

SOURCING PATTERNS WITHIN BRITISH AND AMERICAN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION: THE RISE OF NON-ELITE PRIMARY DEFINERS

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have noted the dominance of official sources within the news process and their unique ability to shape media narratives. This research addresses the role and implications of news sources in contributing to the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters within British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Furthermore, this paper will assess how the position of global political elites towards the protests in Egypt possibly opened up the editorial space within the news coverage of the revolution for the anti-Mubarak opposition movement to emerge as the dominant voice within the reporting.

Keywords: News sources, Arab Spring, newspapers, journalistic routines, content analysis, political protest.

INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were accorded with favorable media coverage within reporting of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution from influential print (Fitzgerald, 2016) and broadcast (Guzman, 2016) news outlets in the United States and/or the United Kingdom. This paper aims to build off of such scholarship by examining how news sourcing patterns contributed to the positive media representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition¹, paying particular

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¹ It is beyond the purview of this research to determine whether the ascendancy of non-elite sourcing patterns presented herein can be linked to the rise of 'network journalism'. Such a theoretical approach would be more appropriate if the focus of the study examined sourcing patterns within online news coverage. Instead, this paper exclusively focuses on how sourcing patterns played a decisive role in the positive representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition within print media, hence the focus of the literature review on primary definers, normative sourcing patterns, and press-state relations. One could take a number of theoretical approaches to this research topic, but given the scope of the study and research questions posed, this was indeed to most appropriate and relevant route for the purposes of this study.

attention to which sources were quoted or cited most frequently, in addition to the order that they appeared within individual news stories. Furthermore, this study will also outline whether official (e.g. former or current governmental/political officials) sources were determined to be supporting the anti-Mubarak opposition or then-President Mubarak within news coverage of the revolution.²

When evaluating the factors contributing to the positive media portrayal of protest groups or social movements, it is important to heed Tuchman's (1973) advice that scholars who want to develop a more holistic understanding of media coverage should focus on the construction of news (p. 62) since journalists themselves are influential gatekeepers determining who or what aspects of a particular event make it into, or are emphasized within reporting. (Shoemaker et al., 2009). Evaluating media coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution offers an opportunity to evaluate to what extent the anti-Mubarak opposition was given a platform to articulate and voice their grievances to an international news audience in contrast to official sources from Western or regional nations, along with Egypt itself. While this study contributes to existing scholarship evaluating news coverage of the 'Arab Spring,' it will also highlight the implications of this research for press-state relations.

News sources and broadening the concept of 'primary definers'

Examining sources and sourcing patterns within media coverage is essential since it not only reveals 1) whose voice is included (and whose is not), but to what extent they are included, and 2) the order in which certain sources appear, which is important as the sources who are quoted first can "set the limit for all subsequent discussion by framing what the problem" or issue is. (Hall et al., 1999, p. 255). What is more, examining sources and sourcing patterns addresses how news is constructed and how audiences come to understand the news that they are consuming. An essential piece of scholarship relevant to understanding this phenomenon is Hall et al.'s discussion of

² For the purposes of this research, the term Anti-Mubarak Opposition is a catchall designation referring to street protesters, individual or individual protester, Mohamed ElBaradei, Egyptian politicians, political groups or organizations, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the online opposition. Street protesters and an individual or individual protester were simply just that: either a reference to the street protests engulfing Egypt during the revolution, or an individual or individual protester that were either active participants within, or sympathized with the larger opposition. Mohamed ElBaradei is a former Egyptian diplomat, Nobel laureate, and former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency who was either seen as a prominent, or the leading opposition figure. ElBaradei was a response category on his own given his stature within Egyptian and international politics. The Egyptian politicians' response category referred to current or former Egyptian political figures who were outspoken critics of the Mubarak-led Egyptian government, and of lesser importance than Mohamed ElBaradei. Figures such as Ayman Nour (dissident politician who was jailed by Mubarak after challenging him for the presidency in 2005), Amr Moussa (former Egyptian diplomat and former Secretary General of the Arab League) and Osama al-Ghazali Harb (former member of Mubarak's National Democratic Party that went on to co-establish the liberal-leaning Democratic Front Party with Yehia Al-Gamal in 2007) fell into this category, amongst others. The political groups or organizations response category referred to the Egyptian Association for Change, the Council of Wise Men, socialists, 'leftists', and other references to formal or loose oppositional coalitions. The Muslim Brotherhood merited its own category due to their turbulent relations with the Egyptian state, as well as their preeminence within Egyptian social and political life. Lastly, the online opposition could have referred to an individual describing their use of Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, or blogs to coordinate the protests, or referred to an organized group using the same or similar platforms to communicate with other dissidents and mobilize against the Mubarak-era government (e.g. the April 6th Youth Movement and the "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook page).

primary definers, a term that encompasses powerful institutions, interest groups, and people that are part of, or connected to the governing elite of a nation. (ibid.).

