

# Egypt

	2013	2014		
<b>Internet Freedom Status</b>	<b>Partly Free</b>	<b>Partly Free</b>	Population:	84.7 million
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	15	15	Internet Penetration 2013:	50 percent
Limits on Content (0-35)	12	12	Social Media/ICT Apps Blocked:	No
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	33	33	Political/Social Content Blocked:	No
<b>TOTAL* (0-100)</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	Bloggers/ICT Users Arrested:	Yes
			Press Freedom 2014 Status:	Not Free

\* 0=most free, 100=least free

## Key Developments: May 2013 – May 2014

- Authorities repeatedly suspended telecommunications service in the Sinai Peninsula during military operations, disrupting the flow of information to and from the territory (see **Obstacles to Access**).
- The country's highly divisive political environment has resulted in increasing verbal harassment between social media users and a declining willingness to speak out on contentious issues, resulting in self-censorship (see **Limits on Content**).
- In a referendum, Egyptians passed a new constitution that "guarantees" freedom of expression in theory, while outlining punishments for broadly defined offenses that could apply to online speech and preserving military trials for civilians (see **Violations of User Rights**).
- An increasing number of reporters and staff at online news agencies were detained over the past year, particularly while covering antigovernment protests. Prison sentences ranged from suspended sentences to several years. Popular bloggers and political activists continued to face trumped up charges, often for attending unlicensed protests (see **Violations of User Rights**).

## Introduction

On June 30, 2013, a record number of Egyptians took to the streets to signal their discontent with the country's Islamist trajectory and to demand early presidential elections. The protest was spearheaded by an apparent grassroots movement called *Tamarod* ("rebel"). As a result, Defense Minister and Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces Abdel Fattah el-Sisi issued an ultimatum to the country's "political forces" to "address the demands of the Egyptian people" within 48 hours. But President Mohamed Morsi, elected one year earlier as the candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, refused to back down and broadcasted his defiance on television and social media. On July 3, 2013, he was detained by the military and replaced by the head of the Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour. A government was then formed out of a loose coalition of anti-Brotherhood and civilian figures.

The ensuing crisis led to deep fissures within Egyptian society. The stalemate between supporters of the military takeover and the ousted president was broken when security forces violently stormed two large sit-ins of Morsi supporters at dawn on August 14, 2013, leaving more than 800 dead.<sup>1</sup> After the issuing of a transitional roadmap, the banning of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, and the passage of a new constitution, el-Sisi resigned from his post as minister of defense and declared his candidacy for new presidential elections. He was subsequently declared the winner on June 3, 2014, officially obtaining over 96 percent of the vote.

Since then, polarization and paranoia has led to the prosecution of activists, 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. Numerous journalists and staff at news sites linked to independent outlets, to the Brotherhood, and to April 6th, have been assaulted and arrested for covering antigovernment protests or leaking government documents. Independent journalists have been beaten, detained, and even shot. A law outlawing protest, passed in November 2013, punishes protesters with seven-year prison terms; several people were imprisoned under the law. As a consequence, much of the political debate has quieted on the streets, but remains lively online. The Muslim Brotherhood maintains an online presence, although the arrest and imprisonment of most of its leaders means that it is primarily managed by those abroad. Well-known bloggers and activists, including many who were fundamental to the downfall of Hosni Mubarak, have faced trumped up charges as the military-led government seeks to limit all forms of dissent.

From 1993, when the internet was first introduced, until 2008, authorities showed a relaxed attitude toward internet use and did not censor websites or use high-end technologies to monitor discussions. However, with the rise of online campaigns to expose government fraud, document acts of police brutality, and call for large-scale protests, the government began to change its stance. Between 2008 and 2011, state police admitted to engaging in surveillance, online censorship, and cyberattacks—especially against sites related to the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition movements.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 "Egypt: Rab'a Killings Likely Crimes against Humanity," Human Rights Watch, August 12, 2014, [www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-rab-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity](http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-rab-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity).

2 Galal Amin, *Whatever happened to the Egyptian Revolution*, Cairo: Al Shorook, 2013.

Generally speaking, dissent and objections to the military-backed rule have been dealt with harshly, both by the authorities and by progovernment mobs—organized or spontaneous—who took to beating opposition protesters, often under the approving eye of the police. In the most egregious case, journalist Mayada Ashraf was shot dead on March 28, 2014 while covering a protest; her last article had appeared online only hours earlier.<sup>3</sup>

## Obstacles to Access

The development of Egypt's information and communications technology (ICT) sector has been a strategic priority since 1999, when former president Hosni Mubarak created the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) to lead Egypt's transition into the information age.<sup>4</sup> Since then, ICT use has increased rapidly, with internet penetration growing from 16 percent in 2007 to 49.84 percent in April 2014. Mobile internet users via mobile phones or USB modems accounted for roughly 45.26 percent of all internet use, with ADSL use at around 36 percent. Egypt's mobile phone penetration rate was 119.89 percent in April 2014, amounting to 101.93 million mobile subscriptions.<sup>5</sup>

Although these figures are promising, there are a number of obstacles hindering access to ICTs, including an adult literacy rate of only 72 percent,<sup>6</sup> poor telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas and urban slums, and flagging economic conditions. Moreover, ICTs and online culture are often viewed with suspicion and women's access to technology has become a growing concern after the revolution.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, marginal religious figures have issued 'fatwas' against women using the internet without the presence of a male chaperone.<sup>8</sup>

Broadband, though cheaper than in some neighboring countries, is more expensive thanks to a dominant state-owned internet provider. An unlimited 1 Mbps connection costs US\$20 (EGP 140), whereas in Morocco, for instance, a 4 Mbps connection costs US\$12.<sup>9</sup> Prices are even lower in Gulf countries. Moreover, most providers implement a cap on high-speed internet, under what has been marketed since 2007 as a "fair use policy." The fair use policy has been implemented even on supposedly unlimited connections, causing speeds to slow drastically.

Furthermore, telephone lines are not universal, with large segments of the country not connected to the landline telephone grid. Even when they are, the phone infrastructure, based on antiquated underground copper lines, frequently does not allow for speeds above 1 Mbps. To this can be added

3 "Female Reporter shot dead while covering anti-Sisi protest," Reporters Without Borders, March 31, 2014, <http://en.rsf.org/egypt-female-reporter-shot-dead-while-31-03-2014.46062.html>.

4 "Historical Perspective," Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies, Accessed April 16, 2013, [http://www.mcit.gov.eg/TeleCommunications/Historical\\_Perspective](http://www.mcit.gov.eg/TeleCommunications/Historical_Perspective).

5 Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies, "Report of ICT indicators, May 2014" <http://mcit.gov.eg/Indicators/indicators.aspx>

6 United Nations Development Program, "Egypt, Country Profile: Human Development Indicators," accessed July 23, 2013, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/EGY.html>.

7 Ahmed El Gody, 2008, "New Media New Audience New Topics and New forms of Censorship in the Middle East" in Philip Seib New Media New Middle East New York: Palgrave.

8 Sanaa Al Tawila, 2013, The most vocal Women Fatwas <http://bit.ly/19MveMJ>, accessed June 11, 2013.

9 "#InternetRevolution: For a Better Internet in Egypt" March 6, 2014 [www.smex.org/internetrevolution-for-a-better-internet-in-egypt/](http://www.smex.org/internetrevolution-for-a-better-internet-in-egypt/).

the overall poverty of households,<sup>10</sup> and it becomes clear that the vast majority of Egyptians do not have access to broadband internet. In an index that compares ICT prices to gross national income (GNI) per capita, Egypt ranks 77th out of 161 countries.<sup>11</sup>

A user-led campaign was launched in December 2013, named “The Internet Revolution” (Thawrat al-Internet), to protest high prices, the “fair use policy”, and bad customer service on the part of providers.<sup>12</sup> With innovative campaigns such as encouraging users to change to a 512 kbps connection for a month in order to financially pressure providers, or pay their bills in coins of EGP 1 and 0.5, the campaign succeeded in eliciting some response from the National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA), who organized meetings with the ISPs to improve the quality of service. Nevertheless, the campaign continues.

