



# The dynamics of the Egyptian social contract: How the political changes affected the poor

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## ABSTRACT

How have the uprisings in 2011 and 2013 affected deprived communities in Egypt? Adopting a social contract approach, this longitudinal study tracks the same individuals in Manshiet Nasser and Menia over a ten-year period (2006–2015) articulating their wellbeing priorities, unfulfilled aspirations, problems and perceptions on the social contract over time. This grounded micro-level study argues that the uprisings; which were meant to end the old social contract that traded off political rights with socio-economic benefits; have in fact post-2013 led to a new bargain that forgoes *both* sets of rights in exchange for political stability.

The analysis shows the persistence of the *same* wellbeing priorities, problems and unfulfilled aspirations, esp. in employment, income generation, housing and education. This indicates the repeated failure of the state to enact a new social contract that addresses these needs. The burden of the post-revolutionary economic crises fell mainly on the poor, especially female headed households in urban areas and young informal workers – both suffering from high inflation and unemployment. Paradoxically, whilst the January 2011 uprising called for a new social contract promoting ‘bread, freedom and social justice’, it led post-2013 to a more *exclusionary* one. Blaming the uprisings for the political turmoil and economic crises, deprived communities were therefore willing to accept a new social contract that not only denies their basic political rights but also undermines the socio-economic benefits – guaranteed under the old populist social contract. They thus tolerated the state’s failure to fulfil these socio-economic rights in exchange for political stability. The sustainability of the current social contract however remains questionable. Politically, the uprisings had a contradictory effect as they raised political awareness; but undermined feelings of citizenship and led to radicalisation when the democratic transition failed. The new social contract thus not only failed to address the ‘revolution of rising expectations’ after the uprisings, but also jeopardizes long-term political stability in Egypt. Forging a sustainable more inclusive social contract thus remains a major challenge the current regime needs to address.

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## 1. Introduction

Prior to the Arab Spring, the Middle East was characterized by authoritarian stability and the persistence of undemocratic rulers who withstood the democratisation waves that swept Latin America and East Asia (Gause, 2011). Authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Iraq dominated the region for decades; mostly backed up by strong armies and encountering little political opposition. Since 2011, a wave of uprisings and popular protests – known as the Arab Spring – swept the MENA region from Tunisia to Egypt reaching Libya, Yemen and Syria. They took the world by surprise. Tunisia is upheld as a success story having witnessed a relatively smooth democratic transition with a more

participatory social contract (Stepan, 2012). The eruption of new protests in Jan 2018 tested the resilience of this transition. Other countries, such as Syria, Libya and Yemen suffered an outbreak of civil wars, especially when political groups engaged in armed conflict.

Egypt, however, is an interesting and unique case. It did witness two ‘waves’ of popular protests in January 2011 to oust Hosni Mubarak; and in June 2013 to overthrow the Muslim-Brotherhood backed president Mohamed Morsi. After a relatively short-lived democratic period (2011–2013) with new political parties, relatively free parliamentary elections in 2011 and presidential elections in 2012, Egypt returned to autocratic rule with President Sisi – largely backed up by the military – consolidating his power.

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To explore this transition, most studies focused mainly on authoritarianism (Albrecht, 2013; Brynen et al., 2012; Stacher, 2012; Diamond and Plattner, 2014), democracy (Davis, 2013; Lynch, 2012; Korany and El-Mahdi, 2012; Dawisha, 2013), geopolitics (Danahar, 2013; Gerges, 2014) and political economy (Cammett and Diwan, 2013; Hanieh, 2013). Others examined the roles that Islamists (Bradley, 2012; Pargeter, 2010; Hamid, 2014), women (Elsadda, 2011; Singerman, 2013; Hafez, 2014), workers (Al-Mahdi, 2011; Alexander and Bassiouny, 2014), and youth (Hoffmann and Jamal, 2012) played in these uprisings. Very few studies explored these uprisings through the eyes of the 'subalterns' or deprived communities themselves. Bush and Ayeb (2012), Abdelrahman (2013) and Abdelrahman (2014) explained how the recent political changes were rooted in lengthy struggles before 2011. Bayat (2010) also examined the impact of these changes on the lives of 'ordinary people', while Diwan (2016) explored how citizens view these political processes - drawing on macro-level data from World Value Surveys.

What is missing is an articulation of people's voices to understand *how* these changes affected them. This article fills this gap by examining the following research questions: how were the uprisings experienced by ordinary people - particularly those living in deprived communities? How did the uprisings affect their wellbeing priorities, aspirations and problems? Do they perceive the current social contract to be better or worse than the old one?

This article contributes to our understanding of the circumstances of ordinary Egyptians in the post-2011 era. It tracks the changes in wellbeing perceptions and aspirations of two deprived communities *over time* and examines how the changes in the social contract before and after the uprisings affected them. This longitudinal study, conducted in Egypt between 2006 and 2015, adopts a unique methodology that tracks and compares the voices and attitudes of the *same* respondents in two different locations, one rural and one urban, over 10 years (pre- and post-uprisings).

Theoretically, it adopts the social contract concept as an analytical tool to frame the study in order to delineate the 'benefits' of the old (and desired new) system and to examine the impact that the political changes have had on different wellbeing domains. The paper argues that a new social contract implicitly emerged after the uprisings. This included a bargain emphasizing security and political stability thus altering the old social contract which focused mainly on delivering socio-economic benefits. The study shows how the revolutionary demands for 'bread, freedom and social justice' *remained largely unmet*, thus leading to further deterioration of wellbeing in deprived communities, especially in urban areas. The old authoritarian bargain was replaced by an even *more* exclusionary social contract whereby the state failed to fulfil its main responsibilities in the socio-economic and political domains; in exchange for political stability. People's hopes for a democratic transition were not only unfulfilled, but paradoxically the uprisings led to a *more* repressive state, a highly *polarised* society and the benefits of the achieved economic growth did *not* trickle down to the poor. As a result, poor communities *continued* to suffer under the current regime.

The next section presents the conceptual framework of the study explaining why it adopts the concept of social contract as an analytical tool. It also emphasizes the importance of people's perceptions to explore the dynamics of the social contract and the impact of the uprisings on deprived communities. Section three briefly examines the features of the Egyptian social contract and the manifestations of its failure. Section four explains the research methodology; while section five presents the data analysis and research findings. The conclusion explains the implications of these findings for Egypt's future social contract.

## 2. A grounded view of the Egyptian social contract

### 2.1. Why a social contract approach?

To examine the impact of the uprisings on deprived communities, this article adopts a social contract approach. As pointed out by Loewe et al. (2020), the concept of the social contract goes back to philosophers like Hobbes (1914) and Rousseau (1961) who introduced it to explore the nature of political authority and legitimacy. More recently, Lessnoff (1990, p.9) viewed social contracts as exchanges of promises which highlight 'the obligations of rulers and subjects'. To examine the dynamics of state-society relations in Egypt before and after the uprisings, this article adopts a social contract approach to link societal expectations with state capacity, political bargaining, authority and legitimacy (UNDP, 2015,2016).

This approach is suitable for this analysis as it allows us to compare people's aspirations with the state deliverables and enables us to articulate people's perceptions about the importance and fulfilment of these deliverables. It thus emphasizes the need for the government to address people's demands to gain its legitimacy. The approach also stresses the role of people's power since 'street politics is an increasingly important form of political expression and citizens are making more forceful and more frequent demands on their leaders' (Cammett et al., 2013, p.408).

This social contract approach therefore allows us to critically examine the political and economic obligations of the state towards its citizens in addition to stressing the impact that the non-fulfilment of these obligations can have on state legitimacy and on state-society relations. Social contracts reflect how different parties negotiate with each other. Their importance thus lies in balancing the expectations and obligations of state institutions with those of the rest of society (Lessnoff, 1990). A growing gap between people's expectations and state's obligations can lead to the failure of the social contract and to popular discontent - as the next sections will show.

