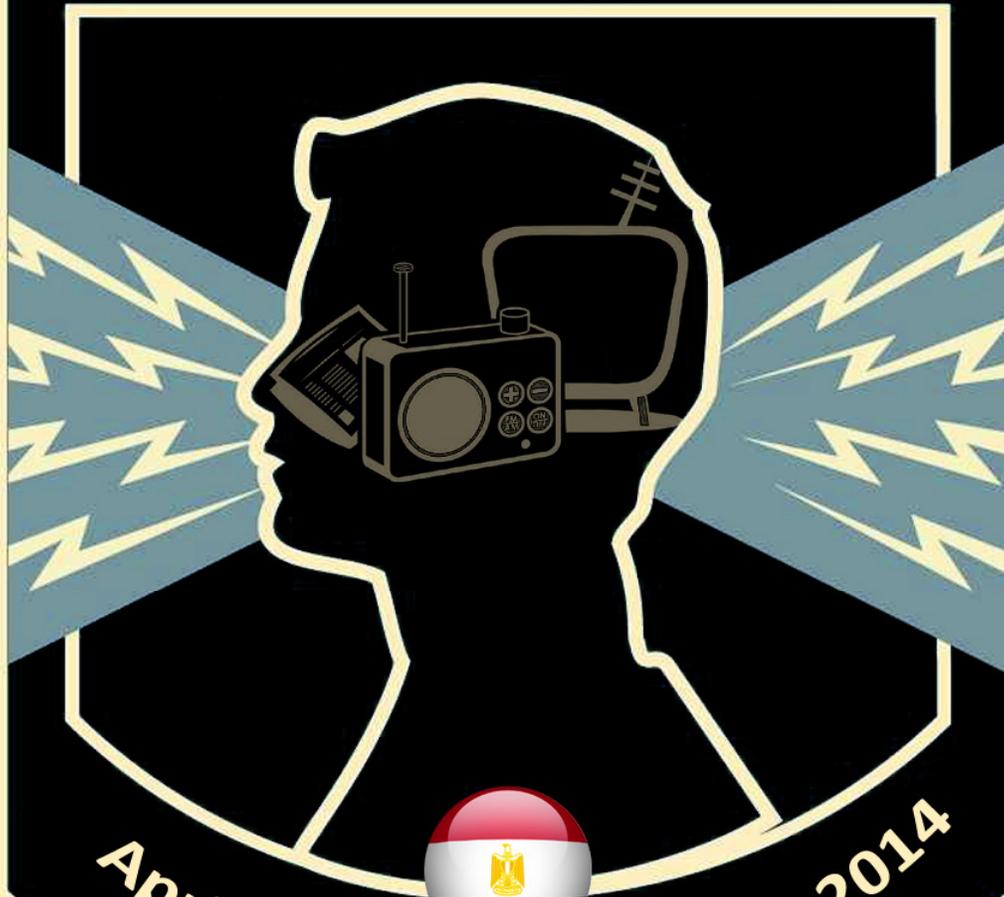


# First Interim Report on Media Performance in the 2014 Egyptian Presidential Election Campaign



April 20, 2014 – May 20, 2014



**CAIRO INSTITUTE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES**  
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'homme  
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

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## This Report

This interim report presents a summary of the quantitative and qualitative findings of CIHRS's media-monitoring project.<sup>1</sup> CIHRS's media observatory monitored the performance of five newspapers (*al-Ahram*, *al-Gomhouriya*, *al-Masry al-Youm*, *al-Shorouk*, and *al-Watan*), eight television channels (Egyptian Satellite Television, Nile News, ONTV, CBC, al-Qahera wal-Nas, Sada al-Balad, MBC Egypt, and al-Jazeera Egypt), and two radio stations (Radio Egypt and Radio 90:90). The outlets were monitored daily (nine hours each for television and radio) throughout the campaigning period of the 2014 Egyptian presidential elections.<sup>2</sup> This report describes, analyzes, and evaluates<sup>3</sup> the performance of the media from April 20, the deadline for candidacy applications,<sup>4</sup> to May 20, shortly before the official end of the campaigning season on 23 May.<sup>5</sup> The report does not cover media coverage of the vote abroad,<sup>6</sup> which took place on May 15–19,<sup>7</sup> because its focus is on campaign coverage. The vote in Egypt and abroad will be the subject of the second interim report, to be produced after the elections, scheduled for May 26 and 27.<sup>8</sup>

The CIHRS media observatory selected the media outlets under review based on three main factors: audience share for all three types (visual, print, and audio),<sup>9</sup> diversity and representation of all views in society,<sup>10</sup> and the diversity of ownership models. The

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<sup>1</sup> The CIHRS began monitoring media coverage in 2005, issuing [a report on media performance in the run-up to the parliamentary elections](#), followed by [a report on the media and presidential elections](#) in January 2006. The media observatory monitored [media coverage of the 2010 parliamentary elections](#), as well as the [2011 parliamentary elections](#). The observatory issued three interim reports covering the [campaign](#), [vote](#), and [runoff](#) of the 2012 presidential elections. It further monitored media coverage of the referendum on the 2012 constitution and the 2014 referendum on the constitutional amendments, and issued interim reports on the [constituent assembly's work](#) and [the social dialogue on the charter](#).

<sup>2</sup> Media was monitored daily in morning and evening prime-time hours, from 9 am to noon and from 7 pm to 1 am for television and 12 noon to 7 pm for radio. For print media, the monitoring covered newspapers' second edition.

<sup>3</sup> The observation and analysis was undertaken by a team of 20 monitors trained in quantitative and qualitative observation and content analysis, in order to make accurate, documented findings that reflect the media's positive and negative biases toward all parties in the elections.

<sup>4</sup> The observatory chose to begin monitoring with the end of the candidacy period in order to identify the real actors (the candidates) in the election. During the candidacy application period, the media reported on numerous potential candidates who ultimately declined to run.

<sup>5</sup> The researchers chose to issue this report 48 hours prior to the moratorium on campaigning so that if the media reported on the report's findings, this would not breach the moratorium.

<sup>6</sup> This report covers and assesses coverage of candidates' campaigns and activities during the vote abroad.

<sup>7</sup> The vote abroad was slated to end on May 18, but the PEC issued a decree extending the vote by an additional 24 hours to the evening of May 19. According to the PEC, the vote was extended to increase turnout.

<sup>8</sup> The CIHRS believes that the rules governing the media's performance during campaigns differ from those regulating performance during the vote itself. Similarly, the monitoring methodology considers the analysis and assessment of media performance during the vote abroad to be ultimately subject to the same rules governing coverage of the vote in Egypt. Hence, combining these in one report will give a more nuanced portrayal of media performance during the vote.

<sup>9</sup> There is an issue related to the lack of Egyptian organisations that specialize in audience research, particularly after several satellite channels objected to the findings of international companies. The researchers thus conducted a small poll of a varied sample of the public to determine the most watched and therefore most influential channels for the presidential elections, taking into consideration other factors governing the selection of the sample, including material and human capacities.

<sup>10</sup> There is also a problem related to the lack of diversity in the Egyptian media after several pro-Islamist channels that rejected the presidential elections were shut down, along with *al-Hurriya wal-Adala*. This led the researchers to include al-Jazeera Egypt in the project, in order to preserve a representative voice of this party, even though the channel is not Egyptian. The project also included MBC Egypt, another non-Egyptian channel

monitoring assesses the professionalism of the media in accordance with international standards for media professionalism and international charters on the role of the media during elections,<sup>11</sup> showing due regard for the differences in the role of state-owned media—which is obligated to give voice to all segments of the public without bias—and the private media—which is ultimately subject to the control of capital and the editorial policies it imposes—using the observation methods appropriate for each type of media outlet and its ownership model.

## General Context of the Presidential Elections

Democracy does not stop at the ballot box, despite the importance of this procedure as evidence for its existence. An analysis of the broader political context and the steps that precede the vote offer a more meaningful portrait, and this is particularly true during the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

Looking at the general Egyptian context, the presidential elections are taking place in a climate of extreme political polarization and hostility mobilized against one particular political faction. Other political forces that oppose practices of the government and security apparatus and police involvement in political life have also withdrawn from the process. The current government is using its “war on terrorism” as a justification for human rights violations, which are at an all-time high. Indeed, it is using the “war” as a pretext to attack and to smear certain political groups, while promoting a particular candidate as the nation’s savior from the talons of terrorism.

In addition to the extrajudicial killings that have become a fixture of every assembly or demonstration,<sup>12</sup> political activists are being harassed, arrested, and imprisoned for long periods. The judiciary and Public Prosecution have been deployed in political disputes, becoming an additional tool with which the authorities repress political opponents. Long prison sentences have been handed down to political activists and human rights defenders, while indefinite pretrial detention has stopped being a temporary precautionary measure and has become a punitive measure.<sup>13</sup> This is in addition to the mass death sentences given to alleged members of the Muslim Brotherhood, issued after trials lasting no more than one hour.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, these elections are taking place in the shadow of a law—Law 107/2013 on the right to public assemblies, processions, and peaceful demonstrations in public spaces, known as the protest law—that severely impedes the right of peaceful assembly, including in electoral rallies. The law gives the Interior Ministry the right to deny permits for any peaceful assembly based on vague, ill-defined criteria, as well as the right to disperse any unlawful assembly and prosecute participants. Several political activists and human rights defenders

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representing a different view with high viewer ratings in Egypt. In this way, it was hoped that the project would represent non-Egyptian channels in a more balanced way.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the role of the media in general elections, see the CIHRS book on the topic at <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=3617>

<sup>12</sup> For more information, please see, “On the Third Anniversary of the Revolution: The Egyptian Police Usher in a New Age of Repression,” joint press statement at <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7983&lang=en>

<sup>13</sup> For more information, please see, “Munazammat huquqiya tatalib wizarat al-dakhiliya bil-ifsah ‘an makan al-sahafi ‘Abdullah al-Shami,” joint press statement, <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=8601>

<sup>14</sup> For more information, please see, “Al-Minya Mass Death Penalty: Wasted Justice and Mockery of Defendants Rights,” joint press statement, <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=8567&lang=en>

have been imprisoned under the provisions of the law,<sup>15</sup> among them activist Mahienour al-Masry and others, who were most recently sentenced to two years in prison for breaking the protest law.

