

Claremont Colleges

## Scholarship @ Claremont

---

Scripps Senior Theses

Scripps Student Scholarship

---

2022

# NO LAUGHING MATTER: POLITICAL HUMOR AND MEDIA IN EGYPT'S JANUARY 25TH REVOLUTION

Julia Brock

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps\\_theses](https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses)



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#), and the [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brock, Julia, "NO LAUGHING MATTER: POLITICAL HUMOR AND MEDIA IN EGYPT'S JANUARY 25TH REVOLUTION" (2022). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 1859.

[https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps\\_theses/1859](https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1859)

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scripps Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scripps Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

**NO LAUGHING MATTER: POLITICAL HUMOR AND MEDIA IN EGYPT'S  
JANUARY 25<sup>TH</sup> REVOLUTION**

**BY  
JULIA V. BROCK**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**SENIOR MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICAN STUDIES AND POLITICS DUAL MAJOR  
THESIS**

**PROFESSOR SUMITA PAHWA  
PROFESSOR HEATHER FERGUSON**

**APRIL 29, 2022**

I would like to acknowledge Professor Sumita Pahwa, my first reader and academic advisor, for her efforts in supporting and editing my thesis. Her brilliant, country-specific knowledge was a terrific asset during this project, and I am forever indebted to her for all she has done for me during my academic career at Scripps College. Her sage advice and editorial suggestions have made me the writer I am today, and I have the deepest respect and admiration for her and her work. I would also like to acknowledge my second reader, Professor Heather Ferguson, for cultivating in me an interest in Egyptian art and popular culture during the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. Both women were indispensable to this project.

I would like to acknowledge the Scripps College Middle East/North African Studies and Politics departments, as well as Scripps College faculty and staff, for their support and encouragement of my project. I am grateful to be part of the Scripps community and will continue to exhibit the core characteristics of a Scripps student for the rest of my life: confidence, courage, and hope.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Steve and Kim, for your love and support. I feel brave enough to tackle any challenge knowing that you are both in my corner. Your influence has made me the person I am today. Thank you to my friends and extended family; each of you has a special place in my heart. And a special thank you to my dear friend Nevada Joan Lee, who has been a tremendous source of inspiration, friendly competition, and adventure. You all traveled this road with me, and your encouragement (and laughter) inspires me to strive for excellence.

This thesis is dedicated to all of you, who taught me how to laugh.

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Contents.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II. Theory and Literature Review.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>III. Counterpublics: What Are They and Why Do They Matter.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>IV. Methodology.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>V. A Brief History of Media and Political Jokes in Egypt: 1828-2000s.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>VI. Stoking Insurgency: Humor and Media Fueling Subversive Political Discourse in the 2000s.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>VII. The Laughing Revolution: Political Humor’s Manifestations in Social Media, Independent Newspapers, and Alternate Media in the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.....</b>	<b>37</b>
a. Counterpublics Within the Revolution.....	37
b. Revolutionary Political Humor and Artistic Expression.....	43
<b>VIII. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>52</b>

# No Laughing Matter: Political Humor and Media in Egypt's January' 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution

“Every tiny joke is a revolution.” -George Orwell

## I. Introduction

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, thousands of Egyptians came to Tahrir Square to protest then-President Hosni Mubarak's autocratic regime. They were armed with a savvy tool: humor. The frequent examples of political humor within the revolution—including Twitter accounts poking fun at Mubarak (Nunnes Idle and Soueif 2011) and other funny examples of political dissent—reflect the prevalence of humor within Egyptian society.<sup>1</sup> Political jokes<sup>2</sup> were widely prominent in the decade preceding the revolution as a form of covert criticism of Mubarak and his regime. People shared political jokes on social media and published them in independent newspapers in the 2000s, and once the revolution began, political humor expanded into the street via graffiti and homemade signs. Political humor encouraged individuals to express their political criticisms of Mubarak more openly by turning his regime into a joke at which the public could laugh (Anagondahalli and Khamis 2021). Although political humor had been part of Egyptian politics for decades before the uprising, I will be focusing on the unique role it played in creating new opportunities for dissent within Egyptian society via its distribution in subversive newspapers and social media, and its establishment of informal communication channels between dissenting individuals.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Egyptians are well-known for their affinity for jokes. Political jokes date back to the Pharaohs of Egypt, indicating a trend that positions humor firmly within the fabric of Egyptian society. They are nicknamed *ibn nukta* (son of the joke) by other Arabs due to their wit and love of humor. For more see Samer S. Shehata, “The Politics of Laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarek in Egyptian Political Jokes,” *Folklore* 103, no. 1 (1992): pp. 75-91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1992.9715831>.

<sup>2</sup> I define political jokes as jokes that require political context to be understood. This context could include knowledge of a political leader or their policies, current events within a country, or other matters that are political in nature.

There is a great deal of humorous content from the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution and the decade preceding it, including political cartoons, humor blogs, graphic novels and more. However, scholarly analyses of the uprising have not paid close attention to how humor functioned as a communication and mobilization resource within subversive information networks during this period in Egyptian history (see Armbrust and El-Ghobashy 2019).<sup>3</sup> In my preliminary research, I noticed that subversive content was often carefully conveyed within a joke, indicating an intentional use of humor that enabled dissent among Egyptians in a way that demonstrations and other forms of resistance did not. If humor was so prevalent during the movement, as seen in several photographs of protestors at Tahrir Square with signs mocking Mubarak (Khalil 2011), why has there not yet been scholarship that directly addresses how political humor aided in the establishment of the conditions for revolution in 2011? Additionally, there has been a lack of specific scholarship about how political humor's distribution within media sources in Egypt between 2000 and 2011 helped support politically dissenting conversations in the country. This paper inserts itself within this scholarship gap to offer an analysis of political humor and media's roles in creating conditions for a mass social movement.

My research seeks to understand the roles humor and the Egyptian media sphere played in mobilizing individuals to protest in the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. I argue that political humor acted as a mechanism for distributing politically subversive, humorous content to individuals before and during the revolution. I hypothesize that political humor was crucial in creating spaces where people could begin sharing subversive ideas with one another in various non-state-controlled media formats. The networks facilitated by sharing of humor and subversive content

---

<sup>3</sup> While both authors dedicate time discussing the economic (El-Ghobashy) and political factors leading to the revolution, as well as social media's influence on the revolution (Armbrust), they do not focus on political jokes or humorous elements within the revolution. I will fill that research gap in my thesis.

facilitated political conversations that became the impetus for political movements like the 2004 Kifaya, 2008 April 6 Youth, and 2010 We Are All Khaled Said movements, and, eventually, the 2011 January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. In the 2000s, I hypothesize that social media was used to organize protests, and that independent media supplemented this insurgent political discourse by publishing subversive political jokes. Once subversive discourse was established within these early social movements and media sources, the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution built on these existing networks to allow humorous subversive content, delivered across varying mediums like protest signs and street art, to permeate political discourse to such a degree that elites in power had to respond to revolutionary demands.

In the ten years preceding the revolution, political jokes took on many forms, including political cartoons.<sup>4</sup> Caricatures depicting political issues in a subversive manner were primarily found in independent newspapers during the 2000s, offering a new avenue for implicit political discourse that deviated from the regime's official political message (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012). Creators of these jokes covered current events without directly naming the issues they had with their government's leadership, which allowed them to circumvent some of the restrictions that Mubarak placed around public political dissent. With the arrival of the Internet, social media itself became a space where insurgent political discourse flourished, lending itself to the organization and publicization of mass demonstrations like the Kifaya, April 6 Youth, and We Are All Khaled Said movements. My research suggests that the independent and social media spheres created the conditions for the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution, a mass social movement that effectively used political humor to enhance informal communication systems of political dissent.

---

<sup>4</sup> I define political cartoons as drawn comical images that include visual and textual context. Political cartoons are also based within political and country cultural context that is necessary to know in order to "get" the joke.

## **II. Theory and Literature Review:**

The theories that will best allow me to explore political humor's role in the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution are media theory, social movement theory, and humor theory. First, I analyze how community behaviors can be produced within information circles that are driven by media sources. Both independent and social media have online spaces for individuals to interact, which enhances their outreach within a community. An autocratic regime can attempt to limit or ban certain types of online arenas of speech, such as those occurring on social media, but the Internet's malleable structure allows individuals to work around censors to continue facilitating revolutionary discussions (Howard et.al. 2011, 7). The combination of engagement with insurgent content on media networks and physical community engagement can increase participation in that movement since there are multiple points of engagement (Nugent and Berman 2017). In Egypt, this on-the-ground community engagement came from participation in other politically dissenting demonstrations like the Kifaya movement or the April 6 Youth movement. The Internet provided another avenue for political mobilization and informal insurgent communication among Egyptians, which bolstered revolutionary communication and equipped Egyptians with more tools to use against the regime. I argue that humor is an important element in understanding the spread of politically subversive opinions within the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution through social and independent media that build off in-person revolutionary actions.

Media also allows people to engage in public discourse in a direct manner within a more informal environment than a formal arena of public political discourse, creating casual communication systems that allow for distribution of insurgent ideas. As media in Egypt expanded to incorporate social media and other electronic forms of information distribution, media circles of engagement build off of each other—notably demonstrated by the repetition of

similar themes like corruption within independent media, social media, and political joke publications (Guyer May 2017)—to create more avenues for politically subversive discourse. These new avenues used previously established subversive discourse as a springboard for increasingly insurgent conversations. The types of media predominantly analyzed in this paper are independent news sources, which appeared in the 1990s and 2000s and sought to push the boundaries of accepted political discourse, and social media, which emerged with the birth of the Internet and opened the doors for every Egyptian with Internet access and savvy to share their political opinions with the world. Independent news sources are defined in this paper as traditional news sources free of government or corporate interests, while social media is defined as websites or applications that allow individuals to share and create content and network online with others. Social media is an informal arena of political discourse because it is not controlled by a particular state or regime, and because the materials shared on personal accounts are informal as well. Social media contains the power to amplify a political statement or image within a wider online community. Independent media sources do not contain the same ability to facilitate real-time political discourse within its boundaries since there are not as many interactive elements, such as “liking” content, as social media. However, the content published in independent media sources can contain messages of political dissent, such as cartoons asking about Mubarak’s dictatorial rule (Guyer May 2017). This content sparked subversive conversations between individuals, therefore maintaining and enhancing an informal communication system between individuals who consume the same news. Political jokes in Egypt have historically presented opportunities for political dissent to be shared between individuals (Shehata 1996), creating strong networks based on trust and mutual appreciation of a good joke. By introducing humor as a key arena of public discourse within discussions of media

networks in Egypt, this thesis broadens the scope of research on social movements to incorporate humor as an element of this type of mobilization and shows how humor worked to build and sustain trust among groups of people who were openly expressing dissatisfaction with Mubarak's regime.

The Egyptian public's exchange of subversive humorous content within non-regime affiliated media spheres helped to transform the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution into a powerful social movement, which is the second theory I utilize in my thesis. Social movement theory believes that community bonds are a key factor of social movements (Grandovetter 1973). Weaker community ties, or ties that are not defined by close affinity but can diffuse more information to a greater number of people, are essential in maintaining a movement's prevalence (Granovetter 1973, 1366). My thesis focuses on the ties between social movements that were in part facilitated by social media followership of certain pages, such as the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook Page's 70,000 followers, some of whom were affiliated with previous social movements (Alaimo 2015). This paper demonstrates why community behaviors, such as masses of people engaging with subversive content about Mubarak within Egyptian non-state media spheres like the Said Facebook page, are an essential element in understanding how a movement like Egypt's January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution grew and what united the growing community of political dissenters.

Within social movements, humor can become lost among other mobilization factors like community network building, which is why humor theory is my third and final theory of focus. Humor is crucial in "facilitating outreach and mobilization, a culture of resistance and turning oppression upside down" (Sorensen 2008, 185). When jokes are targeted at audiences or individuals outside of the origination point of the humor, other individuals can be drawn into the discussion if the cultural context in which the joke is situated is understood by all parties

involved (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2014, 296). Despite this extensive research on humor theory, further study is needed to understand the exact role humor plays in social movements. My research is positioned within this gap to directly highlight humor's position within social mobilization and the ways it can garner support for political movements like the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. A majority of the jokes that were told become infused with political topics because political events often provided cultural context that is necessary to know in order to "get" the joke. The importance of political humor in Egyptian society allows humor to embody a more concrete place within that society since current events are frequently incorporated into political cartoons and jokes, which subsequently created the space for political humor to be a vital part of the revolution and its preceding decade.