### 2.2. Why perceptions matter?

To examine the dynamics of the social contract in Egypt before and after the uprisings, this study adopts a grounded approach, i.e. it conducts a micro-level analysis focusing on people's *perceptions and voices* to understand how the changes in the social contract affected their lives over time. Perceptions matter for the study of social contracts in MENA region for several reasons. First, perceptions are important as they affect people's actions. 'What motivates individuals to *act* depends on the environment in which they live and on its *perception*' (Bavetta, Donni and Marino, 2017, p.1[emphasis added]). Secondly, perceptions are important to reveal any existing gaps between objective macro-level indicators and micro-level experiences. This gap is important as it can fuel public protests and further undermine state's legitimacy thus jeopardizing long-term political stability. Tracking poverty and inequality trends in MENA, Rapanos (2017, p.16) concludes that 'inequalities, as measured by the Gini index, were not very large, and were reduced, even a little, in the last 30 years'. In Egypt, for example, 'according to both official government figures and the World Bank, the Gini coefficient has been declining throughout the last decade from 36.1 percent in 2000 to 30.7percent in 2009. ...And the 2009 inequality figure of 30.7 percent is also a very low figure by regional and international standards' (Verme et al., 2014, p.1). It is important to note, however, that most of the Gini coefficients in the MENA region are based on consumption data, not income, and hence are not considered accurate reflections of *real* inequality.

Thus, while these macro-studies might point out a decline in income inequality prior to the 2011 uprising in Egypt, *perceived*

inequality has in fact risen. Drawing on subjective wellbeing data, studies (Arampatzi et al., 2015; Ianchovichina et al., 2015; Devarajan & Mottaghi, 2015) point out rises in social discontent and perceived inequality prior to the Arab Spring uprisings which were *not* captured in expenditure and consumption data or household surveys. 'Neither growth rates nor absolute levels of income inequality can account for popular movements to overthrow incumbent dictators. Rather, *perceptions* of socioeconomic trends in the context of evolving political economies were at the root of mass protests' (Cammatt et al., 2013, p. 409 [emphasis in original]). Given the importance of perceptions and their influence on people's actions, several studies (Brunori, 2017; Cruces et al., 2013) sought to explore the nature and determinants of these perceived inequalities.

Third, perceptions are significant as they affect state legitimacy. Loewe et al. (2020) view the social contract as an agreement between social groups on the one hand and the government on the other. This agreement regulates state-society relations and outlines the rights and obligations of each party towards the other. The 'continuation' or 'rupture' in these relations and the renegotiation of a new social contract thus depend on each party's *perception* whether the other parties are fulfilling their obligations in the social contract or not. At times of political turmoil, such as the Egyptian uprisings, state-society relations underwent rapid changes when different social groups *felt* that the state no longer fulfilled its obligations (at least in providing bread, freedom and social justice). These deepening public grievances 'are also likely to be connected to changes in the *inequality of opportunities* rather than to only the inequality of incomes *per se*' (Cammatt et al., 2013, p. 427 [emphasis in original]). That is why the articulation of people's perceptions is crucial to examine the impact of the political uprisings on state-society relations and on the social contract over time.

Paradoxically, the uprisings started in Tunisia and Egypt – the two countries with the highest economic growth rates and stable macro-economic environment in the region. Egypt witnessed a prolonged growth phase with sustained growth rates around 5 percent peaking to 7 percent between 2006 and 2008 (Verme et al., 2014). Despite this sustained economic growth, absolute poverty in Egypt has drastically increased and household welfare declined in real terms as growth failed to trickle down to the lower income quintiles (Verme et al., 2014). It is therefore evident that macro-level data on poverty and inequality alone cannot explain public discontent. It is therefore imperative to look *beyond* these macro-level indicators and to understand how this growth was *experienced* by deprived communities. Exploring perceptions is therefore essential as there is an 'apparent mismatch between income inequality measured by Household Income Expenditure and Consumption Surveys (HIECS 2000, 2005, 2009) and the perception of income inequality measured by the World Value Surveys (WVSs 2000, 2008)' (Verme et al., 2014, p. 5).

This study thus aims to contribute to the literature on social contracts in three main ways. First, it demonstrates the *dynamic* nature of the social contract and its changes over time. Second, it explains how the social contract and 'its deliverables' are *perceived and experienced* by deprived communities. Third, it explores how the changes in the social contract over time are affecting *different domains of people's wellbeing*. The next section briefly explains the features of Egypt's social contract and the manifestations of its failure.

### 3. Egypt's failed social contract

#### 3.1. Features of Egypt's social contract

This section aims to provide the empirical background and contextualisation of our micro-level study. It identifies the features of

the dominant social contract in Egypt under Nasser and Sadat. It then shows how the social contract under Mubarak failed to deliver adequate educational and health services, to pursue suitable labour market policies and to address the inefficiencies in the subsidy system. The data shows how this social contract was based on a trade-off of political rights for socio-economic benefits and how the state's failure to provide the latter led to growing calls for the former.

Post-independence, the dominant type of the social contract in Egypt was the authoritarian bargain (Yousef, 2004; Richards and Waterbury, 1996) whereby the state provides social welfare while limiting the mobilisation spaces for political participation. As demonstrated by Hinnebusch (2020), this social contract is characterised by 'an implicit exchange between the regime and the populace: citizens would remain quiescent as long as the regime provided them with benefits including secure jobs, social services, subsidised housing, and consumer goods' (Cook and Dimitrov, 2017, p. 8). From the 1950s, the MENA region was dominated by such authoritarian social contracts focusing mainly on free schooling, healthcare, subsidies and public employment (Karshenas et al., 2014). In Egypt, this populist authoritarian social contract was initiated by Nasser through a series of redistributive policies, esp. land reforms and secure public employment (Pripstein Posusney, 1997). Under Sadat, the same social contract persisted despite the political opening during his rule. He opted, however, for *infitah* – open door – policy thus paving the way for the gradual rolling back of the state and the rise of a new bourgeoisie class that further alienated the poor (Waterbury, 1991; Ehteshami and Murphy, 1996). Under Mubarak, 'from the early 1980s, however, cracks appeared in the form of unsustainable budgetary and balance-of-payments imbalances' (Karshenas et al., 2014, p. 727). Sustaining the main tenets of the social contract, such as free education and health care, subsidies (esp. on food and fuel) and secure public employment, was therefore difficult thus leading to a legitimacy crisis and a gradual failure of the social contract under Mubarak's regime – as the next section demonstrates.

#### 3.2. Manifestations of a failed social contract

This section emphasizes the decline of the original post-independence social contract and demonstrates the growing failure of the state under Mubarak to deliver on its promises, esp. the provision of quality public services (e.g. health and education), employment and subsidies. The deterioration in the quality of public services, especially education and health, was a clear manifestation of the failed social contract prior to the January uprising.

Free education was a vital component of the populist social contract and a catalyst for social mobility in the 1950s and 60s. In the 1980s, however, the quality and equity of the education system sharply deteriorated. More than 70% of Egyptian families resorted to private tutoring; which most poorer families could not afford (Dang and Halsey, 2008; Devarajan & Mottaghi, 2015). The returns on education continued to decline and the contribution of education to social mobility remained minimal (Assaad, 2010; Salehi-Isfahani et al., 2009). Education also failed to solve the unemployment problem due to the neglect of employability skills and the mismatch between these skills and graduate training (Karshenas et al., 2014). As a result, unemployment among youth (15–29 years) holding university degrees accounted for 44% of total unemployment (according to CAPMAS (2018) data in October 2015). It is therefore unsurprising that this group of frustrated *educated* youth actively participated in the January 2011 uprising.

The deterioration of health care services was also evident in the high rates of doctors' absenteeism – reaching 20–30 percent – in public health clinics (Brixi et al., 2015; Devarajan & Mottaghi, 2015). The public discontent with the quality of health care

services was summed up by a woman stating that 'you can go to the private clinic and lose your money, or go to the public clinic and lose your life' (World Bank, 2013, p.35). One of the reasons for the sharp deterioration in the quality of health care is the erosion of accountability in public services (World Bank, 2003; Brixi et al., 2015; Devarajan & Mottaghi, 2015). That is why citizens resorted to informal networks and out-of-pocket payments to access better services. However, these 'temporary' strategies failed to improve the quality of public institutions or to reform them.

