

EGYPT

	2011	2012
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	Partly Free	Partly Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	12	14
Limits on Content (0-35)	14	12
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	28	33
Total (0-100)	54	59

* 0=most free, 100=least free

POPULATION: 82 million
INTERNET PENETRATION 2011: 36 percent
WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS BLOCKED: Yes
NOTABLE POLITICAL CENSORSHIP: No
BLOGGERS/ ICT USERS ARRESTED: Yes
PRESS FREEDOM STATUS: Partly Free

INTRODUCTION

During the opening months of 2011, the world witnessed a series of demonstrations that soon toppled Hosni Mubarak's 30-year presidency. The Egyptian revolution received widespread media coverage during the Arab Spring not only because of Egypt's position as a main political hub in the Middle East and North Africa, but also because activists were using different forms of media to communicate the events of the movement to the world. While the Egyptian government employed numerous tactics to suppress the uprising's roots online—including by shutting down internet connectivity, cutting off mobile communications, imprisoning dissenters, blocking media websites, confiscating newspapers, and disrupting satellite signals in a desperate measure to limit media coverage—online dissidents were able to evade government pressure and spread their cause through social-networking websites. This led many to label the Egyptian revolution the Facebook or Twitter Revolution.

Since the introduction of the internet in 1993, the Egyptian government has invested in internet infrastructure as part of its strategy to boost the economy and create job opportunities. The Telecommunication Act was passed in 2003 to liberalize the private sector while keeping government supervision and control over information and communication technologies (ICTs) in place. To assure its power, the government used multilayered measures to control ICTs, which have varied from establishing restrictive laws and regulations, to monitoring dissenters and limiting their ability to disseminate political messages online. In several cases, the government used its security arm to intimidate, harass, and detain activists.

These actions, however, did not prevent Egyptians from developing online groups and interacting in virtual communities to discuss issues of common concern. For activists, internet technologies, especially social media websites, have provided not only a tool to access information but also a medium to create a new, virtual world with the powerful ability to influence the real world. Meanwhile, the former regime underestimated the power of the internet, seeing it a space for the opposition to vent.

The current governing authorities in Egypt now have a keener understanding of the revolutionary power of the internet, especially social media. When the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took over the government in February 2011, the military administration maintained many of its predecessor's tactics of control over ICTs, keeping mobile phones, the internet, and social media under vigorous surveillance. Furthermore, new high-tech tools were installed to monitor cyber discussions, and throughout 2011 and early 2012, several activists and bloggers were intimidated, beaten, or tried in military courts for “insulting the military power” or “disturbing social peace.”

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

Recognizing the importance of a strong ICT sector for sustainable economic growth, the Egyptian government long considered the development of the information technology (IT) sector a national priority. In 1999, the government established a Ministry of Communication and Information Technology headed by Ahmed Nazif, who in July 2004 became the last prime minister of Egypt in Mubarak's era.¹ As prime minister, Nazif led a technocrat/business-focused government that believed technology could be controlled and managed if steered by the right policies.² Indeed, the Egyptian IT sector developed rapidly over the past decade, with over 2,000 IT companies generating an average of US\$7.6 billion for the Egyptian economy per year.³ Furthermore, the Egyptian ICT industry experienced an annual growth rate of 13 percent between 2004 and 2010 and continued to grow in 2011, despite the economic uncertainty following the events of early 2011.⁴

¹ Sherif Kamel, Dina Rateb, and Mohamed El-Tawil, “The Impact of ICT Investments on Economic Development in Egypt,” *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries* 36 (2009), <http://www.ejisdc.org/ojs2/index.php/ejisdc/article/view/524/264>.

² “Technology Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy, 2011-2014,” Technology Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center, January 2011, http://tiiec.gov.eg/backend/Publications%20Files/TIEC_Strategy.pdf.

³ Ahmed El Gody, *Journalism in a Network: The Role of ICTs in Egyptian Newsrooms* (Örebro: Örebro University Press, 2012).

⁴ “Egypt Information Technology Report Q4 2011,” Blackmere, March 3, 2012, <http://www.transworldnews.com/1024048/c1/egypt-information-technology-report-q4-2011-new-market-research-report>.

