Enhancing Political Participation Abroad: The Media's Impact on Parliamentary Elections for Egyptian Expatriates

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Abstract

The impact can vary significantly for audiences outside the direct reach of domestic media—those who may not receive the same content as citizens residing within the country. This discrepancy becomes particularly evident during times of crisis and political turmoil when media strategies must be tailored to reach external audiences and achieve specific goals effectively. Therefore, the core issue addressed in this study revolves around a fundamental question: How can media effectively support and enhance political participation among expatriates during parliamentary elections? Grounded in Democratic Participatory Theory, which advocates for media prioritizing public interests and democratic engagement through pluralism, local interaction, and equitable access to information, the study aims to explore this question. The research employs a questionnaire to investigate the effectiveness of media campaigns in encouraging Egyptian expatriates to participate in parliamentary elections. The findings suggest that these campaigns have a limited impact on motivating expatriates to engage politically.

KEYWORDS: Parliamentary Elections, Egyptian Expatriates, Electoral Campaigns, Media.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Free dissemination of information through various media platforms offers significant potential for grassroots mobilization, grounded in a broad and accurate understanding of political events. Media studies have shown that repeated exposure to similar topics can significantly enhance individuals' knowledge of a particular subject. This effect varies depending on multiple factors particularly the target audience of Media messages.

In recent periods, the relationship between the media and the public has evolved, becoming increasingly interdependent (Ibrahim, Safieddine, & Pourghomi, 2023). It's a given that Media has been found to have the power to influence the formation of public opinion trends and play a crucial role in

shaping individuals' political awareness on various issues. This role of the media becomes particularly prominent during elections, significantly impacting public opinion.

Democratic elections and its relationship with media is of great interest to researchers and specialists in many fields such as politics, Mass media and communication, as well as political sociology. Discussions about elections are often linked to the role played by the media. Numerous studies indicate that individuals perceive social reality through the images and meanings established by different media platforms (Kerr & Lührmann, 2017). However, this expected effect of the media may vary for audiences who are expatriates and have been living outside the country for many years. Media organizations may not adequately understand the characteristics of this audience, study its diverse needs, or direct content that enhances its connection with the home country (Melissen, 2005).

This is important as the Egyptian Constitution, under Article 208, states that the state is committed to caring for the interests of Egyptians residing abroad, protecting them, guaranteeing their rights and freedoms, enabling them to perform their public duties towards the state and society, and participating in the development of the nation. Therefore, Egyptians residing abroad have the right to participate in elections and referendums in accordance with the procedures determined by the laws regulating that.

Democracy cannot be established without an understanding or awareness of the democratic process among citizens and at least the political community, both domestically and abroad. This includes political socialization/education for citizens and allowing various political parties and entities to demonstrate their participation in the electoral process. The process of democratic transition is highly complex, and multifaceted, it depends significantly on the level of social and economic development, as well as the prevailing economic, regional, and global conditions at the historical moment of political transition. Percentages of political participation in elections contribute to this process (Marsden, Meyer, & Brown, 2020).

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The dissemination of information through communication channels has the potential to mobilize popular and mass action based on a broad and accurate understanding of political events. Media studies reveal that repeated exposure to similar content can significantly enhance individuals' knowledge of particular subjects, especially when it aligns with the interests of the target audience. The media plays a crucial role in the political process by shaping public opinion through the provision of extensive information, which the public uses to judge candidates and their platforms. This involves directing attention to specific candidates and issues, thus influencing their perceived importance. However, the

impact of media varies depending on whether the target audience is internal or external. Therefore, the research problem is defined by the central political question: How does media influence public opinion and political participation among different target audiences, both domestic and abroad, with special emphasis on Egyptian expatriates?

III. IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Understanding the needs and characteristics of expatriate communities, particularly during election periods, is crucial for enhancing their political participation.

Political media has become essential in the current era. Studying its role and impact on both domestic and international audiences provides opportunities to improve media performance, especially during elections. Media may impact the performance of various political actors such as political parties in mobilizing voters, recruiting candidates and influencing voter turnout.

Major elections and parliaments are key drivers of democratic life. Therefore, it is important to highlight the media's varying roles and effects on external audiences to enhance the effectiveness of different media channels.

Leveraging the perspectives of communities living abroad can improve media performance during election periods, contributing to the development of strategies for utilizing media in elections and contemporary political issues.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to identify the role of the media in supporting the political participation of expatriate communities during election periods.

