

# Legitimising Dissent: Media Framing of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution within British and American Print Media

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper investigates how British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution framed the protest movement that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak as the President of Egypt. Previous studies examining Western media coverage of domestic protests indicate that news media often covered movements and protesters with the expectation of violence occurring, or whose motivations, aspirations, and actions were trivialised and marginalised, while Western media coverage of the Middle East and North Africa often contextualised the region's nations, peoples, and politics in ways that promoted negative stereotypes. In analysing British and American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, this paper demonstrates the opposite to be true through a content and framing analysis of relevant news stories (n=611). Results from British and American newspaper samples offer strong evidence for not only reassessing the dominance of the reportorial paradigms by which the news media covers political and social dissent, but also normative Western media portrayals of the nations and people within Middle East and North Africa.*

## KEYWORDS

Framing – British media – American media – Political protest – Egypt – Arab Spring

## 1. Introduction

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution was the mass protest movement that led to the resignation of long-term authoritarian President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011. Eighteen days of street protests in the cities and towns across Egypt underpinned by a broad swathe of political (censorship and rigged elections), economic (rise in food prices, endemic corruption, unemployment, and lack of upward mobility), and human rights grievances (police brutality and impunity) spelled the end for Mubarak's rule after twenty-nine years in power.

Political protest is not an indication of casual disagreement with stated governmental policy, as it speaks to the deeper political consciousness of those demonstrating against the status quo (the protesters), those who seek to maintain it (political, governmental officials and their allies), and those whose profession (journalists) it is to interpret the political and social dynamics underpinning the public and visceral manifestation of policy disapproval (protests).

To put the present paper in context, journalists rarely include concepts such as

freedom and democracy in their reporting on Western client-states (van Dijk, 1995, p. 27), and it is also worth briefly stating that past research has demonstrated how particular reportorial paradigms have guided mainstream British and American media coverage of domestic protests, resulting in negative media representations of protests and protesters (see 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). Furthermore, since the current study is examining the portrayal of a political protest movement in Egypt, previous scholarship has detailed the prevalence of Orientalist stereotypes dominating Western media coverage of the nations and peoples of the Middle East and North Africa (Said, 1997), which has been corroborated by scholarship following September 11<sup>th</sup> (Karim, 2006; Pintak, 2006; Mishra, 2008; Kumar, 2010).

In the case of British and American print media coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, this paper will show the opposite to be true. The study aims to provide a clear picture of not only how the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were portrayed, but also examines the representation of then-President Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian government, and the Egyptian police. The research presented herein also aims to contribute to the growing body of literature examining media coverage of the 2011 uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, otherwise popularly known as the Arab Spring.

## 2. Emerging trends in media coverage of protest

Since the news media play a pivotal role in determining the legitimacy of protesters and protest movements, the question arises as to what could account for the positive portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters within British and American newspapers. The following scholarship begins to answer that question by exploring the ways political protest may receive positive, sympathetic media coverage.

Gadi Wolfsfeld explains that political antagonists and protest movements can gain currency within media coverage through what is called the *political contest model*. The *political contest model* suggests that the news media is the arena in which the battle for political control and legitimacy is waged, whether it is between competing political parties, officials, or protest movements and authorities (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 3). When it comes down to securing favourable media coverage, antagonists must be presented as a credible, moderate alternative to what they are protesting against by the news media (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 115). Conversely, when movements are framed as irrational, extremist, or potentially dangerous, they will naturally find it extremely difficult to mobilise popular support through favourable media coverage (ibid.). Given the contemporary 24/7 news cycle, antagonists and political movements are presented with the dilemma of competing for an extremely competitive media space, and must prove their newsworthiness (ibid. p. 21).

The conferral of legitimacy in the reporting of political conflict, Wolfsfeld notes, is most dependent on journalistic perceptions of the goals, motivations, and methods of the antagonist, versus the perceptions of whether the response on the part of authorities was legitimate (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 155). The decisions on the part

of journalists as to whether a “genuine” injustice has been perpetrated, and whether the response on the part of authorities was “reasonable or excessive, depend largely on how the information and images of protest resonate within the political culture of each news medium” (ibid. p. 155).

