



# POWER2YOUTH



## The Disguise of Youth Inclusion in Egypt

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### Abstract

*To understand the extent to which youth are excluded in the Egyptian public and political spheres, this paper poses various questions: What are the strategies enacted by the Egyptian state towards youth today? Which state institutions are concerned with youth? Are these institutions developing clearcut policies for the empowerment of youth? To answer these questions, the paper will provide an overview about the regime's policies towards youth from Mubarak to al-Sisi. It shall give a critical analysis of how these regimes have dealt with youth socio-economic and political issues from the 2000s decade onward. Once the manifest state youth policies are pointed out, an analysis of the causes of youth exclusion will follow.*

**Keywords:** Egypt | Youth | Domestic policy | Employment | Family | Migration

### INTRODUCTION

Macroeconomic reform measures under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund started to take root during the 1990s in Egypt. Measures to liberalize and to reduce government spending were undertaken to decrease budget deficits. Within these reform measures, the Egyptian government was to encourage and facilitate the role of the private sector in the economy. However, this process was characterized by many informalities, corruption, corporatism and clientalism. This resulted in the development of other structural and social problems, such as high unemployment rates, especially among young people; rising social inequalities; increase in informal settlements; and less equality of opportunity, especially in rural and poor areas in Egypt. In the meanwhile, the regime's perception of these problems attributed them to the high fertility rates and rapid population growth of the mid and late 20th century. This encouraged policy makers to introduce birth control and family planning programmes. These policies have resulted in stabilizing and decreasing annual birth rates. This caused a population change, where the largest proportion of Egyptians shifted from infants and children to youth aged 20 to 29. According to the latest figures by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), young people between the ages 10 to 29 amounted to 39.1 percent of the population in 2014. The highest percentage within this population is in the 20- to 24-year-old category, with 10.3 percent of total population.<sup>2</sup> This youth bulge started in 1995, and is expected to continue until the year 2045 (UNDP 2010:2). Government policies were successful in reducing the number of births until 2010, however they were not successful in eliminating inequality and rising social, economic and political pressures of a growing youth population.

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<sup>2</sup> CAPMAS, "Population", in *Egypt in Figures 2015*, p. 6, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/newvvr/EgyptinFigures2015/EgyptinFigures/pages/english%20Link.htm>.

State policies are not youth-neutral; on the contrary, states develop specific policies and legislations targeting young people directly. To understand the extent to which the subsequent Egyptian regimes from Mubarak to al-Sisi have initiated youth policies and dealt with issues concerning young people, this paper will analyze various policy domains which directly impact the livelihood as well as civic and political participation of young people in Egypt.

During the 18-day uprising, one of the main demands of activists was social equity - the demand for all citizens to have equal rights to access economic, social, cultural and political resources. The events leading to Mubarak's ouster and beyond have shown that young people's grievances were largely neglected by the regime. All leaders who have followed Mubarak - The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Mohamed Morsi, interim president Adly Mansur and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi - have publically contended that young people are a force for positive change in Egypt, and that they would use all necessary means to enhance young people's access to public office. These rulers have also contended that they would change policies to advance young people's rights of inclusion in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres as well.

To understand the extent to which the various Egyptian regimes have enacted youth-sensitive policies, and the regime's perception of youth, this paper tries to answer various questions: What is the extent to which policy makers are enacting youth-sensitive policies? Do they perceive young people as a threat, or are young people perceived as positive agents for change? Is the Egyptian state proposing clearcut policy solutions to young people's grievances? And, are today's policies concerned with empowering young people in society, as opposed to the pre-2011 era?

## **1. THE REGIME AND YOUNG PEOPLE PRE AND POST JANUARY 25: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

The relationship between the regime and young people is highly complex. This complexity has not changed over various contexts, whether prior to the January 25 uprising or thereafter. On the one hand, the regime perceives young people as a force for development and positive change, while on the other hand it perceives young people - and especially young political activists - as a threat to its own existence. This contentious story dates back to Nasser, however these dynamics were very visible in Sadat and Mubarak's policies toward young people, and continued until the ascendance of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to power.

The 1970s decade witnessed major contentious events by young people, mainly university students. After Sadat's inception of the new Constitution in 1971, he attempted to liberalize the economy and opened up certain political spheres, allowing new political parties to be established and permitting some political freedoms on university campuses. Sadat emphasized the role of students in the future leadership of the country, and announced that he would be cancelling the university guards, the security personnel and the involvement of professors in student affairs (Erich 1989). The direct result was the increased politicization of the student body by 1972; student activists contested Sadat's war policies through street demonstrations which ended in the January 1972 "riots". Sadat and his regime decided to face the rising student activism through authoritarian measures, such as using force against some radical

activists and imprisoning them, while tolerating others who were considered “liberal”. These were coopted into the system, and by the mid-1970s the student unions had a direct majority of these “liberal” youth. Another strategy for coopting youth into the political system was the establishment of the Council of Youth and Sports in 1979.<sup>3</sup>

When Mubarak became president in 1981, he turned the Council of Youth and Sports into a Ministry. The 1980s and 90s did not witness much youth contention; their activism was contained within closed university doors. In the year 2000, youth policy started to change, with the rising star of Gamal Mubarak in politics. When Gamal started to come to prominence on the political scene, his father contended that if young people are ignored, they might pose a serious threat to the economic and political stability of Egypt. The Egyptian government established the Future Generation Foundation as a vehicle through which young people could be incorporated into the policy-making circles. This foundation was mainly managed by Gamal Mubarak, in order for him to be presented as the champion for youth grievances (Zahid 2010).

