POWER2YOUTH

Youth Civic and Political Engagement in Egypt

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Abstract

This paper investigates the extent to which young people are included or excluded in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres in Egypt. Based on fieldwork conducted among young people between March-December 2015, the paper analyses why some young people choose street contention and mobilization, and why others have chosen to become involved in mainstream politics, economy and society. The fieldwork has shown that urban, young, educated middle- and upper-class young people are most included in the social and cultural spheres. However, a major determinant of this inclusion is for these young people to accept the regime's authority and not be in the political opposition.

Keywords: Egypt | Youth | Arab Spring

INTRODUCTION

The decade preceding the January 25 uprising was marked with heightened youth activism against the Mubarak regime. Youth activism and engagement was overwhelmingly in the form of street demonstrations and in protest movements, rather than in mainstream political and civic organizations. Various empirical studies have found that only 2.9 percent of young people in Egypt were members of humanitarian and charitable organizations, professional organizations, workers' unions, sports clubs and scout groups combined. Political party participation amongst young people was only 0.3 percent in 2014 (Roushdy and Sieverding 2015:123). Meanwhile, the highest unemployment rates in Egypt were (and remain) amongst young people and, of the formerly functioning 26 political parties, only two parties, the then ruling National Democratic Party and the Democratic Front Party, encompassed youth divisions. Only young people who agreed to work within the authoritarian system were included in these small venues of formal participation in public life, and the rest were to some degree marginalized and excluded. While the conventional forms of participation were limited, some resorted to unconventional types of participation through developing protest movements, or various youth initiatives that either networked together or worked independently to change various aspects of their political, economic, social and cultural life (Shehata 2012, Sika 2012, Vairel 2013, Beinin and Vairel 2013).

Since the ousting of Mubarak, policy makers have been keen to incorporate youth-sensitive policies in an attempt to include young people in the various social, political, economic and cultural spheres. From 2011 until 2013 with the ouster of Mohamed Morsi, the first elected Islamist president, youth conventional and unconventional forms of participation seemed to increase. Many formal and informal youth organizations were established, with an eye on

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social, political, economic and cultural change.

Why did young people chose street contention and mobilization against the regime, instead of choosing to become involved in mainstream politics, economy and society? Who are the civically and politically active young people in Egypt? What is the extent to which they are included or excluded in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres in Egypt? To understand these questions, this paper will address the role of youth collective agency in adopting social change, and "the nature of youth as both an ideological symbol and political actor" (Sukarieh and Tannock 2014:81). It will analyse the way in which they frame and elaborate their status as "being young," and what their transformative role in society is. Lastly, the paper will address the extent to which gender identification impacts civic and political engagement of young people.

This study will first analyse the structural factors that favour or constrain young people's civic and political participation. It will then analyse the way in which young people engage civically and politically within these circumstances.

The analysis is based on 33 semi-structured interviews and five focus groups (FGs) with young people. The semi-structured interviews were held during the period from May until October 2015 with 21 young men and 13 young women whose average age was 25. The majority of the interviewees (23) reside in Cairo, have a Bachelor degree (21) and attended public tertiary education (24). The focus groups were conducted during the period from April until May 2015. Analysis of these groups is based on a total of 36 participants, 26 of whom were males and 10 females.[2]

1. THE STRUCTURAL CONTEXT PRIOR TO JANUARY 2011[3]

Young people aged 10 to 29 constitute 39.1 percent of the Egyptian population today, with the highest percentage (10.3 percent) of young people falling in the age category of 20 to 24 year olds.[4] State policies ever since the Nasser regime have not been youth neutral; on the contrary, they developed specific policies and legislation targeting young people. The issue of young people became most prominent in the 1970s after Sadat's ascendance to power. Activism and demonstrations have been constrained in universities. This has been most evident in the development of repressive laws on the right to assembly and the right to protest.

The relationship between the regime and young people is highly complex. This complexity did not change in 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

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[2] Due to the structure of the FGs, we were not able to obtain the educational and residential background of participants, as we were with the semi-structured interviews.
[3] This part of the paper, up until "Activism and Protestation", is based on a background paper to the project written by Guy Eyre, "State Policies toward Youth in Egypt."
[4] Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), "Population", in *Egypt in Figures 2015*, p. 6, http://www.sis.gov.eg/newvr/EgyptinFigures2015/EgyptinFigures/pages/english%20Link.htm.

activists – as a threat to its own existence. This contentious story dates back to Nasser; however, these dynamics were very visible in Sadat's and Mubarak's policies toward young people. They continued to be so with the ascendance to power of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The 1970s decade witnessed major contentious actions on the part of young people, mainly university students. After Sadat brought in the new Constitution in 1971, he attempted to liberalize the economy and opened up certain political spheres, such as 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 (Erlich 1989). The direct result was 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 counter this rising student activism with authoritarian measures, like using force against some radical activists and imprisoning them, while tolerating others who were considered "liberal." These were co-opted into the system, and by the mid 1970s the student unions had a direct majority of these "liberal" youth. Another strategy for co-opting youth into the political system was the establishment of the Council of Youth and Sports in 1979.[5]

Implicitly there are two types of young people from the regime's perception. The first are the young people who obey the authoritarian structure, want to work within this structure and can be co-opted within the regime, politically, economically, socially and culturally. These young people are the ones which the regime can easily contain and co-opt through developing policies regulating political participation, along with economic, cultural and social participation. Young people of this sort are the ones who participate in development NGOs, who belong to political parties, whether 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.

On the other hand are those who are perceived by the regime as "radical" or who want to move beyond the authoritarian structure in which they live; these 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 this second type of young people, the regime utilises various methods. The first is to coerce them either through the use of direct physical force, while contending on the streets, or through imprisoning them without due process of law. The second is to develop its own legitimation in the eyes of the citizens at large, by developing public institutions directed at youth, to show that the regime is indeed instituting youth policies. The third is to co-opt as many young people as possible to a cosmic reform pattern, to show that young people who do not participate within the regime structures are indeed the "outcasts."

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[5] Youth Policy, *Factsheet: Egypt*, 19 October 2014, http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/egypt.