The deterioration of health and educational services had major implications on social mobility and social justice in Egypt (Salehi-Isfahani et al., 2012). To address this problem, the approved Egyptian constitution in 2014 committed the government to spend at least 3 percent of GDP on health care, 4 percent on primary education and 2 percent on higher education. Increasing government spending on health and education, however, does *not* automatically lead to an improvement in the quality of these services (as our analysis will show) given the misallocation of these funds (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Mares, 2003; Cammett et al., 2013). It is also questionable whether the state will honour these pledges; especially given the growing pressures on its budget.

Another manifestation of the failed social contract under Mubarak is the badly targeted and inefficient subsidy system, especially for food and fuel ones. These subsidies constitute 25 percent of state budget. Energy subsidies constituted 41 percent of government spending in 2011. However, the system is marked by inefficiencies and bad targeting; with almost 46% of petroleum subsidies reaching the top quintile in 2008 (Abouleinen et al., 2009; Cammett et al., 2013). The importance of 'bread' was particularly highlighted in the January 2011 uprising's slogan; which used the term to symbolise basic needs. 'It is argued that the right to (subsidized) bread forms part of Egypt's moral economy, according to which bread should be available and affordable to everyone' (Frerichs, 2016, p.611). The political importance and sensitivity of the food subsidies, esp. bread, was also evident in 1977 when Sadat sought to reduce them, but soon had to reinstate them because of major food riots.

These subsidies are a crucial component of the 'authoritarian bargain' as they are 'political giveaways' (Waterbury, 1983) and 'essentially charities bestowed upon a compliant population' (Karshenas et al., 2014, p.728). However, with the increased financial constraints on state budget and the deepening economic crisis after the uprisings, since July 2014 the Egyptian government started to cut fuel subsidies and increase energy prices. Nevertheless, in the 2017/18 fiscal year, the subsidy bill still accounted for \$18.23 billion. With the signing of the IMF \$12 billion three-year agreement in 2016, however, further cuts to subsidies were introduced thus leading to further 'cracks' in the social contract, esp. as the rise in food and energy prices directly affected the ability of poor people to meet their basic needs (Arampatzi et al., 2015).

Since Nasser's era, public employment has been another important feature of the Egyptian populist social contract. However, with the inefficient and the 'inflated' public sector, the state could no longer keep this promise. Fresh graduates nowadays no longer enjoy the guaranteed state employment as their counterparts in the 1950 s and 60 s. By 2009, the percentage of the labour force working for the state declined from 40% to 25%. The private sector, however, failed to create enough jobs to absorb this growing demand for jobs (Malik and Awadallah, 2013). Personal connections – known as *wasta* – play a crucial role in accessing jobs thus further undermining social justice (Cammett and Diwan, 2013; Arampatzi et al., 2015). Without secure public jobs, educated young graduates from poorer backgrounds are forced to accept low-quality jobs in the informal sector with little or no access to social or health insurance (Chamlou, 2013).

### 3.3. Implications of a failed social contract

While the state no longer delivered on its promised social contract (esp. its socio-economic benefits), it was nevertheless reluctant to allow wider political participation. As a result, calls for wider political freedoms and civil rights increased, esp. with the rise of movements such as *Kefaya* and 6 April in the early 2000 s. Unlike other regions, however, in MENA 'autocratic rulers did not open up the political space in order to reduce social pressures stemming from the decline in economic resources' (Cammett et al., 2013, p. 418). The failure of the populist social contract was *not* accompanied by an opening in the political space; thus further increasing public discontent under the Mubarak regime leading up to the January 2011 uprising.

Nevertheless, recognising the failure of the existing social contract, the state claimed the need for a new one (UNDP, 2008). For example, Egypt's Human Development Report (UNDP, 2005) explicitly entitled '*Choosing our Future: Towards a New Social Contract*' stressed the need to reshape state-society relations in light of a new more inclusive and fair social contract. A new initiative – the Social Contract Centre (SCC) – was jointly established by UNDP and the Egyptian cabinet – to 'follow up and guarantee the efficient and timely implementation of the vision recommended in the report and to build consensus on the social contract objectives' (SCC (2018) website). The principles of this new social contract – 'equality, participation and accountability' – highlighted in the SCC's mission statement; stressed the need for an integrated developmental rights-based program. Such initiatives, however, merely paid lip service to appease the public rather than presenting any genuine attempt to reconfigure the failed social contract.

This analysis has so far shown how the growing public discontent was fuelled by the deep intertwined economic and political grievances; and more importantly by 'the *perceived* rise in inequalities and lack of social justice, a perception that had been mounting as a result of the rollback of the state and economic liberalization characterized by cronyism' (Cammett et al., 2013, p.413[emphasis added]). The next section briefly explains the research methodology before presenting the main findings of the study.

### 4. Research methodology: Why a longitudinal study?

The article builds on a unique longitudinal primary data set collected in Egypt in 2006 and in 2015. An extensive questionnaire covering general, material and social wellbeing domains was conducted with the *same* individuals over a ten-year period. It was administered in two – rural and urban – communities: (1) Manshiet Nasser and (2) rural villages in Menia (Upper Egypt). These two fieldwork sites were selected to allow for rural–urban comparisons of wellbeing perceptions and aspirations over time. Rural Upper Egypt has consistently had the highest prevalence of income poverty – 43.7% in 2010 (UNDP, 2010). Manshiet Nasser was selected as in 2006 it was the poorest urban district in Egypt (UNDP, 2003) and ranked 24th in the world's largest mega slums (Davies, 2006).

Using purposive sampling, 80 respondents each answered 103 open-ended questions in the first wave of data collection. In this wave, respondents were selected based on two stratification criteria: age and gender to allow for an intergenerational and inter-gender comparative analysis of wellbeing perceptions. In the second wave of data collection, the *same* respondents were targeted to allow for data comparability over time. Out of the 80 questionnaires conducted in 2006, 45 respondents agreed to be re-interviewed in 2015. To present a comparative analysis of the *same* individuals and their perceptions and experiences over time, the responses in the data analysis tables in this study are mainly based



on these 45 respondents who were followed over the 10-year period. This comparative analysis thus allows us to understand the impact that the political changes has had on them over time. The time period was chosen to reflect the changes that occurred in their lives before and after the 2011 uprisings.

As for the sample composition, to reflect an existing bias in the Egyptian population and to enhance the sample representativeness, the sample was slightly biased towards women (with 24 female and 21 male respondents) and towards younger respondents compared to those from older age groups (40+). The sample was also equally divided between both locations (Manshiet Nasser and Menia). Given the rich and uniqueness of these qualitative datasets, the aim of the study was to track the perceptions of the same individuals over time and to examine how the political changes affected their wellbeing, aspirations and problems and to explore how they perceive the political changes post-2011.

Each questionnaire included 103 open-ended questions covering general, material, social and mental domains of human wellbeing. The second wave of data collection included additional direct questions on the impact of the political changes on poor people's lives and their relationship with the state. Data was analysed using open coding. This paper focuses mainly on three main sections of the dataset: (1) the main elements of a good life that people value, (2) their (unfulfilled) aspirations and (3) their main problems.

Given the length of the questionnaire, the qualitative nature of the study and the difficulty in finding the same individuals after 10 years, the sample size had to remain relatively small. This, however, turned out to be advantageous in several ways. First, the small sample size allowed the researcher to *build a rapport* with each respondent over 10 years thus helping them to open up and answer sensitive questions on their perceptions of the political changes – which large surveys are usually unable to address. Second, to ensure the generalisability of the data and for triangulation purposes, the articulated voices were also *complemented with other data sources* from recent Egypt census data 2017, World Values Surveys, SDG indicators and Afrobarometer data. Third, the sample size was also compensated with the *richness of the data set* which covers different domains of wellbeing in the 103 open-ended questions. The study thus adopts a qualitative research methodology which allows for an in-depth analysis of wellbeing perceptions and sheds new lights into the experiences of ordinary Egyptians before and after the 2011 era.

