Rebuilding Post-revolution Egyptian Media: Embracing Free expression, Diversity and Inclusiveness''

Introduction

Media Diversity Institute (MDI) derives its mission from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 which states that '*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers'*. Egypt is a signatory to this declaration, thus, media too have an obligation to give a voice to *all* citizens regardless their differences. Religious believers have the same obligations. If God wanted humans to be similar to each other, God would have created all of them with the same colour and features, for example. So, difference and diversity are the basis of universe creation.

MDI's mission is manifested in providing technical support to media organisations in the Middle East and North Africa to achieve a balanced level of media coverage, aiming for media that includes and contains all voices in the society of different backgrounds, rather than excluding the other.

Through its project in Egypt "Rebuilding Post-revolution Egyptian Media: Embrace Free Expression, Diversity and Inclusiveness", funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), MDI seeks to implement a number of initiatives that would provide technical support on several levels, including media coverage.

In this framework, MDI implements the initiative of "Monitoring and following up the Level of Media Diversity". This includes issuing a series of reports that monitor the degree of diversity in visual and printed media coverage of the most important events in Egypt.

This series of reports aims to provide a simplified scientific, qualitative and quantitative evaluation on the diversity of media coverage of events. Consequently, media outlets can benefit from their outputs with respect to media handling of community issues.

MDI endeavours that such efforts contribute to promote understanding and balanced dialog between all society categories, taking into account the diversity of their cultures, beliefs and backgrounds through comprehensive and balanced media coverage. This would strengthen the bonds of unity between all society spectrums.

Hala Morgan

Country Program Director

Diversity Observatory

Report 2

Media Diversity During Egypt's Presidential Elections

(May-June 2012)

Prepared by: Dr. Rasha Abdulla

May-June 2012 witnessed the first Presidential elections in Egypt following the January 25th revolution of 2011. A total of 13 candidates qualified to run in the first round, held on May 23 and 24. The top two candidates competed in the second round of the elections on June 16 and 17. This report, the second in a series, examines diversity in the coverage of the 2012 Presidential elections in Egypt. It follows our first report, which was released in March 2012, and which covered diversity in the coverage of Egypt's 2011 Parliamentary elections.

This report aims to provide an accurate and scientific analysis of how inclusive and how diverse the media content was in the coverage of the Presidential elections. Diversity is defined as the inclusiveness of different groups in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, income-based discrimination, gender, and any other factors which makes individuals or groups different from, but equal to, each other.

Methodology and Sample

This report is based on a methodology that incorporated both quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis to obtain a clear, scientific look at the diversity within Egyptian media. We tackled both print media and television. We analyzed issues of four newspapers, as well as episodes of several talk shows, and the evening news bulletins on Egyptian state television. The quantitative analysis focused on **a representative sample of state-owned media and private (independent) media**. We chose two popular state owned and two popular private newspapers. The newspapers we monitored are:

1) **Al Ahram** (state)
2) **Al Akhbar** (state)
3) **Al Masry Al Youm** (private)
4) **Al Shorouk** (private)

Overall, **the coders analyzed a total of 5,308 stories** that were published regarding the elections in the four newspapers. We analyzed a week before and a week after each round of the Presidential elections for a total of 32 monitoring days. The exact dates are May 16 to May 31 and June 9 to June 24, 2012.

Television coverage was also considered in a qualitative manner through discourse analysis. We monitored coverage of the elections on the state television main news

bulletin (the 9 pm news presented on both the main terrestrial channel, Channel 1, and the main satellite channel, Al Masriya), as well as the main news bulletin on Nile News. We also monitored several talk shows: the main state television political talk show *Mubasher min Misr*; as well as two private, independent talk shows *Baladna Bel Masri* on OnTV, and *Al Aashera Masaan* on Dream II. Within the chosen dates of the analysis surrounding the elections, *Baladna Bel Masri* was temporarily replaced by a live coverage of the elections. When that was the case, we analyzed this live coverage presented during the same prime time of *Baladna Bel Masri*. On all the talk shows, only episodes that had to do with the elections were considered for the analysis.

The research addressed diversity both in terms of the agents featured in the media as well as the topics mentioned/discussed.

