

Factors Suppressing Egyptian Women's Participation in Public Affairs: Case Study of Egyptian Uprising 2011

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Abstract

Women in Egypt have been active participants in the public affairs in recent decades, which was optimized during the Uprising of 2011. The purpose of this paper is to propose that women's participation has generated many forms of violence against them. This violence would act as a deterrent factor for other females for participation causing a state of avoidance among many females to avoid the negative consequences of their participation in public affairs. Data are collected via questionnaires to explore whether women's participation in the public sphere generate violence against them and to what extent women abstain from participation just to avoid potential violence. It was concluded that the various forms of violence whether family-based violence, social violence, and political violence, are the major reasons why Egyptian women avoid participation in politics and public affairs which is defined in this paper as "admin-political apathy". The research is based on original empirical research targeting Egyptian women who are scolded for their participation in politics and public affairs, which eventually results in their admin-political apathy. The paper recommends that protecting women's civil rights by law is substantially effective in withstanding violence directed towards them causing obvious exclusion of females from political and public life.

Keywords: *Public Affairs, Political Participation, Admin-political Apathy, Women, Uprising, Social Violence, Political Violence, Family Violence.*

Introduction

In recent years, many females in different societies worldwide began to share their experiences with participation in public affairs by exposure to abuse, intimidation, assault, harassment and many other forms of violence. This global practiced pressure on women has eventually resulted in suppressing females' active engagement in public affairs although

women's participation has been emphasized and codified in international law in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Global efforts, declarations and action plans have been issued to combat violence against women in politics and administration. In 2011, a UN General Assembly resolution introduced a “*zero-tolerance*” approach in response to violence against women in politics particularly elected officials and female candidates. In 2013, a UN Human Rights Council recommended that “*stigmatization, harassment and outright attacks have been used to silence and discredit women who are outspoken as leaders, community workers, human rights defenders, and politicians*”. To emphasize the issue and advance cross-regional dialogue, NDI further launched an event in March 2016 in New York City for a global call to action, “*#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence against Women in Politics*” to identify possible steps that actors in different sectors need take to eliminate violence against women in politics (NDI, 2016).

The Carter Center suggests that the Draft Guidelines consider numerous cross-cutting determinants of the right to participate in public affairs where the Human Rights Committee in General Comment 25, took a broad interpretation of the right to participate in public affairs, to include the right of citizens to participate: *Restrictions on the right to participate in law and practice, Citizenship, The Right to Participate and Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, Inclusion and non-discrimination: Women's participation; Ethnic and Minority Participation, Participation of Youth; Participation of Indigenous Persons; Participation by Persons with Disabilities, Respect for freedom of assembly, association, and expression, Transparency and Access to Information, The importance of a functioning and impartial judicial processes, and effectively protecting and advancing the right to participate in periods of instability or conflict.*

The research would focus on only two determinants of women's participation in public affairs: 1) *effectively protecting and advancing the right to participate in periods of instability or conflict* 2) *respect of assembly, association, and expression*. This research would refer to the Egyptian Uprising of January 25th, 2011 which provided a clear-cut context in which indicators of women's participation in public affairs were substantially tested, in turn, it can be inferred whether women's civil rights are protected particularly during periods of instability and conflict as specified by The Carter Center.

Literature Review

The research would explore the relationship between the dependent variable which is women's participation in public affairs and the two independent variables of 1) effectively protecting and advancing the right to participate in periods of instability or conflict 2) respect of assembly, association, and expression. In other words, the paper argues that the surrounding socio-political context would suppress women's participation in public affairs.

The concept of public affairs is agreeably defined to combine difference socio-political and administrative aspects; as article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) codifies the right to participate in public affairs and in paragraph 5 of the Human Rights Committee in General Comment 25, the Committee defines the conduct of public affairs is "*a broad concept that relates to the exercise of political power. It covers all aspects of public administration and formulation and implementation of policy at international, national, regional and local levels.*" However, there is a clear overlap between participation in public affairs versus political participation.