Therefore, it is important to consider how the national media of certain countries cover protests taking place abroad, particularly within a country of significant geopolitical importance (such as Egypt). As Simon Cottle and Libby Lester note, the “transnational” aspect of some protests fundamentally changes the way in which the message of protesters is communicated and mediated across the globe (Cottle & Lester, 2011, p. 2), thus creating opportunities for protests to mean and signify different things for journalists and the different nation-states from which they report.

To expand on that point, the notions of justice and injustice were featured within the BBC’s coverage of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, as researchers from Loughborough University determined that some of the reporting constructed a narrative where citizens were pitted against “brutal dictators” (Loughborough University, 2012, p. 33). Furthermore, the 2011 uprisings were characterised as “revolutions” occurring across the Arab world, an understanding that connected the protests to a “European revolutionary tradition” (ibid.) that may have contributed to the BBC’s favourable portrayal of anti-government protesters across the region. Further research from Steven Salaita (2012) noted the favourable representation of anti-government protesters within American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, while Andrea Guzman (2016) found that the demands of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution were portrayed as rational by CNN and Fox News, while the actions of Mubarak and the Egyptian government were cast as irrational.

Pursuant to the topic of political legitimacy, Robert Benford and David Snow identify *collective action frames* as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). Collective action frames simplify and condense reality (ibid.), and thus allow individuals to make sense of the world around them. William Gamson (1995) further elaborates upon three aspects of collective action frames that may contribute to the legitimation of protest groups: *injustice*, *agency*, and *identity*. The *injustice* aspect to collective action frames requires that human actors are responsible for hardship and suffering, whether they are governments, corporations, or other groups who may be presented as malicious in order to spark popular indignation (Gamson, 1995, p. 91). *Agency*, Gamson continues, speaks to the fact that the message of the protesters or movement in question has to be taken seriously, and is powerful enough to merit a response from authorities, whether it is in the form of arrests or suppression (ibid. p. 95). Lastly, *identity* “implies being a part of a ‘we’ who can do something” (ibid. p. 99), and thus in the context of media coverage of a protest movement, invokes a sense of solidarity with protesters. The identity aspect of collective action frames asserts and defines a “we” who share common values and interests, as opposed to a “they” who are fundamentally opposed such values (ibid.).

The relevance of collective action frames (and the attendant aspects of them as identified by Gamson) is crucial, as they outline how news media coverage can legitimise political protest. Whether it is focusing on the injustice suffered by an op-

pressed citizenry, or bestowing protesters with a powerful sense of agency capable of meriting a response from the governments whose power is being questioned, collective action frames must be taken into account when discussing how media coverage can legitimise the political messages and actions of protest groups.

### 3. Methods

#### Research Goal

The news media plays a critical role in shaping how citizens make sense of the world far beyond their national borders, in addition to signalling what constitutes valid political participation, and what does not. As stated earlier, there is a long tradition within Western news media of not only de-legitimising domestic political protests, but also casting the nations, peoples, and politics of the Middle East and North Africa in decidedly negative terms within news reporting. This research paper aspires to illuminate how and why political protest comes to be legitimised within media coverage, especially when taking place within a nation such as Egypt and the close links that it has with dominant Western nations such as the United States and United Kingdom. Overall, this paper aims to contribute to the emerging scholarship examining Western media coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, and the broader Arab Spring.