Recent investment in telecommunications infrastructure has been limited since the revolution. The country’s economic crisis halted plans for a fourth mobile operator license and many foreign investment projects have ceased due to the increase in violence and political instability. Electricity blackouts due to fuel shortages also disrupted internet access in major cities. Blackouts, which reach their peak during the summer months, were a key mobilization point against President Morsi in 2013, and could be of political significance in the summer of 2014.

The Egyptian mobile phone market is divided between three companies. Mobinil, founded by construction magnate Naguib Sawiris, is now majority-owned by the French company Orange and had over 33 million subscribers by mid-2014. Vodafone Egypt, around 55 percent of which is owned by Vodafone, had over 41 million subscribers. Finally, Etisalat Misr is a subsidiary of Etisalat (UAE), which owns 66 percent of it, and had over 23 million subscribers. The state-owned company, Telecom Egypt, has a monopoly on landlines and, in April, obtained a license for a new mobile telephone company.

By the end of May 2014, Egypt had 44.5 million internet connections, with the market dominated by state-owned Telecom Egypt (under the name TE-Data). The Egyptian government has centralized internet infrastructure and fiber-optic cables into highly controllable “chokepoints.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, virtually all of Egypt’s telecommunications infrastructure is owned by Telecom Egypt. Egypt’s five main ISPs lease lines from Telecom Egypt and resell bandwidth to over 200 smaller ISPs. The arrangement makes it easy to suspend internet access or decrease speeds, as was the case during the 2011 revolution. From January 27 to February 2, 2011,<sup>14</sup> authorities disabled the country’s Border Gateway Protocol Routes, shutting down all internet traffic in less than one hour.<sup>15</sup> Telecommunications companies were then ordered to cut mobile internet and text-messaging service under the terms of strict agreements they had signed with regulators. At the time, state

10 World Bank, “Data—Indicators: Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$2 a Day,” <http://data.worldbank.org/country/egypt-arab-republic?display=default>

11 “Measuring the Information Society,” International Telecommunication Union, 2012, [http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/mis2012/MIS2012\\_without\\_Annex\\_4.pdf](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/mis2012/MIS2012_without_Annex_4.pdf)

12 “The Internet Revolution” campaign official page, <https://www.facebook.com/Internet.Revolution.Egypt>.

13 James Glanz and John Markoff, “Egypt Leaders Found ‘Off’ Switch for Internet,” The New York Times, February 15, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/16/technology/16internet.html?\\_r=2&pagewanted=all&\\_](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/16/technology/16internet.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all&_)

14 Erica Chenoweth, “Backfire in the Arab Spring,” Middle East Institute, September 1, 2011, <http://www.mei.edu/content/backfire-arab-spring>.

15 Iljitsch van Beijnum, “How Egypt did (and your government could) shut down the internet,” Ars Technica, January 30, 2011, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2011/01/how-egypt-or-how-your-government-could-shut-down-the-internet/>.

intelligence agencies claimed that “foreign intelligence [was] using communication technologies to plan terrorist actions.”<sup>16</sup>

In the second half of 2013, as the state engaged in widespread military operations in the Sinai peninsula in the pursuit of armed militant groups, it regularly shut down telephone and internet communications for several hours at a time in a bid to limit coordination between the militants,<sup>17</sup> as well as to prevent the detonation of cellphone-triggered IEDs, a favored tactic of the militants.<sup>18</sup> The military effort intensified in September 2013, during a massive campaign which saw the army combing entire villages and using heavy equipment. During the hours of the campaign, the entire peninsula was “cut off entirely from the outside world”. This was done with no warning to the residents who endured those repeated cuts.

Mobile service providers and ISPs are regulated by the NTRA and governed by the 2003 Telecommunication Regulation Law. The NTRA’s board is chaired by the ICT minister and includes representatives from the defense, finance, and interior ministries; the state security council; the presidency; workers’ unions; as well as public figures, experts, and other military figures.<sup>19</sup> Officially, the NTRA is responsible for regulating the telecommunications industry<sup>20</sup> and furthering ICT development through projects like the “eMisr” National Broadband Plan outlined in late 2011.<sup>21</sup> The NTRA also conducts analysis of the telecommunication market and publishes research to encourage investment. However, there have been some reports revealing the NTRA’s ties to online control and surveillance activities. Through its control of the mobile subscriber database, it has been accused of monitoring mobile and social media applications.<sup>22</sup>

## Limits on Content

No political, religious, or social websites were blocked in Egypt over the past year. Nonetheless, self-censorship has increased as a result of the polarized political climate. State-owned news outlets are unlikely to challenge crucial government decisions, while ordinary social media users risk harassment or, in some cases, professional repercussions for voicing their opinions on political topics. Despite these challenges, new, independent outlets are attempting to fill the gap, and Egyptians remain adept at utilizing social media as an instrument for positive change. The past coverage period saw a number of examples, particularly on issues of women’s rights.

16 Aameera Fouad, “Saying no to mobile phones,” Al-Ahram Weekly Online, Issue No. 1083, February 2-8, 2012, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2012/1083/eg402.htm>.

17 “Phones and Internet shut down in North Sinai,” Mada Masr, September 24, 2013. <http://www.madamasr.com/content/phones-and-internet-shut-down-north-sinai>.

18 Special Report: Egyptian militants outwit army in Sinai battlefield”, March 16, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/16/us-egypt-sinai-specialreport-idUSBREA2F05020140316>.

19 “About Us: NTRA Board: Board Members,” National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, accessed April 16, 2013, [http://www.tra.gov.eg/english/DPages\\_DPagesDetails.asp?ID=175&Menu=5](http://www.tra.gov.eg/english/DPages_DPagesDetails.asp?ID=175&Menu=5).

20 “About Us: NTRA Board: NTRA Function & Role,” National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, accessed April 16, 2013, [http://www.tra.gov.eg/english/DPages\\_DPagesDetails.asp?ID=176&Menu=5](http://www.tra.gov.eg/english/DPages_DPagesDetails.asp?ID=176&Menu=5).

21 “eMisr National Broadband Plan,” National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, [http://www.tra.gov.eg/emisr/Presentations/Plan\\_En.pdf](http://www.tra.gov.eg/emisr/Presentations/Plan_En.pdf).

22 Ahmed El Bermawy “NTRA deny monitoring social media and SMS” Masress, January 20, 2013, <http://masress.com/dostor/65762>.

Social networking tools and blog-hosting services are freely available, with government institutions also taking to them, primarily Facebook and to a lesser extent Twitter, to disseminate statements and news. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services are also widely used, even though it is technically prohibited to make international calls from mobile networks under Article 72 of the Telecommunications Law, which forbids the “by-passing [of] international telephone calls by any means whatsoever.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, VoIP calls through services such as Skype and Viber can only officially be placed over fixed-line or Wi-Fi networks, not through 3G.<sup>24</sup> The debate over VoIP flared up again in June 2013 after the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (NTRA) announced the establishment of a committee to “monitor” communications on free messaging apps WhatsApp and Viber, pending a potential decision to block or restrict them. The NTRA’s declaration said that the rationale was economic, citing that “pre-paid applications will face losses.”<sup>25</sup> At the same time, political and security motives cannot be discounted, as the fact that Viber was originally developed by an Israeli company was regularly mentioned in the press. The committee never issued a recommendation on the subject. On November 3, 2013, responding to one newspaper’s allegations, the NTRA denied that it was considering imposing charges for Viber, WhatsApp, and BlackBerry Messenger use.<sup>26</sup>

Egypt’s courts have made a number of high-profile rulings to block online content, with pornography a constant highlight of the rhetoric surrounding the state’s censorship campaign. A lawsuit launched in May 2013 accused the president of “ignoring the issue,” and claimed that a ban on pornography would cost only EGP 7 to 8 million (US\$ 980,000 to 1.1 million).<sup>27</sup> Egypt’s prosecutor-general had previously ordered government ministries to implement a 2009 ruling by the Supreme Administrative Court banning pornographic websites in late 2012.<sup>28</sup> The decree was never formally implemented, with the ban estimated to cost as much as EGP 100 million (US\$ 14 million),<sup>29</sup> with significant effects to internet speeds. Civil society organizations have objected to the threat of a ban, both on grounds of freedom of expression but also because the expense would be too great. On August 24, 2013 the Administrative Court rejected the lawsuit.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, several ISPs have implemented the court’s decision on a voluntarily basis, offering a “safe internet service” to subscribers.