To understand how well expatriate communities, engage with political issues in general and elections in particular, and to identify the factors influencing their political attitudes.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of media influence on political participation has gained significant importance in recent years, particularly through the monitoring of public use of traditional and new media during election periods. Examining previous studies is a fundamental step that contributes to building a theoretical background for this subject. Here, we review some studies that have discussed this topic:

The impact of social media on United States elections was examined by (Curry, 2018), who aimed to recognize the impact of social media on election results. The study showed that the highly popular Twitter platform reduced the proportion of Republicans participating in electoral voting, particularly noticeable when comparing the 2016 and 2020 elections. Twitter, founded in 2006, grew from about 1 million users during the 2008 election to 40 million in

2012, 67 million in 2016, and 69 million in 2020, prompting officials to request media providers to oversee election-related content in the U.S.

Transitioning to the role of social media in election campaigns, (Ortensi & Riniolo, 2020) explored how election campaigns mitigate gaps in the use of political media. Their results indicated that campaigns often narrow or stabilize differences based on age, sex, education, and political interest. However, systematic differences in political media use persist during campaigns, with young people, women, the less educated, and those disinterested in politics being less engaged.

Further exploring media exposure, (Haugsgjerd & Karlsen, 2024) studied the implications of exposure to political platforms on shaping voter trends towards parliamentary elections. They found a positive correlation between the political trends of well-defined parliamentary programs and media handling of elections, which influences public voting behaviors. Additionally, a lack of political interest was associated with reluctance to participate in elections.

Focusing on the impact of false information, (Halpern, Valenzuela, Katz, & Miranda, 2019) examined young people's exposure to false news via social media and its relationship with parliamentary election participation. The study revealed a statistically significant link between exposure to false news and tendencies towards election participation among young people.

The role of media in political development was investigated by (Marquart, Ohme, & Möller, 2020). They aimed to understand the nature of individuals' relationships with media and its influence on political decision-making processes. The study highlighted the importance of media in shaping political development policies.

Addressing digital media engagement, (Min & Wohn, 2018) focused on the role of digital media in activating political engagement among university youth. Their results showed a statistical correlation between reliance on digital media and participation in parliamentary elections. Despite the high proportion of digital media engagement, the results indicated a decline in digital voting adoption.

Lastly, (Walter & Ophir, 2023) analyzed trends among overseas and expatriate communities regarding the effectiveness of media campaigns in mobilizing public opinion and community engagement. They found a statistical correlation between the intensity of viewing media campaigns on foreign channels and the level of social engagement and responsibility among expatriate communities.

These studies collectively illustrate the diverse and significant impact of media on political participation, both domestically and internationally, highlighting the varying effects across different demographics and contexts.

VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Democratic Participatory Theory, an extension of media theories that emerged in response to criticisms of monopolistic commercial practices in privately owned media. It contrasts with theories like Social Responsibility Theory, which emphasizes media practice and the accountability of social institutions (Warren, 2009). From the perspective of Democratic Participatory Theory, media self-regulation has not prevented powerful media institutions from controlling societal narratives and failing to meet the evolving needs of media consumers. Central to this theory is the belief that media should prioritize the public's informational needs and encourage pluralism and local interaction, fostering horizontal communication among all societal stakeholders (Hourdequin, Landres, Hanson, & Craig, 2012).

This theory posits that media should be directly accountable to their audience, enabling public participation in decision-making processes and cultural expression, thereby enhancing democratic engagement (Mueller & Stratmann, 2003). It challenges dominant political systems in Western societies that may marginalize minority voices and weaker societal forces, advocating for inclusive media practices that empower all segments of society (Mueller & Stratmann, 2003).

Democratic Participatory Theory advocates for media systems that prioritize public interests, foster democratic participation, and empower diverse societal voices through equitable access to information and cultural expression. The theory underscores the right of individuals, groups, and minorities to access and use communication channels and public information according to their identified needs. It asserts that the primary purpose of media should be serving the public, not the institutions or individuals that control them.

Moreover, the regulation of communication and mass media content should avoid central control, prioritizing public participation over the discretion of media professionals or journalists. Local groups, organizations, and communities should have their own platforms for mass media communication. While the media plays an important and supportive role, it should not be decisive, with government oversight focusing on establishing guiding principles while respecting media independence. Encouraging media self-regulation is crucial for upholding ethical standards and accountability. Media should act as a pro-democratic medium, promoting democratic values and processes. Ensuring media accessibility is essential for combating marginalization by providing equitable access to information for all individuals.

