

[Anthropology 495: Senior Seminar, Cairo Cultures  
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# [Political Participation in Cairo after the January 2011 Revolution]

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank and express my appreciation to those who helped me in developing this research paper. Even though they wished to remain anonymous, I thank the Egyptian citizens who helped me gather the information needed. Moreover, I have great appreciation for all of the citizens who are actively participating in Egypt to make it a better place by voting in the constitutional referendum, standing in the peaceful protests and are holding awareness campaigns to show people the rights they have as citizens of Egypt.

## **Executive Summary**

As part of the Cairo Cultures Anthropology course at the American University in Cairo (AUC), the aim of this research paper was concerned with political participation in the larger Cairo community. This course basically provides a background of the various cultures within Cairo, and how it came to be one of the most-known cities in the Middle East; in addition to that, Cairo is also viewed as a cultural center for the region. The concept of this project is to understand the history of political participation in Cairo. However, the focus is on how, after the events of January 25, 2011, the Egyptian citizens might have a different attitude towards politics and taking part in it as a whole.

The idea behind this topic came about simply because of the constant, and slightly, sudden changes which have been occurring in Egypt as a whole. The uprising on January 25 brought about serious attention to the Egyptian nation and the whole world was closely monitoring the events and the people who took part in the peaceful protest. Egypt, once again, was recognized because of its people and what their capabilities are; all eyes were on Egypt. With the difficulties that took place in the revolution, it is very important to understand that the key trigger for what happened was the fact that people were being very passive about the corruption and fraud that overwhelmed the country. People, especially the youth of the nation, did not want to be mere observers of how their country can fall into ruins thus the uprising took place. The concern though, which the research paper looks at, is whether or not the youth of the revolution will continue in this progression of participation in politics or will they simply stand aside now and watch as things simply fall into place.

This research paper is based on gathering information from different sources in addition to interacting with the people and receiving primary based information. The information gathered from people was in survey and interview methods. The survey method was helpful as it was used for students in AUC and through social networking while the interviews (which were based on the survey questions) were used in while talking to regular citizens. These two methods were used since distributing surveys is not quite preferable in Egypt as it might be illegal. Such techniques of collecting data were used since, as they seemed to be the most efficient in terms of understanding more about the people's interaction with the events and news going on in Cairo, and Egypt altogether. Overall, there were about 150 people who participated in the research.

## **Introduction**

Protests, in not only Cairo but also all around Egypt, started on Tuesday, January 25 after the inspirational, and successful revolution, which took place earlier in Tunisia (Park para. 3). Thousands upon thousands of people began heading to the main streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and other major cities in Egypt protesting against the things which they have been living with for the past three decades; poverty, unemployment, government corruption and the authoritarian, dictator rule of Hosni Mubarak. The protest was one that was by the people, mostly the youth, and it quickly spread throughout the nation with the usage of modern social networking devices such as Facebook and Twitter.

Three days later, the Egyptian government blocked sources of communication such as that of the mobile networks and internet usage. This only brought about more rage and it increased national attention to the uprising, unlike what the government had hoped for (Park para. 4). On the same day, the Egyptian police forces headed to the streets arresting and injuring citizens with the constant usage of batons, tear gas, and water cannons. This simply caused clashes between the peaceful protestors and the police forces who were using violence and force in order to contain the protests. This was also the day in which the largest protest was planned; even though “the government took the unprecedented step of blocking the internet services” throughout the country, that did not stop people from joining the protests in Tahrir Square in Downtown Cairo (para. 7).

On that same day, Mubarak finally appeared on state television, after a six-hour waiting period, to announce that he will be dismissing the government, which will enable him to create an entirely new one. With that in mind, he praised himself for being an Egyptian and continued by saying that he would not resign. That did not help or even calm down the people around the country or those who were in the streets protesting as they were constantly chanting “down with Mubarak” or “down with the regime”.

It was only a couple of days later when the police forces completely disappeared from the Tahrir square scenes and all over the country. At exactly that same time period, an allegedly ‘mysterious’ escaping of thousands of prisoners took place. This brought about chaos as it led to attacks, robberies and a few cases of rape. This was seen as one of the most unbalanced situations in the events as the citizens were trying to bring about peace amongst each other and form checkpoints in order to maintain safety and security throughout all neighbourhoods from any prisoner attacks.