Results

I.   Newspaper Analysis:

There was a total of 5,308 stories related to the elections in the four newspapers between the dates of May 16 to May 31 and June 9 to June 24, 2012.[1] The number of stories per newspaper was as follows:
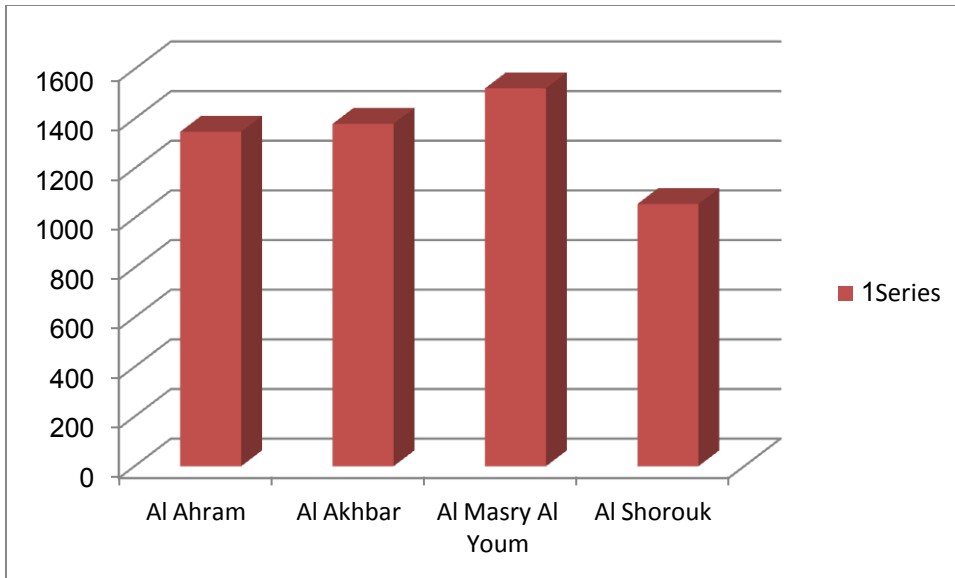
Al Ahram: 1348

Al Akhbar: 1380

Al Masry Al Youm: 1523

Al Shorouk: 1057

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[1] We had problems with obtaining a few newspaper issues, and those had to be excluded from the analysis.

In terms of type of story, 37.5 percent of the stories were pure news stories (1979 stories); 39% (2059 stories) were feature stories; and 23.2% (1227 stories) were opinion pieces or editorials.

Out of the news and feature stories analyzed, 71.6% (2917 stories) were small in size, meaning they were under ¼ of a page in size; 16.8% (683 stories) were medium in size (between ¼ of a page and up to under half a page), and only 11.6% (474 stories) were half a page or more in size.

We looked at the quality of journalism displayed in the four newspapers in terms of objectivity, and fairness and balance. Among the stories that qualified for coding on the objectivity variable (4066 stories), a good 82.2% (3344 stories) were classified as "objective", meaning that they separate fact from opinion, and their content is free from sensationalism, and free from libel or inciting negative emotions towards the group(s) mentioned. Another 14.3% (580 stories) were "somehow objective," and only 2.7% (142 stories) were "not objective."

In terms of fairness and balance, a concept at the heart of diversity, the numbers were not as good. The concept of fairness and balance was defined as "covering both/all sides of a story rather than one side." Among the stories that qualified for analysis on this variable (3270 stories), only about half (50.6%, or 1653 stories) were classified as "fair and balanced." Another 12.8% (420 stories) were classified as "somehow fair and balanced," while the remaining 36.6% (1197 stories) were classified as "not fair and balanced."

While the state owned newspapers Al Ahram and Al Akhbar tried to maintain fairness and balance, particularly during the second round of the elections, it was harder to maintain objectivity, particularly as it pertained to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces

(SCAF), who was running the country at the time, and the military in general. For example, on May 24 and 25, both newspapers ran photo spreads as part of the coverage of the voting process, in which both newspapers emphasized cliché pictures of army soldiers helping the elderly and the handicapped to the voting booths. Captions on the pictures were along the lines of "the army supports the people."