While the courts have yet to force the blocking or deletion of these sites, progovernment users have taken up more informal tactics to force the deletion of social media accounts or groups that express views to which they are opposed. A Facebook campaign invited its supporters to report pro-Muslim Brotherhood pages *en masse*, ostensibly for violating the social network’s terms of use relating to

23 “Telecommunication Regulation Law, Law No. 10 of 2003,” February 2003, Arab Republic of Egypt.

24 “Egypt banks VoIP services from operators such as Skype,” BBC News, March 24, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8585998.stm>.

25 “Egypt considers banning Viber, WhatsApp,” Al Ahram Online, June 8, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/73465/Business/Economy/Egypt-considers-banning-Viber-WhatsApp-.aspx>.

26 “NTRA: Viber, WhatsApp, BBM are free and cannot be priced,” Al Masry al Youm, November 3, 2013, [www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/335106](http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/335106).

27 “NTRA: Viber, WhatsApp, BBM are free and cannot be priced,” Al Masry al Youm.

28 “Egypt prosecutor orders Internet porn ban” Daily News Egypt, November 8, 2012, [www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/11/08/egypt-prosecutor-orders-internet-porn-ban/](http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2012/11/08/egypt-prosecutor-orders-internet-porn-ban/).

29 “New case on banning porn websites in Egypt adjourned,” Al Ahram Online, June 1, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/72860/Egypt/Politics-/New-case-on-banning-porn-websites-in-Egypt-adjourn.aspx>.

30 “Internet porn ban case turned down,” Daily News Egypt, August 24, 2013, [www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/08/24/internet-porn-ban-case-turned-down/](http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/08/24/internet-porn-ban-case-turned-down/).

the incitement of violence.<sup>31</sup> A government supporter, often introduced in television interviews as a ‘technology expert’, repeatedly stated that a Facebook page can easily be closed if 20 different accounts report it to the company.<sup>32</sup>

Self-censorship has resurfaced to levels reminiscent of the pre-2011 days. The proliferation of cases against journalists on trumped up charges of ‘spreading false news’ and ‘aiding the enemy’—that is, the Muslim Brotherhood—has had a chilling effect on freedom of expression and reporting, with many choosing to stifle their own opinions out of concern for their own employment security or personal safety.<sup>33</sup> Columnists and television presenters who were highly critical of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and then of former president Mohamed Morsi were placed in a precarious position in the post-June 2013 environment. A hostile military-led regime, backed by a public that seemed equally hostile to dissent, made any criticism of the military’s actions during the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood deeply unpopular.

This climate of intimidation, added to the intense political polarization, has altered the online news landscape. As most Muslim Brotherhood news websites maintain a nominal presence and are managed from abroad, the range of opinions has shrunk considerably, as has the professionalism of web outlets. In turn, state-owned media has espoused an extreme pro-military position, doing away with the modicum of diverse opinions once displayed. In such a climate of self-censorship and populism, in which many journalists are eager to reflect government positions, there has been less of a need to employ official state censorship.<sup>34</sup> Once-leading opposition outlets, such as *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, promptly aligned with the state narrative, further limiting the diversity of opinions available to the public. This has contributed to an environment in which editors-in-chief and website administrators have opted to go along with populist sentiment rather than carry opposition voices.

However, some independent media sources have stepped up to fill the gap. One such example is Yanair (“January”), an online news portal in Arabic established by young professional journalists.<sup>35</sup> While Yanair lacks a viable business model and relies primarily on opinion pieces rather than reporting, their opposition stance has rapidly earned them a large readership and a solid roster of opinion contributors. Another is *Mada Masr*, an English-language publication founded by former *Egypt Independent* journalists and contributors.<sup>36</sup> Operating on a limited budget, *Mada Masr* has nevertheless succeeded in launching an Arabic portal alongside the English one, and its journalists have carried on the mission of providing objective and original reporting on current events. It has also distinguished itself with its primers and background articles, as well as hard-hitting cartoons.

Furthermore, there is very limited coverage of regional news both in traditional and online media. One of the few examples comes from *Mandara*, a news website focusing on the Sa’eed, Egypt’s rural

31 “Activists launch a campaign to close the Brotherhood’s online pages, and how to report them [Video]” Al Fagr, December 28, 2013. <http://new.elfagr.org/Detail.aspx?newsId=489707&secid=1#>.

32 “Communications professional: Closing down all the Brotherhood’s Facebook pages is very easy,” Al Dostor, February 26, 2014. [www.dostor.org/379770](http://www.dostor.org/379770).

33 The most famous example is the case brought against three Al-Jazeera English journalists, who were sentenced to terms ranging from 7 to 10 years in prison in June 2014. See “Egypt court sentences Al Jazeera journalists,” Al Jazeera, June 23, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/egypt-finds-al-jazeera-journalists-guilty-201462373539293797.html>.

34 Rasha Abdulla, “Egypt’s media in the midst of the Revolution,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt\\_media\\_revolution.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt_media_revolution.pdf).

35 See <http://www.yanair.net>.

36 See <http://www.madamasr.com>.



and largely impoverished South.<sup>37</sup> *Mandara* also offers training to budding journalists who report from the southern governorates. Coverage of the Sinai Peninsula, whose local population is caught in violence between armed forces and Islamist groups, is sparse. With little news reported in formal media, people turn to local activists and journalists who report on local events.<sup>38</sup> Their coverage makes national news very sporadically.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the online media landscape, the continued development of Egyptian social media reflects both users' engagement in debate, as well as their selection of social media as a primary source of news. With 16.2 million subscribers in Egypt by the end of 2013,<sup>40</sup> Facebook was the most visited website in the country.<sup>41</sup> Egyptians account for around a quarter of all of the region's Facebook users and the numbers continue to increase; over 2.6 million new Egyptian accounts were registered in the first half of 2014 alone.<sup>42</sup>

Social media remains an arena for rhetorical sparring between supporters of the military-led government, backers of the deposed Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government, and the dwindling "revolutionary" movement, now a minority. In fact, after General Sisi issued an ultimatum to the Muslim Brotherhood-backed president, it was on Twitter that Morsi posted his rejection of the ultimatum.<sup>43</sup>

The height of the social media war came in the aftermath of August 14, 2013, when security forces stormed two Muslim Brotherhood-supporting long-standing sit-ins in the squares of al-Nahda and Raba'a al-Adaweya, the latter significantly larger. The death toll of the operation was estimated by the Egyptian government to be 638 victims,<sup>44</sup> while a Human Rights Watch report released on the first anniversary of the events put the death toll at "a minimum of 817 people and more likely at least 1,000."<sup>45</sup> A four-fingered salute, usually drawn in black on a yellow background, emerged as a symbol of solidarity with the victims of the killings and, more broadly, with the ousted president. The symbol was de facto criminalized, leading to a number of harsh punishments against anyone who displayed it, including a protester who received a 2.5-year jail sentence for wearing a Raba'a pin,<sup>46</sup> a child who was arrested for carrying a ruler with the symbol on it,<sup>47</sup> and professional athletes

37 See Mandara Online: <http://www.mandaraonline.com>.

38 Massaad Abu Fajr is one such example, see [www.facebook.com/massaad.abufajr](http://www.facebook.com/massaad.abufajr); Federation of Journalists and reporters in Sinai, see [www.facebook.com/fjr.sinai](http://www.facebook.com/fjr.sinai).