Internet use in Egypt has increased rapidly, with internet penetration growing from 12.6 percent in 2006 to 35.7 percent in 2011.⁵ Further, the number of high-speed internet users reached 18 million households with a 33 percent monthly increase, though there are reports that eight million households using high-speed internet share the connection, often illegally. Meanwhile, Egypt's mobile phone penetration rate stood at nearly 102 percent in 2011, increasing from approximately 24 percent in 2006.⁶

Although these figures are promising, there are a number of obstacles hindering access to ICTs, including a high computer illiteracy rate,⁷ poor telecommunications infrastructure, particularly in rural areas and slums, and flagging economic conditions, with nearly a fifth of the population living below the national poverty line.⁸ Moreover, ICTs are often viewed with suspicion, and women's access to technology has become a growing concern especially in rural areas.⁹

With Egyptian society becoming increasingly electronic, more people are going online to create a parallel information and communication system to bypass the government's feeble one. Until 2010, the Egyptian government showed a relaxed attitude towards access of ICTs and did not censor websites or use high-end technologies to block online discussions. On the contrary, the government removed many of the obstacles experienced in neighboring Arab countries, for example, by enabling access to the encrypted BlackBerry instant messaging service.¹⁰ However, with the rise of online dissidents, the authorities started to change its attitude towards internet access.

The January 2011 revolution revealed a centralized ICT system with a relatively small number of fiber-optic cables and a few companies that are beholden to strict license rules and government regulations.¹¹ For example, although Egypt has 214 internet service providers (ISPs), the country's bandwidth is controlled by a handful of providers—Egypt

⁵ Ibid.; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "Percentage of individuals using the Internet, fixed (wired) Internet subscriptions, fixed (wired)-broadband subscriptions," 2011, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>.

⁶ According to official statistics by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the number of mobile phone lines reached 91.3 million, reflecting a penetration rate of 112.3 percent as of January 2012. "ICT Indicators in Brief, February 2012 Monthly Issue," Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, February 2012, http://mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications_442012000_Eng%20Flyer-Feb2012-3.pdf.

⁷ Estimated at 94 percent in 2007. "Computer Literacy & Broadband in Egypt," Ashoka Arab World (blog), December 12, 2007, <http://ashokaarabworld.wordpress.com/2007/12/12/computer-literacy-broadband-in-egypt/>.

⁸ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC/countries/EG?display=default>

⁹ Ahmed El Gody, *New Media New Audience New Topics and New forms of Censorship in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

¹⁰ "Country profile: Egypt," Africa & Middle East Telecom News, 2012,

http://www.africantelecomsnews.com/resources/AfricaOpp_Egypt.shtml; Shorouk El Hariry and Marine Weitzmann, "Egypt's BlackBerry users anxious over regional bans," The Daily News Egypt, August 5, 2010,

<http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/people/blackberry-users-anxious-over-possible-ban-dp1.html>.

¹¹ CircleID Reporter, "Egyptian Government Shuts Down Most Internet and Cell Services," CircleID, January 28, 2011, http://www.circleid.com/posts/egyptian_government_shuts_down_most_internet_and_cell_services/.

Telecom, Internet Egypt, Vodafone/Raya Etisalat Misr, and TE Data—which together manage Egypt’s internet traffic.¹² Although these ISPs are privately-owned, the Egyptian government maintains tight control through strict rules and regulations as well as by monitoring their performance.¹³

Government control over online access made it easy to block internet traffic in less than an hour on January 27, 2011 following the revolutionary demonstrations. The government shut down almost all of its Border Gateway Protocol routes, which disconnected the country from the global network.¹⁴ Only the Noor service provider (which served the country’s cabinet, public banks, and Egypt’s airways) was left operating but was denied service couple of days later after several activists began accessing the network from a local office in Alexandria.¹⁵ Similarly, mobile operators were ordered to cut all mobile phone service, including mobile internet and SMS (short message service) text-messaging, under the pretext that “foreign intelligence [was] using communication technologies to plan terrorist actions,” according to State Intelligence.¹⁶ In an interview, Mobinil founder Naguib Sawiris stated that under the company’s terms of agreement, the government had the right to cancel any or all mobile services when necessary.¹⁷

During the events of January 2011, the government also shut down the main point of entry for international submarine fiber-optics, the Ramsis Exchange, and its two exchange points, the Cairo Regional Internet Exchange and the Middle East Internet Exchange. To restrict media coverage, the government distorted NileSat’s television signals and limited the availability of data bandwidth. The unprecedented restrictions created widespread international condemnation of the Egyptian government,¹⁸ which in part led the authorities to restore internet connectivity on February 2, 2011. In addition, the heavy filtering in place at the height of the revolution ostensibly came to an end, and imprisoned online activists were released. News reports speculated that the authorities unblocked the internet to make

¹² Christopher Williams, “How Egypt shut down the internet,” The Telegraph, January 28, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/8288163/How-Egypt-shut-down-the-internet.html>.

