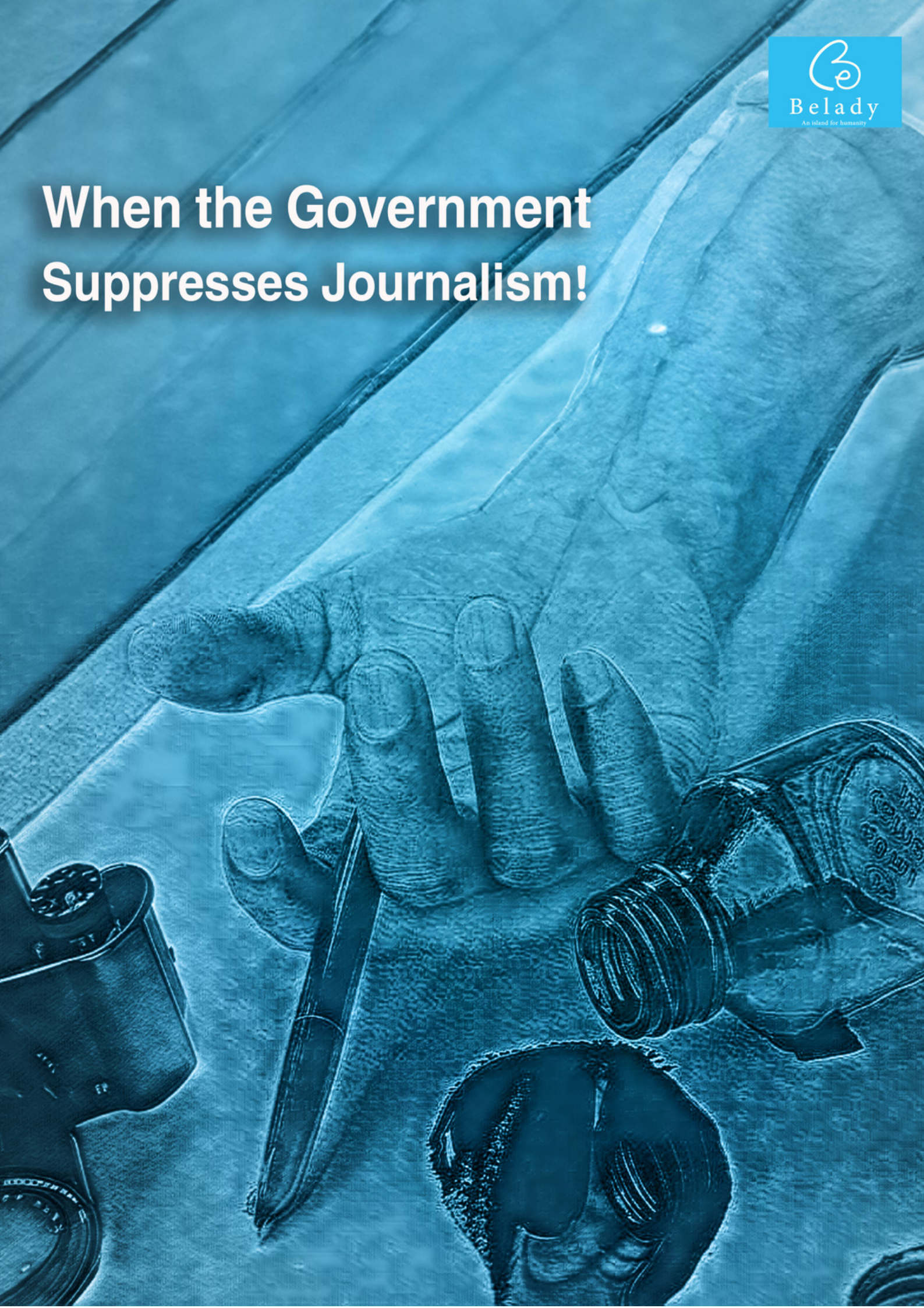


When the Government Suppresses Journalism!



When the Government Suppresses Journalism!

Belady: An Island For Humanity -- A Human Rights Organization Supporting Egyptian Women and Children since 2017

Belady aims to dismantle institutionalized violence by documenting the Egyptian regime's violations against children and women and educating national and international society and decision-makers about them. We also advocate for the amendment of legislation that codifies violations while pressuring authorities to implement overlooked laws and treaties that would ensure respect for rights and freedoms. Belady provides protection and legal and psychological support for Egyptian children and women detained for political reasons.

Executive Summary

Belady: An Island For Humanity produced this report to analyze the reasons behind the decrease in journalistic freedom indicators in Egypt, believing that journalistic freedom is the pillar of freedom for society and a key factor in building democracies based on pluralism and transparency.

The introduction of this report contributed to defining journalistic freedom and the risks faced by such a profession under totalitarian regimes. The report also discusses the history of Egypt in establishing journalism as a profession and allowing Egyptians to collect information about the community and authorities- as Egypt is considered the first Arab country to know journalism since the nineteenth century.

The first part of this report discusses press institutions (digital and print) that were shutdown between **2013** and **2022** and the journalists that were harassed by arrest or detainment in the era of the current political regime.

Belady documented the shutdown of **23** newspapers distributed among partisan, national, and independent newspapers. It also found that the shutdown of newspapers was based on either security and political reasons (which were the cause for **6** shutdowns), or financial reasons (which were the cause of **14** shutdowns). We were also unable to reach the reasons for shutting down the remaining **3** newspapers.

Referring to the newspapers that were shutdown, it was found that **20** newspaper institutions addressed political, social, and human rights issues, while two newspapers addressed art, and one newspaper addressed health issues.

As to electronic journalism, Belady documented the censorship of **90** electronic websites, **82** of which deal with political, social, and human rights issues, and **2** dealing with sports.

When looking at the result related to the arrest and imprisonment of journalists, Belady reported **422** arrest cases during this period, **362** of whom were journalists. Belady also reported that **44** journalists are still imprisoned and that one journalist died in detention facilities.

The second part of this report analyzes the data by determining who is responsible for the shutdown of print and digital newspapers and providing an analytical reason for the escalation of attacks on journalism in 2017. It also provides reasons for arresting and imprisoning journalists and providing stories of the suffering that some journalists faced behind prison walls due to their journalistic work.

As a conclusion, the report infers that the political system is responsible for the setback that the Egyptian press has experienced since 2013. Finally, the report includes recommendations to ensure journalistic freedom along with a call to stop harassing and imprisoning journalists.

Methodology

Belady's methodology for this report included researching the suspended or censored papers and digital newspapers in Egypt, along with researching data about the imprisoned journalists during the year 2013 up until December 31st, 2022 through monitoring qualitative and quantitative data over the course of a year.

Belady evaluated the quality and accuracy of the collected data using the triangulation of sources when saving the data, followed by applying several evaluation check-in points when entering, coding, and analyzing the data using Microsoft Excel.

When it comes to analyzing patterns of violations, Belady adopted the following classification:

Journalist: The journalist is the person who practices the profession of journalism, whether it is verbal or written. The job of a journalist is to collect and share information about recent events, trends, people's issues, and reportage work. The job also includes preparing reports to broadcast or publish through different media outlets such as newspapers, television, radio stations, and journals. Journalism also encompasses all those involved in news, analysis, and documentary content production, including producers, photographers, and workers on documentary films.

Arrest: Arresting journalists in crowds, demonstrations, or arrests carried out through pre-targeting whether by breaking into houses either because of journalistic work, political background, or civil activities.

Rotation: After an order is issued to release a prisoner, the prisoner finds him/herself presented again before the Public Prosecution for investigation in a new case, which may include the same old charges or new ones.

Enforced disappearance: The arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the state, or groups of people acting with authorization or support from the State. It is followed by denying the deprivation of the individual's liberty or hiding the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared person which deprives them of the protection of the law.

Introduction

Journalistic freedom means the right to publish facts, ideas, and opinions without interference from the government or private entities. This right applies to print media which includes books, newspapers, and electronic media including radio and television.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stresses this right by stating “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and this includes the right to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any tool regardless of frontiers”.¹

Some governments place restrictions on the press because they believe that it is used to oppose them. Many governments have put the press under their control to serve their interests. Most publishers and writers work against this to achieve as much freedom as possible.

Egypt is considered the first Arab State that knew journalism. The history of journalism in Egypt started when Mohammad Ali, ruler of Egypt, issued his order “Journal of the Khedive” in 1827 as a special bulletin to be informed of the country’s affairs and finances. However, he sensed the people’s need to see the government’s work, so he ordered the expansion of Khedive’s Journal to turn into “The Egyptian Gazette” in 1828. The Gazette was distributed to government employees who paid the subscription fees. Later on, “The Military Newspaper” appeared in 1833. Popular/People’s Press then emerged during the reign of Saied Basha (1854-1863), who sought to get closer to the hearts of the Egyptian people.²

Repressive regimes usually feel that the media, when not fully controlled by the state, may pose a danger in times of crisis. This is a result of the political role that the press plays by raising issues that reflect public opinion, create a general spirit of discontent, or offer a different interpretation from official narratives. This means that repressive regimes are wary of free media, which pushes dictatorships to arrest and imprison journalists who are not under the regime’s control.