The novelty of this methodology and its contributions are four-fold. First, it is a longitudinal study that took place over ten years thus presenting a *dynamic* picture of the changes in wellbeing perceptions and aspirations over time. Second, the two waves of data collection (2006–2015) took place before *and* after the uprisings thus allowing us to carefully examine the impact of the political changes on the respondents in a rapidly changing political context. Third, it tracks the *same* individuals over 10 years thus allowing for the comparability of the results over time. Finally, the study not only compares the respondents' wellbeing perceptions and aspirations over time; but also compares their experiences across locations (rural and urban) and gender groups thus providing a more nuanced analysis of the impact that the political changes have had on different social groups as the next section will reveal.

The next section presents the data analysis and research findings. It tracks the respondents' perceptions over time and explains how they view the changes in state-society relations and in the social contract during this period of rapid political change in Egypt.

## 5. The dynamics of the social contract: How the uprisings affected the poor

As the social contract continued to 'crack' under Mubarak's regime, the January 2011 protests erupted calling for a new social

contract focusing on 'bread, freedom and social justice'. From 2011 until 2013, the political transition period and Muslim Brotherhood's rule were marked by high levels of uncertainty, growing terrorist threats, stagnant growth rates and deepening economic crises. Since 2013, however, the Sisi regime – backed by the army – has taken over power legitimising its rule mainly through large-scale infrastructural projects (such as the 'new Suez Canal') and using populist discourse to justify its crackdown on political freedoms. The regime implicitly imposed a revised authoritarian bargain in which it promised to provide stability and security in lieu of socio-economic and political rights. It was therefore able to implement new unpopular policies which would not have been possible under Mubarak, such as the gradual removal of fuel subsidies and the devaluation of the Egyptian pound. These policies led to unprecedented inflation rates reaching 23.2% in 2016 compared to 9% in 2011 ([Central Bank of Egypt database, 2018](#)). As a result, the prevalence of income poverty reached 27.8% in 2015 ([UNICEF, 2017](#)), with extreme multidimensional poverty averaging 11.9%; reaching 18% in Upper Egypt ([ENID, \(2015\)](#)).

Since deprived communities were so deeply hit by these political changes, it was important to articulate their voices to understand how the uprisings affected *their* wellbeing and to explore how these communities perceived the aforementioned changes in the social contract. The next sections present the main research findings.

### 5.1. Tracking wellbeing perceptions – The primacy of political stability

What impact have the uprisings had on deprived communities and how did their wellbeing perceptions change over time? To answer this question, this section articulates the respondents' perceptions of the 'good life' and compares them across location and gender groups. It shows that while the *same* main elements of a good life were valued over time (income, jobs and housing), the political uprisings led to shifts in wellbeing priorities emphasizing the importance of political stability, increasing the feelings of insecurity (e.g. about children's future) and undermining the importance of faith, especially in urban areas.

Respondents in our sample were asked not only to identify their valued 'elements of a good life' but also to rank these wellbeing domains in order of priority. [Table 1](#) – below – compares these wellbeing perceptions over time. It compares the answers to the question '*what do you think are the three most important elements of a good life? Which of those three is the most important one?*' The responses were categorized through open-coding and then ranked in order of frequency (i.e. how frequently this dimension occurred in the responses). All the tables in this section were composed in

**Table 1**  
Elements of a Good Life Valued in 2006 and 2015.

Elements of a Good Life valued in 2006	Elements of a Good Life valued in 2015
1.Income	1.Income
2.Jobs	2.Jobs
Housing	
3.Faith	3.Housing
Family	Political Stability and Security
	Social Relations
	Peace of Mind
4.Peace of mind	4.Education
5.Social Relations	4.Family
Good Personality Traits	Good Personality Traits
	Faith
6.Children's needs	6.Children's needs
	Health
7.Health	7.Transportation
8.Education	

this way. For example, in both periods, 'income' was mentioned 27 times as an element of a good life; followed by 'jobs' mentioned 17 times in 2015 compared to 13 times in 2006. Other elements such as faith and family ranked higher in 2006 (mentioned 11 times) compared to only 7 times in 2015. For the first time, in 2015 elements like 'country stability and security' appeared 9 times in the responses. Whilst education was only mentioned 3 times in 2006, it was included in 8 responses in 2015. It is important to note that these findings seek to track the *changes* in wellbeing valuations among this group of individuals *over time*. That is why, the 'statistical' significance of these numbers was not tested; as the main aim is to highlight these changes rather than to generalise the findings from this relatively small sample. The findings reveal how the political changes affected *these* individuals and their wellbeing perceptions over time.

Table 1 thus reveals the following findings. First, the *same* wellbeing priorities persisted over time; with (1) income; (2) jobs; and (3) housing topping the list. These results are *not* surprising, given the dire economic recession that Egypt has suffered from after 2011. Respondents identified income generation as their most valued wellbeing domain reflecting the difficulty in making ends meet, in educating their children and in saving to get married. This is mainly due to the sharp reduction in per capita income which started since 2005 when real per capita income decreased by 8.7%, with the sharpest decline in urban areas (Verme et al., 2014). Employment ranked second in the valued wellbeing domains given the scarcity of jobs during the post-2011 dire economic crisis. During this period, unemployment among youth (15–24 years old) soared from 28.7% in 2010 to 34.4% in 2017 (World Bank open database, 2018). Housing was another priority domain, especially in MN because of Egypt's rapid urbanisation problem resulting in the lack of low-income and social housing. To address this problem, 'the housing ministry has estimated that 500,000 new homes need to be built every year for five years to keep pace with the expanding population and to address the estimated backlog of 3 million housing units' (Gonim and Abougabal, 2016, p.1). It is important to note the interlinked nature of these domains, e.g. without jobs and available income generation opportunities, it is hard to afford basic needs, such as adequate housing.

Second, in addition to the persistence of the *same* wellbeing priorities (income, jobs and housing) over time, the importance of other domains has shifted; some were undermined (e.g. faith); while others became more significant (e.g. education and political stability). In 2006, faith was ranked as a core wellbeing domain; however, in 2015 its importance fell sharply. This could be mainly due to the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as one respondent explained 'the MB mixed politics and religion; when politics is such a dirty game'. Another one added: 'I can no longer trust our Sheikhs whom we have known for years' - thus indicating the growing public scepticism towards faith more generally. Drawing on World Value Survey data, Diwan (2016) also noted this sharp decline in support for political Islam from 81% in 2000 to 55% in 2008; indicating this gradual discrediting of religious groups even before the January uprisings. In contrast, however, despite the decline in the returns on education (Assaad, 2010), its importance has significantly increased over time. Respondents pointed out its instrumental importance for employment and social mobility.

The most significant finding, however, is that after the uprisings, respondents in our sample identified - *for the first time* - political stability as a crucial wellbeing domain. Whilst in 2006, Mubarak maintained political stability through electoral authoritarianism and distributive politics (Blaydes, 2010; Koehler, 2018), the post-2011 period was marked by political turmoil and insecurity. This could mean that people were prone to accept a social contract in which the regime delivers security in exchange for ceding

socio-economic and political rights. Respondents identified several political factors that are important for their wellbeing (which could be items that a new social contract would cover); such as respect for rights and responsibilities, having a capable president and loyalty to the country. This finding is particularly important as it reveals the newly shaped state-society relations in which citizens demanded a new social contract that delivers jobs, housing and education but above all security and political stability.

To compare wellbeing perceptions across location, the responses were coded, counted and categorised separately for each fieldwork site. Comparing these perceptions across location, one notes four main trends. First, the importance of jobs has increased significantly in Manshiet Nasser, thus reflecting the growing pressures of job scarcity on the urban poor. Its importance also increased in Menia villages - indicating the stagnant economy in rural Upper Egypt. Second, in contrast to jobs that almost doubled in importance, the importance of 'faith' plummeted in Manshiet Nasser - again reflecting the overall trend in the sample that faith has been discredited after the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood. Third, again reflecting the same trends in the sample, education as a means of improving wellbeing increased in importance in both locations in 2015; although in 2006 it did not feature *at all* in Menia as an element of a good life. Nevertheless, the importance of education remained much higher among respondents in Manshiet Nasser than Menia; indicating why the highest levels of frustration in Egypt was among the *educated urban* youth who led the 2011 uprising. Despite the growing frustration among the educated youth, it seems that education was *still* valued as an essential element of a good life - mainly for intrinsic reasons and other instrumental reasons such as social status. Fourth, another important contrast between rural and urban contexts in 2015 is the significance of political stability mainly in urban areas. It ranked 3rd in the valued elements of a good life in Manshiet Nasser, but was not mentioned by the respondents in Menia. These results confirm the urban nature of the Arab Spring uprisings and demonstrate how the political 'uncertainties' of these uprisings were mainly felt and feared by the urban poor.

