MEASURES BY THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT TO COUNTER THE EXPLOITATION OF (SOCIAL) MEDIA - FACEBOOK AND AL JAZEERA

Master Thesis

Name: Rajko Smaak
Student number: S1441582
Study: Master Crisis and Security Management
Date: January 13, 2016

The Hague, The Netherlands
Master Thesis: Measures by the Egyptian government to counter the exploitation of (social) media

Leiden University
CAPSTONE PROJECT ‘FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION VERSUS FREEDOM FROM INTIMIDATION

MEASURES BY THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT TO COUNTER THE EXPLOITATION OF (SOCIAL) MEDIA - FACEBOOK AND AL JAZEERA

BY

Rajko Smaak
S1441582

MASTER THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Crisis and Security Management at Leiden University, The Hague Campus.

January 13, 2016
Leiden, The Netherlands

Adviser: Prof. em. Alex P. Schmid
Second reader: Dhr. Prof. dr. Edwin Bakker
Master Thesis: Measures by the Egyptian government to counter the exploitation of (social) media

Leiden University
Abstract

During the Arab uprisings in 2011, social media played a key role in ousting various regimes in the Middle East and North Africa region. Particularly, social media channel Facebook and TV broadcast Al Jazeera played a major role in ousting Hosni Mubarak, former president of Egypt. Social media channels ease the ability for people to express, formulate, send and perceive messages on political issues. However, some countries demonstrate to react in various forms of direct and indirect control of these media outlets. Whether initiated through regulations or punitive and repressive measures such as imprisonment and censorship of media channels.

This research examines the measures taken by the Egyptian government to counter the exploitation of social media by opposition groups. In this research the emphasis is put on the opposition movements, as they pose a major threat to the positioning of the government in Egypt. This research is predominantly focused on official measures taken by the government. Thorough comparative analysis of several constitutions and measures implemented primarily focused on limiting the impact of (social) media is included. To put this in contract, the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press will be examined in order to gain knowledge on the actual outcomes of the measures.

This research demonstrates that in the case of Egypt, while repressive measures have been imposed by the government, Al Jazeera and Facebook did find their way into the communication monopoly of Egypt. Seemingly, repression and harsh actions toward public thought by the government, increase the ability for media to disseminate their statement. Secondly, this thesis concludes that the several Egyptian government administrations since 2011 modified the constitution, in order to get grip on media, into their own favour. Enabling them to arrest, repress and limit public thought even more. This study highlights the importance of public thought, and the need for an enhanced idea of the abilities and impact of (social) media in repressive countries.

Keywords: Social Media, Al Jazeera, Facebook, Egypt, Exploitation, Measures
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ V

Acronyms ........................................................................................................................................ VIII

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1

2. Methodology ............................................................................................................................... 3

2.1. Roadmap research .................................................................................................................. 3

2.2. Grounded theory ..................................................................................................................... 6

3. How Egypt traditionally tried to control the thoughts of its citizens ........................................... 9

3.1. 2000-2011 ................................................................................................................................. 9

3.2. Data .......................................................................................................................................... 12

4. What were the measures taken by the Egyptian government before the Arab revolutions to limit public/media thought and expression? ................................................................................................................................. 15

4.1. Egyptian media landscape ......................................................................................................... 16

4.2. Constitution .............................................................................................................................. 17

4.3. Penal code .................................................................................................................................. 19

4.4. Emergency Law ......................................................................................................................... 21

5. What is the impact of modern developments, such as the rise of Al Jazeera and the Arab Spring, on the near communication monopoly of the state of the Egyptian government? ............................................. 26

5.1. The Arab Spring – A collective action ....................................................................................... 28

5.2. The role of (social) media ......................................................................................................... 29

5.3. Timeline and collective action through (social) media ............................................................ 31

5.3.1. ‘We are all Khaled’ ............................................................................................................... 32

5.3.2. Al Jazeera versus Mubarak .................................................................................................. 33

5.4. Measures taken by Mubarak .................................................................................................... 37
6. During his presidency, how did Morsi, leader of the former MB and FJP, respond to the effects the net and the TV channel Al Jazeera had on the communication monopoly of Egypt during the Arab Spring? .................................................................................................................................................................................. 40

6.1. The SCAF .................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 41

6.1.1. 2011 Interim constitution ........................................................................................................................................................................................................... 43

6.1.2. Concluding remarks .................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 46

6.2. Mohamed Morsi’s transitional period June 2012 – July 2013 ................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 48

6.2.1. 2012 Constitution ................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 50

6.2.2. Measures taken by Morsi ................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 53

6.3. Concluding remarks ................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 55

7. How is current ruling President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi responding to influential (social) media platforms, while improving the living conditions in Egypt? .................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 58

7.1. 2014 Constitution ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 60

7.2. Measures taken by al-Sisi ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 61

7.3. Versus al Jazeera ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 65

7.3.1. Detention Al Jazeera journalists .................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 66

7.4. Concluding remarks ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 68

8. Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 71
### Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>GT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</td>
<td>ICCPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and Northern Africa</td>
<td>MENA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Brotherhood</td>
<td>MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supreme Council of the Armed Forced</td>
<td>SCAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Egyptian Radio and Television Union</td>
<td>ERTU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Declaration of Human Rights</td>
<td>UDHR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>UN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

From the moment that former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was ousted, it became clear what it means to be a blogger on social media and to be a journalist covering critical opinions and views on political issues in Egypt. Social media has found a way into the communication monopoly of Egypt, in which it signifies a shift away from a monolithic media scene to a more pluralistic one. However, it was not until 2011 when the Arab revolution erupted in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that the proliferation of the relatively new media contributed to the political shift in Egypt. The pace at which media in Egypt has transformed has been much faster than in most Western countries. This facilitated Egyptian people to express dissent easier. The social media platform Facebook opened up the possibility for Egyptian critics and bloggers to express themselves in light of certain political matters. During the Arab revolutions, Facebook was used by revolutionaries as a tool for organizing demonstrations, looking for financial support, and retrieving new support in order to achieve their goals, all of which are elements that can be considered, from a semi-authoritarian governmental perspective, exploitation of social media.

This fast pace of media development and the ease for the Egyptian people to express their thoughts on political issues resulted in a number of paradoxes. The relationship between government and media in Egypt, for example, is ambivalent. The Egyptian government limited press freedom and freedom of the net, as will be thoroughly explained in this thesis. The Egyptian government has been characterized as being against freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

This thesis attempts to analyse the measures taken by the Egyptian administration with regard to freedom of expression. A comparative literature analysis will be conducted on the measures taken under the rule of former President Hosni Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Mohamed Morsi, and lastly ruling President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi. The purpose of this thesis is not to provide a thorough description of the measures taken by the different administrations but to present a comparative analysis focused on freedom of expression and

---

freedom of the press versus the imposed measures aimed at limiting the exploitation of social media. The significant consequences of the measures will form the conclusion of this thesis.

This thesis assumes that even the most repressive and restrictive kinds of measures or initiatives imposed by governments to limit the use of social media platforms by oppositions groups are most often not as effective as the state hopes. Instead, social media channels are more likely to find ways around these repressive measures. In this thesis, the media entity Facebook and the TV channel Al Jazeera, two of the most important and influential social media platforms in Egypt, will be used as case studies in order to underpin the research conclusions. This comparative research, that goes into the administration of the SCAF, Morsi, and al-Sisi, demonstrates that while the different government forms presented themselves as the shepherd of the transition in a more democratic society, in practice this turned out different. Instead, conditions have worsened. One of the concluding remarks derived from this thesis is that social media channels such as Facebook and Al Jazeera are not intertwined with governmental regulations and laws, especially in authoritarian regimes. It seems that social media are most often able to find a way of achieving their purpose, although the users and the (social) media entities do not remain untouched in Egypt.

This thesis is guided by the following research question:

“**What measures have been taken by the Egyptian administration to counter the exploitation of (social) media by opposition groups since the rise of the Arab revolutions?**

The central question will be underpinned by the following sub-questions:

- **What is (social) media?**
- **What is the opposition in Egypt that ‘exploits’ social media?**
- **How did Facebook and Al Jazeera find their way into the communication monopoly of Egypt before and after the Arab revolutions?**
- **What were the measures taken by Hosni Mubarak to counter the use of (social) media?**
- **What were the measures taken by Mohamed Morsi to counter the use of (social) media?**
- **What were the measures taken by the Security Council of the Armed Forces to counter the use of (social) media?**
- **What are the measures taken by Abdul Fattah al-Sisi to counter the use of (social) media?**
2. Methodology

This chapter provides an explanation of the systematic theoretical analysis that is applied in this thesis. After describing the theoretical analysis, the extent to which theory is used as a guiding framework in collecting data will be described and an explanation of how the analysis will be conducted will be given. This section explains how research is carried out in order to accomplish sufficient conclusions. To understand a phenomenon like the countermeasures taken by the Egyptian government to limit the exploitation of social media, qualitative data collection and analysis will be the methodology employed in this thesis. Before describing the technique of data collection, it is essential to further elaborate the background and fundamental guidelines of the theoretical approach used in this thesis.

2.1. Roadmap research

This thesis will apply a qualitative examination based on the implemented measures, both formal and informal, intended to influence and limit the impact of social media and the exploitation of it by oppositional movements. Qualitative data collection in this thesis is not data derived numbers or percentages; instead, the data collected will be in the form of words, which is a way of thinking and approaching data collecting methods and data in a non-numerical way.

Firstly, before exploring the actual measures and initiatives taken by the different government administrations in Egypt over the last decade, this thesis will start by providing general data on patterns and behaviour on the internet and social media channels. Data retrieved from the Freedom House, The World bank, and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that stipulate

---

2 Although the term ‘media’ has multiple meanings, I use ‘media’ to mean collective channels in which tools or instruments are used to receive, store, and deliver information. Such tools and instruments are, for example, printed media, radio, television, and internet (social media).

3 Social media is a phenomenon that is different from traditional communication channels and technologies. This thesis uses the definition of social media illustrated by Paul M. Leonardo et al. (2013): ‘Web-based platforms that allow workers to (1) communicate messages with specific co-workers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular co-workers as communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing.’ Enterprise Social Media: Definition, History, and Prospects for the Study of Social Technologies in Organizations. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication. Vol. 19. Issue 1, P. 1-19.

recent developments in light of the internet will be utilized. For example, data on the number of Facebook users will be exemplified. As such, this knowledge provides a basic framework for analysing measures taken by the government to counter the use of social media platforms. To form a basis for comparison, some data regarding the number of internet users in the Netherlands will be included.

This thesis will focus on the two most popular (social) media channels in the MENA region. Firstly, the role of the online social media platform Facebook will be covered. Facebook is a platform available to everyone with internet access that offers the ability to receive, preserve, and share information on a plethora of different views and opinions. This is especially pertinent in semi authoritarian countries, in which online bloggers are able to express critical views on (political) issues. Secondly, the role of the Qatari TV channel Al Jazeera will be covered. Al Jazeera has become a strong media entity in the MENA region based on its critical views on political issues.

The roles of Facebook and Al Jazeera and their social impact in Egypt, specifically, will be exemplified. This is primarily based on information gathered from independent and unbiased news platforms such as the BBC, AL Jazeera, The Guardian, The New York Times, Al-Ahram, etc. In terms of data collection, this thesis aims to cover a combination of Western and Egyptian media outlets in order to get a sufficient and unbiased data basis. In addition, this chapter is complemented by information retrieved from research conducted by NGOs such as the Freedom House, Article19, Human Rights Watch, Committee to Protect Journalists, and Amnesty International.

For the remainder of this section, the four recent administrations governing Egypt will be analysed. Firstly, an overview will be given of to what extent Hosni Mubarak was able to limit the exploitation and impact of social media. Secondly, after the ousting of Mubarak, Mohammed Morsi was democratically elected as president. Due to repressive public pressure, Morsi was removed from office and the SCAF took office for a short period of time, implementing repressive initiatives on social media and journalists. Lastly, the current ruling president, Adbel Fattah al-Sisi, former member of the Egyptian Armed Forces, was selected as the last case study. Al-Sisi is criticized by many regarding his oppressive rule. Conclusions will be drawn based on a comparison between the four

---

5 Human Rights Watch. (2015). A Year of Abuses Under al-Sisi. *Human Rights Watch.* A private non-governmental organization that publishes research on human rights states that President al-Sisi 'has presided over the flagrant abuse of human rights since taking office a year ago pledging to restore stability. Violence by armed groups and the government escalated [...] the authorities have continued to aggressively enforce a de facto protest ban and routinely dispersed anti-government demonstrations with force. In addition, it is stated that collective response to Egypt’s crackdown and imprisonment of journalists have failed in doing so’.
administrations on the basis of how they have failed to meet (inter)national human rights standards. For example, since the ousting of Mubarak, there have been several initiatives to introduce new constitutions. These constitutions are included in the analysis. While constitutions form the basis for freedom of expression and freedom of the press, restricting measures, such as the Emergency Law and other actions by the government, have remained in place. The conclusion regarding the contradicting and controversial outcomes of the government’s actions is interesting when looking at the constitution that forms the basis of the living conditions in the country. Repressive initiatives to limit these freedoms have become daily aspects of life.

For the purpose of this qualitative master thesis Grounded Theory (GT) is a useful method for collecting and analysing data. Many social researchers approach an area of inquiry with a prior and well-formulated theory that so accurately describes the area of study that their research concentrates on the accumulation of information applicable to the existing theory. However, Martin and Turner, who developed an ‘extension’ of the GT, argue that many inquiries do not fit this pattern. It is common for current research to not fit into this theory. As such, this thesis will be focused on establishing an idea or conclusions that facilitate discussion of the general features of this topic, and is based on GT as part of the data collection process. This thesis thus concentrates on the qualitative data with possible outcomes that can form ideas, rather than on testing or verifying existing theories. This theory or set of ideas and recommendations can be used and tested in further research.


6 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1984. (1984). United Nations (UN). In 1948 the UN proclaimed the UDHR. This thirty article document is the international basis on which human rights are outlined.


2.2. Grounded theory

The first introduction of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss can be found in The Discovery of the grounded theory, published in 1967. One of their main purposes for publishing the book was to improve the capacity for researchers to generate theories that would be relevant to specific subjects. ‘Not everyone can be equally skilled at discovering theory, but neither do they need to be a genius to generate useful theory’. A second important aspect of this this book is the logical justification for using GT in research as a fundamental framework for data collection. A third and final important outcome of this book is the notion that GT contributes to the collection of qualitative data. This is a major contribution because, back in the 1960s, research was dominated by quantitative research. As such, qualitative research has become more important, as a platform was created that supported theory building.