Elections are predicated on the ability to freely choose one candidate among many for a specific office. Choice dictates that candidates have an equal opportunity to present themselves to the public and discuss their ideas and programs on equal footing, to ensure the integrity of a choice based on accurate information and deliberation. The media plays an important role as a representative of voters, investigating information and its accuracy and examining the feasibility of campaign promises and platforms. The media should provide diverse, considered analyses and views of candidates' programs that enable voters to form an opinion and establish a baseline for accountability.

Comparing this role to the situation during the 2014 elections, we find that the media did not rise to the task, (its expected role) in any meaningful way. Monitoring Egyptian media coverage revealed clear bias to one candidate over the other. This bias did not begin with the official opening of campaign season on 3 May, but was evident during the mobilization for the referendum on the constitution in January, when the media promoted the vote as a referendum on the legitimacy of then-Defense Minister Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi even before he had officially announced his candidacy for the presidency or unveiled a platform.

In fact, the media began acting in a partisan fashion even earlier than January, actively smearing other potential competitors of the defense minister. The media played a vital role in limiting the number of contenders and cutting off popular competition through early campaigns waged against several possible candidates. Thus the outcome of the elections was predetermined even before the electoral law was issued. The fiercest of these campaigns was launched against Abd al-Moneim Abu al-Futouh<sup>16</sup> and continued even after he announced he would not run on 9 February 2014.<sup>17</sup> The second fiercest campaign was directed against Gen. Sami Anan.<sup>18</sup> When Khaled Ali announced in mid-March 2014 that he had decided not to run for President in protest at the electoral law, several media outlets viciously attacked him, denying his right to object to the law.<sup>19</sup> Although Ahmed Shafiq was less of a target in this period—perhaps because he pledged not to run if Sisi declared his candidacy—even this statement occasioned a media attack.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, from the beginning the media treated Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi not just as the strongest candidate, but as Egypt's next president. This was particularly notable given the

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<sup>15</sup> For more information, please see, "The Verdict against Maher, Doma and Adel," joint press statement, <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=7762&lang=en>

<sup>16</sup> The media described Abu al-Futouh as a failure, a perennial loser, the slave of the Muslim Brotherhood, the losing candidate, the Brotherhood candidate, and the failed terrorist, insinuating also that he is funded by Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood. See for example, "The Couch Party" on al-Qahera wal-Nas, Jan. 22; ONTV's "25/30," Jan. 26 and Feb. 3; Hamdi Rizq in *al-Masry al-Youm*, Jan. 30; and *al-Wafd*, Feb. 8.

<sup>17</sup> See for example, "Respected Gentlemen," on ONTV, Feb. 28; "Egypt Today" on al-Faraeen, Feb. 14; "ONTV Morning" on ONTV, Feb. 8; *al-Dostour*, Feb. 9 and *al-Wafd*, Feb. 11 and 15.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, *al-Wafd*, Jan. 29, Feb. 22, and Mar. 13; *al-Watan*, Feb. 14; Hamdi Rizq in *al-Masry al-Youm*, Mar. 12; "The People Want" on Tahrir TV, Jan. 5 and 9.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, "The Country Today" on Sada al-Balad, Mar. 16; "Cairo Today" on Orbit, "Egypt Today" on al-Faraeen, and "The Other" on Rotana Egypt, all on Mar. 17; "ONTV Morning" on ONTV, Mar. 17 and 18; and "The Egyptian Scene" on al-Jazeera Egypt, Mar. 19.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, al-Jazeera, Mar. 12; "Wake-Up Call" on Tahrir TV, Mar. 13; and *al-Youm al-Sabi'* and *al-Watan*, Mar. 13 and 14

absence of any dissenting media voices after the closure of the religious television channels<sup>21</sup> and *al-Hurriya wal-Adala* newspaper,<sup>22</sup> which made the media climate less diverse and turned the campaign into an exercise in mobilizing support for one candidate. Prior to the campaign period, the media portrayed Sisi as a historic symbol and popular leader, one who did not seek the office of president but was rather sought by it. Some media figures even suggested saving the cost and effort of elections, the outcome of which they believed would be decided as soon as Sisi announced his intention to run. In addition, Sisi received prior support from some private media outlets,<sup>23</sup> which was expressed explicitly and implicitly by several media figures in a meeting with candidate Sisi; this support was not in evidence for his competitor.

It was in this context that Hamdeen Sabahi announced his candidacy—the first test of the media’s coverage and the first opportunity to declare its biases. The initial responses to the Sabahi’s announcement exposed the attitudes of some media personalities, with prominent media figures attacking him for merely entering the race<sup>24</sup>; this attack continued until the final hours of campaigning.

Although some media personalities welcomed Sabahi’s candidacy, it was always given with the understanding that it proved the competitive nature of the elections,<sup>25</sup> which reduced Sabahi to merely a prop in a race with a predetermined outcome. This explains the pro-forma balance<sup>26</sup> that some media outlets attempted to maintain as soon as the official campaign period began on May 3. However, even a cursory look at media performance revealed a clear bias for Sabahi’s opponent.

Furthermore, an election boycott and the arguments advanced by its proponents were absent or disparaged. This option was not discussed as a democratic choice, but presented instead as an attempt to subvert the government-sponsored roadmap. Ads promoting participation in the elections labeled boycotters as “unpatriotic” and “not quite right,”<sup>27</sup> and there were unflagging attempts to portray boycotters as Muslim Brotherhood supporters who sought to ruin the coming democratic pageant.

The bias toward one candidate was not only evident in the media, but among state institutions as well, which should remain neutral. Sisi only declared his candidacy after the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces announced its support, and Sisi declared his candidacy to the

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<sup>21</sup> For more information, see “Closure of Islamist Media Channels and Arrest of Some of Its Staff,” joint press statement, <http://www.cihrs.org/?p=6913&lang=en>

<sup>22</sup> *Al-Hurriya wal-Adala* is the mouthpiece of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party. Ahram Press refused to print the paper after Dec. 26, 2013, following a prime ministerial decree designating the Brotherhood a terrorist group.

<sup>23</sup> Some private channels posted Sisi’s photo next to their channel logos to express their support, while others adopted his campaign slogan—“Long live Egypt”—as their own. Several media personnel on private channels explicitly endorsed Sisi, as noted in this report, while the owner of one of the channels most supportive of Sisi (al-Qahera wal-Nas) was also a Sisi campaign official as well as one of the biggest actors in the television and radio ad market in Egypt.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, “The Couch Party” on al-Qahera wal-Nas, Feb. 9; see also the attack on Sabahi by the presenter of “Tahrir Salon,” on Jan. 20, Feb. 9, and Feb. 26.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, comment of the host of “25/30” on ONTV, Feb. 9, and “Hamdeen the Candidate” in *al-Masry al-Youm* the same day.

<sup>26</sup> Pro-forma balance here refers to the attempt to cover both candidates’ activities with an equal number of news stories and roughly equal time. Genuine balance involves other formal and content aspects that most outlets under review did not adopt. See the section on balanced coverage in this report.

<sup>27</sup> A presenter on “The President and the People,” on al-Qahera wal-Nas, said on May 10, “If you don’t want a state or law, then boycott the elections.”

public before resigning from the military. Days before the vote, *al-Masry al-Youm* ran a story about talks between Sisi and the prime minister regarding the “post-election government.”<sup>28</sup>

The Presidential Elections Committee (PEC) is implicated in the bias as well. The delay in announcing the beginning of the candidacy period was widely criticized, and many linked it to Sisi’s delayed decision to run, which he announced only four days before the beginning of the candidacy period, and after the PEC press conference was postponed more than once.

When the deadline for the declaration of candidacy passed on April 20, most media outlets immediately began covering the electoral battle, the formation of the candidates’ campaigns, and activities of popular support campaigns, completely disregarding the date for the beginning of the official campaign season on May 3. In fact, the quantity of coverage devoted to the elections and candidates from April 20 to May 3 was nearly the same as that from May 3 to May 20, the latter being the official campaign period. While the PEC made no comment on this, it did, surprisingly, object when Sabahi held a rally to announce his platform and informed the channel broadcasting the rally of the infraction, which it pointed out preceded the beginning of the official campaign by 24 hours. Yet, media outlets had already hosted Sabahi to discuss his platform and closely followed all his competitor’s meetings and campaign statements for the previous ten days.<sup>29</sup>

Pro-Sisi materials were posted across the country long before the official campaign season opened without any objection from the PEC. Its sole action came on May 1, 48 prior to the opening of the campaigning, when the PEC instructed the Daqahliya governorate to remove all offending campaign materials from Mansoura at the expense of the offender. The action came after the PEC received a complaint from two former parliamentarians stating that a huge number of pro-Sisi posters were hung in Mansoura prior to the official campaign period.<sup>30</sup>

In statements to the media, the PEC said that it had informed the Minister of Local Development on the same day to order all governors to remove all offending campaign materials of either candidate in all governorates at the offender’s expense,<sup>31</sup> but no media outlet covered the issue or followed up on the implementation. In any case, it was easy to find all manner of campaign materials in the streets of various governorates after these statements, which came only a few hours before the campaign season opened.

