

Egyptian Journalistic Professionalism in the Context of Revolution: Comparing Survey Results from Before and After the January 25, 2011 Uprising

MOHAMAD HAMAS ELMASRY¹
The University of North Alabama, USA

DINA MOHAMED BASIONY
The American University in Cairo, Egypt

SARA FARAG ELKAMEL
Columbia University, USA

This study presents the results of two comparative surveys of Egyptian print journalists carried out in late 2008 and June 2013, respectively. The surveys aimed to assess aspects of Egyptian print journalism practice and professionalism at two different points in time: during the late Hosni Mubarak era and during Mohammed Morsi's one-year term in office. The surveys addressed journalism education and training quality, work routines, perceptions of press freedom, and journalistic ideology. Results offer insights into the inner workings of Egyptian journalism before and after the 2011 revolution that ousted Mubarak and, importantly, a baseline on which to gauge Egypt's future progress on key measures of journalistic professionalism.

Keywords: Egypt, news, journalistic professionalism, revolution, Morsi, Mubarak, survey

Introduction

Egypt's historic 2011 revolution, which ousted President Hosni Mubarak after 30 years in power, was expected to transform various aspects of Egyptian society. One area in need of significant reforms was journalism. Although Egypt has been seen historically as having one of the more developed media industries in the Arab world (Amin & Napoli, 1997; Ayalon, 1995; Rugh, 2004), Egyptian journalism has

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Mohamad Hamas Elmasry: melmasry@una.edu
Dina Mohamed Basiony: basiony@aucegypt.edu
Sara Farag Elkamel: sara.farag@gmail.com
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historically been fraught with problems, including a lack of freedom from government control (Cooper, 2008; Elmasry, 2011; Farag, 2004; Mellor, 2005; Najjar, 2004; Pintak, 2008; Sakr, 2001) and poor standards of education and training (Amin, 2002; Waterbury & Richards, 2007). The ousting of Mubarak and the installation of a more democratic form of government were expected to address the problem of press freedom. Improvements in education and training will likely require sustained programs of reform. Education and training are key because they aid the development of a journalistic ideology (Weaver et al., 2003), and are important components of journalistic professionalism in general (Harless, 1990; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2003; Windahl & Rosengren, 1978).

In 2012, Egypt held the nation's first-ever democratic presidential election and elected the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi. Morsi was ousted by the military only one year into his first four-year term, however, after mass protests demanded his resignation. The Morsi era was characterized by increased media freedoms (see Elmasry, 2013; Margolis, 2013; Steele, 2013), but also attempts by the Morsi administration to restrict the media sphere (Abdulla, 2013; Fawzy, 2013). The changed political environment—along with the relatively more open news environment—offer a useful point of comparison with the Mubarak era.

The present study—based on a professionalism survey of Egyptian print journalists distributed in 2008, late in the Mubarak era, and again in 2013, during the final months of the Morsi era—grew out of nearly six months of fieldwork in Cairo conducted over the last half of 2008 and additional fieldwork in summer 2013. The fieldwork in both years also included in-depth interviews at major Egyptian dailies. The purpose of the survey was to assess various aspects of Egyptian print journalism practice and professionalism during the two time periods under study and to determine whether the cataclysmic event of 2011 produced any major changes in professionalism and practice. Specifically, the two surveys address journalism education and training quality, work routines, perceptions of press freedom, and journalistic ideology.

The survey results presented here offer insights into the inner workings of Egyptian print journalism during two important time periods divided by a popular uprising intended to bring about increased freedoms, and the findings may offer a key measure of where post-Mubarak Egyptian journalism must head if it is to offer adequate support for Egyptian democracy.

Literature Review

Contemporary Egyptian media owe much of their current form to Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's president from 1954 to 1970, and Anwar Sadat, president from 1970 to 1981. Nasser nationalized the press in 1960, and, with the exception of a brief period allowing publication of dissenting ideas following the humiliating military defeat by Israel in 1967 (Nasser, 1990), used harsh repression to silence dissent (Hopwood, 1982; Woodward, 1992). Sadat's time in power included some periods of relative political and press freedom, but his regime's prevailing character was repression reminiscent of, although not as brutal or strict as, the Nasser period.

Mubarak, Egypt's president from 1981 to February 11, 2011, took over as leader after Sadat's assassination in late 1981. Mubarak at times was willing to allot considerably more political and press freedom than either of his predecessors, but at other times was highly repressive. Overall, he exhibited both democratic and antidemocratic tendencies, with much of his rule characterized by ambivalence and inconsistency (Goldschmidt, 2008).

Mubarak spoke vigorously about the need for Egypt to democratize (Egypt State Information Service, 2007; Nasser, 1990), and he did follow through on those declarations to some extent (Elsasser, 2010; Hamdy, 2009). For instance, under Mubarak, both opposition and independent newspapers were allowed to function (Cooper, 2008; Marsot, 2007). Although opposition papers—which needed government approval in the first place—did not often adapt overly critical views (Frag, 2004), independent papers sometimes pushed the envelope. Cooper's (2008) analysis showed some tangible evidence of the influence of independent newspapers. During the sample period, the independent *Al-Masry al-Yom* was less reliant on official sources and covered more stories critical of the government. These findings were corroborated by a recent comparative study carried out by Elmasry (2011) of Egyptian opposition, independent, and government-owned newspapers. Elmasry's study showed that *Al-Masry al-Yom* and the oppositional *Al-Wafd* relied less on government sources, focused less on Mubarak and his family, frequently discussed problems in Egyptian society, and adapted a more negative tone toward the government than official newspaper *Al-Ahram*.

