**Egyptian youth and political participation: between pretension, reluctance and re-empowerment**

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**Introduction**

The Egyptian youth played an important role during the last four years in the political process. As from participating in the January Revolution, then participating in different political events such as referendums and elections and finally the Rebel Movement (Tamarod Movement) and its role in mobilization against Mohamed Morsi system and assembling for getting down in 30/6 to get rid of the Muslim Brotherhood rule. This period proved that the role of youth in the political process via participating is one of the most important genuine fortunes that the Egyptian society possess, also it shed light on the years of neglect for this social, political and economic fortune during the years of Mubarak's rule and the last four years provided an obvious model of the way to benefit from the youth through encouraging, empowerment and support to participate.

Yet, it became clear that the percentages of the youth participation in the political process is retreating in the last period, so it is important to investigate the factors that may drive youth once more into the engaging in the legal political process and exploring the motives that can transfer the energy of the Egyptian youth into constructive participation that the Egyptian society may benefit from as a whole, away from extremism, negative movement or directed towards aggressive social work. Perhaps searching in the different types of political participation illustrates its diversity and pluralism as well as shedding light on the compatibility of these patterns with the general political context of the society political conditions as a whole. Consequently, this paper aims at looking at
the youth political participation types to identify the reasons for the decline of percentages participation, the method of maximum benefit of participation types which conform with the political and security context which the Egyptian state and the Egyptian society experience as a whole and the method of empowering the Egyptian youth and benefit from their energies in the political process through support the peaceful and legal political process of different types.

**The Egyptian youth and the political participation (a comprehensive overview)**

It is not possible to start talking about the Egyptian youth and the relationship that connects them with political and social participation without addressing the demographic and statistical facts about the youth of Egypt. According to the latest report about the youth in Egypt issued by the National Council for Social Services and Development in April 2015, youth represent about 37.5% of the total population of the Egyptian people, so the report indicates that 23.5 million people of the population of Egypt is in the segment of youth out of the total 86.6 million people as total population. It is also expected that the number of youth in Egypt will exceed 40 million people after ten years, but the report revealed other numbers that must be taken into consideration in the context of talking about youth and political participation. For example, the report revealed that the percentage of the youth participation in political parties and volunteering work does not exceed 2.5%, also it registered the desire of one out of three males to immigrate outside Egypt, in addition to revealing that 61% of the unemployed in Egypt are under the age of 25 years and this percentage increases to 91% of the unemployed under the age of 29 years¹.

Without indulging into the rest of statistics and numbers that the report displayed, the aforementioned information refers to important and serious implications as the Egyptian youth constitute a third of the population, yet we find an obvious absence of a general strategy to improve the conditions of these youth who one out of three of them starts thinking about immigration after unemployment swept away their dreams and ambitions for many years. In other words, the real crisis that the youth faces in Egypt and all the state institutions and society as a whole face as well is the crisis of wasting of strategic human resources. The real cost for this wasting may not appear in the time being, but undoubtedly it will appear in few years when Egypt reaches a development and elitist emptiness due to shortage of qualified and well trained youth who are willing to take responsibility after years of neglect of their requirements and wasting of their energies. And then,

¹ For a summary of the report see Al-Watan newspaper "Al-Watan publishes confidential evaluations of the state about the youth conditions in Egypt" 10/4/2015
research in the youth and political participation issue is considered a research of one of the issue's dimensions as it cannot be apart with the development, economic and social dimensions which constitute its different aspects.

There is no doubt, that the Egyptian youth faced a difficult phase of marginalization and neglect during the period of Mubarak's rule which lasted for thirty years, as there was no obvious vision or practical desire to improve youth, but on the contrary, the youth were expelled out of the public life whether via enabling a specific sector of elites from the public jobs even if they exceeded the legal age or via the absence of justice and equal opportunities concepts of the state structure that was concerned only about extending the period for the faces which served it more than being concerned about enabling and developing the skills of new generation of youth as various factors helped in that such as corruption, favoritism and the absence of independent control bodies. Hence, it was not a surprise in the light of this expellant climate for youth, notably those who are interested in political participation that a huge sector of youth stay away from the political process sponsored by the state, and this sector found an outlet in non-institutional social movements which began to appear during the last ten years of Mubarak's rule.

Perhaps the beginning of the un-institutional protest work in Egypt is the announcement of establishing of the People's Committee in support of the rising in 2000, since this movement particularly turned into an example for many other movements that adopted its flexible organizational structure, its wide ideological belongings and its usage of the direct protest work tactics far from the institutional frameworks.

