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27 NOVEMBER
2018

Islam Ahmed Othman



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TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: info@eis-eg.org

Egypt: Media impact on public opinion

Dr. Islam Ahmed Othman

- *Egypt: Media impact on public opinion, a study on the impact of Egyptian Media on citizens' attitudes toward constitutional declarations from 2011 to 2012.*

Since the January 25 Revolution (2011) and removal of the Mubarak regime and constitution, Egypt has witnessed many successive political changes and transformations, most notably four constitutional declarations, namely:

- The first constitutional declaration, which was issued by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) on February 13, 2011, two days after the departure of former President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak. The declaration suspended the 1971 constitution and dissolved Egypt's two legislative bodies, the People's Assembly and the Consultative Assembly. A statement by SCAF said a commission would be set up to draft a new constitution, to be approved by a referendum, and that the military would remain in power for six months or until new elections could be held.

- The second constitutional declaration, which was issued by SCAF on March 30, 2011. It included amendments to some articles of the 1971 Constitution. The provisional declaration consisted of 63 articles, including a number of the amendments that were approved by a referendum on 19 March 2011.

- The third constitutional declaration, which is also known as the supplementary constitutional declaration. It was issued by the SCAF on 17 June 2012 on the second day of the 2012 presidential election. The supplementary constitutional declaration placed severe restrictions on the powers of the incoming president and granted the SCAF sweeping legislative and executive powers and greater authority over the constitution-writing process.

- The fourth constitutional declaration, which was issued by President Mohamed Morsi on November 22, 2012. It was intended to repeal the SCAF's supplementary declaration (17 June).

These constitutional declarations are new political phenomena imposed by the nature of the stage that the study is addressing – since the suspension of the 1971 Constitution after the January Revolution (2011) until the Constituent Assembly has finished drafting the new Constitution on 30 November 2012, which was passed in a referendum on 15–22 December 2012 (with 64% support, and a turnout of 33%).

Media – as a source of information and channel of knowledge together with other sources of knowledge – plays an important role in presenting such political phenomena to the public, so that people can identify, understand, and realize their dimensions and aspects, and accordingly build their own views.

However, in addressing various political phenomena in human societies, media outlets usually focus on certain dimensions and neglect others; and thus, they contribute to shaping people's opinions and attitudes towards these political phenomena in accordance with their objectives, policies, and approaches.

This study attempts to monitor and understand the role of satellite channels in shaping the attitudes of their followers towards the political phenomena witnessed by the Egyptian society.

The study Problem

The study problem here is revealing the role that was played by Egyptian satellite channels during the period under study in shaping the attitudes of its audience towards the constitutional declarations that were issued during the period between

the suspension of the 1971 Constitution on February 13, 2011, until the referendum on the 2012 Constitution on December 15, 2012.

During that stage, the media, especially satellite channels – both those run by the government and the privately-run ones – played a significant role in providing citizens with necessary information on the political issues that were raised on the Egyptian arena, including the successive constitutional declarations that characterized that period in the history of the nation, indicating confusion and lack of clarity of the State's public policies in the wake of the Revolution.

Significance of the study

This study is significant for the following reasons:

- The Egyptian January 25 Revolution and the subsequent developments in 2011 and 2012 - represent a special and very sensitive period in the history of the country, which requires studying the impact of the media on the political, social, and economic changes during that period.
- The Egyptian public relies mainly on satellite channels, both governmental and private, as a source of information. Therefore, studying the role and impact of media on society during that period is extremely important.
- The issuance of four constitutional declarations during that period made it one of the most prominent political phenomena at that time, in light of the political controversy raised after issuance of each declaration between supporters and critics – which requires studying this phenomenon.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to identify the following:

- The extent of the public's reliance on Egyptian satellite channels as a source of information.
- The objectives of this reliance and whether they were for understanding and knowledge, or direction and guidance, or entertainment and a means for spending time only.
- The effects of media, especially satellite channels, on the general public audience.
- The role of these effects on shaping the political awareness of the public.
- The role of these effects in shaping the public's attitudes towards various political issues at that time.

In addition, the study monitors and surveys features of the impact of the Egyptian public's reliance on satellite channels in terms of their attitudes towards the constitutional declarations that were issued during that period.

*Read the full study in Arabic [here](#)