Scientific Paper

Youth political engagement during the Arab Spring: Egypt and Tunisia compared

Bahgat Korany
AUC Forum

Mostafa El Sayyad
AUC Forum

Abstract

This Scientific Paper aims at highlighting youth political engagement during the Arab Spring – the peak of explicit, direct and mass "youth involvement in politics". This exceptionally high involvement did not continue to be institutionalised. In fact, the earlier mass political participation contrasts at present with a certain political marginalisation of former activists/youth leaders. The logical research question is then: what accounts for such two extremes?

To analyse this evolution from one extreme to the other, this paper adopts a comparative approach between the two *seemingly similar* cases of Egypt and Tunisia. These two countries are different in some respects: Egypt has nine times the population of Tunisia, for example, and the two countries' recent colonial past has been influenced by different sociopolitical traditions: Anglophone and Francophone. However, for the subject of this paper they share the status of being the pioneers of the Arab Spring.

To carry out its comparative methodology and especially to decode the youth political participation problematic from one extreme to the other, the paper utilises the SAHWA Project data 2015/16, both qualitative and quantitative. Since these data have to be situated within each country's national context, the paper uses also some other sources, when required.

In terms of organisation, the paper's 22 tables reiterate the primacy of the "youth bulge" that the two countries share: the available data unequivocally shows for instance that unemployment is number one as a cause of concern. However, unemployment is treated here not only as an economic aspect but also as one that

leads to political discontent, as well as increasing mistrust of state institutions, a mistrust that results in the present political withdrawal, at least at the formal level. In the last part before concluding, the paper uses other field data from Egypt to investigate the challenges facing youth political participation, including young people's lack of experience of using institutionalised political machines. The paper concludes by drawing attention to other unconventional aspects of civic engagement/political participation and presents a table comparing the similarities and differences between Egypt and Tunisia.

Keywords: youth, political engagement/disengagement, Arab Spring, Egypt and Tunisia, unemployment, political institutions, political socialisation.

Introduction

Given the post-Arab Spring context of political disappointment and youth hesitation to talk "politics", the focus on political participation in this paper ran the risk of producing only a short paper, in the sense of an analysis based on direct fieldwork. For after the enthusiasm and influx to occupy the public space, the youth are now suffering from frustration and a feeling of anti-climax, if not loss. Part of this disappointment/frustration is due to the initially great (and unrealistic/exaggerated) levels of expectations. Indeed, the initial unrealistic expectations were the result of the relative ease with which in both countries an authoritarian leader at the head of a long period of repression and exclusion was easily overthrown. Surprisingly, it took only about three weeks to force both Ben Ali and Mubarak to step aside. But the mass pressure was uncontrollable. The Arab Spring looked like a pressure-cooker that had been boiling for a long time and ended blowing up and throw a previously tight lid into the air. In retrospect, such a successful blow-up, authentic and mass-based it was, lulled the young revolutionaries into complacency and distracted them from the hard task of elaborating a well-thought-out strategic blueprint for action. Young people discovered this drawback after the act, and the result was a feeling of frustration/disappointment.

This is only one aspect of contextualising the two extremes of youth civic engagement/political participation. To comprehend the intricacies of this issue from low level formal engagement before the Arab Spring to a soaring levels during its early phase in 2011–2012 before returning to low, this paper's approach is both

holistic and comparative. [1] To be holistic, the paper situates the issue of civic engagement/political participation in the sociopolitical context of the 2011 Arab uprisings, the so-called "New Middle East" (Danahar, 2013; Gerges, 2014) and beyond. As for the comparison, the paper will deal with Egypt in comparison with Tunisia, which pioneered the Arab Spring. In fact, the two countries are perceived as "relative successes", in the sense that they kept their state functioning whereas other "Arab Spring countries" (e.g. Libya, Syria, Yemen) are trapped into bloody civil wars and the syndrome of "fragile/failed states".

Given SAHWA's objective and focus, the paper's comparative methodology is based on an *agent-based approach:* This agent, the youth bulge, is used here not only as an age group but also as a politically marginalised one with some specific characteristics. The general literature agree and the fieldwork confirms (e.g. Murphy, 2012; Arab Human Development Report, 2016) that young people tend to be:

a) Technologically savvy;

b) Given their (over-)involvement in social media, in comparison to their elders they embody an intersection of the particular/domestic and the general/global;

c) These young people are not conceived here as "a generation in waiting" as the title of an early classic on the subject indicated (a static concept), but are inherently dynamic and on the move, often in protest and for transformational change, even if this happens to be at present discouraged by the challenges faced.

---

[1] Whereas Tunisia pioneered the Arab Spring, Egypt is demographically about nine times the size of Tunisia. This is why Tunisia is relatively under-researched compared to Egypt, especially in English publications. For instance, a data project such as ASD'A brings in Tunisia only in 2012, i.e. almost two years after the beginning of its uprising in 2010. Moreover, most of the French publications tend to be rather qualitative. SAHWA's quantitative survey data are a welcome help in this respect.

In addition to this introduction and the general conclusion, the paper is organised into six parts. Part one identifies the youth bulge and draws attention to some of its basic characteristics. Part two deals with unemployment, since the consensus – confirmed both by qualitative and quantitative data – is that this issue is the biggest problem. Part three draws the connection between the social and political factors as they materialised in the street. Part four, the longest, focuses on the basic issue: political participation and civic engagement. Part five follows the holistic approach by attempting to analyse this civic engagement/political participation focus within the wider social context, using the concept of youth political socialisation. Part six assesses one of the most important challenges of youth civic engagement/political participation: modest experience/low capacity in institutionalising what is known in political science analysis as a political machine e.g. a well-organised mobilisational structure such as a mass political party. The conclusion pulls the threads together, synthesising in table form the similarities and differences between Tunisia and Egypt. Some forms of governmental political co-optation notwithstanding, the conclusion draws attention to other forms of youth civic engagement/political participation – the indirect or informal mode. To support this paper's argument, the 2015/16 data used are both qualitative (ethnographic fieldwork), and quantitative (survey data), regrouped into 22 tables for the two countries. Unless otherwise specified, these are primarily SAHWA data.

I. Shared characteristics of Tunisia and Egypt: Primacy of the "youth bulge"

Though there is consensus that the uprisings were mass-based, they were pioneered by the youth. This is an objective fact that supports the SAHWA Project's focus.

Indeed, the youth bulge manifested itself by invading the political street. It translated into the expansion of the public space and in fact its take-over. The slogan repeated in the big squares of the different Arab countries الشارع لنا ''the street is ours'' says it all. In this sense, a definition of the Arab Spring is to consider it a demonstration, a concentration of a generational shift. But this youth bulge and its political participation shouldn't be thought of solely purely quantitative terms. Those under 29 years old are indeed a majority across Arab Mediterranean countries reaching in many societies the level of two-thirds of the population. However, and more importantly, this youth bulge is indicative of two aspects crucial to our topic and the SAHWA Project at large.

a. They are the *energizing and creative group* in their societies. Not only do they tend to think out of the box, they (over)use the newer means of social media to communicate. Indeed, there is a correlation between the rise of youth and the increase in the use of new social media. (Ghonim, 2013).
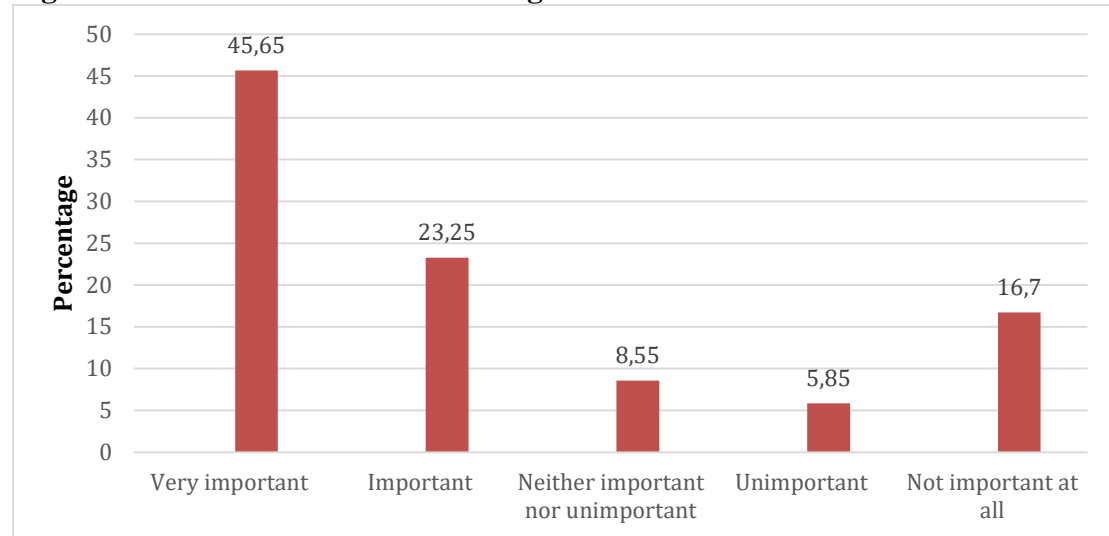
What do the available data tell us?

