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**Egypt's Unfinished Transition or
Unfinished Revolution? Unruly Politics
and Capturing the Pulses of the Street**

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Mariz Tadros

Summary

This paper speaks to the first thematic field in the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)'s Democratization, Decentralization and Local Governance Network (DLGN)/ Institute of Development Studies (IDS) collaboration, namely 'how to improve the quality of citizen participation, accountability and representation in young democracies'. Its starting point is that in order to improve the quality of citizen representation, one needs to better capture the pulse of the citizens on the ground. It argues that in the context of post-Mubarak Egypt, a universal liberal procedural approach that equates ballot box activity with democracy is highly reductionist. An engagement with a broader array of indicators would in fact suggest that ballot boxes and authoritarianism can thrive side by side. The paper proposes that in order to avoid the kind of disconnects from citizen realities that characterised the political analysis of citizen agency during Mubarak's era, it would be helpful to understand the spaces and forms through which unruly politics is thriving in Egypt today.

Keywords: unruly politics; citizen representation; democracy; citizen agency; Egypt.

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Contents

	Summary	3
	Acknowledgements	5
	Introduction	6
1	The limitations of the ballot box litmus test	6
2	Are we missing the signs of a country on the brink once again?	9
3	Unruly politics and unorganised public attention	12
4	Unruly lens on capturing the pulse of the street	15
5	Where to? Conclusions and key policy messages	17
	References	19
	Tables	
	Table 3.1 Protests in Egypt by different groups, 2012	13

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Introduction

In January/February 2011, there was much hope that the ousting of President Mubarak following two weeks of millions of Egyptians taking to the street would pave the way for a democratic transformation. Many Egyptians hoped that the ousting of Mubarak after thirty years rule would serve as a warning to future governments of the dangers of becoming disconnected from the people.

There has been a growing consensus among political scientists that transitions rarely follow linear processes, and that any tautological approach to paths of change is likely to be misleading. However, discussions continue to revolve around what are the critical benchmarks or steps needed to promote democratisation in transition contexts. This discussion is particularly vibrant around Egypt's current political trajectory. Two years after the Egyptian revolution, there are questions as to what to make of the new Muslim brotherhood-led government. It has won the parliamentary and presidential elections by a slim margin and Egyptians are deeply polarised between supporters and opponents. Is it a case of unfinished transition or is it a case of unfinished revolution? Regrettably this debate as well is deeply polarised between analysts that support the Muslim Brotherhood and therefore believe that an unfinished transition to democratic transformation is being played out, and those more critical of the regime, who argue that the citizens are still in revolt because the aims of the revolution (captured in the populist slogan bread, freedom and dignity) have not been realised.

This paper argues that the same signals of a disconnect between universalist liberal democratic prescriptions for change and the situation on the ground are surfacing once again. This disconnect, I would argue, stems from (1) almost exclusive focus on some liberal democratic milestones to measure democratic change such as elections and constitutions, without giving due weight to indicators of exclusionary politics; (2) failure to see the parallels between pre- and post-Mubarak Egypt with respect to the political, economic and social crises, and (3) being blind to the regular protests that occur on a daily basis and the realm of unruly politics.

1 The limits of the ballot box litmus test

Proponents of the 'Egypt's unfinished transition' scenario suggest that democratisation processes require more time and opportunity to thrive and that what counts is getting the institutional procedures and measures in place that would allow for the instating of democracy. Analysts such as Alfred Stepan, Marc Lynch and Marina Ottaway have used democratic procedural measures such as the initiation of a new constitution and elections as the key benchmarks for democratic transition. Writing in 2012, Marc Lynch argued that,

Egypt still has a chance to muddle through and end up in a pretty decent place by this coming spring. It would not be the worst outcome for a chaotic transition if Egypt emerges in March with a constitution establishing institutional powers and limiting the powers of the Presidency, a democratically elected but weakened President, a Muslim Brotherhood in power but facing unprecedented levels of scrutiny and political opposition, the military back in the barracks, a mobilized and newly relevant political opposition, and a legitimately elected Parliament with a strong opposition bloc. The costs may have been too high and

the process a horror movie, but getting a Constitution in place and Parliamentary elections on the books puts Egypt just a bit closer to that vision.
(Lynch 2012)

He acknowledged that the constitution raised controversy, but suggested, 'it may be a mediocre constitution full of worrying ambiguities, but Egypt has not been remade as either a theocracy or a new dictatorship'. Arguing along similar lines, Nathan Brown suggested that,