Through this research, Belady presents the state of journalism and journalists in Egypt amidst the closed political climate created by the current regime, by giving an overview of the state of press institutions (print and digital) that have been shut down since 2013 until 2022. It also provides an overview of the journalists who have been harassed by arrest or imprisonment in the era of the current political regime (part one) and then discusses these results through an analytical view (part two).

Part One: Results

This part of the report presents the statistical results related to print newspapers (1), as well as digital newspapers (2), then the status of journalists who have been detained since 2013 (3).

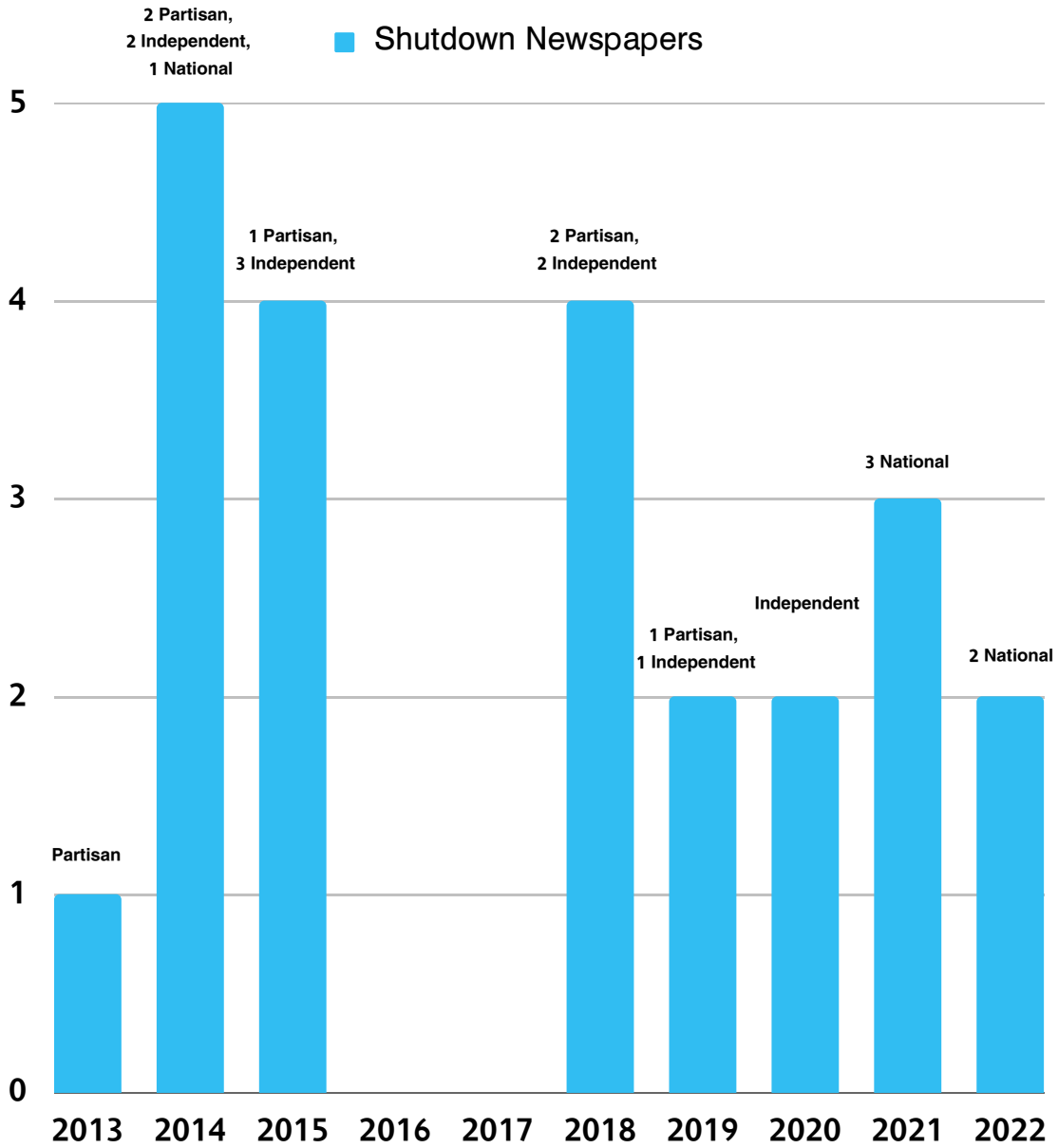
¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights

² History of Telecommunication in Egypt

1/ Results Concerning Print Newspapers


First, Distribution of the Number of Shutdown Print Newspapers in Egypt since 2013

Since the current political regime assumed power, 23 print newspapers have been shut down. This is distributed among partisan, national, and independent newspapers.



Belady observed that 79.1% (19/23) of the newspapers that were shut down were political newspapers which explains the reason for targeting the press by the political authority.

Second, Shutdown Print Newspapers

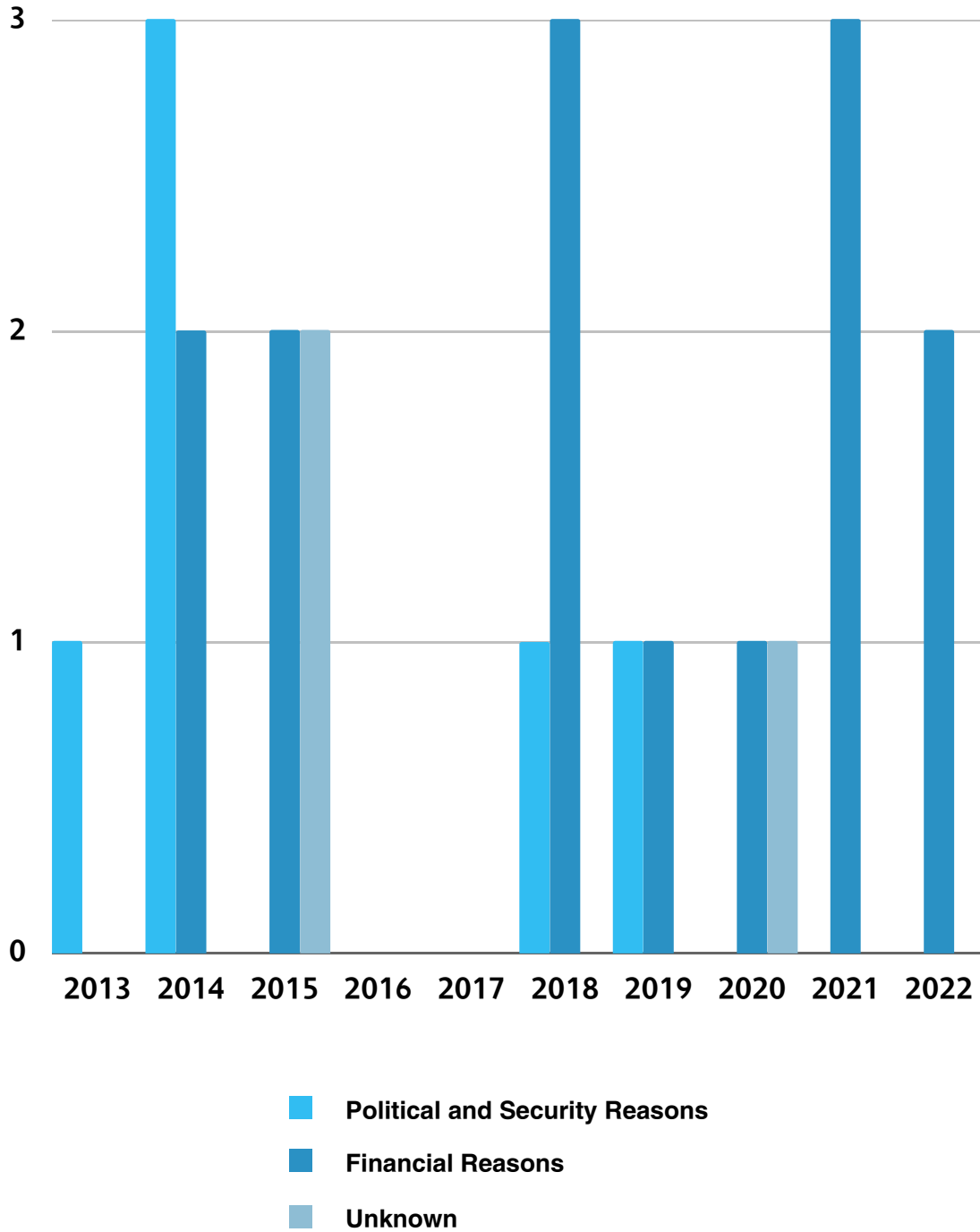
 Newspaper Name	Authority Responsible for Decision
Al Huriyya Wal Adala	Security apparatuses and Judicial Authorities
Al Sha'ab Al Jadeed	Security apparatuses and Judicial Authorities
Al Wadi	Security apparatuses and Judicial Authorities
Shashty	Security apparatuses and Judicial Authorities
Wasla	National Press Authority
Al Arabi Al Nasri	Security apparatuses and Judicial Authorities
Al Tahrir	The Party Management
Al Badeel	The Newspaper's Management
Al Ahram	The Newspaper's Management
Al Noor Al Jadeed	Unknown
Al Masriyoon	Unknown
Al Geel	Security apparatuses and Judicial Authorities
Al Ghad	The Party Management
Al Khamis	The Party Management
Al Sabah	The Newspaper's Management
Al Maqal	The Newspaper's Management
Al Akhbar Al Masa'i	The Newspaper's Management
Al Ahram Al Masa'i	National Press Authority
Al Masaa	National Press Authority
Al Kawakib	National Press Authority
Tabeebok Al Khas	National Press Authority
Al Midan	National Press Authority
Al Ahrar	The Newspaper's Management
	Security apparatuses and Judicial Authorities