39 See for instance "Journalist Union: 1085 deceased and injured in a year in Northern Sinai," August 18, 2014. <http://bit.ly/1s7LJxw>.

40 "Report: Internet users reached 35.95 million in 2013," Egypt Independent, February 4, 2014, [www.egyptindependent.com/news/report-internet-users-reached-3595-million-2013](http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/report-internet-users-reached-3595-million-2013).

41 "Top sites in Egypt". Alexa report (accessed August 2014) [alexa.com/topsites/countries/EG](http://alexa.com/topsites/countries/EG).

42 "Facebook in the Arab region," Arab Social Media Report, <http://www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Facebook/LineChart.aspx?&PriMenuID=18&CatID=24&mnu=Cat>, accessed September 23, 2014.

43 "Morsi Ousted While Sparring With Egyptian Army on Social Media," Mashable, July 3, 2014, [mashable.com/2013/07/03/egypt-social-media/](http://mashable.com/2013/07/03/egypt-social-media/).

44 "Health Ministry raises death toll of Wednesday's clashes to 638," Daily News Egypt, August 16, 2013, [www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/08/16/health-ministry-raises-death-toll-of-wednesdays-clashes-to-638/](http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/08/16/health-ministry-raises-death-toll-of-wednesdays-clashes-to-638/).

45 "Egypt: Rab'a Killings Likely Crimes against Humanity," Human Rights Watch, 12 August 14, 2014, [www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-rab-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity](http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-rab-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity).

46 "State-appointed body finds no evidence of rape at women's prison," Al Ahram Online, July 9, 2014, [english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/105853/Egypt/Politics-/Stateappointed-body-finds-no-evidence-of-rape-at-w.aspx](http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/105853/Egypt/Politics-/Stateappointed-body-finds-no-evidence-of-rape-at-w.aspx).

47 "Egyptian boy arrested after teacher finds stationery with pro-Morsi symbol", The Guardian, December 10, 2013, [www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/egypt-schoolboy-arrested-stationery-morsi-symbol-rabaa](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/egypt-schoolboy-arrested-stationery-morsi-symbol-rabaa).



disciplined for performing the salute or wearing branded t-shirts.<sup>48</sup> Online, many used the symbol as their avatars and profile pictures, both within and outside Egypt.<sup>49</sup> Unsurprisingly, the symbol spawned a large number of parodies, mocking either the four-fingered salute or the cause behind it.<sup>50</sup>

To circumvent the public hostility towards it, the Brotherhood has attempted to multiply its online presence by using other front organizations such as the “National Alliance to Support Legitimacy and Reject the Coup,”<sup>51</sup> “Egyptians against the Coup,” and other smaller groups. The Muslim Brotherhood also launched a website for International Women’s Day on March 8, 2014, focusing on violations against female members and supporters of the Brotherhood.<sup>52</sup>

After Field Marshall el-Sisi announced his intention to run for president on March 26, 2014, many independent activists, Muslim Brotherhood supporters, and other detractors of el-Sisi took to Twitter and Facebook to insult him with the Arabic hashtag translating to “Vote for the pimp.” In contrast, supporters of the Field Marshall used the hashtag “I will elect Sisi” to express support for his candidacy.<sup>53</sup> Statistics about the anti-Sisi hashtag were widely shared by its supporters as proof of the general dislike of el-Sisi, overloading the Twitter analytics website Keyhole on March 29.<sup>54</sup> Speaking to the media, a renowned blogger stated that the hashtags came about because Twitter is “the only arena where [Sisi critics] can express their opposition.”<sup>55</sup>

In May 2014, during the course of the short-lived presidential campaign which pitted Sisi against veteran politician Hamdeen Sabbahi, with Sisi and his supporters dominating the airwaves, Sabbahi’s supporters also took to social media. Debates with sparring hashtags based on the slogans of the candidates were commonplace, but faded with the end of the elections.

Rights groups and campaigns have also found a home on social media. Groups like “The Egyptian Movement for Change” (*Kefaya*), the 6th of April Movement, and “We Can See You” (*Shayfenkom*) have been successful in rallying for political causes through the use of social-networking sites.<sup>56</sup> The “No Military Trials for Civilians” campaign is a primary example of sharing information and messages online, in order to rally supporters on the internet to participate in offline actions.

Women’s rights groups have emerged as key users of social media for advocacy. Campaigns such

48 “Egyptians Defiant Over Use of ‘Rabaa’ Symbol”. Voice of America, November 29, 2013, [www.voanews.com/content/egyptians-defiant-over-rabaa-symbol/1800249.html](http://www.voanews.com/content/egyptians-defiant-over-rabaa-symbol/1800249.html).

49 “‘Four-Finger Salute’ Shows Solidarity With Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood,” Radio Free Europe, August 24, 2013, [www.rferl.org/content/egypt-four-finger-salute/25085068.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/egypt-four-finger-salute/25085068.html).

50 “Four-finger salute: Egypt rivals use ‘Rabaa hand’ to turn Facebook yellow,” Al Arabiya, August 22, 2013, [english.alarabiya.net/en/media/2013/08/21/Four-finger-salute-Egypt-rivals-use-Rabaa-symbol-to-turn-Facebook-yellow.html](http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/2013/08/21/Four-finger-salute-Egypt-rivals-use-Rabaa-symbol-to-turn-Facebook-yellow.html).

51 See <https://www.facebook.com/AllianceSupportingLegitimacy>.

52 See <http://sewomen.org>.

53 “Sisi’s Egypt Presidency Bid Ignites War On Twitter” Haberler, March 29, 2014, <http://en.haberler.com/sisi-s-egypt-presidency-bid-ignites-war-on-twitter-406864/>.

54 Mustapha Ajbaili, “Egypt TV presenters tout Twitter ban over anti-Sisi hashtag,” Al Arabiya News, March 31, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/television-and-radio/2014/03/31/Egypt-TV-presenters-tout-twitter-ban-over-anti-Sisi-hashtag.html>.

55 “‘Vote For The Pimp’ Hashtag Prompts Twitter Battle In Egypt,” The Huffington Post, March 31, 2014, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/31/vote-for-the-pimp-egypt\\_n\\_5064149.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/31/vote-for-the-pimp-egypt_n_5064149.html).

56 Naayem Saad Zaghloul, *Electronic Mass Communication in Egypt: Reality and Challenges* (Cairo: Egyptian Cabinet, Information and Decision Support Center, February 2010), 38.

as HarassMap and Baheya ya Masr have expertly used the internet to raise awareness, advocate for their positions, and rally supporters. Even primarily offline campaigns, such as the “feminist graffiti” NooNeswa or the theatre and storytelling of the BuSSy collectives have made excellent use of social media to spread the word about their activities.<sup>57</sup>

## Violations of User Rights

Political events over the past year have threatened the safety of Egypt’s digital activists, online journalists, and ordinary social media users. Within hours of the ousting of Mohamed Morsi, the army closed down several Islamist television channels and arrested five journalists from Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr.<sup>58</sup> The crackdown extended to online media, with reporters and editors from Muslim Brotherhood-linked sites such as Rassd and IkhanWeb arrested and imprisoned. However, arrests and assaults have not been limited to Islamist-leaning media outlets. Independent journalists, particularly those investigating military operations or covering antigovernment protests, have been targeted with beatings and even live ammunition, resulting in the death of reporter Mayada Ashraf. In an environment where two of the main organized opposition movements—the Muslim Brotherhood and the April 6th Movement—have been banned, the post-Morsi, military-led regime has demonstrated its intent to close down avenues for dissent.

The removal of Mohamed Morsi by the army in July 2013 led to a suspension of the existing constitution, which had been signed into law by Morsi in December 2012. In its place, the constitution of 1971, as amended in 2011, took effect until the subsequent passing of a new constitution in January 2014 under the provisional government of Acting President Adly Mansour and Defense Minister Abdel Fattah el Sisi. The latter has been the public face of post-Morsi Egypt and, as such, has been the recipient of much of the praise and criticism for Egypt’s current state of affairs. Criticism of the government’s crackdown on all opposition forces in the country has thus resulted in an increase in military prosecutions under the charge of “insulting the army.” Online activity is adjudicated under two judicial systems: civilian courts under laws derivative of the Mubarak era,<sup>59</sup> and military courts operating under broad powers with little accountability.