Humor theory is important in understanding what social role humor plays, how it could enhance the creation of a social movement, and why humorous insurgent content could facilitate subversive discourse by addressing shared political grievances held by Egyptians under Mubarak in an implicit manner. Sharing humorous, politically subversive content among personal information networks creates counterpublics<sup>5</sup> where people can circulate this content. Egypt's autocratic government prohibits democratic political action, so it is up to the people to engage in counterpublics, which are more democratic arena of informal politics, to create a situation in which collective action leads to substantive change. These informal communication arenas can shape community norms, allow people to practice engaging in political skills, and build community trust between participants in the informal arena, making them key arenas within my analysis of politically subversive conversations in Egypt that led to the revolution.

---

<sup>5</sup> I define counterpublics in this paper as arenas of political communication that operate outside of the dominant public political discourse.

Humor, being a discursive mechanism of informal communication, is an integral part of understanding why these informal arenas of communication create space for participatory politics. Humor acts as a conversational implicature—a part of speech that allows someone to say something without explicitly stating their meaning and relying on implications based on contextual clues—which provides people with a buffer when talking about politically subversive content (Hassan 2013, 553). Implicatures are especially important within societies that repress freedoms of speech because discussing subversive political ideas without explicitly stating them provides a layer of protection. This protection comes from the fact that humor provided plausible deniability to individuals who express dissenting political opinions; they can pass off their statement as being “just a joke” even though it is conveying a deeper politically insurgent thought. Jokes fall primarily within three theories of humor that are crucial in the understanding of the context in which political humor occurs: incongruity, superiority, and relief (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2014, 295). Incongruity theory emphasizes the juxtaposition of conflicting narratives within a joke to create introspection on behalf of the target of the humor. Superiority theory allows the joke-teller to flip the power dynamic within their joke, a trick often used in political humor when criticizing leaders. Relief theory emphasizes humor’s ability to release pressure within a society by addressing tensions in a laughable manner. Political humor is primarily based within incongruity theory since it inspires deeper understanding of the social fabric within which the joke is based and can therefore help the listener determine if the joke is simply a joke or if it is an alternate form of political discourse (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2014, Young 2014). Political humor can also fall under “hostile” humor, or humor that is aggressive, satirical, or defensive in nature (Freud 1989). This “hostile” political humor, in the Egyptian context, typically focused on leaders and their decisions and was increasingly prevalent in the lead-up to

the Laughing Revolution. Humor theories are crucial to understanding the reasons why the jokes referenced before and during the revolution are funny and what political weight they carry.

Political scholarship does not include frequent mentions of humor as a political tool, but some scholars have dedicated their efforts to exploring the effect that political jokes have within a society and the impact they can have on a government. Gregor Benton, for example, believes that humor “will change nothing...it will mobilize no one...it is important for keeping society stable” (Benton 1988, 54). The argument that humor is incapable of driving the masses to collective action is directly countered within this paper. I find that humor was an integral factor in creating discursive political conversations that allowed individuals to connect to others with like-minded political views, reducing the fear threshold within the regime to a degree that made protesting a feasible outlet for the masses. Evidence of humor’s effect among protestors is seen in the multitudes of people reusing the same joke formulas when creating anti-Mubarak posters in Tahrir Square (Khalil 2011): they are direct examples of how political humor encouraged individuals to mobilize and continue engaging with one another in a revolutionary context, which greatly affected the outcome of the revolution by virtue of creating a mass uprising whose demands Mubarak couldn’t ignore. I will demonstrate how the use of political humor in non-regime affiliated media spheres in Egypt between 2011 and 2011 exemplifies how politically subversive content, delivered in a humorous manner, cultivates insurgent discussions that eventually spawned a full-scale revolution.

Upon examining these three theories, I hypothesize that politically humorous content was frequently explored to highlight existing institutional injustices within the state, and the distribution of that satirical content created bonds between individuals that were reinforced during protest movements in the 2000s so that people understood the networks of subversive

communication to a degree that allowed them to feel supported by masses of people when protesting Mubarak in 2011. Social and independent media sources provided outlets through which people could access this subversive discourse. Social media like Twitter and Facebook contained information about organizing protests and rallies, and independent media, like the non-regime affiliated newspaper Al Dustour, published content that was critical of politicians and their policies. This media combination ensured that people could express political frustrations in subversive ways, talk about politics implicitly, and also stay informed about upcoming protests once social media became a more established presence in Egypt.

### **III. Counterpublics: What Are They and Why do They Matter?**

Another critical angle of analyzing public discourse within a state is through the lens of arenas of political communication that operate outside of the dominant public political discourse, which I categorize as counterpublics. Within counterpublics, people can discuss current events, democratically resolve disputes, and debate politics, making them informal settings where participatory political thought and action develops among common folk (Wedeen 2007). Informal arenas of politics are considered counterpublics because they operate outside of official government and institutional sectors.

Counterpublics are spaces where subversive political discourse can flourish, creating new channels of political engagement among individuals. Politics communicated through illicit means, such as jokes or rumors, can be subversive when delivered in an autocracy that controls the spread of information within a state because they skirt around the regime's control over speech (Blaydes 2018, 205). Rumors and jokes are subversive because they are not part of the regime's official political discourse and can often present contradictions to the regime's rhetoric

about itself. They allow people to share their true political opinions by creating space for the teller to distance themselves from the content and simply relay information. It is especially important to analyze the discourse occurring within these civil society counterpublics because the content can indicate true public opinion of the leadership and politics within an autocratic country (Blaydes 2018, Shehata 1992).

The notion of counterpublics as legitimate sources of political discourse is not accepted within all circles of political science. Some scholars, like Jurgen Habermas, believe that the public sphere of politics is the only one that cultivates political events and therefore the only one that merits political analysis (Habermas et al. 1989). However, the idea of the public political sphere consisting of a singular sphere restricts political analysis to one plane of discussion. The single-arena analysis Habermas champions erases more intricate civil society discourse that feeds into political discussions and decisions. This civil society discourse creates counterpublics that serve as alternate arenas of political discourse, establishing multitudes of channels for political engagement among the people (Wedeen 2007). They are vital to understanding the ways civil society affects political outcomes in autocratic countries like Egypt.

Previous analysis of counterpublics increasingly calls attention to their importance in shaping political discourse within a country, but it does not adequately highlight humor's role in facilitating political discussion within such settings. Within this thesis, I will make the case for why humor is a crucial element within the information distribution system of these counterpublics and why that system was crucial to establishing the foundation for the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. I will also show how humor created an informal structure of dissent within non-regime affiliated media spheres, allowing them to become counterpublics in which the masses could engage with political content in a subversive manner.

Media that was not controlled by the state, such as Twitter, Facebook, and independent newspapers, provided a space where the masses could access more politically subversive content than was available to them in state-run media. Political jokes become a form of communication that created informal political arenas within a state, allowing space for subversive political discourse to flourish within these insurgent counterpublics (Shehata 1992, 76). By accessing content that was shared among a niche yet politically active portion of the population, individuals expanded their connections to the movement by accessing more material via media and witnessing others consuming the same resources, which made the array of political dissenters more visible to each other and enhanced their social and political bonds. These diffuse bonds expanded these arenas of political dissent, and humor, being a component of human communication that enhanced bonding between individuals (PsychAlive 2013), reinforced those counterpublic arenas. The humorous content served as a political opinion barometer for individuals to judge the perceptions of the regime by fellow Egyptians (Shehata 1992), which then informed their decision to protest the regime. During the 18 days of the revolution, humorous content became infused into the protests via slogans, posters, and graffiti (Khalil 2011). The sharing and consumption of political humor created enhanced, diffuse community bonds among political dissenters across independent and media forms, providing an area of political dissent that culminated within the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

#### **IV. Methodology**

Social movement, media, and humor theories are necessary in contextualizing the conditions leading to the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. My paper reflects the ways in which each theory is positioned within the decade preceding the revolution, as well as the revolution itself, to allow for a mass uprising to oust Egypt's president.

I hypothesize that humor was used as a tool for social mobilization before and during the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution, and that independent and social media outlets played a crucial part in distributing politically subversive, humorous content to individuals to lay the groundwork for the revolution. If my hypothesis is correct, I will expect to see that political humor in Egyptian activist movements in the 2000s—including the Kifaya, April 6 Youth, and We Are All Khaled Said movement—created space for individuals to bond over shared political grievances, criticism of Mubarak, and a general perception that others in Egypt understood their frustrations with current circumstances in the country. These bonds, I predict, were created by the distribution of information, conveyed through humorous mechanisms, among individuals through independent and social media. I will also analyze how humor allowed political information to be disseminated in specific circles outside pre-existing socioeconomic and other societal cleavage groups. This mass communication network translated online activism into in-person protests in the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

I will show how overlapping ties between insurgent political networks that were created in the 2000s reinforced the strength of those social ties in convincing people to participate in in-person protests, which is a key component of social movement theory. Social movement theory provides a framework through which I can examine the ties between individuals in online networks, like the roughly 80,000 followers of the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook page, and the thousands who attended in-person protests at Tahrir Square in Cairo on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Alaimo 2015, 1). These followers are a representation of Grandovetter's "diffuse ties," which I addressed above, and they indicate how a larger number of people were able to learn about the insurgent political content that was on the Facebook page and therefore become mobilized to

protest. Therefore, analyzing activist movements in the 2000s provides crucial background for the formation of counterpublics of dissent that fed the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

Media theory will provide important contextualization for how those connections were perpetuated by independent and social media, such as the links between the online We Are All Khaled Said page and the January 2011 protest organizers and the insurgent themes in independent newspaper cartoons (Guyer May 2017, 1). Non-state affiliated media, most of which originated in the 2000s, is crucial to understanding how information was framed to convey implied political dissent to Egyptians. Independent newspapers represent a space where the masses could engage with subversive content without overtly exposing themselves as political dissidents, making them crucial publications that established subversive conversations in media spheres as important arenas where political thought could develop. Cartoonists were therefore able to work around limitations on freedoms of speech through their work since it did not overtly criticize Mubarak in the early 2000s (Guyer May 2017, 1). Social media, an online communication medium, allowed for more informal communication among the masses in a newer media format, as seen within protest-planning conversations between individuals on the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook page (Alaimo 2015, 1). These media spheres established counterpublics of insurgent discourse that were mobilized in 2011 to produce humorous content, this time directly attacking Mubarak while using the same tools of subversive discourse that were sharpened in the decade preceding the revolution.

I will argue that the masses, defined as Egyptians who were not formerly political activists or politically mobilized as a united group, are a notable group to analyze in relation to media because their interactions with political humor in the 2000s indicate a growing willingness to engage with politically subversive content. The increasing engagement with this media

content helped create the broader civil society conditions necessary to orchestrating the 2011 revolution, which included large numbers of women and others who were not seasoned activists. Within subversive media spheres, political jokes are able to circumvent government censorship to challenge established power dynamics within an autocracy like Egypt because they are perceived on the surface to be nonthreatening to powerful individuals (Shehata 1992, 78).

Finally, humor theory will be crucial in understanding how politically subversive content transformed into a mechanism to express political opposition during the 2000s, culminating with the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution in which people expressed outright political criticism of Mubarak in humorous and serious ways. Humor was a vehicle through which people could make fun of Mubarak via comical drawings and questioning his “dictator” policies in the 2000s (Guyer May 2017, 1), therefore humor theory is crucial to understanding what mechanisms of humor allow it to be a useful revolutionary tool. Humor theory explains why certain groups, such as students, would engage with activist movements based on humor’s inclusivity and capacity to create bonds between individuals. I will also analyze how humor expanded from independent and social media sites into street art, protest posters, and other mediums when the revolution began. This transfer, I will argue, demonstrated humor’s ability to continue encouraging political engagement in in-person activist movements and not just private engagement with subversive politically humorous media.

I will use several sources to gather data for my hypothesis, including political humor in social media, independent newspapers, blogs, graphic novels, comic books, protest signs, and street art. I will also use peer-reviewed articles and archival research that include examples of political humor during the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. These sources are easily accessible in a remote environment and contextualize the role these jokes played within Egypt at the time they

were written, which will aid me in demonstrating humor's cultural and political power in the 2000s and 2011.

The political jokes chosen for this analysis are considered "professional" political jokes. Professional jokes are jokes made by individuals who make a living on producing humorous content intended for mass consumption by everyday people and are often more intentional in the framing of the topics portrayed within the joke (Hammoud 2014, 21). "Professional" jokes are still a reflection of political discourse happening within informal conversational spheres among the masses because they are embedded within political discourse in non-state-controlled media. "Professional" jokes and other visual humorous materials are widely available in online spaces because the Internet contains so much information, including information related to "professional" political jokes from sites that get a lot of Internet action like newspapers. Therefore, "professional" jokes are a primary focus of my analysis, particularly in the pre-revolution decade due to their greater accessibility. Once the revolution began, however, protestors who were not professional comedians or cartoonists made protest posters and graffiti (Khalil 2011), indicating that the use of political humor as a tool of protest had expanded to the masses. During the revolution, however, people became emboldened to create their own original political humor within protest signs, street art, and other mediums (Khalil 2011, 25).

