



## Egyptian Youth: Networked Citizens but Not Fully Engaged Politically

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### Abstract

One lesson learned from Egypt's 2011 uprising was that young people are highly active politically as witnessed by the emergence of the networked young citizen. As the country became more stable it was feared that members of this participatory culture would reject formal politics in favor of alternative forms of participation or disengage all together. This article relies on a survey of representative youth, to seek answers to questions about their political involvement. The findings indicate that Egyptian youth are active, in online political participation, albeit more cautiously. They are also engaged with formal political participation and civic engagement.

### Introduction

The significant role attributed to the Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said" in Egypt's January 25, 2011 revolution shed light on the power of the Internet and online social networks in the political sphere of Egypt and, later, in other Arab countries. In 1993, Egypt was the first Arab country to introduce the Internet affording Egypt and other regional countries the hitherto unknown ability to communicate and exchange information freely, thereby causing unforeseen changes (Khamis & Vaughn, 2013).

From its advent to the days of the Arab Spring, the Internet contributed, to varying degrees, to the mobilization of protests in Tunisia, and then in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. Since then, new technologies have evolved and new online social platforms have spread. In addition, regimes have fallen and civil wars have been triggered. The Arab region is rapidly changing, politically, economically, and culturally (Harlow, 2013).

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Hence, an important question has emerged. What is the nature of the political participation of Egyptian youth after several waves of revolution within an unstable region? This study alone cannot answer this question; therefore, it will focus on an attempt to identify those networked citizens among Egypt's youth, and assess their contribution to and their participation in political life in a bid for a more democratic future.

## Literature Review

### The Internet and political activism in Egypt before 2011

Although online political activism reached its peak in 2011, it had already attracted attention as early as 2005 (Abdulla, 2013) when political activists' blogs helped to advance the use of Internet technology. Thus, Egypt became the breeding ground of blogs, spreading ideas and highlighting political and social ills previously unexpressed. Other regional bloggers jumped on the bandwagon (Abdulla, 2013; Hamdy, 2009).

Blogging created a significant space for online political discussion in the region. Simultaneously, many offline political activities in Egypt were taking place, such as the *Kefaya* (Enough) movement. While traditional media under strict government control and influence were not able to cover such opposition movements and their demands, it was to online platforms that these movements and their demands migrated. Venues such as blogs and YouTube were used to publicize activities and mobilize others for street protests (Preston, 2011).

To a large extent, online political activism remained limited to blogs until 2007 with the arrival of Facebook in Egypt. Facebook was the next momentous development (Abdulla, 2013) as a social network site that provided individuals with the power of diverse communication allowing users to create private personal profiles and connect with others (Boyd, & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Users could learn more about other people through individual profiles, and could find like-minded 'friends' to connect with. They could also use private messages to communicate, make public comments, and share videos and images (Zuniga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012).

Facebook actually had a significant effect on online political activism in Egypt due, in large part, to its dynamic structure. Users could claim their personal Facebook page as a space to freely post what they wanted. Social networking via Facebook gained immense popularity amongst Egyptian youth before January 25, 2011 and became an important tool for communicating political messages (Abdulla, 2013). Consequently, on January 28, 2011 at the height of protests against the ruling regime, the Egyptian government cut off mobile communications and Internet services.



## Internet and political activism in Egypt after 2011

The democratic space created through Facebook in Egypt continued to grow exponentially after the initial days of the January 2011 revolution. Similar to other countries all over the world where individuals use the online medium to promote and report offline activities in politics, culture, and social life (Todd, 2011), Egypt did the same after the January 25, 2011 revolution. The new space on social media remained free and allowed for freedom of expression until the now deposed but freely-elected President Mohamed Morsi came to power. During his regime, Internet freedom encountered some restrictions. For instance, a court mandated a three-year prison sentence for the blogger Albert Saber, charging him with blasphemy against Islam for having posted an anti-Islam film trailer on Facebook (Eltahawy, 2015).