'There is no systematic reconstruction of the state and there is nothing resembling the guardianship of the jurist (the system that puts clerics in positions of political power). Morsi's Egypt is not theocratic and democratic mechanisms still operate, however crudely and often illiberally.'¹ (Brown 2013: 18)

One of the democratic mechanisms in place, which should stir the transition in the right direction, according to Ottaway, is competition through elections. She argued that,

'The most important step is for secular parties to accept that, if they want a democratic outcome, they have to fight in the electoral arena. Democracy does not just mean elections, though they are an unavoidable component of a democratic process... It is not that Islamists do not share the blame for the present state of affairs. They have become arrogant and overly sure of themselves, but the only way to stop them is to show that they are vulnerable to competition.' (Ottaway 2013)

Renowned transitionologist Professor Alfred Stepan echoed the same sentiment when he argued that,

'The prospects for a democratic transition in Egypt would be strengthened if liberal and moderate Islamist forces would reach consensus on the way forward, accept the sovereignty of the Egyptian people, as expressed in elections, and build the institutions needed to ensure that when the elected government takes office, it will uphold the rights of all Egyptian citizens.' (Stepan 2012)

Drawing constitutions and electoral competitions are two key milestones that feature in much of the democratic transition literature, however, when they are privileged over the other constellation of factors at play in any given context, they can be highly misleading.

The Muslim Brotherhood-led government did indeed arrive at a constitution, but what was at its stake was not its mediocracy but the process through which it was arrived at, which lacked consensus and involved the withdrawal of important elements of the polity in objection to its lack of inclusiveness. The outcome was a constitution that granted the military special privileges, laid the foundations of a theocracy and created clauses that inhibited basic liberties and freedoms (Tadros 2013).

As with Mubarak's regime, the Muslim Brotherhood government can consolidate its rule through means which seem democratic, but which in essence further the interests of the ruling regime. For example, the electoral law that was passed to regulate the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Egypt may seem to be democratic, because it was passed by majority rule in the *Shura* council (the upper house of the Egyptian parliament). However, an examination of

¹ It is beyond this paper to delve into whether Egypt is becoming a theocracy, see Tadros (2012b) for the alternative perspective on the constitution and the Islamisation of the state.

procedure and content raises serious questions regarding its legitimacy. The new constitution introduced a new article, which stipulated that in the absence of a democratically elected parliament, the upper house, the *Shura* council, would assume the responsibility of promulgating legislation. The *Shura* council was originally conceived as a consultative body. In view of its non-legislative function, many voters did not bother with the *Shura* council elections. Unlike the parliamentary elections that witnessed a high turnout, there was a 7.2 per cent voter turnout. This severely undermines the legitimacy of the current *Shura* council's authority to pass laws, since this was not its original function nor does it have a constituency that has delegated it with the power of legislating.

The electoral law that was passed by an Islamist majority core in the *Shura* council contained provisions that would reduce the fairness of the elections, such as allowing the use of religious slogans in campaigns. Though religious sloganeering has been used in many previous elections by both Islamist and non-Islamist forces, it has featured more prominently in the campaigning of the Muslim Brotherhood and *Salafis* (see Tadros 2012b). In the past elections, the Muslim Brotherhood and *Salafi* campaigns represented non-Islamist competing parties as enemies of Islam who partner with the infidels, Christians in particular (*ibid.*). The impact was highly divisive in terms of polarising citizenry in two camps, the guardians of Islam *versus* the enemies of religion. It also had the impact of deepening sectarian sentiment between the majority Muslim population (roughly 90 per cent) and minority Christian population (roughly 10 per cent). However, though it occurred, there was at least a lip service condemnation rendered for violating election law. It also meant that those harmed could potentially raise wage suits against the parties involved. The new electoral law has given a highly dangerous campaigning practice the legal mantra, making the playing field highly unequal.

The practice of resorting to democratic procedures to essentially legalise highly undemocratic substantive issues is not unique to Egypt's transition trajectory. Miller warned that,

'A cautionary lesson can be drawn from the wave of political transitions that in the early to mid-1990s swept through sub-Saharan Africa, a region with nearly as little prior democratic experience as the Arab world. Though overall less tumultuous than the revolutions of the Arab Spring, these transitions occurred relatively quickly and many involved public protests. After the initial swell of change, many of these transitions failed to deliver enduring democratization... newly elected regimes often practiced old forms of repression or manipulated democratic formalities to their benefit.' (Miller 2012)

It is these concerns regarding use of democratic mantra for undemocratic purposes that are neither represented in Stepan, Brown or Ottaway's stress on the elections litmus test, and which have made analysts question the merits of equating democratic transition with ballot box voting.