My analysis begins with Nasser's nationalization of media in the 1950s because this established episodes of contention within media spheres, dividing it between regime-controlled and non-regime-controlled arenas of communication. I follow with the declaration of a state of emergency in 1981 that allowed officials to continue dominating official media narratives and limiting public subversive discourse, and the introduction of social media platforms in the late 90s that provided space for non-state-controlled political discussions, especially those with

subversive undertones, to flourish. These historical touchpoints established alternate media spheres as plausible alternatives to state-controlled media, which provided space for people to voice more honest political opinions. Alternate media spheres at this time were arenas in which people could convey politically subversive ideas in a manner that included the masses, particularly those who could access these alternate media spheres, in political conversations.

The rise in alternatives to state-sanctioned media set up the media sphere for the 2000s, which saw the most outright political social movements in the country's history to that date: the Kifaya, April 6 Youth, and We Are All Khaled Said social movements. These movements reflected how new media and subversive political discourse was harnessed to organize anti-regime activity. These movements coincided with the rise of several independent newspapers like Al Dustour, which mobilized political grievances within cartoons to create space for implied dissent to permeate political discussions. These media spheres created politically-oriented counterpublics that used humor as a primary tool of opposition communication, allowing for more subversive content to be shared among a broader public due to jokes allowing their creators to have plausible deniability when conveying an insurgent political idea within a joke or cartoon.

## **V. A Brief History of Media and Political Jokes in Egypt: 1828-2000s**

First, one must understand the history of news and cartoon publications in Egypt to understand the distinction between the different media outlets within Egypt today. Egypt's first newspaper, al-Wa'quia al-Msiria, was founded in 1828 (Fanack 2021, 1) after the invention of the printing press galvanized enthusiasm for such news publications in the country. Later that century, *Karikatur* (كاريكاتور), an Arabic phrase for political cartoons, originated in the 1880s in Cairo (Guyer January 2017, 1). The rise in political cartoons cultivated a culture in which

political humor was accepted in Egypt among the people as a means of bonding with others through humor about politics, but it was not yet widely used as a mass form of dissent.

The introduction of the printing press and prevalence of political cartoons within the same century established a relationship between humor and media spheres in which humor acted as an alternate vessel for political thought and opinion that could be channeled to the masses via media. This combination continued during Gamal Abdul Nasser's reign, which began in the 1950s. In 1952, a military coup led by The Free Officers ousted Egyptian monarch King Farouk, kicking off a new authoritarian era of Egyptian politics with Nasser, one of the coup leaders, as President. As president, Nasser pursued many avenues of power consolidation in order to have a total monopoly over Egypt. One of his consolidation objectives was nationalizing the press in 1955 to control the framing of current events within publications and influence ordinary Egyptians' media consumption. His nationalization strategy increased repression of free political speech in Egypt, especially if that speech represented dissent or distaste for the regime. During Nasser's reign, children's comics such as *Mickey*, which included images of children playing pranks on Israeli tanks, were popular because they were effective at imposing nationalist ideals onto children at a young age, but there was no perceived "adult" cartoon outlet (Guyer January 2017, 1). Instead, oral political jokes about Nasser flourished as nearly untraceable forms of politically subversive communication. Tracing the jokes' origins was challenging because there was no written record of them and they were widespread among civil society, so they provided a safe avenue for implicit political criticism. Nasser was aware of the jokes, but he did not perceive them as a serious threat to his political power because they were delivered in informal communication arenas and did not appear to pose a concrete or direct threat to his power, which enabled their perseverance within his autocratic regime. Within this restrictive environment,

political jokes became vehicles through which individuals could express their true opinions about the regime (Shehata 1992). Nasser's declaration of a state of emergency during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War allowed him to further consolidate power and censor the media. The restrictions on speech during this period set the stage for a new genre of political discourse that created two spheres: the formal, public sphere and the informal counterpublic sphere.

Under Nasser's successors, Sadat and Mubarak, direct state control of the media remained a regime objective. After Sadat was assassinated, Mubarak imposed an emergency law that granted the state extensive authority to detain individuals based on threat of "terrorism" (New York Times 1983, 1). The law was also used as a justification to maintain political subservience to the regime, including in the media. Although Mubarak continued renewing the emergency law during his presidency, he allowed more space for political dissent than his predecessors. His relative leniency with political humor, compared to his predecessors, allowed jokes to relieve some political tensions within the country, which resulted from unemployment and fury about Sadat's peace deal with Israel. Mubarak's implicit allowance of political humor implicitly created space for alternate forms of political information, specifically political jokes, to permeate civil society discourse.

Independent and social media emerged in the 1990s and 2000s as alternate discursive spaces to state-supported media due to a growth in new technology and an appetite among the Egyptian masses for more discursive news sources. Independent newspapers are owned by a state-sanctioned businessperson, not a political party, and contain more politically subversive content that deviates from the state's official political agenda (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, 1). These newspapers straddle the line of dissent and politically acceptable publication content, so they often publish content that "challenged government-set media restrictions and tones and

attempted to negate their obfuscation of the issues at hand” (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, 1). This delicate dance slowly pushed the “red line” of dissent closer towards outright political criticism, which aided in establishing the conditions necessary for organized collective action, like a revolution, that explicitly called for Mubarak’s resignation. The Internet, arriving in Egypt in 1992, was also crucial to independent newspapers since publications like Al-Masry Al-Youm and Al-Dustour since they could now publish material online, which increased the visibility of subversive independent media content among younger Egyptians with Internet access. Increasing access to dissenting political opinions was one way in which Egyptians were mobilized to protest Mubarak; independent media was one of the earliest forms of media that allowed for content that implied political dissent to be published, and putting its publications online meant that more people could then access that content. The connections made via information sharing online were supplemented with the in-person print process of the independent newspapers, which made accessing the subversive information within these newspapers accessible to non-Internet users too.

The arrival of the Internet gave rise to a new communication arena: social media. Social media, debuted in Egypt in 1998, is a much more informal arena of communication that includes citizens looking to express their opinions on platforms without government restrictions (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, 1). It includes social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter and regularly updated conversational website groups like blogs. Social media sites were crucial in organizing social movements since the regime did not consider them to be serious arenas where political thought and action could occur. The regime did not consider how civil society could create a political counterpublic that included space for political debates and proposed in-person protests, as seen in the April 6 Youth movement Facebook page (Shapiro 2009, 1). Social media could

spread word about upcoming planned demonstrations to the masses in a quick and efficient manner. We Are All Khaled Said is a prime example: the page implored people to participate in the scheduled “January 25: Revolution Against Torture, Poverty, Corruption and Unemployment” demonstration on Police Day, January 25<sup>th</sup>, in 2011 (Vargas 2012, 1). That call was answered en masse, sparking the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

The Internet presented a new avenue for communication between Egyptians, allowing for the formation of new counterpublics, but it was not immediately accessible to all when it first came to the country. The Internet originally had limited Arabic sites (Media Ownership Monitor 2019, 1), meaning that early users tended to be those whose education and economic background allowed them to learn English and afforded them the privilege to access online. The number of people who could access the Internet at home “via any type of device or connection” increased from approximately 0.6% of the population in 2000 to roughly 21.6% in 2010 (Internet Live Stats 2016, 1). The Internet created a new communication avenue in which the regime did not have absolute control, which opened the door for dissenting media content to be published and engaged with by the masses. Although those who could access the Internet were a small portion of the population, they were still able to maintain discursive conversations within online media spaces. Despite roughly 70% of the population being literate in Arabic by 2010 (MacroTrends 2021, 1), the image component of Internet content allowed non-literate individuals to still access information within this sphere of communication. Given its informal nature and the regime’s lack of control over its contents, the Internet granted its initial users space to organize and publicize dissident demonstrations with greater ease, which was crucial in encouraging politically subversive action in the decade prior to the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

The 2000s saw the most explicitly anti-Mubarak mobilizations in Egypt's history, with young activists calling for change on social media and independent newspapers pushing the boundaries of acceptable publishing content to encourage political dissent. The Kifaya, April 6 Youth, and We Are All Khaled Said movements used social media as the primary mobilizing tool for protests. Independent media supplemented people's political frustrations with comical drawings that implied that Mubarak was the source of these grievances (Guyer 2017, 1). Both media sources maintained the salience of unofficial, politically subversive discourse in Egypt. During this time, humor was used to indirectly criticize Mubarak, as seen by his new nickname "la vache qui rit," which reflected people's animosity towards Mubarak's economic opening policies that brought in foreign substances like this French cheese from which the nickname was derived (Kraidy 2016, 75). I will revisit humor's importance in enhancing these inclusive counterpublics of dissent in the following chapter.

In the early 2000s, pro-Palestine and anti-war sentiments gave rise to the first open political dissent movement: the Egyptian Movement for Change, also called the Kifaya (كفاية) movement. The Kifaya movement began as a pro-Palestinian and anti-war movement in 2004, but it morphed into a call for Mubarak's resignation during its two-year lifespan. The Bush administration pressured Mubarak to hold multiparty elections in the early 2000s, which opened the door for activists to organize collective movements with more insurgent aims than was previously possible (Shapiro 2009,1). Among other demands, organizers called for Mubarak's resignation and protested the 2005 elections, in which Mubarak won 88% of the vote via rigged election (Global Security 2011, 1). During the movement's development, "bloggers worked with protest organizers to ensure that photographs and narratives of the protests were quickly disseminated online" to non-state-controlled media sites like independent newspapers and

international news sources like Al Jazeera (Lynch 2007, 1). These information networks sustained dissenting dialog within alternate media, establishing new media spheres as locations where political dissent existed by sharing firsthand accounts of the movement for any Internet-savvy individual to access. Some Kifaya organizers were bloggers themselves (Salah Fahmi 2009, 92). Bloggers could circulate information and images that couldn't be published in state-sanctioned media, making them crucial forms of alternate media that contributed to growing insurgent political dialog in Egypt. The relationship between the Kifaya movement and bloggers exemplifies how overlapping counterpublics, one of online publication and the other of street activism, could create multiple alternate areas of political engagement.

During the Kifaya movement, jokes explicitly focused on corruption, using it as a front for personal criticism of Mubarak (El Amrani 2011, 1). Some protestors called out Mubarak by name, but at that time, there was not enough force to fully break down that social norm. Despite social media offering new avenues for information dissemination and social movement organization, those who were involved with Kifaya struggled to expand the movement beyond elite circles. The reason was in part because less than 14% of the population were at-home Internet users by 2006 (Internet Live Stats 2016, 1). Additionally, independent newspaper columns about the movement did not contain information about organizing and participating in the movement, which would have been crucial in spreading work about future protests to a wider demographic. However, independent and online media's coverage of the movement raised awareness of dissenting actions among Egyptians, showing them that political dissent was possible within Mubarak's autocracy and offering examples of other Egyptians with relatable political grievances against corruption and other issues. By 2006, the organization's momentum

was greatly reduced, but frustration directed towards the regime continued to fester, eventually spawning the April 6 Youth movement.

The April 6 Youth movement further established online revolutionary networks among young, educated Egyptians and enhanced dialog about state violence and repression within this same demographic. It started in March 2008 when 300 Facebook users joined a group in solidarity with textile workers who were protesting poor working conditions and low wages in al-Mahalla al-Kubra, growing to over 70,000 followers in just a few weeks (American University 2012, 1). The perception of increasing space for political dissent came about as a result of Egypt's first multiparty elections, which were established when the Kifaya movement started because of the Bush administration's persistent pressure on Mubarak to hold elections (Shapiro 2009, 1). The April 6 Youth page's growth was indicative of an increased willingness by the people to indicate their preferences towards anti-Mubarak activity. A strike, the group's proposed activist action, was perceived to be an indirect way to challenge Mubarak's power while supporting demands for economic equality. Given that nearly 90% of unemployed Egyptians were between the ages of 15 and 29 (A Political Junkie 2011, 1), striking was also a method of mobilization for youth who could not express their political frustrations directly without facing severe state repercussions like arrest.

