



Egypt Media Assessment Report

Prof. Rasha Allam

Needs Assessment: Media and Elections in Egypt

I- Introduction

II- Media Background

III- Legal Obligations

A. Legal and Political Environment of the Media

Current legal obligations

1. Print Media
2. Broadcast Media
3. New Media

B. Proposed Regulatory Requirements

1. Proposed Egyptian Broadcast Law
2. Controversy on the Arab Satellite Charter

IV- Media Syndicates

Proposed Broadcast Syndicate

V- Media Coverage of Elections

A. Good Practices in Election Coverage

B. Obligations of Media for Election Coverage

C. C – Cases of Election Coverage in Egypt

1. Presidential Elections in 2005
2. People's Assembly Elections 2005/2006

D. Challenges Facing Journalists Covering Elections in Egypt

1. Identified Changes in Media Coverage
2. Main Obstacles Facing Journalists
3. Main Obstacles Experienced During Election Coverage
4. Evaluating Election Reporting – Presidential Elections
5. Evaluating Election Reporting – People's Assembly Elections
6. Impact of Official Structures
7. Mechanisms for Independent Media Coverage

E. Efforts to Promote Best Practices in Electoral Coverage

VI- Conclusions and Recommendations

I- Introduction:

This study aims towards assessing the Egyptian media environment with a specific focus on the media legal environment especially for the Egyptian media coverage during Elections. The report covers the legal and political environment (Print-broadcast), the experience of media coverage election in 2005, the legal obligations of media when covering elections and the main challenges facing journalists.

II- Media Background:

The Egyptian broadcasting media operate under the governmental control in terms of ownership. The Egyptian state is fully aware of the impact of the broadcasting media on audience, yet control has gone through different phases since Egypt's first President, Gamal Abdel el Naser until the current days. Currently, under the regime of President Mubarak, the media are witnessing a higher degree of freedoms, yet authorities use legal restrictions which affects media freedoms. During Mubarak era, some progress has been achieved over the last five years due to the increased international and internal pressure for political reform.

The Egyptian media have been witnessing changes within its structure in the last decades through the emergence of the private ownership in the market of the print and the broadcast sectors. The print sector is composed of national, political party and private newspapers, where each category has its own tone in news coverage. The broadcast sector has witnessed a growth as well with the introduction of new private television stations. Although, they are only allowed to satellite broadcast, yet they tackle sensitive issues with a challenging approach which acted as a pressure on the national television networks to provide more attractive and distinctive programs without being biased to the government. This freedom is sometimes threatened by the government as it is not legally established.

III- Legal obligations

A- The legal and political environment of media in Egypt:

The Egyptian media performs under the ownership of the Egyptian government, yet situation is different to national from private media. National Egyptian media fall completely under the ownership of the Egyptian government, however, private media do not perform under the same ownership, yet lack of a legal independent environment gives the government tools to intervene.

Current legal obligations:

The Egyptian Constitution does not restrict media freedoms, yet restrictions are practiced through the press law, penal code and the emergency law.

On one side, the Egyptian constitution includes a chapter titled "sovereignty of press", with six articles ensuring media freedom. The articles ensure that censorship on newspapers is prohibited, the articles ensures as well the right to access information as a basic right for the journalists.

· There is no law to regulate broadcasting in Egypt.

In addition, in 1982, Egypt signed the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights where freedom of opinion and expression are enforced and operationalized as stated in Articles 18 and 19 of the Covenant.

Yet, on the other side, the Legal restrictions in Egypt are practiced on the newspapers with two terms: the licensing of the newspaper and the censoring of the content.

In terms of issuance, law no 96/1996 gives the High Council of the press to be the only body responsible for issuing license to newspapers. Political parties and public legal persons are only the ones who are permitted to take license for newspaper publications. Several restrictions are imposed upon issuing the newspaper, such as the allocating the newspaper resources and determining their prices.