Finally, the military was called in to take over security and the protestors and citizens welcomed them, as they seem to hold a higher regard to the population in comparison to the police. The military forces took needed measures to secure the cities and capture some escaping prisoners with the cooperation of the civilians. Even though the military is respected in Egypt, people did not stick to the curfews, which were set; this was one of the ways to show their dissatisfaction with the ruling of the country and how frustrated everything has become. It was seen as a way to speak up; it was all part of the protesting techniques used by the Egyptians throughout the country.

As to start solving problems, which lead to the occurrence of the revolution, the state had agreed to make constitutional changes. These amendments included altering articles 75, 76, 77, 88, 93, 139 and 148 of the 1973 constitution while taking out article 179. Furthermore, an addition of article number 189 consisting of two parts, 189 and 189A.

After the government proposed these changes to the Egyptian population, there was a referendum. The referendum place on March 19, 2011 and the people voted yes or no regarding if they were satisfied with the articles which have been change, eliminated and added to the constitution. The importance of the constitutional referendum for the research paper is that it provides a brief idea of how people perceive political participation and if they are willing to take part in it.

Some articles were of good use in forming an idea of political participation in Egypt and how it could have been raised as one of the changes, which was as a result of the revolution. For example, in one article, the author mentioned that it is natural that the people's response is likely to change or alternate according to their environment (Kuppinger 352). As a result, there are underlying modifications to the behavior of the citizen's political participation because globalization can also increase political awareness (353). The Egyptian population was exposed to globalization and the world outside; from that point forth, the Egyptians were able to take part in demanding a change. While could fit in Kuppinger's argument that globalization can, in fact, influence people's decision especially since globalization has been spreading throughout the Middle East and North African region (360).

In another article, the author provides an inside look of the formation of the Wafd party, an opposition political party to the National Democratic Party (NDP). In addition, the members constantly tried to raise awareness among people to show that the NDP was not legitimate and did not strive for a better communal good (Hinnebusch 84). This can be seen as one of the ways in which the Egyptian citizens became more aware of political participation and having to go out to the streets and form the peaceful protests.

It was only in the 1950s, that political participation in Egypt was a symbol used as a force of freedom when the colonizers finally fled Egyptian soil (Abdel Halim para. 4). Later on, the participation decreased mainly due to economic and political factors but there were also cultural and historical traditions which played a role (para. 6). Furthermore, the lack of participation was due to that concept that Egypt has not been exposed to popular examples of modern democratic participation, even for the everyday life of the majority of the population. The author continues by mentioning that essential adjustments in the legislative framework and improvement in the strategies in the government should change, such as the transformation of the economic situation as well as transparency between the government and its people, and then there would be a possibility of trust between the governmental institutions and the people (para. 10). Only then will there be political participation. With these adjustments being said, the uprising and protests of early 2011 show that most of these changes will be taking place in the future, if not already.

## **Methods and procedures**

The research paper was to gather information from different sources to understand more about the political participation in Cairo, especially after the occurrences in January 2011. Since there was the aim of trying to understand the spectrum of political participation in Cairo, different people of different classes took part in the research; which meant that the research was mostly consisting of the quantitative approach since having a large constituency would make it easier to rely on the data. The surveys and interviews were also quite reliable as they were used as a means to generalize the data collected from the people. In addition, the surveys were built in order to gain information about then people's past experiences with political participation as to comprehend if there has been any sort of change.

In order to construct the survey, there was first a brief analysis and observation of political participation in Cairo since it was visible that a large number of people were not political active or even concerned with the politics of their own country. The main idea of gathering the information was based upon having the surveys distributed among the students in AUC as they are within the age range (from 18 to 30) for the research paper. The problem here was that the data collected simply from AUC students would not represent or allow the research to generalize on to the Cairene population. For this exact reason, the method of interview was used to talk to people of Cairo. Surveys could not be administered to them as the Egyptian law prohibits this type of research in public places without any governmental approval, which ultimately limited the options for the research. The interviews simply had the

same questions as those of the survey thus there was not any major change or damage which could have been done to the research over all.

The surveys, which were given out to the students of AUC, were in English; the students were mainly from those of a familiar social network. A draft of the survey was distributed to some people at first to make certain that the surveys were clear and simply to understand and complete.

The interviews on the other hand had to be in Arabic in order to be able to talk to a larger group of people, as it is also the most convenient and effective was to gather information in Cairo. Constructing the interview questions was only achieved after having a final draft of the survey questions. The interview questions were revised to make sure that the translating will allow the people to answer without hesitation and comfortably, thus making the interview informal.