Despite the presence of independent and opposition newspapers, the Mubarak regime continued to maintain a tight grip on press content. The law of shame, emergency law, the Egyptian Penal Code, and the Press Law of 1996 permitted the arrest of political opponents without trial and the banning of publications, among other forms of political repression (Goldschmidt, 2008; Mellor, 2005; Sakr, 2001). For example, the emergency law (on the books since the start of Mubarak's rule in 1981) allowed Mubarak to "order censorship on correspondence of all kinds, as well as on newspapers, publications, drawings and all means of expression . . . provided that the censorship is applied to matters related to public peace or national security" (International Research and Exchange Board, 2005, p. 19). The Penal Code's 185th article, meanwhile, decrees "a fine not less than 10,000 pounds and not exceeding 20,000 pounds . . . for whomever insults a public official" (Egyptian Council of Lords and Council of Representatives, 2008, pp. 196–198).

Human rights organizations documented many abuses against journalists during the Mubarak era, including prison sentences for publishing information deemed violations against national security (see Amnesty International, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2006a, 2006b; Pintak, 2008; Reporters Without Borders, 2008; U.S. Department of State, 2009).

Overall, then, the Mubarak era was an ambivalent one in terms of journalism. Although there is evidence of liberalization and increased freedoms, the regime also used a series of tools to silence, or at least mitigate, opposition voices.

Before Mubarak had even been formally removed from power on February 11, 2011, the January 25, 2011, uprising against him brought increased flexibility for the independent press. A study by Hamdy

and Gomaa (2012) showed that, during the 18-day uprising against Mubarak, some independent news outlets openly called for the dictator's forced resignation. The 2011 revolution also witnessed unprecedented social media activism in Egypt, with citizen journalists acting as key purveyors of information (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

Attributes of Professionalism

Efforts to professionalize journalism—dating back to the early 20th century in the United States—have aimed to differentiate professional journalists from nonprofessionals and define “who is a journalist” (Musa & Domatob, 2007, p. 315). Established professional journalistic standards can, at least theoretically, lead to quality improvements, because required education, training, and ethical doctrines hold journalists and news organizations to account to universal standards (Harless, 1990).

The notion of professionalism in journalism—conceptually and in practice—is a much-studied subject in U.S. and comparative mass communication research, but research into the phenomenon has been fraught with disagreement and tension (Reese, 2001). Allison (1986) notes that a major research problem has been how to define and approach journalistic professionalism. Reese (2001), meanwhile, points out that journalistic professionalism has many “values held in tension” (p. 174) and that it is a difficult concept because scholars lack consensus about its definition.

While scholars have often conceptualized journalistic professionalism as a set of attributes—esoteric knowledge, training and expertise, salary, and a specific set of values, among other factors—which can be used to differentiate professionals from nonprofessionals (see Harless, 1990; Weaver et al., 2003), some scholars consider such an attribute-centered approach naïve because attributes, rather than existing in a meaningful way, may be myths spread by occupations (see Allison, 1986; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). Nonetheless, there seems to be some general, if tentative, consensus that an attribute-centered approach is useful. Education, salary, and ethical orientations have been key points of concentration for scholars (see Weaver et al., 2003; Windahl & Rosengren, 1978), as has the nature of the journalistic ideology—particularly as it relates to notions of objectivity, detachment, subjectivity, advocacy, and criticism (Hallin, 1992; Janowitz, 1975; Johnstone et al., 1972–1973; Weaver et al., 2003).

Deuze (2007) argues that the emergence in recent decades of a global ideology among journalists has helped define who is—and who is not—a journalist. The matter of defining journalists has also been made more problematic, however, by new technologies that make it more difficult to differentiate journalism from other types of media work (Deuze, 2007).

Some of the scholarship on press systems emphasizes professionalism as an important explanatory dimension. Ostini and Fung (2002), for instance, regard journalistic professionalism as an important variable, while Hallin and Mancini (2004) compared North American and European press systems in part on the basis of journalistic professionalism.

Thus, our survey of Egyptian journalists distributed in 2008 and 2013 includes items related to attributes, attitudes, and practices that previous studies have associated with journalistic professionalism.

We are mindful, however, of the problems attendant to the concept, and therefore regard the findings as simply initial indicators of a phenomenon that, in any given context, demands greater scrutiny and analysis from varied perspectives.

Given the Egyptian media landscape under Mubarak and Morsi, and the attributes of professionalism discussed here, this study presents the following broad research question:

RQ: How do Egyptian print journalists in two different eras and under two different presidents compare in terms of occupational values and orientations, particularly with respect to professional attributes?

Method

To answer the proposed research question, data were gathered primarily through use of a survey. The survey was distributed to a large sample of Egyptian journalists in December 2008 and, again, to another sample of journalists, in the summer of 2013. Interviews were also conducted during a nearly six-month fieldwork period in Cairo in 2008 and over one month in summer 2013. To shed additional light on the survey findings, some of the interview results are interspersed into the findings of this article.

Survey

Surveys are useful because the data they produce can describe important characteristics of a large population (Babbie, 2004; Kerlinger, 1986), and survey findings can act as a useful complement to ethnographic findings (see Hughes, 2006). To gather data from a broader representation of Egyptian journalists, a questionnaire was distributed to reporters and editors at daily Egyptian newspapers with items about journalistic professionalism (education, career path, salary, experience, etc.), work practices, and perceptions about press freedom. The survey was distributed in December 2008, near the end of a nearly six-month fieldwork period, and again in the summer of 2013.

