

James Youniss, Brian K. Barber, Rhett M. Billen

Children In the Garden of Democracy: The Meaning of Civic Engagement in Today's Egypt*

Keywords

Egypt, youth, civic engagement, revolution

1 Introduction

This is the second in a series of reports on the current wave of youth civic engagement in Egypt. Our goal is to offer an on-the-ground account of the unfolding political changes in Egypt from the perspective a small group of youths. Individual young people were selected by the second author in the first of his recurring visits to Egypt beginning one week after the resignation of Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011. Local contacts recommended individual youth to be interviewed, who then provided further introductions. Through this "snowball" procedure, the final group of youth (ranging from 8-12 depending on availability at the time of subsequent interviews) was selected strategically to include much of the apparent diversity among Egyptian youth, while at the same time being small enough to permit in-depth, repeated interviews with them over the unfolding course of the revolution. Specifically, the group (all in their 20s) included males and female Muslims and Christians from Cairo and Alexandria who were involved to varying degrees in the revolution—ranging from never being involved in demonstrations to constant participation (e.g., through sitting in Tahrir Square night and day during critical periods). They have been interviewed individually in English at approximately 4 month intervals since the initial contact in early 2011.

Our first report was based on the portion of the interviews in which the youths described their involvement in the demonstrations of early 2011 that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak. We viewed their comments in terms of a social-movement approach to civic engagement. These

James Youniss is research professor of psychology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. For the past 20 years, his work has focused on civic and political development in young people, in an effort to understand how participation helps shape political-moral identity. *email: youniss@cua.edu*

Brian K. Barber is the founding director of the Center for the Study of Youth and Political Conflict and professor of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, USA. He publishes on youth development within differing social environments, specifically in the contexts of political conflict, as in the Palestinian territories, Bosnia, and Egypt. *email: bbarber1@utk.edu*

Rhett M. Billen is a doctoral student in the department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, USA. He is interested in how youth and families develop in unique and demanding circumstances. *email: rbillen@utk.edu*

young people spelled out their grievances against Mubarak's government, the ideological outlook they shared on political reform, the opportunities that enabled their actions, and the organizational apparatus that made this momentous event possible (Barber & Youniss 2012).

This article is a reflective analysis of questions that have emerged in our unfolding research. We continued to interview these same youth over the past year and situated their evolving views first with our further exploration of Egypt's complex political situation and second with our knowledge of recent social scientific thought regarding civic engagement among youth. This triangulation leads us to consider three kinds of questions: 1) how to assess civic engagement adequately in a population of youth that lived under politically restrictive conditions; 2) how new definitions of active Egyptian citizenship are emerging; and 3) what these new definitions imply for engagement in the future.

2 Assessing Civic Engagement

The events of early 2011 caught the attention of scholars worldwide who study youth civic engagement. For the past decade, the bulk of research was focused on four issues: 1) the lack of engagement of young people in established democratic states; 2) the tendency of youth engagement to involve predominately members of higher social-economic communities; 3) the possibility that enmeshment of youth in social networking activity may detract from political engagement; and 4) attraction of youth to armed conflict and political violence in weak or failed states (Milner 2010; Goldstone 2011).

The initiatives taken by youth in Egypt fit none of these categories. They resemble more closely youth action during the 1950-60s civil rights movement in the United States, the 1960-70s anti-war and anti-nuclear movements in various European nations, and the series of uprisings and revolutions on behalf of democratic reform of authoritarian regimes that occurred in the former Soviet Bloc in the 1980s and 1990s (Collin 2007). Regrettably, those instances of revolution passed without much global attention and little scholarly study (with the exception of East Germany; Oberschall 2007; Opp & Gern 1993) and thus there is little from those key events to guide us.

The movement was unanticipated, even in Egypt. A survey of 15,000 Egyptian youth conducted by the Population Council in 2009 and first reported on in December 2010 assessed engagement in terms of self-reported voting, internet use, volunteering, degree of trust, and attitudes toward the government. The authors offered the following conclusion: friends and family... They do not invest time to learn

"Civic engagement in young people in Egypt is very weak ... Their social networks are limited to few more about the social and political issues from available media, in print, or online" (Population Council 2010, 147).

