



The Libya Reverb Project

Media Sites on Facebook

Report #03

Dec. 11-17, 2015

Libyans obtain information and develop opinions from a variety of media sources. While television remains the most popular, social media is another influential source, particularly among the youth. Many Libyan social media sites do not follow international standards for journalism and should not be viewed in the same light as traditional media. This has resulted in Libyan social media being broadly labeled as digital “rumor mills.” While there are numerous sites generating quality content, this label does have some validity. Despite this, the reverberations of popular Libyan social media and its influence on public discourse should not be underestimated.

The Libya Reverb Project (LRP) aims to uncover emerging and consistent themes among Libya’s vibrant social media. The LRP team writes weekly reports sampling the most engaging posts from prominent Libyan media sites on Facebook. The LRP team has also developed a substantial database of Libyan social media sites that includes civil society, government, political actors, municipal councils, armed groups, and others. For additional information on the Libya Reverb Project, please contact libyareverbproject@gmail.com

Methodology

Working from a database of more than 300 Libyan social media sites (primarily Arabic-language), the LRP team sampled 10 Arabic-language Facebook sites that self-identify as media and have more than 100,000 followers.¹ The two competing Libya News Agency sites were also sampled. Next the team surveyed the postings from each site during a one week period (Dec. 11 - 17) and identified five posts from each site with the highest engagement (Like, Comment & Share). Finally, the sixty posts were coded to identify prominent themes reverberating through Libyan social media during the week.

¹ EAN Libya, Al-Wasat, Libya News 24, Ajwa News, Libya Now, Tripoli Al-Hadath, Radio 92.3 FM, Libya’s Channel, Libya Today News, and El-Kul News



The Libya Reverb Project
libyareverbproject@gmail.com

Coded Themes

The themes identified from the sampling during the reporting period are:

Security & Crime - posts that focused on issues such as armed conflict, kidnapping, and other crimes

Economy - posts that focused on issues such as currency value, salaries, buying-power, and availability of commodities

Civil Society - posts that focused on issues relating to civil society or about civil society organizations and activities

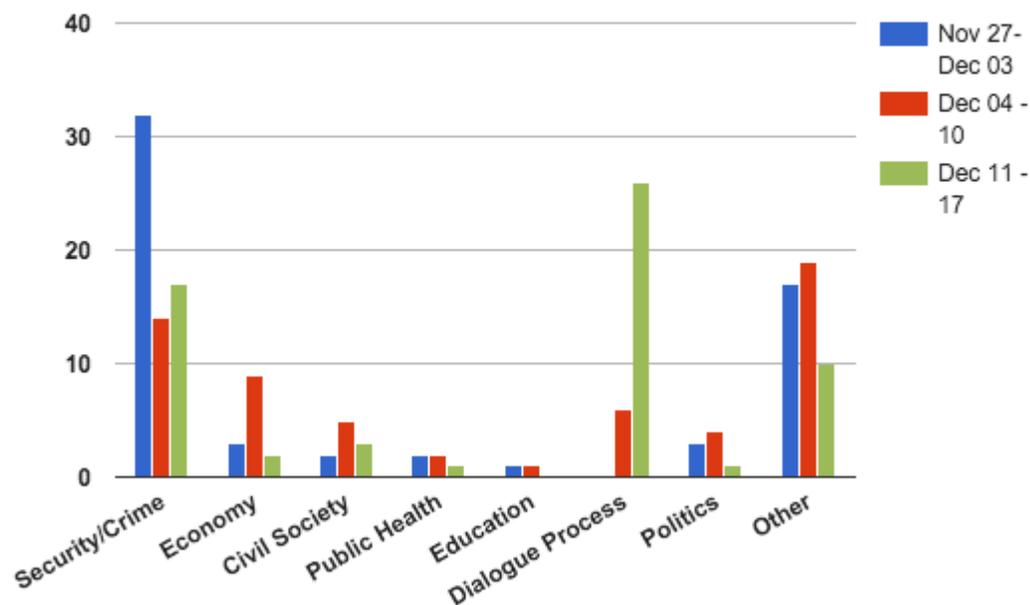
Public Health - posts that focused on issues such as health care infrastructure and health related PSAs

Education - posts that focused on issues relating to developments in the education system

Dialogue Process - posts that focused on issues relating to the political dialogue process or the Government of National Accord (GNA)

Politics - posts that focused on issues relating to political developments in Libya that are not directly related to the UN, the Libyan political dialogue process, or the GNA

Other - posts that focused on issues not covered in the above themes. Examples include satirical commentary, cultural content/events, and international affairs like the Syrian refugee crisis.





