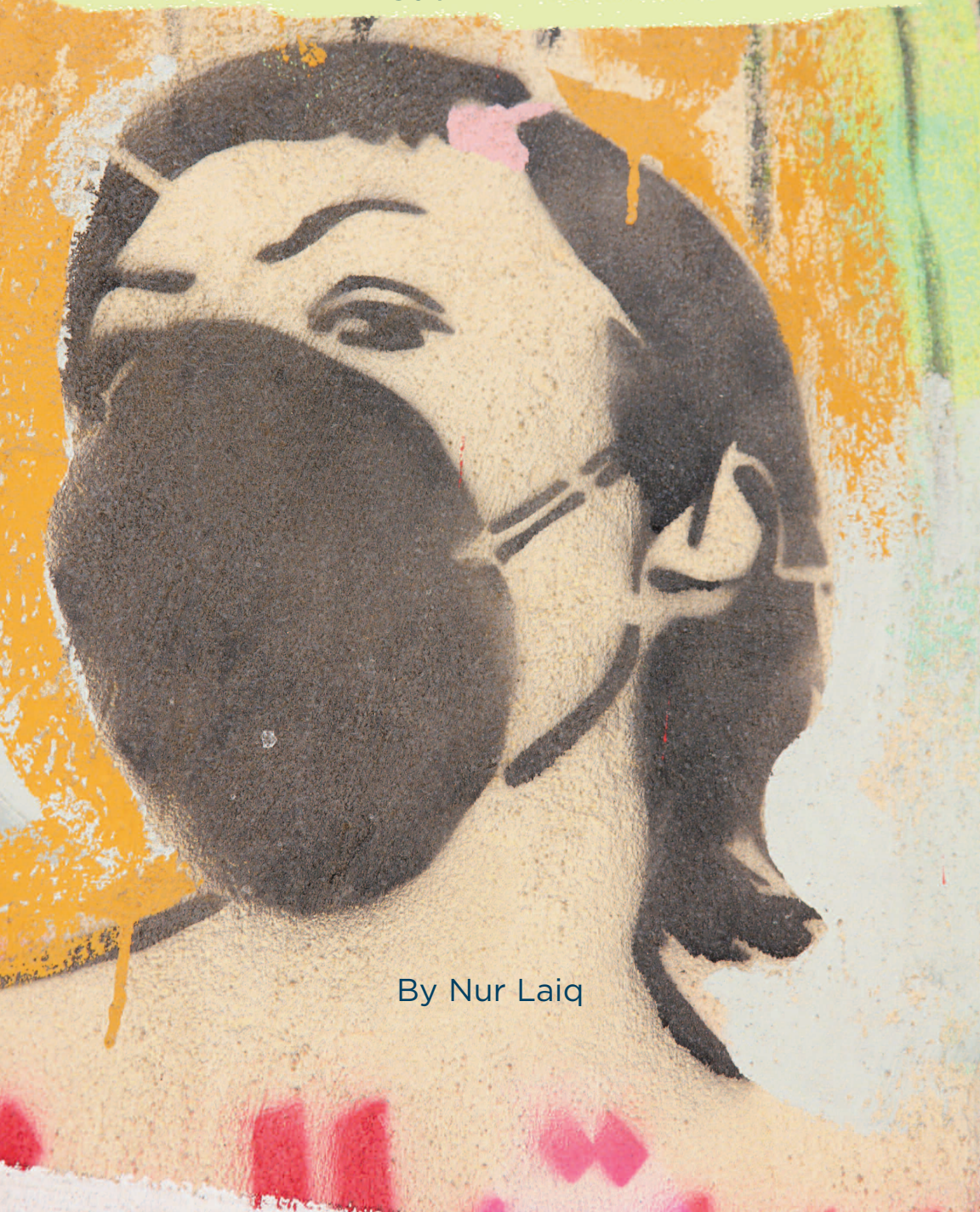


Talking to Arab Youth

Revolution and Counterrevolution
in Egypt and Tunisia

By Nur Laiq



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Nur Laiq



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Cover Photo: A graffiti tribute to the women of the Egyptian revolution on a wall in Cairo following the military attack in December 2011. Photo taken by Nur Laiq. Title design by Jill Stoddard.

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Foreword

Youssef Mahmoud

Senior Adviser, International Peace Institute

Youth represent the face of the Arab revolutions. Youth activists formed the vanguard of the movements that led to the overthrow of autocratic rule in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Since then, the transition processes in these countries have been set on a trajectory that will be long and tumultuous. During the transition period, youth actors have been a wild card. They have used their raw power of mobilization to accelerate the demise of the postrevolutionary elected government in Egypt and are putting pressure on the authorities and on traditional party politics in Tunisia. Their demographic weight and their demonstrated potential as both power brokers and spoilers have grabbed the attention of governments and policymakers. The above notwithstanding, an in-depth understanding of Arab youth's role during the postauthoritarian transitions has thus far remained elusive.

Talking to Arab Youth contributes to addressing this gap. This study provides a detailed and nuanced analysis of youth ideas and actions, the narratives that drive them, their aspirations, and the challenges they face as they navigate the uncharted political and civil society transformations they helped bring about in the Middle East and North Africa. Part of the International Peace Institute's Arab Youth Project, this book offers stakeholders direct access to youth voices and discourse, explains the political currents sweeping through the Arab world, and provides an indication of the direction in which the transition processes may be heading.

The representativeness and legitimacy of both old and newly formed political parties will be seriously questioned if efforts are not made to create safe spaces for youth to fully participate in public policy debates. Marginalized youth will remain a potential risk factor for all governments—whether democratic or authoritarian. This is particularly the case if the political and economic grievances that led to the revolutions remain unaddressed and promises of change unfulfilled. Those in power already recognize the force youth represent, and some

have made attempts to capture that force for narrow partisan interests.

A more strategic approach would be for governments and other political organizations to create less hierarchical, more horizontal structures that foster collaborative governance, in which youth-led movements feel a sense of agency and can play their role as partners instead of subjects. The health of future governance structures and the vitality of the relationship between state and citizen will largely depend on a fully engaged youth.

Talking to Arab Youth provides valuable insights into both local and international stakeholders on how best to harness the social and political entrepreneurship that the Arab revolutions have unleashed and that the youth resolutely continue to seize.

Acknowledgements

“They are just kids holding up traffic; it will pass,” said Mrs. Mubarak over afternoon tea to a friend of mine who met her in an official capacity just a few days before the Mubarak regime fell on February 11, 2011. The idea for the Arab Youth Project was sparked by the events on Tahrir Square and the disconnect between youth and state. It gained momentum following conversations with Egypt’s Ahmed Maher and Yemen’s Tawakkol Karman as they campaigned for youth voices to be heard. It is the youth activists of Egypt and Tunisia who are the lodestars of this work, and it is to them that I would like to express my most profound thanks.

I am humbled and inspired by their actions both during and after the revolutions. In addition to interviewing them, I attended demonstrations with them on women’s rights and labor rights, and sat in on a meeting on citizens’ rights, a teach-in on protest techniques, a session on the use of graffiti to support striking factory workers, and a midnight jam session with the eighty-four-year-old poet of protest Ahmed Fouad Negm, surrounded by young musicians. Through them, I experienced the fervor and headiness of the revolution and its possibilities but also witnessed the courage, dedication, and hard work that change requires. I am deeply indebted to each and every person who shared their time and thoughts with me. I would like to thank everyone individually but feel that to do so during the current tumult might be detrimental to them.

I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Abdullah Alsaïdi, Peter Gastrow, Youssef Mahmoud, and Hardeep Puri at the International Peace Institute (IPI) and Pascale Baeriswyl and Stéphane Rey at the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN for their enthusiasm and advice on the Arab Youth Project. I would like to give special thanks to Levent Bilman at the UN Department of Political Affairs and Walter Armbrust, Eugene Rogan, and Michael Willis at St. Antony’s College, Oxford University. The talks they invited me to give at the UN and at

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Nur Laiq
October 2013

Introduction

The political landscape of the Arab world has undergone dramatic changes since 2011, the effects of which will continue to reverberate into the foreseeable future. The overthrow of authoritarian rule in Tunisia by popular protest was followed by the collapse of long-standing regimes in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, leading many to celebrate a new dynamic between citizen and state in the Arab world. In late 2013, the situation looks quite different. The first democratically elected president in Egypt has been deposed, hundreds of his supporters killed, and the Muslim Brotherhood banned. In Tunisia, parliament has been suspended; two politicians have been assassinated; and a campaign calling for the ouster of the Islamist-led government has gained momentum. In both countries, the population is divided and the *anciens régimes* fight to restore the old order. Will the ideals that sparked revolution be subsumed by counterrevolution? Or will the trajectories of revolution bend toward democratic consolidation?

Much will depend upon how the people respond. This study focuses on one critical group of actors who were central to the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia: the youth. It maps the ideas and actions of youth activists in Egypt and Tunisia to assess the role they could play in the future as the process of revolution and counterrevolution unfolds.

In the Arab world, 60 percent of the population is less than twenty-five years old.¹ This means that out of a total population of 360 million, approximately 216 million are youth. In addition, many activists up to thirty-five years of age count themselves as part of the youth movement. If you include this demographic, the figure would amount to over 70 percent of the population.² The youth bulge has long been compelling for its political and economic ramifications. It is a demographic that has unemployment rates of 20 to 40 percent, making youth unemployment in the Arab region the highest in the

world.³ Forty percent of high school and college graduates cannot find a job. Many youth in the Middle East are relegated to lives of despair, with little hope for the future. Their transition to adulthood has been interrupted, as they remain jobless and often living at home, having to postpone marriage and most other life plans. At the same time, they are connected to the world through satellite channels, the Internet, and social networks—all of which offer glimpses of what might be possible.

In the Middle East and North Africa, whether the revolution is reversed or consolidated, it is unlikely that a new government—authoritarian, hybrid, or democratic—will be able to offer an immediate panacea to address the issues that sparked the original unrest. In both Egypt and Tunisia, the machinery of the state is sclerotic. The culture of torture, police brutality, harassment, and censorship runs deep. The economic distress that led the Tunisian fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi to self-immolate struck a chord with youth across the region in 2011 and will likely continue to resonate. The region would need about 51 million jobs by 2020 to meet employment demands, most of them for youth entering the job market.⁴

Structural, social, and economic inequalities, as well as poverty, unemployment, and corruption, are widespread in the Arab world. At the same time, the demands for a better quality of life and the desire for dignity will endure, especially among youth who both ignited the spark and sustained the flame that led to the revolutions in the Arab world. This study aims to map the diversity of opinion and activism among youth in Egypt and Tunisia and to assess its implications for the future of the Arab transitions. While contextualizing youth ideas and actions, it also explains the primary currents within Egyptian and Tunisian politics and society at large. In order to do so, it examines the following questions: How sustainable are the youth ideas? What is their capacity for organization in politics and in civil society? Will they be able to stand up to the politics of polarization and force?

In the intense heat of the current moment in the Middle East, the fires that have been lit are so blinding that it might seem inconceivable to contemplate youth actors as a force capable of affecting change or of generating ideas for political and civic engagement. However, their demographic weight combined with the sense of power derived from

having launched revolutions makes them a force in the *longue durée*. And transitions to democracy are processes that need to be viewed in a long-term perspective. Their outcome depends on both structural factors—such as entrenched militaries, bureaucracies, regional and international environments—and individual and collective actors.

The enduring presence of institutional elements of the old regime acting to undermine progress at every step (often called the “deep state”) represents a significant obstacle. However, civil society actors and political activists can play a countervailing role in the postrevolutionary period, as witnessed during the transitions in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe. Political and civic activities provide essential channels for engagement, whether under an authoritarian regime, hybrid rule, or a consolidated democracy.⁵ The role of youth in influencing the future of the transition processes is deeply significant within this context.

This study focuses on the youth of the Arab transitions, but youth-led protests have taken place in countries across the world, including Brazil, Chile, Greece, India, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom, among others. Through their revolutions, youth have reenergized the notions of public empowerment, citizenship, and dignity at a moment when many across the world feel the social contract between citizen and state is broken. The protests reflect “a new geography of privilege and disempowerment that cuts across old divides of rich and poor countries, or North and South,”⁶ where youth are the contesting actors.

The study is part of the International Peace Institute’s Arab Youth Project, which uses an empirical approach to deepen understanding of youth activism and provide policymakers with an insight into young people’s priorities, actions, and roles as influencers within the Arab world’s new political landscape. The project started during the early days of the transitions in the Arab world, when it was clear that youth-state relations were being rewritten. It was also stimulated by my discussions with the leader of Egypt’s April 6th Youth Movement, Ahmed Maher, and Yemen’s Tawakkol Karman, who went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her activism. While youth activists have gained much front-page press, there has been little in-depth exploration of their ideas and actions. The Arab Youth Project focuses

on the youth of the Arab countries in transition—Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya—and seeks to build bridges between youth actors and policymakers.

The research for this study was conducted using an ethnographic approach of semi-structured interviews to capture and analyze a multitude of voices. Fieldwork took place during extended stays in Egypt and Tunisia in 2012, during which I conducted more than 150 hours of interviews with more than seventy activists. The interview questions were framed to capture youth perspectives on citizen-state relations in the postrevolution era—the subject of this book—as well as interpretations of key political concepts such as democracy, ideologies, authority; the roles of print and social media; transition models that influence youth; the roles of regional and international actors in transitions; and ideas of how stakeholders might better engage with youth. These conversations, as well as meetings with older political elites, inform this report, even though they do not have specific sections devoted to them. Preexisting contacts with youth activists helped to open doors. My interlocutors offered their address books and made phone calls to contacts from across the political spectrum, which facilitated my interviews. In the tumult of the transitions in Egypt and Tunisia, personal recommendations and contacts were essential in gaining unrestricted access to activists and political players and earning their trust. The element of trust was particularly important in enabling discussions that had depth and were open and frank.

As much as I would like to place on record my gratitude to those who were interviewed, given the turbulence of the current political environment, I feel that to list them by name might do them a disservice or jeopardize their actions. While I have not given the name of interviewees, I do provide contextual information about each of them in the endnotes.

The age range of the activists interviewed stretched from eighteen to thirty-eight, though they tended to be in their thirties in Egypt and in their twenties in Tunisia. However, within the context of the Arab Spring, activists tend not to base their youth identity on specific age brackets. Rather, they perceive themselves as a generation that has been through a rite of passage marked by a shared historical moment.

They have a shared consciousness and a common narrative of change through which they self-identify as being part of a youth social movement.

Youth are, of course, not a homogenous group. This report provides only a sample of the diverse voices of young activists pushing for change in Egypt and Tunisia. Particular attention is also paid to the views of young women, who are less often heard. I conducted interviews with leaders of key youth movements that led the revolution as well as with young politicians covering the breadth of the political spectrum that includes moderate Islamists, puritanical Salafis, secularists, communists, and liberals. Among civil society activists, I focused on numerous rights-based and citizen groups, local coordination committees, media collectives, the Ultras (a football fan club that plays a key role on the frontlines of the Egyptian revolution), individual activists such as bloggers and graffiti artists, as well as some groups engaged in development work.

The emphasis on Egypt and Tunisia is based on the weight of the two countries and the pivotal role played by their youth. Egypt has long been considered the standard bearer of the Arab world, whose success or failure will arguably set the pattern for the region. Its revolution was considered influential enough for China to censor the word “Egypt,” blocking its use from all Internet servers in the country—an example followed by some African dictatorships.⁷ Tunisia is where the Arab revolutions started, and it also might be the only country where it will be consolidated over the long term. The youth of Egypt and Tunisia will not only shape the future of their own countries; they will also have a profound impact on trends throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

In what follows, the first chapter centers on youth discourse. It provides a detailed analysis of the prevalent narratives in Egypt and Tunisia, which in turn affect youth actions as examined in chapters two and three. The second chapter focuses on youth action in political parties and the third chapter on the youth’s civic engagement. Each chapter is divided into separate sections on Egypt and Tunisia to allow for a distinct examination of the trends in both countries. While assessing youth discourse and activities, the chapters also contextualize the broader issues facing the Egyptian and Tunisian polities.

Chapter One

COMPETING NARRATIVES

Youth movements were the initial drivers of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, because the story they told—encompassing a call for dignity, a cry against police brutality, and action for socioeconomic justice—resonated with the wider population. The appeal of these ideas presented by a united front of millions in Tahrir Square and Avenue Bourguiba led to the overthrow of Presidents Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The allure of this narrative was also based on the foundation that, as one activist in Cairo remarked, “this revolution wasn’t ideological at all. There wasn’t a minute on Tahrir where anyone thought, ‘this guy is an Islamist.’ One of the good things about the revolution is that it undermined ideology, focused on getting better things for everyone, whatever his ideology.”¹

However, these revolutionary ideas now have to compete with numerous other discourses that ricochet around the Middle East and North Africa. The contesting narratives invoke existential battles between the values of Islamists and secularists, security and extremism, stability and democracy. These are the stories that often dominate the headlines, but it is too early to predict which ones will prevail. Narratives on the nature and identity of the state were at the center of the transitions in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe.² The Arab world is no exception. In the uncertainty of a transition period, identifying and understanding different strands of political discourse is of particular relevance, as it can explain why and how events unfold.³ Political narratives are never neutral and can be used both to encourage people “of the prudence of compliance and conformity” and to create a “repertoire of resistance.”⁴ Authoritarian states construct their own narratives to bolster their case for power, representing it as a matter of national survival. The pervasiveness of such a narrative over time leads it to become so deeply embedded that,



"He Who Delegates Never Dies," by Omar Picasso. The faces in the top left belong to the Muslim Brotherhood's supreme guide, Mohammed Badie; military chief Mohamed Hussein Tantawi; and former president Hosni Mubarak. Photo taken in Tahrir Square, Cairo, July 5, 2012, by Nur Laiq.

as the political scientist Charles Tripp has argued, it can "become the 'common sense' version of a country's past informed by and informing the present." The power of such a narrative is that it "acts as the prism through which political relations are seen."⁵ It can also "provide a way of legitimating courses of action by appealing to a mass audience accustomed to viewing things through distinctive lenses."⁶

While narratives from the past are resilient and are often used by elites to reproduce their hegemony, revolutions also create new narratives, which have a significant power of their own and can be harnessed for the creation of a new polity. Their most significant impact often lies in the long term, as they widen the space for debate on power and resistance and contribute to the development of calls for greater accountability through the system.⁷ They create a repertoire of ideas and actions that challenge power and offer a new grammar of political action for the relationship between citizen and state.