Only one month after the study's publication, on January 25, these characterizations proved to be misleading as hundreds of thousands of young people took public action at considerable risk, demanding the end to an oligarchic regime and the beginning of a new democratic state. The size of the demonstrations and the ability to sustain them in the face of counter-movements by the government required extensive organization and coordination among various networks and interest groups. These overlapping networks functioned together via communication linkages provided through the Internet. Thus, one month after findings of the 2009 survey were published, most of the elements in the report's conclusion were contradicted.

We do not fault the conduct of the survey for this misreading of the population. Rather, the problem more likely lies with the nature of and assumptions behind such surveys. Items such as voting and following current political news are standard in surveys of youth in Western societies that have established democracies in which voters are recruited and the media are unfettered from government control. This leads us to ask whether these items are useful for estimating the political orientation of societies with oppressive regimes, such as Egypt under Mubarak. For example, what value did voting have if results of elections were preordained? And why would young people follow news controlled and knowingly censored by the state?

A more telling criticism pertains to the assumptions that underlie this kind of survey. Behind any survey are assumptions about the conditions that would lead to the behaviors being measured. If the behavior in question is voting, then assumptions might be that everyone in the sample has an equal opportunity to vote and that each vote is meaningful to future political decisions and policy. If these assumptions are incorrect, then it is not reasonable to conclude that failure to vote signifies disinterest in or neglect of civic duty.

This is not an esoteric point but highlights the importance of decisions about measurement when assessing civic engagement. In the United States, for example, it is common practice to survey youth and use the findings to characterize behavioral and attitudinal tendencies of cohorts. One might call this "generation labeling" as youth born between certain dates are given names, such as GenX or Millennials, and then assigned proclivities such as "consumer oriented," "self-centered," "highly moral," "generous," and the like. These attributions are nearly worthless unless one knows the context and resources that might have led to the behaviors and attitudes being measured. For instance, affluent young people in the United States are bombarded with targeted commercial advertising that encourages them to be heavy consumers of material goods. It would truly be news if young people therefore were not consumer oriented.

A positive example of a survey of Egyptian youth that took account of resource availability and opportunity was also reported in 2010. The e4e (Education for Employment, 2010) survey sampled 1,500 youth and 1,500 employers including public and private educators, policy makers, and civil society leaders. The aim of the survey was to assess job and educational aspirations of young people in correlation with the educational and employment conditions in which they were living. By design, this survey sought to connect behaviors and attitudes of youth with the resources available to them. There would be little value if youth said they aspired to become physicians yet they had no opportunity for medical education, or to become computer programmers if they had no access to computers. It follows that there is value in the decision to assess youth attitudes alongside available education and employment opportunities.

The conclusions from this survey were quite explicable and realistic. The relative scarcity of youth with technical skills was not attributed to youth's indolence or preferences but to the outdated curriculum used in their schools. These data came from youth and employers; the latter noting that they have had to construct on-the-job internships to compensate for the lack of skills even among college graduates. It follows that youth are capable of acquiring such skills but that they are not typically provided with them by schools using antiquated curriculums.

This point is made well by Queen Rania of Jordan who sponsored the e4e survey. She argued that the way to predict the future is to shape it through education. Instead of attributing qualities to youth as though there were no context, she recommends that youth be educated for the qualities that are needed in the contemporary job market. She claims, "We are letting [youth] down in ill-equipped classrooms with untrained teachers ... with outmoded curriculums already obsolete in the modern marketplace." She then adds, importantly, "If I have learned one thing over the years, it is this: we can trust youth to maximize opportunities when they are presented" (Education for Employment 2010, 7). In other words, when youth are given educational opportunities, they typically respond by capitalizing on them. And, therefore, to assess their capacities more effectively one should consider the resources they are provided in education to succeed.

Another positive example that reinforces this point are the findings of analysis of youth's role in ending the Mubarak regime reported by Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo (Gerhart Center 2011). They began by mapping assets that enabled youth to become politically engaged. Instead of assigning attributes to youth in the abstract, the authors sought to connect behavior to the available resources. For example, in trying to understand how large, orderly crowds turned out and then were sustained, the report described youth organizations whose pre-Tahrir activities helped young people become critically aware of the circumstances that repressed their political potential and educated them

in the importance of their own civic engagement. A case in point was the non-government organization, For You My Country that offered community-level training for entrepreneurs and young people wanting to create their own NGOs. FYMY was established in 2002 and has a staff of 50 persons. Its founding principle was to teach youth that charity to the poor will momentarily eliminate deprivation, "...but that sustained civic engagement and strategic social development ..." have the potential to eradicate poverty (Gerhart Center 2011, 17).

