All the News Fit to Print: Egyptian and Tunisian Media Development and Political Toleration through Arab Spring

Seth Fiderer

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Part of the International Relations Commons, Journalism Studies Commons, Models and Methods Commons, and the Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Fiderer, Seth, "All the News Fit to Print: Egyptian and Tunisian Media Development and Political Toleration through Arab Spring" (2020). Undergraduate Honors Theses. Paper 1539. https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/1539

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
All the News Fit to Print: Egyptian and Tunisian Media Development and Political Toleration through Arab Spring

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from The College of William and Mary

by

Seth Patrick Fiderer

Accepted for Honors

________________________

Professor Maurits van der Veen, Director

Professor Sharan Grewal

Professor Paul Vierthaler

Williamsburg, VA
May 8, 2020
1. Introduction

The Arab Spring Revolutions of 2011 have had diverse outcomes throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Two states that have experienced large scale change are Tunisia and Egypt, both of which experienced regime change. Tunisia has experienced large-scale democratization and has become more politically open. Egypt experienced a brief democratic period between 2011 and 2013 before a military coup reverted the country to authoritarian practices. Both nations have revised their press codes since their respective revolutions. Additionally, both nations have had tenuous relations with Islamist groups, namely the Tunisian Ennahda party and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Both groups were demonized under the pre-revolution authoritarian state media. However, the media of Egypt and Tunisia have changed in different ways since the revolutions. It is important to look at media and press freedom as an analog for the freedom of civil society during times of transition. However, this is difficult in situations with histories of censorship and repression.

This study will address the treatment of Islamist opposition parties in print media pre and post revolution as a proxy for general political toleration and media freedom. This is done using probabilistic topic modeling and sentiment analysis to determine how frequently various newspapers cover these groups and the tone used in that coverage. This approach allows us to discern a breakdown of preference falsification as well as a change of press and public sentiment over time. This study finds that, while both Tunisia and Egypt see greater media freedom after their respective revolutions, Tunisian state-owned papers remain neutral towards opposition parties, while Egyptian independent papers become much more polarized.

This thesis will begin by exploring the history of Tunisia and Egypt and how it relates to their current political and media landscapes. Next, their media landscapes will be discussed,
followed by a literature review of both Arab media and media theory. Each newspaper studied will be introduced and topic modeling and sentiment analysis will be explained in their application to this study. Finally, the analysis and findings of this study will be discussed.

2. Background

History of Tunisia Prior to Arab Spring

Tunisia is a small nation located in North Africa between Algeria and Libya. It is ethnically homogenous, with very few tribal divisions. Tunisia was a French colony until its independence in 1956 through a relatively peaceful independence movement led by Habib Bourguiba. The legacy of Bourguiba is one of social tolerance of most groups, with the exception of Ennahda. Ennahda is an Islamist right-wing political party. It was viciously repressed under Bourguiba, being driven into exile. Therefore, with Ennahda being reintroduced into the political sphere after the revolution, it is likely Tunisian publications are more tolerant of political opposition groups.

In November 1987, General Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali took control of the country through a “medical coup” in which doctors loyal to Ben Ali declared Bourguiba unfit to rule, leading to further repression of Islamists, economic stagnation, and the mobilization of private security forces against opposition, essentially creating a police state. During Ben Ali’s rule, the economy of Tunisia stagnated, and unemployment skyrocketed. The effects of this economic hardship were felt most strongly in the rural Tunisian south and center-west, with poverty ratios 8% and

\[\text{Ibid., 75.}\]
14% higher than the national average respectively as of 2004. Finally, the Tunisian military had been suffering from a lack of funding just prior to the revolution, crippling its efficacy.

Ennahda arose from the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI). The MTI first gained prominence during the Bourguiba era with a series of student protests. These protests were met with harsh governmental repression due to Bourguiba’s intense hostility towards political Islam, resulting in the arrest of several members of the MTI. Among the most notable of these was Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of the movement. The trial was suspected to be heavily stacked with Bourguiba loyalists. When the trial returned a relatively light sentence, Bourguiba was shocked. He demanded that Ghannouchi be given the death penalty, causing many to fear Bourguiba had lost control and resulting in Ben Ali’s medical coup.

Ben Ali continued this legacy of Islamist repression, forcing the Ennahda party into exile in France. While little information exists about the period of exile, Abdelkarim Harouni, former President of the Ennahda Shura Council claims that this period of exile led to a high degree of political organization and cohesiveness. This allows the modern Ennahda to dominate the Tunisian political landscape; other political parties cannot compete with the member base, organizational capacity, or resources of Ennahda. In the current Tunisian political climate, political organization and mobilization has become increasingly difficult as election burnout lowers voter turnout, and Ennahda is becoming seen as the monolithic political organization. This reputation has had an effect in the Tunisian media, with Ennahda members allegedly

---

3 Burns, Revolts and the Military in the Arab Spring, 77.
4 Ibid., 74.
5 Ibid.
6 Abdelkarim Harouni, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 5, 2019.
See also Grewal (2020), who discusses the exile period in depth and its relation with liberalization.
becoming increasingly aggressive on radio broadcasts and in publications. We can expect this to result in increasing reluctance to express criticism of Ennahda in the media.

**History of Egypt Prior to Arab Spring**

Egypt is an Arab nation located in North Africa bordering Israel and Libya. It is much more religiously diverse than Tunisia, with 10% of Egyptians being Coptic Christians. This divide between Muslims and Coptic Christians has historically been codified into law. For example, Copts have previous been barred from holding public office. This plays into a broader politicization of religious discrimination which may play a role in state media treatment of religious opposition parties.

In the early 1900s, the Muslim Brotherhood began to form under Hassan al-Banna as a response to British imperialism and the liberalization of Egyptian life. The Muslim Brotherhood, at its founding, was dedicated to reinterpreting Islam in a way that could compete with secular, Western values, while retaining traditional Islamic values. Al-Banna prioritized land redistribution and social justice as well as advocating for workers’ rights and unionization.

Anwar Sadat’s economic planning went in a wildly different direction than his predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Under Sadat, Egypt adopted *infitah* (opening) economic policies, designed to promote foreign investment. Additionally, Sadat violated the “Three No’s” policy towards Israel adopted at the Khartoum Summit in 1967. This policy meant that

---

7 Tunisian Tour Guide, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 6, 2019.
10 Burns, *Revolts and the Military in the Arab Spring*, 100.
11 Ibid.
Arab states would have no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. The Camp David Accords of 1978 created a framework for peace between Egypt and Israel. While appeasing the Western international community, Sadat’s violation of the Khartoum Summit led to the alienation of Egypt as an actor from broader Arab politics for decades.

Among the most vocal critics of the Camp David Accords was the Muslim Brotherhood. During the early years of the Sadat regime, the Brotherhood had partially cooperated with the regime. This was a departure from the Nasserist policies to restrict the movement of the brotherhood. The regime allowed the Brotherhood to operate as a “semilegal network and publish its own newspapers and magazines.” This changed after the Camp David Accords, and eventually resulted in members of an Islamist group called the Islamic Jihad assassinating Sadat in October of 1981.

As previously outlined, the Muslim Brotherhood has fallen in and out of the good graces of the Egyptian government for decades. While the Mubarak regime was notably hostile towards the Brotherhood, the brief opening under the Morsi regime allowed for greater political representation of the Brotherhood itself. This brief period showed the Brotherhood consolidating into a political party and the use of Islamist rhetoric as a political platform. This brief period of toleration of the Brotherhood during the Morsi era will provide an interesting divergence from coverage of the Brotherhood during the Mubarak and Al-Sisi eras. I would expect to find a greater amount of coverage as well as a more tolerant tone overall in articles discussing the

---

14 Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 537.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Brotherhood during this period, followed by much less frequent coverage and a more antagonistic tone during the Al-Sisi era. I expect this due to the greater press freedom granted by the minor liberalizations under Morsi as well as the reversal of these freedoms and further repression of the Brotherhood under Al-Sisi.

