Determinants of Political Participation among the Egyptian Public
Findings from the Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008

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I. Introduction

The following narrative is based on an analysis of the worldviews and political participation of the Egyptian public according to a survey conducted in 2008 among 1000 adults 18 years of age and over. The purpose of this paper is twofold: The first is to describe the proposed dimensions that might have shaped the public political participation. These dimensions include their political culture, institutional, and socio-economic characteristics of the individual actors. Variables such as individuals’ migratory experience; sources of their information; degree of marginality; social capital and civic engagement; their political awareness at the local, the regional, and the global levels; and, finally, their future perspectives are considered. Second, the paper will attempt to explain the public’s political participation by using a multiple regression model for assessing the independent effects of the proposed
variables on their political participation. The statistical model will also assess the relative contribution of a set of individual-level attributes such as education, social class, gender, and urban residence. In addition to these individual-level attributes, we will also acknowledge the significance of the contextual variables in explaining the variation in political participation. The effect of these independent variables is expressed through regression coefficients, which state each variable's effect on the dependent variable in Egypt.

II. Scholarly Work on Political Participation

Three competing theories of political participation have been recognized in the literature as the most prominent among social scientists. Liu [2001] made an effort to identify these theories as political, cultural, institutional, and socio-economic approaches.

The political culture approach emphasizes the importance of political value and attitudes on political participation. Scholars in this school believe that political efficacy and political trust affect political participation more than other factors do. These factors have been recognized as behind the worldwide erosion or surge in political participation in the industrial world [Almond and Verba 1963; Brady, Scholzman and Verba 1999; Pippa 1999; Klingeman and Fuchs 1995]. The application of the “political culture model” has guided the empirical research of social scientists to explain as to why individuals become more engaged in political life.

The institutional school brings organizational affiliation into the equation. Scholars in this school have found that affiliation with voluntary association and party affiliation seem consistently to increase political participation [Almond and Verba 1963; Brady, Scholzman and Verba 1999; Bratton 1999]. Engagement in voluntary associations induces political involvement, even if the members of a particular club, league, or society are glued together for strictly non-political reasons [Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Kwak, Shah and Holbert 2004]. Strömblad and Bengtsson [2010], using the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM); proposed by Verba, Schlozman and Brady [1995], have concluded that individual political participation is positively influenced by both endowments and ambitions. In brief, those who have resources that facilitate participation and those who are psychologically motivated to act politically
are expected to be more engaged in political life.

The social structure model takes the socio-economic background as the main factors to explain individuals’ difference in political participation. Research in this area has confirmed that higher income and better education create more politically active citizens [Conway 1991; Nagel 1987; Verba and Nie 1972]. Accordingly, individuals with higher socio-economic status (SES) participate in politics more often than lower SES individuals do. According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady [1995], individuals with higher SES possess various resources like wealth, education, and civic skills that enable them to pay the high costs of political engagement.

Empirical evidence from countries that have stable democratic systems; has enabled researchers to conclude that institutional school is the first, cultural school is the second, and SES is the last in their explanatory power of political participation.

1. Social Capital and Civic Engagement

The concepts that are most prominent in the institutional perspective are social capital, civic engagement, and political party attachment. The concept of social capital has received attention among social scientists to describe the individual benefit derived from the web of social relationships and ties. This web of social relationships will increase their personal access to information and skill sets that will no doubt enhance their feeling of power. In Bowling Alone, Robert Putnam used the concept to refer to “the collective value of all ‘social networks’ and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other”, According to Putnam and his followers, social capital is a key component to building and maintaining democracy [Putnam 2000].

Commenting on the literature on the concept of “social capital”, Francis Fukuyama-points out that there is not an greed definition of social capital, so, he explains it as “shared norms or values that promote social cooperation, instantiated in actual social relationships” [Fukuyama 1995; 1999]. He argues that social capital is a necessary precondition for successful development, but a strong rule of law and basic political institutions are necessary to build social capital. He believes that a strong social capital is necessary for a strong democracy and strong economic growth. Familism is a major problem of trust because it fosters a two-tiered moral system, in which a person must favor the opinions of family members. Fukuyama believes that bridging social capital is essential for a strong social capital, because a broader radius of trust will enable connections across borders of all sorts and serve as a basis for
Social capital, therefore, offers a wealth of resources and networks that facilitate political and civic engagement. The growth of voluntary associations and organizations outside the market and state is viewed by a number of authors as a catalyst for connecting people with each other; building trust and reciprocity through informal, loosely-structured associations; and consolidating society through altruism without obligation [Walzer 1992; Alessandrin 2006; Newtown; 1997].