#### Research Questions

Given the exploratory, descriptive nature of this research and that scholarship examining media coverage of the protests that occurred during the 2011 Arab Spring is still an emerging area of academic inquiry, the following research questions were developed with the aim of not only determining the media representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters, but also how the other central actors involved in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution were portrayed within British and American newspapers:

**Research Question No. 1:** *Did newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution frame the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters in a positive, neutral, or negative manner?*<sup>1</sup>

**Research Question No. 2:** *Did newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution frame Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian government in a positive, neutral, or negative manner?*<sup>2</sup>

**Research Question No. 3:** *Did newspaper coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution frame Egyptian police and security services in a positive, neutral, or negative manner?*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Coding categories for Question 1- Positive:* Journalists and/or their sources described the protests and protesters in laudatory terms, provided explanatory, in-depth coverage of the reasons behind the protests and goals of the protesters, were optimistic of outcome, and highlighted violence against anti-Mubarak protesters. *Neutral:* Journalists and/or their sources were neither convincingly supportive, or critical of the anti-Mubarak opposition movement. *Negative:* Journalists and/or their sources focused

## Description of methods

Content and framing analysis was conducted to determine the dominant trends present within the news coverage that was examined over the course of the sampling period. Framing analyses are typically performed through content analyses (see Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007), thus combining these two methodological approaches was a practical means by which to examine the media representation of the various factions involved in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Content analysis is a long-standing method for analysing the content of textual material as it relates to spoken, written, and visual texts. Content analyses are a vital means by which to understand how news media report on social phenomena (Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 52), such as political protest. This study examined the style and quantity (ibid. p. 3) of particular themes present within news coverage of the 2011 revolution. However, as Barrie Gunter notes, content analyses should go beyond a recitation of quantitative data, and explore “the interpretive procedures that can define the weight of a media message in terms of its potential impact upon the language” (Gunter, 2000, p. 57). In relating framing to media coverage, Robert Entman explained framing as the process of “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Entman, 2004, p. 5). As a conceptual tool, framing offers scholars pursuing research in journalism and media studies a means by which understand “how the news product comes to be shaped and presented as it is, and – even more importantly – why” (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 218).

## Research sample

This study examined newspapers from the United Kingdom and the United States to provide an in-depth view of how the press from these two influential, Western nations reported on the events in Egypt. Cross-national research of British and American print news media has yielded rich, and substantive results within previous research comparing and contrasting coverage from both nations (see Christensen, 2005; Dardis, 2006a). Similar to Frank Dardis’ study, the aim for this research project was to identify, and then examine mainstream, establishment broadsheet newspapers

on the negative implications of the protests (regional chaos, Western national security, concern over who would rule Egypt should Mubarak fall).

<sup>2</sup> *Coding categories for Question 2 - Positive:* Journalists and/or their sources described Mubarak et al. as the legitimate leader(s) of Egypt, called for support of Mubarak and cessation of protests. *Neutral:* Journalists and/or their sources were neither convincingly supportive, or critical of Mubarak and Egyptian government; or described the future of Mubarak et al. as uncertain or in jeopardy. *Negative:* Journalists and/or their sources described Mubarak et al. as dictatorial, autocratic, authoritarian, tyrannical, unwilling to implement reform, or noted the deployment of loyalists to suppress opposition protesters.

<sup>3</sup> *Coding categories for Question 3 - Positive:* Journalists and/or their sources described the police et al. as reluctant to clamp down on protesters, displaying an ideological affinity for their aims. *Neutral:* Journalists and/or their sources described the police et al. as neither explicitly repressive or sympathetic in their stance towards the anti-Mubarak opposition. *Negative:* Journalists and/or their sources described the police and/or security forces as intimidating, arresting, injuring, or killing protesters.

that would produce the *most common* and *most likely seen* coverage. (Dardis 2006a, p. 414). Drawing from Christian Christensen, this is not a review of the U.K. or U.S. print news media as a whole, but rather an analysis of the stories chosen from the selected publications (Christensen, 2005, p. 114).

The newspapers analysed from the United Kingdom were *The Daily (and Sunday) Telegraph*, *The Times (and Sunday Times)*, *The Independent* (and *The Independent on Sunday*), and *The Guardian* (and *The Observer*). These papers were chosen due to their political leanings (Conservative: *The Daily Telegraph & The Times*, Liberal: *The Guardian* and *The Independent*) and circulation numbers (Dardis, 2006a, p. 414), amount of coverage devoted to foreign affairs, and integrity of their archived print coverage.