The 2000s decade was also marked by increased youth street contention. In 2004 the Kifaya movement was established. It brought to its ranks many young people who went on to then establish their own youth movements, the first of which was the Youth for Change movement. As in the 1970s, young people have once again moved their contention out from behind closed university doors and into the streets. Like his predecessor, Mubarak used various strategies to coopt the “liberal” and containable youth, while at the same time using force and imprisoning “radical” youth, who were perceived as uncontainable (Abdelrahman 2014). In addition, Mubarak decided to revamp the Ministry of Youth and provide it some visibility through announcing a new director in 2005, Safey Eddin Kharboush, a university professor at the faculty of economics and political science in Cairo University.

After the ouster of Mubarak in February 2011, SCAF and Mohamed Mursi used the same policy of coopting young liberal or non-radical Islamists and excluding and using force against radical leftists or young people who refused to cooperate with the rulers (El-Bendary 2013). In the same manner, since the ouster of Mursi in 2013, the regime from Adly Mansur (the interim president) to Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has been coopting young liberal or Salafi Islamists, who are in favour of the current regime, while using excessive violence against young people of the opposition.

The relationship between the regime and young people highlights two important dynamics of the regime’s perception of young people. In the view of the regime, there are two types of young people. The first are those who obey the authoritarian structure, want to work within this structure and can be coopted within the regime - politically, economically, socially and culturally. These young people are the ones whom the regime can easily contain and coopt through developing policies regulating political participation, along with economic, cultural and social participation. It is young people of this sort who participate in development NGOs, who belong to political parties, whether from the “tolerated” opposition or pro-regime parties. These young people accept the boundaries of the state laws and rules, and agree to work within these boundaries.

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<sup>3</sup> Youthpolicy.org, *Factsheet: Egypt*, updated 19 October 2014, <http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/egypt>.

On the other hand, young people who are perceived by the regime as “radical”, or those who want to move beyond the authoritarian structure in which they live, are the ones that the regime tries to directly exclude from economic, social, cultural and social participation. These young people are mainly from the “untolerated” opposition, like adherents to the April 6 movement, the Revolutionary socialists, or the Muslim Brotherhood. In trying to contain the second type of young people, the regime utilizes various methods. The first is to coerce them through either using direct physical force while contending on the streets, or through imprisoning them without the due process of law. The second is for the regime to develop its legitimation in the eyes of the citizens at large, through developing public institutions directed at youth, to show that it is indeed developing its youth policies. The third method is to coopt as many young people as possible to an overarching reform pattern, to show that young people who do not participate within the regime structures are indeed the “outcasts”.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, when speaking about “youth policies” the regime targets the non-radical, pro-regime young people.

## **2. BASIC INFORMATION ON STATE POLICIES TOWARD YOUTH**

During the 1970s, the Sadat regime started to show its interest in addressing youth issues, through establishing the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports in 1979. However, since then, the regimes’ policies toward youth have been uncertain, and without clearcut or long-term policy outlooks. During the first two decades of his rule, Mubarak was mainly concerned with population control policies, mostly evident when the International Conference on Population and Development was held in Egypt in September 1994. Mubarak’s main contention was that population increase was the main cause of Egypt’s economic difficulties. He argued time and again that population growth needs to be controlled to enhance the quality of public services. In addition, privatization and free market economy were perceived to go hand in hand with population control (Naser 2014). This conference showed the regime’s commitment to reducing fertility rates, and to adopting a development strategy based on the cooperation of businesses, governmental and non-governmental organizations. This resulted in an increasing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which were believed to be an important tool for development. In this regard, NGOs flourished in the following decade and many partnerships between government and NGOs were initiated throughout the decade.

By the end of the 1990s, the youth bulge did come to fruition, and the regime decided to enact some policy changes along with providing more space for development-related NGOs to work with young people.

### **2.1 The Regime’s Basic Definition of Youth**

According to the Ministry of Youth, youth are young individuals whose ages range from 18 to 30 years old. The former ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) defined youth as those whose ages range between 18 to 35. CAPMAS defines youth as those aged 15 to 29. Looking at all the data and indicators that our research team has collected, it appears that

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<sup>4</sup> I arrived at this conclusion after analyzing 33 semi-structured interviews and 5 focus groups with 30 participants during the fieldwork for WP3.

all other government institutions and newspaper outlets refer to “youth” in general, without defining who the youth are. According to law 15/2013, members of the board of directors of civil society organizations that are concerned with youth and sports issues may not be older than 45. Prime Ministerial decree number 1592/2014 provides that each minister is obliged to have two young associates, whose ages are no less than 30 and not older than 40. There is a clear mismatch between available data from different institutions on youth, and the actual government policies toward youth. Obviously policies toward youth inclusion are more inclined toward the “upper cohorts” of youth; only youth who are older than 30 years of age are perceived as being worthy of inclusion in the public policy domain, or in the decision-making process of the Egyptian government.

## **2.2 Youth Policies during the 2000s Decade**

By the year 2003, with the obvious pressure of the youth bulge, the then ruling NDP formulated a national youth policy for the years 2003 and 2004. The plan extended the national policy for youth to different areas including employment, political participation, health, population, media, sports, environment and social activities. The NDP purported that youth policy should aim at influencing the whole youth population. Nevertheless, a specific focus was targeted towards certain groups, mainly unemployed youth, young women, youth with special needs and rural youth. However, this national plan was neither adopted by Parliament nor was it implemented by the ministries concerned or the government as a whole (Tohami Abdelhay 2009:21).