This chapter examines the prevalent discourse of Egyptian and Tunisian youth. Youth prioritize changing the political culture in order to move away from authoritarian models of functioning and modes of

thinking. Their discourse is focused on the expansion of political rights and the desire for socioeconomic justice. While their narratives engage with the original ideals of the revolution, they have not been able to escape from the legacy of the Islamist versus secularist binary that has dominated political life in Egypt and Tunisia for decades. Mapping youth discourse has been akin to following a river with many tributaries. However, this is reflective of most transition processes, which necessarily entail a continuing negotiation and renegotiation of the state and its history, culture, politics, and identity. This section thus provides a reading of multiple and often-competing youth narratives and their implications in both Egypt and Tunisia.

EGYPT

Following the revolution, in elections carried out over the 2011–2012 period, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party gained the majority of seats in the parliament with 38 percent of the vote, the ultraconservative Salafi Nour Party won the next biggest block with 24 percent, and the remainder was divided between secular parties. In the presidential elections that followed, the Brotherhood won with 51 percent of the vote and Mohammad Morsi became president in June 2012, having beaten the former regime minister and military man Ahmed Shafiq. The Muslim Brotherhood's victory led to a deep divide between the presidency and the opposition, with the latter comprising the Salafis and a secular bloc of both pro-*ancien régime* and pro-revolution figures.

The discourse in Egypt quickly metamorphosed from “Muslim Brotherhood versus the opposition” into one of “Islamist versus secularist,” creating a deeply polarized polity. The Revolutionary Youth Coalition, the primary decision-making body during the revolution, disbanded in July 2012, just days after the inauguration of Egypt's first democratically elected president. It had made it through the trials of the revolution, but its members could not navigate the newly polarized political space. A member of the coalition described his feelings: “It made me very sad. I didn't know the revolution could end except when this coalition ended. This means that the youth couldn't continue. They weren't able to give up this idea of polarization. They kept saying, ‘you are from the Islamists, you are from the liberals.’”⁸

The polarization diverted youth attention from the original goals of the revolution, and youth activists became increasingly involved in the pitch battles taking place between the government and the opposition, based on the Islamist versus secularist discourse. The wider youth bloc fragmented and became marginalized in the new political landscape. However, the discourse among youth activists did not replicate the simple binary narrative of the older generation of politicians, which was overwhelmingly focused on the Islamist versus secularist issue.

The youth discourse was multifaceted and reflected a variety of opinions. It also contained contradictions and disconnects, and was subject to change depending on the dynamics of the situation. Polarization was a dominant theme, but equally present were the ideas of social and economic justice, narratives against the brutality of the security services, and the monopolization of political space by the state via its media and the military. This section unpacks these primary narratives and contextualizes them in order to provide a finer reading of how the transition is unfolding and the directions in which it might head.

Polarization

Opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood was prevalent among many youth interviewed. It was expressed not just by secularists but also by Salafis and non-Brotherhood Islamists. “We don’t have problems with the Muslim Brotherhood about freedom. But about innovations, value systems, of thinking out of the box, having space to be creative,” said a secular civil society activist.⁹ A Salafi civil society activist explained further: “We criticize the Ikhwan [Brotherhood] not because they are Ikhwan but because they are the majority. They are the regime, actually. In the past one and a half years, the Ikhwan hasn’t demonstrated in any clashes with government. No conflicts at all.”¹⁰ Many youth interviewed were not against Islamists in general being in power but were skeptical of the Muslim Brotherhood specifically, whom they viewed as being part and parcel of the Mubarak era, whose politics and culture still belonged to the pre-revolutionary way of thinking. A young policy researcher evaluated the situation as follows: “What has happened in Egypt is elite circulation.”¹¹

The Muslim Brotherhood's history comprises a chronicle of arrests and detentions without trial, from the purges by President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s through to Mubarak's rule starting in 1981. The organization had been barred from legal participation in politics throughout, with the exception of the period from January 2011 to September 2013. However, by Mubarak's period, the Brotherhood had developed an extensive base of support and acquired political capital based on social legitimacy. It was tolerated by the Mubarak regime, which allowed the Brotherhood to take part in elections and political life extra-legally in order to bolster its own legitimacy. The Brotherhood made use of the opening to participate in elections at the parliamentary level and also in syndicate and student politics through the 1990s. Youth distrust of the Brotherhood is based on the Mubarak era chapter of their history. It was deepened by the Brotherhood's initial hesitation in participating in the revolution and its interactions with the military after the revolution.

Morsi's government was not seen by youth to be confronting the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the military but rather making deals with it. Morsi did replace the head of SCAF, but he did not make any observable attempts to dilute the power of the military. The military trials of 12,000 protesters, who had been detained during the protests against Mubarak in 2011, were allowed to continue. All youth interviewed were against the trials, and many were supporters of the youth group "No to Military Trials." However, it is not just the Muslim Brotherhood that was slow to join the revolution or reluctant to take on the military. Many of the political parties were cautious in joining the revolution; most have not pressed for action against the military and yet have not been as tarnished by it as the Brotherhood.

Youth distrust also revolved around the view that the Muslim Brotherhood's sole interest was power. "The MB want power at any cost. Full stop. They lie, deceive, make deals with anyone," said a secular activist.¹² Another explained, "We don't want 'Egypt is the Brotherhood, and the Brotherhood is Egypt.'"¹³ The idea that the Brotherhood could recreate Egypt in its own image is a powerful one that has been in currency since the reign of Nasser. It continues to be promoted as a specter by the military, which positions itself as the

guardian of Egypt's sovereignty against the threat of a Brotherhood takeover. It is also a discourse that has been adopted by most autocracies in the Middle East, from Syria to Saudi Arabia, all of which position themselves as a bulwark against the "menace" of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Youth discourse has been affected by this deeply embedded narrative. "The Muslim Brotherhood has proved once again that once they see the cake, they can't control themselves from eating all of it—their share and more," was a commonly expressed sentiment.¹⁴ Not all youth subscribed to the military's narrative about the Brotherhood's ulterior motives. Many Brotherhood-affiliated youth had participated in the revolution. Some had played an important role in organizing Tahrir Square during the revolution and had close links with other activists. They were seen by their secular peers as different from the Brotherhood's political elite, as "more principled and open minded."¹⁵

There were also many secular activists who did not think of the Muslim Brotherhood as an existential threat. A young analyst at the Egyptian Institute for Personal Rights explained, "The Muslim Brotherhood are not ideological as they were in the 1970s, they are not calling for an Islamic state. It is an Islamicized capitalism, all about integration into the global order."¹⁶ Another interviewee who had run for parliament as an independent candidate concluded, "The main concern is that...they want to turn Egypt into the mold of the Muslim Brotherhood. With Morsi, I am all for supporting him...A lot of people are scared it might turn into another Iran. But I think it won't as times have changed."¹⁷

Most youth interviewed in the period from mid- to late 2012, including the severest critics of the Brotherhood, were unified in viewing Morsi as the legitimate president: "I didn't vote for the president, but he is the leadership now," said one Islamist civil society activist.¹⁸ Meanwhile, a Salafi-leaning member of the Egyptian Current Party said, "I pray for Morsi because in reality he is the president. But I don't trust him or support him."¹⁹ However, the electoral mandate of the Brotherhood was not recognized by most of the older political elite in the opposition, who often accused Morsi of overreach. In this respect, it is worth noting a crucial difference between the attitudes of youth and that of mainstream politicians of

the older generation. The Brotherhood responded by insisting on a majoritarian view of democracy, seeing their electoral victory as being enough of a reason to implement their policy agenda without the need for too much debate.

At the same time, there were numerous occasions when the Morsi government tried to reach out and negotiate or to be inclusive, to which the opposition refused to respond. Most opposition politicians, as well as the rock stars of the youth movements, were offered positions in government, which they rejected. “I was invited to be the youth minister but refused as I don’t want to be part of the system but outside [it]. We are active and can push for anything. We would rather be activists; if we are part of the cabinet, then who will surprise Morsi? Wael Ghoneim was nominated for communications minister but he also refused,” said a leader of the April 6th Youth Movement.²⁰ The secular opposition also had a view of democracy in which it saw itself as the unrepresented majority, which didn’t need to engage in much debate. Both sides viewed democracy as a zero-sum game.

Once in power, Morsi became the lightning rod for dissatisfaction with the Muslim Brotherhood but also with the more widespread failure of the revolution to deliver an improved standard of living. However, anti-Brotherhood sentiment was deepened by the legacy of the state’s narrative against it. It is worth noting that the Salafis do not feature prominently in the polarization debate. The Salafi Nour Party won 30 percent of the seats in parliament in 2012. The Salafis are ultraconservative Islamists, representing a constituency far right of the Brotherhood. They campaigned for the most conservative clauses in the constitution and favor the institution of *sharia* law. They also supported the military-led ouster of President Morsi in July 2013. They have not been singled out by the military, the public, or the youth for their Islamist politics. This indicates that the problem lies in the negative perception of the Muslim Brotherhood organization and not with its conservative politics per se.

Politics of Identity

Egypt’s polarization has been couched in terms of an identity crisis. However, the interviews undertaken for this report suggest that the “identity crisis” is not a function of the struggle between Islamists and

secularists but rather is centered in particular on the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian politics and society. Other Islamic entities such as the Azhar clerical establishment and the Salafist Nour Party remain acceptable to both the military and the public. Al-Azhar was co-opted by President Nasser, following which its clerics have continued to tow the state line. The Salafis were tolerated by Mubarak, who did not see lay Salafi preachers as a threat, unlike the organized Muslim Brotherhood. The narrative of antagonism toward the Brotherhood and not other Islamist groups continues to be reproduced.

It has also shaped the discourse among youth. While many activists were deeply critical of the Muslim Brotherhood, none talked of an Islamist versus secular divide. They are not against the idea of political Islam per se. Many subscribe to the view that “Islam isn’t just a religion; it’s a culture, values.”²¹ While criticizing the Brotherhood, they espoused a dispassionate line on Islam and politics. An activist explained,

The most conservative country in the Arab world according to a survey is Egypt. So you can’t say you should separate religion and politics. Should Islam be in the constitution? I believe, no. But there should be no conflict. So if the majority wants it....You can’t say separation of politics and Islam is a pillar of democracy, because at the end of the day this is a nation driven by religion, conservatism.²²

The argument resonates with the findings of most public opinion polls. For example, a 2011 Gallup poll indicated that only 9 percent of Egyptians would like a separation of church and state, and 14 percent want theocratic rule. The majority, at 69 percent, are agnostic about the idea of religion in politics.²³

The idea of an identity crisis did not arise in my interviews in Egypt (whereas it came up repeatedly in Tunisia). The only two groups of interviewees for whom identity was a matter of concern were ultraconservative youth, whose appearance had elicited the opprobrium of the state, and Coptic Christians.

One civil society activist, who is also a Salafi in his personal life, described his existence under the Mubarak security state:

I wanted to go to a seaside place, and my friend told me that ‘you

shouldn't go because the police will stop you.' I was stopped after 70 kilometers. They saw a beard and a *niqab*. I have been called for investigation and detained twenty-two times. They repeat the same questions: Why do you have a beard? Where do you pray? What do you think about Mubarak?²⁴

He did not believe in either political Islam or the Muslim Brotherhood but talked of how hard it was to get a job or to rent an apartment for those who looked conservative. Another civil society activist who wears the *niqab*, which covers the face entirely, described being repeatedly harassed by the police during the Mubarak era and being told to take her *niqab* off.²⁵ After the revolution, the bearded activist started the Costa Salafi group to promote intercommunity dialogue. He named the group after Costa Coffee, a British cafe chain akin to Starbucks that has branches around Cairo, in order to try to present a softer image of Salafis, "for we too drink cappuccinos and like chocolate cake."²⁶

The state's response to Islamists, or those perceived as Islamists, has oscillated between co-optation, toleration, and harassment. The state has also taken a similar approach to the Coptic community, which has existed in Egypt since the pre-Islamic era and forms 10 percent of the population. Sectarian strife between the Muslim and Christian communities has been a prominent feature of Egypt since the 1970s. President Anwar Sadat played a significant role in undermining the status of the Copts, by debarring the Coptic patriarch from public life and through a constitutional amendment that made *sharia* the main source of the law.²⁷ The Copts remained cut off from the fold until Mubarak reinstated the patriarch and promoted himself as a patron, especially at a time when the rising tide of political Islam was threatening both him and the Copts. A mutual agreement was reached between the state and the church.²⁸

However, a cycle of violence that includes burnings and lootings of churches has continued unchecked through the decades, with the state media often playing a supporting role. While the Copts I interviewed supported the former regime candidate Shafiq and were concerned about the Muslim Brotherhood, the main concern of the youth related to the revolution's goals. A Coptic activist described the situation as follows: "The most important issue is the issue of identity.

There's no equality among citizens."²⁹ He drew a pyramid with the Muslim Brotherhood at the top and Christians and other minorities such as the Shi'ia and Nubians below, and said, "Fifty years ago, Martin Luther King said we will be free, and he dreamt that there would a black president. His dream happened. And I dream that we will have a Copt not as a president but [as a] first-class citizen like a Muslim."³⁰

The wider community of youth activists is cognizant of the pyramid of inequality based on identity. Most see it as a legacy of the authoritarian state: "They are all questions that were clamped down upon, under 60 years of dictatorship—so we are now opening up questions of 200 years."³¹ Many youth are keen to tackle this legacy and to promote the empowerment of minority groups. However, there is a clear separation between the issue of identity and that of political polarization. The latter relates solely to perceptions of the Muslim Brotherhood and stems from the discourse of Islamist versus secularist that has been promoted by the state. The anti-Muslim Brotherhood narrative holds sway over Egyptian political life and has also come to dominate youth discourse. As a result, it has taken energy away from their initial revolutionary goals, fragmented movements, and added to confusion regarding motivations and objectives. Even those youth who were not polarized themselves, were often reacting to the politics of it and being distracted by it.

Economic Crunch

All youth interviewed, irrespective of their political leanings or polarization, shared the same revolutionary goals. These gravitated around the issues of economic justice and the challenges of the "deep state"—institutional elements of the old regime, acting to undermine progress at every opportunity. This was initially couched in the fight against police brutality but expanded to include all security services, the interior ministry, the military, and the vast bureaucracy that includes the state media. The view that "the neoliberal development model doesn't work"³² was expressed by youth activists from across the political spectrum. The postrevolutionary period has been marked by labor protests, strikes, and sit-ins in every sector of the economy, including doctors, lawyers, college and school teachers, college students, gas workers, taxi drivers, and bus drivers. A study by an Egyptian think tank reported that Egypt witnessed 5,544 protests

between January and May 2013, of which 64 percent were related to economic demands.³³ Youth activists have been active in supporting protests and in helping each group agitate for demands. However, their actions have been splintered, with each protesting group—from striking doctors to bus drivers—fighting for their own rights without linking in with a wider labor movement or a political platform.

Youth believe that “the government has no vision but also no capacity to do anything, so they are caught in a paralysis.”³⁴ They argue that “the elites—military, big businesses, etc.—don’t believe things are dire yet. But Egyptians, like the rest of the world, are looking for alternatives to the system...We need a huge transformation of the state.”³⁵ Most youth view economic justice as one of the principal aims of the revolution and are against the policies of the government and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which they see as antithetical to this goal. Egypt has a complicated past with the IMF. The Egyptian state and the IMF have viewed it as a success story for privatization and structural adjustment under Presidents Sadat and Mubarak, who oversaw an opening of the economy. The public, however, associates economic liberalization with high unemployment, price increases, the threat of subsidy reform, and encroaching poverty.

The postrevolutionary period has seen economic problems compounded by political instability and the general flux of transition, which have led to dramatic falls in foreign direct investment and tourism revenue. The state faces a budget deficit, which is 11 percent of gross domestic product, and has been continuously on the brink of bankruptcy. Negotiations between the government and the IMF for a \$4.8 billion loan have become a central part of the government’s economic policy in 2012 and 2013, both pre- and post-coup, and have been met with protests from many youth groups. In this context, many youth see each government as being the same as the one before. One activist expressed her antipathy toward the Muslim Brotherhood being based on this: “I don’t mind someone being Islamist...What’s worrying for me is not the identity thing, but the exploitative angle of the liberal system. It just grew a beard.”³⁶ However, while the Morsi government did not succeed in attaining the IMF loan or in cutting government subsidies, the post-coup government is set to achieve both.

While protests continue, labor organizing and independent unions remain illegal, with postrevolutionary governments doing little to change Mubarak era laws. The Morsi government added amendments to the law against organizing that would continue to hamper trade union pluralism, also creating rifts between pro- and anti-Muslim Brotherhood camps within the labor movement and further fragmenting it. The post-Morsi government has not made any changes. Youth activists in civil society and political parties are critical of this and of the fact that 1 percent of the population controls the majority of the wealth.³⁷ But youth express the view that, among them, there are “ideological convictions that push people towards one system or the other,”³⁸ making it difficult for them to create a political platform that moves beyond fighting for the rights of individual groups.