Multiple definitions of political participation are proposed by many scholars. One definition described any political activity exhibited by ordinary citizens with the purpose of influencing political outcome including strikes and demonstrations or any other protesting behaviors as being political participation (Teorell, 2007). Another definition states that political participation had long been used interchangeably with electoral participation and voting was considered as the main way for citizens' political participation (Brady, 1999). A parallel expanded definition for political participation referred to any voluntary political activity which aimed at influencing directly or indirectly political choices within the political system (Milbrath, 1977). Those broadly utilized definition may cause a confusion in terms of describing some activities such as demonstrating or voting as being related to politics or public affairs. Therefore, political participation in this paper would imply any political activity practiced with the purpose of attaining a leading political role through appointment, nomination for elections, and leading political parties; whereas participation in public affairs implies any practices based on civil rights such as citizens' voting or demonstrating.

Previous research available on women's participation in public affairs generally is limited except the provision of for most of the resources on women's participation have focused on political participation without connecting it to a wider scope of public affairs. Notwithstanding, the Carter Center has stated that political participation is only one aspect of

the larger scope of public affairs which includes many political activities. Therefore, further research is needed to emphasize participation in public affairs as a wider concept in relation to political participation. Plus, the paper introduces the concept of admin-political apathy to refer to the act of refraining from engagement in public affairs activities as proposed by the Carter Center. Whereas, current data found to propose only the concept of political apathy as indifference of an individual and a lack of interest in participating in political activities.

The latest report on women's political participation in 2018 by OECD and NCW has specified challenges facing women's political participation including economic inequality which has a direct impact on women's ability to pursue a career in politics and can affect women's ability to mount effective, well-resourced political campaigns and present persuasive arguments in favor of their electability. Another challenge is limited exposure to politics as women often report difficulty to understand the political process, and noted a high level of unfamiliarity with the legal and political process. Also, limited networking opportunities is another factor as women tend to be more reliant on family relations, and their work in voluntary roles, to build their political capital. The report additionally pointed out that culture, limited encouragement, party dynamics and gender stereotypes highly contribute to women's exclusion from political life such as the patriarchal culture, and social norms which strongly resist gender equality. Finally, structural barriers, gender-based violence with limited access to justice, and stereotypical media representation which portrays male politicians as often more prominently covered in the media, particularly at election time. It is obvious though that the concept of political participation based on the report, refers women pursuing political roles by appointment, election, and membership in political parties without referring to ordinary women practicing their civil rights such as voting, assembling, and demonstrating and other aspects of participation in public affairs as mentioned.

Women's participation in public life on the other hand is defined by the Public Library of Medicine in 2000 as being women's membership in women's organizations, community action groups, voluntary organizations, and other close to home groups. They prefer to participate in activities which are problem solving rather than institution building. These activities and groups operate outside established political institutions and are not considered as part of public and political life. In this regard, the report of the OECD and NCW emphasized that women's engagement via membership in civil society organizations and syndicates has summounted after the January 25th, 2011 Uprising. This includes newly established non-governmental organizations, interactive electronic sites, and artistic youth movements. Multiple coalitions were formed between women's and human rights

organizations, the most important of which was the Egyptian Coalition for Women's Participation.

Accordingly, it was important to distinguish the concepts of political participation, participation in public life, and participation in public affairs. It can also be concluded that participation in public affairs is a larger scope which entails participation in politics and public life. The research would use the term admin-political apathy to refer to citizens' refrain from practicing and public affairs related activities. As previous research work has focused on factors suppressing women's political participation, this research aims at proposing and analyzing factors responsible for women's refrain from participation in public affairs based on empirical research within the period of January 25th, 2011 Uprising using the two indicators of participation in public affairs previously mentioned: 1) protection of the right to participate in periods of instability or conflict 2) respect of assembly, association, and expression.