2. Civic Engagement and Social Trust

Civic engagement has been considered by social scientists as a “socializing” mechanism for learning citizenship and, eventually, trusts by members of the society. According to Edwards and Foley [1998], “organizations teach citizens the civic virtues of trust, moderation, compromise, and reciprocity and the skill of democratic discussion and organization.” Robert Putnam, for whom associational membership is the source of social trust, has concluded that “social trust and civic engagement are strongly correlated; the greater the density of associational membership in a society, the more trusting its citizens. Trust and engagement are two facets of the same underlying factor of social capital” [Putnam 1995: 73]. The positive relationship between civic engagement and social trust has been recently questioned due to the falling levels of civic engagement in the United States from 1960 to the present. This has been viewed as the reason why political participation has also shown a decline in the United States. In “Inequality, Trust, and Civic Engagement,” Eric Uslaner argues that the “rising levels of economic inequality are a key reason why political participation has fallen. But the relationship between inequality and declining participation may not be direct. I offer an alternative explanation: Rising inequality makes people less optimistic for the future, which makes them less trusting of others, and thus less likely to take part in activities that bind them to their communities” [Uslaner 2010].

3. Interest in Politics and Party Attachment

Researchers have found that civic engagement and political party attachment are the variables that possess the most explanatory power. The studies that have dealt with “political culture” have considered that value orientations, such as expressing interest in politics, are the best predictor of an individual’s political participation.
Lack of participation among citizens has been a subject of scholarly debate among political scientists and sociologists. We can conclude that there is a consensus among them to define social exclusion as the process whereby certain groups are pushed to the margins of society and are prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, low education, or inadequate life skills. This will distance them from job, income, and education opportunities as well as from social and community networks [Lessoj and Jowell 2000; Levitas 1999; Duffy 1995].

4. Cross-Cultural Investigation of Political Participation

Cross-cultural researchers have not devoted a great deal of attention to political life, as Tuden and Marshall [1972] pointed out a decade ago. Ethnographers have been the first to acknowledge that politics is seen to involve questions of influence, legitimating, and compliance as well as the exercise of formal authority on the one hand, and naked power on the other. They have tried to answer the question: To what extent are opportunities for political action widespread all over the world?

In a survey of political participation in seven nations: Nigeria, Austria, Japan, India, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, and the United States, Verba, Nie and Kim [1979] examined the relationship between social, economic, and educational factors and political participation. The study provided insight into an ongoing debate among political scientists and sociologists to answer the question: Why is political participation in some nations distributed evenly across economic, social, and educational lines, whereas other nations foster participation only by their privileged classes? Their analysis treats politics not only as a dependent variable influenced by socioeconomic factors, but also as an independent variable that affects levels of political participation through variations in party systems and linkages between parties and other organizations.

In his analysis of voting behavior in countries that can be labeled as “new democracies” such as South Korea and Taiwan, Liu [2001] re-examined the three models of political participations. His results have confirmed that “institutional affiliation exhibits significant effects in both stable and new democracies. However, education outperforms income in stable democracies, and also in all new democracies. Institutional argument outperforms SES in stable democracies, but not in new democracies. In other words, institutional factors are more important in stable democracies than in new democracies. Our results show that cultural factors affect
political participation consistently in both stable and new democracies” [Liu 2001: 9].

III. Political Participation in the Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008

1. Political Participation Behavior

In this section of the paper, we will attempt to provide descriptive statistics covering the political participation among the Egyptian public. To achieve this purpose, we have chosen three variables that reflect both political behavior and orientation by analyzing the following variables:

1. Expression of political interest
2. Voting in previous elections or referendums
3. Political parties’ attachment and preferences

(1) Expression of Political Interest

In order for us to explore the “political culture” that shapes the political life of the Egyptian public, we had to pose the following question: “How much are you interested in political issues, like the new ministerial formation, unemployment, prices, salaries, etc.?” To our surprise, almost 43% of all respondents reported to be either considerably interested or somewhat interested in political issues that deal with everyday life like the new ministerial formation, unemployment, prices, salaries, etc.