Elis Goldberg argued that, against the backdrop of increasing contestation of the Muslim Brotherhood's governance policies, the practice of elections does not put Egypt on the path of a democratic transition. He suggested that judging from the level of protests, Egypt is very much in the midst of an unfinished revolution. For the Muslim Brotherhood, he contended,

'[E]ven a large electoral majority in parliamentary elections may not, for the foreseeable future, translate into viable governance as popular demands continue to be expressed in ways that are both democratic and disruptive and as the political leadership of the country finds it difficult to agree on a common path forward.' (Goldberg 2013)

One of the conceptual and methodological limitations to focusing on electoral procedural dimensions and the formal players in political society is that it fails to take into account the constellation of factors which provide us with the substantive elements of democracy, namely, citizenship rights, public and private freedoms and liberties. It is possible, as Sadiki (2012) argued, to have elections without democracy.

2 Are we missing the signs of a country on the brink once again?

It would have been impossible for anyone to predict the Arab revolts, simply because despite the simmering of grievances among large sections of the population and within the state apparatus (including the army), no one could have predicted a) what position the army would take and b) whether the people would rise in sufficiently large numbers to have considerable political weight.

However, there are striking similarities between the conditions prior to the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and the situation today. Proponents of a struggling transition rather than an unfinished revolution would argue that the situation is radically different today because President Morsi was democratically elected to power via the ballot box, whereas President Mubarak was not. Second, unlike Mubarak whose regime had no legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of the population, President Morsi has a strong constituency on the ground (see Brown 2012).

It is important to note however, that President Morsi came to power with only a small marginal difference between him and the other nominee (0.5 per cent). Second, while members of his party and other Islamist parties continue to endorse the President's rule fully, ordinary citizens' support for the Muslim Brotherhood has waned against the backdrop of increasing economic hardship, absence of safety and human security and the political monopolisation of power in the hands of the movement's members.

The striking issue is that in both regimes, issues of social justice and economic wellbeing were relegated to the backburner. The most critical issue facing many Egyptians today is the drop in standards of living experienced by the poor and the middle class due to rising inflation, in particular with respect to food price hikes. Moreover, the economic situation seems worse, in view of the increase in the price of fuel and its severe shortage. The government's reserve of hard currency has fallen to about \$13 billion from \$36 billion since two years ago. In April 2013, the Egyptian pound fell to LE6.92 against the dollar in banks, and is expected to fall to LE7.5 this year (Ahram Online 2013a). This devaluation of the pound will significantly affect the country's ability to import food. The country's debt has also risen by 11.8 per cent in the second quarter of the 2012/13 fiscal year, recording \$38.8 billion compared to the previous quarter, according to the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) (Ahram Online 2013b).

It was feared that the monopolisation of political power in the hands of the former regime's ruling National Democratic Party would reproduce itself. President Morsi vowed earlier on that the country needed the expertise of people beyond one political group. Instead, a process of 'ikhwanisation'² soon followed through the appointment of members of the movement to government offices at all levels of government and in key civil society institutions. For example,

² In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood are commonly referred to as the 'ikhwan', hence ikhwanisation refers to the process by which the Muslim Brotherhood take over

out of the 29 governorates in Egypt, 19 of the key governors appointed by the President were from the Muslim Brotherhood/Freedom and Justice party (El Masrafawy 2013). Muslim Brotherhood members occupy 118 seats of the 270 seat *Shura* council (103 elected, 15 appointed). Moreover members of the Muslim Brotherhood have been appointed to key decision-making and consulting positions in all the ministries, and many of the key syndicates (for example, the head of the Supreme Council of the Press is from the Muslim Brotherhood). Four members of the Muslim Brotherhood were appointed to the 19-member human rights council. While members of the Muslim Brotherhood are as entitled to occupy key policy-making positions as other citizens, what is at stake is the domination by the Muslim Brotherhood of state positions, a process that has neither been transparent nor inclusive.

The formation of a predominantly Muslim Brotherhood government where political allegiance is a far cry from the movement's earlier commitment to a non-political technocratic leadership. This has created widespread disillusionment among the opposition about the Muslim Brotherhood's stated inclusiveness. This is not to suggest that the Muslim Brotherhood have entirely lost their constituency; it still continues to be strong in many parts of Egypt where people benefit from their welfare and religious proselytisation activities. However, there is certainly a major disconnect emerging between officials and their discourses and what is being experienced on the ground.