Hosni Mubarak succeeded Sadat and increased the funding and strength of the Egyptian military.\(^\text{19}\) He continued to increase the economic sovereignty and political autonomy of the armed forces, creating a force that was loyal to him but also distinct from the regime itself.\(^\text{20}\) Mubarak ran into controversy throughout his rule, especially around nepotism and military appointments. This came to a head in the 2000s when he attempted to bolster the position of the National Democratic Party in order to create a clear line of succession to appoint his son as the new president after his resignation.\(^\text{21}\) Hosni Mubarak’s son, Gamal Mubarak, promoted various reforms sponsored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, which directly endangered the economic status of the military.\(^\text{22}\) The Egyptian military maintained a level of independence from the regime as a coup-proofing measure; essentially, the Mubarak regime provided personal autonomy and financial incentives to the military. This way, the military would have no reason to revolt against the government.\(^\text{23}\) This, along with broader economic stagnation, set the stage for the revolution of 2011.

**Tunisia in the Arab Spring**

\(^\text{19}\) Burns, *Revolts and the Military in the Arab Spring*, 109.
\(^\text{20}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{21}\) Ibid., 110.
\(^\text{22}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{23}\) Ibid.
The wave of revolutions that would become known as the Arab Spring began in proper in December of 2010 when Muhammad Bouazizi, a young fruit seller and college graduate, self-immolated in Sidi Bouzid, a rural province in central Tunisia. Bouazizi was protesting the lack of economic opportunity and the forced adoption of informal economies for rural Tunisian youth. Onlookers filmed and distributed footage of this protest along with descriptions of rumors that he had been slapped by a female police officer, inciting imagery of state abuse in the face of widespread governmental nepotism and corruption. This video was quickly picked up by Al Jazeera and spread rapidly through social media, leading to large crowds gathering and marching through the streets. Ben Ali fled the country, and the long-standing dictatorship fell. The military remained mostly uninvolved in the revolution itself, despite Ben Ali’s commands. This allowed protestors relative safety and become crucial in the spread of the protests to other nations. Al Jazeera enjoyed a broad readership in both Egypt and Tunisia as part of the broader Arab Media Sphere.

Since the revolution, Tunisia has written a new constitution and held a number of elections. The first election was won by Ennahda and the second was won by opposition parties, such as Nidaa Tounes. This precipitated a peaceful transfer of power between parties, indicating a democratic path forward, despite the claims of the Minister of the Interior. However, in 2013, a series of political assassinations threatened to undermine the

24 Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 537.
25 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
democratization process, providing even greater urgency to the need for a constitution.\textsuperscript{30} The
political crisis of 2013 led to the establishment of the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartets,
which aided in the transition and drafting of the constitution. The Quartet was awarded the Nobel
Peace Prize for its efforts in 2014.

**Egypt in the Arab Spring**

Next, this protest wave spread to Egypt. Inspired by media coverage of heroic Tunisian
protestors as well as seeing the success of the Tunisian protests with little harm done to
protestors, Egyptians followed suit. Egyptian protestors took to Tahrir Square, occupying the
public space and creating a tent city. These protestors maintained non-violent resistance but were
met with violent repression from the Mubarak regime, with hundreds being killed within the first
few days of the protests.\textsuperscript{31} The coup-proofing of the Egyptian military through economic means
backfired on the Mubarak regime, as this level of autonomy allowed the protestors to court the
military as the world turned its eye to Egypt, resulting in the downfall of the Mubarak regime.\textsuperscript{32}

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, elections had been called by the military to
amend the previously existing constitution.\textsuperscript{33} Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood,
pushed for a rapid return to the previous electoral system in hopes of gaining political
representation.\textsuperscript{34} This was the first of many rounds of elections in which the Muslim

\textsuperscript{31} Burns, *Revolts and the Military in the Arab Spring*, 115.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 47.
Brotherhood was able to make significant gains, with Morsi himself being a member of the Brotherhood.

As time went on, the corruption of the Brotherhood became apparent; Brotherhood-affiliated Parliamentary deputies were exposed for attempting to stack the constituent assembly with Brotherhood-sympathizers, taking legal action against critical journalists, and seizing and interrogating critical protestors. The Brotherhood accused the opposition of refusing to accept election results that launched them into greater positions of power, resulting in more and more attempts to prevent non-Islamists from ascending to positions of power. This led to the creation of the Tamarod movement, a protest group that was aimed at the removal of Morsi from power and new elections being held. A mass protest was held in June 2013 which led to the July 3rd coup in which the military ousted Morsi and took control of the government. Al-Sisi took control of the government and maintains this position to this day.

As the Arab Spring spread to various countries throughout MENA, Egypt and Tunisia were left with new states to build. Tunisia’s lack of military intervention and strong civil society led to democratic development, while Egypt experimented with slight democratization before the military overthrew the Morsi regime, placing Al-Sisi in control.

Current Situation

Currently, Tunisia is on tenuous ground. Tunisians have had unrealistically high expectations of immediate prosperity post-democratization. They expected rapid progress, and

---

35 Ibid., 51.
36 Ibid.
38 Brown, “Egypt’s Failed Transition,” 56.
when these large reforms took longer than young Tunisians expected, polling numbers plummeted.\textsuperscript{39} Polling data shows that many Tunisians today believe they are worse off now than they were under Ben Ali.\textsuperscript{40} The most commonly reported problem is economic stagnation, with unemployment and inflation reaching record levels.\textsuperscript{41} The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet was created by civil society groups to draft a new constitution for the nation with both consensus legitimacy and electoral legitimacy.\textsuperscript{42} This Quartet was comprised of the UGTT, the Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Tunisian Lawyers Syndicate, and the Tunisian Human Rights League. Since the quartet did not have a statute or the ability to adopt policy unilaterally, all decisions had to be passed through the Tunisian parliament, thus providing legitimacy to the work of the Quartet.\textsuperscript{43} However, one of the largest issues currently facing Tunisia is democratic burnout. Simply put, every political party except for the Islamist Ennahda party and Nidaa Tounes is too poorly organized to function properly. Other parties exist in a nominal sense; they frequently disband shortly after their foundation or lack the constituency to gain political representation.\textsuperscript{44} Additionally, it is likely many Tunisians feel elections come too frequently. This is a result of how many elections were needed during the transition process. Tunisians needed to vote on a constituent assembly, a president, and a parliament. These two factors combined means much of the Tunisian polity no longer engages in political discourse. Students are most notably affected by this burnout. For example, many students of the


\textsuperscript{40} International Republican Institute Researcher, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 5, 2019.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Former Leader of the Tunisian Human Rights League, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 7, 2019.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

Mediterranean School of Business unwilling or reluctant to discuss politics in any form according to professors at the university.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{The Tunisian Media Landscape}

Prior to the revolution, the Tunisian media was heavily centered around rewarding publications sympathetic to the regime while punishing opposition publications.\textsuperscript{46} Print media under Ben Ali was divided into four categories: state-owned media, media owned by the ruling party, privately-owned media with nepotistic ties to the regime, and opposition press.\textsuperscript{47} While sympathetic publications were rewarded with greater funding and advertisement, opposition papers were subject to economic and political pressures from the regime.\textsuperscript{48}

One of the most crucial means of state control for new publications was the media licensing system. While the Ministry of Communication managed general Tunisian media, the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for approving and licensing new print publications, effectively making print media a matter of state security.\textsuperscript{49} This meant that the Ministry could revoke the license of any newspaper at any time for matters of “state security” with no due process of any kind.\textsuperscript{50}

Another form of control over state publications was the Agency for External Communication under the Ministry of Communications. The most notable role of this

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45}Professor of Political Science at the Mediterranean School of Business, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 4, 2019.
\item \textsuperscript{47}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{48}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{49}Fatima El-Issawi, \textit{Arab National Media and Political Change: Recording the Transition}, The Palgrave Macmillan Series in International Political Communication (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 15.
\item \textsuperscript{50}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
organization was to distribute advertising revenues, a function which determined whether specific print publications would be able to survive. This, in conjunction with the licensing system, gave Ben Ali strict control over the Tunisian media landscape. This control ceased after the fall of the Ben Ali regime which led to the abolition of the Ministry of Communications and the limitation of the power of the Agency for External Communication.