The basic position of GT is that it ‘generates a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses’. In other words, the discovery of a grounded theory is derived from the growing accumulation of data indicating a relationship, which later becomes even further settled on the basis of different perspectives with different focuses. In other words, GT, spelled out in The Discovery of the grounded theory, developed into different forms. The original GT forms the basis of other studies as such. The primary approach of GT is rather open and general regarding data collection. GT study adopts an investigative research method in which no actual hypothesis is being used as an underlying aspect of research. While, on the one hand, it is observed that most research adopts a well-formulated theory as a concentrating framework for analysing data, Glaser and Strauss, on the other hand, argue that theory can be obtained from a comparative analysis model of data. GT can develop

---

10 Ibid. P. 15.
a way of thinking or theory obtained from qualitative data. Such theory that contributes to an explanation of how the social world “works”.\textsuperscript{13} The authors do, however, encourage those who do research to commence by concentrating on a detailed description of the features of the collected data before attempting to produce more general theoretical statements. GT is a research model that does not offer a solution to all research hitches. Turner, however, spells out the importance of GT as an underlying theoretical framework as ‘\textit{well suited for dealing with qualitative data of the kind gathered [...] from case-study material or from certain kinds of documentary sources}’.\textsuperscript{14}

Although Glaser and Strauss stress that GT can take many forms, the form in which theory is presented can be independent from the process of generating the theory. GT, therefore, can be presented as a well-produced set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion using conceptual categories. The form in which theory is presented does not make it theory, rather theory is defined by its characteristic of explaining or predicting something. This thesis will attempt to form a product consisting of a set of conclusions that provide an explanation in light of the gathered data. Therefore, establishing a concrete theory is not the goal of this thesis. As is indicated in the previous chapter, this thesis measures the different government administrations and compares their initiatives. GT also contributes to the predictive power of generalization. In other words, ‘\textit{by comparing where the facts are similar or different, we can generate properties of categories that increase the categories’ generality and explanatory power}’.\textsuperscript{15}

The selection of GT methodology has some implications on the organization of the research. This thesis is based on qualitative data research. Analysis will be conducted by looking into constitutions, regulations, directives, etc. introduced in Egypt as methods of limiting the exploitation of social media platforms. As such, an understanding will be shaped in the form of ideas or theory composed in the concluding chapter of this thesis. As Glaser and Strauss put it, ‘\textit{if the analyst wishes to convert qualitative data into crudely quantifiable form so that he can provisionally test a hypothesis, he codes the data first and then analyses it. He makes an effort to code all relevant data [so that it] can be brought to bear on a point, and then systematically assembles, assesses, and}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
analyses these data in a fashion that will constitute proof for a given proposition’.\textsuperscript{16} Secondly, GT underpins the notion that qualitative research, with which a theory or idea can be created, should not be confined to ‘the practice of coding first and the analysing data’.\textsuperscript{17} This could cause unnecessary delay and interruption of the purpose of the research.\textsuperscript{18}

Since the assumption is that theory is created from collected qualitative data, there is an emphasis on setting aside determined notions prior to theory building. Typically, research includes a set of research questions that guide the research. In contrast, Glaser and Strauss argue that GT is excluded from any precise research question framework. Therefore, in order to establish a well-formulated ideology of theory, they argue that research should start off by setting out a few predetermined ideas. Generating an idea or theory from data presupposes that hypotheses and concepts are not stipulated prior to doing analysis. However, concepts derive from the gathered data and are intertwined in the given research questions. The initial underlying framework of this thesis does not include defining hypotheses in advance. On the contrary, this thesis does include pre-developed research questions that form the basis of the research direction. While this chapter described the method of research, the following chapter will go into some general information regarding the use of the internet in Egypt. Thereafter, an overview is given of the measures implemented by Hosni Mubarak prior to the Arab revolutions to limit the role of social media platforms and the possible exploitation of the net. Mubarak was given the challenge to respond to several important movements regarding the role of the internet. First, the internet penetration rate grew from five percent of the total population using the net to approximately 55 percent using the net. In parallel, the introduction of the media platform Facebook was and still is a major challenge for the Egyptian government, as can be observed in recent years.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. P. 101.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. P. 102
3. How Egypt traditionally tried to control the thoughts of its citizens

The starting point of this thesis aims enhancing understanding of what occurred prior to the ousting of Hosni Mubarak. Before analysing the initiatives executed by the governments since the ousting of Mubarak, it is important to consider the data on internet user penetration, for instance, the number of Facebook users in Egypt. For the remainder of this chapter, an overview will be given of the measures taken by Hosni Mubarak to deal with the introduction of Facebook in 2005 and the increasing importance of Al Jazeera. The Emergency Law, penal code, and constitution were used to his advantage and restrictions on social media platforms were imposed. After examining Mubarak’s rule, it can be concluded that during his regime, the Emergency Law in particular deteriorated the situation in Egypt. His strict measures limited both freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

3.1. 2000-2011

Over the last decades, technological development of social media channels and internet applications has affected the manner in which individuals communicate. To understand communication through the internet, one can differentiate between content of information, the purpose of information, and the amount of information. Developments in these areas of information and communication have had a major impact on society. The phenomenon of sharing an immense amount of uncensored and accurate information through media channels such as Facebook, Wikipedia, WikiLeaks, Twitter, and YouTube, has influenced the political sphere. The governmental response to the influential role of social media is central to this thesis. Governments all over the world, especially in the MENA during the Arab revolutions, have been dealing with the position of social media. There are elements such as propaganda, spreading information, activist activities, and

---

19 There are multiple general examples of why communication via social media influences society. Some of these examples can be the positive and some can be negative. An example of a positive impact is the ease with which people can communicate with one another. An example of a negative impact is that people can target others for bullying. Social media can also be used by terrorist movements. The most recent example is the use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube by the terrorist movement Islamic State. Their propaganda machine on the net is observed to be ‘effective’ in recruiting new members.

20 Philip N. Howard et al. (2011). “Opening Closed Regimes. What was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?” Project on Information Technology & Political Islam. P. 1-30. The authors explain the role of social media in the MENA region and the influence of igniting the Arab revolution in other countries. Retrieved April
recruitment for opposition groups and terrorist movements that can be exploited through the media platforms. Consequently, states in which opposition groups or terrorist movements use social media to weaken the position of the government try to counter any type of exploitation of the internet by those organizations. However, activists that played crucial roles in the Arab revolutions used social media platforms as a key tool for expressing their thoughts concerning governmental acts. The ability to share such an immense amount of information through social media platforms underpinned the motivation for many activists to support the Arab revolutions. During the revolutions, thousands of protestors organized protests and other actions via social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. A Cairo activist states that “we use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world.” Media platforms not only empowered people to oust presidents or governmental regimes, they also made Arab civilians aware of the fact that underground communities exist, such as those willing to listen and share similar information and opinions. In particular, the post-revolution era in Arab countries perceived a successful boom of national media channels, especially TV channels such as Al Jazeera. For the first time in history, TV channels and social media platforms were able to tackle political issues. Thus, it can be concluded that freedom of speech and freedom of the press (strengthened by propaganda, recruitment, and organizing protests) have a negative impact on government administration. During the last few years, the various Egyptian government administrations have been responding to the influential (social) media platforms and TV channels. Their counter-measures and legal provisions have aimed at reducing and repressing the exploitation of social media and will be the focus of this thesis.


21 Philip. N. Howard., Muzammil M. Hussain. (2013). “Democracy’s fourth wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring”. Oxford studies in Digital Politics. The authors refer to the Arab Spring as follows: “During the Arab Spring, four of the world’s most recalcitrant dictators – Zine el Abadine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt – fell after decades in power. Each lost power after unparalleled levels of social protest – and sometimes armed conflict – called for an end to their tough regimes. The “Arab Spring” is what many international commentators are calling the cascading popular democracy movements that began in Tunisia, inspired Egypt, and consequently animated other movements across the region.[..] These protests drew out networks of people, many of whom had not been as successful at political organization before: young entrepreneurs, government workers, women’s groups, and the urban middle class.” P. 3.

Countering the exploitation of social media can be observed in multiple measures undertaken by governments. Governments are able to implement strict legal regulations or softer laws or regulations to respond to the communication platforms used by opposition groups. Saudi Arabia is a rather extreme example that implements strict legal laws to counter terrorism in general. The Saudi government has never tolerated any kind of criticism of the state. In addition, with the introduction of new counter measures, King Abdullah is dashing any hope of opening such a space. This thesis, however, will focus on Egypt due to the rather large impact of the Arab uprisings and the major role of (social) media and communication platforms used by opposition groups there. Many regulations regarding protesting, social movements, and online activities have been observed. This thesis is focused on the role of social media in Egypt and to what extent the government has tried to counter the exploiting elements of media by opposition movements since the rise of the Arab Spring in 2011. A comparison will be made between the three different administrations that have governed the country since the ousting of Mubarak. Specifically, the measures taken by Mohamed Morsi, the SCAF, and current President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi will be considered.

To get a better understanding of what ensued after the rise of the Arab spring or Arab uprisings, the events prior to 2011 that transpired in terms of governmental changes to (social) media will be analysed briefly as an introduction. The starting point of the so-called Arab uprisings in the MENA region cannot be pinpointed to one single person or event. Some argue that Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation in Tunisia is one of the first signs of the awakening of the Arab revolution. Others argue that Wael Ghonim’s use of Facebook to increase political debate and participation was the most important moment before the revolutions.

---


3.2. Data

One of the most important and relevant indicators of the exploitation of (social) media is the use of the (inter)net. The Egyptian government has successfully sought to expand the use of the internet as a tool for its economy since the beginning of the 1990s. However, while the government has tried to implement modern infrastructure to the internet and media in Egypt, it has also aggressively implemented preventive and responsive measures to curtail the use of these new technologies to receive any sensitive political information, particularly during the Mubarak regime.25

The figure below shows the number of internet users per 100 inhabitants in Egypt from 2000 to 2014.

![Internet users per 100 people in Egypt](source: World Bank)

The conclusion can easily be drawn that the country has experienced an era of enormous growth in the number of internet users. While in the year 2000 the average number of individuals using the internet was only 0.6, it increased to 11 individuals per 100 by 2004. Ultimately, almost half of the population was using the internet in 2013. To put this in the context of social media platforms, a survey by the Gallup and the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors stipulates that at the beginning of 2011, during the Arab revolutions, the total number of Facebook users in Egypt was approximately

---

25 The internet was first introduced in Egypt in 1993 through the Egyptian Universities network and the cabinet’s Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC). Consequently, the public gained access in 1995, but internet use did not fully take off until 2002 due to a lack of technology. In 2002 the government introduced an initiative that stood for ‘Free Internet’ whereby every Egyptian citizen with a telephone line could have access to the internet for a certain price.
4.7 million. Comparing this number with the 16.2 million users in late 2013, it can easily be concluded that social media channels have become a trend. Approximately twenty-six percent of the Arab world’s Facebook users are Egyptian and Facebook was the most visited internet site in the country in 2013. To put this in perspective, a comparison can made with the number of internet users in an European country. The Netherlands, for instance, also experienced an era of increase in the number of individuals using the internet. As is observed in the figure below, the number of internet users per 100 persons had already increased tremendously by the beginning of the 2000s, whereas Egypt only experienced such a growth in 2009. One of the most striking observations, when looking at the differences between the Netherlands and Egypt, is that per 100 persons 40 individuals in the Netherlands use the net, while in Egypt, 50 individuals per 100 persons use the net. Thus, the number of internet users in the Netherlands has increased rather gradually since 2004, while Egypt has observed a tremendous increase since the end of 2010 due to the corollating events of the Arab uprisings.

A growth in the number of individuals using the internet contributed to the Arab Spring since the internet facilitates to people to find support in expressing their discontent. Additionally, the

---

advent of social media opened new methods for people to find those who have similar thoughts and interests on certain issues, and to share and discuss about this. Especially, the popularity of retrieving political news through social media platforms is significantly increased.\textsuperscript{27} Political participation in semi-authoritarian states is observed to be rather low. Since the introduction of the internet and the use of social media platforms occurred at the same time, Egypt experienced an increase in the number of political participants as well.\textsuperscript{28} The parliamentary vote turnout of the Egyptian population increased by approximately 45 percent from the mid-1990s until 2005. From 2005 to 2010, the percentage decreased rather drastically to 25 percent. At the introduction of the Arab revolution, the percentage increased to more than 60 percent of the Egyptian population voting.\textsuperscript{29}

Thus, a remarkable intensification of the number of users exercising the net to receive and spread information coincided with the growth of political participation. This increase in political participants and an increase in users of the net resulted in government responses. For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to determine the initiatives and measures taken by the Egyptian government prior to the Arab spring. Therefore, research on measures and initiatives taken after the Arab uprisings in Egypt will follow.\textsuperscript{30} This comparative thesis will provide conclusions that can form a model in light of the impact of social media and the intention of a government to change its modus operandi.

\textsuperscript{28} See Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson (2012) “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square”. Journal of Communication. The authors outline the important role of social media in political participation since 2005 in Egypt. More specifically, the ‘online political sphere emerged first in the form of blogs and personal sites, later in Facebook, YouTube and Twitter’. The article takes the example of the April 6\textsuperscript{th} Youth Coalition in Egypt, which has made several attempts since 2005 to challenge the regime through the use of the internet. The introduction of the Arabic version of Facebook amplified this process even more, as on it subjects were openly discussed and dissent could be expressed. As such ‘political content online increased, with multiple campaigns by citizens journalists and online activists exposing poverty, corruption, and the abuse of human rights in the country’. P.364-365. Retrieved February 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2015 from the website: http://www.academia.edu/2493339/Social_Media_and_the_Decision_to_Participate_in_Political_Protest_Observations_From_Tahrir_Square.
\textsuperscript{30} Comparing the measures taken prior to the rise of the Arab spring and after the rise in Egypt will give a view of the impact that the use of social media might have had and whether or not the exploitation of the net by opposition groups or terrorist movements have thus been effective or not. As such, this thesis will firstly outline the measures taken by the Egyptian government prior to the Arab spring and consequently describe the measures taken by the government after the rise in order to control thought and expression through (social) media of opposition groups or terrorists movements in the country.
4. What were the measures taken by the Egyptian government before the Arab revolutions to limit public/media thought and expression?

Data shows that an increase in the use of the internet and social media platforms, and an increase percentage of political participation occurred at the same time. Facebook and Al Jazeera created leeway for the Egyptian people to communicate and express discontent regarding, inter alia, political issues. Prior to the rise of the Arab revolutions, which erupted on January 25, 2011 in Egypt, the role of social media platforms, Facebook, and the media network Al Jazeera explicitly, became highly important in the ousting of Mubarak. The Egyptian government responded by implementing manifold measures to influence the public thought of Egyptian citizens to some extent. Most measures, which will be covered in the following sub-chapters, have been seen as sanctions that have violated freedom of expression and freedom of the press. These measures were most notable due to the constitutional changes over the years.

In addition, three other traditional measures have been executed in recent history and they are important to analyse for the purposes of this thesis. They are, to be exact: the 1. Emergency Law; 2. the Penal Code; and 3. the press law. These are three controversial initiatives aimed at control and regulating freedom of the press and freedom of expression, despite constitutional guarantees of these rights. The following sub-chapters will give a more detailed framework of these traditional measures imposed by the Egyptian government to counter any type of exploitation of social media.

Online and offline media outlets in Egypt differ from those that are known in the western world. The Egyptian media described in this thesis is one of the most influential and most-read media sources in the world. Therefore, it is key to briefly outline the status of media in Egypt.

---

31 See Jo- Anne Prud’homme (2010). Policing Belief. The impact of Blasphemy laws on Human Rights. A Report by the Freedom House. The author discusses the role of the laws implemented by the Egyptian government regarding the guaranteed freedoms as mentioned in the constitutions. ‘The government of Egypt has long been criticized for imposing unduly harsh and repressive limitation on freedom of speech, the Egyptian Penal Code (EPC) criminalizes religious insult and blasphemy; insults to the president; the dissemination of the news, statistics, or information that could harm the reputation of Egypt abroad and criticism of the constitution. [...] journalists and publishers are subjected to severe limitations on their work.’ P. 21. Retrieved March 1, 2015 from the website: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Policing_Belief_Full.pdf.
4.1. Egyptian media landscape

Before analysing the counter-measures taken by the Egyptian government, it is important to briefly clarify the status of media in Egypt itself and distinguish the difference between state-owned media and public media platforms representing the people’s voices rather that the government’s policies. In Egypt there are more than 600 newspapers, magazines, and journals, and approximately 100 TV channels. The Egyptian media sphere is seen as one of the most influential and widely-read in the region. The country’s media is divided into privately-owned media and state-owned media. The Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), under the supervision of the Ministry of Information, controls regulations, directives, and laws regarding state-owned media. Throughout recent history has privately-owned and domestic broadcasting media been mostly not allowed to air news in light of governmental issues. This thesis will focus on the measures taken by the Egyptian government regarding privately-owned media. More specifically, the pan-Arab channel Al Jazeera and the social media platform Facebook will be the emphasis.

Private media platforms are among the most influential and widely-read in the world. Although the Arab revolutions helped to increase freedoms, private media outlets have struggled to cover news regarding governmental issues. During Morsi’s presidency in 2012/13, the non-state media outlets were likely to be in favour of the liberals, while the Islamist media backed the former president. ‘Political polarization runs through media’. According to the ruling government under al-Sisi, Al Jazeera is Al Jazeera a media channel cooperating with the MB. From here on, media associated with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has been targeted by al-Sisi. This resulted in the closure of Al Jazeera for a short period and the arrest of Al Jazeera journalists.

---


33 The Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) cooperates with the Ministry and controls the government owned media platforms.