Moreover, similar policies of repressing press and media freedom to those that characterised the Mubarak era are being pursued. The difference between Mubarak's media restriction strategies and those pursued by Morsi's government, is that the latter involve not only use of rule of law but also turning a blind eye to the mass mobilisation of the Islamist constituency, when they stage protests and block the paths of media persons under the pretext of cleansing the media of the so-called remnants of the old regime. In the 2011/12 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) global press freedom index, Egypt fell 39 places from 127 to 166. This was partially the result of repression that occurred during the period of Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) rule prior to Morsi's election; however, things seem to have only worsened since then. As prominent rights lawyer Gamal Eid pointed out, 'there have been four times as many lawsuits for 'insulting the president' in Morsi's first 200 days in office than during the entire 30 years that Mubarak ruled'.

One of the elements that characterised Mubarak's police state was the security regulation of non-governmental organisations, though it was of an informal nature. Under a new proposed NGO law, Morsi's government intends to make security control of NGOs legal and formal. The *Shura* council recently discussed a draft bill proposed by the Ministry of Justice intended to regulate the affairs of civil associations. Human rights organisations have widely criticised this law as being highly inhibitive and serving to legitimise the intervention of the security apparatus in controlling the affairs of civic associations. New restrictions have been introduced to an already highly restrictive law, such as the proposed formal representation of the Ministry of Interior and the National Security Agency (an alias for the secret political police) on the steering committee responsible for overseeing the affairs of civic associations. They will be empowered to monitor and reject civic associations' applications for foreign funding. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) expressed concern that the newly institutionalised powers of the security apparatus would be used to detract and prevent organisations from working on human rights. CIHRS argued that,

'Stemming from the draft law's repressive philosophy, its provisions consider the administrative body to be the rightful custodian of civil society. It thus gives the administrative body the right to object to or delay decisions issued by associations' boards

and to object to nominees for the board, placing the burden of appealing these arbitrary decrees on NGOs themselves. (CIHRS 2013)

Moreover, police brutality, which played a catalytic role in propelling people to rise against the regime in January 2013, is considered by some human rights organisations as now reaching levels worse than those encountered under Mubarak. While not all the protests held against the government are peaceful, nevertheless, the government's unrestrained use of teargas and torture have been widely criticised by human rights groups. Egypt is estimated to have spent the equivalent of £1.7m on 140,000 US-sourced tear gas canisters in the month of January 2013 alone (Kingsley 2013).

Many transition experts warn that one of the key threats that jeopardises the prospects of building a new democracy in countries that have experienced regime change is the pervasive and insidious powers of the former ruling authorities and their attempt to hijack or retain power. For example, Miller (2012) highlighted that one of the factors that accounts for the variation in level of orderliness and stability during the transitions of former Soviet Union and Eastern European nations is the degree of the former regimes' penetration of society. He noted that,

The regimes that maintained the tightest control and used the harshest methods to repress dissent, such as Romania and Bulgaria, had the most difficult transitions. Few, if any, autonomous groups had been allowed to emerge that could help to broker the transitions. Thus, the transitions in Romania and Bulgaria were chaotic and slower than those in countries such as Hungary and Poland, where civil society had begun to emerge prior to the transition.
(Miller 2012)

The Muslim Brotherhood themselves have argued that it is remnants of the former regime, the '*fuloul*', who have opposed their rule, and that they have taken up the task of battling to safeguard the revolution and its aims (Abd el Wahed 2013). However, it is important to note that though the former ruling party did have tentacles within many sectors, their entrenchment in society is far less than that of the Islamists (Muslim Brotherhood and *Salafis*) who have a far deeper penetration of society than the former regime. In fact, the former National Democratic Party never had a strong constituency on the streets of Egypt (Wardany 2012) whereas the Muslim Brotherhood and *Salafi* assumption of roles as the guardians of Islam had enabled them to build deep ties within society, in particular among the urban poor and in rural communities. Hence the current power configurations suggest a new breed of authoritarianism in the making, not the return of the old strand.

In view of the highly volatile political situation and increasing economic hardship, the country may end up on a third path, which is neither that of an unfinished revolution nor that of an unfinished transition. It is possible that to exit such a critical situation, an external crisis may lead to Egypt announcing a war. This would certainly temporarily deal with the domestic crisis. One does not have evidence to suggest it is a probable course of action, one is simply arguing that it is a possible pathway that cannot be dismissed.