Figure 1: Effects of the internet during the 2011 events in Egypt
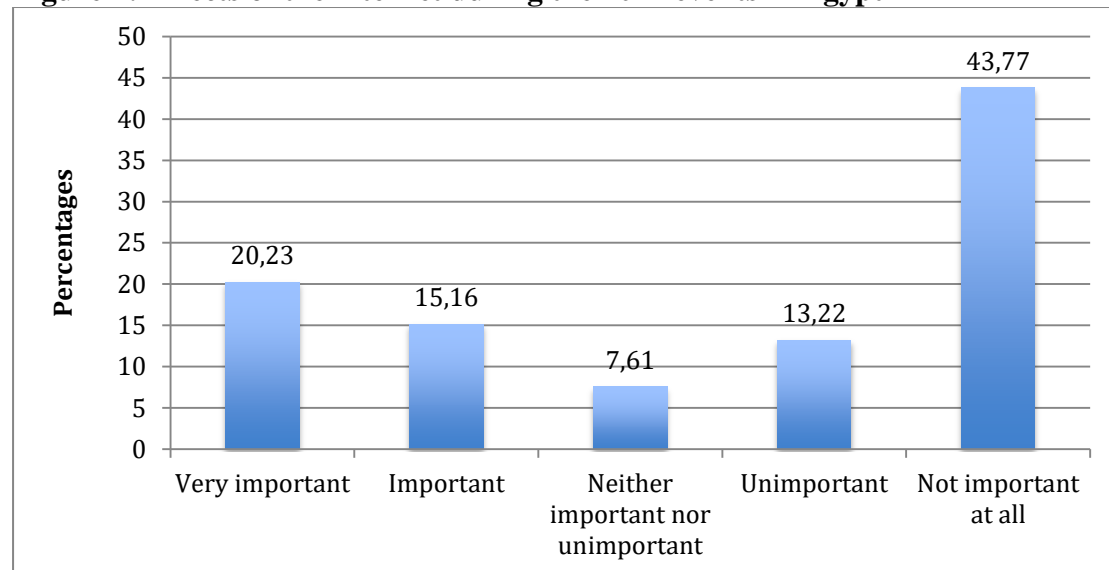
Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG.[2]

---

[2] EG is the acronym used for Egyptian data throughout the paper.

Figure 2: Effects of the internet during the 2011 events in Tunisia

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 – TS.[3]

The data about Tunisia confirm the general impression of the correlation between youth and the rise of the internet. More than two-thirds of those surveyed think that the internet is either important or very important, compared with about 22% who think the contrary. The data about Egypt, however, are rather different and could indeed be counter-intuitive, as they suggest that the internet was not that important in Egypt despite a lot being said about the role of social media in the revolution. This finding contradicts – as we will see below – what the executive regional director of Google, Wael Ghonim, affirms based on his experience (Ghonim, 2013). This unexpectedly low level can be attributed to having a majority of Egyptian youth in the lower educational/financial levels. At these levels of the Human Development Index (Korany, 2014), Egypt does indeed rank much lower than Tunisia. Let it be said that most youth activists insist that while the internet and social media are indeed a crucial part of young people's daily lives, they highlight that their movement was more about occupying public space. Moreover, during days of the Arab Spring in Egypt, the Ministry of the Interior intervened to block mobile phones and internet connections

---

[3] TS is the acronym used for Tunisian data throughout the paper.

and completely cut off these methods of communication (including the internet) for three days. However, the masses continued to flood into the streets, almost pushed by the need for direct contact as the "virtual" one was interrupted. In that sense, the internet in Egypt was indeed an intervening variable limited to the organisational level, such as the Kollena Khaled Sa'eed (We are all Khaled Said) group on Facebook, but it was not necessarily the fuel for many people during the height of popular mass protests. Consequently, Egypt and Tunisia differ in terms of the effects of social media usage during the times of uprising. In the case of Tunisia, social media was much more commonly used, as the data suggests (**Egypt**: 35.39%: **Tunisia**: 68.9%).

SAHWA data, however, converge when it comes to the issue of absolute primary concern in both countries: unemployment.

## II. **Unemployment as a tip of the iceberg, a trigger**

Tunisia's uprising on December 17th 2010 started in the countryside and spread to the big cities. Egypt was just the opposite. However, Bouazizi – an unemployed graduate who set himself on fire because he was not allowed to be a street fruit and vegetable vendor – was the spark that literally and metaphorically inflamed the rest of the Arab world. This is why we tend to associate the Arab Spring with the problem of unemployment. Indeed both qualitative and quantitative data support the utter primacy of unemployment as the number one challenge for everybody – the youth and less youthful groups, e.g. parents, who still believe in equal opportunity.

> My father educated us on principles; he refuses to resort to personal connections and nepotism for his children to be hired […] My father educated us to avoid the corruption of the system, although he has

relationships with important people he knew in Saudi Arabia. (Aymen, TN_LS_3: 5).
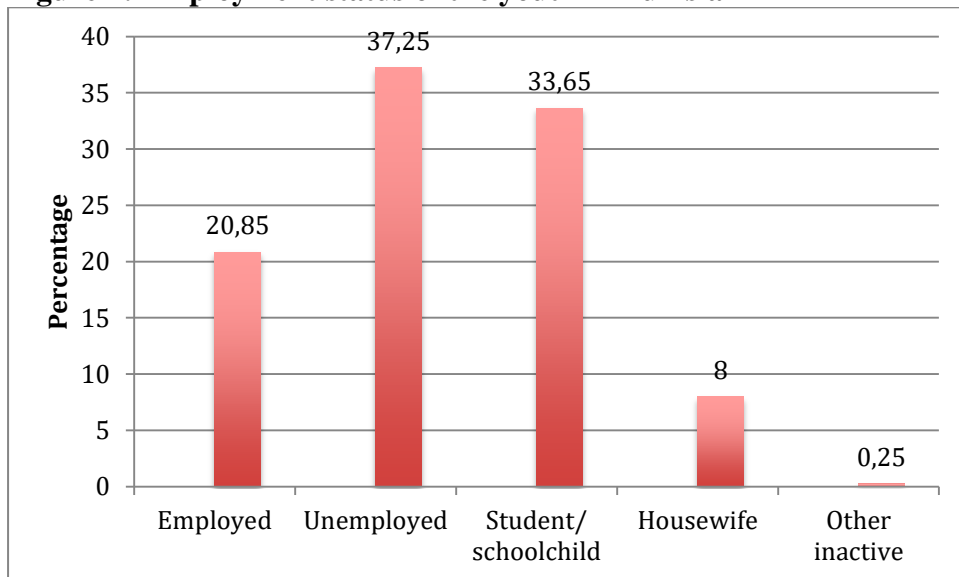
What do the data demonstrate about actual (un)employment levels and their impact?

Figure 3: Employment status of the youth in Egypt
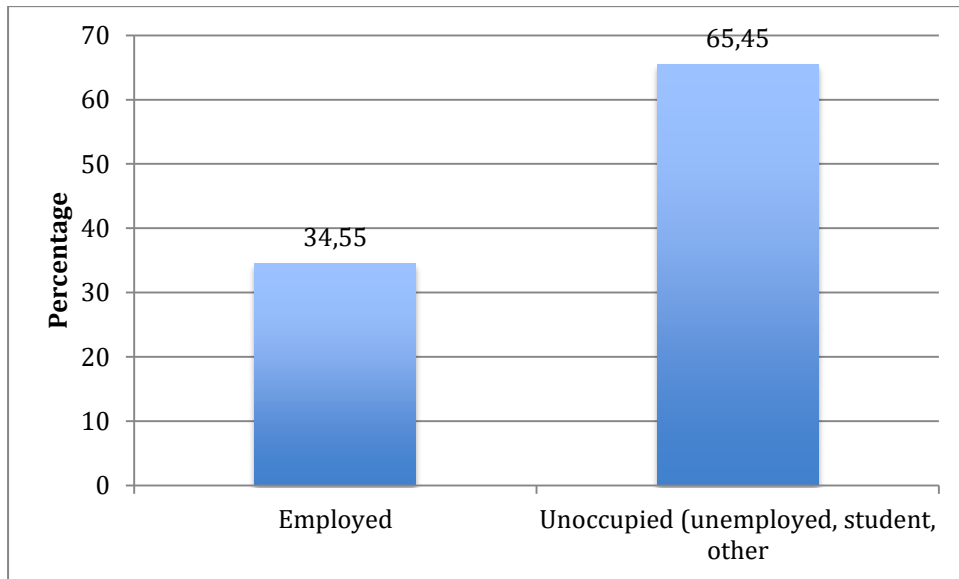
Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG (Q31).

Figure 4: Employment status of the youth in Tunisia

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS (Q27_1).

Unemployment remains extremely high in both the cases of Egypt and Tunisia. The desperation of many led them to try to find a job by any means. Patterns of corruption and inequality of opportunity have thus become widespread with high levels of "*wasta*" or nepotism. Family and other personal connections have actually been the number one way people get a job. This leads to widespread incompetence, as professional criteria in filling jobs are marginalised. Equally important, discontent and mistrust towards political authority increase among those who are educated and find themselves jobless. This spread of nepotism inevitably reinforces youth mistrust and lack of interest in formal political participation, e.g. membership of political parties.

> Mona also narrates that it is very difficult to find a job that goes along with your education. She shows that she works as a researcher, while a colleague of hers now works as a teacher, and her aunt works as a math teacher at primary school (while she recalls that her aunt couldn't even explain the most basic concepts let alone to 40 or 50 students) and none of them actually work in their specialization. Mona notes that this is the trend in Egypt. Even her cousin has a diploma in social sciences and still cannot find work. (Mona EG_NI_3: 5).

While unemployment is indeed a pressing issue on both national levels, the data also suggest a huge mismatch between education and job supply. As the above qualitative data confirm, it is common to find people who graduate with a certain specialisation working in a totally different field merely to earn a living. This mismatch between education and employment creates an imbalance. The scarcity of jobs offered leads people who have a degree and cannot find work to accept a badly paid job, different from their area of specialisation, or below their skill level. Bouazizi's case in Tunisia is indeed a full incarnation that mirrors this widespread mismatch.

Ahmed speaks about the minimal job opportunities available today at large. He also notes that most of the job opportunities available now are in one sense or the other commonplace, such as job opening in any sales department. "Such position does not necessarily require any necessary experience and therefore does not meet the demand of those who have higher educational degrees. People of higher degrees tend to require higher positions, and will not accept such offers that will contribute nothing to their future career. As for public sector jobs, they unfortunately tend to be readily available through family connections and reveal [the] inequality of opportunity through nepotism. (Ahmed_EG_NI_4: 4).

From the economic to the political

Unemployment cannot be conceived of as a purely economic issue, if it ever were. In the case that interests us, concerning the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt and indeed beyond, unemployment was the tip of the iceberg that revealed other problems in the sociopolitical system and disconnected the youth from such a system. The content analysis of slogans in Tahrir Square or Bourguiba Avenue indicates that the uprisings were becoming *increasingly political*. The call for "bread" (or employment) was directly associated with freedom in the most repeated slogan. These slogans, chanted in a rhythmic, harmonious, brief and expressive way, became consequently very mobilisational. Moreover, each reveals its own sociopolitical context and its demands. Here is a sample of some of the *400 slogans* (author's translation) that were increasingly chanted and hence reveal the underpinnings of the uprisings in both Egypt and Tunisia.