(2) Voting in Previous Elections or Referendums

The respondents were asked to indicate as to whether or not they have voted before. “Did you vote in any previous elections or referendums?” The responses that are displayed in Figure 2 below show that more than 38% did so in previous elections. This appears to be logical, given the customarily low turn-out of Egyptian voters that has been established in previous elections in Egypt before.

It is very common to find individuals who are registered voters but publicly admit that they did not vote in the last elections. When one attempts to get an answer from them as to the reasons behind their lack of participation, they admit that their participation would not make any difference.
(3) Political Parties’ Attachment and Preferences

Figure 3 displays the responses to the question: “What type of elections did you vote in before?” It is surprising to see that the Egyptian public appears to be more familiar only with the parliamentarian and the presidential elections, which occur every five years. Figure 3 shows that their representation in these two types of elections are 34.1%, and 27.4%, respectively. The question that comes to mind is that the Egyptian public is still far from embracing real democratic culture. We say so because of the low percentages of voting in other types of elections like referendums.
for the amendment of the constitution, local assembly-council elections, elections of the board of clubs or social organizations, and elections of the board of professional syndicates.

Voting for registered political parties in Egypt was the subject of our next question: “If the parliamentary elections were to take place tomorrow, what political party would you vote for?” As Figure 4 shows, the Egyptian voters are familiar only with the most popular political party in Egypt, namely “El Watany El Democraty” or the National Democratic Party (NDP). As Figure 4 demonstrates, 25.8% of the respondents said they would vote for the NDP, followed by only 3.5% of the public who would vote for the Muslim Brothers, although they are not registered political parties among the 22 licensed parties. Insignificant percentages were reported for the other parties. These parties were not recognized by the masses in both the elections and real political arena.

The following variables have been selected and operationally defined to reflect certain aspects of the three models that have been cited above. To reflect variables that are associated with the political cultural dimension, we selected soliciting information from the mass media rather than from family and friends, advocating human rights’ principles, believing in the right of the masses to have a share in the decision-making process, viewing corruption as a serious problem, political awareness, and possessing positive attitudes towards the future. Variables related to institutional
Figure 4: If the Parliamentary Elections Were to Take Place Tomorrow, What Political Party Would You Vote for?

!![Figure 4](image)

(Source) The Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008 data.

and organizational dimension were measured by social capital, civic engagement, and political party attachment. Variables that reflect the social-economic model were measured by social class, gender, higher education, and urban residence.

2. Soliciting Information from the Mass Media

There has been a debate among social scientists and practitioners concerning how mass media affect the political attitudes of the citizens in the society. Few would argue that the institutions of the mass media are important to contemporary politics. Democratic politics places emphasis on the mass media as a site for democratic demand that helps in the formation of public opinion. Yet, the media are not just neutral observers but are also political actors themselves. The interaction of mass communication and political actors, politicians, interest groups, strategists, and others who play important roles in the political process is apparent. Nobody can deny that mass media elements contribute to the shaping of the public’s political discourse.

The data presented in Figure 5 do support the long-standing belief of most political scientists who support the contention that the mass media have a profound impact on the political orientation of individuals. One author asserts that few would argue with the notion that the institutions of the mass media are important to
contemporary politics.

The data suggest that forms of visual media represented by TV stations and satellites seem to be deeply embedded and entrenched in the daily routine of the Egyptian public. And that was shown by asking the question: “How many times do you use the following mass media?” The data presented in Figure 6 clearly show that most of the public turns to satellite TV stations in addition to the local stations to get the news on current events. The majority of the Egyptian public, close to 50%, have selected satellite TV stations on both local and Arab stations on a regular basis to solicit the information and the news. Local TV stations have also been selected by almost 39% of those who were interviewed.