¹³ Ahmed El Gody, *New Media New Audience New Topics and New forms of Censorship in the Middle East*.

¹⁴ Iljitsch van Beijnum, “How Egypt did (and your government could) shut down the Internet,” Ars Technica, January 30, 2011, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/news/2011/01/how-egypt-or-how-your-government-could-shut-down-the-internet.ars>.

¹⁵ Peter Bright, “Amidst chaos and riots, Egypt turns off the Internet,” Ars Technica, January 28, 2011, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/news/2011/01/amidst-chaos-and-riots-egypt-turns-off-the-internet.ars>.

¹⁶ Ameera Fouad, “Saying no to mobile phones,” Al-Ahram Weekly Online, Issue No. 1083, February 2-8, 2012, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2012/1083/eg402.htm>.

¹⁷ Stephanie Baker and Mahmood Kassen, “Billionaire Facing Death Threats Says Egypt Risks Becoming Iran,” Bloomberg, October 26, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-10-26/billionaire-facing-death-threats-says-egypt-risks-becoming-iran.html>.

¹⁸ Ryan Singel, “Report: Egypt Turned Off the Net With a Big Switch, Not Phone Calls,” Wired, February 10, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/02/egypt-off-switch/>.

it easier to monitor dissidents' discussions and plans of actions online, since it was more difficult to monitor events as they unfolded on the ground.¹⁹

In lieu of blocking, the SCAF limited internet connectivity by throttling certain websites in the months following February 2011, especially during major demonstrations like those at Maspiro in October and Mohamed Mahmoud Street in November,²⁰ where violent clashes arose between the military authorities and protestors. During the 2011 parliamentary elections, several websites and news portals including Al Dostor, Youm7, and Al Shorouk reported slow networks and service time-outs, suspecting foul play by the SCAF. Activists and social media outlets, such as 6th of April, had similar complaints hinting that the ruling military regime was still using old tactics of controlling internet access to suppress dissident activity.

Both mobile service providers and ISPs are regulated by the National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA) and governed by the 2003 Telecommunications Regulation Law. As of early 2012, NTRA's board is chaired by the Minister of Communications and Information Technology and includes representatives from the SCAF, national security forces, and Ministries of the Interior, Defense, Intelligence, Finance, and Information.²¹ Officially, the NTRA is responsible for establishing telecommunication development plans, such as the eMisr high-speed internet, and building the capacity of mobile operations in Egypt. The NTRA also analyzes the telecommunication market and publishes research to draw investments.²² However, there have been some reports revealing the NTRA's ties to online access control and surveillance activities, such as controlling the database of mobile subscribers and mobile short messages (especially those of news website services), as well as monitoring social media applications such as WhatsApp.²³

LIMITS ON CONTENT

During the January 2011 revolution, social-networking websites helped spread ideas of discontent among Egyptians by calling them to join in protest and put pressure on the

¹⁹ Erica Chenoweth, "Backfire in the Arab Spring," Middle East Institute, September 1, 2011, <http://www.mei.edu/content/backfire-arab-spring>.

²⁰ Ben Wedeman and Ivan Watson, "Military police try to halt Cairo skirmishes," CNN, November 23, 2011, <http://articles.cnn.com/2011-11-23/africa/world.africa.egypt-protests.1.mohamed-hussein-tantawi-riot-police-cairo-s-tahrir-square?s=PM:AFRICA>.

²¹ "About Us: Board Members," National Telecommunication Regulatory Agency, accessed July 16, 2012, http://www.tra.gov.eg/english/DPages_DPagesDetails.asp?ID=175&Menu=5.

²² "Our New National Telecommunication Regulatory Agency" [in Arabic], NTRA, accessed July 16, 2012, http://www.ntra.gov.eg/arabic/News_GetNewsList.asp?ID=39.

²³ Ahmed El Bermawy, "NTRA deny monitoring social media and sms" [in Arabic], Masress, June 20, 2012, <http://masress.com/dostor/65762>.

