



**Diversity Observatory**

**Report 3**

**Media Diversity during Egypt's Constitutional Referendum**

**(Nov-Dec 2012)**

**Prepared by: Dr. Rasha Abdulla**

**Report released 12 February 2013**

On November 22, 2012 Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi issued a new constitutional declaration, which political entities feared gave him powers unprecedented to an Egyptian president. On the same day the stock market lost EGP 29.3 billion, the third largest loss in a single day since January 2011. Mass protests followed in Tahrir Square and around the Itihadiya Presidential Palace, as four Presidential advisors and one deputy resigned over the declaration. On December 9, President Morsi retreated on the amendment and issued a new one, but said everything that took place as a result of the rescinded amendment stands. That included holding a referendum on the constitution despite many opposing voices who said the constitution needed more work, more diverse civic voices and more inclusion in its preparations, and more agreement on its articles. The referendum was held on Dec. 15 and Dec. 22.

This report, the third in a series on media diversity in Egypt, examines diversity in the coverage of the above events, culminating in the constitutional referendum. It follows two reports, the first on media diversity in coverage of the Parliamentary elections in Egypt, released in March 2012, and the second on media diversity in coverage of the Presidential elections in Egypt, released in September 2012.

This report aims to provide an accurate and scientific analysis of how inclusive and how diverse the media content was in the coverage of the above incidents. 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.

**The overall results of this report show an even further reduction in diversity within media coverage. This is alarming, especially knowing that the figures in the previous two reports did not show a good representation of the diversity within Egyptian society. This report shows that even that very weak representation of minority groups within societies is getting slimmer.**

### **Methodology and Sample**

This report is based on a methodology that incorporated both quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis to obtain a clear, 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 several popular talk shows. 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 2,969 stories** that were published pertaining to the above incidents in the four newspapers. We started the analysis on the day the problematic constitutional amendment was issued and analyzed up to a day after the first round of the Constitutional Referendum, for a total of 25 monitoring days. The exact dates are November 22 to December 16, 2012.

Television coverage was also considered in a qualitative manner through discourse analysis. We monitored coverage of the same incidents on the state television main political talk show *Mubasher min Misr*; as well as four popular private, independent talk shows *Baladna Bel Masri* on OnTV; *Al Hayah Al Youm* on Al Hayat; *Akher Kalam* on OnTV; and *Akher Al Nahar* on Al Nahar.

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 2,969 stories related to the incidents in the four newspapers between the dates of November 22 to December 16.<sup>1</sup> The number of stories per newspaper was as follows:

Al Ahram: 1013

Al Akhbar: 441

Al Masry Al Youm: 923

Al Shorouk: 591

In terms of type of story, 66.2% of the stories were pure news stories (1964 stories); 11.9% (354 stories) were feature stories; and 21.3% (630 stories) were opinion pieces or editorials.

Out of the news and feature stories analyzed, 73.4% (1890 stories) were small in size, meaning they were under  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a page in size; 19.9% (512 stories) were medium in size (between  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a page and up to under half a page), and only 6.7% (172 stories) were half a page or more in size.

---

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

We looked at the quality of journalism displayed in the four newspapers in terms of objectivity, and fairness and balance. Among the stories that qualified for coding on the objectivity variable (2577 stories), only about half of them (1337 or 51.9%) 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(s) mentioned. Another 34.2% (880 stories) were “somehow objective,” and 13.9% (360 stories) were “not objective.” It has to be noted that these results show significantly less objectivity from our last report, where 82.2% of the stories were classified as “objective,” 14.3% were “somehow objective”, and only 2.7% were classified as “not objective.” Generally speaking, it seems that the heated political environment that Egypt is going through makes it much harder for newspaper to maintain their “objectivity” towards the issues.

The concept of fairness and balance, a concept at the heart of diversity, was defined as “covering both/all sides of a story rather than one side.” Among the stories that qualified for analysis on this variable, under half (45.7%, or 1178 stories) were classified as “fair and balanced.” Another 40.4% (1040 stories) were classified as “somehow fair and balanced,” while the remaining 13.9% (1197 stories) were classified as “not fair and balanced.”