As for censorship, it is not limited only to censoring the content of papers published inside the country, but also to ban any paper published abroad from being sold inside the country, and this is according to law no. 20/1936 (Openarab.net, 2007). Yet, conditions of banning are not identified.

Article 10 of the law also gives the Minister of Interior the power to prohibit any newspapers published abroad from entering the country if there is a need, such as threatening to national security. Other laws restrict media freedom of expression, such as the defamation laws, penal codes, and emergency laws.

The Egyptian media consist of national (governmental) and private sectors with various level of independence. The following section describes the status of different media outlets.

1. Print Media:

The print media in Egypt is more diverse (national, oppositional, partisan, independent) than the broadcast media however, the Egyptian government exercises controls through distribution and legislations. Although the margin of freedom has increased in terms of the number of opposition and independent newspapers that are given the license to publish their newspapers, yet the main three national newspapers are governmentally owned. Although the constitution speaks that the press is free, however, the emergency law and the press law limit this freedom of expression.

The main three national newspapers are AlAhram, AlAkhbar and AlGomhuria, where the government owns the largest percentage in their shares. Also, the editors in chiefs are directly appointed by the president of the Shura council through the recommendation of the High Council of press.

The High Council of the Press is exercising control over journalistic institutions. The High Council of the Press reports to the Shura council, the Senate, and is responsible for providing license for any newspapers in Egypt.

No one is allowed to publish a newspaper without a license. This license is given by the government where long procedures are taken to be issued, and the Egyptian cabinet has to consent on issuing it. (IFLA/FAIFE World Report: Libraries and Intellectual Freedom 5, 8, 1999)

2. Broadcast Media:

All domestic radio and television national stations operate within the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), which is owned and controlled by the Egyptian government and affiliated with the Ministry of Information. It was formed and operates under Law 13 of 1979, modified by Law 223 of 1989 (ERTU files, 2001). The ERTU is the main body where all the national channels are broadcast from. The structure is very tall, with high division of labor and an exercise of a high degree of bureaucracy. Being governmentally owned gives the government control over the structure where their decision is centralized in the hands of the head of the ERTU who is appointed by the Prime Minister based on recommendation from the Minister of Information. Moreover, government subsidy is the main source of funding and budget for the ERTU, and that is the main reason for using the medium as a political tool and for exercising censorship over content (Rugh, 2004).

The Egyptian radio and television union (ERTU) is owned and controlled by the government where the main two national networks are broadcast from Cairo to the rest of the state.

The national broadcast media are composed as follows: two main terrestrial networks that cover all Egypt, and six terrestrial channels where each covers a specific constituency. As for the radio broadcast, there are 42 radio stations on medium wave and three on short wave and 14 on FM bands (Amin and Napoli, 1995).

Having control over the broadcast media is quite important for the government giving the fact that the rate of illiteracy was reported as 28% in 2007, which led the government to maintain control over the content (UNICEF, 2007).

Although the margin of freedom of expression in the Egyptian media has really improved, yet the Egyptian government is still exercising control by law where the ERTU is the only governing body of broadcasting in Egypt.

Although changes have been witnessed through the decades, yet the legal environment which is found mainly in the media law and regulations provide the Egyptian government with a good hand to practice its political pressure over the content given to the public.

3. New Media:

The Internet has opened a wide forum for citizens to express their opinions with high degree of freedom. Egypt is considered to be the highest country in Africa in terms of Internet users which counts for approximately 12.9%, for year 2008 (Internet World Statistics, 2008). The new media have opened windows of communication for the Egyptian citizens and encouraged citizens to participate politically within groups and exchange their ideas freely under a system that embraces lots of authoritarian features.

Bloggers enjoy a bigger margin to express opinions freely and criticize lots of the corruption taking place within the Egyptian government, yet the Egyptian security services could easily detect and detain citizens if they crossed the red lines and if they get the feeling that they could be a threat to the national security of the country. For example, Abdel Kader Suleiman was sent to prison in 2007 as he insulted Islam and defamed President Hosni Mubarak.