On May 17, 2014, the media reported that the PEC objected to the Sisi campaign’s distribution of energy-efficient light bulbs throughout the country, seeing it as an electoral violation under Article 52 of the presidential elections law, which carries a penalty of at least one year in prison and/or a fine of at least LE1,000 and no more than LE5,000 for any person who gives, offers, or promises to give a benefit to a person to encourage him to vote a

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<sup>28</sup> *Al-Masry al-Youm*, front page, May 19.

<sup>29</sup> For example, ONTV hosted an interview with Sabahi to allow him to discuss his platform on Apr. 24, while *al-Masry al-Youm* [published his platform](#) on Apr. 21. All outlets closely covered several meetings between Sisi and various sectors, most organized before the campaign season began.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Masry al-Youm* reported on May 2, “The PEC demands campaign material be removed from Mansoura streets.”

<sup>31</sup> Ahram Online, May 1, “[The PEC Orders Removal of Sisi Campaign Material in Mansoura, which was Placed by Two Former Members of the Dissolved NDP.](#)”

particular way.<sup>32</sup> Yet, as of writing, the PEC had taken no action on the infraction, while the media continued to report that light bulbs were being distributed in various governorates.<sup>33</sup>

Elections held in such conditions cannot be expected to be democratic or democratizing. They are merely a formal exercise with a predetermined outcome, in which popular participation makes no difference at all. If this continues, it may lead the public to abandon politics entirely and revive the worst aspects of the Mubarak regime, when the state wholly monopolized politics.

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<sup>32</sup> *Al-Masry al-Youm*, May 17, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/447587>

<sup>33</sup> Starting on May 17, the media reported that the Sisi campaign was distributing [energy-efficient light bulbs in Cairo and eight other governorates](#), including [Menoufiya](#) and [Qalyoubiya](#).

## Features of the Media Landscape During the Presidential Campaign

The lack of diversity has been a defining feature of the Egyptian media after June 30, 2013. Although ownership models (private or public) and media types (visual, audio, print) differ, outlets adopt the same outlook and speak in the same tone. All of them support the presidential elections and one particular candidate. Voices that reject or boycott the elections, regardless of their reasons, and anti-Sisi voters, are invisible, especially after several Islamist television channels<sup>34</sup> and *al-Hurriya wal-Adala* were shut down.

But there are some new developments relevant to the media landscape during this election campaign, including:

### **1. A Committee to Assess the Performance of the Public and Private Media**

On April 23, 2014, Minister of Information Dorriya Sharaf al-Din issued a decree forming a committee to monitor and assess media performance and presidential campaigning. The committee, chaired by Dr. Adli Reda, included several media professors.<sup>35</sup> Although similar committees have been formed in previous elections, this committee was established by the minister rather than the PEC. Media experts felt this undermined the autonomy of the committee, which should be directly subordinate to the PEC and present its report only to the committee.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, this is the first time the committee included the heads of four private television channels (those with the biggest audience share). This led other media outlets to raise reservations about the neutrality of these representatives in their assessment of their own channels and those of their competitors. Talk shows on some channels raised questions about the standards used to select these channels and determine viewership, as well as guarantees for the committee's neutrality when assessing state-owned media and the four private channels represented on the committee.<sup>37</sup>

Under Article 2 of the committee's operating standards, the committee is tasked with observing and monitoring audio and visual materials on all radio and television channels, state-owned and private, as well as observing the candidates' campaigns,<sup>38</sup> and submitting its reports to the PEC. In the first press conference held to issue the committee's first interim report, the head of the committee explained that it was tracking approximately 14 hours of broadcast daily,<sup>39</sup> but he did not identify the outlets being monitored or to what extent they represent the full spectrum of the Egyptian media. It is inconceivable, however, that the

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<sup>34</sup> For more information, see "Closure of Islamist Media Channels and Arrest of Some of Its Staff."

<sup>35</sup> *Al-Ahram*, Apr. 24, 2014, <http://digital.ahram.org.eg/Policy.aspx?Serial=1588615>

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Mahmoud Alam al-Din, Dr. Safwat al-Alam, and expert Yasser Abd al-Aziz discussed this on Tahrir's "Frankly," May 8, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=652GH3hy5s4>

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> The PEC did not identify the campaign materials it was authorized to monitor, whether they were limited to media materials or extended to street signs, posters, and rallies, or what capacities the PEC employed to undertake this monitoring. This is significant since Articles 5 and 6 of the PEC's ten principles prohibited the use of state-owned or public-sector buildings, facilities, transport, or transportation in campaigning, as well as public utilities, houses of worship, and schools, universities, and other educational institutions. They also prohibited exploiting the candidate's official position, job, or profession in any way for campaign purposes, or spending public or public-sector funds for campaigning. While these are important rules, they are beyond the scope of media monitoring and require different tools to monitor and assess.

<sup>39</sup> The first press conference of the committee to assess media performance during the presidential election can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZG7Z1yR17A>

committee monitored all state-owned and private audio and visual media outlets, which number more than 100. In addition, the first report contained no mention of radio, while the second referred to several state-owned radio stations.<sup>40</sup>

The committee drafted ten brief articles that were distributed to the media on May 5,<sup>41</sup> described as the guidelines used by the committee to assess media performance, adopted on May 3.<sup>42</sup> (The committee made no mention of any practices or biases in the media prior to this date.) Most of the guidelines were obligatory only for the state-owned media; guidelines for the private media related only to the broadcast of the findings of opinion polls, the prohibition of the slander of candidates and their families, and the duty to avoid undermining national unity and the values and principles of Egyptian society. The head of the committee announced at the press conference that private channels had the right to endorse a particular candidate provided they did not slander or libel his competitor.

## **2. Early, Heavy Media Coverage of Elections and the Designation of Space for Election Coverage**

All media outlets began covering all aspects of presidential elections early on, starting with a discussion of the election law and objections to it and including news of the PEC, its decisions on the process, and voting dates in Egypt and abroad. The press was more interested in following the electoral process in this period than television and radio.

But this interest in awareness-raising and voter education declined markedly when the candidacy period began and until the deadline passed. At this point, the media began focusing on potential candidates and the collection of citizen endorsements. Nile News devoted the most coverage to general education, covering the PEC's decisions and explaining them more than other channels.<sup>43</sup>

As soon as the deadline for candidacy had passed, the media, especially the private media, began following the candidates, their meetings and conferences, and their campaigns, both of which began before the official campaign period, and as media interest in voter education and participation declined. During this period, television channels carried the most coverage of elections, while radio devoted very little time to the issue, limited to 1–3 news items repeated at the newscast at the top of the hour.

By the time the official campaign season began, most media outlets had set aside a specific space or time for election coverage. Every newspaper designated two pages daily to the elections, as well as news stories on page one.<sup>44</sup> ONTV, for example devoted all of prime time, from 7 pm to 1 am, to a discussion of presidential elections, while channels such as al-

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<sup>40</sup> As of writing, the committee has issued just two reports, the first for May 3 to 7 and the second for May 3 to 17.

<sup>41</sup> According to the head of the media monitoring committee in the committee's first press conference on May 8, the delay was due to the PEC's delayed adoption of the standards.

<sup>42</sup> See the ten principles at <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/476242>

<sup>43</sup> See the channel's newscasts from Apr. 20 to 30 and the news segments at the beginning of its talk shows.

<sup>44</sup> The section in *al-Ahram* is called "The Election of a President"; "The Road to the Presidency" in *al-Masry al-Youm*; "Egypt Awaits the President" in *al-Shorouk*; "The Road to the Palace" in *al-Gomhouriya*; and "The Battle for the Presidency" in *al-Watan*.

Qahera wal-Nas and Nile News created new programs to discuss the race, such as “The President and the People” and “The President and Egypt.”<sup>45</sup>

### ***3. Decline of Exclusives, Growth of Joint Programming, and Emergence of New Forms of Debate and Analysis Programs***

In contrast to other election times, when media tend to compete for exclusives with candidates or their statements, in these elections, the media seemed to have no interest in competition at all. It was not unusual to see channels sponsoring a joint broadcast, with hosts from two different channels participating, or an interview with one of the candidates sponsored by three channels. Indeed, two channels might air the same show simultaneously, or a newspaper might turn over its pages to transcribing the interview for its readers.

This tendency was accompanied by a clear bias, as channels sponsored joint broadcasts more often for Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, which were also more limited when compared with interviews with his competitor. Interviews with al-Sisi were also all taped while Sabahi’s interviews were largely live broadcasts. To maintain balance, both candidates should have spoken to media hosts directly on air and faced the same set of questions, to enable voters to compare their platforms and judge their spontaneous reactions, in an electoral debate format, which, unlike the previous elections, was absent in this race.