The aim in 2008 was to distribute the survey at the (then) 12 Egyptian dailies aimed at general audiences, but this proved difficult because of time constraints and because permissions were not granted at two government-owned papers, *Al-Gumhuriya* and *Al-Misaa'i*. The 2008 survey data, therefore, were gathered from journalists at 9 daily papers: *Al-Ahram*, *Ahram al-Misaa'i*, *Rose al-Yusuf*, *Al-Misaa'iya*, *Al-Masry al-Yom*, *Al-Dustoor*, *Al-Badeel*, *Al-Wafd*, and *Al-Ahrrar*. Four of these papers (*Al-Ahram*, *Ahram al-Misaa'i*, *Rose al-Yusuf*, and *Al-Misaa'iya*) were government owned, 3 (*Al-Masry al-Yom*, *Al-Dustoor*, and *Al-Badeel*) were independent, and 2 (*Al-Wafd*, and *Al-Ahrrar*) were opposition owned.

In 2013, the survey was distributed to 7 of Egypt's 16 dailies: the government-owned *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Ahram Al-Misaa'i*, and *Al-Misaa'iya*; the independent *Al-Shorouk*, *Al-Tahrir*, and *Al-Dustor*; and the opposition party-owned *Al-Wafd*. Time constraints and the summer 2013 instability in Egypt prevented distribution of the survey at other newspapers.

In both years, random sampling proved difficult because it was not possible to receive employee lists and because the infrastructures at most newspapers do not provide journalists with many computer or Internet options.

In both years, the survey was distributed to reporters and editors who were working in the newsrooms and available on the days the newspapers were visited. The researchers visited the newspapers at midday, peak hours. Journalists who were on vacation, on leave, working in the field, or otherwise located outside of the main newsroom areas when papers were visited did not receive the questionnaire. In both years (2008 and 2013), respondents were informed of the purposes of the survey and that it was anonymous, and they were instructed to place the questionnaire in a closed box after filling it out. The overwhelming majority of journalists in the newsrooms did fill out the survey when asked. A total of 283 journalists filled out the survey in 2008, and 240 in 2013, for a total two-period sample of 523.

Although the samples were not random and cannot be said to represent Egyptian print journalists on the whole, the final samples of 283 and 240 journalists are considerably larger than Ramaprasad and Hamdy's (2006) survey of 116 journalists, which also employed a nonrandom, convenience sample, and are large enough to provide meaningful insights into the values and work habits of many Egyptian print journalists.

The survey was initially prepared in English and translated into Arabic. A draft of the survey was shown to several *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Masry al-Yom* journalists in 2008 to ensure items were understandable. Revisions were made based on their suggestions, with the most notable change affecting the length of the survey. Upon the advice of several journalists, the questionnaire was shortened substantially from its original version, which had featured many more items about a more diverse group of topics (including news values, news ethics, and organizational constraints).

The questionnaire concentrated mostly on four matters: the journalistic profession as practiced in Egypt (including questions about education, career path, salary, experience, and promotional possibilities); work routines (including questions about work day structure, story ideation, information gathering, and source-journalist relations); journalists' perceptions about press freedom in Egypt (including questions about journalist fears of jail and fines); and journalistic ideology (including questions about professional commitment and objectivity). Ideas for survey questions emerged mostly from ethnographic observations and interviews conducted during a nearly six-month stay doing fieldwork in Egypt in 2008. For example, during interviews, several journalists said they worked second jobs in television, so a question was included in the survey addressing this. Also, interview data made clear that many journalists were unhappy about what they perceived as favoritism and corrupt hiring and promotions practices, so questions were included about these issues. Some items were drawn from past survey research, such as a question about professional commitment drawn from Hughes' (2006) study of the Mexican press and another about professional commitment drawn from Ramaprasad and Hamdy's (2006) study.

Along with multiple-choice questions, the survey included Likert-type items— 2 dealing with story ideation and information sources and 10 addressing press freedom and values designed to gauge intensity as well as valence.

Interviews

Interviews are an excellent complement to survey data because they allow for greater depth (Babbie, 2004). Thus, in addition to the survey, we interviewed select journalists and editors. Most of the interviews were conducted in 2008, when a total of 88 in-depth interviews with journalists were conducted at three newspaper sites: *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Masry al-Yom*, and *Al-Wafd*. Time constraints prevented extensive interviewing in 2013, but a total of 12 interviews were conducted with journalists from several newspapers. Interviews addressed various issues, including the issues of professionalism addressed in the survey.

The next section presents results from both the primary data collection tool employed here—surveys—as well as select interview results.²

Results

Education and Training

As in most of the developing world, Egypt falls short on many educational measures. Waterbury and Richards (2007) have documented the overall poor quality of the Egyptian education system. Elementary and middle school programs are poorly funded, and at the high school level, the problems of low teacher salaries and overcrowded classrooms have led many educators to moonlight as high-cost private tutors. The curriculum tends to emphasize memorization at the expense of understanding. Scholars also have identified many flaws and failings in higher education and professional education. Egyptian scholar Hussein Amin (2002) has remarked specifically on the poor quality of Arab journalism education.

In 2008 interviews with Egyptian reporters and editors, journalists who had studied journalism in college complained that their university journalism programs were almost exclusively theoretical, that professors lacked professional training and experience, and that courses focused on rote memorization. One veteran *Al-Wafd* journalist said in 2008 that journalism education in Egypt “is garbage” and “relies exclusively on memorization.” A journalist at *Al-Ahram* said in 2008 that students “memorize but don’t understand.” Interviewed journalists also claimed that many journalists lack basic literacy qualifications because they are weak in formal/standard Arabic, the official language of Egyptian newspapers.

