

# Egypt

## From Revolutions to Institutions

Opportunities to support the people and  
groups that are designing better governance



**REBOOT**

Zack Brisson and Panthea Lee

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## **Egypt: From Revolutions to Institutions**

Producers and Lead Researchers: Zack Brisson & Panthea Lee

Researchers: Mostafa Kashef and Mahmoud Shamaa

Photographs: Zack Brisson and Panthea Lee

Book Designer: Meghana Khandekar

Web Designer: Evan Hensleigh

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Reboot drives public sector innovation. Working in the fields of governance, international development, and civic media, we help organizations that serve the public good develop better programs and services.

We conduct rigorous contextual research to understand the needs, behaviours, and aspirations of the people and institutions we work for and with. This often involves bringing marginalized voices into the processes that impact their lives. We combine research insights with robust business and market analyses to produce actionable strategies and design solutions.

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# Why Egypt. Why Now.

As Egyptians head to the polls for a historic constitutional vote, the world watches and waits to understand just how structural long-term changes to the country's governance system will be. While mainstream media stories focus on admittedly appealing narratives of technology-enabled change, numerous groups and institutions continue to work outside the spotlight to build a new political structure.

Reboot's focus is on understanding rapidly changing mechanisms of social interaction, and leveraging them for better societies. As practitioners at the intersection of governance, technology, and social science, we help our clients build effective programs and identify optimal investments that will lead to a better future. Recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa provide many examples of the type of systemic change that is possible. Likewise, these events will prove instructive on the larger pat-

terns of social change we are all observing. As a global population that has routinely been excluded from political power continues to gain access to information and communications tools, we can only expect more social ruptures. Thus, we decided to abandon the armchair analysis and get our feet on the ground.

**As students of history, we know the story of any revolution truly begins on Day 2. How Egyptian society navigates this present period will have outsize impact on the region, and likely the world.**

In settling on a research destination, the answer was easy. Egypt has long been a political, cultural, and social leader in the Arab world. Its people's success in unseating Hosni Mubarak, their autocratic ruler of 29 years, was both historic and emblematic of larger patterns in the region. As students of history, we know the story of any revolution truly begins on Day 2. How Egyptian society navigates this present period will have outsize impact on the region, and likely the world.

Therefore, we believe the lessons of the Egyptian revolution tell a larger story about emerging forces in global governance. It is hard to point to an example of a peaceful, popular revolution ousting a sitting regime in such a short timespan. And in the early months of 2011, the Egyptian military's restraint set an example for governments pon-

dering what state sovereignty is worth when it represents little more than a monopoly over the systematic use of violence.

Historically, Egypt has been a tolerant nation, one that accommodates diverse people, ideas, and faiths. Today, its citizens hope to reclaim this reputation and to serve as a model of a modern, cosmopolitan Arab state. A sizable, educated middle class offers the human capital necessary for building a dynamic, well-functioning political system. These factors suggest that Egypt is on the edge of a transformation that is much bigger than any one government. Rather, the country's transformation is representative of the larger shifts occurring in the form and function of civilization at the dawn of the 21st century.

**These profound shifts demand deeper study. Yet despite the opportunities they portend, there are no guarantees that outcomes will indeed better serve citizens.**

These profound shifts occurring in Egypt demand deeper study. Yet despite the opportunities they portend, there are no guarantees that outcomes will indeed better serve citizens. The previous regime's ability to rebrand and reconstitute is a major threat. The ability of a long oppressed society to quickly move beyond angry protests and on to civil debate remains an open question. And whether forces that have long benefited from a dysfunctional political system can be forced to cede their positions is hard to say.

The answers to all these questions are yet unwritten. The Egyptian people's will to reform is formidable and resolute. Having endured a repressive governance ecosystem for decades, however, they now require support in building a robust civil society and participatory political institutions.

What follows is an attempt to provide insight into the people, organizations and forces that will drive the next stage of Egypt's political transformation. Extensive conversations across societal strata informed our analysis. We traveled to four locations across the country and spoke with day labourers, factory workers, factory owners, cab drivers, farmers, youth activists, labour organizers, community organizers, NGO of-

**There are many ways to support the Egyptian people in their struggle for a more effective state. We hope our research can inform responsible, impactful investment decisions.**

icers, government officials, journalists, lawyers, white collar professionals of all stripes, and politicians. Cairo provided a strong foundation for keeping abreast of the national dialogue as it evolved. Day trips were taken to El-Mahalla El-Kubra, a critical hub of dissent and labour organizing; Kaisariya, a small village outside Mahalla; and Damanhur, capital of the agricultural province of Beheira.

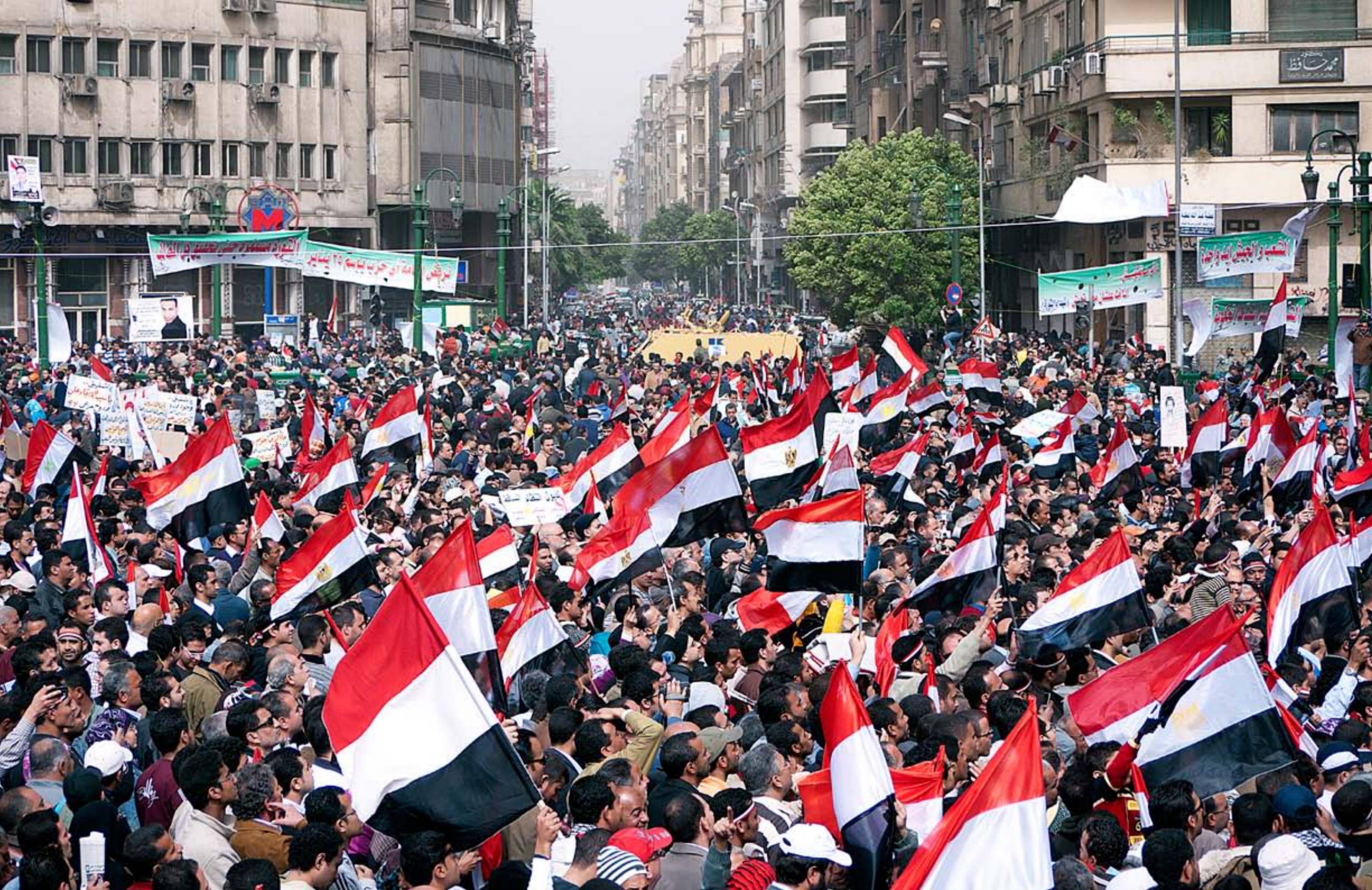
Yet even with that breadth, no field study can provide every answer. This is only the tip of the iceberg in an extremely complex situation. Our goal is to provide timely analysis early in Egypt's transformation process. Our hope is that institutions working for Egyptians can build upon this information in developing their programs and designing their services. There are many ways to support the Egyptian people in their struggle for a more effective state. We hope our research can inform responsible, impactful investment decisions.