Regardless of the reasons al-Sisi’s reported refusal to engage in a debate with his opponent, the media circumvented this by creating simulated debate programs, conducted in the absence of the candidates. One channel held a debate between campaign representatives for each candidate,<sup>46</sup> while another created a debate by interposing the candidates’ responses to specific questions asked in taped interviews.<sup>47</sup> Most channels hosted debates between the candidates’ supporters.<sup>48</sup>

A significant development was the emergence of new forms of election programs. Although studio analysis of candidates’ statements is a relatively old idea, the media made efforts to give it a new twist<sup>49</sup> and introduced the studio audience as a participant in the analysis.<sup>50</sup> Questions remain, however, about guest-selection criteria and balance, taking into consideration the need to change studio experts and analysts regularly to guarantee a diversity of views.

### ***4. Spread of Satire and Comedy Shows, and the Increased Use of New Media***

Comedy and satire programs do not fall within the scope of this media analysis because as a matter of course they do not comply with professional standards and are divorced from

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<sup>45</sup> ONTV brought all its evening program hosts into one studio daily for five hours at least in a program titled “Egypt’s President.”

<sup>46</sup> See for example, ONTV, May 8, “Egypt’s President.”

<sup>47</sup> See for example, al-Qahera wal-Nas, May 11, “The President and the People.”

<sup>48</sup> See for example the debate between Farida al-Shoubashi and Mohammed Hashem on MBC’s “Egypt Now,” May 17.

<sup>49</sup> Most television channels designated at least two hours daily to analyze the candidates’ statements, largely on the evening programs devoted to the presidential election.

<sup>50</sup> ONTV in particular, which brought all its evening presenters into one studio with a diverse audience, which asked questions and commented on the candidates’ statements and performance.

reality, falling in the realm of creative endeavor. But the spread of such shows was a feature of the general electoral environment. Their reading of reality impacts viewers and therefore their voting decisions. In fact, this was one reason given by MBC for suspending Bassem Youssef's "al-Bernameg" during the elections, although the same channel green-lighted a similar program, "Good Evening with Sayyed Abu Hafiza," which often mocked and criticized the electoral process and re-casted the candidates' statements in a satirical way.<sup>51</sup>

This type of program, which first emerged on social media platforms, was also seen in ONTV's "TV Republic" and "The Garhi Show." Having met with great success on YouTube, ONTV began airing segments of them on its screen.<sup>52</sup> Al-Qahera wal-Nas carried the "The Chicken's Newscast," which gave a satiric take on daily news, especially election and candidate news, and thus influenced the audience's understanding of news stories.

On the other side, al-Jazeera broadcast "Creative Protest,"<sup>53</sup> selecting serious or satiric material—songs, sketches, videos, poetry, etc.—to express its rejection of the events of June 30 and July 3, 2013. These satiric materials often showed clear bias, mocking—and at times libeling—the candidates and their supporters and occasionally state institutions and government officials. The channel also hosted "SisiLeaks,"<sup>54</sup> which consisted solely of segments of al-Sisi's taped statements.

In general, most media outlets,<sup>55</sup> including print and radio, daily incorporated examples of new media in traditional media, though to varying degrees. Each outlet chose particular Facebook pages or Twitter accounts to follow, and selected YouTube videos to air that suited its editorial policies. Herein lies the risk of the deployment of social media. Selectivity is of course necessary given the never-ending addition of new material on the internet, but selectivity also involves bias. In addition, electronic media and public media are suited to different materials, particularly when it comes to satire, given the nature of their respective audiences.

## **Most Significant Observations on Media Coverage of the Presidential Elections, April 20–May 20, 2014**

This election was not a test of media diversity, as is the case in most elections because there was no diversity to begin with, either in the media or among the parties involved in the elections. This election did not feature several candidates or representatives of different parties of diverse backgrounds that the media should have ostensibly represented. Rather, this election tested balance in coverage of just two candidates. The standard this time is not only equal time and space for each candidate, but the breadth of coverage, the sources, the introductions to news items, and the conclusions drawn from them, as well as the way stories are presented in terms of size, color, and placement, in a way that objectively promotes equal

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<sup>51</sup> See for example, an episode titled "The President."

<sup>52</sup> See for example an episode titled "An Opinion Poll from the Garhi Show," <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9gFdVjnzP0&feature=youtu.be>>.

<sup>53</sup> Samples of "Creative Protest" can be found at <<http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid865919677001?bckey=AQ~~,AAAAyT9nkzk~,t3oKWSgFQjQ7gB5IcwGVcbJMxq-faiKJ&bctid=3513693442001>>.

<sup>54</sup> SisiLeaks, a play on Wikileaks, consisted of excerpts of Sisi's taped speeches and videos.

<sup>55</sup> State-owned media showed the least engagement with satire and new media forms as a source of news or in the comments of guests and sources.

opportunities for both candidates. More important than inviting each candidate or his representatives to speak for equal time is maintaining balance in the nature of the questions asked of each candidate and media personnel's ability to examine each candidate's platform and stances on the issues of interest to voters without bias or misinformation.

For example, balance is not achieved through television interviews with both candidates when one of the interviews is taped and edited while the other candidate gives a live interview. In addition, different interviewers for each candidate means that balance depends on interviewers' desire to ask follow-up questions and demand more detailed responses; some interviewers may do the latter, while others may ask leading questions that ultimately work to the candidate's advantage. This is in addition to the role played by introductions, terms of address, and descriptions used by the interviewers, which may show more deference to one candidate and transform him from the guest to the conversation moderator.

Most media monitored here intentionally emphasized their concern with balance: newspapers gave each candidate one page per day, while channels posted both candidates' photos on the screen and gave space to the candidates or their representatives on most talk shows and newscasts. Nevertheless, a closer view of media conduct shows an absence of genuine balance. Quantitatively, Sisi received more coverage than Sabahi in all media outlets, including al-Jazeera. He was the subject of more news items and received more time and space. Advertisements, commercial breaks, and the news ticker also reflected a quantitative bias to Sisi. In terms of content, there was a clear bias toward Sisi that took several forms: he was consistently referred to as the "field marshal" rather than "candidate," and the phrase "God willing" was regularly appended to questions about his likelihood of success.<sup>56</sup> His stances and achievements as defense minister were regularly invoked, and there was a focus on the army, its siding with the people, and its counterterrorism efforts, which cannot be separated from the fact that one of the candidates has a military background. Finally, there was a clear disparity in the difficulty of the questions and the use of follow-up questions in interviews to explore each candidate's platform. Finally, production elements were used to place news of Sisi in coveted places in the papers and highlight it through color, size, and the addition of quality photographs.

This report will focus on these issues in detail for each type of media.

## **1. State-Owned Media<sup>57</sup>**

Preliminary observation reveals attempts by the state-owned media to maintain professionalism and balance in its election coverage. Anchors and hosts on Nile News and Egyptian Satellite Television (EST) took pains to stress the neutrality of state-owned television and its professional and balanced coverage. The monitoring also revealed hosts' attempts to present the views of the party absent from the discussion, maintain distance from guests' biases, and swiftly correct any inaccurate claims they made.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Presenters on al-Qahera wal-Nas used the phrase "God willing" more than others when discussing Sisi's chances of success. See for example, "The President and the People," May 8.

<sup>57</sup> This section looks at state-owned media outlets that were monitored: *al-Ahram* and *al-Gomhouriya*, and Nile News, EST, and Radio Egypt.

<sup>58</sup> See for example, EST's "Yesterday and Tomorrow," Apr. 29; "This Morning" on Nile News, Apr. 21; "Economic Files" on Nile News, May 3; and "Live from Egypt," May 11.

But this observation cannot be generalized to all state-owned media, not only because we did not monitor all outlets, but because there is a clear disparity in levels of objectivity and professionalism, as well as between programs and even specific issues on one outlet.

While *al-Ahram* and *al-Gomhouriya* attempted to stress their fair distribution of space to each candidate, certain production and layout elements exposed their bias toward one in particular. *Al-Ahram*, for example, gave each candidate one full page, but commercial ads were repeatedly placed on Sabahi's page, at times taking up more than half the space, while being notably absent from Sisi's page.<sup>59</sup> The front page also usually carried a headline with Sisi's name in it while his competitor was not individually covered on the front page, although the two candidates occasionally shared a headline. Photos of Sisi published by *al-Ahram* were also of noticeably better quality than photos of Sabahi.

Although *al-Gomouriya*'s headlines always referred to both candidates, the reference to Sisi typically contained some positive emotional connotation or description,<sup>60</sup> supported by the photos accompanying the story.<sup>61</sup> There was also a clear disparity in the news stories about each candidate in several of the paper's issues.<sup>62</sup> In general, both *al-Ahram* and *al-Gomhouriya* were filled with pro-Sisi articles<sup>63</sup> while neither carried opinion articles supporting Sabahi. Sabahi appeared in *al-Ahram* in only a few negative articles,<sup>64</sup> while the opinion pages of *al-Gomhouriya* carried numerous articles viciously attacking Sabahi simply for running against the former defense minister.<sup>65</sup> Of the state-owned media, *al-Gomhouriya* placed the most emphasis on Sabahi's links to the Muslim Brotherhood, both in news items<sup>66</sup> and features or opinion articles.<sup>67</sup>

The state-owned press also repeatedly made editorial missteps that appeared unintentional but betrayed a bias to one of the candidates. For example, *al-Ahram* more than once granted unjustified anonymity in a news item that warranted no privacy and whose sources were known, most of it related to the actions of Sisi's campaign.<sup>68</sup> *Al-Gomhouriya* engaged in

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<sup>59</sup> See for example *al-Ahram*, May 4 and 6.