2. THE POST-JANUARY 25 STRUCTURAL CONTEXT

After the ouster of Mubarak in February 2011, SCAF and Mohamed Morsi used the same policy of co-opting 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 Morsi in 2013, the regime from Adly Mansur (the interim president) until today has been co-opting young liberal or Salafi Islamists, who are in favour of the current regime, while using excessive violence against young people of the opposition.

How Does the Regime Frame Young People?

The way in which young people are portrayed by the authorities gives interesting insight into how they are perceived in the polity in general. Young people have been framed as important productive forces for the forging of a developed Egyptian nation. When Mubarak was in power, his economic policies increasingly failed to absorb a large number of young people into the labour force, especially with the increase in youth bulge. The notion of youth as a force for development was slowly reframed as young people presenting a social problem (Ali and El-Sharnouby 2014). In addition, another framing was developing, mainly that young people are vulnerable to the corrupting effects of religious radicalism, Westernization and globalization (Assad and Barssoum 2007).

This was also part of the simultaneous construction of young Egyptians as being Islamist militants "penetrating college campuses, or memorizing the Quran in the back street mosques (*zawaya*) of sprawling slums" (Bayat 2010:43). This specific narrative underscored the prevalent moral panic concerning the purported vulnerability of youth to global culture and "radical Islam" (Bayat 2010:43), and their corruptibility (Abaza 2006:241), and was a continuous source of concern for the state (Birkholz 2013:13). Thus youth needed guidance away from moral and political deviation (Meijer 2013).

In addition, the older generation of Egyptians portrayed young people as "victims" of cultural invasion from an alien Western culture and of globalization (Sowers and Toensing 2012, Birkholz 2013). Cultural invasion and youth corruptibility became a moralizing discourse of young people's selfishness, and hedonism (Singerman and Amar 2006). Young Egyptians were framed as drug-users, and as increasingly open to both the mixing of young men and women and to different forms of sexuality (Meijer 2013).

The idea of young people's delinquency has been framed as the product not of independent action but of young Egyptians' purported impressionable naivety and corruptible innocence (Sowers and Toensing 2012). As such, much of elite discourse on youth in Egypt under Mubarak, in focusing on youth's dangerous potentiality, and (thus) the need for youth protection, guidance and supervision, engendered a "familial discourse" whereby the regime actively depicted itself as a surrogate "father" (or parent generally) of young men and women (Sowers and Toensing 2012).

Framing Young People after January 2011: Old Wine in New Bottles?

During the 18-day uprising, Mubarak[6] and his then appointed vice president, Omar Suleiman,[7] endorsed the idea that "Egyptian youth" had revolted. They also adopted the idea that young Egyptians are agents for progress and change more generally. On 10 February 2011, one day before Mubarak's abdication, Suleiman stated that "[t]he January 25 youth movement has succeeded in pushing major change toward the path of democracy". In doing so he committed himself to protecting "the revolution of the youth."[8]

Following President Morsi's deposition in 2013, Interim President Adly Mansour in a public address to mark the new Constitution also described youth as pillars of the nation and progress. He claimed that "you [the youth] have been the fuel of the two popular revolutions. The phase of building and empowerment is still ahead of you. Build your future and participate in political life, through enriching partisan action. You should be sure that your efforts will bear fruit" (Hashem Youssef 2014).

Following Abdel Fatah al-Sisi's ascendance to power in 2014, elite discourse on "Egyptian youth" has broadly incorporated two main themes: on the one hand, al-Sisi has communicated a conciliatory and somewhat apologetic message: "sorry to have neglected you." He further affirmed his wish for Egypt's youth to be on his side, and promised young people that they would have more opportunities for political, social and cultural inclusion through the establishment of a new National Youth Council to improve dialogue between government and youth (Dunne and Bentivoglio 2014).[9]

Nevertheless, this conciliatory discourse has been inflected with much of the paternalistic vocabulary that was also present in the elite discourse under Mubarak. For instance, while addressing Cairo University students a few months after his ascendance to power, he addressed students as "sons and daughters." In addition, in articulating his love for Egypt's youth, he affirmed that he considered them "his children" (Dunne and Bentivoglio 2014).[10] He also discusses young people's importance as productive forces for the national renewal of the economy. In urging Egyptian youth to help "build a new Egypt," Sisi has been explicit that in doing so, they must build with him. For instance he stated that "I need your [Egyptian youth] trust. I need your loyalty" (Nagah 2014). This discourse shows that he is simultaneously circumscribing the legitimate role envisioned for young Egyptians in Egypt. In this way, the President's message to Egyptian youth has been clear: you can become involved in "national projects" and governance, but only if you do so in particular ways; otherwise, "stay out of politics" (Dunne and Bentivoglio 2014).

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[6] "I am addressing the youth of Egypt today in Tahrir Square and across the country. I am addressing you all from the heart, a father's dialogue with his sons and daughters." See "Egypt Unrest: Full Text of Hosni Mubarak's Speech", in *BBC News*, 10 February 2011, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12427091.

[7] "Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman Speech", in *Reuters*, 10 February 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-suleiman-speech-idUSTRE71990120110210.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See also "El-Sisi Promises Bigger Role for Youth in Cairo University", in *Ahram Online*, 28 September 2014, http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/111915.aspx.

[10] Ibid.

Policies Constraining Activism: An Attempt to Control Cyberspace

With a handful of exceptions, the Egyptian regime's efforts to control cyberspace before 2008 and until 2014 were restricted to the prosecution of individual activists on the basis of their individual use of social media (Ezzat 2014). These prosecutions were also dependent upon "sparse legal provisions" in the Egyptian Penal Code principally designed "to combat so-called 'publishing crimes'" (Ezzat 2014). The 2007 sentencing of blogger Karim Amer to four years in prison, under now ex-President Mubarak, for insulting the president and Islam, marked the first targeting of an Egyptian citizen by the authorities on charges concerning online freedom of expression (Saad 2015).