3 Unruly politics and unorganised public attention

The uprisings that ruptured the *status quo* in Egypt in 2011 challenged us to rethink the mechanisms, the agendas and the actors we associate with social and political activism. Ali (2012) suggested that prior to the 25 January revolution, the protests became so frequent that he could not keep track of them anymore, nor did the press bother to report all of them (Tadros 2012a). Yet these protests were important precursors to the revolution because they served as political incubators for politicised action for many and provided people with the organisational skills needed to act collectively. While these protests were going on, many leading opposition public figures and intellectuals (such as Ibrahim Eissa) were at the time lamenting why Egyptians do not rise.

We missed these episodes of public dissent because these forms of collective action did not fit our checklist of what constitutes the right way to challenge the *status quo* by the right citizenry. When workers, labourers, farmers and *Copts* (Egyptian Christians) organised protests, these were often shunned as too narrow in their representation and demands. In other words, these protests were not seen as chipping at the *status quo*. The same dismissive attitude informed many of the analyses of the continued protests by the same groups in Egypt after the revolution. There was an equally derisive response from many of the local intelligentsia towards the tactics deployed to show public dissidence as lacking in a radical edge or a sufficiently forceful assault on the ruling authorities to be of any effect. Yet in many cases, dissidents were aware that clashes with the security would lead to their incarceration and repression, so they found other ways of being disruptive using what McAdam *et al.* (2001) would typically call mechanisms of contentious politics. One of the most successful tactics was the 'Stay at Home' campaign launched by the April 6 youth movement in 2008, via Facebook and text messages calling upon people not to go to work. The strategy subverted the security apparatus threats against workers who dare to strike or citizens who protest in solidarity. Groups of citizens informed the politicians by making noise with pots and pans that they were hungry. The April 6 youth movement raised straw broomsticks in front of the shrine of the Prophet's daughter, at the Sayeda Zeinab district, to signal that the country is in need of a clean up.

What is significant is the actors were not the conventional agents of change; they were not civil society organisations, not social movements and not political parties – in other words, they were not the usual suspects of the development and democratisation policy domains. They could not be neatly compartmentalised into types of civil society organisations because in most cases, they did not have an organisational structure in the first place. It is in this sense that such actors' engagement in unruly politics is so critically important. Unruly politics here is defined as the marginal space through which citizens engage politically outside the conventional realms of state and civil society. All kinds of actors with progressive and regressive agendas engage in unruly politics, hence the caution against its romanticisation. Irrespective of whether unruly politics achieves its desired outcomes, its very dynamics will mean that the *status quo* is being fundamentally shaken to its very fabric.

The significance of unruly politics manifests itself when we examine the political landscape of activism in Egypt prior to the uprisings. Abd el Wahab (2012) shows that civil society in Egypt by and large no longer served as the arena for contestation, except on the fringes (judges' clubs, professional syndicates and workers' independent groups). His analysis suggested that civil society organisations had become too orderly, too politically contained for engagement in contentious politics, so much so that when youth wanted to become politically active, they sought other spaces and other mechanisms that are neither institutionalised nor under the auspices of particular organisational umbrellas.

Even after the 25 January revolution of 2011, the focus of political analysis continues to be on the larger protests, initiated by organised visible actors in political society such as the youth revolutionary movements, the Islamist groups, or the opposition parties. However, beyond the pre-planned, pre-organised media-appealing major protests that occur on an interval basis, there are small, spontaneous protests regularly taking place at an average estimate of 11 protests a day. Irrespective of their agendas, these forms of citizen engagement in unruly politics represent important signals of public unrest, and they should not be ignored. They reflect one indicator of ‘the pulse on the ground’ that requires careful examination. Two years after the revolution, the number of everyday protests organised by small groups of citizens have *increased* and have gone underneath the radar.

The frequency and disparity of protests in 2012 is one of the strongest indicators of the angry pulse of the citizens under the new Muslim Brotherhood-led government. This is a viable conclusion to arrive at since other factors have remained constant throughout the past two years. For example, the political space to protest has not changed, nor has the level of political mobilisation increased during those last two years. Yet one of the strong variables congruent with the rise in frequency of protests is Morsi’s assumption of the presidency in July 2012. There were 185 protests in January, 119 in February, 170 in March, 270 in April, 206 in May, 157 in June after which there is a dramatic leap to 566 in July, 410 in August, 615 in September, 507 in October, 508 in November and 104 in December³ (ECESR 2013).

In 2012 there were 3,817 protests witnessed in Egypt from all different groups within a population.

