

EGYPT

Name: Nagwa Abdallah

Year of Fellowship: 2010/2011

1) What is the basic political system in your country (e.g. democratic, semi-authoritarian, authoritarian or other type of hybrid regime)?

Semi-presidential: the president is both head of state and head of government despite having a prime minister as the head of the cabinet of ministers. Although the political system is dominated by the National Democratic Party, there are a number of different political parties.

2) What are the main features of your media landscape? (private/public, print/broadcast/internet usage, ownership concentration, government control, etc.)

Some Egyptian media remain tools of state power rather than a foundation for an autonomous public sphere, like the state-run national TVs and national newspapers, Al-Ahram, AlAkhbar and El Gomhoriya, but the country also enjoys a variety and a growing number of private TV stations. Also there are over 500 newspapers, journals and magazines; some of them are high quality independent and privately-owned, while others are the mouthpiece of opposition parties, like El Wafed. In addition there are a huge number of blogs and websites. Around 16.7 million Egyptians were online by December 2009. Also the State radio's monopoly was broken with the arrival of private music stations in 2003.

Since the turn of this century, competition among information producers in Egypt has been intensified. Not only the independent newspapers are undertaking the leading role of changing the media landscape but citizen journalism on the Internet emerged as an alternative to the mainstream press. Recent events in Egypt demonstrate blogs' enormous potential as an advocacy tool and more broadly, as an alternative source of news.

3) Where does your country come in the rankings of Freedom House (on freedom of the press) and Reporters Without Borders?

According to the Freedom House ranking for 2010, Egypt comes in 130th position among 196 countries, with a total score of 60 and classified as partially free. Also the 2010 report of Reporters Without Borders' report puts Egypt in 127 position among 178 countries.

4) Would you broadly agree with their characterisation of your situation?

Yes, I do agree.

5) a) what are the main challenges facing the media in your country in the next five years (economic, political, technological etc)?

The challenges will be the legal, administrative and security penalties that hinder freedom of press in Egypt. The authorities have added and are still working on adding more restrictive legislation related to the freedom of information flow, such as the Law on the Protection of National Unity, the Law on the Security of the Nation and the Citizen, the Law on Political Rights, in addition to the Emergency Law which most probably will be still enforced to imprison journalists.

b) what are the main limits on the practice of a free press in your country, based on your own practical experience of working there?

In the last few years, journalists have begun crossing the red line traditionally associated with the Egyptian media. However, there is still a large gap between a situation in which a journalist is merely immune from arrest and one where he or she enjoys complete freedom of reporting.