During the second round of the elections, both state owned newspapers (but Al Ahram in particular) did a better job of trying to give each candidate equal coverage in terms of tone and space. Most pages were designed symmetrically covering both candidates, with pictures even chosen to feature very similar hand and face gestures.
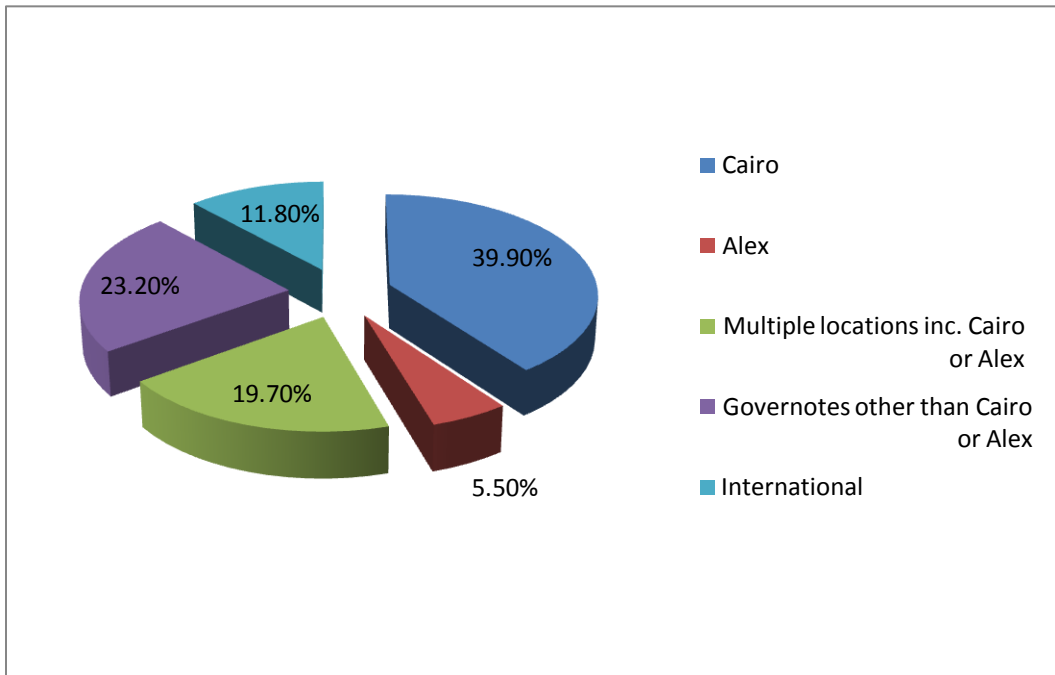
Diversity of Themes:

As with the coverage of the Parliamentary elections, a great majority of the stories (80.2% or 4248 stories) were about politics and the logistics of the electoral process. These were broken down into stories covering local politics (58.7% or 3113 stories); stories covering international politics (3.3% or 177 stories); and stories covering the logistics and the laws surrounding the electoral process (18.1% or 958 stories). Relatively very few stories actually discussed the detailed programs of the Presidential candidates. Social issues were featured in only 5.1% (269 stories); economic issues were featured in 2.3% (only 122 stories); religion was featured in 1.7% (91 stories), and crime in 2.5% (135 stories). Some of the main challenges facing Egypt had very low coverage. For example, education was only featured in seven stories (0.1%); health was only covered in 12 stories (0.2%); and science and technology in only 24 stories (0.5%).

Issues pertaining to diversity also had a very small percentage of coverage. For example, women's issues were only discussed in 38 stories (0.7%); children's issues in only seven stories (0.1%); and people with special needs in only 19 (0.4%). Issues pertaining to religious minorities, including Christians were discussed in only 34 stories (0.6%); ethnic minorities in only 17 stories (0.3%); refugees were discussed in only one story and the elderly in eight stories.

Geographical Diversity:

As with the 2011 Parliamentary elections, geographical diversity in this Presidential election coverage has improved significantly compared to before the January 25 revolution. The lack of such diversity has long been a major problem within media coverage, whereby most of the coverage was dedicated to Cairo, with some minor coverage in Alexandria, and almost no coverage in any other governorates. In this Presidential elections, out of the stories where a location could be identified (2704 stories), Cairo still ranked significantly higher than other governorates, with about 40%

of the stories dedicated to the capital (exactly 39.9% or 1078 stories). Following Cairo is Alexandria, with 5.5% or 148 stories. About one fifth (19.7% or 533 stories) covered multiple Egyptian governorates that included either Cairo or Alexandria, and another 23.2% (626 stories) was dedicated to governorates other than Cairo or Alexandria. The remaining 11.8% (319 stories) covered international locations, (such as stories covering Egyptian expatriates). This is a major improvement over the coverage of past elections, as illustrated in the following graph.

