"MEDIA COMMITTEES" OR NEWSROOM? THE MATSADA2SH CASE AND THE EVIDENTIAL TEST FOR BROTHERHOOD ATTRIBUTIONS ONLINE

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ARDENT · KEY FINDINGS

"Media Committees" or Newsroom? The Matsada2sh Case and the Evidential Test for Brotherhood Attributions Online

01 Between 28 and 30 September 2026, Egyptian security forces detained six journalists from Matsada2sh ("Don't Believe It"), an online fact-checking and investigative platform.

02 Its Facebook page has more than 1.3 million followers. Egypt's Interior Ministry said the page was "part of the media committees of the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood", run from abroad.

03 On 7 October the Public Prosecution said its investigation had found the platform operated as a Brotherhood-affiliated media outlet and that its staff had received foreign funding.

04 Matsada2sh denied the accusations. An open letter signed by Reporters Without Borders and 33 other organisations calls for the journalists' release.

Summary of the study by the research team · 3 November 2026

SUMMARY

Between 28 and 30 September 2026, Egyptian security forces detained six journalists from Matsada2sh ("Don't Believe It"), an online fact-checking and investigative platform (Reporters Without Borders 2026a). Its Facebook page has more than 1.3 million followers (The National 2026). Egypt's Interior Ministry said the page was "part of the media committees of the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood", run from abroad (The National 2026). On 7 October the Public Prosecution said its investigation had found the platform operated as a Brotherhood-affiliated media outlet and that its staff had received foreign funding (Gamal El-Din 2026). Matsada2sh denied the accusations (The National 2026). An open letter signed by

Reporters Without Borders and 33 other organisations calls for the journalists' release (Reporters Without Borders 2026a).

Ardent's work tracks how Islamist networks, the Muslim Brotherhood above all, use online media. That work depends on being able to tell a real Brotherhood media operation from a critical outlet that a government labels as one. This study sets out what each side has said, what is and is not established, and the test Western researchers, platforms and governments should apply before relying on such attributions.

Our finding: on the public record as at 3 November 2026, the Brotherhood link in this case is **alleged by an authority and disputed**. It has not been tested in court. It should not be cited as an established fact.

1. TIMELINE

Date (2026)	Event	Source
28–30 September	Six Matsada2sh journalists detained in raids in Cairo, Gharbeya Governorate and Port Said; phones and laptops seized, including family members' devices	Reporters Without Borders 2026a; Committee to Protect Journalists et al. 2026
30 September	Reporters Without Borders says it is "a first in Egypt: an entire newsroom behind bars"	Reporters Without Borders 2026a
1 October	Interior Ministry statement: the page is "part of the media committees of the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood", run by a person abroad and assisted inside Egypt in return for payments from abroad; six arrested, one a member of the Journalists' Syndicate	The National 2026
7 October	Public Prosecution statement (case no. 8083 of 2026, Supreme State Security Prosecution): platform affiliated with the Brotherhood; defendants held in pretrial detention	Gamal El-Din 2026
29 October	Reporters Without Borders reports that prosecutors accuse the six of "spreading false news" and "belonging to a terrorist organisation", and calls the accusations baseless	Reporters Without Borders 2026b

2. THE AUTHORITIES' CASE, AS REPORTED

Everything in this section is the Egyptian authorities' account. None of it has been tested in court, and the research team has not seen the underlying evidence.

According to Ahram Online's report of the 7 October prosecution statement, the prosecution said that National Security Sector investigations indicated that Brotherhood leaders abroad had instructed members to set up social media pages "to spread what it described as rumours and false news and statements", to question the performance of state institutions and to create public discontent ahead of protests. The prosecution said Matsada2sh was one such platform (Gamal El-Din 2026).

The prosecution said one defendant had admitted to organisational meetings with a person abroad through messaging applications, to receiving monthly payments in foreign currency through bank transfers from a company owned by that person, and to publishing posts calling for the overthrow of the

system of government. It said examination of his phone showed closed groups on an encrypted application linking the defendants with the person abroad, and emails from that person (Gamal El-Din 2026).

Denials recorded in the same statement. By the prosecution's own account: - the other defendants **denied membership of the Brotherhood**, except one, who said he had belonged to it in the past but had left before joining Matsada2sh; - all acknowledged working for the platform, which they said was managed from outside Egypt, and acknowledged receiving periodic payments in US dollars, **except one, who said he did not receive such payments**; - the defendant who is a registered journalist **denied publishing the pro-Brotherhood posts** found on his account, although the prosecution said technical evidence showed they were published through it (Gamal El-Din 2026).