Protecting the Right of Participation during Instability Periods

Since the onset of the Uprising, women had to go through direct confrontation with security forces during the Uprising, for policemen detained protesting demonstrators and women bodies became a tool for manipulation to impose control and dominance of the state. For example, in March 9th, 2011, eighteen female demonstrators were arrested by the army soldiers in Tahrir Square, taken to the Egyptian Museum to be assaulted, humiliated and tortured (Mekhemar, 2013). Furthermore, women became more vulnerable during the period of Uprising conflict not only in the public sphere but in the private sphere even worse; as women's political participation was encountered by various forms of domestic violence practiced by male figures in family with the purpose of preventing female's political participation which was exacerbated by the absence of security forces to arrest violence perpetrators or respond to domestic violence cases reported to the police (Wasef, 2018).

Respect of Assembly, Association, and Expression

Shortly after the eighteen days of demonstrators' assembly in Tahrir Square were over, other strangers started to fill the square and sexually harass girls and women to humiliate them and dissolve their assembly, preventing them from forming association, and blocking any possible avenues for expression using gendered deterrent mechanisms. A startling case of the journalist Lara Logan who was harassed and stripped out of her cloths in the square by about forty men during covering the Tahrir events. Post Uprising period reflected disrespect for women's assembly, association, and expression for after the Muslim Brotherhood came into ruling, social aggression towards women was optimized by religious media stigmatizing

female's participation in demonstrations shamefully and justifying sexual harassment as being a normal outcome of female's political participation in demonstrations (FIDH, 2014). After the Uprising demonstration has ended with Mubarak regime's toppling down, women were soon after excluded from key decision-making positions during the political transition. The absence of women on the constitutional committee, with only one woman in the interim cabinet in Egypt, has led to the fear that women are being marginalized and deprived of their freedom of expression.

Methodology

Primary data collection through surveying Egyptian women from all age groups to explore the consequences of their decisions to vote or protest during the Egyptian Uprising. The questionnaires aimed at exploring to what extent women's participation in public affairs by voting or demonstrating was confined by socio-political limitations which denote lack of supportive atmosphere for women's participation in public affairs and therefore denial of focal indicators of public affairs participation as the research hypothesizes. The sampling plan targeted females from different educational background, marital status, and age groups and the data collected had been analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to find out the relationship between absence of the two indicators of participation in public affairs and women's admin-political apathy.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data shows that women encountered marital violence due to polarized political views between them and their husbands, 20.8% strongly agreed and 27.5% agreed that political disagreements between a husband and a wife on who should she vote for during elections provokes marital violence against her. Similarly, voting by yes or no during referendums as a reason for domestic violence was supported by 20.8% who strongly agreed and 31.7% agreed respondents.

Regarding joining demonstrations as a main civil right, 24.2% strongly agreed and 32.5% agreed that a wife's participation in demonstrations without telling her husband is a reason for him to act violently against her. Also, 27.5% strongly agreed and 25.8% agreed that a wife's participation in demonstrations in spite of her husband's disapproval results eventually in marital disputes ending with physical punishment.

The hypothesis that surrounding political context paralysis women's participation in public affairs by voting and demonstrating had been tested through investigating the reason why a woman would participate or not in elections, referendums, and demonstrations besides exploring the political, social and domestic consequences of their participation. The majority

of respondents accounting for 59.3% indicated that they witnessed no violence during the elections or referendums followed by a percent of 30.5% who reported acts of violence and fights among voters; and other tiny percentages reported social violence in the form of sexual harassment and family violence exemplified by attempts to prevent from voting by family.

On the other hand, those who never voted after the Uprising were asked about the reasons for not participating and their answers reflected either disinterest in politics or avoidance of political, social, or domestic violence. Therefore, women had to choose between their civil rights and physical protection domestically, socially, and politically. For 59.7% expressed their fear of facing political violence; 56.5% were afraid of social violence as sexual harassment; and 56.5% wanted to avoid spousal violence in case they participate.