The social movements began engagement in a political rise stage in the period from 2000 to 2010 and despite the fact that the beginning was to the Arab nationalism base and resisting Israel and after that moving to reject the US occupation of Iraq, yet the emergence of "Kefaya" (enough) movement in the period between 2004 and 2005 was one of the most important facts to revive the un-institutional political movement in Egypt and to attract a wide sector of youth to return back to the public field after many years of marginalization and reluctance. And after that a wave of new social movements appeared such as "6 April", "Public Campaign to Support ElBaradei", "Youth for Justice and Freedom" and "We are All Khaled Saeed" and these movements managed to attract a large number of youth to their ranks via a flexible leading structure, multi-belongings thought, a wide national base of different visions for political and constitutional reform, respect of human rights and rejection of inheritance idea which began spreading particularly after the constitutional

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2 See Dina Shehata: "Political Return: The new protest movements in Egypt" Political and Strategic Studies Center, Al-Ahram Foundation, Egypt, 2010
amendments made by Mubarak. Some studies that were published after the January Revolution concluded that the emerging of social movements in Egypt and attracting a huge sector of youth caused a state of political and social movement, helped in breaking the fear barrier of political participation or reluctance, spreading protest culture which in turn led to the January Revolution. In fact, there is a huge weakness in this perception, as the emergence of new social movements and its tactical and political influence is undoubtedly one of the important sides which led to the January Revolution, but it is impossible to consider that the reasons which led to the January Revolution from the perceptive of the emergence of new social movements and ignore other factors which are equally important such as the aggravation of the security and political repression by Mubarak's system, counterfeiting the parliamentary elections in 2010 so as to the National Party may win with overwhelming majority, promoting to the idea of rule hereditary and the regional dimension represented in the Tunisian Revolution.

This rapid display indicates that the Egyptian youth, despite being away from the active political participation for many years, were able to make a tangible difference in the Egyptian political life via participation and that was after new political and social entities developed the concept and method of participation and opened a space for youth to express their ideas, visions and national aspirations for the future of this country. In other words, the social movements managed during the last decade of Mubarak's rule to re-enabling youth and participated in their return to engage again in the public field while the state ignored this wealth and worked on supporting imperfect political process and lacked transparency and equal opportunities.

The impact of the January Revolution and the subsequent events on the percentages of youth participation

The departure of Hosni Mubarak of Egypt rule in 11th of February 2011 was a fresh start for the youth to be on the top of the political scene in Egypt after years of absence, as the social movements began to spread and attract new members as well a group of these movements began to enter into political coalitions and alliances and other movements sought to shift into declared political institutions through the announcement of establishing political party in the name of the movement. As the social movements witnessed a political rise stage after overthrow Mubarak's rule, the different circles of the institutional political process witnessed an increasing demand by youth to participate in. Hence, there was a significant presence of youth in March 2011 referendum on the

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3 See Walaa Gad Elkarim "Political participation of youth between the party structures and the revolutionary status: the Egyptian case is an example", Civil Society Studies Center, Cairo, December 2012
constitutional amendments then the parliamentary elections in 2012 and the presidential elections in the same year. And with the weak political performance of Mohamed Morsi management, the participation percentages of youth in the referendum on the constitution of 2012 declined as the participation percentage in this referendum did not exceed 32.9% of the total electoral body compared with the participation percentage that reached 42% on the referendum of the constitutional amendments in 2011⁴. Despite the high participation especially from the youth sector in the events of 30/6 which led to the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi rule and ending the control of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, the participation percentages in the events of the political process after 30/6 was not either high, whether in the referendum on the new constitution or the presidential elections in 2014 and these events witnessed a significant decline in the participation percentages of the youth sector in particular. For example, in the referendum on the constitution of 2014 the participation percentage reached 38.6% of the total electoral body which is as well less percentage than this recorded in the referendum of 2011, as some figures indicate that the participants who are less than thirty years their participation percentage did not exceed 16%⁵ in the referendum which indicates an obvious case of decline in the political participation percentages of youth after the rise experienced by these percentages directly after the January Revolution.