The new constitution came into effect on January 18, 2014,<sup>60</sup> after a campaigning process fraught with irregularities and a vote boycotted by the opposition.<sup>61</sup> It contains articles that address and nominally guarantee freedom of the press, stating that Egyptians “have the right to own and issue newspapers and establish visual, audio and digital media outlets.” According to Article 70, “the law shall regulate ownership and establishment procedures for visual and radio broadcast stations in addition to online newspapers.” This wording implies that even online sources of information could

57 The campaigns mentioned can be accessed at [harassmap.org](http://harassmap.org), [fb.me/BaheyaYaMasr](https://fb.me/BaheyaYaMasr), [fb.me/WomenGraffiti](https://fb.me/WomenGraffiti), and [fb.me/TheBuSSyProject](https://fb.me/TheBuSSyProject).

58 Rasha Abdulla, “Egypt’s media in the midst of the Revolution,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt\\_media\\_revolution.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/egypt_media_revolution.pdf).

59 Hannah Grigg, 2013, “Freedom to Criticize Under Attack in the Middle East and North Africa” *Atlantic Council* <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/freedom-criticize-under-attack-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

60 All articles of the constitution mentioned here are based from the English translation developed by International IDEA and available at [www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/20131206EgyptConstitution\\_Dec.pdf.pdf](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/20131206EgyptConstitution_Dec.pdf.pdf)

61 “Human Rights Watch condemns Egypt constitution arrests,” Al Ahrām Online, January 13, 2014, [english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/155/91491/Egypt/Constitution-/Human-Rights-Watch-condemns-Egypt-constitution-arr.aspx](http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/155/91491/Egypt/Constitution-/Human-Rights-Watch-condemns-Egypt-constitution-arr.aspx).

be regulated and their owners may be required to seek government approval in order to operate, as is currently the case with newspapers.

Article 71 states that censorship is forbidden “in any way” and no individuals should be punished for publications. However, exceptions are made for “times of war or general mobilization,” with crimes delineated for “incitement to violence,” “discrimination amongst citizens, or impugning the honor of individuals.”<sup>62</sup> Article 211 outlines the establishment of a “National Media Council” tasked with regulating “the affairs of radio, television, and printed and digital press, among others” (Article 211) and ensuring that the press maintains a commitment to “professional and ethical standards, as well as national security needs.” Furthermore, Article 57 states that private communications “may only be confiscated, examined or monitored by causal judicial order, for a limited period of time, and in cases specified by the law.” Judicial warrants are needed in order to enter, search, monitor, private property such as homes as specified in Article 58. However the constitution continues to permit the trial of civilians under military courts, to the anger of political activists.<sup>63</sup> Most of those trials occur outside of the capital and away from the public eye.

In late 2013, the Ministry of Interior announced a draft antiterrorism bill amending the penal code and the criminal procedures law.<sup>64</sup> The proposed legislation classifies a larger number of crimes as terrorism and provides for the establishment of a “Terrorism Prosecutor’s Office” which would likely be subject to fewer checks and appeal provisions than normal courts. The draft threatens internet freedom, as it would allow the police to monitor internet traffic and social media activity to “prevent their use for terrorist purposes.”<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, Article 27 of the draft calls for a minimum sentence of five years in prison for “setting up a website with the goal of promoting ideas or beliefs inciting to the use of violence, broadcasting information to mislead the police or judicial authorities on terrorism cases, or exchanging messages and issuing orders between terrorist groups or organizations.”<sup>66</sup> Further, setting up a group with the intention of “advocating by any means the obstruction of provisions of the constitution or laws” is punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty, a charge that, activists pointed out, could apply to any peaceful political party or advocacy group.<sup>67</sup> After heavy backlash from the international

---

62 The full text reads, “It is prohibited to censor, confiscate, suspend or shut down Egyptian newspapers and media outlets in any way. Exception may be made for limited censorship in time of war or general mobilization. No custodial sanction shall be imposed for crimes committed by way of publication or the public nature thereof. Punishments for crimes connected with incitement to violence or discrimination amongst citizens, or impugning the honor of individuals are specified by law.” See “Egypt’s constitution 2013 vs. 2012: A comparison” Al Ahraom Online, December 12, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/88644/Egypt/0/Egyptys-constitution--vs--A-comparison.aspx>.

63 “Egypt panel approves ‘conditional military trials of civilians’,” Ahram Online, November 21, 2013, [english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/87113/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-panel-approves-conditional-military-trials-o.aspx](http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/87113/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-panel-approves-conditional-military-trials-o.aspx).

64 “Text of the counter-terrorism law: the Ministry of Interior demands monitoring Facebook and blocking inciteful websites,” Shorouk, January 30, 2014, [www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=30012014&id=0b0f8466-6b03-4d6a-a2e1-82df6c5ca4f2](http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=30012014&id=0b0f8466-6b03-4d6a-a2e1-82df6c5ca4f2).

65 “Egypt’s Anti-Terrorism Law to Target Internet,” Global Voices, January 31, 2014, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2014/01/31/egypts-anti-terrorism-law-to-target-internet/>.

66 “Egypt’s Anti-Terrorism Law to Target Internet,” Global Voices.

67 Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, “Egypt’s draft anti-terrorism laws constitute greatest threat to civil liberties in 37 years,” IFEX, April 30, 2014, [https://www.ifex.org/egypt/2014/04/30/draft\\_terrorism\\_laws\\_grave\\_violation\\_of\\_constitution/](https://www.ifex.org/egypt/2014/04/30/draft_terrorism_laws_grave_violation_of_constitution/).

community,<sup>68</sup> Interim President Adly Mansour sent the legislation back to his cabinet for greater public consultation in April 2014.<sup>69</sup>

In a shift from the previous coverage period, this year witnessed an increase in the number of arrests and prosecutions of online journalists, particularly those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood or its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Abdel Rahman Shaheen and Ahmed al-Ajos, two reporters with the news website Freedom and Justice News Gate, were arrested on April 9, 2014 for “inciting and committing violence.” Shaheen was sentenced to three years by a court in Suez.<sup>70</sup> Al-Ajos was released on bail in September and his trial was set for October.<sup>71</sup>

Three individuals from the opposition news website Rassd were arrested. Executive Director Samhi Mustafa and co-founder Abdullah al-Fakharany were taken into custody in August 2013, initially for “disturbing the peace” and other charges unrelated to their profession. However, the charges were later switched to “spreading chaos” and “spreading false information” as part of their coverage of the armed incursion into the Raba’a protests. Separately, Rassd correspondent Mahmoud Abdel Nabi was charged with possessing weapons and inciting a riot while covering protests and clashes between pro-Morsi and pro-army supporters in Alexandria in July 2013.<sup>72</sup>

Many journalists continue to be subjected to military trials. Amr al-Qazzaz and Islam Farahat, two Rassd journalists, were arrested in November 2013 and accused of leaking videos of el-Sisi, as well as government documents. While al-Qazzaz was acquitted, Farahat was sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of EGP 500 (US\$ 70).<sup>73</sup>

Khaled Hamza, a political advisor in the Muslim Brotherhood and former editor-in-chief of its website, Ikhwanweb, was arrested with four others while attempting to cross the border into Sudan in February 2014. All were handed one-year prison sentences by a military court.<sup>74</sup>

Two journalists from the pro-Morsi online news network Yaqeen were arrested in late December 2013 while covering student protests at Al Azhar University, which turned violent.<sup>75</sup> Photojournalist

---

68 See José Gonzalez, “Egyptian draft anti-terror laws pose a threat to freedom of expression,” Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, May 5, 2014, <https://cjfe.org/resources/features/egyptian-draft-anti-terror-laws-pose-threat-free-expression>, and Erin Cunningham, “Egyptian draft laws to widen ‘terror’ definition drawing fierce criticism,” Washington Post, April 22, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/egypt-draft-law-to-widen-terror-definition/2014/04/19/e79e5f3a-7725-4a25-a43a-0e005aa99b69\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/egypt-draft-law-to-widen-terror-definition/2014/04/19/e79e5f3a-7725-4a25-a43a-0e005aa99b69_story.html).

