

Synopsis of the report

I. Methodology:

This second interim report discusses the quantitative and qualitative assessment of media outlets¹ monitored daily² during the second phase of the referendum on the Egyptian constitutional amendments,³ of December 5, 2013, when the final draft was released public debate to the night before the referendum, when the moratorium on coverage went into effect.

The report, issued by the CIHRS' media monitoring team,⁴ is the second in a series, the first having addressed media coverage of the fifty-member Constitutional Committee tasked with amending the constitution, focusing on the first phase of the referendum from October 25 to December 4, 2013.⁵

CIHRS selected the media outlets for the study based on three primary factors: viewer ratings, diversity and fair representation of all views, and fair representation of the various media ownership models. After the closure of several Islamists television outlets that supported the 2012 constitution and rejected the new draft constitution, however, Egyptian media exhibits a distinct lack of diversity, which is necessarily reflected in the sample considered here.⁶ As a result, the media outlets evaluated, unfortunately, do not constitute a balanced or representative sample of views in society.

The methodology used for the monitoring process assesses the professionalism of media outlets using international standards for media performance and international covenants on the role of media during referendums and general elections. The methodology takes into consideration the differences between state-owned media, which should give voice, without

1 A total of 20 media outlets were reviewed, divided as follows: seven newspapers (al-Ahram, al-Gomhouriya, al-Wafd, al-Hurriya wa al-Adala, al-Masry al-Youm, al-Shorouk, and al-Watan); eight television channels (the Egyptian Satellite Channel, Nile News, ONTV, CBC, al-Hayat, al-Nahar, MBC Egypt, and al-Jazeera Egypt); and five radio stations (Radio Egypt, 90:90, Hits Radio, Nugoum FM, and Quran Radio).

2 Monitoring was conducted at prime time, which for television is 7 pm to 1 am and for radio is 3 pm to 7 pm. For the newspapers, monitors reviewed the second edition. Monitors were trained in quantitative and qualitative methods and content analysis, in order to produce accurate data that reflects the biases of media outlets, positive or negative, toward all parties to the referendum.

3 For the purposes of monitoring media coverage, the referendum on the constitutional amendments was divided into three phases. The first began with the formation of the fifty-member constitutional committee and continued as it worked on the amendments until it submitted its draft to the president. In this period, the media covered the committee, and members of the committee were the primary media sources. The second phase covers the public discussion of the draft constitution, in which the media bears the primary responsibility to explain the text and manage the debate between different views. This period ends the night before the referendum, when a moratorium is imposed and all public discussions are halted in the media in preparation for the vote. The third phase involves coverage of the vote and the outcome, starting on the night of the moratorium through the vote, the ballot count, any challenges, and the announcement of the final result.

4 The CIHRS' interest in media monitoring began in 2005, when it first monitored the performance of Egypt media during the parliamentary elections, followed by a report on the media and presidential elections in January 2006. The media observatory in June 2009 prepared a report on Arab and Sudanese media coverage of the Darfur conflict, and it reported on Egyptian media coverage of the 2010 parliamentary elections and coverage of the 2011 parliamentary elections. CIHRS Media Monitoring issued three interim reports on media performance during campaigning, voting, and runoffs in the 2012 presidential elections, and was involved in monitoring coverage of the 2012 referendum on the constitution.

5 For the first report, see <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7771>>.

6 For more information on the closures, see, "Closure of Islamist Media Channels and Arrest of Some of Its Staff: Clear Violation of Media Freedom, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=6913&lang=en>>.

discrimination, to all segments of the people, and private media, which are ultimately subordinate to capital and its editorial policies and therefore adopt market standards in the quest for material and moral profit. The methodology also recognizes the special nature of partisan media outlets, as the organs of particular political parties with biases and stances on public issues. The methodology employs monitoring methods suited to the type of media (written, visual, audio) and its ownership structure.

II. Introduction: General context of the second phase of the referendum

The constitutional referendum does not begin at the ballot box and end with the declaration of results, and it does not take place in a vacuum. Rather, the general atmosphere of the poll casts its shadow over the process. In fact, when considering the constitution itself, we should not limit ourselves to its actual textual content, but extend our view to the reality it expresses.

Like any vote, a referendum is an instrument for selecting one of several options. It derives its legitimacy from the fact that those who engage are the stakeholders—namely, the people. This necessitates a climate that allows for freedom of choice which requires all options to be put before the people. This, in turn, requires that the state and its apparatus remain neutral and refrain from showing bias for any particular choice. Instead, its role should be to ensure the freedom to choose.

The events of the past few weeks don't constitute a climate that would foster a free and fair referendum. To the contrary, the continuous resort of the governing authorities to security policies over political choices along with media practices have exacerbated polarization, portraying one choice as the sole, correct option and accusing those favoring other options, for whatever reason, as traitors to the nation.

In terms of media practices, which the interim report discusses in detail, the state media has failed to provide an impartial or balanced political landscape for proponents of a yes vote, no vote, and the boycott—a legitimate political choice—but has resorted to emotional, occasionally misleading⁷ appeals for a particular vote everywhere. Instead of securing an environment suitable for a public discussion of divergent opinions, the state's security apparatus has harassed advocates for a no vote, charging them with treason for calling for a rejection of the constitutional amendments, and mounting a smear campaign in the media. This calls into question the very need for a referendum if voting no is itself being publicized as treason or a crime meriting punishment.