One must not forget another interesting fact about the media that can influence and shape the publics’ political and value orientation. These issues can be learned
from readings of local and regional magazine and from listening to radio stations. Programs that deal with popular culture and educational programs can form the publics’ values towards political issues as well. These human value systems, in turn, shape people’s attitude to political issues, influence how they vote, and therefore determine who holds political power.

3. Political Marginalization

In our survey of 2008, a direct question related to participation in the decision-making process was posed to the public as follows: “Regarding real life, to what extent do you think a citizen actually participates in decision making in your community? They participate actively in the decisions; They participate in the decisions only to a small extent; They do not have the right to participate at all in the decisions; DK/NA; Other.” The results to this question are shown in Figure 7, which suggest that there are more than 75% of our samples who perceive themselves as having a small part or no-part at all in the decision-making process.

More than 35% the Egyptian public in our sample do confirm that the people do not have the right to participate in the decision-making process in their community, and 40% see that they participate in the decisions only to a small extent. If this is the
case, why then did 38.2% of the public in the present survey report to have voted in previous elections? The data generally support the contention that the Egyptian public perceive themselves as “marginal” when it comes to participation in the decision-making process.

4. Political and Ideological Awareness

At the National Level: The following question was posed to our respondents: “What is your personal point of view on the following opinions about your country and society? Do you approve very much, much, moderately, not very much, not at all”? Based on their personal experience, the respondents were able to identify the following issues as the most pressing that need public attention:

(1) Family relationships are weakening
(2) Corruption is spreading more and is considered a serious problem
(3) Lack of equal opportunity
(4) The moral is declining
(5) The existence of informal outlets for political expression for fear of oppression
(6) The significance of an active role of women in society
(7) The significance of political stability
We should point out that political awareness is a broad term. For the purpose of this paper, it refers to the individual’s ability to identify and relate to the national, the regional, and the global issues that surround the individual. What our respondents have mentioned above clearly reflects the problems that face them in their daily life. These problems are listed above in order of their degree of intensity. The above problems have surfaced and contributed to the feeling of discontent on the part of the individuals to the extent of threatening the regime stability [Iwasaki 2010]. Other scholars have acknowledged some of the serious problems affecting the declining of morality, the spread of corruption, and the lack of equal opportunities. Some encouraging remarks, however, are made about the new surge of women activism in Egypt.

At the Regional and Global Level: First, a general question was posed to our respondents as follows: “How much do you think the foreign countries should commit in tackling the resolution of the following political issues in the Middle East?” [Conflicts between political groups in Iraq-Conflicts between the political groups in Lebanon-Conflicts between the political groups in Palestine-Conflicts between the political groups in Palestine-Darfur problem in Sudan-Issue of refugees-Issue of...]

(Source) The Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008 data.
displaced persons-Issue of nuclear development in Iran-Terrorist activities-Military intervention or occupation in the Middle Eastern countries]. The responses on this question were coded on a five-point scale: (1) Very Much, (2) Much, (3) Moderately, (4) Not Very Much, (5) Not at all, and (6) DK/NA.

The above issues or problems reflect the major challenges facing the people of the Middle East. Figure 9 shows the percentage of those who have categorically stated that the foreign power should not have anything to do with the regional issues (Not At All). This in itself strongly indicates a high level of political awareness on the part of the Egyptian public who watch day and night what is going on in troubled areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and, above all, Palestine. This answer reflects a high degree of political awareness at least among an average of 25% of the Egyptian sample.

I ideological awareness is a concept that refers to the content of a person’s political values and ideas. An ideology is a well-developed set of views that guides an individual’s thinking on politics. A political ideology provides a worldview that, if well-developed, enables us to interpret and provide order to the world around us.
Figure 10: What Are the Ideological and Political Trends That You Usually Sympathized with?

(Source) The Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008 data.

The responses to the question: “the ideological and political trends that you unusually sympathized with?” were analyzed. The emerging pattern has been identified in several surveys that have been conducted in Egypt and the other Middle Eastern countries. The emerging pattern depicts the influence of religion on the public’s vision of identity. The majority of our respondents identify themselves with Islamism, Egyptian nationalism, and Arabism. Nasserism and Marxism are fading away.