This is only the beginning. Along with our team in Egypt, we will be continuing to build upon this preliminary analysis. We have launched a dedicated Egypt web portal at <http://theReboot.org/Egypt> where we will be sharing a sample of our data, and will be releasing an Arabic version of the report in the coming weeks. Looking ahead, we will be supporting various actors in mapping the path forward in Egypt. This is a time of immense opportunity for the Egyptian people, and we feel honoured to be a part of the vibrant conversation.

As always, we welcome your insights, criticisms, and ideas for further investigation at [Egypt@theReboot.org](mailto:Egypt@theReboot.org).

Thank you for reading -- we hope you find this material interesting and relevant. And, most of all, thank you to all the Egyptians who shared their lives, their culture, and their revolution with us.

Zack Brisson & Panthea Lee  
March 16, 2011



# A Revolution? To Be Determined.

Groups neglected by the gaze of the media spotlight seek to cement the political gains that stand before them.



So what has really changed in Egypt? This was one of the key questions we were driving towards, one repeatedly asked of us by colleagues while we were in-country in the early days of ‘post-revolutionary’ Egypt. And indeed, this question also forms the crux of the debate Egyptians are having amongst themselves: Have we had a ‘real’ revolution? If so, what will be the long-term consequences?

To address this question, let us begin in Zamalek. Long home to Cairo’s ruling elite, this guarded island neighbourhood on the Nile houses foreign embassies and Western-style cafes that wouldn’t be out of place in New York or London. Traditionally, Zamalek has been largely off-limits to Cairo’s lower classes. Unless they had specific business in the district, they could expect to be harassed and even expelled by the police.

All that has changed since January 25. Crammed micro-buses, a primary mode of transportation for the city’s poor, now ply the tranquil, leafy streets from which they were previously barred. “Soon our streets will look like the rest of Cairo!” lamented one Zamalek resident. He feared that post-revolution, his neighbourhood would no longer be spared the insufferable traffic jams that are Cairo’s hallmark. Given the importance and influence of Egypt’s class structure, these seemingly pedestrian changes represent a massive cultural transformation, and are emblematic of larger transitions occurring across the country.

Similarly instructive is the absence of police enforcers from the urban spaces of Cairo. In a city where until recently, public areas were tightly controlled by armed officers, citizens now make use of a new found freedom to organize. Street vendors and impromptu block parties line roads that black shirted national security officers once prowled with confidence. This police force remains a primary target of revolutionary ardor. This fury, well earned through decades of repression, has largely forced the police to keep a low profile.

All of these changes are clear evidence of a social equa-

Revolutionary street art lines the streets of Cairo. | Previous spread: Egyptians gather in Tahrir Square on February 25th to demand the ouster of Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik. A week later, this demand was met by the military’s Supreme Council.

tion that is in continual flux. This period of fluidity in class structure is causing confusion among many at the top of the pyramid. Upper-class citizens ponder a new reality where a well-placed phone call to the right person will no longer fulfil any demand they may have. Petty oligarchs accustomed to using the state as a crutch for their empires wonder if a new government will be as useful. Though these changes leave little visible impact on the concrete political and economic order of the country, their substance cannot be underplayed.

Citizens have a sense that now is their chance to transform the institutions and practices that previously inhibited their political, social, and economic opportunities. This can be seen in ways large and small, from the crowds that now chastise law enforcement for unfairly hassling passersby to the neighbourhood councils forming in impoverished neighborhoods like Cairo’s Imbaba, which has historically lacked political representation.

“Street vendors and impromptu block parties line streets that were once tightly controlled by police enforcers. Upper-class citizens ponder a new reality where a well-placed phone call to the right person will no longer fulfil any demand they may have.”

The will to participate and make change is palpable. The Egyptian people want better, and a newly restored sense of self-respect tells them they are entitled to such. They are prepared to do the hard work necessary to build a new political system, but they require resources to realize the opportunities ahead. There are, however, practical realities. Structural changes to the political and economic landscape will not happen overnight. It is, in practical terms, impossible to completely overhaul entire ministries and industries in a matter of days, weeks, or even months. Reforming and rebuilding institutions requires time, a truism in any context and certainly so in today’s Egypt. To a large degree, most seem to accept this reality and are keen to dig into a national dialogue on what the future of Egyptian society looks like and how to get there. This conversation is vibrantly playing out in the civic square, whether



A protester in Tahrir Square demands an end to the Shafik government, and thanks the military for its support of the people.

on the street, in print, over broadcast, or online.

The discourse, however, is constrained by the fact that visions differ on the revolution's 'ideal' results. Many groups want to consolidate and maximize the opportunities in this hour of reform, and focus on achieving broad demands that enjoy near universal support. Others, however, remain dissatisfied with the pace of reform, and see the present moment as a rare opportunity to push forward more specific agendas. Those at the lower rungs of Egyptian society -- and they are many: currently, 40 percent of Egyptians live on less than USD 2 a day -- are impatient for change. They see this period as their best opening to achieve substantive socioeconomic progress. Likewise, those who have politically or intellectually resisted the previous regime, and been brutally oppressed for their disobedience, are unwilling to accept compromises that leave tangible traces of the Mubarak regime.

None of these groups can be blamed for their positions. Morally and intellectually, they are all, in their own ways, legitimate. Yet, despite their validity, there is no accepted playbook for the successful, positive reformation of a society after a revolution. In that absence, many Egyptians feel that continued opposition by disparate interest groups will stymie progress and force the military to resist further change in the name of national stability. This is a concrete challenge, and one Egyptians, and outsiders hoping to help support Egypt's

progress, must consider.

Which brings us to a critical question: What can the international community do to support the Egyptian people's goals of a more just, equitable, and economically vibrant society? Aiding the people, institutions and forces capable of encouraging an inclusive political transformation is a good place to start.

Indeed, the transition process involves many important Egyptian institutions, and several that have long been working towards substantive national reform and have earned the respect of the people. The burgeoning independent press, for one, is both respected by the populace and desperate to prove its role in building a better Egypt. The labour movement, as another, has played a critical role in recent years in mobilizing ordinary Egyptians to demonstrate for basic liberties. Likewise, the judicial community, from judges to lawyers, is eager to establish a legitimate legal system that promotes justice in the true sense of the word.

**What can the international community do to support the Egyptian people's goals of a more just, equitable, and economically vibrant society? Encouraging the forces able to facilitate an inclusive transition would be a good place to start.**

For a people who have spent decades disabused of notions to engage in governance, it will take time, money, and resources to establish the knowledge and systems needed to create a participatory framework. Education on the practical mechanisms of political participation will be critical to building long-term democratic capacity. Many Egyptian groups have the infrastructure and credibility necessary to provide such training, the result of years of experience in underground capacities. Post-revolution, as they emerge into the open, we must support and build upon their existing credibility and ongoing efforts.



A monument in Tahrir Square honours those who were killed during earlier protests.

Finally, to achieve a stable society, critical infrastructure projects, especially those to improve living standards among Egypt's poor, must begin immediately. Better electricity grids, clean water, and access to affordable essentials such as housing and education all take time to build. Yet if these initiatives aren't started immediately, the poor are likely to conclude the revolution has left them with few evident gains. This will undermine the long-term stability of whatever new government emerges. International partners can provide the capital, knowledge and organizational leadership to support the people and organizations that have the capacity build better governance. There are many well-resourced local entities who would welcome, and even supplement, such support for their efforts

to build a new Egypt.