The selected population was that of any socio-economic class in Cairo but the requirement is that they be within the ages of 18 to 30. Those who took the surveys and interviews represented a very diverse sample of the Cairo community as people live in Zamalek, Heliopolis, Maadi, Downtown Cairo, Imbaba, Shobra and other places. There was about a total of 150 surveys and interviews (100 surveys and 50 interviews).

## Description of the survey and interviews

There were several objectives or issues which the survey and interviews were designed to meet. The first aim behind the questions asked was to find out whether or not the individual had participated in the constitutional referendum on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The question of whether or not the individuals politically participated in the protests during January and February was not asked since the research paper is only concerned political participation after the protests and the step down of Mubarak. Hence, the question of if the person took part in the constitutional referendum is essential to understand the general concern and involvement in the political sphere of Egypt as a whole after the events of January. Especially since this was one of the official occasions, in which the population could have freely participated in order to share their opinion and votes.

The latter questions were concerned with whether or not the individual was satisfied with the outcome and if the person feels like his vote made a difference. These questions provide an insight of what the people think of the aftermath of the referendum regardless of whether they voted.

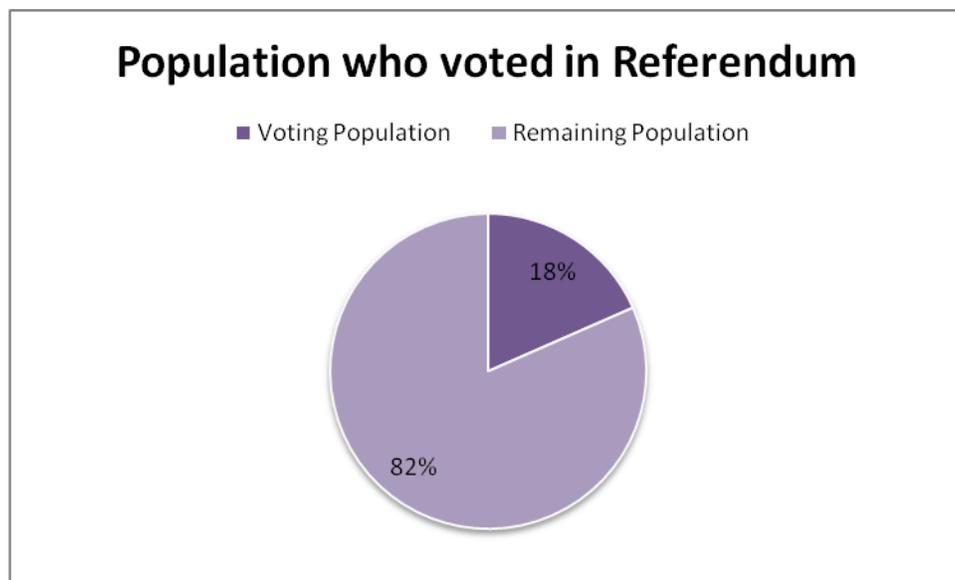
After these questions there was a question regarding if the individual had a voting card before the events of January 2011; this question was asked in order to understand if someone was politically active, in regards to voting, before the events, which took place. This is important as it is a tool used in order to gather information on the before and after political participation of the people.

Finally, there were questions concerning the parliamentary and presidential elections, which should take place within a year, if the individuals will vote in the elections in order to view their opinion in regards to the political changes, and affairs that could occur.

## Results and Analysis

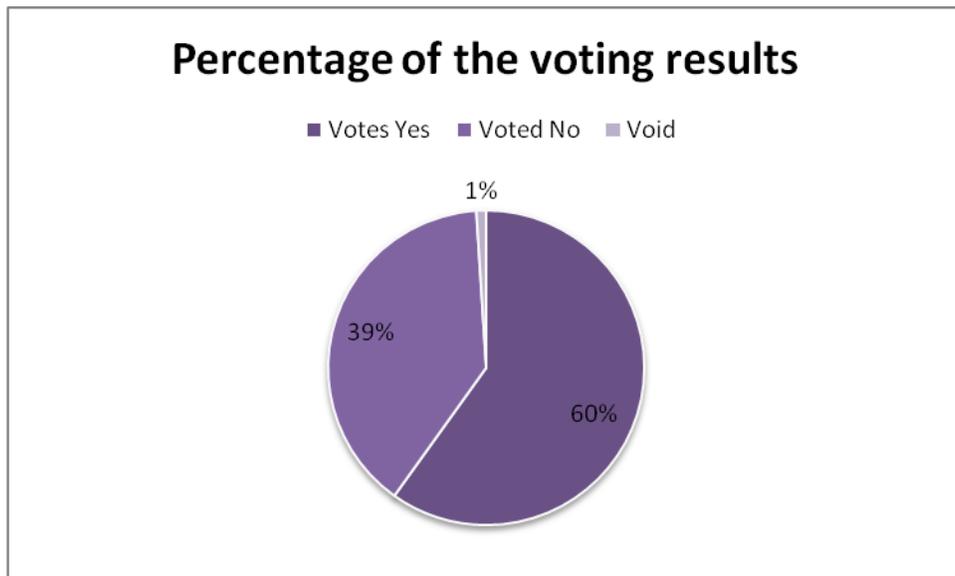
### Results of Constitutional Referendum