Egyptian government. Activists used Twitter to highlight local events, drawing global attention to what was happening on the ground and directly informing Western media coverage. State police admitted that it monitored online dissident discussions, but they underestimated the magnitude of offline protestors.²⁴ For that reason, in the wake of the demonstrations, the government blocked Twitter, Bambuser, and Facebook websites, and arrested several bloggers, dissidents, activists, and human rights figures in an attempt to control online discussions. Soon, the government censored five of the Muslim Brotherhood websites and disseminated denial-of-service (DoS) messages to media portals including Al Jazeera, BBC Arabic, and Al Arabiya. Other news websites like Al Youm7 and Al Dostor reported slow networks and usual cut-offs.²⁵

Losing control over news coverage to social media, the Egyptian government decided to shut down the internet altogether on January 27, 2011. Egypt's netizens, however, found ways to circumvent the government ban. For example, activists began using mobile and satellite mobiles to send short messages for broadcast by Egyptians abroad.²⁶ Since fixed-phone lines were still working, foreign ISPs in France and Sweden offered modem connections to produce content. Meanwhile, Google and Twitter set up a system of voice tweets whereby people could call a foreign number and leave messages that were instantly posted on Twitter under the hashtag, "#egypt."²⁷

The authorities decided to unblock internet access on February 2, 2011, likely because it was harder for Egyptian security forces to control online communications and monitor netizens' plans while Egypt was offline. Once internet and mobile services were restored, the government forced mobile operators to send out messages urging subscribers to participate in pro-government rallies. The government adopted the same tactic with the internet, using public figures to post pro-government messages on their webpages and Facebook accounts. The SCAF created its own group on Facebook to communicate with protestors and to ease the tension between the rebel group in Tahrir Square and the regime. "One of our key weapons was spreading rumors to manipulate the street," stated General Abdel Moneim Qato in a TV interview.²⁸

²⁴ Sam Gustin, "Social Media Sparked, Accelerated Egypt's Revolutionary Fire," *Wired*, February 11, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2011/02/egypt-revolutionary-fire/>.

²⁵ "Egypt Bans Twitter: Access Twitter in Egypt using Proxy Websites and Free VPN," *Internet Techies*, January 26, 2011, <http://www.clickonf5.org/11397/egypt-bans-twitter-access-using-proxy-vpn/>.

²⁶ Calvert Collins, "Social Media Plays Pivotal Role in Egypt's Revolution," *8 News Now*, February 14, 2011, <http://www.8newsnow.com/story/14029788/social-media-plays-pivotal-role-in-egypts-revolution>.

²⁷ Emma Batha, "TechnoTalk - Google and Twitter help Egyptians bypass Internet closure," *AlertNet*, February 1, 2011, <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/blogs/techartalk/google-and-twitter-help-egyptians-bypass-internet-closure/>.

²⁸ Mohamed El Dahshan, "The Sacking of Dina Abdul Rahman is a threat to the freedom of Media in Egypt," *Index on Censorship* (Uncut blog), August 5, 2011, <http://uncut.indexoncensorship.org/2011/08/the-sacking-of-dina-abdul-rahman-is-a-threat-to-the-freedom-of-media-in-egypt/>.

After the revolution ended in February 2011, social networking became the new political playground. All emerging political parties, the Egyptian government, and the military body started actively participating in online forums, engaging with the public in discussions about the current state of the country. Several Facebook groups and Twitter accounts were created to win over Egyptian hearts and minds. The number of Facebook users reached over 10.6 million users by the end of 2011, placing Egypt in the top 20 countries using Facebook.²⁹ Similarly, the number of YouTube users increased to over eight million, the most in the Arab world. Several activists established websites to monitor government and SCAF activities, especially during the March 2011 referendum and following the parliamentary elections in late 2011.

Online content is still sometimes removed in questionable circumstances. For example, blogger and labor activist Hossam el-Hamalawy had certain photos from his Flickr account deleted in May 2011 by Flickr administrators due to copyright infringement allegations.³⁰ El-Hamalawy's Flickr account was known for its large collection of photos of Egypt's state security service taken by protestors attending demonstrations since 2008. However, only in March 2011 did Flickr intervene with charges of copyright infringement after el-Hamalawy had posted the profile pictures of security agents found on a disk when activists stormed the state security headquarters. Although the posting of images taken by someone else is indeed against Flickr's terms of use, it appeared as though a sufficient number of pro-government users had alleged copyright infringement, leading to the deletion of the photos even though the content was of public significance. Similar tactics were used previously by the Mubarak government and its sympathizers, who were able to file complaints based on Facebook's official terms of use to temporarily disable two large Facebook groups, one of which played a crucial role in the uprising.

