

To Giulio Regeni,

*Your passion and curiosity
have been an inspiring beacon.*

Thanks for everything you did.

A new consolidation process in authoritarian Egypt

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Introduction

The following work is the result of some questions that I had been asking myself throughout last year concerning an issue which, lately, has been tackled in many discussions, though not directly, also due to a pretty extensive media coverage on it.

Two events, in particular, stimulated my interest, which were, firstly in January 2016, the death of the young Italian PhD researcher Giulio Regeni in Egypt and, after a few months, in July, the coup attempt occurred in Turkey. More than the facts themselves, what I found worth-understanding was the general reaction of the country, in terms of internal dynamics, after the two events. Despite being aware of the enormous difference existing between the two facts both from an historical and political perspective, there was a common denominator that could be found, that is to say, the authoritarian form of regime of both countries.

That said, I decided to draw closer attention on the case of Regeni's murder, also driven by the intention of having a clearer idea of what was the surrounding backdrop in the country, the political and economic scenarios, and the reason why a similar thing might have happened. Therefore, it was necessary to focus more on the country itself so as to grasp better the mechanisms through which the current Egyptian military regime has succeeded in consolidating its power thus affecting million citizens' lives. More importantly, what was to be analyzed in depth was how and if the regime truly gained a widespread legitimation also seeking to understand why Egypt, as one of the countries more intensely affected by the Arab Revolution's experience, after the transition, underwent the backlash of a military consolidation rather than following a democratic path like Tunisia, for instance.

Therefore, I divided the analysis into four chapters each one tackling crucial aspects for the understanding of how the Egyptian military regime, led by the former field marshal

Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, achieved a non-democratic consolidation process even more intense than that one happened under the Mubarak prerevolutionary era.

More specifically, the first chapter gives a general theoretical framework about the military regimes, explaining how literature has considered them and what are the possible patterns of transitions from a democratic to a military regime or vice versa. In the final part of the chapter, Egypt will be considered giving an historical outline on the military background of the country from 1956 until now. This is essential to further comprehend why a military consolidation in Egypt was even more likely to happen.

The second chapter provides an economic analysis in comparative terms taking into consideration also other countries belonging to the Middle Eastern area so as to see how economic trends in the area have evolved from 2014 up to now. Economic figures and data are an extremely important aspect when the political evolution of a country is assessed and when the regime's consolidation process is studied in its core mechanisms. Nevertheless, economic assessments have turned out to be rather complicated due to the unavailability of several fundamental sources and by a certain difficulty in finding official updated figures that could be deemed more reliable. However, many and different databases have been searched for and consulted in order to make use of a variety of information sources as much as possible. Moreover, considerations specifically related to Egypt's economic performance and to its military expenditure indices have been made in order to understand also how the economic sector has been strategic for the consolidation of military power and who are the major business actors and companies involved in this process as a whole. Ultimately, also tables and charts have been inserted in an appendix to the second chapter to give an overall and more immediate idea on figures and data discussed throughout the chapter.

The remaining two chapters go more into the depth of complementary mechanisms which have been adopted by the regime in order to guarantee its maintenance over the last

three years. In the third chapter a closer attention is drawn on more covert strategies of consolidation, because they have been used by the military regime in a subtler form and, consequently, are not so immediately perceivable. They are, firstly, legitimation analyzed both from a domestic and a foreign perspective and, secondly, cooptation, a pretty common trend in Middle East authoritarian regimes.

On the contrary, the fourth and last chapter stresses the importance of a more open and evident mechanism of consolidation which is repression, used increasingly more by the regime in order to keep any form of activism and popular mobilization under control and to prevent dissent from organizing and posing a threat to military hegemony. In addition, this chapter tackles demobilization achieved intentionally by the regime and it is explained by presenting a variety of regime's suppressive actions within the country, supporting the analysis through empirical references, data, percentages provided by NGOs as well as human rights associations. Together with some extreme examples showing how the regime is to be blamed for such violations, ultimately, the case of Giulio Regeni's murder will be presented, examining dossiers and news related to the case, aware of the fact that his death is not an exception in new authoritarian Egypt but it has sadly become a diffuse reality, indeed.

To sum up, because of the constraints deriving from the scarce presence of updated information, above all from the economic point of view and the fact that the regime is still ruling Egypt, it appears a rather hard task to forecast the exact direction that Egypt will take in the next years. However, in spite of these difficulties, my attempt was mainly to answer the primary question concerning how the military have been able to consolidate their power after Morsi transitional era and, in light of this, I intended to present the current Egyptian scenario both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective hoping to have given also a

satisfactory and rather complete answer to the question and not to have overlooked any relevant detail in this work.

Last but not least, I dedicate the following work to the PhD researcher Giulio Regeni for being a remarkable example of courage and perseverance, to his family but also and not less importantly to all those people, still alive or not, who have had or have the strength to resist regime's repression day by day, to hope and fight for truth, freedom or simply for a change.

Transition toward a military regime

This first chapter is aimed at providing a preliminary outlook on a particular form of political regime, the military one, which will be analyzed, at a first stage, from a normative point of view in all its different facets according to the wide literature related to it. This definitory introduction in the first part of the chapter will be useful in order to have a neater idea of the topic being discussed throughout the entire work and it is essential to understand a more specific topic examined in the second part of the chapter. Indeed, the latter will tackle the most noticeable patterns of transition toward a military regime that several world countries deal with as well as the possible different mechanisms and conditions according to which such a transition occurs. It will be evident that when a military regime is installed in a country or it is simply the result of a political transition, it means that the quality of democracy has been questioned and any attempt of democratic development has been hampered. The specific case eventually presented as an example as such is the political backlash undergone by Egypt since the installation of the Al-Sisi regime in 2014.

1.1 What is a military regime?

[...] Where the military is relatively large, centralized, and hierarchical, as it is in most countries today, polyarchy is of course impossible unless the military is sufficiently depoliticized to permit civilian rule ... The crucial intervening factor, clearly, is one of beliefs ... The point to be made here is simple and obvious: the chances for polyarchy today are directly dependent on the strength of certain beliefs not only among civilian but among all ranks of the military. [...]

(R. Dahl, *Polyarchy*)

In this short quote from one of his seminal works, Robert Dahl underlines a relevant aspect of what have mostly characterized military regimes which is a strong, centralized military power prevailing on civilian rule and preventing a democratic regime or a polyarchy, as Dahl defines it, from developing. He also focuses on another important feature that cannot be overlooked that is to say the strength of beliefs and ideologies within the military ranks in order for the consolidation of such a regime. Not only Dahl but even scholars such as Hicham Bou Nassif¹ claim that this is an extremely important variable to explain how military regime might have become stronger or weaker in the political scenario and what kind of role they might have played in the political development of some countries.

In order to better define a military regime, it could be necessary, firstly, to begin with a classification by the scholar Linz² related to the opposite concept that is to say, a democratic regime. Indeed, he argues that today there can be found six types of democratic prototypes:

- 1) Fully consolidated democracies
- 2) Countries whose democratic institutions have survived until the end of the Second World War and afterwards
- 3) Third wave democracies which have arguably achieved democratic consolidation in the last quarter of the 20th century and can be said to be fully democratic
- 4) Countries that have recently achieved democratic transition and consolidation but somehow are still affected by their authoritarian past in terms of institutional setting

¹ The scholar in his work "Coups and nascent democracies: the military and Egypt's failed consolidation" argues, firstly, that ideational variables are fundamental to shape the military's political behavior

² Linz, Juan J. (2006) *Democrazie e autoritarismo: problemi e sfide tra XX e XXI secolo*. Il Mulino, Bologna

- 5) Democracies grown out of the fall of the Soviet Union also affected by great economic changes overlapping democratic transition
- 6) Democracies affected by civil wars whose institutions are still far from being democratized, countries with fake democratic institutions, military regimes or puppet governments

Anyway, the majority of the literature on the subject has agreed on the fact that, in terms of a definitory framework, military regimes can be referred to as a form of authoritarian regime as opposed to a democratic one; therefore, before getting more in depth into what a military regime is, it might be useful to recall the distinction that political science made between dictatorship and democracy according to which dictators acquire the power to remain in office by means of repression rather than of free and fair competitive elections. (Friedrich and Brzezinski, 1965). Moreover, there is also another relevant classification made by Linz³ according to which military dictatorships along with party dictatorships are two possible shapes of authoritarian regimes which are defined so when they roughly present the following five elements:

- 1) limited pluralism
- 2) ideological justification of the regime
- 3) low political mobilization and absence of political engagement
- 4) a small group exercising the power
- 5) limits on citizens' rights

Within a scenario as such, there is just a narrow group of people or an “oligarchy” which is endowed with an effective decision-making power and this pattern often results in

³ Linz, Juan J., (1964) An authoritarian regime: the case of Spain

a subversion of the quality of democracy. In most cases, it is the military itself to seize its hegemony as a powerful elite supporting the regime, strengthening its links with key economic actors and its political leverage, as I shall explain in the next chapter. There is enough evidence that dictators also within military regimes exercise their power not only through mechanisms of suppression but even through channels such as loyalty, clientelism and political exchange in order to build legitimation and this, too, will be discussed more in later chapters.

Focusing more on the concept of authoritarian regime which is the most distinctive feature of a military regime, it must be said that there have been several authors who strove to provide a more specific terminology for the topic by making a fundamental distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in order to avoid misleading overlaps. Such a terminological dualism was a groundbreaking turning point in the political philosophy's speculation of the 20th century since it turned out to be useful to understand that non-democratic regimes are not all the same.

For instance, such a dualism was tackled by the philosopher Hannah Arendt in one of her seminal works "The origin of totalitarianism⁴" in which she argued that totalitarian regimes can be said to differ from the authoritarian ones for the more pervasive role played by ideology in nullifying the identities of the masses and by terror. The totalitarian state is deprived of any institution not corresponding with the ideology of the only one party existing. Furthermore, the constant need to find an enemy is another relevant aspect of such regimes but, while in the authoritarian regime the enemy is seen as a potentially existing threat, in the totalitarian one it is perceived to be objective almost in an obsessive way.

⁴ Arendt, H. (1973). *The origins of totalitarianism* (Vol. 244). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

On the whole, it seems that, even though totalitarianism in its actual meaning has more or less disappeared today, authoritarianism has actually survived despite the three waves of democratization⁵ and it even proves to be rather persistent in many countries lacking the basic conditions for democracy.

A wide literature has agreed on the fact that authoritarian regimes in their specificity lack the unlimited pluralism which is the distinctive feature of democracies, instead, as well as the absence of legal accountability of the political power and low mobilization. These factors altogether can be present to a different extent depending on the degree of authoritarianism but certainly represent the key elements for the regime in order to maintain the political setting unchanged. Nonetheless, in definitory terms, authoritarian regimes represent an extremely wide term within which several typologies have been developed on the ladder of abstraction. According to empirical data by Freedom House, nowadays, nearly 60 countries out of the 200 independent countries examined are reported to be authoritarian regimes. Therefore, recalling each of them would take a very long time and would take us far from what the main focus of this first paragraph is. Despite the difficulty in finding one single typology of authoritarian regime, as Linz observes, anyway, a classification that can be helpful to our purpose is between military and non-military authoritarian regimes. Being the former the main focus of this chapter, it is of extreme importance to take into account that the majority of the authoritarian regimes currently existing can be also, somehow, deemed as “hybrid regimes” or, according to other scholars, “electoral authoritarianisms” (Schedler, 2006:3).

After the massive process of democratization occurred in the last century, many world countries have undergone several internal changes and gradually experienced new

⁵ The term was coined by Samuel Huntington in one of his seminal works “Clash of civilizations”

forms of authoritarianism though not explicitly conceivable as such since they have adopted many of the normative features shared by liberal democracies. Some of the countries which have followed a similar path are Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Russia, Kenya and Nigeria. For instance, such countries have adopted the formal rules of democracy along with its entire institutional framework except for the elections which actually keep being manipulated. At the end of the day, the fact that elections are not free, fair and competitive and that there was neither real opposition nor electoral turnover have made these cases of covert authoritarian regimes far from the minimalist definition of democracy.

Within the broad realm of electoral authoritarian regimes, despite what the term might suggest at a first impression, the military are not outsiders but they actually play a key role in the maintenance of such a specific political pattern. Consequently, some scholars have also coined another expression to better define the profound interaction of these elements which is “military electoral authoritarian regimes”. Many countries could be classified as such and, more particularly, also the current Egyptian regime which will be the specific case analyzed in the later chapters.

At this point, we could spontaneously wonder what leads the military elite to assume the command of a country thus going far beyond the scope of their original function and, more importantly, what are the reasons of such a shift in the role of the military in some countries. In order to answer the question, it is necessary to take into consideration that, historically, the military have always played a pivotal role within a State due to their main function of guaranteeing security and order by protecting citizens from either internal or external threats. Anyway, this was done assuming that soldiers and, more generally, the military were subordinated to politicians and to Parliaments as the latter were the true representatives of citizens’ will.

When providing the innovative definition of modern State in one of his most important works⁶, Max Weber claimed that a State in order to be defined so must have the “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force” against residents of its territory. This was a groundbreaking concept at that time since it basically meant that the existence of modern States relied on values such as force and violence. Weber grasped well this process which was occurring in the contemporary State in a period when wars were tearing the world apart. He clearly understood that the main feature of statehood was to hold the control over its territory and its citizens by means of force and this could be pursued only with a national army. Naturally, better-equipped and better-endowed armies were expected to result in stronger and more powerful States which, according to a realist perspective, was supposed to increase state’s security.

As a consequence, over the years but particularly in the 20th century, this culture began to spread, widely known as “militarism” and based on the assumption that the military elite should prevail on politicians and Parliaments thus acquiring more prestige and power. This process was also determined by the assumption of the military being representative of national identity tracing back to the 19th century’s romantic nationalism. However, when wars turned into the most significant event of the 20th century, violence seemed to escalate and new forms of menace rose, the military came to be seen as rescuers and their figure acquired even more importance than before. The famous sentence by Mao Zedong “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” is a clear demonstration in this sense. This was the reason why abuses of such a privileged position would become more likely to occur and it would be evident particularly after the Second World War when many countries experienced a huge amount of military coups. Eventually, in the ‘60s and ‘70s, this trend became even

⁶ “Politics as a vocation” was one of Max Weber’s seminal works derived from a lecture he held in the universities of Munich in 1919

more diffuse especially in underdeveloped and developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America where political instability and corruption represented a fertile ground for the military power to overcome the civilian one. Literature has confirmed empirically that in the later 1970s the military controlled the government in about one third of non-Western states (Nordlinger, 1977:6).⁷

Historically, the concept of militarism has evolved to a great extent and, somehow, it gave birth to the idea of military power being legitimized not only by the monopoly of force, as explained above, but also by their ranking in the social hierarchy. There is no doubt that their educational and cultural level has been a relevant justification for acquiring such a legitimation, but, more importantly, according to Finer, their superiority was believed to derive from three factors: a remarkable capability in organization, a highly emotionalized symbolic status and the monopoly of arms⁸ (Finer, 1976).

Nowadays, in modern States, any military elite is better organized than a civilian group and it seems depending on the fact that the former is more centralized, hierarchical and endowed with a strong sense of purpose and solidarity between the components which makes their mission in the state of vital importance. Again, according to such a view, the military elite is educated as a body detached from the civilian masses and has evolved as an integral part belonging to the state, at the core of its organizational structure, linked to national tradition and led by patriotic sentiment. Certainly, this attributes the army an undiscussed superiority over any other state political organization, but what should be looked at more carefully in order to understand the process occurred in certain political systems is the relationship between the civil and the military powers over time. According

⁷ Nordlinger, E. A. (1977) *Soldiers in politics: Military coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall) in Brooker, Paul (2000). *Non-democratic regimes, Theory, government and politics* (London: Macmillan Press).

⁸ Finer, Samuel E. (1975). *The man on horseback* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books).

to an authoritative source⁹ by Huntington, what distinguishes the military corps of today from those of the past is the “professionalism”, or better, the fact that nowadays modern military officers corps have the characteristics of a professional expertise group just like a corporate body with its own social responsibility. According to Huntington, this element implies what he defines the “objective civilian control” as opposed to the “subjective civilian control”. Indeed, the latter is achieved when the military control and, hence, military power is reduced to such an extent that the military is not recognized as a separate professional body servant of the state and it is adapted and made “mirror of the state”. On the contrary, the objective civilian control is a process whereby the military is conceived as politically neutral and its professionalism is maximized. By such a distinction, it emerges that the two things seem inversely correlated and, furthermore, Huntington adds that “[...] those civilian groups which tried to minimize the risks of war by reducing the power of the military frequently encouraged exactly what they were attempting to avoid. [...]”. (Huntington, 1957)

Before going in the depth of the possible reasons why the military control overtakes the civilian power in some circumstances and in what way it can be achieved, it might be useful to analyze what has traditionally made the military power distant from the civilian one and far from running political offices, despite its extremely important role in the state affairs. For instance, according to Finer (1976), modern states are more sophisticated and their economy as well as their administrative system have become far more complex than ever; as a result, the army lacks the adequate instruments in order to cope with the demands of more advanced communities and, therefore, it is less likely that it takes the control of the political scenario. Indeed, this point of view might explain why military regimes have always

⁹ Huntington, Samuel P. (1957). *The Soldier and the State* (Harvard: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press).

been diffuse in underdeveloped and developing countries rather than in consolidated democracies. This trend is confirmed also by another element that Finer considers either a positive or a negative factor for the military seizure of power. According to him, a military intervention in the political arena is much more unlikely in a society with a mature and developed political culture. Related to the latter is the concept of the legitimacy enjoyed by the military in a country on whose importance Nordlinger focuses on. He claims that the higher the degree of legitimacy of a civil government, the higher is the resistance to a military action, which is expected to happen in a more developed and mature political background.

Beside this aspect, there is also another factor that is expected to prevent the military from governing which is that they basically lack this right since they are not actually entitled to be elected as representatives of the people as the liberal tradition of representative democracy claims. The absence of such a right is evident especially when the military themselves, after seizing the power by means of a coup, turns out to be fragmented amongst several components contending power thus making it a fragile and short-termed experience. Furthermore, the moral implications of a military intervention in the political arena must not be overlooked since the military are not generally recognized the authority of using force for merely political purposes. More in details, Finer, who provides an accurate analysis of the factors either stimulating or preventing the political intervention of the military, argues that there can be other reasons why the military might be inhibited in politically intervening. He starts his analysis by taking into consideration two elements, the “disposition” and the “opportunity” to intervene which are, respectively, subjective and objective factors; the relationship between the two results in a “calculus of intervention”. As a result, he argues that a restraint could be the belief in the principle of civil supremacy, but also the presence of self-interested fears could rise when assessing the consequence of a political intervention

and, therefore, dissuade from such an action. The failure of a coup and its repercussions on the military status quo is believed to be a strong deterrent, indeed. Failure after a coup can be widely intended as the consequent loss of prestige, internal cohesion, economic leverage and political effectiveness. As historical evidence and path dependence theory have revealed, the degree of divisiveness found within the military corps after a political intervention is argued to have affected the likelihood of military coups on the whole. From this consideration, it emerges that the military are arguably careful and rational actors who make a cost-benefit analysis when it comes to deciding whether to carry out a coup or not. At this point, prospect theory according to which in condition of outcome parity, individuals prefer to keep a situation unchanged than to assume the risks of a change might give further confirmation of the reasons behind such a behavior. Nevertheless, the critical point of this analysis can be the fact that not in every circumstance can the actor, the military in this case, be expected to make perfectly rational evaluations.

Finally, there can be found other types of constraints for the military to seize the power which are external obstacles also defined by Finer as “negative opportunities”. These are: the lack of an historical background of coups, a recently achieved independence of the state and the presence of foreign troops on the territory.

Moreover, another scholar, Decalo¹⁰, identifies other forms of obstacle in these terms such as the appointment of family members and ethnically loyal recruits in the military as well as paramilitary guards in order to keep a better control over the army without reducing, at the same time, its capability. According to him, such a strategy has proven to be effective in deterring the military from carrying out coups in 16 African countries as well as in the Middle East (Decalo, 1989).

¹⁰ Decalo, S. (1989) ‘Modalities of civil-military stability’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 27, Issue 4, December 1989.

1.2 Main patterns of transition

Yet, these seem not to have been sufficiently big constraints for the military in some cases and, therefore, it is now time to examine what can be the main groundings for the military intervention in certain countries thus posing a serious concern for the democratic development in some countries. Naturally, this is linked to the way through which transitions toward a military regime occur; therefore, from here it will be possible to analyze more in depth causes and consequences of such transitions with all the implications they bear.

For what concerns the motives behind the military intervention in politics which leads the process of transition from a non-military toward a military political regime, it is necessary to recall, again, the authoritative work¹¹ by Finer which enumerates four possible intervening factors:

- 1) Self-proclaimed manifest destiny of the soldiers
- 2) National interest
- 3) Sectional interest and, more broadly, corporate self-interest
- 4) Individual self-interest

As it can be seen, these elements could be then summed up in one single key factor which is interest. Interest can be appealed to four different dimensions serving the specific objective of a military action. Frequently, it happens that national interest is called upon by officers when enacting a coup as a supreme principle inspiring a sense of national solidarity, a worth-engaging cause for all citizens against a common enemy, that in our specific case was clearly represented by the Muslim Brothers, depicted by the regime as the worst threat

¹¹ Finer, Samuel E. (1975) *The man on horseback* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books).

against Egypt. This peculiarity resembles the concept of enemy as intended in totalitarian systems. The wide degree of involvement and responsibility it brings up often makes interest the primary goal of coup-makers but only fictitiously. In fact, national interest often disguises other forms of interests such as corporate self-interest or individual self-interest. The latter two have been the leading cause of the majority of coups whereby military officers have been striving to reach their own professional aspirations, economic capability and prestige. Furthermore, another important aspect which cannot be disregarded is where the military officers belong in terms of social class or group since a coup might be also the instrument through which a specific social group can affirm its own ethnic, religious and social interests thanks to its particular and special status. The fact that the military power within a country can become remarkably strong and effective is shown by what Finer (1976) defined as “blackmail” that is to say the act of simply threatening to stage a coup rather than truly doing it. Other possible causes behind a military intervention in politics can be either trying to produce pressure on the official government in order to advance a specific demand without overthrowing it or removing it directly giving a new alternative. (It should not always be taken for granted that a military coup is designed to overthrow the existing regime).

However, there is no doubt that the majority of the military regimes, in whatever way they have become as such, be it the result of a transitional or a consolidating process, can be said to have grown out of a military intervention. In light of this, then, how can such a political shift happen? What are the main conditions for its enactment? And what is the final outcome of all this?

In order to answer all these questions, first of all, it is necessary to specify that when a military coup is enacted, according to some scholars, it is possible to distinguish two types following from the leading causes mentioned above: a ‘corporate’ coup and a ‘factional’

coup. While the former is a coup staged by the entire unified military body in a more cohesive way, the latter occurs in a more fragmented fashion against higher-ranking officers or corporate and professional leaders. Nordlinger (1977) argues that the first type of coup presents a higher degree of success than the second one, although, arguably, over the decades most coups have been enacted in a factional way. Moreover, another scholar¹², beside stressing once again the higher organizational ability of the military compared to any other civilian group, argues that factional coups, which have been the majority up to now, are a clear sign of the military's weak internal cohesion and, hence, in a minor ability to politically intervene (Janowitz, 1964).

As far as the first question is concerned, it can be roughly said that in those cases where the deterring attempts of the official government do not prove successful, the military demonstrate a sharp superiority over state institutions to such an extent that they become able to control them. Here, the military clearly seize the power and get to run public offices or ultimately become the new governors of the state. It has also been argued that in times of war, crisis and political instability the military are more likely to intervene successfully by installing a new type of regime. Indeed, in many countries today, this trend can be noticed in the recurrent habit of resorting to the state of emergency or crisis in order to further legitimize a military action or simply the extension of their power or to justify a severe restriction of civil liberties.

Broadly speaking, there can be mainly three outcomes of transition depending on how the military settles their power in the political system and, therefore, resulting in three different structures of regime: firstly, if they seize the power directly after the intervention and limit or suppress people's participation, a pure military authoritarianism is installed with

¹² Janowitz, M. (1964) *The military in the political development of new nations: an essay in comparative analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

the creation of a so-called *junta*¹³. Secondly, if the military, after seizing power, cooperate with several social groups such as the Church, landowners, bureaucracy, relevant stakeholders or industrial entrepreneurs, what is installed, then, is a civilian-military authoritarianism, an hybrid form of regime presenting a single party, corporative chambers and unions. Finally, there is another form of regime which has been defined “civilian authoritarianism” meaning that the actors holding the power enjoy a higher legitimation and represent an ideology or a more coherent orientation. Military are not properly intrusive as in the previous two forms but it is pretty frequent to find militias or other paramilitary groups. Party mobilization, in these cases, is a common instrument to build up clientelist networks so as to strengthen legitimation.

By and large, transitions can happen in several ways; for instance, there can be cases of democratic regimes turning into a hybrid regime, or also exactly the opposite case. There can be also a further worsening of the quality of democracy so that a hybrid regime becomes an authoritarian one or, ultimately, authoritarian regimes that may change, more or less slightly, their degree of authoritarianism though not evolving to democracy at all. According to Morlino (2017), during the last decades, transitions from democracy toward a hybrid regime have been more frequent than those toward an authoritarianism, as opposed to the case of Spain in the ‘30s or the military regimes in Latin America in the ‘60s and ‘70s. Nonetheless, this is not enough to say that transition toward authoritarian military regimes have decreased since some countries have recently experienced it, such as Egypt.

However, Finer distinguishes several modalities whereby the military pursue state power. Other than by installing a direct military rule, there are two other relevant procedures

¹³ These possible outcomes of transition are presented in: Morlino, L., Berg-Schlosser, D., & Badie, B. (2017). *Political Science: A Global Perspective*. SAGE.

which equally enable the military to reach strategic positions but in a subtler way, which is currently the most frequent case. When it comes to seizing the power indirectly, the military can make an extremely strategic use of civilian forces or civil society in order to gain momentum; such a pattern describes what he defined as a “quasi-civilianized” form of direct military rule whereby civilian institutions or political parties seemingly support the military forces and are used as puppets in the military’s hands. It is evident that any civilian body designed within this scheme is completely dependent on the military and heavily constrained by them.

The scholar gives also other definitions that can be useful to have a more complete idea of what a military regime is in concrete, depending on the extent to which the military hold the executive power; for instance, he draws the distinction between cases in which the military rule as an organization and those in which there are personal rulers or agents as direct representatives of the military. Nevertheless, this classification could be considered too rigid since empirical evidence has found that, nowadays, many military regimes can be assessed to be halfway in this sense. There might not be one single dictator or a military junta but, in fact, they have an executive which is controlled by the military. These cases can be referred to as “military-supportive” civilian regimes where the military play an important supportive rather than policy-making role and turn out to be highly influential at the end of the day. Cases as such resemble also those regimes where there is a president strongly endorsed by the army through its capillary presence in several official state parties.

Ultimately, another extremely important detail cannot be overlooked that is to say, national interest, which is a very appealing and advantageous element for the military when it comes to seizing the power. If the army perceives itself or makes the country perceive it as the real true guardian of national interest, the path to their political success is likely to be easier. Therefore, a fair share of the military actions could be justified for the sake of national

interest and, as a result, this could lead to the approval of political programs under their overt leadership or authority (Finer, 1976: 31) or even to vetoing or restraining some civilian prerogatives.

Furthermore, another scholar, Perlmutter¹⁴ makes another distinction between arbitrator and ruler types, the second of which is closer to the pattern of a military regime and has three characteristics: a) rejects the existing order and challenges its legitimacy; b) lacks confidence in civilian rule and has no expectation of returning to the barracks; c) has a political organization and tends to maximize the army's rule (1977:107-8).¹⁵ If this terminological dualism can be conceived by looking at the goals of the newly-installed regime, however, another possible outcome can be also found when considering the structure rather than the goals, that is to say the party-army regime. According to Perlmutter, this specific type of regime mostly relies on a political party being more or less supportive of the military. Such an outcome can be also the result of a transition from a ruler-type regime where the military are politically involved toward a scenario in which they go back to barracks, becomes politically neutral and only some figures remain as leaders of a political party.

Within the realm of military regimes studies, a groundbreaking contribute was also given by Nordlinger (1977), mentioned above. In one of his important works¹⁶, Nordlinger claims that in military regimes, power is maximized when a ruler-type regime is installed, recalling Perlmutter's classification. In such a scenario, not only do the military [...] control the government, but also dominate the regime, attempting to control large slices of political, economic and social life through the creation of mobilization structures. [...] (1977:24). As

¹⁴ Perlmutter, Amos. (1977) *The military and politics in modern times: on professionals, praetorians, and revolutionary soldiers*. Yale University Press

¹⁵ *Ibidem* in Brooker, Paul (2000). *Non-democratic regimes, Theory, government and politics* (London: Macmillan Press).

¹⁶ Nordlinger, E. A. (1977) *Soldiers in politics: Military coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall)

it will be said in the following chapter, the creation of such structures is the core procedure whereby legitimation can be built for the survival of the regime itself.

Another scholar who focused on the topic was Huntington in one of his seminal works “*Political order in changing societies*” (1968).¹⁷ In this work, he introduced the term “praetorian society” meaning a polity in which the military are one of the politicized groups and social forces able to bring about changes and transformations at the institutional level, for instance, by means of a coup. The three types of praetorian society are associated to three different degree of political participation thus being the impact of the military in a polity strongly interconnected with civil society. Therefore, according to Huntington’s view, a praetorian society is generally thought of as the result of a failure of political institutions in guaranteeing effective political participation within modern societies. This element leads to answering the second question on what are the elements in a political system that pave the way for the installation of a military regime. However, the analysis made by the scholar has currently found less empirical evidence than expected, when considering the different historical paths of Latin America, Africa and Asia and, certainly, the political history of each area still play a major role in explaining how political participation evolved.

Before moving onto the second question, it must be said that, basically, transitions toward a military regime may lead to three outcomes, that is to say, a successful installation of a new military regime, a failed attempt to install it and no attempt at all due to several factors that have been outlined earlier. However, within the pattern of transitions and their possible outcomes, some cases conceivable as “hybrid” are extremely interesting.

¹⁷ Huntington, S. P. (2006). *Political order in changing societies*. Yale University Press.