Facebook activists are also closely watched by the Egyptian security services. Although there are several groups that criticize media freedom suppression, and other aspects in the Egyptian governments, the Egyptian government does not allow anyone to have a great impact on the public and mobilize them against the government. For example, the Egyptian security forces have committed anti-liberal action against Israa Abd ElFatah, who called for a strike in the Nile Delta city of Mahalla Al Kubra, as she was sent to prison.

The Parliament is also now debating a draft law that would provide for prison sentences for “abusing Internet use” and for “publication of multimedia content without government permission”.

B- Proposed Regulatory Requirements

1. Proposed Egyptian Broadcast law

The Egyptian government has proposed a new law to regulate the Egyptian broadcast sector in June 2008 and it has been into the Egyptian Parliament since November 2008. The core of the new Egyptian broadcast law is the establishment of an independent broadcast regulator where most of the broadcasting activities falls in its hand, such as giving or provoking licenses, allocating frequencies, managing advertisements duration and frequencies as well, program rating, etc. The draft law that was published in one of the Egyptian independent newspaper was hosted by huge criticism from media professional and critics. Criticism were very similar to the one directed to the Arab Satellite charter in terms of vague expressions that stifle freedom of expression more than enabling it. For example, the draft law states that journalists will be sentenced to prison if they cause damage to “social harmony, national unity, public order and the values of society”. Other terms questions the independence-impartiality? of the proposed regulator, such as being run by representatives from the Ministry of Information. Although having broadcast regulation is essential for the new era that

As Egypt is still in transitional stage moving from an authoritarian system towards a libertarian one, the law has some points were the government wants to put its hands and interfere, although the main goal is regulating the broadcasting industry and applying the concept of responsible freedom.

Some actions were taken based on some principles of the draft law, for example, CNC’s director, Nader Gohar, was accused of having a communication work without permission and no license for broadcasting, yet these charges were dropped on April 2009.

2. A controversy on the Arab Satellite Charter:

In February 2008, the Arab Ministers of Information have reached a consensus on a charter to regulate the Arab Satellite Channels. Most media commentators, presenters, as well as media critics have heavily criticized the charter stating that it is a way to suppress freedom.

Professor Hussein Amin, the main author of the Satellite Charter, stated the importance of regulating the broadcasting industry by having guidelines that broadcasters should abide by, in order to have responsible freedom; otherwise violence, terrorism and religious hatred will be overused and negatively affecting the Arab region.

Many criticisms were launched on the vague principles that different international and national entities and organizations regard as an indirect means to suppress freedoms. The

IFEX heavily concede the Arab Satellite Charter loose principles, such as not to offend leaders or religious figures, not to destroy social harmony, and the importance to conform to the religious values of the Arab society. The IFEX states that these terms are suppressing media freedoms and violating Article 32 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights approved by many Arab governments (Hardaker, 2008).

Other organizations such as the Human Rights Watch heavily criticized the Arab Satellite Charter as well stating that it is considered an extension for freedom suppression. "Arab League governments are trying to stifle one of the few relatively uncensored forms of media communication in the region", said Joe Stork, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

As some people were totally against the charter, others believe that it is vital. The BBC Head of Arabic Services, Hosan Al Sokkari, although criticizes the charter, yet agrees on some principles, such as the separation between advertising and content by setting advertising regulations, and preserving children's rights.

On one hand, broadcast regulations are applied worldwide, yet a misconception about regulations and censorship disables people to grasp the aims of broadcast regulations. On the other hand, vague principles require clear definition and sub-codes to guarantee independency from governmental interference or restriction on freedoms and to avoid arbitrary interpretations and enforcement.

An important point as well is the impact of the Satellite Charter Regulations on media election coverage. Having media regulations will ensure the importance that channels will cover elections with abundance by guidelines that ensure fairness, objectivity, honesty and truthfulness.