Gender Diversity:

As was the case with the Parliamentary elections coverage, gender diversity within the media coverage of the Presidential elections was disappointing. Analysis of the 5,308 stories examined showed that severe bias towards males and against females. It is worth noting that the latest United Nations demographic statistics about Egypt indicates that the gender ratio is 1.01 males to 1.00 females. The stories analyzed featured interviews with 20,312 individuals. Of these, 18,987 were males and only 1,325 were females. This is a staggering difference of 93.5% for males and only 6.5% for females. It means that basically one female is featured for every 14.3 males. This difference is almost the same difference found in Report 1 on the coverage of the Parliamentary elections.

%6.50

%93.50

■ Males
■ Females
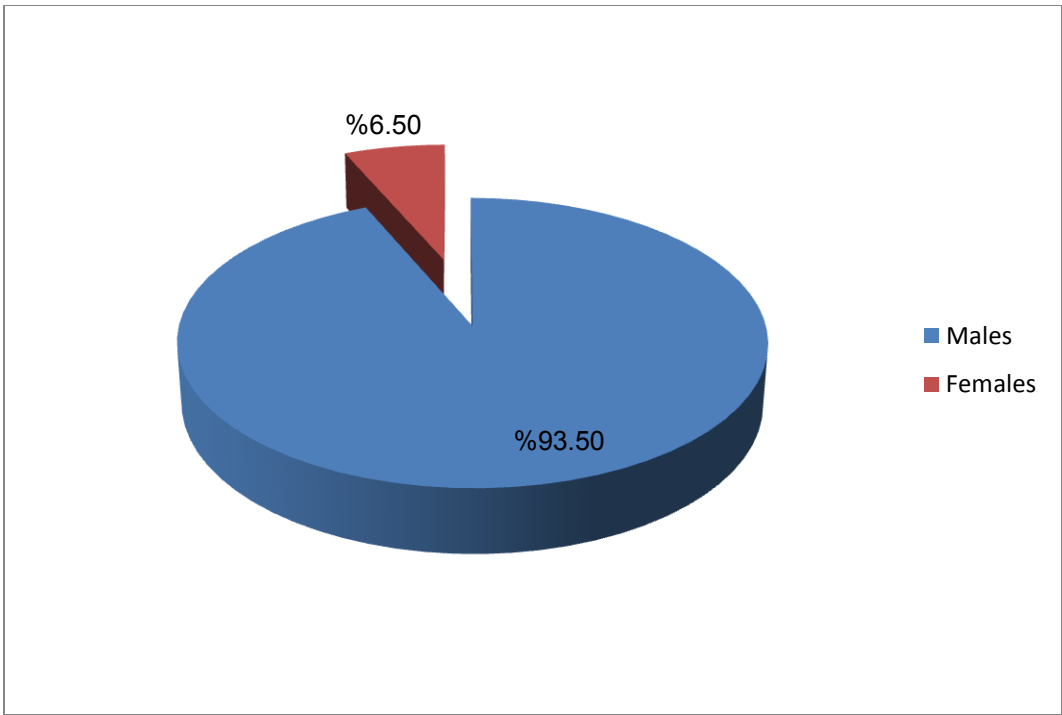
Religious Diversity:

Religious diversity is another very important aspect, and one which is not easy to measure. In order to try our best, in this report we attempted to identify Muslims, Christians, Bahai's, as well as those whose religion is unclear within the context presented. We identified an individual as Muslim if he/she had a clear Muslim name (e.g. Mohamed) or if they mentioned their religion or religious affiliation, or bore a clear sign (e.g. garment or veil) relevant to Islam. We identified an individual as Christian based on either having a clear Christian name or by mentioning their religion or church representation, or otherwise bearing a clear sign (e.g. garment or cross) relevant to Christianity. Bahai's were only classified as such if they were identified as Bahai's in the story. If a person had neither of the above attributes, he/she was listed as "unclear religion." We are aware that this is not a perfect way of measuring religion or religious diverity, since even within Islam, the majority religion in Egypt, there are different sects and diversities, and we continue to work on ways to enhance our measurement tools.

Once again, as with the coverage of the Parliamentary elections, the results of this coverage were quite disappointing. There are no Egyptian official figures of the number of Christians in Egypt, but most sources estimate Egypt's religious demography to be around 90% Muslim and 10% Christian. This analysis showed only a minority of 619 individuals with Christian names or attributes featured within the total number of those

interviewed. In comparison, those identified as Muslim were 14,538. There were no Bahai's identified in the stories analyzed. The relative percentages of this coverage out of those whose religion was identified (15,157) are 96% for Muslims and 4% for Christians.