Activism and Protestation

Immediately after the 2011 uprising, young activists were able to organize and express their opinions on campuses (Meringolo 2015), and Egyptians generally regained their right to protest/demonstrate. Yet this culture of protest which had emerged gradually in the decade preceding 2011, with significant and large street demonstrations concerning labour rights, human rights and political freedoms, has been heavily stifled since 2013 (Meringolo 2015). Since al-Sisi's coming to power, the freedoms of association and assembly have been harshly restricted.[11] The new 2013 Protest Law mandates jail sentences for those who participate in any demonstration not approved by the interior ministry, and dictates a minimum sentence of two years' imprisonment for an indeterminate range of offenses including "violating public order" (Dunne and Bentivoglio 2015). This law enabled the regime to imprison tens of thousands of young activists, for simply protesting (Cambanis 2015). In addition, the new "Terrorist Entities law" employs vague terminology "that can easily be applied to human rights advocates and peaceful political opponents" (Saad 2015). Today, "the internet remains the only medium in Egypt where criticism of the Sisi regime is open and widespread" (Kouddous 2014).

The recently-announced "Social Networks Security Hazard Monitoring operation" is an attempt to correct the perceived failings of the regime's previous strategies for crackdown on the public sphere by utilizing regular and mass surveillance of digital activity rather than individual cases of surveillance in specific investigations (Ezzat 2014). This new legislative effort has been accompanied by a new discourse propagated by President al-Sisi which has underscored the purported "threat of the internet" as a tool for terrorist groups to recruit and to gain funding.[12]

Under the draft cybercrime law, violations are to be criminalized and thus punishable under the Egyptian Penal Code. Penalties under the draft bill encompass fines from 3,000 to 500,000 Egyptian pounds and prison sentences between six months and life without the possibility of parole (Saad 2015). The bill also encompasses a separate mandatory minimum sentence of two years imprisonment for building, or collaborating in building, any website that aims at enabling crimes outlined in the Penal Code (Saad 2015).

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[11] Freedom House, "Egypt", in *Freedom in the World 2016*, January 2016, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/egypt.
[12] Following President al-Sisi's remarks at the Arab Summit held at the end of March 2015 at Sharm el-Sheikh, and in a conversation with Sam Kutesa, President of the UN General Assembly, also in March 2015 (Saad 2015).

3. FACTORS OF EXCLUSION

Looking specifically at the relationship between state and society, John Dryzek distinguishes between two types of exclusionary policies, active and passive exclusion: "[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).

Exclusion within the Private and the Social Realms

The majority of young people in our sample had concerns first from within the family and second on the larger social scale. Within the family many have argued that their views are not taken seriously, and that they cannot express themselves freely on various matters, especially political matters. In this respect, one of the focus group participants (FG2) argued that when they feel this exclusion within their family, they develop their own parallel universe with other like-minded young people to feel that their voice is heard.

On the larger social scale, the majority of these young people argued that people in authority treat them like "children," whether in universities, in organizations or in the government. Some have argued that the professors in their classes are not interested in listening to their opinions, either on social or on political matters. A member of a political movement for instance argued that society looks at young people as "a bunch of children" who do not understand the problems that are faced by the government, which has to accomplish many other things than think of how to include young people in the governing processes.[13] According to another student union activist, the state has been addressing young people as children both before and after January 25. An example of this was provided by a young woman who met with the Minister of Finance in 2013 to advocate for a large factory project for the development of a remote area in Egypt. She said that the Minister talked to her as if to a child, yet promised to help her with the paperwork for the project. However, since to date he has still not granted permission for the start of their project, she argues that "I was not taken seriously."[14]

During focus group 4, which was held with young artists, participants discussed the problems they face with social stigma against young artists. Society at large does not believe that art is important, which puts them at a disadvantage in trying to get their artwork seen. They argued that Egyptian society looks at young artists as people with lose morals. One young man said that people on the street make fun of him, because he has long hair and wears unconventional clothes. Another pointed out that "we just want to be heard [...] we are trying to prove our existence and that is all."[15] Additionally, even within their own households, their families are also judgmental, since they do not see art as a real job. Another interesting reflection on the type of exclusion young artists receive in society was provided by a young man: "In order to be able to work on the street, I bribe the policeman on the street to make sure that passers-by do not harass me and [I can] continue my work."

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[13] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 26 August 2015.
[14] Focus Group 2, 2 May 2015.
[15] Focus Group 4, 9 May 2015.

Young women have discussed the problem of their exclusion from different perspectives than young men. Some of the young women argued that they are not able to go out with their friends as much as their brothers, for instance, because their families are against young women going out to cafes like young men. Others who were allowed to go out by their families, faced other types of exclusion, like not being able to drive alone at night, out of the fear of harassment. Another young woman argued that "girls really don't have the option of moving in Upper Egypt, it's not only in movies, it's life!"[16]

Socio-economic Background of Young People: A Determinant of Inclusion

There is a trend of exclusion amongst young people in Egypt based on their socio-economic background. Exclusion in this sense is based on two main factors: (1) economic and social well-being – the more wealthy and the more educated a young person is, the less likely he or she is to be excluded; and (2) area of residence, with young people living in urban areas and large cities being the least likely to be excluded.

Young people with high educational standards and high economic standards of living, who are associated with small businesses, and who help create NGOs or initiatives for youth entrepreneurship are included in the political and social spheres. Two interviewees for instance argued that they did not face any obstacles to developing their business organizations; on the contrary the government supported their organizations. One young man who developed a new NGO for helping start-up businesses argued that "if young people want to be included, they can. Everything depends on us." This young man was invited to attend the economic conference hosted by al-Sisi in Sharm El Sheikh to discuss his business initiatives.[17] Another young woman, who grew up in the United States and returned to Egypt working as a young faculty member at a private university, said, "I am not excluded or marginalized at all. I have a lot of privileges like money, social status, social networks and a family background that does not permit for me to be excluded."[18] Another young woman who co-established an NGO for the enhancement of education argued that "I don't see myself as a victim and am therefore not marginalized. [...] When I feel excluded or marginalized with some people, I develop a parallel community, with whom I feel that I belong."[19]

Young people who are active in civil society organizations, and who have no tertiary education, also discussed exclusion based on class. A young man for instance said that he enjoys sports; however, because he cannot afford to be a member of sports clubs, and because he does not belong to the mainstream political elite, he is denied the right to become part of a youth centre in the Giza governorate. He also argued that the mere shutting down of citizens' access to football matches[20] is a type of youth exclusion, since these matches are important venues for a large number of youth.[21]

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[16] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 19 August 2015.
[17] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 26 July 2015.
[18] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 7 August 2015.
[19] Focus Group 2, 2 May 2015.
[20] A ban on football fans attending matches was enforced in 2012, after deadly clashes in Port Said. In February 2015 the ban was partially lifted, however it also ended in more than 20 deaths among fans. See, for instance, "Egypt's Crowd Ban for Domestic Football Games to Remain in Place", in *Ahram Online*, 10 December 2015, http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/173167.aspx.
[21] Focus Group 1, 19 April 2015.