*Figure 1* shows the population of those who took part in the constitutional referendum on 19 March 2011 in comparison to those who did not vote. As it is visible, the majority of the Egyptian population did not vote in the referendum but it is a large population in comparison to how people did not vote or participate in the past due to the high percentage of rigging the votes. 18,537,954 million people constitute the 18% of the people who went to vote, including those whose voted were void; this leaves 63,541,682 million people who did not vote (“Referendum Results” para. 1).



*Figure 1*

On the other hand, *Figure 2* shows the constitutional referendum results of the capital city of Egypt, Cairo as this is the city of which the research paper focuses on for a large part. The majority of those who voted in the Cairo (60% which were 1,381,738 people), voted that they were satisfied with the constitutional changes, which leaves 39% (901,625 people) who voted that the constitutional amendments were not enough or concise (para. 1). The remaining 1% constitutes about 23,198 voted which were void hence they did not count (para. 1).



*Figure 2*

### Results of the research paper

In *Figure 3*, the results of the first question of the surveys and interviews are available. As seen, most of those who participated in the research were ones who actually voted in the constitutional referendum, 130 people. Most of those who voted in the referendum did so since they finally felt like their opinion mattered and that they have a say in the construction of the government and the regime. On the other hand, 20 people who did not vote in the

referendum and it was mostly because they did not feel that their vote would make a difference in the outcome and results of the constitutional referendum.

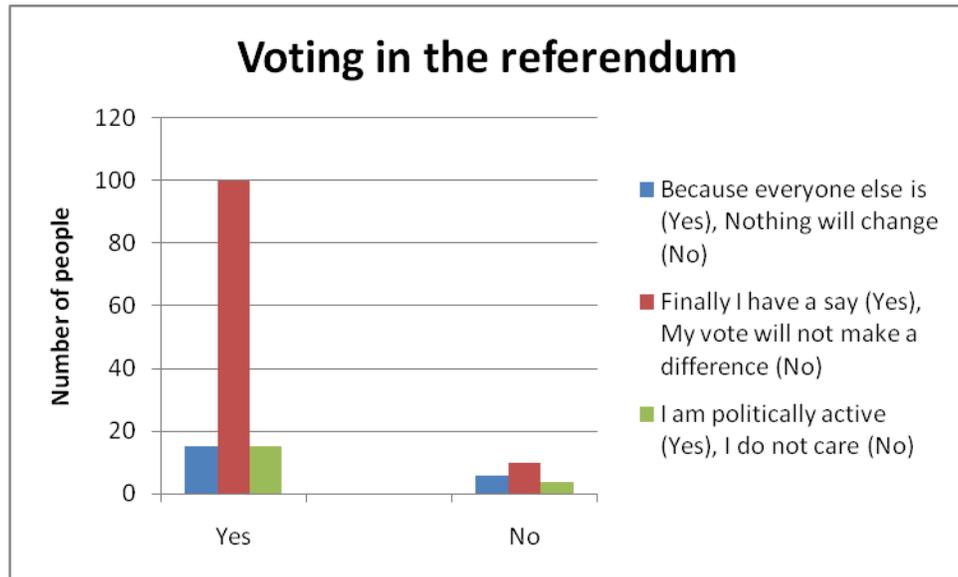


Figure 3

There was also a great gap between those who were satisfied with the outcome of the constitutional referendum. From the research, using the surveys and interviews, 32 people were satisfied with the result of the referendum while 98 people were dissatisfied. Such outcome from the research shows how people's opinions are different. Another question, which is relevant to knowing people's satisfaction with the outcome, is concerned with if they feel like their vote actually made a difference. Out of the 150 people who took part, 96 said that they feel that their vote made a difference, 34 disagreed while there were 20 who did not vote in the first place.

