



Political Participation in Egypt: Perceptions and Practice

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Abstract

This paper examines both perceptions and practices of political participation in Egypt. In choosing to classify forms of participation as formal and informal, this study draws on existing academic literature, before applying and adapting criteria to the Egyptian socio-political context. This paper seeks to show the changes in Egyptians' perception of political engagement after the revolution of January 25th, 2011. Based on a nationwide poll of over 2000 Egyptian citizens, and analyzing the data from various comparative perspectives – time period, gender, economic class, education level, etc. This paper will illustrate the main trends in increased political participation, the reasons behind lesser degrees of engagement with informal means of participation, and the broad consensus that for political participation to be effective in Egypt's complex transition period it must be representative and inclusive.

I. Introduction

Political participation is broadly defined as an **activity by private citizens designed to influence governmental decision-making**.² Since the revolution of January 25th 2011, Egyptians have acquired a **greater sense of political entitlement alongside greater optimism at influencing political change**. As this report will show, this trend is evident in the increase of political engagement from voting in elections, joining political parties, NGOs, civil society initiatives, to protesting and demonstrating in public areas.

During the 30 years of former president Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian rule, political participation in Egypt was very limited to say the least and most people believed it to be ineffective in influencing government decisions. Egyptians also faced many obstacles that in

²Huntington, S. P., Nelson, J. M., & Harvard University. (1976). *No easy choice: Political participation in developing countries*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

most cases prevented them from exercising their right to political participation. However, since Mubarak's ouster in 2011, a combination of factors from tangible increases in the number of electoral and referenda processes to intangible elements such as breaking through the 'barrier of fear', have led Egyptians to become more aware of their rights, and more determined to practice them.

For instance, many demonstrations and sit-ins were organized all over the country during the 18 days of the 25th of January revolution, and people continued to protest even after the fall of Mubarak's regime. In addition to the notable increase in participation rates in many elections and referendums as part of Egypt's so-called "Road Map", there has been a significant increase in the number of political parties created and social movements founded over the past four years, and an overall attempt to re-claim the public space for public uses.

This paper aims to identify the activities that Egyptians recognize or identify most readily as political participation, as well as their opinion of the impact these activities have on Egypt's government and decision makers. It offers a comparative angle between citizen engagement prior to and after the uprisings of January 2011, from the interim government under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to the government of Mohamed Morsi and the incumbent regime of President El-Sisi.

This study will provide a definition and a brief academic framework for the concept of political participation before applying it to the Egyptian socio-political context. In this context it will distinguish between two main types of political engagement, formal and informal, in addition to categorizing and identifying specific activities considered as such by Egyptian citizens.

The study will examine citizen perceptions and practices of specific formal activities such as voting in elections and referendums, alongside specific informal activities such as demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience such as sit-ins in various universities at the time of polling. The issue of political discrimination and exclusion in Egypt will also be dealt with by analyzing perceptions of gender-based discrimination and political discrimination, versus the necessity for quotas and political pluralism. Finally, this study will examine public opinion regarding the effectiveness of political participation in Egypt's complex transition period over the last four years, and citizen expectations regarding the space for political engagement four years from now.

II. Definition of political participation

Political participation is the subject of an entire school of academic literature, and its conceptualization as such is largely dependent on specific socio-political contexts.³ For instance, the rapid expansion of political activities and information technology over the last decade has pushed the boundaries of what was once taken as conventional political participation. From broad-based definitions of political participation as “an action that influences the distribution of social goods and values”⁴ to more specific arguments examining whether activities are active or passive, aggressive or non-aggressive, structural or non-structural, mobilized or voluntary, etc⁵..., there is no universally accepted definition amongst scholars or practitioners.

³Jan W van Deth, A conceptual map of political participation, *Acta Politica* (2014) **49**, 349–367.

⁴Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 4.

⁵Patrick J. Conge, The Concept of Political Participation: Toward a Definition, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jan., 1988)

For the purposes of this paper, the following operative definition of political participation will be taken and will be adapted to the socio-political context in Egypt. **Political engagement refers to the active involvement of social actors in the sphere of politics;** it can be taken as a demonstration of the responsiveness of citizens to the policies made by their governments.⁶ Political participation also refers to **the process through which a citizen can play a role in the political life in their community,** and through which they have the chance to contribute in discussing the general goals of the community and deciding the best ways to accomplish them.⁷

For a more specific categorization of political participation, political scholars such as Maki (2006) **group activities into two categories: formal and informal forms of participation.**⁸ Maki's classification of political activities focuses mainly on the direction and purpose within a specific context; where "formal political participation is defined as not anti-systemic and does not directly challenge the underlying legitimacy of the central government."⁹ By contrast, informal forms of political participation are primarily characterized by voicing or acting on anti-systemic opinions.

In the Egyptian context, one must bear in mind the overall low levels of political awareness and participation and limited means available for citizens to engage informally in the political process or influence government decision-making. In a society where voices of dissent have rarely been tolerated, it is interesting to note that dissenting views are often only

⁶Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972)

⁷ Ali Nasser. *The role of civil society organizations in enhancing political participation in Palestine.* (The Palestinian Center for Research and Cultural Dialogue (PCRID): Palestine, 2010), 28.

⁸ Andrew Maki, *Decentralization and Political Participation: Argentina and Chile in Comparative Perspective.* (Connecticut college: 2006), 21-22.

⁹ibid.

associated with informal means of political engagement, whereas in some other countries formal channels serve the same purpose.

2.1 Formal political participation

Formal participation refers to citizens using their legitimate right to participate in politics to influence political issues through existing channels. Accordingly, formal activities are not against the legitimacy of a structural government and tend not to be anti-systemic. Based on this definition, this study will consider the following activities as formal means of political participation:

1. Running for any official political position.
2. Voting in elections or referendums.
3. Joining a political party.
4. Campaigning for a certain candidate or political party in the elections.
5. Participating through civil society organizations.

2.2 Informal political participation

Informal participation in politics usually refers to participation through informal spaces and channels not directly established or controlled by the government. Informal acts of political participation usually challenge decision makers and can act as channels for voices of dissent. Accordingly, the following activities are categorized as informal means of political participation:

1. Participating in demonstrations and protests.
2. Participating in sit-ins or civil disobedience.
3. Violent activities against state institutions and symbols.

4. Following the news through watching the television or reading the newspapers.
5. Discussing political issues and problems with friends, family, colleagues or co-workers.
6. Being active online through social networking websites, groups and blogs that concern about politics.

III. Findings of the public opinion poll on political participation

3.1 Methodology of the study:

This paper is based on the results of a nationwide survey conducted by Baseera, the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research, in late 2014. The poll was conducted on a national representative sample of 2027 citizens, 18 years of age and above. The sample was randomly drawn from all governorates, and thereafter weighted to represent population distribution across provinces in Egypt and gender proportion. The survey was conducted through randomly generated phone numbers (landlines and cell phones) from November 26th to December 1st, 2014. Locally-hired researchers at Baseera were responsible for carrying out the poll. Whilst the author and Baseera acknowledge that telephone polling is subject to certain criticisms, the political nature of the survey topic meant that face to face interviews would have been subject to various administrative and temporal restrictions. The response rate of the poll was 44.2% and the margin of error was calculated at 3%. Compared to other surveys carried out by Baseera, the response rate was lower, attributable to the length and political nature of the questionnaire.

3.1.1 Properties of the public opinion poll sample

The national sample is designed to reflect to the greatest extent possible Egyptian demographics including characteristics such as age, gender, living area, education level, economic level, etc. The sample comprised of 48% males and 52% females. Respondents were divided into three groups; 28% youth (18 – 29 years of age), 42% aged between 30 – 49, and 30% aged 50 years of age or above. As for the levels of education, again three groups were applied: respondents with below intermediary education reflecting the majority of Egyptians at 52%, respondents with intermediate or upper intermediate education (35%), and respondents with a university degree or higher educational level (13%). With regards to the wealth or socio-economic level of the respondents, 51% belong to the lowest socio-economic level, while 29% belong to the middle level and 12% belong to the highest socio-economic level. Finally, based on areas of residence, the respondents were divided into urban areas and rural areas, with a total of 46% and 54% respectively.

