

Exploring the citizens' perceptions of democracy in the Egyptian context

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Abstract

Learning about how today's young generation in Egypt, a non-Western country, perceives democracy would be a good start for the academia and the practitioners to better understand democracy's future directions in the Middle East. The aim of this paper was to explore: What are Egypt's youths' cognitive associations and perceptions towards democracy; their general mood concerning the 2011 political transition; and their opinions of the democratization of their country. Through extensive free listing and in-depth interviews with thirty different young middle class citizens (between the ages of 17 to 30), the research was able to gain insights corresponding to the research objectives. The research revealed that young citizens know the principles of democracy. The young generation's general perception on democracy is a positive one. The concept of democracy signifies freedom, equality and wholesome social integration. Moreover, the existence of negative perceptions related to the actions of those in power (political officials) indicates that a part of the young generation is discontented with the current political order of the country. With these emerged insights, the researchers contributed academically by adding insights about young Egyptian citizens' perception of democracy after the 2011 Arab Spring.

1 Introduction

Egypt's political shift in 2011 aimed to better inspire democratic institutions to responds to the people's aspirations, which was to: *"holding free and fair elections; empowering citizens to play a role in their country's future; protecting and expanding universal rights, expanding independent civil society, and building democratic institutions that are transparent and accountable"* (Bassiony, 2011).

The wave of democratization around the world brought about a rising need to evaluate, to compare and to explain democratic progress cross-country (Bosin, 2009). Among the 193 countries worldwide that are recognized by the United Nations, 123 are said to be democratic (www.freedomhouse.org). Therefore, more than half of the global regions have set up a form of government that is characterized by the participation of its people, under whatever form that may be (Abrahams and Smith, 2011). Each country practices democracy differently (Thianthai, 2012).

Operationalizing the concept of Democracy is subjective (Thianthai, 2012); almost everyone has a different view on what it means (Abrahams and Smith, 2011). Democracy is considered: *"a complex social and political phenomenon"* (Bosin, 2009, p.7). The view of this regime has been developing for centuries, embracing new components and activities (Dalton, 2007). Yet, the classical definition of democracy consist of four key components: it is a political system in which the citizens choose their government through free and fair elections; the citizens participate actively in politics and civic life; the citizens' human rights are protected; and the citizens are governed by rules of law and procedures in an equal manner (Lipset, 1959).

Each individual and society has his or her own perception of what democracy means in regards to what is democracy composed of; what are the required elements that enable its establishment; and what are the required activities that would help to establish such a form of

government (Daneika, 2010; Becker and Raveloson, 2008). Democracy is somewhat nuanced, containing different understanding and shades of meanings (Thianthai, 2012). For some countries, the mere presence of regular cycle of elections, with their legal instruments and institutions, are sufficient. Others argue that democracy is primarily about popular sovereignty acting within a framework of participatory decision-making (Bosin, 2009).

This paper tries to bring insights into this relatively unclear jungle of information that is turning around the theme of democracy. This paper presents the public mood and acts as an indicator around perceptions on democracy in the Egyptian context (a neophyte's country ready to absorb a basic notion of a broad democracy).

2 Research Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to explore the perceptions of democracy in the Egyptian context (in a context of changing political structures). This study provides timely and objective information on young peoples' primary outlooks given the delicate political situation in Egypt. It provides an empirical exploration on young people's involvement in democracy including:

- Awareness about democracy and citizenship.
- General mood of the current political transition of the country
- Attitudes regarding politics (including civic activity) and change: their interests and views on engagement and influence
- Experiences of political and civic participation; and the nature/forms and level of political and civic engagement.

3 Theoretical Framework

Western democracy emphasizes freedom of expression, fair electoral competition, and separation of powers as key regime standards (Dalton, 2007). Nevertheless, democratic practices differ in various countries, since the regime is shaped by factors, such as social structure and past political habits (Abrahams and Smith, 2011). Literature on democratization in newly established democratic countries is limited in empirical reports. Little attention has been paid to exploring the perceptions of the younger generations to reveal their understanding and opinions of what it means to be democratic (Beetham 2009; Thianthai, 2012). Additionally, democracy does not only vary by world region, but also from each generation (Thianthai, 2012). Thus, examining youth and young adults in the political arena can shed light into how the new political generation thinks of their country's government system (Beetham 2009).