Despite government's efforts to suppress dissenting voices (see "Violations of User Rights"), the internet has continued to grow rapidly as a source of information and news for the country's citizens. Until 2005, Egyptian online content did not exceed a few hundred thousand webpages, but over the following few years, the number of pages surpassed the 20 million mark.³¹ To many, this increase has been the result of the rise of independent media, citizen journalism, and bloggers. Regionally, Egyptian news websites are some of the most visited websites in the Middle East, with 45 percent of online news content from of the Arab

²⁹ "Egypt Facebook Statistics," Socialbakers, accessed July 18, 2012, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/egypt/last-3-months#chart-intervals>.

³⁰ Uri Friedman, "Egyptian Blogger Renews Censorship Charge Against Flickr," The Atlantic News Wire, May 11, 2011, <http://www.theatlanticwire.com/global/2011/05/egyptian-blogger-renews-censorship-charge-against-flickr/37559/>.

³¹ Tim Eaton, "Online activism and revolution in Egypt: Lessons from Tahrir," New Diplomacy Platform, January 25, 2012, <http://www.newdiplomacyplatform.com/portfolio/online-activism-and-revolution-in-egypt-lessons-from-tahrir/>.

world coming from Egypt.³² In both 2010 and 2011, Forbes rated the Al Youm7 news portal as the most visited electronic news site in the Middle East.³³

Online news websites have begun to replace traditional news sources due to their immediate and interactive nature, and because they allow for audience participation and cover topics not tackled by the traditional media. Content from citizen journalism and bloggers' websites have even become raw material for private and independent media. Since 2007, Egyptian bloggers have been collecting and disseminating information about arrests of activists, as well as acts of torture by the regime.³⁴ Some of these bloggers were arrested in connection with their offline protests and defended by other bloggers who used a variety of digital platforms to support them. Others bloggers have become media celebrities—such as Alaa Abdel Fattah, Wael Abbas, and Asmaa Mahfouz—who have been recognized for their work in pushing the limits of freedom of expression in Egypt. Furthermore, groups like Kifaya, 6th of April, and Shayfenkom have emerged through the use of social-networking websites to communicate with their audiences.³⁵

Despite the growing diversity of voices online, the SCAF's security forces in 2011 created its own army of online commentators who are paid to join and steer online discussions in favor of the Egyptian regime, echoing state-controlled media. Prominent government writers such as Abdallah Kamal also set up their own Twitter and Facebook accounts to participate in posts and foster pro-government discussions. Nevertheless, reports³⁶ have revealed that political parties, especially the Freedom and Justice and Al Nour parties, the Egyptian government, and the SCAF have all established an army of micro-bloggers in their struggle to spread information and set the pace and tone of discussion.

Several independent outlets, including Youm7,³⁷ El Badil, and social media pages such as RASD on Facebook, have accused the authorities of hacking into their sites and deleting certain content, particularly during times of political unrest. Noting the dangers of working in the journalism business, these outlets have also hinted at the mounting pressures they receive from the authorities to manipulate content, coinciding with user complaints of their online posts and comments being deliberately deleted. In response, journalists from Youm7 and Al Masry Al Youm speaking anonymously stated that they have kept audience

³² Ahmed El Gody, *Journalism in a Network: The Role of ICTs in Egyptian Newsrooms* (Örebro: Örebro University Press, 2012).

³³ Osama Diab, "New Egypt, new media," *The Guardian*, March 10, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/10/egypt-media-newspapers-mubarak-propaganda>.

³⁴ Ahmeed El Gody, *Journalism in a Network: The Role of ICTs in Egyptian Newsrooms*.

³⁵ Naayem Saad Zaghoul, *Electronic Mass Communication in Egypt: Reality and Challenges* (Cairo: Egyptian Cabinet, Information and Decision Support Center, February 2010), 38.

³⁶ See for example: "Twitter Discussions & Trends," Isqat Al-Nizam, last modified March 5, 2012, accessed June 30, 2012, http://wiki.aucegypt.edu/isqatalnizam/index.php/Twitter_Discussion_%26_Trends.

³⁷ "Hacking Youm7 News Website," Sacrab News, April 17, 2012, <http://www.secarab.com/vb/details-3079.html> [in Arabic].

complaints on their sites to serve as recognition of and an indirect apology for the forced deletion of some comments.