The Libya Reverb Project
libyareverbproject@gmail.com

Highlights: Dialogue Process

The single most prevalent theme reverberating through the Libyan social media sites sampled this week was the Dialogue Process. Libya Today posted a status on December 17th following the



signing of the UN-brokered agreement in Morocco stating “*Sami Al-Saadi, Abdulrauf Al-Minaai, Abusahmain, Al-Gheriani, Mahmoud Abdulaziz, Abdulwahab Al-Gaed, Ziad Dgheim and Ghaida Al-Twati reject the Al-Skheirat dialogue...that means we’re on the right path.*”

The post reflects a popular trend reverberating through Facebook and Twitter where many are rejecting or supporting the UN-brokered deal based on the public figures supporting/rejecting it. This could possibly reflect one of the many ways public opinion has naturally operated post-revolution, but it could also be an indication that in the absence of information on the exact terms/substance of the agreement, this is one of the few ways the society can make sense of it. The post was Libya Today’s most engaging of the week.

On December 15th, Libya Now posted the picture above to its Facebook page. The picture was the page’s most engaged post of the week. The man in the picture is labeled “Qatar” while the closed door is labeled “The Libyan Dialogue”. It is not clear whether the dialogue in question refers to the UN-brokered dialogue or the parallel “Libyan-Libyan” dialogue held between certain members of the HoR and GNC. And, while anti-Qatar sentiment has grown tremendously in Libya in the past few years outside of the dialogue process, the picture represents a currently growing sentiment amongst social media users that is highly suspicious and many times downright hostile to what they perceive as growing foreign meddling in Libya’s internal affairs.





Security & Crime

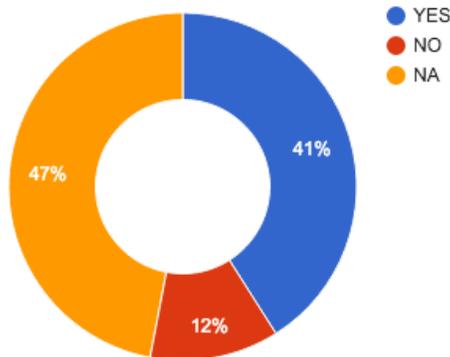
While Security & Crime came second this week to the Dialogue Process on social media, it was still a highly reported and engaging theme on multiple platforms. One issue that has dominated



social media is the recent escalation of violence in the city of Ajdabiya. The link above by Al-Wasat news on December 17th tallied 13 dead and 18 wounded. While news regarding the exact nature of the violence have been contradictory, most sources have been reporting that the clashes have been occurring between

extremist groups and local residents/armed forces. One rising opinion on Facebook and Twitter has been the condemnation of Ajdabiya’s local council and Ibrahim Jathran for not doing enough to protect the city.

In Focus: Analysis of High-Engagement Post by EAN Libya



On Thursday December 17th and following the signing of the GNA agreement in Morocco, EAN Libya Facebook page published a post asking the following question: “*Do you support the signing of the agreement in Al-Skhirat to end the conflict in Libya?*” The post was the page’s most engaging during the reporting period with over 3000 comments and nearly 20,000 likes. The LRP team surveyed 600 of the 3,050 comments² and divided them into three groups, Yes/No/NA. The “Yes” comments had to make an explicit support of the agreement at any point in their comments, the

“No” comments had to make an explicit rejection of the agreement at any point in their comment, and the “NA” comments were ones that did not show explicit support/rejection at any point in their comments.

² The percentage breakdown remained relatively constant from the first 100 comments surveyed onwards, which allows the LRP team to make an informed guess, but not assert, that these percentages reflect the entire body of comments.