4.2. Constitution

Egyptian journalists have been facing harassment and suffering from repressive laws for decades. Despite the freedoms ‘ushered in by the uprisings’, the media and news outlets, both state-owned and privately-owned, have struggled in providing independent coverage. One of the governmental measures taken to respond to the increasingly influential role of journalists was included in the constitution. The Egyptian constitution, which was first implemented in 1923, has experienced several amendments over the last century in which limitations, restriction, and measures regarding freedom of the press and freedom of thought and expression have been observed. 35 36 37 The most important amendments to the constitution were made in 1956, when the constitution was proclaimed and when it secured the formation of the National Assembly. The second important period in which amendments were observed was in 1971, when President Anwar Sadat took office. The former constitution, by Nasser, ‘strve for the eradication of the control of capitalistic influence over the government by providing for a state-run economy and a national welfare system.’ 38 Sadat used Nasser’s constitution as a foundation for his claimed attempt to open the door to a more open democracy in Egypt. 39 However, Sadat ultimately limited the role of the opposition, just like Nasser did. The constitution, which was adopted by a public referendum, proclaimed democratic freedoms in the system. The main components of the 1971 amending declaration made by the government were: 1) peace through freedom; 2) Arab Unity; 3) national development; and 4) more freedom for the Egyptian citizens. One rather important and striking

35 It is important, before examining the article in light of limitations, to note that the constitution does include several articles which address the right to freedom and freedom of expression, among others. Article 47 outlines the freedom of opinion as follows: ‘Freedom of opinion is guaranteed [...] and to disseminate it verbally or in writing.’ Article 48 continues by stating: ‘Freedom of the press, and mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship [...] suspicion or suppression by administrative methods is prohibited’. See Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1971 (as Amended to 2007).
37 See Sarah El Masry (2012) “Egypt’s Constitutional Experience”. The author compares the different elements, such as word choice and sentence structuring, of the constitutions and concludes that each document was formulated uniquely with its own striking articles. As the author puts it: ‘the monarch powers with regard to the 1923 constitutions, social equality and layout rights in the case of the 1954 constitution and the president’s power with regard to the 1971 constitution.’ Daily News. Retrieved February 12, 2015 from the website:http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/10/30/egypts-constitutional-experience-2/.
39 Ibid., at page 242.
stipulation that allows for the president to adjust the constitution appears under article 152 of the 1971 constitution. The article mentions the following:

‘The President of the Republic may call a referendum on important matters affecting the supreme interests of the country’

This stipulation refers to the ability of the ruling president to introduce a referendum regarding any type of issue which is in the interest of the country. As such, Sadat was able to propose any kind of amendment in his favour, as long as he could argue that it would be in the interest of the country. During the late 1970s, Sadat became less popular in the eyes of the Egyptian citizens due to failing to provide the economic growth and increased stability that he promised. This public reaction led to a rather dictatorial response by Sadat, whereby he changed the constitution in light of his own ideology, which was made possible due to article 152 of the 1971 constitution. In addition, Sadat used article 142 of the 1971 constitution in his favour. Article 142 made it possible for him to remove the Prime Minister without any kind of support by officials, giving the office to himself. These articles, among others, also made it possible for Sadat to amend the constitution and change governance. During one referendum the majority of the proposals turned out with a 99.96 percent “yes” vote. One of his first amendments was to abolish any kind of limit regarding the terms of the presidency in Egypt. Originally, this was set at a maximum of two terms, in which one term had a duration of two years. Consequently, this amendment resulted in the possibility of a limitless presidency in Egypt. As a result, Hosni Mubarak ruled for more than 30 years until the rise of the Arab revolutions in 2011.

Under Sadat and Mubarak, freedom of the press and the media were suppressed though freedom was ensured to some extent within the constitution that contained articles providing guarantees for this freedom, in practice this was without much effect. Article 48 of the 1971 constitution guarantees the following by stating:

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., at article 3.
43 See CONSTITUTION OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT, 11 Sept. 1971, as amended, May 22, 1980, May 25, 2005, March 26, 2007, article 141. ‘the president of the Republic shall appoint the Prime Minister and relieve him of his functions [...] and their deputies shall be made by the President of the Republic after consultation of the Prime Minister.
44 See James Feuille (2009), supra note 10, at p. 242
‘Freedom of the press, printing, publication and mass media shall be guaranteed. [...] suspension or suppression by administrative methods is prohibited. In state of emergency or in time of war a limited censorship may be imposed on the newspapers, publications, and mass media in matters related to public safety or purpose of national security in accordance with the law’.\textsuperscript{45}

The article refers to the notion of time of emergency or time of war, where the government is basically allowed to arrange the rules unilaterally and thus this article is not applicable. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Egypt has been in a state of emergency since 1981. In other words, elements of freedom spelled out in this article have been basically meaningless since then.

In addition, article 208 describes the following:

‘The freedom of the press is guaranteed and press censorship is prohibited. It is also prohibited to threaten, suspend, or suppress a newspaper through administrative measures, as stipulated in the constitution and defined by law.’\textsuperscript{46}

Thus, the 1971 constitution introduced by Sadat was rather insufficient in light of freedom of the press and freedom of thought. Loopholes and possibilities for Sadat to regain power into his own hands have been observed in manifold. Former President Hosni Mubarak took over the office of presidency and carried on the rather semi-authoritarian ruling. The Emergency Law, which will be discussed in one of the forthcoming sub-chapters, is the main framework for the deteriorating situation regarding freedom of expression.

### 4.3. Penal code

Egyptian media, especially during Mubarak’s presidency, experienced an era of substantial challenges. Limitations were imposed to repress the ability of media to provide opinion driven news, such as blogs and columns, and to hold the government to account.\textsuperscript{47} One of those challenges, among the constitutional measures taken and the implications of the Emergency Law, is the penal code. The Egyptian Penal Code, promulgated in 1937 by Egyptian national authorities, functions as a

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. at art. 48.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. at art. 208.
basis for criminal law and has been amended several times since its formation. The penal code, as a legal basis, is mainly focused on the criminal sanctions regarding media outlets. More specifically, the code includes articles that determine provisions regarding defamation. Criminal sanctions and a collection of articles that allow journalists to be prosecuted for reporting any negative image related news regarding governmental issues and functioning.

The Penal Code provides provisions regarding freedom of expression and freedom of thought. Article 179 of the Penal Code states that it is a crime to assault the president of Egypt:

‘Whoever affronts the President of the Republic by means of any of the foregoing methods shall be penalized with detention.’

Article 184, which protects the Majlis al-Nowwab (People’s Assembly), the army (SCAF), the executive courts, and other relevant public authorities, states:

‘Whoever affronts or insults in any of the foregoing methods, the People’s Assembly, the Shura Council, or other regular organizations, the Army, the tribunals, the Authorities, or Public Departments, shall be penalized with detention and a fine of not less than five thousand and not exceeding ten thousand pounds or either penalty.’

Article 186, that protects the judiciary system, states:

‘Whoever affronts any of the foregoing methods, the standing, dignity, or authority of a judge in connection with a court action, shall be penalized with detention.’

Article 188 and 305, which prohibits the publication of any kind of false news, states:

‘[…] a person who informs of a false matter, with bad faith, shall deserve the penalty, even no rumour occurs from him except the said information, and no action is initiated regarding what he informed of.’

---

48 See Egypt Penal Code, No. 58 of 1937. Article 179.
49 Majlis al-Nowwab (in Arabic) or the House of Representatives is the unicameral parliament of Egypt.
50 The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), also the Higher Council of the Armed forces, is the body which consists of 25 Egyptian military officers and served as a council during national emergency. SCAF gained power to govern the country after the ousting of Presidency Mubarak on 11 February 2011. The SCAF relinquished power in June 2012 when Morsi was elected as president.
52 Ibid. Article 186.
53 Ibid. Article 305.
Article 201, which protects the government from being insulted regarding its functioning, states:

> Any person [...] during the performance of his position duties, delivers [...] a speech comprising slander or vilification against the Government, or against a law, decree law, republican decree, or any work of the public administration authorities, or who diffuses or publishes, [...] shall be punished with detention.\(^{54}\)

Thus, these articles of the Penal Code determining provisions are clearly in violation of freedom of expression and freedom of thought. The articles explicitly penalize those who ‘insult’ the president other public authorities and governmental functioning. Expression of opinion, including insults not containing statements of facts, should never invoke defamation liability, since the ability to express oneself in this manner is fundamental to the right freedom of expression. Numerous articles in Egyptian law, such as article 308 and of the penal code, correspondingly punish insults.\(^{55}\) In addition, the use of excessively broad, vague, and difficult language in laws, provisions, or restrictions blur what may and may not be expressed. Broad and vague provisions can easily be used to target protected speech and grant the authorities the discretion to penalize anyone they find personally offensive or who criticize or disagree with their ideology or initiatives.

### 4.4. Emergency Law

Even though the Egyptian government has been trying to influence the extent of freedom of expression and limit public thought by implementing constitutional articles, as discussed in the previous chapter, actual outcomes seem to be dysfunctional from an Egyptian governmental perspective.\(^{56}\) Since the beginning of the twentieth century, elements such as political expression regarding preferable political standpoints have become more and more witnessed by the Egyptian


\(^{55}\) Ibid. Article 308 & 308bis. Article 308 states the following: ‘If the insult [...] comprises an attack against the dignity and honour of individuals, or an outrage of the reputation of families, the penalty inflicted shall be that of detention together with the payment of a fine.’ Article 308bis states the following: ‘Whoever addresses to another [...] an insult not based on a defined fact, but comprising in any manner an outrage of honour or dignity, shall be punished.’

public. This was especially noticeable when the influence of former President Hosni Mubarak’s arch opposition group, the MB, increased tremendously due to international support and NGO partners, and achieved 20 percent of the seats in the lower house of parliaments in Egypt.57 The MB, politically and ideologically developed, underpinned its focus on more social, economic, and political issues from a religious point of view.58 In addition, the MB was observed, especially in its early years, to be similar to revolutionary movements in which the use of propaganda, programs of physical and ideological training, insistence on discipline and obedience, secret cells and a large youth corps, are observed.59 The increasingly influential role of the MB resulted in stricter measures to counter any kind of thinking or expression that could influence the regime. These measures were expressed as the Mubarak government launched a crackdown on the MB by detaining hundreds of members.60 61 In addition, a number of legal reforms were introduced in order to counter the resurgence of the opposition group.62 One of the legal reforms was stipulated in the rewritten constitution of Egypt as follows: ‘political activity or political parties shall not be based on any religious background or foundation’.63 Thus, the government was given the authority to ban opposition groups and detain anyone who fit under the elements of this article.

One of the most significant and well-known measures limiting the heterogeneity of Egyptian media and public thought and expression, with a special focus on the role of the MB, was the Emergency Law.64 This repressive law was first enacted in 1958 and actually introduced for the first

57 The Muslim Brotherhood (also known as Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun), one of the oldest, largest, and most influential Islamist organizations in the world, has the central objective of establishing an Islamic state, which is a state ruled and governed not by human and man-made laws, but by Sharia law.
63 Ibid.
64 The Emergency Law ensured that the state of Egypt would be characterized by the phenomenon known as a state of emergency. During the state of emergency, the Egyptian government enhanced the role of the police,
time in Egypt during the Arab-Israel war in 1967. During the era in which the Emergency Law was active, the state changed into a so-called ‘State of Emergency’. However, the country did not experience a suppressed environment until 1981. Starting in 1981, when former President Anwar Sadat was assassinated, the Emergency Law in Egypt dominated the lives of the Egyptian people for over more than 30 years. Every three years, which in fact is the maximum duration, the law was continuously re-imposed. During the Arab Spring in 2011, the wide-range law became a focal point for the demonstrations demanding the abolishment this law. The Emergency Law lasted until 31 May 2012, just moments after Mubarak was ousted. One of the most striking elements of the Emergency Law was that during a state of emergency, the Egyptian government was given broad leeway to arrest any citizen without any formal charges. This law was a tool for the Egyptian ruling regime to execute power and limit basic rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of thought.

In 2005, when new presidential elections took place, President Hosni Mubarak promised to replace the Emergency Law. Instead, Mubarak renewed some of the articles within the Emergency Law three times. These changes took place in 2006, 2008, and 2010. By changing articles, executive departments were given even more extensive powers to suspend basic rights and freedoms. Prohibiting demonstrations, censoring newspapers, monitoring personal communications, and detaining people indefinitely without charge are just a few examples of the repressive measures taken in order to influence public thought. Manifold human rights organizations expressed their constitutional rights were suspended, and censorship was legalized. Under the Emergency Law, non-governmental political activity, such as demonstrations, political expression via social media, and unregistered donations for political opposition groups were formally banned by the government.

66 The state of emergency was imposed several times, namely during the Arab-Israel conflict, the era after Anwar Sadat was assassinated in 1981, and most recently during the Egyptian revolutions in 2012, under the regime of Hosni Mubarak.
67 The wide ranging and rather unpopular law became one of the focal points of the Arab revolutions in the beginning of 2011, which had the intention to oust President Hosni Mubarak. Retrieved March 21, 2015 from the website: http://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/31/world/africa/egypt-emergency-law/.
critical view of the deteriorating situation in Egypt, in which it is observed that at least 5,000 people were imprisoned between 2000 and 2010.\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^4\)

Regarding freedom of expression and freedom of thought in Egypt, article 3 of the Emergency Law made it possible for the ruling power or the military ruler to “control communication, newspapers, publications, and all means of expression prior to publications, and seize and shut down places of printing.” In this case article 3 (1) of the Emergency Law empowers Egyptian authorities to “arrest and detain suspected persons who endanger public order and security.”\(^5\)

In this regard, this law clearly violates the right to privacy and to confidentiality of correspondence and telephone calls, as well as the freedom of opinion, expression, and research stated in articles 45 and 49 of the Egyptian Constitution, and articles 17-19 of the ICCPR,\(^6\)\(^7\) of which article 19 can be described as the most important article in light of freedom of thought. The article states:

“Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. [...] Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart


\(^3\) Amnesty International. (2010). Public Statement. This statement refers to the fact that ‘Egypt should keep its promise to free detainees who can no longer be held. [...] The change included the end of any reliance on the Emergency Law for holding anyone for any other reason and would require the government to immediately free hundreds of detainees whose detention is unrelated to such offences’. Retrieved March 30, 2015 from the website: file://vuw/Personal$/Homes/14/s1441582/Downloads/mde120272010en.pdf.


\(^6\) See the International Covenant on civil and Political Rights, United Nations. (166). Article 17 states the following: ‘no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputations. 2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference.’ Retrieved March 31, 2015 from the website: http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx.

\(^7\) See the International Covenant on civil and Political Rights, United Nations. (166). Article 18 states the following: ‘Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought [...] this right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. Retrieved March 31, 2015 from the website: http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx.
information and ideas of all kinds [...] either orally, in writing, or in print [...], or through any other media of his choice.\textsuperscript{78}

There are manifold examples of the Egyptian government, the Mubarak regime in this case, sentencing bloggers, protesters, and opposition groups according to article 3 of the Emergency Law. One of the most well-known cases is the arrest of Abdul Kareem Nabeel Suleiman.\textsuperscript{79} Due to critical expression on his blog and other websites, Kareem was held in custody for more than 1,450 days and underwent physical and mental torture. All of his literature was confiscated as well.

The Egyptian government always claimed that the counter-measures it took, such as the emergency rules, were meant mainly for fighting crime, drugs, and terrorism. However, recent cases have proven that laws are being used to the advantage of the Egyptian government to secure its position. Egypt has been under a state of emergency from 1981 to 31 May 2012, and one of the central demands of the 2011 revolution was the abolition of the Emergency Law, which allowed indefinite detentions without charge and unfair trials, among other abusive practices. As the traditional measures influencing the extent of public thought and the role of social media have been briefly discussed, the following chapter will go into how modern developments such as the rise of Al Jazeera and the Arab spring have influenced the communication monopoly of the Egyptian government.


\textsuperscript{79} Abdul Hareem began to rebel against the religious extremism and the semi-authoritarian regime of Egypt. Most of his statements were expressed through his blog and site “Modern Discussion”. Late October 2005, Kareem heavily criticized the Islamic religion and the unjust acts of the government.
5. What is the impact of modern developments, such as the rise of Al Jazeera and the Arab Spring, on the near communication monopoly of the state of the Egyptian government?


The quote above has been making rounds on social media in Egypt since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak. It is generally argued that the frequent use of social media during the Arab uprisings, which first erupted on 18 December 2010 in Tunisia, played a central role in the uprisings. More specifically, the preparatory phases and explanatory ideology of the Arab uprisings can be tracked through Facebook initiatives and events. Some refer to the Arab revolution as the Facebook revolution. Philip Howard (2011) draws the conclusion, in his thesis which is especially focused on the role of social media, that digital media ‘was consistently one of the most important sufficient and necessary conditions for the wake of the Arab Revolutions’. In addition, as stated by Morozov

---

81 Philip N. Howard, Aiden Duffy, Deen Freelon, Muzammil Hussain, Will Mari and Marwa Mazaid. (2011). “Opening Closed Regimes. What was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?” Project on Information Technology & Political Islam. P. 1-30. The authors focus mainly on the Tunisian and Egyptian case of the use of (social) media on the net during the Arab Spring. One of the conclusions of this paper, after analysing political conversations in the blogosphere and three million tweets, and tracking the online behaviour via social media of the public, is ‘first, social media played a central role in shaping political debated in the Arab Spring.’ P. 2. Retrieved April 14, 2014 from the website: http://pitpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2011_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid_pITPI.pdf.
83 Rob Lever. (2013). “Arab Spring: Did Social Media really spark Revolutions?” Middle East Online. This article highlights the on-going debate regarding the actual role of social media and the Arab Spring, and to what
“most cyber-utopians stuck to a populist account of how technology empowers the people, who, oppressed by years of authoritarian rule, will inevitably rebel, mobilizing themselves through text messages, Facebook, Twitter, and whatever new tool comes along next year.”