Primary definers provide a framework by which all subsequent contributions to a dialogue are defined as either relevant or irrelevant. (ibid.). For example, Hall et al. mention that journalists, when reporting on political topics, will seek out commentary from MPs and accredited sources to provide an authoritative analysis of whatever issue is being debated. (ibid. p. 254). What this then means is that instead of journalists acting as a bulwark against the interests or influence of the powerful, they orient their coverage in a way that is in tune with the definitions of good policy or social reality that only 'accredited sources' can provide. (ibid.).

Influential research from Tuchman (1978) further outlines the importance of who is quoted in news stories, contending that "quotations of other people's opinions are presented to create a web of mutually self-validating facts" (p. 95) in which journalists professionally validate their work by including comment or opinion from sources. Tuchman's ethnographic study of newsroom culture and practices found that in the relationship between reporters, political sources, and citizen-based social movements, journalists typically did not seek out commentary from representatives of social movements. (ibid. p. 81). Instead, Tuchman found that journalists defer to statements from political figures possessing considerable sociopolitical currency, while neglecting dissident voices (ibid.). Selecting the politically powerful as a vital source for information inevitably helps contribute to decisions on which facts are taken into account when piecing together a news story (ibid.), as political sources often only disseminate information deemed prudent to the realization of a desired policy outcome.

Indeed, prevailing journalistic routines often produce news coverage that elevates the voice of elite sources and diminishes or depoliticizes the voice of non-elite sources (e.g. ordinary citizens). (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Clausen, 2004; Lee et al., 2005). However, more recent scholarship has offered a critical appraisal of Hall's seminal work. Cottle (2003), in analyzing Hall's conceptual understanding of 'primary definers', faults Hall for failing to adequately address the implications of the relationship between news sources and news producers (p.10).

To expand on Cottle's point, if we were to accept Hall's stance that 'primary definers' command the discursive field within the media, set the terms of debate, and cast news producers as unwitting purveyors of dominant ideologies (ibid. p. 11), we would be adhering to a reductionist understanding of the relationship between state power and the media as a top-down hierarchy that does not view the media as a site of struggle between news producers and sources. Indeed, as Timothy Cook (1998) has previously argued, journalists and the media outlets they report for should not be seen as uncritical vessels reflexively disseminating official opinion, but as political actors with considerable agency in their own right. (p. 12-13).

Echoing Cottle, Schlesinger and Tumber (1999) call into question the legitimacy of deeming a source a primary definer, since such a designation does not take into account the competition amongst sources to influence a news story. (p. 258). Additionally, they question who would be deemed the 'primary definer' in a dispute between governmental elites, and if there can be many primary definers, rather than just one. (ibid.). Second, there is the question of what constitutes the boundaries of primary definition. Not all members of the political class have equal access to the news

media in the way that prime ministers and presidents do, who can subsequently influence news coverage to enhance their reach and legitimacy amongst the viewing public as a dominant source. (ibid. p. 259). Such inequalities of access are not taken into account within Hall et al.'s formulation of primary definers. (ibid.). Thirdly, Schlesinger and Tumber fault Hall for assuming the passivity of the news media and their reticence to challenge elite opinion. (ibid.).

More important to this research, though, is the collapsing boundary between 'primary' and 'secondary definers' (e.g. journalists) that has been illustrated in recent scholarship (McLaughlin, 2008; Greer and McLaughlin, 2011), with research from Kunelius and Renvall (2010) pointing towards the rise of citizens as 'primary definers'. Evidence for this emerging trend has been demonstrated in more recent scholarship examining sourcing practices within news coverage of the 2011 Arab Spring. Hermida et al.'s (2014) study found that National Public Radio's Andy Carvin was inclined to favor non-elite sources within his influential Twitter stream, where he curated information emanating from Tunisia and Egypt during the revolutionary protests that swept through both nations. Carvin's preference for non-elite sources was particularly evident in the case of Egypt. (p. 492). Van Leuven et al. (2015) determined that "ordinary citizens and non-mainstream groups" emerged as important sources within Belgian TV and newspaper coverage of the Arab Spring while cautioning that, at least in the Belgian context, journalists still "mainly turn to official political sources to introduce the news." (p. 585-586). Hermida et al. and Van Leuven et al.'s research present especially relevant and compelling case studies going forward, as both studies point towards the realization of Gans' (2011) call for "bottom-up news" that focuses on how ordinary citizens "are affected by the decisions and acts of high government officials." (p. 4).