5. Social Capital and Civic Engagement

On a range of indicators of civic engagement including voting, political participation, newspaper readership, and participation in local associations, we need to foster a vibrant civic life that will lead to a strong democracy and strong economic growth according to Fukuyama. However, social capital may also lead to bad outcomes if the political institution and democracy in a specific country are not strong enough and are therefore overpowered by the social capital groups, or by what is known as the “political elite.”

Against the above background, we can see from the data presented in Figure 11 that almost 46% of the Egyptian public neither has participated, nor wants to participate, in civic activities. Only 1.4% of them said they regularly participate in such activities. This in turn explains the very weak participation in the political events...
such as elections or other activities such as demonstrations or oppositions in general.

The results to the following question were presented in Figure 12: “What kind of groups do you belong to currently?” The preference for this civic society’s membership goes mainly to social groups, agricultural groups, charity groups, professional syndicates, and social clubs, in that order. While the membership to these groups might facilitate the lives of its members, it does not add much to the enriching of political life in the community. The picture that has emerged does not confirm to the proceeding generalizations that have been advanced by Edwards and Foley [1998] above. Eric M. Uslane [2010] has attempted to explain the implication of the absence of dynamic civic engagement on political life in society as follows: “Rising inequality makes people less optimistic for the future, which makes them less trusting of others, and thus less likely to take part in activities that bind them to their communities.”

As it was stated before, in the socio-economic model, education and income appeared to be the most dominant factors in explaining variations among citizens when it comes to their political participation. Recently, migratory experience has been
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(Source) The Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008 data.
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6. Effects of Migratory Experience

Migration experience appears to play a crucial role in the shaping of the worldviews and political orientations among the respondents. When the question was posed to them “as to whether or not they have ever lived outside of Egypt for more than 6 months: (1) Yes (2) No (3) DK/NA”, we had 12.3% of the respondents reporting that they have lived outside Egypt for at least an extended period of six months.

In the context of the Egyptian migratory experience, we expect that those who have lived and worked abroad for a period of more than 6 months will develop the political right orientation required for political participation.

But the respondents were further asked to indicate as to “How much would you say that you are interested in living and working abroad?” As Figure 13 shows, more than 35% of them reported that they would like to work and live abroad.

7. Standard of Living and Future Perspectives

For the purpose of the present analysis, we propose that how the individuals feel about their standard of living and their future perspective will affect their political participation.

In general, the results in Figure 14 indicate the pessimistic views of those who were interviewed about their standard of living. Only 12.6% of the respondents felt that their future standard of living would be much better. The results also confirm their ambiguous attitudes toward the future. As part of the respondents’ attitude towards
their standard of living and the quality of life that they enjoy, the following question was posed to our sample: “How do you feel about the quality of life in the area where satisfactory remarks about the quality of life in their areas of residence. Whether this
attitude will leave a positive influence on their political behavior or not is an issue that still needs to be seen.

Figure 16 shows the responses to the question: “Compared with three years
ago, do you believe your present standard of living is,”. The general patterns support the contention that the future holds not very bright conditions. However, when the respondents were asked to compare their present standard of living with the future one in three years from the time of the interview, 30.6% of them felt that their future standard of living would be between slightly or much better than the present one.

The above discussions have dealt with the “social world” in which our respondents live and interact. The effect of this social world will be soon uncovered to assess its contribution in explaining the observed variations among the respondents.

IV. Measurement and Analysis

The foregoing analysis is meant to be descriptive in nature to throw lights on the political environment in which the Egyptian public operates. The impressions that we deduced from the analysis lend support to the general contention that the Egyptian public might be politically apathetic. Given the oppression that is being implemented by the regime to express their political views, we have seen that the Egyptian public resorts to the informal outlets among family members, close friends, and co-workers for fear of such oppression.

As it was advanced at the beginning of the present paper, we will attempt to explain the public’s political participation by using a multiple regression model for assessing the independent effects of the proposed variables on their political participation. The statistical model will also assess the relative contribution of a set of individual-level attributes such as education, social class, political interest, and civic engagement. In addition to these individual-level attributes, investigators have also acknowledged the significance of the contextual variables in explaining the variation in political participation and awareness. The effect of these independent variables is expressed through regression coefficients, which state each variable’s effect on the dependent variable in Egypt.