This brief display indicates a close connection between the available freedoms margin in the society and the public domain and the youth participation percentages in the political life, and it is a connection that may exist in a large number of communities, yet it has some kind of privacy in the Egyptian case due to the accumulation of various issues related to youth notably in accordance to their relation with the state, the ruling systems and the legal political process sponsored by these systems. After the January Revolution there was a transition phase which did not produce a new political system so there was a wide space for change as well as the tactical capabilities of the social movements and political powers in this stage were at its highest levels which in turn invites us once more to connect between the political participation percentages of youth and an open field ahead of

⁴ See Mohamed Basiony Abdel-Halim "The Dilemma of Settlement: the political implications of the constitutional referendum results in Egypt" international politics site, Al-Ahram Foundation, http://www.siyassa.org.eg/NewsQ/2846.aspx

⁵ See Bashir Abdel-Fatah "the Egyptian youth and the referendum about the new constitution" AlJazeera site.net, 30/1/2014 http://www.aljazeera.net/knowledgegate/opinions/2014/1/30/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF
different political and social powers and entities which are capable of attracting and urging youth to participate.

It was expected that the political participation percentages of youth may decline after Mohamed Morsi rule of Egypt in 2012, which is reflected on the participation percentages in the referendum on the constitution of 2012 where Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood and their alliances of the Islamic currents exerted all types of possible political exclusion and dealt with the presidential elections result and the majority of the parliament as a justification of authoritarianism and unilateralism decision hence the political and social powers turned against the political process and the participation percentages of youth declined in the political process as a result of lack of trust in the ruling system. And perhaps the events of "Al-Itahdia" that followed the issuance of the Constitutional Declaration in November 2012 was the best evidence of the system poor vision concerning the legal political process and the size of difference between the youth who rushed into the yard of Al-Ithadia Palace as a protest against the Constitutional Declaration which placed all the powers in the hands of the president of the state and protected his decisions from revision or accountability and between the ruling system then. And Mohamed Morsi management did not find solutions for this crisis but to rely on the members of Muslim Brotherhood to prevent those youth who surrounded Al-Ithadia Palace as an objection to Mohamed Morsi last decisions.

Despite the wide popular support to overthrow the rule of Mohamed Morsi after the demonstrations of 30/6 and the support of wide sector of youth and most of the political and social powers to the transitional phase that followed the announcement of the road map, yet the participation percentages of youth in the political process did not rise to the expected levels, especially after the massive approval and wide participation of youth as a community segment in the demonstrations of 30/6 and here a major dilemma concerning the participation percentages of youth takes shape which cannot be overlooked or ignored in the context of talking about re-enabling the Egyptian youth and seeking the factors of their return to the legal political participation.

The political context and the security reality in the phase after 30/6 imposed on Egypt and its political system confronting security threatens represented in a remarkable development for the terrorist organizations which adopt violence and armed jihad under the banner of religion as its approach, as the regional political reality in all of Libya, Syria and Iraq produced new terrorist formations which threaten the Egyptian national security especially in the light of the political conflict and the continuous military competition on the western borders of Egypt with Libya and it was not possible or logic that the ruling system in Egypt to ignore this threat whether during the transitional phase that followed the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi rule of in the phase of post-election of president Abdel-Fatah El-Sisi, especially after the atypical transitions that the terrorist
attacks experienced and targeted various sectors and classes of the Egyptian people as opposed to the usual targets such as vital facilities and infrastructures. And in an attempt to confront these threats, the state issued a package of legislations that may preserve a security stable condition and limit the protest action which became difficult to secure the participants in it or ensure not to turn into violent action. And these legislations placed restrictions on the public work especially that related to the un-institutional political work and on some activities of the civil society organizations in addition to the political participation of youth in universities which was rejected by a wide sector of youth who interpreted these legislations as a sort of deliberate exclusion and a large number of youth kept away from the political participation as a result of lack of trust in the political process in the light of legislations that a wide sector of youth considered repressive legislation. Here the dilemma faced by the system of president Abde-Fatah El-Sisi takes shape as his duty is to confront increasing and changing security challenges and threats from one side and to reach solutions that may enable him to effectively respond to that threat by using the available political, legislative and security tools and his duty as well to remerge youth in the legal political process to benefit from the political, social and economic wealth represented in the Egyptian youth from the other side. Consequently, we can notice that the issue of remerging the youth in the political life through participation, create a middle area between rebellion and protest and reluctance of participation is in fact a multi-dimensional issue under the current political context. It is impossible to solve the issue from a political, security or legislative perspective only, but it is necessary to work on coordinating between the different dimensions of the issue to reach a strategy that may enable the state to regain the youth trust in the political process, yet without reducing the priority or any security considerations that may be related to the current condition of the country and in the same time enabling the youth to return to the legal and institutional participation in the political life after emphasizing its transparency, effectiveness, importance and ability to achieve the national ambitions of the youth of Egypt with their various directions.

