



## **Media Monitoring for Diversity Project**

### **Report 1**

## **Media Diversity During Egypt's Parliamentary Elections**

**(November-December 2011)**

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Diversity is an attribute of major importance in any robust media system. Fair and balanced media thrive on the principles of inclusion, covering all sides of a story or an issue, and guaranteeing enough representation for religious, ethnic, geographical, and socio-economic minorities.

Following the January 25 revolution, Egyptians hoped for major reforms in their media system. How much of that reform has taken place, if any, throughout the range of state-owned and private media in Egypt remains to be resolved. This report is the first of four reports analyzing diversity in the Egyptian media. The aim is to provide an accurate, scientific, yet simplified picture of how inclusive and how diverse the content is as a step towards paving the way for such reform.

This report focuses on the diversity of the media in its coverage of Egypt's parliamentary elections, the process for which started in November 2011. Diversity is defined as the inclusiveness of different groups in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, income-based discrimination, gender, and any other factors which makes individuals or groups different from, but equal to, each other. Since this was the first parliamentary elections after January 25 in Egypt, it was important to document changes, improvements, and challenges in the media coverage of the electoral process.

## **Methodology and Sample**

This report is based on a methodology that incorporated both quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis to obtain a clear, yet scientific look at the diversity within Egyptian media. We tackled both print media and television. We analyzed issues of four newspapers, as well as episodes of four talk shows, and the evening news bulletin on Egyptian state television. The quantitative analysis focused on **a representative sample of state-owned media and private (independent) media**. We chose two popular state owned and two popular private newspapers The newspapers we monitored are:

- 1) **Al Ahram** (state)
- 2) **Al Akhbar** (state)
- 3) **Al Masry Al Youm** (private)
- 4) **Al Shorouk** (private)

Overall, **the coders analyzed a total of 4,395 stories** that were published on the elections in the four newspapers between the dates of November 2 and December 14, 2011.

Television coverage was also considered in a qualitative manner through discourse analysis. We monitored coverage of the elections on the state TV main news bulletin (the 9 pm news), as well as on several talk shows: two state TV political talk shows *Eteghat*, and *Mubasher men Misr*; as well as two private, independent talk show *Baladna Bel Masri* on OnTV, and the private, independent talk show *Al Aashera Masaan* on Dream II. Only episodes that had to do with the elections were considered for the analysis.

The research addressed diversity both in terms of the agents featured in the media as well as the topics mentioned/discussed.

## Results

### I. Newspaper Analysis:

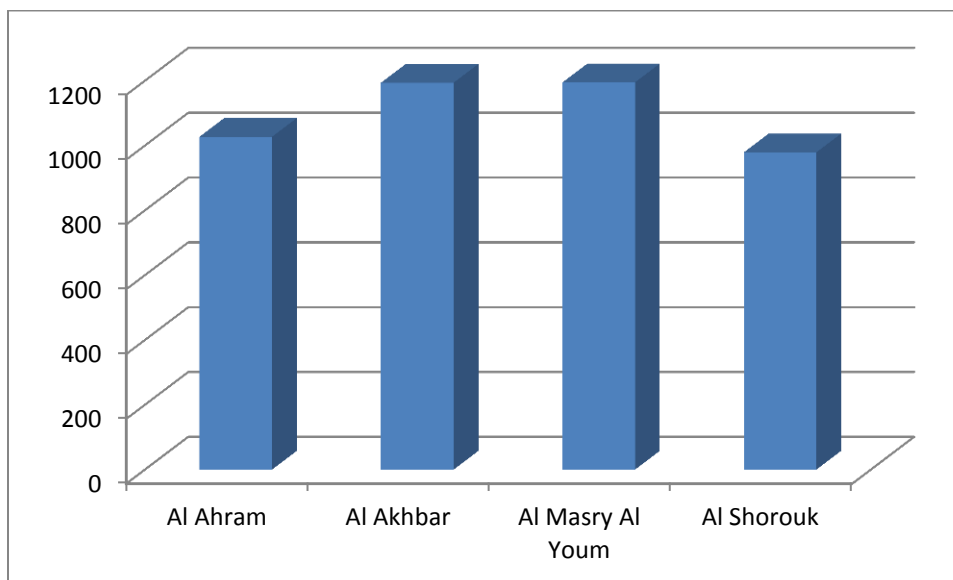
There was a total of 4,395 stories related to the elections in the four newspapers between November 2 (the day the election campaign started) and December 15.<sup>1</sup> The number of stories per newspaper was as follows:

Al Ahram: 1027

Al Akhbar: 1194

Al Masry Al Youm: 1195

Al Shorouk: 979



<sup>1</sup> We had problems with obtaining a few newspaper issues, and those had to be excluded from the analysis.

In terms of type of story, more than half the stories were pure news stories (52.9% or 2321 stories); 27.1% (1191 stories) were feature stories; and 12% (528 stories) were opinion pieces or editorials.

Out of the 4,395 stories, 81% (3419 stories) were small in size, meaning they were under ¼ of a page in size; 15.5% (652 stories) were medium in size (between ¼ of a page and up to under half a page), and only 3.5% (148 stories) were half a page or more in size.

We looked at the quality of journalism displayed in the four newspapers in terms of objectivity, and fairness and balance. Almost three quarters of all stories (74.3%, or 3040 stories) were classified as “objective”, meaning that they separate fact from opinion, and their content is free from sensationalism, and free from libel or inciting negative emotions towards the group mentioned. Another 20% (818 stories) were “somehow objective,” and only 5.7% (233 stories) were “not objective.” Interestingly, within the “not objective” category, almost three quarters of these (73.4%, or 171 stories) were in Al Ahram newspaper.

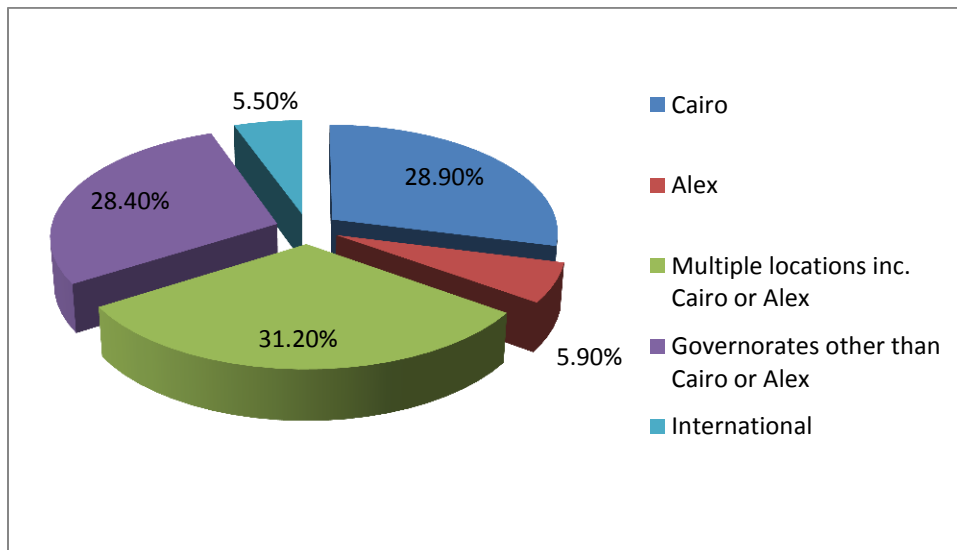
In terms of fairness and balance, a concept at the heart of diversity, the numbers were not as good. The concept of fairness and balance was defined as “covering both/all sides of a story rather than one side.” Only about half the stories (55.1%, or 2254 stories) were classified as “fair and balanced.” Another quarter (25%, or 1023 stories) were classified as “somehow fair and balanced,” while almost one fifth (19.9%, or 816 stories) were classified as “not fair and balanced.”