To be sure, successfully operating in the current environment is not without risk and significant constraints. Yet ignoring opportunities to support progress because of such constraints would be both short-sighted and risky from a regional, and even international, security perspective. Likewise, it is critical that the international community expand its focus beyond the tech-enabled youth activists that have dominated the spotlight thus far. There are many credible, savvy groups operating in Egypt that are in need of greater foreign recognition. By supporting these groups, international partners can help the Egyptian people ensure that the revolution leads to a new state that isn't just different, but better. ■



## Profile: Egypt's Labour Movement

### A critical organizing force for some of Egypt's most marginalized

Egypt's labour organizers have long been among the most vocal and domestically persuasive movements advocating for substantive national reform. While its demands began with workers' rights, over the years, labour has expanded its scope and vision for social reform. A matured focus necessitated leaders become better informed, organized, and networked. Indeed, the labour movement has been instrumental in mobilizing and educating regular Egyptians on their fundamental rights, and in orchestrating coordinated demonstrations against a repressive regime.

Industry syndicates (or unions) in Egypt previously required government sanction and were controlled by a state

arm, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation. This meant that syndicates often sacrificed members' interests for those of the state. Most syndicate members we spoke with — from factory workers to lawyers — unleashed torrents of complaints against their syndicate leaders. They claimed syndicates were ineffective at securing fair wages and the ability to form independent unions. These basic demands were sabotaged by syndicate leaders more interested in protecting their relationships to government and business groups.

Thus, organizations such as the well-respected Centre of Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS) formed as independent entities serving the labour movement. At first, the organizing efforts of these groups were largely sporadic, fueled more by potent resentment than by astute strategy. Over time, the movement improved its tactics and evolved

beyond solely labour advocates to a general civil rights force to be reckoned with. Labour was actively involved in monitoring the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections. The April 6 Youth Movement, which has received much praise in recent media, was born out of a labour strike in El-Mahalla El-Kubra on April 6, 2008.

Today, the 21-year-old CTUWS has four branches across Egypt. The organization provides legal support, financial resources, and training to labour organizers nationwide. They have no political affiliations, though their demands — the end of the Mubarak regime and a legitimate shift towards democracy — are inherently political. To better understand CTUWS and the labour groups it supports, we traveled to Mahalla. The city is known across the country as a hub for Egypt's labour movement. There we met with factory workers, labour organizers and the head of CTUWS. We gathered in CTUWS' office, a utilitarian space where the television is always on and heavy cigarette smoke chokes the air.

Given CTUWS' history, we expected excitement around

1. A group of textile workers debates the political challenges they face in the coming period 2. A worker at Misr Spinning and Weaving, the country's largest textile company, details his frequent arrests for organizing 3. The leader of CTUWS discusses his strategies to support the Egyptian labour movement.

recent events, but the labour organizers -- grizzled, chain-smoking men in their 50s and 60s -- were unimpressed. "The regime hasn't changed," was the consensus. One organizer elaborated: "The regime is much more than man. We still have a lot of work to do."

Leading a constituency that is largely digitally unconnected, and often illiterate, these experienced organizers described the face-to-face tactics they used to educate, mobilize, and deploy their communities. Mobile was only used for communications among the head organizers, but not among the masses. Internet-related anything was out of the question. Indeed, for all the possibilities of smartphones and social media, when it comes to mobilizing labour, printed flyers and break times in the factory cafeteria still reign. The organizers saw their

strategic parameters not as constraints — quite the opposite. “It is risky to rely on phones and computers because you never know who is watching, listening, and reading,” one organizer explained. “And what if phone or internet service gets turned off, then what do you do? Talking to the people in front of you, that you can see, touch, and trust — that is the only thing you can rely on.”

Despite labour’s conventional techniques in an era of seemingly boundless technological possibility, their success and credibility speaks for itself. The Egyptian labour movement has drawn significant concessions from the government over the years, and boasts extensive support among the popular classes. In 2007, textile workers at a state factory in Mahalla won the right to receive hazard pay. In 2008, property tax collectors camped out for two weeks in front of the parliament before receiving a 325 percent increase in salary and the right to form the country’s first non-state controlled union.

In the present moment, popular opinion on the labour movement’s role in the revolution is divided. Some Egyptians say it played a decisive role in toppling the regime. Coordinated mass strikes in early February, they maintain, were the last straw that finally pushed Mubarak over the edge. Others insist labour was but one of many opposition groups. And a majority of those we met wished, ‘post-revolution’, that labour would now stop their “selfish” strikes focused on particular, rather than national, demands. “Now is not the time,” they say, “labour must be patient.”

Whether gratitude, skepticism, or resentment dominates popular opinion towards it, there is no doubt that Egypt’s labour movement was critical in realizing the January 25 Revolution. Whether labour is correctly credited in the history books remains to be seen, but for now, labour requires critical support -- political, technical, and financial -- to realize the socioeconomic gains their constituents seek. ■

A cotton farmer protesting in Tahrir Square lists his demands.





## Profile: Independent Media

### The race to create a platform for a critical national dialogue

In a region not known for an exceptionally robust press, Egypt can claim one of the more diverse and independent media ecosystems in the Arab world. In print and via broadcast, citizens can choose from a range of perspectives and outlets. Online, a growing movement of bloggers and commentators led Harvard’s Berkman Centre to, in 2009, name Egypt the most active online journalist community in the Middle East.

With few other legitimate channels for political participation, the independent media in Egypt have often served as de facto opposition parties. The robust media are made possible by an active customer base and ready human capital. Egypt’s middle class, while relatively poor, is sizable, well-educated,

and increasingly hungry for political information. It is also from these ranks that a large proportion of Egyptian journalists are drawn. In a society where middle- and lower-class citizens were routinely harassed by security forces, the power of a press card reading “Please make it easier for the holder of this card to do his job” — a cheeky circumlocution — has long been seen as an upwardly mobile force.

The recent revolution has vaulted the media into atmospheric prominence. Egyptians now compulsively consume the media for clues to what their future will hold. Many are desperate to stay abreast of the rapidly changing political developments so as to better participate in the national transformation process. “Previously, no one cared about politics; now, we all follow every word,” was a common refrain. Popular television sitcoms and dramas have been replaced by political

programming. Independent newspapers are growing in audience every day. Correspondingly, regime-controlled media are quickly drying up as Egyptians reach for outlets they can trust.

Cognizant of the role of the media — past, present, and future — in Egypt’s democratic transformation, we pursued key media figures and institutions in our study. Likewise, we probed attitudes and behaviours around media with nearly all respondents. Extremely informative was the day we spent at Al-Dustour, one of the leading independent newspapers which has gathered a robust following on the strength of its reporting against government corruption.

Conversations with Al-Dustour’s journalists, editors, and management revealed an institution that is actively seeking to cement its role as a positive facilitator to the national dialogue. Journalists of all ranks expressed strong interest in developing new editorial models that move beyond cataloguing the failures of the past and onto constructing an achievable vision of the future.

One editor in particular was excited by the prescriptive

1. A journalist holds his press-card bearing the text “Please make it easier for the holder of this card to do his job.” 2. The Editor in Chief of Al-Dustour 3. A political cartoon that mocks the corruption of Egypt under former President Hosni Mubarak.

model offered by his section, ‘Post Box’. The section’s colloquial title, ‘The Complaints Page’ paints a clearer picture of its purpose. Once a week, it documents the challenges, both quotidian and structural, faced by ordinary citizens as they navigate a broken governance system. From critical but out-of-reach medication to trash that is never collected, these citizen grievances reflect the challenges of everyday life in Egypt. Complainants can submit their issues via print, email, or old-fashioned office visits. Al-Dustour then documents and publishes those it believes are most compelling or widely applicable. The editors also determine which government ministry is responsible for the particular issue and publish a photo of its minister alongside the complaint. Ministers then have the opportunity to address or resolve citizens’ issues, and have their actions recognized in a later Post Box. Whether driven by



The Post Box editor at Al-Dustour holds up an edition of his section.

events in Egypt.