Methods of remerging youth in the political process

It is clear for us from the follow-up of the influences and results of the January Revolution and the connection between these results and the participation percentages and engagement of youth in the political process that there is a close relationship between the increase of youth political participation percentage and a climate that allows a high margin of freedoms and as well a close relationship between the youth trust in the legal political process and then their participation in it and the proportion of transparency and control over the political process. Also, the other point is no less important as its impact seemed clear during the January Revolution and as well in the
preparation phase of 30/6 demonstrations, is that the Egyptian parties or the traditional political entities are no longer able to attract youth as a social class or a political capital to its ranks and this sad truth applies on the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary parties alike. In fact, the historical experience of the political parties since being returned to the political life in the seventieth of the last century does not indicate being able once to attract youth segment to its membership which of course is one of the influential factors on the reality of the youth political participation in Egypt in recent years. It is the fact which leads us to wonder about the importance and effectiveness of the political parties in the current Egyptian political map and its ability to provide an attractive political and social product for youth and its connection to the practical performance on the ground of the different governorates in Egypt away from the media and the political dialogue halls.

Hence, the remerging of youth in the legal political process is a multi-dimensional issue that its different dimensions must be handled in order to reach a realistic and practical strategy that may contribute to the return of youth into the political life after the reluctance phase and under a remarkable presence of a number of extremist currents, it is important to take advantage from the Egyptian youth energies to face it through participation. First, it is important to restore confidence in the legal political process in order that this process may enable to attract a wide sector of youth whether via participation in election or nomination and in this context, more transparency must be added to the political process through allowing the media to cover its various events, the presence of government control on the event of the political process and as well the presence of independent control by the civil society organizations on the different procedures implied in the context of the legal political process. Second, it is necessary that the legal political process procedures are compatible with a range of legislative amendments which allow a status of a relative openness of the public domain and taking into consideration the necessary security dimensions that are related to preserve the lives of citizens. It must be warned here that opening the public domain does not necessarily mean a chaotic state of pretending protest, strikes and sit-ins as these methods are no more than tools to be used by the social movements and political entities and powers and it is possible to place more peaceful alternatives and less chaos provoking of these methods for the political and social powers and taking into account legalizing and securing these alternatives by the state if it imply a collective presence in the public space. There is no doubt that there is a close connection between the relative openness of the public domain and the creation of a significant space for the media freedom, notably the independent and un-institutional media, as the last four years experience indicates that this type of media is more influential than the traditional media to mobilize youth for participation in the events of the political process. Third, it is necessary to remerge the youth in the political life to reply on new tactical methods and different political and
social tools especially in the significant weak state of the political parties and their inability to attract youth into their ranks and then it is possible to depend on un-institutional social movements and political powers on a condition that their approach is characterized with peaceful and away from violence and have national priorities and constructive aspirations for the future of Egypt. And perhaps the experience of "Tamarod" movement in mobilizing to demonstrate against the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 is the best evidence of the size for the political and social influence of the un-institutional social movements, notably those which most of their members and leaders are youth at the levels of political participation of youth in Egypt.

The civil society role in the re-empowerment of the youth in the political participation
As the issue of remerging the youth in the political life needs efforts and changes to be made by the state, it needs as well an active and supportive role of the civil society organizations which must serve as a middle ground between the state and the youth especially those who refuse to participate at all, those who are not convinced of the usefulness of the legal political process in general or those who adopt the protest demonstration as a unilateral approach for public action and political participation. In a lot of cases and in the Egyptian case in particular, the refusal to participate or following the protest approach is a result of the lack of trust in the institutions of the state and in the political process sponsored by these institutions. There is no doubt; there are a lot of negative legacies which relate to the political process sponsored by the state in the Egyptian model as it is impossible to forget matters such as elections counterfeit, modification of constitution articles to serve non-national visions and interests, dealing with opposition forces in a repressive and violent way or restricted the civil society institutions as being observer of the political process under the absence of the state control institutions, which are all issues that Hosni Mubarak system established in the Egyptian political practices over thirty years.