VII. DATA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paper is a descriptive study, aiming to depict, analyze, and evaluate the characteristics of Egyptian Expatriates (Egyptians residing abroad) and how their voting in parliamentary elections may be influenced by media

messages. This is an exploratory study that encompasses qualitative and quantitative analysis depending on primary data collection. This study analyses the role of media in enhancing the political participation of Egyptian Expatriates during parliamentary elections. The study population is comprised of expatriates and their communities, surveyed through an online questionnaire. The study surveyed a diverse sample of 153 participants (Egyptians residing abroad) from various Arab and foreign countries. This approach enabled the author to identify of levels of impact of media messages and draw explanatory conclusions responding to the research question. of media messages and draw explanatory conclusions responding to the research question.

Table 1: The Impact of Media Campaigns on Voting Patterns of Egyptian Expatriates

Statements	Agree	Neutral	Oppose	Mean	Relative Weight %
Media campaigns were characterized by objectivity and accuracy	6.8	64.1	29.1	1.78	59.3
Media campaigns addressed all viewpoints.	12.8	59	28.2	1.85	61.5
Media campaigns increase political awareness	19.7	54.7	37.6	1.89	63
Media campaigns alone do not shape how I cast my vote	17.1	46.2	37.6	1.79	59.5
No media campaigns were directed to us as Egyptian expatriates vote earlier than citizens at home.	16.2	48.2	25.6	2.04	68.1
Media campaigns are not usually focused on elections	29.9	41.9	17.9	2.15	71.8
Media platforms do not design campaigns tailored to the Egyptians residing abroad	33.3	45.3	17.9	2.26	75.2
Media campaigns convinced me to vote	41.9	41.7	16.2	1.69	56.4

Based on the percentages in Table 1, it is evident that the lack of tailored media campaigns for Egyptian expatriates (75.2%), insufficient emphasis on campaigns encouraging expatriates to vote (71.8%), and inadequate timing of

campaigns suited for early-voting expatriates (68.1%) indicate a limited impact of media on the voting behaviours of Egyptians living abroad.

Table 2: Media strategies suitable for addressing Egyptian Expatriates

	K	%
Social Media Platforms	92	60.1
Video messages from candidates	27	17.6
Posters and Roll-ups in Egyptian gatherings	7	4.6
Political conferences and debates	39	25.4
Cell phone SMS	40	26.1
Talk shows and discussions targeted towards us in our country of residence	66	43.1

Data from the previous table indicates that expatriates prefer being addressed via social media platforms (60.1%) and talk shows and online discussions tailored to them (43.1%). Additionally, the researcher analyzed the additional comments on the questionnaire, leading to the following findings:

- The results indicated that the level of participation in parliamentary elections among the sample of Egyptians residing abroad (153) was low, as only 10% of them participated regularly in elections.
- 80% of the studied sample indicated that one of the most significant reasons why the second generation of Egyptians residing abroad did not participate in the parliamentary elections was their lack of confidence in the information provided during the election campaigns.
- 70% of the sample results revealed that the majority of residents abroad do not have time to follow Egyptian news in general. Consequently, this lack of awareness constitutes one of the primary reasons why they are uninformed about parliamentary elections, intensified by inadequate media coverage of their countries abroad. This may also be the reason why they prefer to be reached by Social Media indicating that Facebook (71%) is the most accessible followed by X (20%).
- Overall results indicated that there was no statistically significant positive correlation between the rate of media dependence among Egyptian residents abroad and their intention for future political participation.

VIII. CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

It is recommended that conducting comprehensive studies on communities

residing abroad, particularly focusing on the youth demographic, is essential to understand how to enhance and promote political participation. The aim is to identify key reasons for reluctance to participate in elections and determine the primary communication channels they rely on for obtaining information, especially concerning political and parliamentary matters.

Moreover, increasing electoral outreach to these communities, particularly through Social media platforms and targeted television programs tailored to their specific interests and needs, is crucial. Additionally, comparative research between similar groups residing inside and outside their home countries can provide valuable insights into their levels of political awareness and knowledge. By identifying the most effective communication channels for engaging with these groups, such research endeavours can maximize the impact of Media campaigns and foster greater political engagement among expatriate communities.

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