Young people residing in Upper Egypt and in informal settlements faced most economic and social exclusion. Within this sample we had four young people who work in civil society organizations, and one young man who is a member of a political movement with these criteria. This young man argued, "We feel like we do not have any ownership to anything. This is the general feeling for everyone who does not have money in this country."[22] Another young woman who lives in a village in Upper Egypt argued that "Egypt is a centralized country, which only provides opportunities to young people in large cities. People in Cairo have much more opportunities than in Upper Egypt. I am not only saying this because I am from Upper Egypt, but this really happens."[23] The young woman further argued that, looking at her village, she does not see any change or empowerment whether before or after the January 25 uprising. Another young man[24] who is on a scholarship at a private university in Cairo argued that "exclusion and marginalization are class based: poor people do not have any voice, middle-class citizens are more or less heard, and upper-class citizens are the most heard in this country."[25] A young activist in a political movement, who lives in Cairo and works at a bank, but has a relatively low income,[26] argued that "we as young people from the lower middle class and poor class do not exist for the state. Only those who are sons of intellectuals or elites from judges or lawyers are important and pampered by the state. When al-Sisi addresses youth, he is addressing the upper-class youth, those who were present in the economic conference, not us."[27]

Exclusion of these young people is also felt in their right to access basic services, especially health and security. All five young people argued that they were less privileged in their right to access health care, for instance. A young man argued that his neighbour called the ambulance for a family emergency once, but the ambulance told him that they cannot drive to this informal area. He had to move the sick person to another street, and then the ambulance would be able to pick her up.[28] Another young woman argued that her informal settlement has more than 100,000 inhabitants, however, "there is not one single police station here. When young people start to fight on the streets here, the fight becomes violent, people die and there is no one to help, no ambulance, no police, nothing. The state does not care about people like us."[29]

4. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVE EXCLUSION

As argued earlier, active exclusion implies that a state attacks or undermines the ability of citizens to associate or participate in civil society (Dryzek 1996). For the purposes of this research, I will also discuss the state's undermining of citizens' ability to participate in political parties.

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[22] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 9 June 2015.
[23] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 19 August 2015.
[24] This young man is not one of the five young people living in informal settlements and Upper Egypt. He is instead a student from a middle-income family who cannot afford a private university.
[25] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 21 July 2015.
[26] Less than 3,000 pounds (300 euros) per month.
[27] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 6 September 2015a.
[28] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 6 September 2015b.
[29] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 1 November 2015.

The fieldwork with young organized men and women in Egypt shows these types of active exclusionary measures by the state. This is most evident in the state's development of barriers to young people's participation in activities that are political in nature. Young people who are members of political parties, who work in human rights organizations or are members of human rights associations, are the most actively excluded young people. Young people who are members of other civil society organizations also face exclusionary measures. However, they have argued that this is mostly the case when their work crosses certain red lines.

Human Rights Organizations and Protest Movements

During the focus group[30] that was conducted with young participants in human rights organizations, one participant argued that "the country is currently trying to push youth away from public and political work into philanthropy, so they can control them and so they can benefit from their non-profit jobs." Another participant argued, "What they are trying to do is decrease the number of all the people who are active politically so they can say that young people who are in the opposition are only a 'minority' of young people in general." This type of exclusion has led many young activists to migrate. One activist for instance argued that "I have many friends who are migrating on a regular basis, and this is something that makes the current regime happy – as it becomes easier to control the activists."[31]

In addition, young participants in this focus group argued that the state imposes legal restrictions on the work of human rights organizations – to restrict their power and to restrict their capacity to hold the state accountable for its human rights abuses. Two other additional problems concerning the media were discussed during the focus group. Activists argued that the media does not provide human rights actors air time, or space in the mainstream newspapers to promote their causes. Furthermore, it undermines their role and portrays them as agents of the West. Nevertheless, according to one young activist in a human rights organization, "The regime hates us, but at the same time it needs us for its external legitimacy. Can we change policies? Yes and no, as it is very hard for activists today to be present in the public sphere; however, we can still make some small changes. We were able to get the regime to take out one hundred imprisoned activists, because we had a successful international campaign."[32]

Protest movements actors argue that political participation by young activists today is totally banned. Today he is afraid to talk about politics or to talk about his political and security concerns with his friends or with citizens in cafés as he used to prior to and immediately after January 25, because he is afraid to go to jail.[33] Another young activist who is member of a political movement summarized how young political activists feel: "Today, the state is in enmity with young people, especially activists, as long as they are not pro-authority. There is too much violence against young activists, my friends are imprisoned and people do not care for justice to prevail."[34]

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[30] Focus Group 1, 19 April 2015.
[31] Focus Group 3, 2 May 2015.
[32] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 7 September 2015a.
[33] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 8 September 2015.
[34] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 6 September 2015b.

A young human rights activist shows a difference between young people who are willing to be co-opted into the current political system, and those who are not willing to. He argues that the first type of young people are marginalized since they are taken within some governmental organizations, to make a case for public opinion that young people are included in the political process; however, these youth are side-lined and their voices are never heard. On the other hand, young people like activists from the April 6 movement or the Revolutionary Socialists who are not willing to work with the regime at all, are coerced and imprisoned. "Today the regime got rid of the various types of political activists. It created a rift between them, those who were willing to be co-opted are in enmity with those who are not, the first are marginalized, and the second are imprisoned."[35] In a similar vein, a young activist who was a member of a political party, and later of a political movement, argued that the state is adept at excluding young activists or young oppositionists. An interesting argument he makes concerns *Shabab Jabhet al-inkaz* (The Rescue Front Youth). This Front is composed of young people who were part of the April 6 movement and were ousted by its members. The Front's leader, Tarek al-Kholy, is used by the state, which provides him with airtime in the various media outlets to curse the April 6 movement. However, according to this young man, the state uses al-Kholy only as a "picture" for youth inclusion. In reality they marginalize him and do not include him in the governing process. Another example is that of Khaled Telema, who served as the deputy youth minister after the June 30 events. When problems occurred between him and the Minister of Youth, the president got rid of Telema, and then all young deputies to ministers were ousted. "He [Sisi] doesn't even include his own people, he only takes 'selfies'[36] with them."[37]

A young woman activist, who was an independent observer to the presidential elections in 2012, argued that she is no longer interested in politics, or in activism.[38] She contends that since 2012 the security apparatus has been eavesdropping on her, other colleagues of hers were sent to prison, or their reputations have been defamed in the media. Working on women's rights is even more challenging. She argues that whenever she discusses the rights of women, people take it from a religious perspective and hence, they turn feminism into anti-religion.