In 2004, public pressure and contestation increased, with a remarkable number of young people participating in public protest; as an indirect reaction to this, another attempt by Mubarak towards youth policies was developed, this time through closing the Ministry of Youth and Sports and creating two National Councils instead: The National Council for Youth and the National Council for Sports. In the meantime, various government officials expressed their commitment to the enhancement of youth’s standards of living through youth-sensitive policies. For instance, the then Minister of Economic Development Osman Mohamed Osman contended that:

The government is committed to develop and adopt a multidimensional concept of youth welfare that gives greater focus to the interrelated dimensions of education, access to ICT, employment and the quality of jobs, income levels, gender parity, health, civic participation, and so forth, and to translate these into an integrated strategy and action plan. The government is also committed to attain an equitable distribution of capabilities and opportunities for all of Egypt’s youth. (UNDP 2010:viii)

Though the official discourse of the regime seemed positive towards youth issues, the policies enacted by the government did not transcend into a real commitment towards medium- and long-term strategies for youth development and inclusion in the various public and political domains. When the January 25, 2011 uprising was sparked, many observers referred to it as a “youth revolution”. Among the four different leaders from 2011 until today the youthfulness of the uprising has not been contested; on the contrary, all leaders have committed themselves to more inclusive youth policies.

### 2.3 State Institutions Concerned with Youth Policies

Various state institutions have been concerned with youth policies through the years, however the extent to which they have committed themselves to effective and long-term strategies for the development of youth-sensitive policies is questionable.

#### **The Ministry of Education and Vocational Schools**

One of the major institutions concerned with youth policies is the Ministry of Education, whose main mission as stated in its millennium goals is to “provide youth and children with experiences and activities of capacity building to become qualified to practise political participation, and this starts at an early age from primary and secondary schools until the university” (Tohami Abdelhay 2009:20). Its major policy objectives are concerned with reforming primary, secondary and tertiary education, to develop various skills in youth. In 2007-08 a five-year plan was enunciated which established the criteria for new accreditation systems, to increase standards and the quality of education, with a new teacher development programme. In addition a new academy for teachers was established. Access to education and gross enrolment has increased dramatically in the past decade with gross enrolment rates of 100 percent at the primary education level. Decentralization of the ministry became a major aspect within this plan (Handoussa 2010).

Another policy objective is to enhance young people’s skills, and to target youth unemployment the Ministry of Education adopted a system of technical and vocational training for secondary-level youth graduates in the early 1980s (Abrahat 2003). This system was mainly based on the Mubarak-Kohl Initiative, introduced in 1994 as “an alternative to general secondary and traditional technical secondary schools” (Adams 2010:4). The initiative did bring about positive developments in the field of youth employment. For instance, it was found that 85 percent of a sample of this initiative’s graduates were offered employment after their graduation (Adams 2010:23). Nevertheless, the initiative had a major drawback, with very low female participation (Adams 2010). Another drawback relates to the curriculum, which according to many scholars is outdated and has a shortage of modern and advanced specializations, which could further advance youth’s skills in the employment market (Handoussa 2010:xxi). Though this initiative brought about more positive outcomes than not, the Ministry of Education decreased the number of vocational schools from 2,081 schools in 2003-04 to 1,792 schools in 2007-08. Public secondary schools on the other hand have increased in numbers from 2,081 to 2,284 during the same period (IDSC 2011:10). This shows two interrelated flaws in the regime’s youth policies. First, the vocational system has much potential for generating job opportunities for young Egyptians, however it is not efficiently utilized by the Egyptian government, which is not investing in advancing the curriculum or in increasing the number of schools. Second, unemployment rates in Egypt (see section on unemployment policies) are highest amongst highly educated youth - representing 32 percent of the unemployed in 2011 (Goudineau 2012). Provided that the government is concerned with decreasing the levels of unemployment, it should have invested more heavily in the vocational training of young graduates.

#### **The Ministry of Youth and Youth Councils**

Another major institution for the development of youth policies is evidently the Ministry of Youth, although the uncertainty that accompanied has the naming and the functioning of



this institution shows a reluctant and ill-advised all-encompassing strategy on youth. After two decades of political apathy, and with a new youth bulge emerging, Mubarak decided to revamp the regime's youth policies. In this attempt it replaced the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports with the Ministry for Youth and Sports in 1999. Mubarak asserted that this ministry would create the legal and social framework for the development of a youth-policy-oriented regime. He argued that youth "must have everything they need to become part of the modern age in which technological achievement depends on the intellectual resources of the people" (Wardani 2012:37). After the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, young people became more active politically - as argued earlier, the establishment of Kifaya was an inspiration for young people to develop their own youth movements. In reaction, the Youth Council was established. The director of the Council changed the government discourse somewhat, through articulating the importance of "political" involvement of youth in the public domain and in the electoral process.

Two years after its establishment in 2007, the Youth Council, in consultation with different NGOs and other government institutions, compiled a unified document in which the national youth policy was defined. This policy was concerned with twelve major areas for development: employment, political participation, education, health, population, culture, mass media, social activities and voluntarism, social welfare, sports and recreation, environment, and studies and research (UNDP 2010:13). Three issue areas stand out:

1. *Employment*: here a national employment strategy based on public and private partnerships is to be created, with the promotion of entrepreneurial and self-employment culture, adequate funding for small enterprises to young individuals, determining an employment quota for youth with special needs, and promoting awareness about labour laws and rights among youth.
2. *Political participation*: this involves the expansion of civic education and young leaders programmes to foster knowledge about different political systems in addition to citizens' rights and duties awareness campaigns. Political parties should also be called upon to let youth become part of their leadership, and instil the value of political participation among youth in different educational outlets and the media.
3. *Education*: educational policies should be conducted in consultation with youth, and a national plan to combat the dropout rates in education should be developed. In addition, an improvement of the technical education system is to be established.

An important idea in all twelve areas for development is the establishment of partnership between the private and the public sectors in addition to the inclusion of civil society organizations in these partnership programmes.