Third, Reasons for Shutting Down Print Newspapers

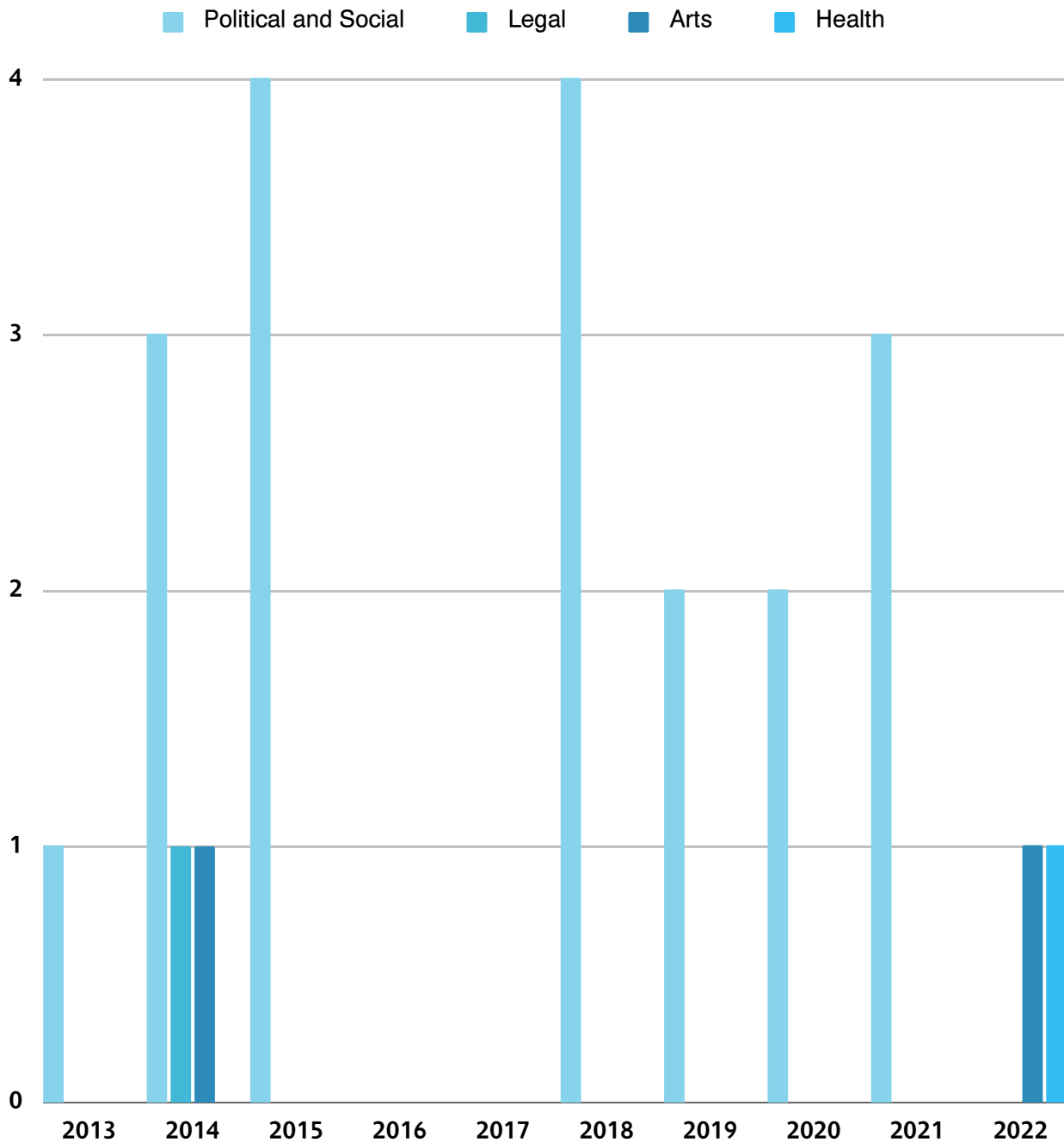
Belady observed the shutdown of 23 periodical newspapers since 2013, 6 newspapers were shutdown for security and political reasons, 14 were shutdown for financial reasons, and 3 were shutdown for unknown reasons.

The distribution of shutdowns from 2013 to 2022 is as follows:

Reasons for Shutting Down Print Newspapers



Fourth, Distribution of Print Newspapers According to Year of Shutdown and Issues of Periodical



Fifth, the Most Prominent Egyptian Newspapers that Have Been Shutdown for Political Reasons

Al Sha’ab Al Jadeed Newspaper: A partisan newspaper published weekly by the Independent Party (formerly the Labor Party). It was launched in the year 2000, only to be shutdown on January 29th, 2014, by a decision of the Public Prosecution, following a complaint filed by the Egyptian government accusing the newspaper of “incitement to violence, and threat to national security”. Essam El Deeb, the lawyer representing Engineer Ibrahim El Fayoumi, filed lawsuit No.17783 of judicial year 68 to shutdown Al Sha’ab Al Jadeed Newspaper, citing that it incited systematic violence against the armed forces and police, promoted the ideology of terrorist and extremist groups, and opposed the June 30th revolution.³

³ New Lawsuit Demanding the Shutdown of Al Sha’ab Newspaper

Al Wadi Newspaper: An independent newspaper published weekly. It was published in Arabic and was printed by Al Ahram Foundation Press. It started operating at the beginning of **2014**, to be banned in March of the same year. An unwritten order was issued to the printing press to cease printing for the newspaper. Further security restrictions were placed on it.

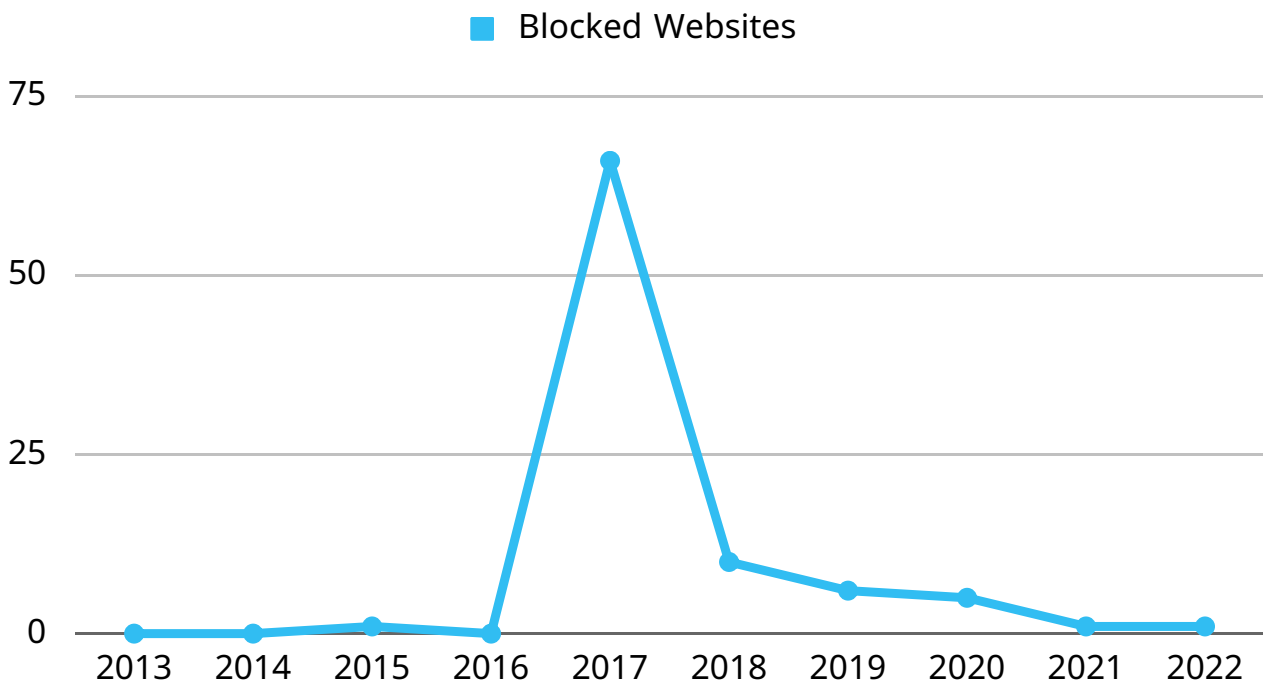
Khaled Al Balshi, the newspaper’s editor-in-chief, suggested that the reason for the newspaper’s suspension was that one issue included two articles by political activists Ahmed Maher and Alaa Abdel Fattah, who are currently imprisoned for rejecting the Protest Organization Law issued by authorities in November **2013**. The newspaper also published a special report on the role of the Military Council after the January revolution, along with interviews by the young women behind the “No to Military Trials” group, and testimonies of the wives of kidnapped and missing individuals in the events of the revolution, and a report titled “A Visit to Dr. Kofta’s Clinic ” and another on the individuals who planned the electoral program of El Sisi.⁴