69 Rana Muhammad Taha, “President refers anti-terror legislation back to cabinet amid mounting criticism,” Daily News Egypt, April 15, 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/04/15/president-refers-anti-terror-legislation-back-cabinet-amid-mounting-criticism/>.

70 Egypt convicts another journalist, bans TV channels,” Committee to Protect Journalists, June 25, 2014, <https://cpj.org/2014/06/egypt-convicts-another-journalist-censors-channels.php>.

71 “Journalists released from prison in Egypt, but others remain,” Committee to Protect Journalists, September 17, <https://cpj.org/2014/09/journalists-released-from-prison-in-egypt-but-othe.php>.

72 “Egypt detains more journalists as elections approach,” Committee to Protect Journalists, April 10, 2014, <https://cpj.org/2014/04/egypt-detains-more-journalists-as-elections-approa.php>.

73 “Document – Egypt: Key Human Rights Concerns Ahead of Presidential Elections,” Amnesty International, May 23, 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE12/028/2014/en/f149bccf-8056-4281-8edf-13e19f0670f2/mde120282014en.html>.

74 “Document – Egypt: Key Human Rights Concerns Ahead of Presidential Elections,” Amnesty International, May 23, 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE12/028/2014/en/f149bccf-8056-4281-8edf-13e19f0670f2/mde120282014en.html>.

75 “Egypt jails two journalists, renews detention of another,” Committee to Protect Journalists, April 30, 2014, <https://cpj.org/2014/04/egypt-jails-two-journalists-renews-detention-of-an.php>.

Ahmed Gamal and journalist Saaid Shihata were held for months without charge until April 2014, when they were accused of “participating in an illegal demonstration and assaulting a police officer.” Gamal, who has not been formally charged, reportedly went on hunger strike on August 25.<sup>76</sup> Shihata was set to be tried in May 2014.

Independent journalists have also been arrested during the coverage period of this year. Muhamed Sabry, a blogger, freelance journalist, and photographer, was handed a six-month suspended sentence on November 3, 2013.<sup>77</sup> He was charged under a military court with “entering a prohibited military zone and filming a military facility” while investigating the killing of Egyptian soldiers near the Rafah border crossing.<sup>78</sup>

Numerous journalists have been arrested on charges of joining illegal protests while covering demonstrations as part of their professional assignments. Ahmed Fouad, a journalist at the news website *Karmoz*, was also arrested while covering antigovernment demonstrations on January 25, 2014, the third anniversary of the 2011 revolution. He was accused of numerous crimes unrelated to his journalistic work, including “joining a group that aims to disrupt the law,” “blocking a road,” “possessing a weapon,” and “demonstrating without permission.” Karim Shalaby, a reporter for *Al-Masdar* news site linked to the April 6th Movement, was also arrested on January 25.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Hussein Hassan Sobhy, a reporter for the news site Radio Horytna, was arrested while covering a pro-Brotherhood protest in February 2014.<sup>80</sup> He was not released on bail until September 17.<sup>81</sup>

On October 5, 2013, award-winning journalist Ahmed Abu-Deraa was sentenced to six months in prison, a sentence that was later suspended. Abu-Deraa, the 2012 recipient of the European Union’s Samir Kassir award for freedom of the press, was charged with “intentionally spreading false information about the military.”<sup>82</sup> The investigative journalist had given details of injuries and the destruction of six homes and part of a mosque in the village of Sheikh Zawad during a military operation to create a buffer zone with Gaza.<sup>83</sup> News sources speculated over whether he was arrested for several articles,<sup>84</sup> which appeared online, or a related Facebook post.<sup>85</sup>

On February 15, 2014, police arrested the administrator of a Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Facebook page, charging him with “spreading false news, inciting violence against security forces” as well as

76 “Journalists released from prison in Egypt, but others remain,” Committee to Protect Journalists, September 17, <https://cpj.org/2014/09/journalists-released-from-prison-in-egypt-but-othe.php>.

77 For Sabry’s Twitter profile, see <https://twitter.com/muhamedsabry>.

78 “Mohamed Sabry sentenced,” Daily News Egypt, November 3, 2013, [www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/11/03/muhamed-sabry-sentenced/](http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/11/03/muhamed-sabry-sentenced/).

79 The movement was banned on April 28, 2014.

80 “List of Imprisoned Journalists in Egypt,” May 19, 2014, <https://cpj.org/blog/List.of.Imprisoned.Journalists.in.Egypt.pdf>.

81 “Journalists released from prison in Egypt, but others remain,” Committee to Protect Journalists, September 17, 2014, <https://cpj.org/2014/09/journalists-released-from-prison-in-egypt-but-othe.php>.

82 Rana Muhammad Taha, “Abu Deraa gets suspended prison verdict,” Daily News Egypt, October 5, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/10/05/abu-deraa-gets-suspended-prison-verdict/>.

83 “Egypt detains journalist for publishing false information,” Committee to Protect Journalists, September 6, 2013, <https://cpj.org/2013/09/egypt-detains-journalist-for-publishing-false-info.php>.

84 See “Apache resumes shelling village o Sheikh Zuid and injures 4 people,” Al Masry Al Youm, September 3, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/258180>, and “Security Source: the government plans to keep army buffer zone with Gaza for three months,” Al Masry Al Youm, September 4, 2013, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/259048>.

85 See his Facebook post at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=628222377217888&id=10000090395107](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=628222377217888&id=10000090395107).

“spreading personal information of security officers.”<sup>86</sup> The 25-year old, only identified by his initials, is believed to still be in prison pending trial.

Authorities have made extensive use of the restrictive protest law to arrest several of Egypt’s high-profile political activists, who use social media to interact with followers, document human rights violations, and mobilize protests. In many cases, their online activities have been key to building their following and, conversely, in bringing unwanted attention from police and security forces. One of these revolutionary activists is blogger Alaa Abdel-Fattah, who has suffered legal harassment from the governments of Hosni Mubarak, the SCAF, Mohammed Morsi, and the post-Morsi military-led regime.<sup>87</sup> Abdel-Fattah is a founding member of the anti-Brotherhood and antimilitary Revolutionary Front.<sup>88</sup>

In the latest case, Abdel-Fattah was arrested along with two dozen co-defendants at a November 2013 demonstration organized by the “No Military Trials for Civilians” campaign, of which his sister is a founder. He was charged with assaulting a police officer and taking part in an illegal protest. Although he had announced his intention to voluntarily present himself to the authorities upon hearing the accusation, police raided his house at dawn and violently beat him and his wife while arresting him, also confiscating electronic devices from his house.<sup>89</sup> Abdel Fattah was subsequently detained in prison for nearly four months before being released on bail of EGP 10,000 (US\$1,500).<sup>90</sup> On June 11, physically prohibited from entering the courtroom, he was sentenced in absentia along with 24 others to 15 years in jail for assaulting a police officer and taking part in an illegal protest.<sup>91</sup> The defendants were also fined EGP 100,000 (US\$ 14,000) each and placed under five years of police surveillance. However, only Abdel-Fattah and renowned activists Wael Metwally and Mohamed Abdel-Rahman (“Noubi”) were imprisoned after the sentence was read. The trio had been part of a wider group of activists and prisoners who had started a hunger strike against Egypt’s new protest law. Due to Egyptian law on sentences handed out in absentia, they were granted a retrial in August 2014. One month later, they were released on bail as the court’s judge stepped down from the case.<sup>92</sup> Abdel-Fattah was once again arrested in October 2014.<sup>93</sup>

On June 1, 2013, Coptic lawyer Romani Murad Saad was sentenced in absentia to one year in prison and a fine of 500 EGP (US\$80) for allegedly insulting Islam.<sup>94</sup> He was also made to pay EGP 10,000

86 “Pro-Brotherhood Facebook page creator arrested in Egypt,” Al Arabiya, February 15, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/digital/2014/02/15/Pro-Brotherhood-Facebook-page-creator-arrested-in-Egypt.html>.