On the page, members engaged in heated political debates, discussed the best strategies for a general strike, and proposed future wide-scale protests, which would later manifest in 2011 as the seeds of the revolution (Shapiro 2009, 1). The collective action within the page created a counterpublic of politically subversive content where civil society members can engage in politics through new channels. The page's outreach included young, educated Egyptians, many of whom had never been politically engaged before (1). The fact that the page could engage new

facets of Egypt's youth within online subversive political counterpublics is a testament to the movement's successful outreach among people under 30. This age group made up most of the 18% of Internet users in Egypt in 2008, up four points from 2006, is another indication that the masses were seeking alternate media spheres to communicate with each other (Internet Live Stats 2016, 1). The April 6 Youth page reflected how activists were channeling political dissent through a new media platform that was not as easily censorable by the state, which allowed young Egyptians to finally engage in politics in a manner that was not previously available. The movement's logo, a "fist of solidarity" (Gröndahl 2012, 21), created a visual dimension to the movement in the same way that visuals can enhance humorous dialog in a cartoon.

Instead of leading to wage increases, a riot broke out in al-Mahalla on April 6 that resulted in state violence and death. Bloggers and "Facebookers" were also detained for their roles in the movement's organization, along with university students and disillusioned Egyptians (Salah Fahmi 2009, 105). To bring the movement into more public spheres of media discourse, independent media sources like Al Dustour wrote articles about the movement, including pictures of protesters with linked arms and people being arrested by state police (Reese 2009, 1). The overlap of blog and independent newspaper coverage of the movement reflected how counterpublics of political dissent were already expanding to the point where they overlapped with one another, which helped reinforce them. Independent newspapers' coverage of the movement raised awareness of insurgent political forces in Egypt among its readers, which in turn emboldened individuals to continue calling for change. Evidence of this emboldened subversive discussion is seen in the We Are All Khaled Said movement in 2010, which I will analyze next.

Despite the failure of the April 6 proposed strike to substantively improve wages in Egypt, people continued expressing dissent within online spheres of communication like Facebook, eventually spawning the Facebook group We Are All Khaled Said. In June 2010, Google employee Wael Ghonim created the page We Are All Khaled Said, named in honor of the man beaten to death by Egyptian security forces for people to reflect on how they are all suffering under from violence under the regime (Alaimo 2015, 1). The page grew rapidly: "by mid-month [June], the page had 130,000 members, and as of Jan. 22, 2011, the number hit 380,000 members" (PBS 2011, 1). Ghonim's use of "I" statements in the page made it more informal and easily relatable to people with grievances against the regime, which increased followership as well (Alaimo 2015, 1). Directly appealing to followers enhanced the community bonding elements within his page; followers discussed appropriate responses to Said's death on the page in a similar way that April 6 Youth members engaged in political debates on that Facebook page two years earlier (Alaimo 2015, 1) Ghonim made an effort to educate his followers about financial corruption, violence by Egyptian security, and other issues within Egypt to empower the page's followers with a better understanding of their political circumstances (Alaimo 2015, 1). This education empowered the page's followers and increased collective knowledge of societal issues among them, leading to a more informed group that was politically engaged and motivated to create substantial change in the country. Armed with political knowledge, followers continued engaging with subversive media on the Facebook page, eventually leading Ghonim to propose a demonstration on Police Day in 2011 to protest police violence and, more broadly, the regime's policies. This protest blossomed into Egypt's January 25th revolution.

## **VI. Stoking Insurgency: Humor and Media Fueling Subversive Political Discourse in the 2000s**

Within the same decade as the Kifaya, April 6 Youth, and We Are All Khaled Said movements, political humor criticizing Mubarak and his regime blossomed in independent and social media sources, allowing humor to be utilized as a connective social mechanism to work in new media sites on a bigger scale and with newer audiences. Alternate media, such as independent newspapers, became new platforms for political humor based on their ability to disseminate funny social commentary to wide swaths of readers and followers. Humor relieves feelings of solitude and lessens tension (Psychology Today n.d., 1), which happened via the dissemination of political jokes. Jokes that made fun of Mubarak's attempts to set up his son as his successor, for example, created the conditions for laughter while alleviating frustration people felt at the fact that Egypt's politics were entirely in the hands of a corrupt family (El Amrani 2011, 1). Jokes like this were circulated widely in Egypt in the 2000s, implying that a collective society was sharing in this type of political humor. Shared laughter indicates that social bonding was occurring by virtue of people consuming the same media that was commenting on their shared widespread societal grievances. Using humor to address social, economic, and political grievances in Egypt validates the experiences of those suffering and "weakens the grip of humiliation or disgrace" within society (Goldman 2013, 4).

Humor's role in lowering the fear threshold about criticizing Mubarak lies within its power to make people laugh and bond. Humor develops within a repressive society to alleviate tension and flip the power dynamic between the people and their leader (Shehata 76). Therefore, political jokes are an expected societal component of autocratic regimes like Egypt's. This power dynamic manifested in Egypt via state repression of free speech and other violent acts (CPI

2006), making it even more crucial for the masses to have an alternate form of non-state-controlled communication, like humor, that can implicitly convey political thoughts while evading state crackdown. The reflection of politically subversive ideas within jokes in the 2000s, such as the concept of criticizing Mubarak through implied comical depictions of him in independent newspapers (Guyer May 2017, 1), indicates that jokes are a more open avenue of subversive public political discourse. These comically dissident political opinions complemented the insurgent discourse the Kifaya, April 6, and We Are All Khaled Said movements, which all used social media as a mobilization tool, to produce political engaging, subversive conversations for the masses.

While social media operated primarily as an organizational tool for 2000s social movements to use for planning and announcing demonstrations, as exemplified in my case analysis of the three 2000s movements, independent media provided space for people to reflect on shared political grievances within politically humorous content. Independent newspapers frequently left space for political jokes in their publications (Guyer 2017 May, 1). One newspaper, Al Fajr, even had an entire page in its publication and on its website for political cartoons (Al Fajr). Because these newspapers picked up on common themes like income inequality and state violence, people could infer that they were not alone in their dissatisfaction with these same elements of Egyptian life. This inference contributed to the bonding that was already occurring through shared laughter since these sentiments were conveyed through jokes and comical drawings of political leaders. Independent media provided crucial framing of the subversive conversations occurring in social media, where activists were calling for social change in the Kifaya, April 6 Youth, and We Are All Khaled Said movements. They brought

those politically discursive conversations to print media and amplified them through different, but still predominately young and educated, swaths of society.

The political jokes present in independent media paint a more holistic picture of how individuals could voice insurgent opinions under Mubarak's rule in the 1990s and 2000s. There were subversive political cartoons in independent newspapers that depicted Mubarak in a more explicitly unfavorable light in the 2000s. Amro Selim, a caricaturist for the independent newspaper *Al-Dustour*, “started by drawing [Mubarak] from his back until people recognized it was him.” (Guyer May 2017, 1). His drawings first emphasized the figure's Mubarak-like features, such as his large nose, without overtly exposing him as the subject, before eventually becoming more explicit in his drawings as criticizing Mubarak humorously became more accepted. Selim convinced colleagues to push boundaries as well, such as Walid Taher's 2006 comic asking if Mubarak was a “dictator” (Guyer May 2017, 1). Voicing insurgent political ideas is dangerous in an authoritarian society that limits freedoms of speech, and the simple act of daring to draw a cartoon helped this dissent to be transmitted through society relatively safely through plausible deniability and double meanings. Taher's comic was published during the Kifaya movement, when there was political humor and frustration being expressed in the streets and in independent newspapers. Political humors presence emboldened protestors to continue pursuing political dissent through these media spheres because they were seeing their grievances reflected back at them, reminding them that they were not alone in their frustrations with the regime. Additionally, independent newspapers were not controlled by the regime, which allowed people to continue pushing the boundaries of acceptable political dissent. These jokes brought private criticism of Mubarak into the public sphere in a humorous manner, which offered the joke-tellers some protection from regime pushback in comparison to newspaper columnists who

more overtly criticized Mubarak (CPJ 2007). The humorous criticism was not directly shaming Mubarak so cartoonists and other professional comedians had plausible deniability of slander. It also emboldened readers to continue engaging in these informal counterpublics by emphasizing the universality of people's political frustrations.

Despite the different roles that independent and social media played in disseminating information, the former to cleverly frame politically subversive conversation to encourage critical thinking about Mubarak's regime and the latter to provide space to organize protests, there was overlap between the two media types. Independent newspapers like *Al Masry Al Youm* and *Al Dustour* "routinely cite[d] blogs as sources for their stories, offering another indirect route for political impact" (Lynch 2007, 1). The decision to cite blogs reflects Egypt's large blogosphere, comprised of 160,000 bloggers; 30% of these bloggers focus on political topics (Essam 2012, 146). This overlap indicates that political insurgency was expanding across communication mediums to reach a broader swath of people and making online subversive conversations more accessible to a broader public that had access to print media but not the Internet. Overlapping ties between different spheres of political engagement, in this case readership of blogs and independent newspapers, encourage participation in that political group's agenda without needing to personally know those involved in the writing, reading, and dissemination of that information (Nugent and Berman). Additionally, the coverage of political protests in independent newspapers was indicative of an increasingly conscious effort to bring private sphere dissent into the public sphere. There was also overlap within individual action on social media and professional cartoon production. Cartoonists like Mohamed Andeel, for example, had personal Facebook and Twitter profiles, but also worked for independent newspapers like *Al-Dustour*. The famous cartoonists Madgi El-Shafei, also called the Godfather

of Egyptian Graphic Novelists, drew for Al-Dustour in 2005 and established a website for Arab political cartoons that same year (Arabic Comix Project n.d., 1). These cartoonists' work spanned multiple communication mediums like independent printed newspapers, social media pages, and websites for Arab political cartoons like Madgi El-Shafei's 2005 site, further amplifying subversive political discourse in non-state media.

In the latter half of the decade, even state-run newspapers incorporated more critical social commentary on Egyptian politics. State-run newspapers like Al Ahram typically published content that was supportive of Mubarak, such as a 2005 article that cherry-picked a quote from Condoleeza Rice about Mubarak unlocking "the door for change" but omitted her calls to cease Egypt's emergency law and promote more equitable justice in the country (Whitaker 2005, 1). Increasing prices of subsidized bread, the violent response to the April 6 Youth movement, and an increasingly negative view of Mubarak's governance (Beinin 2015, 1) provided space for additional criticism within its pages. A 2008 cartoon in Al-Ahram by Doaa al-Adl, considered to be the first openly female caricaturist in modern Egypt, depicted "a black tsunami composed of eight grinning faces and greedily snatching hands that threaten a poor man in mended clothes on a wooden boat" (Ettmuller 2012, 1). The comic landed in the state-run newspaper because it was not overtly critical of Mubarak or his regime, indicating that the "red line" of criticism had been pushed to a degree where state-sponsored media permitted limited political dissent within its pages. In the comic, corruption was mobilized as a stand-in for discussing Mubarak directly. However, the political critique within the caricature implies that Mubarak's government is the responsible party behind this corruption, therefore transforming the drawing from a simple artwork to a political implicature that reflects deep frustrations with the ruling elite in Egypt. A critical observation of the comic reveals how Al-Adl did not directly attack Mubarak since that

would have been breaking a powerful social taboo that had not yet been broken, but she still engaged in subversive cartooning nonetheless. Those social taboos about public political criticism of the president were challenged by political jokes articulating political grievances like Adl's, and by jokes in independent media more broadly.

Despite its publication of Doaa al-Adl's subversive cartoon, Al Ahram continued to publish articles that supported the regime's narrative in the 2000s, which opened the door for a new type of political humor: memes. In September 2010, Obama met with political leaders from Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and Egypt to discuss the future of peace in the MENA region. A photo of the gathering depicted Obama walking along a red carpet, with the other leaders flanking him on either side (BBC). Al Ahram published an article covering these talks and edited the photo of the leaders so that Mubarak was in front of the group in an effort to portray him as "leading" the group in these talks. The international community caught the change in the photo and shamed Al Ahram for its blatant doctoring of the image (BBC). In Egypt, however, people criticized the publication, and the regime more broadly, through humorous memes. A meme is an image that is replicated and circulated online, "commenting on any popular topic creating a humorous ironic effect" (Aboud 2022). Within Egypt's online communities, people were laughing at Al Ahram's sloppy attempt to photoshop Mubarak into a leading role at this gathering, which only served to undermine his image and give the people another reason to believe that the government was corrupt. Some Internet users photoshopped Mubarak's face onto images of Neil Armstrong and Usain Bolt, mockingly declaring Mubarak to be the leader on the "road to space" and the "road to glory" in a similar way that Al Ahram used Photoshop to declare Mubarak to be the main leader in these discussions between Obama and several MENA countries (Carr 2010). Tech-savvy Egyptians were weaponizing Mubarak's own likeness against him, using the same

Photoshop technique that Al Ahram used in their article to instead highlight the hypocrisy of his regime and the lack of freedom in the press. The increasing presence of memes online indicated that more people were becoming comfortable with online tools used to disseminate humorous images, and that more people were becoming comfortable with these images containing explicit political references to Mubarak.