1. Dependent and Independent Variables
   (1) Measuring the dependent variable

   In the present analysis, the dependent variable “political participation” was treated as a composite index derived from principal component analysis. It includes
three variables that are meant to measure the political participation of the respondents: expression of political interest, voting in previous elections or referendums, and political parties’ attachment and preferences. The “Yes” responses on the proposed three variables were recorded as “1” and all other responses, as “0”. The factor loadings on the three variables have yielded a general factor that can easily be named as “Political Participation” and that explains more than 47% of the total variance. The factor scores on this general factor reflecting the degree of political participation were retained as an index to represent our dependent variable.

(2) Measuring the Independent Variables

As for the proposed independent variables, their selection was theoretically and empirically justified based on the experiences of other nations. The operational definitions and the measurement are as follows:

1. Migratory Experience: as measured by “Yes” responses to the question “Have you ever lived abroad more than six months?”
2. Mass Media as a Source of Information: % of those who rely upon mass media as their source of information;
3. The Right of the Masses to Actively Participate in the Decision-Making Process: % of those who acknowledge the right of the masses to actively participate in the decision making-process;
4. Membership in Human Rights Organizations: % of those who have actively participated in human rights organizations;
5. Corruption as a Serious Problem: % of those who see corruption as a serious problem in the country;
6. Future Positive Outlook: % of those who expressed positive views on their future standard of living;
7. Gender: where male equals 1 and female equals 0;
8. Subjective social class: % of those who see themselves as upper class;
9. Higher Education: % of those who reported to have higher education;
10. Urban Residence: % of those residing in urban residence.

Table 1 shows the inter-correlation coefficients between the political participation index and the independent variables. The results show significant relationship between the dependent variable and most of the proposed independent
### Table 1: Correlation Coefficients between Voting in Elections and Suggested Independent Variables

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Political Participation Index</th>
<th>Migratory Experience</th>
<th>Mass Media Participation in Decision Making</th>
<th>Human Rights Membership</th>
<th>Corruption as a Serious Problem</th>
<th>Future Positive Outlook</th>
<th>Subjective Social Class</th>
<th>Gender (Male)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Future Positive Outlook</td>
<td>P .043</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.129 (**)</td>
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<td>Subjective Social Class</td>
<td>P -.004</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>-.026</td>
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<td>-.002</td>
<td>.079 (**)</td>
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<td>S .889</td>
<td>.116</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (Male)</td>
<td>P .200 (**)</td>
<td>.196 (**)</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>-.028</td>
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<td>.151 (**)</td>
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<td>Urban Residence</td>
<td>P -.222 (**)</td>
<td>-.067 (*)</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.311 (**)</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>-.016</td>
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<td>S .000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>P .063 (*)</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.132 (**)</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.123 (**)</td>
<td>.161 (**)</td>
<td>.121 (**)</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.088 (**)</td>
<td>.225 (**)</td>
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<td>S .047</td>
<td>.982</td>
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(Notes) ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
(P) = Pearson correlation, (S) = Significant, (N) = Number of cases
(Source) The Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008 data.

variables. However, there exist no relationship between social class and future positive outlook. This initial picture generally confirms the observation that the majority of those who are recruited to vote in the Egyptian elections are mainly males, from a rural background, who have worked abroad, and are less educated. Those who usually run for parliamentary elections find in rural residents and the urban poor their prospects for constituents who can be bribed to give their votes.

The other observations that can be derived from the intercorrelation matrix
are rather interesting. The political participation index clearly shows significant correlations with migratory experience, relying upon the mass media, and participation in the decision-making process. The same is also evident among those who are members of human right organization, those who advocate to the view that corruption as a serious problem, males, and rural dwellers.

Given the above observations, are we witnessing an example of political apathy on the part of a majority of the Egyptian public? We believe that the picture that we have drawn to describe the Egyptian public as “apathetic” does contradict with their expression of interest in their belief that individuals have the right to actively participate in the decision-making process. They are simply depressed because of the political situation, feeling marginalized and excluded. The decision of most of the opposing political parties to boycott the second round of the recent elections does confirm our findings that social class does not seem to have any effect on political participation in Egypt.