In sum, the *same* wellbeing domains were valued in both sites; however, at varied degrees. Income and jobs were the main wellbeing priorities in rural and urban contexts. However, housing remained an ongoing challenge in Manshiet Nasser; as one of the largest slum areas in Cairo. After the rockslide in Manshiet Nasser in 2008, which left 119 people dead, the state accelerated the Suzanne Mubarak Public Housing project to relocate some inhabitants from Manshiet Nasser to safer housing units. Sisi's regime also focused on new housing projects, such as the new administrative capital and El Asmarat housing projects, in addition to promising the construction of a million units of affordable housing (Rutherford, 2018). In the new social contract, it is thus evident that the state needs to prioritise jobs, housing and education as crucial valued wellbeing domains.

Across gender groups, whilst the valuation of wellbeing domains differed; both groups were concerned with insecurity and instability. This explains why the revised post-2013 pact could have been largely accepted. Women were concerned with the insecurity of their children's future, especially their educational needs; while men prioritised employment, political stability and national security. Interestingly; the latter blamed the uprisings for their job losses and the stagnant economy. An informal worker in Manshiet Nasser explained how he lost his job after January 2011 stating 'the 25 January revolution made me stay at home for a year. I have accumulated a lot of debt and this caused me many problems. My fiancé left me'. Prioritising political stability and blaming the uprisings for the economic and political uncertainty explains why people prioritised political stability over other wellbeing domains. It thus reinforces the possibility that they accept the

proposed new social contract based on security in return for obedience.

## 5.2. Unfulfilled aspirations – The same frustrations persist

After tracking the wellbeing perceptions over time and comparing them across locations and gender groups, this section explores the changes in people's unfulfilled aspirations over time. Aspirations are important for the social contract as they are directly linked to societal expectations from the state. Were the aspirations of the millions who took on the streets calling for social justice fulfilled? The study reveals the failure to address people's rising expectations after the uprisings. This was evident in the persistence of the *same* unfulfilled aspirations in employment and education over time.

Table 2 - below - presents interesting but shocking findings. First, the *same unfulfilled aspirations of our respondents persisted over time*. Two aspirations were particularly important and remained unfulfilled, namely education and employment. This finding is extremely important for our study of the social contract for two main reasons. First, the provision of job opportunities and good quality education are core 'responsibilities' of the state under the social contract. The failure to fulfil these aspirations and their persistence over time thus demonstrates the failure of the Egyptian state to fulfil these obligations. A young man from Menia explained that 'the situation in the country did not improve so far as I am still unable to find a job'. Second, this finding has deep implications for any new social contract. The unfulfilled aspirations in the education and employment domains limit the possibilities of social mobility; thus planting the seeds for growing public dissent and political instability in the future.

In addition to employment and education, other unfulfilled aspirations included the difficulty in fulfilling children's needs, in building a family and in finding adequate housing. These aspirations are crucial as they prolong the wait-hood period, esp. for youth (Honwana, 2012; Herrera, 2012). They can also explain the wide youth participation in the January 2011 uprising (Sika, 2012; Tohamy, 2016). Consistent with previous findings on wellbeing domains, in 2015 respondents pointed out the failure to meet their children's needs as one of their 'top' unfulfilled aspirations explaining that this is mainly due to increased political instability, deteriorating educational services and rising inflation. This not only limited the ability of deprived communities to fulfil their aspirations; but also affected their children's aspirations thus leading to an intergenerational transmission of aspirations failure (Ibrahim, 2011a). These findings also confirm the *profound* adverse effects of the political changes on deprived communities and

explain why some parents highly value political stability – as a core element of the social contract.

Comparing the unfulfilled aspirations across gender and over time, one notes the increased vulnerability of urban women and their growing concern for their children's future. Tables 3 and 4 - below - compares these unfulfilled aspirations over time. In 2015, men's main unfulfilled aspirations were lack of jobs and failed educational aspirations and these *persisted* over time. This indicates that the Arab Spring has failed to address these aspirations, especially among the youth. Women's unfulfilled aspirations were more varied than men's as they included - in addition to unemployment and failed educational aspirations – the failure to meet children's needs and the inability to generate income. The data is consistent with the findings in the next section on 'main problems' as 'the failure to meet children's needs' ranked 2nd among women's main problems in 2015.

Thus, in 2015, both gender groups identified education and employment as their two main unfulfilled aspirations. However, a deeper sense of insecurity and frustration was expressed by urban women as one female respondent explained: 'my husband left us when he could no longer pay our expenses. He left me with the kids. He could not find a job or any income; so he decided to leave'. This demonstrates the increased vulnerability of urban women after the uprisings due to the rising costs of living in Cairo and the commodification of basic services, as well as the growing numbers of those who became food insecure in Greater Cairo (accounting for 3.5 million) in 2011. 'Food security which was previously perceived as a rural issue in Egypt, is becoming a rising concern for urban areas as well' (WFP, 2013, p.10). In addition, political instability, protests and terrorist attacks mainly hit the urban poor; since rural villages remained comparatively securer - with almost all terrorist attacks taking place in urban areas.

It is also essential to compare the unfulfilled aspirations in rural and urban contexts (as illustrated in Tables 5 and 6). A remarkable finding in 2015 is that the top three unfulfilled aspirations for both locations are not only the *same*, but also in the *same order of importance*: (1) jobs, (2) education and (3) failure to meet children's needs. This finding indicates a clear stagnation in the realisation of these aspirations despite the political changes. These unfulfilled aspirations remained big challenges for the urban and rural poor alike. Despite these similarities, one can identify three key differences in the aspirations' trends in rural and urban settings over time. First, the frustration from the unfulfilled employment aspirations was much higher in Manshiet Nasser compared to Menia. Similarly, more respondents in Manshiet Nasser reported their

**Table 2**  
Main Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2006 and 2015.

Ranking	Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2006	Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2015
1.	Education	Jobs
2.	Jobs	Education
3.	Housing	Children's needs
4.	Marriage	Income
5.	Income	Housing
6.	Children's needs	Fulfilling religious duties
7.	Travel	Self-development
8.	Fulfilling Religious Duties	Peace of mind
	Playing a Social/Political Role	
	Having Good Social Relations	
9.		Political Stability
		Living in a better area
		Travel
		Buying consumer goods

**Table 3**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2015 - by Gender.

Ranking	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified by <b>men</b>	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified by <b>women</b>
1.	Education	Jobs
2.	Jobs	Children's needs
3.	Fulfilling Religious Duties	Education
	Meeting Children's needs	Income
	Housing	
	Marriage	
4.	Self-development	Housing
	Peace of mind	
	Income	
	Area	
	Travel	
5.		Marriage
6.		Fulfilling Religious Duties
		Self-development
7.		Peace of mind

Source: Author.

**Table 4**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2006 - by Gender.

Ranking	Unfulfilled aspirations identified by <b>men</b>	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified by <b>women</b>
1.	Education	Education
2.	Jobs	Housing
3.	Income	Children's needs
4.	Marriage	Jobs
	Travel	Marriage
	Housing	
	Religious Duties	
	Social/Political Role	
5.	Good Social Relations	Income
6.	Meeting children's needs	Social Relations

Source: Author.

**Table 5**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2015- by Location.

Ranking	Main Problems identified in <b>Manshiet Nasser</b>	Main Problems identified in <b>Menia</b>
1.	Jobs	Jobs
2.	Education	Education
3.	Children's needs	Children's needs
4.	Housing	Income
5.	Income	Marriage
6.	Fulfilling Religious Duties	
	Self-development	Self-development
	Area	
7.	Travel	Peace of mind
		Fulfilling Religious Duties
		Consumer Goods

Source: Author.