Security forces have not addressed their failure to confront repeated terrorist attacks and the tendency of some Muslim Brothers to employ violence; on the contrary, they have instead targeted others for violence and repression. Since the draft constitution was submitted to the president, the security forces have been given free rein to act, as if the completion of the constitutional text were some sort of signal. Since December 3, security has been turned against activists and human rights organizations in an attempt to silence all dissident voices, at times by branding them as traitors or mobilizing public opinion against them and at other times by intimidating them with imprisonment or false charges.

⁷ See the section on advertising and propaganda and the second on campaigning in the first interim report, <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7771>>.

At the same time, the security forces have failed repeatedly to contain terrorism. The violence that was initially confined to Sinai has spread, and now includes the attempted assassination of the interior minister and a bombing of the security directorate.⁸ This raises legitimate questions about the competence of security forces and their willingness to secure the poll and provide the protection necessary for citizens to cast a free vote. These incidents were reflected in media coverage of the referendum, as the media used them to mobilize citizen support for the constitution, claiming that the adoption of the constitution would stop such criminal acts and that the goal of the incidents was only to obstruct the referendum. Therefore the actions would end as soon as the constitutional amendments were approved. The media did not, however, hold the security apparatus responsible for its failure to stop these incidents in the first place.

The period under review also saw the Cabinet declare the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, setting penalties on any person who promotes the group or terrorism, funds its activities, or joins the group after the decree.⁹ According to the prime minister, the decree is no more than a statement of position,¹⁰ since the executive does not possess the authority to make such a declaration.¹¹ Nevertheless, the decree had consequences for media coverage, especially coverage of the referendum, as discussed in the report.

On December 28, issue no. 295 of the Official Gazette carried the decree of the Supreme Elections Committee regulating the vote at home and abroad. The paper also published the SEC Decree 38/2013 regulating campaigning around the polling station. The decree prohibits any person from campaigning voters by any means within 200 meters of the station. But the decree did not set any other limits on media covering the vote, the use of negative campaigning or intimidation, the use of religious campaign materials, or any other guidelines related to common violations in this period.

III. Media context for this phase of the referendum

In the period under review, some new developments were seen in the media landscape that influenced both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the report. On December 26, the *Ahram Press* suspended printing of *al-Hurriya wa al-Adala*, the organ of the Freedom and Justice Party, pursuant to the prime minister's decree declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. Although the paper is published by a legal party that as yet has not been dissolved by judicial order, as required by the interim constitution issued in July 2013, the *Ahram Press* decided to confiscate the paper's right to appear, thus reducing the sample size of the study and its diversity. With this move, no Egyptian outlets opposed to the referendum and the constitutional amendments remained in the sample. This left only *al-Jazeera Egypt* as the sole outlet adopting a dissident discourse. The other outlets deliberately abandoned standards of diversity and balance, choosing instead to wholeheartedly support the referendum and leaving no space for opposition or ambivalent opinions, as discussed in the report.

8 For more information about rights organizations stance on these terrorist acts, see, "Munazzamat huquqiya tudin hadath al-Daqahliya al-irhabi," <<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7765>>.

9 The decree as published by the State Information Service can be viewed at <<http://www.sis.gov.eg/Ar/Default.aspx>>.

10 The prime minister made this statement on a program on MBC Egypt on December 29. The segment can be watched at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tS6sTJM9Vhk>>.

11 The prime minister's statements were aired on Dream on December 26, viewable at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJWcWRMK-98>> .

The CIHRS emphasizes that diversity and balance are professional standards binding on state-owned media, which should give voice to all segments of society without preference or exclusion. While private and partisan media's adoption of specific stances or bias is acceptable in a media landscape, the lack of any unbiased views across all outlets does undermine the notion of balance in the media coverage directed to the public. This raising suspicions that media outlets which declare their biases are propagandizing.

There were also changes in satellite programming in this period. The program "Jumla Mufida" on MBC Egypt was cancelled on December 10, 2013 and replaced by "Yahduth fi Misr," the first episode of which aired on December 29. This led to less coverage of the referendum on the channel, as most days covered by CIHRS media monitoring contained no reference to the referendum at all, with the exception of advertisements aired during the prime hours..¹²

Media interest in the constitution increased markedly in this period compared to the previous phase, when the committee was drafting the text, although a few outlets maintained their generally limited coverage of the referendum. Among radio stations, there was virtually no mention of the constitution on Quran Radio and Hits Radio; 90:90. Radio Egypt carried the most radio coverage of the constitution. Among television stations, private channels showed similar interest in the constitution, but less than Nile News and the Egyptian Satellite Channel. Among the pan-Arab channels, MBC Egypt carried very little coverage, while al-Jazeera Egypt showed markedly more interest in the constitution compared to the first phase.

News Papers continued to carry the most coverage of the constitution. Even given the limits of space, all papers without exception chose to prioritize news of the constitution and referendum throughout the period reviewed by the second report, though each outlet focused on a different aspect of the process, as discussed in the report.

In general, during the second phase of the referendum, most media outlets clearly declared their position on the constitutional amendments, with all coming out in support of the document with the exception of *al-Hurriya wa al-Adala* and al-Jazeera Egypt, which stated their rejection of the amendments. Of interesting is the method that news outlets used to express their stance, whether the personal opinion of program presenters, newspaper editorials, the logo chosen by the channel or paper to accompany its content or coverage, or in the production of channel promos that reflected the outlet's biases.

To read the full report [Arabic only] press [here](#)¹³

¹² This was the channel with the least coverage of the referendum; for a period of at least 15 days, no mention was made of the constitution at all, even during the ad segments. The quantity of coverage increased markedly when "Yahduth fi Misr" began to air on December 29.

¹³ CIHRS is currently translating the full version of this report.