#### **Diversity of Themes:**

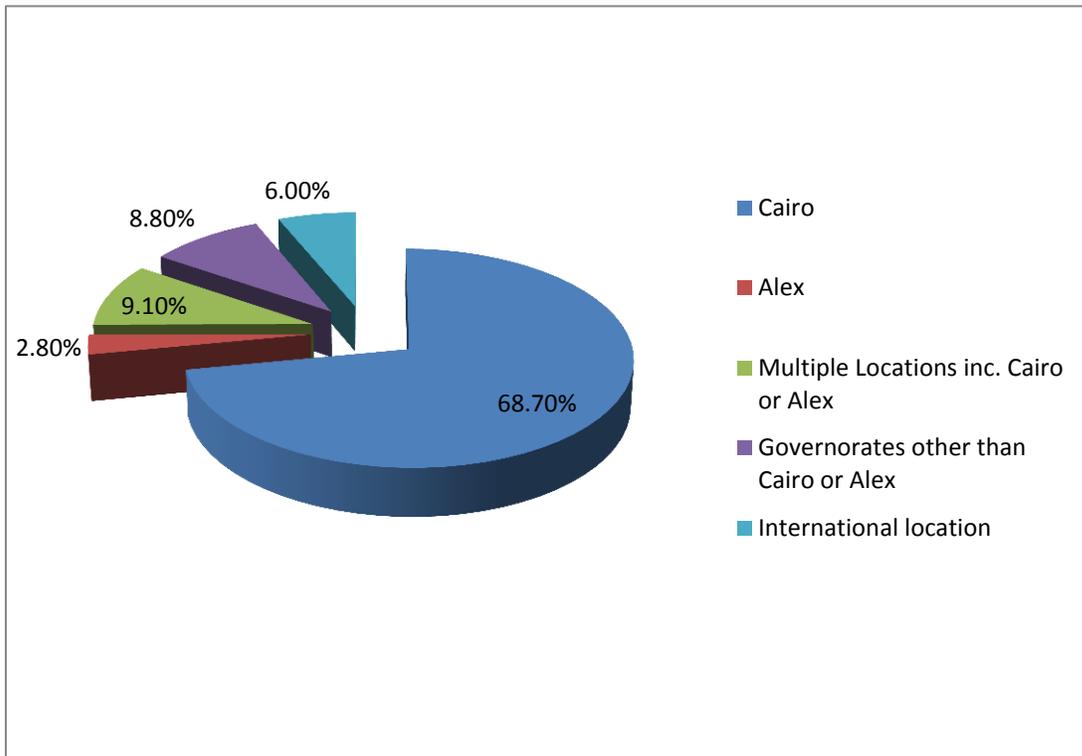
As with the last two reports, a great majority of the stories (88.7% or 2630 stories) were about politics and the logistics of the referendum. Stories covering international politics amounted to (2.7% or 81 stories). Economic issues were featured in 4.0% (only 119 stories); social issues were featured in only 0.5% (14 stories); the army/SCAF was featured in 1.2% (35 stories), and crime in 0.1% (2 stories). Some of the main challenges facing Egypt had very low coverage. For example, education was only featured in 9 stories (0.3%); and health was only covered in 5 stories (0.2%).

Issues pertaining to diversity also had a very small percentage of coverage. For example, women’s issues were only discussed in 7 stories (0.2%); people with special needs in only 4 stories (0.1%); and children’s issues were not discussed at all. Issues pertaining to religious minorities, including Christians were discussed in only 10 stories (0.3%); ethnic minorities in only 6 stories (0.2%); and the elderly were not discussed at all.

#### **Geographical Diversity:**

Although still better than pre-revolution, geographical diversity in this monitoring period was not as good as the two previous reports. The lack of geographical diversity has long been a major problem within media coverage in Egypt, whereby most of the coverage was dedicated to Cairo, with some minor coverage in Alexandria, and almost no coverage in any other governorates. Within this monitoring period, out of the stories where a location could be identified (1980 stories), Cairo still ranked significantly higher than other governorates, with