**Table 6**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2006- by Location.

Ranking	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified in <b>Manshiet Nasser</b>	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified in <b>Menia</b>
1.	Education	Jobs
2.	Jobs	Education
3.	Housing	Marriage
4.	Children's needs	Income
		Housing
5.	Income	Children's needs
6.	Marriage	Travel
	Travel	Fulfilling religious duties
	Social Relations	
	Political/Social Role	
7.	Fulfilling religious duties	

Source: Author.

frustration in educational aspirations than in Menia. This confirms the previous findings that there is the growing frustration in urban areas; especially among the educated youth. In addition to jobs and education, - as expected - housing was also highly ranked as an important unfulfilled aspiration among the respondents in MN. This confirms similar findings in the next section on 'main problems'. Thus, comparing unfulfilled aspirations across both locations in 2006 and 2015, the results showed how respondents in *both* sites became *more* concerned with meeting their children's needs than before. This demonstrates the profound impact of political instability on the poor's lives which rendered them highly vulnerable and uncertain about their children's future.

Thus across both sites, the *same unfulfilled aspirations persisted over time*, namely: (1) jobs; (2) education and (3) difficulty in

meeting children's needs. This similarity demonstrates how the political changes affected deprived communities in a comparable manner and how political instability led to deepened frustration and inability to fulfil children's needs, especially in urban areas. The same findings were also evident when respondents identified their main problems - as the next section reveals.

### 5.3. Main problems - The most vulnerable are worse off

Like the findings on aspirations; the study shows how the *same* problems persisted over time and how respondents were highly concerned with the limited income and employment opportunities, their children's uncertain future and the growing political instability. These findings highlight yet again the need for the social contract to address these persistent problems. They can also explain why these communities might have accepted the shift from the provision pact to the protection pact under the Sisi regime (Rutherford, 2018).

Table 7 indicates the main problems that respondents identified and ranks them in order of priority and frequency. It shows how the *same* problems persisted over time. As Devarajan and Mottaghi (2015, p.16) explain 'the aftermath of the Arab Spring has been so turbulent, and in some cases so violent, that the underlying problems remain'. This was confirmed by an elderly woman in Menia indicating that 'there have been only minor changes, but the same old problems persist'. Table 7 also shows that limited income generation and employment opportunities as well as family problems were the most urgent problems over time. Respondents were also concerned with their children's education and their inability to marry their children off. Increased uncertainty and political instability and growing concerns for children's future were also among the main problems identified in 2015 given that this period was marked by repeated bombings and terrorist attacks. The poor quality of government services was also identified as a main problem indicating the deterioration in service quality, as explained earlier. These findings have serious implications for the social contract as they manifest the state's inability to address these problems over such an extended period of time. The absence of a 'workable' social contract that addresses these demands thus deepens the suffering of deprived communities leaving the most vulnerable even *worse off* after the uprisings.

Confirming previous findings on unfulfilled aspirations, men in our sample identified lack of income and jobs as well as poor service quality and increased political instability as their main problems; whilst women again emphasized their concern for their

**Table 7**  
Main Problems in 2006 and 2015.

Ranking	Main Problems in <b>2006</b>	Main Problems in <b>2015</b>
1.	Lack of Income	Lack of Income
2.	Lack of Jobs	Lack of Jobs
3.	Family problems	Family problems
	Bad social relations	Insecure Children's future
4.	Insecure Children's future	Bad Government services
5.	Bad Government services	Political Instability
6.	Bad Education	Bad Social relations
	Housing	
7.	Inability to get married	Lack of Peace of mind
	Personality problems	
8.	Health	Health problems
	Area	Housing problems
9.		Inability to get married
10.		Lack of Faith
		Bad area

Source: Author.



children's future. Across sites, the same problems were identified focusing mainly on income generation and employment. However, respondents in Manshiet Nasser pointed out the deteriorating quality of government services and the persistent housing problem – given the informal nature of their area. In Menia, however, participants were concerned with their children's future and the limited job opportunities available to them; which were mostly insecure or dangerous ones in the quarries. The persistence of the same unfulfilled aspirations and problems over time thus shows how the post-2013 social contract failed the poor and increased their vulnerability. It also shows the urgent need for a more inclusive social contract focusing mainly on generating more opportunities for income generation and employment. The next section examines the changes in state-society relations over time and explains how the respondents perceived the political changes after 2011.

#### 5.4. Changes in the social contract – How the poor perceive state-society relations

How did the changes in the social contract affect state-society relations and how are these political changes perceived? *'The positive impact of these political changes is yet to be seen'* – this is how an elderly man from Manshiet Nasser answered this question. The articulated voices reveal the paradoxical impacts of the uprisings and how they altered state-society relations in the economic, social and political domains.

##### 5.4.1. The deepening economic crisis hitting the poor the most

In the economic domain, the voices revealed deep disappointment with the current social contract due to the continuous state failure to fulfil the demands for 'bread and social justice'. This is mainly due to rising inflation, high unemployment rates and the deterioration in the quality of public services such as health, education and social security provision.

Inflation is the most pressing problem, especially for the urban poor and for pensioners due to the rise in food prices. Rising food prices hit the poor the most. A recent World Food Programme report (2017, p.1) indicates that 'of households surveyed who faced shocks affecting their economic situation in the past two years, 74.7 percent noted rising food prices as the main shock'. Our micro-study confirms these results. A woman in Manshiet Nasser stated that 'meat is so expensive nowadays. We can no longer afford it'. Another added that 'the value of our money decreases ... How can we make ends meet?' Increased food and fuel prices hit poor households, especially those with unstable incomes. Although rising inflation was already noticeable during the last years of Mubarak's rule (Ibrahim, 2011b), it is interesting to note that many respondents blamed the uprisings for rising inflation. One elderly woman in Menia said 'the prices increased due to the economic crisis that was caused by the uprisings'. This indicates how public perceptions tend to link the growing economic hardship and increased costs of living with the uprisings; rather than with the state's failure to fulfil its responsibilities or to adhere to its promises in the social contract. Others viewed this inflation as a deliberate state strategy to control the population leaving them thriving to make ends meet. Remarkably, the fieldwork for this study took place *before* the devaluation of the Egyptian pound in November 2016. It is thus expected that the latter led to another increase in prices thus *further* deepening the effects of inflation on deprived communities.

Unemployment hit the urban poor and youth in our sample the most. This was evident in the case of an elderly female respondent and her husband in MN who both lost their jobs after 2011 but could not find new ones. Nevertheless, post-2011 there was an increase in government jobs and soaring wage bills 'reflecting the greater willingness of post-revolutionary governments to respond

to demands for improved conditions among the vocal and better organized public sector workers' (Assaad and Krafft, 2013). One can thus note that some elements of the old populist social contract were briefly introduced post-2011 to control public dissent among public sector workers. Nevertheless, the dire economic crisis after the uprisings adversely affected deprived communities, esp. urban women and informal workers. This also explains why jobs topped the list of unfulfilled aspirations over the ten-year period of this study – indicating the failure to enact a social contract that can boost economic growth and job creation for the most deprived communities.

Exploring the impact of the uprisings on public services, participants pointed out some improvements in infrastructure, such as improved sewage and water systems, the building of a new schools' complex and hospital in Manshiet Nasser as well as a new preparatory school and a renovated health care centre in one of Menia's villages. This enhanced access to public services, however, did *not* lead to improved *quality*. Respondents in MN, for example, explained how the new Sheikh Zayed hospital was well-equipped but complained about the rise in out-of-pocket health expenditures and the lack of doctors' training. In Menia, health care centres were renovated but the quality of their services remained unsatisfactory. This growing dissatisfaction was also evident in the Arabbarometer data. When asked about the current government's performance in improving health care services 45.8 percent evaluated this performance as 'very bad' in 2013 compared to 21.6% in 2011 (Arabbarometer online dataset, round 2&3). Dissatisfaction with the quality of public health services has thus doubled between 2011 and 2013 indicating the failure to fulfil another crucial element of the social contract.