It is useful to point out that there is a slight change in methodology between this report and the recent report we released on the coverage of the Parliamentary elections in Egypt in our classification of religions. We are aware that the methodology used previously might have under-estimated the percentage of Christians (no other minorities were identified), and we hope that the methodology we used in this report did not inflate the percentage of Christian representation. This is a problem is literature measuring religious diversity all over the world, since religious affiliations are not always obvious or easy to identify.
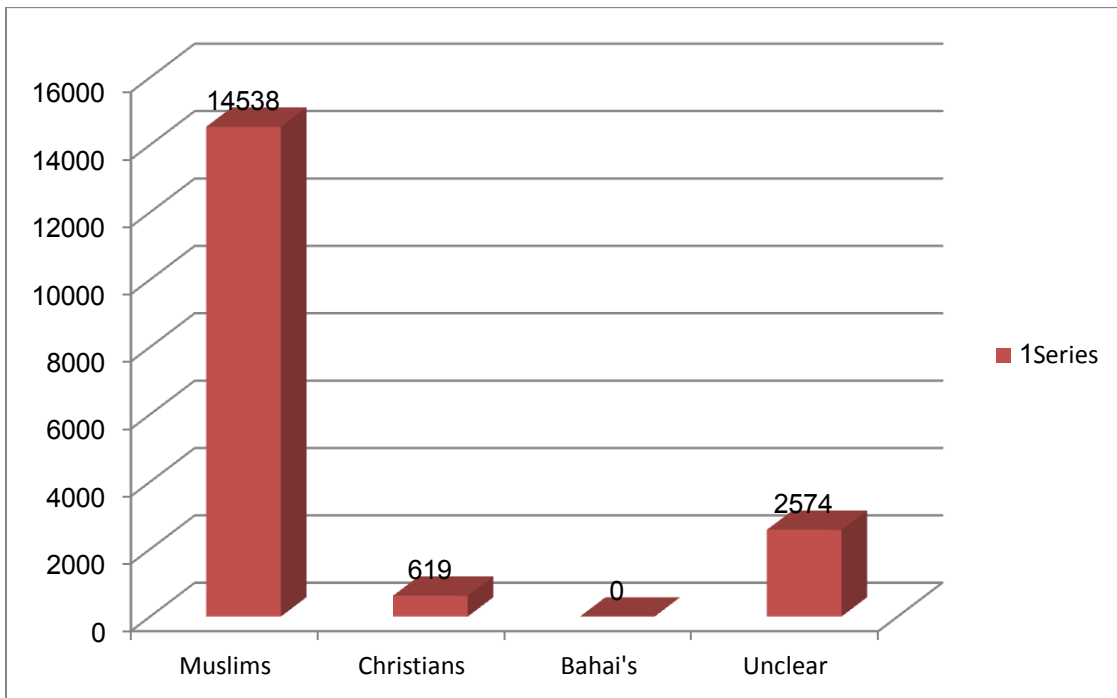
On a positive note, there were a few stories discussing Sufism and Sufis' attitudes towards the elections. For example, on May 20, Al Akhbar newspaper published a two-page special report on Sufis in Egypt, and their attitudes towards the elections. The newspaper also published a major interview with a Sufi leader on May 21. This was partly coverage for a convention that the Sufis organized entitled "Sufism and the Elections," which was covered in all the four newspapers we analyzed. All four newspapers continued coverage of the Sufis' attitudes towards the elections. This coverage is very positive because it serves to show that Islam is not a monolithic religion, and that there is diversity even within the one religion. It is worth noting that a number of

Sufi leaders openly supported Mr. Ahmed Shafiq against Dr. Mohamed Morsi, who was President of the the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, saying they were against any one entity monopolizing the state, and especially doing so in the name of religion. Similarly, members of the Hashimite way, also Muslims, were reported in the media to support Ahmed Shafiq.

Ethnic and Other Minorities:

Media representation in these elections was also disappointing for ethnic minorities as well as other important sectors of the society such as persons with disabilities, children, or the elderly. Out of the 20,312 individuals interviewed or featured in the stories, only 14 people of different ethnic origins such as Bedouins or Nubians were identified in the stories. There were also a total of 37 people identified as persons with disabilities, 23 identified as expatriates, 70 identified as elderly in stories discussing their issues, and 36 children. We are also aware of the difficulties in identifying some of these categories, but the numbers are so small that even if they are under-estimated, the absolute accurate figures still cannot be satisfactory. It is worth noting that the Egyptian State Information Service estimates the number of individuals under the age of 15 in Egypt to be 31.74%, and the number of individuals above 60 to be 6.27%.