### **Diversity of Themes:**

Most of the stories (86.1% or 3777 stories) were purely about local politics and the logistics of the electoral process. Very few stories actually discussed programs of the parliamentary candidates or how they intend to serve their constituencies. The second most discussed theme in relation to the elections was crime and the lack of security on Egyptian streets. This theme was covered in 216 stories (4.9%). Religion (as a topic) was covered in 48 stories (1.1%); international relations were covered in 46 stories (1%); and any other topic occupied under 1% of the coverage. It is interesting to note that the issues that took up under 1% of the coverage are the issues that a voter would normally depend on to choose his/her Parliament representative. These include social issues (0.7%); economic issues (0.5%); education (0.1%); health (0.1%); arts and culture (0.3%); and science and technology (0.4%). Issues pertaining to diversity also had a very small percentage of coverage. For example, women’s issues were only discussed in 0.5% of the stories; children’s issues in 0.1%; issues pertaining to religious minorities, including Christians (0.4%); people with special needs (0.1%); ethnic minorities (0%--only 1 story); and the elderly (0%--only 1 story).

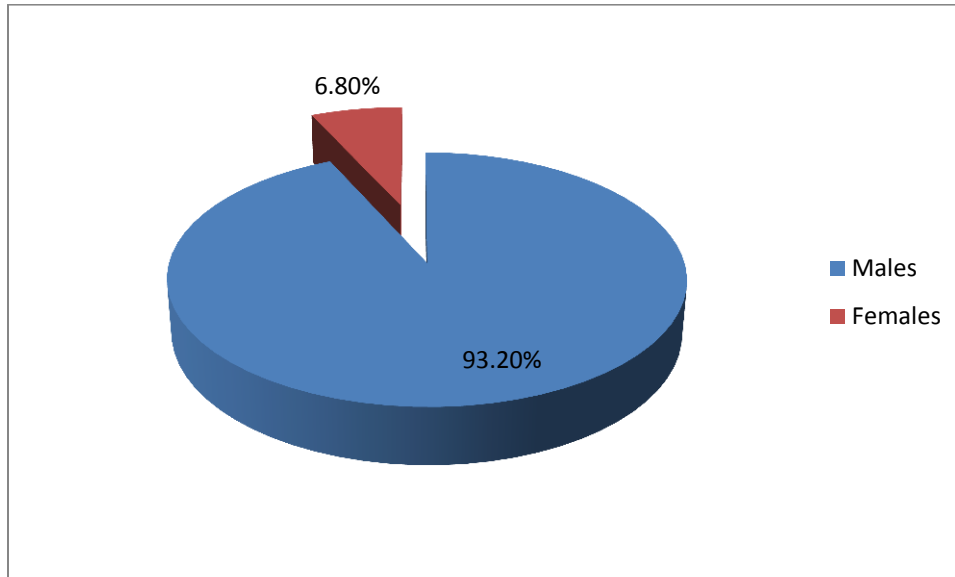
### Geographical Diversity:

Geographical diversity has improved significantly in the coverage of the 2011 Parliamentary elections. The lack of such diversity has long been a major problem within media coverage, whereby most of the coverage was dedicated to Cairo, with some minor coverage in Alexandria. This election round, the picture was very different. Within the 4,395 stories that featured election-related coverage, under 30% was dedicated to Cairo (exactly 28.9%, or 1220 stories), and 5.9% or 249 stories were dedicated to Alexandria. About one third (31.2%, or 1316 stories) was dedicated to multiple Egyptian governorates that include either Cairo or Alexandria, and another 28.4% (1198 stories) were about governorates other than Cairo or Alexandria. The remaining 5.5% (230 stories) covered international locations, (such as stories covering Egyptian expatriates). This is a major improvement over the coverage of past elections, which can be illustrated in the following graph.



