

Egyptians' Perceptions regarding appointing women in leadership positions in Egypt

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I- Introduction

Recent studies have shown that institutions with more gender balance within its institutional structure in the management level and as board members attain higher financial returns. The participation of women in the decision making process has proven to be profitable as was found that group of European companies with more women in their management teams had 17% higher stock price growth between 2005 and 2007, and their average operating profit was almost double their industry average. In addition, business reports have found that firms that have the most women board directors outperformed other firms with low number of women in their board in terms of returns on sales, invested capital, share price performance and equity¹.

In the MENA region many governments boast numbers of women in their national legislatures that far exceed those of the United States; currently, Tunisia and Algeria exceed 31% in their lower houses. After what is known as “the Arab spring” in 2011, some changes have occurred and several Arab countries have adopted gender quotas. Egypt 2014 constitution stated that the state shall take measures to ensure appropriate representation of women in the parliament. Women represent 15% of the members of the current Egyptian parliament. The judiciary in Egypt is still closed to men, where women represent less than 0.5% of judges.

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¹ *International Labour Office (ILO). 2015. Women in business and management: Gaining momentum, Global report (Geneva).*



The National strategy for women empowerment that has been launched by the National Council for Women in 2017 aims at increasing women's presence in leadership positions. One of the challenges addressed by the strategy is the culture, values and perceptions about women's capabilities to act as a business and political leader.

This paper sheds light on the perceptions of Egyptian regarding appointing women in leadership positions in government and in private sector, and presents a set of recommendations to improve women representation in the high level management in these sectors.

II- Methodology

Baseera conducted a survey on Egyptians' Perceptions regarding appointing women in leadership positions in Egypt during the period from October 20th to October 24th, 2018. The data were collected from a random sample of 1527 respondents aged 18+. Respondents were accessed through their landlines and mobile phones. The data were weighted to represent population distribution by region, gender, and education level. All estimates in this paper are subject to a less than 3%- margin of error.



III- Main Results

III-1 Experience with and perceptions regarding female supervisors

Around one quarter of the working respondents have worked before under the supervision of a female manager. Only 16% of them faced problems with their supervisors that they think it would not have happened if their supervisors were males and 5% found some problems in communicating with their female supervisors. The majority of those who work under the supervision of a female supervisor rated the performance of their supervisors as good (63%) or average (25%) which is not too far from the rate of those who work under the supervision of male supervisors as 72% of them rated their supervisors' performance as good and 19% rated it as average.

These figures show that the experience of working respondents with a female supervisor is fairly good. However, 46% of the working respondents prefer to work under the supervision of a male supervisor, 14% prefer to work under a female supervisor and 40% were invariant. The percentage of those who see that Egyptians would accept working under the supervision of a female supervisor is higher as it reached 74% while 18% see that Egyptians would not accept that and 8% said that they don't know.



III-2 Promoting female employees

Moreover, 41% of the Egyptians see that when an employer has a male employee and a female employee and needs to promote one of them, the employer must promote the male employee, 24% see that the employer must promote the female employee, 21% were invariant, 6% put some criteria for promoting any of them and 8% couldn't decide.

Those who were in favor of promoting the male employee mentioned many reasons including that men are able to work under pressure (18%) and men are able to handle work responsibilities better than women (15%) while other respondents mentioned reasons that related to men's roles and society norms rather than men's capabilities including because men are the main household breadwinner (18%) and because they are simply men (13%).

Most of those who were in favor of promoting female employee mentioned reasons related to women's capabilities and characteristics as 45% mentioned that women are more successful and active in work, 20% mentioned that the sympathy of women and their treatment of employees is better than men, and 16% mentioned that women are able to work under pressure more than men.

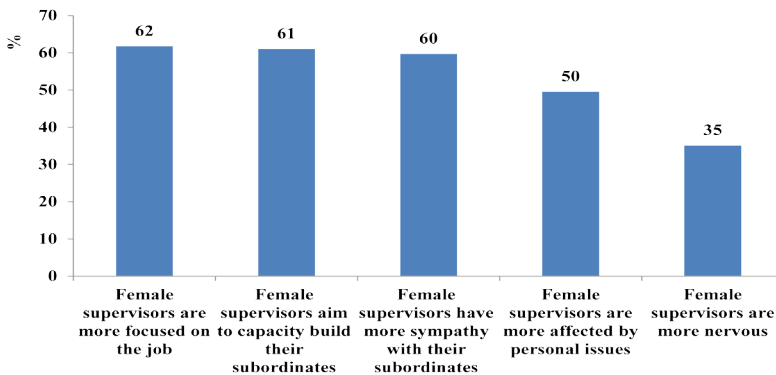
III-3 Perceptions about female managers

Around two thirds of the Egyptians believe that females managers are more focused on their jobs than male managers. Moreover, 61% see that female managers are keen on building the capacity of their



subordinates and almost the same percentage see that female managers have more sympathy with their subordinates. While one third of Egyptians think that female supervisors are more nervous than their male counterparts, 56% think that they are not. On the other hand, half the respondents believe that female managers are affected by their personal issues more than male managers.

Figure (1): perceptions about the performance of female supervisors vs male supervisors



Source: The Egyptian center for public opinion research (Baseera).

Difference in perceptions of males and females are clear in some respects. The percentage of those who believe that female managers are more focused on their jobs increases from 56% among males to 68% among females. Around half the males (53%) see that female managers are keen to improve the capacities of their subordinates while the percentage increase to 70% among females. On the other hand, the



percentage of those who believe that female managers are more nervous increases from 30% among males to 40% among females.