There are no clear red lines on what issues journalists and citizens should not tackle, though traditional journalists are typically alert when writing about the presidency, the military, and Muslim-Christian relations. By contrast, online activists and bloggers have grown to be critical of these subjects, pushing the limits of freedom both online and offline by forcing the traditional media to tackle sensitive topics.

With the development of Web 2.0 technologies, more bloggers and civic advocates have begun using social-networking websites to expose government fraud and acts of brutality by the security forces. Activists use ICTs to debate current events, criticize the government, public officials and political parties, share personal experiences, propose solutions to current socio-political problems, and construct various visions of the country's future.³⁸ The country's netizens have quickly harnessed ICTs, using online news sites, blogs, video blogs, YouTube posts, podcasts, Facebook, Twitter, SMS text messages, and mobile phone web publishing to produce and disseminate news and advocacy that outpaces government control. Surveys between 2010 and 2011 counted 13,500 active citizen news journalism websites in Egypt that provided "politically driven reportage on local events... break[ing] numerous off-limits to the mainstream Egyptian media" and clustering citizens around the idea of democratic change through the use of ICTs.³⁹

VIOLATIONS OF USER RIGHTS

The Egyptian constitution and penal code state that the media is free within the limits of society. Such an ambiguous statement gives the government the right to limit freedom of expression under the premise of "keeping public order," and there are no explicit rules that allow the government to censor or monitor citizens' behavior. However, according to local advocates, the constitutional rights for protecting freedom have lost their protective force because of an array of restrictive laws, specifically the 1996 Press Law, the 1971 Law on the Protection of the Nation and Citizens, the 1977 Law on Security of National Unity, the Publications Laws and the Parties Laws, and the Emergency Law.⁴⁰

³⁸ "Blog Shut Down After Promoting Opposition Candidate," IFEX, September 16, 2010, http://www.ifex.org/egypt/2010/09/16/amrosama.eb2a_blocked/.

³⁹ Lawrence Pintak, "Arab Media and the Al Jazeera Effect," in *Global Communication: Theories, Stakeholders, and Trends* ed. Thomas L. McPhail (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 260.

⁴⁰ "Media Sustainability Index – Middle East and North Africa," *Media Sustainability Index 2005* (Washington D.C.: IREX, 2006), http://www.irex.org/system/files/MSI05_MENA_EG.pdf.

In May 2010, the Egyptian government renewed the Emergency Law, which had been in place since 1981, until the end of May 2012. In an effort to reduce controversy, the declaration explicitly limited its use to combating terrorism and drug trafficking and did not grant any powers to impose censorship or shut down media outlets. Nevertheless, both the Mubarak regime and SCAF military administration used the Emergency Law⁴¹ to stifle freedom of expression, restrict citizens' rights to access and publish information,⁴² and detain thousands of civilians between 2010 and early 2012, including several online activists.⁴³ Granting broad powers to the president during emergencies to confiscate, suspend or shutdown all means of communication, the Emergency Law also provided legal justification for the Mubarak regime's unprecedented decision to shut down all internet and mobile connections in January 2011.⁴⁴ Although former President Mubarak, the prime minister, and the interior minister were fined a total of US\$91 million by a court order for cutting internet and mobile services,⁴⁵ the three are appealing the fine, arguing that their actions were within the limits of the law.⁴⁶

The government under the SCAF in 2011 continued to repress online freedom of expression and the free flow of information, which started in 2008 when the Mubarak regime began planning to pass an ambiguous law to control the internet.⁴⁷ The bill was soon withdrawn from parliament as a result of mounting pressure from the media and civil society. Shortly after, the government filed a legal case to censor 51 websites mostly belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, which the court denied, highlighting the importance of freedom of expression. However, in 2009 an Egyptian court issued a ruling that banned access to pornographic websites on grounds that such content was offensive to religion and society's values.⁴⁸ The rule was never implemented, likely because the state security forces were more interested in restricting political content. Nevertheless, in March 2012 another court

⁴¹ UPDATE: *Freedom on the Net 2012* covers events in 2011 through May 1, 2012; however, it is important to note that the Emergency Law officially expired on May 31, 2012.

⁴² "Egypt: Cosmetic Changes Can't Justify Keeping Emergency Law," Human Rights Watch, May 13, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/05/12/egypt-cosmetic-changes-can-t-justify-keeping-emergency-law>.

⁴³ "Egypt: Parliament's Chance to End State of Emergency," Human Rights Watch, May 30, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/30/egypt-parliament-s-chance-end-state-emergency>.