V. Predicting Political Participation

“Multiple regressions” is the statistical method that we are using for assessing the independent effects of a set of variables on a single dependent variable. The general model is: \( Y = X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + X_4 + X_5 + X_6 + X_7 \), where \( Y \) is the dependent variable and \( X_1 \cdots X_n \) are the suggested independent variables. The effect of the above independent variables is expressed through regression coefficients, which state each variable’s effect on the dependent variable among the Egyptian public. Perfect explanation would result in a multiple correlation coefficient, \( R \), of 1.0. Short of perfection, the higher the \( R \), the better the overall explanation.

By using the OLS model\(^{(a)}\) predicting political participation among the Egyptian public, the coefficients are presented in Table 2.

The results of the regression analysis show that the most powerful predictors of political participation index are most of the proposed independent variables except social class and positive future outlook. The individuals who are highly educated, who advocate the right of the masses to participate in decision-making, and those who have history of party attachments seem to be potential candidates for active political participation in Egypt. Whether or not this group will ever get the chance will depend
upon the political reform that everyone in Egypt would aspire.

Factors such as subjective social class or having a positive future outlook do not explain much of political participation among the Egyptian public. The majority of the public appears to be politically marginal, and they are excluded from the decision-making process. Commenting on the recent parliamentary election, local and international observers accuse the authorities of manipulating the November 28 balloting through vote-rigging and violence. Results showed a crushing victory for the ruling party.

What is distinctive about political participation in Egypt, then? The answer to the above question can be found in a study based on a survey conducted by Hinnebusch [1983]. In this study, Hinnebusch examined political activists in Syria and Egypt using data from a questionnaire. Both share similar characteristics: developing Middle Eastern countries; and have been ruled by authoritarian regimes. The conclusion that he drew from this study is both interesting and relevant to the case under investigation here.
"First, it is often argued that political ties are predominately personal and primordial. Habits of broader association are rudimentary; hence the typical units of political action are small groups and client networks seeking immediate and particular benefits. Class and occupation are largely irrelevant; concern with broad issues and ideology is weak. Second, authoritarian political structures accentuate these conditions, suppress the rudiments of openly competitive group politics, yet lack the means to atomize traditional political issues and forge active followings. Hence, politics is largely a matter of patrons and favors, of elite manipulation of the masses, and of anomic, anti-regime violence. Thus throughout much of the Third World there is thought to be a vacuum of autonomous, publicly purposive, broad-based political participation."

VI. Discussion

The present study attempted to explore the determinants of political participation among the Egyptian public. To achieve this purpose, we had to review the prominent competing theories in this field to guide us in selecting plausible variables for our analysis. Liu [2001] has outlined three approaches that deal with the socio-economical, political cultural, and institutional factors. The first approach belongs to the socio-economic School that takes the social economic background as the main factors to explain individuals’ difference in political participation. The second is the political culture school, which emphasizes the importance of political value and attitudes. The advocates of this theory believe that political efficacy and political trust affect political participation more than other factors do. The third is the institutional school that brings organizational affiliation into the equation. Scholars in this school have focused on the ways in which macro institutions create incentives and sanctions for political participation.

The above three approaches have enlightened us as to what variables should be included for our analysis? Given the available data, we have selected 10 variables that each reflects a certain aspect of “political culture” as well as institutional and organizational affiliation. In brief, we proposed to include in our analysis variables that reflect migratory experience, individuals’ sources of information, degree of marginality,
social capital and civic engagement, political party attachment, and degree of their political awareness. In addition, we have also included social factors such as social class, education, gender, and urban residence as they influence political participation.

When the proposed variables were put to test, we discovered that political participation among the Egyptian public showed significant correlation among those who have had previous migratory experience, among those who rely upon the satellite TV for information, among those who are males, and among rural dwellers. To our surprise, we discovered that there are no significant correlations with social class and among those who have expressed positive future outlook, as previously postulated. The findings also reveal that the higher educated groups participate less politically, while, at the same time, expressing interest in politics; and advocating the right of the individuals to actively participate in decision-making. Some of these groups are members in human-rights organizations and, surprisingly, have strong party attachments.