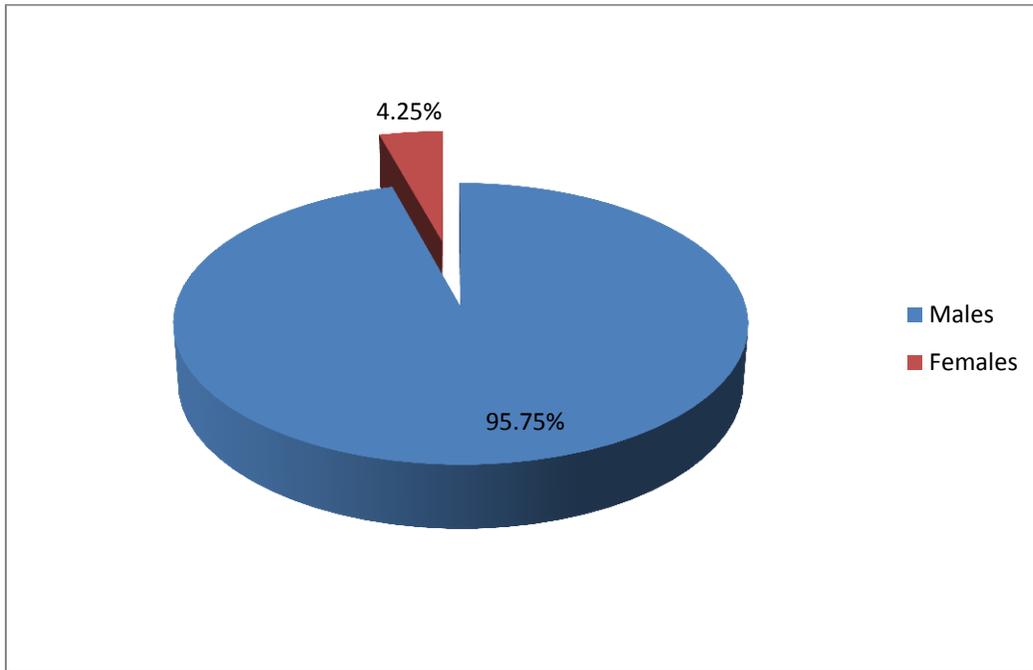
over two-thirds of the coverage (68.7% or 1361 stories) dedicated to the capital. Alexandria had a share of 2.8% or 55 stories. Another 9.1% (270 stories) covered multiple Egyptian governorates that included either Cairo or Alexandria, and another 8.8% (175 stories) was dedicated to governorates other than Cairo or Alexandria. The remaining 6.0% (119 stories) covered international locations (such as stories covering Egyptian expatriates). These results are illustrated in the following graph.



### Gender Diversity:

As was the case with the last two reports, gender diversity within the media coverage of the constitutional referendum was disappointing. Analysis of the 2,969 stories examined showed that severe bias towards males and against females. It is worth noting that the latest United Nations demographic statistics about Egypt indicates that the gender ratio is 1.01 males to 1.00 females. The stories analyzed featured interviews with 8,662 individuals. Of these, 8,294 were males and only 368 were females. This is a staggering difference of 95.75% for males and only 4.25% for females. It means that basically one female is featured for every 22.5 males. This ratio

is even worse than the one reported in the previous two reports, which featured a female representation of 6.8% and 6.5% respectively.