Table 3.1 Protests in Egypt by different groups, 2012

Organiser	Number
Government sector	1381
Citizen	1205
Private sector employees	410
Public sector workers	222
Self employed	204

Source: Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights 2013 (<http://ecesr.com/report/7113>)

An analysis of these protests serves to refute a number of myths about citizen participation regarding their profile, motives, geographical focus and political orientation. One of the common myths is that only the political elites who are disconnected from the rest of the population are protesting, because they do not wish to have a Muslim Brotherhood-led regime, one that has the endorsement of the rest of the population. It is important to note that with the exception of self-employed and private sector employees whose socio-economic background may cut across classes, the other categories listed above are likely to come from the poor and *petit bourgeoisie*. Hence, these protestors are not the alienated few, they represent constituencies from within the wider population.

The second myth is that protests are essentially a Cairene phenomenon, and beyond the capital citizens have no interest in such street politics. It is true that the largest number of protests were

³ Please note that the report warns that they had only looked at the first week of December. The numbers for the rest of the month had yet to be released at the time of submission of this paper (1 May 2013).

held in Cairo (684), however it does not represent a substantial percentage of the total (only ten per cent). The Delta governorates combined witnessed more protests than Cairo (Al Gharbiyya 282, Alexandria, 232, Al Sharqiyya 222, Al Dakhaliyya 182). There were also 130 and 212 protests in the Upper Egyptian governorates of Asiat and Minya respectively. Kaft el Sheikh witnessed 161 protests, with the remaining protests occurring in Qalubiyya, Ismailiyya, and Fayoum combined.

The third important myth that the report dispels is the notion that these protests were organised by secular anti-Muslim Brotherhood elements. An analysis of the data suggests that the majority of these protests were not staged by members of political society but by ordinary citizens, some of whom would have predictably voted for the Muslim Brotherhood in previous elections. In most cases, citizens protested over economic issues most notably increases/shortages in food prices, water and fuel crises, and basic human security issues such as unsafe roads.

For example, 1 May 2013 witnessed some of the following protests⁴:

- In the governorate of Sharqiyya, some members of the police continued their strike for the third consecutive day to demand better pay and to be appropriately armed in the light of the high criminal activity that the country is witnessing.
- In the governorate of South Sinai, the workers in the water resources department organised a strike to demand better pay to catch up with rising inflation and announced that the doors of the municipality will remain shut until their demands are met.
- In the governorate of Fayoum, the inhabitants of the village of Al Allam had a protest in front of the security building of the municipality to demand the return of safety in the area, following the kidnapping of a young child on her return from school. They pressed the head of the security sector to resign and for there to be a security overhaul.
- In the same governorate the workers of the ambulance staged a protest against the authorities' withdrawal of 16 ambulance vehicles from Fayoum and their relocation to another governorate, insisting that the governorate needs them for emergencies.
- In the same governorate, a group of nurses working in the primary health care clinic in Deglou were on strike after an official told them they were not equipped to undertake their job, a statement which they found insulting and insisted on an official apology be made.
- In the governorate of Asiat, the employees working for magles el dawla staged a strike to protest their working conditions and demand the right to form their own trade union to represent their interests.
- In Aswan, the workers in the public hospital of Kom Ombo staged a partial strike against what they believe to be financial and administrative corruption in the hospital management. They demanded the resignation of the financial and administrative staff of the hospital and an independent inquiry to be launched in the management of the resources, and an investigation to be made on why critical medical supplies are missing from the emergency services.

⁴ This is a selection of some of the many protests that took place.

- In the governorate of Menoufiya, the employees of magles el dawla went on strike to protest the lack of disbursement of part of their wages for three months.
- In the governorate of Sharqiyya, the citizens blocked the 'Fadadana-Faqous' road to protest the disappearance of a female student and the lack of security in the area.
- In the governorate of Ismailiya, the citizens of Al Ba'oula burned car tires on the Ismailiya-Zagazig highway to obstruct the passage of vehicles after one of their villagers who owned a farm was kidnapped by unknown persons who demanded a ransom for his release. The villagers complained that the police have not done their job in investigating the case.
- In Suez, some *bedouins* blocked part of the tunnel of Ahmed Hamdy in front of the town of Ras Sedr to protest the arrest of one of their members by the police for being in the possession of drugs.
- In the governorate of Sohag students at the university of Sohag staged a protest against new educational policies which they believed would undermine their employability.
- In the governorate of Menoufiyya, students at the Menoufiyya university also staged protests with the same concerns in mind.
- In the governorate of Luxor close to 100 employees working in the health sector staged a protest to demand their salaries, which had not been paid for four months.