The survey sought to acquire a better sense of practitioners’ educational backgrounds and preparation, or lack thereof, for news work. In 2008, nearly 99% ($n = 274$) of those responding to the survey reported having a college degree, a finding consistent with Mellor’s (2005) note that journalists in

² The interview data are discussed and analyzed in detail elsewhere (see Elmasry, 2011).

the Arab world generally come from an educated, elite class of society. Overall, however, 45.1% ($n = 125$) of those surveyed in 2008 had not majored in a journalism-related program, whereas 54.9% ($n = 144$) had been either print or broadcast journalism majors. In 2013, the situation was similar, with 97.9% of journalists ($n = 232$) indicating they had a college degree, and a total of 40.9% of journalists ($n = 97$) saying they did not have degrees in journalism.

In Egypt, graduating high school students are placed into collegiate programs based on their high school exam scores, without much choice regarding major, so students who might wish to work in journalism but are assigned other majors have to seek journalism jobs after college without relevant preparation. Whether journalism majors or not, therefore, entry-level journalists lack requisite knowledge and skills and must learn them on the job.

This necessitates good on-the-job training programs, but journalists interviewed in 2008 at *Al-Ahram*, and to a lesser extent at *Al-Wafd*, expressed the belief that training is generally lacking, and at best minimal. One *Al-Wafd* investigative reporter spoke of an informal but effective on-the-job training program in place in the investigations unit that aids reporters in news story construction and language usage. An in-depth interview with an *Al-Ahram* journalist in 2013 suggests that the newspaper continues to offer only minimal training and workshop opportunities for its journalists, mostly in the areas of computer literacy, English language, and a few journalist-related sessions. The interviewed journalist said the newspaper suffers from a serious lack of professionalism, suggesting that more training would be highly beneficial. The level of professionalism for most journalists is “below zero,” she said.

In contrast, journalists at the independent *Al-Masry al-Yom* generally spoke highly in 2008 about their training programs and their management’s willingness to invest in training programs. Many 2008 *Al-Masry* interviewees cited an intensive training series administered by the BBC focusing on news writing (basic story construction, starting and ending sentences, how to use quotes, how to write features, etc.) and notions of objectivity and impartiality (i.e., to use the word *attack* instead of the word *transgression* when covering violent political conflicts) as especially helpful. According to 2013 data, training continues at *Al-Masry al-Yom*, although one journalist complained that training programs do not take place “at regular intervals” and are unit-specific.

Partly compensating for technical shortcomings in Egyptian newsrooms is a phenomenon found at many newspapers—and which appears to continue to be pervasive throughout the Egyptian newspaper system: “the desk,” jargon for a group of experienced journalists trained in news writing who are a level below desk editors in organizational hierarchies and put incoming copy into suitable form for publication. In editing the work of regular reporters, they focus on language, construction, style, and general clarity to turn originally submitted items into fit-to-print stories. One lead desk person at *Al-Masry al-Yom* said in 2008 that most journalists lack basic writing skills, so their articles require very heavy editing, and estimated that 60% of the work for the front page gets rewritten.

Career Paths

Like many Egyptian industries, journalism continues to be, for the most part, male dominated. Of journalists who responded to the survey in 2008, 64% ($n = 176$) were men and 36% ($n = 98$) were women. In 2013, 66% of respondents were men ($n = 157$), and 34% ($n = 82$) were women.

Overall, journalists surveyed in both years were relatively young, with an average age of 32.8 years in 2008 and 33.1 years in 2013. The 2008 data show, in general, that independent newspapers sampled had slightly younger staffs than opposition and government papers. Among the three independent papers, mean ages were 24.9 years, 28.2, and 28.4; for the two opposition papers, they were 36.5 and 39; and at the three government-owned papers, the mean ages of journalists were 40.4, 41, and 37.2. The official *Rose al-Yusuf* was an exception to the general pattern for government-owned papers in 2008, with a relatively young staff of 26.5 years on average. A similar pattern was found in 2013, when the average ages for journalists at the three independent papers were 26.8, 34.5, and 28.4; 37.5 at the lone opposition paper surveyed; and 37.8, 35.5, and 34 at the three government papers studied. \

The typical career path for an Egyptian newspaper journalist begins at the position of entry-level reporter. With experience and membership in the Syndicate of Journalists—a trade union that provides journalists with legal protections and secures their contractual benefits, among other functions—can come promotions to junior and, in a smaller number of cases, senior editor positions. Thus, many Egyptian journalists have an early career objective of gaining membership in the syndicate, since it constitutes a sort of official recognition as a professional journalist and incorporation into the occupational community.

There were about 6,000 members of the organization in the mid-2000s (Pintak & Ginges, 2008).³ To gain entry, applicants must have at least six months' experience at daily newspapers (or one year of experience at weeklies), receive formal recommendations from their employers, present an archive of work and pass an exam. Among 2008 survey respondents, 59% ($n = 161$) said they were syndicate members, and 41% ($n = 114$) said they were not. In 2013, a greater percentage of surveyed journalists (68.5%, $n = 163$) indicated being members of the syndicate. Nonmembers are at a disadvantage when covering certain stories and dealing with certain government sources, some of whom refuse to speak with journalists who do not have this imprimatur of professionalism.