Student Unions and Political Parties

Some participants in focus group 3 argued that students today have more access to participate in their universities, through student unions and the Models programmes. However, the majority of participants claimed that there were many cases where youth were prevented from joining Student Unions (SU) or Models by security forces. For instance, when one of the participants was running for SU presidency in the mid-2000s, he was confronted by security personnel who asked him to sign allegiance to the former National Democratic Party (NDP) as a condition for his election, but he refused, which resulted in his dismissal from the SU candidacy. Another participant talked about his experience at Al-Azhar University, also in

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[35] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 7 September 2015a.
[36] This is in reference to the president's selfie picture with young ushers during the Sharm el Sheikh economic summit, which went viral in the formal and informal media outlets in Egypt.
[37] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 7 September 2015b.
[38] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 31 August 2015.

the mid-2000s. He participated in student groups that provided certain needs for poorer students (like photocopying class notes for example). During his time at university, a parallel student union was formed to avoid the corruption and security infringements of the ordinary student union election process, which was mired in security intervention and NDP hegemony. He says that the security forces used to exclude Muslim Brotherhood (MB) groups from running for elections, to ensure that SU representation would not be politicized and would not be formed by the political opposition. This participant argued that when he experienced this exclusionary process, even though he did not belong to the MBs at the time, he decided to participate with his friends through protest activities both on and off campus, rather than participating through formal politics. When the attempt to have a parallel election was close to coming to fruition, the university security and administration attacked the student housing where the MBs were living and randomly took students to prison under the false accusation that the MB were organizing militias.[39]

In similar vein, a young woman who was a member of the SU in a public university argued that "the authorities tell you that you are allowed to do whatever you want on campus, but then when it comes to certain activities or when it comes to listening to people from the opposition, they deny you this right for 'security concerns'."[40] She contended that they had once invited former presidential candidates to hold a talk on campus, however, the security did not grant them permission for the seminar. One participant argued that this is a form of exclusion, since some young people are not allowed to become part of this space at all.

As for political parties, young participants argued that the government pretends to be interested in including young people in the political process. However, in reality it does not do so. For instance, a conference was held in Alexandria in September 2013 under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth, for the empowerment of youth in various political parties. Nevertheless, the Ministry only invited young people from the "tolerated" opposition; others actors, like young people belonging some Islamist Parties for instance, were not invited at all. One young man argued that if a young person is not within the sphere of a "tolerated" opposition, and is considered by the security apparatus to pose a political threat, he is directly excluded from participating in political life.[41]

An interesting intervention was brought up by a young woman who discussed graffiti art at length. She argued that graffiti was not considered a threat by the state, and no harassment against graffiti artists was enacted, except after the events of November 2011, when graffiti artists started painting pictures of their deceased friends. "Then the state started harassment, when they saw that passers-by were watching this art, and were influenced by it."[42]

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[39] The participant was discussing the mid-2000s events, and not the post-2013 events, which were more exclusionary.
[40] Focus Group 3, 2 May 2015.
[41] Emphasis should be placed here on "he" since the young person did not address the issue of he/she; for him, political participation or exclusion is a "male" phenomenon.
[42] Focus Group 4, 9 May 2015.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS OF EXCLUSION/INCLUSION

As mentioned earlier in the paper, this research was conducted with young people who belong to various civil society organizations such as NGOs, political parties and youth initiatives. To what extent are the young people in this sample included within the organizations to which they belong? The majority of young people in our sample did not feel excluded within their own organizational backgrounds. Many have established their own youth initiatives, some have established their own organizations while others have joined already established youth political movements. When problems between various young people within some organizations occurred, especially the April 6 movement, they decided to establish other splinter groups. Accordingly, young people's agency and creativity are important, whereby they do not give up and become passive, but rather they develop their own organizations when they feel excluded. Organizations or initiatives that are developed within universities have youth ownership as well, however young people argue that "whenever there are demonstrations or people from the political opposition, the security cracks down, and the government stops the student activities."[43]

One young woman, however, who is currently working in a developmental NGO, argues that in some NGOs, "like the one I work at today, which is sponsored by the government, these do whatever they are told to do by the government. Accordingly they do not open space for young people to develop new initiatives [within the NGO]. I only have an administrative position now, even though I want to do more research and development."[44]

Young people belonging to political parties, however, envisioned more organizational problems. During a focus group that was held with young political party members, these young people argued that "in the parties where there is a clear figure who is leading it (Hamdein Sabahy, etc.), there is less place for the youth to play an influential role." These parties "use young people cosmetically to pretend that they have a role, they invite young people to various forums and workshops, however they do not let them participate in the decision-making process." Accordingly many young people have left large political parties like al-Masryyin, al-Ahrar or al-Karama and gone to other political parties. Some young people have developed political parties independently, like the Justice Party – however, this was soon to merge with the Constitution Party, which was established by Mohammad ElBaradei, a Nobel peace prize laureate. Nevertheless, according to young people in this party, they do have much power within their organizational structure.

6. BEYOND EXCLUSION: HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE PERCEIVE THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY?