The fall of the Ben Ali regime created an opening for the establishment of new print publications. 228 new print publications were created shortly after the revolution itself according to the National Authority for the Reform of Information and Communication (INRIC) with most closing soon after beginning operation. Additionally, these new publications lacked professionalism and journalistic experience, leading to a high level of sensationalism and “personal and political account-settling.” As part of the political transition, the High Authority for the Achievement of the Revolutionary Objectives (and later the new Constituent Assembly) worked with INRIC to reform the Tunisian media landscape according to three essential decrees: the rewriting of the Press Code, allowing journalists access to governmental documents, and freedom for the broadcast sector under the newly established High Independent Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA), an independent regulatory body.

The first of these decrees, Decree 115-2011, rewrote the Press Code of Tunisia. The original Press Code was written in 1975 and revised four times (1988, 1993, 2001, and 2006). Decree 115-2011 was notable for abolishing any and all forms of licensing in media as well as implementing transparency in funding, ownership, circulation, and management of publications,

---

51 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 El-Issawi, Arab National Media and Political Change, 18.
a departure from the corrupt practices under Ben Ali. Additionally, it proposed anti-monopoly measures to ensure the plurality and fairness of Tunisian media. Finally, the new Press Code would minimize jail sentences for journalists in favor of fines. However, the implementation of Decree 115-2011 was delayed until October 2012.

The second major Decree was Decree 41-2011, the establishment of access to political documents and information through an online portal. This Decree allowed unprecedented access to governmental information and was adopted immediately. However, Decree 41-2011 was heavily criticized for a large number of exceptions, which “threaten to transform it into a cosmetic guarantee.”

Finally, Decree 116-2011 established HAICA. HAICA plays an important role in the newly democratized Tunisia as the body that regulates campaign advertising. Moreover, HAICA has the ability to levy penalties on media outlets that violate the law. These penalties gradually increase in severity and can go as far as fully revoking the media license of an outlet. However, all decisions of HAICA can be appealed through the judicial system.

Unfortunately, while Decree 41-2011 was adopted immediately, the delays surrounding the adoption of Decrees 115-2011 and 116-2011 led to the resignation of the entire INRIC team, citing continuous and intentional delays by the Ennahda-led governing coalition reminiscent of pre-revolution censorship and media control as well as a lack of political support for media.

55 Ibid., 19.
57 El-Issawi, Arab National Media and Political Change, 19.
58 Ibid.
reform.\textsuperscript{59} Even the establishment of HAICA was met with delays due to disagreements between the Ennahda-led coalition and the secularist opposition.\textsuperscript{60}

The current Tunisian media landscape is one of pluralism and a confused legal statute. Articles 31 and 32 of the Tunisian constitution allow the freedom of uncensored opinion, thought, expression, media, publication and the right to information.\textsuperscript{61} However, these provisions are undermined by the 2015 Anti-Terror Law, proposed in the wake of Islamic State violence.\textsuperscript{62} This Anti-Terror Law bans criticism against Tunisian security forces by imposing a minimum two year jail sentence for publishing criticism and a ten year jail term for dissemination of security secrets.\textsuperscript{63} It is crucial to note that this law was a direct update of a law created by Ben Ali in 2003 and was seen by many as a return to authoritarian practices.\textsuperscript{64} The original 2003 law led to the arrest and torture of around 3000 journalists under charges of terrorism according to Human Rights Watch.\textsuperscript{65} Therefore, this resurgence of media censorship practices may have important implications for the state of opposition coverage in modern Tunisian press outlets.

Currently, the most dominant Tunisian media outlets are \textit{La Presse}, \textit{Esshafa}, \textit{Assabha}, \textit{Alchourouk}, and \textit{Le Temps}.\textsuperscript{66} The most prominent state-owned outlet is \textit{La Presse}. Newspapers are published in French and Arabic with many newspapers additionally publishing English

\footnotesize{
\begin{itemize}
  \item 60 El-Issawi, \textit{Arab National Media and Political Change}, 19.
  \item 63 El-Issawi, \textit{Arab National Media and Political Change}, 23.
  \item 64 Rodrigo, “Tunisia’s Anti-Terror Law.”
\end{itemize}
}
editions. TAP is no longer the media monolith it was during the Ben Ali era but is still widely published. According to Edward Webb, “Tunisia’s media system appears to be genuinely in transition.”67 This entails a level of media plurality not previously seen in the Tunisian media landscape. It is important to note that newspapers are not the most widely consumed form of media. Talk shows enjoy a much broader viewership. However, talk shows in Egypt and Tunisia are understood to be inherently biased to a degree that newspapers are not.68 Many talk show hosts consider neutrality “an act of treason.”69 The talk show scene within these countries is additionally highly sensationalist, with many citizens seeing them as inadequate demonstrations of political thought.70

The Egyptian Media Landscape

Throughout the independence of Egypt, the media landscape has been largely occupied by state-owned media outlets. The press was nationalized in 1956 with the “sole purpose of voicing the regime’s message.”71 State media has always been a powerful regime tool in Egypt. For example, President Gamal Abdel Nasser infamously used his radio station Voice of the Arabs to attempt to mobilize the populations of rival states’ against their leaders as well as to assert the position of Egypt as the quintessential Arab state.72 A part of Sadat’s infitah involved the reintroduction of private media, which, according to El Issawi, helped “diversify the media content, but failed to challenge existing taboos.”73

---

69 Ibid.
70 Professor of Political Science at the Mediterranean School of Business, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 4, 2019.
72 Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 147.
The first mechanism of control over the state media was established with the Supreme Press Council in 1975. The Supreme Press Council was tasked with providing licenses to newspapers through a fairly ill-defined process, with licenses seemingly being granted on an ad-hoc basis. There were no clear grounds as to why a license was granted or denied. This body was dissolved in 2013 by the new military government in favor of a new Supreme Press Council, which has sparked controversy due to its adoption before a revision of a formal press code.

Throughout the 2000s, the state began to issue licenses for more private newspapers, such as the notable Al-Masry Al-Youm in 2003. This led to an increasing competition against the established state media from fledgling private dailies, weeklies, and magazines. Edward Webb discusses the practice of “censorship by appointment” within Egyptian state publications; essentially “senior management could be relied upon to shape the message without needing formal censors.” This created a second layer of censorship: one in the newsroom and one from the state. The state media of Egypt created an environment in which journalists needed to learn through trial and error what could and could not be published. Much like Tunisia, Egyptian state publications were subject to a harsh licensing system. Having editors and censors provided a boon to state publications as they could avoid running into conflict with regime censors. Egyptian journalists described the relationship between them and the editor-as-censor in a quite

74 Ibid., 24.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Webb, Media in Egypt and Tunisia, 30.
78 Ibid., 31.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
simple way: “we’re not censoring you because we’re pro-regime - we just don’t want this newspaper to be closed down.”

