

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/egypt-major-decline-in-freedom-of-21-05-2014,46317.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Egypt

Presidential election

## Major decline in freedom of information since army takeover

21 May 2014

With an eye to Egypt's 26-27 May presidential election and Field Marshal Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's probable victory, Reporters Without Borders has compiled the following overview of the impact of the past 11 months of Sisi-backed rule on the media, journalists and freedom of information in Egypt.

Although the [new constitution](#), adopted by referendum in January, guarantees freedom of information, the situation on the ground has been bad and the lists of journalists who have been arrested or killed and media that have been closed are long.

*"Respect for media freedom has declined considerably since the army seized power,"* said Reporters Without Borders research director Lucie Morillon. *"At least 65 journalists have been arrested and 17 are still in detention. We urge the authorities to respect the new constitution, which guarantees media freedom. All the journalists currently held must be released at once and all charges against them must be dismissed."*

### Six journalists killed

A total of six journalists have been killed by live rounds since President Mohammed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government was deposed on 3 July 2013. Most were killed while covering pro-Morsi demonstrations.

The first victim was **Ahmed Samir Assem El-Senoussi**, a photographer for the newspaper *Al-Horreya-Wal-Adalah* (Freedom and Justice), who sustained a fatal gunshot injury while [covering clashes](#) outside the Republican Guard building in Cairo on 8 July. *Sky News* cameraman **Mick Deane**, **Ahmed Abdel Gawad**, a reporter for the Egyptian daily *Al-Akhbar*, and photojournalist **Mosab Al-Shami** [were killed](#) while covering clashes between police and pro-Morsi demonstrators in Cairo's Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square on 14 August, one of the darkest days for the media in modern Egyptian history.

**Tamer Abdel Raouf**, the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*'s regional bureau chief, [was shot dead](#) at an army checkpoint in Damanhur, in the northern governorate of Beheira, on the night of 19 August.

**Mayada Ashraf**, a reporter for the *Al-Dostour* daily newspaper and the *Masr Al-Arabiyya* news website, was fatally [shot in the head](#) as she was covering a demonstration that Muslim Brotherhood supporters organized in the eastern Cairo district of Ain Shams on 28 March in response to the announcement that Field Marshal Sisi would be a presidential candidate.

No independent and impartial investigations have so far been carried out with the aim of identifying those responsible for the deaths of these journalists.

### Many arrests

The number of arrests of journalists during the past 11 months is particularly disturbing. According to the tally kept by the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (CPJ), more than 65 journalists were arrested for varying periods of time between 3 July and 30 April.

The authorities systematically target media and journalists affiliated (or regarded as sympathetic) to the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been banned again. This witch-hunt against suspected Brotherhood supporters, which affects Turkish, Palestinian and Syrian journalists as well as Egyptian ones, violates the new constitution. Trumped-up charges are used to keep journalists in detention.

A total of 17 journalists are currently detained, according to the CPJ. They include three Al-Jazeera journalists who were arrested on 29 December: Cairo bureau chief **Mohamed Adel Fahmy**, Australian reporter **Peter Greste** and **Baher Mohamed**. Their trial, along with the trial of 17 other alleged Al-Jazeera journalists, began on 20 February and has been repeatedly adjourned ever since.

A total of 20 people identified by the authorities as Al-Jazeera journalists (including four foreign journalists) are being [prosecuted](#) on charges of attacking national unity and social peace, spreading false reports and (in the case of those who are Egyptian) membership of a "terrorist organization."

Eight of these 20 defendants are detained while the other 12 are being tried in absentia. Al-Jazeera says only four of these defendants are its employees. The trial of the Al-Jazeera journalists is emblematic of the current situation of freedom of information in Egypt.

**Abdullah Al-Shami**, one of the confirmed Al-Jazeera journalists being held, has been detained since 14 August although no formal charges have been brought against him. He has been on hunger strike since 21 January in protest against the arbitrary nature of his detention, which was extended for another 45 days on 3 May.

He was [secretly transferred](#) to the Al-Aqrab (Scorpion) high-security wing of the Tora prison complex in southern Cairo on 12 May, although his lawyer says his state of health is now very worrying.

Like Shami, **Mahmoud Abu Zied**, a photographer for the *Demotix* and *Corbis* agencies, has been held since his arrest in Cairo's Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square on 14 August and is also currently held in Tora prison. [Yaqeen](#) website reporters **Saaid Shihata** and **Ahmed Gamal**, [arrested](#) on 30 December while covering [clashes](#) between police and students at Cairo's Al-Azhar university, are being held on charges of participating in an *illegal demonstration* and *insulting a police officer*. [El-Masdr](#) reporter **Karim Shalaby**, who was [arrested](#) while covering an anti-government demonstration on 25 January, is also charged with participating in an illegal demonstration. **Abdel Rahman Shaheen**, a correspondent for *Al-Horreya-Wal-Adalah* (Freedom and Justice), a website affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, [is being held](#) on a charge of inciting violence following his arrest on 3 April.

**Samah Ibrahim**, a reporter for the same site who was [arrested](#) on 14 January while covering a pro-Morsi march, was [sentenced](#) on 17 March to a year of forced labour. This was reduced on appeal to six months in prison and a fine of 50,000 Egyptian pounds (5,300 euros).

Detaining journalists arbitrarily in this manner violates the new constitution, especially [article 71](#).

The extreme polarization of the Egyptian media (into pro and anti-Morsi factions) is reinforcing the polarization of Egyptian society. As confirmed since the start of the election campaign, many media openly support the current government and, as a result, are not performing the watchdog role that the media are supposed to play in a democratic society.

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