<sup>60</sup> See the headline of May 2, "The Youngest Volunteer in the Sisi Campaign: I'm Sad I Can't Give Him My Vote"; Sisi is described as "the general whose rule awaits him" on May 3; the following headline was quoted from the foreign press, "Sisi Is a Strong Leader Who Will Easily Win"; discussing a statement of the secretary-general of the National Council for Women on participation in elections, the headline used was "Sisi Can Unite Political Forces Thanks to the People's Faith in Him," Apr. 22.

<sup>61</sup> See for example, the clear disparity between the size and quality of photos of the two candidates on May 4, page 4; May 3, page 2; and May 8, page 1.

<sup>62</sup> See for example the election pages on Apr. 27, Apr. 28, May 7, and May 8.

<sup>63</sup> *Al-Gomhouriya* was distinguished from *al-Ahram* by the remarkable number of articles lauding Sisi—at least three a day and at times more than five in a single issue. These articles carried headlines such as "The Next Captain of the Ship," "Egypt's President, Not a Candidate," "Sisi Forcefully Fills the Leadership Vacuum," and "Egypt's Next President."

<sup>64</sup> For example, an entire month of monitoring the *al-Ahram* opinion pages found no more than five articles mentioning Sabahi, most of them negative.

<sup>65</sup> There were on average two articles a day in *al-Gomhouriya* attacking Sabahi and describing him negatively. For example, "Paper Leaders," May 4, and "The Demonic Statements on the Election," Apr. 28.

<sup>66</sup> See for example a story titled "The Brothers Give Sabahi Their Vote, the Former Brothers Are for Sisi," Apr. 23, page 4.

<sup>67</sup> See for example an article titled "Daoud, Sabahi, and the Brotherhood Makes Three," Apr. 23, p. 23; "Stigmatized by Terrorism," Apr. 30; "Hamdin's Discourse, Sisi's Discourse," May 8.

<sup>68</sup> See for example the story titled "Sisi to Present His Platform in Next Week's Speech," *al-Ahram*, Apr. 30, and "Sisi Campaign Announces Members of the Youth Campaign," Apr. 20.

unwarranted generalization, using phrases in its headlines such as “NGOs say” or “political parties say” despite the diverse views of such collectivities and the fact that the paper had only solicited the opinion of one representative.<sup>69</sup> There were several stories in *al-Gomhouriya* that did not match the headline, which was biased toward Sisi.<sup>70</sup>

While most state-owned papers exercised caution about ads promoting individual candidates, *al-Gomhouriya* published two pro-Sisi ads, the first from the Arab Tribes Association in Qena and Sinai<sup>71</sup> and the second from the head of the Farmers Syndicate in Kafr al-Sheikh.<sup>72</sup> Radio Egypt did not exercise the same caution, broadcasting three different ads daily for Sisi’s “Long live Egypt” campaign; no pro-Sabahi ads were observed.

Starting on May 13, an ad began airing on EST encouraging voter turnout, appended with the slogan “Long live Egypt”—the Sisi campaign tagline—revealing the channel’s failure to maintain its policy on partisan ads.

The monitoring found that some presenters on EST repeatedly attacked and mocked Sabahi and defended his opponent.<sup>73</sup> For example, on the program “Named After Egypt” on April 22, the host commented on a Sabahi statement saying, “This isn’t how presidents act. The ideas you’re presenting do not fit the problems or the magnitude of the challenges. In the end, it’s just a bunch of numbers that anyone can say.” In another episode on May 7, the same presenter said, “The Egyptian ship requires joint effort and work to steer it through, which is what Sisi is offering, but many of those riding on this ship are perhaps seeking their personal interests.”<sup>74</sup>

EST also showed special interest in a leaked statement by Sabahi, in which he said that should he win the presidency, he would prosecute Sisi, by inviting a representative from both campaigns to discuss the leak. At the same time, the channel helped to air the leak and lend it credibility by preparing a segment that polled citizens on the street about the statement. All the responses aired in the segment attacked Sabahi.<sup>75</sup>

Although the presenters on Nile News made an effort to maintain a pure reporting stance uncolored by opinion, their guests were less diverse and more biased to Sisi.<sup>76</sup> The channel’s commercial breaks also betrayed bias to Sisi, repeatedly airing songs and taped segments of the candidate that dated from his term as defense minister and highlighting the role of the army in the transitional period and the fight against terrorism. Although these practices date from before the elections, after Sisi announced his candidacy they constituted covert support for him.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See for example a story titled “NGOs Support Sisi for Egypt’s President,” Apr. 30.

<sup>70</sup> See for example, “Go Ahead, You Can Bring Change: From America in Support of the Eagle,” Apr. 27, which contained no mention of Sisi at all, as well as “Arab Tribes Declare Support for the Field Marshall,” Apr. 29, which headlined a story about the anniversary of the liberation of Sinai wholly unrelated to Sisi.

<sup>71</sup> *Al-Gomhouriya*, May 6, page 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Al-Gomhouriya*, May 7, page 1.

<sup>73</sup> See for example “The Weekend,” May 8, where the presenter said of Sisi, “He’s more realistic, more pragmatic, he doesn’t get people’s hopes up.”

<sup>74</sup> See also “Egypt Awaits the President,” May 5, and “Named after Egypt,” May 6 and 13.

<sup>75</sup> EST’s “Named after Egypt,” Apr. 26.

<sup>76</sup> See for example, “Issue in Islamic Law”; “From Cairo,” Apr. 29; “This Morning,” May 5; and “Economic Files,” May 10.

<sup>77</sup> In one of these segments (1 minute and 31 seconds), titled “The River Nile: the Artery of Life,” Defense Minister Sisi appears at the end saying, “Power is the last thing you think of when you’re securing your

On one episode of “This Morning” on Nile News, after the presenter attempted to stress that the outcome would depend solely on the ballot box, the deputy editor-in-chief of the state-owned *al-Misa* declared, “We’re just repeating facts. This is no time for neutrality. All the people are with the field marshal.”<sup>78</sup>

## 2. Private Media<sup>79</sup>

All three different types of private media were united by their clear bias toward Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi. Although several outlets attempted to disguise the bias with some pro-forma semblance of balance, our observations revealed the superficiality of the pose, though each type of media outlet evinced a different degree of bias and way of expressing it. While the private press was wary of overtly declaring its biased views, presenters on satellite channels more readily publicized their voting preferences. Meanwhile, Radio 90:90 alternated between balanced news coverage and the clear biases of its talk-show presenters.

During the period under review, different outlets showed varying degrees of interest in airing ads raising voter awareness and encouraging participation, but very little space was devoted to ads for either candidate. While the three privately owned newspapers carried virtually no ads for either candidate, al-Qahera wal-Nas, Sada al-Balad and Radio 90:90 were filled with pro-Sisi ads. Meanwhile, ads for Sisi’s “Long live Egypt” campaign appeared very rarely on CBC and were totally absent from ONTV. Only four days before the end of the campaign season, on May 18, the first ad for Sabahi appeared on CBC and was also broadcast on ONTV on May 19.

*Al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan* both abandoned the values of diversity, balance, and objectivity in their candidate coverage. They typically resorted to layout elements,<sup>80</sup> publishing anonymously sourced news items,<sup>81</sup> and sentimental headlines to express their bias towards Sisi. *Al-Shorouk* alternated between professional coverage and bias in the period under review, but it was the least biased of the three newspapers. It also deserves credit for the diversity of its opinion pages, hosting opponents of both Sabahi and Sisi, unlike other papers,<sup>82</sup> which were filled with extremely negative articles about Sabahi<sup>83</sup> or supportive ones about Sisi.<sup>84</sup>

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country’s national security. There’s dialogue and other interests we consider first.” Another segment (1 minute and 58 seconds), titled “Be Safe, Egypt,” is a video clip for the song “Be Safe, Egypt” showing the demonstrations of January 25 and June 30, followed by scenes of army training exercises. At the end, the song stops and Sisi’s voice can be heard saying, “By God, the Egyptian army united as one man.” A third video is on the confrontation with the Brotherhood and shows Sisi speaking about the honor of protecting the country.

<sup>78</sup> “This Morning” on Nile News, Apr. 21.

<sup>79</sup> This section covers the private media outlets monitored: *al-Shorouk*, *al-Watan*, and *al-Masry al-Youm*, and ONTV, CBC, Sada al-Balad, al-Qahera wal-Nas, and Radio 90:90.

<sup>80</sup> Production and layout elements include the placement of the story, the headline color, and the size and quality of any photos, all of which were used throughout the period under review for Sisi’s benefit.

<sup>81</sup> The monitoring observed a marked increase in the rate of anonymously sourced stories in the three newspapers discussed here, seen daily.

<sup>82</sup> *Al-Shorouk* carried articles that rejected Sisi’s candidacy and saw it as the return of the military state, and criticized the state and media pro-Sisi bias. See articles by Fahmi Howaidi and Amr Hamzawi.

<sup>83</sup> See for example articles in *al-Masry al-Youm* on Apr. 20, 22, 28, and 29. Several of the paper’s authors viciously attacked Sabahi for his statements about prosecuting Sisi.

<sup>84</sup> See for example articles in *al-Watan*, May 4, one of which stated, “Sisi is an emissary of Divine Providence, an expression of the Egyptian people with their army, police, and all institutions.” See also four pro-Sisi articles in the same paper on May 8 and articles in *al-Masry al-Youm* on Apr. 20, 23, and 30.