Identifying Youths' Self-perception

While the majority of sampled young people agreed that youth as a concept is usually linked to a particular age group, they all agreed that it is more about self-perception. Participants in the various FGs and interviews seemed most inclined to perceive themselves as "young"

[43] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 5 July 2015.
[44] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 15 August 2015.

based on their birth age. The majority of young people believe that the age between 18 and 35 is "youth." Being young for many was that they think differently, have many new ideas and lack stability in life. For them, the major problem about being young is that society and the regime perceive people who are between the ages of 40 and 50 as young, and thus they take away youthfulness from the real young. There is a large discrepancy between how the regime defines young people and how young people define themselves. For instance, according to a young man, "Today I feel that the state and society are totally far from youth. For instance any ads to have a post in public employment ask for at least 10 or 20 years' experience. This means that they don't want youth, they want 40 to 50 year olds."[45]

From an age perspective, they view themselves as young; however, those who were married seemed to feel less young than those who were still single. An important aspect of being young for participants is the progressive way of thinking. "Progressive means thinking outside the box, and outside the frames set by the state and by society."[46] Another important aspect of being young was about the need to have dreams and aspirations for a brighter future. Youth, according to many young people in the sample, is when individuals move from being dependent and irresponsible to becoming more independent and responsible. A young woman argued that youth is the time in which "people can explore all possibilities and all opportunities," unlike any other age group. Some young people discussed the importance of including the element of "fun" in defining youth. As one participant argued, "I feel this is the only time in which we as young people can have 'fun' in life compared to other age groups." One participant argued: "I am 34, and I am still connected to the 18 year olds. This connection is not there between our age and the 60 year olds." Another participant defined youth based on "feelings." If you feel young then you are young. When asked what makes you feel young, the participant replied: "Age, similarities in aspirations, goals, dreams, desires."[47]

A few participants in FG3, however, argued that youthfulness should not be linked to age and we should differentiate between the physical and the mental age. One talked about *'am al-thowar* ("uncle" of revolutionaries), an old man who took to the streets during the revolution and used to lead protests and start chants. Accordingly, the participant explained that age is relative; you are to be considered young based on the amount of time left for you to be able to exert change in society.

"If we become too pragmatic, then we will not break the norms and will stop seeking new ideas. If we become more aware of the consequences of our actions, and start fearing these consequences, then we will not do anything, and will thus not be youth."[48]

"I feel young, because I am 28 which is the definition of youth, but also because my attitude reflects being young. I always want to change and make things better, every day I wake up I want to use my power to change."[49] Another participant echoed this idea: "As long as you

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[45] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 5 October 2015.
[46] Focus Group 2, 2 May 2015.
[47] Focus Group 3, 2 May 2015.
[48] Focus Group 4, 9 May 2015.
[49] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 8 September 2015.

have dreams that could come true, then it means that you are young."[50]

One young woman makes an interesting observation: I "feel young, but the context in which I live in doesn't make me feel young. I want to travel and go see a lot of different places, but the social norms and family traditions want me to get married and be responsible. I don't want that."[51]

What Is Change for Young People?

Young people's perception of change within this sample varies dependent on their social background, gender and their type of participation. The majority of the civically engaged young people in the sample believe that change should occur from the state, and their perception of change is dependent on structural aspects such as legislation, education and health care. They argue that they as part of non-governmental organizations help in the process of change and development; however, this is not sufficient, and the state needs to do much more to enhance change. Changing the education system and applying the due process of law are essential for the development of Egypt, according to the sampled group within this category. However, they believe that the state is not willing to change, and therefore they take the initiatives themselves to make small-scale changes. For example a young man who is a member of a private university student union argued: "Today my main job is to change my own community and university, because if this changes, the whole country could change."[52] Another young woman who works in a community development NGO based in an informal settlement, argued that "through my work here at the NGO I teach children in my community to become more responsible and more educated people, to help change this community for the better. However, I can't do that on my own; the state should also engage in this process through investing more in education."[53]

Young political activists, on the other hand, were mainly interested in political change, fundamentally through being included in the governance process, and through changing legislation concerning political participation. This change, however, is not only desired at the state level, they also want to be included in the governing process of political parties, even opposition political parties.

The majority of young women in the sample tended to be active in the nonconventional forms of participation and in NGOs, not in political parties (only one member of a political party attended a focus group). These young women's motivation has to do with changing social perceptions about women. Hence, the major locus for change does not lie in the state, but rather in society. A young woman who works in an NGO and lives in an informal settlement summarized it this way: "I wish I was free, I wish the person in front of me would trust my decisions and give me the same benefits as young men. I wish I would be able to travel, the family perception is always 'how would you travel alone? You have to have someone to take care of you'. Even if a girl finally gets married, she faces other sorts of problems. Why is it that if a man cheats on his wife, she has to accept it because she's a woman, while if it is the

[50] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 8 August 2015.
[51] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 8 September 2015.
[52] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 21 July 2015.
[53] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 1 November 2015.

other way round, her husband would kill her, and it would be socially acceptable for him to do so? Even when both men and women do illegal things, the woman is treated unfairly. I wish I could change all of that."[54] Another young woman argued: "The problem is that many people still believe that the girls are to blame for harassment, and this is very hard to change."[55]

Another major issue for young women in the sample was to change society's perception of the "right" age of women to get married, in their early 20s. An activist woman who developed an initiative for women's rights said, "I wish that a woman could say out loud that they don't want to get married before 35. Our social perception needs to change."[56]

Challenges Faced by Organized Youth

The main challenge faced by the majority of the sample, regardless of whether they are involved in political activism, social development, women's empowerment or human rights organizations is closure – or as they say, the "shrinking of the public sphere" or the "shrinking of the street."

Though the current regime publically endorses young people and their participation in sports activities, it is interesting to hear the insights of organized young people who are members of various sports groups. For instance, according to a young woman who organizes sports events in different Egyptian governorates, "I feel that the government can shut us down, anytime. [...] I feel insecure, because I am always threatened by having to deal with security concerns and security closures of our marathons without prior notice."[57]

A young man who developed an initiative to help secondary school students to develop their extracurricular activities at schools, argued that there are "a lot of young people who believe that we could make a difference in Egypt, however, with recent events, they gave up, as no one is interested in developing new initiatives at all."[58] According to a young woman who developed a few initiatives concerned with women's rights, "the public space is narrowing down, no one can work on the streets anymore."[59] For instance she argued that her organization used to hold public gatherings, or bring in experts to discuss films about gender equality; however, after June 2013, security became a concern for her and her colleagues at the organization: "We are afraid to put people under security investigations. You never know if the police will break into your organization and charge you with illegality or not."