According to Finer (1975) these can be called “less-than-military regimes” since the army intervenes politically but not openly and by stealth. In these cases, the military have gained the control of the civilian government and maintain their power threatening a coup or blackmailing state institutions in particular circumstances. Here, state with its fragile institutions becomes puppet of the military serving as the instrument to seize and consolidate their power later on. Finer defines them as indirect-complete military rule as opposed to those cases of indirect-limited military rule in which the military action is not continuous but intermittent. However, some argue that the second case is not to be classified as a military dictatorship but rather as a sign of flawed or failed democracy. Hybrid cases also include the “military-supportive” civilian governments where state can survive only thanks to the support received by the military which is another clear sign of a profound institutional crisis and of the breakup of state sovereignty.

Ultimately, another way through which transition toward a military regime might happen is the self-proclaimed coup or *autogolpe*. Such a sudden action is generally conducted by the chief executive of the army himself with the aim of increasing dramatically his control over the government and the political system subverting the constitutional order and, therefore, installing a military regime based on a personalist dictatorship or a military-supported civilian government. A self-coup could be also an instrument to make a previously existing military regime stronger and more enduring. Furthermore, in some cases this military intervention finds the ostensible support of a president or the head of a state, abusing its prerogatives.

However, according to many scholars, this is not the case of a proper military regime installation but rather of a transition toward a military-supported civilian government which, despite formally, maintain civilian peculiarities such as parties in the political arena. Assessing hybrid cases that have been mentioned so far can be a misleading operation since

it is easier to come across conceptual overlaps. As a result of this, some cases which are liable to be classified as military dictatorships or military regimes actually might turn out to be party dictatorships where there is certainly a crucial role played by the military in tightening the political space but not to the extent of full-blown military regimes.

Furthermore, a peculiar and interesting case to look at within the pattern of transitions toward a military regime is Turkey in the '60s and later again in the '70s and '80s. There is wide agreement in literature on the fact that the Turkish army, once enacted a coup or seized the power, does not remain in office for a long time but rather “goes back to barracks” so as to give the power back to a civilian government after restoring public order. In the first case, this was evident when, under the Democratic Party rule (DP), some internal components of the army, middle-low ranking officers who felt the Kemalist tradition values betrayed by the government in office (the military was loyal to Kemalist doctrine since Mustafa Kemal himself had belonged to the army), staged a coup. The latter was intended to be a necessary action in order to restore democracy and rule of law in the country and, for this purpose, a new military junta was created but it did not last long. After a year, a military regime had not been installed and in the new constitution the novelty of bicameralism was introduced. Eventually, in the '80s, due to economic uncertainty and widespread dissatisfaction, General Kenan Evren organized another military coup but, this time, the impact was bigger on the country since a new constitutional text was established with severe limitations of rights. All the opposing leftist political parties were removed and more conservative policies detached from Kemalism as well as monocameralism were introduced. However, as for the previous attempts, this experience did not last more than two years, although serious limitations of civil and political rights continued to exist.

As far as the second question is concerned, it can be said that there are some conditions which are more likely to lead some states to experience political shifts toward a military regime. The causes are to be detected in several factors but, primarily, in a failed process of democratization.

Indeed, the process of democratization that a country experiences lies behind any consequent evolution of its political system and, therefore, the way in which it takes place could explain some traits of several autocratic regimes existing today.

It is a common belief that one of the leading features of democratization is the electoral process which is supposed to make a state accountable and responsive to its citizens. Elections allow institutional change and give the possibility of a political turnover. In light of this, many scholars have focused so much attention on the positive role of elections as a catalyst of any transformation toward democracy that the two things have been conceived as necessarily interdependent. However, over the years, empirical evidence has shown that some cases such as Russia, Venezuela or Egypt have been disregarding this pattern and despite being characterized by the presence of elections, they are not examples of a deep democratization process successfully implemented and present some typical features of autocracy like power concentration in the hands of small groups or elites and severe limitations of rights (Krastev, 2006: 53). Cases as such were also introduced earlier in the first paragraph and also defined as electoral authoritarianisms. Some scholars, in particular, Karl (1995) and, later on, Mansfield and Snyder (2007) have stressed the fact that when it came to assess the quality of democracy of a political system and the degree of its democratization, the electoral process had been a deceiving criterion and it had been given too much emphasis. As a result of this, it had been usually placed as a substantive priority for countries in transition, actually neglecting the importance of necessary preconditions such as rule of law, free press, new institutional setting and

constitutional reforms. According to this view, an incremental procedure is believed to be more useful and effective in order to make the new regime a stable democracy. This did not happen in several cases such as, for instance, the Serbian conflict in 1994 and Iraq in 2003, which might be examples of “out-of-sequence transitions”, using, again, an expression by Mansfield and Snyder (2007).¹⁸

At this point, it can be added that democratization is hugely determined by the institutional arrangement which reveals what kind of power relationship there is amongst the different political actors. The constitutional framework designed during the transitional phase plays a significant role in the distribution and balance of powers and some cases of failed transitions could be explained by a flawed constitutional device. Nevertheless, not always is the institutional arrangement the sufficient condition to give birth to a process of democratization since this can be also used, somehow, as a subtle instrument to legitimize a certain unequal power distribution or to perpetuate mechanisms of repression. Consequently, it is also extremely important to understand who are the actors representing the institutions and what is the output, recalling the term coined by Easton when defining a political system¹⁹.

By and large, it can be deduced that what seems to make transitions toward a military regime more likely in a country is, firstly, the profound weakness of state institutions as well as the lack of a democratic political culture, which is also much linked to each country’s historical background. Path dependence theory might explain the extreme relevance of the past experiences for a country and, consequently, the presence of an authoritarian legacy or the experience of a dictatorship in a previous period increase the likelihood of a military mobilization in times of crisis and turmoil, as in many Latin American countries where

¹⁸ Mansfield, E. D., & Snyder, J. L. (2007). The Sequencing" Fallacy". *Journal of democracy*, 18(3), 5-10.

¹⁹ Easton, D. (1967). *A systems analysis of political life* (pp. 411-429). New York: Wiley.

“democracy is elusive because of the hangover of past state practices and authoritarian traditions” argues O’Donnell (2000). Moreover, fragile institutions are generally associated to a situation in which sovereignty is gradually fragmented or has collapsed and state identity has faded away. This is why the first intervention in order to accomplish an effective democratization should begin with state-building measures as well as the establishment of the rule of law even before opening the electoral competition. Again, going back to the need for an incremental procedure that prevents a country from drifting toward autocracy, Mansfield and Snyder (2007) argue that “[...] troubled partial democracies have long retained the institutional deformities born of an initial transition from autocracy that failed to produce a coherent democracy [...].” According to the authors, two examples of these institutional deformities that survived were, in one case, Serbian ethnic nationalism and political demagoguery, whereas in the other case assumed, the central role played by the army in Argentina, Pakistan and Turkey making them shift from a quasi-democracy to a military regime. The last case indicates how the power of the army becomes stronger when there is no fertile ground for a democratic political culture and both visible and invisible institutions are too porous and fragmented to enforce “stateness”, that is to say an array of state prerogatives in terms of monopoly of the use of force, legitimacy and territorial control.

Within the possible causes of a transition toward a military regime, I deem important to underline an element much related to the political tradition of a country which has been empirically demonstrated by several scholars for particular cases such as Russia. Some forms of regime are traditionally perpetuated and institutionalized over time and so is a wide range of common beliefs which shape the relationship between citizens and politicians. Many of these beliefs are embedded in the political culture since they are passed down and this may justify some autocratic patterns like state secrecy, elitist privileges, concentration of power, which would no longer be perceived as wrongful at the end of the day.

What is more, also nationality problems by giving birth to ethnic conflicts, civil wars and separatism may constitute an advantage for the army to lead a basically fragile state toward an authoritarian backlash and, potentially, a military regime. The military could strategically play a defensive role by supporting one side rather than the other or simply appearing as the guarantors of national interest for the sake of state security threatened by violence and upheavals. A general sense of insecurity amongst citizens in such a context could arguably legitimize a military intervention or providing a valid justification for it.

Finally, another factor that might favor the rise of a military regime and strictly linked to the other ones analyzed up to now can be a poor and scarce capacity of the state to respond to internal and external pressures without using coercion. The more a state needs to resort to force and coercion, the weaker its overall capacity is thus not being able to deal with complex challenges in the long run. Globalization has lately made this task harder since states in these situations come to be double-faced and are forced to manage demands both from within and from the outside at the same time. When institutions face a similar crisis with no adequate instruments to overcome it and do not prove able to keep up, the military could exploit the political vacuum defying the existing order. Furthermore, contexts of economic instability such as currency crises, inflation, hyperinflation or high unemployment rates are nothing but a catalyst of dissatisfaction and political reaction which can arise as military interventions. Undoubtedly, this has an overall strong impact over the political system where it happens, halting any democratic development process or often leading the country to a more authoritarian regime by further consolidating the military power, as it has occurred in Egypt after the 2011 revolution.

1.3 Egypt and its military background

Before moving onto the more specific case of current Egypt as a blatant example of military rather than democratic consolidation, it might be useful to go more in depth with an analysis of the cyclical path followed by the country starting from Mubarak's regime, going through the period of Arab revolutions and finally coming back to Al Sisi's new military regime, again. A comparison between the two regimes can be useful in order to further understand what has brought Egypt back under the military rule even after the Arab revolutions. Egypt represented a peculiar case in terms of post-transitional evolution since it experienced an authoritarian backlash after the 2011 protests differently from other Middle East countries such as, for instance, Tunisia or Morocco.

If we bear in mind the several possible factors determining transitions toward a military regime, it can be realized that Egypt was bound to experience frequently the unfolding of authoritarian rather than democratic transitions because of its long-dated military background which proved to be resistant to any attempt of democratization over the time.

In the previous paragraph it has been said that those regimes born out of a military intervention or a coup are more likely to be installed in contexts of institutional weakness or lack of state sovereignty and developing countries have a fertile ground for this kind of phenomenon. Historically, such countries are widely known to have been under the colonial rule for a long time and, despite pursuing independence, this has somehow affected their state-building capacity and hindered the spread of a democratic culture throughout the years. What should be taken into consideration, then, is that in these contexts the military, often by means of cooptation, became one of the channels through which colonial powers could hold the control of the different local communities, thus acquiring prestige and capability. At this point, it might follow that, from a certain moment, the army itself was able to turn its back

on the colonial rule so as to assume the total leadership of their country where there were no other effective counter-balancing institutions. This pattern is likely to have become pretty usual and even more entrenched in those contexts where violence and strength were the only ways to lead the country and there was a substratum of reactionary nationalism in the fabric of society. Egypt could be deemed as a similar case and its military rule throughout the 20th century is a clear demonstration of what has been said so far.

Back in 1952, there had been the first military coup since the end of the Second World War enacted by the Free Officers led by Nasser. The ideological reasons behind this action helped to legitimize it as the only way to give the Pan-Arabism cause a strong voice and, therefore, Egypt under the military regime of Nasser became a beacon for the rest of the Arab countries despite being a regime actually far from democracy. This is proven, for instance, by the fact that under Nasser the Muslim Brothers were considered the worst enemies of the regime and, because of this, sentenced to death. This fact of attacking or prosecuting a group of people within the state is another peculiarity of authoritarian regimes where freedom of opinion and dissidence are severely kept under control or forbidden. It could be also noticed that, consequently, over time this attitude is likely to have triggered the radicalization of certain social and political movements, particularly in the Middle East context where religion played an enormous instrumental role for political propaganda as well as for dissent. It can be easy to deduce why and how the radicalization of these movements through the threat of terrorism and the regime's autocracy appear to be self-sustaining.

Anyway, in order to focus more specifically on the comparison between the latest two military regimes that Egypt experienced, it is necessary to move on straight to the '80s when Hosni Mubarak's regime was installed. Not even can it be forgotten that its presidency lasted about three decades, despite being an authoritarianism and it has not been the only case up to now. Therefore, the fact that some countries, in spite of their undemocratic and

despotic nature, prove to be stable and enduring represents an interesting element to look at. Here, some of the reasons concerning the longevity of Egyptian military regimes will be introduced, but in the last two chapters more specific explanations of this phenomenon will be provided.

The first phase of this regime consisted of more open and liberal policies mainly due to the new international position enjoyed by the country and by a national economy performing better than before. This pattern did not occur only in the very first period of Mubarak's regime but it could also be found in the first years of the previous regime led by Sadat after the death of Nasser. It must be added, however, that, under Sadat, the military supremacy on state affairs was reduced due to the increasing distance between the civilian leadership and the military involvement in politics (Statcher, 2012:60).²⁰

Going back to the Mubarak era, many scholars agree on the view according to which the attitude shown by the regime consisted of a moderate opening of the political space at the beginning so as to accommodate the instances of civil society but it was actually a maneuver strategically designed to build consensus and, eventually, consolidate power. Hence, it was not a new political era to be introduced by Mubarak but it was actually the continuation of what had already been initiated. Such an evolution of the events might be interpreted in contrast with what Huntington argued about democratization. In fact, he claimed that authoritarian regimes were more likely to evolve toward democracy in contexts of economic liberalization; however, Egypt in the Mubarak era clearly indicates this is not always the case.

Therefore, in a second moment, the regime began to show itself in a more authoritarian facade and from this point what emerged dramatically were the criticalities of

²⁰ Stacher, J. (2012). *Adaptable autocrats: regime power in Egypt and Syria*. Stanford University Press. In Roll, S. (2016). Managing change: how Egypt's military leadership shaped the transformation. *Mediterranean Politics*, 21(1), 23-43.

a country unprepared to face an aggressive economic liberalization and exposed to the threat of Islamic radicalism. In such a context of uncertainty, Mubarak was determined to halt any democratic evolution by closing the political space for civil society and restraining civil liberties more and more. According to the official propaganda, this action was designed to make the country safer from terrorism but it was actually aimed at reducing the Egyptian state to a pure authoritarianism where the police and the state security forces were the real agents of Mubarak's power. In the meanwhile, citizens gradually became victims of the unemployment brought about by a massive neoliberalism in the '90s and, as a result of this, they felt more and more detached from political participation in a state which had turned into a "police state" (Kandil, 2012:4).²¹

Furthermore, another critical element of the scenario described was the electoral process which was hugely manipulated in favor of the regime. Indeed, this could be noticed in the frequent landslide victories achieved by Mubarak where he was confirmed President more than twice reaching 96,3 % in 1993. Popular dissatisfaction grew dramatically over the years and the fear of being dismantled caused the regime to call frequently the state of emergency as a clear strategy to preserve the whole system of power on which the regime was based and to stop any form of activism. It must not be forgotten that, beside the domestic measures taken by the regime in order to resist any political change toward democracy, there was also another factor that allowed Mubarak to run the country for such a long period and this was the international context. Indeed, the regime did not refuse to abide by the economic and fiscal measures imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund regardless of the negative impact on the Egyptian people and it also appeared committed to fight terrorism whatever it would take. As a result, despite some periods of divergence and

²¹ Kandil, H. (2012). *Soldiers, spies, and statesmen: Egypt's road to revolt*. Verso Books. In *Managing change: how Egypt's military leadership shaped the transformation*. *Mediterranean Politics*, 21(1), 23-43.

contrast, the Western world gave moderate support to the regime and seemed not to be aware of what was actually the regime's domestic policy.

In the third and fourth chapters all the mechanisms behind the strong resilience of a such a political scenario will be analyzed more in detail so as to better understand how the current regime, in turn, has been consolidating its military character under Al-Sisi. Therefore, what needs to be known for the moment is that, in terms of domestic policy, Mubarak strongly relied on the support of several elements: security forces (*mukhabarat*) and police headed by the Ministry of the Interior (*Al-Dakhiliyya*) ready to freeze dissent, a huge bureaucratic network tangled up in corruption and a powerful economic and industrial machine in the hands of military which gradually became a real caste in the system of state power (Karawan, 2011).

Furthermore, another aspect that cannot be underestimated is the high degree of division amongst the opposition mainly represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and its difficulty to run for the elections due to electoral laws limiting the space for political competition. By such a device, it was Mubarak's official party, the NDP²² (National Democratic Party) to enjoy a neat advantage thus dominating the entire political arena. The dramatic reduction of party's representative role was another evident sign of the enormous backwardness of Egyptian democracy at that time.

By the same token, civil society was reduced to nothing and repression would take place pretty often in a very violent way so that panic and fear could easily spread amongst people and blatant human rights violation could remain unreported.

According to Gervasio²³, it can be said that one substantial aspect of continuity between the regime of Sadat and Mubarak was the abolishment of the welfare state system,

²² The original Arabic name of the party is "*al-Hizb al-watanī al-dimuqrātī*"

²³ Gervasio, Gennaro, *Egitto: una rivoluzione annunciata?*, in Corrao, Maria Francesca. (2011) *Le rivoluzioni arabe. La transizione mediterranea*. Mondadori Università, Milano

previously pillar of Nasser's policy. By doing so, it was as though they broke the social pact which linked citizens and state putting the sense of common solidarity at stake.

This attitude of the regime contributed more and more to a wide opposition being built behind the scenes, despite the resilience shown by the regime even after an electoral victory of the Muslim Brothers in 2005 (they gained 88 seats but the election is remembered for several episodes of violence, ballot rigging and massive cooptation of entrepreneurs and businessmen). Consequently, the regime obtained the support of a vast array of actors but the major role played by these new actors especially in the economic sector would make power less concentrated and, somehow, pave the way for new and better organized forms of dissent, such as the *Kifaya*²⁴ movement, eventually leading to January 25 revolution and to the regime's fall. The push toward a concrete change finally derived from the upheavals also occurring in Tunisia against Ben Ali's regime and from the cruel murder of the young activist Khaled Said, tortured to death by the regime's official corps in 2011. Such events provoked a considerable wave of rage and, in a way, brought the regime to a point of no return.

At this point, it must be held into account that different actors were involved in the radical change occurred in 2011, but, more surprisingly, the ones who guided the country throughout the revolution after Mubarak's resignation were the military which, somehow, had come to be detached from the regime's security forces when the latter had failed to freeze the turmoil. The military, which had been long engaged in building their economic hegemony, had the power to convince Mubarak to resign in February so as to assume themselves the command of the country through the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF). By doing so, they could gradually go back in the saddle, leading the transition process with the clear intention of amending the constitution already in force according to their own interests rather than electing a new constituent assembly, as it happened for

²⁴ The movement was named after a famous slogan representing the so-called "Egyptian Movement for Change" (*al-Haraka al-misriyya min ajl al-taghyr*). The word in Arabic means "enough".

Tunisia, instead. Therefore, the military became the ultimate decision-maker in the country and, consequently, they succeeded in imposing themselves as veto players over the constitutional process and were able to approve the so-called Selmi Principles²⁵ thus strengthening their independence.

From 2012 to 2013, many different political actors were present in the political arena but the Muslim Brotherhood with its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) led by Mohammed Morsi seemed to dominate. It can be useful to hold into consideration that the first seeds of an authoritarian backlash were already sowed when the Egyptian Constitutional Court declared illegal the elections of the Constituent Assembly in 2012, but the SCAF as well as the Muslim Brotherhood strongly opposed this decision.

However, this transitional government led by Morsi proved to be an extremely brief experience due to a diffuse belief according to which the Muslim Brothers were not truly concerned with the “reconciliation” of the country but rather on extreme religious positions. Clearly, in this scenario, there was a decisive behind-the-scenes role played by the military in using people’s dissatisfaction for their own purpose, appearing as the only possible rescuers of the country and having national reconciliation as their main objective, indeed. As a result, in July 2013, Morsi was ousted by means of a coup, another Constituent Assembly was appointed and a provisional government led by Adly Mansour was eventually installed. That could be deemed as the beginning of the transition toward another military regime still disguised by general enthusiasm and hopes for a change.

As a result of this, the supporting role of the army in what was expected to be a democratic transition is revealed in a survey by the Zogby Research Services indicating that the overall consensus toward the military institution was 93 % in 2013. However, according to this source, the Egyptians did not seem so convinced that the situation after Morsi’s fall

²⁵ The document was named after the Deputy Prime Minister Ali Al-Selmi

was better off, even though the new political movement, not yet a party, led by general Al-Sisi, Tamarod, was gaining more and more ground.

It might be interesting to notice how, despite many death sentences and prosecutions against the Muslim Brothers that year, people were still willing to look at the military as an actor leading to democracy with no fear for the future of the country. Some may wonder why the military have enjoyed such a position and how it could be that people underestimated the outcome of such a political evolution. Actually, it should not surprise if it is taken into consideration that it was a really short time since Egypt had come out of its authoritarian military regime lasted thirty years. This fact cannot be overlooked when thinking of the deep impact that the regime and its system had on the country which was not able at all to cope with the political vacuum and the lack of better political alternatives. According to many scholars, this of the widespread chaos and of the political backlash resulting from an enduring dictatorship is a common feature of post-authoritarian scenarios, especially when the regime lasted for such a considerable amount of time that the development of an open and free political culture has been slowed down or relentlessly reversed.

Therefore, in Egypt, any democratic path still found too many obstacles and people seemed not to be aware of the trend backwards experienced by the country. What is more, right after the military coup in 2013, citizens all through the streets even welcomed general Al-Sisi and for his bold political intervention he was hailed by personalist slogans, enthusiasm and he was strongly propped up. The extremely wide political coverage enjoyed by the general and the increasing pervasiveness of his figure in one year within the political “competition” should have raised some suspects on the legitimacy of the process but he did not find obstacles in his rise to power. Furthermore, the fact that the regime used elections, although not regularly, was deceiving for the majority of the Egyptian who thought that it

was the beginning of a new democratic process. Nevertheless, in the third chapter it will be explained why, actually, the lack of a democratic outcome after the Revolution in Egypt was, above all, the result of a mismanaged military-led transition process.

In 2014, the promulgation of a new constitution was the key action aimed at carrying out once and for all the transition and to begin what should be better called as consolidation of the military power. Therefore, broadly speaking, in what way does the Al-Sisi regime differ from that of Mubarak and what are the elements of continuity which carry on perpetuating a system of power embedded in the country's political culture?

It can be said that, surely, transition from one regime to the other occurred but more in terms of constitutional arrangement rather than form of government. The approval of 2014 constitution, one year after the military coup, marked the beginning of the new form of military consolidation with the Al-Sisi regime. It can be argued that such a process could no longer be defined as a transition since it brought the country back to the military rule. Transition, which was still in course under the Muslim Brotherhood rule, right after the Egyptian revolution was somehow halted by the institutional weakness of the country and interrupted by the military coup in July 2013. In the next chapter, it will be seen how Egypt is still quite far from being conceived as a country in transition toward democracy or fully democratic, as Tunisia or Morocco, for instance.

The consolidation of the military power in the hands of Al-Sisi could be easily traced in the fact that the 2014 constitution, elaborated by a Constituent Assembly, contained specific provisions aimed at limiting the political space and strengthening the role of the army. The fact that the constitution was approved by means of popular referendum should not deceive since we have seen to what extent electoral manipulation has been happening over the last decades and, unfortunately, this case is not likely to have been the exception.

Consequently, the constitutional provisions introduced in 2014, still currently in force, highlighted several new aspects as compared to the previous one: for instance, a much reduced role of the Al-Azhar institution, firstly devoted to issue legal opinions based on the Islamic law and from 2014 conceived only as a mere scientific institution whose concern should not go beyond its own sphere of competence, that is to say, religious issues (art.7). Clearly, such provision might be interpreted as a legitimizing strategy of the new regime to appear less strict, less concerned with religious affairs as well as more liberal and progressive; by doing so, it further marked the ideological difference with confessional parties and made them even more isolated in the political arena after having also excluded them from the Constituent Assembly. A second feature of the new constitutional order, actually also present in the previous version, was the particular emphasis on Egyptian national identity as a glue for society and fundamental pillar on which education must be based (art. 19). Furthermore, if a more careful look is given both from the inside and from the outside, other peculiarities can be found in the 2014 constitution: firstly, the fact that the protection of individual rights is entirely up to the state, which implies also that it is the state itself to decide whether the respect of these rights should be enforced or not, restraining the role of the judiciary as a neutral body. This can be also deduced by Article 188 establishing that the judiciary has a residual power in the state jurisdiction and that, moreover, its affairs shall be managed by a Supreme Council whose structure and jurisdiction will be regulated by Law. Secondly, the central role played by the army in structuring the very essence of the Egyptian Republic reveals how much state institutions have been absorbed in the military. According to Article 200, *“The armed forces are committed to protect the country, preserve its security and territories. [...] No individual, entity, organization or group is allowed to create military or para-military structures, groups or organizations.”*²⁶ Last but not least,

²⁶ The full text of the 2014 Constitution is available here: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/newvvr/dustor-en001.pdf>

the regime has not even yet enforced a real mechanism of transitional justice such as effective fact-finding commissions. Therefore, all these elements demonstrate the degree of military consolidation undergone by the country in the last three years and also that, despite the endeavors of Egyptian activists and citizens during the Revolution, a democratic transition has not resulted from 2011 Revolution and the situation has not improved at all. Even though the regime seems to have been arguably enjoying more international support and less extended media coverage has been given to Egypt's domestic situation, the authoritarian drift imposed on the country cannot be ignored.

In light of this, the next chapter will analyze more in depth how the current regime has achieved the consolidation of the military rule in a subtler way, that is to say, by imposing its hegemony particularly on the national economy. A display of figures and data will help to understand also the specific situation of Egypt in comparison with that of other Middle East countries that followed more or less similar paths after the Arab Revolutions.

A comparative overview

The focus of this second chapter is to provide a preliminary framework based on quantitative data consisting of economic figures related to Egypt since the Al-Sisi regime was installed in 2014 on the wave of the Arab revolts and after the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood's government led by Mohamed Morsi.

On the grounds that an overall evaluation of the country's economic performance turns out to be extremely meaningful in order to obtain a better qualitative insight in the political evolution of the current Egyptian regime, some specific variables will be examined such as the gross domestic product (GDP), current account balance, gross and net government debt, government revenue, government expenditure, national savings, total investments as well as population rate, unemployment rate and inflation from 2014 up to the current year.

Secondly, the same variables will be analyzed for some other countries within the Middle East area, one by one, which are considered to be peculiar cases in terms of evaluation of the quality of democracy, be it achieved or not, respectively Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. After this preliminary display of the data, it will be possible to make a comparison that should help us more to understand where the Egyptian case could be currently placed in terms of democratic or authoritarian evolution and what kind of consolidation it has undertaken.

Ultimately, a more specific focus will be given on military expenditure as well as the role of military in the Egyptian economy and in order to understand whether the Egyptian industrial and economic development has followed a path divergent from the military activity in the country or, conversely, it has been strongly affected by it.

2.1 Economic background: Egypt in a comparative perspective

Before making the comparison between Egypt and the rest of the mentioned countries, it is fundamental to look at the data belonging only to Egypt within the four years considered. The economic variables chosen for a preliminary outlook have been obtained from several databases²⁷ amongst which are the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund online databases. Furthermore, in order to provide the economic indicators with cohesion and order, figures have been distributed in a table which can be found at the end of the chapter (Table 1).

As it can be seen, the current account balance and GDP data for the last two years are not available; however, this table roughly provides us with preliminary but useful information about the Egyptian economic performance since 2014 up to now.

As far as the government debt, revenue and expenditure are concerned, 2016 appeared to be the year in which public debt reached the highest rate despite a slight decrease in the following year. On the contrary, government revenues and expenditures were higher in 2014 at the beginning of the period considered, registering respectively about 24 % and 37% out of the national GDP percentage. Another interesting figure is the amount of national savings which was higher in 2014 than the other following years. Inflation rate, computed from the average consumer prices index, has a significantly opposite trend since the highest percentage is estimated to be reached this year in 2017, according to some IMF staff estimates. What is more, also Egyptian population, expressed in millions, is expected to grow reaching about 92 million people and, similarly, the quantity of total investments on the national GDP percentage. Ultimately, as far as the unemployment rate is concerned, it is reported to have been slightly higher in 2014 (IMF World Economic Outlook Database, 2016).

²⁷ Online databases: *Trading Economics, World Bank Data, IMF World Outlook Database 2016*

On the whole, this economic outlook sheds light on some other variables that are equally important for this research such as the regime's economic priorities, its policy choices and the way it managed to allocate and share public resources. Therefore, in light of these results which might appear inconsistent by giving a first preliminary look at the table, what can be deduced is that the Egyptian economy since the installation of the Al-Sisi regime has been hugely challenged neither thoroughly improving nor stabilizing during this period. More in details, the figures shown above might also indicate that the regime during the first years had to cope with a fairly high unemployment rate which diminished in the following years arguably due to some specific policy choices of the regime. These might have consisted of a more export-oriented economy in 2015 and, despite briefly shifting to an import-oriented model the next year, to a generally more open economy based on competitiveness and on a high investments rate. Such an economic pattern suggests that the government's strategy might have been to implement a policy of currency devaluation in order to stimulate external markets to invest on the Egyptian territory and to make the country an ideal economic partner. Nevertheless, the price to pay was the dramatic increase in the internal prices triggering an inflationary wave and, hence, a higher life cost for the Egyptian citizens.

Despite the lack of information about Egypt's gross domestic product for 2016 and 2017, another online database²⁸ discloses more details and long-term estimates which turn out to be extremely useful for this insight. According to IMF sources published in a Statista dossier of 2016, Egypt's real GDP growth has been rather unsteady up to now: the highest growth rate occurred only in 2015 where it reached 4,2% but the following year it decreased again. However, estimates also suggest that again in 2017 Egypt will register an increase in its GDP growth rate which is expected to grow constantly until 2020. These estimates seem to be consistent with the ones concerning the unemployment rate from 2016 up to 2020.

²⁸ Statista Dossier about Egypt, November 2016, www.statista.com

Forecasts, indeed, indicate that it will dwindle progressively year after year. More surprisingly, also the inflation rate, after a dramatic increase in 2017, is expected to be gradually shrinking, regardless of the trade-off between inflation and unemployment assumed by Philips.²⁹ Furthermore, what also emerges from the dossier is the increasing national debt rate which is expected to be twice as much as the current one by the next three years. Ultimately, an interesting figure that can be noticed is the ratio of government expenditure to Egypt's gross domestic product: after amounting to 32,36 % in 2014, it began to decrease each year with the exception of 2017 and it is also expected to register its lowest rates by 2020.

In order to build a comparison which is the core objective of this first part, it is essential to analyze the same economic variables but for a set of sample countries which will represent the other term of the comparison. As in the previous case of Egypt, the economic figures have been disposed in tables, one for each country observed and, by giving a look at the data, there can be found both similarities and differences with Egypt.