Taking cue from Frank Dardis' other study, the newspapers analysed from the United States were *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today* (Dardis, 2006b, p. 124). Similar to the U.K. newspapers, these American newspapers were included within the data set due to their circulation numbers, the amount and influence of their coverage devoted to foreign affairs, and accessibility of their archives (ibid.). In terms of the political leanings of these publications, *The New York Times* is generally accepted to have a more liberal stance, with the political orientations of *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* harder to assign a distinctly liberal or conservative label.

This study examined news coverage from the dates of January 24, 2011 (the day before the protests commenced) to February 21, 2011, ten days after Hosni Mubarak resigned as president of Egypt. The articles were obtained by performing a Nexus UK search for relevant newspaper coverage by using the search terms <Egypt> and <protests>. Altogether, 386 articles from British newspapers and 225 articles from American newspapers were analysed, bringing the total of articles examined to 611.

#### 4. Findings: Legitimising dissent

The first research question sought to answer how the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were framed within British and American newspaper coverage of the Egyptian Revolution. Table 1 shows the extent to which the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were accorded with positive, neutral, and negative newspaper coverage from both the United Kingdom, and United States:

**Table 1: Tone towards anti-Mubarak protesters within British and American newspapers**

|                                | % of articles published within British newspapers | % of articles published within American newspapers |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Positive</b>                | 66  | 66   |
| <b>Neutral</b>                 | 21  | 19   |
| <b>Negative</b>                | 6   | 13   |
| <b>Could not be determined</b> | 7   | 2  |

*(All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.)*

The fact that 66% of articles from the British sample, and 66% of articles from the American sample portrayed the anti-Mubarak opposition favourably confirms the overwhelmingly positive media coverage this movement received. This result is all the more striking when compared with the amount of newspaper articles from either country that portrayed the protesters in neutral and negative terms. The anti-Mubarak opposition was framed in *neutral* terms within 21% of articles published by British newspapers and 19% of articles published within American newspapers, therefore making it the only other framing category to achieve some degree of prominence. The following excerpt from *The Guardian* serves as an example of how the protesters were constructed as a positive protest movement:

Meanwhile the citizens on the ground have come into their own. Tahrir is about dignity and image as much as it is about the economy and corruption. People are acutely aware of how much their government has messed with their heads, worked to divide them, and maligned them to the world. “She says we only care about a slice of bread,” a young labourer says, “We care about bread. But we also care about pride.” A bearded man with a wife in a niqab says: “We’re all Egyptian. Was I born with a beard?” He grins: “When Mubarak leaves I’ll be able to afford a razor!”

(Soueif, 2011)

Within this article, the Egyptian novelist and commentator Ahdaf Soueif presents the anti-Mubarak protesters not as an irrational, partisan movement advocating for the ascension of one particular community to the top of Egyptian politics, but as a collective unified by very tangible, universal grievances: lack of economic opportunity and endemic corruption. Beyond that, the protesters are presented as a movement galvanised by humanistic motivations to reclaim lost dignity and pride that seemingly encompasses a broad swatch of Egyptian society, hence Soueif’s reference to the Mubarak government that “worked to divide them” and a bearded Muslim man who offered the unifying proclamation that “we’re all Egyptian.” Such themes were also present within the coverage of the immediate aftermath of Mubarak’s dismissal from power by the Egyptian military, as evidenced by an editorial from *The Times* on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011:

The spontaneous eruption of joy was something that Egypt never expected to see. People of all trades, classes, and religions waved flags and cheered, thronged the streets of Cairo, embraced the bemused soldiers and chanted slogans hailing freedom, democracy and a new beginning. The unfolding of history, which President Obama prematurely believed was happening on Thursday, has now happened. It has been this generation’s Berlin Wall moment. Egypt, the Middle East and politics throughout the Arab world have been changed forever. It is certainly time.