The regime took note of this increase in political dissent in the 2000s and responded by cracking down on political humor in an attempt to limit subversive political discourse. When Dr. Abdul Wahab al-Meseiri, a leader of the Kifaya movement, planned to deliver a seminar about classifying and analyzing jokes in 2007, the Egyptian State Security Service canceled the talk by falsely claiming that Dr. Al-Meseiri was ill (Abbady 2007, 1). The real reason behind the cancellation, however, lies with the state's tightening of freedom of expression. Al-Meseiri's influence was contingent on his participation in a social movement against the regime, therefore the regime was threatened by his general public presence. Mubarak's regime was also conscious of the power jokes had to encourage subversive political discussions given the increasing prevalence of politically humorous discursive content, which indicates the depth of importance that jokes had in creating counterpublics that had potent, if indirect, political power. Individual cartoonists were also threatened for their work. Even when cartoonists attempted to criticize Mubarak without directly depicting him, as Amr Okasha did when he drew "part of Mubarak -- his big nose" in his comics, they could receive death threats over their work because it pushed the acceptable line of criticism too far in the regime's eyes (Cavna 2011, 1). The risk associated with Al-Meseiri and Okasha's roles in amplifying politically insurgent sentiments reflects an awareness by the regime of the power humor has in mobilizing individuals along insurgent

ideological lines. The swift backlash to public Presidential criticism reflects the regime's growing concern over the boldness of public criticism.

Perhaps the most explicit example of insurgent political graphics that prompted a fierce response by the Egyptian regime is the *Metro* graphic novel. Created in 2008, *Metro* was the first graphic novel "for adults only;" it covered topics like corruption, greed, and poverty, which the children's comic book *Mickey* from the 1950s did not. The main characters, young middle-class people named Shehab and Mustafa, are driven into debt by corrupt government officials and rob a bank in a last-ditch attempt to alleviate their financial strain (Johnston 2009, 1). The novel's creation reflects the success that graphics, such as those found in the novel and cartoons, had in presenting entertaining and subversive political content. Author Madgi El-Shafei claimed to respond to a "growing community of readers crying out for freedom" (Jaggi 2012, 1) by weaving politics with creative expression to reach audiences beyond those who were engaged in official state political discourse.

While graphic novels do not employ as much overt humor as comic books, *Metro* employs visual and written storytelling that conveys a story with the same insurgent political discourse power as political cartoons did during the 2000s. Shehab calls Egypt a "cage" (Arab Comix Project n.d., 1) as a reference to the increasingly restrictive measures Mubarak was putting in place in the 2000s, including crackdowns on dissent. *Metro*'s political statement about corruption reflects a growing frustration among the people with the country's cage-like stagnation. Shehab also laments the dark satirical irony of reporting incidents of violence to Egypt's police force, saying it "would not matter" if he reported the men who attacked his girlfriend Dina to authorities because it was possible that they were behind the attack in the first place (1). Although not explicitly funny, this statement evokes incongruous humor because it

juxtaposes the role of authorities with the corruption with their ranks. It is also something that Egyptians can relate to since it was common for officials to berate Egyptians for bribes and general molestation. A third scene with political undertones includes a murder, with the killer screaming "This is a message from the men upstairs" (1). The "men upstairs" are political elites like Mubarak, symbolizing the connection between civilian suffering and regime thugs who use fear to maintain order. The book utilized graphics to convey emotion on character's faces and, most importantly, present political criticism in an implicit manner that encourages engagement with the pictorial and written components of the book.

The fact that *Metro* and the April 6 Youth movement, two politically insurgent elements within Egyptian society, were surfacing in the same year indicated the increasing willingness among Egyptians to challenge status quo politics in the state and utilize alternate media, such as social media and graphic novels, to communicate these sentiments to others in the country. Shortly after its release in April, Egyptian police seized *Metro* from Cairo's bookshelves and from Malimah, the publishing house owned by *Metro's* author Madgi El-Shafei (ANHRI 2009, 1). While the novel was released around the same time as the proposed April 6 Youth strike, it was not published in consultation with the movement's organizers. Both author and publisher were accused of violating Penal Codes 178 and 179, which "punish 'publications contrary to public decency' with imprisonment" for up to two years (1). The public indecency referenced in the arrest was a one-page scene with sexual references. The criticism of Egypt's political situation and elite corruption within *Metro* provided additional incentive for the regime's repression of the publication due to the regime's desire to control all forms of political communication in the country. *Metro* exemplifies the power that visual graphics, when combined with dialog, have in producing space for political dissent.

The reaction to Metro's forced halted publication by Egypt Independent, an English extension of the Al Masry Al Youm network, indicates that *Metro* wasn't operating in a vacuum and that it was aiding in distributing politically subversive content to readers. Egypt Independent, the English branch publication of the independent newspaper Al Masry Al Youm, ran an article criticizing the decision to limit the novel's publication and calling out the regime's increasing limitations to freedom of expression (Charbel 2010, 1). The target audience was limited to those with the resources to read English, which indicates a continued struggle during this time to expand subversive discourse beyond mainly elite circles. *Metro's* contribution to Egyptian subversive political discourse, while brief, was felt by other media sources that published insurgent political conversations, and they made sure to disseminate their opinions on this censorship to their readers to encourage their continued engagement with subversive content and remind them that their freedoms of speech were at stake.

*Metro* was the first graphic publication that tackled political and social issues in Egypt, but it would not be the last: the comic book *TokTok* came along as another creative outlet for artists to express their understanding of Cairo in innovative and subversive ways. *TokTok* was founded by five cartoonists—Shennawy, Andeel, Tawfik, Makhlof, and Hickam Rahman—from various independent newspapers like Al Dustour who pooled their talents to “capture the mood at the street level of Cairo” (Hills 2015, 1). Their connections to independent newspapers reflect the overlapping communication ties between subversive communication networks and reveal the power that collaborative communication has in creating counterpublics of political discourse.

The publication was conceived in 2010, with the first edition released in Cairo's Townhouse Factory Space on January 10, 2011. The publication did not spark the revolution on

its own, but its production reflects the growing appetite for subversive political commentary, delivered in a humorous fashion, within Egypt. All 2,000 first edition *TokTok* copies were quickly “swept off the table” (Cairo360 2011, 1). The comic book cost ten Egyptian pounds, which was “affordable by Egyptian art students and amateur illustrators,” making it more easily accessible (Guyer January 2017, 1). The written text was a limiting factor that prevented non-literate individuals from picking up a copy, but the relatively low cost made it more accessible to educated individuals under financial strain. The first issue was also sold in galleries and cafes in Cairo, which were spaces that attracted the book’s educated, youthful target audience (1). The novel’s compelling graphics also provided another dimension to the story that fleshed out the grievances of the characters and allowed people to see their lives and pains reflected in the novel. The accessibility and multimedia elements of *TokTok* increased its access within Egyptian society, ensuring that subversive content was distributed to more individuals.

*TokTok* hit Egypt with a tidal wave of political and social commentary that created yet another avenue for indirect political engagement with subversive political content. Each artist brought the streets of Cairo alive with their brilliant art and witty dialog. The cover depicts a parking attendant—who were ever-present pests on the Egyptian streets who would frequently write parking tickets and then force the ticketed individual to pay them off to keep the ticket from going on a permanent record—in an implicit critique of parking authorities and the Egyptian security apparatus at large (Shennawy et. al. 2011, cover). *TokTok*’s creators could not have predicted the revolution any more than other individuals in the country, but their work reflected an awareness of social issues surrounding class, policing, and socioeconomic status. They chose to immerse their work within these conversations, commenting on policing, romantic strife, and other daily factors of Egyptian life (Shennawy et. al. 2011) in order to release

frustrations through a creative, subversive outlet. The topics they covered were prevalent in political conversations in counterpublic communication arenas, as seen in the protest movements in the 2000s and the subsequent media contributions to those movements and to stoking political insurgency in the country. While *TokTok* did not explicitly call for revolution, it undoubtedly contributed to the growing political fervor that led to the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

The rise in political humor in independent and social media sources coincided with the Kifaya, April 6 Youth, and We Are All Khaled Said movements to create counterpublics of politically discursive conversations. Humor—taking form in political jokes in independent newspapers, comic books and graphic novels—provided space for people to criticize Mubarak and his government without overtly stating their grievances and risking severe consequences. As politically humorous content became increasingly prevalent in the latter half of the 2000s, individuals became increasingly emboldened to voice criticism, which culminated in the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

## **VII. The Laughing Revolution: Political Humor’s Manifestations in Social Media, Independent Newspapers, and Alternate Media in the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution**

### *a. Counterpublics Within the Revolution*

Revolutionary or subversive content in alternate media spheres, like independent and social media, created counterpublics of communication in the 2000s that served as the basis for the revolution in 2011. Within these counterpublics, humor was a crucial element because it is unable to be fully controlled by those in power, such as government officials, and therefore poses the most threat to their power (Graham 2014, 125). Its innate ability to create and perpetrate subversive dialogue make it a crucial element of subversive political discourse, especially in an

autocratic society like Egypt where freedom of speech is curtailed. Humor also had tremendous power to facilitate bonds between individuals. According to a study conducted by Dr. Robin Dunbar, humor “provides evolutionary qualities that encourage group bonding and protect us from physical and psychological pain” (PsychAlive 2013, 1). It lowers the pain and fear threshold within individuals while promoting connection-building, both of which are vital in creating a protest movement strong enough to withstand pressure from Egypt’s authoritarian regime to cease protest. Political humor represents a political force, operating within non-regime-affiliated counterpublics, that fosters democratic conversations (1). Due to its community enhancing abilities, humor was a necessary component in forming the conditions for a mass social movement like the January 25th Revolution.

After a decade of political protests against Mubarak and his regime, counterpublics of political dissent were well established among activists and middle-class Egyptians, laying a strong foundational network for a larger revolution. Egyptians were frustrated about corruption and cronyism within Mubarak’s regime, as well as increased bread prices and unemployment. In January 2011, there was optimism about democratization because Tunisia’s president succumbed to popular protests (PBS 2011, 1). The optimism and political frustration fed a desire for Egyptian democratization, which had been an increasingly common topic of conversation among insurgent counterpublics. These counterpublics, emboldened by the 2000s movements to continue organized political dissent, gave rise to calls to action, such the YouTube statement by Asmaa Mahfouz, one of the organizers of the April 6 Youth movement, telling people to go to Tahrir Square to protest Mubarak’s regime (Mahfouz 2011). Mahfouz video spread through the activist networks of her April 6 Youth movement to reach members of other organizations like the We Are All Khaled Said page. This page amplified the call to protest to its followers, where

80,000 people declared intentions to protest on that date (Lindsey 2016, 1). This connection, made through these overlapping politically discursive networks, provided substantive information to people from both April 6 Youth and We Are All Khaled Said information networks about the organized protests. The video directly called for people to "go down to the street...[and]make people aware" of the planned protests and get them to engage in the protest by doing more than just "liking" posts on social media (Mahfouz 2011).

There was increasing supply and demand for humorous, politically subversive conversation before the revolution that continued for the duration of the movement. The week before the revolution, tweets referencing political change in Egypt jumped from 2,300 to 230,000 a day (O'Donnell 2011, 1). Humorous content was a large portion of these tweets: an informal survey "found that people were using social media to circulate jokes about Mubarak's regime almost as much as they were using it to provide logistical information about the protests" (Anagondahalli and Khamis 2014, 1). This content was not solely driven by professional comedians, reflecting a change in Egyptians accepting agency for their country's future and feeling emboldened to cultivate their own politically humorous and subversive content. Both factors were crucial in enabling everyday Egyptians to protest Mubarak's regime in January 2011.

In independent media, this fervor for political change was articulated through political cartoons both before and during the revolution. Between January 2010 and February 2011, nearly 60% of independent newspaper Al Dustour's cartoons focused on politics, with independent newspaper Al Masry Al Youm publishing roughly 35% political cartoons and 28% cartoons focusing on domestic issues (Saleh 2018, 500). The magnitude of humorous coverage in these newspapers, produced by paid cartoonists, reflected how political humor had become a

substitute for formal political conversation in Egyptian civil society. Its prevalence indicated that there was enough insurgent discourse in Egypt to drive substantive change in the country. *TokTok's* presence in Egyptian middle-class society in 2011 further bolstered illustrated insurgent commentary about Mubarak's regime. These informal media arenas of political discourse reflected a growing desire for substantive political change in the country in which both paid cartoonists and everyday Egyptians felt emboldened to express their true political opinions in an increasingly bold manner.