3.1.2 Summary of the public opinion poll questionnaire

This report is structured to reflect the content of the questionnaire. Initially respondents were asked about their general perception of different forms of political participation, and whether they thought these activities were effective in influencing government policies and decisions in Egypt. Respondents were then questioned as to their previous engagement with voting in different elections and referendums, as well as degree of their participation in demonstrations and protests and voting intentions for the upcoming parliamentary elections. The survey also explores Egyptians' view of political discrimination or the exclusion of any social or political groups from political processes. Finally, the poll addressed perceptions of

the necessity of political participation in times of transition and to what extent it is currently seen as effective in Egypt.

3.2 Identification of different forms of political participation

The respondents of the survey were asked whether they accept each of the previously listed activities as a form of political participation. Those who “agree” were asked a follow-up question on their assessment of its effectiveness in influencing government policies and decisions. At no point in the survey were respondents presented with the pre-defined categories of formal and informal means of political participation so as not to influence their answers.

Figure 1: The percentage of respondents who identify each of the listed activities as political participation

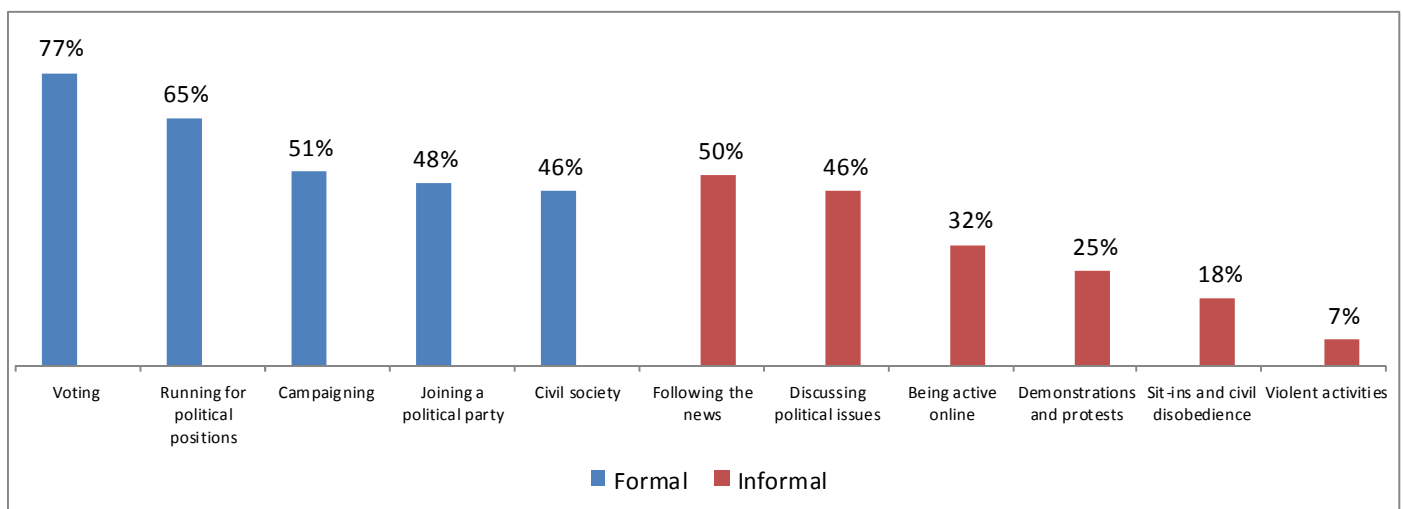
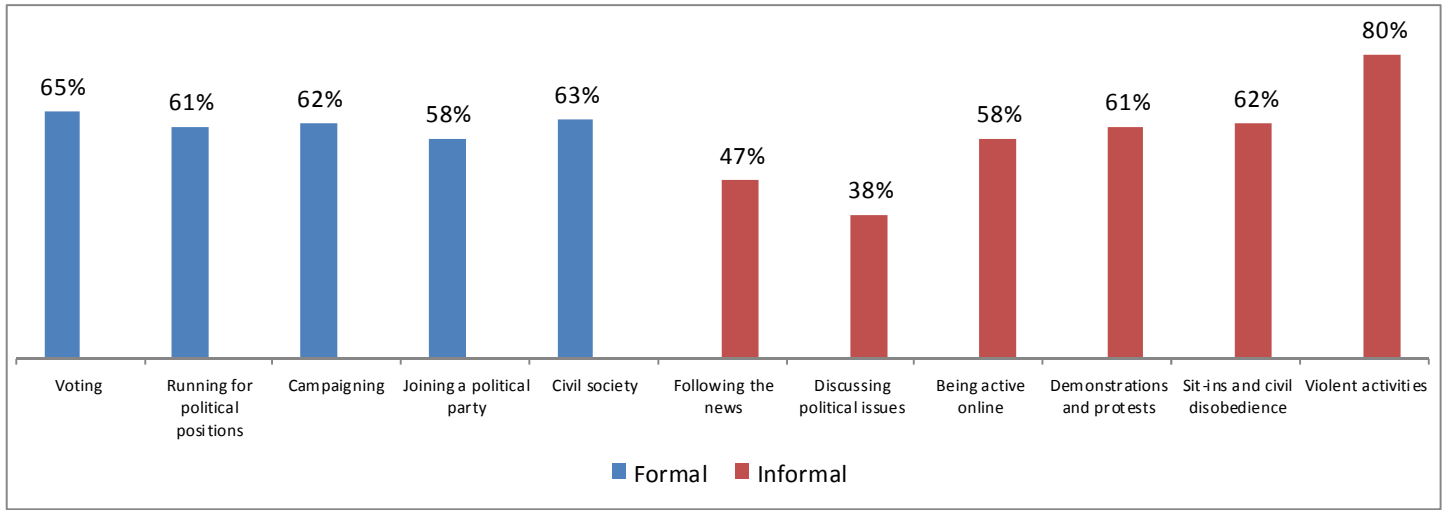


Figure 2: The percentage of respondents who believe that each of the listed activities is effective in influencing government policies and decisions in Egypt.



According to the results of the survey conducted by Baseera, **Egyptian citizens identify more readily with formal means of political participation than informal means.** For instance, 77% of respondents classed voting in elections or referendums as a means of political engagement, and 65% of this majority consider it effective in influencing government policies and decisions. Similarly, running for an official political position is considered by 65% as a form of political engagement, 61% of whom believe that it is effective. The table that follows offers a breakdown of the results by key demographic characteristics:

Table 2: Formal forms of political Participation

		1. Voting in elections or referendums		2. Running for any official political position		3. Campaigning for a certain candidate or political party in the elections		4. Joining a political party		5. Participating through civil society organizations	
		Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective
Gender	Male	78.7%	64.1%	69.7%	60.8%	51.6%	60.6%	50.7%	58.6%	48.6%	61.3%
	Female	74.8%	66.3%	59.9%	61.2%	50.4%	64.1%	45.6%	59.1%	43.1%	64.8%
Education	Below average	66.8%	58.7%	54.7%	57.1%	46.6%	66.1%	43.8%	58.6%	40.7%	63.5%
	Intermediate/ upper intermediate	86.8%	69.1%	74%	62.5%	55.4%	57.3%	51.4%	57.1%	50.6%	64.1%

	University and higher	88.6%	74.4%	77.9%	67.1%	57%	63.6%	56.1%	57.9%	52.4%	58%
Age	18-29	71.5%	61.6%	61.8%	58.8%	47.8%	62%	48.4%	56.7%	44.5%	61.3%
	30-49	76.8%	68.4%	65.1%	61.3%	50.8%	62.1%	46.6%	56.9%	47%	62.4%
	50 and higher	81.6%	64%	66.6%	62.3%	54.3%	63%	49.8%	60.3%	45.2%	65.7%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	71.3%	61.5%	57.7%	59.7%	49%	62.9%	45.6%	60.3%	43.5%	65.1%
	Middle level	83.1%	71.4%	73.4%	61.6%	54.9%	66.8%	54.2%	58%	50.3%	65%
	Highest level	88.1%	67.6%	78.2%	65.5%	57.9%	60.3%	55.4%	54%	48.2%	57.9%
Residence	Urban	83.6%	67.3%	72.1%	61.6%	55.9%	59.7%	52.9%	54.8%	50.6%	59.9%
	Rural	70.7%	63.2%	58.2%	60.3%	46.7%	65.2%	43.8%	61.1%	41.5%	66.2%
TOTAL	Percent	76.7%	65.2%	64.6%	61%	51%	62.4%	48.1%	57.8%	45.7%	63%
	Count	1554	1013	1310	799	1034	645	974	562	927	584

Upon further breakdown of the results, several trends stand out. We see that those who have obtained a university degree are more likely to accept, as political participation, activities such as voting in elections and referendums, as well as running for political positions as forms of political engagement (89% and 78% respectively), than those whose education level is below intermediary (67% and 55% respectively). In addition, Egyptians with a higher level of education are more likely to believe that voting influences the government than those with below intermediary level of education (74% and 59% respectively).