(*The Times*, 2011)

Reporting from American newspapers echoed the themes first described within coverage from British newspapers, contextualising the protests as Egyptians asserting a unified voice in an effort to address the longstanding economic, political, and social grievances galvanising the protests against President Mubarak. As David Sanger from *The New York Times* wrote:

President Obama declared on Tuesday night that an “orderly transition” in Egypt “must begin now,” but he stopped short of demanding that President Hosni Mubarak leave office immediately. Mr. Obama used his four-and-a-half minute speech from the Cross Hall of the White House to embrace the cause of the protesters in Egypt far more fully than he has at any previous moment since the uprising against Mr. Mubarak’s 30-year-rule began.

(Sanger, 2011)

Furthermore, nods to the historic nature of the protests appeared within reporting from *The New York Times*, which, similar to the editorial published within *The Times* of London calling the protests “this generation’s Berlin Wall moment” (*The Times*, 2011), spoke of the uprising as a paradigm shift between the governed and governing within the Arab world’s most populous country:

But he made clear that the process started by the protesters could not be reversed. “We’ve born witness to the beginning of a new chapter in the history of a great country,” Mr. Obama said, casting it as a natural successor to other moments of transition in a society that goes back thousands of years.

(Sanger, 2011)

While it is apparent from Sanger’s reporting that U.S. President Barack Obama has yet to fully abandon Hosni Mubarak, it is clear from Obama’s statement that there is an inexorable gravitation on his part toward more fully supporting the protesters. The following article from *The Washington Post*, however, was much more straightforward in its positive coverage of the protests, citing the popular discontent with the Mubarak government and grievances shared by the protesters. The headline of the story sets the tone for what follows in the article written by journalist Leila Fadel, likening the situation in Egypt through the long-held dream of an activist that now has its chance to be born into reality:

**Headline:** A once-imprisoned activist finally sees what he dreamed of for Egypt

**Body:** From the center of Tahrir Square, Hossam el-Hamalawy surveyed the sea of people around him. He could feel it, he said. Victory was close. “I’ve dreamed of this for a very long time, and it’s finally happening,” the well-known blogger and activist said. He stood completely still in the cen-



ter of the hundreds of thousands of people who flooded into this downtown square from every direction. “No words can describe it.” For so many, this fight had started just eight days ago. But Hamalawy, 33, has been fighting against a feared ruler for 13 years.

(Fadel, 2011)

From the tone of the headline to Hossam el-Hamalawy being physically situated in the midst of the protests as described by Leila Fadel, el-Hamalawy becomes the embodiment of the struggle of the “hundreds of thousands” of demonstrators around him, and the means by which Fadel tells their story as well. Aside from the unity of purpose and resolve shared amongst the protesters, also present within the coverage is a celebratory atmosphere and camaraderie, humanising the protesters:

He (el-Hamalawy) walked through the crowds Tuesday kissing and congratulating friends and strangers.

“So finally we lived the day, we will see it,” a friend told him.

“Indeed, indeed,” el-Hamalawy replied. “Today is like a wedding.”

He snapped pictures of banners and protesters sharing water and food to sustain each other. On the first days of these demonstrations, he used Twitter to transmit minute-by-minute accounts of the growing popular movement.

“I would love to think that I was a drip in this big ocean,” he sighed as he walked through the unprecedented crowds. “We feel so close now, so close. Mubarak is stubborn, though, and he won’t go in silence.”

(Fadel, 2011)

In addition to the communal atmosphere where Fadel quotes el-Hamalawy describing himself as a “drip in this big ocean” in which he is symbolically and literally written into the heart of the movement, a level of technological sophistication is noted as well. The article reveals that el-Hamalawy and other protesters possessed the technological savvy to disseminate their own narrative of events, in this case through social media platforms such as Twitter. What these examples from British and American newspaper coverage demonstrate is how the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters were portrayed in a decidedly positive manner.