Custody. The admissions were made in custody. The prosecution said none of the six had visible injuries, and that three who alleged force had been used against them were referred to the Forensic Medicine Authority, whose reports, according to the prosecution, **found no injuries or signs of violence** (Gamal El-Din 2026). Defence lawyers allege torture and ill-treatment (see §3).

3. THE DEFENCE AND THE RESPONSE

- **Matsada2sh** denied the accusations in a statement (The National 2026).
- **Reporters Without Borders** describes Matsada2sh as an independent newsroom and fact-checking website founded in 2018 and calls the accusations baseless. It reports that the six were initially subjected to enforced disappearance before the authorities acknowledged the arrests. RSF reports that, according to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, which represents the journalists, questioning focused on the nature of their journalistic work, editorial decision-making, how stories are selected and their sources of information. RSF also reports the lawyers' allegation that the journalists were subjected to torture and ill-treatment (Reporters Without Borders 2026b).
- **A joint statement** hosted by the Committee to Protect Journalists says officers refused to show a warrant, that a Matsada2sh editor was arrested in 2023 and released after 48 hours, and that the platform has faced earlier smear campaigns (Committee to Protect Journalists et al. 2026).
- **Context.** Egypt has outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood and declared it a terrorist organisation since 2013 (The National 2026). Reporters Without Borders ranks Egypt 169th of 180 in its World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders 2026b).

4. WHAT IS ESTABLISHED, AND WHAT IS NOT

Claim	Status (Ardent labels)
Six Matsada2sh journalists were detained between 28 and 30 September 2026	Established (reported consistently by the authorities and by press-freedom groups)
Prosecutors are investigating them for false news and membership of a terrorist organisation	Established as an accusation
Matsada2sh is a Muslim Brotherhood "media committee"	

Claim	Status (Ardent labels)
	Alleged by an authority; disputed (denied by Matsada2sh; Brotherhood membership denied by all but one defendant, according to the prosecution)
Staff received foreign payments on Brotherhood instructions	**Alleged by an authority; disputed** (one defendant denied receiving payments, according to the prosecution)
Defendants were mistreated in custody	**Alleged by defence lawyers; denied by the prosecution**, which cites forensic reports finding no injuries

5. WHY THIS MATTERS FOR WESTERN AUDIENCES

This section is the centre's analysis, not a statement of fact. The Brotherhood's use of online media is a legitimate subject of Western concern, and this study does not question that. But the Matsada2sh case shows three risks in importing foreign-state attributions uncritically.

1. **The label can attach to criticism itself.** The prosecution's account of the alleged strategy includes, by one defendant's reported admission, "highlighting shortcomings" and "belittling officials' roles" (Gamal El-Din 2026). Those are also descriptions of ordinary critical journalism. An attribution that rests on the content of reporting is weaker than one resting on proven organisational or financial ties.
2. **Platforms may face takedown pressure (inference).** The outlet's audience is on a Western-owned service, its Facebook page (The National 2026). No source reviewed reports any takedown request to the platform in this case; this point is the research team's inference about a foreseeable risk. Western platforms and governments receiving requests framed as counter-terrorism should test them against the standard below. - [LEGAL CLEARANCE REQUIRED] Reporters Without Borders reports that the outlet's director lives in exile in the United States (Reporters Without Borders 2026b). He is not named here. This must not be read with the Interior Ministry's claim about a person abroad as implying that any identifiable US resident runs a Brotherhood media committee.
3. **Credibility is shared.** Researchers who repeat an unproven attribution lend it weight; if it later collapses, it damages the credibility of sound work on real Brotherhood networks.

6. A TEST FOR BROTHERHOOD ATTRIBUTIONS

Before Ardent, or a Western government or platform, treats an outlet as a Brotherhood media operation, we propose that it should have:

1. a finding by a court or an authority in a jurisdiction with independent judicial review, or two independent sources, for any organisational link (consistent with Ardent's two-source rule);
2. evidence of organisational, financial or command ties, not only of editorial line;
3. the outlet's response, and any denials by the people concerned, quoted next to the claim;
4. a clear label (found, alleged by an authority, alleged by others, disputed) carried into every later citation.

7. NEXT STEPS

- Track the case: any court ruling, change in detention status or published evidence.
- Seek the full Arabic text of the 1 October and 7 October statements, and the original Matsada2sh statement of denial.

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