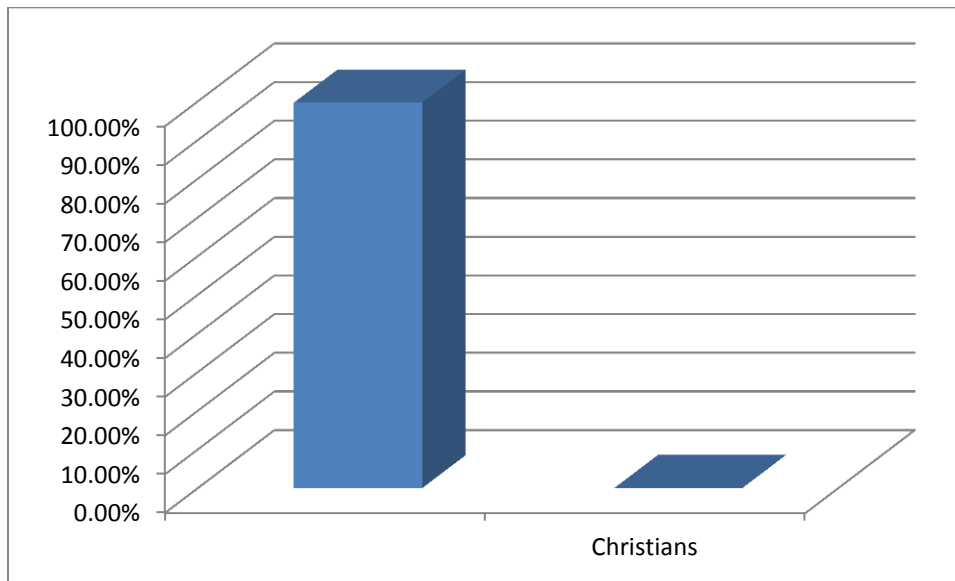
### Gender Diversity:

Analysis of gender diversity within the 4,395 stories examined showed that the stories are severely biased towards males and against females. The stories featured interviews with 14,001 individuals. Of these, 13,042 were males and only 959 were females. This is a staggering difference of 93.2% for males and only 6.8% for females. It means that basically one female is featured for every 15 males.



### Religious Diversity:

Religious diversity is another very important aspect, and one which is not easy to measure. We identified Christians based on either having a clear Christian name or being identified in the story as Christian. The analysis showed only a minority of 416 individuals with Christian names featured within the total number of 14,001 interviewed. This constitutes only 0.03%. No other individuals of any other religious minority were identified. We do realize that this may not be the best way of measuring religious identity, but it was the only way available for the purposes of this report. Given the staggering lack of representation of religious minorities, the absolute accurate figures cannot be very far from the ones we report. This staggering lack of representation is illustrated in the following graph. As you can see, because the percentage is so small, the column labeled “Christians” is almost non-existent.



### **Ethnic and Other Minorities:**

The picture is even worse for ethnic minorities as well as other important sectors of the society such as persons with disabilities, children, or the elderly. Only 5 people of different ethnic origins such as Bedouins or Nubians were identified in the stories. There were also a total of 11 people identified as persons with disabilities, 28 identified as elderly in stories discussing their issues, and 5 children. There were 80 expatriates interviewed in the stories.

## **II. Television Coverage**

The analysis of the television coverage of elections in this report is qualitative, based on a critical discourse analysis of some episodes of the Egyptian state television main news bulleting (9 pm news) as well as four popular talk shows. At this point, the analysis is only meant to provide some guidance into particular aspects where major improvements have taken place and other areas of concern where more efforts should be exerted.

Other than the news bulletin, the talk shows analyzed were *Eteghat*, and *Mubasher men Misr* on Egyptian state television; as well as *Baladna Bel Masri* on OnTV, and *Al Aashera Masaan* on Dream II. Only episodes that were related to the elections were considered for the analysis.

Again, the main area of improvement had to do with geographical diversity in covering the elections. For example, OnTV had live coverage all day on election days from all governorates where voting was taking place. Live correspondents were on the scene conducting field reports and interviews, and expert analysis was provided from the studio. Egyptian state television also improved a great deal in this regards, where they had some correspondents on the news providing live coverage and field reports. Previously, Egyptian state television coverage of elections usually only focused on Cairo.