The survey confirmed the observation that Egyptian journalists make relatively modest livings (Rugh, 2004). More than half of 2008 respondents, 51% ($n = 143$), earned 1,000 Egyptian pounds (about \$182) per month or less, while three-quarters, 77% ($n = 214$), earned 1,500 £E (about \$272) or less monthly. Survey results showed that in 2008 employees of *Al-Ahram* and *Ahram al-Misaa'i* were the best paid, followed by *Al-Masry al-Yom's* journalists. *Al-Ahram* has a reputation as the most financially secure of the government publishing houses, and *Al-Masry al-Yom* is owned by some of the wealthiest businessmen in Egypt, so these results were not surprising. *Rose al-Yusuf* and *Al-Dustoor*, with the

³ The researchers were unable to locate more recent published membership figures, and attempts in 2013 to obtain figures from the syndicate were unsuccessful.

youngest staffs of all the newspapers sampled, offered the lowest 2008 salaries, with all 33 respondents from the former and 36 of the 38 respondents from the latter earning 1,000 £E or less monthly.

The 2013 survey results show that 2013 salaries were higher than 2008 salaries, but still relatively low, particularly considering that the relatively modest increases do not necessarily offset cost-of-living increases. In 2013, only 26.5% ($n = 61$) of journalists earned less than 1,000 £E per month, and more than half (51.8%, $n = 119$) earned more than 1,500 £E per month. Journalists at *Al-Ahram*, *Ahram Al-Misaa'i*, and *Al-Wafd* were the best paid in 2013, with more than 60% of surveyed journalists at *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Ahram Al-Misaa'i* and 36% of *Al-Wafd* journalists earning more than 2,000 £E per month.

Interview data suggest that the lower salaries were a major problem in the eyes of journalists in both 2008 and 2013, including those earning relatively more at some newspapers. Making ends meet can be difficult even on salaries of 2,000 £E (equal to about \$300 in late 2013) per month, particularly for journalists who support families; many feel compelled to seek second jobs at other media outlets to supplement their incomes. Such moonlighting sometimes creates awkward situations; for example, a journalist might work for an independent newspaper by day and a government paper by night, or vice versa—which indeed was the case with several interviewees. Nearly a third of respondents in both years (32% in 2008; 30% in 2013) reported a second job for another media organization. Interviewees made it clear that financial considerations are the main impetus.

In interviews, journalists acknowledged that the stresses and strains of working two jobs can affect job performance. For example, a journalist may feel pressure to finish a story for one news organization quickly to go on to an assignment for another outlet. Moreover, interviews at *Al-Masry al-Yom* in 2008 suggest that journalistic integrity may be compromised in other ways. Some newspaper reporters who also work in television news sometimes contact TV supervisors with story suggestions based on what their newspaper will be running the next day, giving the TV station the chance to produce and broadcast news that evening before it sees print. An *Al-Tahrir* journalist interviewed in 2013 complained that balancing the different editorial slants of multiple employers can be difficult.

Salary concerns were a major issue at newspapers in 2013, as exemplified by a protest held by *Al-Shorouk* newspaper journalists in June 2013, just as data were being collected for this study. Low salaries were a primary cause of the protest. One journalist griped, "How do you think we can work when [the administration] treats us with such neglect?" Initially, many journalists busy with the protest did not want to complete the survey, but volunteered upon finding out that the survey included a question about salary. One journalist remarked: "You came at the right time."

Another area explored in the survey was hiring and promotions in newsrooms. It is widely understood that Egyptian society works partly on favoritism; to get a job, get promoted, receive quality health care or other services, or avoid legal penalties, one usually needs a *wusta*, or connection, to an important person. Indeed, this arguably corrupt social practice was one of the complaints of the January 25, 2011, revolutionaries. People without connections, which are deeply embedded in the Egyptian

system, are often ill-fated.⁴ As a popular idiom about Egypt goes: The system isn't corrupt; corruption is the system (quoted in Kester, 2008, p. 501).

During our observations of newsrooms in 2008, journalists at *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Masry al-Yom*, and *Al-Wafd* complained about corrupt hiring and promotional practices at their newspapers, and a senior editor at *Al-Ahram* acknowledged that *wusta*—people employing family and friends—has led to an employee surplus at that paper and other government papers.

In response to a survey question asking journalists how they had gotten their jobs, 24% ($n = 65$) of 2008 and 27% ($n = 66$) of 2013 respondents said they had been hired due to personal connections. In 2008, 61% ($n = 161$) of surveyed journalists said they were hired as result of their qualifications, compared with 52% ($n = 124$) in 2013. The 24% and 27% figures seem relatively low, especially considering the concerns often expressed during interviews about corrupt hiring practices; but it may be that only about one-fourth of journalists were willing to admit having used the route (given that the response, even though anonymous, may not be socially desirable), so the figure may well be an understatement. For some papers, the proportion of respondents attributing their hiring to connections was much higher; for example, in 2008, 41% ($n = 18$) at *Al-Ahram* and 47% ($n = 9$) at *Al-Wafd* chose this response. The situation was similar in 2013, when 52% of *Al-Ahram* journalists and 37% of *Al-Wafd* journalists reported being hired on the basis of personal connections. Results for this item are displayed in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Basis for Hiring at Egyptian Newspapers According to Egyptian Journalists in 2008.

Newspaper	Qualifications		Personal connection		Other		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (government)	14	32	18	41	12	27	44
<i>Rose al-Yusuf</i> (government)	29	88	4	12	0	0	33
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (government)	15	68	3	14	4	18	22
<i>Al-Misaa'iya</i> (government)	13	46	7	25	8	29	28
<i>Masry al-Yom</i> (independent)	31	76	6	15	4	10	41
<i>Al-Badeel</i> (independent)	20	67	5	17	5	17	30
<i>Al-Dustoor</i> (independent)	25	64	10	26	4	10	39
<i>Al-Ahrar</i> (opposition)	11	65	3	18	3	18	17
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	8	42	9	47	2	11	19
Total	166	61	65	24	42	15	273

⁴ Indeed, this arguably corrupt social practice was one of the complaints of the January 25, 2011, revolutionaries.