Similarly, they were asked as well about describing their experience with demonstration and the largest portion of answers reflected fights between security forces and demonstrators by 62.5%; followed by 50% reported arresting some demonstrators. Concerning the social and domestic consequences of women's involvement in demonstrations, 37.5% reported incidents of sexual harassment and 50% reported fights at home. The percentages of various forms of violence incidents as reported although not large, but consider an indication of what women face or might face as a result of their engagement.

Whereas those who never took part in demonstrations within the Uprising were asked about the reasons for not participating and their answers reflected either obedience for their families' desire to avoid family conflict as 73.2% reported that their families would not agree; avoidance of sexual harassment as 71.4% reported, or for fear of political violence incidents as reported by 69.6%. So, physical threat seem to be major reasons for paralyzing women's participation in demonstrations unlike participating into elections or referendums where less violent consequences are expected to occur whether politically, socially, or domestically.

Discussion

Family and Women's Participation in Public Affairs

The data collection revealed that because Egypt has witnessed an abrupt political polarization, radical political views in the private and public spheres. In private context, they were fully developed into serious fights within family members during elections and referendums for many women agreed that many cases they know had marital violence which reached the brink of divorce as the husband wanted his wife to vote for a particular nominee, party, or force her to vote with yes to a referendum. In turn, women had to pay for ideological view if it is not analogous to their males' in family from their own physical security.

Demonstration is no exception if not worse, even larger number of female respondents have reported cases they know where a wife's protesting in demonstrations without informing her husband or in spite of her husband's disapproval, have generated serious spousal violence against her. The price that women used to pay for their civil rights made many of them eventually abstain from civic engagement to avoid domestic penalties and conflicts.

Although a tiny percent stated that they experienced family fights during elections for women's voting, a high percent abstained from voting for fear of their husbands' discontent. This mean their refrainment from voting is basically driven avoiding potential marital violence. On the other hand, half of women who participated in demonstrations within the Uprising period confirmed that they encountered family fights due to their participation. Plus, a very high percent of women who never joined a demonstration were motivated by avoiding family fights or reported that their families would not let them participate. Some interviewed cases have also elaborated that their families' disapproval of women's participation in public affairs is fostered by their fear of socio-political violence and perceived public activities as being for males only. So, the socio-political atmosphere puts Egyptian females in a position of trading off their civil liberties for their physical protection.

Social Context of Women's Participation in Public Affairs

It can be inferred that the social context exemplified by women's exposure to sexual harassment, blocks women's civil liberties in the sense that they refrain from voting in elections or referendums and do not join demonstrations for fear of exposure to sexual harassment. According to the empirical data, a low percent stated their exposure to sexual harassment during elections, a high percent refrained from voting for fear of sexual harassment; although a moderate percent have faced already sexual harassment in demonstrations, a high percent explained not participating in demonstrations for fear of sexual harassment because they were being already harassed in the street and public transports on their daily life more frequently during the Uprising period than ever before. Thus, the social context reinforces women's admin-political apathy

This notion can be measured against the social view in general on a woman's role in public affairs and can be supported by the traditional view that public activities are not for women as most participants reported when they were asked about the reasons they never voted or demonstrated. Moreover, the traditional view of limiting women's participation and role to certain fields is unfortunately adopted by females who were against the idea that women can be equally effective in taking leading positions in public administration and politics. For a large percent of survey participants refused that a woman can be a president or

a soldier in the army, while a moderate percent rejected that a woman can take a role in the judiciary or police institutions, and few women were reluctant that a woman can be a member in the parliament. This can be an indication on how social inequality and traditional gender roles is ingrained in the mentality of both males and females against women's role in society which means that women in Egypt are facing female-to-female violence equally to male-to-female violence.