Despite the difficulties that faced the newly emerging online space, political movements such as *Tamarrod* (Arabic for “Rebellion”) were still able to use the Internet to promote their offline activities on online platforms. *Tamarrod* was a social-political movement in which young political activists collected people’s signatures as testimony to their demand to end the role of the president who was later deposed. *Tamarrod* later reported that it had reached 22 million names of people who had thus expressed their rebellion, (“Profile,” 2013) and on the 30th of June 2013, mass protests took place throughout Egypt. In response to the protests, the army toppled the country's president, suspended the constitution, and offered a roadmap for a transitional period as a measure toward building a democratic state (Wedeman, Sayah & Smith, 2013).

Research reports have documented in great detail the rise of social media in Egypt and how it affected, among other things, communication patterns, work, news consumption, politics, and political deliberation. At least 49.6% of the population is currently using the Internet (World Bank, 2016). A recent study, *Media Use in the Middle East*, conducted in 2015 by Northwestern University in Qatar shows that Facebook users, amongst Egypt’s Internet users, increased from 81% in 2013 to 87% in 2015. Other online social network services also gained a slightly bigger audience. For instance, Twitter users increased from 23% in 2013 to 25% in 2015 among Internet users in Egypt. (Interactive: Media Use in the Middle East, 2015).

Additionally, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology of Egypt reported that the number of people who use the Internet through smartphones reached nearly 27 million users of the 93 million mobile service subscribers listed in 2015. Previous numbers indicated, to a large extent, that communication technology in Egypt was continuously growing (“Indicators - MCIT,” 2015). Consequently, in media research, the role of these technologies in changing social and political life in Egypt cannot be ignored. This paper attempts to study Egypt’s networked citizens and assess the degree and the nature of their



political participation.

However, after the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood regime and despite the promise of new technologies and newfound freedoms, the political atmosphere in Egypt has become somewhat more restrictive. A new law was introduced in November 2013 preventing street protests. According to the law, protesters must get security permission before taking to the streets, and heavy fines or a jail sentence may be implemented in case of violation. Consequently, it has become difficult to organize a social protest without due permissions and many activists have been imprisoned in cases of violation of that law (Kirkpatrick, 2013).

### **Networked citizens**

The term 'Networked Citizens' partially emerged out of the traditional citizenship debate. In contrast to the traditional definitions of the active citizen who could vote in elections, join political parties or groups and engage in active networks, the networked citizen concept developed as a result of the rise and dissemination of social networks. Nowadays, an individual's network is not only based on his family or friends, but it is also constructed on cyberspace networks shaped by individuals-especially youth-who share similar views (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014, p. 2).

Neta Kligler-Vilenchik and Kjerstin Thorson (2015) differentiated between the term networked citizen and the informed citizen. The main difference was in defining the process of how citizens gain knowledge about social issues. The informed citizen uses trusted sources and does his own research to gain knowledge, and then makes decisions based on a rational assessment. On the other hand, the networked citizen usually gains his knowledge through other citizens, and through personal networks and this could affect his decision-making process.

Furthermore, Kligler-Vilenchik, and Thorson differentiated between the networked citizen and the informed citizen with regard to how they act. In their view, the informed citizen "acts within formal institutions" such as voting, while the networked citizen's impact appears when "many small acts aggregate to large-scale influence" (2015, p. 6).

### **Political participation: background and definition**

Bardy (2007) defined political participation as an "action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes." (Goroshit, 2016, p.27) In the modern political science sense of political participation, researchers associate it "with electoral activities such as voting and working for political parties" (Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012, p. 320). Some other political researchers argue that political participation is more than simply participating in elections, and rather, includes other activities such as presence in protests or working for the society (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1997). Although social scientists have defined political



participation as an ingredient of polity that allows individuals to impose effective power on state policies, some intellectuals differentiate between various types of participation which depend on other intervening social, cultural, political and technological variables. This study will take into consideration such observations as detailed below.