Youth centres also come under the mandate of the Youth Ministry, and a policy for upgrading youth centres with more libraries, sports courts and technology rooms was promulgated. In 2008, 143 new youth centres were established. Moreover, five youth hostels were also established in 2008 in different cities including Alexandria, Port Said and Hurgada (UNDP 2010:15). The problem however, is that these centres, sports courts and hostels were targeted toward youth affiliated with the then ruling NDP. The extent to which all youth have had access to these facilities is questionable. According to various Egyptian youth who were part of focus groups within the capacity of this project, youth centres are tools to coopt youth. Youth who are in favour of the regime are allowed to become part of these centres, while others are not.

In addition, youth centres that are located in rural areas are defunct and have no input into youth's sporting or cultural activities.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, according to the *Survey of Young People in Egypt* (SYPE), only 1 percent of youth are members of these centres (Roushdy and Sieverding 2015).

### **The Ministry of Manpower and Migration**

The final institution that is concerned with youth issues is the Ministry of Manpower and Migration, which has been cooperating with different international organizations to facilitate labour migration among educated youth to the OECD countries and beyond. The Ministry has also signed bilateral and multilateral agreements with different governments to facilitate youth migration, the most important of which is the Egyptian-Italian agreement on migration in 2007 (Roman 2008).

The subsequent Egyptian regimes, from Sadat until today, have been in favour of and support youth migration. Migration is perceived not only as a means to generate youth employment, it is more importantly a source of income for the ailing Egyptian economy. Egypt was ranked the fifth country worldwide in the volume of remittances received in 2001. The remittances in 2007 amounted to 5 billion dollars, which is close to 4 percent of Egypt's GDP (World Bank 2008:263, Nassar 2010:24, Sika 2010:4).

In its 2014 strategy, the Ministry of Planning only pays lip service to youth issues through arguing that the government should "implement unified laws for places of workshop, youth, women and the rest of the marginalized population's empowerment" (Ministry of Planning 2014:36). However, no strategic plans or specific targets were set to develop meaningful youth policies.

Of all the various institutions concerned with youth, the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood is the only institution which solely addresses women's rights, with a special emphasis on young women. The amendments to the personal status law, which grant women many rights compared to earlier laws, were a result of this Council's lobbying with different parliamentarians during the 2000s decade. Moreover, in 2008 it lobbied for and gained support from the Parliament for the amendment of the Egyptian Child Law. These changes adopted a rights-based approach to issues about family care, education rights, health and social care.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.4 Cooptation through Institutions**

The previous section has shown that in an attempt to avert youth contention, the regime has been trying relentlessly to tackle the problems faced by youth, especially in the social and economic aspects of life. The various councils are a manifestation of how the regime develops such councils to counter the problems and grievances of youth, coopts various youth under the umbrella of these councils, and tries to develop its legitimacy through them.

The establishment of sports and social centres is an interesting manifestation of these cooptation strategies. These centres, however, cater only to urban youth in major cities. What

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<sup>5</sup> Focus Group 1, April 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See the website of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, <http://www.nccm-egypt.org>.

is more, youth who have access to these centres are the ones who are in favour of whichever regime is in power. Youth have reported that the few youth centres which are present in rural areas are defunct and without activities.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, youth who fall within the opposition are denied access to these various centres.

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from these youth policies: **First** is that there is a clear bias of the Egyptian government toward urban educated youth, even though its rhetoric purports the inclusion of rural youth. This can be traced to the fact that the unemployment problem is a phenomenon among educated urban youth, as will be shown later in this paper. The government hereby excludes rural youth problems, which are different than those of urban youth. **Second**, there is also a clear bias by the government against young women. Women are not targeted as a special group according to the 2007 Youth Council declaration. While the declaration discussed the importance of addressing unemployment, it did not address women as being the primary target for these policies, even though educated young women have the highest unemployment rates in Egypt, with unemployment rates reaching 76 percent amongst young women with secondary level education and 46.9 percent for young women with university level education in 2013 (Barsoum et al. 2014:29). Last but certainly not least, when addressing “youth” the government in general addresses the life experiences of middle-class youth, rather than poor youth. The Mubarak Kohl initiative, for instance, is such an example, with the bulk of its work being an urban city entitled Ten Ramadan city.

### **Access to Higher Education: An Implicit Example of Young People’s Exclusion**

Exclusion here refers to “the interplay of class, status, and political power and serves the interests of the included” (Silver 1994:543). Through adopting structural re-adjustment programmes during the 1990s decade, as argued in the introduction to this paper, Egypt started to follow a market-oriented and privatization policy perspective to the economy. With this exceedingly market-oriented economy, the regime adopted new legislation to help develop the private market and to incorporate the development of private universities within this economic outlook. In this context, the number of private universities increased from 4 private universities in the year 2000 to 15 by 2007-08.<sup>8</sup> The sheer number of private universities, however, is not an indicator of whether public policies toward youth access to higher education have been successful. Recent studies have shown that the enrolment rate of private universities is much lower than that of public universities. The problem, however, concerns *who* can access higher education. According to Magued Osman, access to higher education is primarily an urban, middle-class phenomenon. Analyzing the 2010-11 household survey in Egypt, he argues that youth who belong to the highest 20 percent quintile of society have twice as great a prospect for attending university compared to the 20 percent of the poorest quintile of society. In addition the place of residence - whether urban or rural, and whether in Upper or Lower Egypt - has even more impact on youth’s chances for university enrolment. For instance, 33 percent of urban Lower Egyptian youth are enrolled in universities, compared to 17 percent of rural Lower Egyptian youth. The story in Upper Egypt, which is home to the poorest governorates, is even more pronounced. Twenty-seven percent

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<sup>7</sup> Focus Group 1, April 2015.

<sup>8</sup> The numbers here are based on the IDSC report (IDSC 2011); nevertheless, the analysis is ours, since the report has read these numbers in a different manner, and from a pro-government perspective.

of urban Upper Egyptian youth compared to only 10 percent of rural Upper Egyptian youth are enrolled in universities. Thus comparing the chances of youth to attend higher education, Osman found that urban rich youth belonging to the highest quintile of society, have a ten times greater chance of higher education than those of the poorest rural quintile of society (Osman 2015).