For instance, as far as Morocco is concerned (Table 2), what is to be noticed firstly is that its economy seems to have taken off particularly since 2015. This is demonstrated by a higher GDP index in 2016 and 2017 and, at the same time, a decreased unemployment rate. The rise in the inflation index, meaning higher internal prices, might also be interpreted as a sign of thriving economic development as well as a higher percentage of total investments on the total GDP. Finally, also Morocco is expected to register a rise in its population rate as in the case of Egypt, although in a less considerable way. Furthermore, the 2016 dossier on Morocco provided by the Statista online database³⁰, when analyzing

²⁹ In 1958, the economist Alban William Philips in his work "*The relationship between unemployment and the rate of change of money wages in the UK 1861-1957*" elaborated a macroeconomic theory according to which there is an inverse proportionality between the inflation and the unemployment rates. Later, this trade-off came to be known as "the Philips curve"

³⁰ Statista Dossier about Morocco, November 2016, www.statista.com

another variable which is the ratio of government expenditure to the overall gross domestic product, indicates that a little but steady reduction has occurred since 2015 and it is expected to decrease by 2020. And again, this is a trend that also Table 2 confirms.

Moving, then, onto Tunisia analyzed through the same variables (Table 3), what is found is that there were not dramatic changes during the four years considered. This is particularly shown by the fact that the Tunisian population rate is reported to have increased by little; its economy, as a whole, seems to have developed but at a slower pace than other countries of the area since a higher growth in its GDP index, however relatively modest, is expected to occur in 2017. Unemployment rate, despite a slight decrease estimated for 2017, still remain considerable, especially if compared to that of the other countries considered. Also the percentage of total investments are reduced although this year, particularly, the country appears to be more oriented towards exports. Finally, again in the case of Tunisia, there is an increasing government's gross debt which cannot be underestimated.

As far as Saudi Arabia (Table 4) is concerned, it is immediately clear that in this case economic figures definitely have higher values due to the wealth and the geopolitical advantage possessed by the country. And yet, what can be also noticed is that from 2014 up to 2016 its economic performance slowed down, as the figures about GDP clearly show, but the latter is expected to rise again in 2017. Furthermore, also Saudi Arabia's population increased during these years as well as its inflation rate, which appears to have soared year by year, as observed also in the previous countries. On the contrary, the ratio of government expenditure to GDP decreased, as the Statista database³¹ indicates. Despite the lack of information about the trend of unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia after 2015 in any of the databases consulted, some details about the trend of national debt can be found on that

³¹ Statista Dossier about Saudi Arabia, October 2016, www.statista.com

database.³² Not only is it reported to have been soaring dramatically since 2014 but according to IMF estimates, it will even continue to soar until 2020.

Ultimately, giving a look at the data for Jordan (Table 5), what can be said at a first glance is that the overall economic trend seems rather unstable. Despite that, a steady figure seems to be the GDP rate which increased during the four years and this is also confirmed by the evident increase in the percentage of total investments. The population rate, too, soared in these years differently from the inflation rate which by and large kept moderate levels, even decreasing in 2015 and 2016. Within the group of sample countries, Jordan along with Morocco is the country where the inflation rate reached the lowest levels despite an increase forecast for 2017.

In order to make a clear comparison between Egypt and the rest of the countries and to grasp it more immediately, economic variables have been singled out and ordered according to the unit of measure used in the tables. Bar charts have been chosen as the best instrument to express numeric figures and show more effectively the trend of each country during the four years. Nevertheless, some bar charts miss the same information that were not available in the tables previously analyzed. The only one element added in these charts is the government net debt³³ which is another way of measuring the debt of a country.

Firstly, when focusing on the current account balance and the gross domestic product (Chart 1 and 2), what can be seen is that, at least in 2015 and even more in 2016, Egypt seems to have registered a negative balance account, meaning that it might have imported more than it exported. In light of this and observing the other figures, in those two years Egypt can be deemed to have been in a middle position since it did not register dramatic

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Government net debt is another macroeconomic tool useful to have an idea about a country's debt amount. It is obtainable by removing the financial assets and interests from the gross debt rate. Net debt is also more commonly referred to as "public debt". Net debt figures were elaborated through the "*IMF World Outlook Database 2016*"

current account imbalances like Saudi Arabia but, at the same time, its current account imbalance was higher than that of Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. As far as the GDP rate is concerned, it is immediately clear that Saudi Arabia is the country which performed best. However, despite the lack of information regarding Egypt for 2016 and 2017, it seems that its GDP rates proved to be the highest in the area second only to that of Saudi Arabia. It could be interesting to notice that in the first year from 2014 to 2015, after the Al-Sisi regime was installed, the Egyptian economy arguably took off.

Secondly, from the following charts it emerges that both the gross and the net debt rates (Chart 3 and 4) of the Egyptian government are the two highest ones along with those of Jordan within the whole set of countries as opposed to the figures relative to Saudi Arabia. Looking, then, at the figures about the government revenue and expenditure (Chart 5 and 6), it can be immediately seen that, respectively, Egypt registered the lowest rates in the area keeping this constant trend during the four years. Conversely, as far as the government total expenditure is concerned, in the same time frame, Egypt was fairly superior to the rest of the countries except for Saudi Arabia; somehow, these data may give some hints about the policy choices that the Al-Sisi government has made since it came in office. When considering the amount of national savings (Chart 7), it appears clear that Egypt did rather badly in the last four years. Particularly 2016 was the year in which the lowest rate of national savings in the entire area was reported, contrary to Morocco where national savings increased year after year. A similar trend can be registered also for the total investments rate (Chart 8) where Egypt performed worse than the other countries if considered in relative terms; however, what cannot be underestimated is the fact that, over the years, Egypt hugely increased the percentage of total investments if considered in absolute terms.

Finally, moving to the last three elements of the comparison (Chart 9, 10, 11), what can be claimed is that Egypt is reported to be the country where either the inflation rate or

the population amount are the highest. More specifically, as far as inflation is concerned, while it kept at a steady level in all the other countries, Egypt represents the odd one out as inflation soared dramatically year by year. Besides, also the population rate chart show that the Egyptian population counted incredibly more than that of the other ones, growing by an extremely rapid pace. If unemployment rate is taken into account, despite the missing figures about Jordan and Saudi Arabia for the last three years, it is evident that such a rate decreased more intensely in Egypt and Tunisia, but on the former at a slower pace than the latter.

This preliminary comparative framework seems to indicate that, despite several undeniable economic difficulties that Egypt has been coping with, the al-Sisi regime seems to have recently given the Egyptian economic system a major incentive and stimulus by fostering investments in order to make the country more competitive within the area.

Yet, there emerge some contradictory aspects which cannot be disregarded about the country and which dissuade from giving its overall economic performance a completely positive assessment. Therefore, it is also necessary to go beyond simple data and look into several sources other than figures and charts so as to fill the voids resulting from missing data. For instance, as it could be seen, databases did not provide more details about the Egyptian economy in 2016 and 2017 but some relevant information related to that can be found on two articles written by two local journalists on the “The New York Times”. The first one³⁴ highlights the dramatic economic hardship that Egypt has been dealing with triggered by an enduring sugar shortage occurred in the country in October 2016. Sugar, like many other products, is an essential daily-life component for the Egyptian population and, according to the same source, about 88 % of citizens accesses it through the help of government subsidies which have been dramatically cut down in 2016. This economic maneuver of cutting public subsidies could explain figures shown below indicating that

³⁴ Diaa, Hadid and Nour Youssef (2016). “Sweet-toothed Egypt endures a sugar crisis”, *The New York Times*, 21 October 2016

Egypt's government expenditure decreased year by year as opposed to government revenues which have arguably increased since 2015. This crisis and the government's reaction of indifference have brought about much unrest so far. However, such a crisis is not just related to sugar shortage but, as the second article³⁵ reports, also to the current weakness of the Egyptian national currency. This results from the choices made by the Egyptian Central Bank to devalue the pound and let it float freely so as to make the national economy more competitive, increase exports and foster tourism. Nevertheless, this economic intervention has arguably proven to be costlier than beneficial for the majority of citizens due to an inflation rate increasingly soaring as well as savings and salaries plummeting. Business groups are said to have hailed with delight the decision of the Central Bank whereas Egyptian people seem to have not. Furthermore, the article reports that the scarcity of currency reserves caused the government to control capital movement and to put constraints on withdrawals of travelers as well as on the US dollars' exchange thus giving birth to a black market for dollars' purchase.

All these details clearly explain that despite the rise in the investments amount and a decreased unemployment rate, the current economic development of Egypt might be questioned in terms of real effectiveness. The way in which government manages to share public resources and wealth could certainly reveal key aspects of the quality of the current Egyptian political regime and it would also enable to answer the core question about whether the regime has been leading a truly democratic consolidation process or it has not.

2.2 The military expenditure

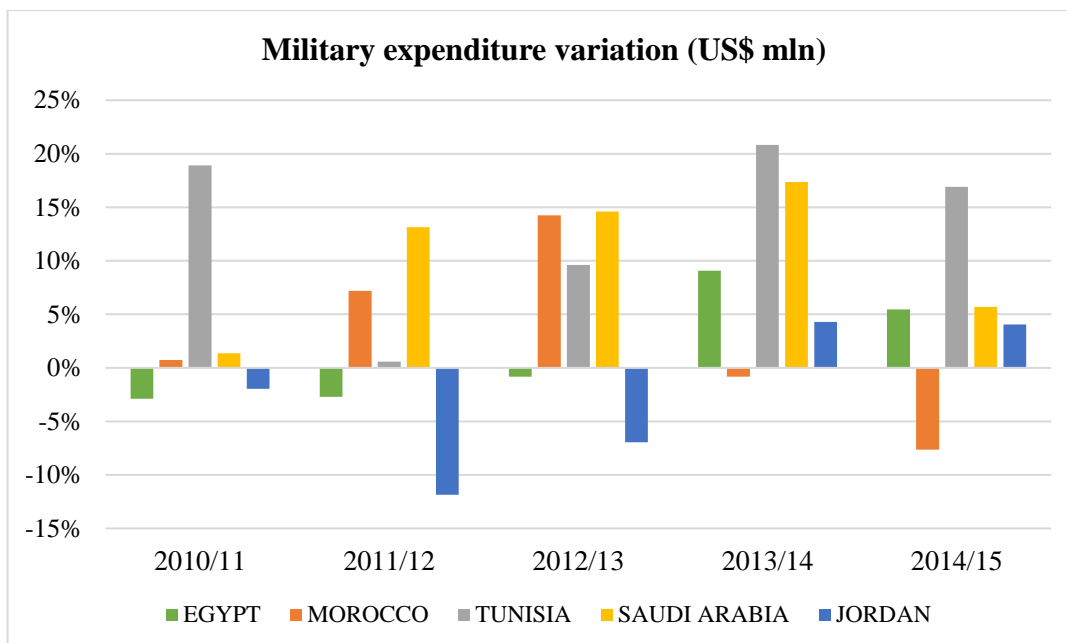
After presenting an overall comparative framework through several different variables, now it can be useful to draw the attention on a more specific one, that is to say,

³⁵ Diaa, Hadid and Nour Youssef (2016). "Egypt floats currency seeking to appease I.M.F but risks enraging poor", *The New York Times*, 4 November 2016

the military expenditure. It is widely known that every State has a defense budget and needs a minimum level of military equipment in order to be defined as such. In light of this, what is presented here in the chart below is a brief comparison of the military expenditure trend rate from 2010 to 2015 amongst the countries previously taken into account so as to understand how that share of public resources has been allocated in each country and how it has evolved. Unfortunately, it is not possible to go more in depth with further figures due to the fact that even the most recently updated databases do not provide any information concerning military expenditure relative to 2016 nor estimates for 2017. On the whole, what can be noticed is that the most remarkable increases in the military expenditure rate are reported to have happened since 2012 and, if Egypt is considered more specifically, between 2013 and 2014.

Nevertheless, as far as the military are concerned more generally within the Arab world, there is an authoritative source³⁶ which claims that, from a comparative point of view, the frequency of democratic sustainable transitions is the lowest in the Arab region and, moreover, the countries of the same region are on average the world's most repressive ones. (Elbadawi and Makdisi, 2013). Indeed, this also results in the fact that, according to some 2015 data from the World Bank, Middle-Eastern armies are reported to be the world's largest ones in terms of size compared to population and spending on the GDP percentage. Finally, in a comparative study of 88 countries considered in terms of dimension of the military, Egypt, along with Algeria, Libya, Syria and Yemen, stands out in the nine countries scoring the lowest index, thus meaning that it has one of the most sophisticated military bodies, which is a significant result for this analysis.

³⁶ Springborg, Robert (2016). "A shifting role of the military in Arab Politics? Cross-regional perspectives and implications for the future of civil-military relations in the region" In *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, edited by Albrecht H., Croissant A., Lawson F. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database

However, this can be fairly enough to state that Egypt has been arguably enhancing its military capability since 2013. Furthermore, by the growth in the military expenditure rate it can be also deduced that the role of the Egyptian army must have acquired more and more relevance, at least for what concerns the first two years of the Al-Sisi regime since more public resources were allocated to strengthen the power of the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF). However, it is right because of this sort of spillover effect, meaning that the military tasks have gone far beyond their scope getting hugely involved in the economy, too, that the national army, composed of nearly 2 million units, of which 500,000 are in active service, has become far less able to guarantee security and order over the last years.³⁷

At this point it may be important to remember that during the transitional phase under the Morsi presidency, the military played a leading role through the *Tamarod*³⁸ counterrevolutionary movement which would bring the country to the military coup of 3

³⁷ Colombo Silvia (2014). "The Military, Egyptian Bag-snatchers", *Insight Egypt* n.5 November 2014, IAI

³⁸ The movement was named after the Arabic word "تمرد" which means "rebellion".

July 2013 and pave the way for the new Al-Sisi presidency. By doing so, the general Al-Sisi, at the time Head of the Armed Forces, overthrew Morsi appointing Adly Mansur, Head of the Supreme Constitutional Court.

Therefore, even at the very first stages of the new regime's installation, the military are claimed not only to have played a political leadership role but, in particular, to have represented a strong ideological force supported by a strategically designed propaganda in a context in which the Egyptian political arena was extremely fragile and detached from people.

Indeed, during 2013, a critical year in which Egypt experienced turmoil and the profound effects of the Tahrir square events, the military action was very effective in delegitimizing the Muslim Brotherhood's government led by Morsi. This was proven by a national face-to-face survey³⁹ conducted by the Zogbi Research Services (ZRI) in July 2013 after carrying out a poll in May that same year. The survey was made on a sample of 5042 Egyptian citizens who were asked their opinion concerning the post-Morsi and post-Tamerod developments: on the one hand, if in May only 36% of the interviewed sample answered that they had hopes for a better evolution of the overall situation, on the other hand, what the ZRI survey found in July after the military coup was that those relying on the military intervention were nearly twice as much as in May, more precisely, 68%. Furthermore, the dossier reports that an overall 93% deemed the military as the best and most reliable channel for a concrete change in that specific circumstance.

It is very likely that this widespread sense of confidence toward the military was a result of the political vacuum left by the Muslim Brotherhood and by the FJP⁴⁰, at that moment, considered by people much focused on religious ideology and too far from citizens'

³⁹ Zogby J., Zogby E., Zogby S.H. (2013). *Dossier "Egyptian Attitudes, September 2013"*, Zogby Research Services ILC, Washington

⁴⁰ The Freedom and Justice Party was the Muslim Brotherhood official political party

real needs. Religion as a cohesive element for the population seemed to have weakened due to the rising disaffection over the Muslim Brotherhood. Again, the ZRI survey provides us with useful information concerning the Egyptian attitudes towards the different state actors. The survey reports that, confidence in the military (70%) still remains higher than that in the judiciary (54%) and the police (49%), despite a considerable decrease of confidence in the first two from July to September after the coup. This might explain better the reason why the military had few obstacles in declaring themselves as the only rescuer of Egypt's national reconciliation which was perceived as an essential goal for the future of the country, figures⁴¹ say.

The diffused hopes for a wind of change in the Egyptian political scenario paved the way for the rise of the new Al-Sisi regime in May 2014 with a landslide electoral victory, thus empowering the military role in the State, particularly, in terms of economic capability as Chart 12 above demonstrated. Consequently, what is remarkably important to say is that over the years the more pervasive presence of the military within the State affairs of the current regime has been arguably shaped and made concrete in one sector, particularly, which is the economy. This might have rendered seemingly difficult to understand what are the boundaries of the role of the military within the country, but it actually allows to disclose one face of the current regime, as it will be seen in the next paragraph.

2.3 The military inside the Egyptian economy: a well-established relationship

This paragraph will finally tackle the Egyptian economic and industrial development and how the military class has been involved in this sector. In order to address the preliminary question about whether current Egypt is a truly consolidating regime, a first general overview will be presented about state industries and companies listed in a table

⁴¹ Zogby J., Zogby E., Zogby S.H. (2013). *Dossier "Egyptian Attitudes, September 2013"*, Zogby Research Services ILC, Washington

below. Secondly, such a framework will contribute to understand the extent to which the military has been involved in the current Egypt's state business, revealing how profoundly intertwined the military elite and the national economy have come to be. What is more, this overall analysis will also justify some figures and data that can be found in the tables at the end of the chapter relatively to Egypt which, at first, could appear contradictory and misleading but, in light of this analysis, they are not.

2.3.1. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) and companies

Before analyzing more in depth the major business companies within the country, it must be taken into account that Egypt in the late '70s underwent a process of deindustrialization, which can be described by a peculiar trend: even though per capita income began to increase from that period, national economy drifted gradually to less capital-intensive assets and to more resource-intensive endowment of assets. Consequently, there was an increasing trend to specialization in sectors where productivity was lower and labor was less organized. According to some scholars, this provides a further explanation for Egypt's difficult path toward democratization over time as compared to other countries in the area (Elbadawi & Makdisi, 2011). This aspect also reveals how the Egyptian economy has been often mismanaged and more subject to inefficiencies, which might have determined more easily the survival of an authoritarian type of regime.

Anyway, in current Egypt, the majority of the relevant economic companies and industries present in the country can be roughly grouped into the following sectors: agriculture, automobiles, consumer electronics, IT technology, construction and real estate, manufacture, telephony, tourism and energy. The industries belonging to the mentioned sectors are the ones that make the hugest amount of profits and more ahead I will explain why. In order to have a clearer idea of what type of companies this paragraph will especially

deal with, the table below shows the most important state-owned enterprises⁴² (SOE) which are those owned directly by the government and operating under the authority of ministries or public actors. Furthermore, they have been chosen according to their significance in each sector for the current Egyptian economy.

| NAME | CHAIRMAN / CEO* | SECTOR |
|--|--|--|
| The Suez Canal Authority | Admiral Mohab Mohamed Hussien Mameesh | Transport |
| Suez Oil Processing Company | Admiral Mohab Mohamed Hussein Mameesh | Energy |
| El Saeed Contracting & Real Estate Investment Company | Ahmad Naim Ali Hasan Al Badrawi | Construction |
| Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS) | Mohamed Al-Masry | Energy |
| Talaat Moustafa Group Holding Company S.A.E | Tareek Talaat Moustafa | Real Estate, Manufacture, Construction, Agriculture |
| Egypt Electricity Holding Company (EEHC) | Gaber Desoki Mostafa Ibrahim | Energy |
| Engineering for the Petroleum & Process Industries (ENPPI) | Mohamed Abdel Rahman Hathout | Construction |

⁴² The SOEs mentioned in the table were selected from the online database “*Thomson Reuters, Zawya (2017)*” and further details about chairmen and CEOs were picked up from the official websites as well as other updated online sources

| | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------|
| Arab Petroleum Pipelines Co. | Mohamed Abdelhafez | Energy |
| Construction Authority for Potable Water and Wastewater | Mohamed Abdelhafez | Energy |
| Maadi Company for Reconstruction and Development | Fahd Mohamed Ahmed Derbala | Construction |
| El-Sewedy Electrics | Ahmed Sadek El Sewedy | Energy |
| EgyptAir | Safwat Mosallam | Tourism/Travel |

(Source: Thomson Reuters, Zawya MENA)

*CEO (Chief Executive Officer)

The companies reported in the table above are registered as publicly listed or owned by the government. Nowadays, despite a thriving percentage of Egyptian private companies and industries existing in each sector, a fair share of enterprises is managed by the Egyptian government through a hierarchical network of people, Chairmen of the Board or Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) who are, somehow, the representatives of certain economic interests lying behind the management of the company, more or less linked to the official government. Therefore, what is particularly important to analyze is the relationship that exists between a group of powerful economic enterprises which play a pivotal role in strategic sectors of the Egyptian economy and the government itself led by Al-Sisi along with the other several ministries. Once this link is found, it will be rather easy to grasp how the military elite, deeply rooted in the central political decision-making process, has achieved a strong economic leverage, drifting far from its original defensive role.

In order to assess the extent to which the military have been influencing the economic system in the country, it might be useful to present the way in which Egyptian companies

and public enterprises can be classified for more clarity, according to a classification made by a World Bank source⁴³. First of all, according to this source, Egypt counts about 260 public enterprises which fall into different regulatory regimes and can be grouped into four categories:

- *Economic authorities and service authorities* which can be more specifically defined as public authorities responsible for providing facilities and public services, whose activity is managed by the government in terms of prices control or budget control. Indeed, as far as service authorities are concerned, their budget is set by a government's decision, which make them slightly more dependent on governments than economic authorities.
- *Public business sector companies under specific ministries*: these companies are entirely under the government's control through the capillary activity of several ministries according to the sector in which each company operates. The majority of enterprises included in this category is basically concerned with strategic economic sectors such as energy (oil and gas), banking, housing, aviation, electricity.
- *Public business sector companies under the Ministry of Investment*: by and large, the sectors in which such companies operate are agriculture, chemical industry, transport, construction and tourism. Furthermore, back in 1991 a regulatory regime was established on this group of companies by means of a legal provision (Law 203) which aimed at privatizing the sector so as to make it more effective, more accountable by imposing, for instance, the creation of a board of directors.

⁴³ Raballand Gael, Veillot Gilles, Habhab Lydia and De Meneval Philippe (2015). "Middle East and North Africa. Governance reforms of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). *World Bank Report No. ACS15142*, August 2015

- *Private business corporations with state participation:* nowadays, a huge amount of companies in Egypt can be included in this category. In this case, either the Ministry of Investment or other more specific ministries are allowed to hold stakes although in a private business environment by creating *joint ventures*. Later in this paragraph, some relevant examples of this category will be provided.

Moreover, there are also cases in which some ministries control a fairly high number of SOEs or public companies and this often results in internal meetings taking place amongst shareholders, the ministry itself and the board of directors where political appointees are very frequent. This might be often an effective way of accommodating different spheres of activities fostering the creation of links between private and public economic interests as well as a model of mixed corporate governance.

In light of the subdivision presented above, all this seems logical, obvious and functional to a better control over the market forces. However, it should not be taken for granted that a regulatory regime exists in the Egyptian economy and over the years it might have turned out to be counterproductive in terms of resource sharing and firms' productivity. But what are basically these regulatory frameworks about and what was the rationale behind their creation? And, more importantly, have they always proven to be beneficial for the Egyptian market? These are very complex questions to answer since regulations in the Egyptian economy are also strongly related to the issue of political connections and, consequently, of privileges, which are believed to have produced more and more market distortions over the last years.

There are a notable literature and researches concerning the effects of regulatory privileges since they came to be perceived as an issue as well as a source of extreme

inequality and loss of market competitiveness. It was under the Mubarak regime that economic disparity and state mismanagement prevailed, contributing enormously to the Arab revolts begun in Tahrir Square and rapidly spread over the country.

Many empirical studies have been carried out on the topic but there has been one⁴⁴, in particular, which looked further into the state-business relations in Egypt addressing the issue of productivity in the Egyptian firms. What the research basically focuses on is whether the politically connected firms enjoy more profits, more access to credits and more protection from other firms or they do not. Evidence has shown that connected firms have been strongly favored by government through easier access to licenses, trade protection, energy subsidies and a considerable amount of credits as well as financial guarantees. This intense state-business partnership seems to have intensified so much that many strategic sectors such as oil, gas, banking, telephony have acquired an incredibly great advantage as opposed those small firms out of government's reach.

Besides, within the realm of politically connected holding companies or investment funds, it should be no surprise to find not only public enterprises but also private companies. Indeed, as far as the latter are concerned, I previously mentioned a particular type of private investments called *joint ventures* which involve state participation, as well. Joint ventures are becoming more and more diffuse as a powerful channel for businessmen's higher profits. More often, owner of politically connected companies belong to an exclusive family-network system strictly close to the current political leadership giving them the opportunity to influence the decision-making process within boards, parliamentary committees and parties. This could be empirically fitting also into the current state-business relations occurring under the Al-Sisi regime, as it will be demonstrated in the next paragraph.

⁴⁴ Diwan Ishac, Keefer Philip, Schiffbauer Marc (2015). "*Pyramid capitalism: political connections, regulation and firm productivity in Egypt*", Policy Research Working Paper 7354, July 2015. Macroeconomics and Fiscal Management Global Practice Group: World Bank Group

Therefore, going back to the previous questions, regulations seem to have been adopted inappropriately without taking into account their possible effects on the Egyptian economy as a whole. On the one hand, some scholars have elaborated an opinion according to which politically connected firms are more profitable due to the protection they have from high government taxation rather than the privileges themselves obtained; on the other hand, certain scholars, like the authors⁴⁵, raised concern about the misallocation of resources across the firms in the sector as well as the gradual decrease of growth which would result from this privileged state-business mechanism. Arguably, there is also wide empirical evidence that unconnected firms are left behind while the connected ones survive market competition but, more importantly, do not provide an equal distribution of employment. This is proven by the fact that jobs in the country are more concentrated in micro or small local firms which rely on few employees and are, however, less productive than few large firms. For instance, data suggest that these small firms with fewer than ten employees account for 72 % of aggregate employment (Hussain and Schiffbauer, 2014; World Bank, 2014). As a result, this might be considered as one major source of inequality still persistent in the Egyptian economy regardless of the increase estimated in the investment rates for 2016 and 2017; however, in light of this analysis, what should be not overlooked is that a soaring investment rate for the country, as reported in the figures above, might not necessarily be translated into an overall economic growth thus justifying some contradictory trends found in Egypt over the last four years.

2.3.2 Conflict of interests and the military's vast economic hegemony

What has been reported so far in the previous paragraphs describes a more and more frequent trend which had already begun in the '90s and went consolidating both under the

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, p. 61

Mubarak's regime and under the current Al-Sisi presidency. One of the leading factors behind the Egyptian 2011 upheavals has not been eradicated yet. Certainly, the trend described above is also much linked to some basic aspects of the Arab politics which historical analyses can explain well. Patron-client relationships have always been a constant trend in Middle-East politics and the military, aware of the extremely relevant role played in contributing to national economic growth, took advantage of this power imbalance and, as a result, they became the authors of several political overturns during the last seventy years supported by a strong ideology and a sense of nationalism. Public sector where the military seized their prestige was a key sector for the economic development of the country and this is the reason why they came to acquire a pivotal role in the industrialization process, claims Shana Marshall⁴⁶.

However, globalization reached barracks, too. By this, I mean that also the military seem to have perceived the consequences of an increasingly globalized world where greater power is held by those in possess of economic capability and a considerable amount of resources. Nowadays, low politics have arguably prevailed on the high politics and matters such as security and defense, somehow, have prioritized the economic power itself. This transformation can be mirrored in the shift of the military role from a security-giver body to wealthy businessmen profoundly committed in state affairs, as also figures on military expenditure have indicated. Furthermore, it might be also claimed that this shift has been one possible way of surviving radical political changes stemming from a more or less diffuse trend towards democracy in the current globalized world.

After guiding the transition process after the 2011 revolts, the Egyptian military carried out a process of personal consolidation through two different ways: firstly, by political means with the help of government and several key ministries and, secondly, by

⁴⁶ Marshall Shana (2015). *"The Egyptian armed forces and the remaking of an economic empire"*. Carnegie Middle East Center, April 2015. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for international peace

strengthening their economic partnerships with foreign and national joint ventures and taking the control over the most outstanding investment projects stipulated in the country.

What was, then, the most fruitful political channel that the military in the post-Morsi era used in order to consolidate their power? Undoubtedly, the statutory body of the Superior Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), currently led by the President Al-Sisi along with other 20 senior officers, which proves how strong the bond between the military and political elites has remained so far. Moreover, nearly at the end of the transition process, it was the SCAF which played the most decisive counterrevolutionary role by overthrowing Morsi with a military coup on the wave of a general dissatisfaction towards the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, the SCAF which was generally appealed in case of national emergency or crisis, despite its temporary suspension, did maintain a pervasive decision-making role even after the transition period and with the installation of the new regime providing the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) with several strategic state offices.

It must not be forgotten that, in the last few years, the SCAF has even gone far beyond its scope, raising serious concern due to the allegations of human rights abuses and torture cases frequently reported by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

But it is also important to stress another point about the constant military interference in the national economy. On October 27, it was Al-Sisi himself who issued a law formalizing the role of the army in domestic security and widening the jurisdiction of military courts. Basically, this legislation enabled the military to assist police in guarding public facilities such as power stations, gas pipelines, railway stations, roads and bridges. Furthermore, the law would allow the use of military tribunals to try civilians charged with offenses such as blocking roads or attacking public property, argues the journalist Kouddous (2014).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Sharif Abdel Kouddous (2014). “*Egypt’s 1984*”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 October 2014

The other channel through which the military have gradually made their way to a powerful economic role is joint ventures and there are further examples showing how conflict of interests and political connections, often intentionally kept off record, have happened even in the current regime. For instance, several scholars have reported cases such as that of the National Bank of Egypt which provided a \$20 million credit facility for a petroleum company called “Thawra” since the military possessed some stakes in it (Badr, 2014); or again, the case of some shares of the telephone company Vodafone transferred to the military ownership (Atallah, 2014). Last but not least, even the remarkable Suez Canal Corridor Development project led by the Suez Canal Authority⁴⁸ is managed by the military and under the supervision of the EAF’s Engineering Authority. Another interesting detail is that foreign ventures that Egyptian businessmen have been sharing profits with mostly come from the Gulf countries, particularly from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. These countries are, indeed, wealthy enough to fund investment projects and the development of big infrastructures in strategic sectors for the military and the current regime is keen on maintaining such economic networks. In addition to this, it must be remembered that the Egyptian government has not even missed another opportunity to consolidate its outward economic push in 2015. This was the year in which ENI, the Italian leading company in the energy sector, discovered considerable amounts of gas in the Mediterranean Sea thanks to the oil-well “Zohr 1x” and, as a result, signed two groundbreaking concession agreements with the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS) in order to strengthen its position in the country and to relaunch its exploration activities in the Egyptian’s offshore.