According to Verba and Nie (1972), conventional political participation is divided into four major genres of participation: voting, participating in campaign activity, communicating with public officials, and participating in “cooperative or communal activities.” (Fu, Wong, Law, & Yip, 2016, p. 127) Subsequently, to match the development of societies, a group of researchers advanced the typology of political participation to four modes:

- representational: voting and party activity [...]
- extra-representational: consumer participation (e.g. petition campaigns or donations to political organizations)
- protest activity (e.g. demonstrations, political assemblies, or rallies)
- contacting (both representational and extra-representational)

(Fu, Wong, Law & Yip, 2016, p.127)

More recently and due to many political and societal changes, political participation has become more than just engaging with political parties or voting (Goroshit, 2016). Accordingly, it is important to study the new types of political participation. There are two main dichotomies. The first divides political participation into formal and informal political participation. The second one splits political participation to online and offline participation. Both dichotomies can overlap in any given situation.

### **Formal and informal political participation**

In well-established democracies where political space is appropriately delineated, and where individual actors can affect political space with minimal risk, formal political participation can function. In democratic countries, the law can protect political practitioners, parties, groups, and other political institutions that have opposing opinions or voices and who express diverse ideas (Lust-Okar, & Zerhouni, 2008, p. 35).

But when the political space is restricted, the informal method of political participation can become the only viable method. When the state fails to interact with or listen to its citizens and deal with individuals’ requirements and wishes, the informal approach to political participation becomes essential in trying to satisfy those needs (Lust-Okar, & Zerhouni, 2008, p. 40). This kind of political participation, according to Laila Alhamad (2008), exists extensively in Middle Eastern countries where authoritarian regimes control the political sphere. In her opinion, traditional or formal political participation is insufficient, and the way that



it functions in democratic states is simply inapplicable in non-democratic states (as cited in Lust-Okar, & Zerhouni, 2008, p. 35).

Moreover, the paths of informal political participation also face many barriers. The non-governmental organizations which include culture and research centers, human rights organizations, media groups, women's organizations, and community development organizations or organizations that encourage civic participation in authoritarian Middle Eastern countries are harassed by the government (Lust-Okar, & Zerhouni, 2008, p. 40).

### **Online and offline political participation**

The second political participation dichotomy to be explained is that of online and offline participation. Offline political participation refers to political activities that take place in the real world, such as attending a political conference or going to vote. Since the advent of the Internet, researchers have recognized that this new medium has the potential to change the way individuals deal with politics. Indeed, other forms of political participation began to spread, such as sending a political email to encourage other people to participate in upcoming elections or engage in online social networks with politicians (Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012).

In this paper, the authors found it imperative to study both online and offline political participation. To a large extent, online activism is reflected in offline activism and vice versa, and new and old media play an important role. The new forms of media have generated what Henry Jenkins (2006) referred to as a "participatory culture" that fundamentally "contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship" (p. 3). In this sense, the participatory culture is an outcome of the advancement of technology that has produced an inevitable convergence in the media.

Nowadays, media consumers and creators are participating in a new interactive relationship model where participants create personal content that can be used by corporate media. The well-reasoned debate concerning convergence is that it occurs initially in individuals' brains and manifests itself in people's relationships with each other (Jenkins, 2006).

Jenkins took the idea of convergence to another critical level. He suggested that, in the modern digital age, "the new political culture" will generate "new ideas and alternative perspectives" that are fundamentally different from those ideas where traditional media dominate the public sphere (Jenkins, 2006). Accordingly, Jenkins anticipated that digital media would have an inescapable influence in our contemporary world.



## Political participation in the Middle East

In the Middle East, “political participation is shaped to a substantial degree by political, social and economic contexts.” (Lust-Okar, & Zerhouni, 2008, p. 260) In other words, the nature of the authoritarian political sphere in the Middle East influences other areas such as economics, religion, and social life (Lust-Okar & Zerhouni, 2008, p. 3). Therefore, it is impossible to understand political participation in authoritarian states without taking into consideration the meaning and context of that participation. For example, in order to understand the politics of Algeria, and similarly that of Saudi Arabia, the relationship between the Islamic groups and the government must be comprehended. Islamic groups usually create what is called “a state within a state” as “a parallel system of services and values alongside the state.” (Lust-Okar & Zerhouni, 2008, p. 35)

Likewise, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has offered this sort of structure for decades. This informal form of political activity explains part of the reason why the now banned Muslim Brotherhood party received public support after the 25th of January revolution. Many scholars consider this form of participation to be a type of civic engagement.