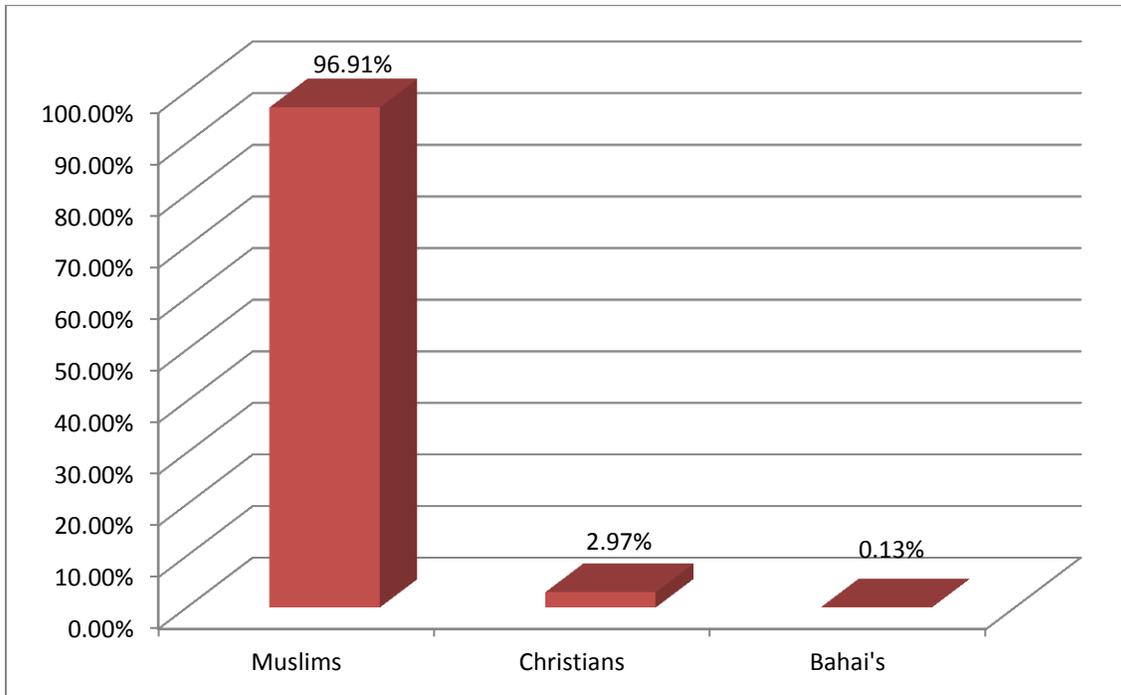


### **Religious Diversity:**

Religious diversity is another very important aspect, and one which is not easy to measure. As with the previous report, in this monitoring period we attempted to identify Muslims, Christians, Bahai's, as well as those whose religion is unclear within the context presented. We identified an individual as Muslim if he/she had a clear Muslim name (e.g. Mohamed) or if they mentioned their religion or religious affiliation, or bore a clear sign (e.g. garment or veil) relevant to Islam. We identified an individual as Christian based on either having a clear Christian name or by mentioning their religion or church representation, or otherwise bearing a clear sign (e.g. garment or cross) relevant to Christianity. Bahai's were only classified as such if they were identified as Bahai's in the story. If a person had neither of the above attributes, he/she was listed as "unclear religion." We are aware that this is not a perfect way of measuring religion or religious diversity, since even within Islam, the majority religion in Egypt, there are different sects and diversities, and we continue to work on ways to enhance our measurement tools. However, this is a problem in literature measuring religious diversity all over the world, since religious affiliations are not always obvious or easy to identify.

Once again, as with the previous two reports, the results of this coverage were quite disappointing. There are no Egyptian official figures of the number of Christians in Egypt, but

most sources estimate Egypt's religious demography to be around 90% Muslim and 10% Christian. This analysis showed only a minority of 236 individuals with Christian names or attributes featured within the total number of those interviewed. In comparison, those identified as Muslim were 7,706. There were 10 Bahai's identified in the stories analyzed, and 642 whose religion was not identified. The relative percentages of this coverage out of those whose religion was identified (8,020) are 96.91% for Muslims, 2.97% for Christians, and 0.13% for Bahai's.