Another question was whether the referendum was organized. This question was necessary since if there was a lack of organization that could possibly be a discouragement for people to vote or even take part in political participation, which involves interacting with the government. While most of the people mentioned that the referendum was organized, 119 people, others said that it was not, 11 people; the remaining people were those who did not vote in to begin with.

With a very large number of people who went to take part in the constitutional referendum, it was essential to ask if they had issued a voting card before the events of January 25. The importance of this question is to identify if people were actually politically active before the turn of events earlier in the year. A total of 144 people said that they did not have a voting card while six said that they did. This could be used as a tool to show that the people did not pay much attention to political participation beforehand as they did not vote in previous parliamentary and/ or presidential elections.

Another question was concerned with if they will vote in future elections whether it be the parliamentary elections or the presidential elections. In regards to the parliamentary elections, 128 said that they would vote, eight said they would not, while 14 were unsure. On the other hand, 130 people said that they would vote in the presidential elections which 20 were uncertain; it is important to point out that none of those who took part in the research said that they would not vote in the presidential elections. To some extent, this portrays how they want to be active in politics.

## Conclusion

The survey and interviews had a total of 150 people who participated; they were of different socio-economic statuses in order to have a diverse view which could represent the Cairo community. The majority of the population, in fact, voted in the constitutional referendum and is planning to vote in future elections. In addition, according to the results as a whole, it would be fair to say that most of the people in Cairo will be actively participation in politics, at least by using their voting rights.

By referring to the actual results of the constitutional referendum, it is clear that a large number of people, unlike the usual or expected, had participated in the voting process. A sum of 18,537,954 million people took part and in comparison to the entire population, this could be seen as a small percentage of the society. In terms of political participation though, those who voted stand out, as people in Egypt did not necessarily take part in politics.

The results of the research paper, on the other hand, provide enough information to say that those people were not politically active in Cairo. This sudden urge to participate and vote in the constitutional referendum was brought about by the changes that had occurred because of the revolution and its aftermath. A clear example of that is the difference between those who did had a voting card, six people, before January 2011 and those who did not, 144 people. If one does not have a voting card, he cannot vote; therefore, he cannot participate in the voting process, whether it is for parliamentary or presidential elections.

It is important to point out that the main reason most of the people voted in the constitutional referendum was because they finally had a say and could easily participate in the voting process. Comparing also the result of those who voted, 130 people, with the number of those who did not have a voting card clearly shows how people are willing now to be politically active and try to bring about change. With the notion of how a revolution is usually concerned with a change to the better and how the negative elements of the regime would be gradually eliminated, simply gives hope to the people that the voting process will not be corrupted or rigged like in previous years.

It is equally essential that the number of those who did not vote, 20 people, is completely different than the number of those who said that they will not vote in the parliamentary elections, only eight people. While on the other hand, no one said that they would not vote in the presidential elections, 130 said that they will vote and 20 were uncertain if they would. The important element here is that even though a group of people did not vote in the constitutional referendum, it does not take away from the fact that more people are likely to vote in upcoming elections.

For further suggestions in a similar research, it would be best if there are more people working on the research to be able to gather more data in order to have it be a more accurate generalization of the Cairo community. In addition, having more people working on the research would help in gathering information in regards to those of an older generation and try to understand their perspectives and points of view about their political participation in the past; this will help in forming a clear image of how political participation has changed

throughout the years. On the other hand, the different methods used, survey and interviews, were very useful to gather the needed data thus they should be used as to reach a larger number of people in the community.

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## Appendix

### Questions for survey and interviews

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you vote?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
3. Why?
  - a. Yes
    - i. Because everyone else is
    - ii. Finally I have a say
    - iii. I am politically active
  - b. No
    - i. Nothing will change
    - ii. My vote will not make a difference
    - iii. I do not care
4. Were you satisfied with the outcome?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. Did you feel like your vote made a difference?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. It does not matter
6. Did you sense that the referendum was organized?
  - a. To some extent
  - b. Not at all
  - c. I did not vote
7. Did you have a voting card before January 25<sup>th</sup>?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. Are you planning to vote in the parliamentary elections?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not sure
9. Are you planning to vote in the presidential elections?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Not sure