The Egyptian Press Code has numerous provisions to prevent criticism of government officials. Moreover, a similar system of licensing applies to journalists as well. The Journalists’ Syndicate Law (1970) prevents journalists who were not registered with the Journalists’ Syndicate from reporting. This law, in combination with a high barrier to entry in terms of years of experience and body of work, effectively prevents most journalists from entering the field. The interim constitution drafted by SCAF promises media freedom and security, but this freedom can be suspended in times of national emergency. Additionally, the licensing system was largely replaced by the 2012 constitution in favor of a notification system, effectively lowering the barrier to entry for new publications into the media landscape.

A new constitution was adopted by SCAF in 2014, guaranteeing the freedom of the press (Article 70), freedom of publication (Article 71), and the independence of press institutions (Article 72.) These articles create three regulatory bodies: the Supreme Council for the Regulation of Media, the National Press Organization, and the National Media Organization. However, these provisions are undermined by a significant increase in arbitrary detainment of journalists critical of the regime. Finally, in 2015, Al-Sisi implemented a new Anti-Terror bill, which provided greater grounds for penalties to be levied against press outlets on the basis of spreading “false” information on matters of security. Most frequently, this is applied to any news

---

81 Ibid., 32.
82 El-Issawi, Arab National Media and Political Change, 27.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 28.
outlet deviating from the official government word on the situation.\textsuperscript{87} This is used to silence opposition publications. Moreover, this has important implications on the content published by Egyptian media outlets after the revolution and after the coup; some topics may not be covered now that were common between 2011 and 2013.

There are over twenty daily newspapers in Egypt.\textsuperscript{88} Among the most notable of these are \textit{Al Ahram}, \textit{Al-Masry Al-Youm}, and \textit{Daily News Egypt}. The Egyptian media landscape has a diverse mixture of independent and state-owned publications published in English and Arabic. Since the military coup, many newspapers have become much more brazen in propaganda and pushing for political outcomes.\textsuperscript{89} Additionally, many journalists face detention for criticism of the regime, as demonstrated by the closure and arrest of outlets and editors aligned with the Morsi-aligned Freedom and Justice Party in 2014.\textsuperscript{90}

3. Literature Review

\section*{Literature on Arab Media}

Literature on the matter of Arab media discusses the existence of a single Arab Media Sphere.\textsuperscript{91} Prior to the satellite era, media was a state affair, with different Arab nations having radically different media. However, transnational broadcasting since the 1990s has allowed for the development of an Arab Media Sphere that surpasses borders.\textsuperscript{92} Specifically, Al-Jazeera and other satellite television stations limited Arab rulers’ ability to manipulate the media due to the presence of media that crosses national borders and can be projected anywhere for a relatively

\textsuperscript{87} El-Issawi, \textit{Arab National Media and Political Change}, 31.
\textsuperscript{89} Webb, \textit{Media in Egypt and Tunisia}, 78.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{91} Lynch, “The Structural Transformation of the Arab Public Sphere,” 41.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
low cost. This new Arab Media Sphere allowed for broad discussion of political issues with a greater degree of freedom than ever permitted before as individuals could consume media from other nations not beholden to state censors, which allowed for rapid spread of protests due to coverage on Al-Jazeera and, to a degree, on social media. Additionally, the demonstration and diffusion effect allowed for the protest waves to spread rapidly due to the case of Egypt. Egypt was both a hard and intrinsically important case due to its long-standing authoritarian regime coupled with a history of protests as well as its historical relevance in the sphere of Arab politics during the Arab Nationalist era.

The diffusion effect is defined as “the transfer of an innovation - for example, a new product, policy, institution, or repertoire of behavior, across units.” Egypt was unlikely to find success in revolution due to the strength of its military. Since the potential protestors saw that they could be successful under the Tahrir Square model due to Egypt and Tunisia’s revolutions having little to no loss of life, as well as coverage in the new Arab Media Sphere, the protests were able to cross national boundaries.

Many consider the Arab Spring a “social media revolution” due to the effect social media platforms, namely Twitter and Facebook, had on the stakes faced by both protestors and regimes. Due to the advent of social media, many people were able to provide their political

94 Ibid., 8.
96 Ibid., 58.
97 Ibid., 72.
opinions anonymously in an online space. Many protestors used this new-found anonymity to mobilize more quickly and effectively than they had in the past. Regimes also found that the social media coverage received by the revolutions internationally had drastically raised the cost of repressive state violence.\footnote{Marc Lynch, "Media, Old and New," in \textit{The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East} (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), 102.} Protestors could record acts of violence against them and spread them rapidly through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, leading to greater international awareness of acts of violence committed by authoritarians against Arab protestors.

This explanation seems limited when one considers the authoritarian learning that occurred towards the latter half of the protests. Authoritarian learning is similar to the diffusion and demonstration effects; authoritarian regimes will learn practices of repression from other successfully repressive regimes.\footnote{Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, "Authoritarian Learning and Counterrevolution," in \textit{The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East}, ed. Marc Lynch (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), 76.} While in Egypt and Tunisia social media was absolutely helpful in organization of protests, in later cases, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, social media was actually used by the regimes to counteract and preempt protests.\footnote{Ibid, 87.} Regimes would monitor social media and arrive at protest sites early to arrest would-be protestors. For example, the Syrian Assad regime had been intermittently censoring content on Facebook and Twitter since 2007 but allowed full access during this period as a way to entrap protestors.\footnote{Howard, Philip N., and Muzammil M. Hussain. “The Role of Digital Media.” \textit{Journal of Democracy} 22, no. 3 (2011): 35–48. \url{https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0041}.} Additionally, more subtle repression occurs with many regimes. Some leaders declared protestors as carriers of “\textit{fitna},” a classical Islamic term for chaos or disorder. For example, in Sunni Saudi Arabia, the regime portrayed the protests as a Shia conspiracy to instill \textit{fitna} within the country.\footnote{Heydemann and Leenders, “Authoritarian Learning and Counterrevolution,” 87.}
typical association of Arab Spring with social media is much more complicated than literature at the time made it out to be. It is likely other forms of media impacted the diffusion of the Arab Spring protests just as much as social media.

One of the most notable methods for regimes to control journalists prior to the Arab Spring was the licensing system. Throughout the development of Tunisian and Egyptian media, Ben Ali and Mubarak both employed a system of state licensing for startup newspapers. Newspapers needed to gain official approval from the government in order to begin operation which could be revoked at any time.\(^{104}\) As a result, journalists tempered criticism of the state in order to ensure that their printing license would not be revoked which led to a biased, pro-state media.\(^{105}\) State-owned papers, such as Egypt’s *Al Ahram* and Tunisia’s *Tunis Afrique Press* (TAP) would be given daily directives which would indicate exactly what they would write and how.\(^{106}\) The role of a journalist in these states was understood to be that of an informant; they were mouthpieces for the state.\(^{107}\)

Within Tunisia, while the media has certainly undergone a massive amount of change since the 2011 Revolution, the “Tunisian media is still a venue for manipulation, intimidation, and bias.”\(^{108}\) It is also important to note that the Tunisian media is becoming a stage for sensationalist political argumentation. For example, some pundits have interviewed the families of suicide attackers in order to gain media attention.\(^{109}\) By contrast, Egyptian journalists seem to have much harsher limits on what they can discuss, with a set of unofficial “red lines” that they


\(^{106}\) El-Issawi, *Arab National Media and Political Change*, 57

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 17.