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, people responded to Mahfouz's call to action, converging in Tahrir Square in the first of what would become an 18-day revolution demanding a full government overhaul and for Mubarak to renounce the presidency. Her appeal to their sense of honor and anger at the regime pushed individuals to physically demonstrate their anger by turning out to the square on Police Day in 2011. Mahfouz's call to action engaged overlapping connections between activist groups since she was calling on participants from the Kifaya, April 6, and We Are All Khaled Said movements to protest (Mahfouz 2011). Her appeal, and the subsequent demonstration on January 25<sup>th</sup>, indicated that the subversive media networks in Egypt were ripe for dissidents to mobilize each other in mass protests. Despite police firing tear gas and rubber bullets, protestors occupied the square all night and again the following days (Shenker 2011, 1). The overlapping ties between individuals within online dissent discourse and in-person protest networks were strong enough where people felt they could transmit their online dissent into in-person action against the regime with other like-minded individuals.

State media did not address the protests at first since the regime believed they would be successfully dispersed (Lindsey 2011, 1). When protestors showed no signs of rescinding the square to state control, Mubarak cut Internet access to all of Egypt on January 28th. The decision

to cut Internet access reflects the regime's understanding that the Internet was a tool that protestors were using to spread subversive information. Within authoritarian regimes, leaders aim to divide the people they rule to prevent them from forming a unified front against them (Alrababa'h and Blaydes 2021), and Mubarak believed cutting off Internet access would thwart the revolutionaries.

Rather than discontinue protest activity, however, cutting off Internet access pushed people like Ramez Mohamed, a 26-year-old telecommunications employee, to turn their online activism into in-person participation. Ramez didn't originally participate in the in-person January 25<sup>th</sup> protest due to his comfort with online dissent (Cohen 2011, 1). The Internet blackout was the last straw for him and the roughly 5.2 million Egyptian Facebook users, 30% of whom used the networking site to “organize actions and maintain activists” during the revolution (Mansour 2012, 1). These users were predominately young, tech-savvy Egyptians whose outlet for expression was abruptly cut off. By the 28<sup>th</sup>, protestors had established enough of a presence at Tahrir Square that in-person connections, which originated from subversive communication spheres, had enough weight to continue perpetuating this insurgent discourse in a manner that encouraged newcomers like Ramez to join a few days after January 25<sup>th</sup>.

After the media shutdown failed to cease subversive protests and conversations, the regime intensified its response with violence and concessions. Mubarak dismissed his government on January 29<sup>th</sup>, and on February 1<sup>st</sup> he issued a speech stating he would not run for reelection again but did not offer to step down (Stead 2018, 1). Clashes between protestors and police, already resulting in an estimated 300 deaths, intensified the same day as Mubarak's speech, when a million people gathered in Tahrir Square to protest Mubarak's rule (Rashed and Azzazi 2011, 25). This was the most violent day of protests thus far: plain-clothed regime

supporters and NDP members rode in on horses and camels, attacking protestors with a barrage of Molotov cocktails, rocks, and whips (25). Due to the violence, safe houses became necessities during the revolution. Shennawy, one of the creators of *TokTok*, was “at Tahrir all the time,” and “[his] house became a refuge for [his] cartoonist friends” when they needed a break from the streets (Haddad 2016, 1). Safe houses became micro communities within the wider community of revolutionaries that reflected the trust that was built within revolutionary networks in a relatively short period of time. The organization of safe houses demonstrated how counterpublics can function outside of the state to provide for individuals. In this case, safe houses were providing security for protestors when the state was the one perpetuating violence against protestors. There were bonds of trust developed through cartoonist networks that physically manifested in them using each other’s houses as escapes from regime thug street violence in Tahrir Square, which shows the power that humor had to bring people together and maintain steadfast in the face of violence during a protest. Shennawy’s offer exemplifies a tangible effect that the formation of counterpublics of subversive discourse, first through independent and social media and then through in-person protest activity, had on the revolution.

For the following ten days, protestors continued occupying Tahrir Square and marching in Egypt’s cities, demanding Mubarak’s resignation. The protests expanded beyond the elite 2000s activists: public transportation employees, students, doctors, and eventually even government officials joined other youth activists demanding Mubarak’s removal (Nunnes et.al. 2011, 194-195). When Mubarak finally departed Cairo for Sharm el-Sheikh and resigned as president on February 11th, a wide array of Egyptians rejoiced at the dawning of a new political era. Revolutionaries “embraced new, simplified ‘anti-regime’ identities, which became the only identities that mattered: no one cared about religion, regional affiliation, or even class” (Rashed

and Azzazi 2011, 27). This bonding was reinforced by humor. Group laughter at Mubarak reinforced the solidarity formed within the revolutionary ranks. The solidarity was consciously created by individuals who chose to be there to advocate for the future they wanted for their country. Solidarity is in part fueled by collective aims and actions, which were cultivated in the decade preceding the revolution through counterpublics of insurrectionary discourse.

The counterpublics formed within subversive communication spheres, such as those perpetuated within independent and social media in the 2000s, took on physical form within the revolution. Instead of discussing politically revolutionary ideas online, members from Facebook pages like We Are All Khaled Said showed up at Tahrir Square to protest Mubarak's reign in a physical manifestation of the subversive conversations that they had been having (Alaimo 2015). They brought dissent to the streets, choosing Tahrir Square, a central traffic circle in Cairo, was the primary base for revolutionaries. Tahrir Square, meaning "liberation" in Arabic, became a bustling hub where political debates and revolutionary ideas were exchanged between protestors (Nunnes et. al 2011). The square itself became a physical embodiment of the dissenting counterpublic discourse that had permeated independent and social media sources in Egypt over the past decade. Protestors formed "popular committees," an example of a tangible resource generated within this revolutionary in-person counterpublic, to protect private and public property (Nunnes et.al. 2011, 71). These committees were formed by protestors taking the initiative to create a democratic system within themselves, which is a hallmark trait of counterpublics. Counterpublic behavior continued throughout the revolution:

People are forming neat queues – something Egyptians never do – to buy tea at improvised stalls. Everywhere everyone is on their best behaviour; a few days later, women will tell me that sexual harassment, an endemic problem in Cairo, is absent from the square. A nearby hall has been transformed into an emergency clinic for those injured in battles with the police. Protesters of all ages, social classes, education levels and ideologies are talking politics and sharing their grievances, united by a simple goal: the status quo must end (Rashed and Azzazi 2011, 25).

Participatory thought and political action combined in Tahrir Square to create a physical counterpublic out of the subversive media counterpublics that were formed over a decade. There was also no centralized leader for the protests, which created a horizontal communication structure that kept the revolution's focus on the goal of ousting Mubarak rather than on leadership squabbles (Abdullah 2011, 1). This informal environment reflects the informal nature of jokes. Their creation and relatively successful function reflects how powerful counterpublics were in establishing and sustaining revolutionary conditions in Egypt in 2011.

*b. Revolutionary Political Humor and Artistic Expression*

Within this revolutionary action, jokes were creating and enhancing social bonds between revolutionaries that worked to sustain subversive political dialogue and also to create a broader sense of community. The community element was formed in part by people “getting” the jokes made against Mubarak. A joke is more fun if you're “in” on it since there is collective understanding behind why a joke is funny, as well as a general acceptance by those saying the joke that they are not the butt of the joke. Therefore, “getting” a joke is another important element of humor, and one that was employed effectively within Egyptian political jokes in 2011. Being “in” on the joke also increased sensations of unity among protestors since their ire was directed at an outside source—a politician—whom everyone could take turns humiliating in a funny manner. People felt that they were part of a bigger joke by repeating jokes about

Mubarak's refusal to step down and mobilizing culturally significant symbols of unwanted guests, which I will elaborate on in the following paragraphs.

Tahrir Square was also a place where protestors took political humor, an already established tool for subversive discourse in Egypt, and weaponized it against the regime within multiple media forms. Revolutionaries incorporated humorous subversive conversations into protest signs, marking an expansion from independent and social media spheres of communication to one in which anyone on the streets could produce and replicate the joke. Many signs asked Mubarak to leave because "my arms are tired" or "I need a haircut" or "my wife wants to give birth and the baby doesn't want to see your face" (Anagondahalli and Khamis 2014, 1). The blending of political demands with these repeated jokes illustrates an understanding of humor's unique ability to illustrate political grievances in a manner that invites repetition and encourages participation in the joke. Formulas for certain jokes, like the signs asking Mubarak to leave for various reasons, had a repetitive nature that incorporated more people into the subversive dialog that the joke was amplifying.

Other protestors made revolutionary signs with more visual elements than written words to bring another, more universally applicable dimension of humorous communication to the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. Mubarak's likeness to a cow, an animal that became synonymous with Mubarak's dependency on foreign aid in the 80s, was starkly portrayed in one protestor's homemade poster. The poster included a ridiculous Mubarak-looking cow with an earring and the words "Muuuuu...barak, dégage (Get out!)" (Kraidy 2016, 76). This image was Mubarak as "La Vache Qui Rit," the image that represented a French cheese company that was imported into Egypt in the 80s when Mubarak began his economic opening to the frustration of many Egyptians (Kraidy 2016, 76). This cheese company was tied to Mubarak's name back in the

2000s when political dissent against him was beginning to ramp up in the Kifaya movement. The repeated pattern of humor indicates that this was a well-known joke made about Mubarak and that, more likely than not, its persistence in Egyptian society meant that individuals who saw this poster would understand the joke's humor and political message. Pictorial elements of political humor made the topic "legible to the illiterate and capable of transcending cultural, class-based, and generational barriers," lending themselves well to a movement that sought to transcend social cleavages by using humor to convey political statements (Guyer 2014, 1).

Another homemade sign that heavily employed visual graphics was an image of Mubarak with Hitler's hair and mustache drawn on (Anagondahalli and Khamis 2014, 1). Without words, this sign conveyed the sentiment that Mubarak was akin to Hitler. Mubarak looks ridiculous with his fake Hitler hair and mustache, but the true humor in the second poster comes from the dark comparison between Mubarak and Hitler's dictatorial governing strategies. The combination of written and visual components expands the reach of the joke beyond the resource-rich demographic that began organizing online into a demographic that accessed their political humor in the streets during the revolution. This demographic could include individuals who struggled with reading because the visual element ensures that they still understand the point of the political joke. Just by looking at these posters, people were participating in the humor they conveyed because there was no need to read them to find them funny. The visual elements allowed everyone, regardless of class or economic status, to be "in" on the joke together.

Another way for participants to be "in" on the jokes about the regime was by drawing on culturally significant elements within Egypt. Several protestors brought qollal (small clay jugs) to Tahrir Square because breaking a qollal after an unwelcome guest ensures they won't return according to Egyptian popular culture (Khalil 2011, 110). One man brought a whole zeer (large

water jug), which drew laughter from Egyptians as they immediately understood his point (110). The qollal and zeer exemplify the power that civil society, pop culture, and humor had in the revolution. The zeer exemplified the great desire of the Egyptians for Mubarak to leave, and the qollal's significance in society allowed many Egyptians to "get" the joke and feel like they were part of a broader discourse that spoke the language of the streets. Cultural significance was also prevalent in satirical Twitter accounts, made at Mubarak's expense, such as @MubarakTheGreat. The account's profile picture was a French processed cheese as a nod to Mubarak's cow-like features, and the tweets contained politically humorous content that referenced Mubarak's corruption and political repression (Kraidy 2016, 76). The account was created in February, indicating that humorous content was continuing to be generated in media and in-person communication arenas. Its mobilization of Egypt-specific humor reflected an awareness of the power that cultural significance had in attracting people to the movement based on shared cultural experiences and laughter.

@MubarakTheGreat was far from the only example of political humor mocking Mubarak on social media. Other examples of political jokes made at Mubarak's expense included a fake Hosni Mubarak Twitter account, @HosniMobarak, that released tweets mocking the President's reactions to the uprising. The tweets included statements like the following: "'Habib...says I should prepare a farewell speech for my citizens. Where are you guys going? #jan25'" (Nunnes Idle and Soueif 2011, 52). The fake Twitter account was made to humiliate Mubarak, subverting the traditional political power dynamic in Egypt in order to give the people power over their leader by making fun of him. This account, along with others like @TheReal\_Mubarak and @NotHosniMubarak, humorously impersonated Muabarak to hypothesize about his thoughts regarding his refusal to step down as president for several days. These accounts tweeted things

such as “#breakupexcuses Nope can’t think of any. I want to stay with #Egypt for the rest of my life” (Global Voices 2011) and “Reports pro #Mubarak protestors are paid by the government are untrue. Also can anyone lend me some money? I owe some cash to some people” (Global Voices 2011). These accounts, and their content, indicate that there was mass interest in making fun of Mubarak’s desperate cling to power, even amidst the more violent days of protest. The humorous content of these accounts, targeting Mubarak in unfavorable ways, reflects a desire by the account operators, and those who were consuming the content, to continue finding ways to empower the protestors through humor that subjugated Mubarak to the mockery of his own people.