⁴⁴ Vittorio Coalo, chief executive of the U.K.'s Vodaphone which is the majority owner of Egypt's largest mobile carrier, and Naguib Sawiris, founder of Mobinil, confirmed in two separate interviews that the shutdown was carried out legally. Coalo said Egyptian officials asked mobile operators to shut off networks and stated this request was "legitimate" under Egyptian law and NTRA's terms of use. See also, Connor Moran, "Egypt's Internet Shutdown: Was it Legal?" Law, Technology & Arts Blog, February 1, 2011, <http://wjlta.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/egypts-internet-shutdown-was-it-legal/>.

⁴⁵ "Mubarak fined for cutting internet and phones," Al Jazeera, May 28, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/05/201152811555458677.html>.

⁴⁶ "Egypt court demands details of web, phone blackout," Reuters Africa, August 8, 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFL6E7J80Z920110808>.

⁴⁷ David Stanford, "Egypt faces new media censorship," Al Jazeera, August 7, 2008, <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/2008/08/20088791952617974.html>.

⁴⁸ "Cairo court rules to block porn sites," Agence France-Presse, May 12, 2009, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hnniQuhwRV5EUeG0e_3ABfUjWAYQ.

reaffirmed the 2009 decision,⁴⁹ leading to a debate in the currently pro-Islamic parliament on implementing the ban. In the meantime, several ISPs have been reportedly issuing customized filtering services.⁵⁰

Violations against users, especially bloggers, continued to grow between 2010 and 2012, with several bloggers and activists threatened, beaten, or harassed. Prior to the January 2011 revolution, a number of bloggers—including Wael Abbas, Israa Abdel Fattah and Asmaa Mahfouz—were detained to keep them from communicating online under claims that their posts endangered social welfare and/or threatened national security. During the first few days of the 2011 revolution, Egyptian security forces detained a number of activists, bloggers, and Facebook group administrators, including Wael Ghoneim, the founder of the “We are All Khaled Said” group that was created to protest Khaled Said’s brutal death by the hands of police forces in July 2010.⁵¹

After the revolution, the SCAF continued the same policies against bloggers and online activists such as Maikel Sanad, a political activist and blogger who had criticized Egypt’s six decades of military rule and actively participated in the revolution. He was arrested on February 4, 2011 by military police and tortured before being released 27 hours later. In March 2011, Sanad was arrested again in his home by military police and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment on charges of “insulting the military” in his blog post titled, “The Army and the People Were Never One Hand.”⁵² On December 14, 2011, the Egyptian supreme military court of appeals reduced his sentence to two years, and after mounting local and global pressure, Sanad was pardoned by the military on January 23, 2012.⁵³

In another instance, veteran blogger and human right activist Alaa Abd al-Fattah was detained after refusing to be questioned by military prosecutors over allegations of “inciting violence and sabotage” during deadly clashes between the army and protesters in October 2011. Abd al-Fattah said the army had no grounds for interrogating him and demanded to speak to a civilian official, which prompted his detention. He was released a few months later. Between December 2011 and February 2012, the police and military targeted numerous other activists and human rights advocates, detaining them on allegations of receiving donations and training to spread chaos in the country. As of May 2012, 43 activists

⁴⁹ Leon Watson, “Court orders Egypt to ban porn websites to protect its ‘society and values,’” *Daily Mail*, March 30, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2122854/Court-orders-Egypt-ban-porn-websites-protect-society-values.html>.

⁵⁰ Al-Masry Al-Youm, “Blocking internet pornography a priority for telecom minister,” *Egypt Independent*, March 22, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/blocking-internet-pornography-priority-telecom-minister>.

⁵¹ See, We are all Khaled Said’s Facebook page, accessed August 23, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk/info>.

⁵² Max Strasser, “The Army and the People were Never One Hand,” *Foreign Policy*, January 24, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/01/24/the_army_and_the_people_were_never_one_hand.