Media Monopoly

“Mubarak is gone but Mubarakism will take much longer to go,” was an expression often heard in Cairo after the revolution.³⁹ A young Freedom and Justice Party founding member described it as “the deep state, the *feloul*, the figures that don’t want the regime to change. This is our biggest challenge. And the media, because all the media are against us.”⁴⁰ The media, police brutality, and the military came up as the most pressing issues among the youth interviewed. The media was of primary importance, police second, and military third for reasons that will be explained below.

An independent journalist described how “all private media and [the] state has an anti-Muslim Brotherhood stance in varying degrees.”⁴¹ The government has long controlled the media through state-run newspapers and television channels, which is what most Egyptians have access to.⁴² Privately owned media companies also tend to follow the government line:

Media are reduced to power props in the hands of their ownership. Today this ownership finds its interest in countering the Muslim Brotherhood and aligning with the military. Accordingly, this interest has completely tainted the coverage, leading to the active masking of the truth.⁴³

The state has often used its influence to attack those it views as troublesome. This has included civil society activists. A former

member of the April 6th Youth Movement describes her experience:

After the revolution, SCAF made the illusion that the media is different. So instead of state media they used alternate media also to spread information against us, and people are now confused. So it is a difficult period to get in touch with people. And people now see us as foreign agents. People trust the army more than us. So now we need to use different tools.⁴⁴

The tactics used against the civil society activist interviewed are the same ones the military uses against the Muslim Brotherhood or any anyone else who might question their power. Journalists who do not follow the government line are often accused of representing the interests of foreign agents or terrorists, and of undermining state security. A journalist described the “culture of censorship” that has existed since the 1960s, “where the editor is like a small dictatorship... The political culture has to be changed,” she said. “There is state censorship and then the bigger problem of self-censorship.”⁴⁵ Youth are trying to counter the influence of state media by setting up their own small media outlets, which mostly exist on websites. They see themselves as “ready to push lines and write about taboo issues.”⁴⁶ Many youth listed having access to independent media as their primary aspiration. A Salafist spoke of his dismay at the news industry: “I am apologizing because nothing is transparent—newspapers, media—and so you get very exhausted.”⁴⁷

Police State

“All the reasons for detaining protesters now are the reasons, as before, that I myself was arrested for while I was with Kefaya during 2005 or protesting against Mubarak. The reasons are ones like delaying traffic,” described a lawyer who now defends detainees.⁴⁸ He continued to explain that nothing has changed since the revolution:

We don’t know where the people who are arrested are placed. The police make it hard for us to meet the detainees. I represented a few of those who were arrested outside the US embassy. I was surprised that some of them were tortured while being arrested. One had become deaf. And one had his legs slashed. They were ordinary Egyptians.⁴⁹

Amnesty International has issued annual reports detailing the torture that is a matter of routine in most police stations. It is

“committed with impunity by both security and plainclothes police openly and in public, as if unconcerned about possible consequences.”⁵⁰ This describes the situation under Mubarak and again after the military coup of July 2013. Under Morsi, the practice continued but without the air of impunity that has resurfaced following his ouster. Morsi was unwilling or unable to reform the police. In 2012, one activist suggested about reform that “in institutions, it’s going to be a struggle under Morsi: the police will have [a] hard time helping him out because they have been enemies for years.”⁵¹ The Muslim Brotherhood did disband one of the much feared and resented state security services. However, this security service has been reinstalled following the military coup.

The power of the police, state security services, and the interior ministry can be traced back to President Nasser’s period, during which he built a “veritable pyramid of intelligence and security services.”⁵² It is claimed that by 2002, the Ministry of Interior controlled 1 million police and security personnel. The figure expanded to 3 million upon the inclusion of plainclothes police, thugs, and *agents provocateurs* who exist on the payroll to break up peaceful demonstrations in order to avoid tarnishing the image of state security.⁵³ Youth, especially activists, have long suffered under the hands of the state security apparatus. Again, most youth interviewed expressed their desire to overturn the culture of violence cultivated by the state: “I hope the authorities now can focus more on these rights. I hope there will be a stop to all these violations of human rights.”⁵⁴

Military Dominion

“My first priority is to get more authority for Morsi from SCAF. To cut SCAF’s hands. To end the military regime,” declared a former leader of the April 6th Youth Movement.⁵⁵ A key aim of the revolution was to rid Egypt not only of Mubarak but to free it from sixty years of military rule. Most youth activists mentioned it as their principal postrevolutionary aspiration: “for me it’s against SCAF and the military, to have freedom,” said a Salafi activist.⁵⁶ The youth analysis was that “SCAF is part of the old regime and has the same interests—trading, manufacturing. They have the same network”⁵⁷ and “will not relinquish power easily and will always want to be involved in decisions in the country.”⁵⁸ This was the predominant sentiment

before the presidential election and Morsi's win in June 2012.

However, following the Muslim Brotherhood's electoral victory, attitudes began to shift. A Muslim Brotherhood activist remained adamantly anti-military: "SCAF works against democratization. There's an opinion in the starting few months of the revolution where we thought SCAF would start to work to complete the democratization of the state, but now it is clear that SCAF works against the revolution."⁵⁹ But for others the situation changed. The fight against the military slid down in the list of priorities, partly in reaction to the Muslim Brotherhood's electoral victory: "This is not our battle between the Muslim Brotherhood and SCAF, so let them fight and we will fight for our own rights."⁶⁰ This secular activist suggested that "the people who went to Tahrir, some also identify with the military and security; there is a nostalgia for military and security."⁶¹

While opinions on the role of the military in political life oscillate, the power of the military remains mostly unchallenged. Both the Brotherhood and the opposition have been driven by their polarized politics to woo the army instead of restructuring it. Some youth are also increasingly operating within the framework established by the older political elite while at the same time accusing the Brotherhood of being too soft on the military. There are also many who would like the military to be relegated solely to their barracks. However, most agreed that they did not have the power to take on the military, as expressed by an April 6th activist: "We aren't ready, we don't have real power. We aren't a real alternative, and there are a lot of splits within the secular side among people and parties, so now [is] not the time to take on SCAF."⁶² Another civil society activist explained, "We can't crush the military, we want to continue without blood. Let the military stay if they want. We need to breathe freedom. And now we can speak freely."⁶³

Restricting Narratives

The inability to build a coalition combined with the widely accepted view of a "deep state," or institutional elements of the old regime that act to undermine the government's every step, made it difficult for the Muslim Brotherhood to realize postrevolutionary institutional reform or public service delivery. Every policy issue and political move was viewed through the prism of the Islamist versus secularist divide. The

youth have, for the most part, tried to function outside of this polarized framework and to stay focused on the goals of the revolution.

However, as the dissolution of the Revolutionary Youth Coalition indicates, they have found it difficult to avoid being affected by the polarized climate. The Egyptian Current Party member, who is also a Salafi, made the following suggestion:

They should have taken one goal and kept on pursuing it after the revolution. And in my opinion it should have been the judicial system. If we had reached this goal, then the revolution would have succeeded. I wish we had started working on free press, on institutional bodies, on education. If all the policy members came together and found a solution...They only care about power.⁶⁴

His analysis holds true in that the youth most affected by the polarization have been those active in the political field, as members of political parties or youth movements that led the revolution, such as the Revolutionary Youth Coalition or the April 6th Youth Movement. Extensive interviews suggest that this is the case because the Islamist versus secular divide has become the principal rallying cry in politics and some youth politicians have at times found it difficult to break away from this framework. However, even those youth groups that have been at times swayed by this binary have maintained a measure of pragmatism. For example, the April 6th Youth Movement has led the call for a national dialogue and seeks to offer an alternative, more inclusive vision that moves beyond this divide. They have argued that “there must be a third voice.”⁶⁵

TUNISIA

Identity Crisis

“We were homogenized into blocks”⁶⁶ during the last sixty years, declared a young journalist in Tunis. “We still carry legacies of the past. Now the voices are coming back to the scene. And now a Pandora’s box has been opened.”⁶⁷ The ideas and narratives of youth reflect the deep identity crisis that Tunisian society is going through. The authoritarian state of Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali sought to impose a secular framework upon all Tunisians. Bourguiba clamped down on religious education and institutions, closing the thirteenth century Zaitouna

University in Tunis that had been a pillar of moderate Islamic education. Ben Ali took the secular program further, passing a law under which the headscarf was banned for women and beards were not permitted for men. The Islamist-leaning journalist argued,

The law made Tunisian society look homogenous from the outside but on the inside there was a real conflict between secularists and Islamists. In the last five years, Islamic identity started to come to the front. Secularists think this Islamization is a danger, but you could also look at it as a product of failed modernization instituted by Ben Ali.⁶⁸

The secularization policies of the authoritarian state suppressed political Islam but did not eradicate it. The space that opened up after the revolution has led to a torrent of political and religious opinions filling the Tunisian polity. “Our generation doesn’t know anything about Islamic thought, and that drives us to it. We are talking a lot because there is a saying here, ‘my breast is full.’ I have a lot of things bottled up,”⁶⁹ the journalist added. There is a crisis of tradition and of self, as debates that may have taken place post-independence but were censored under authoritarian rule now resurface. Secularism, moderate Islamism, and ultraconservative Salafism jostle up against one another, each now carrying additional baggage.

The majority of youth identify as Muslims, but their views on Islam in the public and political sphere appear to split them in two camps: those who are staunchly secularist and those who think that political Islam has a rightful place in a country that is Muslim. However, this divide did not often correlate to opposing or supporting the ruling Islamist party Ennahda, about whom opinion is split for reasons related to the historical legacy of anti-Islamist sentiment, similar to that expressed against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The polarization between secularists and Islamists that has gripped Tunisian society and politics is also reflected in youth views. At the same time, most youth despair of the polarization, as one activist expressed: “Religion shouldn’t be the debate. It’s crazy that the debate is here.”⁷⁰ However, many of the youth interviewed felt that the debate was needed and that the Pandora’s box had to be opened. Youth views on secularism, Islamism, and Salafism are wide-ranging and also reflect the narratives that have engulfed Tunisian society as a whole. While acknowledging the importance of addressing these issues, many

youth also felt that the initial narratives that sparked the revolution—the questions of social and economic justice—must not be ignored.

Secular youth continue to believe in the French model and are concerned about secular rights being guaranteed in the constitution. Their primary concern with the ruling Ennahda Party relates to this and, in particular, the issue of women's rights. Islamist youth, including women, express uneasiness with the rigidity of French secularism, or *laïcité*, and the inflexibility of a system that doesn't allow for headscarves to be worn. They perceive the French model of secularism being one of "excluding some people rather than including them."⁷¹ Many secular Tunisians wonder where "all these women with headscarves and *niqabs* came from."⁷²

The answer from interviews with young women who had chosen to veil, pointed towards the influence of Islam from the West. The Islamist journalist explained: "This is also part of a globalization. I started copying some women in the UK, the US, who had a 'cool' Islam. It was a way for me to reconcile Islam and modernity."⁷³ A young school teacher answered: "I decided to wear the headscarf when in the US, and then here after the revolution. Many of my friends have started wearing it now. Before you were viewed as an extremist if you wore it and walked on the streets. I got used to wearing it myself in the US."⁷⁴ She explained that in the US, where she spent a year on a Fulbright exchange, she had the freedom to try on the headscarf, whereas in Ben Ali's Tunisia, she would have been harassed by the authorities and would have also felt social pressure against it.

The flow of pan-Islamic ideas is also evident in the more traditional sense. A young Islamist activist, when expressing his thoughts on the conflicts in the Arab world and relations with other Arab countries, did not mention Arab nationalism but talked of a pan-Islamic sentiment: "It's a shame what's happening, because they take our land and kill our brothers and sisters. You have to understand, there's no Tunisian or Egyptian. We are all one entity; Islam unifies us."⁷⁵ He also stated that "ideally we would have *sharia* here."⁷⁶ But he saw this as something that needed to be campaigned for, "We are trying to communicate with people about *sharia*, about Islam, not to judge people but to educate."⁷⁷ To many youth, Islam offers an ideological structure that provides meaning.

The quest for meaning is also being expressed in the more radical form of Salafism. Postrevolution Tunisia has witnessed a rise in Salafi youth presence and action. Many of my interviews were conducted in Tunisia in 2012 during a period of heightened Salafi activity that included an attack on an art gallery, the burning of the American Cooperative School of Tunis, and the breach of the US embassy wall—the latter two in reaction to the inflammatory film, *The Innocence of Muslims*. The Salafis—or “the bearded ones,” as they are referred to in Tunisia’s French-language press—have puzzled not just the media, as the reference suggests, but also secular and Islamist youth: “My friends ask, ‘Where the hell do they come from?’” one journalist remarked.⁷⁸ While in Egypt the Salafis have had an established presence for decades, in Tunisia they are perceived as an unknown entity that has suddenly surfaced after the revolution. In Egypt, I interviewed many Salafis, but this was harder in Tunisia. I met some young Salafi women, but the Salafi men I was scheduled to meet would repeatedly reschedule and cancel meetings.

Salafis are often reduced into a single homogenous group. But while all Salafis share a puritanical vision of Islam, based on its sixth century interpretations, they are otherwise just as diverse in their opinions and actions as the secularists and other Islamists. The different groups include those who believe in a separation of religion and politics; political activists who have formed two new Salafi parties in Tunisia; and jihadi Salafists, such as the Ansar al-Sharia group. Similarly, Salafism’s appeal is based on a diverse set of factors, many of which do not fit into neat categories of secular versus Islamist or modern versus traditional. Each of the young women in the group of Salafis I interviewed was studying for degrees in English for Business Communication and was animated about “respect for the jihadi Salafists”⁷⁹ and the establishment of a *sharia* state.

When asked about what a *sharia* state might look like, the women answered in the same vein as their moderate Islamist counterpart and stressed the importance “to live peacefully, to accept differences between people also, because our point of view is rejected by many people. I advise you meet as many different people, because we all have different visions.”⁸⁰ Their enthusiasm for jihadism didn’t translate into coherent answers when questioned about the details of Salafism and

its appeal for them, or when pressed on what a *sharia* state might look like and how compatible it was with their other ambitions in terms of the rights and freedoms they wanted. A young Islamist lawyer who defended Salafi youth in trials during the Ben Ali period suggested that, “This is just a fashion...It’s appealing to young people who some time ago wanted to be metal heads and now the new fad is growing a beard and wearing a *qameez*.”⁸¹

The interviews conducted for this report and media reports of youth attracted to Salafism suggest that it is currently in vogue. The trend can be understood against the backdrop of the repression in the Ben Ali era. There are many perceptions of why and how Salafism has taken hold. Among the youth I interviewed, some suggested that they felt “society was lost, and they wanted to go to their goal but they don’t know how. So they regressed to what they know to be true.”⁸² One argument that has many supporters among youth is that Ben Ali’s crackdown on Islamic teaching left the door open for “them to be educated through satellite channels like Ikraa from the East (the Gulf and Egypt) and with booklets that were exchanged illegally.”⁸³

One Islamist activist elaborated: “Ben Ali, he tried to break the relation between society and Islam—Tunisia used to have the Zeitouna [university]—and how to understand Islam. There was a different way of understanding Islam under Zeitouna from that of the Salafis. So young people now receive no education from Zeitouna and the *ulema* [Islamic notables] but rather from TV.”⁸⁴ He added, “Young people were totally steered to another way of understanding. Salafism wasn’t in Tunisia before. Muslims want a history of pride. We are living in a time of decadence of Islam, decadence of the *umma*, the nation of Islam. They don’t have plans so they—the Salafis—resort to violence.”⁸⁵

Much of the discourse is focused on Salafism arising as a result of poverty:

When someone is poor and has nothing on earth, he will look to the sky. And will go to a mosque where he is convinced that if you do that, you will go to heaven...All this is a mistake of the system before the revolution because there was no culture but poverty, a corrupted education system. People don’t get a good education, so it’s easy to convince them.⁸⁶

While there are many poor and unemployed young men who can be found at Salafi rallies, this might not be the main cause, as my interviews with the Salafi college students indicate. A young journalist argued,

These kids are the product of a system which has totally marginalized them. So it has become a fashion, a way of expressing themselves, to embrace radical Islam, jihadism. Some have been to Iraq, Afghanistan; some [are] now in Syria; some [have] been to Libya. They come back and expect society to accept them, but they are alien to them. The secular intelligentsia is totally disconnected from what's going on in these neighborhoods. In Egypt and Morocco this hasn't happened, as there has always been organizing among Islamists and the rest.⁸⁷

Young Islamist supporters of the Ennahda Party are particularly concerned with what they view as the "Salafi problem."⁸⁸ The Islamist activist who supported a *sharia* state argued, "The Salafis have an outdated version of Islam. There has been an updated version of Islam now that is related to modernity. They don't have a sense of a state with the rule of law and order. Even the old Salafi *ulema* revised their thoughts. Young Salafis don't find an alternative."⁸⁹ The Islamist lawyer who had previously defended Salafis against persecution noted, "After the revolution we found that a minority of them are abusing their freedom. They can express themselves but are stepping outside the boundaries of freedom. The violence was unacceptable, and that's why we see that the law must be held for those who abuse the freedom of speech."⁹⁰

The allure of Salafism can be explained in numerous ways, but most youth conclude that the reason behind the Salafi issue is the suppression of all religious and political debate during Bourguiba and Ben Ali's authoritarian reign. This raises the issue of how best to engage with Salafis today. Most young Islamists and Ennahda supporters prefer "not to criminalize them but put them within [the] context of Ben Ali repression in [the] past"⁹¹ and also not to repeat the mistake of the previous regime by enforcing an "environment [where] these people are not allowed to exchange their ideas and have a safe place to discuss them."⁹² One activist argued that they have to be persuaded "to change their way of thinking...but if you put a wall between you and people, how do you communicate, how do you reach people?"⁹³

Another young Islamist anticipated that once the fad has passed, “they will be more organized, which will get people to know them better. What’s happened now...is because these people aren’t organized. They don’t know where freedom stops, they don’t have a...rounded education.”⁹⁴ He added, “There’s a huge gap between them and society because they aren’t organized. They don’t have a means of communication with people; they don’t have unified ideas or one platform. They speak in random places like a mosque somewhere, and you don’t know if it’s a particular person speaking or a whole Salafi ideology.”⁹⁵

In November 2012, the government estimated that Salafi preachers had taken jurisdiction over approximately 500 mosques out of a total of 5,000 in Tunisia. Under Ben Ali, the mosques were tightly controlled and sermons were only allowed on a government-sanctioned list of topics. Following the revolution, the state is no longer in control of the mosques, imams, or sermons, though the government has reported seizing back 70 of the 500 mosques from Salafi preachers. Most Salafis, for their part, do not trust the government and view Ennahda as a fake Islamic party that has made too many concessions. A speaker at a Salafi gathering in May 2013 thundered against the government, “No one can resist when the wind of revolution blows. You get on your knees in front of America, but our youth will bring America itself to its knees.”⁹⁶

The Ennahda-led government’s response has been mixed. For some time, Ennahda tried to bring Salafis into the fold and advanced the idea of dialogue over force. This has been met with criticism by those who argue that the government should be firmer with Salafis who have engaged in acts of intimidation, such as the sacking of an art gallery and a cinema. Some youth also view Ennahda’s stance with suspicion, suggesting that it is convenient for the moderate Islamist party to let Salafi extremism slip in order to paint themselves in a better light. However, most youth also see dialogue as the primary way to engage with the Salafis. For example, the leader of the Ikbis movement is creating a group to start a discussion between all the Islamic groups. Nonetheless, he suggested that “we have to deal with them using many different tools—security tools for the violent ones... The police tool shouldn’t be abused, but we also shouldn’t let them do what they want. Many don’t accept the state or the laws. This is very

dangerous.”⁹⁷ The government, too, seems to be reaching into this toolbox, banning a gathering of the jihadi Salafi Ansar al-Sharia group in May 2013.