The Libya Reverb Project
libyareverbproject@gmail.com

It must be noted that this endeavor to measure public opinion regarding the Al-Skhirat agreement has a some shortcomings. First, the data source is not an official poll but rather an unsolicited free-for-all social media post open to anyone with a Facebook account³. Second, since the data is comprised of free commentary rather than a strict Y/N/NA vote, it was subject to LRP's subjective analysis in tallying.

However, whether or not these percentages accurately reflect public opinion in Libya regarding the UN agreement, the process of surveying the comments led to some valuable insights:

- Regardless of the nature of the comment, the members of the presidential council and who they are played an important role in shaping people's opinions.
- Regardless of the nature of the comment, several issues influenced people's opinions. These issues include the Libyan National Army, Police, government salaries, security, internal displacement of citizens, kidnappings, destruction of infrastructure and private property, militias, and extremist groups (particularly ISIS)
- A large number of comments drew parallels between this agreement and the formation of the first Maliki government in Iraq and the state of the country under his government since 2006. The parallel drawn by many is not surprising given the feeling many Libyans hold toward the element of foreign intervention in this agreement.
- Regardless of the nature of the comment, many have expressed their confusion over what exactly was agreed upon in Morocco. As one commentator put it, "*No one brought forward the text of the agreement so that we can say yes or no*"
- The majority of the "Yes" comments were framed as "yes if", and in many cases the required clause for agreement was security-related. And, by far the biggest clause was "yes, if it will bring an end to the militias," and a strong sense of exhaustion and desperation. So, while a significant number of people have expressed support, a significant portion of that group voiced their reservations, and that their "yes" vote is driven largely due to being fed up with the deteriorating conditions in the country.
- The "No" comments did not necessarily mean that those individuals were in favor of the parallel dialogue process that some have labeled "Libyan-Libyan". However, the majority of those who voted "no" explicitly stated their rejection of what they labeled as "foreign meddling" or "guardianship"
- A large number of the "No" comments were also based on the members of the Skhirat dialogue, namely members of the LIFG and Muslim Brotherhood.

³ To address this shortcoming, only comments written in Libyan dialect or Modern Standard Arabic and in Arabic script were considered. However, the vast majority of the reviewed comments were written in Libyan dialect which gives LRP good reason to believe the commentators were likely Libyan citizens.



The Libya Reverb Project
libyareverbproject@gmail.com

- The comments that did not fit into the “Yes” or “No” categories which LRP labeled as “NA” were the most interesting. A very large number of those comments expressed their confusion over the exact nature/substance of the agreement and thus did not feel they were informed enough to express support/rejection. The other factors/issues that those comments stated were, a) lack of political options b) mistrust based on past performance of the GNC and HoR c) belief that any future government lacks real influence/power.

The LRP team has highlighted a few comments:

- *“My friend who supports Gaddafi supports [GNA], my friend who supports Operation Dignity supports [GNA], my friend who supports Libya Dawn supports [GNA], and I who don’t support any of them also support [GNA]. In short, we’re tired.”* - This was one of the highest liked comments on the post.
- *“If I say yes you you’ll say I support Dignity, if I say no you’ll say Libya Dawn so I’m not saying yes or no”* - This comment perfectly captures many sentiments expressed throughout the comments reviewed.



The Libya Reverb Project
libyareverbproject@gmail.com

About Us

The Libya Reverb Project is a collaboration between Amr Bennis and Frank Talbot. We believe that social media plays an important role in how Libyan society engages in discourse and that this can be better understood by analyzing the engagements within social media communities. The Libya Reverb Project is our modest effort to further this understanding.

Amr Bennis is an independent researcher focusing on political, economic and social developments in Libya. He is a Libyan national and is fluent in Arabic and English. In 2015, Amr earned a bachelor degree in Near Eastern Languages and Civilization from Harvard University. Previously, he worked for the National Democratic Institute's political parties program based in Tripoli, Libya.

Frank Talbot is the principal of Talbot Advisory International, LLC - an advisory firm focusing on political analysis, stakeholder engagement and risk management. He has worked with several development organizations in Libya since 2011. Frank will complete a master's degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University in 2016.