### Political participation and civic engagement

First, one must epistemologically differentiate between political participation and civic engagement in their abstract and actual manifestations. Second, one must understand why civic engagement is considered a kind of informal political participation which is fundamental in authoritarian regimes.

According to Cliff Zukin (2006), civic participation in its basic form is an activity that “involves behavior aimed at resolving problems of the community.” (as cited in Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012, p. 320) Thus, civic engagement could be a kind of interaction with civil society institutions such as development organizations or human rights institutions that work for the welfare of the public. Political participation, in its simplest form, is a “behavior seeking to influence government action and policymaking,” and, in democratic states, this influence could occur through formal political participation such as voting (Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012, p. 320).

Hence, although it could be concluded that civic participation is different in its nature from political participation, civic participation can-in authoritarian regimes-be defined as a form of informal political participation where the political sphere is limited and highly restricted. In that case, civic participation is an important form of participation used to circumvent government-imposed obstacles, to support the growth of democracy (Zukin, & Ebrary, 2006) and to help peacefully change a society. (Lust-Okar & Zerhouni, 2008).



Within this context, an important question emerges: “Is Egypt a democratic state or not?” It is not a simple question to answer, but according to numerous international democracy rankings and reports, such as World Concern, and the European Union (EU) Annual Report on Democracy as well as many other international reports on media and press freedoms by institutions such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, Egypt is not a fully democratic state. (EU Annual Report on Human Rights, 2014; Freedom in The World, 2015; World Press Freedom Index, 2015; World Audit Democracy, 2016). Therefore, in this study, political participation includes both forms of participation: the formal and the informal. This is to satisfactorily and clearly illustrate the categories of participation being practiced in Egypt.

### **Political participation and media effects**

There is a rich tradition in social science research that traces the relationship between media-including new and emerging forms-and political participation with the purpose of drawing a clear image of the debate surrounding the impact of the media. However, before presenting this debate, the link between media and political participation, both nationally and internationally, should be briefly outlined.

Political participation is critical for a vivid and resilient democracy because it allows citizens to engage in governance and participate in the decision-making processes in their society. Despite this fact, it is important to note that political participation rates are declining internationally (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). In Canada, only 40% percent of youth voted in the 2012 federal elections. The turnout for elections and for joining political parties in Canada has decreased in recent years (O’Neill, 2007). Furthermore, after high school, volunteerism among youth was noted to be significantly declining (Boulianne, & Brailey, 2014).

This observation not only applies to Canada but to many other societies or communities. American research shows almost the same outcomes. Scholars including Robert Putnam (1992), John Coleman (1990), and Francis Fukuyama (1995) have acknowledged the general decline in political participation in America for some time (as cited in Bryant, & Oliver, 2009). Putnam (1995) argued “that between 1960 and 2000, Americans went from being “a nation of participants to a nation of observers,” especially for those under 30 years of age (Bryant, & Oliver, 2009). Putnam (2000) presented another important point when he noted that, in the United States, political participation decreases when the level of education increases (as cited in Print, & Milner, 2009).

Scholars have attempted to understand the reasons behind this worrying detachment or disengagement from political participation. Over the last two; decades, scholars have suggested that societal changes, economic conditions, suburbanization, family problems, generational differences, and education could be





the main causes behind this phenomenon (Bryant, & Oliver, 2009). A more recent study conducted by Matt Henn and Nick Foard (2014) in Britain suggested that youth do not ignore politics or underestimate the importance of political participation but instead, they complain about the lack of visible opportunities to participate effectively in politics, finding the online sphere a more appropriate space to reflect their interests and needs.