Explosion of Freedom

The Salafi issue is difficult to resolve, and youth views on it reflect the quandary the government faces. The space that opened up after the revolution has allowed for “the ones who are marginalized, excluded, and have no voice—the only way for them to express themselves is through violence.”⁹⁸ The government stressed that it will not repeat the repression of the old regime, a stance that is supported by most youth. This leaves the Islamists grappling for ideas on how to bridge the gap between the extremists and the moderates among them. At the same time, dialogue is also failing between the secularists and the Islamist moderates. One journalist described the communication between the two camps on social networks like Facebook and Twitter as unable to ease the tensions: “I see all those Facebook groups insulting each other, and sometimes it feels like the brink of a civil war. And I have to go outside to check everything’s okay.”⁹⁹ Speaking before the July 2013 coup had happened in Egypt, she continued, “I envy Egypt and Morocco for having a thriving political scene. I think of us as closer to Libya, where the dictatorship killed the political scene. So it is hard to have democracy in Tunisia overnight... We never had the education of valuing our differences.”¹⁰⁰

The one conclusion that many youth have reached is that differences have to be valued, that there is no option but to have these debates that had been suppressed for decades. They believe that it is only by working through the issues that have emerged from the Pandora’s box that some accommodation can eventually be reached:

We have freedom now, and everyone can do whatever they want. This freedom—the explosion of freedom—[is] after decades of security and no freedom. When you make freedom, you will find all ideas and extremists on the right and left. It is an unstable past but it will be more stable in the future.¹⁰¹

Fractured Politics

Tunisia’s identity crisis is also reflected in its political landscape. Its first postrevolution elections for the National Constituent Assembly

led to a coalition government, also known as the troika of Ennahda, Ettakatol, and the Congress for the Republic (CPR).¹⁰² Members of the troika parties often express dissatisfaction with the current arrangement. The president has been accused by some party members of putting personal interest ahead of the party in the decision to align with Ennahda. Many in Ettakatol have also been outspoken about the decision to join Ennahda in the government as being one of political expediency. Both parties have seen defections as a result. These divisions are reflected in the broader debates taking place in Tunisia and among young Tunisians who are divided over their views on Ennahda.

Old memes continue to resurface regarding Ennahda and the opposition. The Ben Ali regime spent decades demonizing and crushing Ennahda, imprisoning and exiling tens of thousands of its members. The secular opposition during the Ben Ali period sided with the government against Ennahda. As the political space opened somewhat in the 1990s, even the secular opposition parties that had not been co-opted by the regime had rifts emerge between them as they tried to unite but were pulled apart by disagreements over bringing Ennahda into the fold. The theme of Ennahda versus a secular opposition continues, as most opposition parties choose to draw battle lines based on the secular versus Islamist divide.

Ennahda itself has, for the most part, engaged in the discourse of democracy, pluralism, rights, and equality under the helm of its reformist leader Rachid Ghannouchi. Not having any connection to the Ben Ali regime has also given it legitimacy in the eyes of many. It has outdone all other parties in terms of fundraising and organization, and it was the first party to establish offices in every constituency across the country. Most of the opposition parties did not develop political platforms, networks, or grassroots campaigns. The election period ushered in a more polarized politics, with a central theme being “the rest” versus Ennahda, as many parties ran on a platform of “not being Ennahda.” This did not work in terms of votes, but it did worsen the political climate in terms of polarization. In June 2012, greater division appeared with the formation of Nidaa Tounes, which saw members of Ben Ali’s party and some of the new secular parties uniting to form an anti-Islamist movement. In this political climate, it

is not surprising that mistrust runs deep among youth. A blogger who had met the Ennahda leadership and believed many of them to be democrats still felt that they have accumulated too much power: “Ennahda is slowly becoming the state party. Ennahda can use religion. It’s like a credit card that you can use.”¹⁰³

The atmosphere is charged with rumors and conspiracy theories relating to Ennahda. A young civil society activist believed that Ennahda is giving people money to wear the *niqab*.¹⁰⁴ The sentiment that Ennahda is trying to Islamicize society and that it has a hidden “Islamic Project” arises often. Another civil society activist believed that “they aren’t imposing it from the top but creating the groundwork to get change from the bottom. [The] discourse on the ground is ‘vote for our party so you can enter paradise.’”¹⁰⁵ A well-known blogger claimed that Ennahda is using the Salafis to divert attention, that “the Salafis are the armed wing of the Ennahda Party.”¹⁰⁶

Youth are also hard on the opposition, though for the most part the opposition parties are not seen as having ulterior motives. Youth believe that the only political program offered by most opposition parties was to be anti-Ennahda, leaving secular voters with little choice. One journalist argued, “They are the ones to blame, because from day one they start accumulating mistakes. Their common goal was to fight Ennahda rather than working on something or on winning elections. Old uncharismatic leaders haven’t resigned, even after they lost.”¹⁰⁷ The opposition also has to face youth distaste for what is perceived to be its blind pursuit of power:

What I think of political parties is that they are just people who want to have power, they don’t care about citizens. Even if we had secularists in power, we [would] have problems too. The opposition is divided in so many parties; they are engaged in useless debates.¹⁰⁸

Another youth explained a change of opinions pre-election and post-election: “Those who were in CPR and Ettakatol felt betrayed by the parties aligning with Ennahda. So we had a lot of high expectations before elections, and reality broke down these expectations after elections.”¹⁰⁹ The only parties that youth are surprisingly nonchalant about are the two new Salafi parties, which have been given permission to form since the election. Some expect them to attract those disillusioned with Ennahda, while others expect them to help

Ennahda deal with Salafi violence by channeling it politically.

In addition to facing criticism from its secular detractors, the Ennahda Party is running into trouble with the youth who support it. A young school teacher who voted for Ennahda “because I wanted in this country to be safe to wear a headscarf” now feels that “they have done nothing for me,” because she has not been able to find a job.¹¹⁰ “I know they can’t do magic in a day but I don’t see any progress,” she said.¹¹¹ This is a common perception among youth, irrespective of their ideological views on Ennahda and Islamism. They feel that Ennahda and the troika “has done nothing for youth unemployment and marginalization of the regions.”¹¹²

One young journalist argued that Ennahda’s “biggest blunder was [its] promises, as they wanted to appease people. And they wanted to come to power. And now they have to deliver on the promises but can’t deliver.”¹¹³ Ennahda Party youth also felt disappointed in the party because it had not delivered on the promises of the revolution. One interviewee who expressed this view then laughed and added, “I have been with Ennahda for twenty-five years; I am thirty-one. My father is in Ennahda. My heart beats with Ennahda. After the revolution, I joined Ennahda in real terms.”¹¹⁴

Regarding the party’s slow movement on the goals of the revolution, he explained, “There’s a difference between the way my father looks at things and I. Let’s say I have the possibility to convince my father, but they don’t have the will to make things change.”¹¹⁵ However, he went on to explain that while the older Ennahda generation does hear and understand the youth desire for urgent action, they are more cautious because of their experience of torture and prison prior to the revolution. Some secular youth are also willing to give the Ennahda government and its younger politicians a chance to govern:

Young Islamists are very different from old Islamists, they came out as Islamists after the revolution. [I am] impressed by how many Islamist friends I have. They try to reconcile their Islamic identity with the modern world.¹¹⁶

In addition, there are some who believe that democratic rule will change Ennahda, or at least its course, and that while in power Ennahda will have to tone down its religious rhetoric. They also

contend that Tunisia's worsening economic situation will mean that Ennahda will eventually be voted out and that in five years another party will take over.

The issue of officials from the former ruling party, Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD), still occupying positions of power—at times with the blessing of the troika—is also one that concerns many youth. They feel that the Ennahda-led government has incorporated too many members of the old regime instead of holding them accountable for corruption under Ben Ali or for their actions during the revolution. Most youth want former RCD members, at least those in high-ranking positions, to be removed. The Ennahda youth pressure group lists this as one of its top demands. An Ennahda activist explained, “It’s really hard to collaborate with RCD people. It’s okay to collaborate with normal people from RCD—some of them were forced to be members to get jobs—but the corrupt ones should go to jail.”¹¹⁷ Another Ennahda supporter stressed that “the most important thing is the anti-revolutionary forces... If I were the government I wouldn’t focus on whether girls should wear *niqab* or not, they have that right. But rather [I would] fight the old regime that’s still in place.”¹¹⁸

Revolutionary Aims

Crises of politics and identity consume the postrevolutionary space, but economic and social grievances remain unresolved:

The government doesn’t have control of anything. People want to see change in the economic situation... The government is not responsive to demands, and there is also no dialogue taking place with people. There is not enough accountability and transparency, and people want to see results of their vote.¹¹⁹

The revolution has not filtered through state institutions, which remain calcified in the eyes of the youth. The government has yet to implement reforms within the police, the judiciary, and the interior ministry, or to hold former regime loyalists accountable for corruption and past abuses. “Now, everyone is only talking about Salafis and not talking about anything like transitional justice, dealing with former regime members... Today everyone’s talking about problems that aren’t the real problems.”¹²⁰

To the youth, the economy and transitional justice are the two key demands of the revolution. An Ennahda-leaning activist explained, “To prevent what happened in the last five decades, this is the priority for us: to install democracy and independent institutions—to install independent institutions like a council of justice, a council for elections.”¹²¹ Most youth acknowledge that reform takes time, but there is an overarching sentiment that the government promised too much in the campaign and is now not delivering or even addressing the important issues: “Whoever is in government in the next ten to fifteen years will be in trouble anyway, as we have structural issues. But the government doesn’t want to take responsibility for their actions.”¹²² Top of the list in terms of government inaction for most youth is the economy.

Economic Discontent

“I analyze things by being unemployed, and Ennahda has done nothing,”¹²³ proclaimed a young teacher who voted for Ennahda. The government has been unable to steer the economy in a new direction, and it remains the primary issue for youth in Tunisia, where the official unemployment rate is 16 percent¹²⁴ and the unofficial one is twice as high. Inequality between the regions is stark, and corruption continues. “The biggest challenge right now is the economy,”¹²⁵ is a phrase I heard many times during my interviews. “We are looking for investors to offer more job opportunities, to fight corruption, for graduate students to have jobs,” said a Salafi-leaning university student studying English for business.¹²⁶

The sense of desperation that caused Mohamed Bouazizi to self-immolate is still palpable among youth today. Two years into the transition, in March 2013, a twenty-seven-year-old cigarette vendor died as a result of self-immolation. His last words were, “This is Tunisia, this is unemployment.”¹²⁷ There is talk among some youth of how the next revolution will come from the slums, as demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins continue to take place across the country. Most youth acknowledged, “The current government can’t fix this in ten months, of course. The problem is that they started their campaign saying they could create 400,000 jobs, but they just can’t keep their promises.”¹²⁸ Expectations are high, and while youth do not expect miracles, some of their impatience and frustration is linked to what

they perceive as the “politics as usual” style of the troika government, which promised much but has delivered little.

Police Brutality

Anguish over the economy is matched by despair related to the lack of change in the attitudes of police, the interior ministry, and the security sector. A prominent blogger disclosed, “Just in August [2012], I was beaten by ten policemen. I thought this would never happen after Ben Ali.”¹²⁹ Following the demonstrations that led to the breach of the US embassy and the burning of the American school in Tunis in 2012, prominent in youth analyses of the events were descriptions of scores of youth in the vicinity of the demonstrations being rounded up and detained without trial for weeks, complaints of continuing police brutality, and concern that the interior ministry remained unreformed. A young journalist lamented that the “Tunisian police is not democratic and hasn’t learned to deal with mob violence.”¹³⁰ Youth are keen for security sector reform, as the culture of the security institutions remains unchanged in the aftermath of the revolution.

There was much talk of the oscillation between the police continuing to use excessive force at demonstrations on the one hand and, on the other hand, “not doing their job, whenever something happens.”¹³¹ One activist asserted, “Even though the revolution was about people versus police and the police lost that war, the Ministry of Interior and police are still very strong. Ennahda tried to take them on in the beginning but couldn’t, so now they try to appease them, the angry policemen.”¹³²

The pace of reform has been slow. Attempts at introducing a new culture within the police have floundered. Heavy-handed methods of policing continue. The response to having their authority questioned has often led to strikes or to withdrawal, increasing insecurity in the streets. The government has started to implement some reforms within the security sector, dismissing a few old-regime officials from the interior ministry, a bastion of the Ben Ali regime. But for the most part, the sticky issue of transitional justice has been put on a back burner, with the troika worried about rocking the boat. Some in the government think that focusing on justice and reform may increase instability within the country.

Most youth acknowledge that the government is faced with a tough situation: “There are many clans, and it is very difficult to rule the interior ministry...In Chile it took seven years to reform the Ministry of Interior, so it isn’t going to happen in one year” said a young political activist.¹³³ Another activist drew a graph, with jagged peaks and valleys along a five-year line, after which the line plateaued, and explained, “For five years, it’s normal to have instability after you have a revolution. It may be the same for all the Arab world, can be more or less for Egypt. For Libya, at least ten years, but for sure we will reach stability like other countries such as France, etc.”¹³⁴

The interviewees suggested that the biggest problem is not that the government is slow to enact reforms but rather that it has not fully engaged in dealing with the legacy of the past and in constructing a path forward. Many youth argue that both the government and opposition are so focused on getting a piece of the political pie, that they have ignored the importance of working together to take on the issues of police reform and transitional justice. Youth want “a government of national interest”¹³⁵ and a collective, coherent vision of transitional justice and institutional reform, which they view as the cornerstone of democracy: “The biggest problem of Tunisia is that we have to ensure a peaceful transition from authoritarian regimes to a durable democracy—not a fake democracy but a real one. The government must regain confidence. This is a big challenge for them and us.”¹³⁶

CONCLUSION

The main current of youth discourse addresses the issues of political and economic reform. Youth are keen to move away from old authoritarian politics. They are particularly focused on issues relating to the “deep state”—individuals and institutions from the former regime that remain in positions of influence. In both Egypt and Tunisia, youth narratives focus on the fight for economic rights, civil liberties, and human rights. They aspire to challenge the power of the deep state, particularly the long arm of its media and the brutality of its security services.

However, youth have been unable to avoid all legacies of the past and are deeply affected by the polarization in their two countries. Here,

their narratives compete with each other. While polarized, most are also committed to promoting an equal and tolerant society and to working through what they believe is an inheritance of sixty years of authoritarian rule. They see the turbulence created by old narratives as a part of the transition process: "The problems after the revolution aren't the result of it. Before the revolution the problems were unseen or covered. It will take time and have shape after a while, but movement is better than standing still," said an Islamist activist in Egypt.¹³⁷ One secular activist added, "We were brought up with the attitude that you 'better walk in the shadow of the wall.' All these things have been destroyed. We were all kept apart before. Now we can look at the mirror and see each other, and interact with each other."¹³⁸

The principal impact of the polarization is that it detracts from the narratives related to political, social, and economic rights. It fragments and dilutes youth activism, returning it to a pre-revolutionary mode of action in which youth fought for single issues, each from a different corner. Such an approach reduces the power of their grander narrative related to revolutionary change. At the same time, even diffused narratives create a grammar of political action.¹³⁹ The influence of youth discourses can be traced in both countries if one examines the strikes and demonstrations of the 1980s in Tunisia and the 2000s in Egypt, which had little immediate impact but created a possibility. The repertoire of the revolutions is likely to provide a great stock of material for political action and civic engagement for decades to come.¹⁴⁰

Youth discourse in Egypt and Tunisia has already created what Vaclav Havel and Hannah Arendt refer to as a "force of opinion" that challenges power.¹⁴¹ The question that remains is whether this discourse will be able to appropriate the national commons and to shift the direction of the transition processes toward democratic consolidation.