Press-state relations: From a 'passive' to 'active' understanding

The relationship between the press and the state has been the focus of intense deliberation over how these different entities influence each other and under what circumstances. Since this research also assesses whether official political sources could be found to be supportive of the revolutionary protests or not as was described in the reporting, it is important to explore several theoretical models by which to evaluate the topic of press-state relations and how it impacts the construction of news and journalistic sourcing routines, particularly in relation to foreign news. Bennett (1990) previously argued news media professionals, from the boardroom down to beat reporters, indexed the range of viewpoints within news and editorials according to the contours of debate taking place within government circles about a particular topic. (p. 106). Thus, Bennett's 'indexing' hypothesis is that non-official voices are included within news stories or editorials when those voices express opinions that are in alignment with viewpoints emanating out of official policy circles. (ibid.).

Hallin's 'Spheres' analyzed the U.S. media's performance in covering the Vietnam War, arguing how American journalists orient their coverage in relation to the policy positions of "the major established actors of the American political process." (Hallin, 1986, p. 116). Journalistic discourse within the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy is largely defined by the "parameters of debate between and within the Democratic and Republican parties" and the executive branch itself, with the professional norm of

objectivity establishing the ideological boundaries of news coverage (ibid.). Within the Sphere of Consensus, journalists are advocates or celebrants of values or policies that are assumed to be so uncontroversial that opposing views need not be entertained. (ibid. p. 117). The Sphere of Deviance, however, describes the role of journalists in “exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda” ideas or groups who challenge the consensus values or viewpoints, thereby defining and defending “the limits of acceptable political conflict.” (ibid.).

While Hallin’s ‘Spheres’ is certainly an influential conceptual framework by which to assess why journalists cover foreign affairs or governmental policy in a particular manner, subsequent contributions from Wolfsfeld (1997) and Robinson (2001) add further nuance to this discussion. Gadi Wolfsfeld’s (1997) political contest model illuminates the complexity at play in the reporting of political conflict, demonstrating that journalists are professionals with agency that make editorial decisions independent of official opinion or influence, and actively assess the goals, motivations, and methods of those seeking to bring out change versus the response of authorities determined to undercut those aspirations. (p. 155). Piers Robinson builds on Hallin and Bennett’s earlier work through the policy-media interaction model, which elevates the role of journalists to actively influencing the formulation of policy through producing news coverage that is not contained within the boundaries of official opinion, thereby possibly becoming a part of and shaping elite debate. (Robinson, 2001, p. 540). While this paper will not be arguing that the reporting conducted by the journalists covering the 2011 Egyptian Revolution can be entirely mapped onto the conceptual frameworks detailed within this section, they are nonetheless useful in demonstrating how the scholarly understanding of the media’s role in reporting on foreign affairs, politics and policy has shifted from seeing journalists as being largely unwilling to call into question or deviate from official opinion (Hallin, 1986; Bennett, 1990) to acting independently of, or actively challenging it. (Wolfsfeld, 1997; Robinson, 2001).

Scope of Research

This paper analyzes the sourcing routines of influential newspapers from the United Kingdom and United States in their coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. The paper specifically focuses on which sources were quoted or cited most frequently within news coverage, in what order they appeared within the reporting, and whether or not official sources from U.K., U.S. or other nations could be determined to be supporting then-President Hosni Mubarak or the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters. Following previous research from Fitzgerald (2016) demonstrating that the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were accorded with overwhelmingly positive media coverage within either country’s influential establishment newspapers, this paper assesses the impact of news sourcing routines on the positive media portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters. This is an important point to emphasize, as the choice of news sources can “promote a particular interpretation” (Entman, 2004, p. 5) of an event or issue. Through an analysis of news sources, it is possible to understand how and why news stories are presented as they are (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 218), which is especially timely and relevant given that the positive portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters stands in contrast to previous studies not only highlighting the negative portrayal of domestic political protests within American and British media outlets (Turner, 1969; Halloran et al., 1970; Gitlin, 1980; Shoemaker,

1984; McLeod, 1995; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Boykoff, 2006; Boyle et al., 2004; Boyle et al., 2005; Jha, 2007), but also the pervasiveness of reductionist characterizations of the Middle East present within Western news coverage of the region after 9/11. (Karim, 2006; Pintak, 2006; Mishra, 2008; Kumar, 2010).