The 25 January uprising certainly propelled citizens who had not engaged in political activity to demand their rights and press for accountability. In many of the examples cited above, for instance, citizens were not only asking for individual rights but a more accountable governance structure, i.e. such as the workers in the hospital pressing for an inquiry into corruption and an investigation into missing medical supplies, or citizens who block the highway as a consequence of the disappearance of a farm owner or a young female pupil – but whose demands are for a police force that is more effective in dealing with crime and more responsive to their complaints.

The above protests serve as a warning sign that citizens' spontaneous organising in response to everyday hardships should not be taken lightly. Citizens' participation in protests and strikes is indicative of the existence of a mobilised social repertoire, which if catalysed by the right constellation of factors could potentially have a snowball effect⁵, encouraging others to take part. It is just a question of what would serve to tip them over.

4 Unruly lens on capturing the pulse of the street

No one could predict the uprisings that led to the toppling of presidents who had been in power for two–three decades and more, partly because when the Tunisian and Egyptian youths first took to the street on 25 January, they initially called for political reform and only later did they raise the ceiling to toppling the regimes. The unpredictability of the uprisings was also associated with the great ambivalence *vis-à-vis* the position of the army. It is ironic that although

⁵ For snowball effect in relation to the Egyptian revolution, see Ezbawy 2012.

the uprisings of Egypt were widely publicised – and planned for – the state security investigations apparatus had severely underestimated the likely turnout of people in the protests and therefore did not signal to other security sectors the need for further forces on the ground (Hassan and El Gahmy 2011).

The mass mobilisation of citizens that occurred surprised both the ‘uprisers’ and the wider policy of political and social analysts. Clearly, we had failed to get a sense of the ‘pulse of the street’ prior to the uprisings.

After the 25 January uprising, in addition to street politics (protests, stand-ins, marches), other forms of unruly politics have emerged which provide us with a good sense of the citizen pulse on the ground. Political satire became a highly popular means of citizen engagement, thanks to the television programme of Bassem Youssef, *el Bernameg*. The programme, which has a following of an estimated five million people, mostly makes fun of the president, the Islamists and occasionally the secular forces. The show has gripped millions of Egyptians, and incurred the wrath of both the government and key leaders in the Islamist movement. What is significant is not the critique of the president or the government, it is the way in which it is conveyed (through humour) and the broad based support it has garnered. On Friday night, at the time of the broadcasting of the programme, many of Cairo’s streets are empty as if a decisive football match is taking place. Whether huddled inside the coffee shops or at home, citizens are glued to their television sets. The discussions, the debates, the repetition of the most popular parts of the programme are an indicator of the pulse of the street.

Songs, poetry, street performances, dances, graffiti, and political cartoons have reached new frontiers of innovation and creativity since the revolution. While these have been cultural expressions for hundreds of years, it is how they are politicised and who politicised them at what moment that represents unruly politics. For example, one such incident involved a young girl, a pupil at a primary school in Hurgada who was supposed to recite a poem in front of the Minister of Education (known to be affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood) visiting the premises at the time. When presenting in front of the Minister, she changed the words of the poem and ended it with a highly subversive assault on Morsi (Shaban 2013). The minister apparently got up and left. These everyday acts of subversion that send powerful messages of resistance and dissent are a form of engaging politically which are indicative once again of the pulse on the ground.

Moreover, adopting a fluid, dynamic approach to capturing the pulse of the street is not only important for understanding citizen agency but also for capturing citizen–state relations. For example, up to roughly the mid-2000s officials communicated their initiatives and reactions mostly via the state-affiliated media (Channel 1 and 2) and state-affiliated press (Al Ahram, Al Gomhoriyya and Al Akhbar newspaper). However, with the advent of satellite television, much of the officials’ input was conveyed via talk shows and news analysis programmes. In other words, for any analyst wishing to understand the political scene, it is no longer sufficient to analyse the press, there is a need to follow the talk shows and news analysis programmes. Social media too has become a very important medium not only for understanding the agency of mobilised citizens but also state–society interactions. Actors within the government, the Freedom and Justice party and the Muslim Brotherhood more generally have communicated important messages regarding their views on current affairs via their Twitter and Facebook accounts. These messages are crucial on many levels, not least that they often expose disconnects between various discourses for various audiences. One example is the dual dialogue pursued by the number two Muslim Brotherhood man after the attacks on the American consulate in Benghazi, which left one dead, and the protests that followed in Cairo involving attacks on the American embassy there, all allegedly expressions of anger at the release of a derogatory film

about the Prophet Mohamed. On the 13 September 2013, el Shatter expressed in the Muslim Brotherhood's official English-language Twitter account (@Ikwaweb) his 'relief that none of the US embassy Cairo staff was hurt'. In contrast, on the Arabic language twitter account, and its official website there was praise for the protests outside the US embassy and a call for a million-person rally on Friday against the film and America. The US embassy responded by tweeting its own response to El Shatter's condolences: 'Thanks. By the way, have you checked out your own Arabic feeds? I hope you know we read those too' (Aly 2012). Since the grounds of where and how power relations are being manifest are constantly shifting, it is critically important that our methodological approaches to understanding politics and political culture are continuously being revised, according to where taking the pulse is needed.