Chapter Two

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In Egypt, the country's first freely elected parliament was dissolved by judicial decree in June 2012; the president was ousted by military coup in July 2013; and the Muslim Brotherhood was banned in September 2013. In Tunisia, the national assembly was suspended in August 2013, and a campaign calling for the overthrow of the elected government—similar to the one in Egypt, which led to the ouster of President Morsi—has gained momentum.¹ The outlook for a transition to an inclusive, participatory democracy, in which freedoms and checks and balances are institutionalized, looks bleak.

However, in both countries politicians continue to use the language of participatory democracy, elections, legislatures, and political parties. The idea of such a political society is widely subscribed to, even as it is subjected to subversion by some. Thus, the role and development of political parties continue to remain relevant, even as the transition process itself slows or falters. The inclusion and empowerment of youth are fundamental elements of a meaningful political process. Engaging youth in formal politics promotes a sense of ownership, which in turn allows for the constructive channeling of grievances. It also creates the space for fresh and innovative policy ideas and the development of a new generation of political actors.

Following the uprisings, 110 political parties were registered in Tunisia and more than 40 in Egypt.² Youth played an active role in the formation of new political parties and in resuscitating old ones. They participated in the expansion of heavyweight parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and Mohamed ElBaradei's *Doustour* Party in Egypt, and the Islamist *Ennahda* Party and the center-left *Ettajdid* Party in Tunisia. They also played a central role in building smaller parties such as the Islamist Egyptian Current Party, the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, and the Communist

Massar Party in Tunisia.

Yet, youth have been conspicuous for their lack of political clout in Egypt and Tunisia. Why are youth not part of the political elite? What are youth doing within political parties? What are their aspirations and their challenges? This chapter provides an assessment of young people's political engagement and the directions it is likely to take in the future. It does so by presenting case studies from a cross-section of political parties, in which youth activists assess party life and address the questions raised above. While the case studies zoom in on the role of youth, they also provide an indication of the wider problems being faced by political parties as they struggle to develop their political identities and networks.

The common picture that emerges is one of structural constraints, weak political programs, and the challenge of carving out a space in the tumult of an uncertain political transition. There is, however, a key difference in political party development between Egypt and Tunisia. It is a structural issue of youth inclusion, the impact of which reverberates through all party activities. Egyptian youth are, for the most part, not formally integrated into party structures, with few parties having given thought to the creation of a youth wing or to their inclusion in party governance committees. Most youth remain unrepresented in decision-making circles, even as they constitute the backbone of many of the parties.

In contrast, most political parties in Tunisia have incorporated youth into their central structures, either through youth wings or through quotas in central committees. They have to contend with the rigidity that a structure creates, but this also means that there is a political ladder to climb. Their struggles within the party often represent challenges that are not particular to youth but to all politicians—relating to a lack of finances and the desire to have a stronger voice within the party.

The Egypt case studies focus on Mohamed ElBaradei's *Doustour* Party, the Muslim Brotherhood youth breakaway *Egyptian Current* Party, the Muslim Brotherhood's *Freedom and Justice* Party, and the former presidential candidate Hamdin Sabahi's *Popular Current*. The Tunisia case studies address the *Islamist Ennahda* Party, the center-left



Youth with anarchist flag and ballerina in revolutionary dance. Cairo, July 27, 2012, photo by Nur Laiq.

Ettajdid and Ettakatol Parties, and the Communist Massar Party. The interviews conducted for this study covered a range of political parties, including not only the above but also others, such as the Salafi Nour Party in Egypt, the center-right Jumhury Party in Tunisia, and the Congress for the Republic, which is led by the Tunisian president. The parties represented in the case studies were chosen not on the basis of their ideological leanings but rather with the aim of providing a sample that would represent the ideas and actions of youth in political party development in Egypt and Tunisia. The case studies map youth political engagement in young people's own words, conveying their aspirations and concerns related to party politics and illuminating the areas where youth identify gaps in the ability of parties to be both more inclusive and responsive.

EGYPT

Dustour Party

Dustour (or the Constitution Party) is a secular-leaning party, which was founded in April 2012 by the Nobel Prize winner Mohamed ElBaradei and a group of fellow intellectuals. The steering committee, which manages the work of the party and is responsible for

establishing its structure, is led by a youth activist who believes that “through youth we are trying to access more places, reach more people. Since Mubarak stepped down, this is the first time we are going to shape our own political history. Before that, political parties were mostly intellectual people, and so these political parties were transformed into cultural salons.”³ He argued the principal problem is that most party leaders “still don’t know how to deal with the street. It needs a lot of creativity and to learn from people’s experiences. When you are in the street you have to redefine service. That service is not oil and sugar like the Ikhwan [Brotherhood] but developing society. This is what Dustour is trying to achieve.”⁴

The head of the steering committee expounded on the details of trying to implement change: “The way we structure the party takes into consideration not only the city but the different neighborhoods of the city. So starting from the grassroots level, how do we deal with problems? We have good research about what’s happening in particular places and others on each neighborhood so that [we] can achieve their goals.”⁵

The challenges he mentioned are similar to those expressed by other party activists: “Financial ability is the barrier—to organize all these youth and talents. Most of our meetings are in cafes.”⁶ He explained the party’s tactics as follows:

We are trying to create structure and raise funds. There are two meanings to the street: meaning the *maidan* [square] and the ballot box. We don’t believe in the *maidan* solution anymore. We have designated committees that cover all areas of society, in the smallest unit in society—for example, villages. Our meetings take place at all levels, from the village council to the governorate. Some are related to health. We gather all youth who are doctors in villages who are aware of the problems in the village. They can tell me all the problems. I go to that neighborhood and know the budget for the hospital and I stress that the hospital should be improved.⁷

The anecdote captures the grassroots work many youth activists are engaged in.

In doing so I’m putting a new structure for political engagement. The members of the party know the problem of this village while at the same time we can find a member in a different party just giving out oil and

sugar. I then tell them the person responsible for each issue, and so in a village you can go to them. People accepted this because they feel we aren't theoretical and don't just give out fliers. We don't solve their problems, but we live it with them. This is our priority.⁸

It also brings to the fore the fact that many political parties are engaged in highlighting or empathizing with the plight of the disenfranchised but are unable to consolidate this into building a political policy platform.

Egyptian Current Party

The Egyptian Current Party (Tayyar Masry) was founded in June 2011 by youth who left the Muslim Brotherhood to create their own party. It has 1,500 members in Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez, as well as in Luxor and Asyut in Upper Egypt. The party's founding members are prominent youth activists who had been members of the Muslim Brotherhood for more than ten years and had also played an active role in organizing activities in Tahrir Square during the revolution. They expected the Brotherhood to continue the revolution once in power but instead found they were more interested in reform than revolution: "We decided to make a revolution, the whole world talks about the revolution. Why do we come back to reforming again?"⁹ The youth were also unhappy with the Brotherhood's decision "to be alone in politics"¹⁰ instead of joining other parties in taking on entrenched interests such as those of the military and state institutions, still dominated by Mubarak era values and administrators.

However, the primary reason for the decision to leave the Brotherhood and set up their own party lay in the generation gap between party leaders and youth. "The leadership said, 'We know you don't know; we have experience.'"¹¹ In a party structure that is still very hierarchical, the youth voice has been drowned out. The perception among its youth is that the party elite places "the organization before everything, the organization before you, the organization before Egypt. It is an organization that can't change, if you want to be a leader for the group, the Muslim Brotherhood sees [you] as a danger rather than an opportunity."¹²

Egyptian Current stresses its focus on goals as well as process. Its priorities are to ensure that the military is kept out of politics, to push

for reform of the interior ministry, and to have the twelve thousand who were arrested during the revolution released from prison. “If we had power today as a party, we would release all people from jail. Our party has a [search committee] for who is in jail right now; we have made a label for all of them.”¹³ In terms of process, “we make a coalition every time for everything. There are one, two, three things we want...so we make a coalition for each issue. Then in four–five years, no one can deal with Egypt alone.”¹⁴ The youth are also keen to “go over the problem of ideology”¹⁵ and to re-examine the doctrines of the Muslim Brotherhood: “There’s a problem with Egypt, we don’t have liberals.”¹⁶ The values of the Egyptian Current might sound utopian, but such values have attracted prominent members from the April 6th group such as Asmaa Mahfouz, who is also a founding member of the party.

Another Egyptian Current member who is a practicing Salafi explains: “I joined this party because I am concerned with the idea of not owning. The party should not be owned by one, by polarization.”¹⁷ The party is run by an elected leadership committee of sixteen people, who meet weekly to make small decisions—the rest are put to a vote.

We believe in participatory democracy. All of the party’s 1,500 members have to participate and take a decision. The biggest decision is not made without a vote with everyone in the party. When we went to support Abu Futouh [the liberal Islamist candidate for president], we first made a vote for whom we would support in the elections. Seventy-eight percent voted for Abu Futouh.¹⁸

One of the party’s founders stated the principal challenge for the party is financial: “Money is the biggest problem. It’s hard to gain money for a party that’s small. But we are fighting. Money is from our pocket.”¹⁹ The party also needs 5,000 signatures in order to register as an official party, leading to the problem of “whether we can make it or not—to be or not to be,”²⁰ he concluded.

In the meantime, the party has already fielded candidates in the parliamentary elections as part of a bigger list. This founding member also ran for parliament from the district of Barcha. He took a month off work to spend time in all of the 160 villages in the district, relying on financial aid from family and friends for his election campaign. Another member who also ran in the election as a candidate from

Cairo reflected, “We couldn’t send our message to the people, because there were flaws...This is why we failed, lack of experience and lack of money. Not only no money but no experience.”²¹ He added that for the past three months he had stopped going to party meetings in part because of financial obligations and the need to spend more time at his job, and in part because “there’s no clear vision, because there are conflicting views...Things have changed, we don’t know whether we should play the revolution or go in the political direction.”²²

The founding member I spoke to had a similar analysis but was not deterred and argued that in the “first period after revolution, the old guard takes places. But after five to ten years things will change... Don’t look to Egypt in this time. Look to Egypt in five years. How much people are going into politics right now is about how much money. See after five years, come back and see.”²³

Freedom and Justice Party

The Freedom and Justice Party (Hurriya wa al ’Adala) was founded by the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) in May 2011 and was the dominant party in Egyptian politics in the period that followed. It was led by Mohammad Morsi, who became Egypt’s first democratically elected leader, winning 52 percent of the vote in the 2012 presidential election. The party also headed the Islamist bloc in the 2012 parliamentary elections and won 38 percent of the vote. Following the July 2013 coup, the party faced a military onslaught and was banned by the military in September 2013. Nonetheless, its members will continue to have a presence because of the sheer strength of their numbers, if nothing else.

A twenty-nine-year-old founding member of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), who has been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood since he was thirteen and is the secretary-general of its youth wing, was entirely focused on promoting the Morsi government’s Renaissance Project and its objectives of providing “security, traffic, fuel, and bread.”²⁴ When asked about youth priorities within the party, he explained,

In the rest of the governorates, there is a common goal to find bread. People have started to feel that the revolution is impacting them negatively and their work has been delayed. So people are concerned

with working and not political debates. And we have our goal...that there would be a constitution and transfer to civilian rule. And there would be security and tourists would come back to the country.²⁵

However, his assessment of the challenges facing the Brotherhood also relate to the structure of the state, the media, bureaucracy, and the military. This view finds resonance among most Brotherhood youth. The member of the FJP Youth Secretariat added other challenges: "As a party having to govern, not SCAF etc., but just governing. Internally, that we make a decision separating association and party—[the] decision has been taken, but the steps are slow. Externally, it's about interacting with others."²⁶

On the issue of separation between the Brotherhood and the FJP, the young FJP founding member responded: "The party and the Ikhwan were together so have the same challenges. To clarify, the FJP is funded by the Ikhwan. The Ikhwan are very, very, very well organized. So when we have problem within the Ikhwan, it is solved immediately, because we have many managerial levels."²⁷ He was more circumspect than his counterparts in other parties about the internal politics of the FJP, but he conceded, "We were founded recently, so of course we have a lot of problems."²⁸

The Brotherhood and the FJP have often been criticized for their lack of transparency and for a trust deficit. Its Youth Secretariat member had spent time deliberating on the matter:

We are working on this issue. We now meet with different parties and movements and take their opinion in transparency...It is clear now from different leadership in the party that the Ikhwan can't work alone...The situation we faced in the election with Morsi made it very clear that we can't work alone. Before, there were people who thought we could work alone; we said that other parties were very small and not organized or powerful enough to support democratization. If we don't work together, then we will fail.²⁹

While acknowledging the view of the opposition that the government is not inclusive, he also felt that Morsi was not being given a fair chance:

Every day in front of [the] palace, people [are] asking for things. People suffered for thirty years so want to express themselves. It is a real

problem, real people have real requirements. It is their right. But there are also some people who are against Morsi, and are [part of the] counterrevolution. How come you hear about these demonstrations and not the ones in front of SCAF? So we think some of the demonstrations are directed to make the work of Morsi harder.³⁰

A member of the Youth Secretariat of the FJP who is in charge of relations with other parties acknowledged that “the period from the revolution to now is a very sensitive period, and the nature of thinking in the Muslim Brotherhood takes the movement in a specific way. So any different ideas take time for consideration. I think the difference between youth and leaders in the Ikhwan is that some youth don’t like the way decisions are made.”³¹ The tension between the youth and the party elite is almost tangible. While this issue was perhaps too delicate for youth officials within the party to discuss, it is evident from the interviews conducted with the party youth who left and was outlined in the interviews with youth from the Egyptian Current, many of whom were former Muslim Brotherhood activists. However, the FJP party activist reflected further on why youth have been leaving the Brotherhood after the revolution: “I think these are mutual wrongs. The leaders of the Ikhwan don’t make a suitable effort to gain their trust, and the leaders of the Egyptian Current, for example, don’t make the best effort to stay in the institution. It is a mutual mistake.”³² However, referring to the deteriorating economic situation and the high unemployment in Egypt, he argued that the Brotherhood “first needs to solve global problems then focus on individual issues.”³³

Popular Current

The Popular Current (Tayyar Shaaby) is a political front formed in September 2012 and headed by Hamdin Sabahi, the populist candidate who came third in the presidential elections and includes members of other liberal parties such as ElBaradei’s Dustour Party and the Karama Party. A local coordinator for the Popular Current, who had also worked on the Sabahi presidential campaign, defined the movement as follows: “The Popular Current isn’t representing a political party but is a political movement that blends different groups with different ideologies to create a current. Our slogan is freedom, social justice, and independence.”³⁴ The priorities of the youth in the Popular Current relate to the revolution, to fighting for the rights of

the protesters who were arrested during the revolution, and to speeding up Mubarak's trial process: "We have organized several rallies that created awareness on the rights of the protesters who got arrested."³⁵

The local coordinator explained the broader program of the political front: "Most of the candidates had included in their program what they would do for Egypt. But we were trying to tell people that Hamdin's career actually represented his program. So, for example, when we talk about rights for fairness, he was actually arrested for this. He believes in the rights of the poor and all the working class. His history proves that he actually fought for and paid the price for it, unlike other candidates who are old regime or reformists like the Muslim Brotherhood."³⁶

Sabahi's presidential campaign did particularly well among youth, "We discovered that most of the voters [are] from [the] youth," the coordinator said.³⁷ As a result, Sabahi's Popular Current is one of the few political movements in Egypt to institutionalize youth presence within the party structure. The plan is to have different councils, with 100 representatives in each council, and 11 of them representing the youth.

When questioned about the generation-gap issue, the coordinator was adamant that it is important to focus on the fact that youth are being represented in the Popular Current, while "of course, there is a difference in political powers and different ideologies and different ages."³⁸ He added,

To me, Sabahi is like Gandhi. "He's one of us" is the slogan. We see Sabahi as one of us. And he receives our criticism and anything that's addressed to him. In our political work we are used to taking decisions democratically and not according to leaders in other parties...During the campaign, or now in Tayyar Shaaby when we are discussing releasing a statement, we vote through these pillars—the members who are representing [are] different governorate centers. They don't impose an authority.³⁹

He, like many other young political activists, plans to stand for parliament in the next election. He plans to do so via a Popular Current list and expects the biggest challenge to be the Islamists and

the lack of funds available to take them on. But, he adds, "We are poor and we represent the poor."⁴⁰

TUNISIA

Ennahda Party

Ennahda (Renaissance) is the dominant political party in Tunisian politics. It has a moderate Islamist program, and it is the primary partner in the ruling troika government of Tunisia. That said, the government is currently under pressure as protesters call for its ouster in a manner similar to the one that resulted in the deposal of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The party's youth bureau is divided into committees on student affairs, leadership skills, cultural activities, political affairs, and media affairs. A youth bureau member and university student who is responsible for party activities within the Tunis university system outlined the mission of Ennahda's university outreach program:

We have a political mission, a cultural mission....[We have] discussions to understand the needs of our universities after the revolution, and [we have] intellectual discussions. Another mission is to make students feel relaxed and express their opinions without fear, and to find a new vision and a real transition within the university, not only in government.⁴¹

The youth bureau member was active in Ennahda during high school, before the revolution, and said that "now if you join Ennahda, you have to be an activist for at least five years before you can have a position. [However,] the youth have an exceptional case because Ennahda is encouraging youth to improve themselves, so it paves the way, so it is faster."⁴² When asked about generational differences, another party representative stepped in. The interview took place at the Ennahda Party headquarters in the presence of a young official who is in charge of youth development and seemed to be playing the role of a minder. She answered, "The relationship between persons within the same party should be built on respect, Brotherhood. We can have different opinions but should put our hands together to eliminate different forms of difference."

Nonetheless, both she and the youth bureau member agreed that "young people want to do everything at the same time. They are active

and want to accelerate the change and reach their goals very quickly. But the wisdom of the old doesn't give them the right to do everything by themselves; they are obliged to ask and think a lot before doing anything." They stressed that the biggest debates among the party youth relate to bridging the gap between the regions and that the leadership encourages them to excel at university while giving them access to party leaders. Their analysis of intergenerational politics resonates with that of their counterpart in Ettajdid.