Prior studies have used public perceptions of democracy (external judgments against pre-established criteria) to measure democracy (Landman, 2007). Such data provides an indication of the degree to which mass publics support democracy in general, as well as provide indicators on mass perceptions of the relative performance of democracy (Thianthai, 2012). Furthermore, this democracy measurement approach provides suggestion regarding citizen support for democracy, which exhibits significant variation between and within regions (Abrahams and Smith, 2011).

3.1 Defining Democracy

There are certain features of democracy that have existed over long periods of time and have now advanced across vast geographical spaces (Dalton, 2007). Democracy is a form of authority based on popular sovereignty and collective decision-making (Putnam, 2000). Abraham Lincoln declared that democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people (Brian, 2013).

Modern democracy contains vital elements, such as political pluralism, human rights, civil liberties, a vigorous civil society, and a political culture of tolerance, cooperation, and

compromise (Putnam, 2000). The prime functions of democracy is to protect such basic human rights as freedom of speech and religion; the right to equal protection under law; and the opportunity to organize and participate fully in the political, economic, and cultural life of society (Brian, 2013).

Citizens in a democracy have not only rights, but also the responsibility to participate in the political system that, in turn, protects their rights and freedoms (Dalton, 2007). In literature, democracy endurance is based on citizens' involvement (Luhmann, 2000). Citizens' feedback is the main element that can either reinforce and further strengthen democracy or hinder it (Memoli, 2011). Easton (1965) emphasized the importance of citizens' evaluations of political institutions and their components (parties and political actors) and citizens' identification with the state.

The concept of democracy has been developing for centuries, embracing new elements and dimensions (Landman, 2007). These additional features have produced significant discussions about the different definitions of democracy (Thianthai, 2012). The basic sense of democracy as a form of governance rests on the notion of "rule by the entire people" rather than "aristocrat, monarch, philosopher, bureaucrat, expert, or religious leader." Definitions of democracy come in all shapes and sizes. The following passages illustrate a variety of definitions in chronological order. Each emphasizes one or more things thought to be true about democracy. Democracy is:

- "A competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process." (Schattschneider, 1960, p.141)
- "Government by the people, where liberty, equality and fraternity are secured to the greatest possible degree and in which human capacities are developed to the utmost, by means including free and full discussion of common problems and interests." (Pennock, 1979, p.7)
- "A set of procedural rules for arriving at collective decisions in a way which accommodates and facilitates the fullest possible participation of interested parties." (Bobbio, 1987, p.19)
- "Rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives." (Schmitter and Karl, 1991, p.76)
- "A political system that combines four features: regular free and fair elections, universal suffrage, accountability of the state's administrative organs to the elected representatives, and effective guarantees for freedom of expression. Formal democratic countries will differ considerably in social policies that reduce social and economic inequality. We therefore introduce two additional dimensions: high levels of participation without systematic differences across social categories (class, ethnicity, and gender) and increasing equality in social and economic outcomes." (Huber, et al., 1997, p. 323-324)
- "Governance by leaders whose authority is based on a limited mandate from a universal electorate that selects among genuine alternatives and has some rights to political participation and opposition." (Danziger, 1998, p. 159)
- "Democrats are committed to rule by the people. They insist that no aristocrat, monarch, philosopher, bureaucrat, expert, or religious leader has the right, in virtue of such status, to force people to accept a particular conception of their proper common life. People should decide for themselves, via appropriate procedures of collective decision, what their collective business should be." (Shapiro, 1999, 29-30)

4 Research Methodology

This study was a contextual one, grounded in the many different realities, experiences and perspectives held by the participants in regards to what is democracy. All interpretations

were based in a specific context and time (Egypt's 2011 post revolution period). This study used the *interperativist approach*. The findings emerged through dialogue in which conflicting interpretations were negotiated among the participants. It was through this dialectical process that a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the social world was created. Thus, this study had *relativist ontology*. It assumed that reality is constructed inter-subjectively through the meanings and grasps developed socially and experientially. Furthermore, it followed a *transactional (subjectivist) epistemology*. The researchers and the participants of the study were interactive. The researchers' values were inherent in all phases of the research process. This study was based on perceptions. According to Abrahams and Smith (2011), perception is of greater importance. "It is that perceptions are real for those who feel them; they are articulated through language and they have meaning for the individual" (p.34).