Al Hurriya Wal Adala Newspaper: A partisan newspaper published daily since October **28th, 2011**. It was banned on September **25th, 2013** upon a decision by the Public Prosecution, which ordered the shutdown of the newspaper’s headquarters and its sealing with red wax. The editor-in-chief Adel El Ansari and others were arrested and brought in for questioning, facing charges of inciting against the State. All assets of the newspaper were also confiscated following a judicial ruling banning the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, including “Al Huriyya Wal Adala” newspaper which speaks for the “Freedom and Justice” party, the political arm of the group.⁵

2/ Results Concerning Digital Newspaper Websites

First, Digital Newspaper Websites Blocked in Egypt from 2013 until 2022

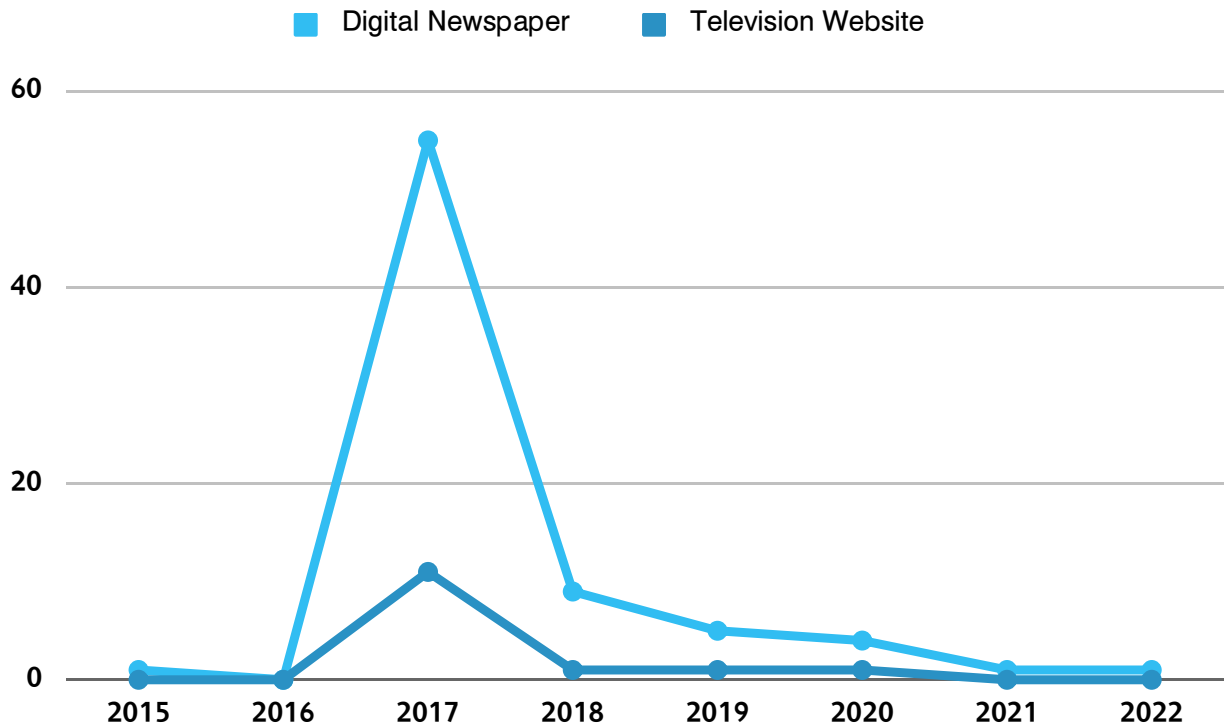
Since **2013**, Belady observed the blocking of **90** electronic press websites in Egypt, distributed as follows:



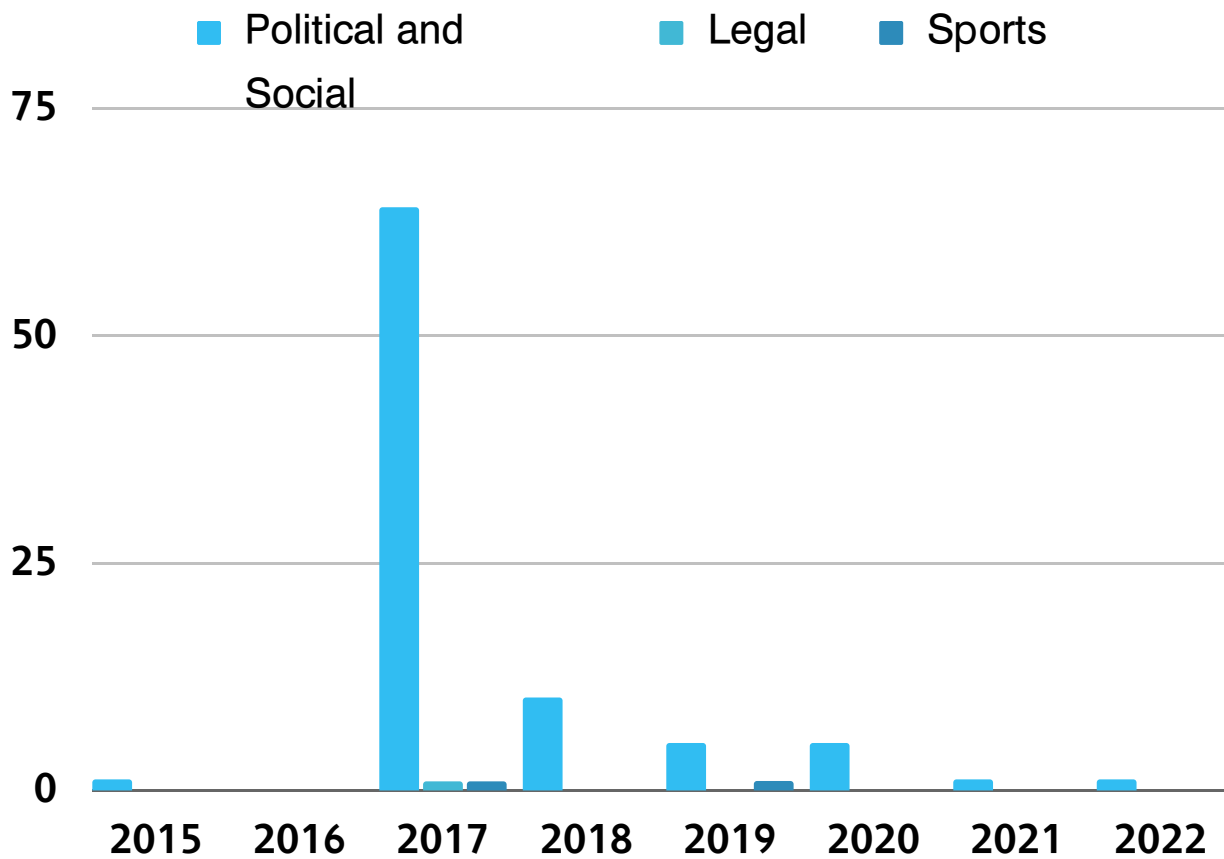
⁴ Preventing the release of the third Egyptian newspaper since the coup

⁵ Egyptian security seals the headquarters of "Freedom and Justice" Newspaper

Second, Distribution of Blocked websites According to the Year of Blocking and the Type of the website since 2015



Third, Distribution of Blocked Websites According to the Year of Blocking and the Issues of Their Main Content



4. The Most Prominent Blocked Digital Newspapers

Darb: The Socialist Popular Alliance Party launched the website “Darb”, headed by Journalist Khaled El Balshy, on March 8th, 2020. A month after its launch, on April 9th, 2020, the site was blocked in Egypt. “Darb” is the third website by journalist Khaled El Balshy that was blocked, as the authorities previously blocked two websites that he headed, one called “Al Bidaya” in June 2017, and the other called “Kateb” which was blocked after nine hours of its launch in June 2018. It is worth noting that “Kateb” was one of the initiatives of “The Arab Network for Human Rights Information” which had its website blocked in August 2017. The Popular Alliance Party and “Darb” team issued a statement about blocking the site on April 11th, 2020 titled “We will continue to work and we will take the legal measures”. The statement affirmed that “in spite of the unannounced, anonymous blocking of the site, the site will still continue with the same editorial policy, as a platform for exchanging information, opinions, and expression for the democratic forces in all their diversity”. They also declared that all union and legal measures will be taken to fight “this repressive decision.” The statement concluded by iterating that “blocking and suppressing opinions and confiscating journalistic freedom do not protect nations”.⁶

Mada Masr: The website covers Egyptian affairs. Its main feature is providing news accompanied by the context behind it after scrutiny and analysis. It also provides reports, investigations, and articles in the fields of politics, economy, culture, and society.

