

## **75.9 percent vote in favor of the constitutional amendments**

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First Published: March 28, 2007

CAIRO: Justice Minister Mamdouh Marei announced Tuesday that 75.9 percent of Egyptians who voted in the referendum were in favor of the 34 constitutional amendments which were approved by the People's Assembly last week.

Marei said that 27.1 percent of the 35-million-strong registered voters participated in the referendum.

But the opposition has questioned both the alleged voter turnout and the poll results.

Ehab Al Khouly, head of Al Ghad party, accused the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of changing the numbers. He told The Daily Star [Egypt](#) that he believed the opposition had succeeded in urging people to boycott the referendum, and so the NDP tampered with the percentages.

This, he added, would add a false legitimacy to the amendments to make them seem representative of public opinion.

"The judiciary washes its hands of the referendum results," Ahmed Sabr, spokesman for the Judges' Club told Agence France-Presse about Monday's ballot. "We will no longer be a fig leaf to cover something shameful."

Government claims of a 27.1 percent voter turnout came under even heavier criticism.

The percentage that the government announced is "unrealistic" said Hamdy Hassan, an MP affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

"This percentage has never been reached before in any election, even in the People's Assembly elections, which have the highest participation rates, no turnout has ever exceeded 20 percent ... So how can the referendum participation rate reach 27.1 percent?" Hassan asked.

"All monitors of the polling stations agreed that the participation rate was very low and hardly reached five percent," Hassan said.

AFP reported that opposition parties also argued that the turnout hardly reached the required 10 percent.

Hassan told The Daily Star Egypt that the committees in charge of the [ballot boxes](#) were mostly government officials besides two or three judges "whose role was to fortify the result in favor of the amendments."

Hassan acknowledged the positive stand of the public who, in his opinion, "boycotted the referendum."

Diaa El Din Dawoud, head of the Nasserist party, told The Daily Star Egypt that his party's members didn't vote, keeping the spirit of the boycott. He said that the results announced were a forgone conclusion.

The state doesn't have the courage to admit its failure even if the cost is the future of the country, he added.

On referendum day, Minister of Information Anas El Fiqi criticized in a press conference the opposition's call for a boycott, which he believes is a rigid stance that doesn't go along with encouraging political participation.

"If you want political movement you should participate," he said.

But Hassan believes that the voters were mostly police officers and government employees who were forced to go to the polls.

"The result was expected ... the government has never announced any accurate and un-fabricated result before," Hassan said.

The party will struggle for a new constitution, said Yaseen Tag El Din, deputy head of Al Wafd party. The results only represent 16 percent of Egyptians, he told The Daily Star Egypt, and that these amendments will only lead to more oppression.

Mohamed Kamal, the spokesman of the NDP, told The Daily Star Egypt that “[The government] only takes into consideration the registered voters. Those who are left out are underage citizens.”

“27.1 percent is a satisfactory turnout,” Kamal said. He believes that the main reason why more people are not participating is because of lack of awareness about the importance of voting, which is something the government will try to overcome in the future.

Tuesday’s newspapers reflected the conflict between the government and the opposition.

The state-run daily Al-Gomhouria’s lead headline read “The people state their opinion ... people rushed to the polling stations to vote for the constitutional changes.” The story was corroborated with a picture of a crowd protesting in favor of the changes.

An identical headline appeared on the front page of Al-Akhbar daily newspaper.

But opposition paper Al Wafd’s lead story read: “Low participation rate: the nation learns a lesson from the people who boycotted the referendum,” featuring a picture of a sleeping security guard at an empty polling station.

Civil rights activist Gamal Eid, director of the Arabic Network for [Human Rights Information](#), agreed with the judges and the opposition.

“Human rights NGOs have reported serious forgery cases. Forging was both in the number of participants and voting choice,” Eid said.

“The attendance did not by any means exceed five percent,” Eid added. He told The Daily Star Egypt that the referendum’s only positive result was that it showed the success of the opposition forces and their influence on the public which boycotted the referendum. –Additional reporting by Sarah El Sirgany.