Still, the military presence in state affairs is not only found in ventures, companies and SOEs but it can be detected also in the political space around the regime and the

⁴⁸ As indicated in the table above, the Suez Canal Authority is a public and state-owned authority having legal personality but basically in the hands of the military elite since its creation in 1956 after the Suez Crisis

government, which is a clear example of conflict of interests since within this group of MPs there were also some who belonged to powerful sectors of the Egyptian economy.

More specifically, in April 2016, the national newspaper Al-Ahram⁴⁹ reported that some high-profile parliamentary members affiliated with a group in support of the Egyptian president called “Support Egypt” won 25 seats in several Parliament’s committees, a few of them even in an uncontested fashion. Some names are mentioned in the article such as Mohamed Al-Sewedi (chairman of the Egyptian Federation of Industries and one of the leading producers of electric cables and engineering equipment), appointed Head of the Industry Committee. And again, Talaat Al-Sewedi, relative to Mohamed Al-Sewedi and a leading official from the “Al-Wafd” party, elected chairman of the Energy and Environment Committee. Mohamed Farag Amer, an important industrialist from Alexandria and a Support Egypt official, was elected Head of the Youth and Sports Committee (he is also chairman of the so-called “Alexandria's Semouha Sporting Club”). And the high-profile Alexandria businesswoman and "Support Egypt" MP, Sahar Talaat Mostafa was elected as Head of the Tourism and Civil Aviation Committee. (Mostafa's father, Talaat, was a major Alexandria contractor and MP in the 1990s like her two brothers, Tarek and Hesham). It is not random that some of these names mentioned here can be also found in the table above listing the Egyptian SOEs. Moreover, beside a wide array of foreign partners endorsing the military economic power and their contribution in further legitimizing the regime, it is relevant to hold into consideration also that under Sisi’s regime, the Long Live Egypt Fund was created as another relevant source of financing for all of the investment projects promoted by the regime. Accordingly, the fund was an extremely relevant channel for national private donors, many of which have been mentioned in the table above. Financial operations within the fund are not entirely disclosed; however, according to some sources,

⁴⁹ Gamal Essam El-Din (2016). “*Pro-sisi bloc sweeps elections of Egypt’s Parliament 25 committees*”, 23 April 2016, Ahram Online Newspaper

the fund is believed to be subject to Egypt's central auditing bureau and other components of the establishment but, not surprisingly, under Sisi's supervision.

Therefore, it is now easier to deduce how the considerable presence of wealthy businessmen highly involved in the national economy and occupying a relevant political role in parliamentary committees has turned out to be costly and unfair for the entire country. There is no doubt that such an institutional setting has posed a serious threat to the democratic development of a country where political decision-making is corrupted and distorted, economic resources are misallocated and the military enhance their repressive role in a pervasive way, as it will be seen in the fourth chapter.

To sum up, it can be claimed that, on the whole, Egypt's economic situation did not improve and, except probably for the first year, it performed far worse than the regime supporters expected. In a way, this could have been easily forecast since the resources allocation in the hands of the military, that soon revealed its true face, ended up with a shrinking labor market, a bad fiscal situation and some specific economic sectors deeply affected, most notably the manufacturing and textile industry. More specifically, it has been reported that after the January 25 Revolution, impoverishment rate has generally increased and the regime, in the end, has done little to ensure a more equal resource sharing. Wealth has become more and more concentrated in the hands of corrupt bureaucrats, rent-seeking military businessmen and few companies could keep up with the extensive privatizations enacted by the regime bringing about further market distortions and inefficiency. Labor force as a whole and non-military or independent companies were struck by the new regime economic policy. Also tourism was affected by decreasing performance triggered by the Luxor and Sinai attacks in 2015; as a result, also fiscal situation is at stake due to decreased foreign exchange reserves. In addition, less opportunities currently remain for younger

people who still strive to find a job which is not related to the military field and, finally, the growing uncertainty in the country, due to terrorism and to the Libyan borders' instability, results in a negative spillover effect on the economy as a whole.

Naturally, a worse economic situation is likely to threaten the legitimacy of the regime itself and the fact that dissatisfaction has not yet openly arisen to the same extent as in 2011, does not mean that such a situation can be sustainable in the long run and, above all, does not imply that the military themselves will remain as strong as they currently are.

APPENDIX

Chart 1

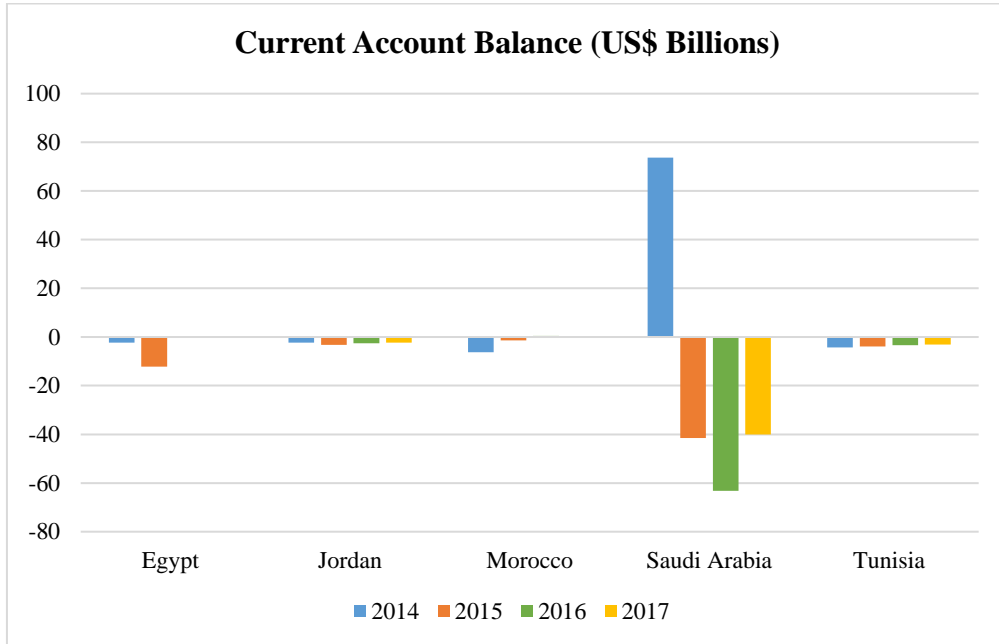


Chart 2

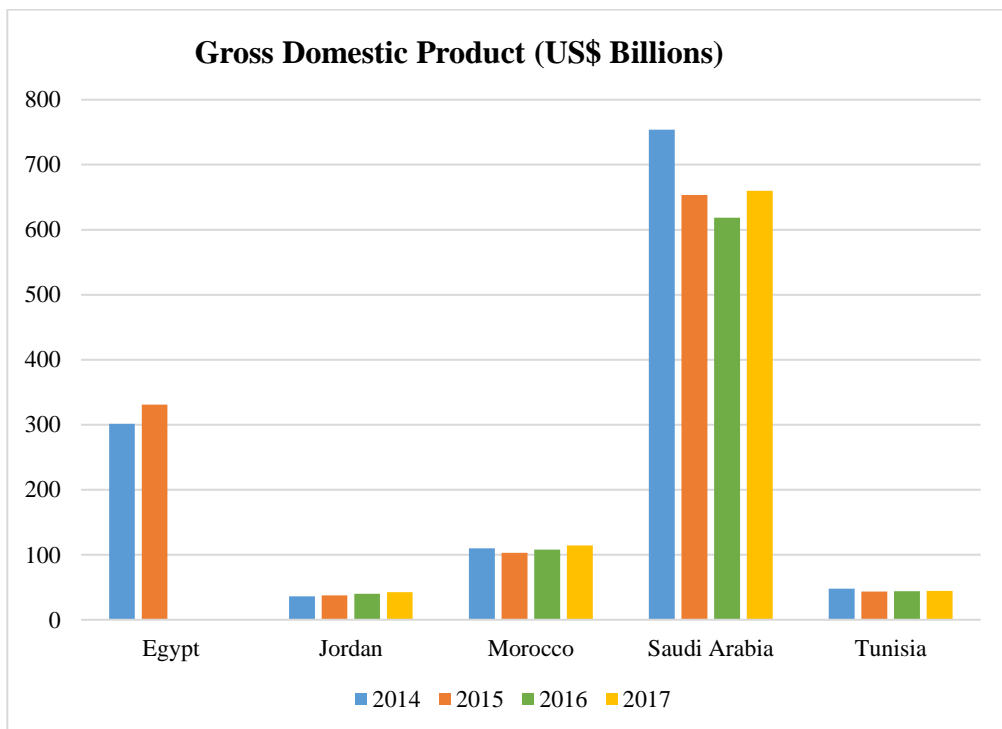


Chart 3

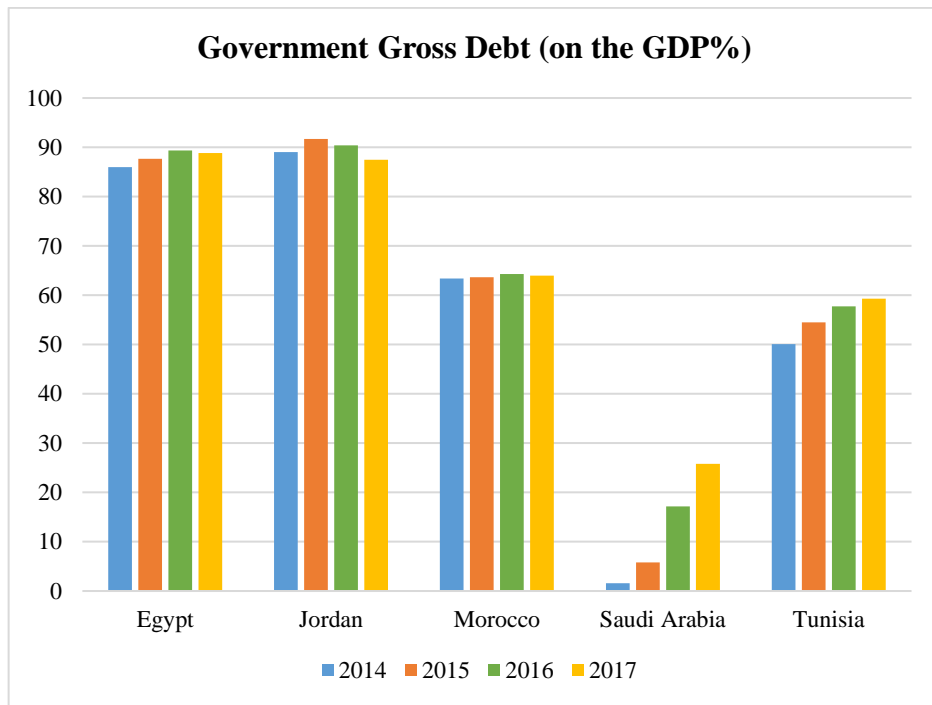


Chart 4

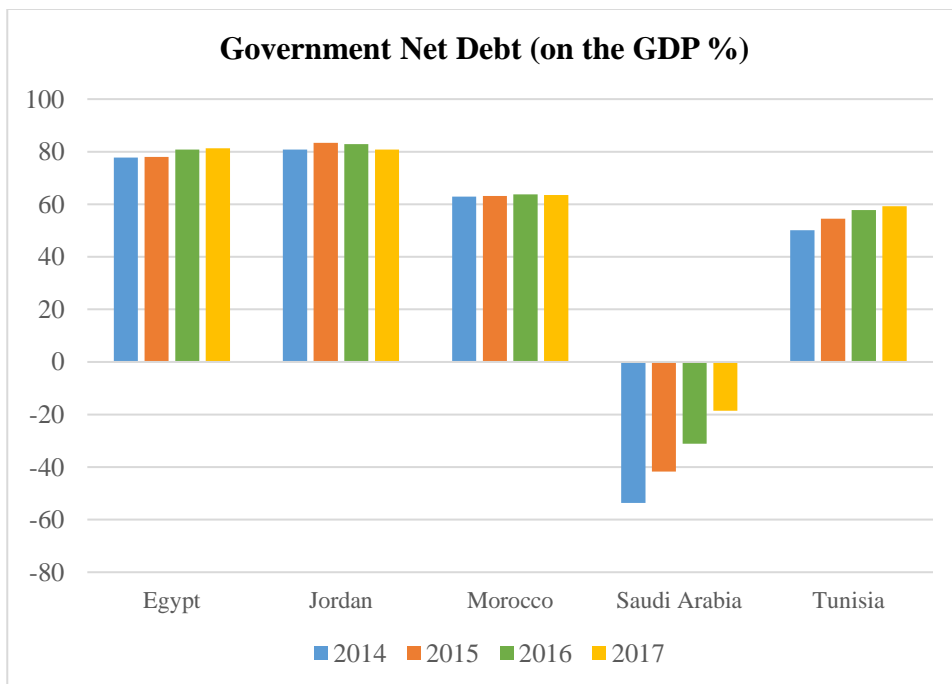


Chart 5

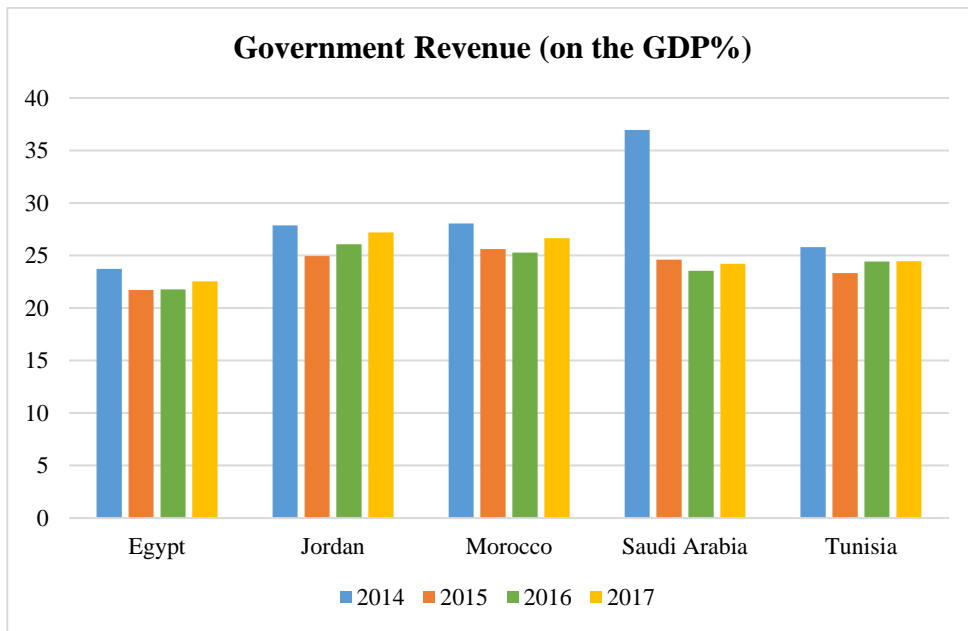


Chart 6

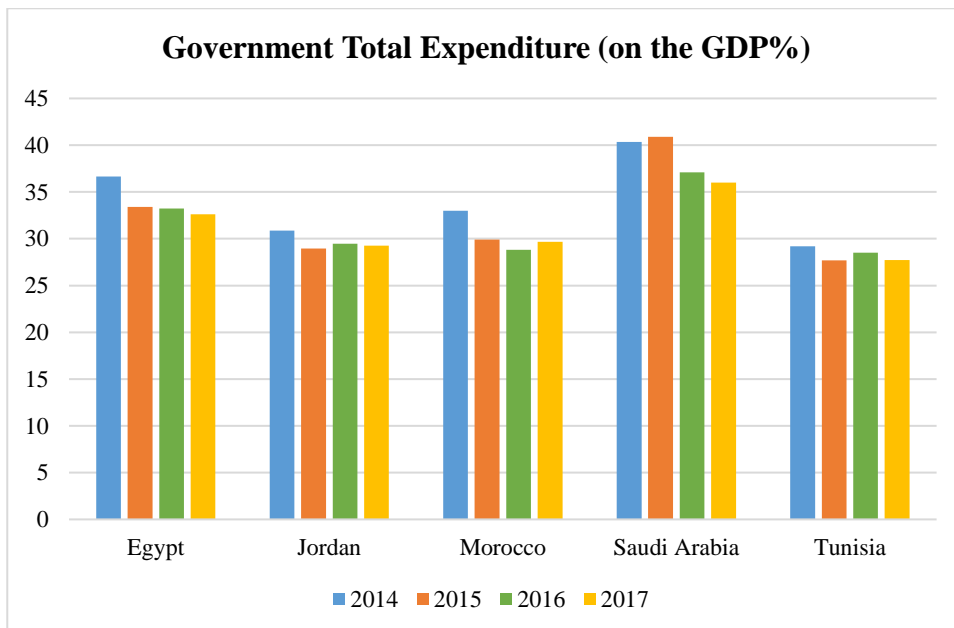


Chart 7

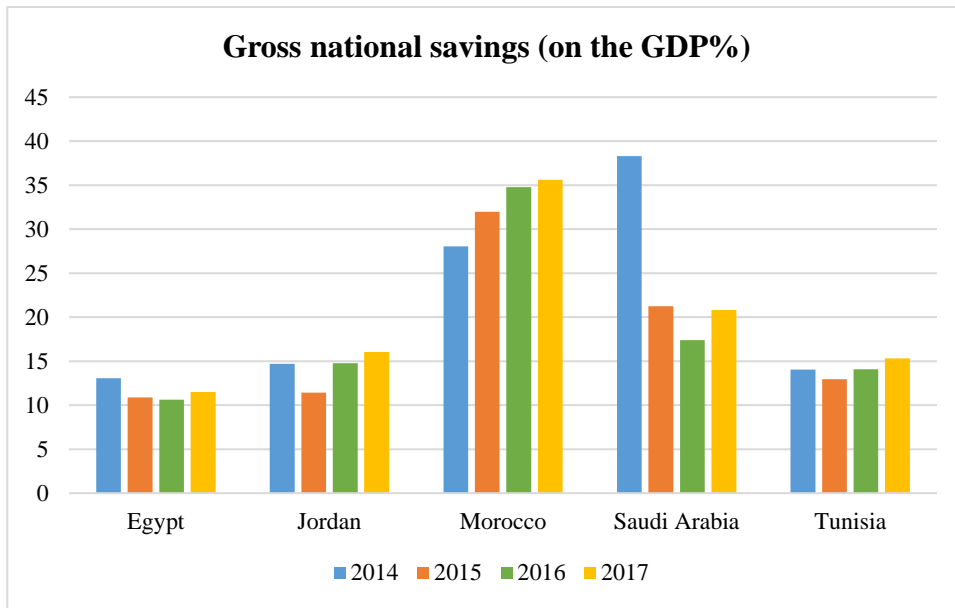


Chart 8

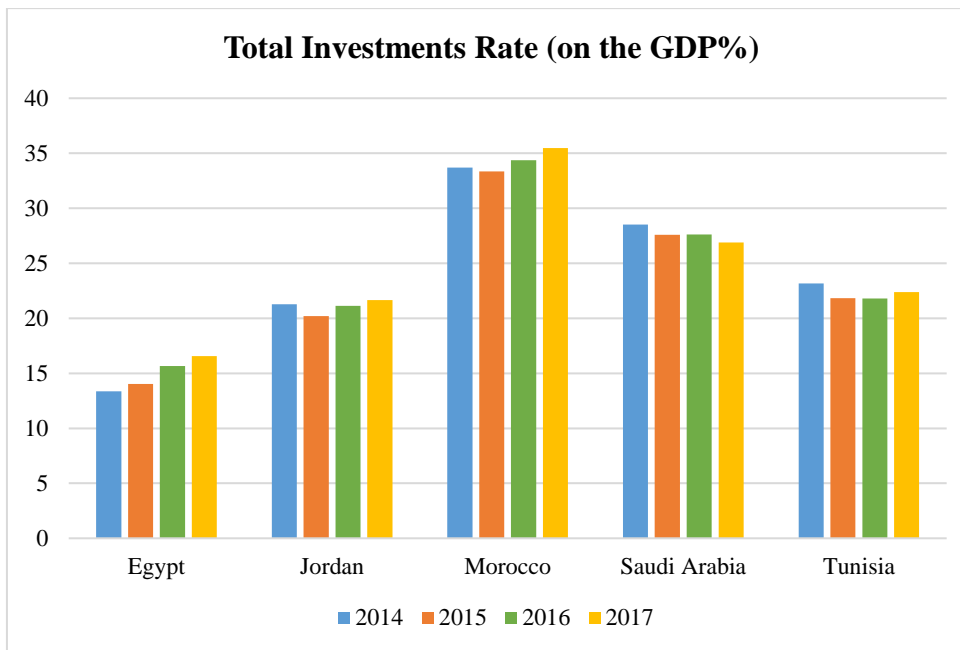


Chart 9

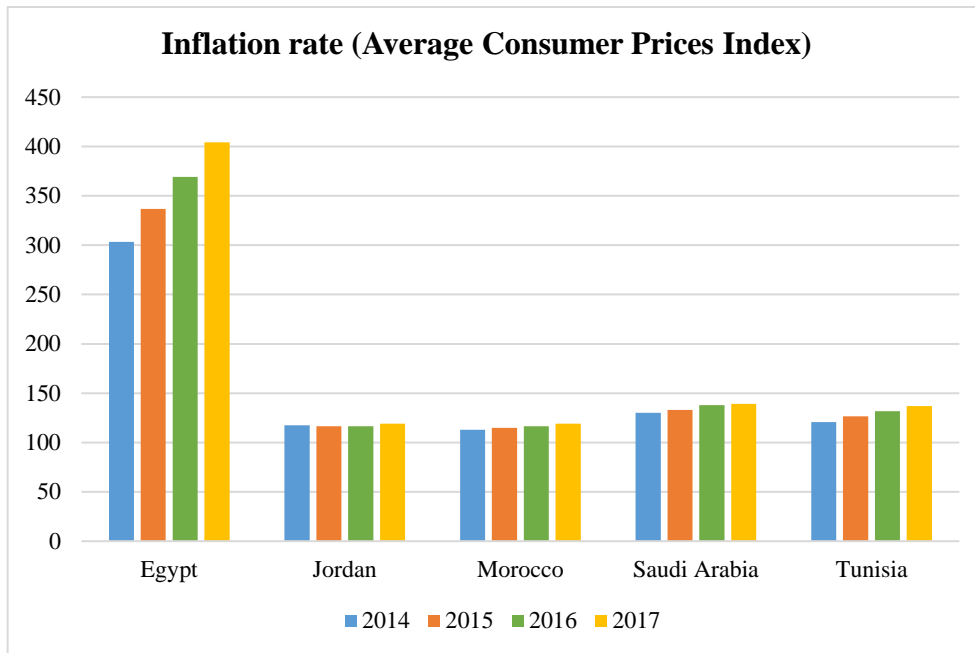


Chart 10

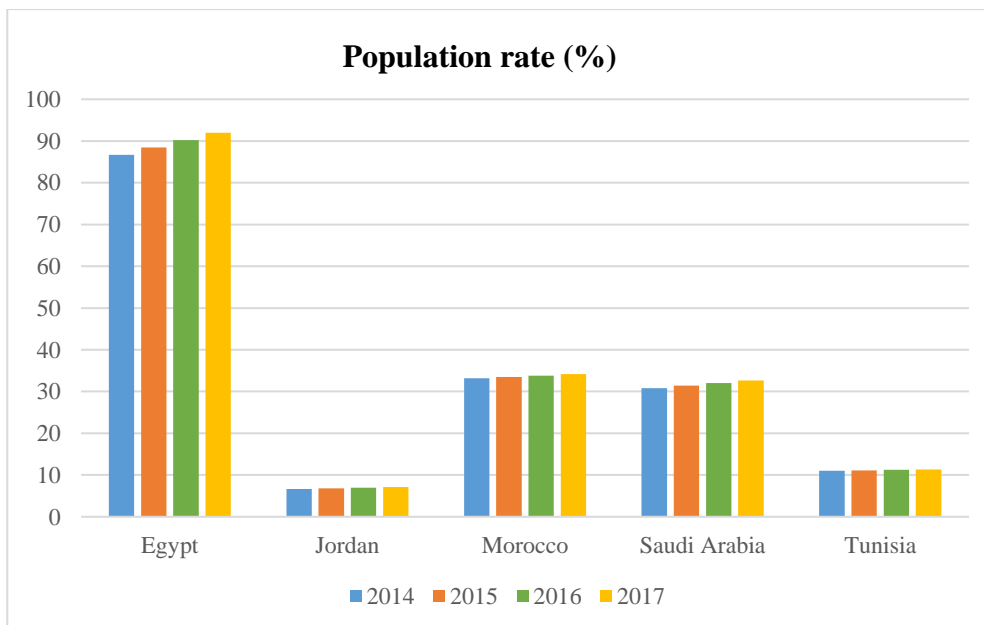
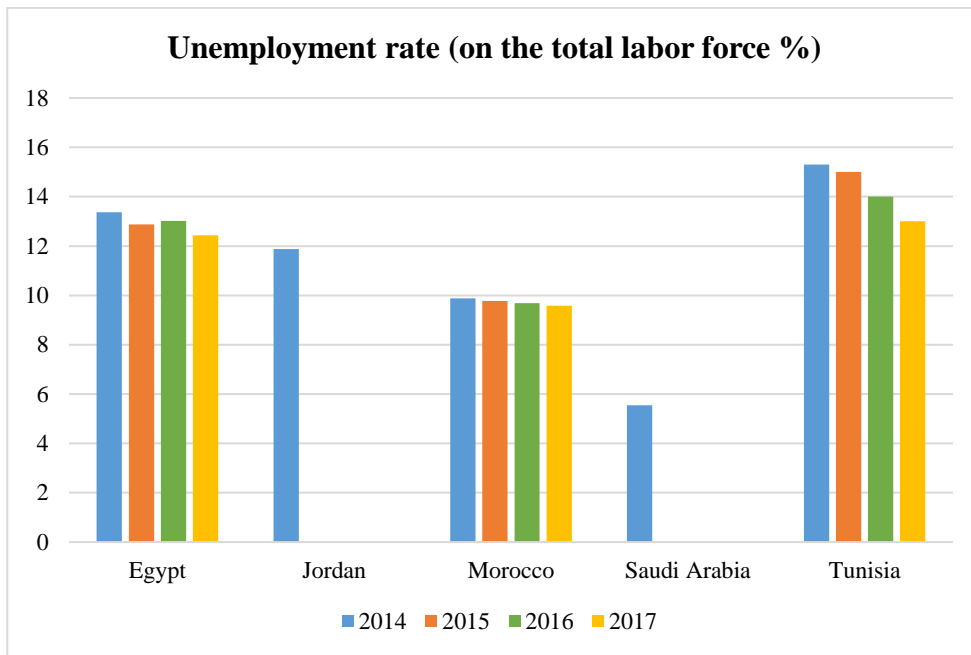


Chart 11



TABLES

| TABLE 1 (EGYPT) | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Current Account Balance (Billions) | -2.356 | -12.182 | n/a | n/a |
| General government gross debt (on GDP%) | 85.984 | 87.655 | 89.35 | 88.818 |
| General government revenue (on GDP%) | 23.738 | 21.701 | 21.777 | 22.532 |
| General government expenditure (on GDP %) | 36.66 | 33.397 | 33.228 | 32.627 |
| Gross Domestic Product (US\$ billions) | 301.391 | 330.765 | n/a | n/a |
| Gross National Savings (on GDP %) | 13.044 | 10.866 | 10.611 | 11.51 |
| Inflation rate* | 303.473 | 336.838 | 369.199 | 404.092 |
| Population (Millions) | 86.7 | 88.434 | 90.203 | 92.007 |
| Total Investment (on GDP%) | 13.35 | 14.044 | 15.665 | 16.569 |
| Unemployment rate* | 13.365 | 12.881 | 13.015 | 12.437 |

World Economic Outlook Database April 2016, *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

* Inflation rate as reported here on the tables is expressed by the average consumer prices index

*Unemployment rate data are computed out of the total labor force

| TABLE 2 (MOROCCO) | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Current Account Balance (Billions) | -6.226 | -1.413 | 0.457 | 0.149 |
| General government gross debt (on GDP%) | 63.374 | 63.667 | 64.311 | 63.968 |
| General government revenue (on GDP %) | 28.044 | 25.602 | 25.271 | 26.639 |
| General government expenditure (on GDP %) | 32.987 | 29.899 | 28.804 | 29.683 |
| Gross Domestic Product (US\$ billions) | 110.009 | 103.142 | 108.096 | 114.342 |
| Gross National Savings (on GDP %) | 28.029 | 31.977 | 34.788 | 35.614 |
| Inflation rate* | 113.061 | 114.87 | 116.594 | 118.925 |
| Population (Millions) | 33.179 | 33.503 | 33.827 | 34.15 |
| Total Investment (on GDP%) | 33.689 | 33.347 | 34.365 | 35.483 |
| Unemployment rate* | 9.879 | 9.779 | 9.679 | 9.579 |

World Economic Outlook Database April 2016, *International Monetary Fund (IM*

| TABLE 3 (TUNISIA) | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Current Account Balance (Billions) | -4.341 | -3.875 | -3.405 | -3.126 |
| General government gross debt (on GDP%) | 50.106 | 54.502 | 57.748 | 59.271 |
| General government revenue (on GDP%) | 25.811 | 23.325 | 24.427 | 24.447 |
| General government expenditure (on GDP %) | 29.186 | 27.689 | 28.516 | 27.732 |
| Gross Domestic Product (US\$ billions) | 47.605 | 43.581 | 43.989 | 44.363 |
| Gross National Savings (on GDP %) | 14.048 | 12.947 | 14.064 | 15.323 |
| Inflation rate* | 120.776 | 126.635 | 131.682 | 136.877 |
| Population (Millions) | 10.998 | 11.11 | 11.224 | 11.338 |
| Total Investment (on GDP%) | 23.166 | 21.838 | 21.804 | 22.37 |
| Unemployment rate* | 15.3 | 15 | 14 | 13 |

World Economic Outlook Database April 2016, *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

| TABLE 4 (SAUDI ARABIA) | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Current Account Balance (Billions) | 73.758 | -41.479 | -63.165 | -40.061 |
| General government gross debt (on GDP%) | 1.567 | 5.809 | 17.192 | 25.766 |
| General government revenue (on GDP %) | 36.945 | 24.613 | 23.549 | 24.201 |
| General government expenditure (on GDP %) | 40.346 | 40.885 | 37.097 | 36.014 |
| Gross Domestic Product (US\$ billions) | 753.832 | 653.219 | 618.274 | 659.661 |
| Gross National Savings (on GDP %) | 38.297 | 21.249 | 17.406 | 20.806 |
| Inflation rate* | 130.094 | 132.941 | 137.956 | 139.285 |
| Population (Millions) | 30.77 | 31.386 | 32.013 | 32.654 |
| Total Investment (on GDP%) | 28.513 | 27.599 | 27.623 | 26.879 |
| Unemployment rate* | 5.548 | n/a | n/a | n/a |

World Economic Outlook Database April 2016, *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

| TABLE 5 (JORDAN) | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Current Account Balance (Billions) | -6.226 | -1.413 | 0.457 | 0.149 |
| General government gross debt (on GDP%) | 89.049 | 91.683 | 90.399 | 87.446 |
| General government revenue (on GDP %) | 27.876 | 24.96 | 26.081 | 27.211 |
| General government expenditure (on GDP %) | 30.864 | 28.963 | 29.453 | 29.258 |
| Gross Domestic Product (US\$ billions) | 35.878 | 37.62 | 39.795 | 42.299 |
| Gross National Savings (on GDP %) | 14.681 | 11.42 | 14.77 | 16.03 |
| Inflation rate* | 117.431 | 116.401 | 116.609 | 119.092 |
| Population (Millions) | 6.675 | 6.824 | 6.976 | 7.131 |
| Total Investment (on GDP%) | 21.266 | 20.188 | 21.137 | 21.65 |
| Unemployment rate* | 11.875 | n/a | n/a | n/a |

World Economic Outlook Database April 2016, *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

Complementary paths to consolidation: legitimation and cooptation

“The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty.”