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

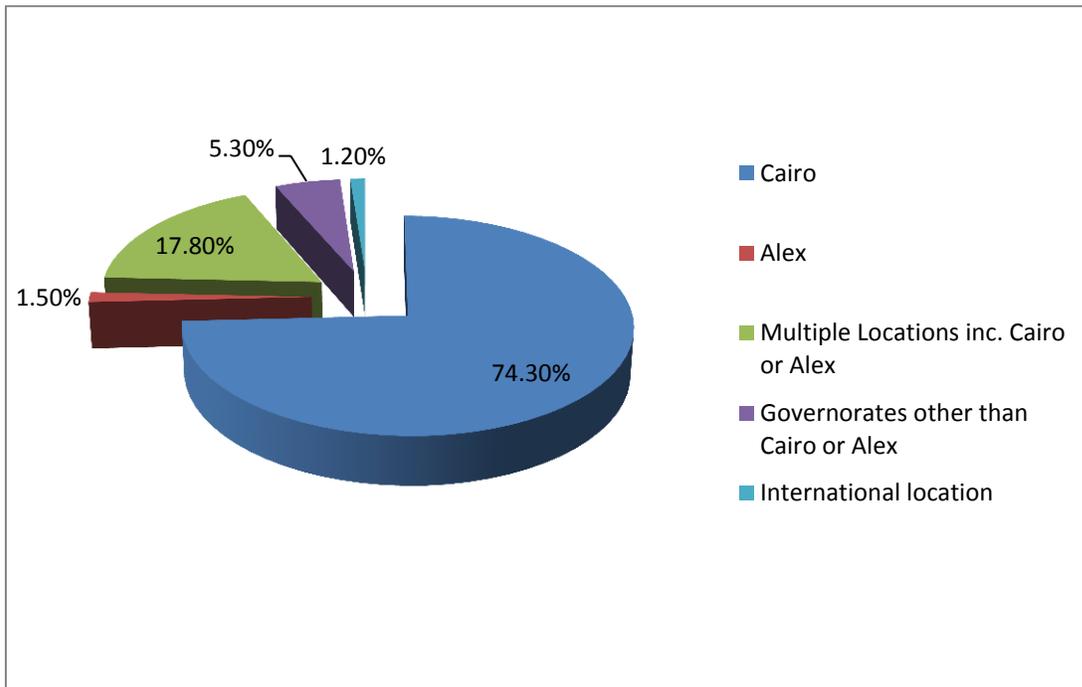
Media representation in this monitoring period, even more so than the previous two reports, was quite disappointing for ethnic minorities as well as other important sectors of the society such as persons with disabilities, children, or the elderly. Out of the 8,662 individuals interviewed or featured in the stories, only 3 people of different ethnic origins such as Bedouins or Nubians were identified. There were 37 people identified as expatriates, only 4 identified as persons with disabilities, only 3 identified as elderly in stories discussing their issues, and 11 children. We are also aware of the difficulties in identifying some of these categories, but the numbers are so small that even if they are under-estimated, the absolute accurate figures still cannot be satisfactory. It is worth noting that the Egyptian State Information Service estimates the number of individuals under the age of 15 in Egypt to be 31.74%, and the number of individuals above 60 to be 6.27%.

## II. Television Coverage

The analysis of the television coverage in this report is qualitative, based on a critical discourse analysis of episodes of several popular talk shows, both on state television and on private, independent channels. The analysis is 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.

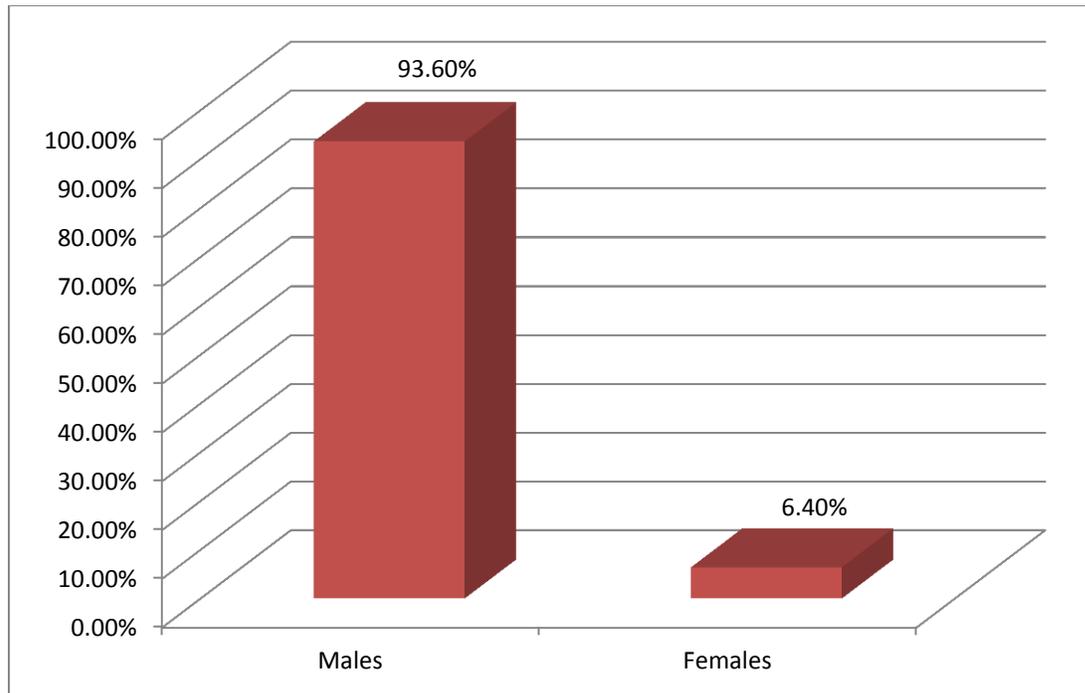
The talk shows monitored were the main state television political talk show *Mubasher min Misr*; as well as four private, independent talk shows *Baladna Bel Masri* on OnTV; *Al Hayah Al Youm* on Al Hayat; *Akher Kalam* on OnTV; and *Akher Al Nahar* on Al Nahar.

