

Egypt: Revolution busts Mubarak's media monopoly

By [Simon Allison](#)

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An essential part of former dictator Hosni Mubarak's strategy was controlling the media. However, over the last decade, access to television stations such as Al-Jazeera and to a lesser extent Al Arabiya, not to mention increasing Internet in Egypt, has meant losing his grip on the media. Now there's a chance for free and independent media to take root.

I wasn't sure what tense to use for this article. Everything one has to say stems from before the revolution and Mubarak's departure. Yet the laws and practices outlined here remain in place, as far as we know. In the end, past tense is probably the best choice - partly in hope and optimism, partly because it seems unlikely the new government can completely muzzle the media (even if that's what it wanted), because, over the last decade, the media has become more and more outspoken even in the face of government pressure.

The advent of the Internet - which Mubarak deliberately made available, at low cost, to as many homes as possible, not realising its potential for unfiltered communication - and satellite television channels, including but not limited to Al-Jazeera, meant there were options other than the state-run media. Nonetheless, it is useful to see how Mubarak kept such a tight grip on his media, if only to prevent it happening again.

Certainly, the demonstrators understood how important the government's control over the press was to the exercise of his power. Last Thursday night, disappointed and angered by Mubarak's defiant speech - the one where he said he understood all the protesters' concerns, but was going to stay on anyway, and then discussed the excellence of his own record at length - the millions of people in Tahrir Square began to look for a new target. The square, after all, was full and clearly the regime was not getting the message. A few ambitious souls struck out on the 8km walk to the presidential palace in Heliopolis. Many more, however, had a closer target in mind - the imposing river-side headquarters of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, known as the Maspero, from where Mubarak's state had monopolised the terrestrial airwaves for 30 years.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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