However, still there was not much diversity in the news reports. News bulletins on Egyptian state television still rank their news based on political protocol rather than newsworthiness. For example, the main news items on election days were of Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi checking on the electoral process and visiting the polling stations. Slogans across the screen frequently use less than objective language as they speak of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) as the “protector” of the revolution as Egypt “crosses the path onto democracy.” While the Egyptian street sometimes raged with anger against army violations, images of soldiers distributing water to voters queuing outside voting stations were aired on the news. Opinions featured through interviews and sometimes as part of the news item are also tilted towards the government and SCAF side, with no loud opposition voices. For example, a case of clear editorializing came in answer to a news item about sectors of revolutionaries who boycotted the elections. At the end of the news item, the anchor said, “The elections are considered the only solution to fulfill the struggling democratic transition since last Feb (Dec. 1).”

Women and religious minorities are also rarely featured as experts on the Egyptian news, and ethnic minorities are almost never featured. Out of 44 guests who appeared on the eight episodes we analyzed, only 4 were women and 4 had Christian names. No issues of diversity as it relates to the elections were discussed.

Egyptian state television talk shows follow almost the same pattern, although more variety and diversity in terms of the types of guests was noticed. For example, they tried to feature representatives from different parties, as well as a few human rights experts, and media and law professors. Despite this surface variety of guests though, any opposition voices are usually soft-spoken, and the presenters are skewed towards the side of the regime. Similar to what is broadcast on the news, talk show presenters on Egyptian state television will say statements such as “We have seen the pictures of the army soldiers carrying an old woman to vote” (*Eteghat*, Nov. 30) or will sometimes also volunteer their own positive experiences and opinions of the army and SCAF.



Again, the same diversity problem exists in Egyptian state television talk shows. Out of the seven episodes analyzed, there were 72 guests, and only 5 of them were women and only 3 had Christian names. And again, no issues of diversity as it relates to the elections were discussed, although these issues should be a focal point of the nominees' election campaigns.

*Al Aashera Masaan* is a popular program presented by talk show host Mona El Shazly. The program seemed interested in featuring different voices during the election period, and also took on a duty of spreading awareness about different aspects of the electoral process. For example, a simulation model of a polling station was set up in the studio on November 26, and the deputy minister of interior was asked to illustrate and “rehearse” the different steps of how the process goes for the voter. Another illustrative episode took place on the eve of the second phase of the elections, where an expert guest provided a “final revision” of the voting steps before the elections using various electoral maps, tables, charts and illustrations.

In terms of diversity of guests, the program tries to feature people of different political backgrounds as well as professional experts, professors, and your average Egyptian. However, gender representation is highly skewed towards men. In five episodes analyzed, 11 guests were featured, none of which were women, and none had a clearly Christian name.

*Baladna Bel Masri* is another popular talk show, presented on OnTV by host Reem Magued. *Baladna Bel Masri* is perceived by many as one of few talk shows that represent the voice of the revolution, which has at times raised concerns about whether or not the concepts of objectivity and fairness and balance are expected of a talk show, particularly on a private channel. The show host is outspoken about her support of the revolution. However, facts are in most cases presented clearly and separated from opinions.

*Baladna Bel Masri* did a very good job of providing live coverage of the elections within every governorate of Egypt. On election days, the program lost its name (but not its presenter) and became part of the open live coverage on OnTV that lasted the whole day. It is worth mentioning that the program started featuring potential nominees and newly formed as well as older political parties a while before the elections, and hosted each party for an equal segment of time to orient viewers about their political programs. Many nominees were also featured on the show, sometimes in debate form between competitor nominees or parties.

In terms of diversity, *Baladna Bel Masri* featured 54 guests in the nine episodes we analyzed, seven of which were women, and none had a clearly Christian name. Generally speaking though, the presenter usually speaks of and sometimes features Egypt's marginalized ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities.

There are some diversity issues, however, that talk shows generally suffer from in Egypt. For example, despite a rich population of almost 85 million Egyptians, talk show guests on all television channels constitute a small pool of experts, politicians, and intellectuals, and as such are frequently repeated. It is not uncommon to flip channels to see a guest that was just being interviewed on a different channel half an hour earlier, and then listen to the same guest in a phone interview an hour later on a different channel. This poses an artificial limit on the scope of variety and diversity of thought and viewpoints offered through these popular programs, and inadvertently sends a stereotyping message of what a talk show guest looks and sounds like. Much more variety needs to be incorporated in terms of featured guests, and much more integration of gender, ethnic, and socio-economic minorities is needed.