As the Egyptian authorities began blocking websites, the independent journalistic website “Mada Masr” was blocked in Egypt on May 24th, 2017. Mada Masr’s team issued a statement on their Facebook page confirming that the website had been blocked. They stated “We just confirmed with our technical partners that Mada Masr’s website has been blocked through the “Reset” injection. The connection to the website’s address has been disrupted by most internet providers in Egypt. Mada Masr proceeded to promise its readers to continue publishing journalistic content despite the ban. The statement emphasized “Although going on a vacation would have made us very happy, we will continue to publish on all available platforms, as well as our website. Wait for our journalism as usual.” After the block, the website used alternative links to reach its audience, most of which were blocked over the past 3 years, until the number of blocked alternative links for Mada Masr reached more than 25, according to reporting by “Masar”. Mada Masr also relied on the Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) service at the beginning of 2018 in another attempt to bypass the block, but the service was blocked in Egypt in February 2018.⁷

Raseef 22: Launched in August 2013, Raseef 22 was the first “independent” digital media outlet in Lebanon, with a solid base in the modern digital media scene. Raseef 22 was the first regional media outlet that focuses on underrepresented communities like women, racial/ethnic/religious minorities, LGBTQI+ community, and youth... Raseef 22 is not affiliated with any political party or businessmen with political ambitions. It is not funded by states or religious institutions and is equidistant from all political ideologies. Raseef 22 focuses on creating new awareness of the right to citizenship, and promoting new values in line with human rights. The site published an article titled “The Nature of the Relationship between the Media and Security Forces in Egypt” on September 5th, 2018, which caused the site to be blocked in Egypt the day after the article was published. The topic of the article dealt with the interference of “sovereign agencies” in the media scene through the acquisition of the “Egyptian Media” group that is owned by “Eagle Capital” on various TV channels. On September 8th, a day after the block, a statement was released titled “Raseef 22 is Forbidden to Egyptians... How Long Will Freedom of Expression Be Suppressed?”. The statement read, “Frustrating and sad... this is how the Egyptian censor’s decisions to block Raseef 22 hit us. For someone to come and try to separate you from an audience that you love, and some of whom loved you, is not easy for those working in a media outlet.” Raseef 22 remains forbidden to Egyptians.

⁶ Blocking Darb, a media website

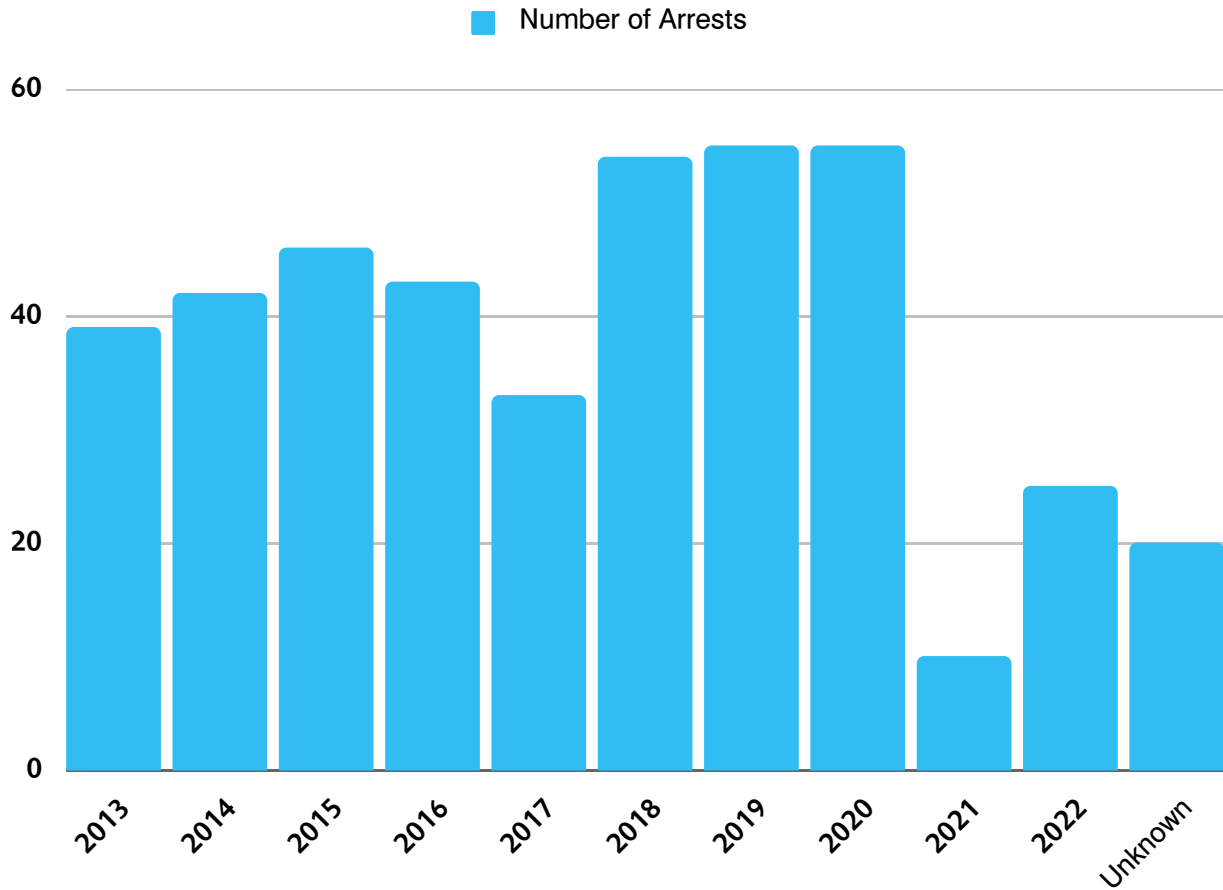
⁷ Blocking the media website “Mada Masr”, Masar

3/ Results Related to Journalists

First, Arrest of Journalists between 2013 and 2022.

Belady observed 422 cases of arrest during this period, 362 of whom were journalists.

Second, the Distribution of Journalists' Arrests throughout the Years:



Third, Arrest by Gender ⁸

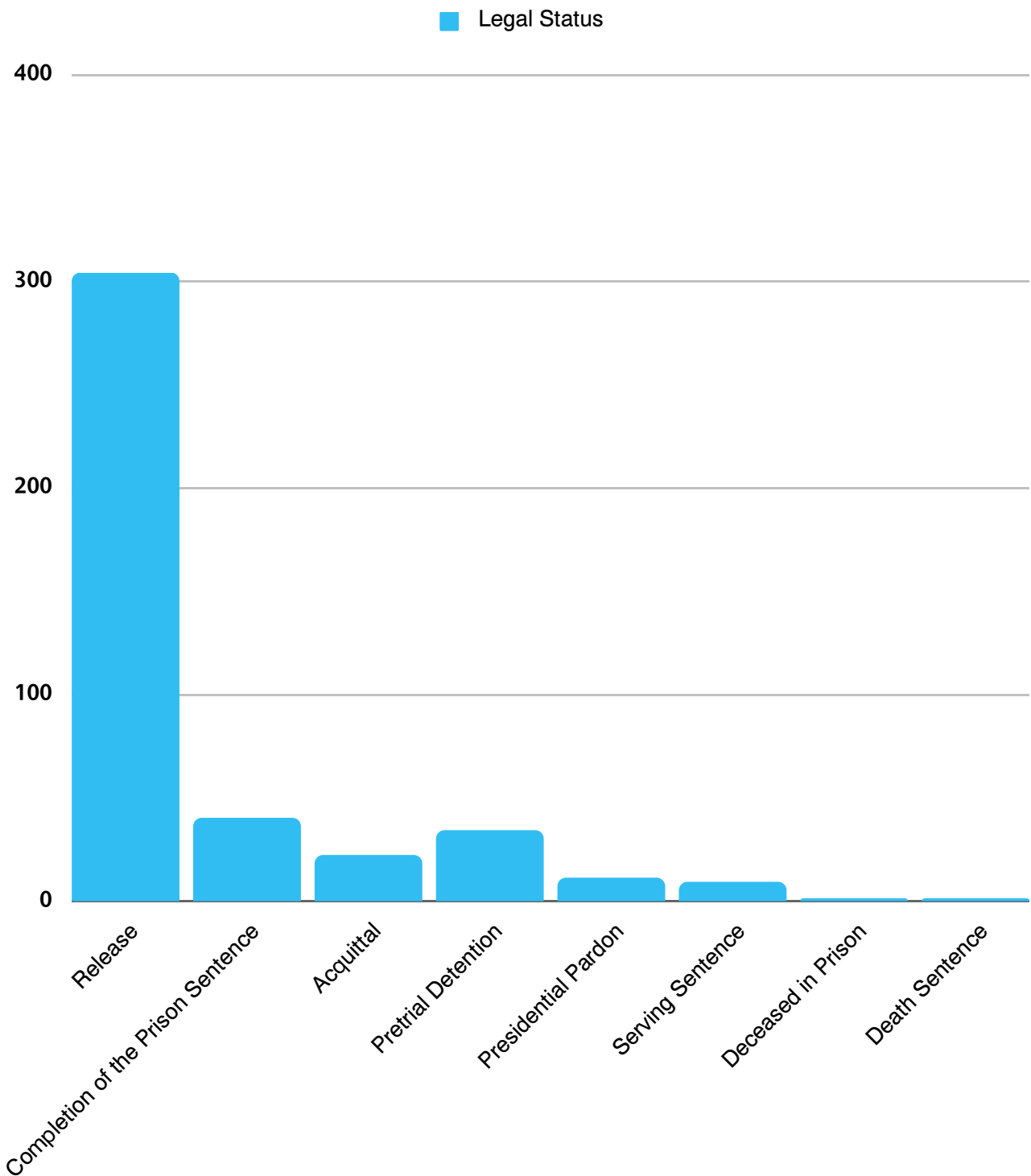


Fourth, the Classification of the Form of Arrest

Belady documented the arbitrary arrests of 398 journalists, and the rotation in new cases of 24.

⁸ Belady adopted a division based on gender (female/male) according to the published information, which often does not recognize gender diversity.

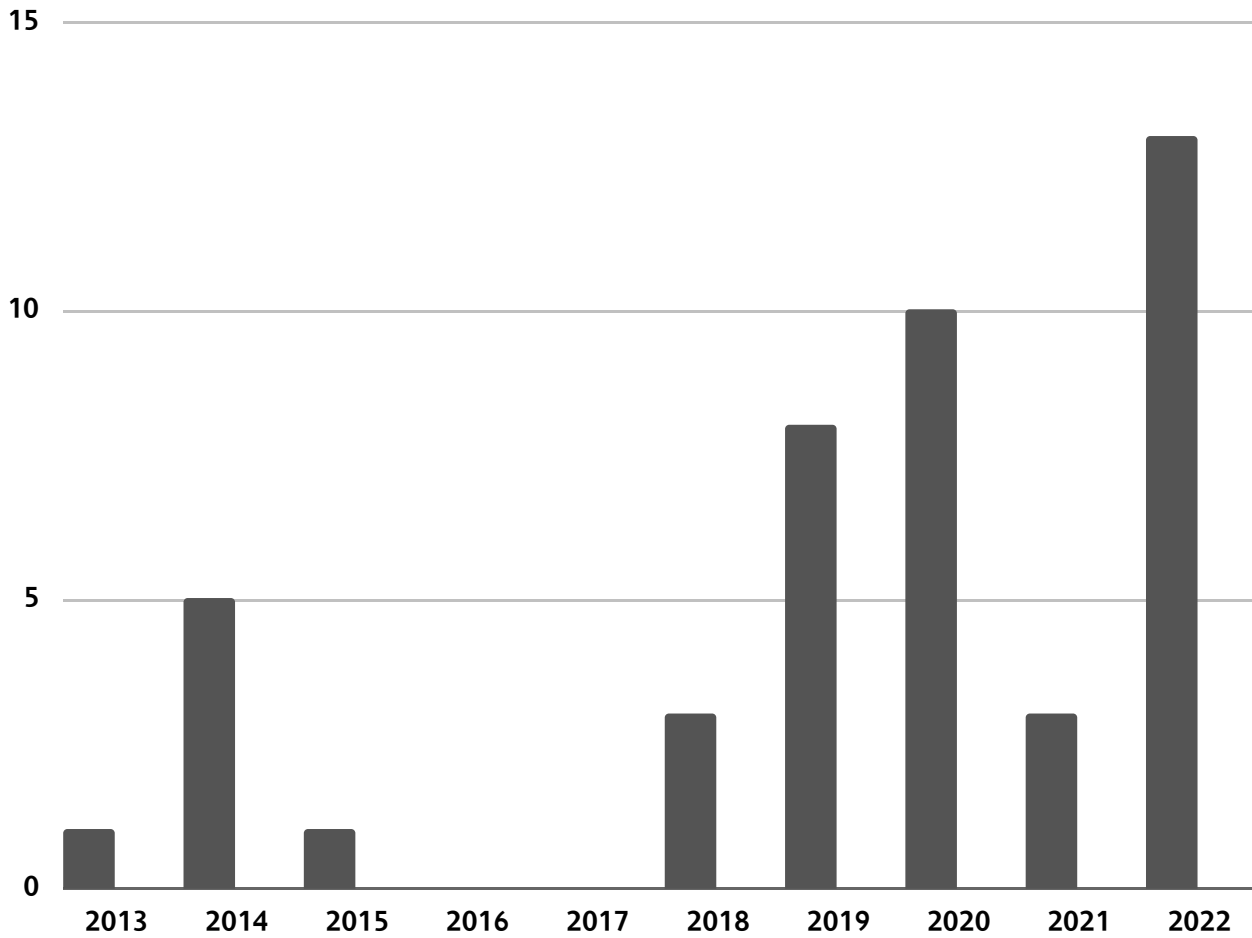
Fifth, the Legal Status of the Arrested Journalists



Sixth, Classification of the Legal Status of Journalists

Belady observed that 44 arrested journalists remained languishing behind prison walls, while 377 journalists were released. Belady also documented the death of a journalist in detention facilities.

Seventh, Statistics on Journalists Held in Prison, According to the Year of Arrest



Eighth: Journalists in Prison by Gender



Ninth, the Classification of the Form of Arrest of Journalists who Are in Prison

Belady observed that among the 44 journalists who remain in prison, 6 were rotated, while the rest have been subjected to arbitrary arrest.

Tenth, the Legal Status of Journalists in Prison

Belady observed that 34 journalists are held in pretrial detention, while 9 others are serving their sentences, in addition to a journalist sentenced to death.

Part Two: Discussion

1/ Shutdown of Print Newspapers: Who Is Responsible?

In the first part of this research, Belady provided statistics concerning print newspapers in an attempt to uncover the reasons behind their shutdown. These shutdowns were alleged to be attributed to financial reasons (14/23) under the justification that the era of print newspaper journalism has come to an end, ushering in a shift towards the digital realm. Nevertheless, Belady found that the majority of the shutdown newspapers are those of a political nature. In fact, out of the 23 newspapers subject to statistics, Belady observed the shutdown of 19 political newspapers.

The financial reasons for shutting down newspapers revolve mainly around bankruptcy or the inability to meet production costs (printing, publishing, distribution, etc.) In addition to economic aspects stemming from newspapers' dependence on human resources (such as journalists and staff), necessitating a budget allocation for salaries.

Concerning the reasons for the financial shutdown, it is important to note that the Egyptian government has many programs to support the press, the most prominent of which is the governorate newspaper support program that was launched in 2014, which aims to support local Print Newspapers throughout Egypt, and the Youth Newspaper Support Program that was launched in 2018, which aims to support newspaper reporting that target youth and students in Egypt, as well as the Cultural Publications Support Program, which aims to support newspaper reportings that deal with cultural, artistic, and literary topics in Egypt. It is worth noting that Belady tried to refer to the financial reports and regulations of these support programs but did not find any trace of the results through the official communication channels.

On the other hand, the government did not stop supporting its newspapers. The current regime participated in opening the state treasuries and banks for media institutions so that it could manufacture its media empire consisting of public and private media, which reflects the economic policy⁹ of the State in the media sector.

At the inauguration ceremony of the Suez Canal development axis in 2014, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi stated that "the late President Abdel Nasser was lucky because the media was by his side."¹⁰ Moreover, at the beginning of his tenure, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi expressed in several speeches his dissatisfaction with the media because of what he described as "exporting pessimism to the people". These statements highlight the political stance of the authority in relation to the media, which is clearly contradictory to the principle of free and impartial pluralistic media.

The Egyptian regime has gradually laid the foundations for the legal system of censorship. The regime has legislated numerous laws and measures since the new 2014 constitution. For instance, the Anti-Terrorism Law was enacted in 2015, and the General Prosecutor issued a decision to restrict publication in certain cases that prohibit investigating unofficial narratives.

⁹ Political Economy of media

The set of economic operations carried out within a specific political context, including the organization of media ownership or the economic philosophy for managing media institutions, along with the prevailing political climate, governance patterns, and active parties, all of which have an impact on freedoms.

Center for Political and Strategic Studies, The Role and Impact of Media and Private Newspapers in Egypt, and Transformations After 2013.