يا مواطن يا ضحية ... أخرج شارك في القضية
O citizen, O victim, Come and Participate

اعتصام اعتصام ... حتى يسقط النظام
Sit-in Sit-in Strike Strike ... till the regime falls

الجوع كافر
Hunger is dehumanising and beastly

يا جمال قول لابوك .... شعب مصر بيكرهوك

O'Gamal Tell your Father ... All the Egyptian People hate you

خبز وماء ... بن علي لاء
Yes to Bread & Water ... But No to Ben-Ali

بن علي يا جبان...الشعب التونسي لا يهان
تونس حرة حرة..بن علي بره بره.
You Ben Ali the coward, the Tunisian people will not be humiliated

لو كان مبارك أبويا...فانا أبن حرام
If Mubarak is my dad, then I'm a Bastard

شيلوا مبارك و حطوا خروف....يمكن يفهم بالمعروف
Oust Mubarak and replace him with a sheep, it might understand it better

"فهمتكم" - بن علي - مبارك
Ben Ali & Mubarak "I understand you" (*But did they really understand?!*)

لو قلنا للحمار يتنحى بيتنحى
If we tell a donkey to step down, it will do

إرحل يعني امشي ... يلي مبتفمشي
Leave means step down ... you idiot

التغيير التغيير... إرحل يا حقير
CHANGE CHANGE ... Get out you Scum

الشعب يريد أسقاط النظام
The People want to overthrow the regime

III. Mistrust in the political system and its political elites, from government to parliament to political parties

For Ayman, "Politics is the nest of his great disappointment. He rather prefers engagement in the work of associations if ever he finds the framework and those who incite him to work in a disinterested manner. Politicians, he says, remain prisoners of their personal ambitions; this is why they have not carried out their promises for many years" (Aymen TN_LS_3: 9).

As said above, a direct political consequence is mistrust in all dimensions of the political process. What do levels of (lack of) confidence in different political institutions – politicians, government, political parties – tell us?

Figure 5: Level of confidence in political institutions (politicians) in Egypt (0 = No Confidence / 10 = Absolute Confidence)
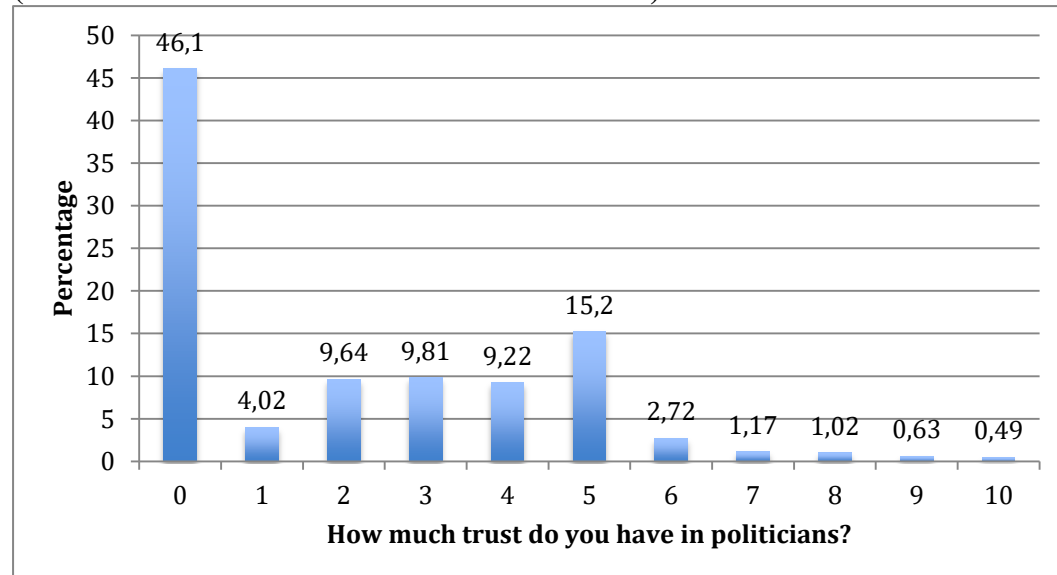
Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG Q66_3.

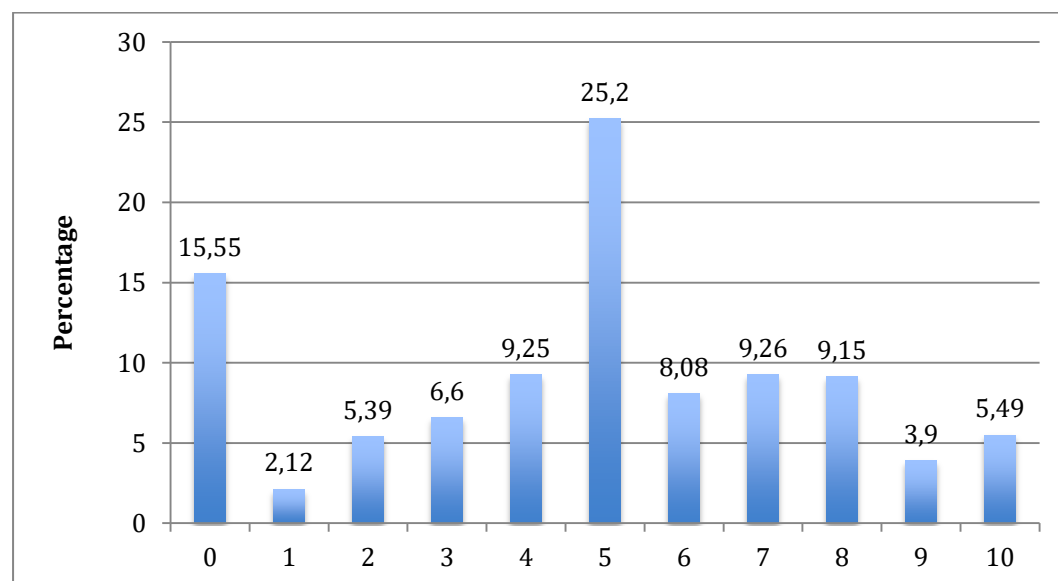**Figure 6: Level of confidence in political institutions (politicians) in Tunisia**
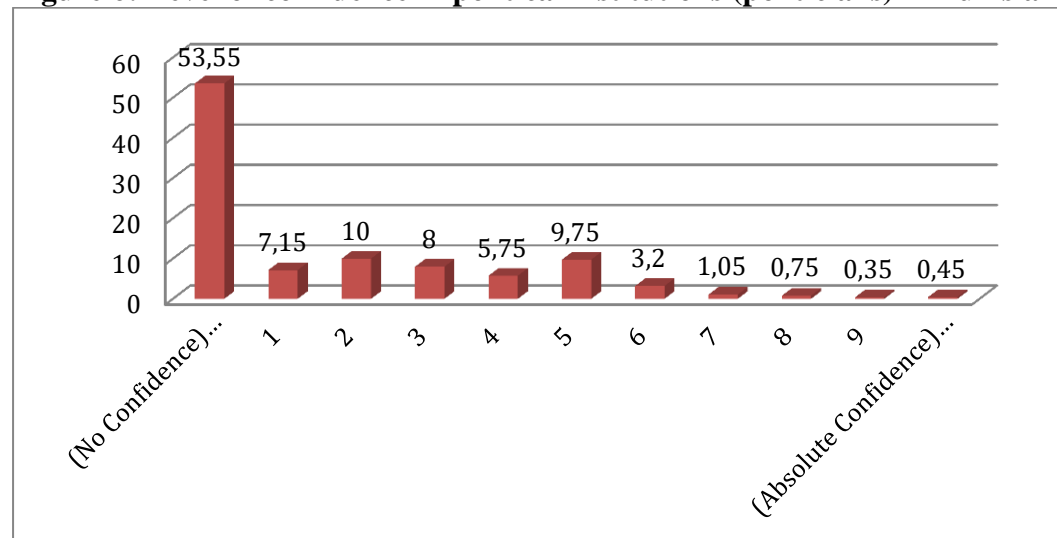
Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS Q66C.

Indeed, mistrust in the political system is another common feature shared by the cases of Tunisia and Egypt. The data are extremely clear and converge for the two countries. It is important not to forget that the initial call for change was under the

umbrella of three main aspirations "bread, freedom and social equality". Such basic needs were not met by presidents who stayed for 20–30 years in power. This long period of discontent triggered frustration and demands for immediate change and restructuring of the system on different levels. This could be seen in the post-revolutionary context following the Arab Spring with the number of strikes and sit-ins organised and calling for more than specific sectorial demands.

> Since 2011 nothing has changed, nothing took place actually. The senior responsible arrived in Gafsa, he makes a tour in the city, and then he says: everything is fine. No! In ten years, the only new thing, it is the opening of the mall CARREFOUR, nothing new. The infrastructure is disastrous. Consider the State of the roads". (Aymen TN_LS_3: 8.)