\(^{109}\) Naji Bghouri, President of the Tunisian National Journalism Syndicate, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 5, 2019.
cannot cross. The most notable of these are the president’s family and the military.\textsuperscript{110} These red lines also existed in Ben Ali’s Tunisia, but they were much less specific. This created a vague uncertainty among journalists as to what could and could not be discussed within newsprint.\textsuperscript{111} These roles seem to be reversed today, as modern Egypt is much more strict on its press than is Tunisia. Egypt’s democratic backsliding has clamped down on media freedom since 2013 while Tunisia’s democratization has increased press freedom since the adoption of the constitution of 2014.\textsuperscript{112}

In 2013, after the military coup in Egypt, General Abdel Fatah el Sisi curtailed media freedom briefly granted after the 2011 revolution. This meant arresting vocal critics of the government or suspending their licensing, similar to the previous licensing system used by Ben Ali and Mubarak. In 2013, noted Egyptian satirist Bassem Youssef criticized the military on his program \textit{al Bernameg}, resulting in a suspension of his media license and \textit{al Bernameg} being pulled off the air.\textsuperscript{113} Additionally, Salah Diab, the owner of Egyptian newspaper \textit{al-Masry al-Youm} was arrested in 2016 for six months for criticizing member of parliament Mortada Mansour in a private phone call.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{Literature on Media Theory}

\textsuperscript{110} Webb, \textit{Media in Egypt and Tunisia}, 26.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 51.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 82, 87.


Hallin and Mancini propose three new media models that they believe accurately describe western media: the liberal model, the democratic corporatist model, and the polarized pluralist model.\textsuperscript{115} However, El-Issawi argues that these media definitions are not fully applicable to non-Western media systems, as they do not account for the media diversity and political systems amongst these nations and normatively prescribes a developmental facet to non-Western media.\textsuperscript{116} These viewpoints see non-Western media systems as immature and flawed and implies that only corporatist models can be efficient, thus setting Western media as the standard.\textsuperscript{117} She argues that Hallin and Mancini see Western media as the definitive democratized media system to the exclusion of other models.

El-Issawi argues that the concept of a journalist in Tunisia and Egypt after their respective revolutions changed but is still unique to these nations.\textsuperscript{118} She argues that the most accurate idea of a “journalist” in these states is in line with Oates’ Neo-Soviet model of media. Oates argues that Russians in the Neo-Soviet model “perceive the media as political players, generally deployed in the service of their financial or political patrons.”\textsuperscript{119} Additionally, the citizens are aware of this, and understand and expect state media to be biased in favor of the regime.\textsuperscript{120} This is logical in Tunisia and Egypt as both states had, prior to revolution, relied on government communiques for information. In interviewing Osama Saraya, the former editor in chief of *Al Ahram*, El-Issawi discovered that “the main function of state media was to embellish

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} El-Issawi, *Arab National Media and Political Change*, 49.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 108.
\textsuperscript{119} Oates, 1285.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
the face of the regime, not to monitor it. It was impossible to imagine another role for it.”

Many journalists still perceive this as their role, but rather they protect the ideals of the revolution. They feel that they have an obligation to publish articles sympathetic to the regime, seeing the regime as a new cause to be loyal to as they were to Ben Ali. Additionally, there has been a lack of capacity building in these newly developing media systems. Many journalists are unsure of their role beyond governmental directives.

Many reporters indicate that they feel a duty to stay in line with the ideals of the regime, implementing self-censorship practices. This is likely informed by the red lines laid down in the pre-Arab Spring media landscapes; in Egypt and Tunisia, there were lines that, if crossed, would have a newspaper totally shut down. This may explain possible changes in sentiment towards political opposition before and after revolution; while media is, in theory, freer than before the revolutions, journalists have not broken away from pre-revolution practices. It is likely that large-scale preference falsification may take place in newsrooms. Preference falsification is a phenomenon in which an individuals’ “private preference” differs from their “public preference” in order to gain social acceptance and safety. Essentially, reporters may be hiding their true opinions of the revolutions and the regimes as they were conditioned to under Mubarak and Ben Ali in order to win the trust of the public who had supported the revolution. While treatment of political opposition may not have changed, this may be the result of years of

122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid, 62.
125 Ibid., 47.
126 Webb, 32.
operation within an environment that normalized preference falsification. This can be measured by looking at frequency of reporting of previously red-lined topics. In this case, we can tell preference falsification has been minimized even if sentiment does not change by seeing a sharp uptick in amount of coverage of a given topic before and after revolution.

4. Data and Methodology

Independent Variables - Publications

For this study, I analyze *Tunis Afrique Presse* (TAP), *La Presse de Tunisie* (La Presse), and *Daily News Egypt* (DNE). The chosen publications have been selected based on data availability, distance from the government, publication history, and general reputability. *Al Jazeera*, a noted and widely distributed Middle Eastern media outlet, has been omitted due to it being based in Qatar, despite enjoying broad readership in both Egypt and Tunisia. Data has been sourced in English and French. These newspapers provide a broad range of sources with a variety of opinions, which will allow a more accurate picture of the political publishing landscapes in both cases. Moreover, these publications are representative of the media spheres of their respective countries. They are published in English and French and enjoy relatively wide reader bases among the francophone and Anglophone elites. Additionally, this corpus encompasses both state-owned and independent media outlets, representing a broader spectrum of ownership and, likely, political thought.

TAP maintained a monopoly on political reporting during the Ben Ali era within Tunisia.\(^{129}\) Prior to his deposal, it was well noted as a mouthpiece for the regime.\(^{130}\) It served as a

---

130 “Assessment of Media Development in Tunisia Based on UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators - UNESCO Digital Library.”
political instrument of the regime itself as well as the only source of political information under the Tunisian licensing system. Additionally, TAP has digitized its publishing archive from 2009 to 2018 with a total of 70,167 articles (15,186,697 words) published in English available on Factiva. The search terms used were “the or a,” the two most common words in the English language, in order to create a corpus of all available data. While Arabic language text was available, it was omitted due to the small sample size of only 8,947 articles, as well as the lack of articles published prior to the revolution. Throughout the process of democratization after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, the Tunisian media landscape became a multipolar system with a diverse set of sources. As a result, TAP has become more reliant on field reporting and less reliant on government communiques in order to stay competitive with a newly competitive media market. Therefore, I expect TAP to experience a broad shift in topic frequency and tone after around 2011 as the relationship between reporter and information changes in a shifting media market. Moreover, I expect TAP to experience an increase in coverage of Ennahda after 2011 and another increase after 2013 with a general negative sentiment throughout.

La Presse was chosen due to its data availability and political leaning. NexisUni has a total of 81,792 articles (47,043,357 words) available published in French. The articles were sourced using the search term pub(tunis) in order to isolate newspapers published in Tunis. Next, La Presse was selected from the available options. This was done in order to not pre-filter articles and create a more robust corpus. La Presse is known as the leading French-language publication in Tunisia and enjoys a readership similar to that of TAP. Founded in 1934, La Presse is produced by Société Nouvelle d’Impression de Presse et d’Edition (SNIPE), a state-

---

owned news company. As previously discussed, media diversification after the fall of the Ben Ali regime created a broad variety of sources in storytelling within Tunisia. Therefore, La Presse will provide an interesting counterpoint to TAP and can be used to determine if any shifts that occur in topic frequency are specific to the news source or not. I expect La Presse to follow a similar shift in sentiment to TAP due to both newspapers being state-owned. Additionally, it is worth noting that the total number of words within the La Presse corpus is significantly higher than that of the TAP corpus. This indicates that the average article printed in La Presse is longer than the average article of TAP. This may be due to the fact that TAP is a press service rather than a newspaper.

Egyptian newsprint is more difficult to source. While some reputable and respected papers, such as al Ahram, have been digitized, they are not in a format that would be possible to process within the scope of this study. Moreover, many papers do not have a large enough corpus to be worth studying, with most publications having fewer than ten thousand digitized articles available on the available platforms (NexisUni and Factiva) during the time frame in question. Therefore, this study will use DNE due to its large corpus of 78,888 articles (44,227,683 words) between 2008 and 2018 and its availability through NexisUni using the search term pub(egypt) for the same reasons as pub(tunis) was used for La Presse. DNE claims political independence from the Sisi regime and has actually been targeted for censorship by the state for “supporting terrorism” and “promoting misinformation.” This, interestingly, supports DNE’s claims of independence, as the Egyptian government has a history of censoring critics using the Media

133 Ibid., 53.
Regulation Law. In contrast with TAP and La Presse, it would be reasonable to expect DNE to be more critical of the regime as well as supportive of revolution and opposition parties due to its independence from the government.