Research Questions

With the scope of the study outlined, this paper is guided by the following two research questions:

- Research Question 1: Who were the dominant sources that were cited or quoted most frequently within British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution?
- Research Question 2: Who were non-Egyptian political or governmental sources determined to be supporting within British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution?³

Methodology and Research Sample

A quantitative content analysis was conducted in order to answer the above research questions. Content analysis is an indispensable method for evaluating how the news media contextualizes social and political events within news coverage. (Payne & Payne, 2004, p.52). This research examined influential newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today* from the United States, and *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent* from the United Kingdom. Comparative analysis of British and American news media has revealed meaningful findings in previous studies. (Christensen, 2005; Dardis, 2006). Following Fitzgerald's (2016) study, this content analysis examined 611 news stories published between "the dates of January 24th, 2011 to February 21st, 2011." (p. 161). The dates were chosen in order to capture the greatest concentration of relevant coverage, while news stories were found via Nexis UK using the keywords 'Egypt' and 'protests.' (ibid.). After coding each individual article, the results were entered into an SPSS spreadsheet, at which point a descriptive statistical analysis was used to parse out which news sources appeared most frequently, in what order, and who official political sources were found to be supporting.

Findings: Dominant sourcing patterns

To begin, the research revealed that the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were most frequently cited or quoted as the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth sources within the British newspaper coverage of the revolution. Within the American newspapers, the anti-Mubarak opposition was most frequently cited or quoted as the first source, with U.S. officials (including President Barack Obama and Secretary of

³ The following is a breakdown of coding categories used to determine the stance of political or governmental officials towards the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. **Mubarak/Mubarak-led government:** Voicing support for Mubarak or Mubarak-anointed successor, and/or condemning or delegitimizing the actions and aspirations of the opposition protesters. **Anti-Mubarak Opposition:** Calls for Mubarak to implement political reform, to respect the right of protest and the civil and human rights of protesters, and/or to step down as the President of Egypt. **Neutral:** Neither convincingly supportive or critical of the protest movement, and/or urging nonviolence from both supporters and opponents of Mubarak.

State Hillary Clinton) being most frequently cited or quoted as the second, third, fourth, and fifth sources within the American press. Interestingly enough, British and American media outlets rarely looked to commentary emanating from social media platforms to supplement their reporting, a point which will be discussed further in the concluding remarks of this paper.

To further unpack the results of who appeared most frequently as the first source, Table 1 lays out the primacy of the anti-Mubarak opposition and U.S. officials in quantitative terms as the preeminent sources within both British and American newspapers. What is striking about these results is how often then Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak or an official from the Egyptian government appeared as the first source compared to the opposition protesters, and how the presence of U.S. officials far outpaced that of governmental/political officials from other nations (most notably the U.K.), as indicated within Table 1 below:

Table 1: Most frequently mentioned as first source – British (n=314) and American (n=191) Newspaper Samples⁴

UK - Source	Percent	US – Source	Percent
1. Anti-Mubarak Opposition	25%	1. Anti-Mubarak Opposition	20%
2. U.S. Officials	11%	2. U.S. Officials	19%
3. Foreign Head(s) of State/Politician(s)	7%	3. Non-Egyptian Agency/Journalist News	9%
4. Hosni Mubarak (tie)	6%	4. Foreign Head(s) of State/Politician(s)	9%
4. Business Source (tie) ⁵	6%	5. Hosni Mubarak	6%
5. U.K. Officials (tie)	6%		
Total	61%	Total	63%

What can be determined by comparing who was most frequently quoted or cited as the first source within British and American newspapers is that the British press gave considerably more weight to the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters, as the protesters appeared more than twice as much (25%) than U.S. officials (11%) in this regard. American publications, on the other hand, seemed to balance the weight of the anti-Mubarak opposition within their coverage with that of U.S. officials. Taking the British and American samples together, however, the anti-Mubarak opposition ascended to the status of 'primary definers' within both countries' print news coverage of the revolutionary protests, and were thereby able to contextualize the protests according to the grievances and aspirations they articulated to the journalists reporting on the events. (Fitzgerald, 2016). In stark contrast to Tuchman's (1978) influential study in which it was found that journalists covering the protests rarely sought out commentary

⁴ This table accounts for articles in which at least one source was included, rather than the total number of articles coded from either sample. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁵ *Business Source*: Employee from a commercial entity commenting on the effects of the protests on energy prices, tourism, etc.

from representatives of social movements, the journalists covering the protests in Egypt elevated the voice of the opposition protesters to a position of dominance, which contributed to the highly favorable media coverage that the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters received within British and American newspapers. Indeed, the anti-Mubarak opposition's status as primary definers stands in contrast to other influential studies where it was found that journalists privilege elite sources and diminish the presence or agency of non-elite sources. (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Lee et al., 2005).