*Al-Watan* carried an early interview with Sabahi, in the issues of April 27 and 28. Although it devoted much space to the candidate, the questions and pullout quotes and the page-one teaser all betrayed a clear bias against Sabahi. The front-page headlines focused only on Sabahi's statements about Sisi. One of the pullout quotes used was "buy your president for one pound," referenced by Sabahi in noting the importance of donations for his campaign, but its selection by the editor in this context gave it a negative cast. An editor also highlighted Sabahi's statement that he was "not the candidate of the revolution," dropping the rest of the sentence for the pullout quote—"but rather a candidate from the revolution"—changing the meaning. The questions asked of him were adversarial. The paper wrote that it had told Sabahi, "The field marshal deserves his popularity because he put himself at great risk," leading Sabahi to respond, "I did it before he did."

*Al-Watan* also sought to undercut Sabahi and his campaign by linking his statements to those of former President Mohamed Morsi,<sup>85</sup> or by suggesting that his campaign was attempting to "imitate" that of his competitor.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, the newspaper chose sentimental headlines from Sisi's statements, typically leading the front page in red. Over the fold on May 4, the paper proclaimed, "Sisi is touched: I won't sleep so the poor can live," while on the front page of May 6, it declared, "Sisi: the smallest family needs LE5,000 a month to live, how can it live on LE35?"<sup>87</sup> The next day's front page led with "Sisi's first appearance: speaking from the heart, a statesman's speech."<sup>88</sup>

As for private satellite channels, although they all exhibited pro-Sisi bias, they cannot be put in the same category. Sada al-Balad and al-Qahera wal-Nas were actively pro-Sisi in most of their programs, newscasts, and commercial breaks, and they engaged in a constant attack on his competitor, after most of the presenters announced their intention to vote for Sisi and urged their audience to do the same. There was a clear degree of difference in the performance of announcers with CBC and ONTV, each of which exhibited varying degrees of bias to one or the other candidates, some of them endorsed neither candidate, while others announced their choice, making our overall assessment more dependent on the program rather than the channel as a whole.

CBC and ONTV won the first interview with Sisi.<sup>89</sup> The event was extensively promoted, with the promo airing 12 times on May 3 and 24 times during the monitoring period on May 4 on CBC and 20 times on May 3 on ONTV. The hype necessarily reflected positively on the candidate and influenced the viewer, since in the normal state of affairs the candidate seeks to gain access to the media to reach the public, not the opposite.

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<sup>85</sup> For example see a story on page 6, May 5, titled "The Road to the Ittihadiya Begins with the Sentence: I Will Step down if the Masses Come Out Against Me," which attributes the quote to Sabahi and Morsi before him, but disregards the fact that Sisi has made similar statements.

<sup>86</sup> See for example a story on the last page of May 4 titled "Hamdeen Campaign Follows in Sisi's Steps: What a Coincidence."

<sup>87</sup> The story subhead states, "The field marshal pledges to reform and increase pensions, Sabahi campaign to organize data expos." Although formally, the deadline is divided between the two candidates, the bias is evident in the subject matter.

<sup>88</sup> This was a reference to his first appearance in the joint CBC/ONTV interview; again note that Sisi is given a prominent place on page one. See also a story on May 7 titled "al-Desouqi pursues Sisi on a journey of darkness from Imbaba to Doqqi to Sayyeda" which revolves around a citizen's story of walking after finding no empty transportation in the streets to his home in order to watch the Sisi interview."

<sup>89</sup> The channel also hosted the competing candidate on May 8, with other presenters, but the channel treated the two interviewees quite differently.

The promotion of the candidate and the interview also cannot be assessed in isolation from the channel's performance the following day, May 10.<sup>90</sup> In a 45-minute monologue—described by the presenter herself as “outside the realm of media neutrality”—the presenter spoke at length about her impression of the candidate's personality traits as gleaned from the interview, describing Sisi as honest, direct, firm, decisive, clear, trusting in the people, pious, enlightened, and religiously observant, etc. The program “The Capital Here,” aired a report that polled people in the street about the interview. Twenty out of 21 people interviewed supported Sisi's speech, while one person had reservations about his failure to address education. In addition, the entire one hour and 37 minutes of the program was devoted to analyzing Sisi's responses in the interview with a group of pro-Sisi guests.<sup>91</sup> In total, the program “The Capital Here” exhibited the most pro-Sisi bias of the programs on CBC, in terms of the selection of guests,<sup>92</sup> the newscast, and presenters' comments and their positive descriptions of Sisi and his campaign (for example, calling him a statesman, describing his campaign as disciplined), as well as the willful disregard for news about his opponent's or his opponent's supporters. The program “Possible” on the same channel attempted to rectify this, creating a formal balance by focusing on news of Sabahi. That program most frequently hosted Sabahi campaign representatives<sup>93</sup> and most closely followed his electoral activities, but often it showed negative bias to the candidate. Notably, when the presenter of “Possible” put in a telephone appearance on “The Capital Here,” he revealed a clear pro-Sisi bias.<sup>94</sup>

On ONTV, the presenter of “ONTV Morning” was the most biased to Sisi,<sup>95</sup> while the program “The Full Picture” should be credited with airing the first interview with Sabahi on April 26; that episode concluded with an invitation—which went unanswered—to his competitor to appear for a similar interview.

ONTV's “Egypt's President,” which began airing on May 8, offered a new format of electoral programming, but it reflected the channel's strong interest in the election—the channel turned over all of prime time to the elections, nearly five hours a day. The presence of a studio audience and most of the channel's presenters endowed the program with a new, interactive aspect not seen on other programs. “Egypt's President” addressed all issues and details related to the candidates, attempting in most of its segments to maintain balance and diversity, with a representative of each candidate and at times a person unaligned with either candidate. It is difficult to categorically acknowledge the balance of the program as a whole, however, because the degree of professionalism depended on the performance of the presenter who moderated the episode, especially considering their different views of the candidates and the insistence of some on declaring their preferences.

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<sup>90</sup> The other ONTV interviewer did not discuss his impressions of the candidate except in the context of answering questions from the audience on the program “Egypt's President,” May 7. He described Sisi as gracious, tolerant, and respectful of decision-making mechanisms.

<sup>91</sup> “The Capital Here” set aside a full segment only two days later (May 12) to discuss and analyze Sisi's interview on Sky News with a number of pro-Sisi guests.

<sup>92</sup> There were almost no guests who supported Sabahi, as typically both guests were pro-Sisi. See for example “The Capital Here,” Apr. 29.

<sup>93</sup> See for example, “Possible,” Apr. 30.

<sup>94</sup> See “The Capital Here,” May 3, when the host of “Possible” called in to comment on Sisi's meeting with media figures, saying “If God wills it and that man becomes Egypt's president, he'll do good things, God willing.”

<sup>95</sup> See for example the episodes of May 8, 9, and 10.

Most of the presenters on al-Qahera wal-Nas and Sada al-Balad endorsed al-Sisi,<sup>96</sup> despite the ramifications of this for the neutrality and objectivity of their programs, which were nearly wholly without Sabahi supporters, either as studio guests<sup>97</sup> or telephone interviewees.<sup>98</sup> These programs were solely engaged in lauding Sisi's statements and stances and covering his campaign activities.<sup>99</sup> In addition, vox-pops segments polling the public were all supportive of Sisi.<sup>100</sup>

The problem is not that these presenters and private channels endorsed a candidate, but rather the way they dealt with his opponent. The presenter of "Hold Me To Account" attacked Sabahi because "the terrorist group" (i.e., the Brotherhood) supported him,<sup>101</sup> while "Facts and Secrets" focused on Sabahi's leaked statement that he would try Sisi, allowing callers and on-the-street interviewees to attack Sabahi in the worst terms.<sup>102</sup> Meanwhile, al-Qahera wal-Nas's "The Couch Party" highlighted how difficult it would be for Sabahi to keep his campaign promises,<sup>103</sup> a point also stressed by the host of "Hold Me to Account" on Sada Balad the only time the channel sponsored a debate on the candidates' views on specific issues. The presenter opened that episode stating, "The important thing is to see who can get things done. Who has the ability? Not just talk and that's it. Do you remember Morsi and his 100 days?" Regarding the candidates' stance on the protest law, the presenter intervened to note, "The public needs to know that Hamdeen will release people who've been sentenced to prison."<sup>104</sup> The protest law was also used by the presenter of "Cairo 360" on al-Qahera wal-Nas to attack Sabahi and his statements on court sentences.<sup>105</sup>

Finally, "The President and the People," which began with the beginning of the campaign period," became a space in which Sisi was praised and his opponent viciously attacked. The program was set up as a debate structured around excerpts from taped interviews with each candidate and their comments on various issues, with four studio guests analyzing the candidates' responses. Bias was clearly evident in the selection of quotes and the way they were taken out of context: all of Sisi's responses were patriotic, perfect responses, while Sabahi's responses were the opposite and consistently hostile.<sup>106</sup> The analysts' comments

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<sup>96</sup> These include the hosts of "Hold Me to Account," "Facts and Secrets," "Tahrir Salon" on Sada al-Balad, and "The Couch Party" on al-Qahera wal-Nas.

<sup>97</sup> In the period under review, not one pro-Sabahi guest was seen in the studios of Sada al-Balad. "The Boldest Words" on al-Qahera wal-Nas hosted a Coptic woman who supported Sabahi, but she was strenuously attacked and her right to speak confiscated. The host even attempt to change her mind, asking her at the conclusion of the show, "Are you convinced now?" See the episode of Apr. 30.