This study used a *qualitative research approach*. It employed an *ethnographic technique*, which aimed to ensure optimum engagement with various respondents. *Semi-structured interviews*, open-ended questions (asked in Arabic and translated later into English), were used to provide a framework of data. It involved conversations with residents, community officials, academics, and various political commentators. The qualitative research method was valuable in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomenon: the perceptions of democracy in the Egypt. It aided in: "tracking unique or unexpected events; illuminating the experience and interpretation of events by actors with widely differing stakes and roles; giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard; conducting initial explorations to develop theories; and moving toward explanations" (Sofaer, 1999, p.1).

This study used purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling technique. The interviewees that were examined were based on the judgment of the researchers. In this study, the selected interviewees were middle class youth and young adults who lived in Egypt during the 2011 revolution. This investigation aimed to assess middle class people in Egypt, many of whom played a vital role in triggering the 2011 up rise and continue to influence the unfolding socioeconomic and political transitions that will shape the country's future.

According to the African Development Bank statistics (2011), North African countries have a much higher concentration of the middle class among their population with Egypt at 79.7% respectively. The middle class in Egypt has always been central to the cultural identity and political economy of development in the Arab World (Abu-Ismael and Sarangi, 2013). Moreover, the Egyptian middle class initiated the 2011 uprisings, specifically the youth segment (Bassoiny, 2011). Thus, Egypt's 2011 Revolution was known as the "Youth Revolution" (Rushdy, 2011). According to Dalton (2007), youth are an increasingly visible and active component in community development. Negm *et al.* (2012) specified that to encourage youth involvement in the community, it is vital to understand the influences, motivations, obstacles, and feedback that they receive from the community.

The data that emerged during the interviews were analysed using *thematic analysis*. To gain further understanding and insights on the research topic, the researchers identified, examined, and recorded patterns (themes) within data. These patterns (themes) across data sets were important to the description of a phenomenon (how Egyptian citizens perceive Democracy), which became the categories for analysis.

5 Data Analysis

During Fall 2014, the researchers carried out the investigation by stopping individuals on the streets, college campuses, private clubs and administrative offices. These intensive visits included interviews with citizens, community officials, academics and various political observers. A total of thirty interviewees, representing different demographic backgrounds (age, gender, marital status, and career) were questioned. They spur dialogue concerning their

personal views of democracy; a more reality-based standpoint regarding how Egyptians perceive democracy. Table 1 illustrates the demographic traits of the interviewees

All of the interviewees were young Egyptians (between the ages of 17 and 30), with 57% being female and 43% male. The sample included students (27%), unemployed citizens (23%), and employed citizens in various fields (50%).

	Gender	Age	Career		Gender	Age	Career
Respondent 1	Female	24	Unemployed	Respondent 16	Female	20	Student
Respondent 2	Female	19	Student	Respondent 17	Male	22	Unemployed
Respondent 3	Female	26	Academic	Respondent 18	Female	26	Sectary
Respondent 4	Male	28	Administrator	Respondent 19	Male	25	Unemployed
Respondent 5	Female	25	Teacher	Respondent 20	Female	26	Clerk
Respondent 6	Male	24	Administrators	Respondent 21	Male	29	Med. Doctor
Respondent 7	Male	30	Politician	Respondent 22	Female	17	Student
Respondent 8	Male	18	Student	Respondent 23	Male	26	Engineer
Respondent 9	Female	18	Student	Respondent 24	Male	27	Engineer
Respondent 10	Female	22	Unemployed	Respondent 25	Female	19	Student
Respondent 11	Male	24	Unemployed	Respondent 26	Female	18	Student
Respondent 12	Female	28	Unemployed	Respondent 27	Female	22	Clerk
Respondent 13	Male	27	Clerk	Respondent 28	Female	24	Administrators
Respondent 14	Female	25	Administrators	Respondent 29	Female	26	Teacher
Respondent 15	Male	18	Student	Respondent 30	Male	25	Unemployed

Table 1: The Interviewees Personal Traits

General Mood of the Current Political Transition

The researchers began asking the interviewees about their opinion regarding the political transition that occurred starting from 2011. The majority of the young Egyptians were optimistic about the current reforms and felt that their country is slowly moving in the right direction. Respondents point to the new constitution and limited economic improvements as evidence that Egypt is undergoing positive change. Some supporting quotes that were stated were as follows:

(Respondent 5) - *"The uprisings and revolutions that occurred in the country contributed to the awakening of people's conscience and calls for change."*

(Respondent 16) - *"Egypt is going in the right direction because there are plenty of new democratic developments that are established, including the constitution and other laws and regulations, which didn't exist before."*

(Respondent 23) - *"I think Egypt is on the right path, but more political reforms are required to avoid any likely uprising to occur in the future."*

Although the enthusiasm is widespread, certain interviewees also express concerns that young citizens are still excluded from decision-making processes, and that broad political reforms have yet to translate into concrete improvements in their everyday lives. Selected quotes that support the interpretations were as following:

(Respondent 7) - *"I believe that Egypt has moved forward towards being a democratic country; but, there are many challenges still to face in order for the country to fully embrace democracy."*

(Respondent 12) - *"I think that Egypt is not going in the right direction, because the post revolution period still contains many people protesting to express their discontent towards the government."*

Awareness of Democracy – What Does Democracy Mean?

The literature show that there are eight elements thought to capture the main essence of democracy: *"All human rights must be respected and citizens must be able to claim and accept their rights; government must be accountable to the people who elect them; citizens must participate in the decision making processes and there must be regular community meetings with elected officials; citizens must be free to elect representatives of their own choice to serve in different structures of government e.g.*

municipalities, provincial, national; everyone must be equal before the law and the courts must protect the rights of all citizens; there must be a free flow of information and transparency in how elected officials make decisions; government must deliver social and economic benefits to the people; and every citizen must have access to basic services” (Abrahams and Smith, 2011, p.10).

The researchers proceeded the interviews by assessing the participants understanding of democracy. The researchers asked the respondents to define what is democracy (opening up the space for individual ideas on how Egyptians define and find meaning in democracy). All those respondents who offered a definition or a meaning in response to the question were considered aware of democracy. All those who were unable to do so were considered unaware of democracy or incapable of recognizing it.

By this criterion, the young Egyptian people, as a whole, are highly capable of recognizing democracy. Virtually, almost all the interviewees were able to identify at least one element of democracy. More than a half (17 interviewees) could provide a second element of democracy, and nearly one-tenth (3 interviewees) was able to supply a third one. The main elements of democracy that were mentioned by the interviewees were as follows:

(Respondent 2): *“Citizens must be free to elect reps of their own choice.”*

(Respondent 4) - *“Citizens have basic freedoms, such as freedom of speech.”* (Respondent 10) - *“The government takes care of their citizens.”*

(Respondent 17) - *“The government must deliver basic survival benefits to the people, such as subsidies in basic foods like bread.”*

(Respondent 20) - *“The leadership is picked by the majority of the citizens.”*

(Respondent 26) - *“Citizens can participate in civic and political activities, such as voting, political campaigning, and protesting.”*

(Respondent 29) - *“Government should have fair laws that govern the people and the people must obey these laws.”*

Considered together, these data confirm that most young Egyptians are capable of recognizing and perceiving democracy as a regime that involves citizens’ input (citizens in politics and civic life), implying that the people are in power to choose their leader who will protect their human rights through laws and procedures.

Succeeding, the researchers mentioned all the main elements that exist in a democracy. The researcher asked to rate the elements that they believe were the most important for a proper democracy to exist in Egypt. The top three were identified as:

- 1st Element: Government must be accountable to the people who elect them.
- 2nd Element: Everyone must be equal before the law and the courts must protect the rights of all citizens.
- 3rd Element: Government must deliver social and economic benefits to the people

The citizens explained these ranking by providing the following justifications regarding their perception of democracy:

(Respondent 4) - *“Democracy means a better life for people as a government tries it’s hardest to fulfil people’s needs and satiate their concerns.”*

(Respondent 8) - *“Democracy means the government is just in protecting and helping the people flourish in their civic roles.”*

(Respondent 19) - *“Democracy means providing people with openness to express themselves – freedom of speech, engagements, religion, etc. – but without affecting and demolishing other people’s rights.”*

This assessment showed that the interviewees believed that for a proper democracy to exist, a responsible, fair, and concerned government is necessary; one that cares and protects the citizens. These high ranking elements regarding the existence of democracy indicates that

citizens in these nations are unlikely to lessen the pressure on the government to listen, respond, and deliver on its obligations.