IV- Media Syndicates:

A proposed Egyptian Broadcast Syndicate:

The Egyptian Ministry of Information is studying two proposals at this point of time to establish a syndicate for radio and television people. The press syndicate in Egypt was established long time ago governing those who are working in print media; however, those who are working for radio and television never had a syndicate since they were considered government employers also because radio and television are owned, controlled and operated by the Egyptian government. The two proposals are different in nature and in content. One proposal was to establish a kind of labor union for those who are working in the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) and the second was to establish a large scale syndicate to include all of those who are working on jobs related to radio and television whether is directly related to ERTU or including the broadcasters who are working in Satellite television from Egyptian base.

A panel was formed to look into the two proposals and examine the advantages and disadvantages of each and they will decide on the recommendations on which proposal the ministry should adapt in the future. This initiative was not taken before, as there were very limited number of radio and television stations the number of workers was contained. So, they were governmental employees, but with the exponentially increase of satellite

broadcasting and the increase in number of the Egyptian satellite television that require a large number of people working outside of ERTU domain necessitate that the creation of a body to govern both entities.

The restructure of the Egyptian broadcasting that is taking place requires certain pillars: first is to introduce a law for the Egyptian broadcasting regulatory authority; second, convert the main networks to public service broadcasting networks; third, enable the environment for free and independent media; fourth, restructure the Nile Television networks to commercial ones; fifth, redesign the local channels; sixth, establish a syndicate to be able to govern the people working on the audio-visual media and to promote their performance.

V- Media Coverage of Elections

A- Best Practices for Election Reporting:

Fair and independent election is an integral component in the democratic life of any country. The media is considered one of the main players whose role is to inform citizens about different choices through professional reporting. Yet, elections have its standards to ensure the provision of equal, impartial, balance and fair reporting.

In Egypt, there are several challenges to the media in the election coverage. First, the presidential election presents a new model for the citizens where they have to choose from multiple candidates. In this transitional stage, the media have a developmental role in educating people about how to make choice from different candidates, and why it is important to vote.

Also, the concept of a democratic election is still in its early stages where people need to be educated how to choose between candidates.

Second, during the parliamentary elections, the media have a responsibility, especially in the national networks which is governmentally owned, to maintain the provision of a fair balanced presentation for all candidates.

This right is stated in Article 19 of the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; 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."

Impartiality is a term endures the concept of being fair without over supporting or over criticizing one candidate over the other.

Criteria for Balanced News:

News coverage on elections should be regulated by four main criteria:

Unprejudiced: means that the news provided about different candidates is free from any predetermined opinions.

Accuracy: means that the information given about any candidate should be verified based on facts from reliable and credible sources.

Objectivity: means that the information about candidates is based on facts and not on emotional or personal judgments.

Fairness: means that all candidates should be treated fairly and given equitable time on broadcast and equitable space on newspaper coverage.

Potentials taken from different organizations:

Curriculums in the public and private universities do not include specific undergraduate courses about media elections; even no master programs are designed to teach media coverage techniques during elections.

As the awareness of people increases about their political participation, and as people become eager to witness democratic elections taking place in Egypt, media as well become interested in reporting about elections. Also, as the constitution changed the choice of the President from a referendum to an election, educational programs must be offered to teach media students the importance, the goals, guidelines and the ethics of media election coverage. Diplomas must be designed and offered for students and journalists to get acquainted with the principles of media election coverage (Amin, 2009).

The ICFJ international center for (ICFJ) has conducted a project where workshops and training session were given for Egyptian reporters in different constituencies to educate reporters how to report fairly and objectively about opinion polls, and the voting process.

On the day of elections, journalists were distributed on the different constituencies to report on the election according to the standards they were taught to abide by. A newspaper was issued by the ICFJ called “Aswatona” or “Our Voices” to report about the performance of the different candidates during the presidential Election Day.