5 Where to? Conclusions and key policy messages

This paper has cautioned against two dangers that threaten to create new disconnects between what is happening on the ground and our analysis of the political situation. The first is the use of a highly reductionist approach to transitions that almost equates ballot box practices with democracy. It has argued that elections are happening simultaneously with a process of deepening authoritarianism, very much reproduced *à la* Mubarak. The new element is the representation of the new regime as being led by the devout and pious guardians of Islam. The religious element has mass appeal for large sections of the population, in particular those living in rural areas. However, even supporters of the 'unfinished transition' scenario need to be cautious of focusing exclusively on institutional and procedural mechanisms such as holding elections. The multiple voices, constituencies and platforms through which people are expressing their citizenship outside the ballot boxes are too important to ignore. If a constellation of factors lead to the outbreak of an uprising (the 'unfinished revolution' scenario), then those who have assumed an essentialist engagement with what constitutes democracy and have supported the regime, will find themselves again disconnected from the citizenry. The West cannot afford to be seen as supporting authoritarianism once again. It is important that Western donors and policy makers are not seen to be siding with the government against part of the population. While it is true that a section of the Egyptian population continues to support Morsi, and the context is one of split affinities, nevertheless, if there is a tipping over and the regime is toppled, it would be counter-intuitive for western policy makers and donors to be seen as having sided with a regime against part of the people.

The second danger that threatens to reproduce the kind of disconnects that characterised our sense of citizen agency prior to the Egyptian uprising of 2011 is the failure to engage with unruly politics. Unruly politics is the stuff that happens outside the conventional spaces of citizen expression and outside the realm of conventional actors. In the Egyptian case study, this has meant the spaces in the governorates, on the highways and in social media, and the unconventional actors have been citizens mobilising without the mediation of organised political actors such as political parties, social movements and non-governmental organisations. Unruliness may take different forms, occupy different spaces and involve different actors depending on the context. However, in this paper we have sought to show how spontaneous, non-formal everyday protests and strikes represent an important pulse of the street, and an important channel through which citizens seek accountability from the state. The failure to acknowledge and deal with the growing repertoire of citizens' expression of voice through street

politics represents disengagement with the kind of politics (unruly) that does not feature in the conventional political society analysis.

What is critically needed is a combined political economy/power analysis approach to acquire a more nuanced profile of the citizens who engage in unruly politics, understand the juncture at which they decide protest, whether they experiment with different mechanisms before or after taking to the streets (for example, meeting with officials, conveying their grievances via media advocacy, resorting to the law) and the kind of ripple or spill over effects unruly politics has on citizen-led mechanisms for demanding accountability. We also need a better understanding of the spatial dynamics of street politics and the different forms of unruliness it assumes. We need to analyse whether there is a difference in how protests are mobilised, between the more organised incidents such as those organised by workers, judges, *Salafis* or *Copts*, and those more spontaneous and sporadic that cut across identity markers. The temporal dimensions of protests are also important: long do the protests last, and what affects the decision to sustain or call them off?

It would also be worthwhile to examine government responsiveness to protests and how it affects citizens' choice of actions, for example, is there a pattern of particular kind(s) of government reaction to protests? Who negotiates with protestors? What kind of discourses and practices represent government response(s)? Is there different engagement with protests, and if so, on what basis? The purpose behind this is to examine whether citizens are incentivised to go out and protest because they have reason to hope that their demands will be met if there is participation from sufficient numbers. It also serves to examine whether citizens are disincentivised to protest on account of the increasing use of brute force by the security apparatus, yet go out to express their voice anyway, due to the political moment (where street politics has become very important in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution) and because of the intensity of their cause/sentiment, etc.

What is suggested is a stratified sampling of the different kinds of protests that took place in 2012/13, to examine what the government response has been, and how that has affected citizen action. Is there a demobilisation effect or are new repertoires of collective action being replenished? This would contribute immensely to our understanding of accountability mechanisms in transition contexts, whether they are on the path of revolution, consolidation of authoritarianism, or something else.

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