Table 3: Informal forms of political participation

Gender	Male	6. Following the news through watching the television or reading the newspapers		7. Discussing political issues and problems with friends, family, colleagues or co-workers		8. Being active online through social networking		9. Participating in demonstrations, protests		10. Participating in sit-ins or civil disobedience		11. Violent activities against state institutions and symbols	
		Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective	Accept	Effective
		48.8%	42.9%	45.9%	37.5%	33.3%	60.4%	24.2%	63.1%	16.9%	64.2%	4.1%	75.6%

	Female	51.5%	51.1%	46.2%	37.7%	30.7%	56.1%	25.2%	59.4%	19.4%	59.8%	8.8%	80.6%
Education	Below average	45.6%	48.2%	43.2%	42.5%	25.5%	66.2%	23.2%	62.1%	18.2%	62.1%	8.2%	83.5%
	Intermediate/upper intermediate	55.6%	47%	48.2%	33.7%	36.6%	52.1%	25.4%	60%	17.4%	62.9%	5.5%	74.4%
	University and higher	53.7%	44.9%	51.5%	2.1%	44.9%	53.7%	28.8%	61.5%	20.7%	60%	2.9%	62.5%
Age	18-29	47.3%	40.1%	47.2%	32.3%	47.5%	56.1%	38.3%	65%	26.4%	58.4%	11.8%	88.1%
	30-49	48.4%	50.7%	42.8%	35.7%	30.5%	58.6%	23.1%	61.6%	18.1%	67.1%	4.9%	74.4%
	50 and higher	55.3%	48.9%	49.4%	44.8%	19.4%	61.9%	14.1%	51.2%	10.6%	57.8%	3.8%	65.2%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	47.1%	47.3%	43.1%	41%	27.4%	62.4%	22%	70.2%	18%	65.2%	8.3%	85.9%
	Middle level	54.2%	45.4%	50.8%	38.9%	39.9%	55.5%	28.3%	58.3%	20%	63.3%	5.5%	72.7%
	Highest level	57.5%	48.3%	55.2%	29.3%	38.5%	58.2%	30.3%	51.3%	19.4%	51%	4.4%	60%
Residence	Urban	53.2%	46.3%	46%	35.9%	34.9%	55.6%	23.9%	59.6%	17.5%	59.1%	4.6%	59.5%
	Rural	47.5%	48.3%	46.1%	39.1%	29.4%	60.8%	25.4%	62.7%	18.8%	63.9%	8.2%	90.9%
TOTAL	Percent	50.2%	47.3%	46%	37.7%	32%	58.2%	24.7%	61.4%	18.2%	62.1%	6.5%	80.3%
	Count	1017	481	933	352	648	377	501	308	369	229	132	106

According to the academic definition and classification of political participation taken for the purposes of this paper, **respondents were less likely to recognize informal activities as means of political participation.** For instance, only 25% of Egyptians consider participating in demonstrations and protests as a form of political participation (61% of whom see it influential). As for adopting violent activities against state institutions and symbols, only 7% of respondents identify such actions as a form of political engagement (although an overwhelming 80% of this minority believe that this form of political participation is influential). Discussing political issues with family members and friends in Egypt is considered the most ineffective form of political participation, and indeed less than half consider it as means of political participation.

The following section of the report will deal with one example of both formal and informal political participation, analyzing Egyptians' actual rate of engagement in voting and demonstrating respectively. The comparative element will be provided by a temporal analysis

before and after the revolution of January 2011 highlighting any major changes that occurred during this period.

3.3 Formal and informal political participation in Egypt

3.3.1 Formal political participation; voting in elections and referendums

Generally, the level of Egyptians’ formal participation through voting in elections and referendums is considered very high compared to their informal participation through demonstrations and protests.

Figure 3: The percentage of self-reported participation in voting in elections and referendums before and after the revolution of January 2011

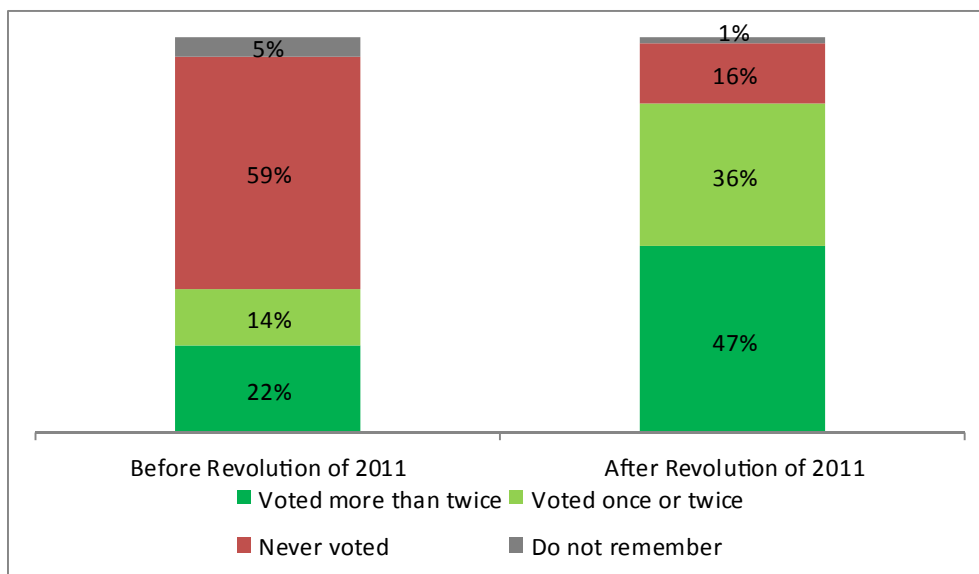


Figure 3 shows that only 36% of Egyptians had participated once or twice in different elections or referendums before 2011, while 59% had never voted. These percentages have significantly shifted over the past four years; 83% of Egyptians have voted at least once or twice since January 2011, while the percentage of those who state they have never voted drops to 15%. The following table shows the key characteristics of respondents for this question:

Table4: Participation in elections or referendums by characteristics

		Before Revolution of 2011				After Revolution of 2011			
		Voted more than twice	Voted once or twice	Never voted	Do not remember	Voted more than twice	Voted once or twice	Never voted	Do not remember
Gender	Male	34.4%	15.9%	46.8%	3.9%	52.8%	33.1%	12.9%	1.2%
	Female	11.9%	13%	69.9%	5.1%	41.6%	39.1%	18%	1.3%
Age	18-29	8.3%	15%	74.5%	2.3%	31.7%	43.7%	24.1%	0.5%
	30-49	22.1%	17%	56.1%	4.8%	50.8%	36.4%	11.3%	1.4%
	50 and higher	35.7%	10.1%	47.8%	6.5%	56.1%	28.9%	13.4%	1.7%
Education	Below average	22.5%	13.8%	58.8%	4.8%	37.3%	42.8%	18.3%	1.5%
	Intermediate/ upper intermediate	20.3%	14.7%	60.2%	4.8%	53.1%	31.1%	14.7%	1.1%
	University and higher	26%	15.8%	54.9%	3.3%	68.6%	24.4%	6.6%	0.4%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	22.1%	15.1%	58.2%	4.6%	42%	41.7%	15.6%	0.7%
	Middle level	22.7%	14.3%	59.9%	3.2%	52.5%	31.4%	14.9%	1.2%
	Highest level	22.6%	12.7%	62.3%	2.4%	63.9%	25.8%	10.3%	0%
Residence	Urban	18%	12.2%	66.4%	3.4%	49.5%	35.6%	14.1%	0.7%
	Rural	25.9%	16.3%	52.2%	5.6%	44.8%	36.8%	16.7%	1.7%
Total	Percent	22.3%	14.4%	58.8	4.6%	47%	36.2%	15.5%	1.3%
	Count	451	291	1192	92	953	734	314	25

During the period before the uprising of January 25th, 2011, men were more likely to make use of their voting rights than women (49% and 25% respectively). However, since the revolution, male and female self-reported voting has become very close (86% and 81% respectively), which reflects a **substantial increase in women's political participation**.