In addition to the substantial experiences young political activists had over the years in organizing for political change (El Mahdi 2009), the above examples reveal that an enabling basis for the demonstrations in early 2011 was laid down by programs that gave youth experience in taking active steps to change the society around them. Shehata (2008) has provided a complementary analysis of organizing experiences and sensed that a decade of activism, spurred by the second Intifada in 2000, might bring about a new mobilization of Egyptian youth. This prospect was based on several factors. The decade of activism took place outside existing political parties, was non-ideological and inclusive of diverse outlooks, and was supported by use of information technology which broadened communication and allowed efficient organization.

This last point was confirmed in a telling way by Wael Ghonim, who documented the Internet campaigns that were focused on Khaled Said, a young Egyptian who was tortured and killed by the security police in 2010. During the second half of that year, the Internet was used to create networks of activists who gained practical experience with public demonstrations by participating in vigils to honor Said and shame the Mubarak regime (Ghonim 2012). These vigils provided youth with experiences of coordinating communication among social networks as well as with taking public stances against abuses by the security police and risking the negative repercussions.

To conclude on the first point, there are sophisticated ways to assess the civic engagement potential of Egyptian youth. They require that behaviors and attitudes not be viewed abstractly, but instead as grounded in and coupled with the proper enabling or impeding conditions. The assignment of attributes in the absence of contextual conditions can be a misleading exercise as was evident from the 2010 Population Council report. The youth depicted in that survey had little in common with the youth of Tahrir, the youth assessed in the e4e survey, the youth with multiple NGO experiences, or the youth who participated in Internet-instigated vigils described by Ghonim. Once conditions in terms of opportunities and resources are taken into account, a more realistic portrait of youth's potential for civic engagement comes into clear view. If one wants to estimate the political potential of Egyptian youth, one first has to understand and measure the resources and opportunities from which political behavior could arise.

3 A New Kind of Citizenship

The assessment of civic engagement also depends on assumptions about what a good citizen within a democracy is and how he or she should act. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) have shown that definitions of democratic citizens range from voting and obeying the law to working actively for equality and justice. Within democracies, there is legitimacy in these and other forms of citizenship.

Given the political events that have occurred in Egypt since 2011, it seems reasonable to ask whether people have begun to reflect on a contrast between the kinds of citizenship that fit the past and emerging concepts appropriate for the future. Although the future remains uncertain, no Egyptian can escape discussion about democratic reform, parliamentary elections, justice for killings and arrests, numerous decisions by SCAF, the role of Islam—the Muslim Brotherhood and the more rigidly conservative Salafist Al-Nour Party—and the writing of a new Constitution. It would be unusual if the broad public airing of these issues did not provoke Egyptians to consider seriously the kind of state they want and their relationships to it and to their fellow citizens.

Signs of change were already evident in the demonstrations that involved various citizen groups that previously might not have publicly interacted. Individuals from various social sectors and organized groups took part in large rallies to form a self-organizing whole. Individual but connected groups formed to take charge of communication, safety, sanitation, mediation of disputes, and so forth. In the process, generational, geographical, social, and economic boundaries were bridged through collective, collaborative action. Outside the context of the massive demonstrations, for example in cafes and during small social events, individuals began to speak openly about political views rather than keeping them private or restricting them to family and close friends.

Recent scholarship on citizenship may be helpful for understanding the direction in which Egyptians' concepts of citizenship could be headed. As noted in the Gerhart Center's 2011 report and Shehata's and El Mahdi's documentation, many young Egyptians already had experience operating in civil society organizations and networks that extend well-beyond family and close friends. They acquired experiences of acting collectively without top-down management in dealing with creative media, entrepreneurship, volunteerism, and human rights organizing and education. Abu-Lughod documented impressive self-organizing capacities among youth in Upper Egypt prior to and during the early months of the revolution (Abu-Lughod 2012).

These activities may be understood in terms of Elinor Ostrom's "self-organizing and self-governing forms of collective action" (Ostrom, 2009). Her Nobel Prize winning work has shown that people around the globe have the capacity for managing their affairs productively without intervention from government or other formal institutions. She has

studied ways in which individuals come together to manage fisheries, forests, and other common resources which might otherwise be exploited in the classic “tragedy of the commons” scenario. Her major finding is that pure market competition vs. government management is only one way to model the situation. She has documented a third possibility that occurs when people choose to deliberate with one another about sharing common resources for mutual benefit and then create rules for managing resources for mutual gain.