Finally, social security provision is another crucial element of the social contract. To reform the existing system, the state sought to revise the subsidy system and introduced *Takaful* and *Karama* – two new social safety nets which aim to transform the lives of 1.5 million poor families in Egypt. However, the views on these reforms were mixed. On the one hand, respondents appreciated the new digital cards used for collecting subsidized goods and appreciated the increase in social insurance allowance; especially for widows and divorced women. Nevertheless, they complained about the scarcity of some subsidized goods. For example, during the fieldwork period, there was a major scarcity in gas cylinders. The scarcity of these goods is caused not only by inefficiencies; but also by widespread corrupt activities in the local administration and local suppliers. A government official in the Ministry of Social Solidarity admitted that 'there has been several reforms in the last few years, however, corruption is still widespread. The number of bribes increased. There are no accountability mechanisms and no monitoring'. Another added: when 'government officials and bakery owners collude to sell the subsidized flour at market prices; people fail to get their share of bread'. Thus, corruption, incompetence and clientelism limited the impact of safety nets on mitigating the effects of the post-2011 economic crisis on deprived communities. This further indicates the inability of the state to uphold its promises in the social contract. The sustainability of this social contract also remains questionable given the recent gradual removal of subsidies, esp. on fuel and selected subsidized goods.

##### 5.4.2. Social polarisation and decline in social capital

This section examines the paradoxical impact of the uprisings on social relations. Whilst the January 2011 uprising initially enhanced social cohesion and unity, the regime shift in 2013 deepened social polarisation and led to the securitisation of public spaces. Respondents talked about unity during the January 2011 uprising: 'we were all one family here'. However, they also pointed out the erosion of communal trust and growing social polarisation

after June 2013. With the rise and fall of the MB and the growing state repression, the level of communal mistrust increased as one young man in MN explained: 'your neighbour can spy on you!' Yet again respondents blamed the uprisings for this: 'after the revolution, people misunderstood the meaning of freedom. What you find nowadays is lack of respect. Social conflicts increased'. Another added that 'families were split between Morsi's and Sisi's supporters'. Copts felt discriminated against, particularly during the one year MB rule. In Menia respondents explained how MB supporters attacked their houses in August 2013: 'they fired at us, surrounded our houses, and destroyed them'. An elderly woman pointed out the decline in social capital: 'nobody supports the other. People no longer trust each other'. These growing social and political divisions thus led to communal conflicts and increased social polarisation post-2011.

Paradoxically, although the uprisings called for regime change, the growing political instability forced many in our sample, especially the elderly, to long for Mubarak's days. Appreciating the social contract during Mubarak's regime, one of them explained 'until now I do not see that Mubarak was wrong... he used to give us free bread and subsidized goods'. A young female Mubarak sympathiser provided an interesting insight stating that 'Mubarak used to steal from us; but we did not feel that he was stealing... Now because of these rapid changes in the country, we can feel it'. Others blamed the MB as the source of political instability accusing them of staging the terrorist attacks post 2013. This longing for political stability was one of the main reasons why respondents in our sample supported President Sisi. One of them explained: 'we are now slowly reinstating security' this is crucial because 'political instability affected all social groups; youth, women and children'. Copts were the ones particularly worried about political instability especially after their endured discrimination and fear under MB's rule. Therefore, they are among the main supporters of the current regime (Fisk, 2018). This significant finding explains why political stability featured so highly among the wellbeing domains and why these deprived communities might accept a new social contract that forgoes their socio-economic and political rights in exchange for security and political stability.

#### 5.4.3. Raised political awareness but undermined citizenship

Post-2011, the *political domain* was initially marked by increased political awareness and an influx of political parties and NGOs. However, after 2013 spaces for political participation started to shrink and feelings of citizenship were highly undermined. After the political mobilisation during the January 2011 uprising, 'everyone talked about politics'. An elderly participant in the January 2011 uprising explained 'I tried to transfer the spirit of Tahrir square to Manshiet Nasser by organising training sessions on political rights and leadership for youth in the area. But sadly, I was shocked due to the political developments after January 2011'. This quote demonstrates not only the growing political awareness post-2011, but also the growing frustration due to the increased restrictions on civil and political rights in Egypt post-2013. It is therefore not surprising that Freedom House revised Egypt's 'freedom score' from 5 (out of 7–7 being the worst) in 2010 to 6 in 2018; mainly due to its abusive security services, arbitrary arrests and continued repression of dissent, esp. prior to the presidential elections in 2017 (Freedom House, 2018).

This contrasts with the increased level of political mobilisation after the January 2011 uprising, which led to the influx of new NGOs and political parties. Despite the increased number of political parties since 2011, however, many secular parties lacked identity and independence (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017). The impact of these political parties and NGOs remained limited due to the restrictive laws passed under the Sisi regime and the fragmented nature of these parties and their failure to provide viable political

alternatives, especially during elections (Völkel, 2017). Growing state repression was also evident from the imprisonment of youth activists and Muslim Brotherhood supporters – mostly after fake mass trials.

This reveals the paradoxical impact of the uprisings on deprived communities. On the one hand, the uprisings deepened the public's awareness of their political rights after the January 2011 uprising, but on the other hand, they led to restricted freedoms to exercise these rights, esp. after June 2013. The growing public concern with political instability – discussed earlier – explains why such restrictions on political freedoms were tolerated under the new authoritarian bargain. It is therefore evident that the social contract that these communities aspired to after January 2011 never materialised. In contrast, it was soon replaced with a restrictive and exclusionary one restricting the exercise of civil and political rights.

When asked about their perceptions on the political transition, respondents in our sample expressed a general feeling of disappointment with the outcomes of the January uprising. This was evident through those voices arguing that 'the faces have changed, but the same system persists' or 'the centres of power have shifted, but there are no new ideologies. Even when the Muslim Brotherhood came to power, they did not have any new ideas'. Another respondent added: 'I have been waiting for this change for thirty years... however I feel we have reached the end of the tunnel and there is no light'. This disappointment was not only due to the failed democratic transition, but also the growing state repression, the rise in police brutality and the increased control over the media (evident in the internet control law passed in 2018). One talented young man in Manshiet Nasser explained how his drawings, which criticised SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces), were rejected by the newspaper for which he worked. He stated:

'I thought we had freedom, but the newspaper refused to publish my drawings. Three days later, I participated in a demonstration chanting "down with military rule". I now do not have any sense of belonging to the country. When I hear the national anthem, I leave the room. Egyptians have been repressed throughout history'.

Although police brutality was one of the causes of the January 2011 uprisings (Kandil, 2011), respondents had contradictory views on the police post-Jan 2011. Some pointed out the increased police brutality, whilst others complained about the absence of law enforcement. Those who mentioned the increase in police brutality pointed out the violence in Tahrir Square and *Rabaa* as one explained: 'I went to Tahrir square and the police shot me in the eye. I am not a member of the MB, but I was in *Rabaa*. The media falsified the image of those who were there'. Police brutality was not only evident during popular protests, but was also used to control public dissent. An elderly woman in the slum area explained how the police seized the goods of her son, a street vendor, leaving him in debt. Another added that 'the police officers are back to their repressive nature again'. Despite these growing police brutality, contradictorily, respondents in the MN complained about the limited law enforcement in their area; pointing out the lack of safety, the dominance of gangs and drug dealers and the rise in sexual harassment. Sometimes the policemen themselves were accused of sexual harassment (Amar, 2011).

Another shocking story indicating the lack of rule of law was in rural Menia. Several respondents in one village complained about a cartel group that forcefully controlled the quarries in their area and prevented them from working in these quarries. Since quarry work is their main source of income, villagers appealed to the state for protection, but the police failed to reinstate law and order – leaving the families in a state of desperation. One explained 'we complained in the media and in TV – but there was no response from the state. All what the police did was surrounding our village as

they were afraid that we publicly protest'. Thus, whilst there might have been a shift from a provision to a protection pact under Sisi (Rutherford, 2018), these voices reveal the failure of the state to even deliver on the latter. That is why, 'the process of applying democratic rule of law must begin with the police themselves; meaning that the Interior Ministry will need to reestablish trust between the police and the people' (Anderson, 2011, p.5). The voices thus contradictorily reveal the rise in policy brutality and the decline in law enforcement.