The role of Al Jazeera has also been heavily stressed in Western outlets. Without a doubt, the Qatari network produced reporting that was highly visible in Egypt during the revolution. Its coverage of events was a powerful tool for some Western-oriented organizers who saw it as a willing, even eager accomplice in their efforts to win the global public relations campaign. However many Egyptians, including those actively demonstrating, felt that Al Jazeera was not sympathetic to their perspective. They saw the network as an agent of foreign interests, altering its coverage to support a prede-

**A truly autonomous and accountability-making fourth estate, in a country with a little such history, will require targeted education and capacity-building.**

termined narrative. There is certainly an element of national pride in this view, but its repeated assertion should give the international community pause in considering the network a universal friend to the mythic ‘Arab street’.

This explosion of voices and perspectives in Egypt is undoubtedly a positive force. The public desires, and the established media industry is willing to provide, a balancing information force in the governance transition now underway. Yet it remains unclear to what extent the numerous and divergent channels will contribute value to a national dialogue. Many are likely to just add noise. The challenge faced by media policymakers in Egypt is a sharpened version of one that societies are facing all over the world. In the age of new media, how can a country develop an inclusive, constructive discourse on national issues? What are the mechanisms to differentiate sophisticated political ideas from well-intended but ultimately amateur voices? These questions have eluded many of the brightest minds in media policy the world over. Yet the Egyptian media is now tackling them head-on, with the added complexity of a revolutionary operating environment.

To succeed in their role as host to an important national



A dedicated protester in Tahrir Square reads a paper under his tent.

dialogue, Egyptian media require significant support. New business and publishing models, which take time and resources to establish, are necessary. To strengthen the quality and ambition of their accountability-making journalism, respected, credible outlets such as Al-Dustour need help building organizational capacity. As their editor told us, only half in jest, “Having the organizational charts of [the major Western newspapers], with corresponding job descriptions, would be immensely valuable.”

Likewise, as credible voices from grassroots and amateur outlets continue to emerge, they will need support to better take part in the national dialogue. Well developed publishing platforms editorial models will help package and disseminate their voices. Both professional and amateur journalists lack knowledge

of investigative methods and reporting technologies, a product of the previous media environment. Training and knowledge transfer in these areas will be critical to their growth.

Collectively, these policies and investments will contribute to a sustainable, diverse, independent media landscape. International institutions with the knowledge and resources to support these needs have the opportunity to make powerful investments in the Egyptian fourth estate in a period critical to the region’s history. A viable democratic media will give the Egyptian people a necessary platform for addressing the political, social and cultural challenges ahead. ■

a sense of responsibility or a concern for their public image, many government officials work to resolve issues publicly addressed to them.

Al-Dustour believes providing a feedback channel to government -- however indirect it may have be -- is what has made Post Box so popular. Such organic ‘hacks’ to the political system demonstrate the lengths to which Egyptians previously had to go in order to exert influence over governance structures. The feature’s success and the overall vision of the Al-Dustour team offers a model for the Egyptian media’s role in the nation’s long-term political transformation.

Of course, Al-Dustour represents only one outlet in a rapidly expanding media landscape. As a new sense of openness settles upon Egyptian society, we can expect to see a blossoming of homegrown platforms for discourse. The Muslim Brotherhood has already announced a new television channel and every week sees the launch of new citizen-driven websites eager to provide an online meeting place for civic debate.

Likewise, internet and satellite connections continue to broadcast and build audiences for foreign news entities. Several international media outlets have gained prominence in Egypt from their coverage during the revolution. The BBC was repeatedly cited as one of the most fair international broadcasters. Numerous respondents from diverse backgrounds turned to it for insights into how the global audience was interpreting



## Profile: The Legal Community

### Micro-revolutions and internal agents of change

For the most part, the Western media spotlight has aimed at a technologically enabled, younger generation as the primary movers of the revolution. However, as we've shown, there are many important and well defined institutions that were critical in creating the political openings necessary for revolution to thrive. These groups, endowed with legitimacy and infrastructure, will be critical in building new and improved governance systems. With a strong basis in the rule of law, Egypt's legal community is one such institution.

Under the Mubarak regime, the legal system was corrupted, preventing judges and lawyers from exercising their ostensible authority to curb the government's abuse of power.

Yet despite decades under such an autocratic governing style, Egyptian society still benefits from a robust community of legal practitioners. This community, frustrated by these political challenges, has been a consistent source of demands for political reform.

In recent years, the legal community has been increasingly vocal and better organized. In March 2006, nearly 1,000 judges demonstrated for full judicial independence and against state harassment of those who had criticized the 2005 elections. This sparked a series of protests that spring, many of which were violently suppressed by police forces. Lawyers in Egypt have also been actively calling for change. In the summer of 2010, after two lawyers were unjustly prosecuted for 'disrespecting a state prosecutor', 100,000 lawyers across the country walked out of courtrooms in a general protest to

demand improved standards of fairness in the justice system.

Such examples point to the years of organizing work that culminated in a broad political agenda for reform. The work of groups like the legal community and the labour organizers outlined earlier, created critical cracks in the power of the regime, ultimately leading to a successful revolution. Given this important pre-revolution role, we sought to understand what this community's continued function would be in the post-revolution transition period.

A day at the national lawyers' syndicate (or bar association) in Cairo proved illuminating. Lawyers' syndicates serve as the primary organizing body for Egypt's lawyers, and the headquarters in Cairo oversees all chapters nationwide. Here,

**Desperate to sever ties with the graft that was so much a part of Egyptian governance organizations and individuals at the local, state, and national levels are all staging their own 'micro revolutions'.**

1. Unpopular, NDP affiliated leaders of the Damamur lawyers' syndicate
2. Well known human rights attorney Mamdouh Ismail
3. A woman seeks a 'divorce' from the corrupt Egyptian state.

we spoke with an assorted group, from renowned human rights attorney Mamdouh Ismail to an Egyptian-American lawyer who had returned to Egypt to participate in his homeland's transformation. We witnessed a roiling debate that spilled out from cramped meeting rooms into the lobby and courtyard of the majestic but decrepit headquarters. Dozens of men dressed in Western-style suits and clutching assorted papers, folders, and briefcases moved in one messy and ever-growing mass. Voices were raised, fingers were pointed, and dignities were insulted. As it turns out, competing factions were arguing over whom the syndicate should appoint as its new leadership. The previous executive body had recently been run out for their ties to Mubarak's National Democratic Party, affiliations from which they benefited unfairly.

This dialogue was echoed at a small regional lawyers'

syndicate in the Lower Egyptian city of Damanhur, where we found groups of lawyers huddled in similarly heated discussions. Frustrated by rampant corruption that saw an alleged 90 percent of their annual legal fees siphoned off, the lawyers of Damanhur were also struggling to appoint new leadership without ties to the hand-selected cabal that had previously sacrificed their interests for that of the regime.

The transitions the lawyers' syndicates are undergoing are reflective of a larger trend across Egypt. In the psychological revolution of the post-Mubarak era, institutions large and small are determined to purge themselves of traces of the old regime. This has led to waves of 'micro-revolutions', staged by individuals and organizations at the local, state, and national levels who are desperate for a clean break from the toxic governance structures of the past. Complicity in corruption, they insist, will no longer be tolerated. In many instances, including the legal community, these shifts are being driven by younger generations desperate to change the rules of the game.

As with all democratic processes, this transformation is complex and positive outcomes are in no way guaranteed. Forces aligned with the previous regime extend beyond individuals — they are nested in institutional structures. Internal forces for change will continue to face robust opposition from the establishment powers who benefited from, and thus structured their institutions to serve, the status quo.