For this study, I analyze state newspapers from 2008 to 2018. This date range was chosen based on a combination of data availability and significant events that occurred during this time period. By isolating a two to three-year period (2008 to 2010 and 2011) before the Arab Spring, we can look at sentiment in state media during the authoritarian period of both Egypt and Tunisia. Next, we can isolate a state-building period after the revolutions themselves and before new political developments, roughly between 2011 and 2013. This time period ends with the political crises sparked by the political assassinations in Tunisia in 2013 and the June 2013 Protests in Egypt which removed Morsi from power. Finally, we can look at the state-building processes in both nations after these developments. We end the timeframe to provide a clear end date for the data selection as well as to create a definite corpus of ten years of data. This ten-year period was then divided into three distinct timeframes: 2008 to 2010 (pre-revolution), 2011 to 2014 (revolutionary), and 2015 to 2018 (post-revolution). This allows for comparison within timeframes of a single corpus as well as comparison among multiple corpora for a specific timeframe.

Methodology

By using Python, a large corpus of data can be quickly analyzed to produce a list of general themes, or topics. This is known as probabilistic topic modeling. “Topic models are

algorithms for discovering the main themes that pervade a large and otherwise unstructured collection of documents. Topic models can organize the collection according to the discovered themes.\textsuperscript{136} For this study, TAP, La Presse, and DNE were analyzed using probabilistic topic modeling through the Non-negative Matrix Factorization algorithm.\textsuperscript{137} This algorithm was chosen for its stability; if a value is present in a coherent topic, topics with close k values (numbers of topics) will almost always have the same topic.

We generate these for a range of k (topic number) values up to 40 in increments of 2 in order to create a variety of topics that are still computationally manageable. We next view the coherence of each k value in order to assess the quality of each topic. This is done by generating a word2vec embedding space.\textsuperscript{138} This generates an embedding space where we can measure the closeness of words in each topic to assess their coherence as a single topic.\textsuperscript{139} In this algorithm, coherence is determined by how frequently similar topics appear across different values of k. This coherence is tested for each value, and once a range of k values with high coherence is tested, topics are generated again for values in between that range that were not initially covered. For example, if k=30 to k=36 had high coherence, we would then generate topics for all values in this range rather than every other value of k. Finally, word clouds are generated from the top 50 most salient terms within each topic, with the size of each word being related to how frequently they are used relative to other words in the topic. We use these word clouds in order to easily visualize the content of topics.


\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
These topics were first generated for each newspaper corpus. After, I examined changes in topic weights by time period (2008-2010, 2011-2013, 2014-2018). The goal of this analysis is to determine if a shift in topics or the sentiment (valence) associated with them discussed by these papers takes place during the process of regime change and democratization. Previous research has expanded upon the use of topic modeling for source-time structures in media. For example, Roberts et. al. discusses the use of the word “Taiwan” within provinces of China between 2000 and 2004 and the difference between Chinese state-owned coverage and coverage by the Associated Press. Similarly, this study will contrast coverage among a few categories: state owned vs. independent media, English vs. French language media, Tunisian vs. Egyptian media, and pre-revolutionary vs. post-revolutionary media.

First, I collected data from NexisUni and Factiva. (Table 1). Articles were then converted into a comma-separated value (csv) file. Topic models will be run for these corpora to generate a list of topics for each publication for the set ranges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>2008-2010</th>
<th>2011-2013</th>
<th>2014-2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tunis Afrique Presse</td>
<td>4480</td>
<td>13641</td>
<td>52046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Presse</td>
<td>7748</td>
<td>33359</td>
<td>40685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily News Egypt</td>
<td>16856</td>
<td>21014</td>
<td>41018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is crucial to note dialectic differences between transliterated Arabic names. Many Arabic names, such as Muammar Qaddafi, have multiple correct spellings. Therefore, I have compiled a list of frequent spellings for various proper nouns and created a code snippet within

---

the prepared notebook to translate them all into consistent spellings. Additionally, machine translation will be used on the corpus of La Presse to translate it into English from French prior to analysis. This translation has been trained through the joint efforts of the Systematic Text Analysis for International Relations (STAIR) Lab at William & Mary and is adapted from a similar project to suit the needs of this study.

This translation analyzes distances between vectors in a multidimensional embedding space containing multiple languages, between target languages to find the average shortest distance for translation route.\(^{141}\) For this translation, we use fasttext Wikipedia-based embeddings.\(^{142}\) These fasttext embeddings are then mapped to the same embedding space.\(^{143}\) We make a few adjustments in order to generate a more accurate translation: checking for accents and capitalization, minor spell-checking, segmenting compound words, and stemming. This allows us to account for linguistic differences as well as uneven distribution in this embedding space.\(^{144}\) This way, the most accurate translation possible will be achieved. This is demonstrated through previous testing on a European Parliament dataset. We compared the resulting sentiment values run on a corpus translated into English by professional human translators on the same corpus translated from French into English by our machine translation set-up. When compared to sentiment analysis done on this professionally translated corpus, our translation model

\(^{141}\) van der Veen et al. 2020. "Translation for the rest of us: Usable word-level translation for automated text analysis". Unpublished manuscript, STAIR lab, William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA.


demonstrated a correlation coefficient of 0.72 (referring to the sentiment values assigned to individual texts).\(^{145}\)

Probabilistic topic modeling will allow for a list of topics for each newspaper and each date range. These topics will be compared along the previously mentioned categories (state owned vs. independent media, English vs. French language media, Tunisian vs. Egyptian media, and pre-revolutionary vs. post-revolutionary media) to determine shifts in media coverage for each newspaper. Ideally, these topics will be used to compare the difference in frequency of discussion of political opposition parties (Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood) as well as the tone with which these newspapers discuss these issues through another practice called sentiment analysis.

Sentiment analysis is the practice of extrapolating general tone towards specific topics from text. For example, Agarwal et. al. analyzed a corpus of tweets and determined if the sentiment surrounding each was positive, negative, or neutral, in order to construct a dictionary for use in future analyses of microblog data.\(^{146}\) Using sentiment analysis in combination with topic modeling over the corpus of newspapers being analyzed will allow us to determine if newspapers become more sympathetic or antagonistic towards political opposition parties throughout the process of regime change and democratization.

Sentiment analysis is used to determine if the valence of a text is positive or negative.\(^{147}\) This analysis is conducted based on general-purpose lexica. Articles in the corpus are compared word by word to the general-purpose lexica, with each word assigned a valence score. The sum

---


\(^{146}\) Apoorv Agarwal et al., “Sentiment Analysis of Twitter Data,” n.d., 9.

of these valence scores is divided by the total number of words in the article to give the article an average valence score. We use the valence scores for these articles in combination with the topic lists generated to determine the general valence per topic per time period, allowing us to determine the sentiment of a topic over a given period of time.

5. Analysis

Tunis Afrique Presse

Topic modeling for TAP revealed a fairly general list of topics. TAP had the highest number of procedural topics. Most frequently TAP discussed fairly general topics. The most prominent topic was procedural but was identity-centered, with the most common phrases being Tunis, Tunisia, and Tunisian.

While TAP did not have a specific topic about Ennahda or Islam, it had a general “political party” topic which I named T_parties (topic 22). Additionally, one would expect a mention of the pre-revolution Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) Party. However, due to the generation of topics being constructed across the entire corpus, this party was notably absent.