A similar increase can be observed with youth participation: whereas before January 2011 only 23% had ever voted, since then over 75% have exercised their right to vote in elections or referendum processes.

With regards to geographic strata, it is interesting to note that before 2011 a greater percentage of rural residents participated in elections or referendums than the percentage of urban residents (42% and 30% respectively). Over the past four years however, this difference

has more or less disappeared and the participation stands at 82% in rural areas and 85% in urban areas.

3.3.2 The reasons for not voting in any elections and referendums

The survey allowed the respondents to list all their reasons for not taking part in any elections or referendums both before and after the revolution of January 2011, as presented in *Figure 4* below. Apart from “other responses” (too varied to list individually), the most commonly mentioned reason for not voting was not having a valid national ID document, which accounts for almost a fifth of the responses.

Figure 4: Main reasons for not voting in any elections or referendums before and after the revolution of 2011.

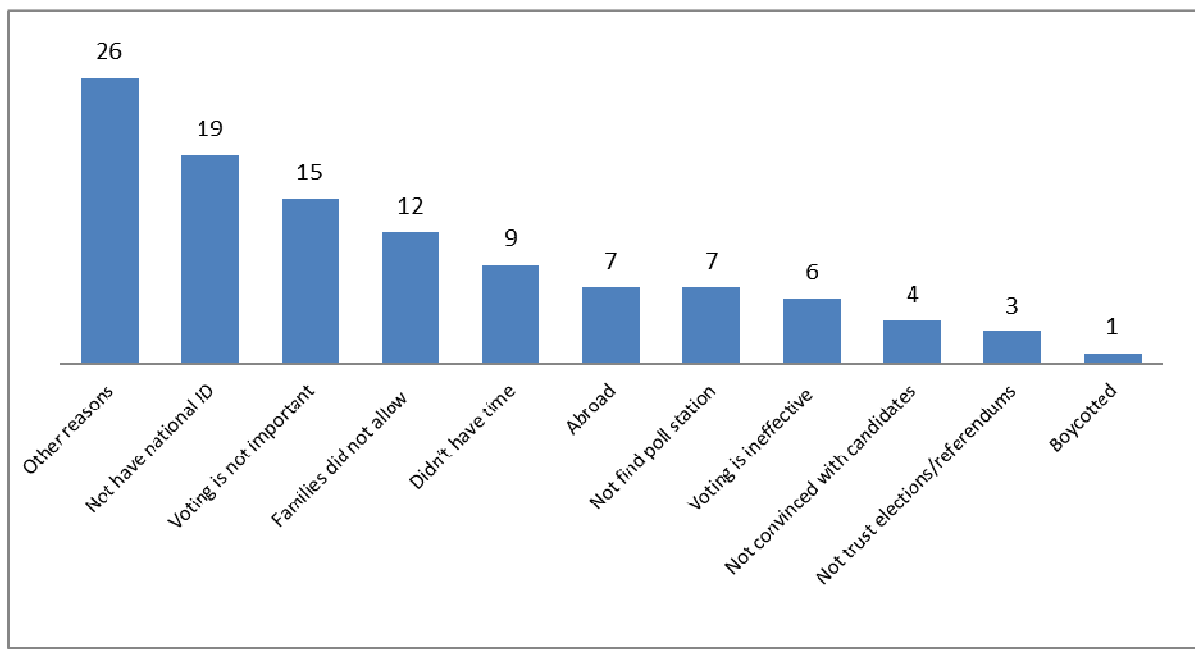


Table 5: Characteristics of the respondents who did not vote because of not having a valid national ID

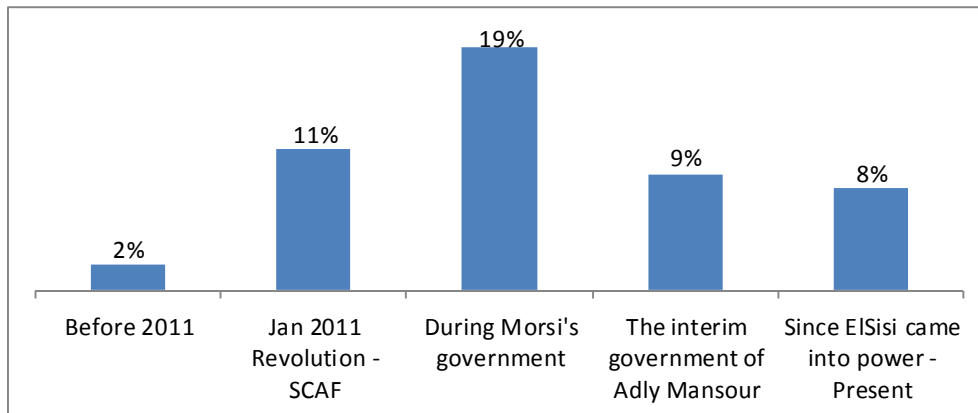
Properties		Percentage
Gender	Male	13.5%
	Female	22.2%
Education	Below average	16.8%
	Intermediate/upper intermediate	24%
	University or higher	5.3%
Age	18 – 29	34.3%
	30 - 49	6.2%
	50 or higher	6.3%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	12.5%
	Middle level	36%
	Highest level	8%
Residence	Urban	18%
	Rural	18.8%
TOTAL	Percentage	18.5%
	Count	58

Interestingly, youth and middle classes were amongst those most likely to not have a national ID card, as were those belonging to the middle socio-economic level.

3.3.3 Informal political participation; demonstrations and protests

When compared to voting in elections or referenda, the level of participation in demonstrations and protests amongst Egyptian citizens is considered low whether before or after the revolution of January 2011, as shown by the graph below (see *Figure 5*) which collates responses according to time period. .

Figure 5: Percentage of participation in protests and demonstrations over 5 time periods



Whilst the increase in demonstrations may be clear to the average follower of events in Egypt, the following table seeks to breakdown the participants in this form of political activity by different characteristics.

Table 6: Properties of respondents who reported participating in protests and demonstrations at least once during the 5 considered periods.

Properties		Before 2011	During the 25th of January revolution	During Morsi's regime	The interim government of Adly Mansour	Since El-Sisi came into power till now
Gender	Male	3.3%	16.8%	25.4%	11.7%	8.2%
	Female	0.8%	6%	12.2%	6.9%	6.9%
Education	Below average	0.8%	6.6%	12.8%	7.7%	6.5%
	Intermediate/upper intermediate	2.5%	15.1%	22.7%	10.6%	9.4%
	University or higher	4.8%	19.1%	29.8%	11.7%	6.3%
Age	18 – 29	2.1%	16.7%	19.3%	10.5%	9.2%
	30 - 49	2.1%	11%	18%	9%	6.4%
	50 or higher	1.8%				

			6.1%	18.7%	8.5%	7.3%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	0.7%	8.1%	15.2%	9.9%	8.1%
	Middle level	3%	13.2%	20.6%	7.2%	6%
	Highest level	4.4%	22.5%	33.6%	13.5%	8.7%
Residence	Urban	2.9%	38.5%	58.3%	23.7%	8%
	Rural	1.1%	7.1%	13.3%	8.5%	7%
TOTAL	Percentage	2%	11.2%	18.5%	9.2%	7.5%
	Count	40	228	376	187	151%

From Mubarak's ouster till Mohamed Morsi was elected in June 2012, the percentage of participants increased to 11%, a sign of Egyptians desire and ability to exercise their right to political demonstrations in public places. Based on the findings of the survey, **the participation of men during this period was significantly higher than that of women (17% and 6% respectively)**. The breakdown between ages shows that youth are twice as likely to take part in demonstrations as citizens of 50 years or more. With regards to education, the engagement of citizens with a university degree was higher than those with below intermediary education (19% and 7% respectively). The socio-economic level was also an influential factor during this period as 23% of the highest wealth class participated in demonstrations and protests during that period, compared 8% of the lowest wealth class.

The overall level of participation was highest at 19% during the period of Mohamed Morsi's rule till his overthrow following the demonstrations of June 30th 2013.

While Egyptians of all age brackets participated in the demonstrations of this period, there was a noticeable difference in the level of participation between men and women, 25% and 12% respectively. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between university graduates and those who have a below intermediary level of education (30% and 13% respectively).