¹⁰ President Sisi's speech at the inauguration ceremony of the development projects for the Suez Canal Axis and the New Suez Canal.

In December 2016, the Media Organizations Law¹¹ was issued, and it was approved by the Legislative Council. This law, Law No. 92 of 2016, grants in its fourth article, the authority to issue licenses for establishing media institutions (paper and digital) to the Supreme Council of Press. Moreover, according to Article 6¹² of the same law, the presidency of the council and the majority of its members are appointed by the agents of the executive authority, chief among is the President of the Republic, who is entrusted with appointing the president of the commission, and an important part of the rest of its members. This leads us to conclude that this law has transformed media councils into regulatory authorities under the control of the executive authority, rather than being purely regulatory bodies.

Based on what was mentioned, we conclude that the political press is targeted by the current political system. This is due to the significant role that media plays in enabling citizens to access free and uncensored information. It is worth noting here that diversity and plurality are essential components of free information.

2/ The Egyptian Regime Withholding Information! Websites as an Example

Shutting down newspapers (print and digital) is considered a violation of Article 19, mentioned above, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Egypt ratified in 1967, as well as Articles 57, 65, and 71 of the Egyptian Constitution, which stipulate:

Article 65: “Freedom of thought and opinion is guaranteed. Every person has the right to express his opinion verbally, in writing, photographing, or other means of expression and publication.”

Article 71: “It is prohibited in any way to censor, confiscate, suspend or shutdown Egyptian newspapers and media. An exception may be made to impose specific censorship on them in times of war or general mobilization. No penalty of deprivation of liberty shall be imposed for crimes committed through publication or public expression. As for crimes related to incitement of violence or discrimination among citizens, or offenses that involve harming individuals' dignity, their penalties are determined by the law.”

However, since 2013, coinciding with the current regime's accession to power, a large number of electronic press websites have been blocked in Egypt. Among 90 press websites that were blocked, 88 websites were of political, social, and human rights content.

¹¹ Law No. 92 of 2016 for the issuance of the Press Organizations Law.

¹² Article 6 of Law No. 92 of 2016 states:

The Supreme Council shall be formed by a decision from the President of the Republic, consisting of thirteen members, chosen as follows:

- 1- The Council President, selected by the President of the Republic.
- 2- A Vice President of the State Council, chosen by the Special Council for Administrative Affairs of the State Council.
- 3- The head of the Competition Protection and Prevention of Monopoly Authority.
- 4- A representative of the National Telecom Regulatory Authority, chosen by the Board of Directors of the Authority.
- 5- Two public figures with expertise, chosen by the President of the Republic.
- 6- Two journalists, nominated by the Board of Directors of the Journalists Syndicate, excluding its members.
- 7- Two media professionals, nominated by the Board of Directors of the Media Syndicate, excluding its members.
- 8- Two public figures with expertise, nominated by the Office of the House of Representatives, excluding its members.
- 9- A representative of the Supreme Council of Universities, from professors of journalism and media working in Egyptian universities, nominated by the Supreme Council of Universities.

The entities referred to in items "6, 7, 8, 9" shall commit, within the three months preceding the end of the council's term, to nominate twice the required number for each category for membership in the Supreme Council. They shall notify the President of the Republic of their nominees' names for him to select the required number from among them. They shall also notify the council of any changes to their qualifications.

If the specified period passes without notifying the President of the Republic of the nominees' names for any reason, the President shall issue a decision to ensure their completion from the category for which the concerned entity did not provide nominees, based on the nomination of the Office of the House of Representatives.

The decision issued to form the council shall determine the financial treatment of its president and members based on what the House of Representatives decides.

In June 2020, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression published a study entitled “What has not been seen: A study on the effects of blocking press websites in three years.” The study stated that the number of press/media websites that have been blocked reached at least 127¹³, in addition to hundreds of websites that carry out a number of other activities, including websites affiliated with local and international human rights organizations, such as the blocking of the Cairo Center website, on the grounds that it published a human rights statement submitted to the United Nations by a number of organizations on the human rights conditions in Egypt between November 2019 and November 2022 in conjunction with the anniversary of the January 25 revolution. The Arab Observatory for Human Rights Information website was also blocked in 2017, as well as websites that enable users to bypass VPNs.¹⁴

Most of the time, the blocking decision is anonymously made, as the regulators of the press and websites in Egypt do not claim responsibility for the block (with the exception of some websites that have been blocked by a decision from the Committee for Seizure and Management of Muslim Brotherhood Funds, or by a decision from the Supreme Council for Media Regulation).

Digital journalism provides instant communication with citizens, and coverage of news in all its forms as soon as it occurs. The Internet has become a more flexible and effective medium for a significant segment of the news audience. Consequently, the practice of blocking affected the press industry in Egypt.

3/ 2017: The Fierce Attack on the Press

Reporters Without Borders stated in its report on the classification of journalistic freedom for 2017 that Egypt has joined the "blacklist" that includes countries where the situation of the press is considered "extremely dangerous", and this explains the high rate of shutdowns of digital newspapers. As a matter of fact, Belady observed the shutdown of 66 digital newspapers in 2017.

It is no secret to every follower of Egyptian affairs that the year 2017 marked the period leading up to the 2018 presidential elections in Egypt, which witnessed the victory of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi by 97%, according to the official results, which at least can be described as elections that lack minimum conditions for freedom of candidacy or voting. This leaves no room for doubt about the causal relationship between the crackdown on journalistic freedom in 2017 and the subsequent presidential elections, along with their outcomes.

Likewise, the report of "Blatant Censorship and Soft Nationalization",¹⁵ issued by the Arab Media Freedom Monitor, considered that the year 2017 witnessed the largest process of changing the media system in Egypt in terms of extending hegemony over many of the most influential media platforms, in addition to the establishment of new channels. Moreover, extensive takeover operations, benefiting intelligence agencies, have been carried out through civilian facades represented by companies and investment funds. These operations have succeeded in purchasing numerous channels, newspapers, and websites from their original owners, utilizing methods of persuasion and intimidation. This was also the case with businessmen Naguib Sawiris and Mr. El Badawi. This could be described as a "soft nationalization" process, paving the way for a presidential election without independent journalism.

¹³ The number of blocked websites differs according to this study from the figures published by Belady in this report. This is due to the temporal factor, as some of the blocked websites are reactivated or alternative websites are created.

¹⁴ What has not been seen: A Study on the Effects of Blocking on News Websites Over Three Years

¹⁵ Annual Report: 2017 Recap .. Blatant Censorship and Soft Nationalization, Arab Observatory for Journalistic Freedom

4/ Arresting Journalists: A Systematic Wave of Violence by the Regime

In conjunction with the fierce campaigns against print and digital newspapers, the regime also imprisons journalists to complement the triad of controlling and manipulating the media. During the period between **2013** and **2022**, Belady observed **422** cases of arrest of **362** journalists, **15.4%** of them were females (**65/422**) and **84.6%** of them were males (**357/422**).

Journalists were deprived of their freedom through **398** cases of arrest in which **24** journalists were rotated in new cases while in prison.

The tyranny against journalists is carried out through the executive's tools- the security forces and the Public Prosecution, which carry out arrests and referrals to court. Security agencies accomplish the task of free and independent media. After shutdown and blocks, pens and ideas are muzzled by imprisonment, repression, and security harassment. In this context, Belady observed the release of **304** journalists after arrest, and **34** of them were subjected to pretrial detention, while **40** journalists finished their prison terms, **22** were acquitted, **11** enjoyed a presidential pardon, and **9** journalists remain in their prisons to serve their sentences. Belady also documented the death of a journalist in prison and a journalist with the death penalty.

A / Journalists in Pretrial Detention

The Egyptian judiciary is expanding its use of pretrial detention to keep most non-pro-government journalists in prison for extended periods. This has had an impact on transforming pretrial detention into a punishment and tool for political reprisal.

Belady presents some cases of journalists who were subjected to pretrial detention for a period that sometimes exceeds prison sentences for some misdemeanors:

Mostafa Mohamed Saad Youssef: A photojournalist for Al Jazeera channel; he worked for many media institutions previously, including Dream TV, ART, Orbit, Sada Al Balad, Modern Sport, and ONTV. He was arrested on November 8th, **2019**, from Cairo International Airport, upon his return from Doha, because of his work on Al Jazeera channel. He was imprisoned in Abu Zaabal prison pending Case No. **1365** of **2018**, Supreme State Security, on charges of joining a terrorist group and spreading false news.

In addition to being held in pretrial detention since his arrest without trial in **2019**, Mostafa Mohamed suffers from health problems; including heart, hearing, and digestive problems. Despite his illness, he has not received medical care in prison.