Peter Levine (Levine 2011) has built on Ostrom’s work to argue that we should not be blinded by three decades of political rhetoric that disjunctively pitted government regulation against free market activity. When limited to this either-or model, people become either voters or consumers. Lost in the process is the view that people can be “co-constructors of systems of rules and norms” to guide their own affairs (Levine 2011, 9). He emphasizes that citizenship often entails that people interact within networks, deliberate about issues, and plan strategies of action, both as individuals and as members of organizations. The result is “politics on a human scale” with emphasis on communication, trust, and collective cooperation.

Danielle Allen (Allen 2004) offers another perspective on this theme. She designates the 1954-65 civil rights struggle in the United States as a threshold event which altered understanding of people-generated politics. As the civil rights movement played out, forms of human relationships sprung to public awareness so that people saw themselves in different ways. They began to comprehend that benefits accruing at large to the middle class white community were contingent on sacrifices made by the African-American community. They became aware of the segregated system and its effects on reproducing a society of inequality, in turn affecting the ways by which individuals, as members of communities, were able to envision their own acquisition of or limitation towards different means and measures of success. Once this reciprocal relationship became apparent, a choice had to be made either to continue in an asymmetrical fashion or to acknowledge the possibility for a more symmetrical reciprocity. Selection of the former would result in maintenance of racial segregation while choice of the latter would lead to a “consensually based political community” inclusive of everyone.

Along with Ostrom and Levine, Allen recognizes that an inclusive form of democracy must be continuously renewed. There is no pretense that all people are alike or that literal equality can be achieved. The goal, instead, is to keep striving for a kind of wholeness guided by communication, equitable treatment, and trust that others will reciprocate.

At the time of writing, Egypt’s political future remains uncertain. Will Egypt revert to oligarchy and paternalism? Will Egypt become a religious state, a secular democracy, or some mixture? We have no answer, but in this brief discussion of citizenship we will use interviews from young Egyptian activists to

suggest the relevance of this thinking to Egypt’s current political evolution. As with civil rights in the United States 50 years ago, in 2011 Egyptian citizenship might have crossed a threshold which closed the door to the past and opened the path to a new future. At the very least, many Egyptians have had opportunities to glimpse a new kind of polity in which citizens can construct their political relationships in a context within which government ensures and encourages principled fairness.

Evidence that this new vision is emerging comes from interviews with our sample of youth. We begin with what they said about conditions before the revolution. In February 2011, as the revolution was unfolding, Omar, a human rights worker, noted that the population was intimidated by being under constant threat of arrest for public statements against the government. An example he used was that one could not have a harmless conversation in a café without fearing that the stranger at a neighboring table would later haul you into his office for interrogation. Political conversations were undermined by what most of our sample described as a culture of corruption in which people with power exploited those with less power.

By July 2011, the youth in our sample noticed a dramatic shift. Mohsen, also a human rights worker, observed: “Now people are talking about military courts. People are talking about civilians’ rights... about the system, the regime. How we need to get the judicial branch to be independent... People are beginning to believe in principles that match their values.” He added later: “Now if you have a point of view and I dislike it, I will say, ‘OK, you are on the opposite side of the revolution,’ and you will say the same to me... We grew up in a system without a chance to debate. We need to learn how to talk, how to dialogue... We exchange opinions. We are like children in the garden of democracy.”

Dina, a Christian human rights educator, made the point about open discourse this way. “We are now more aware... This is not the upper-middle class; ‘we’ is everyone. ‘We’ is the taxi driver. ‘We’ is everyone. It is really impressive. Now when you sit in the taxi and you pick up a conversation with the taxi driver there is depth that wasn’t there before. And there’s interest in what’s happening.” The same before and after perspective was expressed by Kholoud: “Whatever I [previously] thought I just kept to myself. I use to think [about] what is right, but silently. Now I am not silent anymore.” Omar, several months after his initial expression of fear, described the change: “We didn’t know before that we [could] do it. Now we’re free; everyone can talk. Everyone can organize themselves... Before you avoided people; you never talked. But now I... go and talk.”