Extent of Democratic Change - The Democratization of the Country

The interview began to assess, whether the citizens believe that Egypt implemented the democratic process accurately. Accordingly, most of the interviewees believe that the political system has taken steps towards democratization. Such an upward shift represents considerable progress in the democratic transformation of military rule. However, the people are not in complete agreement on the nature and extent of the political change.

The general feeling among most of the interviewees was that Egypt is undergoing considerable change politically, economically, and socially. Nearly all the interviewees recognized that the country has made some progress in its governmental restructuring efforts. A certain interviewee stated the following supporting quote: *"After the 2011 revolution the country has undergone major political changes. A new constitution was established; fair and open elections took place; a civilian (non-military) president was elected; and with the help of the military the citizens removed the president due to his lack of care for the nation"* (Respondent 22).

However, few interviewees believe the country still relies on archaic systems (*an authoritarian rule rather than progression toward democracy*) that alienate and disregard Egyptian citizens. Several respondents perceive that inequality still occurs in official discourse. According to specific participants' comments, well-educated young people require the right connections to obtain jobs and the political sphere is reserved to a set of political elites and their descendants. Many participants feel that average citizens have no access to opportunities to participate in politics. Some supporting quotes from the interviews are as follows:

(Respondent 20) - *"The country needs to have young, well-educated average citizens as policy makers, not the military or bureaus."*

(Respondent 23) - *"Young citizens must gain an active effort on the part of the governing authorities to include them further in policy development, for example in the agenda setting phase or in the implementation of solutions regarding social issues."*

(Respondent 26) - *"Many young people expressed the concern that they feel that what they say is not taken seriously by adult policymakers when decisions are being made."*

The Quality of Democracy

The literature states that democracy exist when citizens are capable of expressing their preferences in the political process and their political leaders respond to those preferences according to the principles and rules of representative democracy (Abrahams and Smith, 2011). In this section, the researchers assessed interviewees' perception towards the presence of democratic citizenship and political leadership.

To evaluate the interviewees' perceived cognitive capability as citizens of a democratic state, the researchers asked about the interviewees' ability to participate in politics and their understanding of politics and government. The interviewees' acknowledged their capacity to take part in politics; the majority affirmed their behavioural capacity to do so. Some supporting quotes were as follows:

(Respondent 1) - *"Since the Arab awakening in 2011, many youth in the region have remained politically active through various political movements instead of engaging with and in political parties."*

(Respondent 5) - *"I participated in both the previous presidential and parliamentary elections because the government promoted such behaviours during the post 2011 revolution."*

(Respondent 7) - *"The government made it easy for citizens to go to their "electoral stations" and vote."*

(Respondent 20) - *"I participated in peaceful political marches and demonstrations during 2013 in order to express apathy towards the government."*

(Respondent 24) - *"Since the 2011 revolution, citizens have become active in various political activities, like voting, political campaigning, and protesting."*

When the researchers asked about the interviewees' ability to understand the complexities of politics and government, the majority expressed their cognitive capacity to do so in an "indirect manner". Through the use of various media tools, political knowledge was contented to grasp. Some supportive quotes were as follows:

(Respondent 6) - *"The media, news casts and programs, commonly expressed nationwide access to democratic knowledge for those with minimal education as well as for people with better education."*

(Respondent 9) - *"A vast majority of citizens have yet to acquire the understanding of their role in a democracy. Thus, they lack the ability necessary to perform their citizen responsibilities as citizens in a democratic country."*

(Respondent 14) - *"I agree that media is a source of information and news."*

(Respondent 21) - *"Media makes it easy for people to have access to information. Thanks to media I know what's going on in Egypt and abroad."*

The interviewees' assorted responses were indicators of citizen empowerment; the capacity of citizens to formulate and express their preferences in the political process. Nevertheless, the quality of democratic citizenship among young Egyptian suffers from its underdevelopment in the cognitive dimension than in the behavioural dimension. Responses to the two above statements reveal evidence supporting the claim that the behavioural dimension of democratic citizenship has developed far more than its cognitive dimension.