Ettajdid Party

Ettajdid (Renewal) is a former Communist party that has repositioned itself on the center-left. It participated in pre-revolution politics and currently leads the Modernist Democratic Pole, a secular coalition that seeks to counter Ennahda at the polls. It does not have a youth wing. A young civil society activist who joined the party after the revolution and is a member of its political bureau found there are a lot of young people in Ettajdid, but if "you don't let youth be active in the party, many of them leave."⁴³ She suggested that parties that were in exile during the Ben Ali era, such as Ennahda and the center-left Congress for the Republic, are more open to new ideas, whereas parties that remained in Tunisia during the dictatorship, such as Ettajdid, are more closed.

The political bureau member also talked of the generational difference in a manner similar to her Massar Party counterpart: "The difference we have between old and young is linked to the way we look at politics and the party as a whole. We want the party to be more active and usable."⁴⁴ She has been pushing for the party to carve out policy positions on key issues of the day. She gives the example of the September 2012 attack on the US embassy in Benghazi, Libya. She had wanted to issue a statement condemning it, but the party elders wanted to wait.

I put more pressure on taking political positions. I wanted to have a political position on what happened on our borders with Libya, because it is not acceptable to kill people because of a movie. But the older people want to be careful and say let's wait to get proper information. This is a way of difference. I feel there is a need to react, to be more present. The older generation takes a lot of time and discusses a lot.⁴⁵

This is also a legacy of Ben Ali's police state, which "made them fear everything, so they are less confident. So they are fragmented on a lot of things. They want to assess what negative thing this may bring to us and so want to avoid it and be very prudent before advancing. We youth aren't like that. This is something common across all parties active during Ben Ali."⁴⁶ However, she added that there is no common youth position in the party and that the generational difference is more about the personal than the political: "I feel sometimes it's like a marriage. I have never been married, but you have to find a compromise."⁴⁷

Another consequence of the police state in the Ben Ali era is that the party elders are still uneasy about communication via email, phone, or Twitter, which has an impact on internal democracy, something that the youth are trying to change. As a result, the party is going digital, trying to provide open data access and to be more active on Facebook and Twitter, which is what youth training sessions focus on. It is also trying to emulate the tactics used in the Obama 2008 presidential campaign, though its finances come from membership fees. In conclusion, the young politician reflected, "We also don't go to the ground enough, unlike Ennahda, which is present on social issues. To show people that we have youth who are active, making them feel there's a connection between their needs and the political sphere. Politics is still new in our country."⁴⁸

Ettakatol Party

The Ettakatol Party (Democratic Front for Labor and Liberties) is on the center-left and is a junior partner in the troika coalition government. All of its members under thirty-two years of age are also automatically enrolled in its youth wing. The party has a parallel youth bureau that mirrors its central structure, and youth are represented in its central political bureau by one representative. A member of Ettakatol's youth wing remarked, "The problem isn't young and old. The problem is people practicing politics before the revolution. They have a problem to delegate. It's not their fault, the regime was closed and so they don't know how to delegate. But now they are democratizing and learning. Now youth have more access to decision centers."⁴⁹

She added that the gap extends to the issue of priorities, which are sometimes not the same. When that happens, she said, “Most of the time it’s what they want that wins.”⁵⁰ The biggest debate within the party had been whether to join the coalition, whereas the youth, “we convinced ourselves that we have to go in the government after the election. But after that something went wrong, inside the government itself.”⁵¹ The debate among the party youth has shifted to focusing on an evaluation of the party’s performance in government. However, most action is concentrated on solidifying the structure of the party and preparing for the party’s congress, as well as its youth congress. In this regard, Ettakatol seems to be one of the more youth-friendly parties around.

Massar Party

Al-Massar (Social Democratic Party) is a reformed Communist party that now positions itself on the center-left. A member of Massar’s central committee, who had been politically active before the revolution, joined the party in 2009 because he “felt things could change”⁵² and now plans to run for parliament in the next election. Prior to Massar, he had been with the Tunisian Workers’ Communist Party (POCT) but found it “very radical and close to its ideology, whereas Massar showed that there can be change and peaceful change.”⁵³ Since the revolution, the relationship between the old party elite and the youth has been difficult. The youth had to fight for representation in the party’s central committee but managed to obtain a 25 percent quota. The situation improved following elections in the regions—since then youth have been allowed to raise money for their own activities.

“The main difference right now is participation in demonstrations. They refuse to participate in democracy,” one young party member said, referring to the older members. “There’s a lot of diplomacy within government—unlike the young people who are more direct. We share goals, but there is a difference in terms of achieving goals. A lot of old people think that the government can achieve these goals. We young people think that the government is the problem, not the solution.”⁵⁴

The central committee member assessed the challenges facing

Massar, saying that while they had a good political program—the key priorities were the economy and equality, or social justice between the regions in Tunisia—but that they had been unable to get the message across. There is also a debate within the party on whether it should focus on defending the freedoms already in the constitution related to women's rights or whether they should campaign for broader rights. The debate also extends to what they should do in the next elections, whether to ally themselves with the Congress for the Republic or Nidaa Tounes (Call of Tunisia) or POCT, and how to navigate a relationship with Nidaa Tounes if it still has ex-regime members.

Another big issue relates to finances: “Money comes from our own pocket. The party doesn’t have much money. Especially our party, as we aren’t a liberal party so can’t get [funds] from companies.”⁵⁵ He concluded that the primary challenge arises from the financial crunch they face, which has resulted in offices being shut down—compounding the parties existing area of weakness given its lack of a widespread presence on the ground.

CONCLUSION

Youth in Egypt and Tunisia relay similar experiences in terms of the desire for their voices to be heard and included in the decision-making process. However, a central difference between Egypt and Tunisia lies in the countries’ political party structures. In Tunisia, most parties have a formal structure for youth participation, whereas in Egypt this is almost entirely lacking.

In Egypt, few parties have given thought to integrating youth into the party’s committees or to creating a youth wing. The Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party has a structure, though this is perceived to be rigid and hierarchical, and it has led some of its youth to leave and form their own party, the Egyptian Current. Most secular parties have not created a formal space for youth voices to be heard. This deficit, combined with the strength of youth movements in Egypt, has led to the formation of some youth parties, though their fortunes change by the day. For example, the Egyptian Current Party, one of the few youth parties to have survived, struggles with financial and structural issues similar to that of any new organization. As a result, youth activists from across the political spectrum are left to

fend for themselves.

Tunisian youth are better integrated into party structures. Nearly all the political parties have dealt with the issue of youth representation, sometimes as a result of campaigns fought by youth within the party demanding a seat at the table. Consequently, most parties have some youth representatives on their central committees or have established parallel youth structures. While structure creates rigidity and a definite hierarchy, it also offers youth activists a set path to follow.

Irrespective of structure, in the eyes of Egyptian and Tunisian youth, the political system is still rigged in favor of the older generation. The revolution has not filtered through political parties, where decisions are made in vertical, top-down interactions. Youth from both Islamist and secular parties see the old elite as intent on having their moment in the sun.⁵⁶ They find themselves at the bottom of the party heap and often excluded from decision making. There is little room for input, and their voices are often disregarded or drowned out by the party elite. Nearly all youth activists lament the generation gap in their parties.

The youth response has taken two directions. Some are fighting battles to be heard and to have more of an impact on decision making within the party. Others are focused on carving out a space for themselves by utilizing the party brand to build their own grassroots network. The structural set-up of the party plays some part in these decisions. In both Egypt and Tunisia, youth activists in parties that have integrated youth into their decision-making structures tend to focus on conventional political activities. Their activities include preparing for party congresses, working on internal and external policy issues, and campaigning for a greater voice within the party and for expanding party presence externally.

In contrast, youth in parties without inclusive structures veer toward activities they hope will enable them to establish their own networks on the ground, using the party infrastructure. Some do so in order to build a grassroots network that will enable them to stand for parliament in a future election. Others use the party umbrella to mount campaigns for the issues that concern them, engaging in civic

activism and protest politics using the party as a vehicle. As a result, many youth are more deeply engaged in organizing protests than investing in party politics, particularly in Egypt.

The challenges of forming a cohesive political platform combined with structural deficits related to organizing and finances make it difficult for youth to compete in the political marketplace. However, this is not a youth problem alone but one that resonates across most political parties in Egypt and Tunisia. In this regard, many youth interviewed expressed an interest in attending trainings on messaging, campaigning, and other aspects of party work. Some parties have already brought in trainers from sister parties abroad, such as the South African National Congress, the Indian Congress Party, and the British Labour Party. There is a growing awareness among youth from both the established and new political parties that it is only when they fix their attention on institutionalizing their presence and build their own capacity that they will be able to become more effective players in the political process.

Chapter Three

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civil society has been regarded as the star actor of transitions to democracy in many countries.¹ It is the arena in which individuals, groups, and movements “attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities and advance their interests.”² Civil society youth activists in Egypt and Tunisia elucidated the values, built the solidarities, and created the momentum on the ground that resulted in the revolutions of the Arab Spring. Since the revolutions, youth have had an authoritative presence at the forefront of civil society activity and continue to remain passionately engaged in this sphere. They view themselves as “moral tribunes” in a polity where many feel that political leadership has changed but the culture of politics has not.³

In both Egypt and Tunisia, youth are keen to change the political culture, which they argue cannot be done through the political system. They view it as a greater project that calls for the overhaul of society’s values and expectations, one in which “everything has to be restructured...beyond just political parties.”⁴ In both countries, most youth who are active in civil society have similar objectives. Youth energy is focused on expanding political and human rights and fighting for causes related to socioeconomic justice. However, young people’s paths diverge in the manner in which they have chosen to channel their activism, particularly in relation to the battle for political rights.

In Egypt, many prominent youth activists and groups such as April 6th have chosen to fight for civil liberties and human rights on the center stage of electoral politics. This requires them to constantly move between allying themselves with and also against a combination of actors that include both political parties and elements of the deep state. The evolving nature of transition politics results in the ground continuously shifting beneath their feet, which means they have had to constantly reassess their aims and realign themselves with different



Muslim Brotherhood hand feeds youth into military grinder and graffiti artist as hero. Cairo, September 27, 2012, photo by Nur Laiq.

actors to achieve them. Tamarod (“rebel”) is a prime example of a nascent youth-inspired movement that played a pivotal role in the military ouster of President Morsi in July 2013. Considering their very recent appearance in the political arena, it is too early to assess whether they are an example of co-optation or contestation as their rhetoric oscillates between the aims of the January 2011 revolution and the July 2013 protests. However, their grassroots activity set off a chain reaction, which saw Tamarod campaigns spring up across the Arab world.

In contrast, most Tunisian civil society activists are focused on playing the role of civil watchdog over the national assembly, the constitutional process, and the electoral process. They are also centered on promoting citizenship awareness activities that essentially encourage the wider populace to also be the new civil guardians of the state. The specific focus of their activism on the institution of the national assembly, the constitution, and electoral processes also means that they have been less affected by the vagaries of the politics of transition.

This chapter takes a similar approach to the previous chapter in

detailing case studies of particular groups, allowing youth activists to describe their activities in their own words and to voice their hopes and fears. Based on interviews with a cross-section of youth-led civil society groups, it examines the challenges these groups and individuals face and offers a reflection of the issues concerning civil society actors at large. As in the previous chapter, numerous interviews were conducted encompassing civil society activism in the broadest sense of the term to include the Ultras football fans, who played an instrumental role on the frontlines of the revolution; graffiti artists; media start-ups; Islamist charities; lawyers' and pharmacists' syndicates; a gas workers' union; journalists; bloggers; and intellectuals' and women's groups. The case studies presented here were chosen as they best represent the aspirations and challenges of youth activism.

EGYPT

April 6th Youth Movement

The April 6th Youth Movement played an instrumental role in calling for and organizing the first day of protests in January 2011. It was a pivotal player in the revolution and has continued to be active in the postrevolutionary arena. The movement was initially founded to support the workers' strike in El Mahalla al-Kubra on April 6, 2008, which was viewed as a key moment in Egyptian activism. April 6th has 20,000 members, who have the right to vote on internal issues and pay a monthly membership fee of 20 Egyptian pounds. Another 20,000 members are active but do not have any rights or pay fees.⁵ The movement is in the process of applying for NGO status and is also discussing the establishment of a think tank. It has thus far used its power to organize demonstrations in support of revolutionary causes.

There is an increasing realization within the movement that "the period to organize demonstrations will decrease day by day. We need to make a balance between demonstrations and clashes to find social development."⁶ One April 6th leader talked of the need to use the street with care: "Tahrir now can be used for big mistakes—for example, if Morsi refuses to release prisoners from jail or to accept civil law, or if the constitution doesn't take care of Coptic rights."⁷ This was said in 2012; the movement did later use the streets to mobilize against Morsi.

While April 6th has used its weight to campaign for particular

issues, it has also flirted with politics. It supported Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in the second round of the presidential campaign in 2012 in order to ensure the revolution would not be derailed by the victory of Ahmed Shafiq, the pro-regime candidate. This caused a rift within the movement, though one leader stressed, "The alliance with Morsi is temporary. Expect it to finish after two to three months, and we will start to criticize them after 100 days."⁸ By mid-2013, the movement was supporting ElBaradei and the Dustour Party as it called for President Morsi's resignation, again citing concern over the path of the revolution. Since 2011, the movement has struggled with the decision of whether to be an NGO, a pressure group, or a political party. In its actions, it has oscillated between playing all roles. Its voice has continued to hold weight in the public arena, though it would be strengthened if April 6th could institutionalize its presence, whether in the sphere of civil society or politics. In December 2011, the movement's leader talked of studying the tactics of the US Democratic lobby group MoveOn and the Republican Tea Party, and the appeal of turning April 6th into a successful lobby group.⁹ In 2012 he explained, "We want to be a lobbying group just now so we can build our grassroots...We will make a political party in five years."¹⁰ April 6th entered the postrevolutionary phase with considerable power and legitimacy but has since struggled with an identity crisis, as it oscillates between roles: "We'll keep pressure on government and make change within ministries. We will advise ministries. We will make advocacy against corruption...There will be local elections in six months; we will participate in these."¹¹ Whether as a pressure group or political actor, April 6th has been able to rally against an issue but has been unable to offer alternatives. This has led to criticism by some youth, who argue that "April 6th highlights the issue but doesn't offer any solutions."¹²

The group has also suffered from combustions related to internal democracy; disagreements in April 2012 led to a split in the group, in which 550 members left and formed the April 6th Democratic Front.¹³ The dissatisfaction stemmed from the refusal to hold internal elections, a lack of transparency regarding funding, and disagreements on the political direction that the movement should take.¹⁴ The April 6th Democratic Front has been less visible in its activities. Both groups

also face other constraints, saying they “need training in advocacy, team work, lobbying, social development.”¹⁵

In addition to the split, April 6th has seen prominent members branch out by themselves. One of its founders left because of “issues with structure, different views.”¹⁶ She added, “I want[ed] to take an action, and the group said no. I [felt] not free. So you have to quit and be independent.”¹⁷ The desire for autonomous action has frequently been a factor in splintering movements and parties since the revolution. Her stance is common among many activists, especially prominent ones in both Egypt and Tunisia: “When you feel you have to follow your party or groups, it’s very complicated. You have to turn very fast. Maybe they can’t take this action now. And you have to follow the decision. And this wasn’t suitable for me or others.”¹⁸

Egyptian Coptic Coalition & Costa Salafis

Two youth-run groups that have adopted the values of Tahrir Square in terms of promoting interfaith dialogue and an awareness of citizens’ rights are the Egyptian Coptic Coalition and the Costa Salafis. The Egyptian Coptic Coalition was formed in January 2012, under the slogan “He who has rights has freedom.”¹⁹ The coalition’s founder stressed that the group seeks to promote inclusiveness and rights for all Egyptians: “That each who lives in Egypt should have his full rights regardless of religion and race. These are the basic human rights of the world.”²⁰ The coalition also plans actions in the street through rallies and demonstrations and has supported other campaigns, such as those protesting for the freedom of military detainees. However, the coalition’s primary campaign is to fight for equality among all citizens, especially those it perceives to be at the bottom of the pyramid, such as the Copts, Nubians, Shias, and women. One of the original members of the coalition is a sheikh from Cairo’s ancient seat of Islamic study, al-Azhar. Its founder stressed, “We talk about Egyptian rights...[we] aren’t an ethnic group like the Maspero Youth Union, which was only responsible for Copts. I want to work with my Egyptian brothers, Muslim brothers, because our cause is the same.”²¹

The Costa Salafis group was founded in April 2011 and has 130 members, most of whom are Salafis—though its membership also includes non-Salafis and Copts. Costa was founded as a means to

create a conversation within the traditional Islamic movement about the revolution and its demands. The movement focuses on creating dialogue not only within the Islamist camp but also between the Salafis and those of other religious and political stripes. Its founder explained, “We are trying not just to create discussions or roundtables but need people to live together....What we are doing is unconditional.”²²

The group also engages in other forms of activism, such as medical campaigns in poor neighborhoods. It joins sit-ins and demonstrations related to other campaigns based on decisions made by its members through a voting mechanism set up on the group’s Facebook page. The Costa Salafis first appearance was at a liberal demonstration, its founder explained, “but we decided to join because these demands were fair. Many people opposed us from the Islamic side and we decided to then not take any political sides. We let the members decide who to vote for, which political party to join on an individual level. I personally boycotted both rounds of the election.”²³ He added, “Maybe we don’t care much about the game. But we care about the rules of the game.”²⁴

The Costa Salafis hold regular group meetings that include teach-ins and dialogue sessions. The theme of one such evening’s discussion attended by twenty members was methods of peaceful protest. The group sees itself as a forum for open debate on all issues related to the revolution and the transition and, like the citizenship-focused group Oreed, it is focused not on the numbers it reaches but on embedding the culture of inclusivity and changing the way of thinking in postrevolutionary Egypt.