Established institutions such as Egypt's legal community are at the heart of the political transformation now underway. Mini-revolutions will continue to ripple through these organizations as internal reformers push out leader's that were tainted by the corruption of the previous regime. These internal change agents need political, economic and organizational support to cement their gains and strengthen the democratic capacity of their important institutions. Groups seeking to encourage progressive reform in Egypt would do well to identify and enable the efforts of such actors. Their success will in many ways determine how far systemic reform advances as a result of the initial revolution. ■



A man in Tahrir Square lists his demands for political reform.

# Neighbourhood Snapshot: Imbaba

Egypt's poor see limited opportunities for further political engagement

Just 5 kilometres from the quiet, tree-lined streets and historic villas of Cairo's affluent Zamalek neighbourhood is the district of Imbaba. Its streets are strewn with garbage, roamed by skeletal strays, and flanked by long expired street lights. In this impoverished neighbourhood, where population density is three times that of Manhattan, we met two friends: Saeed and Mustafa.

Saeed is elated about the events of the past month and eager to detail his involvement. Starting on Friday, January 28 — orchestrated as the “Day of Rage” by organizers — this taxi driver abandoned his job. “For two weeks, I served my duty in my country's liberation.”

Daily he crossed the Nile on his way to Tahrir, often merging with like-minded mobs along the way. In Saeed's mind, there was only one path to liberation: the road to Tahrir. “And so we stood our ground, we fought.” Saeed does not mention the riot police's use of tear gas or water cannons and, later, when the topic is brought up, his face darkens. “Those are events that should not have been broadcast across the world. Al-Jazeera had good coverage of events in Egypt, but they were wrong to shame the Egyptian people,” he says quietly. “There are some things that are private to a nation, our own business.” Unlike several youth activists we spoke with, Saeed does not stress the hardships he and his fellow protesters endured. They were part of the price of freedom, we are made to understand, and the conversation moves abruptly forward.

Saeed is optimistic about a better Egypt, but recognizes getting there will take time. “I didn't care about politics before January 25, but now I am motivated to learn more.” This sentiment was repeated by many others we encountered over our time in Egypt. Saeed is grateful to Facebook for helping bring forth the revolution. Though he himself has not used the website, he believes users of Facebook and similar tools will be critical to his country's salvation. “Technology is powerful. It allows true dialogue.” And although Saeed has never used the platform, he adds, “Everyone should be on Facebook. It is our duty.”

Within Imbaba, Saeed is very much the organic leader

Children's handprints adorn a wall in the crowded streets of Imbaba.

that emerges in any tightly knit community. He was the one that collected the 20 Egyptian pounds (USD 3.40) each from more than 30 neighbours to repair the long broken street lights in his alley. Yet despite his proactive nature and his optimism for Egypt's future, Saeed grows visibly dejected when the topic turns to Imbaba's prospects. “I want people from here to be represented, but I just don't see how that can happen. People from Imbaba can only take part in politics up to a certain point: we could participate in Tahrir. Now, it is out of our hands — the rest is up to others, and up to God.”

Three things, Saeed says, brought him to Tahrir: the desire for freedom, for greater class equality, and for ‘a normal life’, defined as having enough money to provide for his family of eight. To his mind, there has been progress on the first. The path to the latter two demands, he believes, is far more uncertain. Saeed believes the barriers of entry to politics are

“We now know the way to Tahrir, and we won't be afraid to head back

impossibly high for people like him. Serving as a physical body to bolster the protests, he says, was one thing. The next step in national reform requires facilities he simply doesn't have: “We are too illiterate, too poor. We don't even have enough money to take care of daily life, to pay the baksheesh I need to pay to get by,” he says, referring to the greasing of the palms customary across the Middle East. “How will we have the resources to make things better?”

He is, however, determined to remain a vigilant watchdog for progress. If those entrusted to rebuild Egypt fail him, Saeed says punishment will be swift: “We now know the way to Tahrir, and we won't be afraid to head back,” he proudly declares. Like many in Imbaba, Saeed supports the Egyptian-American scientist Ahmed Zewail as one of Egypt's future leaders. “He won a Nobel Prize in 1999 and,” pausing for dramatic effect, “advises President Obama!” (Zewail is one of Obama's advisors on science and technology.) He looks thrilled, and the trademark Egyptian pride is on full display.

Saeed also places hope in select institutions. For years, entities including the non-governmental organization Resala



1. Mustafa seen here inside his home. 2. Saeed sits outside a tea shop in Imbaba 3. Mustafa's children grace the researchers with a smile.

and the well known religious group the Muslim Brotherhood have provided critical social services to Saeed and his neighbours. Such groups have earned the type of strong, popular credibility and trust that can only be established with time and effort. Though he does not politically identify with the Brotherhood, nor with its interpretations of Islam, Saeed recognizes its immense societal value. His family has received medical, education, and financial services from the Brotherhood, and he knows it also operates social support programs for widows, orphans, and the disabled. Saeed hopes groups like Resala and the Brotherhood will take an active role in rebuilding Egypt, for these are parties he knows he can trust to care for him and his family.

Saeed's cautious optimism was balanced with the dark pragmatism of his neighbour Mustafa, who is blunt in his analysis of the situation. "There has not been a revolution," he says flatly. "The worst has gone, but many more like him remain, in government and in society. Things will now get better for them — they have been waiting for this moment — but not

for us. For people like me, things will forever stay the same."

We are in Mustafa's home, a two-chamber studio on the ground floor of a four-storey building. Graffiti covers the building's outer walls. One particularly striking piece depicts the Kaaba, a sacred Islamic site in Mecca. Within the building's unfinished concrete walls live 12 families. There is one bathroom for the entire building. In Mustafa's own 250-square-foot home lives his family of eight. There are thin floral carpets beneath our feet, though the flowers have long since worn away and resemble little more than brownish pink blotches with dabs of faint green. A few pieces of decorative fabric cover the spotty walls. A mixture of peeling sea-green paint and grime pokes out beneath the exterior layer.

Mustafa seems tired. Really, truly exhausted. Unlike his exuberant friend, Mustafa views the events of the past month as more annoyance than anything. As a day labourer who collects and sells scrap metal, he found that business essentially shut down for two weeks while the nation was caught up in revolution. It was a trying, difficult time for Mustafa.

"One day I don't work is one day that my family doesn't eat. We had no food for two weeks and had to beg from our neighbours." He believes Saeed was foolish to participate in the protests in Tahrir, and openly scolds his friend. "People like us are the wood on the fire. They wanted you to sacrifice, but they don't care about you. There will always be more of you, more of us. We are always available for sacrifice." One gets the sense that he is talking about more than just Tahrir.

Mustafa's long list of complaints against his country centre around two themes: immutable poverty and injustice. His son was imprisoned because the family couldn't afford to pay their electricity bill. Mustafa finally begged and borrowed the USD 10 in baksheesh -- one week's pay -- needed to get his son out. He wants his children to lead a better life, but he can't afford the private classes needed to get them there. "My son is in Grade 9 and still doesn't know how to read," despairs the father. "They keep just passing him up through the grades, just to get him through the system. But then how will we ever improve our place in life?"

To buy gas for their home in Imbaba, Mustafa complains, is 10 times what it costs in wealthy Zamalek because his neighbourhood lacks basic urban infrastructure. He says even the government 'support' his family does receive, is a joke. "We bought a loaf of government bread once [bread that is made from subsidized flour the government provides to bakers to allow them to make cheaper, poorer quality goods for low-income clients]. When we brought it home to eat, we found a cockroach in it. That would never happen for those that can pay; for people like us, they don't care. They treat us however they like... It should not be this way." He looks deflated. Tired.

As for the upcoming elections, Mustafa says he will not be voting. "What is the point?" he asks, returning to his favourite metaphor. "We are just wood for the fire; nothing will change for us anyway." ■

# A Note On Technology

Separating fact, fiction, and mythology in revolutionary Egypt is more difficult than it first appears



1. A young girl documents protests in Tahrir Square 2. A protestor in Tahrir holds up a sign: "Come join us. We will use Facebook for our revolution." 3. A series of SMS messages from the military's Supreme Council

The role of the internet, social media, mobile phones, and other connection technologies in the Egyptian revolution is a trendy topic. For many who have long argued that these tools will help topple autocratic nation-states, recent events in Egypt seemed to offer long-awaited corroboration. To those less certain of the structural importance of such tools, it was easy to cry foul of the media's role in hyping the techno-utopian storyline.