Surprisingly, the negative beliefs about female managers increase with the increase of the education level. This is evident in the percentages of those who see that female managers are more focused on their jobs as the percentage decreases from 67% among those with less than intermediate indicators to 54% among those with university education. Also the percentage of those who believe that female managers are more affected by personal issues increases from 47% among those with less than intermediate indicators to 57% among those with university education, and the percentage of those who believe that female managers have more sympathy with their subordinates decreases from 65% among those with less than intermediate indicators to 48% among those with university education.

III-4 Appointing women to leadership positions

Political and public positions

While 62% of the respondents think that women are suitable to be appointed as a governor², only 28% think that women are suitable to be appointed as mayor which indicates that 34% think that women can be a governor but can't be a mayor. The reasons mentioned by around

² *The Governor is the ruler of a governorate while the Mayor is the ruler or the head of a village. In Egypt Governors are more powerful than mayors by law and regulatory procedures than mayors while mayors may depend more on their personal capabilities and connections in dealing with the population of their villages.*



one third of them is that the society would accept a female governor but wouldn't accept a female mayor, another third mentioned that the work of the mayor is too hard to be accomplished by a woman, 16% think that women are not capable to manage meetings of informal reconciliation, and 12% think that this work needs affirmative personnel which is against the nature of women.

Most of Egyptians believe that women are capable to be parliamentarians with no difference between males' perception and females' perception, but only 54% think that women are capable to be the parliament spokesman. This percentage increases from 46% among males to 63% among females.

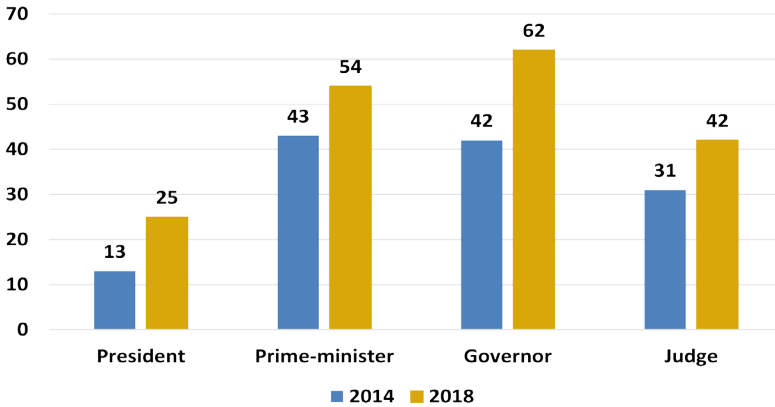
Around 72% believe that women are capable to be ministers while 54% think that women are capable to be a prime-minister and only 25% think women are capable to be a president. Around 42% think that women are capable to be a judge³.

Worth noting that the above mentioned results reflect an improvement in the values and perceptions of Egyptians regarding women capabilities as in 2014 only 13% believed that women are capable to be a president, 43% believed that women are capable to be a prime-minister, 42% believed that women are capable to be a governor and 31% believed that women are capable to be a judge.

³ ArabTrans survey, bassera, 2014.



Figure (2): Trend of Egyptians' acceptance regarding appointing women in certain political leadership positions (2014-2018)



Business leadership positions

Egyptians trust women capabilities in business leadership more than their capabilities in political leadership. The survey shows that 90% of Egyptians believe that women can act as a board member, 81% see that women can act as a chairman, 76% see that they can act as a president of a private company and 72% see that she can act as a president of a public company.

IV- Policy implications and recommendations

The above mentioned results suggest that there are negative stereotypes about female managers that is based on unrealistic perception especially that those who have experience with female managers didn't witness serious problems with them.



The increase of the percentage of those who trust women capabilities to act as political leaders between 2014 and 2018 may be due the increase in women in leadership positions between 2015 and 2018. This suggests that appointing women in these positions gives women the opportunity to prove their capabilities. These results suggest the following:

- Media to shed more light on the successful women in different fields to change the social perception and cultural stereotypes of the lack of ability of women to hold senior political positions and her ability in decision-making. For example newspapers and news portals can include a column on successful women stories including statistics on women in decision-making positions, in parliaments and in the private sector.
- Organizations that have interest in improving women's status can utilize social media in changing the values system in Egypt since its use is widespread among youths and children.
- To appoint more women in leadership positions to give them the opportunity to prove that they are capable to hold these positions and make remarkable achievements.
- Provide training for female parliamentarians to improve their performance in the parliament and prepare them to advocate for women's rights.
- To ensure appropriate representation of women in the boards of State-owned enterprises and in public organization⁴.

⁴ *Women Economic Empowerment Study, World Bank Group, 2019,*
<http://enow.gov.eg/Report/Economic-empowerment-Ar.pdf>



The results reflect that education doesn't have positive impact on Egyptians' perceptions and values regarding appointing women in leadership positions, on the contrary, in some cases the higher the education level the more negative the values are. These suggests that crucial changes in the education system and content is required including the following:

- Improve the curricula of the different education stages to be more supportive for women. This could be achieved by including stories from the old and recent history that reflect women's role in developing the country, in sciences and technology.
- Include positive values regarding women participation and leadership in different subjects.

Women should be more supportive to appointing females in leadership positions. This requires increase women's trust in women's capabilities. This suggests the following:

- Utilize the TV programs that target female audience in increasing women's trust in women's capabilities.
- Engage female students in schools and universities in different activities that can help them discover their capabilities and enhance their skills.