Generally speaking, the geographical diversity in television coverage has improved much since the revolution, but like newspapers, it has retreated in this report than in the previous two reports. As can be seen in the chart below, Cairo still got an overwhelming three-quarters of the coverage. Issues pertaining to diversity were not popular in terms of content, with politics taking about 94% of the coverage, leaving all other issues, including diversity issues, with less than 6%.



Gender representation on the popular evening talk shows still shows a huge skew towards males. Out of 971 guests featured on the five talk shows during the monitoring period, 909 were

males (93.6%) and only 62 females (6.4%). This means that for every woman that viewers see on television talk shows, 14.6 men are featured.



*Mubasher min Masr* had the lowest percentage of female representation. Out of 17 episodes analyzed featuring 131 individuals (in studio or by phone or reports), only 3 were females (2.3%), while 128 were male (97.7%). This is particularly alarming given that this is the state television, which is supposed to be the closest thing Egypt has to public service broadcasting. For every one woman that appears on the main talk show on state television, 42.5 men appear, a ratio that is unacceptable by all means. Geographical diversity has improved tremendously on this program though, which previously used to not dedicate any coverage for areas outside of Cairo or Alexandria. Only two guests on the episodes we analyzed appeared to have a clear Christian name. The program did feature segments discussing minority issues as it relates to the constitution. However, it usually did not feature the minorities to discuss their own issues, so for example, women's issues were not discussed by women; issues pertaining to Sinai and Upper Egypt were not necessarily discussed by Bedouins or Nubians, etc.

*Baladna Bel Masri* is a popular talk show, presented on the private, independent channel OnTV by host Reem Magued. *Baladna Bel Masri* has always been perceived to be on the side of the revolution, and the talk show host has been outspoken about her pro-revolution inclinations. However, the program does a good job of featuring balanced guests, representing different viewpoints, and the presenter separates facts from opinions. During this monitoring period, we

analyzed 12 episodes of the show, featuring 276 guests (in studio or by phone or reports). Among these guests, only 15 were women (5.4%). Geographical diversity on the program was not as good this monitoring period as it was in previous reports, with Cairo getting the great majority of attention. However, on referendum day, the program tried to convey a picture of what was happening in different governorates. It is worth mentioning though that, generally speaking, the program makes it a point every once in a while to feature a sample of Egypt's marginalized ethnic minorities, people of lower socio-economic classes, and people with disabilities.

*Al Hayat Al Youm* is another popular program presented by talk show hosts Sherif Amer and Lobna Asal on the private, independent channel Al Hayat. The program did a good job with objectivity and balance, as it tried to cover all sides of the issues presented, and to feature guests from across the political spectrum. On referendum day, the program did a good job of covering what was happening outside of Cairo through local correspondents in various governorates, who portrayed what was happening as well as violations reported in different areas.

The program had a slightly higher (though still very low) female representation rate. Out of 24 episodes that we analyzed, featuring 213 guests, the program featured 16 women, a 7.5% rate. Males represented 92.5%, with 197 male guests featured.

*Akher Al Nahar* is another popular talk show presented on the private Al Nahar channel. The program is presented by a different presenter every day. The hosts are Khaled Salah, Amr El Kahki, Doaa Gad el Haq, and veteran talk show host Mahmoud Saad. We analyzed 22 episodes, featuring 269 guests. Out of these, 21 were women (7.8%), while the remaining 248 were males (92.2%). While the program tried to maintain balance in terms of the spectrum of voices represented, most of the issues tackled were purely political in nature, and did not delve much into issues of diversity or minorities. Most of the coverage was concentrated in Cairo, except for referendum day, when the program contacted local correspondents to cover the different governorates.