Following the ouster of president Morsi, the former president of the Supreme Constitutional Court Adly Mansour¹⁰ was appointed interim president. The level of political participation in informal activities decreased notably during this period. The findings of the survey show that 91% of Egyptians did not participate in any protests or demonstrations during Adly Mansour's interim presidency. Moreover, since the election of Field Marshal El-Sisi (former Minister of Defence) up to the time of polling, 92% of Egyptians claim to have not participated in any demonstrations or protests. The reasons for this will be examined in the following section of the report.

3.3.4 The reasons for not participating in demonstrations and protests

Only the respondents who mentioned never participating in any demonstrations or protests whether before or after the revolution of January 25th were asked about their reasons for not doing so, and the survey allowed them to state more than one reason as shown in the figure below (*Figure 6*).

¹⁰ After Morsi's ouster, General Abd ElFattah El-sisi (commander-in-chief of the armed forces at that time) announced that Adly Mansour would be Egypt's interim leader until elections were held. He was appointed as its president in May 2013, and he took up his post on the 1st of July.

Figure 6: Main reasons for not participating in demonstrations or protests

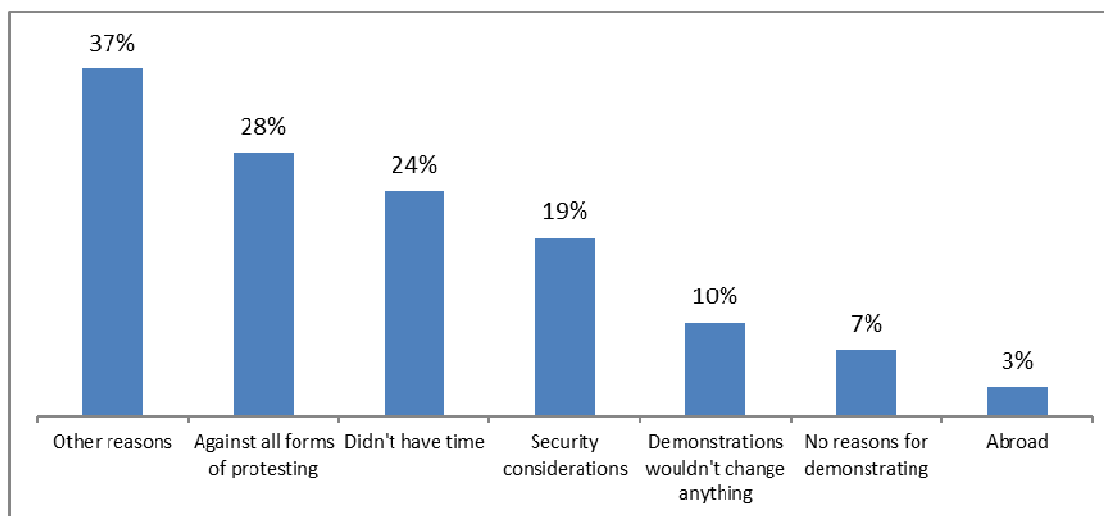


Table 7: Properties of respondents who never participated in any demonstrations or protests whether before or after revolution of 2011

Properties		Against all forms of protests or demonstrations	Did not have time	Security and safety matters / Family	Demonstrations and protests would not change anything	Did not see any reason for demonstrations
Gender	Male	32%	29.8%	4.4%	12.6%	9.2%
	Female	25.7%	20.4%	28.7%	7.5%	5.5%
Education	Below average	28.3%	24.1%	19.9%	7.3%	5.6%
	Intermediate/upper intermediate	27.1%	25.1%	18.5%	12.4%	8.6%
	University or higher	31.6%	23.6%	12.1%	13.9%	9.6%
Age	18 – 29	26.6%	20.1%	24.7%	9.9%	7.7%
	30 - 49	26.9%	25.7%	21.9%	12.1%	7.4%
	50 or higher	31.7%	26%	8.9%	6%	6.2%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	32.6%	26.1%	16.5%	9.2%	7.2%
	Middle level	24.1%	20.5%	20.2%	10.3%	7.1%
	Highest level	33.1%	24.2%	12.9%	14.5%	70.5%

Residence	Urban	29.5%	25.3%	16.8%	10.9%	8.4%
	Rural	27.4%	23.6%	20%	8.7%	6.2%
TOTAL	Percentage	28.3%	24.3%	18.6%	9.7%	7.1%
	Count	399	343	262	136	100

The findings of the survey show that more than a fifth of respondents are against all forms of protesting or demonstrations. Within this group, respondents with the lowest and highest socio-economic levels were more likely to oppose demonstrations, while those in the middle level were more likely to identify with demonstrations and protests as a form of political engagement.

With regards to security and safety issues as a reason for not participating, gender was the primary influential factor as 29% of female respondents mentioned that they did not participate because of security and safety issues or because their families did not allow them to participate for the sake of their safety. On the other hand, the percentage of male respondents who cited the same reason was only 4%.

Overall it can be concluded that **the revolution of January 2011 has changed the concept of political participation in Egypt and encouraged people to take part at both formal and informal levels.** Whilst the former still enjoys greater levels of support than the latter, it is important to note that **just as concepts and means of political participation evolve over time so can citizens' perceptions of them.**

IV. The current status of political participation in Egypt.

In keeping with the conceptual classification of political participation for the purposes of this paper, two types of activity were selected as indicators of formal and informal political

engagement in Egypt at the time of polling: voting intentions for the upcoming parliamentary elections (which at the time of polling had not yet been announced for a specific date) and partaking in protests or demonstrations on university campuses.¹¹

4.1 Intention to participate in upcoming the parliamentary elections of 2015

Since 2012, when the judiciary court dissolved the House of Representatives during Morsi’s government, Egypt has been without its main chamber of parliament. Its powers were transferred to the consultative Al-Shoura council; however, this council was also dissolved under the interim government of Adly Mansour. Since July 2014, uncertainty has surrounded the parliamentary elections and the final phase of Egypt’s self-declared Road Map, including issues such as candidate lists, dates, voting districts, etc.

Respondents’ awareness of the upcoming parliamentary election at the time of polling in late November 2014 was low: indeed only 14% claimed to have read, heard or seen material regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections. Despite low awareness levels, over half of respondents intended to vote (63%), a fifth were undecided, and 16% did not intend to vote.¹²

TABLE 9: Breakdown of pre and post-2011 voting trends and intention to vote in parliamentary elections of 2015

Properties		Pre-revolution of 2011	Post-revolution (January 2011 - May 2014)	Intend to vote in upcoming parliamentary elections of 2015
Gender	Male	49.3%	85.9%	69.5%
	Female	24.9	80.7%	57.1%
Education	Below average	36.4%	80.1%	62.7%

¹¹ Egypt universities outsource security, *Al-Monitor*, 18 Dec 2014, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/egypt-university-private-contractor-failure-security.html>

¹² Baseera’s polls since then (in January and March 2015) show that the voting intentions seem to increase to reach 78%.

	Intermediate/upper intermediate	35%	84.2%	63%
	University or higher	41.8%	93%	64.2%
Age	18 – 29	23.3%	75.4%	59.9%
	30 - 49	39.1%	87.3%	60%
	50 or higher	45.8%	84.9%	70.3%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	37.2%	83.7%	64.9%
	Middle level	36.9%	83.9%	62%
	Highest level	35.3%	89.7%	68.3%
Residence	Urban	30.2%	85.1%	58.1%
	Rural	42.2%	81.7%	67.2%
TOTAL	Percentage	36.6%	83.2%	63%
	Count	743	1687	1277

Based on respondents' participation in elections and referendums since the uprisings of January 2011, as well as their intention to vote in the next parliamentary elections, it can be observed that there has been an **overall decrease in the numbers of Egyptians willing to engage in the formal political process since El-Sisi assumed power**. Furthermore, there seems to be a **rising disengagement amongst the youth**, only 60% of whom intend to vote in the upcoming elections compared to 75% exercised their right to vote from 2011 to 2014. It remains to be seen whether this trend will become more pronounced as a combination of political repression and political apathy take hold under restored authoritarianism.