This topic serves as the closest proxy to a direct Ennahda topic in TAP.
To provide context for the sentiment values, two topics were selected from the list that had extremely clear positive or negative sentiment values. These two topics were “violence” and “terrorism” (topics 7 and 38, $T_{\text{violence}}$ and $T_{\text{terrorism}}$). $T_{\text{violence}}$ refers to the aftermath of political violence in terms of loss of human life. This is shown through the prominence of the word “killed” as well as “people.” $T_{\text{terrorism}}$ is similar to $T_{\text{violence}}$ as it is a topic about the aftermath of political violence, but this topic specifically refers to terrorism and the Ministry of the Interior. These two topics allow us to generate accurate comparisons of sentiment by serving as control topics. For the sentiment analysis notebook, a positive or negative valence value indicates a positive or negative sentiment, with a sentiment between -0.3 and 0.3 being ambiguous. For example, a sentiment of -1 is incredibly negative while a sentiment of 0.5 is fairly positive.

Table 2 shows the sentiment values for party coverage in TAP during the Ben Ali era, before the writing of the constitution, and in the modern press landscape. TAP saw a drastic increase in coverage of all political parties, not just Ennahda, throughout the democratization process in Tunisia. While prior to revolution political parties were rarely discussed, they have been covered ambiguously since. This is likely due to the grouping of political parties as political organizations rather than by particular ideologies. Additionally, there is a notable change in sentiment around parties after the fall of the Ben Ali regime. This is due to greater freedom of expression allowed to journalists, meaning journalists have greater ability to express their political beliefs, breaking down preference falsification. It is also worth noting that references to
political parties shoot up from the first era to the second era but then drop quite seriously from the second era to the third era.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T_terrorism</td>
<td>-2.3583 (5/4480 = 0.0011)</td>
<td>-1.3729 (380/13641 = 0.0279)</td>
<td>-1.6794 (1730/52049 = 0.0332)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T_violence</td>
<td>-2.2008 (309/4480 = 0.0689)</td>
<td>-2.6780 (1087/13641 = 0.0797)</td>
<td>-2.5820 (2154/52049 = 0.0414)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T_parties</td>
<td>1.1318 (66/4480 = 0.0147)</td>
<td>0.2050 (932/13641 = 0.0683)</td>
<td>0.2510 (1379/52049 = 0.0265)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

La Presse

The topics generated from La Presse were more diverse than those generated from TAP and had significantly fewer procedural topics. Despite being translated from French, La Presse had a clear focus on politics and culture. The three highest weighted topics were internal development, soccer, and political parties compared to the single cogent topic in TAP being law. A key difference between the political party topics in TAP and La Presse is that the topic in La Presse focused significantly more on Ennahda, with other parties, such as Nidaa Tounes, being discussed much less frequently. This topic also related to the writing of the constitution after the political crisis as evidenced by assembly, troika, and dialogue. During these dialogues, Ennahda
played a large role as mediator and consultant, leading the dialogues and writing large parts of the constitution\textsuperscript{148}. As a result, I named this topic T\_ennahda (topic 3).

Much like TAP, two generic topics were used as control topics to demonstrate the range for sentiment within La Presse as a distinct corpus. These two topics were about government and security/violence (topics 16 and 8, T\_parliament and T\_security).

T\_parliament focuses mostly on bureaucratic proceedings, with key terms being assembly, commission, and laws. Moreover, there is a slight overlap in discussions of the troika government in T\_ennahda, which may also make mentions of parliament. However, the context of these topics are more distinct than this overlap, meaning this should not be an issue. T\_security is more about violence and terrorism with a focus on state response. This is indicated through the terms security, forces, and army. Having these control topics is crucial for La Presse as the sentiment tends to skew much more positive than TAP. Very few topics had negative sentiment, with T\_security skewing very slightly negative in sentiment. Therefore, having this range of control topics allows us to

contextualize the sentiment around T_ennahda in the context of La Presse rather than generalizing the tone of Tunisian publications.

Table 3 shows the sentiment values for party coverage in topics more heavily weighted towards Ennahda in La Presse. This is likely due to the organizational capacity of Ennahda vastly overshadowing that of other political parties. Moreover, the sentiment for parties is skewed slightly positively. This is interesting as 64% of Tunisians had a negative view of Ennahda as of April 2017. La Presse maintains connections to the government of Tunisia and had based most of their publication during the dictatorship era on official communiques from the government. While this is no longer the required practice, many journalists feel an obligation to report positively on the government. Instead of reporting favorable upon a specific regime, these journalists report they feel they must report favorably upon the ideals of the revolution. This explains the increase in positive sentiment around political parties. With uncertain electoral outcomes, La Presse maintained a neutral stance in order to ensure their continued operation despite any electoral outcomes. Therefore, while many Tunisians have an overall negative view of Ennahda, it is likely that journalists became slightly more sympathetic to the party as they became more politically normalized. Moreover, coverage of Ennahda rises dramatically from the first era to the second era, then drops roughly by half from the second era to third era.

149 Abdelkarim Harouni, interview by the author, Tunis, Tunisia, March 5, 2019.
150 “Public Opinion Survey of Tunisia.”
151 El-Issawi, Arab National Media and Political Change, 47.
152 Ibid.
The topics generated from DNE were the most specific among the publications selected. The most salient topic was about law and government, followed by investment. Daily News Egypt is an independent publication that has had a troubled history with the Egyptian government, being shut down in 2012 and frequently publishing opposition pieces. Moreover, it was the only publication to explicitly tie Islam to a political institution. While both Tunisian publications discuss Ennahda in the context of political parties, DNE discusses the Muslim Brotherhood in the context of both politics and Islam, as shown by the terms “islamist” and “muslim.” This topic, T_brotherhood (topic 28), paints a very specific picture of the Brotherhood in a way both topics about Ennahda did not. This topic contains no other political organizations and is solely about the Brotherhood. Additionally, this topic explicitly refers to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T_parliament</td>
<td>1.1998 (21/7748 = 0.0027)</td>
<td>0.5774 (1000/33359 = 0.030)</td>
<td>0.5659 (1100/40685 = 0.0270)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T_security</td>
<td>1.1353 (12/7748 = 0.0015)</td>
<td>-0.4778 (1241/33359 = 0.0372)</td>
<td>-0.5215 (1917/40685 = 0.0471)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T_ennahda</td>
<td>1.7160 (18/7748 = 0.0023)</td>
<td>0.3315 (2592/33359 = 0.0777)</td>
<td>0.4887 (1468/40685 = 0.0361)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
members of the Muslim Brotherhood, specifically former president Mohamed Morsi. As a result, this topic is the most specific to the topic of political opposition and will thus provide an accurate representation of sentiment.

For DNE, since the topics are so specific, sentiment is more varied than in both TAP and La Presse. Two generic control topics were used to provide points of comparison for T_brotherhood. In this case, the first topic was about law, government, and the constitution. T_law (topic 1) would provide a general baseline for how DNE discusses governmental affairs. T_law aggregates discussion of general state proceedings and is thus a densely packed topic with a wide variety of legal and governmental terms. Next, T_terrorism (topic 5) discusses political violence and the Sinai, a contested region between Egypt and Israel. It discusses militants and loss of human life. Much like T_terrorism in TAP, this will provide an example of highly negative sentiment to use as a contrast for sentiment around political opposition parties.

Table 4 shows the sentiment values for coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood in comparison to control topics. Based on the sentiment around the control topics, it is clear that DNE skews slightly negative, but maintains a general level of consistency. What is interesting to note is that during the period between 2011 and 2013 when the Brotherhood was the majority in government, coverage skewed negative. After the military coup and the repression of the Brotherhood, sentiment got even more negative. While DNE often publishes
independent opposition pieces, it seems to have a clear political point of view, disagreeing or agreeing with the regime based on their beliefs. We also see a similar jump in proportion of articles mentioning political parties from the first era to the second era, followed by a similar drop in the second era to third era.