However, framing the Arab Spring solely as a “Facebook Revolution” or a phenomenon that is systematically supported and explained by the existence of social media in the Middle East is quite an oversimplification. Neither can it be argued that the revolutions in the MENA region have been solely a ‘People’s Revolution’. When looking at the Arab uprising, social media platforms and people are not separated from each other as will be described in this part.

Prior to the Arab revolutions, ideology of opposition parties and movements in Egypt, in which people strove for a more democratic and less authoritarian and corrupt government administration, were built upon years of civil society movements in the region, online and offline. This chapter will determine the role of online activism through social media platforms, such as Facebook and blogs. Additionally, to enhance understanding regarding the relationship between the Arab uprisings and (social) media platforms, the impact of the private TV satellite channel Al Jazeera will be included.

This chapter concludes that the role of the Arab revolution exemplifies the modus operandi of online social networks in facilitating contemporary populist movements. Social media can be seen as space that expands the networks upon which movements depend. ‘Social media are not simply
neutral tools to be used or adopted by social movements, but rather how activists form and shape the social movements.89

5.1. The Arab Spring – A collective action

From an authoritarian perspective, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Egyptian government seemed to be able to influence and gain control of the information flow prior to the 2011 revolutions rather well. Government controlling media, journalists facing restrictions, censorship, surveillance of communication platforms, and repression are some measures that contributed to a more state-controlled situation. However, influencing the flow of information cannot fully function as a strategy to secure the governmental status. As Tufekci (2012) puts it: “it is not simply the degree of control and repression, but rather a complex collective action problem that best accounts for the durability of regimes like Hosni Mubarak’s Egypt.”90

A collective action occurs whenever something or an outcome of a certain action is desirable and achievable by a specific group mostly underpinned by the same ideology. Authoritarian regimes make it rather difficult for individuals to support such collective action by discouraging individual participation through punishments and by controlling the communicative infrastructure, which makes it difficult to coordinate effectively or to express political dissent in the public sphere. From this perspective, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter alter the key tenets of public collective action. In addition, this creates new vulnerabilities for even the most durable authoritarian regimes.91 It was not only the rapid diffusion of the net and the rise of social media platforms that created possibilities for the public to express themselves during the 2011 revolutions. In addition, TV channels such as Al Jazeera also contributed to the development of a platform.

Thus, a new type of an unbiased and objective communication system was established in Egypt in the beginning of 2011, as the people of Egypt started to express themselves regarding governmental issues. As mentioned, this new type of communication system was established twofold through new (social) media and communication technologies: firstly, through using the upcoming

89 Ibid. P. 234.
91 Ibid. P. 365.
phenomenon of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; and secondly, through the private satellite TV channels. In this thesis the role of the TV channel Al Jazeera will be analysed. Al Jazeera created manifold possibilities for expression and dissent in light of political issues.

5.2. The role of (social) media

One of the main faces of the revolutions in Egypt in 2011 was Wael Ghonim. Ghonim is to this day one of the most well-known Egyptians, especially among those who have been and are still included as part of the anti-government protests since 2011. In addition, Ghonim became internationally-known as well. His trademark was that he strove for a more democratic Egypt and aimed for governmental transition in the country. Due to his heroic actions, Ghonim was accepted and labelled as an icon in the Egyptian revolutions. However, he insists that he should be seen only as representing one story of many among online activists, of which there are hundreds committed to creating pages, blogs, and events on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to take steps against Mubarak’s regime. Ghonim was the creator of several Facebook websites and events that fundamentally supported and helped create the first steps of the revolution in Egypt, also called “Revolution 2.0”.

---


93 Wael Ghonim, an internet activist especially known for his role, especially online through Facebook and blogs, in the pro-democracy demonstrations in Egypt. One of the most well-documented Ghonim moments, which resulted in the first steps toward an online collective action in Egypt, was an interview on the Egyptian national news channel, Dream TV 2. During his interview, Ghonim broke down crying as a photo of young Egyptians who were killed was shown. He then pointed out that those people are ‘the real heroes of the revolution’. Retrieved February 4, 2015 from the YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjimpQPQDuU&playnext=1&list=PLA90B1900FE67C0F5.


97 During the revolutions, the use of social media by Wael Ghonim has been considered influential when it comes to freedom of thought and freedom of speech. His blogs and websites were used to express the opinions of those who fought for more democracy and less corruption, and consequently aimed at changing...
The majority of academics, politicians, and officials argue that the role of social media was key in the Arab revolutions in the MENA region and brought political participation and public thought to another level. The ability to initiate online planning, public support, problem framing, propaganda, discussion, and preparation contributed to the success of the revolution in the MENA.\(^98\) From a critical perspective, these abilities also contribute to the phenomenon of exploiting social media for achieving goals. Some argue that the 2011 revolutions in the MENA region had nothing to do with new types of technological communication and social media. Those who oppose the importance of the role of social media dismiss them as the underlying framework for the revolutions. Instead, they argue that the revolution would have taken place without the use of Facebook or Twitter. As Lim (2012) puts it, the opposing polarized opinions form an ongoing debate in light of the impact of social media and internet on the governmental politics and democracies.\(^99\) On the one hand, there are the techno-utopian scholars who argue that the role of the internet and the expansion of ideas on the net contribute to an increase in political participation by the public. In other words, there is less of a hurdle to participate thus revolution is easier to conduct.\(^100\) On the other hand, techno-dystopians argue that the internet might be a danger to democratic societies. They argue that the government is able to use the internet to manipulate users and their thoughts.\(^101\) The content of this debate, however, will be excluded from this thesis as the previous chapter outlined the importance of new online communication methods during the 2011 revolutions. The following sub-chapters will draw an

---


\(^{100}\) See Loader & Mercea (2011) Information, Communication & society. P. 765-766. In their article they shape the relationship between sources of power through access to lifestyle choices. In addition, the authors point out that the ‘potential actions open possibilities for some co-construction of networks and platforms where the formation of political positions may be played out’.

See Polat. (2005). “The Internet and Political Participation”. The author argues that the internet is a potential virtual sphere in which online debates and more participation is observed. P. 454-455.

overview of two relatively new types of communication channels that underpinned collective action during the 2011 revolutions.

The relation between the introduction of (social) media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and the increased participation in political debates and thoughts will also be excluded from this thesis. However, due to the ease of access to platforms such as Facebook, through which Ghonim, for example, introduced platforms and events, it can be stated that there is a relationship between the number of social media users and the number of political participants. Activism through the net can be traced back to the rise of Facebook and Twitter in Egypt. The introduction of these network platforms took place in 2004. Consequently, as these media channels became popular, the range of the online activism in Egypt experienced two spikes: first, in 2004 when these network platforms were introduced; and second, in 2011 when the rise of the Arab spring in Tahrir square erupted. According to Lim (2012), the use of communication and network platforms during the 2011 uprisings can be observed as more than just a technological advantage. It was also a socio-political contribution.\textsuperscript{102}

5.3. Timeline and collective action through (social) media.

The following two sub-chapters will introduce, on the one hand, an example of a social media phenomenon called ‘We are all Khaled’, which got attention through Facebook and whose scope of impact was worldwide, and on the other hand, the establishment of the written and online media outlet Al Jazeera and its influence on the Mubarak administration. These sub-chapters stipulate that these examples influenced the decision-making process of the ruling president of Egypt.

5.3.1. ‘We are all Khaled’

Political unrest started to erupt on January 25, 2011, when thousands of protestors gathered in central Tahrir square in Cairo, and endured until February 11, 2011. As protestors increased pressure on the government, former President Hosni Mubarak resigned after his 30 years of authoritarian rule in Egypt on February 11, 2011.\textsuperscript{103} It was a historical moment, as described by the authors of \textit{Article 19}.\textsuperscript{104} Prior to the first signs of the 2011 revolution, Ghonim went online and moderated a Facebook page. This page was introduced under the name “\textit{Today they killed Khaled}”.\textsuperscript{105}\textsuperscript{106} Ghonim brought attention to the death of Khaled Said, a young Egyptian man who was killed in police custody on June 6, 2010. Ghonim published the following: “\textit{If I don’t act for his sake, tomorrow they will kill me}”.\textsuperscript{107} After bringing Khaled’s death to the public’s attention, discontent erupted. Within minutes several hundred people joined the Facebook page. Several months later, the number of members had increased to 250,000. Right now, more than 310,000 people are following the Facebook Page, which has been renamed “\textit{We are all Khaled Said}”.\textsuperscript{108} A highly important aspect of this movement, along with it being a fundamental public grievance of the corrupt regime, police brutality, the deteriorating economic and social situation, and unrest in the country, that contributed to the high number of followers was the fact that an Arab version of Facebook was launched in 2009. Consequently, the number of Facebook users catapulted from approximately 900,000 users in the beginning of 2009 to nearly five million users in late 2010. The combination of the introduction of an Arab version of Facebook, which made communication more

\textsuperscript{103} Al Jazeera. (2011). \textit{Hosni Mubarak resigns as president}. The resignation of former President Hosni Mubarak was announced by the vice-president, Omar Suleiman, during a televised broadcast. Suleiman mentioned that the president was “waving” his office. The authority of Egypt was given to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Retrieved April 15, 2015 from the website: \url{http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121125158705862.html}.


\textsuperscript{105} See the Facebook page, which was later renamed to “\textit{We are all Khaled Said}”. Retrieved April 8, 2015 from the website: \url{https://www.facebook.com/elshaheeed.co.uk}. This Facebook page is still active and is used as a forum through which political dissent is expressed in light of the Egyptian government.

\textsuperscript{106} Jose Antonio Vargas. (2012). \textit{Spring Awakening. How an Egyptian Revolution Began on Facebook}. \textit{The New York Times}. Ghonim draws the conclusion that the same could happen to him that happened to Khaled. Ghonim started to strive for protests against the then ruling regime of Mubarak. Retrieved April 12, 2015 from the website: \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html}.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.

accessible for Arabs, and it being the right moment for Ghonim to moderate his Facebook page resulted in this high number of followers. As Mubarak’s government found ways to limit freedom of expression and freedom of the press, this new type of social media enabled greater political expression. Social media was crucial during the revolutions on its own, but the injustice during the period that provoked anger in combination with social media was crucial for the people to overcome fear and barriers imposed by the government and engage in actual collective action.

5.3.2. Al Jazeera versus Mubarak

The role of social media was not the most important aspect of the new political communication system and collective action. Along with Facebook and Twitter, news coverage through TV satellite channels contributed to the new formation of the information flow in Egypt. During the 2011 revolutions, Al Jazeera was a rather new and relatively free channel operating media platform in what many perceive as one of the sectors that is less inclined toward freedom of expression. In addition, when looking into former case studies, these media platforms fill not only the media void but also the political void. “In absence of a political will and political pluralism in the Arab world, it seems that Al Jazeera is serving as a de facto pan-Arab opposition and a forum for resistance.” Thus, Al Jazeera had become a headache for former President Hosni Mubarak, as the media platform used and still uses the power of freedom of expression and freedom of the press with which it condemns international investment in Egypt. Ambitious plans to end cooperation, international investments, and support in elections between Egypt and the international arena has

---

109 Al Jazeera, also known as the Jazeera Satellite Channel, has been a Doha based TV broadcaster funded by the House of Thani, which is the ruling family of Qatar, since 1996.

110 The objective element in the news coverage of Al Jazeera, especially during the Arab revolutions in 2011, resulted in manifold arrests of Al Jazeera journalists, along with journalists from other media platforms, in Egypt. The channel was criticized for begin sympathetic with the Muslim brotherhood, the opposition group of former president Mubarak.


112 Ibid. P. 2.
stagnated due to the dominating and objective role of Al Jazeera and other media platforms.\textsuperscript{113} “The influx of independent satellite TV stations in the Arab world has undermined the ability of governments to control what people watch and consequently to control what they think.”\textsuperscript{114} In other words, the impact of TV satellite channels has been undermined ever since it began. This is especially the case since the rise of Al Jazeera.\textsuperscript{115}

The channel played a major role in covering events and providing focused news related to the on-going protests in Egypt in early 2011, which was later termed the Arab Spring. “Al Jazeera played a defining role in galvanizing and promoting the Egyptian protests, as well as praising the role played by social media in these efforts”.\textsuperscript{116}

From the time it was founded and especially during the Egyptian uprisings, Al Jazeera played a cat-and-mouse game with the Mubarak administration. Al Jazeera intensively started to follow the protests and relating events that occurred in Egypt.\textsuperscript{117} \textsuperscript{118} The Egyptian revolution formally erupted on January 25, 2011. It was a revolution consisting of manifold demonstrations, protests, silent

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Al Jazeera published manifold reports and documentaries in light of the governmental situation. Those reports included conclusions regarding elections and possible corruption, economic failures, government corruption, blockades of foreign help from NGOs, and more. This kind of coverage by an international news channel can damage relations between Egypt and the international arena.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Najob Ghadbian. (2001). “Contesting the state media monopoly: Syria on Al Jazeera television”. Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 5, No 2. P. 75-87. A quote from Ghadbian published in 2001 in which the author recognizes the importance of Al Jazeera and its functioning in establishing a new system which was less negatively influenced and limited by the authoritarian governments, such as that of Egypt. P. 75. Retrieved April 15, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{115} “The key word in the success of Al Jazeera is the amount of freedom available to the people […]. Al Jazeera is going the same direction as the state of Qatar in its recent developments, starting with the elections for a chamber of commerce in Qatar […]. I think this direction corresponds with the direction of the media, be it Al Jazeera, or lifting censorship on local Qatari newspapers. The go together in this stage, and I think the direction of Al Jazeera is a neutral one that corresponds with the strategy is taking at this place”. Quoted by Sheikh Hamad, chairman of the board of Al Jazeera, from the TBS journal. Retrieved May 12, 2015 from the website: http://tbsjournal.arabmediasociety.com/Archives/Fall01/Jazeera_chairman.html.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Heidi A. Campbell and Diana Hawk. (2012). “Al Jazeera’s Framing of Social Media during Arab Spring”. The author concludes: 1) “social communications technology in general is presented in a positive light. […] we see that the internet and Facebook and the role they play in the protests is never critiqued or framed as problematic. Online Journal of the Virtual Middle East. Vol. 6. Iss. 1, 2012. Retrieved march 12, 2015 from the website: http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=7758.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Al Jazeera kept the people updated when the first signs of the revolution on 25 January, 2011 erupted. The anti-government practices were reported by the Al Jazeera staff in Cairo. From the 28\textsuperscript{th} of January, a seven day blog was posted online for people in Egypt as well for people worldwide. The page can be retrieved from the website: http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/middle-east/live-blog-281-egypt-protests. All aspects of the revolution were described therein, such as the steps taken by the protestors and occupations and the responses and counter-measures taken by the Egyptian government and the police force.
\item \textsuperscript{118} A timeline posted by Al Jazeera in light of the Egyptian revolution. Daily activities of the revolution and the responses by the Government have been described. This timeline can be retrieved from the website: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html.
\end{itemize}
stands, riots, strikes, and occupations by millions of protestors. The majority of the communication monopoly was owned by the State, or by then ruling president Hosni Mubarak, who gave most television stations the authority to only represent the government. TV productions in Egypt were known for their leading role in the entertainment business and less for their variety in political debates or shows. This was not due to the media, but to political influence. This was also the case with AL Jazeera.

Thus, Al Jazeera found a way of spreading critical information in the near communication monopoly environment of Egypt. A repressive reaction by the Mubarak administration was that the Nilsat stopped transmitting TV Al Jazeera’s signal. Nevertheless, Al Jazeera regained its ability to inform audiences of the Arab World and those in Egypt through close cooperation with other satellite broadcasters in the region that were not controlled by Egyptian authorities. The channel became one of the prominent news channels covering revolutions up close in opposition to the bland, state-owned Egyptian stations.

Consequently, a repressive and challenging era for the Egyptian media followed. Data, published by the Freedom House, stipulates that due to vague laws, uneven implementation, and control by the governments resulted in a status of ‘Not Free’ when looking at freedom of the press

119 Nilesat is the satellite transmission company in Egypt that is owned by the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU).


122 See an example of news coverage by Al Jazeera broadcasted on 10 February, 2011. In this news coverage horrible images are shown of police forces, who were violating protestors. Images like these, compared to ‘normal’ news coverage in Egypt, had a major impact on national and international spheres. Retrieved from the website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=55&v=MG6S7EAnBrc.