Next, the researchers sought to evaluate the interviewees' overall perception of the quality of Egypt's public officials according to the procedural and substantive criteria for democratic governance. Accordingly, the interviewees believe that public officials of the current democratic regime must work differently from the way their authoritarian predecessors did in the past. The conveyed their opinions as following:

(Respondent 7) - *"As leaders of a democracy, they must follow the rules and processes specified in the constitution and various laws in a procedurally proper fashion."*

(Respondent 21) - *"The leaders must work primarily for the welfare of the people, rather than for their own personal benefits."*

In reality though, some participants felt that political officials were alienated from the citizens. The interviewees were overwhelmingly negative in their perceptions of political officials in general. Based on the responses, officials clearly face a collective crisis of credibility, with participants consistently complaining that they disappear after elections and rarely keep their promises to citizens. Some interviewees stated the following supporting statements:

(Respondent 1) - *"Officials are not putting a 100% effort to fulfilling their obligations to citizens."*

(Respondent 6) - *"Political parties are arrogant and fail to communicate with people except in times when they need votes."*

(Respondent 8) - *"During campaign times, I hear all about the finest and suitable political programs that make me dream of a better tomorrow. I wake up to the sad reality when elections are over."*

(Respondent 17) - *"Political officials need to have moral values and ethics."*

(Respondent 23) - *"Egypt has more political parties than any country in the world. Some of them barely get a couple of seats in the parliament. I think this should stop."*

Thus, the researchers concluded that despite all the current restructuring efforts to root out the various forms of authoritarian predecessors, the levels of governmental unconstructiveness have not declined in the eyes of the citizenry. Instead, the extent of exploitation perceived has still remained considerable at all levels of government. Such widespread disregard for the rule of law among public officials makes the current democratic regime look more like the pre-modern states than the democratic states of Western countries. The majority of the interviewees placed their public officials in the fully undemocratic category and the smallest proportion placed them in the fully democratic category. In the eyes of the young Egyptians, a shortage of fully democratically performing public officials poses a serious problem to the consolidation of democracy.

Citizens View Egypt's Democracy to be Different

The researchers lastly assessed the interviewees' opinions in regards to the country's performance of the democratic system and the extent of its suitability for the nation. The interviewees indicated that the current democratic regime look more like the pre-modern states than the democratic states of Western countries. Utilizing the interview techniques, it was possible to outline how young citizens perceive Egypt's democracy to be different from that of other democratic countries. An interviewee stated that: *"Democracy is rare. It doesn't really exist. Too many are denied a voice. In principle, it's about equality but in practice, it can never be realised in its entirety. You can only try to get close."* (Respondent 22)

The interviewees pointed out that Egypt's democracy is distinctively different because of the continuation of: the expansion of the military's involvement in the political life, social inequalities, and the limited translation of private interests into public benefits. The quotes that support this statement are as follows:

(Respondent 2) - *"the military is a dominant force in the governmental system in Egypt."*

(Respondent 10) - *"Since the military interferes in the nation's politics, it is a sign that Egypt is not a strict democratic society."*

(Respondent 13) - *"I see that upper class individuals are not concerned with issues affecting the poor, and that they do not bother to vote, change public policies, or act on behalf of public interest."*

(Respondent 15)- *"One of the most incurable social problems in Egyptian society is the gap between rich and poor. This should not be the case in a real democratic nation. Although every political party in Egypt stresses its resolution to find measures to reduce poverty, very little has been achieved."*

(Respondent 16) - *" People who voted in last elections did not have the sufficient amount of knowledge that was needed to correctly vote. Political understanding is needed among a wide range of citizens. Democratic knowledge is lacked among citizens with minimal education as well as for people with better education."*

(Respondent 20) - *"Most of the Egyptian citizens believe a good leader is one with positive and good thinking, speaking, and acting. Thus, they can lead and improve society NOT a leader who possess knowledge and capability in overcoming challenges."*

(Respondent 22) - *"In theory, democracy is for the good of all. But in practice, minorities are always trampled on. We don't live in a full democracy. Poor people are always excluded and no one listens to them."*

Accordingly, many interviewees believed that in order for Egypt's democracy to triumph, like those of western countries, the country should try reducing social inequalities among individuals; increasing democratic knowledge among the under-educated and educated citizens; encouraging and signifying citizens' rights and political participation; reducing or

eliminating military interference in politics; and constructing and developing society through moral leadership.