## **5. Delegitimising Egyptian President Mubarak and the Egyptian police**

The second research question sought to determine how then-Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the concurrent Egyptian government were framed within news coverage of the 2011 Revolution. The purpose of this category was to provide context for the main finding of the research by examining if other trends buttressed the positive, supportive coverage that the anti-Mubarak protesters received.

Altogether, the majority of newspaper articles from both the United Kingdom and United States portrayed Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian Government in de-

cidedly negative terms, in that former president Mubarak and/or the Egyptian Government were cast as one or more of the following: dictatorial, autocratic, authoritarian, unwilling to implement reform or step down, or directing Egypt's security forces to violently suppress the protests. Table 2 outlines how President Mubarak and the Egyptian government were portrayed within newspaper coverage of the revolution:

**Table 2: Portrayal of Hosni Mubarak and/or Egyptian Government within coverage**

|                                | % of articles published within British newspapers | % of articles published within American newspapers |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Negative</b>                | 54  | 60   |
| <b>Neutral</b>                 | 17  | 16   |
| <b>Positive</b>                | 0   | 2  |
| <b>Could not be determined</b> | 29  | 22   |

(All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.)

The following excerpts from British newspapers are illustrative of how President Mubarak and/or the Egyptian Government were cast as negative within news coverage:

From *The Guardian*: Amid all the confusion, the first cracks in the 30-year-old dictatorship began to appear. A young policeman who moments earlier had been smashing protesters with a baton was forced to fall back, dropping his shield and helmet as he fled. Two protesters of the same age picked them up, ran towards him and handed them back. "We are not your enemy," they told the terrified conscript. "We are like you. Join us."

(Beaumont & Shenker, 2011)

From *The Times*: Egypt's popular uprising was descending into a blood-bath last night after President Mubarak, fighting for his political survival, unleashed thousands of violent supporters on the pro-democracy demonstrators occupying the centre of Cairo.

(Hider & Whittell, 2011)

From *The Guardian*: One of the tottering pharaoh's last desperate gambits has been to send out paid thugs to try and cow those campaigning for freedom.

(Rawnsley, 2011)

It is clear in the above articles that Mubarak is represented as negative, given the description of his rule in *The Guardian* as a "30-year-old dictatorship" and char-

acterising him as a “pharaoh,” with *The Times* commenting that he “unleashed thousands of violent supporters on the pro-democracy demonstrators.”

Similar to the British press, the majority of articles from American newspapers portrayed Hosni Mubarak or the Egyptian government as negative (60%). The type of coverage found within the American newspapers was, more or less, similar to what was found within the British press, replete with references to Mubarak or members of the Egyptian government portrayed as authoritarian, dictatorial, or as architects of severe repression. For example:

From *The New York Times*:

**Headline:** EGYPT OFFICIALS WIDEN CRACKDOWN; U.S. IN TALKS FOR MUBARAK TO QUIT

**From the body:** The campaign was a startling blend of the oldest tactics of an authoritarian government – stoking fears of foreigners – with the air of sincerity of a repentant order.

(Shadid et al., 2011)

From *USA Today*:

**Headline:** Suleiman’s reputation holds dread for some; Power shift to Egypt’s No. 2, one ‘who cracks heads,’ is keenly watched

**From the body:** “Suleiman’s a thug wearing a silk tie; a really nasty, mean guy,” McGovern says. “He makes Mubarak look like a fuzzy puppy. A guy like that who gets into power is unlikely to let it go.”

(Strauss, 2011)

In the above article from *The New York Times*, Egypt’s governing elite, as led by Mubarak, is cast as negative given their employment of “the oldest tactics of an authoritarian government” (Shadid et al., 2011) by resorting to xenophobia through attempting to generate a fear of foreigners in Egyptian citizens. Secondly, *USA Today* notes the promotion of Omar Suleiman by Mubarak to Egypt’s vice presidency and how his possible takeover will not change the character of the government. Within this article, a U.S. official referred to Suleiman as a “really nasty, mean guy” who “makes Mubarak look like a fuzzy puppy” (Strauss, 2011).