⁵³ Jack Shenker, “Egypt pardons jailed blogger as generals brace for anniversary protests,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/22/egypt-pardons-blogger-anniversary-protests?newsfeed=true>.

are undergoing trial on charges of establishing organizations without proper documentation and receiving foreign donations.⁵⁴

After taking over command of the country in early 2011, it soon became clear that the military forces were continuing the same practices under the Mubarak regime of monitoring internet activity.⁵⁵ In addition, the authorities have reportedly invested aggressively in surveillance equipment to monitor online communications. For example, the new Homeland Security Agency established in 2011 (replacing the State Security Investigations Service) has reportedly acquired deep-packet inspection equipment in addition to real time intelligence and content filtering equipment that allows the agency to inspect, track, and target content from internet and mobile networks as it passes through routers.⁵⁶

Restrictions on anonymous communication online have also become a growing issue in Egypt. In 2011, the government enforced an article from the 2003 Telecommunication Act (Law #65) that obliges ISPs and mobile operators to allow government access to customer databases.⁵⁷ Several reports highlighted instances of members of the national security forces using ISP databases to obtain information about the activities of specific customers.⁵⁸ Mobile operators and ISPs are required to collaborate with the Homeland Security Agency and the military police when asked to release information or provide records of subscribers. In addition, internet cafe customers need to provide their names, email addresses, and mobile numbers to receive a personal identification number (PIN) to access the internet. The country's three mobile operators are also required to register their subscribers as well as keep records of their online activities, and an out-going phone call can be traced by a half-dozen government entities.

Extralegal intimidation against activists and bloggers increased in 2011 and early-2012. In one case, blogger Malek Mostafa lost his right eye to a police rubber bullet during a peaceful protest in November 2011 calling on the SCAF to transfer power to a civilian government.⁵⁹ Columnist Mona Eltahawy suffered broken wrists after being brutally beaten and sexually

⁵⁴ "Egypt Trial on U.S. democracy activists set for February 26," Reuters, February 18, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/18/us-egypt-us-hearing-idUSTRE81H0BQ20120218>.

⁵⁵ Jeremy M. Sharp, "Egypt in Transition," Congressional Research Service, February 8, 2012, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/185937.pdf>.

⁵⁶ "Will Social Networks Deliver Democracy To Africa And Middle East?" Tek-Tips Forums, January 28, 2011, <http://tek-tips.nethawk.net/will-social-networks-deliver-democracy-to-africa-and-middle-east/>.

⁵⁷ Christopher Rhoads and Geoffrey A. Fowler, "Egypt Shuts Down Internet, Cellphone Services," *Wall Street Journal*, January 29, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703956604576110453371369740.html>; "New Regulations for customers database" [in Arabic], NTRA, press release, accessed July 16, 2012, http://ntra.gov.eg/arabic/News_NewsDetails.asp?PID=39&ID=168.

⁵⁸ Mohamad Al-Assad, "Plan to Control Internet Services in Egypt on January 25 and beyond" [in Arabic], *Al Youm 7*, May 31, 2011, <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=425202>.

⁵⁹ "Tahrir Square Under Attack: 32 Egyptians Killed, 1,750 Injured in Protests Against Military Rule," Democracy Now (video), November 21, 2011, http://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/21/tahrir_square_under_attack_32_egyptians.

assaulted by the military while covering the same protests.⁶⁰ In February 2012, the prominent activist Salma Said was left with at least 117 birdshot wounds while filming an armored personnel carrier (APC) after the police responded violently to a peaceful protest in Cairo.⁶¹

During the 2011 parliamentary elections and preliminary presidential campaigns, several Facebook news accounts such as “RASD” (Arabic for “observe”) were hacked. The page started as a Facebook alert service to report on fraud and offences during the 2010 parliamentary elections and became a popular news alternative to mainstream media when the revolution broke out in January 2011.⁶² Known for its Facebook campaign, “Monitor, capture, and blog,” that successfully reported on military and government offences during the parliamentary election, RASD began experiencing systematic attempts, allegedly orchestrated by the military and government, to hack its website. The hacking resulted in the deletion of news items about protests against the government and the subsequent dissemination of pro-government/SCAF messages, which forced the group to change its Facebook account.⁶³

⁶⁰ Peter Beaumont and Bel Trew, “Journalist Mona Eltahawy tells of sex assault in Cairo ministry,” *The Guardian*, November 24, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/24/journalist-mona-eltahawy-sex-assault-cairo>.

⁶¹ Salma Shukrallah and Bel Trew, “Egypt’s Interior Minister proven a liar: overwhelming evidence police fired birdshot at protesters,” *Ahram Online*, February 7, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/33950.aspx>.

⁶² Wikipedia, “About RASD News,” accessed September 10, 2012, http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A9_%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9.

⁶³ Hassan Hassan, “Penetrating Rasd Server,” *Alekhteraq.com*, June 17, 2012, <http://www.alekhteraq.com/2012/06/17/%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/#>.