123 Freedom on the net is an initiative conducted by the Freedom House in their research worldwide. The influence of the net, as a means of spreading information with all kinds of underlying purposes involved, challenges current existing governments, political parties, groups, and other individuals who are possibly influenced by the internet. As events in the Middle East in 2011 demonstrated, the internet has also emerged as a crucial medium through which citizens can mobilize and advocate for political, social, and economic reform. Fearing the power of the new technologies, authoritarian states such as Egypt have devised subtle and not-so-subtle ways to filter, monitor, and otherwise obstruct or manipulate the openness of the internet. Even a number of democratic states have considered or implemented various restrictions in response to the potential legal, economic, and security challenges raised by new media. This increasing index has become one of the leading references for current journalists, policymakers, and researchers in terms of the manifold elements of human rights. Retrieved from the website: https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-net#.VNC5VfISb94, https://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press#.VNC5gvlSb94.
from 2000 until 2007. Since 2008 Egypt’s status has improved from being ‘Not Free’ to ‘Partly Free’.

As press freedom continued to deteriorate owing to the government’s repressive laws and intimidation of journalists, most Egyptian journalists succeeded in expanding media coverage diversity by pushing back some of the “red lines” that were restricting their work. While freedom of the press started to improve, in 2011 the crackdown of the November 2011 elections resulted in a ‘Not Free’. ‘Legal harassment, spurious arrests, and violations of due process against journalists and bloggers’ were different measures undertaken by the government. As described in the previous chapter, different attempts by the government to obstruct freedom under the Emergency Law or the press law, for example, made it possible to limit the press and journalists. Other measures taken by the government of Mubarak, and later even harsher measures taken by the regime of al-Sisi, which are still observed to this day are imprisonment of Al Jazeera journalists and sentencing of Egyptian bloggers. In its yearly World Report of 2011 Human Rights Watch draws the conclusion that the Egyptian authorities, despite promising to stop the state of emergency, renewed Law No. 162 of 1958. More specifically, article 3 of the Emergency Law, which allows the state to use exceptional courts to hear cases that are related to crimes that committed in violation of rulings made by the president, was observed. In other words, it became easy for the government to arrest people, clearly violating freedoms of expression and speech. The increase in the number of imprisonments of journalists, bloggers, and protestors can be traced since the time when the SCAF came into power. The SCAF replaced former President Hosni Mubarak when he was ousted on February 11, 2011. The SCAF, under the leadership of Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, originally promised to live up to the promises of the protestors. Instead, the SCAF failed to achieve better conditions in light of human rights and

---

124 Data regarding freedom of the press was retrieved from the Freedom House website: [https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt#.VVOO9Bq4X94](https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt#.VVOO9Bq4X94).
125 Al Jazeera. (2011)“ Live Blog 31/1 – Egypt protests”. This live blog kept the people of Egypt updated by with live coverage from the Al Jazeera staff in Cairo. On 31 January, 2011, ‘in light of the Egyptian government’s detention of six Al Jazeera journalists earlier today, the middle East coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists tells Al Jazeera that the Egyptian government has not been able to control the media effectively during recent protests’. The Middle East coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists states the Following: “Egypt has a long and atrocious record of suppressing the media [...] that Egyptian state TV is showing cooking shows today is an indication of the level of denial [...] but frankly no one is watching Egyptian TV [...] the government seems too intent on shooting the messenger and blaming the victim [...] I urge the Egyptian authorities to learn something from Tunisia [...] the media blackout is not working’. Retrieved may 4, 2015 from the website: [http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/middle-east/live-blog-311-egypt-protests](http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/middle-east/live-blog-311-egypt-protests).
127 Ibid.
enhancing the deteriorated freedoms in Egypt; the hopes of the ‘25 January’ protestors were crushed.\textsuperscript{129} \textsuperscript{130}

\section*{5.4. Measures taken by Mubarak}

During the Arab revolutions, the opposition used Facebook, among other channels, to attract global attention to what was happening on the streets in Egypt. The state police acknowledged the fact that monitoring took place on online dissident forums, but the SCAF underestimated the scope and influence of offline protestors. In the wake of the demonstrations, the SCAF started to block online media platforms such as Twitter, Bambuser, and Facebook. Furthermore, several bloggers, dissidents, activists, and human rights figures were detained in an attempt to regulate online discussions. Shortly after, the SCAF censored five of the MB websites. Additionally, the SCAF disseminated denial-of-service (DoS) messages. Portals including Al Jazeera and BBC Arabic were targeted for the DoS messages.\textsuperscript{131}

Regarding the concluding remarks of the role of Al Jazeera during the Arab Spring and their role in influencing the communication monopoly it can be argued that “Al Jazeera played [a role] in shaping public perceptions of the Arab Spring” as did social media. Both […] allowed those who [had] traditionally not had a voice in the Middle East to be heard instead.”\textsuperscript{132} In addition, Zayani concluded in 2005 that in 2011 “Al Jazeera reinvigorated a sense of common destiny in the Arab world and is

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{129}World Report. (2012) \textit{Human Rights Watch}. According to the report, the SCAF promised to release all “detainees held under the Emergency Law – numbering several thousand in late 2010 – and furthermore promised to end the State of Emergency.” However, the SCAF did not keep its promise and continued to use the special courts, under the \textit{Emergency Law}.According to human rights watch estimates, the SCAF has tried more than 12,000 civilians since January 2012. This number is more than the total amount of civilians tried by the special courts during the Mubarak presidency. P. 545. Retrieved May 2, 2015. P. 545 – 551. New York.


\end{flushright}
Something that began as an online/digital opposition movement and a collective action against the Mubarak administration slowly ignited onto the streets of Egypt and was underpinned by multiple motives and channels that facilitated success. This online movement initially resulted in a series of “Silent Stands”. The protestors intentionally gathered for a non-violent protest in an attempt to maximize the impact while minimizing the amount of violence used by avoiding Egypt’s Emergency Law. Prior to these stands, the rules of engagement were posted on the related Facebook page. Those rules of engagement were specifically mentioned in order to prevent the police from using their power under the Emergency Law. The movement culminated in a colossal and major significant historical revolution at Tahrir Square, where more than 250,000 people gathered in the beginning of 2011. By the 1st of February it is estimated that almost one million protestors gathered on the square. Thus, a group that “was able to unify its followers by providing a solid schemata of interpretation enabled individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label what had happened”. A group

---


134 Pan-Arabism is the ideology that refers to the unification of the countries in the MENA and West Asian regions. Some argue that the phenomenon is closely related to Arab nationalism and Arabism. This differs per source that is referenced.


136 See Arab version of the Facebook page on which the Rules of Engagement for the silent stance were posted. The message begins by describing an overall and introductory part regarding the ideology. From here on, the message continues by outlining “what to wear, what to bring and what not to bring to the protests, and what is forbidden to do. For instance ‘it is strictly forbidden to take any publication or papers. [...] no cheering, do not talk and do not respond to any verbal abuse”. Retrieved from the website: https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=136763013004194. In order to determine the message written on the Facebook page, Google Translate was used.


138 Erving Goffman. (1986). Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience. The author draws an overview of how western society responds to a particular event. Goffman continues by implying that everyone’s response will be underpinned by one or more frameworks. Such frameworks or schemata’s of interpretation are what people depend on, and they create meaning from that which is meaningless, as was the case with the Egyptian situation prior to 2011 and with the instigation of the Arab uprisings. A digital framework, designed in this case by Ghonim regarding the case of the death of Khaled and the deteriorating situation in Egypt, sketched an image of ways to express public dissent. This kind of framework, serving as a digital support, seems to have played a rather important role, as most Egyptians had not expressed themselves regarding political issues before due to governmental pressure and barriers. Thus, framing political issues makes it easier for those who need support. Retrieved May 2, 2015. P. 21. Northeastern University Press
emerged under the ideology of ‘We’ who protest against the regime. Furthermore, Al Jazeera, “creates neither deep awareness nor a political culture. Instead, Al Jazeera allows its viewers and followers to have faith in their own thoughts”.\(^{139}\) Al Jazeera and (social) media platforms such as Facebook supported the public in expressing their thoughts.

Thus, the phenomenon of the Arab uprisings is a rather complex phenomenon to exemplify. The deteriorating political and economic situation in Egypt under the Mubarak administration, in combination with increased public expression and the ease of communicating dissenting views, contributed partly to the rise of the revolutions. This chapter contributes to a minor part to the basic knowledge of the impact of social media platform Facebook and TV channel Al Jazeera on the Egyptian administration. According to the collected material on the developments of the Arab Spring, it can be observed that neither Facebook nor Al Jazeera did organize the revolution all by themselves.\(^{140}\) However, the significant role of both almost certainly contributed to the push that the public needed to collectively demonstrate against the regime. The conclusion of this chapter is that both online and offline media platforms contributed to the collective action versus Mubarak.


6. During his presidency, how did Morsi, leader of the former MB and FJP, respond to the effects the net and the TV channel Al Jazeera had on the communication monopoly of Egypt during the Arab Spring?

Since the fall of Mubarak in early 2011, an era of political, social, and economic instability and insecurity has ensued in Egypt. Even though three major political regimes have controlled the government administration since the beginning of 2011, no actual improvements have occurred in the country. Some even argue that living conditions have worsened.\textsuperscript{141} One key challenge has been successfully purging the authoritarian elements that were imposed on the political system by Mubarak during his regime. During the 30-year rule of Mubarak, the modus operandi of governmental bodies was influenced by his ideology. It was expected and to some extent demanded by the Egyptian people to quickly and sufficient suspend the houses of parliament. After the Arab uprisings, the military, officially the SCAF, made moves to consolidate Mubarak’s influence and get a grip on restructuring the politically, economically, and socially deteriorating situation in Egypt. Although improvement was promised, the press and those who operated on social media platform experienced on-going limitations and suppression. The following sub-chapter will go into the measures taken by the SCAF to counter and / or limit the use of (social) media platforms for exploitation.

When the SCAF took over the presidential office, it was only given governmental powers for a short period of time, as presidential elections took place in mid-2012 and were a historic event in which the MB’s member Mohammed Morsi became the first ‘freely’ elected Islamic president in Egypt. Mohamed Morsi ruled the country for 13 months and promised a ‘new Egypt’\textsuperscript{142} However, during his presidency, Morsi was not able to realize any of the Egyptian public’s demands. In addition, aspects such as freedom of expression and freedom of press, according to many critics, even worsened during Morsi’s presidency. Thus, in November 2012 another revolution took place on the streets of Egypt during which the people demanded the ousting of Morsi. Shortly thereafter, he

\textsuperscript{141} Mohamed Younis. (2013). “Egyptians See Life Worse Now Than Before Mubarak’s Fall”. Gallup Analytics. The conclusion that the situation deteriorated in Egypt is based on results from Gullup’s polling just before President Morsi was ousted from office. Retrieved October 20, 2015 from the website: http://www.gallup.com/poll/164015/egyptians-life-worse-mubarak-fall.aspx.

\textsuperscript{142} Heba Saleh. (2012). Morsi promises a new Egypt. Financial Times. As Morsi was inaugurated, he stated the following: “Today the Egyptians laid the foundations for a dignified life, complete freedom, and a real democracy”. Thus, directly implicating goals that should be achieved under his duty. Retrieved May 23, 2015 from the website: http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/afroca/mohammed-morsi-promises-new-egypt-during-swareing-in-as-president.
was ousted from power by the military and placed under house arrest by Egyptian security forces. Thus, in 2013, the SCAF governed as an interim government after leading a military coup against the first freely elected president in Egypt. Adbel Fattah al-Sisi, who held various positions in the SCAF, currently holds the office of the president.

This chapter concludes that the various regimes that have taken control since the ousting of Mubarak in 2011 have not been able to deliver on the requested transitions as demanded by the public, specifically those pertaining to freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The SCAF and Morsi, therefore, had a paradoxical modus operandi. Due to the strained atmosphere in Egypt the government should manage the political and economic issues extensively; however, due to the high tension in the country, governments have functioned in unusual ways, as was observed during the power grab by the SCAF and by the presidency of Morsi.

6.1. The SCAF

Before doing a thorough analysis of the measures imposed by Mohamed Morsi and Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, it is important to briefly go into the actions executed by the SCAF. Only two days after February 11, 2011, when President Mubarak was forced to resign his position as president, the SCAF took over the presidential, executive, and legislative powers. The SCAF, of which Mohamed Hussein Tantawi was in charge, was welcomed by the Egyptian people as saviour of the nation and gained control for a short period of time in order to meet up with the transitional desires of the public for more political freedom, improved human rights, regaining control of the socio-economic conditions, and foremost working toward a more democratic society. In order to secure their position and increase public support, the SCAF decided to secure the following procedures: ‘... end the state of emergency as soon as the current circumstances are over. [...] Conduct needed legislative amendments and conduct free and fair presidential elections. [...] the SCAF is committed to sponsoring legitimate demands of the people.’

By making statements like this, among others, the SCAF underpinned initiative and effort to demonstrate to the public their ambition to gain back control of the country and live up to the

---

interests of the people of Egypt. Their ambitious interests were even further underpinned by manifold additional statements. Even the Council stated that the Arab Republic of Egypt is from now on committed to all international and regional obligations and treaties.\textsuperscript{144} \textsuperscript{145}

As this thesis is focused on freedom of the press and freedom of expression, and especially the role of the independent TV channel Al Jazeera and the social media platform Facebook, this chapter will include an analysis of those measures focused on usage of these specific (social) media channels. During the revolutions, it was said that ‘the people and the military [were] one hand’, which was a slogan commonly used during the days nearing the ousting of Mubarak.\textsuperscript{146} \textsuperscript{147} Many Egyptians were given high hopes by the SCAF due to the effort and ambition communicated in their statements regarding possible reform in light of the media and aspects of freedom of expression and the press. The conclusion can be drawn, as has been underpinned by many critics and NGOs, that by the fall of 2011 the people of Egypt no longer regarded the SCAF as a guardian of the revolution. In the end, many considered the SCAF the revolution’s antagonist.\textsuperscript{148}

Thus, while the military gained executive and presidential powers in Egypt, multiple new laws and decrees were introduced. However, many radical and harsh laws left over from the Mubarak era remained unchanged and the media crackdown continued. On March 30, 2011, the SCAF adopted a provisional constitution, but the press laws and penal code remained in effect, though promises were made to abandon them. The SCAF did, however, abandon the Emergency Law that had been in place for more than four decades.\textsuperscript{149} \textsuperscript{150} In addition, other measures taken by the SCAF during this

\textsuperscript{145} UNHR. (1976). \textit{International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights}. Article 18 spells out that freedom of thought is a right for everyone. Article 19 additionally refers to the freedom that is obliged to every human being able to express themselves. Retrieved October 14, 2015 from the website: \url{http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx}.
\textsuperscript{147} David Kirkpatrick. (2011) “Mass March by Cairo Women in Protest Over Abuse by Soldiers”. \textit{The New York Times}. The author refers to the fact that this event, during which people went onto the streets to demonstrate against the ruling powers of the SCAF, has been called the “biggest women’s demonstration in modern Egyptian history.” Retrieved May 21, 2015.

Leiden University
transition in Egypt fell short of democratic standards. The analysis of this chapter relies on a translated version of the constitutional text from the Egyptian service portal.\textsuperscript{151}

6.1.1. 2011 Interim constitution

After only two days in office, the SCAF set aside the longstanding 1971 constitution and replaced it with a provisional interim constitution at the end of 2011. Within a short period, a committee consisting of eight handpicked men finished writing the document in which amendments were presented. Not long after, a referendum took place regarding the implementation of this constitution. On the one hand, referendum opponents, those who supported liberal ideology, including intellectuals and the youth, were concerned that the process of voting simply did not allow opposition groups to compete. On the other hand, supporters of the referendum, including the MB, stipulated that the worst articles from the 1971 constitution were dealt with and that the new document was acceptable and applicable to everyone in Egypt. The referendum was rather clear in terms of the outcome. More than 77 percent of those who voted approved of the amended constitution.\textsuperscript{152} This new constitution included 63 articles that formed what became known as the \textit{March 30 Constitutional Declaration}.\textsuperscript{153} Although the declaration has been criticized for being too similar to the old constitution of 1971 as well as being illegitimate, the SCAF proved itself to be a good faith actor as it clearly upheld the promise of holding elections that differed from those of the Mubarak era.\textsuperscript{154} The amended constitution was based primarily on describing how Egypt is to be governed during the transitional period. The constitution consists of articles that outline a


---

Transcription of text from PDF:

6.1.1. 2011 Interim constitution

After only two days in office, the SCAF set aside the longstanding 1971 constitution and replaced it with a provisional interim constitution at the end of 2011. Within a short period, a committee consisting of eight handpicked men finished writing the document in which amendments were presented. Not long after, a referendum took place regarding the implementation of this constitution. On the one hand, referendum opponents, those who supported liberal ideology, including intellectuals and the youth, were concerned that the process of voting simply did not allow opposition groups to compete. On the other hand, supporters of the referendum, including the MB, stipulated that the worst articles from the 1971 constitution were dealt with and that the new document was acceptable and applicable to everyone in Egypt. The referendum was rather clear in terms of the outcome. More than 77 percent of those who voted approved of the amended constitution. This new constitution included 63 articles that formed what became known as the \textit{March 30 Constitutional Declaration}. Although the declaration has been criticized for being too similar to the old constitution of 1971 as well as being illegitimate, the SCAF proved itself to be a good faith actor as it clearly upheld the promise of holding elections that differed from those of the Mubarak era. The amended constitution was based primarily on describing how Egypt is to be governed during the transitional period. The constitution consists of articles that outline a
fundamental basis of freedoms. The SCAF highlighted the importance of freedom of the press and freedom of expression in the constitution. Article 12 spells out freedom of expression as follows:

‘The state guarantees the freedom of opinion [...] and every person has the right to express his opinion and publish it in spoken, written, photographed, or other form within the confines of the law.’