Apart from age, in post-2011 voting patterns the characteristic of gender has also been significant. Whereas under Mubarak the participation of male voters was practically double that of female voters, this gender gap has narrowed significantly over the past four years to the extent that voters numbers now stand at 86% men and 81% women. Interestingly, the **gap is set**

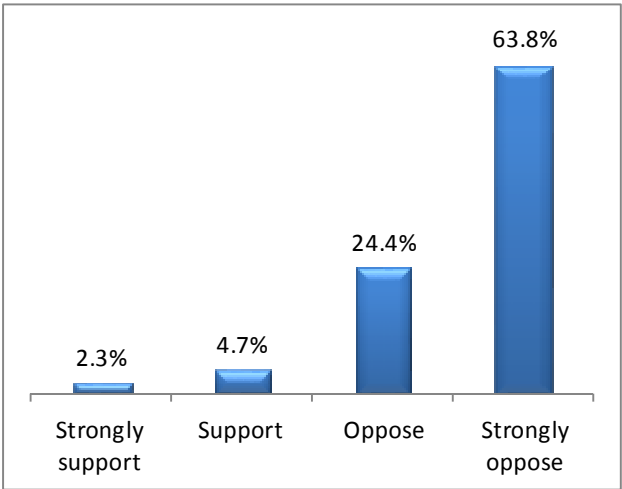
to widen again between men and women in the upcoming parliamentary elections (70% and 57% respectively).

Finally, in terms of **respondents who intend to boycott the next elections, the survey finds that 6% expressed this intention**, which is higher than the 1% of Egyptians who claim to have boycotted elections or referendums to date. This could be indicative of a certain level of dissatisfaction amongst citizens who do not feel represented by the political process and the shape it has taken under El-Sisi.

4.1 Demonstrations at Universities

Egyptian university students have regularly turned out to demonstrate on university campuses, both for political and non-political reasons, and over the past four years, the number of these demonstrations has increased. At the same time, government attempts to control student actions within the framework of tightening the noose on all state institutions have also increased.

Figure 7: Egyptians' opinion about the demonstrations at campus



In the autumn term of 2014, many demonstrations were organized by students at several universities such as Cairo University, Alexandria University, Ain Shams University, Al Azhar University and others. Students protested against the repressive policies and actions of the incumbent government which in turn was met by a violent response from the authorities who see student movements as a threat to the state’s monopoly on power. Many students were

detained or injured, some fatally-so.¹³ It is clear however that these demonstrations or sit-ins and other acts of civil disobedience were engaged in by a minority of the student population.

Figure 7 illustrates the opposition to these demonstrations amongst survey respondents.

TABLE 8: Properties of respondents regarding university students' demonstrations

Properties		Strongly Support	Support	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Do not know
Gender	Male	2%	5.8%	23.9%	63.5%	4.9%
	Female	2.6%	3.7%	24.9%	64.2%	4.6%
Education	Below average	2.4%	2.5%	26.4%	62.3%	6.2%
	Intermediate/upper intermediate	1.9%	5.5%	23.8%	65.1%	3.7%
	University or higher	3%	11.3%	18%	66.2%	1.5%
Age	18 – 29	1.4%	8.9%	28.9%	54.4%	6.4%
	30 - 49	2.2%	4.2%	24.7%	63.6%	5.4%
	50 or higher	3.6%	1.5%	19.6%	73.1%	2.2%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	2.1%	3.8%	24.2%	64.0%	5.9%
	Middle level	2.4%	5.3%	23.9%	65.4%	3.1%
	Highest level	2.4%	8.0%	19.3%	69.1%	1.2%
Residence	Urban	2.3%	6.1%	22.4%	65.2%	4%
	Rural	2.5%	3.4%	26.1%	62.7%	5.4%
TOTAL	Percentage	2.3%	4.7%	24.4%	63.8%	4.7%
	Count	47	94	485	1269	94

13 Amnesty International, *Egypt: Security forces use excessive force to crush student protests*, (2014: October 17), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/egypt-security-forces-use-excessive-force-crush-student-protests-2014-10-17>

Upon further cross-tabulation, we observe that opposition to these kinds of acts on university campuses increases with age. Whereas the main support lies in the age bracket of the university population, youth under 30 years of age, 64% of the respondents of ages between 30 – 49 years of age, and 73% of the respondents who are 50 or older reported that they strongly oppose these demonstrations.

V. The relation between political participation and democracy

Central to the concept of participative democracy is the notion that engagement in political affairs can influence government policies. The right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, and to stand for or vote in elections are a core element of democracy. Additionally, the freedom of political debate, along with freedom of association and assembly are two of the vital concepts of democracy.¹⁴

Furthermore, the level of political engagement and the willingness of a ruling authority to tolerate opposition and dissent are indicative of its legitimacy. Citizen participation indicates a sense of collective responsibility and civic duty that are associated with consolidated and stable democracies. **A sustainable democracy should not only respect the basic right of political participation, but should ideally provide channels for such means and encourage citizen involvement in the political process.**¹⁵

5.1 Egyptians' perception of the effectiveness of the political participation

Robert Dahl defines four basic criteria for an effective democracy: public control of the political agenda, enlightened understanding of policies, effective participation and voting

¹⁴Meyer-Resende, M. (2011). *International Consensus: Essential elements of democracy* (p. 15). Berlin: Democracy Reporting International.

¹⁵Maki, *Decentralization and Political Participation: Argentina and Chile in Comparative Perspective*, 24.

equality.¹⁶ Of most interest to this study, effective participation requires that during the decision making process, citizens must be given adequate and equal opportunity to form preferences on each topic and make others aware of them. Voting equality refers to final part of the decision making process in which citizens must be guaranteed an equal opportunity to vote with the assurance that his or her vote will be given equal weight.¹⁷

It follows that without the existence of real and effective political participation, the process of democratization is not complete. After the uprising 25th of January of 2011, Egyptians started to realize that political participation is a vital element of an inclusive and representative process of political transition. The survey reflects this in the increased levels of citizen engagement with both formal and informal means of political participation over the last four years. It is also reflected by the 80% of survey respondents who agree that political participation is a necessity for Egypt’s democratization process, compared to a mere 4% of respondents who do not believe that political engagement is important to create more democracy in Egypt.

Table 10: Egyptians’ perception of the necessity of political participation for the democratization process.

Properties		Very Necessary	Necessary	Not Necessary	Not Necessary at all	Don’t Know
Gender	Male	64.9%	19%	1.8%	1.7%	12.4%
	Female	58.5%	18.2%	2.3%	3%	18%
Education	Below average	52.9%	18.1%	2.1%	3.4%	23.5%
	Intermediate/upper intermediate					8.2%

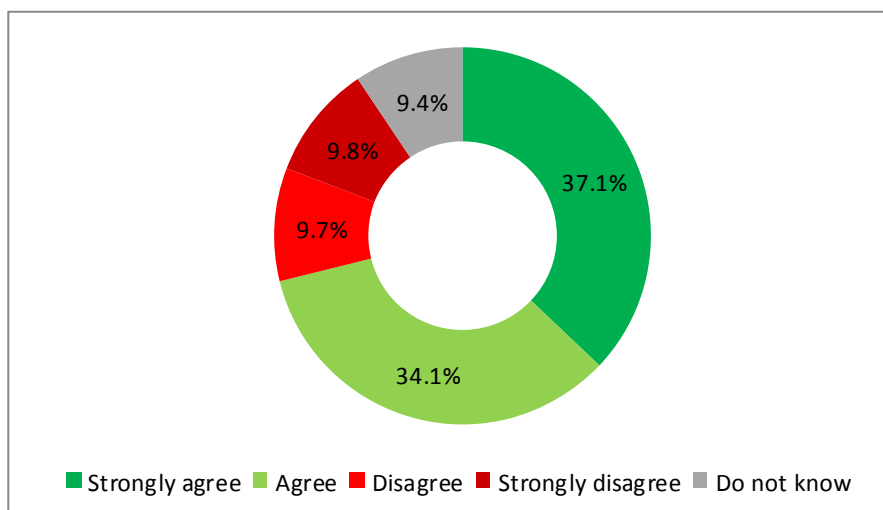
¹⁶ Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, London: Yale University Press, 1998.