Nevertheless, there were some attempts to include diverse populations in the coverage that should not go unnoticed. For example, on June 10, Al Masry Al Youm presented a commendable special section entitled "Messages from the people of Egypt." The section included several long features on the diverse marginalized populations of Egypt and their hopes and aspirations for the new president. These populations included Nubians, Bedouins, Upper Egyptians, slum dwellers, peasants, workers, fishermen, and street children.

II.   Television Coverage

The analysis of the television coverage of elections in this report is qualitative, based on a critical discourse analysis of episodes of the Egyptian state television main news bulleting (9 pm news), the main news bulletin on Nile News, as well as episodes of several popular talk shows, both on state television and on private, independent channels. The analysis is meant to provide some guidance into particular aspects where major improvements have taken place and other areas of concern where more efforts should be exerted.

The talk shows monitored were the main state television political talk show *Mubasher min Misr*; as well as two private, independent talk shows *Baladna Bel Masri* on OnTV, and *Al Aashera Masaan* on Dream II. When *Baladna Bel Masri* was temporarily replaced by a live coverage of the elections, we analyzed this live coverage.

As with the Parliamentary election coverage, and as with the newspaper coverage of both the Parliamentary and Presidential elections, the main area of improvement had to do with geographical diversity in covering the elections. The channels monitored had live coverage all day on election days from most governorates. Live correspondents were on the scene conducting field reports and interviews, and expert analysis was provided from the studio. It has to be noted that Egyptian state television's inclusion of different governorates in its coverage is a good step forward, even if the content of the coverage itself still needs to be improved. However, generally speaking, the geographical diversity in television coverage, although much better than before, was not as good as that provided by newspapers. As can be seen in the chart below, Cairo still had the major share of the coverage by far, with over two thirds of the stories/interviews taking place in Cairo. Issues pertaining to diversity were not popular in terms of content, with politics and logistics taking over 95% of the coverage, leaving all other issues, including diversity issues, with less than 5%.
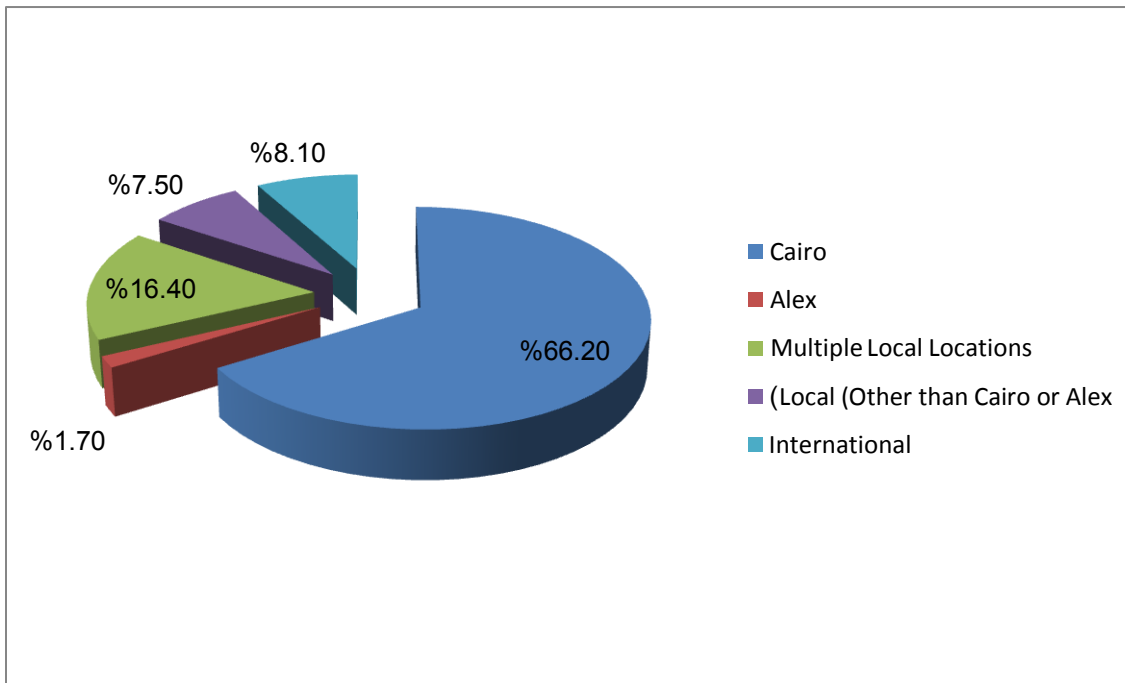
Although the news bulletins did a good job with having a network of correspondents all over Egypt, more attention should be given to training these correspondence to increase the level of their professionalism as reporters. Furthermore, the content of the news