Street carnivals are also beginning to experience constraint. A carnival organized by an NGO was to be entitled *Masr tejama'na* ("Egypt unites us") but it was cancelled due to security concerns. For instance, there was an interesting initiative entitled *al-fany midan* ("The Art Square") which was a project bringing in artists each month in front of Abdeen Palace in downtown Cairo to present their work and to influence social change from below. However,

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 30 July 2015.
[56] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 26 July 2015.
[57] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 30 July 2015.
[58] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 9 August 2015.
[59] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 26 August 2015.

with the advent of the new regime this initiative was shut down.[60]

This problem of the closure or the shrinkage of the public sphere is mostly felt by political activists (FG1). For example, a young man argued that right before January 25 and immediately afterwards, "we used to be able to sit down and discuss politics. We discussed our dreams and goals. Today, all this is banned. People like us who are against al-Sisi and against the Brotherhood, are very few. However, we are still harassed by the police force. Young people from April 6, Youth for Justice and Freedom, the Revolutionary Socialists and some young people from the Constitution Party know one another, but they cannot be effective, because of security concerns. What is happening today against young opposition did not happen even during Nasser's era. We cannot hold any meetings, we cannot coordinate. Today if we meet, we are afraid of imprisonment, so we rarely meet."

A young photographer stated that he stopped photographing news, because it is not safe to do so anymore. "Today we don't know what is right and was is wrong according to the laws and regulations, and I don't want to put myself in danger. I don't want to be a martyr, I can make a difference while I am alive through my photography."[61]

A young woman for instance argued that there is no due process of law, which puts women under threat. She argues that even though there is an anti-harassment law, the police don't enforce it. Even the media helps increase harassment against women. "The media talks about what a girl should and should not wear, so that men do not harass her. Why does the media look at the victim instead of trying to solve the problem?"[62]

January 25: A Short-lived Political Opportunity

All sampled young people, whether civically or politically engaged, whether for or against the regime, argued that January 25, 2011 was a turning point for youth civic and political participation. They argued that, prior to 2011, some young people were active civically and politically; however, after the events that led to the ouster of Mubarak, young people's self perception changed, and they believed more in their power to effect change. Young political activists felt most empowerment right after January 25. For instance, a member of a political movement, who was previously engaged in a political party and in Kifaya, argued that before January 25 and right after, young people were able to build various coalitions together: "We used to be able to sit down and discuss politics."[63]

Our research team was able to trace 29 new political parties, protest movements and initiatives that were created after 2011. Many young people developed initiatives such as "No to Military Trials," or Baheya. These young activists mobilized others to their causes, through their presence on the street. For these young people "street work" or "street demonstration" was the only free space they were interested in working in. Four of our 33 interviewees who lived abroad returned to the country during the events of 2011 to build initiatives, to help other young people to achieve their potential and empowerment. Nevertheless, with the increased

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[60] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 8 September 2015.
[61] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 8 August 2015.
[62] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 31 August 2015.
[63] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 7 September 2015a.

constraints on young people's civic and political participation, many initiatives are dying out, and many young people are abstaining from civic and political engagement.

Overcoming Obstacles: Young People's Perception of Bringing Youth Back In

Although the public sphere is shrinking, and although young people believe that the regime should eliminate its restrictions on civic and political participation, some are determined to overcome these obstacles and work for the general development of Egypt. For instance, a young man within the sample developed his own independent online media outlet in 2014. He built this as a platform for young people to discuss the problems facing them like harassment, education and employment. He argues that in 2011, young people were discussing reforming both state and society in Egypt, nevertheless, by 2014, "nothing had really changed. Therefore, I decided to develop this online news outlet, as a free space for young people."[64]

Political activists, for instance, argued that young people need to network more with one another to develop free spaces for themselves to deliberate and discuss their problems, and how to solve them. They implied that they cannot wait for the regime to include them, because this will never happen. Accordingly, young people need to start imposing themselves on society and on the rulers, to become included.

Other focus group participants (FG2) discussed the importance of developing small youth groups, based on different interests and specializations. Accordingly, these groups should act as a critical voice within society. "Small groups, parallel universe, or small communities" were mentioned a lot within this FG; they were seen as both a force for change as well as a way to remain hopeful, and to keep the values they would like to have in the society at large. The participants also discussed the importance of having critical consciousness while working within these small groups, so as not to stray from reality.[65]

One of the participants, for instance, discussed the importance of moving away from the official discourse of what is "right" or "wrong" or "us" versus "them" – breaking away from the assumption that knowledge exists with a certain group of people and is not present with the rest. Change will happen when everyone sits at the same table without the "us" and the "other." He added that the revolution succeeded in opening up space to talk about societal taboos, and it is our role to keep these discussions open and involve the rest of the society in dialogue on this issue.

7. PUBLIC DOMAINS

The fieldwork with organized youth showed interesting results concerning the issues of migration, employment, housing and family planning. Depending on their wealth, social background and gender, young people have reacted differently to these four public domains. In addition, migration, employment and education were the major concern for young people in this sample. When discussing housing problems, young people talked about it as a "problem;" however, when asked if it directly affects them, only four in the sample stated that it is a

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[64] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 7 August 2015.
[65] Focus Group 2, 2 May 2015.

personal problem for them. As for family planning, only a few in the sample discussed this as a problem. It is also important to note that only two young men in the whole sample discussed gender issues, and both of them discussed the problem of harassment, not gender equality per se.

Migration

Young people in the sample perceived the issue of migration differently. First, young men were more likely to think of migrating than young women. Young women were mainly interested in travelling for a month or two, seeing other countries in the world, and then returning back to Egypt. By contrast, young men discussed migration more thoroughly. Some young men were interested in circular migration, while others were interested in long-term migration. Young men with lower standard of living, and young men living in poor areas or informal settlements were the most interested in permanent migration. Their main argument for migration is to have more employment opportunities. One young man living in an informal settlement said that he had already applied for the American green card and was waiting for a response from the American Embassy in Egypt. A statement commonly made by the majority of young men is: "I want to migrate like all other young men in Egypt."[66] When asked about the reason behind their ambition to migrate, they all argued that they are interested in migrating for better employment opportunities. However, three other important points were reiterated, namely equality of opportunity, the rule of law and dignity.