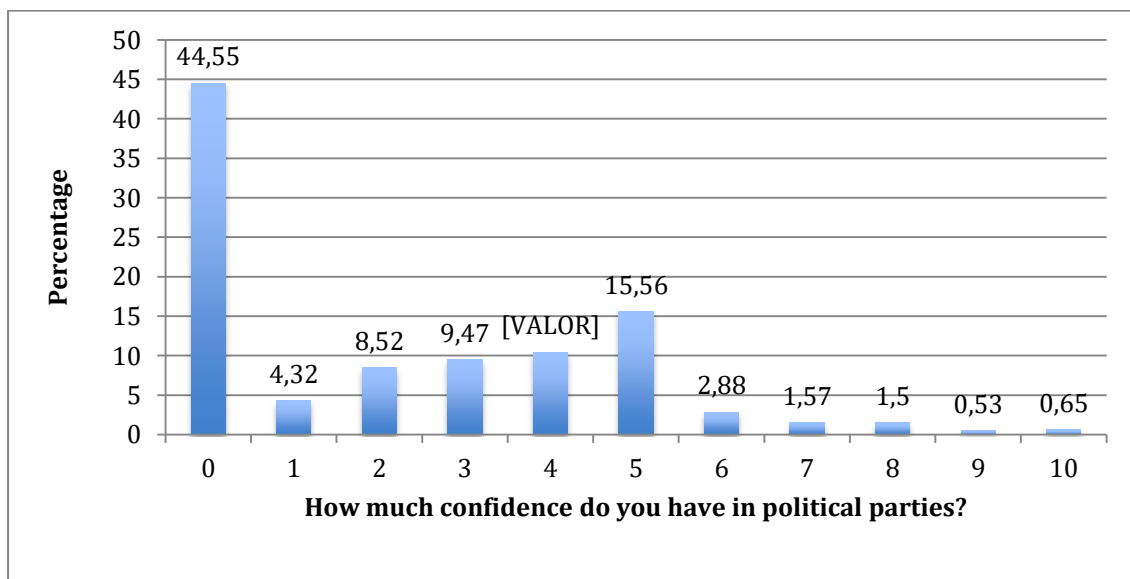**Figure 7: Level of confidence in political institutions (government) in Egypt**

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016- EG Q66_8.

Figure 8: Level of confidence in political institutions (government) in Tunisia
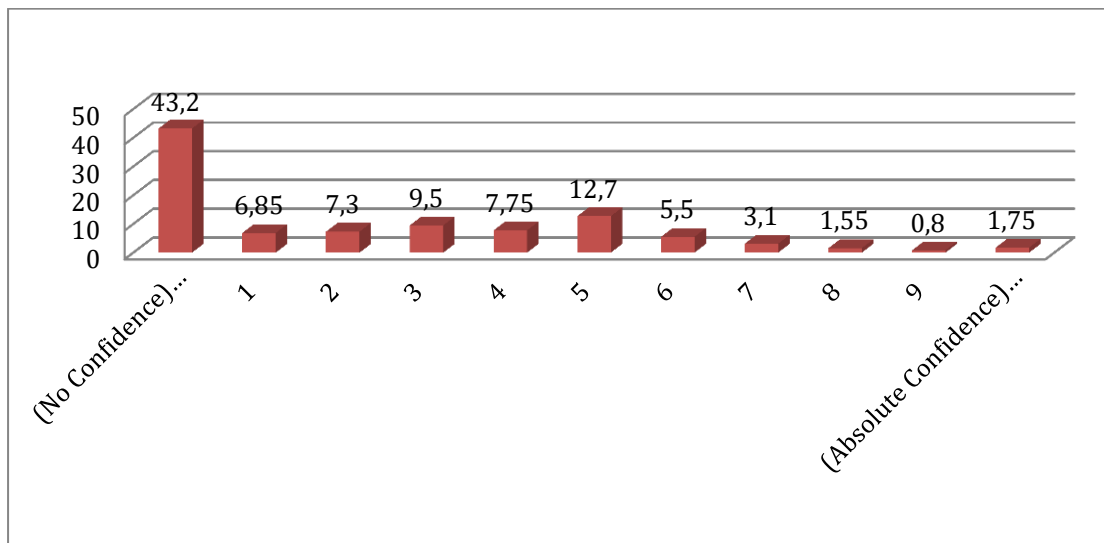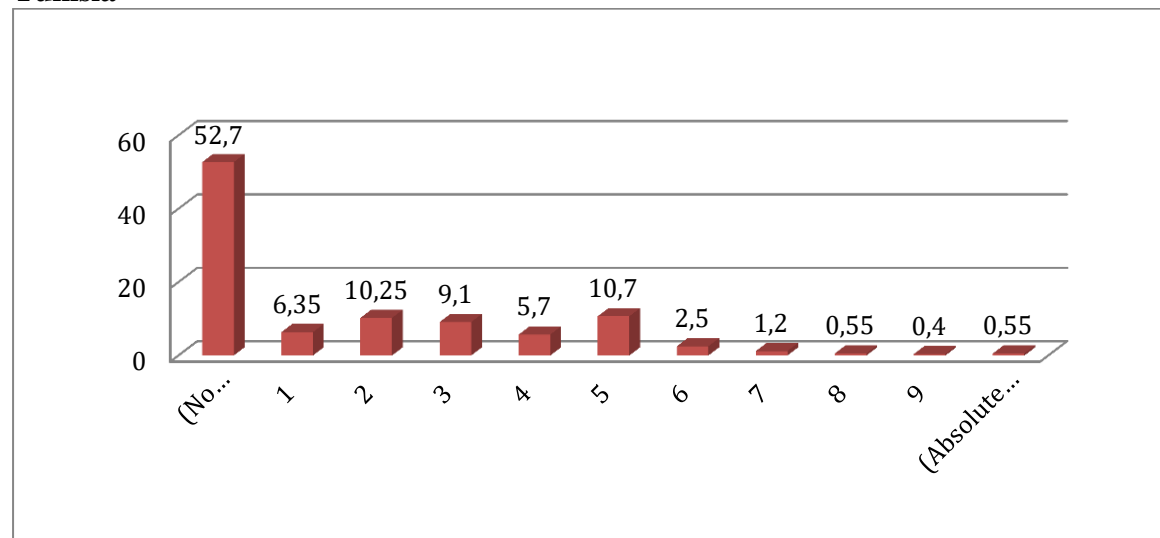

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS Q66H.

Figure 9: Level of confidence in political institutions (political parties) in Egypt

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG Q66_2.

Figure 10: Level of confidence in political institutions (political parties) in Tunisia
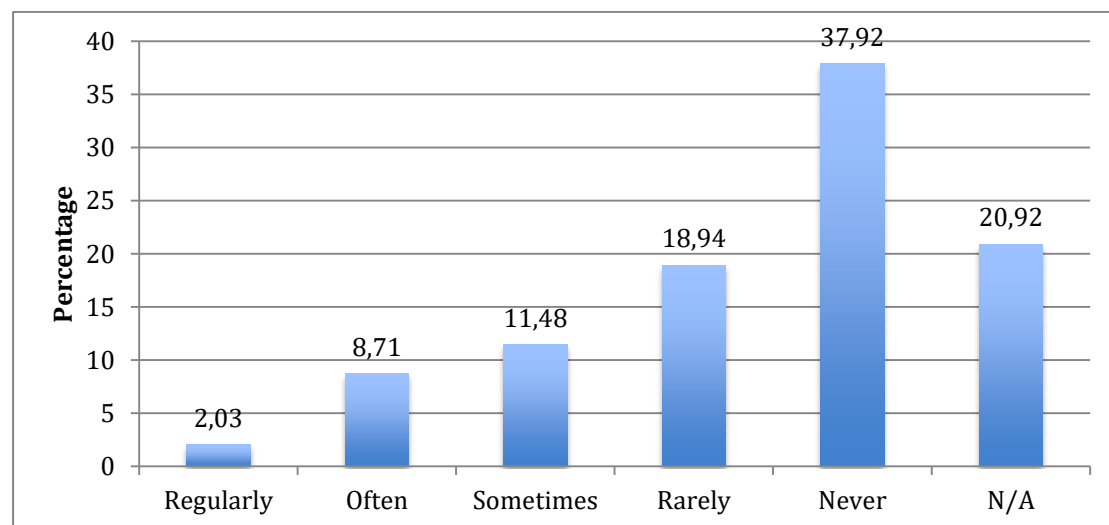

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS Q66B.

IV. **Trajectories of youth political involvement indicate discontinuity in the role of the family as the traditional agent of political socialisation**
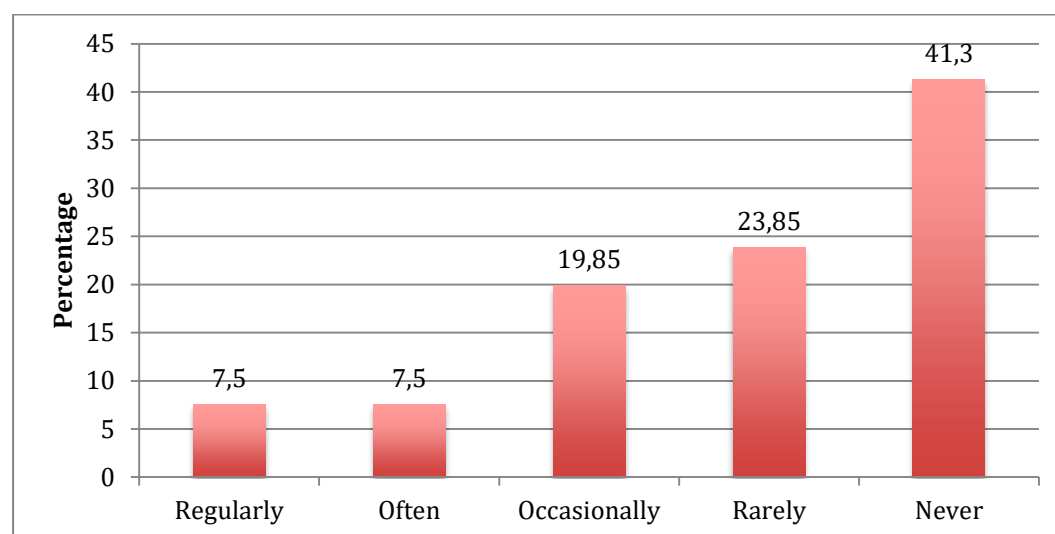
A) National political affairs

Data suggest that expected differences between family and friends in discussing national political affairs might have declined in the post-Arab Spring context of disillusionment.

Figure 11: Political socialisation/discussion of national political affairs in Egypt (father)

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG.

Figure 12: Political socialisation/discussion of national political affairs in Tunisia (father)

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS.