### **Cooptation and Exclusion of University Students**

Cooptation occurs when different sectors of the population are drawn into the regime's sphere by receiving the benefits and perks that it distributes, so that those who might oppose the dictatorship are given a vested interest in maintaining it.<sup>9</sup> It involves a political exchange whereby the authoritarian leader exchanges rewards with his supporters, in a transaction that frequently turns into patronage. Looking specifically at the relationship between state and society, John Dryzek distinguishes between two types of exclusionary policies: active and passive exclusion, where "[a]ctive exclusion implies a state that attacks and undermines the conditions for public association in civil society. Passive exclusion implies a state that simply leaves civil society alone" (Dryzek 1996:482).

In the case of the Egyptian regime and youth activism, the regime excludes young oppositional political activists. For instance, the Ministry of Higher Education is concerned with overseeing Egyptian universities. It should protect students' rights inside university campuses, and be the sole guarantor of the right to education and freedoms on campus. According to its various statements, it strives to develop the different social, political and sports activities of youth, to build on their capacity-building processes. It also has the capacity to oversee the student unions and different activity groups like youth clubs (Tohami Abdelhay 2009). Even though the *de jure* policy of the Ministry of Higher Education is to support students' cultural, social and political activities, the *de facto* policy is different. The Ministry supports the encroachment of the Ministry of Interior on university campuses. Heavy-handed security and an iron grip on universities have been the rule since Nasser's crackdown on universities in 1954. Ever since (with one minor exception during the first years of Sadat's rule), there has been a heavy presence of police forces inside universities, and freedom of speech of both students and university professors remains highly constrained.

In 2005, young adherents to the then ruling NDP predominantly won the national student union. Some young people believed that this was the case due to heavy-handed government intervention in the electoral process. As a consequence a youth-led initiative entitled the Free Student Union was enacted. This was a parallel student union where students chose their own representatives, away from the Ministry of Interior constraints on who would be allowed to run for the formal union's leadership. Participation in these "free and independent" elections was very high, compared to the official student union elections (Tohami Abdelhay 2009:27). Since the July 2013 ouster of Mohamed Morsi from power, heavy-handed security has been the rule rather than the exception, with widespread arrests and detentions of university students who are allegedly members of the Brotherhood. In addition, hundreds of students have been suspended from their universities, while the government increased the fees for university dormitories in an attempt to decrease the number of students living on campus. In addition,

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Wintrobe (1998), Geddes (2003), Gandhi and Przeworski (2006 and 2007), Magaloni (2008), Frantz and Kendall-Taylor (2014).

the Ministry of Higher Education issued new student regulations that curtail student civic and political participation on university campuses (Abd Rabou 2014). Contention between the regime and students increased when in February 2015 the High Council of Universities dismantled student unions and banned student union elections.

The March 20 movement for the freedom of universities, which sought to free Egyptian universities from the police force, has made attempts to enhance freedoms on campus. In 2010 a court decision was taken to free universities from the police force. However, the Court for Urgent Matters ruled in February 2014 that the police force can permanently return to universities.

### 3. HOW ARE YOUTH PERCEIVED IN THE MEDIA?

To have a deeper understanding of whether the government-initiated policies targeting youth inclusion or youth employment have in fact been implemented, our research team decided to conduct a discourse analysis<sup>10</sup> of the mainstream national newspaper *al-Ahram* from the year 2000 until 2014 to see whether youth policies were published, and to understand how the Egyptian policy makers and intellectuals perceive the issue of youth.

Examining newspaper articles concerned with youth, we observed three waves in official media discourse: one from the early 2000s until 2005, the second from 2005 until 2011 and the last from 2011 until today.

The **first wave** perceived youth as a victim of failed government policies in providing adequate jobs. This entails that youth are not perceived as a “problem” generation. Instead, this generation is tackled as a “victim” of circumstances. Thus when talking about the “problems” of youth, the media discusses the “problems faced by youth”. The main discourse is concerning what the government should do to help youth to tackle the unemployment problem. How the government should develop new resources to include youth in the economic, cultural, social and political domains is discussed extensively.

The **second wave** started in 2005; with the growing numbers of youth protest movements and youth contestation, the discourse included more political connotations. There was a perception by the government that youth face a problem, which was manifested in the high numbers of anti-government movements and protests. The discourse here focused on the apathy of youth, through showing the low turnout rates of youth in presidential and parliamentary elections. Public officials say that youth are not interested in political participation, and some workshops are developed to develop their political participation. The director of the NCY visits all the different youth clubs. However, according to SYPE only 1 percent of youth report being members of these youth clubs (Roushdy and Sieverding 2015). This shows a mismatch between what the government supplies to youth and what youth demands actually are.

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<sup>10</sup> Analysis here is based on a database we compiled from the *al-Ahram* newspaper online, including all articles written on youth from the year 2000 until December 2012.

There is an important latent argument in various articles in *al-Ahram*, which divides youth into the “good” and “bad”. The “good youth” are those who are apathetic, and who should be socialized into the mainstream political process. The “bad youth”, on the other hand, are those who belong to the protest movements and who should either be incorporated into the mainstream political process or be punished. The discourse herein is that youth who are part of the protest movements are “agents” of Western governments or of Israel, and they are only vulnerable because they are young and immature.

The **third wave** of youth discourse emerged after the 2011 uprising. The discourse changed towards calling on the government for a more inclusionary policy toward youth. For instance, many reports have discussed the importance of including youth in the political process, because they sparked the revolution. The discourse on “good” versus “bad” youth continued through the three subsequent presidents in power after Mubarak’s ousting. Irrespective of who is in power, news reports are in favour of pro-government youth and demonize anti-government ones. Demonstrations by youth, especially those on university campuses, are reported by the official media to be part of a larger plan by the Muslim Brotherhood to destroy the Egyptian nation.

