

IRI Egypt Index

Summary

This is the first public opinion survey conducted in Egypt by the International Republican Institute (IRI). The survey was conducted from April 14-27, 2011, and was undertaken in cooperation with an international survey research firm operating in Egypt. This poll will serve as a baseline for future IRI polls.

In the aftermath of the January 25 revolution, IRI's Egypt survey found that the people of Egypt are extremely positive about the direction of their country and overwhelmingly pleased with the resignation of Hosni Mubarak. However, the state of the Egyptian economy, and security and crime are foremost in the minds of Egyptians. As a result, the legitimacy of any post-Mubarak government will rest on the ability of its decision makers to address these issues. A summary of key findings suggests:

- People are positive about the direction of the country and hopeful about the future. The source of this optimism is likely the revolution itself. The vast majority of respondents in the survey said that they supported the events surrounding January 25 and they feel the revolution will impact Egypt for the better.
- Despite this optimism, Egyptians are concerned about the economy with an overwhelming 81 percent of respondents rating it as poor. More than one-third of Egyptians (41 percent) said they have trouble feeding themselves and their family or providing for the most basic needs.
- Security and crime emerged as major concerns. Respondents rated the security situation as poor and listed it as one of the main problems facing Egypt, second only to the economy.
- The survey revealed that the upcoming parliamentary elections are wide open, with no party clearly seen as a frontrunner. In an open-ended question asking for whom they would vote, 65 percent responded that they did not know.
- Egyptians are enthusiastic about upcoming elections. The survey shows that the vast majority is either very likely or somewhat likely to vote in the parliamentary elections (95 percent).
- The survey also found wide support for the results of Egypt's recent constitutional referendum.
- The survey results challenge certain widespread assumptions regarding the role of new media in the protests. Respondents reported that they relied on television more than Facebook as their main source of information during the revolution (84 percent compared to six percent), while Twitter barely registered. When asked what medium was the second-most relied upon, nearly half said word of mouth.

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Indicators

- When asked about the general direction of their country, 89 percent said it was heading in the right direction while nine percent said that it was headed in the wrong direction.
- However, when it comes to the economy, Egyptians are of a different mind; just 19 percent rated the current economic situation positively, while 81 percent rated it poorly. Nearly half of the 81 percent who rated it poorly (49 percent) said the economic situation was very poor.
- Respondents were split over whether their personal financial situation had improved or not over the past year; 37 percent said that it had gotten better, 43 percent said that it was worse, and 20 percent said that it had not changed.
- Egyptians are very optimistic about their economic future. Eighty percent said they expected their personal financial situation to improve over the next year and only 13 percent said they expected it to get worse.

Respondents were read a list of issues and asked if they felt that the situation regarding each issue had gotten better or worse. The poll found that along with economic issues, security and crime have also become concerns for Egyptians.

- Of the issues that respondents were asked about, security topped the list of issues that have gotten worse with 77 percent feeling that it had. Further, 51 percent of the total 77 percent rated security as having become much worse. Only 10 percent felt that it had improved.
- Following security was foreign investment (63 percent worse) and living standards (60 percent worse). Additionally, 55 percent felt that unemployment had also worsened.
- When asked about the government's ability to address the problems facing Egypt, 77 percent said that they had confidence in the government while 21 percent did not.

Economy is Top Concern

Respondents were asked in an open-ended question what in their opinion were the top three problems facing Egypt. Unemployment (37 percent), security (21 percent) and corruption (11 percent) were the top three issues Egyptians listed as their first choice. Unemployment and security were also the most cited second choice at 17 percent and 15 percent respectively.

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Egyptians Eager to Vote but Dissatisfied with Parliamentary Election Choices

- In an open-ended question asking Egyptians which political party they would vote for in the upcoming parliamentary elections, none of the parties garnered significant support. Instead, IRI's poll shows most people remain undecided as to whom they will support, leaving open many possibilities for new political party options.
- The survey asked Egyptians if they preferred a current political parties or a new party; 68 percent stated their desire for the latter. Only 14 percent said that they preferred one of the existing parties.
- Despite dissatisfaction with their current political choices, the survey reveals that Egyptians are eager to vote in the upcoming parliamentary elections. When asked about the likelihood of going to the polls on Election Day, 72 percent said they were very likely to vote while 23 percent said they were somewhat likely; this is a total of 95 percent indicating that they intend to vote.
- Egyptians are also eager for the elections to be held. When asked about the timing of the parliamentary elections, 51 percent said September was the right amount of time to hold the elections, 25 percent felt that it was not soon enough and only 21 percent felt September was too soon. It is worth noting that 76 percent feel the election should be held in September or sooner.

Constitutional Referendum

The survey probed attitudes toward the recent constitutional referendum. Despite some controversy over the timing and substance, the amendments passed overwhelmingly.

- Among Egyptians who said they participated in the constitutional referendum, 72 percent said that they voted for the amendments while 9 percent said that they voted no. The actual referendum results were 77 percent voting in favor of the amendments.
- Respondents were asked if they had ever voted in an election by their own free will prior to the constitutional referendum; 28 percent said that they had, while 71 percent said that they had not. Of those who had voted in a previous election, 61 percent said that they had voted in three elections or fewer.

Overwhelming Support for the January 25 Revolution

- When asked if they supported the events of January 25, 95 percent responded affirmatively, with 82 percent saying that they strongly supported the revolution. Only six percent were opposed.

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- Further, 89 percent said that the events of January 25 will impact Egypt for the better. Only five percent said that the revolution would make things worse.
- Egyptians overwhelmingly support the ultimate result of the protests – the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak; 94 percent of respondents approved of his resignation, with 84 percent voicing strong approval.
- When asked in what manner they participated in the revolution, 25 percent said that were involved in the protests, one percent said they took part in worker strikes, and two percent said that they engaged in online activities; 72 percent said that they did not participate at all.
- IRI’s survey also probed the primary sources of information Egyptians got their news from during the January 25 revolution. When asked what was the one source they relied on the most, 84 percent said television, six percent cited Facebook, six percent relied on word of mouth from family and friends, two percent said Internet news sites, and one percent each relied on radio and SMS. Less than one percent cited either newspapers, Twitter or email.
- As would be expected, youth were more likely to use Facebook; 11 percent of those under the age of 30 said they relied on the medium, versus three percent between the ages of 30-39, two percent of those in their 40’s, and three percent of those older than the age of 50.
- The survey also asked what the second and third most relied upon source of information was. Word of mouth topped the list in both categories, with 43 percent citing it as the second most relied upon source of information and 23 percent saying it was the third.
- A total of 97 percent cited television as either their first, second or third choice, while 72 percent mentioned word of mouth; only 15 percent cited Facebook.
- These responses would seem to dispel one of the myths that have sprung up around the events of January 25. Although the role of Facebook, Twitter and SMS are widely discussed, Egyptians overwhelmingly seem to have relied on television for information. And, as their second choice and third choice, most people relied on talking to their friends and family.
- When asked what influenced them to take part in the January 25 protests, 64 percent of Egyptians cited low living standards and unemployment, whereas only 19 percent said the lack of democracy and political reform; the events in Tunisia (six percent), encouragement from friends and family (six percent) and the death of Khalid Said (three percent) trailed far behind.

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