¹⁷ Reza Shoughi, *The essential elements of democracy*, (Gozaar: 2009), <http://www.gozaar.org/english/articles-en/The-Essential-Elements-of-Democracy.html>

	University or higher	68.9%	19.9%	1.8%	1.2%	3.1%
		75.8%	17.3%	2.7%	1.2%	
Age	18 – 29	63.9%	22%	1.5%	3%	9.6%
	30 - 49	61.1%	17.9%	3.2%	3%	14.8%
	50 or higher	60.3%	16.3%	1.4%	0.7%	21.2%
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	58.4%	16%	2.4%	3.4%	19.8%
	Middle level	64.3%	24.7%	1.7%	0.9%	8.5%
	Highest level	76.1%	15.1%	2%	1.6%	5.2%
Residence	Urban	66.1%	19%	1.8%	2%	11.2%
	Rural	57.7%	18.3%	2.4%	2.6%	19%
TOTAL	Percentage	61.6%	18.6%	2.1%	23%	15.3%
	Count	1174	354	40	44	291

When asked about the space for political participation available to citizens in Egypt, the majority (71%) of respondents believe that the current regime under El-Sisi gives people sufficient space to freely express their opinions on political issues. Nevertheless, a fifth of respondents claim this is not the case.. *Figure 8* illustrates the degree to which respondents agree that the current regime allows people to express their opinion on political issues freely.

Figure 8: Egyptians' opinion about the space for political engagement allowed by the current regime



As can be observed in the following breakdown of respondent perceptions by characteristics (Table 11), the **age group least likely to agree that the regime provides sufficient space to freely express political opinions is youth.**

Table 11: Egyptians' perceptions of space for political participation under the current regime

Properties		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Gender	Male	37.5%	32.7%	11%	11.3%	7.5%
	Female	36.7%	35.2%	8.5%	8.5%	11.1%
Education	Below average	39.5%	30.6%	8%	9.1%	12.8%
	Intermediate/upper intermediate	35.6%	37.9%	10.8%	10%	5.7%
	University or higher	31.3%	37.8%	13.7%	11.8%	5.3%
Age	18 – 29	29.3%	36.9%	16%	12.3%	5.5%
	30 - 49	38.9%	30.1%	9.1%	11.3%	10.7%
	50 or higher	41.9%	36.8%	4.7%	5.4%	11.2%

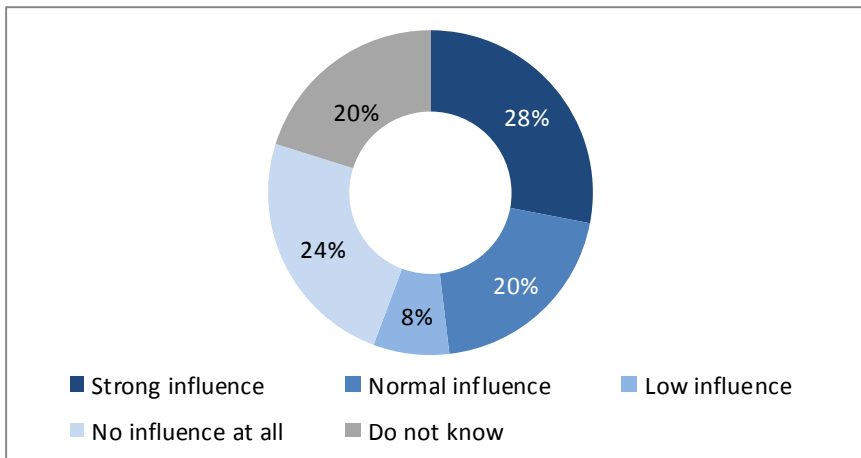
Socio-economic level	Lowest level	40.9%	30.1%	6.4%	10.7%	12%
	Middle level	34.5%	36.3%	14.5%	8.6%	6.1%
	Highest level	38.2%	35.7%	9.2%	12%	4.8%
Residence	Urban	36.7%	34.7%	10%	10.7%	7.9%
	Rural	37.4%	33.4%	9.5%	9.1%	10.5%
TOTAL	Percentage	37.1%	34.1%	9.7%	9.8%	9.4%
	Count	734	675	192	194	185

Compared to under Mubarak's regime, particularly in the last 3 years pre-revolution, 70% of respondents agree that there is more room for political participation now, while 16% disagree.

Interestingly, if we consider different income brackets or social classes amongst respondents, the survey reveals that 79% of Egyptians at the highest socio-economic level agree that there is more space for political participation now compared to Mubarak's era, and 75% of the middle socio-economic level have the same opinion, whereas only 66% the lowest level believe as such.

Finally survey respondents were asked about the effectiveness and potential influence of political participation in the decision making process in Egypt. *Figure 9* shows that whilst just over half of Egyptians see that the current state of political engagement in Egypt can influence government policies **and decisions to different degrees. Slightly under a quarter of respondents (24%) believe that it has no influence at all.**

Figure 9: Egyptians' perception of the effectiveness of political participation



In short, **the broad consensus that there is more space for political engagement than under Mubarak does not seem to translate into optimism that this engagement will necessarily influence the decision making process.** Yet undoubtedly the majority of Egyptians recognize that political participation is necessary in Egypt now in its transitional period to establish a new democratic atmosphere.

VI. Discrimination in political participation

One of the consequences of Mubarak's ouster in 2011 was the subsequent dissolution of his National Democratic Party (NDP) and a ban on former party officials from the political arena. In 2012 during Morsi's rule, the Egyptian parliament proposed a law to exclude all political tycoons of the former regime from political life.¹⁸ Although this law was not applied as the Higher Constitutional Court ruled it void, many members of the Egyptian public were

¹⁸This law includes the president, anyone who acted as his vice-president, anyone who was a prime minister, previous presidents and secretariat generals of the NDP during the past ten years, along with any member in the NDP's political office. *The Egyptian Constitutional Court takes a decision regarding the law of political isolation*, (BBC: June, 6 2012), http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2012/06/120606_egypt_law.shtml

convinced that anyone affiliated with the NDP or Mubarak's regime should be prevented from returning to the political arena. This is looking increasingly unlikely given court rulings since then.¹⁹

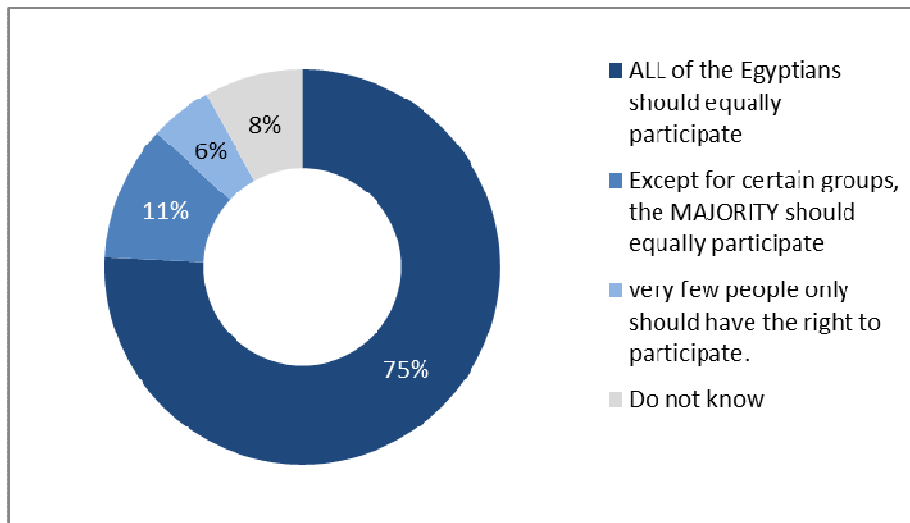
Another party subject to pressures of exclusion from the political process, particularly Morsi's ouster, is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), declared a terrorist organisation at the end of 2014. Fierce media campaigns against the MB and their affiliates have accused them of being behind the vast majority of terrorist attacks in Egypt.

In contrast to the exclusionary and incendiary narrative peddled by state and privately owned media, our poll found that **amongst citizens there is broad based support for an inclusive political process**. According to the results of the survey, the majority of Egyptians (75%) believe that, regardless of gender, social level, religion or political affiliation every citizen should enjoy the equal right to participate in political life without any kind of discrimination.²⁰ Only 11% of respondents find it justifiable to exclude certain groups from politics and a mere 6% claim that very few people should have the right to have a say in the political course of the country.

¹⁹ Egypt lifts ban on Mubarak party officials from running for Parliament, Al-Akhbar English, 14 July 2014, available at <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/20736>

²⁰ It is worth noting here that other Baseera polls have found that the wording of the question influences the respondent's answer. When asked directly whether the religious parties should be allowed to take part in the upcoming Parliamentary elections for instance, 47% are likely to answer unfavourably. Available at http://www.baseera.com.eg/pdf_poll_file_en/participation%20in%20parliamentary%20elections-%20En.pdf

Figure 10: Egyptian's opinion on political exclusion



If we take the minority of respondents who favour the exclusion of certain groups, 7% would exclude the Muslim Brotherhood, 3% would exclude Salafi groups and 0.5% would exclude members of Mubarak's former NDP.