Furthermore, debate has intensified with Putnam (1995) postulating that “this loss of community solidarity, civic volunteerism, and political engagement” is a consequence of the unfavorable effects of watching television (as cited in Bryant & Oliver, 2009). This argument is also advanced by another research effort that examined the relationship between the Internet and political participation. As Internet adoption increased, some scholars argued that the Internet distracted individuals from real offline political activities and civic engagement, extending their argument to claiming that online time is taken away from the time that should be spent in offline political participation (Gil de Zuniga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012).

Conversely, a recognizable body of literature holds an opposite view. For instance, Pippa Norris (1995) replied to Putnam’s argument in her study “Does television erode social capital?” In direct reply, she argued that Putnam’s reasoning about the negative effect of television viewing on political participation had limited support in practice. Indeed, Putnam’s study did not measure important factors such as hours of watching and the context of viewing.

Other scholars argued that what appears to be a decline in political participation and alienation of citizens could be a form of change in the nature of participation (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Thus, the media has nothing to do with the decline. Literature also points to important findings which show both traditional and new media as supporting political conversation and civic debates and thus showing that being offline can motivate civic participation (Shah, Cho, Eveland William, 2005).

Over time, and with the advancement of online theories, research showed the role of the Internet in promoting political participation. Several studies have indicated that using the Internet to acquire news and information increases community and political engagement while using the Internet as a source of entertainment could decrease individuals’ political and civic commitment (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Additional studies reveal that the Internet increases interest in politics on the individual level (Xenos & Moy, 2007). More recent research indicates that smartphones could support social networks in real life, (Bryant & Oliver, 2009) which could potentially narrow the gap between offline and online participation.

It is therefore vital to consider the growing number of smartphone users and the advancement of the Internet when studying convergence in political



participation both nationally and internationally. In the case of Egypt, formal offline political participation has decreased. In fact, according to the independent local public opinion polling company “Baseera”, only 21% of young people between 18 and 30 in age voted in the last parliamentary elections in 2015. Yet, we know that the number of Internet users, smartphone and social media users has grown exponentially. Explaining these factors may contribute to the results of this study, which attempts to better understand the behavior of youth in Egypt. Furthermore, comparing political participation of youth in Egypt and that of youth in other parts of the world will help in understanding the changes in the behavior of youth internationally.

Based on insights gained from the discussion of the literature, the following questions were formulated to frame the study.

*RQ1: Does online participation in social networks positively enhance offline political participation?*

*RQ2: Does online participation in social networks positively enhance online political participation?*

*H1: Online political participation through social media networks will significantly increase offline participation.*

Consequently, the following analysis includes examining variables measuring the factors discussed in the literature.

## **Methodology**

This study aims at investigating the relationship between online political activism and political participation in real-life offline youth behavior. For that reason, the survey method to establish correlations amongst variables under investigation was found to be appropriate in order to examine the mechanisms that control this relationship. Relying on original survey data collected in Egypt between August 15 and September 10, 2016, non-probability sampling based on the snowball technique was used. Despite the fact that snowball samples can be subject to biases, this technique was found to be the most effective method due to the sensitivity of the topic.

The participants received the survey’s URL through e-email and social network invitations. Survey invitations with information about the researchers and the purpose of study were provided to respondents, as were both an Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form and the consent of Egypt’s Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). Respondents who were not classified as youth and did not use social media networks were excluded from the study. Accordingly, 21 respondents were eliminated.



The survey was conducted in Arabic and translated into English by the authors for the purpose of this study. Questions were based on previous studies' surveys in such as "Social Media Use for News and Individuals', Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political Participation" by Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., and Valenzuela, S. (2012); "All Political Participation is Socially Networked? New Media and the 2012 Election" by Terri L. Towner (2013); and "Attachment to Community and Civic and Political Engagement: A Case Study of Students" by Shelley Boulianne and Michelle Brailey (2014); and were adapted to the Egyptian context. The final sub-sample was composed of those respondents who reported using social media accounts (N = 330).