Both arguments carry weight. Technological tools are indeed being used by those pursuing more participatory governance in Egypt. And many have used them to great impact, perhaps most famously the April 6 Youth Movement and Wael Ghonim, the Google executive who was one of the creators of the 'We Are All Khaled Said' Facebook group and accompanying YouTube campaign. Both have been much touted in Western media for galvanizing and connecting a new generation of Egyptian activists. Yet it is also true that technology was only marginally, if at all, used by several factions critical to the revolution. Even mobile phones, while near ubiquitous, were little used in campaigns by the labour movement and the judiciary.

Acknowledging this complex reality, it was critical that we did not focus our research on the use of technology. Doing so would have been unwise: media narratives around technology's role in the revolution have penetrated deeply into all strata of Egyptian society, colouring participant responses. Thus, we explored technology largely by examining quotidian usage. Questions around everyday information flows and communications patterns led to more natural -- and thus, we believe, more accurate -- responses about technology, its uses, and its broader social role. The resulting conversations were illuminating, and often surprising.

## Social Networking

So what did we find? Unsurprisingly, social networking is a prominent force in certain layers of Egyptian society. It is a common source for news and information for those under 35, middle-class and above, who use it to stay abreast of latest topics of discussion among their social network. Facebook is by far the most popular platform, outstripping Twitter which is confined to a relatively small collection of internationally-

oriented users. Indeed, many Facebook users see the site as more of a publishing platform than a space for online socializing. These groups are using Facebook to create fully formed publishing cycles and advocacy campaigns, with limited to no use of external websites. This is an interesting example where efficiency over complexity is leading users to leapfrog the traditional technology adoption cycle.

Perhaps the most interesting application of new media we encountered was this use of Facebook as an advocacy and press management tool by certain opposition groups. One leading organizer with the Democratic Front Party described how they turned to Facebook as a spin machine whenever the government provided an opportunity: "When the security forces broke in our front door on January 26, we immediately put up a Facebook group to collect popular anger and let the media know."

This strategy is effective because traditional media such as newspapers and broadcast news shows often report on the size and vociferousness of these groups as a proxy for expressing their own political views. In terms of sophistication, this cross-media strategy compares to those used by Western advocacy groups, but it was certainly not one adopted by most organizers.

Technological tools have also become culturally important as myths about their impact continue to grow. Use of technology has always been aspirational — it all boils down to access and power — but this has become far more pronounced in present-day Egypt. Even those who haven't used Facebook or Twitter are eager to sing their praises or to feign personal familiarity. Parents who peer over the shoulders of their web-surfing children boast about their own 'Facebook usage'. Even those who admit to never having seen Facebook mumble something or other about internet access costs or the net cafe being too far away before eagerly pressing forward about how their best friend's use of Facebook is really sufficient for expressing both their political wills. And the pulp literature and pop clothing emblazoned with 'Facebook,' now common in Cairo, remind us that technology has the ability to impact a people's consciousness as much as their physical realities.



A man in Damanhur welcomes researchers.

## Mobile

Mobile phones may have played the role of the most tangible technology in the revolution. At a basic level, text messages and voice calls enabled the Egyptian people to coordinate, to stay informed, and to communicate amongst themselves and to the outside world. That is, until the government began interfering with internet and mobile networks beginning on January 25. What began as the blocking of Twitter and Facebook became the complete shutdown of both services. Fully functional mobile services were not restored until February 3.

But beyond immediate communications, the near-ubiquitous mobile phone also provided protesters the opportunity to document the events that were unfolding. As tools for crafting the revolution's narrative, mobile phones gave protesters a sense of ownership over the events. Their videos and photos will also be used to shape the story that will live on. From our conversations, this increased the perceived value of participating. As one youth activist in Cairo explained: "It was our

revolution because we made it happen. And it will stay our revolution because we will be the ones writing its history." (And, one assumes, their place in it.)

Projects such as #18DaysInEgypt, a documentary in development, illustrates this philosophy. This film about the Egyptian revolution will be "shot entirely by those who experienced the events [on-the-ground]", done by crowdsourcing media content from tech-enabled protesters. A fascinating concept, but we must not forget those who will be left out of such an interpretation of history. Tech-related access barriers aside, as of March 17, roughly three weeks after the project site launched, only its About section was available in Arabic. The other two key sections -- news updates and team bios -- were English-only, revealing the project's biases and intended audiences. This strategy has met with the desired success, as it's been covered by the regular parade of international media outlets.

As with any information channel, mobile was also used by various government entities. The Egyptian military began blasting mass text messages as early as 8:17pm local time

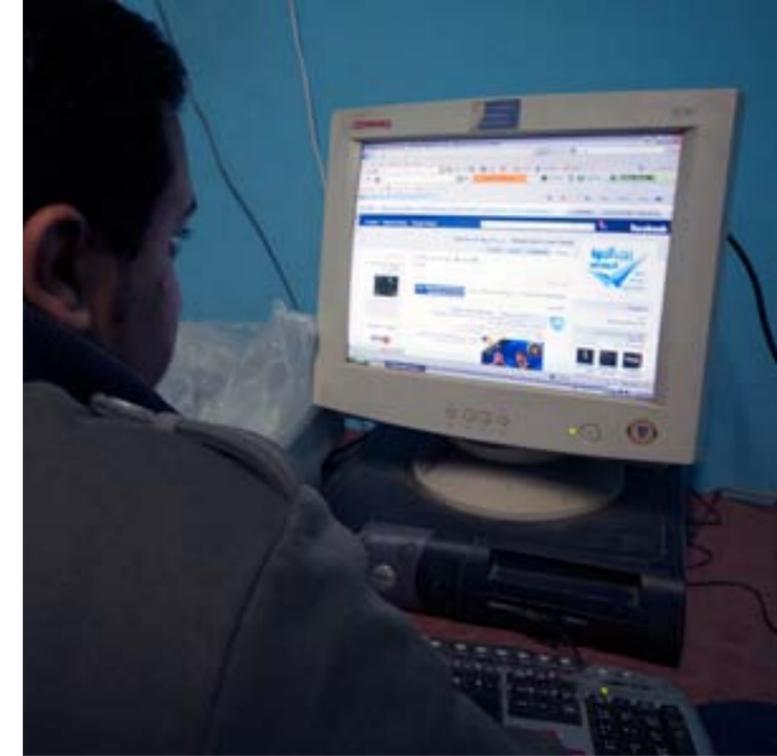
on February 10, 2011 -- less than 22 hours before Mubarak's resignation was announced. The first message: "The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces is currently in a meeting to study the current situation and will speak to the people very soon." (A curious observation: though the SMS messages themselves are in Arabic, their sender is only identified by its chosen English designation 'ArmedForces' as many mobile operating systems do not support Arabic script for contact names. But that is a separate conversation.) Since that first message, the military leadership has been sending mass SMS to its citizens every two to five days to update them on its view of events. As of publication, the last SMS sent by the military was on March 7, and was directed at those who had raided State Security buildings days earlier and removed sensitive materials. The message: "To all the responsible people, please hand in any National Security papers you may have to ensure we can take appropriate action on the information."

## The Limits of Technology

In discussing all the possibility technology holds, we must also consider its limitations. Ultimately, technology's impact is only as strong as the weakest links in the human system that uses it. Indeed, digital tools are seldom trusted in Egypt, and for good reason. Long accustomed to state surveillance, most citizens -- from youth activists to factory workers -- expect the same to be true online and on their phones, and recognize that monitoring is especially likely on digital networks. Thus, while services such as Facebook could be used in advocacy

**Yet it was merely complementary, not core, and it is misguided to suggest technology was the driving motivator in regime change.**

activities such as recruitment campaigns, they could not be trusted for sensitive organizing. Most senior organizers we spoke with still ran their core activities in a very analog, cell-based fashion. Top strategies were set by leadership committees that gathered regularly in hubs like Cairo. Upon returning to their communities, these leaders would distribute handwritten organizing documents to collaborators. Using such tactics,



1. An activist behind the April 6 Youth Movement shows us their various Facebook pages. 2. The cover of a pulp novel, seen here at a roadside bookstand in Cairo, portrays Facebook as a corrupt tool for Western influence.



one group was able to slowly but confidently disseminate a confidential organizing strategy to a network of 8,000 activists nationwide.