Thus, article 12 explicitly guarantees freedom of expression and opinion by stating that every person has the right to express his or her opinion in speech, a written statement, a photographed manner, or in any other form “within the confines of the law”. In other words, freedom of expression is guaranteed by the state, while no actual possible limitations to this freedom are included.

When looking into the case of Egypt, the second part of article 12 does recognize that personal criticism will contribute to a more developed national security. The element of ‘personal criticism’ therefore means that expression regarding political issues or any issues at all related to domestic matters is promoted as it improves national security. Indirectly, the SCAF laid down its right to arrest those who express themselves; However, this freedom can only be exercised under the idea of ‘within the confines of the law’, and with no further clarifications on possible limitations on this freedom.

The constitution continues by providing a more detailed overview of the freedoms of the press and outlaws any kind of censorship. This is spelled out in article 13, and includes the following:

‘Freedom of the press, printing, publication, and media are guaranteed, and censorship is forbidden, as are giving ultimatums and stopping or cancelling publication from an administrative channel.’

Thus, it seems that article 13 provides a relatively sufficient overview of freedom of the press, explicitly referring to freedom of the press and the publication of media coverage. However, the article continues by referring to the fact that whenever the country is in state of emergency - although abolishment of this law was promised, it did not occur the entire time during SCAF’s control.

---

156 Ibid. Art. 12. Part 2 is as follow: ‘[…] Personal criticism and constructive criticism are a guarantee for the safety of national development.’
158 Ibid. Art. 13
of Egypt - exceptions and regulations regarding these freedoms of the press may be made. Multiple articles and provisions were initiated and limited and relegated media as such. Two major provisions enacted shortly before the second round of the presidential election occurred.

Consequently, this allowed the SCAF to limit and influence any type of censorship published by newspapers and publications related to national safety and/or national security. Both articles 12 and 13 reference confines of law and stipulate that exceptions can be made whenever the country is in a state of emergency. Both present vague and unclear clarifications of the confines of the law. More importantly, all content regarding the legal protections outlined in the interim constitution do not apply under the state of emergency in Egypt. These protections were also weakened due to restrictive legal provisions that contradict and negate it. This was especially the case during the regime of Mohamed Morsi under the amended 2012 constitution. Due to vague and missing elements when referring to the ability to ‘limit censorship’ when in a ‘state of emergency’, the SCAF was able to implement measures in line with its own ideology without interpreting the constitution.

In other words, whenever any individual criticized political issues or decisions by the SCAF arrests were made and repressive limitations were placed on freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The most well-known case of the SCAF violating freedom of expression and press freedom is the detention of Maikel Nabil Sanad in March 2011. Sanad was sentenced to three years in 2011 by the Military court after writing a message on his blog. His message was titled ‘The Army and the People Were Never One Hand’. He was arrested solely for expressing his opinion.

During the events of the Arab uprisings at the beginning of 2011, the government under Mubarak shut down the main entry points of the internet in Egypt, which was a repressive measure that limited the ability of the people of Egypt to communicate, express, plan, and all else related to online activism. A result of these restrictions was international condemnation and civil

---

159 Ibid.


demands for more democratic values. Instead of blocking the entire internet, the SCAF initiated procedures to counter and limit the use of online (social) media platforms by opposition groups. This was systematized by restricting the connectivity of the internet for the public through blockages of specific websites in the months following the Arab uprisings. In mid-2011 the SCAF accused the April 6th Youth movement, one of the most prominent and popular movements online that supported the SCAF during the 2011 Arab uprisings against Mubarak, of turning the people against the Egyptian Army. An official statement concerning the movement by a SCAF member was aired publically on TV. The SCAF administration expressed their ‘concerns’ that the April 6th movement was funded by foreign governments and had interest in foreign agendas. These accusations resulted in numerous harsh complaints by the April 6th movement. Other websites, such as Al Dostor, Youm7, and Al Shorouk, stated that their websites were enduring slow connection and service time-outs. Similar complaints by various websites hinted that ‘the ruling [party] was still using old tactics of controlling internet access to suppress dissent activity’.

6.1.2. Concluding remarks

When looking into the SCAF’s 2011 interim constitution, the conclusion can be drawn that the SCAF did respond to the people’s high hopes for media transition under a post-revolutionary ideology. However, it became clear that the dream of a free media system in Egypt was not fully realized by the SCAF. Due to transition, through constitutional changes and new laws and regulations, this media glorification began to transform in the SCAF’s favour. Shortly after, media became a

163 Ibid.
 staunch supporter of the SCAF, including supporting its campaigns. The biased and violence-inciting performance of media became a weapon of the SCAF. Meanwhile, the ineffectiveness and the inefficiency of the SCAF began to surface. Not long after, the people started to express unrest again through mass demonstrations on the streets and the use of social media as a tool for expressing thought in light of political issues.\textsuperscript{168}\textsuperscript{169} As the media turned toward the ideology of the SCAF, \textit{Time} magazine reported that talk shows on the state media stations filled their broadcasts with anti-demonstration rhetoric. Protestors who contributed to the 2011 Arab uprisings in Egypt were portrayed as ‘thugs’ and warnings were made against “foreign interference in Egyptian affairs, rising insecurity, and crime”.\textsuperscript{170} Furthermore, the media labelled the anti-SCAF or anti-military demonstrations as “dangerous and destabilizing events, driven by foreign agents”. Those who opposed the ideology of the SCAF on social media were intimidated by the regime in multiple ways. Specifically, the military responded to demonstrations against the regime with investigations, trials, and arrests.\textsuperscript{171}

The SCAF presented itself as the shepherd of the transition to democracy in Egypt after Mubarak. However, the Human Rights Watch, among many other NGOs, concluded that the regime “trampled the rights of Egyptian people by repressing speech and politics gathering and preserving an unfair justice system”.\textsuperscript{172} The SCAF did, however, try to surpass Mubarak in some areas, such as the Emergency Law. Only two weeks after the SCAF took control, they abolished the Emergency Law.\textsuperscript{173}


\textsuperscript{169} See Rasha Abdulla. (2014). “Egypt’s media in the midst of Revolution”. \textit{Carnegie endowment for international peace}. One of the most well-known attempts by the oppositional public to show the masses the actual status of the media was the \textit{Kazeboon}. The \textit{Kazeboon} was an initiative that organized public screenings of revolutionary related activities on the streets of Egypt. Through this initiative, the people were asked to “organize street protests in which authentic footage and information that the mainstream media were not covering was showed”. P. 17.

\textsuperscript{170} Abigail Hauslohner. (2012). “The Most Powerful Weapon of Egypt’s Ruling Generals: State TV”. \textit{TIME}. The author quotes a youth protestors who states that the media is ‘the SCAF’s most powerful tool’. As a result, the SCAF created a culture of fear, forefrenting the role of the military. Retrieved June 10, 2015 from the website: http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2107910,00.html.


\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
However, despite this step in the right direction, the SCAF continued for the most part to follow in the footsteps of Mubarak and his ideology. The SCAF gave the military, police, and soldiers the authority and jurisdiction to arrest those who opposed the regime, a policy that effectively re-established part of the Emergency Law.\(^{174}\)

### 6.2. Mohamed Morsi’s transitional period June 2012 – July 2013

After an instable transitional period under the SCAF administration, Morsi was appointed president in the beginning the same year on June 30, 2012.\(^{175}\) Prior, Mohamed Morsi was Member of Parliament in People’s Assembly of Egypt from 2000 to 2005 and later became a lead member of the MB. The Brotherhood, a Sunni Islamist religious movement with political and social interests, continued to serve as a leading figure in establishing an Islamic state in Egypt. The Brotherhood’s competitive discourse had disappointing results during the semi-authoritarian era of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. This was a consequence of the legal provisions imposed by the administrations of Sadat and Mubarak that limited the influential role of Islamist ideological oppositions. This was realized by means of banning religious (political) groups from political participation.\(^{176}\) However, following the 2011 revolutions and once Mubarak had been forced out, the Brotherhood became even more popular in the eyes of the Egyptian people. For the first time in recent decades the brotherhood was able to express itself more freely.\(^{177}\) Furthermore and more importantly, the fall of Mubarak created channels and possibilities for the Brotherhood to participate on a political level. As such, the legalized political arm of the Brotherhood was created, under the name *the Freedom and...*

\(^{174}\) Ibid.


\(^{176}\) Jason Brownlee. (2002). “The decline of Pluralism in Mubarak’s Egypt”. *Journal of Democracy.* The author argues that the (Mubarak) government “still deploys the same state of emergency rationale for similarly repressive measures against nonviolent Islamist political actors” such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Vol. 13. No. 4. P. 7.

Despite undisputed association between the MB and the FJP, the members of the MB made attempts to portray the FJP as an autonomous entity. These efforts were undertaken in order to reduce concerns from the international arena and possible Egyptian voters. However, although such attempts were made by the MB, ‘in practice the MB and FJP did not act as separate entities and the Guidance Council had some influence on the development and progress of FJP.’

During the 2012 presidential elections, the FJP was winning seat after seat and later Morsi was elected as the new president of Egypt. Morsi was the firstly democratically elected president of Egypt and gained control on 30 June 2012. He ruled the country for a little more than one year before being ousted due to increasing Egyptian protests and the 2013 Egyptian coup d’état.

Although the people in Egypt have experienced decades of suppression, it can be said for certain that ‘Egyptians never tolerate total suppression’. According to Ahmed (2013), Despite Morsi’s affiliation with a religious group, namely the MB, the freedom flame was strong enough that people reasonably thought that he would never make any attempts to approach politics with ill intentions.

The main underlying focus of the ideology of the FJP was constitutional and it sought for “Civil, with an Islamic reference” style governance. When Morsi came into power on December 26, 2012 a controversial referendum was proposed. There have been allegations, which have been
rejected by Morsi supporters, that “fake judges” were supervising the referendum polls.\textsuperscript{185} This, however, will be excluded from this chapter. These allegations and Morsi’s policies regarding freedom of expression and thought point to the corrupt and extreme style of Morsi’s governance. This chapter will go into the measures used by Morsi to counter the use and exploitation of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Al Jazeera, by opposition groups. It was hoped that media outlets and social media platforms would gain more independence in the transition to democracy; however, slow media reform and political transition have been dominating the Egyptian media sphere.

### 6.2.1. 2012 Constitution

The MB’s FJP won the majority vote for the presidential elections in 2012. The MB governed the process of aggressively pushing for the implementation of a new constitution. Morsi hoped to respond to the ideals of the protestors and journalists of private media outlets during the 2011 and the post revolutions during the regime of the SCAF. Expanding freedoms was the crux of the demonstrations during the Arab uprisings in 2011. The constitution did respond to limitations of the press and on expression of the public and the media; however, these rights were undermined treacherously in the proposed text, whether due to inconsistencies or because of Islamic interpretations of the definition of freedom and rights. Thus, contradictory tracks within the constitution refer to these freedoms, but there is an excessive scope of interpretation with which governments could limit those rights.

First, article 45 stipulates the protection of the freedom of thought and opinion and freedom of the press indirectly as follows:

\textit{“Freedom of thought and opinion are guaranteed. Every human being has the right to express an opinion orally or in writing, photography, or other means of publication and expression.”}\textsuperscript{186}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.  \\
\end{flushleft}
The article directly guarantees the safeguarding of freedom of thought and freedom of opinion by the state. No sort of limitations are contained within the article. While the document does addresses freedom of the press, other articles leave media professionals exposed to possible excessive punishment under the law, including prison sentences for ‘malpractice’. There is, for instance, a contradictory component spelled out in article 31 that draws some limitations to freedom of thought and expression. Although article 31 starts by proclaiming the “inviolability of every human being”, the article continues by mentioning that the government forbids any type of insult by a person against another human being. The Egyptian government will safeguard this right, the freedom from intimidation, as such. The article puts this as follows: “insulting or showing contempt toward any human being shall be prohibited”. This vaguely written phrase in article 31 thus nuances freedom of expression with limitations such as that prohibiting insulting someone. Although article 31 does not outline legitimate limitations to freedom of expression under the human rights law (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), criminal prosecutions based on charges of insulting the president or government have increased tremendously under the rule of Morsi. The UDHR clearly refers to such limitations as a matter of national security and public order. In addition, the UDHR stipulates freedom of opinion in article 19 as follow: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”. Thus, it can be suggested that article 31, which clearly provides a framework for defamation to remain a criminal offence and thus enables prosecution, is in violation of article 19 of the UDHR. Data shows that the number of lawsuits aimed at those who have “insulted the president” during Morsi’s first 200 days as president is higher than the number of lawsuits during entire 30-year reign of Mubarak. One of the

187 Ibid. Art. 31.
188 United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The limitations imposed in the constitution by Morsi are a violation of the declaration, according to article 29. The article stipulates the following: “In exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of other and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society”.
189 Ibid. Art. 19.
190 See first session UHDR, the UN General Assembly declared that the Freedom of Information (which inheres in the Freedom of Expression) is a fundamental human right and [...] the touchstone of all of the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated.” See Resolution 59(1), 14 December 1946. According to Article 19, an organization devoted to defending the freedom of expression “is not only important in its own right but is also essential if other human rights are to be achieved.” Retrieved from the website: http://www.article19.org/pages/en/freedom-of-expression.html.
191 Ahram Online. (2013). “More insulting president’ lawsuits under Morsi than Mubarak”. This claim is made by Gamal Eid, a human rights lawyer and director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI). Eid
more prominent cases, amongst manifold other cases, was the arrest of Coptic Christian school teacher, Bishoy Kamel. Kamel was sentenced to six years in prison after he dispatched cartoons and messages on Facebook containing insulting content aimed at the Prophet Mohamed and President Morsi and his family.\(^{192}^{193}\)

While articles 31 and 45 develop a rather contradictory framework in light of freedom of expression and freedom of thought, the constitution specifies the freedoms for the various press channels and (online) media platforms. Yet, again, similarly to articles 31 and 45, vague and ominous language was used. Article 48 of the 2012 constitution stipulates that:

“Freedom of the press, printing, publication, and mass media shall be guaranteed. The media shall be free and independent to serve the community and to express the different trends in public opinions. [...] The closure or confiscation of media outlets is prohibited except with a court order.”\(^{194}\)

Thus, the opening part of article 48 denotes the various freedoms that shall be guaranteed by the government. Basically, Morsi has tried to soften the legal basis of repressing the media in Egypt. However, while stating that media outlets cannot be confiscated, the government of Morsi is able to confiscate or close any type of media outlet by obtaining a court order.\(^{195}^{196}\)
Article 81 continues by imposing another possible limitation on the content of media as follows:

*Control over the media is prohibited, with the exception of specific censorship that may be imposed in times of war or public mobilization.*\(^{197}\)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, as soon as Morsi came into power, state and private media was increasingly ‘driven into Islamist and non-Islamist camps, to the detriment of journalist integrity and objectivity’. One of the influences on the media outlets was the appointment of new executives and chief operators to the media outlets. The paradigm of having politicians from the upper house Parliament reselecting the chief editors of ‘free’ media outlets can be seen as an act of repression and a violation of the notion of a free press and a free journalistic sector.

### 6.2.2. Measures taken by Morsi

In what way did Morsi try to counter the use and exploitation of online and offline (social) media platforms? At first, the government under Morsi’s rule did not use measures like blocking controversial websites. Later however, Morsi managed to place ‘significant limits on the content of online media platforms’.\(^{198}\) Some attempts by the Egyptian court were made to block certain websites, such as YouTube, though the Ministry of Communications & Information Technology (MCIT) tried to reject those decisions on the grounds that such a decision is unfeasible. In addition, in the highly polarized media environment of Egypt, the political parties and (online) social movements did strive for online supremacy. However, in the beginning of February 2013, the MB government was able to block YouTube for the first time ever, after the media platform allowed an anti-Islamic documentary.\(^{199}\) The court in Egypt made a list of high-profile rulings in order to block or limit the content of certain websites.\(^{200}\) One of these court decisions involved the blocking of YouTube for a

---


198 Ibid. P. 6.


considerable period on the grounds that the website contributed to the hosting of the movie clip ‘Innocence of Muslims’.201

A separate tactic by the FJP was censorship measures taken by webmasters and moderators of online posts and comments on internet forums such as Facebook. Editors of state-owned media outlets used to delete comments, including those critical of government activities. Other initiatives were intended to replace members of state media companies with members or sympathizers of the Brotherhood, thus influencing the media in order to develop a system in which they could operate as a media apparatus to spread propaganda and gather supporters.