Figure 13: Political socialisation/discussion of national political affairs in Egypt (mother)
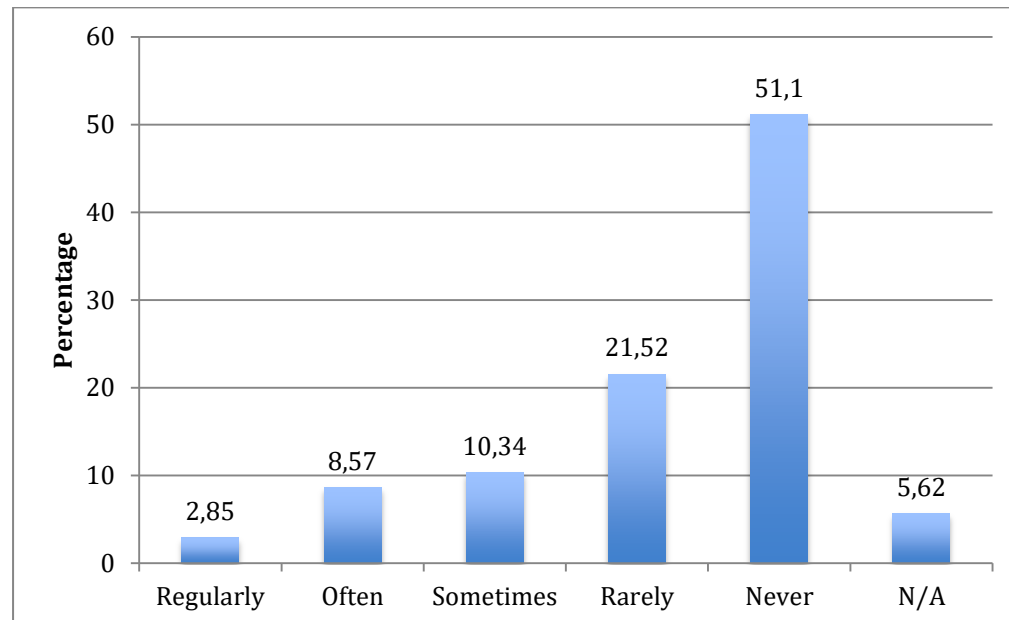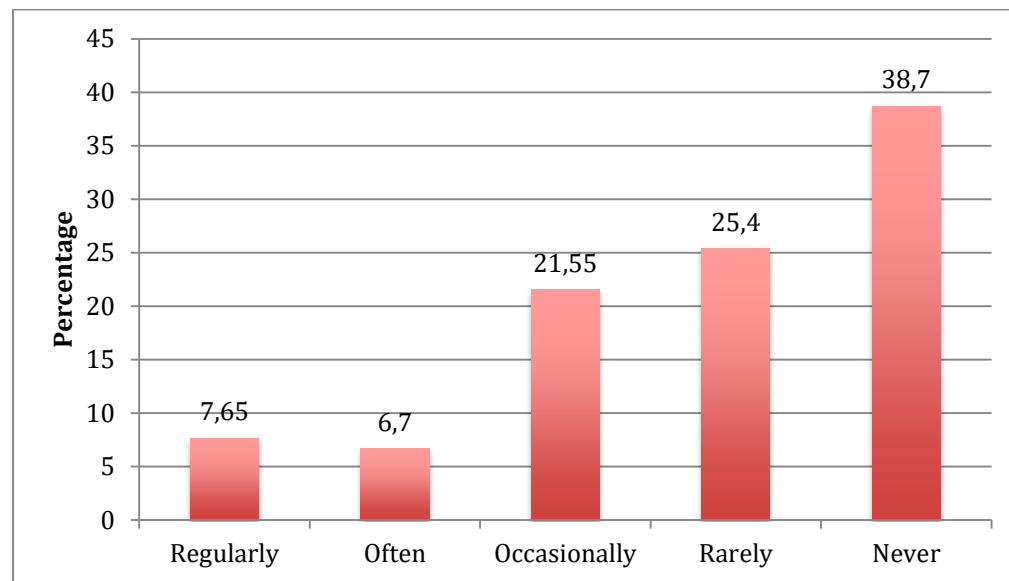

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG.

Figure 14: Political socialisation/discussion of national political affairs in Tunisia (mother)

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS.

Though the popular mass uprisings of 2011 might not have as yet put into effect the aspirations of the youth and those that pioneered the movement, they have indeed reflected an important change in the political socialisation of such young generations. They are now more *politically aware* and *independent of traditional socialisation agents* such as the family. The uprisings reveal youth as the generation that can express itself through several channels. They realise that change is something they were able to attain through organising and mobilising in the public space. The SAWHA Project data reveal such discontinuity in terms of political socialisation among family members and colleagues. This pattern is also common to the cases of both Egypt and Tunisia.

The ousting of presidents in 2011 in both Egypt and Tunisia was the peak of such success to engineer change. It was an instance of time when the youth realised and acknowledged their power to bring about change. As the paper discusses later on in

more detail, the uprisings' setback was when those young people could not realise that their mass action was only a start and not the end point. They failed to organise, maintain unity and institutionalise demand for change through specific and operational modalities.

Part of the discontinuity in political socialisation with family and friends was the actual discontent with the unexpected outcome of the Arab Spring. Basically, these young people were deeply disappointed, and instead of coming out with an operational programme of action, they got discouraged and fragmented. This was the moment counterrevolutionary forces were waiting for. Rather than developing effective political machinery, youth disillusionment and discouragement followed (more on this below).

> I do not care much about the political changes in the country. I believe that as long as I am not personally affected by the changes and circumstances of the political change in Egypt, no direct relation or effect then I would not care much about it. (Sobhy EG_NI_6: 5).

Figure 15: Political socialisation/discussion of national political affairs in Egypt (friends)
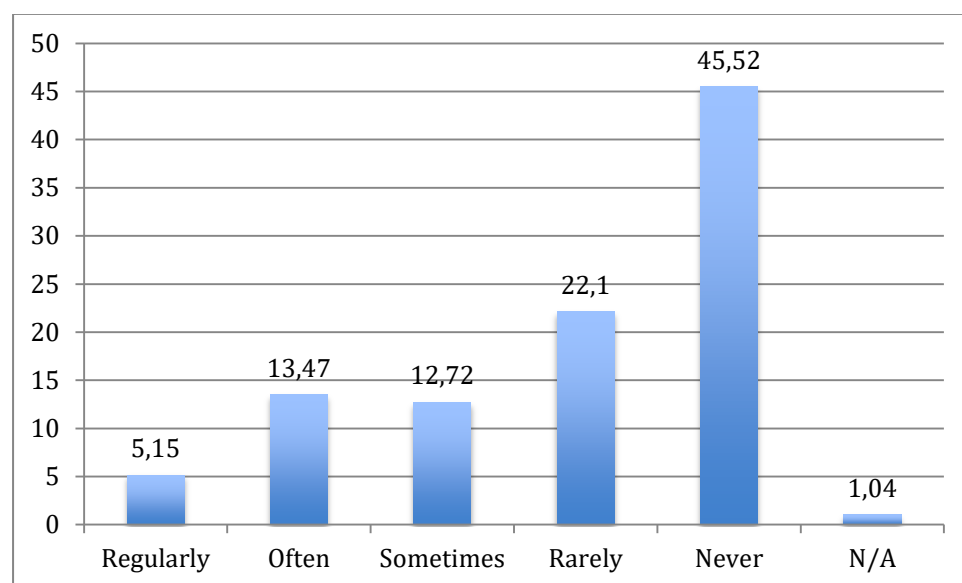
Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG.

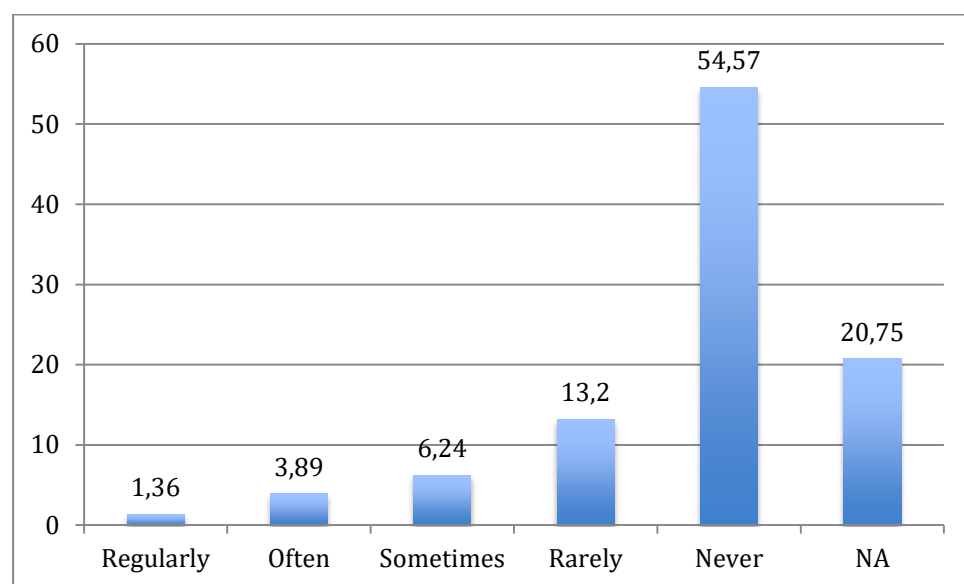**Figure 16:   Political socialisation/discussion of national political affairs in Tunisia (friends)**
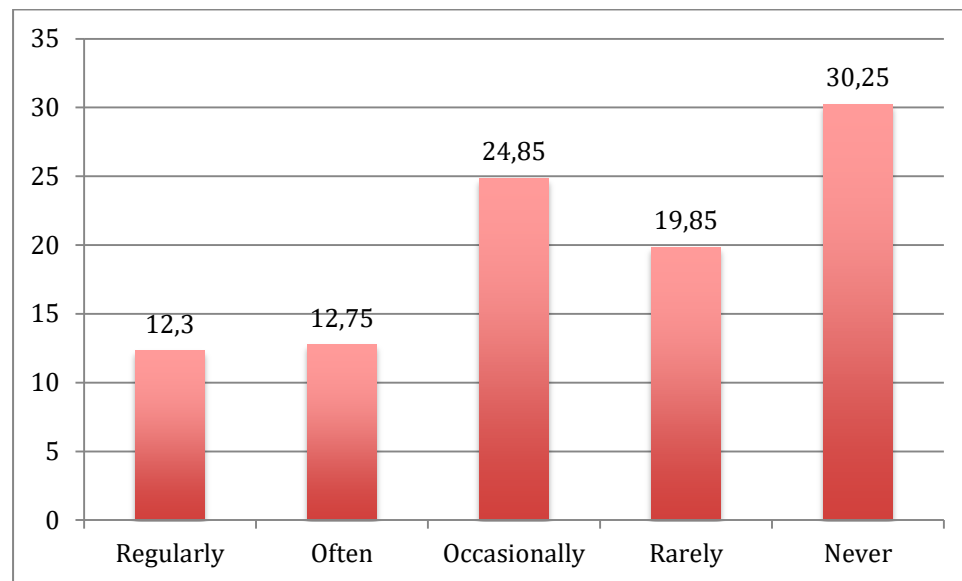
Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS.