## **Conclusion**

This report provides a much needed scientific, yet simplified, quantitative and qualitative assessment of the diversity of the media coverage of the recent Parliamentary elections in Egypt for both print and television media. The report illustrates that overall, only the voice of the mainstream gets emphasized in the press and on the popular television talk shows, while voices of minority groups echo further down the spiral of silence.

For the print media, even though there were 4,395 stories published in the four newspapers we analyzed within the time frame of the study, and even though the standard of journalism was reasonable overall, still the stories mostly focused on the logistics of the Parliamentary elections and how the elections fit within the current political scheme in Egypt. At the same time, the press coverage ignored other important issues of substance such as the necessary components of the electoral nominees' and party programs, as well as all issues related to inclusiveness and diversity, as they relate to women, children, the elderly, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, or socio-economic minorities. This goes to show that even good journalism loses much of its potential when it lacks diversity and inclusiveness.

The analysis showed a severe under-representation of all minority groups in society. This is a very alarming issue since people use media messages to construct their social reality and their perceptions of these groups in society. Females constituted only 6.8% of the overall individuals interviewed for stories, a ratio of 1:15. For every 15 males

interviewed or featured in newspaper stories, only 1 female was featured. No wonder the overall representation of women in the Parliament turned out to be as low as only 2%.

Other minority voices were almost non-existent in the newspaper coverage. Only 5 people of different ethnic origins such as Bedouins or Nubians were identified within the 14,001 individuals featured in the stories. There were also a total of only 11 people identified as persons with disabilities, 28 identified as elderly, 5 children, and only 416 individuals with Christian names (0.03%). No other individuals of any other religious minority were identified or mentioned.

For the television news and talk shows, while some private channels are trying their best to become more inclusive and are succeeding to varying degrees, the narrow selection of a small group of talk show “star guests” poses a serious threat to diversity of thought and expression. The road is longer for Egyptian state television, which needs to realize that it is there to serve all sectors of the people of Egypt. Inclusiveness of minority groups was not any better in the television coverage than it was in the newspaper coverage. A severe lack of representation of all minority groups was also found in the television coverage of the elections.

Overall, one notable area of improvement has been in terms of the geographical diversity of the coverage. While it usually focused solely on Cairo, this time coverage was extended to almost every Egyptian governorate. We hope this trend will continue and will expand to cover other domains of diversity and inclusiveness. Minority groups have a voice, and they have a right for that voice to be heard. It is the media’s responsibility to rise up to its duty of inclusiveness and represent the true diversity of Egyptian society so that these groups do not slide further down the spiral of silence.

## **About the Author**

Dr. Rasha Abdulla is Associate Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo. She has a Ph.D. in Communication (December 2003) from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. She is the recipient of several international teaching and research awards, including most recently, the AUC Excellence in Research and Creative Endeavors Award (2011). Dr. Abdulla is the author of three books and numerous articles. Her main research interests include media inclusiveness and diversity, public television and media reform, as well as the uses and effects of new media, particularly the Internet, and the link between social media and political activism. She tweets regularly on these issues and more at [@RashaAbdulla](https://twitter.com/RashaAbdulla) and can be reached by email at [rasha@aucegypt.edu](mailto:rasha@aucegypt.edu).

## **About the Media Diversity Institute (MDI)**

The [Media Diversity Institute](#) (MDI) is an international organization entirely devoted to working with the media in order to improve reporting on diversity issues which can cause disputes/conflicts at the local, national, regional or international level. We define diversity as race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, income-based discrimination, gender, and whatever else makes individuals or groups different from each other. Different but, equal! Over the last 14years MDI has worked in Europe, the former Soviet States, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Southern Asia. MDI promotes responsible journalism as a means to improve inter-community relations, increase tolerance, and encourage dialogue among individuals and groups coming from different backgrounds. We work with journalism academics and students, media decision makers and reporters, as well as with civil society organizations specialized in diversity issues. We promote responsible journalism, with special emphasis on fairness, accuracy, sensitivity, and inclusiveness.