Oreed

The April 6th Movement has had a wide variety of issues that it has chosen to support, but most youth groups tend to focus on single issues. Foremost among these is citizenship—raising awareness of rights and encouraging public participation in the electoral and constitutional processes. Oreed, which translates as “I Want,” is a group of fifteen to twenty youths that engages in outreach activities to build awareness of citizenship rights and responsibilities. They started with “the notion of spreading democracy, then developed to citizen-

ship,”²⁵ and they conduct workshops on the social, political, and economic aspects of citizenship. The group aims to teach citizens about how the system works; how to relate to official and unofficial bodies; and how to practice the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in Egypt.

Most of Oreed’s members work in the corporate world and have a background in training and capacity building, skills they are now putting to use in creating interactive citizenship workshops. Its five founders and board members are middle class youth who feel that, in the aftermath of the revolution, youth are slipping back into a state of lassitude: “Everyone’s living in apathy, but we are trying to trigger some activism, to say that ‘I can have an impact.’”²⁶

One of Oreed’s board members explained why they focus on citizenship and participation: “Democracy is the motive we had in the square. We had a car and didn’t know how to drive—how to use the freedom we have gained. This is the line between politics and development, advocacy and participation.”²⁷ Another board member remarked that initially the group was driven by the short term and what was happening on the ground. For example, when the constitution-drafting process began, they debated whether to tell people to vote or not but then decided that this was not the issue. Instead they shifted their focus to the long term and to building a base for political empowerment and for political parties. They decided to work in a neutral manner and, rather than campaigning for a “yes” or “no” vote, to disseminate information on what one’s vote should be based on.²⁸ Oreed’s members stressed that democracy does not mean to have a minority leading by what it believes it should apply to the majority—for example, associating democracy with women’s rights—but rather to act as a check and balance.

Oreed has reached out to 200 people through its workshops. It measures its success not through numerical reach but rather through impact, “changing the way of thinking,”²⁹ which it feels is stronger than reaching out to 1,000 people. But the group’s members are concerned about sustainability, as they believe that the revolution is going backward and that people feel “the biggest event in their lives led to nothing. The enthusiasm when we started Oreed in February 2011 was 100 times now. We are going back to being apathetic,” said an Oreed

member.³⁰ “We are going back to the individualism mode before the revolution...When we were hanging out, we would always talk about girls, about nonsense—not about our country [and] how the country will be in ten to twenty years. We are now going back to sitting in cafes and clubs.”³¹

Oreed’s board members analyzed the reasons for their exhaustion. One suggested that it stems partly from feeling that “I have been in a marathon for one and a half years.”³² A common emotion is that youth, “at end of the day, felt betrayed and are now standing alone. No one cares or is willing to participate.”³³ Another mentioned, “Now our demotivation comes from our high expectations that traffic, sexual harassment would be solved after revolution. We were all dreamers.”³⁴ However, one member reflected, “Maybe because I studied politics and so can read the experiences of [other] transitions to democracy. If we had expected that [we] would just enjoy liberty and democracy... It would be all embedded in us automatically. Liberty is the freedom of choice.”³⁵ She added that her activism is now focused on how to encourage the toleration of other opinions and to embed the culture of democracy.

It is because of this that members of the group prefer civil society work to politics: “The role of social movements and of Oreed is to change the mindset, to develop the mindset, to accept others views... We must have civic power to strengthen society parallel to political power.”³⁶ Another board member who worked as an adviser to the development minister decided to quit and join an NGO instead. She explained, “Most of my friends said I was crazy to leave the cabinet of the minister. I said yes because I want to touch my achievements. I joined Oreed so I can touch what I want to change.”³⁷

In spite of the challenges they mention, Oreed’s members insist that

if you are really concerned about taking this country forward, [the focus] should not be political power but to build. The revolution wasn’t a political revolution. It happened for reasons with nothing to do with politics. I am still optimistic because of nature, by numbers that our mindset will rule. Tahrir Square was like utopia—people sharing everything—Christians and Muslims...Everyone inside the square was seeking the same values. Those were the people of the square.³⁸

TUNISIA

Bus Citoyen

Bus Citoyen (the Citizen Bus) is an umbrella organization for five associations that provide training on the constitution and electoral processes, and in raising popular awareness of citizens' rights and of the constitutional process. It was created soon after the revolution in April 2011. One of its founders explained, "We created the NGO right after the revolution. We didn't know what to do but decided we have two goals: creating political awareness in Tunisia and regional and cultural development in the regions, for young entrepreneurs to help the region in reshaping and looking for funds."³⁹ They have received funding from George W. Bush's Foundation for the Future and the US State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative, the French Institute of Tunisia, and Tunisian companies.

Their political awareness activities include trainings on how to register and vote and make an informed decision on the vote. They were keen to set up each session in a way that it was not seen as a one-way educational meeting but as "more of an exchange of information."⁴⁰ This involved reaching out to fifty companies, where they asked for an hour from employees and showed a short video clip on the electoral process. They would then "start a debate, where we got most people to answer each other so information came from them."⁴¹

The group has a civic education program being developed with the United Nations Population Fund, with whom they are preparing a manual for civic education and training modules, which will focus on issues such as human rights, democracy, citizenship, institutional checks and balances, decentralization, and citizen power. They are also keen to organize debates with members of parliament. The group's founder explained that it was the debates on the constitution and citizenship that led the NGO to concentrate on these issues.

However, she also acknowledged that while these activities aim to fill a gap, a primary concern that they have not been able to address is "the gap that exists between people and political space. Many people feel lost and disconnected."⁴² Her remark may be interpreted at two levels, as there is certainly a lingering sense of disconnect between state and citizen but there is also a disconnect between civil society activity

and the citizens at whom it is aimed.

Ikbis

Ikbis means “to tighten the screw” or “to put pressure” in Tunisian dialect, and it was formed by a group of young Ennahda Party activists. It aims to address the disconnect between citizen and state, and more specifically between the ruling political party and the goals of the revolution. Its founder explained that it arose from a spontaneous idea when one of them said “*ikbis* to the government” and created a hashtag out of it on social media but then thought “Why just a hashtag? And why not a campaign?”⁴³ Its founder stressed that while he and the executive committee belong to Ennahda, Ikbis has members from other political parties and is independent from Ennahda, “so we contradict the party leader. The idea behind Ikbis is Tunisia first, then the revolution, then Ennahda the party.”⁴⁴

Most Ennahda youth are similar to their secular counterparts in their feeling that “there is no real achievement related to the revolution.”⁴⁵ They view the government as being hesitant and slow to act, and as one that has been reluctant to fulfill the aims of the revolution. It is in relation to this that they seek to put pressure on Ennahda and the ruling troika. The concerns voiced by the Ikbis leader echoed those expressed by most youth interviewed for this project, irrespective of their political affiliation. Youth are particularly uneasy over the presence of RCD partisans (i.e., the former ruling party) in government, whom they feel should be prevented from participating in political life for at least a ten-year period.

While no former RCD officials hold elected office, they have been allowed by Ennahda and the ruling troika government to remain in high posts within the bureaucracy. The government is wary of taking Tunisia through the equivalent of the de-Ba’athification process in Iraq, while the youth proclaim that it is unacceptable that people they view as politically corrupt are still present in all domains of the state, in the ministries, the judiciary, the security sector, and the media. Ikbis is campaigning for there to be an accelerated transitional justice process, “to open files, to judge them, and to make a national reconciliation commission.”⁴⁶

At the same time, its leader explained that the group understands

that “Ennahda fears making trouble in Tunisia so doesn’t do all this,” but he said “we are trying to make pressure. To find holes where to make pressure. We need to bring the people with us. The most important way to [achieve the goals of the revolution is to put] pressure on the government.”⁴⁷ To this end, Ikbis has been arranging sit-ins and hunger strikes in the Casbah, the plaza in Tunis where the prime minister’s office is located, and in front of the ministries. A sit-in that took place in Tunis in August 2012 attracted a group of 20,000 young people, protesting about a range of issues in the Casbah.

Most of the young people were Ennahda-leaning, though Ikbis has been trying to reach out to other youth groups. Ikbis sees itself not “as a political movement but a revolutionary movement. The only red line for us is to bring down the government.”⁴⁸ However, the polarization that exists within the political system also seeps across into civil society and even revolutionary activism. Some secular youth view Ikbis with suspicion and perceive it as a party-sanctioned group. Being viewed as part of the government camp is one of the challenges that Ikbis faces, another one is the reaction of the government itself. “We were very enthusiastic to begin but now find it difficult. We don’t see a reaction from the government—maybe sometimes a counterreaction.”⁴⁹

I-Watch

I-Watch is a civil society organization that was set up by university students in February 2011, just two months after the Tunisian revolution. Its founder explains, “The idea was to establish a watchdog that enables young men and women to play a role in the political arena, to be independent[ly] fighting corruption, which was the main reason for the revolution.”⁵⁰ Its activities focus on educating youth about corruption, transparency, and citizenship and on mobilizing volunteers for election observation, with a goal of communicating with fifty people in each governorate. It aims to create a national organization with chapters across the country, trying to raise awareness about corruption. In 2012, they had seven chapters, and membership had been temporarily closed until they could train new members, which they planned to resume once the university exam season had passed.

I-Watch also organized a youth national assembly, with 217 representatives from all twenty-four governorates, divided into five committees that mirrored the work of the assembly on the revolution's martyred and injured, finance, the constitution, and administrative reform. Each committee delivered a report with recommendations, which was presented to the minister of human rights and justice. "The main demand was to establish a national consultative youth council, which deals with youth issues including unemployment, so that if you pass a law which deals with young people, you should go to this council."⁵¹ While this has yet to happen, the group has started a roundtable discussion series where members of parliament meet young people and discuss local issues such as development, infrastructure, and unemployment.

The organization has 120 members with all political affiliations but a rule that "when you enter you take off your political cap."⁵² The regulations tighten further when applied to its eight elected executive bureau members, who are not allowed to join any political party. The organization has received funding from the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute in the United States, and the Pontis Foundation in Slovakia.

Youth have often criticized the lack of internal democracy within political parties and have been more positive about the horizontal structure they perceive to exist in the civil society sector. The founder of I-Watch explained that its executive bureau members make decisions with consultations and that they have a control department, managed by law students who run a control checklist for all projects. While most issues have been worked on through a consultative process, the issue of US funding led to a split within the organization, causing some of its founding members to leave. Its founder defended the decision to take US funding, saying, "I am open to any partnership that respects the sovereignty of the country and I-Watch."

The challenges I-Watch has faced relate to perceptions about its funding and also its politics: "At first, we had a lot of people joining and making trouble and saying, 'you are US agents,' etc. So now we have training on partners and budget especially, and then after you can't ask questions about funding."⁵³ I-Watch has also been targeted by some as being pro-Ennahda, "because we took pictures with the

minister of human rights and the vice president.”⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

All youth interviewed spoke of the importance of the expanded space and freedoms since the revolution, which they are able to use to organize and mobilize. Most youth civil society organizations focus on expanding political rights and promoting the ideas of citizenship and dialogue, and the struggle for socioeconomic justice. However, there is a difference between Egypt and Tunisia in terms of the arena. In Egypt, most of the civil society groups work on battling either the reach or the narrative of the state. In Tunisia, youth are more concentrated on serving as a watchdog of parliament and the constitutional process, with an eye toward future elections.

In both countries, most youth-driven groups focus on citizen participation and activism as opposed to formal politics, as a way to bring the citizen back into the public sphere to act as a counterbalance to the political system, which is still viewed with deep suspicion. This is particularly important at a time when the traditional check-and-balance institutions—such as the parliament and the judiciary—remain, at worst, bodies that represent the interests of the old order and, at best, nonfunctioning entities affected by postrevolutionary discord.

In addition, the environment within which civil society activists function in Egypt and Tunisia is very different. In Egypt, the political landscape is more restrictive than in Tunisia, where civil society organizations are allowed to operate more freely and have legal protection. This makes for a stark contrast with Egypt, where the state has, with some success, painted civil society groups as agents of foreign intervention. As a result, many groups have to be particularly careful not to accept foreign funding in order to avoid being further tarnished. The atmosphere cultivated by the state has also made it difficult for some civil society groups in Egypt to gain trust or traction on the ground. This structurally secure position of civil society in Tunisia, when juxtaposed with Egypt, has more positive implications for both its funding and sustainability.

However, nearly all youth-led civil society organizations face structural and financial constraints, as well as challenges related to

strategy and long-term planning. Youth activism has been based on horizontal structures not vertical hierarchies.

Many youth groups exist as a result of sheer determination. They struggle with issues of financing, strategy, and planning. While for some people disillusionment is setting in, many youth groups have been determined to continue their activism. They express a desire to exchange knowledge and engage in capacity-building activities with other groups in the region and beyond. Some loose networks of exchange exist, but most groups have not developed partnerships with other organizations in the region and internationally.

Civil society actors, like all other actors, are struggling as they negotiate the new postrevolutionary landscape in both Egypt and Tunisia. Some activists view civil society activism as way of changing the culture of their country. Others see it as laying the groundwork for future political activity. The primary challenge for youth lies in ensuring that their civil society activity does not become disconnected from the “street” and begin to overlook ordinary people’s economic concerns and the desire for political stability.

CONCLUSION

As of September 2013, the situation in Egypt was grave, its transition to democracy interrupted by a military coup under civilian guise, with no end in sight to the violence between security forces and supporters of the newly deposed president. Tunisia's transition has also stumbled, with the ruling parties holding on to whatever is left of an electoral legitimacy that has been squandered in the pursuit of power rather than effective governance. A spate of political assassinations and unprecedented extremist violence paralyzed the government in 2013, shutting down the National Constituent Assembly in August 2013.

The populations in both countries are divided by competing views of the role of Islam in government and daily life. "Deep state" actors—including the military in Egypt and elements of the security services in Tunisia—are attempting to roll back hard won fundamental freedoms. In both countries, the economy is in shambles as politicians continue to engage in bitter partisan battles, limiting their ability to address the hardships of an increasingly impoverished populace. The future of the transitions to democracy looks uncertain at best.

What role will the youth play as this future unfolds? Youth comprise more than 60 percent of the population in the Arab world. They have already played a fundamental role in changing three governments in Egypt and Tunisia. Their demographic weight and their mobilizing power ensure that they will remain a force to be reckoned with for autocrats and democrats alike.

This study has mapped and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of youth ideas and actions in both political and civil society in Egypt and Tunisia. The Arab revolutions were driven by youth because they had a compelling narrative—a clarion call for political and economic justice that resonated with millions. The transition period has been different. It has opened up, as one interviewee described it, a Pandora's box of diverse and competing narratives.¹ The youth milieu, its discourse and its projects in both the political and civil society spheres

are polarized and fragmented.

This indicates two possible outcomes for the future. One, youth will succumb to the power politics of the elite and will be co-opted by the state. In other words, they may become status quo actors. Two, the youth will regain their agency and reestablish their presence in a way that allows them to propel the transitions toward democratic consolidation. This study aimed at detailing the path they are on presently. What conclusions can be drawn about the sustainability of their ideas and the robustness of their actions? To what extent will they be able to negotiate a new social contract between citizen and state and to shape the future of the transition process?

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Youth in both Egypt and Tunisia state that the issues most important to them are socioeconomic justice, human rights, and civil liberties. They are keen to move away from authoritarian models of thinking and governing. Through the revolutions, they have articulated a new discourse grounded in these aspirations.

In the early days of the transition, these ideas for change relating to political and socioeconomic justice bore a laser-like sharpness, in part because the youth were able to present a united front. However, at present the youth risk becoming divided by the transition process itself, as it pulls them in different directions. One tendency has been to move toward a politics of polarization, the impact of which has led some to lose sight of their original goals. Another has simply been the tendency to fight for single issues as opposed to linking them to a wider political platform. Both have led many youth to resume a pre-2011 model of activism where they have retreated into their own silos from which they can only fight disjointed campaigns. Such a move risks reinforcing the old mechanism of functioning, where the state would exchange specific entitlements for broader political rights.

While youth have been unable to replace the discourse of the past and have been affected by the polarized politics of the present Islamist versus secularist divide, they appear to be more tempered in their beliefs than the wider population. These more modulated views are grounded in an assessment prevalent among youth that the Islamist-secularist binary stems from decades of authoritarian rule, under

which identity issues were suppressed. Thus, while polarized, many youth interviewed argued that there is no option but to work through the crisis. They emphasized the need for dialogue to overcome legacies of the past and to promote tolerance, and they are engaged in citizen-led projects that aim to build the foundations for equal citizenship.

Most activists I interviewed in Egypt know someone who was killed by the state in the battles of 2011, 2012, and 2013. The uprisings are not based on ideas in the abstract. They also have human faces attached to them, and the face of a young activist is a powerful tool that can help to crystallize political imaginations and memories. The Egyptian activist Wael Ghoneim's appearance on an evening show on television on February 7, 2011, is often quoted as a pivotal moment in the uprising. Ghoneim's moving story of police brutality and his call for dignity acted as a catalyst in bringing more people out onto the street, leading to the fall of President Mubarak four days later on February 11, 2011. Similarly, the military instrumentalized the leader of the anti-Morsi Tamarod movement by asking him to address the nation on the day of the military coup, July 3, 2013, in an attempt to boost support for their move.

