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[Home](#) > [Science & Innovation Policy](#) > [Science in the Islamic world](#) > [News](#)

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NEWS

Egypt's draft constitution disappoints scientists

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[CAIRO] Egypt's proposed new constitution would enshrine **funding** for science as the responsibility of the state for the first time, but some scientists are concerned that its push for the '**Arabisation**' of science could isolate it from the global community.

Now the draft constitution has been approved by the Islamist-dominated Constituent Assembly, a referendum on the document is being held on 15 and 22 December. If the Egyptian voters reject it, a new Constituent Assembly will be elected and given six months to draw up a new proposal.

For the first time in any Egyptian constitution, the document mentions the allocated budget for **scientific research**.



Draft constitution pledges to provide funding for scientific research
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- Some scientists are concerned about the inclusion of 'Arabisation' of science, however
- Constitution shows that policymakers are still treating science as a luxury, some argue

Article 59 of the draft constitution says that "the state shall guarantee the freedom of scientific research. The autonomy of **universities**, scientific and linguistic academies, and research centres shall be safeguarded; the state shall provide them with a sufficient percentage of the gross national product."

Omaima Kamel, a medical professor at Cairo University, who is also a member of both the Constituent Assembly and the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, tells *SciDev.Net*: "Scientific research is one of the few topics that has been explicitly linked to the national budget in the new constitution, which reflects the state's commitment to supporting science".

But article 12 of the constitution, which says that "the state shall safeguard the cultural and linguistic constituents of society, and foster the Arabisation of **education**, science and knowledge", is more controversial among scientists.

"The Arabisation of education, science and knowledge would isolate Egypt from global scientific progress," Ehab Abdul Rahman, the director of the Yousef Jameel Science and Technology Research Center at the American University in Cairo, tells *SciDev.Net*.

"We have to prioritise generating knowledge first, which is a complex and time-consuming process that may take up to 30 years [to achieve]."

Kamel points out that article 12 had faced rejection from some assembly members, including Kamel herself, for the same reasons, but the majority voted it in.

Although there is "nothing wrong with translating knowledge and scientific research and providing an Arabic version of it", she feels that converting the entire educational curriculum, including that of universities, in Arabic would "create accumulated damage by isolating our young researchers".

She says that she and other like-minded assembly members stressed during discussions about the constitution that the first step should be to translate science into Arabic, with the Arabisation of education only taking place gradually.

Another concern is a lack of explicit links in the draft between science and development.

Alaa Adris, professor of engineering at Cairo University and head of the scientific research programme at the Misr El Kheir Foundation, in Cairo, tells *SciDev.Net* that as one of the invited consultants on science to the assembly, he was disappointed to find that neither his nor his colleagues' suggestions were included in the final draft of the constitution.

"This draft doesn't make the connection between the ability to produce knowledge and national development," he says.

But Kamel argues that the best place to deal with many of the issues the invited group raised was not in the constitution, but in a legal framework or a national strategy that would set how the country can head towards a [knowledge-based economy](#).

Adris disagrees, arguing that this was a historic opportunity for Egyptians to boost science and knowledge through their constitution, as well as to ensure that science, technology and innovation are not lost among other priorities.

"The new Egypt has to be founded on a platform of knowledge and science, but policymakers in our country are still treating science as a luxury," he says.

[Link to draft constitution](#)

<http://www.scidev.net/en/science-and-innovation-policy/science-in-the-islamic-world/news/egypt-s-draft-constitution-disappoints-scientists.html>

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