### **Operationalization of Variables:**

*Online participation:* In this study, online participation is the independent variable. A five-point Likert scale was developed to scale responses. Respondents were asked to rate seven items under one of five categories: almost always, sometimes, every once in a while, rarely, and never. The seven items were: (1) sharing or posting information or news stories on political events, (2) sharing or posting your personal political opinion, (3) forwarding a political e-mail to another person, (4) persuading others on why they should vote for or against a political party or candidate, (5) following or becoming a fan of a political candidate on a social network, (6) participating in online discussion or chat groups about politics, (7) and using social networks mostly to see what others say.

*Offline political participation:* Real-life political activism is a dependent variable in this research. To measure the variable, a five-point Likert scale was developed. The scale asked respondents to rate eleven items under one of five categories: almost always, sometimes, every once in a while, rarely, and never. The eleven items were: (1) attending a public political symposium, (2) calling or sending a letter to an elected public official, (3) speaking to a public official in person, (4) posting a political sign, banner, button or bumper sticker, (5) attending a political rally, (6) participating in any demonstrations, protests, or marches, (7) voting in the past two years (presidential elections, parliamentary elections, constitutional referenda), (8) writing a letter to a news organization expressing your political opinion, (9) participating in groups that have taken any local action for social or political reform, (10) being involved in public interest groups, political action groups, political clubs, or party committees, and (11) wanting to stage a protest but finding it not possible to get permission.

### **Results**

The data collected from the survey indicates that the majority of respondents are active users of social media networks. In fact, 60.8 % of the sample use these networks on an hourly basis whilst 26.2 % used them daily, indicating that respondents are heavy users of social media. Interestingly, the alienation of youth



from general politics is commonly reported in Western nations (Bouliann & Brailey, 2014; Henn & Foard, 2014).

Apathy toward politics is not uncommon amongst Egyptian youth as well, yet the larger group of respondents in this study reported having voted in the 2014 Presidential elections (53.4%). A smaller yet still noteworthy number (31.9%) reported having voted during the more recent parliamentary elections in 2015. Despite concerns that young people are not fully engaged in the formal political process in the 2014 and 2015 elections, this data suggests that Egyptian youth have more trust in elections than what was noted at the time by the Baseera research center (2014). During the peak year for youth voting (2004) in the US presidential elections, youth engagement was 49%; a smaller percentage than the results of youth voting indicated in this study (Richer, 2012).

Meanwhile, respondents spent more time engaging with non-political associations (28%) than political ones, yet (39%) of the respondents reported that they raised money for charity, which in Egypt is an action that has long been associated with political activity. In fact, it is common in Arab countries more broadly for political participation to fuse with civic engagement (Lust-Okar & Zerhouni, 2008).

The data was also used to explore whether online participation positively enhanced real-life or offline participation.

*RQ1: Does online participation in social networks positively enhance offline political participation?*

To explore the relationship between both the independent and dependent variable proposed for this study, Pearson's Correlations were used indicating that there is a correlation although it was found to be weak.

As shown in Table 1, ( $r=.117$ ,  $n=330$ ,  $p=.033$ )

*Table 1 Relationship Between Online and Offline Political Participation*

		Online participation in social networks	Offline political participation
Online participation in social networks	Pearson Correlation	1	.117
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033
	N	330	330
Offline political participation	Pearson Correlation	.117	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	
	N	330	330

To explore the relationship between online participation in social networks and actual political participation with social sites, another Pearson's Correlation was



conducted finding a significant although somewhat weak relationship.

*RQ2: Does online participation in social networks positively enhance online political participation?*

To answer this question a correlation between both variables-online participation in social networks and online political participation-were conducted. There is a positive significant correlation but it is rather weak as shown in Table 2 ( $r=.144$ ,  $n=330$ ,  $p=.009$ ).

*Table 2* Relationship Between Online Participation in Social Networks and Online Political Participation

		Online participation in social networks	Online political participation
Online participation in social networks	Pearson	1	.144
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	330	330
Online political participation	Pearson	.144	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	330	330

Hypothesis 1 predicted that online participation through social media increases offline political participation. The Pearson Correlation was used to test the relation between both variables, the online and the offline participation. The correlation is significant although weak ( $r=.144$ ).