The rise of Islamist forces also contributed to increased online infringements. Several cases of bloggers and online journalists expressing concerns regarding the FJP or critical views of them resulted in jail sentences as “the popularity of social media galvanized the spread of gossip and rumours, further polarizing the politics in Egypt”.202 There are manifold cases of online activists and social media platform users being harassed and detained due to their activities. As a result of the explosion in the number of social media users, the Egyptian political parties and the MB government made attempts to regain control by spreading a large amount of communication and propaganda on their Facebook and Twitter accounts.203 The Egyptian government actively started to participate in online discussions on governmental issues.

In parallel, the Egyptian press and media have faced innumerable challenges regarding the increasing domination of the Egyptian courts and political pressure in the power struggle over Egypt’s political future. Morsi issued a decree in which the pre-trial detention of journalists was banned, allowing Morsi to extradite foreigners in detention back to their countries, which is a law that is in the interest of the country and the international image of Egypt.204 Similarly, it was a move that led to the president releasing Al Jazeera journalists. Although this was a well-thought out initiative, the

state also continued a pattern of repression, repeatedly targeting the media for critical views on political issues.\textsuperscript{205}

Although the Morsi government imposed these numerous restrictive obstacles, journalists and users of social media continued their anti-governmental activities and trying to protect democratic principles.

### 6.3. Concluding remarks

Thus, it is possible to determine the different practices implemented by the SCAF in the beginning of 2011 and those laid out in the constitution, which is criticized a lot, introduced by Morsi in 2012 that limit the role of the media and freedom of expression. The adjustment of the former constitution led to various negative developments for the Egyptian media, including polarization between pro- and anti-government outlets, an increased use of defamation laws against the press, and a deteriorated situation in terms of the number of cases of journalists being harassed or violated.\textsuperscript{206} The failures of the SCAF presented various governing challenges for the MB. For example, they had to find a balance between the Islamic principles of their own ideology and trying to develop democratic values for a more stable society, as demanded by the people during the 2011 uprisings. However, according to many critics and NGOs, the introduction of a brotherhood government was a failure in that it ended up both as “conservative democratic” and Islamist.\textsuperscript{207} \textsuperscript{208} The final draft of the constitution approved in 2012 by the assembly of Egypt did protect some rights and freedoms but undermined others. Some basic protection was given against arbitrary detention and torture. However, evidence was found that during the SCAF administration, there was a drastic deterioration


\textsuperscript{208} Stephan Roll. (2013). “Egypt: The failure of the Muslim Brotherhoo’. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. The author argues that the MB was unable to form a united Islamist front. This was due to the rather surprising success of the Salafist political party under the name Al-Nour Party. This second largest party in Egypt showed more willingness to cooperate with the opposition. Retrieved June 27, 2015 from the website: http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publications/point-of-view/egypt-the-failure-of-the-muslim-brotherhood.html.
of human rights, with an increase in arrests, detentions, and incidents of torture being recorded.²⁰⁹ Some of the rights that have been undermined in the new constitution are freedom of expression and press freedom, the most basic and necessary rights in Egypt. Although Morsi claimed, soon after his election, that “No one will touch media freedoms. There will be no pens broken, no opinions prevented, no channels or newspapers shut down in my era”, data shows that during Morsi’s presidency, no gains were made in terms of freedom of the press.²¹⁰ The status Partly Free was given to Egypt in 2012 by the Freedom House and changed to Not Free in the beginning of 2013.²¹¹ The Freedom House publishes a yearly report on the country’s level of freedom. Egypt received the status partly free for many reasons. Some of them will be included in this chapter. Campaigns to intimidate journalists and efforts made to prosecute journalists that criticize and insult the brotherhood government and/or president contributed to the status.

During Morsi’s presidency, there were manifold oppressions of freedom of expression and press freedom. As Heather McRobie (2013) puts its “One of the only consistencies in Egypt, from the Mubarak era through to the SCAF period to Morsi’s rule to the tumultuous summer of 2013, has been encroachments on press freedom and attacks on journalists”.²¹² Part of his rule was allegedly aimed at dominating the influential Egyptian media.²¹³ The attempt by Morsi to dominate state media became a major political debate.²¹⁴


²¹³ Ahram Online. (2012). “Egypt “TV presenters march on Tahrir to protest Islamist media ‘domination,’””. Ahram Online. Due to attempts by the government to gain control of the TV channels in Egypt, the employees of those media channels started to protest on the streets of Cairo. Around 200 Egyptian TV presenters marched on Tahrir Square. Retrieved June 15, 2015 from the website: http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/60149/ Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-TV-presenters-march-on-Tahrir-to-protest-Isl.aspx.

²¹⁴ Ibid.
“alleged attempts to gain control of state institutions in order to implement their own Islamic conservative policies”.  

Free media and press and freedom of expression are essential elements of a democratic society. However, data shows that Egypt under Morsi’s Islamic rule was far from being democratic. Crackdowns on popular press and television shows and their presenters resulted in a severe backlash against the MB. This was a reason, amongst many others, that many Egyptians yet again demonstrated against the failing regime of Morsi. As soon as these mass protests erupted on the 1st of July 2013, the MB shut down various media channels, one of which was Al Jazeera. The (online) media platforms, similar to the previous demonstrations in 2011 and 2012, played a major role in these protests. In the process of shutting down the studios of Al Jazeera, during which the Egyptian Security forces broke into the studios, employees and other crew members of the Islamic TV channels were arrested.

While Morsi initially stated that he wanted to expand freedom of the press and freedom of thought, data retrieved from the various (social) media platforms shows that under Morsi those freedoms were further restricted. In short, vagueness in terminology, limitations, restrictions, and measures in the constitution limited the role of social media and TV channels.
7. How is current ruling President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi responding to influential (social) media platforms, while improving the living conditions in Egypt?

At the time that former President Morsi was overthrown on 3 July 2013 by the Egyptian army, the SCAF regained control of the country for a short period of time. At that moment the SCAF was under the supervision of interim President Adly Mansour. Morsi was removed after countless ultimatums imposed by the military.\footnote{Morsi was not able to reconcile the imposed goals of the Egyptian people with his measures. In addition, the government failed to meet the demands that the government share power with oppositional movements within the political sphere. For instance, Morsi took total control of the media by replacing the supervisors of the well-known and influential TV channels and related media platforms with members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, Morsi increased his influence in the media sphere. Retrieved July 8, 2015 from the website: \url{http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/03/world/meast/egypt-protests}.} It was the government’s job to solve and minimize the ideological gaps and dissimilarities between the government and the opposition. These different views were the basis for the coup d’etat supported by hundreds of thousands of protestors that took to the streets in Egypt in 2013 to oust Morsi.\footnote{Ibid.} During the first months of interim President Adly Mansour’s rule, presidential elections were announced, the former constitution was abandoned, the Shura Council was dissolved, and the MB was banned from political participation. Prior to the presidential elections, in a speech during a military parade army officer al-Sisi called for mass demonstrations to grant his military forces a “mandate” to crack down on “terrorism”.\footnote{Borzou Daragahi. (2013). “Sisi calls for mass protests in Egypt to confront terrorism”. \textit{Financial Times}. Retrieved July 6, 2015 from the website: \url{http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/41af5f60-f435-11e2-a62e-00144feabcd0.html#axzz3fUcVku53}.} Some argued that this speech by al-Sisi was made to gain support, while others determined that this speech was a step toward abandoning the MB. Although many political movements rejected the views of al-Sisi, on July 26 2013, the largest crowd in two and a half years appeared on the streets of Egypt to support him. Egypt continued to be ruled by interim President Adly Mansour for almost a year. During this era al-Sisi made himself more popular with the Egyptian public, while the MB was banned step-by-step. The presidential election took place between 26 and 28 of May 2014, without the participation of the MB. The outcome of the election was rather unique with al-Sisi winning 96\footnote{See the official Facebook page of the SCAF on which the speech is (unofficially) translated. The speech includes the following: “Why should people mass in the streets? To give me mandate and an order to confront potential violence and terrorism, and to show the world their will as they have done before. I haven’t requested anything from you. Also, I don’t have the right to do so, but I’d like you to reaffirm to the world, as you did on June 30, and July 3\textsuperscript{rd}, that you have your own free will and decision, and to show them that the will and decision are made free”. Retrieved July 4, from the website: \url{https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/346300132167642}.}
percent of the counted votes, and he was sworn into office on 8 June 2014. During al-Sisi’s presidency, what ideology regarding the role of social media and the possible use of it by opposition groups for recruitment, propaganda, and planning has been observed?

During his inauguration President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi made a memorable statement regarding the role of public thought and freedom of expression that encouraged many. Al-Sisi announced that the role of the government was not to enforce any “restrictions on the freedom of expression in Egypt”. In addition, al-Sisi added that “the right to demonstrate is guaranteed but [...] at the same time to achieve stability and security for the Egyptian people”. In other words, he referred to the fact that the government should guarantee security to the Egyptian public.

This was an ambitious and promising approach for the transition of media outlets and channels. However, al-Sisi, just like Mubarak, the SCAF, and Morsi, is criticized a lot by international communities and non-governmental agencies that study the degree of freedom of expression/thought and freedom of the press in Egypt. Constitutional amendments al-Sisi have been made during his presidency to counter any type of exploitation of (social) media platforms. Government attention has been focused on those who continuously criticize the government through social media platforms and those media outlets and platforms that document and question controversial political issues.

---


224 According to manifold NGO reports, al-Sisi is handling the situation of Egyptian opposition through violence and repression. An Amnesty International report claims that in one day, 14 August 2013, up to 1,000 Egyptian people (mostly Morsi-supporters) were killed by Egyptian Security forces. Retrieved July 12, 2015 from the website: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/06/egypt-beware-al-sisis-claims-of-freedoms/.

225 Ibid.

226 Amnesty International. (2014) “Amnesty International Report 2014/2015. Arab Public of Egypt”. The report refers to the promises made by al-Sisi, but furthermore highlights the fact that during the period of al-Sisi’s presidency free expression has been oppressed.
7.1. 2014 Constitution

The new constitution was signed in January, 2014. The constitution was developed under the supervision of the former interim government after the 2013 coup d’état. The document includes a broad set of arrangements that secure and encourage the important role of public expression through, for instance, social media and other media platforms. These arrangements were complemented by an official statement from al-Sisi, in which he guaranteed freedom of expression and freedom of the press, reflecting the will of the people. In addition, the constitution contains ‘encouraging’ provisions. This sub-chapter will go into the articles outlined in the constitution in which freedoms are guaranteed or encouraged by the government. Another arrangement that was spelled out in the constitution was freedom of the press.

Looking into the constitution implemented by al-Sisi, the conclusion can be drawn that only a few articles are included that form the basis of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, namely articles 65, 70, 71, and 72, which provide a model regarding freedom of printing and broadcasting and the establishment of outlets, and ban all forms of media censorship and prison terms for press crimes. Article 65 refers to the notion of freedom of speech as follows:

‘freedom of thought and opinion is guaranteed. Every person shall have the right to express his/her opinion verbally, in writing, through imagery, or by other means of expression and publication.’

---

227 United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The will of the people shall be the basis of the modus operandi of the government. Article 21 of the declaration stipulates that ‘the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent freed voting procedures.


229 Ibid. Art. 68.

230 Ibid. Art. 70.

231 Ibid. Art. 65.
Article 71 appoints the freedom of the press:

‘the press, printing, and paper. Visual and electronic publication is guaranteed. Every Egyptian [...] shall have the rights to own and issue newspapers and establish visual, audio and digital media outlets.’

Article 72 then refers to the prohibition of any kind of judicial actions taken against media outlets as follows:

‘It is prohibited to censor, confiscate, suspend, or shut down Egyptian newspapers and media outlets in any way. By ways of exception, they may be subject to limited censorship in times of war or general mobilization.’

‘No freedom restricting penalty shall be imposed for publication or publicity crimes. As for crimes related the incitement of violence, discrimination between citizens, or impingement of individuals honour, the Law shall stipulate the penalties therefor.’

The constitution has been the main initiative under the rule of al-Sisi that the Egyptian people have hoped will respond to the deteriorating situation of freedom in Egypt since the rule of Mubarak. While this sub-chapter contributed an overview of al-Sisi’s measures and initiatives, the following two chapters will go into the actual outcomes of the rule of al-Sisi and whether expression through media platforms has improved. Space for (political) opposition diminished under former Islamist Mohamed Morsi, and has continued to do so under President al-Sisi. Despite the existence of guarantees of freedom stipulated in the constitution, actual compliance with the included articles regarding freedom is frequently missing, as data shows that freedom of expression and freedom on the net have deteriorated more since al-Sisi’s presidency began.

### 7.2. Measures taken by al-Sisi

During the first period of al-Sisi’s presidency, no actual blockades or restrictions to political, religious, or social media related websites were used by the government to limit the role of (oppositional) movements. Nonetheless, due to the increasingly polarized political sphere in the country, self-censorship increased. In this sense, the state-owned media outlets and platforms are

---

232 Ibid. Art. 72.
233 Ibid. Art. 71.
almost certainly not sceptical of government issues, while users of ordinary social media platforms are taking the risk of being harassed, repressed, or being the victims of ‘professional repercussions’ for spreading ideologies and opinions in light of political issues. Freely available social networking tools used for disseminating statements and news on political issues have challenged the government of al-Sisi. During al-Sisi’s period as president, various measures have been taken that counter the use of social media platforms for finding financial backing, planning demonstrations, and propagating new members by movements in the name of democracy and freedoms outlined in the UNDHR, articles 18 and 19.234

While judicial courts have yet to force the blocking or deletion of social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter, some pro-governmental organizations have found informal and unauthorized ways to enforce the deletion of some social media producers for spreading dissenting views on political issues and using social media as a tool for garnering supporters for opposition. A Facebook campaign by pro-government groups invited their supporters to collectively search and report pro-MB en masse. Government supporters, also referred to as technology experts, repeatedly stated that Facebook pages can be closed when 20 different accounts report the page to the company. While al-Sisi repeatedly refers to a more free and unsuppressed system in Egypt, the police forces sought, in 2014, opportunities to introduce a system for monitoring (social) media platforms. This was partly due to the increasing role of social media platforms since the Arab Spring. At the start of 2011, the number of Facebook users was around 4.7 million. A system that could track platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for expressions of dissent, insults, and calls for strikes and protests directed at governmental issues was sought by pro-government groups. Leaked documents from 2011, published in 2014 by Al-Watan, revealed the interest of ministry in the development of a comparable system that could monitor, scan, and track down certain textual aspects such as, ‘degrading and acerbic ridicule; slanders; insult; the use of profanity; incitements of extremism; violence; rebellion; demonstrations and propaganda’.235 236 Later, it was reported that a reseller of a

234 United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). Art. 18 stipulates freedom of thought as follows: ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion’. Article 19 continues to state that ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of thought; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers’.
company called *Blue Coat Technology* in Egypt was contracted as a provider for monitoring initiatives in cooperation with the modus operandi of al-Sisi. This resulted in a move to the court by manifold human rights groups in Egypt.

With no parliament in place since 2012, al-Sisi has full legislative authority. As such, Egypt has introduced additional steps to counter the use of social media to oppose the government, and social media is increasingly seen as a ‘security threat’ in Egypt. One initiative taken against the opposition is the cybercrime bill, kept hidden from the public, which is seen by human rights groups as a threat to the freedom of expression. This bill, framed as anti-terrorism legislation, allows law enforcement in Egypt for the first time during al-Sisi’s presidency to submit requests to block websites and pursue prison sentences for internet users deemed a threat to ‘national security’. Vague terms in the 28-article bill such as ‘harming social peace’ and ‘threatening national unity’ make it easier for the government to take action, as multiple interpretations of the bill are possible. The punishments for committing a crime against the state are harsher and are spelled out in article 11. When any kind of imagery or words that threaten the government are used by an individual, the individual is likely to be sentenced to between seven and 25 years imprisonment. The ability for the government to block websites is spelled out in article 19. Egyptian authorities are able to block internet sites when “any words or figures, pictures or movies, or any propaganda material that may threaten national security”.