coverage still needs major improvement, particularly in terms of diversity. Generally speaking, the news on Egyptian state television is based on political protocol rather than newsworthiness. Furthermore, the news bulletins did not display a diversity of ideologies and perspectives. Most of the featured guests or expert analysts were journalists working for state newspapers. There were hardly any experts/guests representing the "revolutionaries," the different secular and liberal political movements/parties, or the Muslim Brotherhood. Women and religious minorities are also rarely featured as experts on the Egyptian news. Ethnic minorities are almost never featured.

News anchors on state media feel a need to defend anything governmental. For example, on May 16, when journalist Suleiman Al Hakim criticized the public opinion polls regarding the presidential elections conducted by Al Ahram, the news anchor immediately interrupted him with a statement on how grand Al Ahram is, making sure to remind viewers that the expert's opinion is his alone.

The same bias towards SCAF and the army that was featured in the state owned newspapers was also featured in the Egyptian news bulletins on state television. The bulletins repeatedly showed the same cliché pictures of army soldiers helping voters into the booths, along with testimonials from citizens on how smooth the voting process is and the great role played by the army in this process.

Egyptian state television talk show *Mubasher min Masr* followed almost the same pro-regime pattern. It was not unusual to hear words of praise for SCAF and the army for running the transitional period as well as for their role in the elections (For example, the episodes of May 22 and 23). Voices representing the other side of that argument were never featured. Generally speaking, any opposition on the talk show, if at all present, is usually mild.

Geographical diversity was not good on *Mubasher min Masr*, with 91.3% of its coverage dedicated to Cairo, and only 3.3% to governorates other than Cairo or Alexandria. Out of 22 episodes analyzed featuring 275 individuals (in studio or by phone or reports), fewer than 15% were women (41 females compared to 234 males) and under 6% had Christian names. No issues of diversity as it relates to the elections were discussed. Over 95% of the topics had to do with local politics and the logistics of the elections.

Al Aashera Masaan is a popular program presented by talk show host Ms. Mona El Shazly on the private, independent channel Dream II. The program did a good job with objectivity as well as fairness and balance, with equal time dedicated to candidates, as well as graphs and charts displayed to visually engage viewers and educate them about

the electoral process and the candidates. During the second round of the elections, the program was keen on choosing pictures that displayed both candidates with similar hand and face gestures.

However, in terms of covering diversity issues, the program did not focus on them much, with over 98% of the coverage going to politics and logistics. In terms of guests, the 22 episodes we analyzed featured 67 guests, only four of which were women, and none had a clear Christian name. The program did a great job with geographical diversity though, with 92.5% of its coverage going to multiple local locations, and only 7.5% focused on Cairo.

Baladna Bel Masri is another popular talk show, presented on the private, independent channel OnTV by host Reem Magued. *Baladna Bel Masri* has been always been perceived to be on the side of the revolution, and the talk show host has been outspoken about her pro-revolution inclinations. Although the program has been quite successful in separating facts from the opinions of those affiliated with it, Ms. Magued decided to stop the show on May 21 to avoid any biases. We therefore analyzed the show during the dates of May 17 to May 21, and then we analyzed the live coverage of the elections presented at the same time slot by a variety of hosts, including sometimes Ms. Magued, as well as Mr. Yosri Fouda and Mr. Amr Khafagy.

The episodes we analyzed of *Baladna Bel Masri* mostly had a fixed format, whereby a Presidential candidate was psychologically analyzed by three psychiatrists (two males and a female). The analysis was uniform and so provided a good degree of fairness and balance. All candidates were invited to go through this analysis, but not all of them approved.

The program featured 32 guests in the episodes analyzed, only six of which were women, and only one had a clearly Christian name. It is worth mentioning though that, generally speaking, the program makes it a point every once in a while to feature a sample of Egypt's marginalized ethnic minorities, people of lower socio-economic classes, and people with disabilities.