The same spirit of public discourse in which potent ideas are exchanged was expressed as well in November during the week of the long-awaited elections. Mohsen said: “I was discussing [politics] with a lot of people; I didn’t know one of them before. We discussed the election, the candidates, the process. It was the first time to have this kind of conversation in a café... [Everyone in] the café was

discussing these issues. People are ready [to listen]. They are flexible. If you use good arguments, you could convince them.” He also recalled a conversation with a taxi driver that grew into a vigorous debate about the Emergency Law which essentially gave security forces unrestrained power to arrest and detain. Once Mohsen explained the manifest abuses of the law, the taxi driver said, “I don’t know all these things you said. But now I’m against the emergency law.” Aly stated succinctly: “People are free to speak out. Before, they were not allowed to talk [about] government oppression.”

For Aly, the entire political system was now open to public debate: “How are we going to establish institutions? What is the role of the state? The relation between the state and the masses? The social order?...We are fighting about an Islamic or secular state; it is more important to ask how this state is going to perform.” Mohsen, too, saw discussion about the system as a new possibility. He recounted that an old man congratulated him and his generation by saying that because of what they did “we can have a conversation about the vote [instead of being restricted] to talk about football.” Mohsen added: “The next step is to start to talk about the constitution... talking about if we need a presidential system or a parliamentary system, how we choose government, how we [ensure] laws...as we go forward.”

In summary, activists that were interviewed said that before the revolution they were “walking beside the wall,” meaning that they cautiously watched what they said as they warily traversed daily interactions with strangers. This metaphor also means that by staying near the wall, they were succumbing to the government’s insistence that it alone decided political and economic affairs. After the revolution, the activists interviewed said they had moved into the center where they actively participate in politics instead of harboring views privately. In the center, they were engaging with others. They felt they could now take up “serious” matters and topics of “depth.” Even strangers now felt free to express political perspectives to one another. They are willing to listen to arguments, to try to change the minds of others, and to change their own minds.

A new kind of relationship was emerging among Egyptians. They trusted that by stepping away from the wall, they would not risk detention by security police, and instead participate in the re-making of society. This shift to self-organizing interaction was summarized by Kholoud: “[We] now feel secure. People have changed. People were sleeping by one another [during the demonstrations] and nothing bad happened. [We did not need] police or the security force. Nothing [bad] happened. [We experienced] social solidarity. If you have a bottle of water, you share it with everybody.” Clearly, the bottle of water could represent an idea and “sharing” refers to exchanging views in a spirit of political collaboration with one’s fellow citizens.

4 Building a Democratic Polity

Within a democracy, civic engagement can involve working to create and sustain institutions as well as opposing and reforming structures. Media accounts since Mubarak’s resignation have been focused on opposition to the regime which held power for three decades and to the culture of oppression that fostered relationships of corruption and mistrust among ordinary citizens. Many of these accounts also portray an uncertain population waiting for decision makers to determine its fate. But if our sample of youths is to be believed, people are not standing by idly. Rather, there are signs that some engaged youth have turned from revolution to the task of constructing a new people-driven democracy to replace the former system. The point of this third section of our paper is to describe the forms of engagement that illustrate youth perspectives and actions leading to this goal.

The interviews reveal a surprising level of realism amongst highly idealistic youth. In July 2011, Kholoud observed, “it’s not yet a post-revolution. It’s still [an ongoing] revolution. There is no revolution on a date [at an appointed time]. It’s not a matter of days, or weeks, or a couple of months. It’s like the French Revolution that went on for ten years...It’s really still on the very start.” What do these youth expect to unfold with time? According to Aly, “We need the time to develop political parties. Please, we need to build structures; [to develop] natural leaders who [will rise] from their own districts.” He added, “for new political parties, you need...years. We need time to build structures.”

Mohsen reflected, “We started the revolutionary process six months ago but the philosophy of the regime is still there. It’s in the normal [Egyptian’s] mind]. We get it in school. It’s [in the] relation between the people who are ruling us and [in us] as citizens. It’s about how you deal with me...It’s about the culture.” He continued, offering a glimpse of the task ahead: “we have to work to make civic education for people all over the country.” He then used the metaphor of planting seeds in agriculture. “We plant the land and then get a yield in two or three years... If this process is successful the values will come from the people. We need to educate people. Maybe it takes years. I think it will succeed in the end.” Aly offered comments similar to Mohsen’s: “Calling the military council to step down will not help the cause. Now we have to call for real change. How are we going to establish institutions? How are these institutions going to function?”