Another initiative taken to limit the role of social media is the anti-terrorism law, approved on 1 July 2015 by the Cabinet and enacted by al-Sisi on 15 August 2015. This 54-article law broadly expands the definition of terrorism and an act of terrorism, and further increases the government’s power to impose harsh sentences for crimes that can be put under this new definition of terrorism.
The law that falls under the notion of anti-terrorism includes articles that put restriction on the use of social media platforms. Article 35, for instance, states:

‘Whoever intentionally, by any means, publishes, broadcasts, displays, or promotes false news [...] shall be punishable.’

Article 26 continues by stating that ‘Filming, recording, broadcasting, or displaying any proceedings of the trials of terrorist crimes shall be prohibited’.

The rather broad definition outlined in article one combined with articles 35 and 36 gives the prosecutors greater power than before to detain suspects, which can now be done without judicial review and without a court order. This is a big step toward enshrining a permanent state of emergency as the law of the land. Nadim Noury, deputy Middle East and North Africa Director of Human Rights Watch, referred to this law as something with which the ‘government granted itself even great powers to continue stamping out its critics and opponents under its vague and ever-expanding war on terrorism’.

On top of these regulations, article 33 is especially problematic for journalists and online bloggers as this law makes publishing news regarding terrorist acts impossible. Namely, article 33 prohibits spreading any kind of information in light of terrorist crimes and labels failing to inform relevant authorities of it as a terrorist crime punishable by imprisonment. This chapter outlined some key measures that were introduced by Morsi to limit the role of social media and the effectiveness of

---


243 Anti-terrorism law. (2015) Art. 1. (A). stipulates that a terrorist is: ‘Any natural person who commits, attempts to commit, incites, threatens, or plans a terrorist crime domestically or abroad by any means, even if individually, collaborates in such a crime in the context of a joint criminal venture, or commands, leads, manages, founds, or establishes or of any terrorist entity as stipulated in Article (1) of President of the Arab Republic of Egypt Decree by Law No. 8 of 2015 on the designation of terrorists, terrorist entities, or any person who funds such entities or contributes to their activity knowingly’.

244 Ibid. Art. 1. (C). A terrorist crime is referred to as: ‘Any offense stipulated in this Law and any felony or misdemeanour committed by using a means of terrorism or in order to achieve or carry out a terrorist act, call to commit any crime of the above, or threaten to commit such a crime, without prejudice to the provisions of the Penal Code’.


246 Ibid. Art. 36

opposition groups. The following sub-chapter will draw conclusions on how Al Jazeera journalists and bloggers on Facebook have been impeded by the measures taken by Morsi.

### 7.3. Versus al Jazeera

After the inauguration of President al-Sisi, within months polarization and paranoia led to the prosecution of activities of opposition groups and the banning of organizations such as the April 6th movement, a respected left-leaning activist and political group that had been highly critical of both the military and the brotherhood. Although al-Sisi promised better conditions for individual expression and press freedoms, his attacks on journalists and media platforms have persisted and become even more systematic compared to those of his predecessors. Experts argue that al-Sisi constructively fails to comply with his own laws and constitution. Al-Sisi has continued an on-going attack against Qatar’s Al Jazeera Television network. The network has been considered sympathetic to the MB. Since al-Sisi labelled the Islamist movement an opposition group, the military authorities have been banning almost all Islamist sympathizers and groups. As such, in particular, Al Jazeera was a group that was banned. The underlying argument, spelled out by the Ministry of Investment, Telecommunication, and information, is that the Qatari channel was banned due to missing documents, legal permits, and a lack of permission to work in the country. It was further argued that the channel has been spreading false information regarding governmental issues. It is likely, as stated by Sherif Mansor CPJ’s Middle East and North Africa coordinator, that the Egyptian government is failing to get any grip on the channel and their influence on the public. With regard to arrests, and banning and shutting down the channel, the government thus violates article 71 of the constitution, which stipulates “that it is prohibited to […] shut down Egyptian newspapers”.

---


To further distinguish the harsh performance of the government of al-Sisi, a few cases of Al Jazeera journalist imprisonment will be discussed. The most well-known case of an Al Jazeera journalist being imprisoned is the case of Peter Greste. Greste was an Australian journalist working in Egypt for Al Jazeera and was imprisoned by the judicial court of Egypt on suspicion of illegally broadcasting news that harmed ‘domestic security’, cooperating with the MB, and spreading false information about government issues.

7.3.1. Detention Al Jazeera journalists

This sub-chapter will briefly describe the three most well-known cases of Al Jazeera journalists that have been imprisoned by the Egyptian government. Australian journalist Peter Greste worked as a correspondent for several news channels worldwide, including Reuters, CNN, and the BCC before working for Al Jazeera’s English news channel. Before working in Egypt, Greste started working in third world countries such as Bosnia, South Africa, Afghanistan, and other MENA countries. Mohamed Fahmy, an Egyptian bureau chief of Al Jazeera news, worked in the MENA region for other major news media platforms such as CNN and The New York Times. Fahmy is the author of the well-known Egyptian Freedom Story.251 Baher Mohamed started working at Al Jazeera TV channel in May 2013. Prior to his work at Al Jazeera, Baher worked for manifold media organizations like CNN. He covered all of the mass protests and followed opposition movements in Cairo that ousted Morsi.

On 29 December 2013, Greste, Fahmy, and Baher were arrested by Egyptian authorities.252 The Egyptian police forces confirmed that their arrest was on the basis of ‘damaging national security’ and terrorism-related charges.253 The interior ministry of Egypt argued that Greste, Baher, and Fahmy were attending illegal meetings with the MB, which was officially declared a terrorist movement.254

251 “Egyptian Freedom Story”. A 160-page photo documentary published by Mohamed Fahmy. Fahmy captured the most frightening images of the fight for freedom, and the setbacks and victories of the 25th January revolution against Hosni Mubarak. It is a document that was part of the ousting of Hosni Mubarak.
254 Committee to Protect Journalists. (2013). “Egypt Arrests Al Jazeera journalists, seizes equipment”. The author points out that the MB was deemed a terrorist movement under the notion of article 86 of the Egyptian Penal Code.
The activities by the Al Jazeera journalists were, according to the ministry, in violation of article 26 of the anti-terrorism law, which prohibits the use of information in light of terrorist trials. In addition, in January 2014 the Egyptian authorities stated that they would charge 20 more Al Jazeera journalists. Among the list of was Rena Netjes, a Dutch journalist who fled the country because she was charged with 10-years of imprisonment. According to the authorities, the journalists aimed to ‘weaken the state’s status, harming the national interest of the country, disturbing policy security, instilling fear among the people, causing damage to the public interest and possession of communication, filming, broadcast, video transmission without permit from the concerned authorities’. During the hearing, the prosecution provided evidence that included footage from several TV and media channels in light of certain events that had nothing to do with the Egyptian politics covered by Al Jazeera. Furthermore, the case also included the retraction of testimonies from three key witnesses. These are two aspects that can be seen as components of the rather frustrated and determined mission of the government to arrest journalists. Adding non-related evidence and the reason that ‘key witnesses’ retracted from the process was a desperate attempt to try to imprison the journalists who opposed the ideas and modus operandi of the government.

The arrests and outcomes of the trial, which resulted in the Al Jazeera journalists that have been given sentences for seven years or more, did not go unnoticed by the international arena. As such, international pressure increased and urged the release of the three Al Jazeera journalists, among other journalists. In parallel, initiatives such as demonstrations and websites were....

---


259 Hamza Mohamed. (2015). “World Reacts to Al Jazeera journalists’ jail sentences”. Al Jazeera News Channel. The article gives an overview of the worldwide reactions to the sentencing of Al Jazeera journalists. For example, Australia’s Foreign Minister Julia Bishop reacts by stating that she was ‘dismayed by the decision [...] and will continue to pursue all diplomatic avenues’. Retrieved November 2, 2015 from the website:
launched in order to put pressure on the international arena and Egypt to work to release the journalists. Examples of such initiatives are the website named freepetergreste.org that fought for the freedom of Greste and the Twitter campaign #FreePeterGreste. Both put pressure on the Egyptian government.

After a period of deterioration in Egypt and pressure from the international arena, the government ordered a release of all imprisoned journalists, including Al Jazeera journalists Greste, Fahmy, and Baher. It was step toward a freer country in which the role of journalists and online bloggers is respected. However, as article 19 stipulates, concerns remain regarding the human rights in Egypt of journalists, activists, and bloggers due to the active restrictive legislation limiting freedom of expression and human rights. The pardon by the Egyptian government is ‘an insufficient step to address the systematic repression against those who dissent. The detention of journalists and activists should not have happened in the first place, and many remain unjustifiable behind bars’.

7.4. Concluding remarks

Going over the various measures used and introduced by al-Sisi since the beginning of his presidency in 2014, it is fair to state that al-Sisi administration has imposed measures to limit the role of terrorism. Notable initiatives are the cyber bill and the new anti-terrorism law. These types of initiatives were initiated in order to limit the likelihood for terrorist or oppositional movements exploiting social media platforms to further their agendas. Aspects such as recruitment, propaganda, and preparation are considered exploitative measures and have been repressed by the government. However, as observed in this chapter, focus has primarily been on the oppositional movements against al-Sisi. Instead of limiting the modus operandi of terrorist movements in the country, the government has restricted the use of media channels by legitimate oppositional movements. One of the most marked examples of the Egyptian government violating freedom of expression and freedom of the press is the attack on Al Jazeera journalists and internet bloggers.


Since al-Sisi’s presidency began, his administration has claimed to work for more equality and the improvement of Egypt’s low index on the freedom of expression metre. The opposite, however, has become a fact as more restrictions have been implemented in order to secure al-Sisi’s own position. According to data published by the Freedom House, the situation in Egypt has worsened in terms of freedom on the net. To be more specific, Egypt was given the status of ‘Partly Free’ in 2013 and 2014. While, in 2015, the status degraded to ‘Not Free’. The internet in Egypt, since al-Sisi was elected president, has become increasingly seen as a ‘security threat’ by the government. The justification that the internet is a threat to national security was used by the government as a drive to implement restrictions through the cyber bill. Instead of limiting the risks to national security, the cyber bill raised questions in light of the deteriorating state of freedom on the net. Despite guarantees outlined in the constitution, legal restrictions have restricted online expression.

When examining data regarding freedom of the press published by the Freedom House, it can be observed that the country has maintained its low status of ‘Not Free’. It was only in 2012 that Egypt improved to ‘Partly Free’. According to the data published by the Freedom House, Egypt has experienced an era of deterioration of freedom. Although the people in Egypt have expressed their will and views on political issues since 2010, conditions have grown worse, especially since al-Sisi took office. A new constitution guaranteed certain press freedoms but they were undermined by the government. In addition, restrictions such as those dictated by the anti-terrorism law have remained and resulted in the trial of Al Jazeera journalists in the country. The government has not backed the media and instead has sought to eliminate the influence of any oppositional media.

It seems that both Morsi and al-Sisi have tried to obtain as much power as possible over the media. Throughout al-Sisi’s first year in office, journalists and bloggers who expressed the slightest critical view on political issues and the regime experienced repression as a result. Censorship, imprisonment, terrorism, and a threat to state security are only some of the terms that have been used by the government to repress journalists and bloggers on Facebook and Al Jazeera. After examining every case study relevant to this research, it can be concluded that all government administrations in Egypt have presented themselves as the ‘saviours’ of the country, claiming to want to impose better living conditions for the people and a transition to democracy.
8. Conclusion

Over the years, public debate regarding (online) freedom of expression and the press has grown, prompted by the advent of blogs and media coverage, dedicated to exposing human rights abuses and criticizing government policies. This qualitative master thesis focuses on comparing the measures taken by the Egyptian administrations since the ousting of former President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, to limit the exploitation of (social) media by opposition groups. The following main research question is the foundation for this thesis: ‘What measures have been taken by the Egyptian administration to counter the exploitation of (social) media by opposition groups since the rise of the Arab revolutions?’

Exploitation is defined as an action or actions to make something more profitable and, at the same time, victimise someone or something. These actions that represent exploitation, concerning this thesis topic, can be activities such as propaganda, recruitment, obtaining financial support, and planning certain events through (social) media. Within Egypt, as has been observed since the awakening of the Arab revolution in 2011, the opposition groups had a major impact on society and the government administrations. More specifically, from an Egyptian government perspective, opposition groups have been one of the most challenging threats to the positioning and endurance of the functioning of the government. Social media channels such as Facebook has allowed to stress the strong and determined ideology of protest groups since 2005, and especially during the Arab revolutions. Furthermore, political issues covered by the independent TV channel Al Jazeera have confronted Egyptian governments as well. One of the main findings of this thesis is that official statements by the SCAF, Morsi, and current President al-Sisi have referred to exploitation of social media platforms as a threat to national security. However, utilizing social media is entailed in freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Yet, this perceived threat to ‘national security’ has resulted in the revision of policies, constitutions, regulations, and similar initiatives regarding media and the coverage of political issues. Consequently, repressive measures have been taken to counter the use of Facebook by critics and media coverage by Al Jazeera of political issues. These measures are: the Emergency Law; the different constitutions; the anti-terrorism law; and, the cyber-crime bill. These measures have resulted in the arrests and imprisonment of bloggers and journalists and the closure of Al Jazeera for a short time.
While the three government administrations, afterwards the ousting of Mubarak, have promised to enhance freedom of expression and freedom of the press, in practice contrary outcomes have been observed in the daily lives of the Egyptian citizens. Three main conclusions can be derived from this comparative thesis in order to answer the main research question. The conclusions are as follows.

First, since the ousting of Mubarak, the governmental administrations of the SCAF, Morsi, and al-Sisi, have taken steps to the implementation of new constitutions. These constitutions, such as the March 30 constitution by the SCAF, the 2012 constitution by Morsi, and the 2014 constitution by al-Sisi, opened the ability for the different regimes to mark their presence as ruling government. The different constitutions included articles which were presented as a contribution to guarantee freedoms. In practice, however, this was without much effect. The constitutions did not provide a thorough basis regarding freedom of expression and the freedom of the press for the people in Egypt as underpinned by many critics worldwide. As far as the March 30 constitution, 2012 constitution and 2014 constitution, were concerned, they contained articles covering the freedoms, but compliance by the government resulted otherwise. Thus, the actions taken by the governments were not conform to the constitutions.

Secondly, the initiatives and instruments introduced by the government in order to secure national security have been used as a basis for repression and restriction on (social) media. First, Morsi placed significant limits, through the emergency law, on the content of media platforms and he also tried to take over media enterprises that supported the opposition. Secondly, al-Sisi used the anti-terrorism law in its favour by putting the MB on the list of terrorist organisations. Enabling the government to arrest those who support the MB. Al Jazeera was according to the al-Sisi administration covering news collected from MB members, making it a terrorist act. Thus, while some initiatives were initially implemented for certain goals, such as terrorism, the Egyptian government used this in its own favour for other goals, such as repressing the opposition.

A third and final conclusion derived from this thesis is the use of language within the official documents. Within the constitutions, laws and newly implemented initiatives such as the anti-terrorism law and the cyber-crime bill, is the language rather vague. This vague language made room for different interpretation by the government administration. Terms such as ‘harming social peace’ and ‘threatening national unity’ spelled out in the cyber-crime bill have been interpreted by the government as something that is damaged by the opposition groups using Facebook and the Al
Jazeera journalists covering the news. Additionally, the coverage of false news, based on the anti-terrorism law, is something that shall be punished. Then again the interpretation of ‘false news’ is debatable.

**Further research**

On the basis of this thesis, I argue that two suggestions can be drawn regarding possible future research. Firstly, according to this thesis, the suggestion can be made that the case of Egypt contradicts the fact that (social) media is something that is untouchable. Since the ousting of Mubarak have the three government administrations been using laws, regulations and initiatives, into its own favour in order to limit the use of social media platforms and repress their independent capability. The most striking measure was that the Al Jazeera journalists and bloggers have been imprisoned for their actions, which have been put under the notion as terrorist acts. Thus, it can be suggested that further research into the actual influence by government measures on social media in other MENA countries is needed. Secondly, and in parallel, this thesis found that government measures and actions taken by opposition groups through social media are intertwined. It can be concluded that Facebook and Al Jazeera played a major role, in terms of preparation and spreading news, in ousting several government administrations in Egypt. Additional research on the impact of these two platforms in other MENA countries would expand our knowledge regarding the use of media as a tool for liberatory expression.

In conclusion, while I believe that this research answers the questions laid out regarding the measures taken by Egypt regimes to repress the use of (social) media outlets, this research is a minor contribution to the bigger story. We need to expand our knowledge of what is happening in other MENA and (semi-)authoritarian countries that is relevant to this topic. Why specifically this region? I believe that social media are highly influential on the realities of everyday life, especially in the MENA region. It is likely that the more a government represses public thought, the more people try to find ways to express themselves. Further research into the MENA region and the governmental responses to exploitation of social media by opposition groups would contribute to the understanding how people and governments act.