What is distinctive about political participation in Egypt is still a question that requires an answer. We have found, for example, that social class is largely irrelevant. Concerns with broader ideological issues, such as advocating human rights, do not seem to motivate the public to participate. At the attitudinal level, the public seem to show interest in politics, advocate human rights, and condemn the spread of corruption in society. They simply possess the right attitudes that might pave the ground for political reform and implement democracy. What does prevent that portion of the population who are eligible to vote from participating in the national elections, for example? The results of the regression analysis also show that urban residence reflects a negative sign, which indicate that rural-residents tend to participate in political activities more than urban dwellers. It is safe to conclude then that, in the Egyptian villages, there appear relative considerations for family and tribal as they influence the way the people vote in these areas.

Since 2004, we have witnessed the emergence of protest groups in Egypt which rally in support of given issues on a number of occasions. These protest groups, whether they are advocates of human rights groups, members of opposition movement known as “Kefaya”, or those who call themselves “April 6,” have gone publically in spite of recurrent police oppressions. However, these groups have left insignificant results or changes to speak of on the political scene. The well-known opposition
political parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the liberal Wafd party have recently declined from participating in the parliamentary election in anticipation of illegal vote results.

Rather than seeking to change existing political institutions, the majority of the public find themselves participating more in less-risky alternative outlets for political expression among family members and cliques of friends. Those who have the courage to join the protest group are small in numbers and are unlikely to organize themselves with the intention of changing existing political institutions. The same applies to the country’s 24 licensed political parties that have proved to be an ineffective mechanism for political change.

What happened in Egypt during January of 2011 has certainly challenged the above contention that the Egyptian public is incapable of changing the oppressive political system. The new hybrid young population, with their ability to use social media tools including the Internet, Facebook, and Twitter to organize the protests, have surprised their elders when they have managed to force Mubarak out of office. The roots of the youth-led Egyptian uprising need to be further investigated within the frame of political participation research in Egypt.

Acknowledgements

The survey on which this paper is based upon was conducted by ERTC (director: Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Latif) within the framework of a research project of Hitotsubashi University, the Need-Based Program for Area Studies: Middle East within Asia (Representative: Hiroshi Kato).

Members of the Need-Based Program for Areas Studies including Dr. Erina Iwasaki have collaborated with the writer since the inception of the project on developing the questionnaire.

The author would like to thank Asmaa El-Moghazy for her research assistance and for preparing the graphs that appear in this paper.

Notes

(1) Definition of OLS/Ordinary Least Squares: OLS stands for Ordinary Least Squares, the standard
linear regression procedure. One estimates a parameter from the data and applies the linear model
\[ y = Xb + e, \]
where \( y \) is the dependent variable or vector, \( X \) is a matrix of independent variables,
\( b \) is a vector of parameters to be estimated, and \( e \) is a vector of errors with mean zero that make
the equations equal.

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**ABSTRACT**

Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Latif

Determinants of Political Participation among the Egyptian Public: Findings from the Opinion Survey in Egypt 2008

This paper clarifies the worldviews and political participation of the Egyptian public using data from the Opinion Survey in Egypt of 2008. The survey was conducted by ERTC (director: Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Latif) within the framework of a research project of Hitotsubashi University: the Need-Based Program for Area Studies: Middle East within Asia (Representative: Hiroshi Kato). A representative sample of 1000 adults 18 years of age and over was interviewed.

The purpose of this paper is two folds. The first is to describe the proposed factors that might have shaped the Egyptian public’s political orientation and participation. Among these factors are migratory experience; sources of information; degree of marginality; social capital and civic engagement; their political awareness at the local, the regional, and the global levels; and, finally, their future perspectives.

Second, the paper explains the public’s political participation by using a multiple regression model for assessing the independent effects of the proposed variables on their political participation. The statistical model will also assess the relative contribution of a set of individual-level attributes such as education, income, age, political interest, and civic engagement. In addition to these individual-level attributes, investigators have also acknowledged the significance of the contextual variables in explaining the variation in political participation and awareness.

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