The success and importance of these 'old-fashioned' techniques show the limits of technology in facilitating Egypt's revolution. But trying to distinguish these tools from offline connections in Egyptian society is impossible. An incredibly social people, the amount of knowledge transfer that occurs in cafes, on street corners, and from roadside newspaper vendors is immense. It is this primary layer of offline interaction that provides much of the fodder for connections happening online.

To democratize the fruits of technology, tools must be tailored for wider accessibility. Adapting online tools for use via SMS is one possibility that could serve populations that lack computer access. Basic text messaging remains among the most inclusive technologies. If online services make greater use of this channel, the share of Egyptians able to use them will expand correspondingly. In the meantime, for excluded populations, technology will continue to impact them only a proximate manner and through exposure to other, technologically enabled parties.

Likewise, until and unless sound solutions to serious security concerns are created, savvy activists will continue to conduct their most sensitive organizing offline. While Egypt's

new Interior Minister Mansour el-Essawy has promised an end to online surveillance, the ubiquity of the practice, even in Western countries, gives little hope that his pledge will be honoured.

Speaking holistically, it is misguided to suggest that technology was the driving motivator in regime change. Technology played a defined and concrete role in the revolution, but its contributions were complementary rather than core. Technology facilitated and encouraged connections and organizing that would have happened anyway. The forces for reform in Egyptian society have deep roots, and they would have ultimately utilized other methods to achieve their goals even if technology wasn't available. What is likely, and many observers will probably argue, is that access to technology did speed the pace with which reform was possible by lowering the costs of recruitment and organizing.

These tools will continue to penetrate deeper into Egyptian society, but it will likely be several years before many of today's relatively unconnected demographics begin using them directly. Literacy, both textual and technological, will need to improve, to say nothing of the socioeconomic factors currently limiting access. Such changes take time. However this gradual pace of change shouldn't trouble observers inspired by the possibilities technology offers.

As an amplifier of human intent, technology will only be as only as effective as the offline social networks it is built upon, and only as good as human intent is able to direct it. Deeper sociological change, from education reform to political restructuring, will be necessary before technology can increase its role in shaping the future of Egyptian society. ■

1. From the collection of a bookseller in Cairo: "The Facebook Story: Revolution and Riches." 2. Protesters in Tahrir Square 'send an SMS' to US President Barack Obama.





## Methodology

### Conducting contextual research in revolutionary Egypt

Our research began nine days after Hosni Mubarak left power. Our goal was to study what happens on ‘Day 2’ after a successful uprising radically changes the dominant governance equation. Over the course of two weeks we spoke with nearly 200 people from all walks of life. Our conversation were by turns, inspiring and troubling, encouraging and heartwrenching.

Interviews were both arranged and ad hoc, and were conducted in homes, in workplaces, and on the streets. Of 54 formal, in-depth interviews, we spoke with 40 men and 14 women. With the exception of one American living in Cairo, all those we spoke with were Egyptian. We sought responses

from those across the socioeconomic spectrum — urban-poor to high society — and of Muslim and Christian faiths. Interviews were, for the most part, conducted in Arabic with a handful in English based on participant preference.

Research scope was initially determined by Reboot, with the input of various local and international groups we conferred with prior to arrival in Egypt. Though we continued to absorb all that we saw through our initial research frame, our focus areas and questions naturally evolved over the course of the study. Data processing was done nightly and initial data synthesis with the local team took place in Cairo at the tail-end of the study.

Our Egyptian team consisted of two male Cairenes, and we leveraged their extended networks in Mahalla, Kaisariya, and Damanhur. Travel was by taxi and motorbike within cities, and by train and microbus between cities. All extended team members were local to the cities or areas in which they guided our activities. And in a country where *wasta* (connections/influence) are everything, our team served the study well.

In Cairo, we stayed one block from Tahrir Square to allow for twice daily visits to the hub — first thing in the morning, and last thing at night — to take the national pulse. This was far more effective than monitoring local or international news. Tahrir is a fount of intelligence and insights; it was where news began and was exchanged. Unsurprisingly, we noticed mass media narratives often diverged from what we witnessed on the ground. Reasons vary but, suffice it to say, being so close to the discourse proved its value.

A common misconception around the role of research is that all the magic happens in the field. In our experience, the hardest but most valuable part happens after. After the field study, our teams in New York and Cairo spent one week synthesizing and making sense of the collected data. We identified patterns and drew insights around various themes in governance and development, and detailed opportunities for making meaningful change in Egypt. This stage creates value out of seemingly unwieldy or otherwise passive data, and has led to the book you now hold in your hands.

1. The team takes advantage of a train ride to process data.
2. Researcher Mostafa Kashef struggles for the shot in Tahrir Square.
3. The team synthesizes data at the Cairo office.

## Research Challenges

While immensely rewarding, our time in Egypt was not without challenges. Studying a country in a time of historic change is naturally difficult. With huge a question mark over the future of Egypt and its people, emotions were perpetually charged — much of what we heard was understandably hyperbolized, and our local team worked tirelessly to translate not just language but ever-changing national and local sentiments. Contradictory messages in the media and on the street proved disorienting both for researchers and those we consulted. To the best of our ability, synthesis activities have mitigated for bias derived from these constraints.

In the period Reboot was in-country, there was widespread distrust of foreigners. We encountered few non-Arabs, state media had been warning Egyptians to be wary of subversive ‘foreign elements’ presently in the country. Our international team consisted of a white American and a Taiwanese-Canadian. The former especially attracted suspicion, particularly in smaller towns and poorer neighbourhoods where foreigners are in general rare, and even more unusual in the present period. Street and intercept interviews sometimes drew negative attention, and a few street interviews in Mahalla and Damanhur led to hostile verbal confrontations from suspicious passersby. A strong sense of pride also sparked public disagreements among Egyptians on whether foreigners were indeed welcome in such a time of change: Do we want outsiders to document Egypt’s revolution, or should we get our house in order first? Despite these challenges, many were eager to speak with us and exercise their newly won freedom of expression.

Accessing female participants also proved challenging, but this was expected given the Arab context. In sum, one-quarter of our respondents were female. In our photos, men also strongly dominate — this is due to widespread objections to the photographing of Muslim women from both sexes and from older generations. We did, however, speak with many strong women who played critical roles in the revolution and will continue to do so in the months and years ahead. ■

Research team scales a fence in downtown Cairo to get footage of the protests.



# What's Next For Egypt?

As the world watches events in Egypt, the prevailing media narrative has focused on a relatively small, connected and western oriented group of activists and organizers. While these groups are easy to cover, they represent only a small fraction of the many groups and institutions that drove the success of the revolution. These alternate groups, many of whom we've covered here, have the experience, credibility, networks, and organizational structure that will be necessary as Egyptians seek to build a more participatory governance system.

Yet these group have critical needs that must be met if their positive impact is to be widespread and sustainable. Their leaders need help building organizational capacity. Their staff need education in democratic processes. Technical tools and training will make them more effective. These are the investment opportunities that international partners should be considering as they make determinations on how to support the Egyptian people during their transformation process.

This transformation process is just beginning. The Egyptian people have a long, complex, and uncertain road ahead of them as they try to create a new governance model in the heart of the Arab world. Events are moving too fast to understand the larger

landscape from news and social media channels alone. In this chaotic swirl, we must instead look to the social, cultural, and psychological trends that will drive the collective behaviour and decisions of the Egyptian people.