6 Discussion and Summary

Democracy is a form of government in which citizens choose and replace the government through free and fair elections; there is active participation of the citizens in politics and civic life; there is protection of the human rights of all citizens; and there are laws and procedures that apply equally to all citizens (Abrahams and Smith, 2011). Supporting this type of regime, especially in new democracies, involves more orientations to democratic ideals and practices (Dalton, 2007). Citizens with little democratic experience, more often than not, embrace both democratic and authoritarian political propensities concurrently (Korea article). Popular support for democracy in emerging democracies, therefore, depends on a majority of citizens who not only accept it but who also reject other non-democratic alternatives (Putnam, 2000).

The Arab Awakening in 2011 surfaced and revitalized the democratic process in the region, especially in Egypt (Negm *et al.*, 2012). It enhanced public awareness on democracy and emphasize on the development and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Bassiony, 2011). Furthermore, It provided entry points and follow-up actions for Egyptians citizens to become politically active through “political movements” (Abu-Ismaïl and Sarangi, 2013). The conceptions of democracy among citizens hold the key to understanding how and why people react to democratic regime (Thianthai, 2012). How citizens think about democracy and in what specific terms they understand it, substantially shape their perceptions and assessments promoting democratic change in a nation (Abrahams and Smith, 2011). Thus, this paper wanted to explore citizens’ perception of what is democracy and how it is implemented in Egypt.

This research interpreted the perceptions of ordinary middle class young citizens regarding democracy. It contributed to a better understanding of how young citizens view Egypt’s democracy. The researchers asked the respondents how they define democracy and what they expect of it; their general mood of the current political transition; how the practises of democracy are implemented in the country

The major assumptions regarding *meaning of democracy perception* that were re-emphasised in this study were as follows: Young Egyptians are capable of recognizing and perceiving democracy as a regime that involves citizens’ input (citizens in politics and civic life), implying that the people are in power to choose their leader who will protect their human rights through laws and procedures. Furthermore, young Egyptians consider that for a proper democracy to exist, a responsible, fair, and concerned government is necessary (one that protects citizens).

The major assumptions regarding the *2011 Democratic transition perception* that were re-emphasised in this study were as follows: Young Egyptians were optimistic about the current reforms and feel that their country is slowly moving in the right direction. The new constitution and limited economic improvements are evidence that the country is undergoing positive change. The young Egyptians perceive that Egypt’s political system has taken steps towards democratization. Such an upward shift represents considerable progress in the democratic transformation of military rule. Finally, the Young Egyptians perceive that the country fosters democratic citizenship (citizen empowerment); citizens who are politically active and are able to formulate and express their preferences in the political process (behavioural dimension of democratic citizenship has developed far more than its cognitive dimension).

The major assumptions regarding Egypt’s *current practice of democracy perception* that were re-emphasised in this study were as follows: Young Egyptians believe that the current

democratic regime look more like the pre-modern states than the democratic states of Western countries. Furthermore, young Egyptians believe that Egypt's democracy is distinctively different because of the continuation of: the expansion of the military's involvement in the political life, social inequalities, and the limited translation of private interests into public benefits.

In conclusion, the participants agreed that as a concept, democracy signifies freedom, equality and wholesome social integration (organizing society). In terms of practice however, the participants believe that they moderately live within a democratic system. Egypt's democracy is young and the challenges of reshaping the country into an inclusive, equitable, and responsive country are significant.

This study had several limitations. The first was the small size of the sample and the fact that participants were in a single area. The present study needs to be supported by quantitative research that assesses the range of suggested antecedents as well as the overall model that was suggested. Finally, this study only focused on the receivers' viewpoints not the influencer.

With these emerged insights, the researchers contributed academically by adding knowledge and insights regarding how citizens perceive democracy in Egypt after the 2011 Arab Spring. This data serves as a proposal for future researchers in adding on to the knowledge of democracy in Middle Eastern societies as well as outlining and recording the future way of recognizing democracy for the next generation. By providing empirical evidence regarding citizens' perceptions, academics and practitioners can implement improved policies by opening up new areas of study on the cultural-bound perception on democracy variation.

7. Limitation and Direction for Future Research

This study had several limitations. The first was the small size of the sample. It was relatively small compared to the actual population of the target population. Thus, future researcher can extend the data collection period in order to ensure enough time to gather data from a larger population sample. The second limitation is that participants were in a single area. Future researchers can collect and interview data from other cities in Egypt. This study used only the qualitative research approach. The present study needs to be supported by quantitative research that assesses the range of suggested assumptions and outcomes.

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