Political humor was a critical portion of the protests outside the realm of social media as well, as seen with graphic and street artists. Graphic and street artists fueled the creative insurgency that supported the revolution by transforming the streets into a massive visual communication mechanism that worked to counter regime disinformation and boost morale. Street artist Ganzeer noticed that “there was a gap between what was happening on the street and what was being expressed and reported in [state] media,” so he and other artists used their artistic skills to inform those living away from Tahrir Square about what was happening there to raise awareness of the protests and encourage others to participate (Deutsche Welle n.d., 1). Artists repurposed the city to become a tool for revolution rather than an arena where the regime enjoyed total control. When police painted over murals depicting martyrs of the revolution to counter this physical manifestation of revolutionary discourse, artists collaborated in repurposing the wall with new subversive content (Awad and Wagoner 2015, 237). These artistic expressions of sadness, hope, and resolve were reminiscent of the visual elements of cartoons and graphic novels that were popular forms of political subversion in the 2000s. As the revolution continued,

street art was used to document the revolution's young history. When protestors took control of the Qasr al-Nil Bridge leading to Tahrir Square, artists spray painted "game over, Mubarak" on the stone lions in a visual marker of their territorial reappropriation from state forces (Lennon 2014, 243).

Among street art, stencils were a quick and easy way to replicate politically poignant images across cities in Egypt, allowing people to participate in political critique more broadly via replication of images or repeated engagement with the same image in various parts of Tahrir Square. The street artist Zamalek stenciled an image of a gun and a video camera to reflect the "weapons" of the regime versus the protestors (Suzee in the City 2014, 1). The graffiti underscores the importance of the media as a weapon within an autocratic regime, but also humorously compares a camera and a gun to highlight the absurdity of the regime's violent responses to protestors. Martyrs such as Khaled Said were another commonly reproduced image. Said's passport photo was stenciled on walls across Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, and beyond, becoming an easily recognizable symbol of average Egyptians who suffered under the regime (Gröndahl 2012, 162). His face was a reminder to protestors of why they were engaging with the regime in the first place; to protest injustice, and to ensure that future generations of Egyptians would not grow up in the same tyrannical regime that ended Said's life. The connection between online subversive counterpublics and in-person artistic protests reflects the strength that these protest networks gained from overlapping with one another. These connections were also reflected in the "fist of solidarity" April 6 Movement logo stencils around Cairo (Gröndahl 2012, 21). The overlap in media spheres also underscores the importance of visuals and cultural significance within protest content, which were key elements of political cartoons that first introduced subversive content into informal media spheres in the 2000s.

In addition to providing a creative outlet for people to air grievances with the regime, political humor bolstered the revolutionaries' spirits in the latter half of the revolution by encouraging laughter at Mubarak's attempts to stay in power. Mubarak's February 1<sup>st</sup> speech declaring he would not seek a sixth term as president, but refusing to resign, sparked dramatic violence that same day (Rashed and Azzazi 2100, 25). Mubarak's weak concessions also inspired laughter from cartoonists. Al Masry Al Youm's Amr Selim drew a group of Egyptians, including a dog, laughing at the hypocrisy and whimsy concessions in Mubarak's February 1<sup>st</sup> speech (Awad and Wagoner 2017, 350). The cartoon reflects the belief, shared by Selim and many revolutionaries, that substantial political change would not be achieved if Mubarak was still in power. The collective laughter in the comic reflects humor's ability to facilitate connections between ordinary citizens, who were a focus of Selim's work (350). Humor, as shown in this cartoon, provided an opportunity for people to collectively humiliate the regime by laughing at it, which reflects the superiority theory of humor that allows those who feel slighted to flip the power dynamic within a joke to shame the more powerful individual, Mubarak. This cartoon also speaks to the wider Egyptian culture of laughter and humor while also implicitly expressing solidarity with the revolutionaries' cause.

Protestors also employed humor to directly combat the state's misinformation during the revolution, which was employed along with violence during the entirety of the revolution. subverting the regime-dominant power dynamic that had been in place for 30 years. In an effort to undermine the revolution, reports on state television in February claimed protestors were working with the U.S. government to make Mubarak look bad and were paid for these efforts in buckets of Kentucky Fried Chicken (Abdulrahim 2011, 1). However, placing full blame outside of Egypt was futile: protestors related their experiences in Egypt to Mubarak's rule, as seen in

the multitude of anti-Mubarak signs and slogans, and therefore were focused on getting him out of office. Humorous political dissent had become too strong to be countered by regime discourse. Instead of writing a formal response statement to the KFC comment, protestors laughed it off. There was even a man with a protest sign that pointed out the ridiculousness in the state's claim (Khalil 2011, 143). Political humor, now established as a successful social tool in uniting the people against their leader, had become a way for the people to obtain narrative power over Mubarak. They could refute his misinformation, record history, and express political ideas through creative and humorous means, which reinforced the civil society counterpublic in Tahrir Square that pushed Mubarak to resign as President in February 2011.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

My line of inquiry concludes that political humor was successfully mobilized within different media forms to convey subversive political ideas and topics among the Egyptian masses between 2000 and 2011. The expression of dissent within those media spheres established avenues of communication between activists and non-elite Egyptians, which transformed into in-person protest networks once the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution began. Throughout the 2000s and 2011, humor aided in the creation of these counterpublics of dissent by offering space for people to see their political grievances reflected back at them via professional cartoonists' work enhancing the notion that their experience was not unique and that there were others who could relate to their suffering under Mubarak's regime.

The media forms I examined from the 2000s, including social media, independent media, and few graphic novels in the latter half of the decade, created avenues for dissent against Mubarak and his corrupt government that were not targeted as severely as they would have been

if they were outwardly dissenting because they were disguised as simply a joke (CPJ 2007). Within these media forms, humor provided plausible deniability to dissidents who expressed subversive political opinions in social and independent media forms because of its informal structure. The humor still carried loaded political references, which allowed individuals to engage in insurgent political discussions under the guise of humor and ultimately led to these dissenting counterpublics manifesting into in-person protests in January and February 2011.

Within the revolution itself, I found that political humor was a vehicle through which people expressed their more direct criticisms of Mubarak's regime in a manner that included more people into the dissenting conversations taking place among revolutionaries. Laughter enhances community bonding, as seen with people repeating the same joke format about Mubarak leaving, which in turn strengthened the community structure necessary to sustain a mass movement like the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. This community structure was reflected in neat queues for items like tea and creating medical facilities for injured protestors (Rashed and Azzazi 2011, 25). My research concludes that political humor was a key revolutionary tool that aided in the establishment of the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution.

My research fills a gap within the academic investigation that explains political humor's role as a communication and mobilization resource within subversive information networks during the 2000s and 2011, but there is still more research to be done about political humor's manifestations within Egyptian society after this crux in Egyptian history. Despite humor's ability to create a space where people could discuss contentious political topics in an implicit manner during the 2000s and the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution, the decade after the revolution has seen increased crackdowns on freedoms of speech, particularly with independent journalists, bloggers, and other participants within the media forms I chose for my analysis (Jerreat). Amidst

the growing restrictions on freedom of speech by Mohammed Morsi, which were expanded by his successor Abdel Fattah al-Sisi upon his acquisition of the presidency, political humor continues to flourish in Egypt within alternate media spheres like TokTok, Twitter, and independent media (Guyer 2014).

The findings in my thesis provide a window into humor's importance as a tool of political resistance within an authoritarian regime, but I believe there is a great deal of opportunity for future scholarship within the fields of humor, media, and social movement theories as they pertain to post-revolution Egypt. For example, I recommend that research on political humor in Egypt could be expanded to include examinations of non-regime-affiliated satellite TV channels that contained satirical political content during and after the revolution, or investigations of modern manifestations of humorous political dissent within media forms that have existed only for the past five years, like TikTok. I believe these future avenues of research would further enhance the scope of study around Egypt's January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution to include discussions of political humor's role in transmitting discursive political opinions through various media forms to determine what has changed, or stayed the same, about humor's role within politically insurgent counterpublics. Based on these suggestions for further study, I believe that my findings offer the first, but certainly not the last, glimpse into political humor's ability to enhance and sustain subversive political dialog within Egypt's autocracy.

## Works Cited

- A Political Junkie (Blog Alias). "Egypt: An Unemployed Population Cohort." Viable Opposition, 2011. <https://viableopposition.blogspot.com/2011/02/egypt-unemployed-population-cohort.html>.
- Abbadly, S. "Egyptian Security Cancels Al Meseiri's 'Analysis of Jokes.'" Ikhwanweb, 2007. <https://ikhwanweb.com/article.php/article.php?id=2102>.
- Abdulla, Rasha. 2011. "The Revolution Will Be Tweeted." The Cairo Review of Global Affairs. <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/the-revolution-will-be-tweeted/>.
- Abdulrahim, Raja. "KFC Gets a Bad Rap in Egypt." Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times, February 7, 2011. <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2011-feb-07-la-fg-egypt-kentucky-20110208-story.html>.
- Abdou, Eman. 2022. "Political Humor: Memes in Egyptian Painting After the Revolution." *Journal of Visual Art Practice*. <https://doi-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/14702029.2021.2022291>.
- Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI). 2009. "Author and Publisher of 'Metro', Egypt's First Graphic Novel, Face up to Two Years in Prison for Material Deemed 'Contrary to Public Morals.'" IFEX. <https://ifex.org/author-and-publisher-of-metro-egypts-first-graphic-novel-face-up-to-two-years-in-prison-for-material-deemed-contrary-to-public-morals/>.
- Al Dustour. N.d.. "جريدة الدستور" Accessed October 25, 2021. <https://www.dostor.org/>.
- Al Fajr. N.d.. "بوابة الفجر" صفحة 8. كاريكاتير Accessed November 30, 2021. <https://www.elfagr.org/category/55?page=8>.
- Al Masry Al Youm. N.d.. "المصري اليوم" Accessed October 25, 2021. <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/>.
- Alaimo, Kara. 2015. "How the Facebook Arabic Page 'We Are All Khaled Said' Helped Promote the Egyptian Revolution." *Social Media Society* 1 (2): 205630511560485–85. <https://doi-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/2056305115604854>.
- Alrababa'h, Ala,' and Lisa Blaydes. 2021. "Authoritarian Media and Diversionary Threats: Lessons from 30 Years of Syrian State Discourse." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9 (4): 693–708. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2020.28>.
- American University. 2012. "Birth of the Movement." American University's Social Media Research Laboratory. <https://april6socialmedia.wordpress.com/birth-of-the-movement/>.
- Anagondahalli, Deepa, and Sahar Khamis. 2021. "Mubarak Framed! Humor and Political Activism before and during the Egyptian Revolution." Arab Media & Society.

<https://www.arabmediasociety.com/mubarak-framed-humor-and-political-activism-before-and-during-the-egyptian-revolution/>.

Arabic Comix Project. N.d.. "Magdy El Shafee: The Godfather of Egyptian Graphic Novelists." THE ARAB COMIX PROJECT: ARAB AND ARAB-DIASPORA GRAPHIC FICTION. <https://arabcomixproject.weebly.com/magdy-el-shafee.html>.

Armbrust, Walter. 2019. *Martyrs and Tricksters: An Ethnography of the Egyptian Revolution*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvd58t0b>.

Awad, Sarah H, and Brady Wagoner, eds. 2017. *Street Art of Resistance*. Palgrave Studies in Creativity and Culture. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-3-319-63330-5.pdf>

BBC. 2010. "Egyptian Newspaper under Fire over Altered Photo." BBC News. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11313738>.

Beinin, Joel. 2008. "Egypt: Bread Riots and Mill Strikes." Egypt: bread riots and mill strikes. <https://intellibriefs.blogspot.com/2008/05/egypt-bread-riots-and-mill-strikes.html>.

Beinin, Joel. 2015. "Egypt's Workers Rise Up." The Nation. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/egypts-workers-rise/>.