Unless unexpected events break the will of the Egyptian public, they will continue to push for change. Their calls for reform will not be uniform

**Barring an almost unimaginable change of circumstances, any reform in Egypt will have to gain at least tacit approval from the military leadership. While their interest is in controlling the tempo of change, they are also willing to accept and oversee substantive reform.**



A young girl proudly raises her Egyptian flag on the outskirts of Tahrir Square.

but will reflect the diversity of the population itself. How and to what extent political, economic, and social transformations will occur remains unanswered. What can be stated clearly, is that an unmistakable psychological revolution has occurred in Egypt and remarkably, it has occurred across class and other social divides. Looking ahead, all but those that have been

most pampered by the status quo are likely to continue supporting, if not driving, reform.

Excluded from political participation for decades, most Egyptians are eager to partake in the transformation underway. Many lack the means for official engagement, but are joining the national dialogue occurring on street corners, in

cafes, and online. Others, with greater resources or driven by outside passion, are getting involved in institutions like those we have covered in this report. From newspapers considering the launch of new local editions, to legal syndicates selecting new leadership, these organizations are scrambling to take advantage of and organize this wave of participation.

Yet for all the powerful good intentions of the Egyptian people, their path forward is anything but certain. In addition to the structural needs already outlined, several political and cultural trends have the potential to constrain progress. To chart the pace of change, we've identified several faultlines worthy of observation in the months ahead.

Perhaps most impactful, is the will of the military. Barring an almost unimaginable change of circumstances, any reform in Egypt will require at least tacit approval from the military leadership. While its interest is in controlling the tempo of change, it is also willing to accept and oversee substantive reform. The military's removal of Ahmed Shafik as Prime Minister and relative tolerance of popular takeover of Egypt's State Security headquarters in early March demonstrates the lengths it is willing to accept.

Its restraint as an institution has been largely admirable

**Autocratic regimes of the last five decades have actively discouraged substantive political participation by citizens and civil society organizations. While this has created a dearth of practical knowledge on participatory governance, recent events show the people's will to engage was repressed but far from sapped.**

thus far, a reality some Western media outlets can be loathe to admit. However, its vast power and organizational secrecy cannot be understated. Thus far, its authority has been exercised responsibly, largely because the weight of public opinion has kept it in check. Yet as memories of a crowded Tahrir fade into the background, public opinion may lose its power to constrain military actions. Just how much reform the Supreme Military Council is ultimately prepared to accept remains un-

certain. How quickly it makes concessions on broadly popular demands, such as an end to emergency law, will give some indication on the military's tolerance for true systemic change. Equally important will be whether it chooses to exercise its power through the use of force.

In moving towards an improved governance landscape, many other significant hurdles remain. First, and perhaps foremost, there is a critical capacity gap in Egyptian society. Repressive regimes of the last five decades have thwarted substantive political engagement by citizens and civil society organizations alike. While this has created a dearth of practical knowledge on participatory governance, recent events show the people's will to engage was repressed but far from sapped. Civil society organizations will need help as they hope to educate and organize citizens newly interested in the political process.

Second, the Egyptian people are now tasked with accomplishing something as yet historically unseen. In an era of highly fractured media, they must create a national dialogue that moves beyond revolutionary ardour and towards meaningful discussion of next steps. Few societies, in the age of social media and endless online opinion, have successfully faced such a challenge.

Perhaps most obstructive for positive long-term reform are Egypt's class divides, which have the potential to divide the public and turn the population against itself. The middle and upper classes are likely to accept reform that is largely political in nature. Egypt's working classes, however, have long borne the brunt of previous regimes, and remain resistant to any vision of reform that excludes tangible, sustainable socio-economic change.

And not unrelated, it is impossible to ignore the deleterious effects of forces aligned with the status quo. The Mubarak regime consisted of innumerable functionaries who benefited from endemic corruption in ways large and small. These individuals are deeply entrenched in the communities and institutions that now seek reform. Their efforts to preserve their competitive advantages will likely slow the pace of reform.

Finally, Egyptian politics is by no means free of foreign involvement. The country's critical role in regional geopolitics



Young activists sit in solidarity at a protest against the National Security forces in Tahrir Square in early March, 2011.

guarantees that outsiders are actively seeking to influence the course of reform. Egyptians are acutely aware of this, and their suspicion of outside influence lead many to question and even discourage the efforts of foreign groups. Yet those groups who are cynically seeding xenophobia are balanced by groups that would welcome foreign investment in the right capacity. It is these groups who are welcoming of foreign investment that international partners must hope to work with.

These challenges are significant, but by no means insurmountable. We have left behind a Reboot country office with a talented local team. These individuals will continue researching the nature of these challenges so that we can identify continued opportunities for positive investment. The Egyptian people are an educated, confident, and cosmopolitan

population. Support offered in appropriate circumstances — and a willingness by foreign security groups to avoid excessive meddling — are, on the whole, welcome and can help Egyptians achieve remarkable progress in short order.

To be clear, the Egyptian people have the will, the culture, and the passion to build a new society that is more reflective of their diversity, needs, and interests. Yet generations of political decay have robbed them of the institutional capacity necessary to make this transition easy. Outside groups have the opportunity to look past facile narratives of 'the Facebook Revolution' to support the talents and passions of everyday Egyptians who have worked and waited their entire lives for this moment. ■

## Authors

### Zack Brisson

Zack's work focuses on creating transformative governance solutions in the fields of government and civic media. He specializes in new forms of political engagement and organizational innovation.

Prior to founding Reboot, Zack led digital efforts for the Center for American Progress' Enough Project, the campaign to end human rights abuse in Africa through innovative advocacy and policy solutions. His work led to the passage of landmark bipartisan human rights legislation relating to the trade in conflict minerals. His work on political accountability for public figures earned the public comment of both President Obama and Steve Jobs.

Zack began his career at the National Geographic Society. He launched the Society's award-winning international retail platform from Barcelona and helped drive its corporate sustainability efforts in consumer products. He also chaired the Society's innovation think tank, focusing on new media markets, organizational innovation, and expanded audience inclusion. Through this work he led development of National Geographic's first social media platform, 'My NatGeo'.

### Mostafa Kashef

Mostafa Kashef is Cairo-based journalist specializing in civic issues in Egypt. He has worked as an investigative reporter with Al-Dustour, Egypt's leading opposition newspaper, and he previously led reporting on social issues at Ain, an Egyptian youth publication. During the January 25 Revolution, Mostafa also supported the New York Times' reporting in Cairo. Fascinated by social trends and movements, he is a firm believer in inclusive progress and equitable resource allocation. His work with Reboot focuses on identifying and reporting on emergent social patterns in post-revolutionary Egypt.

### Panthea Lee

Panthea's work focuses on the practical applications of design and technology in international development. Specializing in design research, she has conducted studies in countries such as Afghanistan, Indonesia, Jordan, and Suriname. She works with ethnographers, designers, and diverse subject experts to translate field data into services and programs.

Before founding Reboot, Panthea was with UNICEF's innovation practice working on a variety of technology for development initiatives. At UNICEF, her portfolio ranged from country-specific to global in nature. Highlights included helping launch Palestine's first open-source software community and developing new models for engaging the mobile sector in support of development aims.

Panthea's career began as a journalist and event producer in Canada and China. She contributed to publications such as the Shanghai Business Review and the China Economic Review on topics relating to press freedom and sustainable development. She hosted community events in partnership with organizations including Pecha Kucha, TED, and TIME. Panthea has researched and lectured on organizational theory at McGill University.

### Mahmoud Shamaa

Mahmoud Shamaa is a Cairo-based photographer, specializing in the impact of architecture and urban landscapes on effective civic ecosystems. Previously, he consulted on design for Shama Marine, a leading Egyptian marine manufacturer. He has also advised the international real estate firm Upswing on management and marketing.

Mahmoud's work with Reboot focuses on conducting original design research across Egypt and identifying opportunities for inclusive urban engagement.

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# REBOOT

45 East 20th Street, 5th Floor

New York, NY 10003

+1 917 727 5142

[egypt@theReboot.org](mailto:egypt@theReboot.org)

[theReboot.org/egypt](http://theReboot.org/egypt)