6.1 Gender roles in political participation:

Egyptian women have long suffered from discrimination in many respects, and constantly battle a number of obstacles, both in everyday life and all the more so to gain the right to participate in political circles. In late 2013, Thomson Reuters carried out a poll that ranked Egypt as the worst country for women's rights among the 22 Arab League states.²¹ On a political level, the poll examined amongst other issues women's civil representation and presence in high public positions. In Egypt's 2011 parliamentary elections for instance, only six women were elected (equivalent to 2% of total seats) to represent the 49% of women in the country's population. Furthermore, according to the World Economic Forum's 2014 Gender

²¹Reuters, Poll: Women's rights in the Arab world (<http://www.trust.org/spotlight/poll-womens-rights-in-the-arab-world/> November 2013).

Gap Report, Egypt ranks 129th out of 144 countries in terms of measuring discrimination between the two genders.²²

With regards to formal means of political engagement, Baseera's survey shows that the gender gap in voter turnout for elections and referendums before 2011 was significant (as illustrated in previous tables). Over the past four years since then however, this gap has narrowed to the extent that male and female voter turnout became almost equal.

With regards to informal means of political participation, women's participation was significantly less than that of men during the revolution of January 2011. The findings reveal that 29% of women did not participate in demonstrations or protests because of security concerns or because their families did not allow them to, compared to a mere 4% of male respondents who cited the same reason. Furthermore, women suffered acts of sexual assault and harassment in many protests and demonstrations. The fact that so few, if any, of the perpetrators of these acts have since been brought to justice has led critics to claim that the threat of sexual assault is a weapon in itself used to silence women and discourage them from active participation in political life.²³ In 2013, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women published a report showing that 99.3% of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment, an appallingly high figure.²⁴

Despite both national and international reports showing that Egyptian women suffer from discrimination of one form or another, **83% of respondents in this particular Baseera survey**

²²The Global Gender Gap Report 2014, World Economic Forum (available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CompleteReport_2014.pdf)

²³*Egyptian women's status report in 2013*, (Egyptian Center for Women's rights: March 26, 2014), <http://ecwronline.org/?p=4578>

²⁴Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in Egypt, UN Women, Harass Map (available at http://harassmap.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/287_Summaryreport_eng_low-1.pdf)

support the statement that women should have the same right as men to run as candidates in parliamentary elections. Even more noteworthy, the percentage of men who agree that women should enjoy this right is almost as high as that of women (81% and 85% respectively).

In order to support women and to guarantee their representation at the political level, some governments across the world now enforce a quota policy. Quotas for women refer to a concept of gender equality which is based on the “equality of results” instead of “equal opportunity” or “competitive equality”.²⁵ It is argued that the classical concept of equality that depends predominantly on removing formal barriers and leaving the rest up to the individual is not sufficient and does not guarantee real equal opportunities for women. Hence, some governments consider the argument for introducing compensatory measures as a means of attaining “equality of results” and guaranteeing women’s political participation or representation.

For Egypt’s upcoming parliamentary elections, the elections law states that women should occupy 56 of the available 600 seats, besides 14 other seats reserved for women who will be selected by the president.²⁶ This amounts to a quota of almost 12% which can be considered a significant improvement on the mere 2% of female representation in the 2011 parliament where quotas were not in place.

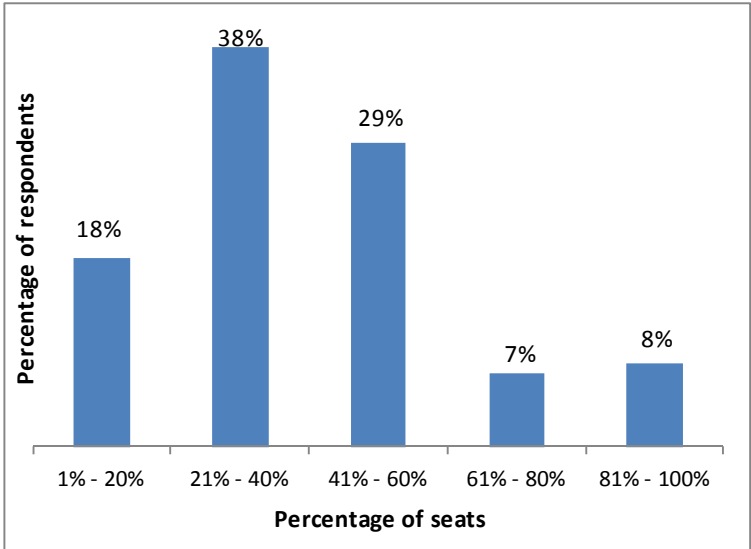
Yet once again, **the official figures do not match up with citizen perceptions.** The Baseera poll found that **71% of Egyptians believe there should be a quota reserved for women in Parliament.** From those who responded favourably, *Figure 11* shows that 38%

²⁵Drude Dahlerup, *Increasing women’s political representation: New trends in gender quotas* (International IDEA: 2002) 144-145.

²⁶Safaa Fathy, 100 seats for women in the parliament...a dream, would it be achieved in 2015 (Alahram: 2014, December 25), <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/350366.aspx>

suggest this percentage should be between 21% - 40% of seats, followed by almost 30% who believe the quota should be set at 41 – 60% of seats.

Figure 11: Egyptians' opinion about women's quota in the next parliament



It could also be argued that introducing quotas is not a sufficient solution to end discrimination in a society where cultural and social norms have long dictated otherwise. Some analysts take the argument to the other extreme and claim that quotas are not truly democratic because they favour women over men and voters should be completely free to elect whoever they want.²⁷ Nevertheless, for now quotas remain a necessity in many cases such as Egypt where the real problem is that many people are still not convinced that women can represent them or be successful politicians.

²⁷Dahlerup, *Increasing women's political representation: New trends in gender quotas*, 144

VII. Conclusion:

Political participation is one of the main characteristics of a democratic regime, and Egypt has been suffering from a lack of a real political engagement for decades. Political participation has different definitions which have evolved with time, social context, and technology. This paper set out the conceptual framework for classifying political participation into formal and informal means of engagement. It presented a selection of activities that Egyptians identify as political participation and the ones they engage in the most. It also showcased significant changes that have taken place before and since Mubarak with regards to Egyptians' perceptions and practice of political participation.

To conclude, this study finds that Egyptians identify with formal means of political participation more readily than informal means. Among those activities defined as formal, the greatest degree of support is for participation through voting in elections or referendums, followed by running for official political positions. Moreover, these two activities are also seen as the most effective in terms of achieving political change. The activities which are least likely to be considered as forms of political participation by respondents include adopting violent actions against the government, participating in demonstrations, and sit-ins or other acts of civil disobedience.

Citizens are more likely to engage with formal acts of political participation than informal acts. With regards to voting in elections and referendums, whereas only 37% of Egyptians exercised their right to vote in elections or referendums before 2011, this percentage has significantly increased since the revolution to reach 83% over the past four years.

This reluctance to engage in informal acts of political participation is evident in the lack of support for acts of civil disobedience such as demonstrations at university campuses. On the other hand, the willingness to engage via formal channels can be seen in the intention of the majority of respondents to vote in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Further, the results of our survey revealed that the most common reason among Egyptians who never voted in any events was that they did not have a valid national ID.

Participation in informal activities, whilst on the whole lower than engagement via formal channels, has increased over the past four years. The highest percentage of political participation through demonstrations and protests in Egypt was during Mohamed Morsi's government until Adly Mansour came into power as interim president. Since then however, the degree of participation in demonstrations and protests has decreased. The survey shows that the most common reason why the majority of Egyptians did not participate in demonstrations and protests is that they are against all forms of protests and demonstrations. In addition, the results show that men's political participation has been generally higher than women's on both formal and informal levels.

The majority of respondents claim that the incumbent regime of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi allows citizens sufficient space for political engagement, and that this space is greater than under Mubarak. Finally, three quarters of citizens believe that political participation is necessary to establish democracy in Egypt, and more than half of respondents expect Egyptian citizens to participate to a greater degree than four years from now.