Last but not least, *Akher Kalam* is another popular talk show, presented by Yosri Fouda on the private channel OnTV. The program's host goes to length to maintain his credibility as an "objective" presenter, thus he usually keeps his opinions to himself (despite a daily short, eloquent editorialized introduction) and tries to be as fair and balanced as possible with the guests. The program also tries to feature guests from across the political spectrum. The program featured 82 guests in the 11 episodes that aired within the monitoring period. Amongst these, 7 were women (8.5%), while 75 (91.5%) were men. Most of the issues discussed were purely

political in nature, with minority issues not at the forefront. However, it has to be noted that the program pioneered a very commendable act a few months ago, as it became the first evening talk show to feature a simultaneous interpreter for sign language appearing daily at the corner of the screen, a big testament to inclusion and to the rights of this sector of society to follow up on discussions.

Finally, once again, we noticed the same phenomenon of the talk show “stars,” who are repeated guests on the evening talk shows. By doing that, these popular programs limit themselves to a narrow pool of guests that producers and presenters are familiar with, and deprive the audience the chance to listen to a more diverse spectrum of opinions. It is not at all unusual for a guest to appear on one talk show, then another, and be interviewed on the phone in a couple of other shows, all in the same evening. Despite the large number of experts, politicians, and intellectuals in the country, a very small percentage of them are therefore featured on these popular shows. This not only limits diversity but emphasizes a stereotypical image of what a talk show guest looks and sounds like.

## **Conclusion**

This report is a scientific, yet simplified, quantitative and qualitative assessment of the diversity of the media coverage of the December 2012 constitutional referendum, and the incidents that preceded it in terms of Presidential constitutional declarations. We analyzed samples of both newspapers and television talk shows. The report concludes that diversity issues are still ignored in the Egyptian media, with the little grounds gained since the January 25 Revolution seemingly at a threat of retreating. Minority groups and the marginalized are still largely ignored in the mainstream media.

For the print media, we analyzed 2,969 stories published in four newspapers within the time frame of the study. Most of the stories focused on local politics and ignored other important issues of substance, as well as all issues related to inclusiveness and diversity, as they relate to women, children, the elderly, religious minorities, and ethnic minorities.

Our two recent reports on the coverage of Egypt’s Parliamentary elections and Presidential elections had revealed a major improvement in terms of the geographical diversity of the coverage of these important events. This report seems to suggest that this is not necessarily an ongoing trend. Coverage is usually focused on Cairo until the day an important event takes place, such as an election or the referendum. It is important to push for and advocate this geographical diversity, as it helps us uncover the various governorates of Egypt, some of which are severely ignored by the media and the government alike.

As with our previous reports, this analysis showed a severe under-representation of all minority groups in society. Females constituted only 4.25% of the overall individuals interviewed for

stories, an even smaller percentage than the 6.8% and the 6.5% we uncovered in the two previous reports. This basically means that during this monitoring period, one female was featured for every 22.5 males interviewed or featured in newspaper stories. On television, that percentage only rises to 6.4%, a ratio of 1 female to every 14.6 males.

Other minority voices were almost non-existent in the newspaper coverage. Only 3 people of different ethnic origins such as Bedouins or Nubians were identified within the 8,662 individuals featured in the stories. There were also a total of 4 people identified as persons with disabilities, 37 identified as expatriates, 3 identified as elderly in stories discussing their issues, and 11 children. These figures are quite alarming, particularly given the actual percentages of these groups of people in the Egyptian society.

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, generally speaking, a severe lack of representation of all minority groups was observed during this monitoring period. Moreover, the narrow selection of a small group of talk show “star guests” poses a serious threat to diversity of thought and expression.

## About the Author



Dr. Rasha Abdulla is Associate Professor and former Department Chair 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).

**Researchers Coordinator:** Sara Alsherif

**Researchers:** Sara Alsherif  
(Please list all researchers names)

## **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.