87 Aaron T. Rose, “Alaa Abdel Fattah arrest prompts outcry from human rights groups,” Daily News Egypt, November 30, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/11/30/alaa-abdel-fattah-arrest-prompts-outcry-from-human-rights-groups/>.

88 “New ‘anti-Brotherhood, anti-military’ front launched to ‘achieve revolution goals,’” Ahram Online, September 24, 2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/82400.aspx>.

89 “Update: Alaa Abd El Fattah arrested, being held at CSF barracks,” Mada Masr, November 28, 2013, <http://www.madamasr.com/content/update-alaa-abd-el-fattah-arrested-being-held-csf-barracks>.

90 “Activist Alaa Abdel-Fattah released on bail,” Al Ahram Online, March 23, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/97331/Egypt/Politics-/Activist-Alaa-AbdelFattah-released-on-bail-.aspx>.

91 “Activist Alaa Abdel-Fattah gets 15-year jail term for attacking officer, illegal protest,” Ahram Online, June 11, 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/103419/Egypt/Politics-/BREAKING-Egypt-activist-Alaa-Abdel-Fattah-gets--y.aspx>.

92 Associated Press, “Egyptian activist Alaa Abd El Fattah is given bail,” The Guardian, September 15, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/15/egyptian-activist-blogger-alaa-abdel-fattah-released-bail>.

93 Robert Mackey, “Alaa Abd El Fattah, Dissident Blogger, Is Re-Arrested in Egypt,” New York Times, October 27, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/28/world/middleeast/alaa-abd-el-fattah-dissident-blogger-is-re-arrested-in-egypt.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/28/world/middleeast/alaa-abd-el-fattah-dissident-blogger-is-re-arrested-in-egypt.html?_r=0).

94 Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “Coptic Egyptian lawyer accused of defaming Islam sentenced to prison,” IFEX, June 4, 2013, [https://www.ifex.org/egypt/2013/06/04/blasphemy\\_cases/](https://www.ifex.org/egypt/2013/06/04/blasphemy_cases/).



(US\$1,500) in civil damages to the plaintiffs. The lawsuit stems from a heated online argument that took place two years ago in a Facebook group related to young lawyers in the Egyptians city of Assiut. Saad and Islamist lawyers argued over the 2012 presidential elections, which pitted Islamist Mohamed Morsi against former regime insider Ahmed Shafik. Unhappy with his political opinions, the Islamist lawyers later alleged that Murad had insulted Islam during a private discussion at a library. Although subsequent evidence was never provided to prove the allegations, the trial went ahead and Saad was sentenced in absentia.

In May 2014, 19-year-old Kirollos Shawky Atallah, a Christian, was detained after he posted a picture of the Muslim prophet Mohammed on his Facebook page along with an insulting comment, causing riots in his village in the governorate of Luxor. Villagers pelted his house with bricks. One month later, on June 24, Atallah was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of “insulting Islam” and “inciting sectarian violence.” His attackers were released the next day.<sup>95</sup>

On January 23, 2014, Twitter and YouTube user Ahmed Anwar was found guilty of “insulting the Ministry of Interior, misusing the Internet, and harassment” in relation to a video he uploaded to YouTube. He was sentenced to three months in jail but was able to commute his sentence after paying EGP 10,000 (US\$ 1,500).<sup>96</sup> The video, uploaded in early 2012, featured mock commentary over footage of a public event of the ministry honoring singers and actors for “raising the morale of policemen.” Legal Affairs Director of the Gharbeya Security Directorate, part of the Ministry of the Interior, filed a complaint shortly after the video was posted, and an arrest warrant was issued in March 2013. Egyptian human rights organizations described the accusation as “yet another piece of evidence of the Egyptian authorities’ hostility and violations against internet users, in a desperate attempt to silence its critics.”<sup>97</sup>

Aside from arrests and prosecutions, online journalists have also been assaulted and arbitrarily detained, particularly while covering protests. Freelance photojournalist Mahmoud Abou Zeid “Shawkan” was beaten and detained during the August 2013 protests and, as of June 2014, remained in custody without charge.<sup>98</sup> American journalist Mike Giglio, formerly of the *Daily Beast* and now at BuzzFeed, was also detained and beaten. He was released the same day.<sup>99</sup> Giglio reported that the police confiscated his laptop and slapped him until he gave up his login password.

Journalists have also come under live fire while documenting protests.<sup>100</sup> Mayada Ashraf, reporter for *Al-Dustour* and news site *Masr al-Arabiyya*, was shot dead on March 28, 2014 while covering

95 “Six years for a Christian man on charges of denigrating Islam in Luxor”, Al-Watan, 24 June 2014. [www.elwatannews.com/news/details/509551](http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/509551), and AFP – Arutz Sheva, “Egypt: Second Christian Jailed for Insulting Islam,” Voice of the Copts, June 29, 2014, <http://www.voiceofthecoets.org/index.php/component/content/article/78-news1/11828-egypt-second-christian-jailed-for-insulting-islam>.

96 “Twitter user convicted of insulting MOI,” Mada Masr, January 23, 2014, <http://www.madamasr.com/content/twitter-user-convicted-insulting-moi>.

97 Ahmed Aboulenein, “Blogger faces trial for mocking interior ministry,” Daily News Egypt, April 7, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/07/blogger-faces-trial-for-mocking-interior-ministry/>.

98 “The photojournalist held in an Egyptian jail for 10 months without charge,” The Guardian, June 25, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2014/jun/25/egypt-journalist-safety](http://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2014/jun/25/egypt-journalist-safety).

99 “Egypt’s Government Thugs Beat Me Up at the Rabaa Sit-In,” The Daily Beast, August 14, 2014, [www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/14/egypt-s-government-thugs-beat-me-up-at-the-rabaa-sit-in.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/14/egypt-s-government-thugs-beat-me-up-at-the-rabaa-sit-in.html).

100 “Two journalists injured covering clashes in Egypt,” Committee to Protect Journalists, April 15, 2014, <https://cpj.org/2014/04/two-journalists-injured-covering-clashes-in-egypt.php>.



antigovernment demonstrations.<sup>101</sup> The news outlet has been critical of the Brotherhood and the FJP. Her last article, which covered the protest, was published online that day.<sup>102</sup>

Ordinary social media users have also been reprimanded by their employers for their social media posts. On February 16, 2014, Cairo University teaching assistant Ahmed Abdel Basset Mohamed was suspended from work for “insulting the university teaching staff” on his personal Facebook page. The teacher, who also posted the decision on Facebook, said that it was punitive action for “rejecting the murder of students inside the university campus.”<sup>103</sup>

Restrictions on anonymity and the use of encryption software make it easier for these activists to be monitored and singled out by the authorities. Under Article 64 of the 2003 Telecommunications Law, the use of encryption devices is prohibited without the written consent of the NTRA, the military, and national security authorities.<sup>104</sup> In addition, cybercafe customers must provide their names, email addresses, and mobile numbers to receive a personal identification number (PIN) to access the internet. Further, the Telecommunications Law allows the offices of the Presidency, Security, Intelligence, and the Administrative Control Authority to obtain citizens’ online information without prior consent in cases that concern national security.