Thus, the civil society organizations role lies basically in building bridges of trust between youth and the political process and these bridges must be built on obvious national basics, taking into consideration that the first priority is to take advantage of the social and political wealth represented in youth and avoid wasting their energies and ambitions. Therefore, the state must open the way for the civil society organizations to play a strategic and tactical role for the purpose of re-empowering the youth and urging for the legal political participation which in turn requires alleviating the restrictions which hinder the work of the civil society organizations especially those related to the law of the civil organizations. And it is necessary to have control over these organizations by the state, but it is important that such control will not transfer into a choking tool of the civil society organizations work, especially those who do not receive a foreign or domestic support that its
sources are questionable or the civil society organizations which are supported by legal bodies that their directions and objectives are not doubted whether they are foreign or domestic.

Perhaps the most important role in the current phase is an educational role as it is important that the civil society organizations begin to prepare for training and educational courses about the political participation and its methods and concepts, the issues related to citizenship and the rights and duties of the individual in a positive society context and directing these courses for the sector of youth in particular. It is also necessary for the civil society organizations that deal with the youth issues to sponsor talk-shows that the sector of youth may express their ideas, ambitions, challenges and difficulties that face these ideas and ambitions so that there is a current societal dialogue between independent parties and the youth segment to identify the reasons that hinder youth from political and social participation or replying on illegal participation types. In addition to that in this context the civil society organizations must cooperate with institutional political entities such as parties or un-institutional such as social movements in an attempt to establish active youth wings within these entities, so as to have a sort of connection between the political and social performance of these entities and a supportive political capital for its directions that is consisted of a wide youth sector. And it is a very important issue as many of the political entities which appeared after the January Revolution (notably the political parties) lack the training and tactical experience and lack the professional capacities and trained staff which are able to establish, train and empower a youth sector that may not have the political participation experience in many cases.

The way of cooperation between the state and the civil society to increase the youth participation percentages

As it is important for the civil society organizations to cooperate with the political parties and the un-institutional social entities to raise the youth participation percentages in the political life, there must be as well a continuous cooperation between the state and the civil society for the same purpose. It is necessary that this cooperation is based on national vision which concentrates mainly on the national interest that involves the return of youth to participate in the legal political process and raise the percentage of this participation, away from any direct interests for specific parties. In this context, the civil society organizations must perform two key roles; first, must be a neutral party trying to combine between the state institutions from one side and the youth from the other side to approximate the point of views between the two parties and establish a positive dialogue between them and provide a suitable climate to exchange opinions, suggestions and views under an independent and neutral umbrella. Second, that the state enables the civil society organizations to
play a control role concerning the political process events such as elections, sorting operations, electoral propaganda and other practices related to the political process procedures.

In this sense, the civil society organizations must cooperate with the various state institutions concerned with the youth issues in order to start a dialogue between the various parties which represent the sides and solution of the issue at the same time. It is necessary in this context that the state may provide the civil society organizations with information, statistics and figures which are related to the social, cultural, economic and political situations of youth to take advantage of in attempts to enable and remerge youth in the political life. The Egyptian state has more than one body and more than one research institution that perform studies about the youth periodically, and it is important in this stage to declare fully the outputs, results and recommendations of these studies so as to achieve maximum benefit from them. It is important as well in this regard that the civil society organizations maintain their independency and impartiality concerning their activity in the issue of remerging and empowerment of the Egyptian youth, so the agenda that these organizations work through must be impartial one taking into account the different point of views for the two parties of the issue (the state and the youth) equally and impartially. Finally, it is essential that the state depends on the civil society organizations to be a link between the state and the youth, especially under the lack of trust in the political process sponsored by the state, which was clear during the continuous decline of the youth participation proportion in the events of this process, consequently directing to a neutral and independent party is one of the assistance factors in the process of trust building again in the legal political process which the state organizes and sponsors.

**Recommendations**

- Restore trust in the political process by increasing the proportion of transparency and involving neutral and independent parties in the control of the events for this process.
- Alleviating the legislative restrictions that may limit the margin of freedoms or undermining the work of the civil society organizations or peaceful political and social entities.
- Work on the formation of unified entity within the state that is concerned with the youth political participation issue to handle the issue of multiple and interfering jurisdictions between the various state institutions related to the youth file and remerging them into the political life.
- The necessity to benefit from some un-institutional social and political entities that work on the basis of peaceful context and national ground as one of the mobilization factors to restore the youth participation in the political life through legal framework.
- Increase the activity of the civil society organizations in the field of educating and training youth and it is better to be at the level of the youth of the parties and political and social movements and as well as at the level of the non-politicized youth or those who refuse to participate.

- Work on establishing advisory youth entities in some of the state institutions especially those who are concerned with the local rule so that the objective of these entities is listening to the views of youth and training them within an institutional domain that is close to their daily issues.

Done.