

## Egypt's Copts march to demand a secular state

Contributed by almasryalyoum  
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Hundreds of Coptic Christians protested in front of the State Television building on Sunday to call for the amendment of Egypt's Constitution to establish a secular state.

The march started in the mixed Coptic and Muslim neighborhood of Shubra--a northern suburb of Cairo--with chants of "Civil! Civil!" and "The people want to change the constitution."

The protest reflects the rising fears of the Coptic community since the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak, who maintained a relatively secular type of governance.

Copts account for nearly 10 percent of Egypt's population of over 80 million and constitutes the Middle East's largest Christian community. They have complained about frequent discrimination and sectarian attacks, and allege that they are overlooked for top jobs in the army, police and certain high ranking administrative posts.

In the past 14 months, the minority has been hit by two deadly attacks. Six Copts were killed in a drive-by shooting while leaving late night mass on Coptic Christmas Eve in the Upper Egyptian city of Naga Hammadi in 2010. At the beginning of 2011, at least 23 worshippers were killed in a New Year's Eve church bombing in Alexandria.

On Saturday the first Islamist political party was formed in the country when a court approved the establishment of the Wasat party (Center party), founded in 1996 by a faction that broke away from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Meanwhile, the committee appointed by the army to amend certain articles of the Constitution includes a Brotherhood-affiliated lawyer, and a Coptic rights group has argued that Christians are under-represented on it.

"Millions of Copts object to the committee formed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces," Nagib Gibrail, head of the Egyptian Union for Human Rights, said in a statement.

"I came here from Shubra to ask what's going on. The army is flirting with Islamists at our expense," said Mary Maqar, a demonstrator.

Along with around 2000 other protestors, Maqar chanted "Oh Belal, oh Buros, tell the people that the revolution is a cross and crescent";

They carried pictures of Christians killed during the 18 days of the pro-democracy protests by the police or thugs allegedly affiliated with the then-ruling National Democratic Party.

"We sacrificed our souls for the sake of Egypt, and our aim was a civil state not a religious one. I came here to ask for equality, the Constitution has to be changed and article 2 removed," said another participant, Janeete Fawzy. Article 2 reads "Islam is the religion of the state. Arabic is its official language, and the principal source of legislation is Islamic jurisprudence (Sharia)."

"It is our absolute right to come and express our views against article 2. This provision is the source of discrimination in Egypt. You simply can't impose your religion on others," argued Loqqa Wagdy, a university student.