<sup>98</sup> "Hold Me to Account," aired on Sada al-Balad, set aside a segment every day to take calls and messages in support of Sisi, with the host commenting on each one and giving it a more positive spin. On April 21, the host took 172 pro-Sisi calls and not one call in support of Sabahi. "The Country Today" also accepted pro-Sisi calls and messages.

<sup>99</sup> Most of the channel's programs reviewed daily news about the candidate's meetings and interviews or the activities of his campaign, without any reference to his competitor.

<sup>100</sup> See for example, a popular poll on "The Country Today" on Sada al-Balad, May 7, which canvassed 22 citizens, all of them supporting Sisi.

<sup>101</sup> See "Hold Me to Account," Apr. 26, 27, and 30, and May 7.

<sup>102</sup> See "Facts and Secrets," Apr. 25.

<sup>103</sup> See "The Couch Party" on al-Qahera wal-Nas, Apr. 27. In general, the program repeatedly attacked Sabahi on several episodes. See Apr. 30 and May 5, the latter for the attack on Sabahi for his use of the eagle emblem.

<sup>104</sup> "Hold Me to Account," May 7. The program host focused on the fact that Sabahi's statements changed after Sisi commented on the Brotherhood.

<sup>105</sup> See "Cairo 360" on al-Qahera wal-Nas, May 1.

<sup>106</sup> On May 11, one of the guest analysts on the program, responding to a question about the lack of a debate between the candidates, said, "It's enough for Sisi to do just one television interview"; "Sisi is a statesman and Hamdeen is an opposition figure. He'll try to make a big show at the expense of objectivity"; "I'm surprised anyway. Sisi doesn't need to be tested"; "We're not talking about two equal persons"; "Hamdeen is a candidate,

were extremely biased, one describing Sabahi in one episode as “toeing the American and Qatari line, he’s filled with arrogance and resentment, he’s dying to be president. The people that will vote for him will be the Brothers and the kids in the street with their baggy pants and braided hair.”<sup>107</sup>

Al-Qahera wal-Nas was distinguished by the repetition of its newscasts, during which the news anchors frequently inserted their own opinion and drew conclusions that ran counter to news neutrality. The presenters also often put their own headlines on news stories they covered before reading the news item and its original headline, giving the story a certain spin with their framing. An anchor reading a news item about the attempted assassination of Sisi began with the line, “The hand of betrayal tries to ensnare the field marshal,” while the line “Sisi deserves respect,” was added in a story about Sisi. This is in addition to the lack of balance and diversity in coverage of both candidates’ news.

Al-Qahera wal-Nas and Sada al-Balad were for a time the only channels that aired pro-Sisi ads, starting on April 27, prior to the official campaign period. In the first week of the campaign period, new pro-Sisi ads began to appear on al-Qahera wal-Nas.

Both channels also heavily featured pro-Sisi songs and videos during programming breaks, including Hussein al-Jasmi’s “Mr. Citizen” and Mohammed Taha’s “Beautiful Egypt,” both of which show scenes of the army in previous elections and referendums and feature photos of Sisi, as well as “My Heart Is with You,” sponsored by the army’s Morale Affairs Department, and “Be Careful, This Is Egypt,” by Nancy Ajram.

Finally, all the presenters on 90:90 Radio were extremely hostile to Hamdeen Sabahi, especially the presenters of “A Cup of Tea” and “What and Why,” both of which led an ongoing assault on the candidate on most of their episodes.<sup>108</sup> Speaking of Sabahi, one of them said, “Any old thug can call himself an activist, an unemployed guy can call himself a fighter. Any opportunist who sings a little for Saddam, a little for Qaddafi, a little for Assad, a little for Iran—next thing you know he’s a Nasserist.” In contrast, both presenters were extremely biased towards Sisi. The presenter of “What and Why” on May 3, commenting on a news story of how Sisi was touched and cried, said, “Sisi’s tears are so dear. Sisi’s eyes welled up with tears when speaking to the poor. His whole being is attuned to the poor and the people’s needs.”

At the same time, the radio station attempted to maintain some degree of diversity and balance during its newscasts, but it repeatedly aired “Bless the Hands” and other songs penned in support of Sisi, as well as ads sponsored by his campaign, both those encouraging voter participation and those explicitly supporting Sisi.

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yes, but he’s not a competitor”; “We’re talking about Sisi as if he were a normal guy”; “With all due respect to Hamdeen, Sisi is a very weighty person”; “You can’t do a debate between a statesman and a talking head. Sabahi’s an actor, he knows how to pick his words for effect, but Sisi doesn’t know how to do those things. He knows how to speak about projects and numbers”; and “A debate is a liberal American process, it’s against Hamdeen’s socialist thought anyway.”

<sup>107</sup> See “The President and the People” on al-Qahera wal-Nas, May 10.

<sup>108</sup> See for example “A Cup of Tea,” May 2, and “What and Why,” May 3.

### 3. Private Non-Egyptian Media<sup>109</sup>

The project monitored two wholly different types of non-Egyptian media. Sharing little in common, the two satellite channels took entirely different stances on the election and also have a radically different focus—one is a news channel, the other a variety channel—which entails varying degrees of election coverage. In addition they both employ different media styles in coverage and analysis. Finally, al-Jazeera Egypt is a leading media supporter of the Islamist camp that rejects July 3, 2013 and its aftermath, including the new presidential elections.

#### 1. Media Coverage of Elections on al-Jazeera Egypt

Al-Jazeera found in Sisi's candidacy support for its discourse of a military coup. In contrast to its performance during the referendum on the constitution, the channel showed a great interest in the presidential election, channeling all its programs, interviews, and bulletins toward the topic, including shows such as "The Voice of the Farmer"<sup>110</sup> and "Sports in Politics,"<sup>111</sup> but through a very negative lens largely focused on the election's lack of legitimacy. It also intensified its sectarian rhetoric, stressing the link between Sisi's success and the Coptic vote,<sup>112</sup> and pointed to the return of the Mubarak regime, the National Democratic Party, and Mubarakist institutions, all represented in the person of Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, his campaign, and his supporters.<sup>113</sup>

There is thus little scope to discuss diversity and professionalism on the channel. Sabahi had little presence compared to the time allotted to Sisi, all of it negative coverage, at times constituting incitement to violence and hatred. One program host, in response to his guest, objected to the idea that Sisi would live instead of die, saying, "Lifespans are in God's hands, He is all-capable." The guest responded, "He won't die now, he'll stay because of the blood he spilled. God will leave him there in front of us until we see what he's made of."<sup>114</sup>

Al-Jazeera Egypt relied heavily on newscasts as a means to present events, frequently airing them during program breaks. The report editor's voice was the most biased among all media outlets and most often mixed news with opinion, giving the news a specific spin. A newscast would open with the line, "In a revealing time when masks are removed and false idols fallen, the scene of athletes panting to meet candidate Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, the perpetrator of the biggest massacre in the modern age..."<sup>115</sup> Commenting on Sabahi's candidacy, the newscaster stated, "And to complete the props for the elections..."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> This section looks only at al-Jazeera Egypt and MBC Egypt, chosen to ensure a balanced and diverse sample that gives expression to all views on the election process and shows due regard for different models of media ownership.

<sup>110</sup> See for example the episode of Apr. 20, when the host closed with the words, "It's wrong, guys, to glorify a man and applaud him like that."

<sup>111</sup> "Sports in Politics" was one of the most antagonistic programs to Sisi. The attacks reached their peak during the commentary on Sisi's meeting with prominent athletes on Apr. 30. See also the episode of Apr. 20 on Mortada Mansour's withdrawal from the race, when the program cursed Mansour.

<sup>112</sup> See for example "Ask," Apr. 21.

<sup>113</sup> See for example "Egypt Tonight," the segment with audience questions, Apr. 21; "Ask," Apr. 21; and a taped segment on the newscast of May 3.

<sup>114</sup> "Editorial Secretary," May 1.

<sup>115</sup> "Sports in Politics," Apr. 30.

<sup>116</sup> Story on the end of the candidacy-filing period, repeated on the al-Jazeera newscast on Apr. 20.

The channel never failed to describe the election as “theater,” “the presidential farce,” “a pantomime,” or “the presidency of blood,”<sup>117</sup> and it used extremely negative terms to describe Sisi in all its programs. The vitriol peaked in the last week of campaigning when Sisi was called a fascist, a dictator, a conspirator, a fraud, a Nazi, a putschist, and vindictive.<sup>118</sup>

Al-Jazeera covered all of Sisi’s actions to comment on them, working to draw links between him and other negative figures, such as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad<sup>119</sup> and Gamal Mubarak.<sup>120</sup> The channel mocked the reconciliation of Mortada Mansour and Shubeir,<sup>121</sup> while guests condemned Sisi’s meeting with media personnel<sup>122</sup> and a delegation from the Sufi orders.<sup>123</sup> The channel mercilessly mocked several statements portraying Sisi as a pious man, with presenter saying, “This adds yet another occupation to Sisi’s talents—he’s become Sheikh al-Margoushi. If a woman hasn’t been able to get pregnant for several years, maybe she can go see him.”<sup>124</sup>

Al-Jazeera Egypt incorporated new media in all forms, designating substantial time to reading out attacks on Sisi posted on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.<sup>125</sup> It even prepared news reports on this content and set aside daily segments on programs and during commercial breaks to air them.<sup>126</sup> In the best example of this selective mining of new media, the program “Creative Protest” presented a set of clips viciously attacking Sisi, including satirical videos by Mohammed Bakous, excerpts from YouTube films, and sketches, all of which attacked Sisi.<sup>127</sup>

At the same time, al-Jazeera Egypt did not support Sisi’s competitor. In fact, Sabahi came under attack on numerous programs and was dubbed “the prop” and “the extra.”<sup>128</sup> Yet, as part of the systematic assault on Sisi, at times the channel drew comparisons between him and Sabahi, who always fared better and whose stances were used to attack Sisi. In one newscast, the channel stated, “Sisi began his campaign with a tweet while his only competitor, Hamdeen Sabahi, promised in a speech broadcast on Egyptian television a dignified life for all Egyptians if he wins the presidency.”<sup>129</sup> Another report stated, “We are

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<sup>117</sup> See for example, “Hold Me to Account,” Apr. 20, as well as most of the newscasts and news stories on the channel.