#### 4. YOUTH: AN EXCLUDED SOCIAL CATEGORY?

In most policy outlooks, and in decisions concerning political participation in particular, youth are perceived as an “excluded” social category. For instance, the parliamentary electoral law number 46/2014 dictates that electoral lists that are composed of 15 members, should include seven members from excluded groups such as women, Copts and youth, and specifically that two of these should be youth. Electoral lists whose composition is 45, should include a higher number for each marginalized group, including six youth. Nevertheless, no definition of “youth” is provided, either in terms of biological age or social age.

There is an acceptance that youth are among the “excluded” group, whether in housing, in employment (highest unemployment levels) or in political participation (low levels of participation both as contestants and as voters). The highest regional and international migration patterns are among youth. A survey on Egyptian youth conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2011), found that 50 percent of youth respondents preferred to migrate to find an employment opportunity. Nevertheless, as argued earlier in the paper, there is no explicit policy to promote youth inclusion in the various spheres of Egyptian life, which results in increasing youth marginalization and exclusion.

Moreover, the discourse on youth has also increased, and many policy objectives toward youth issues have been pointed out. The gesture made by interim president Adly Mansour, in including a few youth figures in the 50-member Constitutional Committee entrusted with revising the 2012 Constitution, was perceived as an important milestone in youth policy. The consequence of this revision was a “new” Egyptian Constitution adopted in 2014. According to Article 82 of the 2014 Egyptian Constitution, the provision of care to youth and young people shall endeavour to discover their talents, develop their cultural, scientific, psychological, physical and creative abilities, encourage their engagement in group and volunteer activities and enable them to participate in public life. Article 180 specifies that one quarter of the seats

in the local administration are to be allocated to youth under 35 years of age, while Article 244 states that “[t]he State shall endeavor that youth, Christians, persons with disability and Egyptians living abroad be appropriately represented in the first House of Representatives to be elected after this Constitution is approved, as regulated by law” (Egypt 2014). The rhetoric for youth inclusion remains high, especially by government officials and particularly al-Sisi and Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahleb; however, the extent to which the regime is really committed to youth inclusionary policies remains doubtful and unclear, as there has been no evidence of long-term strategies targeted toward youth.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR PUBLIC DOMAINS

### 5.1 Employment

The main issue area of concern for the Mubarak regime concerning youth was employment. In the year 2000, Egypt along with 18 other countries “volunteered as Lead Countries of the YEN [Youth Employment Network] with commitment at the highest political level, to share experiences and guide the way in formulating National Action Plans on youth employment” (UNDESA 2007:13). To show its commitment towards a youth-sensitive policy, Egypt hosted a summit in 2002 in Alexandria whose goals were to build young people’s capacity for the creation of sustainable livelihoods and to develop an entrepreneurial culture amongst youth to help them attain self-employment (UNDESA 2007:57).

In its figures for the second quarter of 2015, CAPMAS indicates that 77.7 percent of unemployed individuals are those aged between 15 and 29.<sup>11</sup> The highest percentage of unemployment is among educated youth, with 85.4 percent. Urban areas have the highest unemployment percentage with 16.2 percent compared to 9.2 percent in rural areas.<sup>12</sup> This trend has not changed from the early 2000s until today. Young females are three times less likely to find employment than young males. Unemployment levels for educated female youth are the highest in Egypt. According to recent data, 56.2 percent of females aged 15-24 are unemployed, compared to 15.7 percent of males (IDSC 2011:21). The Egyptian Cabinet’s Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) developed a medium- and short-term strategy for youth employment, based on four different points (IDSC 2011:32):

- reforming the Egyptian labour law;
- increasing public information on youth employment and unemployment;
- undertaking dynamic strategies to increase and reform the Egyptian market to add to the employment market; and
- initiating concrete government programmes for the development of small business in Egypt, with special attention to youth.

According to Nihal El-Megharbel (2007:6), the reported investment rate (19 per cent) is far below in 2006 “the level needed to create more jobs in the economy.” The investment rate should be at around 28 percent in order to create 2.1 percent additional employment opportunities. Another problem in the Egyptian policy towards employment is that “investments are mainly

<sup>11</sup> CAPMAS, *Labour Force Survey Quarterly Bulletin, Second Quarter April-June 2015*, August 2015, p. 30, [http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/Publications.aspx?page\\_id=5106&YearID=11480](http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/Publications.aspx?page_id=5106&YearID=11480).

<sup>12</sup> In rural areas we don’t even know; see how Upper Egypt youth form the bulk of migration toward Europe.

allocated to those sectors with low employment intensity of growth. The distribution of investment by economic activity [...] shows that the sectors with low employment elasticities such as transport, communication and Suez Canal," and mining and social services received "the largest share of investments amounting to 19.9, 17.9 and 15.1 percent respectively, in 2004-05. While the activities with the highest employment elasticities and that can create more jobs," such as manufacturing, trade, finance and insurance, and construction, received "lower shares of investments amounting to 13.2, 12.3 and 2 percent respectively, during the same year" (El-Megharbel 2007:6).

Ragui Assaad and Caroline Krafft argue that "the annual net job growth rate has dropped from as high as 5.0 percent in 2000 to just 1.1 percent in 2011. While net job creation largely kept pace with growth in the working age population, in 2010 and 2011 job growth rates fell below population growth rates" (Assaad and Krafft 2013:3).

These reports show that there is no coherent and unified state strategy and government policy toward the generation of employment in general and toward youth employment in particular. In addition, the neoliberal economic policies that were implemented forcefully in 2004 by the then prime minister Ahmed Nazif, and were regarded to be the major force for youth exclusion and the major reason behind the January 25 uprising, remain as government policy toward economic development (Adly 2014).