Not only do these activists see the situation in realistic terms, but they see their generation’s engagement as key to a democratic future. In this regard, they view themselves as committed and engaged citizens. Omar said, “we are about change happening. We reached the minimum level... against corruption, people who stole our shirts for thirty years. We are building for the [future] the next youth [who will follow us]. This is more difficult than convincing the [older generation]... I don’t think anyone is feeling satisfied, that we [can] now relax.”

Aly added, "We have serious problems on different levels that need to be transformed. Just giving some 'pain killers' wouldn't work... I mean we are speaking about revolutions so just take your time and work on. Work on the issues; deepen your strategy. Allow yourself to develop more tactics and to understand the causes in a much better way." Later he elaborated, "The World Bank is telling us that we are fine, that everything is perfect... It's mathematics and economics. But you have to deconstruct these [data] and understand what they mean."

Mohsen poetically suggested that, "We are like children in the garden of democracy. We have a whole society who are like children in the garden...Children want to learn by doing. If you tell them this electricity is harmful, they will burn their finger by experiencing [it]." Elaborating on this, he used his own future as an example, describing that he would one day be a grandfather narrating stories to his grandchildren: "I'll tell them stories about me and my generation. If we succeed in this revolution, we would be like the first [founding] fathers of society. Every society has its first fathers. They place the first stone, take the first step to make a democratic society."

In reviewing the interviews from our sample, we noted a frequent and explicit commitment on behalf of the activists to their nation's future. Instead of viewing themselves as superiors leading the masses, they saw their actions as a means to awaken a democratic spirit within their fellow citizens. In Aly's words, "This revolution was horizontal, not top down." Nearly every individual in our sample expressed belonging to the social mass and, moreover, believing their actions were contributing to Egypt's history and future. Dina expressed: "I think many of us have nationalistic feelings. We are attached to this country one way or another. But it has always been frustrating to be attached to Egypt ... We live in different continents while living in the same city. People lead very different lives. They come from very different social backgrounds, social classes, economic classes." But when people stood together against the old regime, she described, "It was beautiful. It just felt beautiful."

Alluding to the bombing of a Coptic church which stoked tension between religious groups to make a similar point, Kholoud noted: "It was really tragic. I was crying every day. But the people surprised me again. I have faith in the people. Every time I feel [the revolution] is coming to an end...something happens that brings new energy." In this case, Egyptians came out to demonstrate in support of religious tolerance. Describing the demonstration, Kholoud said: "It was really hot, people were tired, but they continued to sit in. When you think things are getting out of control, something happens and then you know why you invest [trust] in people. Not in political parties, not anything other than the people."

5 Conclusion

There is no standard or best way to assess civic engagement among youth. Throughout this paper we

have tried to show different sides of young Egyptians' engagement. Our general thesis is that engagement cannot be approached merely as an abstract concept, but needs to be analyzed in conjunction with both enabling and impeding socio-political conditions. Using this framework, it is clear that the demonstrations which led to President Mubarak's resignation opened new paths for social and political action for Egyptians. When people operated in a context of corruption and authoritarian control, relationships between individuals were marked by wariness and distrust. Individuals hid their ideas from public scrutiny, keeping them private or within a restricted circle of close friends and family. The revolution enabled new forms of public discourse, and as people began to express ideas publicly, feelings of trust became formed even between strangers and when disagreements were likely.

In making these arguments, we have drawn primarily from the youth of our sample who were socially conscious and politically engaged prior to the revolution, whether in human rights education or reform-oriented civil society organizations, and who participated actively in the demonstrations. Concentrating on such youth was important because they are the ones likely to lead and train their peers through the process of democratic political change. Despite their prior engagement, each individual was transformed by the power and efficacy of the revolution. And, as illustrated above, their awareness of the real hindrances, struggles, and actions to be taken has matured.

The initial euphoria that came with Mubarak's resignation has become a more sober realization that if the revolution is to succeed, public discourse must be accompanied by civic education. Many have become aware, painfully, that the ways of the old regime are etched deeply into Egyptian society and that it will take time for them to be replaced. Nevertheless, the revolution has provided a sense of individual and collective efficacy in no longer permitting the young activists to be abused by leaders' self-interest, corruption, and brutality. These youth have faith that the population can move forward with the help of strong institutions that replace those of the previous generations. This is a powerful outlook insofar as it leads to and sustains these young people's own engagement for the sake of a new democratic Egypt.