J.J Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1972)

After the analysis conducted in the previous chapter, it has emerged that the Arab revolutions, as a whole, did not mean for all the Arab countries a transition toward a consolidated democracy at the end of the day. There is no doubt that what the current Egyptian regime represents today is definitely far from the idea of democracy as well as of democratic consolidation.

Yet, all the same, a form of consolidation occurred with the Al-Sisi’s regime but not in terms of democratic development. Therefore, it is necessary to look into the failures of such a political evolution, which, in turn, might be deemed as the points of strength of the current ruling elite. Exploring the mechanism through which the regime succeeded in consolidating and restoring the prior situation does not mean that the Arab revolutions were useless or ineffective. They actually played an extremely relevant role in fostering social mobilization and changing people’s perspective, as the last chapter will explain.

In this chapter, what will be analyzed more in depth, instead, are the legitimation and cooptation processes along with all the dynamics linked to these aspects. The two processes are deemed as the key elements for an authoritarian or autocratic regime to stand still as well as to remain stable and durable and an accurate analysis of them cannot be ignored when

tackling the consolidation of a military regime, especially when this consolidation, as in the case of current Egypt, may happen in subtler ways.

The process building legitimation involves so many aspects that its analysis encompasses not only the politics, but also psycho-sociological and communicative processes that are worth-discovering if we want to have a more complete idea of the extent to which autocratic regimes can be stable and of the reasons why Egypt, in particular, found itself under the military rule again. Moreover, in the chapter, some empirical demonstrations will be provided in order to comprehend more in depth and define more accurately this new process of consolidation.

3.1 Strategies of legitimation and cooptation

From a legal point of view, a terminological distinction must be made between the notions of legitimation and legitimacy. While the former is the process considered through all its different shades, whereby the ruler pursues the legitimacy to govern on the ruled, the latter is more intended as a right, a value or, according to the definition provided by Habermas⁵⁰, a “normative validity claim” (Habermas, 1976). The meanings of legitimacy and legitimation might overlap easily but in order to better grasp the difference between the two terms, it is to be considered that legitimacy is a necessary and essential condition to have legitimation and, moreover, it has been defined by literature either as a normative or a descriptive notion having two dimensions. There is a subjective dimension, which stems from the citizens’ rather than the ruler’s belief in the right to govern, using the Weberian definition⁵¹. Also Lipset attempts to give a definition of legitimacy by claiming that it is “the capacity of the system to engender and maintain a belief that existing institutions are the

⁵⁰ Habermas, J. (1976). Legitimation problems in modern state. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 17, 39-61.

⁵¹ Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Univ of California Press.

most appropriate or proper ones for the society”.⁵² By contrast, the objective dimension is related to the justification necessary to be entitled to rule, which are equally essential for this discourse. What will be taken into consideration here is legitimation, instead, which implies a more constant and reiterative need to justify the govern by the ruler so as to generate consent and support and to make the regime as durable as possible thus giving a more dynamic and concrete acceptance to legitimacy itself over time. In addition, legitimation takes place in specific manners depending on the political system with its actors and structures as well as on the existing constraints that may arise. This is the reason why building up legitimation often goes with other complementary processes such as cooptation and repression, which will be covered later. Therefore, legitimation can be said to represent the process through which the justification to rule is provided.

Before going into the depth of the legitimation and cooptation processes as the main variables of a regime stability, it is necessary to start from a consideration. Many studies have been conducted concerning the difficulty to establish democracy in the Arab world and much of the attention was drawn on the lack of favorable conditions for a Western-like liberalization. Aware of this, the aim of the next paragraphs, instead, is to provide explanations for this trend by focusing on the opposite perspective, that is to say, analyzing what makes Middle Eastern autocratic regimes enduring and resilient. By doing so, it turns out to be easier to shed light on how the current Egyptian regime has achieved a new form of consolidation and what have been the mechanisms behind it. Literature concerning authoritarianism began to give groundbreaking contributions in the ‘80s when authors like O’Donnell introduced the concept of “bureaucratic authoritarianism⁵³” meaning the

⁵² Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy. *American political science review*, 53(01), 69-105. In Thyen, K., & Gerschewski, J. (2017). Legitimacy and protest under authoritarianism: explaining student mobilization in Egypt and Morocco during the Arab uprisings. *Democratization*, 1-20.

⁵³ O’Donnell, G. A. (1988). *Bureaucratic authoritarianism: Argentina, 1966-1973, in comparative perspective*. Univ of California Press.

increasing rise of a specific elite whose main components were the military. According to O' Donnell, what mostly emerged from this scenario was the pivotal role played by the socio-economic dimension in the survival of certain authoritarian regimes. At this point, in one of his works, Gerschewski⁵⁴ also underlined the increasing presence of a pattern typical of the Middle Eastern area which is neopatrimonialism whereby rulers established a social pact with citizens. This was, somehow, a way for several regimes of the area to strengthen the legitimation process thus making their regimes seemingly more stable.

Starting from the legitimation process, it must be said that, recently, it had been put aside in the several research strands about democratization since it was deemed less relevant to understand how an autocracy remains stable over time. Surely, literature agrees on the fact that it is not the only one factor determining the maintenance of the regime, but it is somehow needed for its survival and, hence, it cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, I share the view expressed by Gerschewski in the same work above mentioned⁵⁵, in which he stresses the extreme importance of including legitimation in this analysis.

From an historical point of view, legitimation was built through different ways and in the totalitarian regime type, for instance, it was achieved with ideology. According to Hannah Arendt, as already said in the first chapter, the latter was, along with terror, one of the two main pillars on which totalitarian regimes were based (Arendt, 1957). Also Friedrich and Brzezinski⁵⁶ argue that ideology is a “well-developed, official doctrinal system, a reasonably coherent corpus” whereby the course of history is rejected or regulated. Differently from the totalitarian context, autocratic regimes seek legitimacy through other channels; amongst these there is the construction of a “mission”, using the term that Kneuer

⁵⁴ Gerschewski, J. (2013). The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes. *Democratization*, 20(1), 13-38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Friedrich, C. (1956). Brzezinski, Z. *Totalitarianism, Dictatorship and Autocracy*.

adopted in one of his works.⁵⁷ The author highlights the necessity for autocratic regimes of today to build a new type of legitimizing discourse distinguishing it from ideology. His critical elaboration stems from the contributions of Linz and his concept of “mentality” (Linz, 1975) and Gerring (Gerring, 1997). Terminologically, the former does not separate the concept of mentality from that of ideology, both meaning “ways of thinking and feeling”⁵⁸, whereas the latter separates the terms, indicating that what the autocratic regimes need to build today in order to maintain stable and durable is a more flexible and less elaborated political culture whose goal is not to pervade the entire society, as in totalitarian regimes, but only to prevent any subversive actions.

There was a research strand, the neo-institutionalist one in particular, which provided an interesting insight concerning legitimation and it helps to understand the extent to which an autocratic regime needs to rely on different sources of legitimation in order to survive. Gerschewski (2013) goes in depth beginning with the distinction made by Easton⁵⁹ between “diffuse” and “specific” support. From a perspective like the Eastonian input and output system, diffuse support is what the regime actually is or represents, whereas the specific support derives from the output or the regime’s responsiveness to people’s demands. It can be deduced that while the latter is more sensitive to any socioeconomic change and performance-oriented, the former might be very difficult either to interpret or measure in authoritarian contexts where information and survey are partially released and might not even be entirely reliable. Therefore, in order to overcome such a shortcoming, Gerschewski suggests three variables whereby diffuse support can be roughly assessed: 1) the number and frequency of public protests as an indicator of social dissatisfaction; 2) qualitative assessments of country experts, 3) content analysis techniques. Indeed, the first variable

⁵⁷ Kneuer, M. (2017). Legitimation beyond ideology: authoritarian regimes and the construction of missions. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 1-31.

⁵⁸ Linz, J. J. (1985). *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*. Addison-Wesley.

⁵⁹ Easton, D. (1967). *A systems analysis of political life* (pp. 411-429). New York: Wiley.

enables to see how a lower degree of legitimation might easily lead to a higher degree of repression, whereas the third variable uses as a tool the extent to which the ruling elite in autocratic regimes is perceived to keep its promises.

Another classification is worth-mentioning when legitimation is taken into consideration and that was elaborated by Kneuer in his work already mentioned⁶⁰, recalled by that of Scharpf (Scharpf, 2004). Kneuer argues that there are three sources of legitimacy applicable to autocracies: input, output and we-identity legitimation. The first one, defined as the set of political decisions stemming from people's consent, is said to be a big constraint for autocracies as opposed to democracies. Naturally, input legitimation exists when political participation is guaranteed in the decision-making process and in the opinion shaping, which is not the case of authoritarian regimes. Conversely, the second source consists of more objective conditions that require the ruler to be responsive where market and civil society cannot act. Ultimately, the third dimension is a sense of national unity, a collective identity, a feeling of solidarity based on cultural, ethnic and historical similarities. As a result, authoritarian regimes struggle to rely on these two remaining sources and, consequently, legitimation strategies are more likely to result in the interaction of the output and we-identity dimensions through the use of patriotic nationalism and affective references as a justification for maintaining power (Kneuer, 2013).

From this discourse, what is to be highlighted is that in authoritarian regimes legitimation entails a much more complex process than in democratic systems since the latter come to be automatically legitimized as such by means of free and fair elections. These represent an institutionalized procedure through which power is reached and bestowed to regularly elected individuals and, more importantly, the rulers find some constraints by an elected Parliament and an impartial judicial body in the exercise of their power. By contrast,

⁶⁰ *Ivi* p. 84

in the case of autocratic regimes, it does not happen or, even if regular elections should take place, power would still need to find further sources of legitimacy. Furthermore, another peculiarity of authoritarian regimes compared with democracies is that the former are much more performance-dependent than the latter. This is the reason why in case of favorable economic circumstances and prosperity, an autocratic regime might find a huge support thus revealing more stable over time. Clearly, in light of this, the harsh economic situation characterizing Egypt before and during the revolution and the uncertainty about the future are likely to have been a catalyst of the consent reached by the regime at first. In addition, if a further look is given to Egypt's figures reported in the previous chapter, it can be noticed that in the first two years of the regime (2014-2015), the Egyptian economy performed pretty well, registering a lower unemployment rate, a higher GDP index and, meaningfully, soaring investment rates. This figure, in particular, will be a further demonstration of how the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) were able to consolidate their power after the revolution.

However, in the case of military regimes, legitimation needs to be further justified and made more credible since the military seize the power by using force, which would be more likely to appear as a violation rather than an order restoration. In addition, there is a variety of situations in which the military may assume the power for some time and different outcomes may result from this. By and large, the military are highly organized and may operate with the support of civilian bureaucrats, for instance, taking the responsibility to select or provide a ruler in times of political crisis if the country has no better instruments to cope with it. The transitional pattern of the military power is less frequent in those cases in which the military extend their office and, after staging a coup, install the so-called "personalist regime" as Kailitz⁶¹ defines it, which differs from the proper military regime

⁶¹ Kailitz, S. (2013). Classifying political regimes revisited: legitimation and durability. *Democratization*, 20(1), 39-60.

and results in frequent power abuse. However, it is often the case that the military action is said to be driven by the state common interest, a patriotic enthusiasm aimed at basically protecting the civilian government from external threats but this cannot last so long and, therefore, Geddes claims that military regimes are expected to be more short-lived than other forms of regime such as party autocracies (Geddes, 1999).

Furthermore, a paradox, or legitimation dilemma (Kailitz, 2013) can be noticed: as far as military actions are concerned, acquiring long-term legitimacy can turn out to be a real challenge. On the one hand, if they do not succeed in managing the political crisis as promised, they are not deemed credible; but, on the other hand, if they do, there is no more justification to remain in power. Summing up more briefly, on the whole, military interventions seem to be enacted for the same objectives which make them no longer necessary after a while. The political experience of Turkey, in particular, as explained in the first chapter, seems to confirm the assumption of military-led intervention being temporary. Nonetheless, Egypt seems to have been an exception in this sense. The country has always experienced political regimes where the military have been key actors in the state politics and have long played such a leading role that the Egyptian state could be deemed not far from the military regime ideal type. Indeed, this is quite evident when analyzing the constitutional device set up with the Egyptian 2014 constitution⁶².

Here below are reported two constitutional provisions which clearly indicate the supremacy of the military over the state structure:

“The Armed Forces belong to the People, and their duty is to protect the country, and preserve its security and the integrity of its territories. Only the State shall be entitled to establish the Armed Forces. No individual, organization, entity, or group shall be allowed to create military or quasi-military squadrons, groups or organizations. The Armed Forces shall have a supreme council, as regulated by Law.”

(Art. 200)

⁶² The text of the 2014 Constitution can be found at this link: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/newvr/dustor-en001.pdf>

The Military Court is an independent judicial body exclusively competent to adjudicate on all crimes pertaining to the Armed Forces, the officers and personnel thereof, and their equivalents, and on the crimes committed by the personnel of the General Intelligence while and by reason of performing their duties.

No civilian shall face trial before the Military Court, except for crimes that constitute a direct assault against military facilities or camps of the Armed Forces, or their equivalents, against military zones or border zones determined as military zones, against the Armed Forces' equipment, vehicles, weapons, ammunition, documents, military secrets, or its public funds, or against military factories; crimes pertaining to military service; or crimes that constitute a direct assault against the officers or personnel of the Armed Forces by reason of performing their duties.

The law shall define such crimes, and specify the other competences of the Military Court.

Members of the Military Court shall be independent and shall be immune to dismissal. They shall have all the guarantees, rights and duties stipulated for the members of other judicial bodies.

(Art. 204)

As anticipated in the first chapter, it could be easily noticed by reading some of the articles how the military were considered the main state guarantors and no other institutions could compare to them. However, despite the undiscussed importance of legitimation for the maintenance of power, in the Egyptian case other equally relevant factors must have been decisive for the survival of a military order even beyond the revolution, one of which will be examined in the next paragraph.

More specific studies were conducted later in the '90s like the seminal work by Barbara Geddes in 1999. Their innovative character comes from the fact that they shed light on the role of repression and co-optation as two other relevant factors determining the maintenance of autocratic regimes.

That said, before moving to explain how cooptation occurred, an extremely relevant aspect must be held into account throughout this discourse, which is the explanatory key for the current Egyptian consolidation under Sisi. By saying this, it can be argued that a strategic

element for such consolidation was a legitimation process well coupled with a stronger demobilization, which will be tackled more in depth in the fourth chapter. Therefore, broadly speaking, the joint role of these two elements and, particularly, of the sustained demobilization enacted by the regime, aware of the strategic role played by civil society, have been making Egypt's new authoritarianism a tougher nut to crack and gave it logistic advantage over any bottom-up activism. Within such a backdrop, also cooptation played a pivotal role and, therefore, now it could be useful to move on to its analysis as another mechanism functional to the authoritarian consolidation.

It must be added that cooptation has been largely diffuse in the Middle East area, particularly, also due to historical reasons. It was a frequent practice during the period of Western colonization in the region through which colonizers built wide networks of alliances and made bargains with local elites in order to have a better control of the several areas within the country. This collaboration was based on economic benefits and rewards which gradually increased the leverage of local elites to the detriment of the rest of the population and perpetuated mechanisms of inequality but also of internal cleavages thus hampering the state-building process in the area.

Consequently, over time cooptation has become one of the main tools through which power has come to be concentrated in the hands of few people. In addition, what can be noticed in a similar pattern is that the way in which co-optation has become diffuse in the Arab world can be explained by another fundamental element for the maintenance of authoritarian regimes, that is to say, the great abundance in natural resources such as oil. Many Arab regimes, particularly the Gulf monarchies, are known to be "rentier states", meaning that the country's wealth depends on the redistribution of resources deriving from oil export revenues according to a system of pure patrimonialism. According to a wide literature, the comparative advantage enjoyed by such countries does not even require a

regular tax payment system justifying the lack of political representation in the country (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987).⁶³

A relevant consequence of this scenario is that Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes use the national economy as a catalyst of political consensus and legitimation but, by doing so, they become also widely dependent on structural conditions such as their economic performance. This pattern is rather close to what a scholar, Richard Auty⁶⁴, in 1993, defined the “resource curse”, according to which countries abundant in mineral resources and resource-driven economies are more likely to have less democracy, a worse development and more inequality resulting from rent-seeking activity. This is the reason why rentier and semi-rentier states could rely more on rent-seeking until the ‘80s but from the ‘90s on, they also proved to be vulnerable to structural constraints such as economic crises, liberalizations and political instability. Nevertheless, these phenomena did not prevent many Arab states to carry on with an historically diffuse system which has gradually become redistributive but in a more selective way, giving further opportunities to business elites in strategic areas of national economy.

Indeed, it was in the economic sector that patronage, clientelism and co-optation have been more evident doing nothing but increasing inequality. Naturally, the intensifying of co-optation strategies has been the consequence of a gradual delegitimizing process, also accompanied, at times, by harsh repression when cooptation mechanisms failed. In addition, the economic potential possessed by these countries and Egypt, in particular, represents a great incentive for external actors and for the international community to legitimize it as an extremely relevant economic partner.

⁶³ Smith, B. (2004). Oil Wealth and Regime Survival in the Developing World, 1960-1999. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(2), 232-246.

⁶⁴ Auty, R. (2002). *Sustaining development in mineral economies: the resource curse thesis*. Routledge.

In the previous chapter, it has been remarked how the military have been able to reach strategic positions in Egyptian national economy and had based much of their campaign during the transition on the country's economic renaissance as well as on new employment opportunities for young people. In addition, it was evident in one section of the chapter that many conflicts of interest also took place and by no other means can cooptation be more obvious than in a regime strategically building a wide network of loyalties and keeping parliamentary seats totally under its control. Furthermore, a similar environment made rather impossible for the opposition, internally weak and inconsistently active, to play a truly effective role. For this reason, it has been defined "loyal opposition" and, hence, any criticism against the regime is well-hidden or simply does not have the instruments to turn into concrete action, as in any democratic system actually should be.

Cooptation has also allowed the regime to access to much more information at the local level by providing material benefits for the coopted actors. The economic advantage and the opportunities offered by the regime have strongly dissuaded a wider number of actors or a consistent opposition to raise criticism and, moreover, according to Gerschewski, co-opting strategies are intended to decrease the likelihood of moral hazard situations.⁶⁵

What is more, particularly in Egypt, cooptation progressively reached other extremely important institutions which are supposedly advocate of civil and political rights protection such as NGOs thus restraining their activity, but more details about it will be given in the next chapter.

It could be useful to give some figures about the extent to which cooptation mechanisms succeeded in penetrating into the social fabric of the country, affecting it profoundly. As a demonstration of this, according to some estimates, back in 2000, when

⁶⁵ Gandhi and Przeworski, "Cooperation, Cooptation and Rebellion"; Magaloni, "Credible Power Sharing"; Svobik, "Power Sharing". In Gerschewski, J. (2013). The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes. *Democratization*, 20(1), 13-38.

the Mubarak regime was still on, the country registered to have about 16,000 NGOs which were, actually, GO-NGOs (Government-Organized NGOs) or DO-NGOs (Donor-Organized NGOs) whose financing, activities and legal status were severely restrained (Caparico, 2000).

Two scholars, Albrecht and Schlumberger, in one of their works⁶⁶, underlined a remarkable aspect characterizing the authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, differently from other similar regimes. They argue that Arab regimes do not hesitate to react whenever a potential threat is perceived and two possible reactions can result: either it is coopted or it is suppressed. Indeed, this indicates that, by and large, they have proven to have more flexibility than it might be expected, despite the internal and external pressures whose impact could not be ignored at all.

3.2 Empirical reports on authoritarian Egypt

In order to have a more complete idea of the mechanisms whereby autocracies maintain their power in order to consolidate their rule, it is necessary to focus a bit more on some models elaborated by the empirical studies concerning authoritarian resilience and see how they might be used to explain more in depth the current Egyptian regime resilience.

Therefore, aware of the wide literature on the topic, it might be interesting to start, more specifically, from the contribution of Gerschewski arguing the presence of the three pillars on which the stability of a regime is based, that are: legitimation, repression and cooptation. In order to operationalize these variables, he then subdivides the three components, respectively, in diffuse and specific support (their meaning has been explained

⁶⁶ Albrecht, H., & Schlumberger, O. (2004). "Waiting for Godot": Regime change without democratization in the Middle East. *International political science review*, 25(4), 371-392.

earlier in the chapter), high and low intensity repression⁶⁷ and, finally, formal and informal cooptation. According to this source, the intensity of repression changes depending on the targeted people and the means used to exert coercion. As a result, high intensity repression would take place more openly against large political groups, opposition and brutal violence against mass demonstrations, whereas low intensity repression would be channeled toward minor groups and in a subtler way. As far as cooptation is concerned, the formal type of cooptation occurs by including businessmen and military officers within formal institutions such as parliaments, parties or elections; conversely, the informal one is more based on the setting-up of close networks and ties between the regime and strategic sectors in a system of capillary neopatrimonialism. According to Gandhi and Przeworski, cooptation can be measured taking into account the degree of institutionalization expressed by indicators such as how often leaders rotate, the number of parties and the mineral resources endowment of the country along with other predictors.

What the scholar underlines is that in order for the process of stabilization to happen, these three dimensions come together becoming complementary and must be institutionalized; moreover, he argues that reinforcement mechanisms may occur either from the outside or from within. In the first case, the availability of external resources seems to be a fundamental variable for the stabilization process and represents a great concern for regimes. This element could explain why the regime has arguably shown an enormous interest in stimulating the economy by increasing dramatically private initiative and entrepreneurship and fostering great investment projects in strategic sectors of national wealth. In the second case, there can also be an endogenous self-reinforcement in different ways depending on the dimension considered.

⁶⁷ The distinction between “high” and “low” intensity repression had already been elaborated by Levitsky and Way in their work “Competitive Authoritarianism”.

Consequently, it is common to find that legitimation, repression and cooptation mechanisms are self-reinforced when there are high starting costs, learning and coordination effects, adaptive expectations or network effect and similar mechanisms which, somehow, enable the regime to penetrate more in the different sections of the society modifying the incentives toward a change. This aspect stresses the paramount role played by the politically relevant elites (PREs) in the mechanisms of cooptation, particularly, when the regime tries to dissuade the elite from accepting changes in the internal hierarchy so that every single component can be kept more under the control of the regime itself.

At this point, one may wonder, to what extent can the regime change their structures? What are the variables for change? Five core strategies of “change for stability” or strategies of adaptation have been detected (Albrecht and Schlumberger, 2004)⁶⁸. By and large, they are:

- 1) Strategies of legitimation in all their facets meaning both the external and the internal dimension of legitimacy much linked to rent-seeking activity and to how the regime is depicted outside the country. The adaptability of the regime to the Western language, at least in the economic sphere, made it possible for the ruling elite to keep the control over national resources.
- 2) Elite change in the sense that with the increase of the economic reforms due to a more globalized world and to consequent structural constraints, new categories have emerged such as private actors and businessmen who came to be a relevant part of the PRE. Many of them with a military or bureaucratic background became hugely included in the institutional setting.
- 3) Institution building: this has implied that a wide network of formal institutions, many more ministries and new actors such as NGOs began to rise. Nevertheless,

⁶⁸ Albrecht, H., & Schlumberger, O. (2004). “Waiting for Godot”: Regime change without democratization in the Middle East. *International political science review*, 25(4), 371-392.

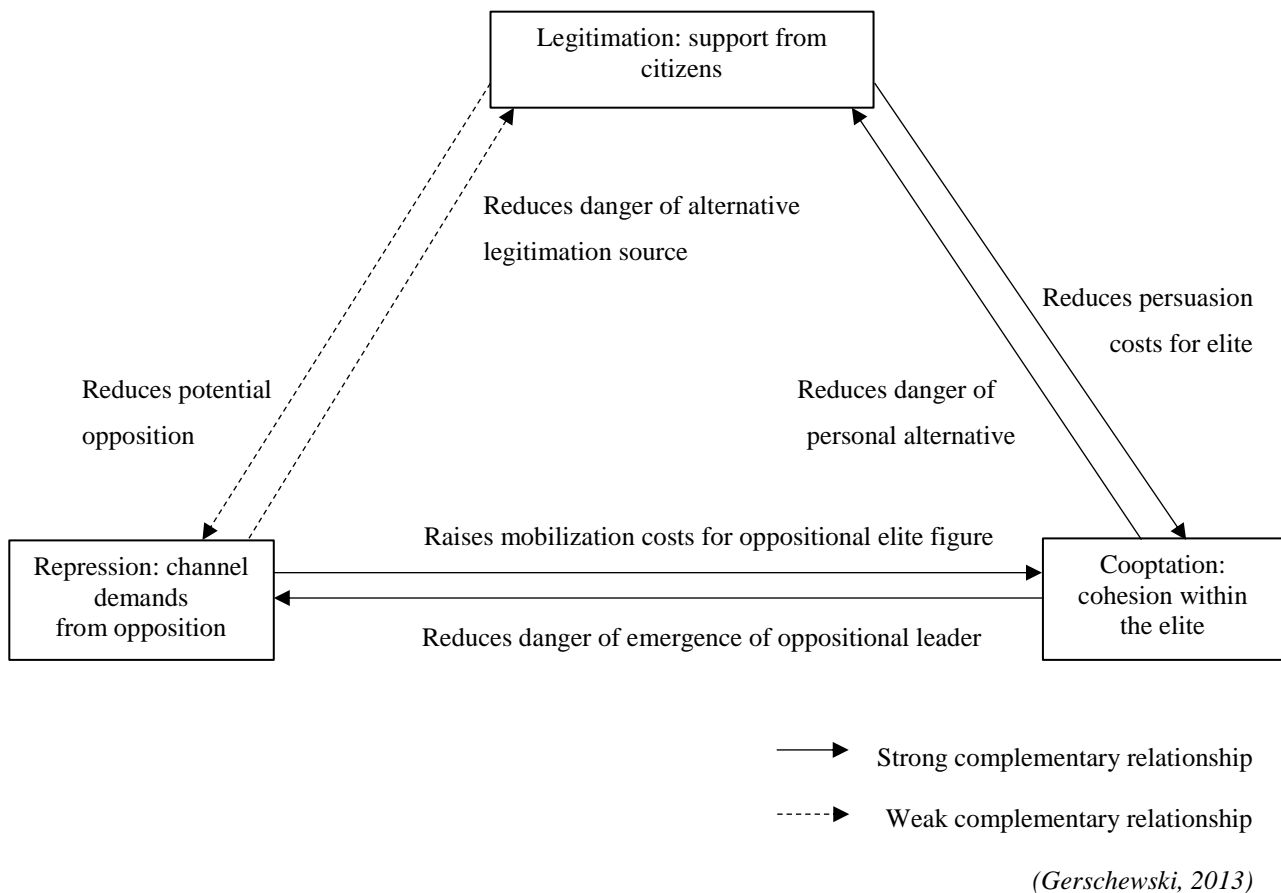
it must be held into account that the real power still remained in the hands of the military and, in addition, many publicly registered NGOs became controlled by the regime and, therefore, were curtailed in their functions and played an exclusively window-dressing role. By enacting such a strategy, the regimes were obviously pretending to abide by certain democratic rule and to reduce state corruption but, of course, facts proved different.

- 4) Cooptation mechanisms that have been mentioned find a fertile ground in the Arab world due to the wealth of the region and to the advantages deriving from it. By such a system, employment opportunities are stirred toward those who are closer to the regime thus removing dissatisfaction from the higher sections of society but bringing about more inequality on the whole.
- 5) Strategic response to external influences which allow the regime to accommodate the public opinion and drift its attention toward foreign policy issues or structural economic constraints which demand the effort of the entire country. This is another way through which political dissent and the risk of a regime's fall might be dissipated.

Going back to the analysis made by Gerschewski, finally, the several possible interactions between the three pillars can be resumed with the scheme in the following page.

According to Linz⁶⁹, there could be even identified a possible path, called “de-politicization configuration” (Linz, 1970) or “low-intensity citizenship” (O’Donnell, 1988) in which there are subtler and softer forms of repression, an informal cooptation such as patronage and clientelism.