Table 2. Basis for Hiring at Egyptian Newspapers According to Egyptian Journalists in 2013.

Newspaper	Qualifications		Personal connection		Other		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>
	<i>Al-Ahram</i> (government)	11	33	17	52	5	15
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (government)	12	38	10	32	10	32	32
<i>Al-Misaa'iya</i> (government)	25	61	7	17	9	22	41
<i>Al-Shourouk</i> (independent)	29	67	8	19	6	14	43
<i>Al-Dustor</i> (independent)	10	45	7	32	5	23	22
<i>Al-Tahrir</i> (independent)	21	60	6	17	8	23	35
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	16	53	11	37	3	10	30
Total	124	53	66	28	46	19	236

Another survey item asked journalists to indicate the basis on which promotions at their newspapers typically take place. Many of the respondents were reporters or lower-level editors and not responsible for managerial decisions, so their answers may reflect perceptions rather than actuality, but even so, they can shed light on work environments and newsroom politics. Overall, in 2008 45% ($n = 117$) of journalists indicated that personal relationships and favoritism determine promotions at the newspapers, 51% ($n = 133$) said promotions are based on qualifications, and 5% ($n = 12$) said promotions are based on both qualifications and personal relationships and favoritism. The papers with the most respondents claiming that promotions are based on personal relations and favoritism were *Al-Wafd* (70%, $n = 14$), *Al-Ahram* (68%, $n = 30$), and *Al-Dustoor* (55%, $n = 21$), and those with the lowest were *Rose al-Yusuf* (19%, $n = 6$) and *Ahram al-Misaa'i* (23%, $n = 5$). These data do not suggest any dominant pattern by ownership type, indicating perhaps promotional practices may be dictated to a large extent by managerial administrations and practices of editors-in-chief.

In 2013, a larger percentage of respondents said promotions were made on the basis of favoritism. Overall, 55% ($n = 125$) of surveyed journalists indicated that promotions were based on personal relationships and favoritism, 40% ($n = 90$) said promotions were based on qualifications, and 4% ($n = 9$) indicated that promotions were given on the basis of both qualifications and personal relationships and favoritism. Results for beliefs about promotions practices are shown in Tables 3 and 4. In 2013, there was not a dominant or pronounced difference based on ownership pattern, although results suggest that more journalists at government papers tended to think that promotions based on personal relationships and favoritism were common.

Table 3. Basis for Promotions at Egyptian Newspapers According to Egyptian Journalists in 2008.

Newspaper	Qualifications		Personal relationships and favoritism		Both qualifications and personal relationships and favoritism		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (government)	9	20	30	68	4	9	44
<i>Rose al-Yusuf</i> (government)	25	78	6	19	1	3	32
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (government)	16	73	5	23	1	5	22
<i>Al-Misaa'iya</i> (independent)	15	63	9	38	0	0	24
<i>Masry al-Yom</i> (independent)	20	50	19	48	1	3	40
<i>Al-Badeel</i> (independent)	19	63	8	27	3	10	30
<i>Al-Dustoor</i> (independent)	16	42	21	55	1	3	38
<i>Al-Ahrrar</i> (opposition)	8	62	5	38	0	0	13
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	5	25	14	70	1	5	20
Total	133	51	117	45	12	5	262

Table 4. Basis for Promotions at Egyptian Newspapers According to Egyptian Journalists in 2013.

Newspaper	Qualifications		Personal relationships and favoritism		Both qualifications and personal relationships and favoritism		Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (government)	6	20	23	77	0	0	29
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (government)	8	27	22	73	0	0	30
<i>Al-Misaa'iya</i> (government)	17	40	21	49	4	9	42
<i>Al-Shourouk</i> (independent)	16	39	22	54	3	7	41
<i>Al-Dustor</i> (independent)	8	40	12	60	0	0	20
<i>Al-Tahrir</i> (independent)	21	66	10	31	1	3	32
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	14	47	15	50	1	3	30
Total	90	40	125	55	9	4	224

Professional Ideology

Hallin and Mancini (2004) suggest that basic ideas about journalism constitute an important part of journalistic professionalism. Survey questions about professional commitment, journalism objectivity, and press philosophy touched on this issue.

One item, borrowing from Hughes' (2006) survey of Mexican journalists, asked journalists to indicate to whom they felt most professionally committed among the choices of: yourself, your newspaper, your country/society, your profession, or more than one. Results, presented in Tables 5 and 6, show that, in 2008, journalists at independent newspapers felt more committed to the journalistic profession than those at government or opposition newspapers, and journalists at government newspapers were more committed to the Egyptian nation than either independent or opposition journalists. This pattern suggests that journalists may have been ideologically socialized into the orientations of their respective newspapers—that is, government papers representing first and foremost the interests of the nation and independent papers claiming professional norms of objectivity and balance as distinguishing features—or that journalists seek work at news outlets with which they share ideologically similarities; or that both dynamics are in play.

Differences based on ownership type were not as pronounced in 2013, responses by the independent *Al-Dustor* newspaper, which showed a higher proportion of journalists being loyal to the profession than other newspapers, notwithstanding. The change from 2008 to 2013 may stem from Egypt's changing political and media environment after January 25, 2011, and a sense of disenfranchisement felt on the part of many relatively liberal journalists at independent newspapers. Many of Egypt's liberals felt alienated and dissatisfied with the Muslim Brotherhood-led government, perhaps leading more of those journalists to indicate they felt more loyalty to themselves than their newspapers, their country, or their profession. In 2013, 26 out of 100 (26%) of the journalists working at independent newspapers indicated being most loyal to themselves, compared to only 13 out of 113 (12%) of journalists working at independent newspapers in 2008.