Benton, Gregor. 1988. "The Origins of the Political Joke," in *Humor in Society: Resistance and Control*, ed. Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton. New York: St. Martin's Press (1).

Bialer, Jake. 2011. "Women in Egypt Speak about Participating in Protests." HuffPost. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/egypt-women-protests\\_n\\_817822](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/egypt-women-protests_n_817822).

Blaydes, Lisa. 2018. *State of Repression : Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*. Book Collections on Project Muse. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. [https://www-jstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctvc77jf1.13?refreqid=excelsior%3A4efea0d9001c9075c49b55d05807c32b&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctvc77jf1.13?refreqid=excelsior%3A4efea0d9001c9075c49b55d05807c32b&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

Cairo 360. 2011. "Toktok2: Comics from the Egyptian Streets." <https://www.cairo360.com/article/arts-culture/toktok2-comics-from-the-egyptian-streets/>.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2010. "April 6 Youth Movement." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2010/09/22/april-6-youth-movement-pub-54918>.

Carr, Sarah. 2010. "Update Your History Book." Inanities. <http://allthegoodnameshadgone.blogspot.com/2010/09/update-your-history-book.html>.

Cavna, Michael. 2011. "Amid Revolution, Arab Cartoonists Draw Attention to Their Cause." The Washington Post. WP Company. [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/comic-riffs/2011/03/arab\\_cartoons.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/comic-riffs/2011/03/arab_cartoons.html).

- CBS News. 2011. "Egyptians Riot in the Streets in 1977." CBS Interactive. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/egyptians-riot-in-the-streets-in-1977/>.
- Charbel, Jano. 2010. "Regulating Freedom of Expression." Egypt Independent. <https://www.egyptindependent.com/regulating-freedom-expression/>.
- Cohen, Noam. 2011. "Egyptians Were Unplugged, and Uncowed." The New York Times. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/business/media/21link.html>.
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). 2006. "Attacks on the Press 2005: Egypt." Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/2006/02/attacks-on-the-press-2005-egypt/>.
- CPJ. 2007. "Attacks on the Press 2006: Egypt." Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/2007/02/attacks-on-the-press-2006-egypt/>.
- Deutsche Welle. N.d.. "How Street Art Influenced Arab Spring Protests in Egypt." <https://www.dw.com/en/how-egypts-street-artists-documented-the-2011-revolution/a-56312962>.
- El-Amrani, Issandr. 2011. "Three Decades of a Joke That Just Won't Die." Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/03/three-decades-of-a-joke-that-just-wont-die-2/>.
- El-Ghobashy, Mona. 2021. *Bread and Freedom: Egypt's Revolutionary Situation*. Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures Ser. JSTOR. Redwood City: Stanford University Press. <http://public.eblib.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6565136>.
- El-Hamalawy, Hossam. 2011 "Egypt's Revolution Has Been 10 Years in the Making." The Guardian. Guardian News and Media. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/mar/02/egypt-revolution-mubarak-wall-of-fear>.
- Ettmuller, Eliane Ursula. 2012. "Caricature and Egypt' Revolution of 25 January 2011." Zeithistorische-Forschungen. <https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/1-2012/4469>.
- Fanack. 2021. "Egypt's Media Landscape: An Overview." Fanack.com. <https://fanack.com/egypt/media-in-egypt/>.
- Freud, Sigmund, and James Strachey. 1989. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Standard. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. New York: Norton (1).
- Global Voices. 2011. "Egypt: Mubarak Has Changed His Facebook Status to 'It's Complicated.'" 2011. Global Voices. <https://globalvoices.org/2011/02/05/egypt-mubarak-has-changed-his-facebook-status-to-its-complicated/>.
- Goldman, Nancy. 2013. "Comedy and Democracy: The Role of Humor in Social Justice." *Animating Democracy*, no 1: 1-10.

- Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6: 1360–80.
- Gröndahl, Mia. 2012. *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- Guyer, Jonathan. 2014 "Gallows Humor: Satire in Sisi's Egypt." *Guernica*.  
<https://www.guernicamag.com/gallows-humor-political-satire-in-sisis-egypt/>.
- Guyer, Jonathan. 2017. "On the Arab Page." *Le Monde Diplomatique*.  
<https://mondediplo.com/2017/01/15cartoons>.
- Guyer, Jonathan. 2017. "Speech Bubbles: Comics and Political Cartoons in Sisi's Egypt - ICWA." Institute of Current World Affairs. <https://www.icwa.org/speech-bubbles-comics-and-political-cartoons-in-sisis-egypt/>.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger and Lawrence Kert. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Haddad, Emmanuel. 2016. "Drawing Dangerously: Arab Comics Push the Boundaries." *News | Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/4/22/drawing-dangerously-arab-comics-push-the-boundaries>.
- Hamdy, Naila, and Ehab H Goma. 2012. "Framing the Egyptian Uprising in Arabic Language Newspapers and Social Media." *Journal of Communication* 62 (2): 195–211. <https://doi-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01637.x>.
- Hammoud, Dalia. 2014. "Egyptianising Politics/Politicising Egyptians: An Analysis of Political Jokes." *Iosr Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19 (6): 20–31. <https://doi-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.9790/0837-19672031>.
- Hassan, Bahaa-eddin Abulhassan. 2013. "The Pragmatics of Humor: January 25th Revolution and Occupy Wall Street." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* (2013). <https://doi-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n2p551>.
- Hills, Carol, ed. 2015. "How a 'Millennial Mad Magazine' Thrives in a Tightening Egypt." *The World from PRX*. <https://theworld.org/stories/2015-02-09/how-millennial-mad-magazine-thrives-tightening-egypt>.
- Howard, Philip N, Aiden Duffy, Deen Freelon, Muzammil M Hussain, Will Mari, and Marwa Mazaid. 2011. "Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media during the Arab Spring?" *Ssrn Electronic Journal* (1). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2595096>.
- Human Rights Watch. 2008. "Egypt: Extending State of Emergency Violates Rights." Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/05/27/egypt-extending-state-emergency-violates-rights#>.

- Internet Live Stats. 2016. "Egypt Internet Users." Internet Live Stats.  
<https://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/egypt/>.
- Ismail, Mohamed. 2008. Reconsidering the Egyptian Media's Pioneering Role in the Arab World: Is it a Myth or a Reality?. The International Conference of the IAMCR: "Media and Global Divide" in Stockholm, Sweden.
- Jaggi, Maya. 2012. "The Godfather of Egyptian Graphic Novelists: Magdy El Shafee." Newsweek. Newsweek. <https://www.newsweek.com/godfather-egyptian-graphic-novelists-magdy-el-shafee-65109>.
- Jerreat, Jessica. 2016. "CPJ Calls on Egypt to Lift Travel Ban on Blogger Esraa Abdel Fattah." Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/2016/12/cpj-calls-on-egypt-to-lift-travel-ban-on-blogger-e/>.
- Johnston, Rich. 2009. "Egyptian Graphic Novel Banned, Creator and Publisher Fined." Bleeding Cool News And Rumors. Bleeding Cool News And Rumors, November 23, 2009. <https://bleedingcool.com/comics/recent-updates/egyptian-graphic-novel-banned-creator-and-publisher-fined/>.
- Khalil, Karima. 2011. *Messages from Tahrir: Signs from Egypt's Revolution*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- Kraidy, Marwan M. 2016. *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.4159/9780674969520>.
- Kutz-Flamenbaum, Rachel V. 2014. "Humor and Social Movements." *Sociology Compass* 8 (3): 294–304. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12138>.
- MacroTrends. 2021. "Egypt Literacy Rate 1976-2021." <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/EGY/egypt/literacy-rate>.
- Lindsey, Ursula. 2011. "Revolution and Counter-Revolution in the Egyptian Media." MERIP. <https://merip.org/2011/02/revolution-and-counter-revolution-in-the-egyptian-media/>.
- Lennon, John. 2014. "Assembling a Revolution: Graffiti, Cairo and the Arab Spring." *Cultural Studies Review* 20 (1) (03): 237-275. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/assembling-revolution-graffiti-cairo-arab-spring/docview/1521717087/se-2>.
- Mahfouz, Asmaa. 2011. "Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog That Helped Spark the Revolution." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgJgMdsEuk>.
- Mansour, Essam. 2012. "The role of social networking sites (SNSs) in the January 25th Revolution in Egypt", *Library Review*, Vol. 61 No. 2, pp. 128-159. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00242531211220753>

- Media Ownership Monitor Egypt. 2019. "Technology." Media Ownership Monitor. Lime Flavour, Berlin. <https://egypt.mom-rsf.org/en/context/technology/>.
- Meikle, Graham. 2014. *Future Active : Media Activism and the Internet*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. <https://public-ebookcentral-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1619036>.
- Nugent E.R, and Berman C.E. 2017. "Ctrl-Alt-Revolt?: Online and Offline Networks during the 2011 Egyptian Uprising." *Middle East Law and Governance* 10 (1): 59–90. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-01001007>.
- Nunns, Alex, Nadia Idle, and Ahdaf Soueif. 2011. *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution As It Unfolded, in the Words of the People Who Made It*. New York: OR Books.
- O'Donnell, Catherine. 2011. "New Study Quantifies Use of Social Media in Arab Spring." UW News. <https://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>.
- PBS. 2011. "Revolution in Cairo." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/inside-april6-movement/>.
- Pike, John. 2011. "Kifaya ('Enough') Egyptian Movement for Change." Egypt - Kifaya ("Enough") Egyptian Movement for Change). <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/egypt/kifaya.htm>.
- Petersen, Roger Dale. 2001. *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe*. Studies in Rationality and Social Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www-cambridge-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/core/books/resistance-and-rebellion/BAD296E1F4C650C44C9F82BB15F09B76>.
- PsychAlive. 2013. "Laugh It up: Why Laughing Brings Us Closer Together." <https://www.psychalive.org/laugh-it-up-why-laughing-brings-us-closer-together/>.
- Psychology Today. N.d.. "Humor." Psychology Today. Sussex Publishers. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/humor>.
- Rashed, Mohammed Abouelleil, and Islam El Azzazi. 2011. "The Egyptian Revolution: A Participant's Account from Tahrir Square, January and February 2011." *Anthropology Today* 27 (2): 22–27.
- Reese, Aaron. 2021. "Framing April 6: Discursive Dominance in the Egyptian Print Media." Arab Media & Society. <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/framing-april-6-discursive-dominance-in-the-egyptian-print-media/>.
- Salah Fahmi, Wael. 2009. "Bloggers' street movement and the right to the city.(Re) claiming Cairo's real and virtual "spaces of freedom"." *Environment and urbanization* 21, (1): 89-107

- Saleh, Rania. 2018. “‘Let them entertain themselves’: the fall of the Mubarak regime seen through Egyptian political cartoons,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, (3): 494-520, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2017.1413645
- Shapiro, Samantha M. 2009. “Revolution, Facebook-Style.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html>.
- Shehata, Samer S. 1992. “The Politics of Laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarek in Egyptian Political Jokes.” *Folklore* 103 (1): 75–91.
- Shenker, Jack. 2011. “Cairo Protesters in Violent Clashes with Police.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/25/egypt-protests-mubarak>.
- Shennawy et.al. 2011. “Toktok :عن Toktok .توك توك. TokTok. <https://www.toktokmag.com/info>.
- Stead, Rebecca. 2018 “Remembering the Egyptian Revolution.” *Middle East Monitor*. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180125-remembering-the-egyptian-revolution/>.
- Sorensen, Majken Jul. 2008. “Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression.” *Peace & Change* 33 (2).
- Suzee in the City. 2014 “For the Love of Graffiti: Cairo's Walls Trace History of Colourful Revolution.” <https://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2012/09/20/for-the-love-of-graffiti-cairos-walls-trace-history-of-colourful-revolution/#more-1019>.
- The New York Times. 1983. “Mubarak Defends Law on Emergency Powers.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/11/07/world/mubarak-defends-law-on-emergency-powers.html>.
- Tufekci, Zeynep, and Christopher Wilson. 2012. “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square.” *Journal of Communication* 62, vol. no. 2. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01629.x>.
- Vargas, Jose Antonio. 2012. “Spring Awakening.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html>.
- Wedeen, Lisa. 2007. “The Politics of Deliberation: Qāt Chews As Public Spheres in Yemen.” *Public Culture* 19 (1).
- Wheelen, Thomas J, and J. David Hunger. 2011. *Tweets from Tahrir*. Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation.
- Whitaker, Brian. 2005. “Weakening Grip.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jul/01/worlddispatch.egypt>.

Young, Dannagal G. 2014. *Theories and Effects of Political Humor*. Edited by Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. Oxford University Press (vol. 1).  
[https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.29\\_update\\_001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.29_update_001).