The data suggest that *political socialisation for change* is more common among the youth themselves than among older members of the family. Let us not forget that it was the youth that pioneered the revolution and called for change. The older generations were not necessarily physical participants – at least not at the outset. Parents partially feared overall change and street protests/demonstrations as a modality, which for this older generation symbolised uncertainty and even chaos. On the contrary, young colleagues/classmates and friends shared a more common experience to which they could relate and were possibly able to discuss.

B) International and regional politics

Because of this context of disillusionment, there do not seem to be at present big differences between family and friends as socialisation agents when discussing international and regional political affairs.

Figure 17: Political socialisation/discussion of international and regional political affairs in Egypt (father)

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG.

Figure 18: Political socialisation/discussion of international and regional political affairs in Tunisia (father)
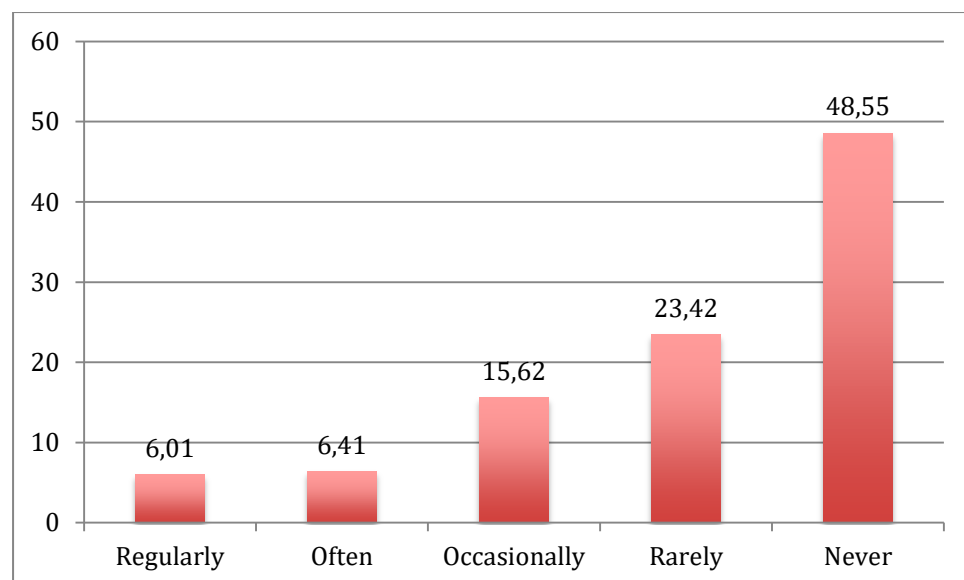
Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS.

Figure 19: Political socialisation/discussion of international and regional political affairs in Egypt (mother)

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG.

Figure 20: Political socialisation/discussion of international and regional political affairs in Tunisia (mother)

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS.

A systematic event/content analysis of the uprisings show that domestic concerns prevailed, whereas international and regional politics occupied a distant 2nd place. Youth concerns seemed to be more dominated by their national/local context.

However, the Arab Spring was a great example of a regional domino effect at youth level. The self-immolation of Bouazizi in Tunisia and the follow-up of the Egyptian movement are a sign not only of regional proximity but also of regional feelings of togetherness and bonding. The youth generations across the region started to realise that they share the same challenges and suffer – to a great extent – from the same problems of unemployment, poor education and abstention from political or civic participation. However, these 2015–16 data show a return to prior focus on domestic concerns when youth *did not* engage prior to the Arab Spring in much discussion of international and regional political affairs. This might be attributed again to the idea of too much preoccupation with their local problems, and the lack of self-confidence to effect change at the national level, let alone the regional/international level.

Figure 21: Political socialisation/discussion of international and regional political affairs in Egypt (friends)
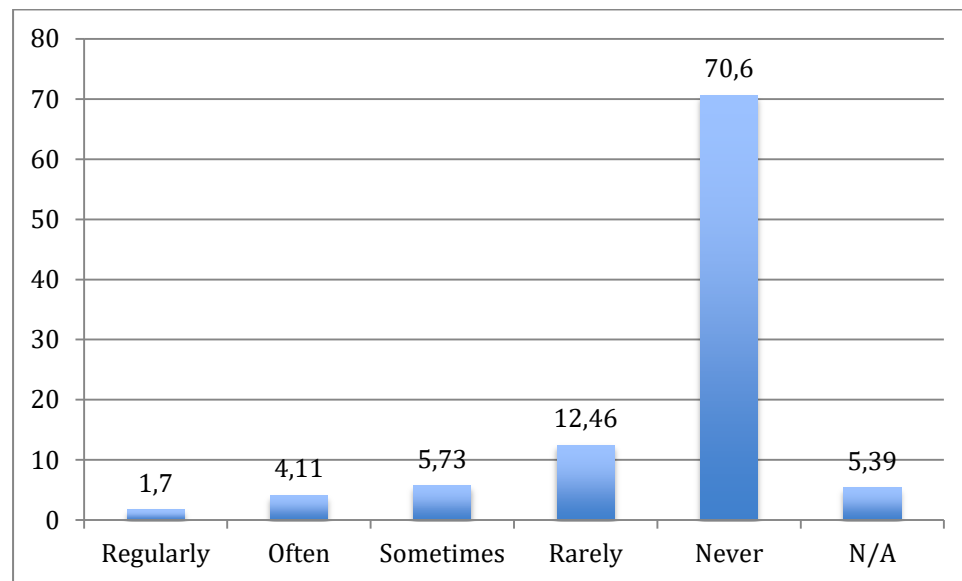

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– EG.

Figure 22: Political socialisation/discussion of international and regional political affairs in Tunisia (friends)
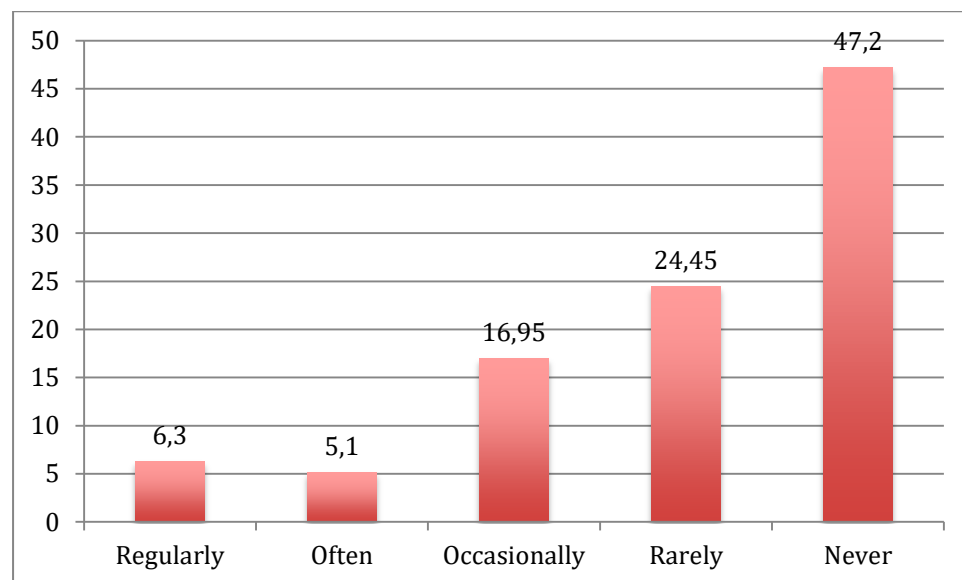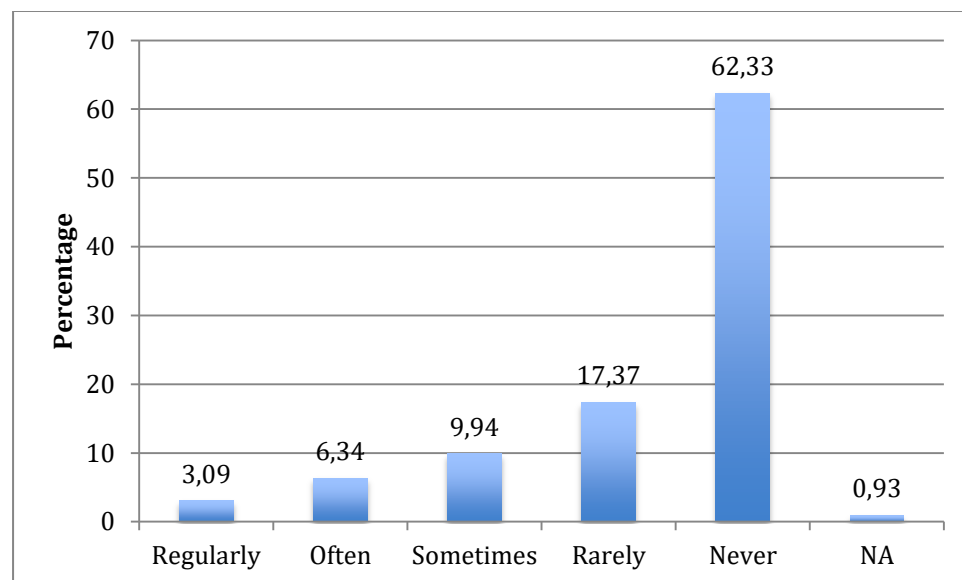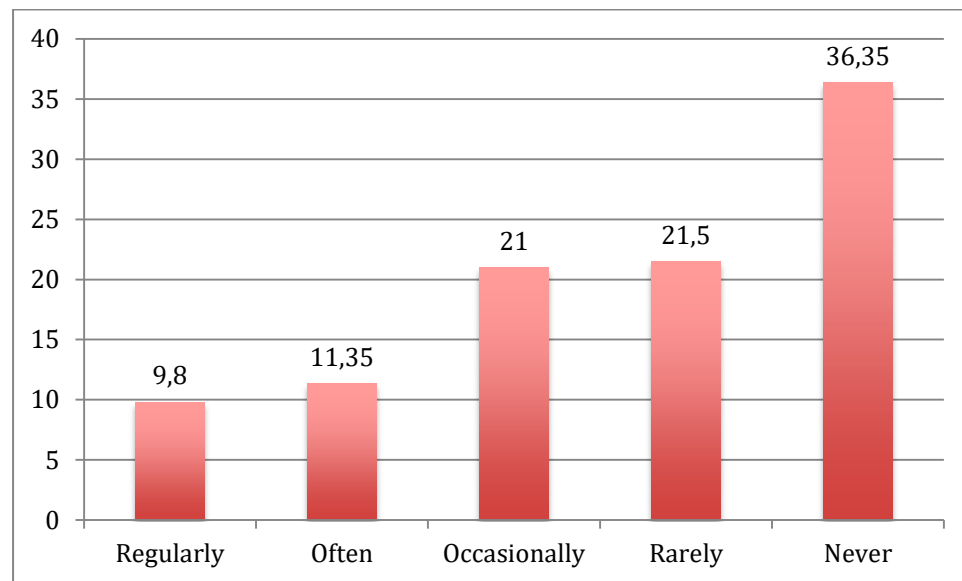