Table 5. Professional Commitment of Egyptian Journalists in 2008.

Newspaper	Yourself		Your newspaper		Your country/ society		Your profession		More than one		Total <i>N</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (govt)	9	20	1	2	15	33	16	36	4	9	45
<i>Rose al-Yusuf</i> (govt)	6	19	2	6	10	31	12	38	2	6	32
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (govt)	4	18	1	5	11	50	5	23	1	5	22
<i>Al-Misaa'iya</i> (govt)	5	18	3	11	6	21	13	46	1	4	28
<i>Masry al-Yom</i> (independent)	3	7	3	7	9	21	26	62	1	2	42
<i>Al-Badeel</i> (independent)	3	9	4	13	5	16	16	50	4	13	32
<i>Al-Dustoor</i> (independent)	7	18	4	10	8	21	18	46	2	5	39
<i>Al-Ahrar</i> (opposition)	3	18	4	24	2	12	6	35	2	12	17
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	8	36	0	0	5	23	9	41	0	0	22
Total	48	17	22	8	71	25	121	43	17	6	279

Table 6. Professional Commitment of Egyptian Journalists in 2013.

Newspaper	Yourself		Your newspaper		Your country/ society		Your profession		More than one		Total <i>N</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (govt)	11	33	2	6	7	21	10	30	3	9	33
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (govt)	7	22	2	6	12	38	11	34	0	0	32
<i>Al-Misaa'iya</i> (govt)	8	18	4	9	14	32	17	39	1	2	44
<i>Al-Shourouk</i> (independent)	12	27	2	5	8	18	18	41	4	9	44
<i>Al-Dustor</i> (independent)	3	14	0	0	6	27	12	55	1	5	22
<i>Al-Tahrir</i> (independent)	11	32	6	18	7	21	10	29	0	0	34
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	6	20	3	10	10	33	9	30	2	7	30
Total	58	24	19	8	64	27	87	36	11	5	239

Another survey item asking journalists to indicate which newspaper ownership type they thought performed best also revealed disparity among respondents working at papers of differing ownership categories. Differences across ownership type were observed in both 2008 and 2013. A majority of respondents in both 2008 (69%, $n = 184$) and 2013 (66%, $n = 150$) believe that independent papers do

the best job of expressing the problems of Egyptian citizens, but they also tended to show comparatively more support for their own newspaper ownership category. For example, none of the independent or opposition journalists surveyed in 2008, and only four of the independent or opposition journalists surveyed in 2013, believe government papers are the best performers. However, about 27% ($n = 32$) of journalists working at government-owned papers in 2008, and 23% ($n = 27$) of journalists working at government-owned papers in 2013, said government papers do the best job. In contrast, independent journalists overwhelmingly believe independent papers are superior, while many of the respondents from opposition papers believe that type does the best. In other words, as shown in Tables 8 and 9, journalists' beliefs about newspaper performance tend to correspond—to some extent—with the ownership category to which their employing paper belongs. The 2013 results are somewhat surprising given that many of the journalists working at government papers are holdovers from the Mubarak regime era, and few of them would appear to be supporters of political Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi.

Table 7. Best Category of Egyptian Newspapers According to Egyptian Journalists in 2008.

Newspaper	Govt papers		Independent papers		Opposition papers		Both govt & independent papers		Both opposition & independent papers		Total <i>N</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (government)	8	20	24	59	5	12	2	5	2	5	41
<i>Rose al-Yusuf</i> (government)	8	26	21	68	0	0	1	3	1	3	31
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (government)	7	32	14	64	1	5	0	0	0	0	22
<i>Al-Misaa'iyah</i> (government)	9	35	14	54	3	12	0	0	0	0	26
<i>Masry al-Yom</i> (independent)	0	0	39	93	2	5	0	0	1	2	42
<i>Al-Badeel</i> (independent)	0	0	24	77	6	19	0	0	1	3	31
<i>Al-Dustoor</i> (independent)	0	0	35	90	4	10	0	0	0	0	39
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (opposition)	0	0	4	29	6	43	0	0	4	29	14
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	0	0	9	43	9	43	0	0	3	14	21
Total	32	12	184	69	36	13	3	1	12	4	267

Table 8. Best Category of Egyptian Newspapers According to Egyptian Journalists in 2013.

Newspaper	Govt papers		Independent papers		Opposition papers		Both govt & independent papers		Both opposition and independent papers		Total <i>N</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<i>Al-Ahram</i> (government)	7	24	18	62	3	10	1	3	0	0	29
<i>Ahram al-Misaa'i</i> (government)	5	19	18	67	2	7	2	7	0	0	27
<i>Al-Misaa'iya</i> (government)	10	23	23	54	5	12	1	2	2	5	41
<i>Al-Shourouk</i> (independent)	2	5	38	58	3	7	0	0	0	0	43
<i>Al-Dustor</i> (independent)	0	0	17	81	3	14	0	0	1	5	21
<i>Al-Tahrir</i> (independent)	1	3	23	66	9	26	0	0	2	6	35
<i>Al-Wafd</i> (opposition)	1	3	13	43	12	40	0	0	4	13	30
Total	26	12	150	66	37	16	4	2	9	4	226

A series of five-point Likert items at the end of the survey measured the degree to which journalists in both periods felt they were relatively free to report and publish, and felt fear of punishment. Responses showed inconsistency, with journalists indicating the system was freer in 2008, but that they felt freer and that there was less risk of punishment in 2013.