⁶⁹ Linz, J. J. (1970). *Authoritarian Regime: Spain [w:] Mass Politics. Studies in Political Sociology, New York.*



Despite the enormous contribution provided by Gerschewski in the field of autocratic regimes stability, recently, there has been some criticism by other researchers who made an even more accurate analysis of the reasons why an autocratic regime might result stable over time. The model elaborated by Gerschewski, which will be here defined as WZB model,⁷⁰ was empirically tested, in a first moment, by Lueders and Croissant, in 2017. At the end of their research, they reported that the WZB model had some shortcomings. More specifically, they had conducted a statistical multilevel regression test based on the significance level of each pillar considered one by one for 68 hegemonic and competitive regimes. In light of this, they concluded that legitimation, as a single variable, did not have a significant effect on the

⁷⁰ WZB is the acronym for the Social Science Research Center in Berlin, Germany. Therefore, the name of the model derives from the place where it was first elaborated by Gerschewski.

durability of autocratic regimes. In addition, according to them, the three pillars did not seem capable of explaining the electoral outcomes in such regimes.

By contrast, in light of the criticism toward Gerschewski's three-pillars theory, two authoritative scholars, Schneider and Maerz have gone more in depth trying to operationalize the three variables through a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The study was a sort of response to the method used by Lueders and Croissant and was aimed at giving a more accurate definition of several world countries' regimes. The QCA revealed to be groundbreaking when it came to assessing certain types of regime which cannot be deemed neither as democracies nor as total authoritarianisms. The fuzzy-set analysis of the QCA has been defined as a "set with flexible boundaries" going beyond the dichotomy of democracy and non-democracy, which fall short of many world countries' regimes. In this study, also Egypt was taken into consideration but during the Mubarak era. Therefore, it could be interesting to look at this significant figure through the lens of the QCA in order to grasp more immediately how elections might have been used to institutionalize the military power.

What emerged by the QCA insight was that, first of all, two possible and different outcomes might be identified as associated to the six dimensions of the WZB model, that are electoral defeat and no electoral defeat. Furthermore, by making a more specific statistical analysis of the sufficient and necessary conditions for the six dimensions resulting from the three main pillars, it turned out that none of them passed the test when tackling electoral defeat. Conversely, when the electoral success was dealt with, the six dimensions could be applied. The results of these findings is that two types of authoritarianism can be empirically observed, that are defined as "adaptive" and "rigid", each one with its own distinctive features. The first one is characterized by diffuse and specific legitimation, formal cooptation and soft repression, but usually, in these cases, procedural and formal institutions

as well as a more flexible attitude are preferred in order to gain stability. On the contrary, the second type presents more extreme features such as diffuse and not specific legitimation, hard repression and, finally, formal cooptation.

Countries included in both of these typologies have been inserted in a table following a chronological order and, what can be noticed is that Egypt appears to be either as an adaptive or a rigid authoritarianism, according to its indices and despite being the country taken into account for the years under the Mubarak presidency. It is not the only one case amongst the countries, but this surely indicates that, in the Mubarak era, Egypt presented features characterizing adaptive and rigid authoritarianism thus being halfway in terms of mechanisms used for power maintenance. Indeed, this can be confirmed by the alternation, during those years, between more open political spaces and severe restrictions.

According to the fuzzy-set QCA analysis, adaptive authoritarianisms are reported to be more and, in addition, they are likely to be more stable than the rigid ones. However, there are still some cases which represent an exception to this, finally resulting less enduring than the expectations or even cases such as Egypt, which could be classified as rigid authoritarianism but still kept some features typical of the adaptive ones.

If the QCA proves very helpful to assess the type of regime existing before the Egyptian Revolution, we might need now to look at other equally reliable sources in order to define further and in more qualitative terms the consolidation process started by Al-Sisi in 2014. Therefore, it might be interesting to see how Freedom House reports scored the country and described the situation year by year from 2014 until today.⁷¹

In order to realize the extent to which Sisi's consolidation worsened the state of the country, we can begin by making a comparison between 2013 and 2014 reports. In fact, it can be noticed that, in one year, Egypt shifted from a "partly free" to a "not free" status once

⁷¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/egypt>

again after 2012. According to the following reports, this status has not changed nor improved since then. In addition, if further attention is drawn on FH scoring which ranges from 1 (the best) to 7 (the worst), Egypt is given 5.5 in the freedom rating, 6 for civil liberties and 5 for political liberties. This was mainly due to the military coup, the violent crackdowns on opposition groups such as Islamists and civil society and, finally, to the more extensive role of the military in the political scenario.

In 2015, ratings were steady but, according to Freedom House Report of that year, some further negative trends were registered such as the complete isolation of the opposition, state surveillance over the media and the electronic communications, “public exhortations to report critics of the government to the authorities” along with mass trials and undue imprisonments of Muslim Brotherhood’s members.

In 2016 and 2017, basically not so much has changed but a more sustained fight of the regime against IS terrorism in the Northern Sinai and in the Gaza Strip territories as well as the increase in domestic sectarian conflicts, which justified the extension of the state of emergency and, consequently, further restrictions of civil and political liberties. More and more journalists and activists are reported to have been jailed and harassed by the military regime and serious human rights infringements have occurred. Also many protests against government decisions were harshly suppressed and, furthermore, the Regeni case, which will be described more in the fourth chapter, caused a downward trend for the country’s situation. All this was the clear sign of demobilization, mentioned earlier as one of the core mechanisms for Sisi’s consolidation, becoming an increasingly diffuse trend and this is proven by the fact that many NGOs, too, were curtailed and heavily regulated in their activity by security agencies clearly linked to the regime. However, more details and explanations about the suppression enacted by the regime will be provided in the last chapter.

Let us not forget that, despite all that has been said so far, the supposed ballot riggings and a low turnout at the polls, general Al-Sisi gained the presidency in the 2014 elections winning 96,1 % of votes. However, the electoral variable is not certainly the best evaluating instrument since elections are reported to have been hugely manipulated in that circumstance and not even can it be ignored the distortive effect of the 500£ fine imposed on those not intending to vote as an incentive to do so.

In light of this, what could be deduced is that, by and large, Al-Sisi, after seizing the power by means of a landslide electoral success which let it gain popular consensus at the beginning, further consolidated the military power to such an extent that, at the moment, Egypt could be classified a rigid military authoritarianism since it has progressively intensified the levels of repression, as it will be seen in the next chapter, strengthening the mechanism of cooptation through an extremely complex bureaucratic system filled with corruption and clientelism. As a result, it could be said that the regime has been consolidating by using a vast array of instruments so that, in spite of the increasing demands for a change after the revolution, it still proved to be able to resist strong pressures. Similarly, cooptation, as the fundamental essential mechanism for the regime maintenance and resilience, undoubtedly evolved in his mechanisms but, at the same time, adapted extremely well to the several political circumstances.

What can be also said about cooptation and the way it has been used since the Al-Sisi regime installation is that it has allowed the current regime to introduce some novelties in the political scenario of the country. Even though cooptation had already been a diffuse practice in the past, the difference now is that Al-Sisi has enacted a new consolidation of the military power by creating a different institutional environment from the Mubarak era. If under Mubarak there was a dominant party, which was the National Democratic Party (NDP) led by the President, in the Al-Sisi era the new regime has progressively eroded the role of

parties carrying out a process of depoliticization of the Parliament. Consequently, the latter has become a “puppet institution” in the hands of the dominant military elite, where self-interest, clientelism and patronage prevail. This setting was designed on purpose in order to make it very difficult for any opposing political force to be strong enough to challenge the regime maintenance. In light of this, it does not surprise that the regime used elections, though manipulated and irregular, to gain legitimation and to impose the military as the most prominent political force, supported by a wide network of people who were bestowed offices and favors detached from the public interest.

What also favored the regime in its rise to power was that during the transition, the Tamarod Movement leaders represented by Al-Sisi, as the main leader of the generals, did a far-reaching political campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood. It was here that several factors greatly contributed to the military’s race to power as well as their legitimacy to rule the country, as it has been argued (Nasif, 2017).⁷² Firstly, the influential role of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in taking advantage of a political vacuum; secondly, the political backdrop in which the Muslim Brothers were expected to lead the country as well as their ideological distance from the military and, ultimately, the role of the judiciary in supporting the military shift. According to Nasif, there is a strong ideational component in the army ranks, which has historically caused the military officers to distrust from political parties deemed as corrupt, divisive and self-interested. Therefore, in the case of Muslim Brothers, in no way could they be seen positively by the officers who claimed that they were the only ones truly supporting the interests of the country, endorsing nationalism and patriotism. Generals felt the responsibility of leading the country toward a more stable

⁷² Bou Nassif, H. (2017). Coups and nascent democracies: the military and Egypt's failed consolidation. *Democratization*, 24(1), 157-174.

position and, for this purpose, the existence of Muslim Brothers did not make any sense at all.

There was a widespread opinion and fear perceived by the military that the Muslim Brothers could bring down all the military structures by infiltrating into them and making them weaker. A similar scenario was so looming that even a constitutional provision, the above mentioned Article 200, was designed in order to prevent the creation of any para-military organization defying the national army. Moreover, the political attitude of the Muslim Brothers during the transitional phase was extremely short-sighted. Instead of gathering all the civilian revolutionary forces in a united coalition, they ended up with breaking this promise and striving to gain the military support by accommodating their interest. This could be deemed as a sort of suicidal move since the military, in turn, would exploit such a situation to definitely exclude the Muslim Brothers from the political arena after that they had lost their fair share of legitimacy. It would be particularly evident in 2014 after the resignation of the interim government nominated by Morsi, when General Al-Sisi would win the elections a few months later.

Eventually, the relationship between the SCAF and the Brothers worsened and, as a result, the Tamarod movement gained momentum. It was certainly one of the first steps by which the military and Al-Sisi were pursuing strong legitimacy, particularly from the media, as we will see in the next paragraph. The reason why the Brothers remained a weak opposition force was that they felt too attached to their religious and cultural background, which resulted in the difficulty to cooperate with civilian and secular forces and in a strong polarization. In addition, the fear of religious radicalism, which is still functional to the legitimization process of the regime, was a catalyst for an increasing dissatisfaction of the Egyptians toward the Brothers and their political activity. Unrest spread quickly also due to

a situation of economic uncertainty and, consequently, the military could not hold back thus justifying their political intervention with their mission of rescuing the country.

Finally, it must not be neglected that, within such a political backdrop, the military was strongly endorsed in its rise to power by the judiciary. Indeed, the latter had the paramount function of restraining the possibility for the Brotherhood to complain after that a period of fights between the two had changed negatively the judiciary's attitude towards the Brothers. The legal backing of the judiciary, shown since the interim government period and afterwards, also allowed the military to enforce laws which would give them many privileges amongst which the possibility to remove the military budget from the parliamentary control and this might be a sufficient element to claim that the judiciary was all but independent and that Egypt was drifting far from the idea of democracy.

3.3 Through the media and the public opinion

The analysis of this paragraph will concentrate on another aspect of the regime consolidation concerning the public sphere and its most relevant channels of expression, that are the media and the public opinion. Therefore, it could be interesting to start the analysis from three articles which belong to the 2014 constitution⁷³ and that could help to unravel the current situation.

(Art.211)

“The Supreme Council for the Regulation of Media is an independent entity that has a legal personality, and enjoys technical, financial and administrative independence, and has an independent budget. The Council shall be competent to regulate the affairs of audio and visual media and regulate the printed and digital press, and other media means.

The Council shall bear the responsibility for guaranteeing and protecting the freedom of press and media as stipulated in the Constitution, safeguarding its independence, neutrality, plurality and diversity,

⁷³ The text of the 2014 Constitution can be found at this link: <http://www.sis.gov.eg/newvr/dustor-en001.pdf>

preventing monopolistic practices, monitoring the legality of the sources of funding of press and media institutions and developing the controls and criteria necessary to ensure compliance by the press and media outlets with the professional and ethical standards, and national security needs as stated in the Law.

The law shall determine the composition and regulations of the Council, and the employment conditions for its staff. The Council shall be consulted with respect to the bills and regulations related to its scope of competence.

(Art. 212)

“The National Press Organization is an independent organization that shall manage and develop state-owned press institutions and their assets, as well as ensure their modernization, independence, neutrality and their adherence to good professional, administrative and economic standards.

The law shall determine the composition and regulations of the Organization, and the employment conditions for its staff. It shall be consulted with respect to the bills and regulations pertaining to its scope of work.”

(Art. 213)

“The National Media Organization is an independent organization that shall manage and develop state-owned visual, audio and digital media outlets and their assets, as well as ensure their development, independence, neutrality and their adherence to good professional, administrative and economic standards.

The law shall determine the composition and regulations of the Organization and the employment conditions for its staff. It shall be consulted with respect to the bills and regulations pertaining to its scope of work.”

The three articles above might seemingly give a first impression of the national media being sufficiently independent and guaranteed in their activity by the so-called “Supreme Council for the regulation of Media”. Actually, despite the lack of an open reference to the control existing over this institution, all of these mentioned institutions turn out to be highly controlled and regulated by the regime. This should not surprise much as in any other authoritarian regime it is widely known that the media are heavily restrained and,

furthermore, the majority of the information released by the press and the news are manipulated and not truly reliable. If a more detailed look is given to the articles, a constant reference emerges to the Law as the main criterion through which the composition and the regulation of such institutions are determined, but we have previously noticed that law itself cannot guarantee a totally independent media coverage since the judiciary as well as the entire legal system are actually compliant with the regime and, hence, with the military power. In addition, the fact that transition failed to be a turning point toward a democratic path is demonstrated by what Shana Marshall reports in her authoritative work, also mentioned in the previous chapter,⁷⁴ concerning the media manipulation.

[...] Throughout the post-revolutionary period, the SCAF also used its strategic investments to influence news coverage. In public statements highlighting what he said were the EAF's charitable contributions to the Egyptian economy, Major General Nasr cited a \$58 million cash infusion for the Egyptian Radio and Television Union. But what Nasr did not point out was that the military's Arab Organization for Industrialization is invested alongside the union in the Egyptian Satellite Company. The company, known as Nilesat, proved to be a reliable counterrevolutionary partner for the military in the fall of 2013 when it blocked the Al Jazeera news station from using a Nilesat satellite to broadcast images of the ongoing crisis in Egypt. (That is not the only time Al Jazeera was targeted. Three journalists from the Qatar-based station were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in June 2014 after they were convicted on broadly dis-credited charges of falsifying news and aiding the Brotherhood.) [...]

What vividly emerges from this piece of Marshall's work is that a part of the media coverage during that period was apparently manipulated, which was surely not the best way for the new regime to make a concrete positive change.

⁷⁴ Marshall, S. (2015). The Egyptian armed forces and the remaking of an economic empire. *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 15.

Within the realm of media and information channels, it is worth-mentioning that, despite the existence of independent newspapers whose activity is still hugely limited, there are three newspapers officially owned by the Egyptian government: *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Akhbar* and *Al-Gumhuriya*. Consequently, in these cases appointees are made by the government and the fact that it severely controls their activity implies that censorship is reduced on these newspapers. By contrast, party-based newspapers tend to release information less frequently due to strict controls carried out by the regime, let alone those acting independently whose coverage does not even reach the national level, as it might be easily expected. Another way through which the regime succeeds in keeping the media under control is by the State Information Service, a state agency filtering all the information that are to be released, expressing the voice of the regime and reporting public statements over several state affairs.

The extent to which Al-Sisi regime has been using the media as an instrument to alter the reality for its own interest and for the sake of the regime's survival will be addressed more in details in the next chapter when more attention will be drawn on the mechanisms of repression. For the moment, it would be useful to take into consideration an interesting fact, that is the rhetoric used by the regime in order to acquire consensus amongst the public opinion as a way to consolidate more.

It has been often observed that there seems to be a strong connection between a country's population and the language used to communicate, especially in political terms. A wide literature has looked more into this aspect and has discovered that political propaganda and, hence, political legitimation also pass through mechanisms of psychological persuasion. Persuasive skills in political communication are extremely important and they are equally helpful to understand how an authoritarian regime can turn out to have more consensus than one might expect.

Again, the media are a functional channel since they are placed between citizens and the regime, therefore, the latter cannot afford to lose its grip on them.

Over the last few years, since General Sisi went to power, several sources have witnessed the execution of many imprisonments without due process or trial and the prosecuted journalists involved in these cases have been manifold. In addition, revolts, upheavals and episodes of violence by the regime security forces, are not always reported as they should be and are pretty often kept off the record or even misrepresented. In particular, back in 2015, Mona Nader, in charge of the media coverage of Cairo Institute for Human Rights studies, observed that Egypt had “gone back more than twenty years”; furthermore, not only did they not shed light on the true problems of the country, but they also ended up endorsing the regime at any cost. Despite the violence and the prosecutions shown by the regime against the Muslim Brothers, another worrying figure related to the regime after one year indicated that positive evaluations and support toward Al-Sisi accounted for almost 90%.⁷⁵

Before analyzing the psychological mechanisms that are likely to enhance people’s support towards the regime, beyond the use of coercion and will’s manipulation, it can be interesting to look at the communicative aspect concerning Al-Sisi’s regime. What I will report here are the words pronounced by Sisi in one of his public speeches just last year, in February 2016.

“Please, don't listen to anyone but me. I am dead serious. Be careful, no one should abuse my patience and good manners to bring down the state. I swear by God that anyone who comes near it, I will remove him from the face of the Earth. I am telling you this as the whole of Egypt is listening. What do you think you're doing? Who are you?”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Source: Leslie T. Chang, *Egypt's media endorsing repression*. <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2015/09/15/egypt-media-endorsing-repression/>

⁷⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/sisi-tells-egyptians-don-listen-160224181547015.html>

Certainly, these words do not convey a sense of relief and freedom but rather stress how suppression may be easily adopted by the regime without hesitating in case of distrust and dissatisfaction towards it. But the very point, here, is that the Egyptian president appeals to the emotional vibe perceived by citizens in a time of chaos and hardship fostering a sense of fear among people. Since repression mechanisms will be dealt with more in depth in the next chapter, I will focus now more on the role of people's perception of the regime.

The fact that censorship and press control do exist cannot be overlooked when considering that people are not adequately informed over domestic issues as they should be and that, in a first moment, the degree of dissatisfaction toward the traditional institutions was extremely high after Morsi deposition. The Egyptians found a sort of relief in the military intervention, above all when they depicted themselves as the only guarantors of state survival and no other better alternatives appeared to exist. The stability and order which were seemingly brought back by the new regime to the entire population along with a new economic stimulus in the first year, were deemed as a turning point and as a new upcoming era. In terms of emotional involvement, it can be said that the regime seemed to be willing to give younger and poorer people new opportunities, but it was actually all smoke and mirrors in the end.

Broadly speaking, public opinion and the way it is affected by the media have an undoubtedly deep impact on the degree of societal change and on people's attitudes. Furthermore, the media have evolved in recent times and it is widely known that social networks, in particular, hugely contributed to the Arab Revolution unfolding. Therefore, in light of this, one of the most urgent goals of the regime has been to filter dramatically the media coverage so as to modify and control people's beliefs and preferences. This shows how the media can turn out to be a double-edged means depending on the historical and

political context. Many scholars have stressed that the media mirror and represent the prevailing structure of power in the society and, as a result, it should no surprise that also the most part of the national media has adapted to the state authoritarian language, thus becoming partial, deceiving and linked to the regime authority.

More importantly, the emotional factor which was a considerable source of people's dissatisfaction has been even analyzed by Thyen and Gerschewski (2017).⁷⁷ These scholars conducted an empirical study, in particular, about student mobilizations during the Arab Revolutions in Egypt and Morocco and what they found is that, as far as Egypt is concerned, the failure of Mubarak to comply with nationalist goals and to adhere to the ideology on which Egyptian political community was based represented the major cause for his delegitimation. Grievances about the way in which regime stood up for the ideology certainly played an escalating role but another considerable effect on mass protests was also determined by the so-called "cognitive politicization", referred to as "a combination of high sense of political efficacy and low political trust which are the optimum for mobilization as well as a belief that influence is both possible and necessary".⁷⁸ In light of this, during the transitional period and later on, Al-Sisi has effectively built his consolidation on the nationalist ideology, where the previous regime had failed. Such a strategy was envisaged and can be clearly found in the current constitutional text, previously analyzed, where the role of Egypt as a leading country in the Arab world is further stressed.

There is a wide literature concerning political behavior and psychological side of politics and it has much explanatory power when dealing with consensus and legitimation under an autocratic regime.

⁷⁷ Thyen, K., & Gerschewski, J. (2017). Legitimacy and protest under authoritarianism: explaining student mobilization in Egypt and Morocco during the Arab uprisings. *Democratization*, 1-20.

⁷⁸ Gamson, W. A. (1968). *Power and discontent* (Vol. 124). Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Therefore, if further attention is also drawn on the role of emotions and sentiments in giving strength to the current Egyptian regime, it might be extremely interesting to look more into the role of fear and the analysis made by Fromm in one of his works can shed more light on this.⁷⁹ Fear is probably the most powerful instrument on which an authoritarian regime is based and Sisi's regime is not certainly the exception. In a way, it can be said that fear, along with other sources of legitimation, has been feeding a fake consent amongst citizens toward the regime and is a form of deterrence in case of revolt or rebellion to it. The economic uncertainty, the political instability, the external threats that Egypt has had to cope with have made fear the key mechanism used by the regime to represent itself as the only one actor able to give citizens a better life and a sense of relief after long periods of turmoil. Fear is not openly visible and it is, surely, too a difficult aspect to measure through figures and data, especially under an authoritarian regime, but it can be somehow perceived. The idea that the regime progressively spread amongst people was that state survival depended exclusively on the support given by them to the regime thus affecting everyone's life. Civic and political culture have been curtailed and, as a result, it seems that the Egyptians have lost their sense of utility within the political community, as though nothing more can be done and indifference is less costly than political engagement. Citizens have been made void of their own individualism as well as victims of a system tougher to dismantle. Furthermore, it would seem that people have preferred a sense of seeming stability and order, though at higher costs, to the future uncertainty resulting from freedom.

However, more importantly, this does not necessarily imply that attempts to change or willingness are absent. Indeed, after the Revolution, people have certainly acquired more awareness and more confidence in a wider variety of instruments, but arguably, under the

⁷⁹ Fromm, E. (1942). *The fear of freedom*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

current circumstances, fear has been internalized and disillusionment has prevailed in people's mindset after a long period in which, particularly, young people's hopes and expectations had been deceptively nourished. In addition, the sense of impossibility to fulfill personal objectives and the fear of the consequences out of it produces a deep sense of distress, which, in turn, is not beneficial not even to the regime. This divergence is the dramatic result of a difficult process of adaptation that people have to cope with.

By the way, it could be even more helpful to understand the complexity of this process by referring to it as a "cognitive dissonance" using a famous expression by Festinger.⁸⁰ Recalling that a similar pattern occurred when individuals, performing an action, show inconsistency or an opposite trend to their own internal beliefs thus falling into contradiction or distress. It is highly likely that, generally, people living under the constraints imposed by an authoritarianism come across this pattern more easily and make a greater effort to adapt themselves or their expectations to a different reality. Following such a theory, I argue that one of the possible outcomes of this can be that people may find themselves torn between two clashing ideas: firstly, that the regime seeks the common good and the public interest by preserving stability and order and, therefore, it deserves to be endorsed, but, at the same time, when severe suppression is carried out, that the regime leaves no space for personal freedom at all, opposing public interest. Consequently, what individuals are inclined to do is to reduce this dissonance by means of adaptation. Such a process is likely to lead people to either justify the regime as necessary for the country, or even underestimate the impact of repression on the society as a whole.

It can be summed up that this complex process might help to explain compliance and what there might be behind people's common idea of the regime; however, it also should

⁸⁰ Festinger, L. (1962). *A theory of cognitive dissonance* (Vol. 2). Stanford University Press.

not make us think that support can be always taken for granted as circumstances may vary and, similarly, people's perception.

Fromm, again, writes: “[...] The very conditions of isolation and powerlessness are responsible for two other sources of destructiveness: anxiety and the thwarting of life. Concerning the role of anxiety not much needs to be said. Any threat against vital (material and emotional) interests creates anxiety and destructive tendencies are the most common reaction to anxiety. The threat can be circumscribed in a particular situation by particular persons. In such a case, the destructiveness is aroused towards these persons. It can also be a constant – though not necessarily conscious – anxiety springing from an equally constant feeling of being threatened by the world outside. [...]”. This is an extremely interesting point underlining how a similar backdrop in the current authoritarian regime is likely to lead to a widespread anxiety, triggered also by a high frequency in violence and repression by the regime. What is striking in the passage is the role of threats perceived from the outside, and a similar pattern is also another characteristic of Sisi's regime, that is the constant presence of an external menace on the country or of a conspiracy. This aspect nurtures fear and, consequently, is a catalyst of legitimation but it will be dealt with more in the next chapter concerning repression.

Escalating fear in a polity does not lead to a long-term legitimation for an authoritarian regime, as it has been already said, but over time the regime has also used emotional involvement in order to appease people. Since the beginning, Sisi has showed himself as a good guarantor of the entire Egyptian population and, in virtue of this, designed a paternalistic system whereby people are perceived under state “protection” and people see the *rais* as a caretaker father to rely on. Somehow, this was functional to deter people from intervening against the regime as this would be harmful to both, according to this idea.

To sum up, it can be argued that, within this scenario, fear is a reinforcing but, at the same time, ambiguous mechanism since a system in which fear is the core element to hold on to is also a system where, basically, every component and no one excluded is fearful. Such a pattern reveals the substantial weakness of the regime also proven by the higher degree of repression that it has enacted, as we will see in the next chapter.

3.4 National cooptation and international legitimation

Economy has been probably the main sector in which the regime exhibited the new course of its policy and it seems that it has represented one of the most selected channels for the enactment of cooptation strategies among most influential elites, as it has been explained with more empirical examples at the end of the second chapter (2.3: The military inside the Egyptian economy). Beyond all that has been said there, it might be interesting now to carry on looking at the profound interaction between the national economy plans and the scope of the military's action in designing these plans as well as the foreign contribution to this power consolidation.

Many of the projects eventually run by the Al-Sisi regime had already been initiated during the post-revolution era and had tested the relationship between the SCAF and Morsi official government, revealing how difficult and troubled it actually was. During that period, the military kept on demonstrating a strong interest toward investments and entrepreneurial activity within the country by offering protection and partnership to potential foreign investors. As Marshall noticed in her works already mentioned⁸¹, the military, indeed, were truly able to secure those enterprises even in more volatile periods, which made them better guarantors than the State itself for business partners, especially in war and defense industries. In order to fulfill this, the army did not even hesitate to react to labor activists or strikers by

⁸¹ Marshall, S. (2015). The Egyptian armed forces and the remaking of an economic empire. *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 15.

suppressing them or forcing them to conscription. Interventions by the military were promptly enacted so as to make the business partners perceive a safe environment and to provide them with concrete logistic support and one of these favored firms was the “Kharafi Group”. In addition, such guarantees were not given to those firms linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and, therefore, the different attitude of the military toward those firms and the lack of protection for those investors, triggered the failure of Muslim Brothers’ policies.

Due to this situation, the SCAF under the EAF leadership acquired more and more power and prerogatives, also thanks to the partisan support given by the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). Decision-making in terms of economic policy was getting more and more in the hands of the military. This enabled the military elite to carry out finally one of the most desired projects, that is to say the Suez Canal Corridor Development Project. According to Sisi’s words, the project was “the gift of Egyptians to the world.”⁸² Of course, there were other companies involved in the investment project such as constructing and manufacturing industries, essential for the implementation of military’s plans, but all of them were somehow linked to or owned by the military and received subcontracts as members of the Egyptian business elite. Another considerable project managed by the military authority was Toshka, the “New Valley”, which was intended to recreate the Nile valley in South Egypt. The Saudi prince Alwaleed Bin Talal owning the Kingdom Agriculture Development Company (Kadco) was involved in the project as the primary investor, meaning how the role of foreign business partners contributed to military’s economic consolidation.

The army succeeded in having the monopoly of the sector by presenting itself as the only one who could secure national economy from the sale of the canal to foreign partners, thus stressing the strategic role it played in state business. The distance from Morsi’s

⁸² Roll, S. (2016). Managing change: how Egypt’s military leadership shaped the transformation. *Mediterranean Politics*, 21(1), 23-43.

government increased particularly when the latter announced the intention of making India a business partner in the canal corridor project. Therefore, it can be said that the regime has taken advantage of its strong economic capability coupled with a huge amount of rhetoric. This aspect appealed to the majority of citizens who, at first, trusted the regime and its ability to provide public services, major infrastructures, a better public transportation service as well as to empower the manufacturing sector. Particularly, in 2013, Al-Sisi showed great concern for an investment project valued at \$40bn with one of the largest construction companies: Arabtec. In this case, it was particularly evident that the new regime had pursued a strong foreign support by international partners whose funding were a further source of domestic legitimation, as I will explain shortly. Furthermore, the military maintained with more or less consistency a united and cohesive corporate structure all through the transitional stage, which allowed them to catch up with all the power that they had progressively seen shrinking during the Mubarak era.

Ultimately, it should be also considered that a great support in the legitimation process of the military return on the scene as well as their following consolidation was provided by a variety of international business actors and foreign partners, as it has been shown up to now. For instance, Gulf monarchies openly endorsed a huge amount of investment projects achieved by General Al-Sisi.

More specifically, by September 2013 Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were reported to be the two major investors in the country and the main supporters of the interim military-backed government and Sisi's new regime. It has also been reported that the two Gulf countries were behind Morsi's government ousting by funding and directing the revolts and collaborating with the military elite in overthrowing it in July 2013. These revelations leaked out probably by people within the military themselves were a blow for the regime legitimation and proved how internally fragile it was actually.

Nonetheless, the endorsement of some Gulf countries was also justified by the fact that Saudi Arabia and the UAE feared the interference of Muslim Brotherhood's Islamism and its spread within the Arab world. This posture was not common to all the Gulf countries since Qatar, along with Turkey, had provided logistic support to Morsi's government and to the Muslim Brothers, as well. This is the reason why Egypt under Sisi still represents a hurdle for Qatari and Turkish-funded investment projects.