Participants in focus group 5 argued that young people have very high expectations which are met with very few opportunities. One young man argued that "everyone in Egypt is migrating, for different reasons. The rich travel for a better standard of living, more rights and good education, while the poor travel to find work and earn a living."[67]

These young people were influenced by the positive public discourse on migration, which promotes migration for development. Some reacted negatively to this discourse through arguing that the regime "wants to get rid of us." However, they themselves did not influence the public discourse, as neither the media nor policy makers discuss young people's desire to migrate.

Employment

Our whole sample consisted of employed young people. Those who were volunteering in civil society organizations, unconventional organizations or political parties had other main jobs, while the rest were employed within civil society organizations. Some had managerial positions, or were the directors of non-governmental organizations or business initiatives, while others had rank-and file positions. When asked whether they believed unemployment was a problem faced by other young people, all participants agreed that finding employment opportunities was a problem, especially for young people.

However, only one young woman in the sample blamed her employment status directly on the regime. She argued that the regime should provide equal opportunities for all young

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[66] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 26 July 2015.
[67] Focus Group 5, 9 May 2015.

people to have access to the job market, especially to the public sector. However, this is not the case, as corruption and cronyism is prevalent in all good job opportunities.[68] Accordingly, because she is not connected and does not have a "*wasta*," she could not find a proper job. She ended up working in a developmental NGO, and although she likes her job now, she would have preferred another type of job that matched her bachelor degree skills. Many others argued that the main barrier to finding good employment opportunities is cronyism and "wasta." "If you don't have a wasta, then you don't receive a good job."[69] Others believe that unemployment is actually more than the official numbers: "The main reason for this is corruption and wasta. If you are not connected then the job market is closed to you. Even in the public sector, the state only allows certain people who are connected to access their jobs."[70]

Other young people perceive the unemployment problem to be a problem of the government's inability to develop long-term and short-term strategies. Others argued that the minimum work experience many employers ask for is five years, which immediately puts young people at a disadvantage.[71] One young man blamed the private sector for the unemployment of young people. He argued that "the private sector is dysfunctional. You employ a highly educated young person but you give him a very low salary, and you do not give him any option, either take it or leave it."[72] Another concern of young people in the sample is the mismatch between education and employment skills. One young man stated: "To find a good job, you have to forget about everything you learned in university."

One politically active young man argued that his friend, who is pro the Muslim Brotherhood, was threatened at his private sector job: he either changes his political inclinations, or he gets fired. His friend decided to change his political stance, to hold on to his work."[73]

Two young people in the focus group sample blamed other young people for not finding jobs; they argued that young people have high expectations, and want to have a high salary from the first job they receive.[74] They argued that those young people in marginalized areas who have high school degrees prefer to open small kiosks in their neighbourhoods or work as plumbers and carpenters rather than working in the private sector. However, they argued, most probably these young people do so because these types of jobs provide them with better incomes.

Housing

The majority of young people in our sample discussed the problems of housing, however these problems were discussed from a distance, as none of them had a housing problem, even young people living in informal settlements. A young woman from Luxor argued that the problem of housing is non-existent in upper Egypt. One young man (in FG5) summarized

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[68] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 12 August 2015.
[69] Focus Group 5, 9 May 2015.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 5 July 2015.
[72] Anonymous, in-depth interview by P2Y research team, 6 September 2015b.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Focus Group 5, 9 May 2015.

the issue of housing in a nutshell: "The problem in Egypt is not a lack of housing facilities, but rather a lack of management. In 2012, there were 12 million housing units, 1.8 million of which were not used, as there is no market for them. The real estate market has been growing exponentially from 2007 to 2010, but it was targeted at gated communities, not units for the masses."

Another problem was mentioned concerning the non-transparency of the government pertaining to the development of new construction sites and new projects. For instance, one young man mentioned an incident unreported in the media, namely that the government had offered an informal sector in the heart of Cairo (Ezbet al-zabaleen) to foreign investors claiming it was uninhabited. Nevertheless, citizens in this area partnered with human rights NGOs, and were able to create pressure to stop the project from seeing light.

CONCLUSION

Starting with the Sadat regime in the 1970s, and until today, the subsequent regimes in Egypt have perceived young people as both a force for development and as a major challenge to their rule. Through developing various laws and organizational structures aimed at young people, these regimes have tried to co-opt the majority of young people to their ranks. Mubarak's development of the Future Foundation in the early 2000s is an important indicator for this. Young people who were willing to accept the authority of Mubarak, his son and the then ruling NDP, were readily included within the youth ranks of the ruling party and within the various youth centres. Young people who refused the authoritarian structure of the regime were either blasphemed in public or imprisoned. Mubarak, and the rest of the rulers from SCAF until today, have adopted the same political policy for young people. They have also adopted an interesting discourse, both prior to and after January 25, which is that young people are naïve and are negatively influenced by Western culture.

In the meanwhile, exclusionary policies against young opposition activists have been the rule rather than the exception, with some political opportunities for their participation prevailing during certain times, especially during January 25 and the two-year interim period. Nevertheless, political threats and exclusion have prevailed for a large part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Apart from political participation, the subsequent regimes have been adept at discussing issues influencing young people in Egypt, especially education and employment. They have also developed a number of laws for the protection of certain rights, like gender equality rights. They have conducted some short-term strategies for young people's employment or housing projects, for instance; however, these strategies have been riddled with inconsistencies and mismatches between what is said and what is actually implemented. The young people in our sample showed their understanding of the regimes' shortcomings in implementing youth-sensitive policies, and largely blamed the subsequent regimes for these shortcomings.

The fieldwork with this sample of young people has shown that the regime favours the inclusion of urban, young, educated, middle and upper class individuals, through certain policies. However, a major factor for this inclusion is for these young people to accept the

regime's authority and not be in the political opposition. Not only is this the policy of the regime in general, but also, young, mid-educated, lower class, rural (or living in informal settlement) individuals also perceive that they are largely excluded from the various cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. As one young person put it, "we don't exist in this state."

However, within this context young people have still shown some optimism and hope for change. They believe in their power to develop their own initiatives, organizations and unconventional modes of participation. They have time and again asserted their capability for enhancing change, and for establishing their own parallel universe, one where they prevail. Over time this will surely manifest as the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (Bayat 2013:46).

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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 13 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.