The third research question examined the framing of Egyptian police and security officials. Though the majority of articles from British and American newspapers did not feature Egyptian police or security officials, discussing their portrayal within news coverage of the revolution is still important, as it offers yet another opportunity to demonstrate how this research differs from previous scholarship examining news coverage of protest. Table 3 illuminates the extent to which police and security officials were portrayed as repressive within British and American newspaper coverage of the revolution:

**Table 3: Portrayal of Egyptian police and security officials within coverage**

|                                | % of articles published within British newspapers | % of articles published within American newspapers |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Negative</b>                | 32  | 26   |
| <b>Positive</b>                | 0   | 0  |
| <b>Neutral</b>                 | 1   | 0  |
| <b>Could not be determined</b> | 67  | 74   |

(All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.)

Indeed, not only were they cast as repressive, but sometimes brutal in their suppression of the protests, as exemplified within reporting from *The New York Times*. The headline of the story employs the verb “crush” to illustrate the Egyptian government’s response to the burgeoning protest movement, setting the stage for describing the conduct of the Egyptian police and security forces that followed:

**Headline:** Egypt Intensifies Effort to Crush Wave of Protests, Detaining Hundreds

**From the story:** The skirmishes started early in the afternoon, and soon, small fires illuminated large clashes under an overpass. Riot police officers using batons, tear gas and rubber-coated bullets cleared busy avenues; other officers set upon fleeing protesters, beating them with bamboo staves.

Egypt has an extensive and widely feared security apparatus, and it deployed its might in an effort to crush the protests. But it was not clear whether the security forces were succeeding in intimidating the protesters or rather inciting them to further defiance.

The protesters seemed far more worried about burly plainclothes security officers, part of the feared state security services. The officers carried wooden planks, short clubs, and other crude weapons, and as they stormed the gatherings, they beat anyone who happened to be standing in the way, including reporters.

(Fahim & Stack, 2011)

The fact that the article describes riot police and plainclothes security officers as using brute, if not potentially deadly force (e.g. rubber bullets) against protesters (and nearby journalists) demonstrates how the violence depicted in this story was a crude, calculated move on the behalf of police to end the protests. The repressive, highly negative representation of the Egyptian police and security services within news coverage of the Egyptian Revolution buttresses the previous results described in this study, where the actions of the protesters were portrayed in highly positive

terms, while Hosni Mubarak and the concurrent Egyptian government were portrayed as repressive and violent.

## 6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that there is a clear, unequivocal distinction to be made between the representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters within news coverage of the Egyptian Revolution, and that of Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian government, police, and security forces. Indeed, the anti-Mubarak protesters were framed in a positive manner within British and American newspaper coverage to an identical degree (U.K.: 66%, U.S.: 66%). Similarly, the representation of then President Hosni Mubarak and the concurrent Egyptian government also spoke to the lack of any significant differences in the coverage from British and American newspapers. Mubarak and the Egyptian government were framed as negative within the newspapers of both nations to a similar extent (U.K.: 54%, U.S.: 60%), and as neutral to a nearly identical degree (U.K.: 17%, U.S.: 16%). Lastly, the gap between Mubarak and the Egyptian government's representation as positive within British and American newspapers was even closer (U.K.: 0%, U.S.: 0.02%).

Previous scholarship examining the ways in which the news media covers political protest is clear in demonstrating that the reporting on protest often denigrates it as disruptive or focuses on the potential for conflict or violence, (see: Halloran et al., 1970; Gitlin, 1980; Shoemaker, 1984; Hallin, 1986; McLeod, 1995; McCarthy et al., 1996; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Arpan et al., 2006; Boykoff, 2006) or concentrates on individuals at the expense of a movement's message (Watkins, 2001). Douglas McLeod and Benjamin Detenber previously argued that mainstream news media outlets take a "guard dog" stance towards political protest, covering them from the perspective of those in power (McLeod & Detenber, 1999, p. 5), but the fact that the anti-Mubarak opposition was covered in such an overwhelmingly positive manner indicates that influential British and American newspapers reported on the Egyptian Revolution from the perspective of Egyptian citizens protesting against their government. The positive portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition grants them political agency, which diverges from previous research highlighting negative Western media coverage of the nations and peoples of the Middle East and North Africa (Karim, 2006; Pintak, 2006; Mishra, 2008; Kumar, 2010).