B- Obligations on media coverage during election:

The Egyptian constitution embraces several laws that control media freedoms in one way or another. These laws create difficulty in establishing an electoral framework to guide journalists in the provision of independent and fair coverage.

Within the constitution many articles are double-faced guaranteeing freedom of expression on one side, and on the other side entailing restrictions that hold back this freedom.

In Article 47 of the Egyptian constitution, freedom of expression is guaranteed as it reads: ‘Freedom of opinion shall be guaranteed. Every individual shall have the right to express his opinion and to publicize it verbally or in writing or by photography or by other means within the limits of the law’ (EHOR, 2003).

Moreover, Article 48 also reads that “Freedom of the press, printing, publication and mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship on newspapers is forbidden as well as notifying, suspending or canceling them by administrative methods” (IFES Rule of Law White Paper Series, 2005).

Yet, the article is followed by a statement that reads: “In a 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 purposes of national security in accordance with the law.” This reflects the vagueness of the Egyptian emergency law where there is no frame of the term *emergency* nor an explanation of what might be considered a *threat* to the national

security. In return, journalists are practicing self censorship as the contradicting laws are in themselves restrictive tools on freedom of expression.

Several other legislations are used only to impose restrictions on any criticism that might be directed towards any governmental official, such as the defamation, libel, slander and insult laws.

Access to Information although the Egyptian constitution states that journalists have the right to access information and that Penal Code forbids any kind of restrictions on the flow of information, the government is indirectly hindering the process as the Press Bureau (State Information Service), which is under the Ministry of Information is the main source of releasing information. Thus, through bureaucracy information might not be easily accessed if not impossible. Therefore information centers must be ready with information packages and information kits and make them available to journalists. YES

Criminal defamation Law. Egyptian journalists are exposed to criminal prosecution against the media when charged with defamation, which leads them to practice self censorship not to get exposed to courts.

Lack of safety is considered one of the factors that stand as an obstacle in front of a balanced reporting. Journalists are exposed to different sets of abuses, such as harassment, house inspection and verbal abuse, by not only police or government officials, but also by the supporters of the opposing candidates.

Moreover, many journalists find difficulty in being member in the Syndicate of Journalists due to the strict regulations imposed by officials such as the necessity to be have a contact with a licensed newspapers, and this enforce the officials to enforce low salaries, where journalists have to accept these harsh conditions to become accepted in the Syndicate.

Some Restriction on freedom of expression is still practiced although many Declarations have stated the importance of abolishing certain obligations on journalists to practice media freedoms. The Sana'a Declaration principles stated the importance of abolishing laws that limits freedom of the press, creating data banks to assist journalists in accessing information, offer guidelines that would assist professional reporting to exist (IFES Rule of Law White Paper Series, 2005)..

Although there are some governmental or non government agencies or organizations that enforce the rights to freedom of expression and access to information, yet improvement is needed in the training of journalists to meet professional standards.

** Sana'a Inter-Governmental Regional Conference on Democracy, Human Rights and the Role of the International Criminal Court formed by Governmental and Parliamentary Delegations from all the Arab and neighboring African and Asian countries, organized by the Government of Yemen and the non-governmental organization No Peace Without Justice, with the participation of 820 participants from 52 countries and representatives from regional and international organizations, as well as representatives of civil society and political parties*

C- Cases of Election Coverage in Egypt

1. Presidential Elections in 2005:

The Egyptian media have witnessed a change in the coverage of the presidential election in 2005.

Since the constitutional change that mark a significant change in the Egyptian political sphere, the media were trying to reflect this change in the media sector to exhibit a more democratic way of coverage. The Egyptian television was trying to play the role of a wide forum that provides citizens with information about the different candidates. Since 2003, there was a national and international pressure for political reform; yet, the decisive decision of constitution amendment has put change in place allowing for a multi candidate presidential election.

Due to the lack of media monitoring poll center, different entities have conducted different studies on their own with different methodologies and without having a common criteria for measuring the main variables to measure the professional coverage of the different media outlets in the presidential elections coverage.