Other foreign partners from the international context which provided further legitimation for the regime were China, Russia, the United States and the European Union. According to Marshall, a higher number of investments related to infrastructure, railroads, power stations and the Suez Canal Project were carried out with China's economic partnership. Similarly, also Russia gave an enormous contribution to the development of iron and steel factories as well as electricity-producing plants. The US business partnership has been of great importance not only during the transitional phase, but also under the new regime and, certainly, it helped to corroborate military privileges. In spite of the US mounting criticism toward several episodes of violence and repression happening within Egypt, the military kept being the major economic beneficiary through the purchase of military equipment by these partners. In 2014, US military aids accounted for \$575 million and the long-standing relationship between the two countries with its effect of reinforcing Egypt's autocratic regime has been analyzed by authors like Brownlee (2012). Likewise, in 2015, also France signed a contract concerning the arms sale and military equipment, worth about \$7 billion. Finally, the role of Mediterranean countries such as Italy cannot be neglected at all, as it has been explained in the second chapter when ENI's investment projects were mentioned.

By and large, Egypt's strategic position that the military took advantage of has been undoubtedly caused also and more importantly, by its geopolitical position and by its natural

resources endowment. Not surprisingly, realpolitik seems to have prevailed over ethical considerations concerning the quality of its democracy or how to lead the country toward democracy, since economic interests are deemed essential for a state survival even at the cost of compromise. Broadly speaking, as far as foreign support to authoritarian regimes is concerned, it could be useful to look more into the expression “autocratic linkage”.⁸³ The term was used by three scholars, Tansey, Koehler and Schomtz in one of their studies arguing that there is an empirical connection between the autocratic regime survival and its international projection with foreign states. This argument is in line with what has been claimed so far about the pivotal role of international legitimation for the military consolidation of Sisi’s regime. More specifically, the three scholars have demonstrated an extremely relevant aspect, that is the higher degree of autocratic rather than democratic linkages in the world of today, thus posing a serious concern for an effective democracy promotion. What the scholars also argue is that autocratic linkage depends on four different dimensions: trade volume, migration flows, diplomatic ties and geographical distance. In addition, another important consideration has stemmed from this study, which is the different role played by Saudi Arabia during the Arab Revolutions with different countries. According to this analysis, Saudi Arabia has proved to be a counterrevolutionary actor by helping to suppress domestic unrest when a country had a higher autocratic linkage and this was the case of Yemen, Egypt and Bahrein, with the exception of Syria, though. By contrast, in the case of Tunisia and Libya, Saudi Arabia showed little interest in preserving the regime. This could also explain why, from the dimension of international legitimation, after the 2011 uprising Tunisia experienced a different scenario compared to Egypt.

⁸³ Tansey, O., Koehler, K., & Schmotz, A. (2016). Ties to the Rest Autocratic Linkages and Regime Survival. *Comparative Political Studies*, 0010414016666859.

The attitude of a country more or less inclined to intervene on the four variables can be explained by the fact that geographical closeness may result in spillover effects in case of unrest in a neighboring country and migration flows are more likely to trigger domestic instability from one country to other. Diplomatic ties amongst autocratic regimes are another relevant variable which might induce to prefer regime maintenance rather than its breakdown. However, it must be taken into account that Saudi Arabia also endorsed the overturn of Morsi post-revolutionary government in favor of the military after 2013 coup and diminished the external pressure on the newly-installed military elite. Therefore, this could appear as an ambiguity by the Saudi government, which, together with Kuwait and the UAE, gave Sisi's regime a total of \$12 billion (Farouk, 2014).⁸⁴ But, at the same time, it reveals how strategic interests and changing domestic patterns are equally worth-considering beside the autocratic linkage. As evidence of this, scholars have also argued that over time democracies have been also shown to support autocratic regimes if this was deemed useful for their purpose (Brownlee, 2012; Cox & Ikenberry, 2000).

In conclusion, it has been seen how the mechanisms of legitimation used by the regime to consolidate its power are manifold and how it has proved capable of penetrating almost the entire fabric of society in different ways. However, what in the next chapter will be stressed is another side of Sisi authoritarianism, which can be undoubtedly perceived as the darker and crueler face, but that actually discloses the regime's fragility and its unsustainability in the long run.

⁸⁴ Farouk, Y. (2014, April). *More than money: Post-Mubarak Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (Gulf Papers). Gulf Research Center.

Another path to consolidation: repression

We have seen how the current Egyptian military regime has consolidated its power over the last three years through several strategies but one of them, which remains a particularly important aspect to consider, will be dealt with more specifically in this last chapter. A particularly relevant element has been stressed in the previous chapters, that is the key role played by demobilization in the new consolidation process begun by Al-Sisi in 2014 together with an entrenched system of legitimation and cooptation and it has been argued how the interaction of these three components have made military consolidation easier to achieve.

Throughout this last chapter suppressive mechanisms will be dealt with and explained more carefully also giving empirical references to the current Egyptian case. In addition, further attention will be drawn on the suppressing reactions of the regime to the activism of a vast array of civil actors which saw their activities and their roles being dramatically curtailed and marginalized. More will be also said about civil society as a whole and its mobilizing role and it will be easier to understand why it became the main enemy and target of the regime. Ultimately, a series of concrete examples will be provided concerning more blatant human rights violations enacted by the regime more or less openly and their impact on the country, ending up with showing how the media, completely under the regime's control, also became strategic to the consolidation process and changed their perspective over such delicate issues, particularly for the widely known "Regeni case", which brought Sisi's Egypt under the spotlight.

4.1 What is there behind repression?

In the previous chapter repression had been identified as one of the three core mechanisms through which the maintenance of an authoritarian regime is preserved. It is quite obvious that an authoritarian regime differs from a democracy since it lacks basic features of the latter such as accountability, responsiveness, participation, competition and other procedural qualities. In authoritarian regimes such dimensions are not existing and, therefore, it is more likely that a stricter control becomes necessary in order to keep the system stable in the long run.

An aspect which authoritarian regimes do not take into account and disregard is the variety existing within a political community and, hence, the divergence of opinions which is unavoidable and determines different ways in which interests are shaped and organized. Dissent is a distinctive element of human affairs and politicians should be able to accept this and cope with a wide array of interests. In authoritarian regimes, dissent is still existing but it is deemed risky and dangerous, therefore, it must be controlled and suppressed.

What are, then, the channels through which dissent is expressed in a political system? Certainly, the media and the civil society and this is the reason why in this chapter a major focus will be on the role played by these two actors in Egypt's military consolidation and how they have been affected by regime repression in their activities.

According to Goldstein, repression involves the use of physical sanctions against an individual or an organization, within the state territorial jurisdiction, with the aim of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and beliefs perceived to be challenging the government's personnel, practices or institutions.⁸⁵ From Gerschewski's point of view, repression can be defined as the backbone of autocracies;⁸⁶ however, it is not

⁸⁵ Goldstein, R. J. (1978). *Political repression in modern America from 1870 to the present*. GK Hall & Company.

⁸⁶ Gerschewski, J. (2013). The three pillars of stability: legitimation, repression, and co-optation in autocratic regimes. *Democratization*, 20(1), 13-38.

a sufficient element since it is too costly to preserve the regime's stability in the long run, therefore, as said in the previous chapter, it needs to be coupled with other instruments.

Gerschewski argues that repression can be either high intensity or low intensity repression depending on the target and the extent of repression. If this dual classification is taken into consideration, there is a valid instrument to assess the degree of violence in a given country, which is the Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Dataset (CIRI). This database provides a wide range of indices such as the "New Empowerment Index" and the "Physical Rights Index" which might be easily adapted to both the high and low intensity types of repression. Nevertheless, it does not provide updated information since countries data are not more recent than 2011, therefore, in order to have a more precise idea of the degree of repression in our specific case of Egypt from a more empirical point of view, we might need to look at other equally reliable sources.

For instance, an extremely valid instrument is the Political Terror Scale⁸⁷ which, in turn, collects the indices from the yearly reports of Amnesty International, the U.S State Department and Human Rights Watch until 2015. In the PTS database, each country is rated from 1 to 5 where 5 means the worst situation in terms of human rights and political and civil liberties. Let us see, then, how Egypt is rated by this database considering a two-years time frame (2014-2015), that is the first half of Sisi's regime. According to these figures, what emerges is that Egypt is rated 4 out of 5 by all of the three sources, meaning that in the country "civil and political rights violations have expanded to a large numbers of the population. Murders, disappearances and torture are a common part of life. In spite of its generality, on this level terror affects those who interest themselves in politics or ideas."

If further attention is drawn also on the datasets of the sources mentioned above, it can be noticed that data confirm the higher intensity of repression enacted by Sisi's regime

⁸⁷ <http://www.politicalterroryscale.org/Data/Documentation.html>

after 2014. For instance, the annual report 2016/17 by Amnesty International⁸⁸ discloses a wide quantity of information about the regime such as increasingly frequent mass arbitrary arrests of journalists, activists and human rights defenders. The central role of the National Security Agency (NSA) is also underlined as the main cause of detentions as well as enforced disappearances. In addition, AI stresses how the harsh repression by the national security forces, extrajudicial executions, tortures, death sentences and widespread violence have dramatically soared in a context of social unrest, where religious minorities are not guaranteed any protection at all.

Other sources by the U.S State Department⁸⁹ also seem to confirm what has been said up to now. More importantly, it is reported that military courts have become an increasingly diffuse method to suppress civilian rights and prerogatives. What is more, the judiciary appears as a corrupted body used by the regime to impose arrests with no warrants or no evidence for condemnation. Harassment and societal discrimination have made people's lives harder and many public infrastructures and facilities have been affected by terrorism, while the regime did not provide any condition of security for citizens nor did it prove willing to investigate over domestic human rights violations thus increasing social insecurity.

Ultimately, according to Human Rights Watch⁹⁰, the Egyptian regime with the endorsement of the police and national security forces has also caused serious human rights abuses in the Northern Sinai pleading the fight to IS terrorism in the area, but, at the same time, increasing prosecutions and tortures of civilians targeted as suspected allies of the Islamic State. Further details about the repression of the regime will be shortly provided when tackling the NGOs activities in the country as being part of the civil society.

⁸⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt/report-egypt/>

⁸⁹ <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

⁹⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/egypt>

At this point, after analyzing different sources of evidence concerning Egypt and its current situation, it might be interesting to wonder why regimes turn to repression and why, in certain circumstances, they intensify repressive measures. At first, it might be argued that logically and intuitively, repression, by reducing political opposition, is required more where there is less legitimation or where such a process is not completely working. Naturally, one does not exclude the other but it is more likely to find regimes whose suppressive action diminishes due to a higher degree of support both from inside and outside.

Nevertheless, it should not be always taken for granted that more repression leads to more legitimation. In fact, there is a scholar, Davenport⁹¹, who underlines an extremely relevant aspect, that is the fragile interactions between repression and legitimation. What he claims is that, basically, repression might lead to unintended outcomes and can turn out to have an unexpected impact. Repressive measures, if adopted too frequently and in the long run, are also likely to lead to a decreased legitimation which, in turn, would bring about further repression acting as a cyclical destabilizing process, often resulting in political extremism and the radicalization of underground activist groups. In light of this, literature has widely confirmed the close relationship existing between a harsh repression and the support for armed groups' insurrections, which is actually what the regime wants to avoid.

Repression has been object of study by a broad literature and over time several scholars have assessed its effect within autocratic regimes. Primarily, it cannot be denied that repression is used by autocrats in order to deter any possible challengers and their supporters thus reducing the probability of political violence (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005:340)⁹² by raising the cost of collective action (Tilly, 1978). In addition, according to another scholar, the three main goals of repression are deterrence, incapacitation and

⁹¹ Davenport, C. (2007). State repression and political order. *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.*, 10, 1-23.

⁹² De Mesquita, B. B. (2005). *The logic of political survival*. MIT press.

surveillance⁹³ (Oliver, 2008). However, as also said earlier in the chapter, if repression is used extensively and indiscriminately, with no balance between carrots and sticks, it may generate an increase in political violence if two specific conditions occur: firstly, if the cost of punishment is lower than the potential benefit of rebellion and, secondly, if those peaceful bystanders compliant with the regime do not remain unharmed (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005:340). When these two conditions of credibility are not met by the regime, rebellion is more likely to result from a high intensity repression. This is the reason why, when thinking of the more specific case of current Egypt, it might be argued that Al-Sisi's regime has apparently strengthened cooptation strategies for bystanders and has not hesitated to punish severely its opponents in order to make compliance and pro-regime collaboration far more appealing.

A further empirical study conducted by Bischof and Fink⁹⁴ has shown that repression can turn out to be a double-edged sword for autocrats. More specifically, there seems to be a U-curve relation between repression and political violence in the short term and depending on the scope of repression. Roughly, the study was based on the PTS indices measurement for the MENA countries correlated to the conflict index and what finally emerged is that repression is effective in deterring political opposition up to a certain level beyond which it produces the opposite effect. Other studies have confirmed this empirical result and, more particularly, one of them revealed that 2011 Egyptian revolution was mainly caused by the fact that Mubarak's security forces had gone too far with repressive measures thus making a more organized and large-scale collective action more beneficial than obedience (Brumberg, 2013).⁹⁵

⁹³ Oliver, P. (2008). Repression and crime control: Why social movement scholars should pay attention to mass incarceration as a form of repression. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 13(1), 1-24.

⁹⁴ Bischof, D., & Fink, S. (2015). Repression as a Double-edged Sword: Resilient Monarchs, Repression and Revolution in the Arab World. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 21(3), 377-395.

⁹⁵ Brumberg, D. (2013). Transforming the Arab World's Protection-Racket Politics. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(3), 88-103.

4.2 Repression under Al-Sisi

Repressive measures have been one of the most distinctive features of the new military consolidation process led by Al-Sisi but, as it could be seen, they had been often taken also before the installation of the new regime. The military had always supported the suppressive interventions of the national security forces and the police in times of rebellion and popular unrest, with the only exception of the transitional stage in which they sided with protesters so as to gain consensus and seize the power again by instrumentally taking advantage of such a situation.

In a way, it can be said that the Egyptians were sadly used to similar reactions of regime violence and harsh suppressive responses every time that the threat of a protest or of a general mobilization was perceived. This was evident in 2010, at the dawn of the Revolution, when the young activist Khaled Said was murdered by the security forces for posting on the Internet a video denouncing the corruption existing in Mubarak's police forces. Afterwards, a wave of unrest quickly spread amongst younger people, in particular, and a public demonstration took place in Alexandria, crawling with more than 3,000 militants, as the sign of a new start for Egypt. Following Khaled Said's death, activists created a Facebook page called *Kulluna Khaled Said*, that is the Arabic for "We are all Khaled Said".

Unfortunately, Khaled Said was neither the first nor the last one to pay for his daring actions and many more would be the activists falling under the regime's yoke. Throughout this chapter, only a narrow portion of these cases can be considered, despite being aware that numbers of daily repressive actions and of victims remain dramatically high.

More specifically, as far as Sisi's regime is concerned, its very first harsh response to activism and mobilization occurred in August 2013, a month after the military coup which

led General Sisi to power and Adly Mansour to the presidency, when the SCAF played a dominant role in the Egyptian political scene. The cruel military response has been widely known as the “Rabaa Al-Adawiya massacre⁹⁶”, a terrible display of violence and repression against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood’s supporters, preceded by another similar protest happened at Al-Nahda Square. The overall impact was dramatic in terms of death toll and world’s public opinion defined the mass killings one of the worst crimes against humanity in the Egyptian history. More in detail, according to a Human Rights Watch source,⁹⁷ the military are reported to have open fire on tens of thousands of demonstrators and killed more than 817 people. Beyond the criticism raised by public opinion towards the military’s harsh reaction, there was also a manipulated media coverage which, not surprisingly, was dependent on the military power and which reported the facts according to the government’s version, either modifying images and footages or even completely removing parts of them.

In the end, what actually had been a perfectly staged and premeditated massacre, as shown by HRW on-site investigations, witnesses’ interviews and leaked video footages, was depicted by governmental authorities as a necessary response to the terrorist acts and the violent incitements by the Muslim Brothers so as to restore order and stability in the country. Again, HRW reports that, in September, Prime Minister Al-Beblawy claimed in the national newspaper “*Al Masry Al-Youm*” that the Egyptian government expected much more to happen on the ground and that the final outcome was less than it was imagined. Apparently, the violent dispersal had been planned and anticipated by the government and all this had led to a massive killing of protesters left without the safeguards that authorities had promised them. As a result of these events, state of emergency was also called and curfews were

⁹⁶ The massacre was named after the Cairo’s square where it was perpetrated.

⁹⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt>

imposed in the country and this, of course, justified the extension of the civil and political liberties restrictions imposed by the regime.

After such escalating events, several human rights organizations have been continuously denouncing the lack of accountability and collaboration by the official authorities in investigating about state violence and crimes. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior has often denied the access to relevant information about the dispersals and manipulated the media coverage on the facts with the help of the other authorities, as mentioned above.

Anyway, carrying on with the analysis of the repression enacted by the regime even after the Rabaa massacre, it must not be forgotten that syndicates and workers' organization had acquired a growing importance in the country and this was not overlooked by Sisi. Consequently, his repression strategies focused more and more on that part of civil society, which was the key for a new potential mobilization, as it had occurred in 2011.

At this point, demobilization returns as a relevant strategy of the new regime. But how did the regime succeed in gradually weakening that specific category of civil society? Basically, it acted from within those organizations, primarily during the transitional phase, getting close to them and gaining their consensus thanks to the Tamarod movement's action so as to better control them, but, eventually, it sought to dismantle them strategically in two ways: by reducing the opposing elements, eradicating the most relevant components and by using cooptation mechanisms in order to bring many elements by the regime's side. This strategy might remind the traditional *divide et impera* principle characterizing the majority of authoritarian systems.

Even though under Morsi's transitional government, civil society movements and workers' organizations had already been made more fragile, it is under Sisi that the regime's

security services have stiffened their repression leading strikers and activists to focus more on values such as national unity or the fight against terrorism. By doing so, the regime was gradually more and more capable of producing factions within the movements and this became even more evident when one of the most remarkable leaders coming from the independent syndicalism was appointed in a ministerial office. Divergences within the associations became wider and there was also an increasing sense of frustration amongst workers and syndicates, which did not see their conditions improved and not even was the national economy's performance any better. Sisi seems to have exploited these elements in order to demolish professional syndicates as well as their organizational potential.

What should be necessarily taken into account is that, by and large, the regime performed a repression openly when dissent was too loud, but also and more importantly in a subtler way, by building a wide network of collaborationism from all the different sources of civil society where dissent was more likely to rise. Such a strategy was aimed at providing the regime with constant information about any attempt to destabilize the system and these mechanisms proved to be effective since they were supported by complex dynamics of sanctions and rewards modifying the incentives of people to collaborate with the regime and strengthening the communicative network built up purposely by the regime.

Those who have not accepted such a compromise experienced the darkest face of the regime but the media coverage concerning repressive measures taken by it has not always been consistent thus proving, again, the great extent to which they were biased. But, again, extensive repressive measures are not likely to be sustainable and easily accepted if they are taken too often as it generally means that the regime is becoming weaker and does not have strong anchors to rely on. As Declich reports, due to the repression enacted by the regime, the 2015 elections registered an extremely low turnout rate (28,27%), which was an evident

sign of the increasing dissatisfaction and distrust towards the system, in spite of what was externally perceived or reported by regime-monitored media.⁹⁸

Arguably, Al-Sisi's regime has also focused much of its energy on isolating the opposition by creating a perfectly designed propaganda as well as a worrying rhetoric aimed at spreading panic and paranoid feelings about strangers and foreigners. Again, what is tackled here is another relevant psychological aspect of the regime's repression using fear and distrust in a profitable way for the maintenance of the overall stability. Foreigners have been depicted by the regime as the main cause of the country's problems since they are believed to be spies serving the interest of Western governments or also terrorists threatening the nation. For this reason, national unity has been often called on for Egypt's sake.

Over the last years, the fear for the foreigner has escalated to such an extent that it has been reported that anyone speaking Arabic fluently but not being known as a local fellow citizen might be seen suspiciously and, in worst cases, even brought forcibly to police stations or jails by security agents. A similar situation was witnessed by the journalist Alain Gresh in Cairo in 2014, whose testimony was reported by Al-Jazeera. In the article, according to Gresh's words, it was written that "[...] Recently, newspapers and TV channels' directors have argued that because of the war on terrorism, they refrain from publishing any information that could harm the state - albeit, hundreds of journalists have signed a petition against that. Moreover, TV channels denounce anyone who makes the slightest criticism. Journalists with different views have been practically excluded from daily newspapers'

⁹⁸ Declich, L. (2016). *Giulio Regeni: le verità ignorate. La dittatura di Al-Sisi e i rapporti tra Italia ed Egitto*. Roma: Edizioni Alegre.

columns. A segment of the public is very vigilant, convinced that Egypt is subject to an insidious European-US-Israeli plot. [...]”⁹⁹

Such measures adopted by the regime and its mania of control clearly show how the current situation is in the country. Furthermore, let us not forget what the sources mentioned earlier have reported in terms of figures and facts prompting that since 2014 repression has been even worse than it was under the last years of Mubarak’s regime. Indeed, it has become extremely pervasive, changing people’s lives and affecting them either physically or emotionally.

If data reported so far about the regime’s suppressive actions might not seem significant enough, we could also rely on further figures provided by another influential Egyptian NGO, “The Al Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence”. According to some of its sources, in the first months of 2016, 88 cases of torture were openly reported amongst which 8 with death sentences. In the previous year, figures were even more worrying as nearly 464 cases of forced disappearances, 1676 of tortures amongst which 500 death tortures had been registered. What is more, it should not surprise that the Al Nadeem Center has recently been one of the most targeted CSO due to its wide activism concerning human rights protection and state violence reporting. Last year, the Egyptian Ministry of Health released a statement in which manipulated information and fake allegations about the Center were made public so as to weaken its position and to determine its closure.¹⁰⁰ In spite of all this, the Center still draws particular attention on many initiatives and petitions aimed at freeing political activists, strikers or trade unionists jailed for political opposition but, in a way, it remains under the strict control of the regime, which did not hesitate to freeze its assets.

⁹⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/11/i-was-arrested-chatting-cairo-20141114175012955778.html>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.alnadeem.org/en/content/our-reply-moh-allegations-regarding-closure-el-nadim>

In addition, it should be underlined that the regime felt the threat of workers' activism from its earliest days since unemployment was a critical issue in the country. According to Springborg,¹⁰¹ military-owned enterprises banned strikes and employees who tried to organize them were imprisoned. As though this was not enough, at the very beginning, the regime imposed also that all street vendors in urban areas should be removed since this activity was deemed fruitful for all those not finding job opportunities. Clearly, this decision also resulted from the awareness that streets were the best place where dissent could be organized, especially in times of dissatisfaction for workers. The potential threat represented by street activism and by workers' emancipation brought the regime to distrust and then outlaw such practices. This element will emerge clearly in the last paragraph when the case of the Italian researcher Giulio Regeni will be tackled. Anyway, according to the regime's strategy, it was far more beneficial for its survival to deprive many workers and leading professional figures of employment opportunities in order to provide them with better economic rewards in exchange for support and loyalty.

Many other examples of the current regime's repression can be provided by looking at Amnesty International reports about the country¹⁰². These sources declare that counter-terrorist attacks have escalated over the last two years seeing many civilians, too, involved. In addition, there have been numerous cases of regime's attempts to restrain the freedom of association, expression and assembly with the help of extensive judicial investigations, which criminalized several NGOs and human rights associations. The photojournalist Mahmoud Abou Zeid has been charged with documenting a sit-in happened in Cairo during the Rabaa massacre and still must face unfair and mass process. Security forces also broke

¹⁰¹ Robert SPRINGBORG, « Egypt's Economic Transition: Challenges and Prospects », *International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement*[Online], 7.0 | 2017, Online since 12 February 2017, connection on 07 June 2017. URL : <http://poldev.revues.org/2277> ; DOI : 10.4000/poldev.2277

¹⁰² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt/report-egypt/>

into the Press Syndicate of the capital, capturing two journalists, Amro Badr and Mahmoud Al-Saqqa blamed for publishing false rumors and inciting protests. Recently, Cairo has also experienced peaceful street protests met by the security forces with tear gas and weapons since they were deemed illegal according to the Law on Assembly (10/1914) and the Protest Law (107/2013). Judiciary is highly corrupted and almost ineffective and no serious or real investigations are carried out when police or security agents use force excessively. A worrying element is also that of forced disappearances, as said before. Numbers are dramatically growing and authorities deny that they even occur, nor is a judicial appeal or a legal protection conceded to the families. Tortures, ill-treatments and beatings are more and more frequent and kept intentionally off-record as well as a higher number of processes held by military courts and ad hoc courts for terrorism-related purposes by openly breaching rule of law.

Furthermore, religious and societal conflicts between Coptic Christians and Shi'a Muslims do nothing but worsen this scenario also providing justifications for the regime to further limit religious freedom and to exacerbate repressive measures against Muslim Brotherhood and any civil group opposing the regime. The threat of terrorism and religious fundamentalism is instrumentally used in order to broaden the target of repression.

That said, after analyzing repression and its more or less subtle mechanisms, it might be extremely important to shed light on a particular aspect of it, that is the economic and logistic support provided by foreign countries to the Egyptian security forces, essential for the suppressive actions within the country. This aspect is closely linked to the economic sector and to the legitimation enjoyed by Egypt as a strategic economic partner in the Mediterranean area and, apparently, Italy is one of those countries contributing to a considerable amount of trade. Again, Declich looks more into the two countries'

relationship, finding out that the Italian Trade Agency is interested in maintaining a close economic partnership with Egypt. Many of the infrastructures and investment projects endorsed by Al-Sisi, as it was described in the second and third chapters, see many foreign companies involved, many of them even before the Sisi era, such as the Italian Eni, Edison, Banca Intesa San Paolo, Pirelli, Gruppo Caltagirone and many more. But, on the whole, what is particularly striking is the even more remarkable role played by realpolitik compared to the domestic affairs of a country where military repression still poses serious concern.

In one of his works, Declich reports some figures provided by an Italian daily newspaper, “Il Fatto Quotidiano”, where it is written that from January to October 2015, Italy exported rifles and carbines amounting to €1,364,738. Giorgio Beretta, from the Italian O.P.A.L (Osservatorio Permanente sulle Armi Leggere) argues that within this sum of money there can be found about 1,266 rifles sent to Egypt from May to June 2015 by the Benelli Armi and Beretta weapons industries, which are highly likely to have been sold to the Egyptian police and security forces. Anyway, it seems logical to think that a huge amount of this trade could be translated into assets for the military regime and Italy has not been the only one country to legitimize Egypt but many other EU states as well as the US, somehow, have endorsed the regime by turning a blind eye on all the human rights violations happening in the country, as it was also previously argued.

In a way, the incentive of several Western states to trade and economic exchanges with Egypt, thus avoiding armed conflicts with the country, could be seen as a contradiction to some democratic peace theory’s assumptions and to a part of literature arguing that more democracy is associated to less human rights violation (Davenport & Armstrong, 2003). In our case, neither the interaction of Egypt with several Western democratic countries nor the increase in the foreign investments rate, as a further source of economic development, seem

to have had a positive influence on Egypt's domestic situation in terms of repression, but actually they seem to have contributed to it.

4.3 Egyptian civil society and activism

We have seen how since the military went back to power in 2014 the main target of the regime's repressive actions has been civil society, whose most leading actors are workers, students, activists, NGOs, public opinion and the media. Civil society also encompasses clubs, trade unions, membership-based organizations, foundations and so on and all of them play a fundamental role within the society.

In order to grasp how these actors have been marginalized more and more by the regime through a sustained repression over the last three years, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the civil society as a whole. As in the other countries of the Middle East area, civil society in Egypt has always been strongly tied to the regime and its activity has been mostly constrained by authoritarianism. The majority of the activities within the realm of civil society is carried out by the civil society organizations (CSOs), which have enormously contributed to the liberalization of some Middle East regimes in the late '80s and '90s. Yet, this was far from being defined as an actual process of democratization since governments and regimes kept on imposing strict control over most of them by interfering with their functions. This often resulted in the closure of some CSOs such as, for instance, the Cairo Ibn Khaldoun Center in 2000.¹⁰³

An important contribution by Kienle (2012) shows how the scarce presence of a wide range of CSOs on the territory results in fewer social and political transformations that may induce political shifts from authoritarian towards more democratic systems. Their inability

¹⁰³ Kienle, E. (2011). Civil society in the Middle East. (p.2)

to affect the socio-political dimension of the country as well as to aggregate the different interests of the society where they are based is the consequence of the severe authoritarian control they are subjected to.

Particularly in Egypt, during the socialist regime, many of the existing CSOs were eventually used by the establishment as channels for cooptation in order to isolate political opposition and better control the society. Not surprisingly, we will notice that such a trend is still rather diffuse today and Egypt is not an exception. Indeed, through cooptation mechanisms, some CSOs have been used instrumentally and brought strategically under the authoritarian rulers' protection in order to crowd out the remaining organizations working independently and to increase fragmentation of the civil society itself.

As far as Egypt is concerned, more specifically, Kienle also underlines that a huge amount of CSOs advocate of political reforms and human rights protection, trade unions and employers' organizations lack independence and must face considerable obstacles imposed by the regime, especially in the last three years after the new military consolidation. The paramount role played by civil society and, more particularly, by trade unions, syndicates and students through the help of the media, has increased the regime's fear that they might be the catalyst of a new wave of dissent for the second time after the 2011 revolution thus knocking down the regime and halting the process of military consolidation.

The equally important role played by the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian civil society as a grass-roots charitable movement capable of mobilizing an entire country by means of predication (*da'wa*) and political propaganda made them the most targeted enemy of the regime's repressive measures. It must be also added that, the frequent repression perpetrated by the regime, even before the Sisi era, has resulted in a gradual eradication of some professional categories within the CSOs and many of them remained off record

continuing their activity in secrecy. However, such categories were able to organize and later more or less since 2001, regime's repressive actions could not stop strikes and workers' uprisings from coming about. By and large, since 2001 there have been about 1.5 million workers going out on strike in Egypt¹⁰⁴ (Beinin, 2010) and, later on, the Arab Revolutions seemed to be the most evident outcome of a growing dissatisfaction within civil society.

Furthermore, many scholars also argue that political repression affects negatively the organizational capability of the CSOs by inducing people to develop individual coping strategies rather than coordinate activities collectively (Bayat 1997; Bennani-Chraïbi/Fillieule 2003; Zubaida 2008; Seib 2007).

More often, over the last years, civil society has become increasingly dependent not only on regimes but also on private actors, closely tied to state business and to all those sectors involved in the regime's coopting strategies, as it has been stressed in the previous chapter, thus further contributing to a general demobilization of civil society. In addition, even those foreign-funded CSOs which attempt to promote human development and universal values are harshly criticized and stigmatized as bulwarks of the neo-imperialist domination.