Source: SAHWA Youth Survey 2016– TS.

Discussion of international and regional political affairs seems to be much less than that of concerns at national level. The youth seem to be comparatively politically disengaged from regional or international politics. Drawing a conclusion similar to the one the paper discussed earlier, the youth of today share similar sentiments and aspirations, making their discussion of political events on the national level more salient.

In this respect, the Arab Spring could be more than a purely political event, however politically important it is. It is a demand for the restructuring of authority, political as well as social. For instance, and in addition to the level of technological literacy, these young people have on average more years of schooling. In addition, their schooling is rather different, as the data on the rise of private education – even foreign schools – show for both Tunisia, Egypt and indeed the rest of the Arab world. This national

focus notwithstanding, they are still – to different degrees – part of the "global village".

VI. The problem of the lack of a youth political machine

As figures 5–10 show, the youth mistrusted traditional formal political institutions, including established political parties. However, they did not manage to establish their own alternative political institutions. On the contrary, mainly because of lack of experience in establishing such political machinery, they tended to improvise rather than strategise and fell victim to their own differences. In fact many analysts attribute the difficulties of the post-February transition as well as some successes of the "counter-revolution" to this lack of experience and the fragmentation/division of the youth groups. For instance, when the transitional ruling SCAF (Supreme Council of Armed Forces) launched one of its "national dialogues" in the fall of 2011, it announced that as many as 153 youth groups had agreed to join! These, however, were not all the existing youth groups, as many and some of the best known ones declined to participate. The main point here is that in the hazy post-January 2011 era, many organisations were established, and many in name only. Such fragmentation – though exaggerated and manipulated by "counter-revolutionary" forces – still reflect young people's lack of experience in establishing political machinery. The closest young people came to the establishment of any political institution was when they discovered a rallying opposition figure or were inspired by a politically provocative event. Examples of each from the Egyptian youth will clarify these two points (Korany, 2012).

A. Substitute youth political machines and their limitations

This is the case of the National Coalition for Change, identified with Mohammed ElBaradei – former diplomat, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Nobel Prize winner. These impressive credentials provided ElBaradei with the required assets of leadership and worked as a valuable basis for credible mass protests on the eve of January 25th 2011.

Even before retiring in December 2009 from his highly visible international post, ElBaradei went on record to criticise the Egyptian regime, insisting on the necessity of drastic political reform. He suggested reducing the mandate for the presidency, the necessity of multiple candidates, and complete transparency in the election process. Before these criticisms Mubarak had initially received and honoured ElBaradei with the highest Egyptian award following his 2005 Nobel Prize. But once ElBaradei criticised the regime and insisted on immediate political reforms, the tone completely changed. An orchestrated media campaign littered the government press, stooping so low as to bad-mouth his family (e.g. the diffusion of carefully-chosen pictures of his daughter in a swimsuit amidst wine glasses) – an utter character assassination. This strategy, however, backfired. If anything, the regime's volte face toward ElBaradei confirmed its hypocrisy and obsession with eliminating any potential rival to Gamal Mubarak as successor to his father. Indeed, this governmental persecution made ElBaradei a martyr, and contrary to the established opposition parties, he appeared to be the honest "outsider" of the discredited system and a credible political alternative.

The scene of ElBaradei's arrival at the airport in Cairo on February 19th 2010 struck me as one of a national celebration, worthy of a national hero. Though the numbers of the welcoming crowd were relatively limited (about 2000), these were the courageous ones who managed to overcome police barriers and harassment. Headed by a few

political activists, they included a large number of young people, especially from governorates outside Cairo, who raised Egyptian flags and banners of support for his various calls for political reform. The scene looked like a whole-nation protest movement in support of immediate political change, a movement keen *and* happy to find its national leader. But for various reasons, this Nobel Prize winner and international civil servant disappointed them (Korany & El-Mahdi, 2013).

Disillusioned, ElBaradei's young followers were again left to themselves. "It was a disaster", exploded Maha El-Gamal, the long-time activist with ElBaradei. She added, "El-Baradei surrounded himself with amateurs and opportunists who were never on the same page with each other" (Khalil, 2012).

Young protestors had no choice but to depend on themselves and establish their own organisations. These organisations, however, were not the result of political planning but an immediate and almost spontaneous reaction to a political event that provoked/galvanised them. Two of these stand out as they have been central: Harakat Shabab 6 Abril (6th of April Youth Movement) and Kollena Khaled Sa'eed (We are all Khaled Said).

B. Harakat Shabab 6 Abril

Its establishment coincided with the mass labour protests on April 6th 2008. These took place in El-Mehalla Al-Kobra, an industrial textile town in the middle of the delta. In that year labour unrest intensified, protesting against police repression, and in favour of higher wages to counterbalance rising food prices. Harakat's founders were all young men and women, notably Ahmed Maher, Asmaa Mahfouz and Israa Abdel-Fattah, who later became very active in Tahrir, and indeed household names. By

2009, the movement could count on connections with about 70,000 young and educated sympathisers.

Because some of its members had gone to Serbia to see on the ground how non-violent means toppled dictator Slobodan Milosevic, they tended to promote the same tactics in Egypt. But this *silmeyia* (non-violent) approach did not prevent police attacks and repression. On April 6th 2009 Harakat was attacked, its websites hacked, and many of its members arrested. Though their demonstrations did not rally more than a few hundred, they learned how to organise to converge from many street directions simultaneously. This was truly a technique that finally overpowered police forces around Tahrir Square during the January 2011 revolution and forced them to run away. Harakat members also learned how to mitigate the effects of tear gas by covering their faces with handkerchiefs soaked in vinegar and how to make rudimentary armour to resist the riot police. These tactics became in fact the trademark of success on January 25th 2011 and afterwards. National/international networking was a characteristic of these youth movements as we see with Kollena Khaled Sa'eed.

C. Kollena Khaled Sa'eed

Sa'eed was a 28-year old who was arrested and publicly beaten to death by the police in Alexandria in June 2010. Against police claims that he choked to death on drugs, photos of his mutilated body were taken by his brother in the morgue and circulated on the internet. Like Tunisia's Bouazizi, who triggered the long-suppressed resistance against Ben Ali, Khaled Sa'eed became the symbol of police brutality and the callous state in Egypt. Mass protest movements usually need a spark to ignite them, and Sa'eed's torture/mutilation – like Bouazizi's self-immolation – provided this spark.

The *Times'* correspondent witnessed on the spot how ElBaradei's militants, for instance, used the Khaled Sa'eed case to incite people to mobilise and rise up.

Mehitab Jellani, a young veiled woman and long-time political activist, kept a copy in her purse of Khaled Sa'eed's iconic autopsy, pulling it out to remind the undecided about the casual daily police brutality that had become commonplace under the emergency laws (Khalil, 2012).

Wael Ghonim, the Google Middle East executive, and the secret administrator of Kollena Khaled Sa'eed, starts his book about the organisation with the event of his kidnapping on the streets of downtown Cairo just a few days before the January revolution erupted in Tahrir. He recounts how the illuminated downtown streets became suddenly shrouded in darkness when he was pushed into a car, handcuffed and blindfolded. One of the two security policemen holding him constantly pushed his head down to his knees so that nobody outside could see what was happening, differently to the public beating of Khaled Sa'eed. But once Ghonim arrived at the Secret Police headquarters, the beating started in earnest amidst a mixture of sadistic police laughter and insults (Ghonim, 2012). Contrary to Khaled Sa'eed, as he was blindfolded he did not know where the flood of kicks and slaps would come from. Ghonim appropriately titles his first chapter "The Republic of Fear".

The subtitle of Ghonim's autobiography and documentation of the Kollena Khaled Sa'eed site is revealing: "The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power". This life history and personalised testament amply confirm it. The website and its administrator are an embodiment of the mobilising impact of social media on

the road to Tahrir. The call for the January 25th 2011 event was diffused through the website with its networking results as we shall see below.

Though social media did not make the revolution, they certainly fuelled it. Instant messaging among even the hesitant and introverted activated a community of frustration that acted as a collective force in the streets. Social media impact continued self-generating when Ghonim remained in solitary confinement for 11 days. Moreover, if Google had not publicised around the world the cry "Where is Ghonim?" he could possibly have been another Khaled Sa'eed.