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) has conducted a comprehensive study in order to monitor the coverage of the different media outlets for the multi-candidate presidential campaigns. The CIHRS conducted a content analysis study for six television channels: channel one, Channel two, Channel three, which are the three main terrestrial channels; Nile News, which is a specialized news channels. These channels operate under the ERTU. The second set includes Dream TV2 and Al Mehwer TV, which are the first two Egyptian private satellite channels. As for the print media, a set of 17 newspapers and magazines were chosen. They range from daily, weekly, national, partisan and independent. The CIHRS measured the amount dedicated for each candidate in the different television channels which used to start daily from 6 pm until 1 am. It also measured the space given for each candidate in the different print outlets. The CIHRS also studied the amount of positive and negative coverage presented on each candidate.

The study found that the broadcast media were more balanced in their coverage towards different candidates compared to the print media. Yet, the print media were able to tackle more sensitive issues, more than the broadcast media which focused mainly on reports about candidates. The study found that although the national newspapers have shown great bias towards the NDP candidate, the independent newspapers maintained balance coverage between the different presidential candidates. And although the national television channels were balanced, that private satellite channels have shown a bias toward the NDP presidential candidate (Media and Presidential Election, CIHRS Report, 2005).

In addition to the CIHRS media monitoring exercise, the ERTU Committee was organized by the Egyptian Minister of Information to establish the guideline principles for presidential election coverage in radio and television. Moreover, a media monitoring committee was established to monitor the coverage of the different channels to the presidential elections and their abidance by these principles (ESIS, 2005).

Among the main principles: equal coverage for different candidates, clear differentiation between personal opinions and facts, prevention of any liable information or the intrusion of the candidates' private lives, differentiation between candidates' coverage and paid

advertising, ensuring equal access for different candidates for the paid advertising (ESIS, 2005).

Yet, some vague principles were included as well, such as preserve the national unity of the Egyptian society without setting sub-codes that defines the term national unity, which led journalists to practice self censorship instead of being exposed to penalties.

According to the ERTU committee, the state owned media were mainly aiming towards three goals: generate public awareness about the importance of participating in the elections, reflecting the activities of the candidates through news coverage, and presenting all candidates to the audience stating each one's program.

Law 174 (2005) regulates the election campaigning states on the following:

“Providing full disclosure, when broadcasting public opinion polls, of the parties who conducted and financed the poll, the questions that were included in the poll, the size and location of the sample, the method by which the poll was conducted, the means by which the data was collected, that date on which it was conducted and the margin of error of the results.” (ESIS, 2005).

A committee was established to monitor the campaigns accomplished by all candidates and evaluate their abidance by the above mentioned standards of Law 174.

Although the national Egyptian television networks were trying to give equal time for candidates to broadcast their programs and interviews were held with all candidates with almost equal timing, the national newspapers have shown a bias towards the president. One media-monitoring organization found that Egypt's largest daily newspaper, *Al Ahram*, devoted more space to Mubarak than to all the other candidates combined. The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights released a report on August 29 detailing the media's pro-government bias. “The ruling newspapers have been conscripted for daily propaganda for the candidate of the ruling National Democratic Party,” it concluded (UNDP, 2007).

Private Satellite televisions have exercised more freedom than the national television channels as in-depth interviews, in terms of sensitive issues tackled and equal time given to the candidates, were conducted more in the private satellite channels (ERTU Committee).

2. Parliamentary Elections in 2005:

Unlike the presidential elections, most of the media outlets have not practiced professional coverage for the parliamentary elections. The print media has shown a bias towards the National Democratic Party (NDP) as well. Candidates from different oppositional groups, such as Kifaya (Enough) and Muslim Brotherhood were interviewed in the Egyptian official television channels to discuss their agendas and plans.

The Egyptian national newspapers were giving a high coverage for the ruling party's candidates and the same for the other parties that were using their newspapers to campaign for their candidates (UNDP, 2007).