While the dominance of the anti-Mubarak opposition movement as a news source is significant in its own right, the question remains as to why the journalists covering the 2011 Egyptian Revolution reported on it in such a favorable manner and privileged the voice of the anti-Mubarak opposition. As researchers from Loughborough University (2012) noted in their analysis of the BBC's reporting on the 2011 Arab Uprisings, the protests were described as "revolutions" pitting protesters against "brutal dictators" whose actions could be compared to previous revolutions in European political history (*ibid.* p. 33), and perhaps influenced the positive media portrayal of the regional protest movements. However, it could also be that the absence of a unified position on the behalf of global political elites opened up the editorial space for non-elite news sources to influence the coverage of the protests in Egypt.

Prominence, influence, and role of official opinion

Although not dominant, U.S. officials were nonetheless prominent news sources within British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. This section of the paper will reveal how the inclusion of American political officials within news coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution may have played a role in the positive media representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters. But first, let us retrace the findings presented earlier, in which American officials were found to be quoted or cited second-most within coverage from the British newspapers, while falling just short of being most frequently cited or quoted as the first source within the American press.

This is where the samples start to diverge, in that while the British press privileged the voice of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters, American newspapers followed a different track, one that saw U.S. officials emerge as an important source within coverage. Whether this speaks to Clausen's (2003) understanding of domestication, where journalists assimilate global events into frames of reference that audiences within the reporting country are familiar with (p.15), or is merely a reflection of the fact that events occurring in nations of vital geopolitical significance to the United States (such as Egypt) are more likely to receive media coverage is open to question. (Shoemaker et al., 1991).

The discussion of the possible influence of U.S. officials on the media representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters will begin by analyzing the extent to which former President Barack Obama, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and other American officials were included within coverage, and who they were determined to be supporting within the reporting on the protests. With that clarified, then President Obama's presence and stance within coverage will be analyzed first.

A. U.S. Officials: President Barack Obama

Former President Obama was not featured to a significant degree within either British or American publications, and therefore did not have a decisive impact on the positive portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition. To start, Obama was mentioned within only 15% of articles published within British newspapers, and 27% of all articles published within American newspapers. By comparison, Britain's own Prime Minister, David Cameron, was only included within 9% of all articles from the British press (and only 2% of all articles published within the American newspapers). What is interesting about the inclusion of Barack Obama is that when British newspapers sought the voice of official opinion to contextualize the protests in Egypt, they were more likely to turn towards President Obama to do so, rather than their own prime minister.

Table 2 shows which side of the protests President Obama was found to be supporting within news coverage of the revolution:

Table 2: Who was President Obama coded as supporting within news coverage?

	U.K. Newspapers	U.S. Newspapers
Anti-Mubarak Opposition	53%	24%
Neutral	31%	70%
Mubarak/Mubarak-led government	16%	6%

The most significant point emerging from this discussion is that Barack Obama was found to be supporting the anti-government opposition over Hosni Mubarak within either country's press by a notable margin. Obama was determined to be supporting the opposition within 53% of the articles that he appeared in from the British press compared to 24% of articles within American newspapers, and his stance was coded as neutral within 31% of British newspapers versus 70% within American newspapers. Given that Obama's stance toward the anti-Mubarak opposition was, for the most part, determined to be either supportive or neutral within either sample, it begs the question of which side then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other U.S. prominent officials were determined to be supporting.

Overall, it is difficult to ascertain whether Obama's inclusion within the reporting and the position he took towards the anti-Mubarak opposition impacted the media representation of the protesters. However, Obama's (and that of other U.S. officials, more importantly) presence perhaps acted as a means by which to project an 'objective take' on the events in Egypt, particularly within American newspapers where although the opposition was most frequently cited as the first source just ahead of U.S. officials, those two sources switched positions in terms of who was most frequently cited or quoted as the second source. Whether U.S. officials were included within media coverage as a 'balancer' to the presence of the anti-Mubarak opposition was further revealed by who Hillary Clinton and the other American officials were determined to be supporting.

B. U.S. Officials: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

Similar to the results for Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton did not feature heavily within coverage from British or American newspapers. Within the British press, Clinton

was included within 38 (10%) news stories. An overview of Clinton’s position towards the revolution within British media coverage is displayed within Table 3:

Table 3: Who was Hillary Clinton coded as supporting within British newspapers?

Anti-Mubarak Opposition	20%
Neutral	40%
Mubarak/Mubarak-led government	40%

Shifting to the American press, Clinton was included in 33 (15%) articles, with Table 4 below laying out her position within reporting from American newspapers:

Table 4: Who was Hillary Clinton coded as supporting within American newspapers?