Online surveillance by security agencies is a grave concern in Egypt. In February 2014, researchers from the University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab identified the Egyptian government as a user of “Remote Control System” (RCS), a spyware technology.<sup>105</sup> RCS, produced by the Milan-based company “Hacking Team,” is marketed as “the hacking suite for governmental interception” and can capture data on the target’s computer; monitor encrypted internet communications; record Skype calls, emails, messages, and passwords typed into a browser; and remotely turn on a device’s webcam and microphone. RCS operates by infecting a target’s device, most likely through phishing; data stolen is transferred through multiple ‘hops’ to anonymize the packets and distance the spying government. Egypt-based endpoints for the reception of data channeled by RCS were identified by the researchers as recently as end of October 2013, indicating it was operational under the current militarily-led regime. Previously, protestors who broke into one of Egypt’s intelligence agencies found documents showing that the government had received surveillance and hacking products from Gamma and Narus, a subsidiary of Boeing.<sup>106</sup>

On June 1, 2014, *al-Watan* published a leaked document that revealed the Egyptian Ministry of Interior was looking to purchase technology to conduct real-time monitoring of social media

101 “Journalist shot dead covering clashes in Egypt,” Committee to Protect Journalists, March 28, 2014, <https://cpj.org/2014/04/two-journalists-injured-covering-clashes-in-egypt.php>, and “Major Decline in Freedom of Information Since Army Takeover,” Reporters Without Borders, May 21, 2014, <http://en.rsf.org/egypt-major-decline-in-freedom-of-21-05-2014.46317.html>.

102 Mayada Ashraf, “March for terrorist launches live bullets at the people,” [Arabic] Al-Dostor, March 28, 2014, <http://www.dostor.org/395949>.

103 “Cairo University suspends a Teacher’s Assistant for his publications on Facebook,” Al Shorouk, February 20, 2014, [www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=20022014&id=ec7c8728-0775-4062-be55-a48c271e7cbe](http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=20022014&id=ec7c8728-0775-4062-be55-a48c271e7cbe).

104 “Telecommunication Regulation Law, Law No. 10 of 2003,” February 2003, Arab Republic of Egypt.

105 See “Mapping Hacking Team’s ‘Untraceable’ Software,” Citizen Lab, February 17, 2014, <https://citizenlab.org/2014/02/mapping-hacking-teams-untraceable-spyware/>.

106 See Evgeny Morozov, “Political Repression 2.0,” September 1, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/opinion/political-repression-2-0.html>, and Karen McVeigh, “British firm offered spying software to Egyptian regime – documents,” The Guardian, April 28, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/apr/28/egypt-spying-software-gamma-finisher>.

and communication apps such Facebook, Twitter, Viber, and WhatsApp.<sup>107</sup> In a “call for tenders” document, the government requested a Social Networks Security Hazard Monitoring System to penetrate public and private communications in order to monitor for a long list of ‘hazards’ and ‘destructive ideas’ online. The list was broad and included such things as “calling for normalizing relations with enemies;” “spreading myths and claims of miracles;” “spreading rumors and intention misrepresentation of facts;” and “pornography, looseness, and immorality.”<sup>108</sup> A coalition of human rights organizations filed a lawsuit in June to call for a halt to the tender.<sup>109</sup> It was later reported that “SEE Egypt,” a reseller of Blue Coat technology in Egypt, had been contracted to provide the monitoring tools.<sup>110</sup> The company was reported listing the ministries of interior and defense as its clients,<sup>111</sup> which it subsequently denied, though news articles reported quotes from an official press release posted to its homepage.<sup>112</sup> The company removed its website altogether for several days.<sup>113</sup>

Regarding cooperation between state security structures and the private sector, ISPs and mobile operators are obliged to maintain a database of their customers and to allow the government to access their databases. After the ending of a grace period issued by the MCIT, customers who do not have their National ID numbers registered with their phone companies will have their phone lines cut. The NTRA has suggested that it would suspend additional phone numbers for mobile operators who fail to abide by the new rules.<sup>114</sup> In the past, details emerged that mobile operators Vodafone, Mobinil, and Etisalat had to sign terms of agreement that bound them to cooperate with government officials when requested to tap any conversation or monitor any discussion. In an interview, Mobinil founder Naguib Sawiris stated that under the company’s terms of agreement, the government had the right to cancel any or all mobile services in the absence of cooperation.<sup>115</sup>

Egyptian government websites have faced cyberattacks, with reports of overseas hackers targeting the sites for political reasons. In July 2013, Turkish collective Ayyıldız Tim took responsibility for defacing a number of Egyptian government websites, including that of the Ministry of Military Production, in support of Mohamed Morsi.<sup>116</sup> Egyptian hackers have also been responsible

107 Patrick Kingsley, “Egypt’s police seek ability to monitor social media for signs of dissent,” The Guardian, June 2, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/02/egypt-police-monitor-social-media-dissent-facebook-twitter-protest>.

108 According to an unofficial English translation, the list also includes “blasphemy and skepticism in religions; regional, religious, racial, and class divisions; throwing accusations; libel; insulting sarcasm; calls for the disregard of societal pillars; encouraging extremism, violence and dissent; mobilizing for demonstrations, sit-ins and illegal strikes; educating about making explosives as well assault, chaos and riot tactics; fishing for honest mistakes, stalking intimacies; and taking statements out of context”. For the full text of the tender, see <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/495659> (Arabic) and [http://afteegypt.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/MOI-SNSHM-rfp-June-2014\\_en.pdf](http://afteegypt.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/MOI-SNSHM-rfp-June-2014_en.pdf) (unofficial English translation).

109 “Administrative court lawsuit to stop social media surveillance,” AFTE, June 19, 2014, <http://afteegypt.org/uncategorized-en/2014/06/19/7953-afteegypt.html?lang=en>.

110 Sheera Frenkel and Maged Atef, “Exclusive: Egypt begins surveillance of Facebook, Twitter, and Skype on unprecedented scale,” BuzzFeed, September 17, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/sheerafrenkel/egypt-begins-surveillance-of-facebook-twitter-and-skype-on-u#2apm87r>.

111 SEEgypt, “SEE Customers...” [www.seegypt.com/selected%20customers.asp](http://www.seegypt.com/selected%20customers.asp).

112 Cached version of SEE’s press release. [http://drive.google.com/#folders/0Bw0\\_LRg9cKHya3N0Vjd6S2dQdGc](http://drive.google.com/#folders/0Bw0_LRg9cKHya3N0Vjd6S2dQdGc).

113 For more on this, see Scott Long, “Meet the Businessmen Who Want Egypt’s Internet Users Jailed, Tortured, and Killed,” A Paper Bird, September 25, 2014, <http://paper-bird.net/2014/09/25/meet-the-businessmen/>.

114 “Mobile operators forced to register customer data,” Egypt Independent April 1, 2010, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/mobile-operators-forced-register-customer-data>.

115 Stephanie Baker and Mahmood Kassem, “Billionaire Facing Death Threats Says Egypt Risks Becoming Iran,” Bloomberg, October 26, 2011, <http://bloom.bg/rXPGQE>.

116 “Ayyıldız Tim, Mısır Silahlı Kuvvetleri’nin sitesini hackledi,” Teknokulis, August 26, 2013, [www.teknokulis.com/Haberler/Internet/2013/08/26/ayyildiz-tim-misir-silahlı-kuvvetlerinin-sitesini-hackledi](http://www.teknokulis.com/Haberler/Internet/2013/08/26/ayyildiz-tim-misir-silahlı-kuvvetlerinin-sitesini-hackledi).

for attacks overseas, such defacements of a series of government websites in the United Arab Emirates,<sup>117</sup> supposed to be in retaliation of Emirati support for the ousting of Morsi.<sup>118</sup>

---

117 "TRA Defends a Cyber-attack Attempt" UAE Telecommunications Regulatory Agency, [www.tra.gov.ae/news\\_TRA\\_Defends\\_a\\_Cyber\\_attack\\_Attempt\\_-529-1.php](http://www.tra.gov.ae/news_TRA_Defends_a_Cyber_attack_Attempt_-529-1.php).

118 "UAE Fends Off Cyber-Attacks Originating in Egypt" Infosecurity, July 23, 2013, [www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/uae-fends-off-cyber-attacks-originating-in-egypt/](http://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/uae-fends-off-cyber-attacks-originating-in-egypt/).