*H1: Online Political Participation through social media networks will significantly increase offline participation* as shown in Table 3, ( $r=.168$ ,  $n=330$ ,  $p=.002$ )

*Table 3* Prediction of Increase in Offline Political Participation

		Online political participation	Offline political participation
Online political participation	Pearson	1	.168
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	330	330
Offline political participation	Pearson	.168	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	330	330

The data analyzed shows that the correlation between social media use and online political participation is weak. However, the correlation is somewhat stronger between social media use and offline political participation. It is also a significant negative correlation given the fact that in earlier studies of the period of political upheavals in Egypt, many studies showed a relationship between the two (Harlow, 2013; Khamis & Vaughn, 2013).



## Conclusion

Patterns of political behavior among Egypt's youth have been the object of attention since the 2011 revolution. Driven by their desire to improve the social, economic, and political conditions of their country, young people were not only directly involved in protests that led to the overthrowing of two presidents within a period of three years but they also showed interest in formal political processes, lining up to vote during elections, engaging with politicians, forming collective social endeavors, and exhibiting a strong interest in civic responsibilities both in real life and online.

And yet, as of 2014, there has been a noted apathy amongst youth both in formal and informal participation, both in real-life and online. For this reason, this study was conducted to examine the status of Egypt's networked citizens to see if they are indeed as engaged as was once noted.

In this study, there is evidence to suggest that Egyptian youth are not as politically apathetic as perhaps other youth in more democratic societies. The restrictions imposed by the new protest laws and intimidation created by the arrest of many young people do not make the political landscape comparable to that of more mature Western democracies, yet young people have not lost complete faith in formal political actions and still participate in elections despite the decrease in freedoms since the enactment of the anti-protest laws. The 2014 presidential elections garnered more participation than parliamentary elections, which may indicate that political parties and politicians are not strong enough to entice young people to be involved and engaged in formal politics.

Although some scholars may argue that the political scene changed before and during the 2018 presidential elections, it is too early to draw conclusions. In this regard, other studies are required to investigate youth political participation during the most recent presidential elections.

It was also found that Egyptian youth are currently engaged in civic responsibilities, which in the Arab region is a less contentious method of engaging in political processes. The complexities associated with particular political orientations often drive citizens to avoid formal politics and instead to engage in non-political civic associations and charities.

One theme that also emerged from this study is that Egypt's youth are using social media networks extensively and frequently engage in online political participation. It was also found that there is a correlation between online participation and the enhancement of offline participation in political life, albeit a weak one. Additionally, being on social media does enhance online political participation.



The data also revealed that there is no relationship between online political participation and real-life political participation amongst youth. This calls into question the networked citizen stereotype often associated with Egypt's revolutionary and technically savvy youth who had the opportunity to express themselves during a time of relative online freedoms (Freedom House - Egypt, 2014, para 15) but did not take this activity adequately offline. Formal politics gained momentum by the 2012 presidential election when youth sought representation in all prominent political parties. However, most of the political parties formed at that time were eventually weakened or became absent from the political scene. The social climate also changed, becoming hostile to the youth in general-and the revolutionary youth in particular-after the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood's time in power (Abdulla, N. 2016).

A new political context emerged in 2013 and once again several youth groups reappeared and allied with the new President Sisi's administration. Youth have since been included socially and politically, even recruited to participate in the drafting of the 2014 constitution (Abdulla, N. 2016). Nonetheless, they have not been able to play more than a limited role in Egypt's transformation and current politics.

It has also been argued that youth participation has been suppressed and discouraged (Amnesty International (2014), Freedom House (2014)) however, it is hard to find a correlation between these arguments and youth offline political participation based on the available data, which represents one limitation of this study.

Ultimately, the results of this study allow us to assume Egyptian youth are not disengaged from formal politics or civic responsibilities. As such, decision-makers in the government, existing political parties, and other formal political institutions should continue to find ways to attract more youth and help them to establish formal representation in national political institutions and to participate in elections. Informal involvement such as civic engagement and activism are not enough to ensure the democratic governance of Egypt.

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