Anti-Mubarak Opposition	10%
Neutral	55%
Mubarak/Mubarak-led government	34%

An interesting point to note here is the divergence between who Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were determined to be supporting most frequently. Though Obama’s position, on average, could be described as neutral within the American media and supportive of the revolution within the British media, he was found to be supporting the anti-Mubarak opposition more than Mubarak or the Egyptian government when evaluating both the British and American media together. Clinton’s position, on the other hand, was found to be pro-Mubarak more often than not.

While it is difficult to explain the apparent discord within the Obama administration, it was an issue that was touched upon within some of the reporting on the protests, particularly within articles that included Frank G. Wisner, a former U.S. ambassador to Egypt dispatched by the Obama administration to the country in order to relay the American position to Hosni Mubarak. In an article with the headline “Obama furious over Egypt remarks by ‘monster’ Clinton” published within *The Times* on February 14, 2011, the disunity within the Obama administration came into focus, describing the divergent positions taken by Obama on one side with Clinton and Wisner on the other:

A rift has opened at the heart of the US Government, with Mr. Obama furious that a delegation led by the Secretary of State had publicly undermined his attempts to pressure President Mubarak to stand down.

The confusion peaked after Mr. Obama was told that Frank Wisner, a former State Department official acting as an envoy to Egypt, had told a security conference in Munich that Mr. Mubarak should stay in office to oversee reforms. At the same summit, Mrs. Clinton emphasised that an orderly transition to democracy “takes time”.

Mr. Obama, who has already called for reforms “right now”, was seething at the remarks which contradicted his position, his aides said yesterday. (Hines, 2011)

What comes out within the reporting from *The Times* is that Wisner (along with Clinton, given her comments at the same security conference) complicated the Obama administration’s efforts to convince Hosni Mubarak that he should step down. Wisner’s

comments and the apparent rift they caused within the Obama administration over how to respond to the protests in Egypt were noted within reporting from journalist Robert Fisk, a well-known, outspoken critic of Western foreign policy in the Middle East who brought to light Wisner's business connections with the Mubarak-led Egyptian government, casting into disrepute Wisner's status as an independent arbitrator without any stake in Mubarak's survival as president and the continuation of the current political order of Egypt:

Frank Wisner, President Barack Obama's envoy to Cairo who infuriated the White House this weekend by urging Hosni Mubarak to remain President of Egypt, works for a New York and Washington law firm which works for the dictator's own Egyptian government.

Mr. Wisner is a retired State Department 36-year career diplomat – he served as US ambassador to Egypt, Zambia, the Philippines, and India under eight American presidents. In other words, he was not a political appointee. But it is inconceivable Hillary Clinton did not know of his employment by a company that works for the very dictator which Mr. Wisner now defends in the face of a massive democratic opposition in Egypt.

So why on Earth was he sent to talk to Mubarak, who is in effect a client of Mr. Wisner's current employers? (Fisk, 2011)

Wisner's comments, despite not receiving widespread coverage, nonetheless offer a possible explanation for the divergence between Obama and Clinton's posture toward the protesters, and are important to note for several reasons. Firstly, the Obama administration did not project a unified front in terms of whether they were backing the Mubarak-led government or the opposition protesters, with the data from which side of the protests President Obama was backing versus Secretary of State Clinton corroborating that point.

Secondly, the fact that Obama and Clinton were the most frequently cited examples of 'official opinion' to make it into coverage, and their divergent viewpoints suggests that their presence within the reporting had little to do with legitimizing the anti-Mubarak protesters. However, the divergent positions of Obama and Clinton perhaps opened a space within the reporting for the voice of the anti-Mubarak opposition to ascend to a position of dominance, where they possessed considerable leverage in shaping how the media covered them given the disunity within the Obama administration. Overall, Obama and Clinton's presence seemed to have more to do with which sort of voices British and American newspapers sought out in order to make sense of how certain political officials with overwhelming global clout were reacting to the protests in Egypt, lending credence to the notion official opinion served as sort of a guarantor of 'objectivity' within coverage of the protests.

Yet, before definitively concluding that the role of American official opinion within coverage was more about perhaps providing an 'objective' voice to balance the anti-Mubarak opposition, it is necessary to see where former or current American officials of lesser significance than Obama and Clinton fell in terms of which camp they were found to be supporting within news coverage of the revolution.