The overwhelmingly favourable media coverage accorded to the anti-Mubarak opposition also buttresses William Gamson's research elaborating how collective action frames may contribute to the legitimation of political protest within media coverage (Gamson, 1995). In this paper we see how the constituent components of collective action frames are at play within the reporting of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. The portrayal of Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian police and security forces as overwhelmingly repressive, and as responsible for the chaos and violence in the streets of Egypt speaks to the *injustice* aspect of collective action frames, where human actors are found to be responsible for hardship and suffering, sparking indignation (Gamson, 1995, p. 91). The *agency* aspect of collective action frames is best exemplified by the positive portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition, indicating that they are an op-

position movement underpinned by various grievances that should be taken seriously (ibid. p. 95). Lastly, the *identity* aspect of collective actions frames generates solidarity with the anti-Mubarak opposition who want to be in command of their political destiny, and antipathy towards the Mubarak-led political order who are “fundamentally opposed to such values” (ibid. p. 99), which again is best exemplified by the positive portrayal of the former, and negative portrayal of the latter entity.

The results presented herein also support Gadi Wolfsfeld’s political contest model, which sought to demonstrate how political movements gain legitimacy within media coverage (Wolfsfeld, 1997). Within this research, it has been demonstrated that the journalists covering the revolution largely deemed the goals, methods, and motivations of the protesters as legitimate, and the response of Egyptian authorities as illegitimate. This corroborates Loughborough University’s findings where the BBC framed the 2011 Arab Uprisings as citizens versus “brutal dictators” (Loughborough University, 2012, p. 33), and supports previous research from Steven Salaita (2012) which found that one of the more important developments arising out of American newspaper coverage of the 2011 Uprisings across the Arab world was the positive representation of the anti-government protesters. This paper also supports Andrea Guzman’s (2016) study examining CNN’s and Fox News’ framing of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, as both outlets focused on the rationality of the protesters’ demands versus the irrationality of Mubarak and the Egyptian government’s actions in response to the opposition protesters.

The research presented in this paper has several limitations. This study did not include in-depth interviews with the journalists covering the revolution for the British and American newspapers examined herein. Such interviews could have illuminated (a) how the journalists covering the protests in Egypt prepared for their reporting, (b) how they interpreted the nature of the protests, (c) whether they felt it necessary to abide by professional standards of objectivity and present the perspectives of both the anti-Mubarak opposition and the Mubarak government, (d) how they cultivated sources, and (e) whether violence against prominent Western journalists (e.g. Anderson Cooper, Christiane Amanpour) influenced their perception of the events in Egypt, amongst other considerations that could have impacted the media representation of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters. Additionally, since this research examined newspapers exclusively, expanding the scope of the study to include coverage from British (BBC, Sky News, Channel 4) and American broadcast news outlets (CNN, Fox News, NBC) could have provided a richer understanding of how prominent television and print news media within both countries interpreted the protests in Egypt.

Although the revolution that unseated then-Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak is five years old at the time of writing, the role and performance of the news media in contextualising this event for their readerships still offers a variety of pathways for compelling and relevant comparative research. Future studies in this area could compare media coverage of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and subsequent events such as the June 2013 mass protest movement that led the coup deposing Egypt’s first democratically-elected president, Mohamed Morsi. While this study was exclusively focused on how British and American news media framed the primary actors involved in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, additional research should also ex-

amine the impact of sourcing patterns and the stance of global political elites towards the protests in shaping media coverage of this event.

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