In 2013, respondents were more likely to feel that the Egyptian political system is overly restrictive on reporting. A total of 24% of 2013 respondents strongly agreed with the statement "The nature of the Egyptian political system restricts my reporting too much," and 36% agreed (for a total of 60%). This compares with just 19% strongly agreeing in 2008 and 27% agreeing (for a total of 46%). Consistent with this result, more 2008 respondents than 2013 respondents believed that "There is a sufficient degree of press freedom in Egypt at the present time." A total of 22% of 2008 respondents strongly agreed with the statement, and 38% agreed (for a total of 60%). In 2013, however, only 19% of respondents strongly agreed, with 32% agreeing (for a total of 51%).

In contrast to these figures, however, some items suggest that journalists believed 2013 to be a freer period. More 2013 respondents than 2008 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I feel relatively free to report what I want and how I want." A total of 66.9% of 2013 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, compared to 62.5% of 2008 respondents. Also, a total of

56.9% of 2008 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Government restrictions on the press cause me to self-censor my reporting at least some of the time," compared with a total of 52.4% of 2013 respondents. Moreover, journalists seemed to fear punishments—fines or prison sentences—more in 2008 than in 2013. In 2008, 58.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I believe that if my reporting were too aggressive I may risk being fined." In 2013, a total of 52.2% of journalists agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. With regard to fear of prison, 54.2% of 2008 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I believe that if my reporting were too aggressive I may risk being imprisoned," compared with 48.5% of respondents in 2013.

The ambivalence reflected here may be the result of disappointment with the policies of Morsi, which sometimes included unnecessary restrictions against journalists, and which underwhelmed a postrevolutionary press corps looking for significantly more freedoms. It is also possible, given that many Egyptian journalists have difficulty separating their roles as reporters from their roles as political activists (Schleifer, 2013)—and a general antipathy to Islamists that "has deep roots among Egyptian cultural elites" (El Shamsy, 2013)—that journalists were more harsh in their responses to freedom-measuring questions than they may have been otherwise. Empirically, there is little question that journalists in the brief Morsi era were freer to write—about the president, his party, and the government—than in the Mubarak era (see Elmasry and El-Nawawy, 2014). The press frequently attacked Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in ways not inconsistent with Mubarak-era reporting. As one 2013 journalist at *Al-Dustor* said, "What do you mean there is no freedom of speech in Egypt today? What else should happen? Every single day every talk show host on every Egyptian talk show tarnishes the president and the regime. What else do they [media practitioners] need?" Another journalist at the independent *Al-Tahrir* newspaper said that the paper sought explicitly to publish stories that would make the Muslim Brotherhood look bad and avoided stories that would make the government look good. If an article did not include criticism of the government, she said, it may not be approved by editors. Another journalist at *Al-Wafd* said that the paper is willing to add information to a story to make it appear more negative. He recalled an incident in which he wrote an article reporting that a famous Egyptian actor was being honored at a film festival in Alexandria, Egypt. Although the story did not have anything to do with the government, the editor altered the headline to suggest that the Brotherhood is against art, the journalist said.

Discussion and Conclusion

The survey and interview results presented in this article place Egyptian newspaper journalists working in two separate periods relatively low on some common measures of professionalism and do not suggest that any significant improvement in professional standards occurred between 2008 and 2013. As one *Al-Dustor* journalist interviewed in 2013 said sarcastically upon learning of our research about journalistic professionalism in Egypt: "Is there [journalistic] professionalism in Egypt?"

In general, the Egyptian print journalism system continues to be plagued by considerable weaknesses, including a relatively large number of journalists without journalism-related degrees, weak training programs, and relatively low salaries for journalists. Poor salaries without fair opportunities for advancement caused 32% of journalists in 2008 and 30% of journalists in 2013 to seek second jobs, forcing many journalists to divide their time and energy between two outlets. Egypt's journalism

education—like its education system in general—is in need of major improvement, and a fairly large proportion of journalists surveyed in both 2008 and 2013 have not attained the imprimatur of professionalism represented by membership in the national Syndicate of Journalists. Also, previous analyses (see Elmasry, 2011, 2013; Schleifer, 2013) suggest that objectivity, or the lack thereof, continues to be a problem in Egypt. One *Al-Dustor* journalist noted that objectivity is lacking in Egypt, saying that he has worked at several newspapers and television news outlets and that management has always attempted to explicitly bias news reports. The Egyptian government—both the Mubarak regime in 2008 and the Morsi administration in 2013—has also worked to restrict media freedom. Although it appears that the brief Morsi era was freer than the Mubarak era, restrictive laws—which the Morsi administration occasionally used—remain on the books.

On the other hand, the survey and interviews yield some evidence of an emerging professional ideology among journalists in Egypt. Those at independent newspapers, who tend to be younger on average, appear to hold different beliefs about the role of journalism in society than journalists at government-owned papers, who are older on average. Journalists at independent newspapers—in both 2008 and 2013—were more likely to express commitment to their profession over themselves, their papers, or their country and to take pride in the work of their brand of paper, which they believe does the best job of reporting on the problems of Egyptian citizens.

Overall, this research points to several issues needing to be addressed by Egyptian university journalism programs, newspapers, and individual journalists. Future research should attempt to provide assessments of professionalism in a post-Morsi era that should yield greater flexibility for social change in general, and educational and occupational change in particular.

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