The party's newspapers have used the same technique of the national newspapers and did not show balance in their coverage for all candidates. Each party's newspaper propagated

for its candidate leaving behind professionalism standards of a balanced and fair coverage (UNDP, 2007).

The Egyptian national television channels were characterized by a great bias towards the National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates. The National print media went along with the national television in dedicating the first half of the front page to either propagate for the NDP candidates or to highlight the main achievements accomplished by the NDP itself. Private media in general did not show interest in covering the parliamentary elections, unlike the interest shown in covering the presidential elections. This is due to the lack of awareness about the importance and the techniques of election coverage and guidelines of coverage as well.

The private media were only interested in tackling the main negative aspects that took place during the parliamentary elections, such as the fights erupted by some candidates supporters in order to prevent any anti-NDP voters from entering the election polls. Private newspapers and private satellite channels were only interested to tackle such issues without providing any coverage for the different candidates. They were attributing these acts for the NDP candidates, unlike the national media which talked about it generally without specifying a certain party (CIHRS, 2005).

It is clear that the Egyptian media environment lacks abidance by the guidelines that would enable its media to act in a balanced way. Especially during election coverage, different media outlets, (national and oppositional, partisan) newspapers are not practicing either professional coverage of the elections or ethics, training and integrity.

D- Challenges Facing Journalists Covering Elections in Egypt:

Journalists face many challenges during covering elections in Egypt; these challenges vary from legal obligations, to lack of professionalism or restrictions practiced over them. The following sections are a summary for the most important reforms witnessed, challenged confronted and expectations about elections based on interviews conducted with media professionals.

1. Identified Changes in Media Coverage:

- The evolution of Independent newspapers and satellite channels provided a new tone that could be described as 'liberal' in the media coverage in general, and media elections in specific. Liberal is defined as editorial independence in election coverage without any political or economic pressures exercised on broadcasters.
- Independent newspapers and private satellite channels have acted as a pressure on governmental channels to alter their pro-governmental policies.
- In parliamentary elections the independent newspapers have helped in uncovering the forged courses of actions that took place. Also, many movements such as 'Kefaya' and the 'Uncorrupted Judges' have pushed the media to experience a liberal tone.
- In the presidential elections, the media have shown a change in the coverage, yet the balanced coverage was only on form and not in essence. The presence of independent newspapers like Al-Masry Alyoum and Al-Destour, the constitutional changes, the implementation of multiple candidate elections have forced the media to change its traditional way during media coverage, yet their loyalty was still to the NDP candidate.

2. Main Obstacles Facing Journalists:

- Access to information is considered to be the core obstacle that stands against journalists to provide professional reporting.
- The media environment is not legally enabled for independent coverage especially the press as media freedom is not guaranteed.
- Censorship is still practiced in all types of media outlets.

3. Main Obstacles Experienced During Election Coverage:

- Preventing journalists from entering the opinion polls was one of the major obstacles that disabled insight media coverage during elections.
- Access to information is only allowed from official governmental offices (main source of information) where restrictions on information are practiced.
- Journalists are still practicing self censorship avoiding crossing the red lines.
- Efforts exerted and time wasted during election coverage by journalists to attain information.

4. Evaluating Election Reporting – Parliamentary Elections:

- National Newspapers were quite biased in reporting about other candidates compared to their reporting about NDP candidates.
- Independent newspapers attracted a wide range of readers due to the fair and balanced election reporting.
- Egyptian national television networks, which are governmentally owned, showed a great support for the NDP candidates.
- Private Satellite channels showed reluctance in reporting about parliamentary elections in general.

5. Evaluating Election Reporting – Presidential Elections:

- Theoretically speaking, media were balanced during the presidential elections, yet in practice, one can easily notice that the media were supporting the current president and that a fair competition did not exist.
- Few Private media were reporting fairly trying to maintain their editorial independence, yet others were propagating for the current president without the provision of a fair coverage for other candidates.