**Table 4: Average Valence for Articles Whose Weight for a Topic Exceed 0.2 (DNE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T_law</td>
<td>-0.0763 (287/16856 = 0.0170)</td>
<td>-0.0265 (1200/21014 = 0.0571)</td>
<td>-0.0135 (1336/41018 = 0.0326)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T_terrorism</td>
<td>-2.0684 (431/16856 = 0.0256)</td>
<td>-2.0449 (745/21014 = 0.0355)</td>
<td>-2.0545 (2029/41018 = 0.0495)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T_brotherhood</td>
<td>-0.3479 (90/16856 = 0.0053)</td>
<td>-0.6686 (1377/21014 = 0.0656)</td>
<td>-1.3080 (1009/41019 = 0.0246)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion of Findings**

The first and most obvious finding of this study is that initial post-revolution media is much more open in all cases. This is evidenced by the number of articles published for each topic referring to opposition parties. In the case of TAP, salient mentions of political parties such as Ennahda jumped from a proportion of 0.0147 between 2008 and 2011 to 0.0683 between 2011 and 2013. This is even more notable for La Presse, in which mentions jumped from 18 to 2592 in the same timeframes. Finally, in DNE, the proportion of mentions of the Muslim Brotherhood increased from 0.0053 between 2008 and 2010 to 0.0656 between 2011 and 2013. Moreover, preference falsification breaks down during these time periods, as sentiment around opposition parties becomes more negative in DNE and much more ambiguous in TAP and La Presse. This is
likely due to journalists being able to express political opinion on previously redlined topics. For example, the sentiment around parties in both Tunisian papers was overwhelmingly negative prior to the revolution and ambiguous after the revolution, while the slightly negative sentiment in DNE around the Muslim Brotherhood became much more negative after. There is, additionally, very little coverage of Ennahda and the Brotherhood prior to the revolutions. This is likely another form of preference falsification; while there is little coverage, this was due to the red lines in what could or could not be reported on. The lack of coverage is just as meaningful and is further evidenced by the increase in article count post-revolution. It is likely that these few mentions were passing mentions of these groups in reference to other topics.

Tunisian papers tend to refer to Ennahda as a primarily political organization rather than an Islamist organization or an opposition party. TAP and La Presse do not tend to refer to Ennahda on its own, rather they speak about Ennahda in the context of Ennahda’s relationship to other political organizations within the Tunisian political sphere. Additionally, they tend to speak about these parties either ambiguously (TAP) or in a mildly positive way (La Presse). There are two likely explanations for this.

First, it is possible that different articles refer to different parties with different sentiment. For example, one article may be more sympathetic to Nidaa Tounes and critical of Ennahda while others are more sympathetic to Ennahda and critical of Nidaa Tounes. This could lead to an aggregation of positive and negative sentiment based on political biases adding to close to net zero in the case of TAP. Simply put, there is enough variation that biases among authors will cancel each other out.

Another possible explanation is that since both TAP and La Presse are state publications, they draw upon the state for a large portion of their funding. Thus, they may be apprehensive to
endorse or criticize a political organization. If a publication were to criticize the actions of Ennahda and they were to make significant gains in an upcoming election, that publication would likely suffer penalties. This reflects a recent rise in political intimidation and detention of journalists in Tunisia.\textsuperscript{153} Additionally, many journalists still feel an obligation to embellish the image of the state.\textsuperscript{154} Therefore, as Ennahda gains more political representation, media coverage of them would naturally become more sympathetic.

DNE is much more partisan than TAP and La Presse. DNE as a publication takes a much more committed stand in regard to the Muslim Brotherhood than TAP and La Presse do towards Ennahda. There are multiple factors that contribute to this. First, DNE is the only independent English language publication in Egypt.\textsuperscript{155} This has allowed it to be much more politically active in reporting since the revolution as it is subject to less government harassment than during the Mubarak era. Since their initial foundation in 2005, they have experienced opposition from the government.\textsuperscript{156} The general increase in political tolerance after the fall of the Mubarak regime allowed DNE to practice less preference falsification and be more open with their biases as well as to publish more frequently on previously red lined topics, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

The change from the 2011-2013 to 2014-2018 time periods reflects this experience. While they overall reported negatively on the Muslim Brotherhood during the Morsi era, they began to report much more negatively on the Brotherhood after the removal of Morsi from office. Even though they were openly opposed to the Brotherhood during the Brotherhood era, it is likely they still engaged in small-scale preference falsification by tempering their criticism and


\textsuperscript{154} El-Issawi, Arab National Media and Political Change, 47.


\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
limiting how extremely they spoke of their political opponents. Therefore, with the Brotherhood being removed from political office, there were no longer consequences for more extreme criticism of the Brotherhood itself. It is also possible that different preference falsification occurs now with journalists required to be more critical of the Brotherhood.

A key finding was that difference in sentiment did not seem to be related to language of publication. TAP and DNE are both published in English, but still portray some topics in the same way as the French-language La Presse. For example, they were both extremely negative in their coverage of terrorism and neutral in their coverage of legal proceedings. Additionally, TAP and La Presse covered Ennahda and Tunisian political parties in nearly identical ways. This removes the cross-national confounding variable as these two publications operate within the same media sphere but in different languages.

The most significant variables were clearly country and ownership. State-owned papers tended to be more restricted in their coverage of politics and parties while independent papers were much more sensational in their coverage. Additionally, state papers tended to focus on the political side of Islamist opposition parties while independent papers tended to focus on the Islamist side. This is a crucial distinction. By focusing on political organization, state papers can report on political opponents within the context of a political system rather than attacking the values of the organization itself. More specifically, Egypt and Tunisia are both constitutionally Muslim states. By attacking the politics of Ennahda, it removes the ability for rhetorical defense based on Islamic values. DNE is not held to these same standards and can thus focus on the Muslim Brotherhood as an Islamist organization. This is reflected by the presence of key

---

terms in T_brotherhood “terrorist,” “ouster,” “inciting,” and “legitimacy.” DNE is able to report with a much more personally biased approach and take a more political stand than both TAP and La Presse due to it being independently owned and operated. Due to its freedom from governmental funding and control, DNE can maintain its own political biases and operate separately from the official governmental stance.

6. Conclusion

The rapidly changing media landscapes and press codes throughout Egypt and Tunisia have been prone to changes in values, regulation, and practices. This paper explored how a landscape in flux leads to changes in coverage through the process of democratization and regime change. It demonstrated the change in coverage and sentiment around political opposition as journalists explored their newfound freedom to cover topics that had previously been off-limits. I find that, as a result of rapidly changing political conditions, coverage of political opposition by state publications has been mostly ambiguous, while independent papers have taken advantage of their new openness to take full advantage of their possibility for bias. Additionally, in all cases, the proportion of coverage of opposition parties skyrockets immediately post-revolution before falling dramatically in the third era (2014-2018.)

While much literature on the matter focuses on social media and its role in the Arab Spring, more research is needed into the professionalism and methodology of Arab journalists after the revolutions. Much of the existing literature is out of date was written too soon after Arab Spring to provide accurate commentary. Additionally, data is difficult to come by as many publications do not have digitized archives. Additionally, there is a need for more research into the relationship between electoral success and media valence.
Finally, this study lacks data from independent Tunisian publications and state-owned Egyptian publications. This weakens cross-variable conclusions, especially among the lines of ownership, due to the confounding variable of state. Moreover, additional Arabic language text would allow for a greater comparison among language, especially since Arabic is the most widely read language in these nations. Additional research would benefit from a broader, more representative corpus. This could be extended to radio and talk shows, as well, using transcriptions of past broadcasts over the same eras. This would provide a more representative view of discussions amongst the polity in the same vein as Arabic text.
Works Cited


“Comment: Accepted to TACL. The Two First Authors Contributed Equally,” n.d.