This contradictory effect of the uprisings was also evident in people's eroded feelings of citizenship. For youth, the popular protests raised their aspirations; but the failed political transition eroded their sense of belonging. This is mainly due to the growing state repression and the passing of laws that eliminated most spaces for youth participation (Farouk, 2017). Because of this crackdown on youth activism, one young activist from Manshiet Nasser explained 'I no longer belong to this country...I feel we were deceived. I turned from a nationalistic young man into someone with no sense of belonging'. Another one stated that 'January 25th was a revolution, but it only benefited political parties and criminal groups, not the people. Nothing has changed. We turned around in circles. Only the prices increased'. This quote demonstrates not only how youth were frustrated, but also how the uprisings were captured (by the MB and the military) thus further eroding youth's hopes for a new social contract that fulfils their revolutionary demands for freedom and social justice.

## 6. Conclusion: Towards an inclusive social contract in Egypt

This concluding section explains the implications of the research findings on the future and sustainability of the social contract in Egypt. Tracking the same individuals over a ten-year period and articulating their wellbeing perceptions, aspirations and problems before and after the uprisings, the study revealed the paradoxical impact of the uprisings on deprived communities. Whilst the uprisings were meant to end the old social contract that 'traded off' political rights with socio-economic benefits; the existing social contract ironically seems to forgo *both* in exchange for political stability.

After 2011, the increased terror threats, high inflation rates, rising unemployment, deteriorating public services (especially education and health) led deprived communities to highly value political stability. Blaming the uprisings and their associated political turmoil for their dire economic conditions, many respondents settled for a new social contract that compromises not only their political rights; but also exchanges the socio-economic benefits (which they enjoyed under the old populist social contract) with a new one focusing on political stability and security. Ironically, although the January 2011 uprising called for 'bread, freedom and social justice', the study revealed the persistence of the *same* problems and unfulfilled aspirations over the ten-year period. This indicates the failure of the state not only to deliver on the 'old' social contract; but also, to forge a new inclusive one. The findings showed the importance of certain wellbeing demands that need to be included in any new social contract, namely the creation of jobs and income generating opportunities and the provision of quality education that fosters social mobility.

Whilst people might currently tolerate the state's failure to deliver on these demands in exchange for political stability in the short run; the sustainability of the current social contract however remains questionable in the long run. Poor communities suffer from growing pressures due to the gradual removal of subsidies,

the deterioration of education and health services and the limited opportunities for social mobility and political mobilisation. The failure to enact a new social contract that fulfils these demands confirms the inability of the state to address the 'revolution of rising expectations' after the popular uprisings; which raised public hopes and led to deeper frustrations. As Cammett et al (2013, p. 413) explains 'in the context of redistributive commitments by rulers to populations, which increased citizen expectations of the state ..., the inability of government to provide for citizens and a growing sense of economic insecurity were particularly egregious. This combination of factors created a dam of accumulated grievances and rising aspirations, ready to burst'. Thus, the persistence of the *same unfulfilled* demands over time not only undermines the state's legitimacy and jeopardizes political stability, but also indicates the limitations of the post-2013 social contract and its lack of sustainability in the long run.

There is therefore an urgent need to enact a new social contract in Egypt – that is inclusive, resilient and sustainable on the long run; and more importantly one that 'works for the poor' and addresses their persistent problems and unfulfilled aspirations. The growing vulnerability of deprived communities and their deepened frustration are ticking timebombs that can jeopardize the future of any political regime – no matter how repressive it is.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## Appendix A

### Data Analysis Tables with Frequencies

**Table A1**  
Elements of a Good Life Valued in 2006 and 2015.

Elements of a Good Life valued in 2015	N	Elements of a Good Life valued in 2006	N
1. Income	27	2. Income	27
3. Jobs	17	3. Jobs	13
		Housing	
4. Country Stability and Security	9	5. Faith	11
Social Relations		Family	
Peace of Mind			
Housing			
6. Education	8	5. Peace of mind	9
6. Family	7	7. Social Relations	8
Good Personality Traits		Good Personality Traits	
Faith			
8. Health	6	7. Children's needs	7
Children's needs			
8. Transportation	1	8. Health	4
		9. Education	3

**Table A2**

Elements of a Good Life Valued in 2015 - by Location.

Ranking	Elements of a Good Life in Manshiet Nasser	N	Elements of a Good Life in Menia	N
1.	Income	16	Income	9
2.	Jobs	11	Jobs	8
3.	Country's Security	8	Faith	6
			Social Relations	
			Family	
			Personality Traits	
4.	Housing	6	Peace of mind	5
	Peace of mind			
5.	Children's needs	4	Education	3
	Education		Health	
6.	Health	3	Children's needs	2
			Housing	
7.	Faith	2	Country's Security	1
	Social Relations			
	Physical Area			
	Family			
8.	Transportation	1		
	Consumer Goods			

**Table A3**

Elements of a Good Life Valued in 2006 - by Location.

Ranking	Elements of a Good Life Valued in Manshiet Nasser	N	Elements of a Good Life Valued in Menia	N
9.	Income	16	Income	12
10.	Housing	8	Family	7
11.	Jobs	7	Personality Traits	6
12.	Faith	6	Jobs	5
	Social Relations		Faith	
			Peace of Mind	
13.	Children's Needs	5	Housing	4
	Peace of mind		Social Relations	
14.	Government Services	3	Health	3
	Education		Children's needs	
	Family			
15.	Food	1		
	Transportation			
	Health			

**Table A4**

Main Unfulfilled Aspirations.

Ranking	Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2015	N	Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2006	N
16.	Jobs	23	Education	23
17.	Education	21	Jobs	19
18.	Children's needs	11	Housing	11
19.	Income	8	Marriage	10
20.	Housing	7	Income	9
21.	Fulfilling religious duties	4	Children's needs	8
22.	Self-development	3	Travel 3	3
23.	Peace of mind	2	Fulfilling Religious Duties	2
			Playing a Social/Political Role	
			Having Good Social Relations	
24.	Political Stability	1		1
	Living in a better area			
	Travel			
	Buying consumer goods			



**Table A5**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations identified in 2015 - by Gender.

Ranking	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified <b>by men</b>	N	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified <b>by women</b>	N
1.	Education	14	Jobs	12
2.	Jobs	11	Children's needs	9
3.	Fulfilling Religious Duties	2	Education	7
	Meeting Children's needs		Income	
	Housing			
	Marriage			
4.	Self-development	1	Housing	5
	Peace of mind			
	Income			
	Area			
	Travel			
5.			Marriage	3
6.			Fulfilling Religious Duties	2
			Self-development	
7.			Peace of mind	1

**Table A6**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations in 2006 - by Gender.

Ranking	Unfulfilled aspirations identified <b>by men</b>	N	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified <b>by women</b>	N
1.	Education	14	Education	9
2.	Jobs	13	Housing	
3.	Income	5	Children's needs	7
4.	Marriage	2	Jobs	6
	Travel		Marriage	5
	Housing			
	Religious Duties			
	Social/Political Role			
5.	Good Social Relations	1	Income	4
	Meeting children's needs			
6.			Social Relations	1

**Table A7**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations identified in 2015- by Location.

Ranking	Main Problems identified <b>in Manshiet Nasser</b>	N	Main Problems identified <b>in Menia</b>	N
1.	Jobs	14	Jobs	9
2.	Education	13	Education	8
3.	Children's needs	5	Children's needs	6
4.	Housing	4	Income	4
5.	Income	3	Marriage	3
6.	Fulfilling Religious Duties			
	Self-development	1	Self-development	2
	Area			
	Travel			
7.			Peace of mind	1
			Fulfilling Religious Duties	
			Consumer Goods	

**Table A8**  
Unfulfilled Aspirations identified in 2006 - by Location.

Ranking	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified <b>in Manshiet Nasser</b>	N	Unfulfilled Aspirations identified <b>in Menia</b>	N
1.	Education	14	Jobs	10
2.	Jobs	9	Education	9
3.	Housing	6	Marriage	8
4.	Children's needs	5	Income	5
			Housing	
5.	Income	4	Children's needs	3
6.	Marriage	2	Travel	1
	Travel		Fulfilling religious duties	
	Social Relations			
	Political/Social Role			
7.	Fulfilling religious duties	1		

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