Political Context of Women's Participation in Public Affairs

Political violence occurrences associated with elections, referendums, and demonstrations represent a strong impediment for women to vote or demonstrate. A moderate percent of female respondents to the survey reported minor fights and violent events between security forces and voters while a higher percent reported fights and violent acts among voters. For those refrained from voting and demonstrating, a significant percent have exhibited their fear of facing violent acts by voters or security forces.

Same applies to demonstrations with higher expectation to political violence than elections or referendums, a large portion of the sample participant have witnessed violent acts between security forces and demonstrators, moderate rate of arresting or detaining demonstrators, and low percent of security assault on demonstrators or demonstrators on security forces. However, a large number of women acknowledged their abstention from protesting peacefully for fear of the threat of violent acts attached to demonstrations. It can be inferred that political violent acts affiliated with elections, referendums, and demonstrations can highly affect a woman's decision not to participate in any of these public spheres.

Recommendations

A code of recommendations would revolve around the question of how to restore women's right in physical protection and how to ensure that women would not be penalized physically in reaction for their involvement in the public affairs. Exclusion of women from public affairs would mean that the majority of the society are marginalized which means absence of democracy. The argument is that participation of women, among all the society communities, is a strong requirement for democracy process in any country. In other words, political authorities cannot continue to allow women's marginalization from the political scene while assuming they are democratically governing their countries specially that females in many societies represent the majority of citizens.

To start with breaking the cycle of violence, we need to stop considering violence as a normal outcome for practicing politics. For the issue of violence against women in administration and politics had been ignored for years and many harassed and initiated

women in politics would not speak out for not knowing how to react and what action they should take.

The key decision makers need to realize the close relation between failure to protect females and their lack of interest in public affairs and civic engagement in order to provide a protective atmosphere at all fronts. Security forces need to stop using females' bodies as a tool for political manipulation and such practices should be criminalized internationally. Additionally, discriminative public speeches against women and portraying shameful images for them should come under hate crimes that authorities need to take clear measures at.

Legally, enforcing proper legislation to introduce a zero-tolerance policy for perpetrators of sexual harassment of women in politics in parallel with issuing domestic violence laws besides secures female participation in public affairs particularly during instability and conflict times, Institutionally, the traditional view that women do not fit into certain positions especially leading positions needs to be changed, the more women exist in the state's various public institutions equally to men, the less they would be regarded as inferior to men in private and public by men. Political parties can also take initiatives to tackle this problem by issuing and

Finally, the endeavors of raising awareness of women's right to participate in public affairs, and gender equality need to be intensified and the role of NGOs along with other associations of women rights should collaborate together on building a strategy of raising women's and girls' awareness about their civil rights and liberties, and provide a clear course of action to be taken in case of any violence they might face upon practicing such rights.

This topic is meant to shed the light for policy makers in all fields and state actors in different sectors to act on mechanisms of women empowerment in collaboration with all state bodies and realize that the issue of women's political participation versus political apathy is eventually part of the overall regimes' policy which either support the concept of gender equality in all life facets including politics or adopt the patriarchal mind-set of gender inequality which tends to preserve traditional gender roles by excluding women from politics.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to introduce the concept of admin-political apathy and shed the light on socio-political factors responsible for it. In this regard, the research differentiated between many interrelated concepts including political participation versus participation in public affairs, and civic engagement. Indicators of public affairs participation were proposed to differentiate political participation from public participation.

It can be noted that previous research work had substantially focused on political participation and political apathy, so there was a need to deal with the issue of participation in public affairs versus admin-political apathy as a larger scope for politics with special focus on women as a unit of analysis.

Two indicators were used as criteria due to their relevance to the Egyptian context, to judge whether they are fulfilled particularly during the Egyptian Uprising, and it was inferred after analyzing the socio-political atmosphere surrounding women that lack of physical protection of women socially and politically is a major reason for their admin-political avoidance.

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