C. U.S. Officials: Former or current

Current or former U.S. politicians (excluding Obama and Clinton), officials, or general references to governmental entities or agencies were included within 96 (25%) articles from British newspapers. A general reference to a U.S. official or officials was most frequently cited or quoted before all others within 27 (28%) of those 96 articles, followed by a general reference to the White House, Obama administration and related officials within 11 (11%) articles, and then Frank Wisner (former U.S. ambassador to Egypt and Israel) amongst many others who were not mentioned to any sort of significant degree. Table 5 lays out their position within British newspapers, where they were found to be supporting the anti-Mubarak opposition more often than not:

Table 5: Who were U.S. Official(s) coded as supporting within British newspapers?

Anti-Mubarak Opposition	44%
Neutral	28%
Mubarak/Mubarak-led government	28%

Within the American media, U.S. officials or agencies were mentioned within 99 (44 percent) articles. Similar to the British media, a general reference to a U.S. official or officials was most often cited or quoted above all others within 14 (14%) of those 99 articles, followed by a general reference to the White House or the Obama administration and related officials within 9 (11%) articles, and then lastly a variety of current or former American officials not mentioned to any sort of significant degree.

Table 6 demonstrates that though the dominant position of U.S. officials within American news coverage was one of neutrality, they were determined to be supporting Mubarak more often than the anti-Mubarak opposition:

Table 6: Who were U.S. Officials coded as supporting within American newspapers?

Anti-Mubarak Opposition	11%
Neutral	68%
Mubarak/Mubarak-led government	21%

Interestingly enough, though U.S. officials were found to be supporting the anti-Mubarak opposition more frequently within British newspapers, they were more frequently coded as supporting Mubarak within the American press.

With that said, the inclusion of President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, and U.S. officials (considering their different stances towards the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters) suggests that their presence within coverage may have been more about serving as a point of reference for the journalists covering the events in Egypt, and did not impact the media representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters in a direct manner.

Indeed, the divergent positions of U.S. officials towards the anti-Mubarak opposition gives credence to the suggestion that disunity amongst American elites possibly provided the journalists covering the events in Egypt greater editorial agency within their coverage. While elite disunity and objectivity may help explain the results presented within this paper, there is a need to consider what other factors may have

been at play, as exclusively focusing on professional norms such as objectivity, as well as discord amongst American officials runs the risk of reducing the role of journalists to that of uncritical stenographers merely reproducing the opinion of political elites, rather than as “active and thinking agents who purposefully produce news.” (Cottle, 2000, p. 22).

To further expand on that idea, the positive representation of the protesters, their dominance as a news source, and the attention given to the variety of motivations compelling them to fill the public spaces of Egypt (Fitzgerald, 2016) can be best contextualized by Cottle (2000), who questioned whether news frames originate within the various layers of wider culture, or whether they are most influenced by institutional sources. (p. 430).

Considering the results presented within this study, it could be that wider cultural and political values embedded within national cultures, as suggested by Loughborough University (2012), and the role of the press in countries such as the United Kingdom and United States influenced the positive framing of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution within British and American newspapers.

CONCLUSION

What this study has revealed is that the anti-Mubarak opposition was most frequently cited or quoted as the first source within British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Breaking the results down further, the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were most often cited or quoted as the second, third, fourth, and fifth sources within the sample of British newspapers, while being cited or quoted second-most as the second, third, fourth, and fifth sources within the sample of American newspapers. The dominance of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters as the go-to news source for British and American newspapers undoubtedly contributed to their positive media representation found in previous studies. (Fitzgerald, 2016). More importantly, it also demonstrates the rise of non-elite news sources (i.e. Egyptian citizens) to the status of ‘primary definers’ in this instance, buttressing previous studies from Hermida et al. (2014) and Van Leuven et al. (2015), both of which noted the emergence of regular citizens as important sources of information within media coverage of the ‘Arab Spring’ protests. Drawing off of Hall et al. (1999), this provided the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters with the opportunity to “set the limit for all subsequent discussion by framing what the problem” or issue is. (p. 255).

The status of the anti-Mubarak opposition as ‘primary definers’ also demonstrates how the results presented herein diverge from Tuchman’s (1978) study, where it was found that journalists rarely privilege the voice of those affiliated with social movements, and instead privilege the voice of official political sources within their reporting. (p. 81). This is not to devalue Hall et al. or Tuchman’s critically important scholarship, but to show how media coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution was unusual in how it broke with conventional professional routines described within their studies in addition to previous research that found journalists typically rely on national figures over local, on-the-ground sources. (Clausen, 2004; Lee et al., 2005).