## 5.2 Family Policies

Family policies mainly revolved around population control until the end of the 1990s. An important example of this was the invitation for the UN to hold its 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Egypt. In the year 2000, family policies started to move from population control to a more rights-based approach toward the family, with a special emphasis on gender equality. The most important policy in this regard is the adoption of a new personal status law, which enhances the rights of women within the family.

Law 1/2000 was passed as a major milestone in women's rights. It granted women the right to divorce, which was previously not the case. It "granted women the right to *khul'* provided they forfeit their financial rights; facilitated access to court in the case of *'urfi* marriages; and introduced the new marriage contract" (Elsadda 2011:92). The development of a family court under law 10/2004 facilitated the protection of the rights of women to access alimony and child maintenance and custody of children. Even though these laws have been implemented to enhance the status of women, it has been reported that men abuse these laws, and make women ask for *khul'* in order not to pay alimony. This again adds to discrimination against women.

According to different scholars, a high standard of living and the rising cost of marriage have a negative impact on the transition from youth to adulthood - or what is largely referred to as "waithood" (Assaad and Barsoum 2009; Roushdy and Sieverding 2015). While precise data on these issues is scarce, CAPMAS does provide data on marriage among under-aged youth (18 and under). According to the 2014 data, almost 12 million (33 percent) out of a total of 36 million females are married before the age of 18, with a high concentration in rural areas. This data needs further analysis and suggests anthropological studies on the effects of



early marriages on young women in Egypt as well as research on the implications for young women's health and social wellbeing.<sup>13</sup>

### 5.3 Migration Policies

The policy of encouraging emigration dates back to the mid-1970s, when a market economy in Egypt could not absorb the high number of university graduates, and when on the other hand, the oil boom of the Gulf States was encouraging inward migration (IOM 2003:21, Ghoneim 2009, Sika 2010:4). By the 1980s Egyptian policy makers had established specialized agencies, including the Ministry of State for Emigration Affairs (Presidential Decree 574/1981), to help migrant Egyptians and provide them with special services (IOM 2003:23). Law 111/1983, concerning the sponsorship of Egyptians living abroad, remains the main law on migration. This law identifies the rights of both temporary and permanent migrants, especially their financial rights, primarily in the form of tax waivers and fees for the deposit of money in Egyptian banks (Ghoneim 2009:4, Roman 2006:5, IOM 2003:25-26). The Ministry of Manpower and Emigration (MME) was later established in 1996, replacing the Ministry of State for Emigration Affairs, and is responsible for the migration process and for Egyptian migrants abroad (Ghoneim 2009:4). The MME subsequently became responsible for more migration-related issues, such as enacting new policies regarding the sponsorship and enabling facilities, both for Egyptians living abroad and for Egyptians intending to migrate. One of the main goals of the MME is to link Egyptian migration policies with Egyptian national interests by advancing migration policies that can foster social and economic development. Accordingly, the MME endorses and provides all necessary means for migrant Egyptians (Ghoneim 2009:4). The importance of migration in the development process was advanced even further with the creation of the Higher Committee for Migration, which was created by Presidential Decree number 2000/1997 (Ghoneim 2009:4-5, Roman 2006:5, IOM 2003:26-28). Headed by the Minister of Manpower and Emigration, the Committee also includes representatives from other ministries, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. The Higher Committee for Migration, along with the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration, endorses the creation of training centres for potential migrants and defines policies for and solutions to potential migrants' needs. However, according to some studies, the legal and political performance of these two bodies, particularly the negotiation of agreements to protect the legal rights of Egyptian migrants, is limited (Ghoneim 2009:4-5, Roman 2006:5).

During the 18-day uprising against Mubarak, Egyptian migrants demonstrated in front of various Egyptian embassies abroad, as a sign of solidarity with Egyptian revolutionaries against the Mubarak regime. Migrants have also lobbied extensively for their right to vote abroad. This right was granted through the approval of the Ministerial Legislative Council in April 2011 (Sika 2011:3).

Educated youth seek migration to the OECD, with a total of 47.3 percent of educated youth travelling there (UNDP 2009:153). According to a World Bank (2008:251) report, Egypt is considered the largest labour-exporting country to the Gulf Cooperation Council, with almost 10 percent of its workforce migrating there. Encouraging young educated males to migrate to

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, El Masry (2012).

seek employment opportunities in OECD countries contributes to brain drain. It also shows that the Egyptian government is concerned with only short-term solutions to the problem of unemployment. This strategy targets urban educated young men. This policy has some drawbacks, since it excludes young women and young rural individuals. Another problem with this strategy is the government's negligence in developing national policies to provide incentives to the Egyptian market to employ young educated Egyptians.

#### **5.4 Spatial Planning**

The Ministry of Housing is in charge of spatial planning in Egypt. It has spent millions of Egyptian pounds on housing for low-income families. Thirty-four billion pounds have been spent on the "Mubarak Housing" project whose main stakeholders were supposed to be the poor; however, this housing has mainly been bought by middle-income families, because low-income families cannot afford it. The same policy has been enacted by the Ministry of Housing concerning the "Social Housing Project", better known as the "One Million House Project" (Shawkat 2014). Apartments falling within this government initiative which sold for 50,000 Egyptian pounds (almost 7,000 dollars) in 2005, were selling for 135,000 (almost 19,000 dollars) in 2014, thus an increase of 270 percent in nine years (Shawkat 2014:2). This deal, however, did not come to fruition, as it was mired in many problems between the government and Arabtec, the Emirati company building the project. By 2015, this mega project had been reduced from 1 million apartments to only 100,000 in only two cities instead of 13 as initially planned (Esterman 2015). Meanwhile, during an international economic conference held in Egypt to promote international investments in this country, a plan to build a new capital was implemented, with the hope of housing five million residents (BBC 2015).