Solafa Magdy: Solafa Magdy and her husband were kidnapped by National Security officers, on November 26th, **2019**, in front of a Dokki cafe, and they were taken to the National Security headquarters in Abbasiya. They appeared the next evening at the Supreme State Security Prosecution charged in Case No. **488** of **2019** State Security. Ms. Magdy was then transferred to El Qanater Prison on charges of "participating in a terrorist group" and "publishing false news and statements." She remained in prison until her release on April 14th, **2021**. Ms. Magdy was beaten and cussed at during her interrogation at the National Security headquarters, and she was also prevented from receiving visits and other means of communication for months during imprisonment, which coincided with the COVID pandemic in **2020**.

At the beginning of her imprisonment, Ms. Magdy underwent humiliating strip searches by female prison guards under direct orders from the prison's chief investigator. This invasive search extended to a forced vaginal examination, resulting in severe bleeding that persisted for several months.

B/ Journalists Who Have Been Subjected to Enforced Disappearance

Enforced disappearance is used by governments for specific purposes, including spreading terror within societies. The state of enforced disappearance affects the disappeared person, their family, and their local community. This is evidenced by the multiplicity and spread of cases. Fear of enforced disappearance spreads within the entire community, which leads to resignation from public affairs and acceptance of such disappearances as a matter of fact.

According to Article 2 of the UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances 47/133 of December 18, 1992, "Enforced disappearance" means the arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State, or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or concealment the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which places such a person outside the protection of the law."¹⁶

As for Egyptian law, Egyptian legislation does not address enforced disappearance and it does not consider it a crime. It only criminalized some aspects of disappearance such as illegal detention and detention in facilities other than the designated ones. It should be noted that these crimes can occur in conjunction with or without enforced disappearance.

Belady presents stories of some journalists who have been subjected to enforced disappearance:

Hisham Abdel Aziz Gharib: A programmer for Al Jazeera network was arrested on June 20th, 2019, after his return from Qatar after he and his family were detained at Cairo Airport. Their passports were confiscated. The family was then permitted to leave the airport. They were then contacted again to return to the airport to collect their passports.

As for Mr. Gharib, upon his arrival at Cairo Airport, he was arrested and taken to an unknown location, and he was kept in illegal detention for two days until he appeared at the Supreme State Security Prosecution. He was interrogated on June 22nd, 2022, and charged in Case No. 1365 of 2018 for joining a terrorist group and publishing false news and statements. He remained in pretrial detention until he was released on bail on December 5th, 2019, by a decision of the Criminal Court held in the counseling chamber. He then remained forcibly disappeared for a month until he reappeared at the Supreme State Security Prosecution office for investigation in Case No. 1956 of 2019 State Security on the same charges.

Ayatollah Alaa Hosni: Ms. Hosni is a Journalist and wife of imprisoned journalist Hassan El Qabbani, and mother of two daughters. On June 17th, 2019, Ms. Hosni was arrested from the Sheikh Zayed district while offering condolences for the passing of former President Mohamed Morsi. She was then taken to an unknown place. Ms. Hosni remained forcibly disappeared for 12 days, until she appeared before the Public Prosecution on June 29th, 2019. She was interrogated and charged in Case No. 640 of 2018 Supreme State Security for communicating with media and satellite channels that incite against the state, joining a terrorist group established contrary to the provisions of the law, and using social media to spread false news.

¹⁶ Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, United Nations Resolution 47/133 dated December 18th, 1992.

She was held in pretrial detention in El Qanater Prison and her imprisonment continued to be renewed until she was released with precautionary measures on December 24th, 2019.

C/ Medical Negligence Causing the Death of a Journalist in Detention Places!

Amr Abu Khalil: Mr. Abu Khalil is an Egyptian consultant psychiatrist who occasionally practices journalism. He was arrested on October 2nd, 2019, in front of his patients in his clinic.

He left the Muslim Brotherhood more than a quarter of a century ago and wrote several articles criticizing the Islamic movement.

Mr. Abu Khalil was subjected to deliberate medical negligence, which led to his death in his prison cell. On September 6th, 2020, he suffered chest pain and informed the guards that it was a sign of a heart attack. Despite repeated requests and calls to transfer him to the hospital, the prison administration ignored the calls. Official government reports claim that he died from natural causes- a sudden drop in blood circulation.

D/ Cases Involving Journalists in Mass

The Marriott Cell: The Marriott Cell case included 20 journalists working for "Al Jazeera" channel. The journalists were charged in the case because of the coverage of the violations committed by the security forces against demonstrators, and it was broadcast on Al Jazeera channel. The political authority considered that covering these events tarnishes the reputation of the country. The journalists have been imprisoned in case No. 1145 of 2014 Qasr El Nil Felonies, registered under No. 535 of 2013 Supreme State Security, registered under No. 12 of 2014 in Downtown Cairo, and registered under No. 26806 of judicial year 82 on charges of tarnishing the country's image abroad and fabricating news to help The Muslim Brotherhood, broadcasting false statements and fabricated images, and joining a banned group. This case included 20 Egyptian and foreign journalists at Al-Jazeera's office in Egypt, the most prominent of whom are:

- **Mohamed Mahmoud Fadel Fahmy:** Mr. Fahmy was the head of Al Jazeera English bureau in Egypt. He was arrested on December 29th, 2013, and remained in pretrial detention until June 23rd, 2014 when the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced him to seven years on the abovementioned charges. On January 1st, 2015, the Court of Cassation accepted the appeal, both procedurally and substantively, overturning the contested verdict and remanding the case to a different criminal court for retrial. Mr. Fahmy was released on September 23rd, 2015, by a presidential pardon.
- **Baher Mohamed Hazem Ahmed Nasr Ghorab:** Mr. Ghorab was an Al Jazeera reporter and producer. He was arrested on December 29th, 2013, and remained in pretrial detention until June 23rd, 2014 when the Cairo Criminal Court ordered his imprisonment for ten years on the aforementioned charges. On January 1st, 2015, the Court of Cassation accepted the appeal related to his case, both procedurally and substantively, overturning the appealed verdict and remanding the case to a different criminal court for a retrial. Mr. Ghorab was released on September 23rd, 2015, by a presidential pardon.
- **Raiding the Headquarters of Rasd News Network:** On February 1st, 2014, the police forces raided the Headquarters of Rasd News Network under the pretext of operating without a permit and publishing false news that harms the reputation of the country. This campaign culminated in the arrest and imprisonment of 9 journalists from the network.

5/ Journalists Still behind Prison Walls

Belady observed that 34 journalists are held in pretrial detention, while 9 others are serving their sentences, and a journalist sentenced to death.

The safety and freedom of journalists are not a matter of personal security, but rather a matter of the safety and health of the entire community. It is the duty of governments to do their utmost to protect journalists and provide them with legislation that protects them in the exercise of their duties. However, the Egyptian authorities have a different opinion based on imprisoning journalists and punishing them, whether by punishing them by pretrial detention or sentencing them to serve time in prison. We also note that these sentences can reach the death penalty!

The Death Sentence against Ahmed Ali Abdo Afifi: Mr. Afifi was a journalist and documentary film producer who was arrested in 2018 and imprisoned in “Tora High-Security Prison-Badr” in case No. 10154 of 2014 October II felonies and registered with No. 3690 of 2014, Cairo, south of Giza. He was charged with spying for Qatar and received the death sentence on June 18th, 2018.

Conclusion

In the end, this research clearly demonstrates that the shutdown of print newspapers and the blocking of digital journalism websites in Egypt is a result of clear and systematic political choices by the Egyptian regime. In addition, the successive attacks on newspapers and digital journalism represent a flagrant violation of journalistic freedom and human rights in Egypt. The blocking of free information and diverse and independent readings that diverge from the authority's narratives is directly related to the right of the Egyptian citizen to obtain information. On the other hand, the regime provides an encouraging environment and economic support to programs for public and private media institutions that obey its orders and are subject to its predetermined agendas.

Likewise, the policy of controlling the media is subject to a strategy of spreading terror and intimidation in the hearts of free writers and impartial journalism. We find that the executive and judicial tool of the regime punishes journalists with imprisonment, security harassment, and unfair sentences who perform journalism or report news that does not appeal to the Egyptian regime.

Finally, Belady considers that every threat directed at media institutions and journalists is a threat that directly targets journalistic freedom, and thus freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, and all basic rights inherent in democratic societies, and that all these arbitrary measures directly lead to the concentration of dictatorship and individual rule devoid of participation in making decisions that directly concern the daily life of the Egyptian people.

Recommendations:

- **Work on enhancing the right to obtain information for citizens and journalists by alleviating restrictions on print and digital newspapers.**
- **Establishing an independent media entity separate from political authority, involving all relevant associations and unions in the journalistic field, with its primary goal being the regulation of the profession and ensuring journalistic freedom.**
- **Directing independent and transparent programs to support print newspapers, with their financial regulations subject to both prior and subsequent oversight through the publication of detailed reports for the public and relevant bodies.**
- **Immediately ceasing the policy of blocking digital news websites.**
- **Committing to the provisions of the Egyptian constitution and ensuring that no journalist is imprisoned due to the direct performance of their work.**
- **Releasing journalists who are currently imprisoned without delay.**
- **Providing compensation for all journalists who were imprisoned or subjected to security harassment.**

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