The youth's main impact will come from their ideas. In both Egypt and Tunisia the youth are committed to keeping the flame of the revolution alive through a narrative that challenges power and engages with issues of political and economic justice. Transitions to democracy are defined not by political structures alone but also by the continuing negotiation and renegotiation of each nation's history, culture, politics, and identity, which in turn create a grammar of political action. Youth have already created a "repertoire of resistance" and possibility. The repertoires of the revolutions are likely to provide material for political action and civic engagement for decades. This will be further shaped by the many youth activists who continue to challenge states that are exclusionary and unaccountable, and who have already "got under the skin of power."²

The youth possess what the Egyptian historian Mahmoud Sabit described as their trump card—an honest conscience.³ However, Sabit also went on to note that the inexperience of youth means that they are not even aware of the cards they hold. Will youth allow for their narratives to be co-opted and captured by the powers that be, as

witnessed during the July 2013 coup in Egypt, or will they be able resuscitate the original discourse of the revolution? In addition to their ideas, the youth's actions will also impact the future course of the transition processes. Will they be able to transcend polarization, fragmentation, and co-option to organize in a way that will redefine the citizen as the center of the political arena?

POLITICAL ACTION

Youth activists in Egypt and Tunisia face very different political environments. In both, political parties are perceived to function along vertical lines with little of the horizontal decision making and idea generation that youth became accustomed to during the revolution. They are also stalled by a discouraging generation gap, especially in Egypt.

Egyptian youth are usually not integrated into party structures, with few parties having given thought either to integrating them into the party's committees or creating a youth wing. At best, youth activists in parties that have integrated them into their decision-making structures tend to focus on conventional political activities. Their activities include preparing for party congresses, working on internal and external policy issues, and campaigning for a greater voice within the party and for expanding party presence externally. In contrast, youth in parties without inclusive structures veer toward activities they hope will enable them to establish their own networks on the ground, while using the party infrastructure.

This deficit, combined with the strength of youth movements in Egypt, has led to the formation of some youth parties, though their fortunes change by the day. The Egyptian Current Party, one of the few youth parties to have survived, struggles with financial and structural issues similar to that of any fledgling organization. Most youth in political parties are left to fend for themselves, which for some has its own appeal in the autonomy it allows. In terms of political activism there is a greater emphasis on the importance of protest politics and less of a focus on building structures, messaging, or positioning themselves within the party.

In comparison, Tunisian youth are better integrated into party structures. Nearly all political parties have engaged with the youth

issue, sometimes as a result of campaigns fought by youth within the party demanding a seat at the table. As a result, most parties have some youth representatives in their central committees or have established parallel youth structures. While this structure tends to function along hierarchical lines, it also offers a political ladder to climb within the system. This translates into a political activism that centers on preparing for party congresses, the development of policy platforms and messaging, and further campaigns for a greater youth voice internally. It also means that political youth activists in Tunisia are less disaffected than their counterparts in Egypt.

The political dynamics of Egypt and Tunisia are different, as are the structures of most political parties. However, the process of enhancing the political participation of youth at all points of the electoral process and their inclusion in decision making at both policy and structural levels is the same. Youth do not comprise a homogeneous group, but by creating and institutionalizing channels through which they can identify and engage on the issues that matter to them, they can create a space for the expression of collective and diverse priorities alike. This could include youth inclusion in national and local consultative processes. The Yemeni model of allocating 20 percent of the seats to youth in the National Dialogue is an example of such a process.

Many activists prioritize the idea of citizenship as both a duty and a responsibility. Some Tunisian youth have already participated as election monitors in Tunisia and Egypt under the auspices of the Carter Center electoral observation program, and they might push for a similar presence via their own national election commissions. Most young politicians voiced their frustration with structural problems and an entrenched older generation of party elites. A first step might be to introduce a youth quota system for positions within a party's central bureau or in decision-making committees, as implemented by some political parties in Tunisia. Another might be to put forward youth lists, as explored in Egypt.

Youth also expressed the view that they are keen to engage with sister political parties in the region and internationally to exchange ideas and trainings on messaging, campaigning, and capacity building. Youth have a long battle ahead if they choose to focus on

institutionalizing their presence on the political stage.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

For many youth, the biggest gain of the revolution has been the opening of the political space to freely organize, to build from the bottom up. The majority of youth activists choose to engage in civil society projects as opposed to formal politics, and they have an expansive presence in this arena. This ranges from youth movements with tens of thousands of members, such as the April 6th Youth Movement in Egypt, to individual activists. Most youth-led civil society organizations focus on putting the citizen at the center of the political process.

In Egypt, many groups work on raising awareness of political and socioeconomic rights and in challenging the “deep state” and its practices, particularly in the security and media sectors. In Tunisia, there is greater emphasis on playing the role of watchdog and monitoring state institutions, such as parliament, the constitution-drafting committee, and the election commission. In both Egypt and Tunisia, some youth have undertaken development work, though these tend to be Islamist-leaning, which is in keeping with the history of civil society activism in the two countries.

Youth are heavily invested in the idea of civic duty and engagement. Youth activism is based on horizontal organizational structures rather than vertical hierarchies of leadership. In the days leading up to the revolution, youth action was based primarily on this principle. Having successfully used a loose decision-making structure to start a revolution, they now expect to be able to continue to function in the same way and achieve similarly spectacular results.

However, nearly all youth civil society organizations face structural and financial constraints, as well as challenges related to strategy and long-term planning. Many youth groups have been determined to continue their activism, but disillusionment is already setting in. Some youth activists, as well as their constituents, feel that they are merely highlighting the issues as opposed to being able to offer and implement solutions, as was the case before the revolution.

Many groups stay afloat on enthusiasm alone as they try to

navigate organizational issues in areas of financing, long-term planning, strategic thinking, relationship building, cooperation, and networking. But this is clearly not sustainable. Youth guard their independence and autonomy of action. But many interviewed stated a desire to boost their strategic and organizational skills, and to exchange experiences with civil society actors in other countries that have had successful transition processes.

The majority of civil society organizations in Egypt and Tunisia focus on single issues and push for the state to respond to their specific demands. The danger of such an approach is that it leads to temporary arrangements and/or co-option by the state. Encouraging cooperation and networking between organizations would strengthen their position. Their effectiveness would also be enhanced by fostering links and developing partnerships with other organizations and actors in the region and internationally. However, the gravest challenge to their position as change agents is their stance against official party politics, which often results in a refusal to engage or to link their causes to political platforms. In order to successfully challenge the practices of the state and of politicians, civil society groups must leverage their grassroots organizing for political action.

MOVING FORWARD

The learning curve during a transition process is always steep and the outcome unpredictable. Youth activists are very conscious of the currents of history and contextualize their own actions within the broader landscape of other transitions past and present. Many youth interviewed showed interest in the transition processes of other countries and were aware of both the cautionary tales and constructive lessons they offer. The narratives of counterrevolution have not escaped them. However, they also noted parallels with processes such as those in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Poland, and Serbia, where the entrenched interests of authoritarian regimes, militaries, and regional hegemonic powers were overcome and the arc of history was bent toward democratic consolidation.

Youth are cognizant of the often overwhelming structural constraints they face, but they have also proven through the uprisings that they can play a game-changing role. While idealistic, most youth

activists' aspirations have been tempered by the unfulfilled promises of the revolution. Many mentioned a timeframe of ten to twenty years for change to happen. They believe that the transition process "will take some time, and it will be a bumpy road."⁴ Transitions are not linear; they stretch out over an elongated period of time during which old and new actors struggle for control over ideas and actions.

Today, youth stand in a unique position. In both Egypt and Tunisia, they are viewed by many as their nation's conscience. At great peril, under authoritarian conditions, they have "dared to organize, act, think and live in the famous phrase of the [Polish activist] Adam Michnik 'as if they were free.'"⁵ They have expanded the political and civic space and have given depth to the meaning of citizen-led movements. They have a broad legitimacy, grounded in a politics that exists beyond the structures of the state. They have mastered social media, which can be utilized to provide more innovative ways of promoting the narratives of the revolution, organizing and creating new citizen-based structures. They believe that using one's voice itself is an act of citizenship.

Youth are the ideal vanguard for building the foundations of a more inclusive and participatory polity. They are key stakeholders in the revolution—its "moral tribunes" who represent an "ethical civil society."⁶ This is where the challenge lies. While civil society is pivotal to democratic consolidation and has been viewed by many as the star of the transition process, it cannot be a substitute for the institutionalized politics of parties, elections, and governments. The tension between politics and civil society was epitomized by a young Tunisian activist: "For you, politics is power. For me, civil society is power."⁷ Many believe that "civil society can play the role of being the main political force that can balance things."⁸ However, there are also those youth activists who are concerned that, in the current situation, "Youth politics has the expiry date of a yogurt cup."⁹

Youth activists need to engage in the political process and in institutionalizing their presence in political parties. The perception among many—particularly those active in civil society—that formal politics is toxic is one that needs to be challenged and replaced by more constructive thinking. One example is the role that youth can play as political mediators. Both Egypt and Tunisia have a desperate

need for a national dialogue between Islamists and secularists, and between citizens and politicians. It is the youth who, through the revolution, opened up the political space in the first place and, during the earliest days of the revolution, fought hand in hand as a coalition with shared revolutionary goals and a focus on issues of citizenship.

The youth could utilize their own example and harness the idea of negotiation and mediation as tools to resolve competing interests that emerge during the transition process. The capacity of youth to act as community mediators could be enhanced through mediation training in youth-led civil society organizations, political parties, and local coordination committees created during the revolution, for example in movements such as April 6th in Egypt and Ikbis in Tunisia. Mediation modules could also be taught at workshops in schools and universities. Such activities could harness youth potential for inclusive dialogue mechanisms to resolve conflicts at the community and national levels.

For democracy to be consolidated, an investment in building strong institutional structures is required. Democracy also entails the institutionalization of contestation and compromise, and the negotiation of interests. Egyptian and Tunisian youth have already demonstrated extraordinary will and capacity in making their revolutions happen. Whether they have the political savvy and the stamina to drive the transition processes and to fulfill the promises of the revolution remains to be seen.

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80. Ibid.
81. Personal interview with an Islamist lawyer, Tunis, September 18, 2012. The term “metal heads” refers to fans of heavy metal music, who are often perceived as being anti-establishment.
82. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
83. Personal interview with an Islamist lawyer, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
84. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
85. Ibid.
86. Personal interview with a Massar Party member, Monastir, September 8, 2012.
87. Personal interview with a journalist, Tunis, September 16, 2012.
88. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
89. Ibid.
90. Personal interview with an Islamist lawyer, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
91. Personal interview with a journalist, Tunis, September 16, 2012.
92. Personal interview with an Islamist lawyer, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
93. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
94. Personal interview with an Islamist lawyer, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
95. Ibid.
96. “Tunisia Crackdown on Salafis Evokes Threats from Ultraconservative Groups,” Associated Press, May 15, 2013, available at www.news24.com/Africa/News/Tunisia-crackdown-on-salafis-evokes-threats-20130515-2.
97. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
98. Personal interview with a journalist, Tunis, September 16, 2012.
99. Personal interview with an Islamist journalist, Tunis, September 16, 2012.

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100. Ibid.
101. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
102. As this publication went to press, Ennahda was announcing plans to withdraw from government, putting an end to the ruling coalition.
103. Personal interview with a civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 12, 2012.
104. Personal interview with a secular-leaning civil society activist, Tunis, September 5, 2012.
105. Personal interview with a civil society activist, Tunis, September 6, 2012.
106. Personal interview with a secular civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 6, 2012.
107. Personal interview with a journalist, Tunis, September 5, 2012.
108. Personal interview with a secular civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 6, 2012.
109. Personal interview with a civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 12, 2012.
110. Personal interview with an Islamist-leaning college graduate, Monastir, September 8, 2012.
111. Ibid.
112. Personal interview with a civil society activist, Tunis, September 10, 2012.
113. Personal interview with a journalist, Tunis, September 16, 2012.
114. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.
117. Personal interview with a Massar Party member, Monastir, September 8, 2012.
118. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 19, 2012.

119. Personal interview with a civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 12, 2012.
120. Personal interview with an Ettakatol Party member, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
121. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
122. Personal interview with a civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 12, 2012.
123. Personal interview with an Islamist-leaning college graduate, Monastir, September 8, 2012.
124. Tunisian National Institute of Statistics, "Note sur l'enquête nationale sur l'emploi 2ème trimestre 2013," available at www.ins.nat.tn/communiques/Note_emploi_T2_2013_ar.pdf.
125. Personal interview with a civil society activist, Tunis, September 10, 2012.
126. Personal interview with a Salafi university student, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
127. "Tunisia's Economy: Still Struggling," *The Economist*, March 19, 2013, available at www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2013/03/tunisiaseconomy.
128. Personal interview with a civil society activist, Tunis, September 10, 2012.
129. Personal interview with a secular civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 6, 2012.
130. Personal interview with a journalist, Tunis, September 16, 2012.
131. Personal interview with a civil society activist, Tunis, September 6, 2012.
132. Ibid.
133. Personal interview with an Ettakatol Party member, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
134. Personal interview with an Islamist civil society activist, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
135. Personal interview with a Jumhuri Party member, Tunis, September 9, 2012.

136. Personal interview with an Ettakatol Party member, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
137. Personal interview with Islamist civil society activist, Cairo, July 7, 2012.
138. Interview with a secular civil society activist, Cairo, July 15, 2012, and September 28, 2012.
139. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. xiii; Paul Carnegie, *The Road from Authoritarianism to Democratization in Indonesia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4.
140. Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 16.
141. Jonathan Schell "Introduction," in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. xxiii.

CHAPTER TWO

1. As this publication went to press, the governing Ennahda Party announced it would resign and transfer power to a caretaker government.
2. Lina Khattib "Political Participation and Democratic Transition in the Arab World," *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 34, No. 2 (April 2013): 315–340.
3. Personal interview with members of the Dustour Party, Cairo, July 14, 2012.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Personal interview with a member of the Egyptian Current Party, Cairo, July 17, 2012.
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11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Personal interview with a Salafi-leaning member of the Egyptian Current Party, Cairo, July 15, 2012.
18. Personal interview with a member of the Egyptian Current Party, Cairo, July 17, 2012.
19. Ibid.
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21. Personal interview with a Salafi-leaning member of the Egyptian Current Party, Cairo, July 15, 2012.
22. Ibid.
23. Personal interview with a member of the Egyptian Current Party, Cairo, July 17, 2012.
24. Personal interview with a founding member of the Freedom and Justice Party, Cairo, July 18, 2012.
25. Ibid.
26. Personal interview with a member of the Freedom and Justice Party, Cairo, July 16, 2012.
27. Personal interview with a founding member of the Freedom and Justice Party, Cairo, July 18, 2012.
28. Ibid.
29. Personal interview with a member of the Freedom and Justice Party, Cairo, July 16, 2012.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.

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34. Personal interview with a member of the Popular Current, Cairo, September 30, 2012.
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 36. Ibid.
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 38. Ibid.
 39. Ibid.
 40. Ibid.
 41. Personal interview with a member of the Ennahda Party, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Personal interview with a member of the Ettajdid Party, Tunis, September 12, 2012.
 44. Ibid.
 45. Ibid.
 46. Ibid.
 47. Ibid.
 48. Ibid.
 49. Personal interview with members of the Ettakatol Party member, Tunis, September 19, 2012.
 50. Ibid.
 51. Ibid.
 52. Personal interview with a member of the Massar Party, Monastir, September 8, 2012.
 53. Ibid.
 54. Ibid.
 55. Ibid.
 56. Personal interview with a member of the Ettajdid Party, Tunis, September 12, 2012.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 9.
2. Ibid., p. 7.
3. Ibid., p. 273.
4. Personal interview with a civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 12, 2012.
5. Personal interview with a founding leader of the April 6th Youth Movement, Cairo, July 7, 2012.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Personal interview with a secular civil society activist, Cairo, September 28, 2012.
13. Personal interview with a member of the Ultras football fan group and journalist, Cairo, July 11, 2012.
14. Tarek Kholi cited in Ahmed Zaki Osman, "April 6 Youth Movement Faces Internal Challenges," *Egypt Independent*, August 14, 2011.
15. Personal interview with a founding leader of the April 6th Youth Movement, Cairo, July 7, 2012.
16. Personal interview with a former leader of the April 6th Youth Movement, Cairo, July 11, 2012.
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19. Personal interview with a founding leader of the Egyptian Coptic Coalition, Cairo, October 4, 2012.
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22. Personal interview with a founding leader of Costa Salafi, Cairo, September 26, 2012.
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 25. Personal interview with members of Oreed, Cairo, October 5, 2012.
 26. Ibid.
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 34. Personal interview with members of Oreed, Cairo, October 5, 2012.
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 38. Ibid.
 39. Personal interview with a leader of Bus Citoyen, Tunis, September 6, 2012.
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 42. Ibid.
 43. Personal interview with a founding leader of Ikbis, Tunis, September 18, 2012.
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48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Personal interview with a founding leader of I-Watch, Tunis, September 10, 2012.
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54. Ibid.

CONCLUSION

1. Personal interview with a journalist from *Tunisia Live*, Tunis, September 2012.
2. Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 317.
3. Interview with historian Mahmoud Sabit, Cairo, October 2012.
4. Personal interview with an Egyptian Institute for Personal Rights analyst, Cairo, October 3, 2012.
5. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 263. Adam Michnik was an activist and public intellectual who campaigned for democracy in Poland.
6. Ibid., p. 272.
7. Personal interview with a secular-leaning civil society activist, Tunis, September 5, 2012.
8. Personal interview with a civil society activist and blogger, Tunis, September 12, 2012.
9. Personal interview with a secular civil society activist, Cairo, September 28, 2012.

Who are the youth activists of Egypt and Tunisia? What are their ideas, and what types of action are they taking? As key protagonists of revolution in 2011, what capacity do they now have to sustain their political and civic engagement over the long term? This study maps the discourse and activism of youth in postrevolutionary Egypt and Tunisia. It offers insight into where the transitions are heading and provides suggestions for how stakeholders might best engage with youth actors in the region.

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