<sup>118</sup> See for example, “Hold Me to Account,” “Egypt Tonight,” and “Special Interview,” May 8, as well as “Hold Me to Account,” May 11.

<sup>119</sup> See for example “Egypt Tonight,” Apr. 25, and “Special Interview,” May 1.

<sup>120</sup> See for example “Sports in Politics,” Apr. 30.

<sup>121</sup> On April 27, “Egypt Tonight” devoted an entire segment to the reconciliation, which showed extreme bias against Sisi. The segment reviewed content from social media mocking the reconciliation. It opened as follows: “Before recovering from the famous hashtag that was spread far and wide, a festival of satire erupted on social media...” The story closed with images from a morgue, filled with bodies, blood, and elderly woman in Aswan crying, with the voiceover, “Who will comfort this mother? Where is the reconciliation with the people of Aswan?”

<sup>122</sup> See for example, “Editorial Secretary,” May 7.

<sup>123</sup> The channel cast the story on its May 4 newscast as “Sisi defends the coup and says he will serve the poor.”

<sup>124</sup> “Editorial Secretary,” Apr. 24.

<sup>125</sup> See for example a story on Mortada Mansour’s withdrawal from the presidential race, aired on al-Jazeera on Apr. 20.

<sup>126</sup> “Egypt Tonight” set aside its second segment to review public comments on social media, as did “Sports in Politics.” The channel also aired videos taken from YouTube during programming breaks.

<sup>127</sup> See for example the episodes of April 21, 25, 27, 28, and 29.

<sup>128</sup> See for example program breaks taken from social media, May 3.

<sup>129</sup> The story was repeated on the newscast of May 3.

faced with two candidates, one of whom evokes models from the last century while the other repeats ‘Long live Egypt’ even if its children are dying.”<sup>130</sup>

One program presenter closed an episode saying, “But if one must choose between Hamdeen and Sisi, surely any person with a conscience and any degree of equanimity would choose Hamdeen. Yes, Hamdeen took part in the military coup, but Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi took part in killing and burning people.”<sup>131</sup>

In general, al-Jazeera was careful to present news reflecting the two candidates’ and their supporters’ mutual animosity and disagreement. On April 22, it led the news with the report that Sabahi had said, “Sisi’s campaign includes every symbol of corruption in Egypt and represents the old power.” The following breaking news headline was also posted on the screen, “Hamdeen Sabahi: Sisi’s campaign includes all of Egypt’s corrupt people and many Mubarak figures,” without providing any context or additional information for the quote. The channel used the same statement on “Egypt Tonight” the next day, April 21, when the presenter pointed to a serious statement from “a coup supporter” against his candidate. This prompted the program guest, the founder of the pro-Sisi ‘Use Your Head’ campaign, to describe the statement as an example of Sabahi’s filthy style.

Finally, the commercial breaks on al-Jazeera consistently contained the most overtly biased content. The channel repeatedly aired the segment showing Sisi swearing that the army did not seek power, as well as scenes of labor protests, ending with the phrase, “Does the Sisi regime support the demands of the January 25 revolution?” It also broadcast a segment showing clashes between anti-coup protestors and police, with the tagline, “No one gets harmed except the poor, God is the greatest protector.”

## ***II. Media Coverage of Elections on MBC Egypt***

A variety channel, MBC Egypt attempted to maintain program diversity even amid political events. It was thus the channel that devoted the least amount of time to the elections, with political coverage on the channel limited to one daily program, “Happening in Egypt,” as well as “Egypt Now,” aired at the same time slot but on the weekend.

Although these two programs contained the most material covered by this project, the weekly satirical program “Have a Good Night” often touched on the elections, specifically Sabahi’s weak chances.<sup>132</sup> The elections were also referenced in two episodes of the entertainment program “The Loveliest Night”; on one episode the guests and presenters sang pro-Sisi songs.<sup>133</sup>

In general, MBC Egypt covered opinion polls, attempting to maintain professionalism while presenting the findings. It was the channel most interested in examining voter preferences as expressed in periodic surveys conducted by polling centers.<sup>134</sup>

MBC Egypt carried an exclusive interview with Sabahi on May 14, 2014. Although part of the interview was to include a debate between his supporters, opponents, and boycotters, the

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<sup>130</sup> Report on the beginning of the campaign period, May 3.

<sup>131</sup> “Editorial Secretary,” Apr. 23.

<sup>132</sup> See the episodes of May 1 and 8.

<sup>133</sup> “The Loveliest Evening,” May 12.

<sup>134</sup> See for example “Happening in Egypt,” May 3, 13, and 14; the channel also undertook a weekly poll, the first one covered on May 2.

segment was short on time and mismanaged. Both the guest and questioners were frequently interrupted, and Sabahi was unable to answer numerous questions due to the lack of time.

The channel tried to make use of new technology, but we found some inaccuracies in some guests' quotes as posted onscreen. A lack of balance was evident in the selection of guests on a few episodes of "Happening in Egypt,"<sup>135</sup> although in the few episodes devoted to the election, the program attempted to maintain some balance and give guests equal time.

## Conclusions

Some conclusions can be drawn from the findings that are relevant to all media outlets, the most significant being:

### 1. *Discrepancies in Tone in Coverage of the PEC*

All outlets covered news of the PEC and its decrees, but there was a clear discrepancy in the tone of the coverage. The monitoring revealed a positive bias to the committee by state-owned media, which included no criticisms or reservations by guests or sources, and offered no public polls of the committee's performance. In contrast, the PEC came in for some attacks in the private media for various reasons including:

- Strict documentation of information of presidential endorsements at public notary offices.<sup>136</sup>
- Opening the doors of public notary offices for presidential endorsements on weekends.<sup>137</sup>
- The addition of the eagle as an electoral symbol, after the PEC had already announced the symbols without including the eagle (Sabahi later received this emblem).
- The failure to fine Sabahi for holding a press conference before the official campaign season, while one Sisi supporter was fined and forced to remove posters hung in support of his candidate in Mansoura before the beginning of the campaign period.<sup>138</sup>
- The PEC's failure to rule on the issue of the distribution of energy-efficient light bulbs by the Sisi campaign.<sup>139</sup>

Al-Jazeera Egypt criticized the PEC as the supervising body for what it considered illegitimate elections.

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<sup>135</sup> See "Happening in Egypt," May 4.

<sup>136</sup> CBC's "The Capital Here" gave the most time to this issue and was the most antagonistic to the PEC. See the episodes of Apr. 26, 27, and 29.

<sup>137</sup> Some media figures saw this as bias to Sabahi, who had not collected the required number of endorsements. This was the view of "The Couch Party" on al-Qahera wal-Nas, Apr. 20.

<sup>138</sup> See for example, "Cairo 360" on al-Qahera wal-Nas, May 1, and the story on the PEC and the Mansoura campaign in *al-Masry al-Youm*, May 2.

<sup>139</sup> See "Named after Egypt," EST, May 17.

## 2. Citing the International Media in Service of a Particular View

All media outlets, regardless of their sympathies, covered the international media and informed their audience of significant foreign press coverage of the presidential elections. Acting in a markedly selective manner, each media outlet cited foreign sources that supported its own biases and favorite candidate. Some outlets cited foreign press accounts that diverged from their own line only to criticize and mock them, thus confirming their own biases.<sup>140</sup>

## 3. Evocations of the Nasserist Era

Drawing upon the popularity of the late President Gamal Abd al-Nasser and harking back to his era was a pervasive theme of and backdrop to the elections. The candidates' official campaigns sought to forge a link between their candidates and Nasser, while the media stressed these links to support their chosen candidates, prompting one cartoonist to portray both campaigns referencing the same figure.<sup>141</sup> Public and private satellite channels aired segments to discuss the common features of Sisi and Nasser,<sup>142</sup> while many press articles drew their own links between the late president and one of the two candidates.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See for example, *al-Watan*, May 2 and 6; *al-Masry al-Youm*, Apr. 26; and *al-Gomhouriya*, Apr. 22 and May 4, as well as most newscasts in May on al-Qahera wal-Nas. For the other side, see breaking news on al-Jazeera, Apr. 25, and Radio 90:90, May 10.

<sup>141</sup> See Amr Selim's cartoon in *al-Masry al-Youm*, Apr. 22 and 24.

<sup>142</sup> See EST's "At Press" and "Cairo Here," Apr. 23.

<sup>143</sup> For example, "Cloning Nasser," *al-Masry al-Youm*, May 4, page 11; "The Nasserist Hubbub," *al-Shorouk*, Apr. 27, page 5.