There is a problem of informal housing and slums, which is largely attributed to the lack of housing opportunities for the young. According to IDSC and CAPMAS data, almost 15 million individuals live in informal housing in Egypt. In Cairo, there are more than 100 informal housing communities, which are believed to house more than 70 percent of the city's residents (O'Donnell 2010:13). This phenomenon started to flourish in the late 1960s, when internal migration from rural to urban areas outstripped the government's capacity to provide housing. When Sadat came to power, the government decreased its allocation of funds to the housing sector, while the demand on housing continued to grow; as a consequence, citizens took matters in their own hands and built their own "informal" housing in various areas (O'Donnell 2010:24). With the advancement of the Open Door policy under Sadat, special planning targeted urban areas, dividing the responsibilities between the government and the private sector. The private sector would be in charge of middle- and upper-class construction processes, while the public sector would be in charge of low-income housing. Two new towns were established under the auspices of Sadat, The 10th of Ramadan City and The 6th of October City. These two cities, however, did not attract many residents, and did not inspire those who were living in informal housing to move. "These towns are built on the outskirts of Cairo and are difficult to access without a private car; furthermore, they lack public space and basic social and educational services" (O'Donnell 2010:26). Mubarak did not change much in the Sadat policies, and informal housing increased.

Today increased interest is being given to informal housing, with the new regime's plan to eradicate slum areas. Prime Ministerial Decree 1252/2014 established a new ministry, the

Ministry of State for Urban and Slum Reform. According to this law, the Ministry should enact a national policy to eliminate slums and should develop a strategy for a better standard of living for all citizens.

The current regime's policies are concerned with institutionalizing the problem of informal housing and slum areas; however, these new developments do not seem much of a change from the previous approach, in that they are advancing the private housing sector and trying to decrease the informal housing sector, while still not providing clearcut solutions to this problem. The two major mega projects, the first being the One Million Houses project and the other being the development of a new capital city, are manifestations of the government's short-term policies. The first project, as shown earlier, did not see light and was reduced from 1 million to 100,000 units. The second mega project remains unclear. Since the economic conference in March 2015, no government plans or policies have been advanced concerning the new capital. The main policy trend in al-Sisi regime resembles that of its predecessors, in favour of high- and middle-income youth, while excluding lower-income youth from government-led housing plans. Another striking discriminatory policy, which is negatively manifested through the fact that no government officials have mentioned it, is rural housing. There is no mention of any policy targeted toward rural housing, even though the World Bank estimates the Egyptian rural population to be 57 percent.<sup>14</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From Mubarak until today, the various governments have been concerned with youth issues, however their policies have had few targets and few long-term strategies. Economic reforms and liberalization processes of the 1990s, though initially undertaken to develop and reform the private sector, for the generation of jobs, housing units, and equal opportunities to education and social development, have ended in corruption, cronyism and favouritism towards various segments of the Egyptian population. Youth policies have followed the general trend of the Egyptian policy-making process, with a façade of inclusionary policies for young people who were coopted by the regime.

The 2011 uprising in Egypt was a manifestation of the failure of regime policies to develop an equitable and just social, economic and political system in general and for young people in particular. After the uprising, some cosmetic measures have been adopted for youth inclusion, like enacting laws pertaining to youth empowerment. Nevertheless, no clearcut strategy has been adopted to include young people in the policy-making circles or in the executive office.

As for the public domains, this paper has shown that the main focus of the various governments has been towards unemployment. These unemployment policies have had various problems ranging from being unable to accommodate the increasing number of youth entrants into the market, to the discriminatory policies against rural youth and female unemployment levels. It seems that the governments' main concern is about urban, middle-class young men. Other policies, especially those targeting housing, sports and migration, have also been inclined toward preferring urban middle-class youth. However, this has been and remains only geared

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<sup>14</sup> World Bank, *Rural Population (% of total population)*, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>.

towards those youth who are in favour of the regime, while those who are in opposition are also excluded. As argued throughout the paper, the Egyptian regime under Sadat and Mubarak allocated middle-class housing to the private sector, and was supposedly going to advance lower-income households with government-financed housing. Nevertheless, the result of this policy was an increasing number of housing projects for upper- and middle-class urban citizens, along with governmental neglect in providing for lower-income housing. Migration is another instance of exclusionary policies of the regime against young women, young poor and young rural individuals. The subsequent regimes have supported and developed targeted policies toward enhancing migration for highly skilled young men, excluding all others.

Political participation of young people is the most coercive and contested policy in the Egyptian polity. From Nasser until today, all presidents have attempted to curtail youth's political participation in general and political participation on campus in particular. From Nasser until Mubarak, student unions were highly hegemonized by the regime, with un-free and unfair elections. Attempts by students to develop their own independent unions were crushed by the authorities. Today, the most coercive measures are being undertaken by the Sisi regime against university students, with targeted state violence against these students, and with the forbidding of student union elections altogether.

Though the regimes' major youth policies throughout the years have mainly targeted urban young educated middle-class citizens, it is ironic that this specific target group is the one to have sparked the Egyptian uprising,<sup>15</sup> and is the one to continue contesting the regime's power today. This shows the importance of addressing "political" issues of youth participation, in addition to a re-evaluation of the various policy domains of the Egyptian government.

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<sup>15</sup> See the Arab Barometer findings in Hoffman and Jamal (2012).

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*POWER2YOUTH is a research project aimed at offering a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multi-level and gender sensitive approach. By combining the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and a macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational) and micro (individual) level analysis, POWER2YOUTH explores the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes of youth exclusion and inclusion in the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth collective and individual agency. The project has a cross-national comparative design with the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey. POWER2YOUTH's participants are 12 research and academic institutions based in the EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries. The project is mainly funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme.*

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