Expectations about media coverage for future elections:

- During the upcoming elections, the media will be a reflection for the political system that will be prevailing at that time.

6. Impact of Official Structures:

- The security entities and the power of authority are the main entities that stand against free and independent election reporting.

7. Mechanisms for Independent Media Coverage:

- A complete restructure is a must in order to guarantee media election coverage characterized by integrity and objectivity.
- Ensuring editorial independence and the freedom given to the Egyptian and the non-Egyptian media to cover elections.
- The right to access information must be guaranteed with no ground of preferences.
- The establishment of election codes that all journalists must abide by during media election coverage.
- The creation of an independent media supervisory body overseeing media coverage and the implementation of the codes.
- Professional training for journalists in covering elections and having certain codes that govern the reporting techniques.
- Increasing journalists' awareness by their duties and responsibilities towards election coverage.

VI- Conclusions and Recommendations:

- A code of conduct must be established and followed by all journalists where basic guidelines for media election coverage are ensured, such as accuracy, fairness, balance and impartiality.
- A data bank must be established enabling a free access to information and the practice of freedom of expression, without any governmental interference on hiding information.
- Media with different types (national, private,) should ensure equitable air time for each candidate or party.
- All media programs in general and News and Current Affairs programs in particular, must provide balance in their coverage about all candidates.
- An independent body should be established to allocate the airtime to the different candidates and supervise media conduct?
- Direct Access programs (produced by candidates or parties) must be distributed fairly without bias to specific candidate or party.
- Different media outlets should ensure the provision of sufficient time and space for different candidates or parties to communicate with the audience.

Citation

- Amin & Napoli, et al (1995). *Assessment of Egyptian Print and Electronic Media*. Submitted to the United States Agency for International Development.
- Democracy Report 2008. Freedom of expression, Free media, coverage, Regulation of media coverage.
- ESIS, 2005. Egyptian State Information System. Presidential Election >Presidential Election 2005 >Principles and Standards.
<http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Politics/PElection/election/Standards/040202050000000001.htm>.
- Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) (2001). Printout, Ministry of Information, Cairo.
- Hardaker, David, 2008. “*Putting the Genie Back in the Bottle: Ruling Regimes and the New Media in the Arab World.*” Lowy Institute for International Policy, December, 2008.
- Human Rights Watch, 2008. *Arab League: Reject Proposal to Restrict Satellite Broadcasters*. February 26, 2008.
- IFES, 2005. A Regional Strategy for Promoting A Free Media and Freedom of Expression in the Middle East and North Africa: *Decriminalizing Defamation and Insult Laws Against Journalists and the Media Through Legislative Reforms, Executive Decrees and Prioritized Law Enforcement Policy Statements*.
- Openarab.net. *The Freedom of Opinion and Expression in Egypt*. Annual Report, 2007.
- The Initiative for an Open Arab Internet.
- Rugh, William (2004). *Arab Mass Media. Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*. Praeger Publishers, Westport, Connecticut London.
- UNDP, 2007. Arab Center for the Development of rule of law and integrity & IFES.
- Promoting the rule of law and integrity in the Arab countries. Comparative report of the state of the media in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco.

Personal Interviews:

- Amin, Hussein. Personal Interview. Professor, Journalism and Mass Communication Department, The American University in Cairo. June 8, 2009.
- Fahmy, Gamal. Personal Interview. Journalist and an Egyptian Press Syndicate Board member.

- Gad, Emad. Head of Israeli studies Program, Center of Political and Strategic Studies.
- Hassan Ragab. Personal Interview. Journalist and Affiliate Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, The American University in Cairo, May 14, 2009.
- Hassan Hamed. Personal Interview. Former Chairman of Egyptian Radio and Television Union. May 16, 2009.
- Internet World Statistics, 2008. Usage and Population Statistics. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#eg>
- Mansour, Ibrahim. Personal Interview. Executive Editor in Chief, Al-Destour Newspaper.