The establishment of the Kollena Khaled Sa'eed site came as an immediate reaction to Ghonim's traumatic experience of seeing the disfigured face of a young man like himself who had been publicly beaten to death. In fact, his wife came across him crying feverishly in his home office and she had to turn off the picture to calm him down. What he needed to reduce his suffering, however, was to take some positive action, to wake others from their passivity. The site was then designed as a call for action against this widespread and extreme police brutality. It is written in colloquial Arabic to avoid any elitist tendency and to reach as many as possible. The reaction was indeed impressive: 300 subscribers in the first two minutes, 3000 in the first hour, then 100,000 about a week later before settling at 250,000 frequent visitors (Ghonim, 2012). The language used is indeed angry, rebellious, lively and very mobilising, with folkloric songs to energise mass feelings of protest and incite translation of them into action. The site was also connected to other website pages such as El-Naggar's of the ElBaradei campaign, and to well-established bloggers such as the award-winner Wael Abbas. With such networking, this site substantiates the idea of social media as an alternative revolutionary forum to established press and TV media. As Kollena

Khaled Sa'eed repeatedly insists: Egypt, after this young man's death should not be the same as before. Indeed, the change was taking place.

Analysis of the site before January 2011 reveals the flow of suggestions about how to carry out this change. Ideas focused on means of protest and the practice of street politics. They proposed starting with mobilisation in Alexandria but soon spread to Cairo and other Egyptian cities. Reuters estimated that one of these protests in Alexandria amounted to 8000 participants (Ghonim, 2012).

Part of this mobilisation strategy was to shame the regime about some of its actions, e.g. the excessive and crude fraud in the 2010 parliamentary elections orchestrated by close Gamal Mubarak confidante, businessman Ahmed Ezz. In these elections, the governing NDP "won" 90% of the seats. The site repeated street jokes and commented sarcastically on Ezz's three self-congratulatory Al-Ahram articles claiming how popular the NDP was. A special file "Black Day of Egypt's Elections" included lots of photos to document the widespread fraud. The strategy made clear that this election fraud was part and parcel of continuous regime failings, the tip of the iceberg.

Thus a few days before January 25th 2011, the site diffused what it sarcastically called regime "achievements". For instance, the number of suicides in the previous four years was 12,000; 5,000 in the year 2009 alone; more than 100,000 attempted suicides per year – more than five times the 2005 rate. More than two-thirds of these suicides were young people under 25 years of age. The site's source of data was no less than the government's central body of statistics, as reported by the equally governmental *Al-Ahram* newspaper (Ghonim, 2012).

In preparation for the 25th, mobilisation efforts intensified. The site published a long six-page reminder of governmental "achievements" (Ghonim, 2012). These included youth unemployment, systemic corruption at the top, widespread poverty, increasing levels of child anaemia, and even growing rates of national depression. The site specified four demands to be immediately met to cope with the disastrous situation, demands such as abolishing the state of emergency laws, and limiting the presidential mandate. It ended by specifying meeting points for mass protests: four in Cairo, two in Alexandria, two in Ismaellia, as well as others in Mahalla El-Kubra, Tanta and Souhag. There were suggestions for mobilising slogans, including two inspired by the Tunisian revolution. Also included were practical guidelines for demonstrator protection and maximum effectiveness (Ghonim 2012).

And the January 25th 2011 demonstration took place. After a long day and night in Tahrir Square, the site admin wrote: "Jan. 25th is not the end of the regime but the beginning of its end" (Ghonim, 2012). The social media were not only key in mobilisation for that day in Tahrir but also saved Ghonim from Khaled Sa'eed's fate. When he was released on February 7th, he was received by no less than the Minister of the Interior. He was accompanied home by the newly-appointed Secretary General of the governing NDP, Dr Hossam Badrawi. When negotiating to appear on one of the most popular talk shows, "The 10 p.m.", he imposed his conditions: to talk uninterrupted as much as he wanted, and to receive in return one million Egyptian pounds, to be given in his name to the families of the January 25th martyrs. Both conditions were immediately accepted (Ghonim, 2012). During the programme, Ghonim's collapse into tears over the discussion of the martyrs and his storming out of the studio publicised even more the ugliness of the callous regime. Its end was in sight, as Mubarak finally stepped down three days later, on February 11th. But youth

organisations did not step up to reap the fruits of their pioneering mass protests. In fact, two years after the revolution, they were rather fragmented and even demoralised (Al-Masry Al-Youm January 24, 2013 for a survey of 10 of the revolution's icons). Many of them are either in prison or in exile.

Conclusion

We can recapitulate the essence of this paper in the following table about some similarities and differences between Egypt and Tunisia.

Similarities	Differences
Poor quality education does not allow for freedom in career choice. There is a **mismatch between education and job opportunities** in the market. Most of the people work outside their area of specialisation. Family connections (*wasta*) are very common and necessary to get a decent job. Young people agree that not much has changed since 2011. The protests and political events in general have changed nothing (pessimistic approach). Little or **no trust in political parties** and their capability to bring about change. (Political disengagement). Illegal migration is a gateway to social change and prosperity if successful. **BUT** the majority of people **would not** do it for anything, unless they were really forced. "It is illogical". More than 94% of Egyptians and Tunisians **do not** belong to a political party. More than 90% of Egyptians and Tunisians **do not** belong to a union. Most (more than 50%) Egyptians and Tunisians **did not** vote in the last elections.	The youth in Tunisia are much more likely **not to vote** when elections are called. (**Egypt**: 31.49% / **Tunisia**: 59.75%). Tunisia displays slightly higher levels of **non-confidence** in institutions such as: **Parliament**: Egypt = 33.39 / Tunisia = 51.4%; **Political Parties**: Egypt = 44.55% / Tunisia = 52.7%; **Politicians**: Egypt = 46.1% / Tunisia = 53.55%; **Elections**: Egypt = 23.59% / Tunisia = 36.5%. 43.2% of Tunisians have **no confidence** at all in the government compared to only 15.6% in Egypt (but still overall mistrust unites the two countries). National channels are significantly more important to Tunisians than to Egyptians in informing the public about 2010-2011 events. (**Egypt**: 19.22% / **Tunisia**: 41.65%). The internet and social media were much more important in Tunisia than in Egypt during the Arab uprising. (**Egypt**: 35.39% / **Tunisia**: 68.9%). (Percentages are the sum total of those who answered "important" or "very important" to the question).

More than 45% of Egyptians and Tunisians **do not** have confidence in politicians.	
Less than 5% of Egyptians and Tunisians have confidence in the elections.	
More than 42% of Egyptians and Tunisians who **did not** vote in the last national election were not interested.	

What we also tried to show in this paper is that the issue of political participation (or lack thereof) could be the tip of the iceberg. It reveals more about society's evolving socialisation patterns, disillusionment with formal institutions, the recent results of the Arab Spring and the search instead for informal networking (e.g. football groups or ultras) as a means of expanding the public space and evading control by political authority. Indeed, this is where the concept of indirect or informal political participation will be worth exploring. As we know economists emphasise that one characteristic of countries in development is the large size of the informal sector. This is a sector whose myriad transactions do not appear in official documents on the state's budget/revenue/expenditure. Many of these informal transactions, e.g. paying your maid or a taxi driver exist in all economies. However, in developing countries the size of these informal transactions can constitute more than half the economy and is in some countries is as high 60%. Is there the equivalent at the political level?

The use of social media – the "republic of Facebook or Twitter" – for political comments and social critique could be the equivalent of the economy's informal sector. The increasing impact of this informal political participation is demonstrated at present by the demands to control such social media and identify its users. The unearthing of such indirect/informal political participation is all the more important in

times of transition and revolution/counter-revolution polarisation such as those most of the Arab Mediterranean countries are going through at the time of writing. Indeed, this informal mode could determine the direction of this transition since the youth bulge is its most important component – numerically and socially.

References

Danahar, Paul. *The New Middle East: The World after the Arab Spring*. London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Gerges, Fawaz (ed.). *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2014.

Ghonim, Wael. *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir*. Boston: Mariner /Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.

Khalil, Ashraf. *Liberation Square*. New York & Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012.

Khatib, Lina. "Transforming the Media: From Tools of the Ruler to Tool of Empowerment" in: B. Korany (ed.) *Arab Human Development in the Twenty-First Century: the primacy of Empowerment*. New York and Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2014, pp. 67–104.

Korany, Bahgat (ed.). *Arab Human Development in the 21st Century.* New York and Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2014: 337–340.

Korany, Bahgat. "From Prison to Power and Back: The Experience of Egypt's Moslem Brotherhood" in: Gamal el-Suwaidy & Ahmed El-Safty (eds.): *Political Islam Movements in the Arab World*. Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center of Strategic Studies, 2012, pp. 297–333 (in Arabic).

Pace, Michel & Francesco Cavatarta. "The Arab Uprisings in Theoretical Perspective: An Introduction", *Mediterranean Politics* 17/2 (July 2012): 125–138.

Schmitter, Phillippe, AUC Forum Panel: Transitions to Middle East Democracy: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9y2OsSiPhE&list=UUMl_NKC30p5E-5EW9tkBJBA&index=4&feature=plpp_video).

Youth in Mediterranean Countries' concept paper, CIDOB, Barcelona, September 2014. See also the special issue of *Mediterranean Politics*, 17/1 (March 2012) devoted to youth, and in particular Emma Murthy: "Problematizing Arab-Youth: Generational Narratives of Systematic future", pp. 5–22. For very useful overviews coming from European institutions see, for instance, Tommi Hoikkala & Meri Karjalainen (eds.). *Finnish Youth Research Anthology 1999-2014*. Helsinki: Finnish Youth Research Network. 2016. Hilary Pilkington & Gary Pollock (eds.): *Radical Futures? Youth, Politics, and Activism in Contemporary Europe.* Chichester, West Sussex (UK), 2015. For a very recent analysis based on Arab youth, see the UNDP's last Arab Human Development Report 2016: *Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*. New York, UNDP, 2016.

The SAHWA Project ("Researching Arab Mediterranean Youth: Towards a New Social Contract") is a FP-7 interdisciplinary cooperative research project led by the Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB) and funded by the European Commission. It brings together fifteen partners from Europe and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries to research youth prospects and perspectives in a context of multiple social, economic and political transitions in five Arab countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon). The project expands over 2014-2016 and has a total budget of €3.1 million. The thematic axis around which the project will revolve are education, employment and social inclusion, political mobilisation and participation, culture and values, international migration and mobility, gender, comparative experiences in other transition contexts and public policies and international cooperation.