OnTVs live coverage, of which we analyzed 16 episodes starting May 23, did a very good job of providing live coverage of the elections within every governorate of Egypt, with less than 40% of the coverage in Cairo and Alexandria. However, gender diversity was not good, with only 13 females featured out of a total of 146 people (less than 9%). About 5% of those featured had a clear Christian name.

Before concluding, we need to reiterate what we emphasized in the Parliamentary elections coverage report regarding talk shows. Generally speaking, talk shows limit themselves to a narrow pool of guests that producers and presenters are familiar with, thus depriving the audience from the chance to listen to a diversity of viewpoints. It is not at all unusual for a guest to appear on one talk show, then another, and be interviewed on the phone in a couple of other shows, all in the same evening. Despite the large number of experts, politicians, and intellectuals in the country, a very small percentage of them are therefore featured on these popular shows. This not only limits diversity but emphasizes a stereotypical image of what a talk show guest looks and sounds like.

Conclusion

This report is a scientific, yet simplified, quantitative and qualitative assessment of the diversity of the media coverage of the May-June 2012 Presidential elections in Egypt for samples of both newspapers and television. The report concludes that diversity issues are still ignored in the Egyptian media. Minority groups and the marginalized are still unheard in the mainstream media.

For the print media, we analyzed 5,308 stories published in four newspapers within the time frame of the study. Even though the journalistic standards were reasonable, the stories mostly focused on local politics and on the logistics of the Presidential elections. At the same time, the press coverage ignored other important issues of substance, as well as all issues related to inclusiveness and diversity, as they relate to women, children, the elderly, religious minorities, and ethnic minorities.

As with our recent report on the coverage of Egypt's Parliamentary elections, the analysis revealed a major improvement in terms of the geographical diversity of the coverage of these Presidential elections. No longer does the coverage focus solely on Cairo; it is now expanded to cover every Egyptian governorate. It is reassuring to see that this was not a one-time occurrence, but seems to be the new trend in Egyptian media, both government owned and private.

However, the analysis showed a severe under-representation of all minority groups in society. Females constituted only 6.5% of the overall individuals interviewed for stories, a very similar percentage to the 6.8% we revealed in the Parliamentary elections report. This basically means that for every 15 males interviewed or featured in newspaper stories, only 1 female was featured. The percentage was slightly better in television coverage, with 14.5% women representation. This is still a ratio of 1 female to every 7 males.

Other minority voices were almost non-existent in the newspaper coverage. Only 14 people of different ethnic origins such as Bedouins or Nubians were identified within the 20,312 individuals featured in the stories. There were also a total of 37 people identified as persons with disabilities, 23 identified as expatriates, 70 identified as elderly in stories discussing their issues, and 36 children. These figures are indeed alarming, particularly given the actual percentages of these groups of people in the Egyptian society.

For the television news and talk shows, while some private channels are trying their best to become more inclusive and are succeeding to varying degrees, generally speaking, a severe lack of representation of all minority groups was observed in the television coverage of the Presidential elections. Moreover, the narrow selection of a small group of talk show "star guests" poses a serious threat to diversity of thought and expression.

About the Author

Dr. Rasha Abdulla is Associate Professor and former Department Chair of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo. She has a Ph.D. in Communication (December 2003) from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. She is the recipient of several international teaching and research awards, including most recently, the AUC Excellence in Research and Creative Endeavors Award (2011). Dr. Abdulla is the author of three books and numerous articles. Her main research interests include media inclusiveness and diversity, public television and media reform, as well as the uses and effects of new media, particularly the Internet, and the link between social media and political activism. She tweets regularly on these issues and more at @RashaAbdulla and can be reached by email at rasha@aucegypt.edu.

About the Media Diversity Institute (MDI)

The [Media Diversity Institute](#) (MDI) is an international organization entirely devoted to working with the media in order to improve reporting on diversity issues which can cause disputes/conflicts at the local, national, regional or international level. We define diversity as race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, income-based discrimination, gender, and whatever else makes individuals or groups different from each other. Different but, equal! Over the last 14years MDI has worked in Europe, the former Soviet States, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Southern Asia. MDI promotes responsible journalism as a means to improve inter-community relations, increase tolerance, and encourage dialogue among individuals and groups coming from different backgrounds. We work with journalism academics and students, media decision makers and reporters, as well as with civil society organizations specialized in diversity issues. We promote responsible journalism, with special emphasis on fairness, accuracy, sensitivity, and inclusiveness.