This study’s significance is best demonstrated by the fact that the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were a go-to, dominant news source within British and American newspapers, highlighting how the journalists covering the 2011 Egyptian Revolution for British and American newspapers did not reflexively align their coverage with the

opinions of official political sources. On one level, this could be due to the fact that a single, unified position was not present within the commentary from American officials (since British officials were all but absent), as President Obama was determined to be supporting the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters more often than not, while Secretary of State Clinton's position towards the protests could be defined as largely neutral (but more supportive of Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian government than the opposition protesters). Even some of the reporting noted active disagreement within the Obama administration in terms of who the United States should be supporting, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and special envoy to Egypt Frank Wisner seemingly undermining President Obama's attempt to pressure Hosni Mubarak to leave office. (Hines, 2011). It could be that the aforementioned disunity amongst American political elites opened up a space within coverage for the anti-Mubarak opposition to gain more credibility as a dominant news source, and thereby influence the way they were covered by Western media.

This, in a sense, speaks to Wolfsfeld's (1997) political contest model where journalists evaluate the goals, grievances, and methods of individuals or groups seeking change independent of official political opinion (p. 155), and Robinson's (2001) policy-media interaction model where there exists "the possibility of an influential media as part of the elite debate" shaping policy decisions or outcomes. (p. 540). At the minimum, the lack of a single, unified position on the part of American political elites did not represent a competing frame for the journalists to weigh their coverage against, and allowed the voice of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters to remain in a position of power within the reporting published by British and American newspapers.

Another interesting finding pertaining to the subject of news sources indicated that social media did not function as a prominent source of information within the reporting on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution from prominent British and American newspapers. Consider the fact that social media was used as a source within the British press only 10 times throughout the course of the sampling period, versus the fact that it was used as a source within American newspapers 54 times (over 5x as much than the British press). Indeed, within the American press, social media was used as the first source within five articles, as the second source within five articles, and as the third source within a further six articles. By contrast, social media was not used as the first source within any articles from the British press, appeared as the second source within two articles, and did not appear as the third source within any articles.

This reveals something interesting about the way news media outlets cover events in a difficult, if not dangerous setting, as Egypt was during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. What can be inferred considering the diminutive presence of social media as a news source within British and American newspapers is that such platforms will not impact the way journalists cover political events in a foreign country if they are able to report (in some capacity) from the nation in which the event is taking place, as they were able to do in Egypt.

This is not to suggest that the reporting environment in Egypt was a space bereft of hostilities towards international media outlets and the journalists reporting for them, but what it does indicate is that social media does not figure prominently as a news source, even in a hostile reporting environment. This finding is corroborated by Knight (2012) who, in researching the use of social media as a news source within coverage

of the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests (another hostile reporting environment), determined that journalists “relied most on traditional sourcing practices: political statements, expert opinion, and a handful of ‘man on the street’ quotes for colour.” (p. 68). Ansari (2012) found that questions emerged on the reliability of information emanating from social media networks during the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests, so perhaps similar considerations compelled British and American journalists covering the 2011 Egyptian Revolution to rely on more traditional sourcing methods.

Perhaps the relative significance of the number of times social media was not used as a source within the British press versus the number of times that it was used within the American press suggests that American newspapers were more likely to utilize such platforms as a news source because of the geographic distance separating the United States and Egypt. Given the financial costs of maintaining foreign bureaus (Sambrook, 2011), it may be that social media (specifically Facebook & Twitter) acted as a primary source of information (Archetti, 2011) for some of the journalists writing for American newspapers.

The limitations of the current study also provide substantive and highly relevant directions for future research. Questions surrounding the presence and usage of the anti-Mubarak opposition, official political/governmental figures, and social media as sources of information could have been answered through in-depth interviews with the journalists who covered the protests and ethnographic newsroom research of the publications examined within this paper. These approaches could have revealed whether the favorable media representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters, and their dominance as a news source within British and American newspapers had more to do with the political and cultural values of the United Kingdom and United States, along with the role of the press within these Western, democratic nations, as suggested by previous research. (Loughborough University, 2012).

In-depth interviews and ethnographic research could have also revealed whether the journalists covering the protests “felt it necessary to abide by professional standards of objectivity and present the perspectives of both the anti-Mubarak opposition and the Mubarak government.” (Fitzgerald, 2016, p. 169). Additionally, this study only examines the sourcing patterns within British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, and does not examine whether those patterns were similar to, or differed from the reporting of other regional protest movements in Tunisia, Libya, and Syria, to name a few. Without a doubt, scholars should go beyond examining print news coverage and include broadcast and digital media outlets into future studies. Furthermore, such studies should contrast sourcing patterns present within coverage from Western media outlets against the patterns present within coverage by news organizations from the Middle East and North Africa in order to provide a broader, more holistic picture of how the ‘Arab Spring’ protests were covered across international news media.

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