Finally, we wish to present two observations from a broader interpretation of the interviews we conducted. First, it is essential to point out that there are many voices among Egyptian youth. Our conversations with youth, who, unlike those we have described above are not political activists, both support and complicate the interpretations offered throughout this article. In terms of support, all youth with whom we spoke were unequivocally in favor of the revolution. For example, Sayed, a 27-year old from the Giza suburb of Cairo, did not participate in any demonstrations. Sharing the attachments of his family he was sympathetic to some degree to Mubarak. Despite this, he was thrilled by the success

of the initial phase of the revolution and more so than any of the other youth we interviewed elaborately extolled the grand history of Egypt and the various ways in which the regime had defiled that cherished identity. He phrased the permanence of the change Egyptians have undergone through the revolution in the following way: "Nobody [can] come to get our throne now."

However, Sayed has been very unsatisfied with the way political activism has preceded. Like many youth who approached us in Tahrir Square just weeks after Mubarak stepped down, Sayed feels that the revolution is "killing Egypt." He and generations of his family work in the tourist industry and they have felt the economic consequences of the revolution severely. Beginning with our first interview with Sayed in March 2011 and in every meeting thereafter, he expressed frustration: "So, what do you need?" he asks, referring to the protesters in Tahrir. "All Egyptian people now need to stop. We made our revolution successful, it's ok. We got our president in a jail, it's ok. His son is in a jail, it's ok. His wife now is very old . . . all the thieves people from the old system, now [are] in a jail." Sayed does not underestimate the value of mass protest at Tahrir. Indeed, he continued his statement by saying that if the new president were to resemble Mubarak, then "It's back to Tahrir!" But for him, "What do we need now? You must work! If you love Egypt, you must work."

Thus, while it seems clear that at a broader level the revolution has facilitated an openness and trust among Egyptians, it is also apparent that there are real divisions that may complicate progress towards that democratic goal. With specific regard to youth and their commitment to change, Sayed's narrative reveals that there may also be substantial distrust among youth regarding what kinds of changes should be made and how quickly.

Our second point has to do with the volatility of this first year of the revolution. Above, we intentionally provided excerpts from the narratives of the youth we have been studying to illustrate the paper's central points about civic engagement and citizenship. We have come to know these youth well over the past year and have no doubt that their expressions of growth, maturity, commitment, and patience are authentic. However, these inspiring and promising comments on real change occur within narratives that are otherwise replete with frustration and disillusionment; and, it appears, this is increasingly true. In the most recent interviews in March 2012, each individual described him- or herself as very depressed and tense.

We provide this sobering portrayal not only to be true to the lived experience of these young people, but to illustrate points made above about the dependency of democratic change on enabling conditions. Crucially, all of the activists indicated that their depression was a function of their perception that no real change in the fundamental conditions has been achieved. This was born out in the timelines of the first year of the revolution that we had them draw during the most recent interview. Invariably, those timelines can be described as

"tragic" (that is, with a systematically downward slope).

On one hand, despite deeply disappointing moments – ranging from the increasingly abusive behavior by the military to criticisms by peers or adults that call into question the youths' motives – these youth are still able to articulate commitment to principles of citizenship and democracy. On the other hand, we have to acknowledge the uncertainty in the durability of these transformations. They appear to be highly sensitive to fluctuating conditions. Despite those ever-changing conditions, the youth continue to demand respect, trust, and inclusiveness as fundamental to their movement.

Perhaps one future indicator of their growth will be the degree to which the young activists are able to adapt to changing political structures. For example, while lecturing Aly and his compatriots to abandon the Tahrir protests after the November events in Mohamed Mahmoud Street (during which Aly was shot in the face), his cherished mentor, a noted professor and political activist, advised them to adapt to current realities. Anticipating the completion of the parliamentary elections that began that very week, she told them that mass protests at Tahrir would no longer be useful. Rather, they should begin visiting – daily if needed – the offices of the newly elected officials and demand their action on behalf of meaningful reform (Barber 2011).

Egypt has moved forward in establishing new political structures by electing a new parliament and a new president. Given that virtually no youth are among the new leadership, it remains important to understand how youth will adapt their attitudes and methods of engagement to align with prevailing realities. Or, should the new structures continue to violate the self-respect and dignity that Egyptians reclaimed through the revolution, perhaps it will be "Back to Tahrir!"

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Endnotes:

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