Another issue which sets further obstacles to the different groups belonging to civil society is that, in addition to difficulties faced domestically with the regime, they do not always receive an equally adequate or effective support neither by Western governments when they are perceived not to adhere to Western liberal values.

To sum up, what can be said is that, potentially, civil society opens doors for social mobilization and, in the long run, for political turnover, but in Egypt, it has not proved to be easy since the majority of the CSOs have been made dependent on the regime and, therefore,

¹⁰⁴ Beinin, J. (ed) 2010. *The Struggle for Labor Rights in Egypt*. Washington, D.C: The Solidarity Center

they ended up fostering those typical mechanisms of patronage and clientelism, far from a broad-based participation and a collective decision-making.

If we consider the specific case of Egypt, in order to realize how hard it is for civil society to achieve its goals under the regime's pressure, two cases might be reported. Firstly, in 2014, the non-governmental organization "Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights", established in 2002 and advocate of human rights protection in the country, attempted to raise awareness by means of a public campaign against state violence and human rights abuses.¹⁰⁵ This campaign had resulted from the decision of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, clearly under the military's control, to register all the state NGOs under a law, which would allow the Egyptian government to shut down arbitrarily any NGO. Such a decision would certainly have the effect of restraining the activity of many state NGOs thus keeping them under a severe control.

However, it was not the only one case since the regime has recently attempted to reduce civil society's political action, again, by means of a regulatory law recently issued by the Egyptian regime.¹⁰⁶ According to a Human Rights Watch source, such a law (Law 70/2017) is going to criminalize and suppress any NGO's political action made independently from the regime thus posing a serious threat to the freedom of association and to the integrity of the Egyptian civil society as a whole including press, media, NGOs and charity associations. In times of economic hardship and crisis, the services provided by such actors is of undeniable importance in order to guarantee the regime's accountability concerning human rights violations. More in detail, by means of this legal device, civil society organizations are prevented from doing any activity which proves harmful to national security, public order, public morality or public health. For this purpose, a National

¹⁰⁵ <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2014/10/27/human-rights-organisations-launch-civil-society-awareness-campaign/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/02/egypt-new-law-will-crush-civil-society>

Authority for the Regulation of Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations is to be created including all the country's security bodies linked to the regime, whose approval is compulsory for the enactment of NGOs activities. In light of these two cases, it seems that from 2014 up to now not much has changed in the country but the situation has even become worse.

For what concerns the activism within civil society and the role of trade unions and syndicates in the country, it is widely reported that the main focus of demobilization in the new regime's consolidation has been workers and students, as they both were key actors in the country mobilization and in the previous regime's fall. However, before explaining how the repressive actions of the current regime unfolded in the country, it might be useful to provide a general outline about some remarkable events which destabilized Egypt even before Sisi went to power and which can shed light on the reason why the regime repression touched, in particular, that specific component of civil society.

In spite of the current military consolidation and an historically military background, over time Egypt has shown that its people have not always been submissive and compliant with the establishment and this was proven by several circumstances, even before January 2011 Revolution, in which people let the regime hear their voice also at the cost of brutal reactions as a response. A huge amount of such activism stemmed from workers and professional syndicates, who had become extremely sensitive to the issue of unemployment, which represented a serious concern for people and triggered a sense of general dissatisfaction in the country. Even after a period of relatively rapid economic growth from 2002 to 2008, labor force in Egypt still had to deal with difficult challenges such as a higher unemployment rate, an increased population rate and a shrinking public sector.

The symptoms of widespread malaise towards the conditions of labor market were first perceived in one of the most important Egyptian cities, Mahalla Al-Kubra, widely

known for a thriving textile sector and for the presence of a huge spinning and weaving factory. The first rebellions in the city burst out in 2006-2007 but it was only one year later that protests reached a considerable level thus posing a real threat to the stability of Mubarak's regime. Strikes were organized by leftist groups and by trade unions against regime's policies, complaining about corruption and rising prices and asking for an increase in the national minimum wage. This time, protests and mobilization, also including younger workers, were harshly repressed by security forces by occupying factories in order to stop the revolts. According to a local source, hundreds were arrested and dozens were critically injured during the crackdown.¹⁰⁷ These events quickly led to the destabilization of the already weak political system on which the regime was based and escalated in further protests occurred in 2011. What Egypt experienced that year, indeed, was the unavoidable result of a process which had already begun a few years before and that had an even bigger impact due to the role played by technology and by social networks in spreading dissent across the country. The young activists' movement called "April 6th" was one of the forerunners of 2011 revolution. As mentioned earlier in my work, also the movement *Kifaya* was a strong catalyst of social protests targeting Mubarak and his family thus contributing to an escalation of the crisis.

In 2010, civil society proved to be able enough to organize dissent and, therefore, hundreds of citizens, activists, journalists, workers and students gathered in the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) in order to attend a political meeting with the help of an active human rights NGO managed by the lawyer Khalid 'Ali.

This clearly demonstrated that the Egyptian society was mature enough to conceive a political change in more democratic terms and dissatisfaction found its greatest expression in people no longer fearing so much the regime as they used to and in a more intense political

¹⁰⁷ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/5777/Business/Economy/Egypt-Mahalla-workers-strike,-bring-demands-to-th.aspx>

engagement. However, if we look at the current situation of the country, this pattern seems to have been reverted.

At this point, an interesting concept deeply connected to the participatory dimension and worth-looking at is responsibility, as intended by developmental theories. Why is responsibility so relevant, then? According to a research strand, political participation is a form of education to the sense of responsibility which, in turn, allows individuals and the entire society to develop self-critical skills and to manage their affairs according to their own interests. Tocqueville argues that there is a moral perspective through which participation can be also looked at, meaning that it is needed to impose a normative and regulatory code within a society. Furthermore, if we follow the developmental approach, higher participation is also more likely to increase political interest, knowledge and sense of “efficacy”. I argue that the latter, in particular, has a paramount function in a political community since it gives citizens the idea of being truly connected both horizontally as all members of a polity and vertically to the ruler.

Applying this to the case of current Egypt, it can be noticed how Sisi’s regime intends to appear as fitting into a similar pattern, but, due to the absence of a real participation, to demobilization and the suppression of any citizens’ attempt to participate, basically, the Egyptians cannot rely on political participation as a core element to develop self-critical skills in terms of civil and political rights. Far from saying that it is not possible to reverse such a scenario because the Egyptian Revolution has hugely demonstrated that it is, but the current regime has been acting in order to further restrain any political space.

Indeed, it was the past experience of the 2011 revolution itself and the degree of awareness achieved by the Egyptians, with its destabilizing effects on the establishment, that has led the new regime to adopt even more repressive measures and to isolate citizens from effective participation more than the previous Mubarak era had done.

4.4 The Regeni case

What will be dealt with in this last paragraph, finally, is one of the probably most evident examples of how the regime's repression affected the lives of many individuals and how it has had both a domestic and an international impact by targeting anyone who tries to foster mobilization or to organize dissent. Giulio Regeni was one of those who, seeking to understand the mechanisms behind the regime's repression and how it affected Egypt's economic and social development, fell victim to the regime's cruel and ruthless action.

Regeni was an Italian 28-years-old PhD researcher determined to discover more in depth how it was possible to support the activity of independent syndicates and he intended to do this by collecting information and testimonies from street vendors and aiming at providing them with opportunities to improve their conditions. By doing so, he would obviously contribute to reactivate and foster mechanisms of mobilization, which the regime feared and wanted to avoid at any costs. Syndicates were that more sensitive component of civil society that, however, had ended up internally divided because of the regime's demobilizing strategies, as it has already been argued.

Regeni was very long-sighted in his analysis and found out that syndicates and street vendors could be the new turning point for a concrete change and, therefore, he desired to carry on with his research regardless of the hostile environment around him and unfavorable circumstances. He was pushed to the research project by the Cambridge University where he was a PhD fellow and by his supervisor, Rabab Al-Mahdi, and, for this purpose, he returned to Egypt for the second time after 2012 as a visiting researcher at the American University of Cairo. He had planned to stay in the Egyptian capital for his research project from September 2015 until March 2016. Unfortunately, he would never come back to Italy since few months of research were enough for national security agents to understand that his commitment would represent a threat to the regime and, consequently, he had to be stopped.

Regeni's disappearance happened on the 25th of January, 2016, fifth anniversary of Egypt's January Revolution and only a few days later, on February 3rd, the young researcher's body was found completely slaughtered and almost unrecognizable along a street leading from Cairo to Alexandria.

Much has been said later about this cruel murder, but little has been done so far in order to completely unravel a rather disturbing truth. According to what has been stated and reported and to the following events, one thing is for sure, that is the Egyptian regime's direct responsibility in this fact, despite what official authorities eventually declared.

More importantly, what should be held into account, is that this has been only one of the many terrible murders committed by the regime and it should not be seen as an exception at all. Moreover, it has obtained a higher media coverage due to the fact that Giulio was not an Egyptian citizen and also because Al-Sisi's government has denied accountability over the murder. In addition, further investigations demanded by Italy and human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International, through the campaign "Truth for Giulio Regeni", have not been made available and the regime has been keeping intentionally secrecy and reticence over the murder.

What has been discovered in a second moment was that the regime's security services, in order to obtain detailed information about Giulio and his activity, used one of the street vendors' syndicalist at Cairo's Ramses markets, whose name was Mohammed Abdallah, also known as Mohammed Saber. Giulio had met him thanks to Hoda Kamel, his friend and Head of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights based in Cairo, already mentioned. She had suggested that the young researcher should get closer to Abdallah in order to acquire more details about syndicates and the street vendors' situation. Unfortunately, Giulio could not imagine that one of his conversations held in Arabic with

that man about his ideas for those syndicates was actually recorded and would be leaked immediately to the regime's security services.

What brought the regime under suspicion was the fact that after the man's body was found in terrible conditions, the Egyptian official authorities did not hesitate to say that it was Giulio Regeni's body but according to scientific estimations, it was almost impossible to recognize him in such conditions.¹⁰⁸

A bubble burst, then, when allegations pointing the Egyptian regime as responsible were eventually backed by Reuters Agency, stating that Giulio Regeni had been captured, tortured and, some days later, killed by the internal security services in the same way as many more activists were being murdered in the meanwhile. The regime's response to the accusations proved to be similar to that of the other human rights violations cases occurred in the country against activists and journalists still detained in jails and victims of tortures and ill-treatments. Official authorities promptly reacted attacking Reuters and deeming those accusations as false and unreliable. In addition, Al-Sisi himself with the support of the Ministry of the Interior, Mahmoud Abdel Gaffar, decided to make the usual and formal rhetoric speeches, broadcast on all national TVs and radios, indicating that a conspiracy was being built by the Western states in order to put Egypt in a bad light and that it was essential to keep order and stability for the country's sake. Again, the element of conspiracy and external menaces returned as a constant in the regime's rhetoric when the risk of mobilization was perceived.

Furthermore, as far as the media coverage about the Regeni case is concerned, Egypt has apparently remained silent due to the suppressive measures and threats by the regime.

¹⁰⁸ Bonini C., Foschini G. *La battaglia per la verità su Giulio Regeni*. Il muro di sabbia. Insetto Repubblica, 7 aprile 2017

The Egyptian activist Ahmed Abdallah, director of the NGO Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (Ecrf) and the 26-years-old journalist Basma Mostafa have been some of the exceptions to this silence and, as a result, they have been prosecuted and condemned by the authorities and are still under arrest. Abdallah had released a report revealing dramatically high numbers related to all the forced disappearances from December 2015 to March 2016 amounting to 204, half of which remained unnoticed, whereas Mostafa was trying to go further in the investigations about Regeni's death but she could not do much because she was arrested by the regime.

On the contrary, the other side of the country's public opinion together with some of the media, under the regime's influence, have obviously criticized the international mobilization for the Regeni murder. A demonstration of this was given by the Arab journalist Rania Yassen in a brief speech during Al Arabiya TV channel's broadcast, reporting that Egyptian official authorities were going to investigate over the source of the anti-regime information released by Reuters about the Regeni case. I deem necessary to report here below the angry comment made by the journalist after a while, translated from Arabic to English, so as to have a clearer idea of the degree of repression existing in the country.

“[...] But I want to tell you this: all this international concern shown for the Regeni case, particularly by the UK and the US, all this means just one thing: this is a conspiracy! As if Regeni's murder were the very first case of murder in the world! But how many are the Egyptians murdered, the kidnappings and the disappearances in other countries? Mafia gangs do anything in all the world's countries, particularly in those places known for this, mafia is in Italy, mafia is in the US and even in South America. It is as though this is the first time ever that a similar thing happens in a country! It's really annoying! Everyday talking about this, lots of words, hypotheses... Frankly, at the beginning, I felt sorry for that young man killed, but now we have enough! To hell with it! I've reached the point of being fed up with this: to hell with it! What is that? What is that, really? What do you want with all this thing about Regeni? What happened? Investigations are still underway, what is all this mess about for a young man? What is that? Be patient! What do you want? We, too,

have a young Egyptian man disappeared in Italy and we didn't get any news about him! We, too, have similar cases of Egyptians killed in other countries, we didn't shut up, okay, but we didn't even make such a fuss for a guy, who was also suspected... I don't want to say things I'm not sure about, only God knows it, but it's clear that there are still a lot of doubts about it, that he might as well belong to some secret services. So, stop it now, we're so sick of this! [...]"¹⁰⁹

There is no need to add much to such a baffling reaction, but what is to be known is that during the days of Regeni's disappearance, two other human rights activists were found dead with their bodies tortured similarly to what happened to Regeni. The Egyptian press reported such findings but, however, the Ministry of the Interior Gaffar kept on denying that it was due to the regime's action and claimed that they had been shot dead by criminal gangs.

Evidence of the regime's responsibility in this fact as in all the other similar cases can be supported by other Italian activists and freelancer journalists detained for a period in the country due to their activities and Declich, again, reports some of them. David Sansonetti, detained and arrested for alleged espionage, witnessed the regime's subtle strategy to gain consensus and to appear as guarantor of order and stability. According to him, the 25th of January 2014, a particular day for Egypt, as it was said, was chosen by Al-Sisi to gather all his supporters in Tahrir Square keeping all the regime's opponents far from the place by means of tanks and, consequently, the media coverage was focused on scenes in favor of the regime filming people hailing Sisi and the military sided with them, according to official authorities' version. Let us not forget that Giulio's very last moments were in Bab Al-Luk Square, strategic place for the 2011 revolution and near Tahrir Square.

¹⁰⁹ The video of the speech can be seen here: <http://www.lastampa.it/2016/04/25/multimedia/esteri/caso-regeni-giornalista-tv-egiziana-contro-litalia-e-un-complotto-VAXt0B1b6srEfJgBrvqw1N/pagina.html>

Furthermore, another man reports his scary experience while being kept in a jail, targeted by the regime for being gay as also LGBT movements has to face regime's repression. What can be noticed is that pain and tortures caused by the regime to all the activists on a daily basis as well as the continuous casual raids by the security forces act like a double warning both for the Western states not to interfere with Egyptian domestic affairs and for young national activists seeking to knock down the regime so that fear and silence can prevail over activism.

In conclusion, what can be finally said is that the Regeni case has been one of the most evident cases of blatant and ruthless human rights violation perpetrated by a regime which is as harsh and cruel as it is necessary for geopolitical reasons in the Mediterranean area. Apparently, the concern shown internationally by Western countries has not proven enough to deter Al-Sisi from consolidating one of the most severe authoritarianisms in the last two decades.

However, at the end of the day, repressive measures are not the symptom of strength and consensus around the regime and it is unlikely to prove effective in the long run. The weakness of the regime might also be made more evident by that same category which was the source of consolidation, that is the military. The latter, in fact, can be powerful instruments of a power reorganization if the overall equilibria change.

By the way, in light of this, it might be useful to conclude this discourse about repression by further stressing how it can be a double-edged sword, as defined by Bischof and Fink, and this concept is further explained by Gene Sharp in one of his seminal works of which I will report some lines, since they provide remarkable suggestions about how repression can be overcome in the hope that what Regeni and so many other activists were

and are still willing to search for or fighting for is alive somewhere and not lost forever and that a second Egyptian Revolution is actually not so far from happening again.

“[...] The army is one of the most important sources of the power of dictators because it can use its disciplined military units and weaponry directly to attack and to punish the disobedient population. Defiance strategists should remember that it will be exceptionally difficult, or impossible, to disintegrate the dictatorship if the police, bureaucrats, and military forces remain fully supportive of the dictatorship and obedient in carrying out its commands. Strategies aimed at subverting the loyalty of the dictators’ forces should therefore be given a high priority by democratic strategists. The democratic forces should remember that disaffection and disobedience among the military forces and police can be highly dangerous for the members of those groups. Soldiers and police could expect severe penalties for any act of disobedience and execution for acts of mutiny. The democratic forces should not ask the soldiers and officers that they immediately mutiny. Instead, where communication is possible, it should be made clear that there are a multitude of relatively safe forms of “disguised disobedience” that they can take initially. [...]”¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Sharp, G. (2012). *From dictatorship to democracy: A conceptual framework for liberation*. The New Press.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, by looking at the different dimensions of such consolidation, what emerges is that the regime has used to a considerable extent a vast array of strategies and one of them, that is repression, has been used even more intensely.

As it has been underlined in the third chapter, Al-Sisi and the military have further strengthened their position and their role within Egypt's political backdrop by coupling subtle strategies of cooptation with extensive and pervasive repressive actions. More importantly, by targeting key actors of civil society and civil activism in order to induce demobilization, these measures are the result of the profound regime's concern towards the potential risk of popular mobilization, as it happened in 2011 with the Egyptian Revolution. This is what must be necessarily avoided in order for the military establishment to survive. Fear, suspicion and insecurity have turned into the main pillars of Al-Sisi's repressive apparatus and, apparently, they are functional to the military's interests. Terrorism and fundamentalism have been increasingly used by the regime as scapegoats to justify widespread violence and random raids caused by official security forces with the collaboration of security services and sophisticated secret agencies. As in any authoritarian system, the police and the security forces have been made watchdogs so that a severe control is constantly kept on anyone's action, much resembling Bentham's concept of Panopticon or the Foucauldian pervasive mass surveillance's system.

The fact that repression has been used massively and even more frequently than the two other variables essential for an authoritarian government's maintenance and consolidation may suggest that the current Egyptian regime has gradually come to be weaker and threatened by inward and outward pressures. The rhetoric as well as the psychological devices on which pro-regime propaganda has been based is not likely to guarantee the regime

an endless popular support. Moreover, dissent might find other effective ways to organize and to revert this consolidation process.

If it is true that, on the one hand, syndicates and workers have been made weaker, on the other hand, it seems also difficult for the military to be able to deal with more demanding challenges in the long run, especially after that the Egyptians have already once demonstrated to be capable of organizing dissent.

In addition, as it has been explained, the main sector in which Al-Sisi tried to consolidate more the military power has been the economy, by creating a concentrated business network to which only the military basically have access. Nevertheless, “Sisinomics”, that is the whole set of economic measures taken by Al-Sisi, according to a Springborg’s definition, has not allowed the Egyptian economy to perform so successfully up to now, as unemployment and high inflation rates are still reported to be just some of the most serious problems faced by the country nowadays.

As far as Egypt’s military consolidation is concerned, if a more objective analysis is to be given in the end, what should be taken into consideration is that such a consolidation has been also the result of a badly-managed transition after the 2011 revolution. There is no doubt that the military power kept being strong during this phase, but military consolidation was even more determined by the fact that transition was not effectively conducted and valid political alternatives were actually missing.

In circumstances where the main opposing force, represented by Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood, could have taken advantage of the political vacuum in order to give the country a new alternative, opposition itself was broadly divided and fragile whereas the military represented the best guarantors of a national salvation at stake. Let us not forget that during the anti-Mubarak protests, the military were essential to tear down the regime and, more importantly, they sided with protesters by protecting them from Mubarak’s security forces

and the police. This aspect has certainly given the military a clear-cut advantage over the other political forces allowing them to gain further legitimation and, later on, to enact a system of elite privileges that had somehow remained embedded in the Egyptian military fabric all along.

The January Revolution had had a great impact on Egypt, ousting Mubarak's authoritarian rule but also, at the same time, leaving the country in a somewhat chaotic state. It was because of this that the military, through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), proved extremely able to lead the country far better than the opposition did, thus keeping a broad control over state affairs and exploiting the fact the Egyptians had to find their own way, again, after thirty years of rigid authoritarian rule.

Therefore, having all this in mind, the authoritarian consolidation undergone by Egypt can be justified more easily, especially if compared to the opposite process occurred in Tunisia, where the transitional government's party Ennahda proved to be more capable of managing the delicate process of transition, leading the country towards a democratic consolidation in a scenario where the military played a more marginal role than in the Egyptian experience.

Ultimately, repression in the way Al-Sisi has been using it to hamper any effective dissent organization, does not seem so compatible with a long-lasting consolidation process, which actually requires more inclusiveness amongst the different political forces and, therefore, sooner or later, the situation will no longer be sustainable for the military as a whole.

What it takes to make a consolidation process as enduring as possible is also a strong internal cohesion and this might not be always present within the military elite due to the unavoidable emergence of clashing interests. Economic incentives and privileges cannot be relied on so much as either external or internal pressures or constraints may arise producing

shifts in the overall equilibria or also being detrimental to the regime's overall stability. Consequently, divisiveness in the broad network of corporate interests may result in a weaker military power and in a more concrete possibility of desertion. This seems to be one of the higher risks of the military being involved in politics, which turns out to be costly, and can also explain why Al-Sisi has been trying to maintain certain privileges untouched so as to make the military body as cohesive as possible.

Certainly, despite state repression and violence, the experience of 2011 January Revolution has not been forgotten and has remained deeply rooted in two ways: one lodges in the fear and threat perceived constantly and obsessively by the regime and the other dwells on young people and activists' hopes that a change is likely to happen very soon. Even if not taking into considerations these factors and if looking at how things are actually going in the country, then, it can be claimed that the military consolidation led by Al-Sisi's regime does not promise much longevity.

Finally, despite the difficulty in making forecasts when dealing with human and social affairs, I argue that if, on the one hand, democracy in Egypt is still likely to find some obstacles to develop and consolidate in the next years, on the other hand, the current regime will not be able to go far beyond a certain threshold of consolidation and nor will it remain as stable and enduring as Mubarak's regime was. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that even the most brutal authoritarian regimes cannot thoroughly prevent underground activism, which is more likely to radicalize in similar political scenarios. Therefore, there can be no more doubts about the fact that Al-Sisi's military consolidation poses a threat, firstly, to itself, but also to any further democratic development of the country, where a highly repressed civil society is more likely to end up expressing itself by radicalization as well as political extremism.

I shall conclude now by reporting on the following page a meaningful part of a famous poem called “Al-Midan” written by an Egyptian poet, Abdel Rahman Al-Abnoudi, on the occasion of the January Revolution and read out publicly ten days after the Tahrir Square sit-in. I argue that the following piece symbolizes the hope for a change and for new future developments, showing vividly how young activists felt about expressing their dissent and making something concrete for their country’s freedom from a suppressive regime. It could also be perfectly adapted to all those current cases of activists and opponents still daring to fight repression or simply wanting to give their opinion. The part of the text chosen and reported here below is both its original version in colloquial Arabic and its English translation.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ The translation here below was taken by the following website: <https://translatingrev.wordpress.com/2011/03/13/67/>

“الميدان”

ايادي مصرية سمرا ليها في التمييز
ممددة وسط الزئير بتكسر البراويز
سطوع لصوت الجموع شوف مصر تحت الشمس
أن الأوان ترحلي يا دولة العواجز
عواجز شداد مسعورين اكلوا بلدنا اكل
ويشبهوا بعضهم نهم وخسة وشكل
طلع الشباب البديع قلبوا خريفها ربيع
وحققوا المعجزة صحوا القتل من القتل
اقتلني قتلي ما هيعيد دولتك تاني
بكتب بدمي حياة ثانية لأوطاني
دمي دة ولا الربيع الاتنين بلون اخضر
وببتسم من سعادتني ولا احزاني؟

“The Square”

*Egyptian hands, tawny and discerning
In lightning, stretched, the stands,
smashing.
People's voice shines. Egypt is
unveiled under the sun.
O state of the barren, begone!
Greedy and dull, it devoured our land.
In form, greed and disgrace, all of the
same brand.*

*There arose wonderful youth
blossoming autumn into spring
Making the miracle, raising the
phoenix from the ashes.*

*Kill me, it matters not. Your reign is
gone.
For my land, my blood writes a new
tomorrow.
Is it blood or Spring? Both green as
one.
And do I smile of happiness or sorrow?*

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Summary

The following work is the result of some questions that I had been asking myself throughout the last year concerning an issue which, lately, has been tackled in many discussions, despite not directly, also due to a pretty extensive media coverage related to it. Two events, in particular, stimulated my interest, which were, firstly in January 2016, the death of the young Italian PhD researcher Giulio Regeni in Egypt and, after a few months, in July, the coup attempt occurred in Turkey. More than the facts themselves, what I found worth-understanding was the general reaction of the country, in terms of internal dynamics, after the events. Despite being naturally aware of the enormous difference existing between the two facts both from a historical and political perspective, there was a common denominator that could be found, that is to say, an authoritarian form of regime in both countries.

That said, I decided to draw closer attention on the singular case of Regeni's murder, also driven by the intention to have a clearer idea of what was the surrounding backdrop of the country, the political and economic scenarios, and the reason why such a thing might have happened. Therefore, it was necessary to focus more on the country itself so as to grasp more specifically the mechanisms through which the current Egyptian military regime has succeeded in consolidating and, therefore, affecting the lives of millions of citizens. More importantly, what was to be analyzed in depth was how and if the regime truly gained a widespread legitimation also seeking to understand why Egypt, as the country which was one of the more intensely affected by the Arab Revolution's experience, after the transition, underwent the backlash of a military consolidation rather than following a democratic path like Tunisia, for instance.

Therefore, I divided the analysis into four chapters each one tackling crucial aspects in order to understand how the Egyptian military regime led by the former field marshal

Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi achieved a non-democratic consolidation process even more intense than that one happened under Mubarak pre-revolutionary era.

More specifically, the first chapter gives a general theoretical framework about the military regimes, explaining how literature has considered them and what are the possible patterns of transitions from a democratic to a military regime. Before providing a definition of military regime, it is necessary to draw closer attention on the concept of authoritarian regime and on how it has been defined by literature. What could be reckoned by this preliminary discourse was that there are still many authoritarian regimes in the world of today and that the military are hugely involved in some of these cases, classified as “military electoral authoritarianisms”.

Afterwards, the work proceeds to outlining the several possible reasons why the military choose to intervene politically or not. By the way, the scholar, Finer argues that military intervention is more likely to happen in underdeveloped or developing countries than in consolidated democracies and, furthermore, one of the leading cause is their willingness to protect a self-interest or corporate interests, often disguised by a self-proclaimed role of national salvation’s guarantors. According to Nordlinger, the majority of coups enacted by the military are “factional” rather than “corporate” and this results from a higher internal weakness of the military elite, which would not allow them to rule for a long time, despite having far more organizational ability than civilian groups.

It also equally important to take into consideration how the different transitions towards a military regime may occur and what can be said about it is that the most cases experiencing such transitions are “hybrid regimes” where democratic is far from being fully established, institutions are basically fragile and corruption is widespread. In addition, this typology of transitions, after that a coup or a self-coup is staged, may lead to either proper

military government being installed with a *junta* or to hybrid outcomes such as “less-than-military” regimes and military-supported civilian governments.

In the final part of the chapter, then, the case of Egypt is considered giving a preliminary historical outline on its military background from 1956 until now. This is essential to further comprehend why a military consolidation in the country was even more likely to happen.

The second chapter provides an economic analysis in comparative terms taking into consideration also other countries belonging to the Middle Eastern area so as to see how economic trends in the area have evolved from 2014 up to now and how the Egyptian consolidation differed from the trends of the other countries considered, which are Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Economic figures and data are an extremely important aspect when the political evolution of a country is assessed and when the regime’s consolidation process is studied in its core mechanisms.

Nevertheless, economy-based assessments have turned out to be rather complicated due to the unavailability of several fundamental sources and by a certain difficulty in finding official updated figures that could be deemed more reliable. However, many and different databases have been searched for and consulted such as Statista Dossiers and IMF and World Bank websites in order to make use of a variety of information sources as much as possible. Moreover, considerations specifically related to Egypt’s economic performance and to its military expenditure indices have been made in order to understand also how the economic sector has been strategic for the consolidation of military power during these years and who are the major business actors and companies involved in this process, as a whole.

Ultimately, also tables and charts have been inserted in an appendix to the second chapter in order to give an overall and more immediate idea on figures and data discussed

throughout the chapter. More in detail, what has been underlined in this chapter was that, by and large, the most impelling challenges that Egypt's economy has had to deal with up to now were a soaring inflation and an increasing population growth rates, resulting the highest ones in the area.

In addition to this, what makes this scenario worse is a gradual currency devaluation aiming at fostering exports and protecting influential business groups as well as their investments. Despite an increase in the investment rate and promising forecasts of national growth for the next years, Egypt is still affected by high economic inequality and productive inefficiencies. Wealth seems to be allocated disproportionately in the hands of the military elite and unemployment rate still represents a serious concern for a huger amount of people, more than it was for Tunisia.

Nor has the regime contributed to improve such a scenario with the decision of cutting down public subsidies in 2016 thus provoking a certain dissent that, however, has been immediately suppressed.

Therefore, it can be argued that the economic measures adopted by the regime over the last three years might be deemed as a zero-sum game which has done nothing but reproducing the same traditional power structures.

In light of this, what this chapter also looks at is the military expenditure variation, also in comparative terms, as the analysis of this variable enables us to obtain further confirmations about Al-Sisi's consolidation process. Indeed, according to a military-related comparative study based on 88 countries, Egypt is one of the nine countries having one of the most sophisticated military bodies and, finally, according to the SIPRI military expenditure database, Egypt has further empowered its military equipment between 2013 and 2014, that is the period when the consolidation process began with a more central role played by the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) in the politics of the country.

During this year, figures and data by a survey conducted by the Zogbi Research Services indicated also that the military played a strategic leadership role within the transitional process and, consequently, they gained much popular legitimation as they were seen as the real guarantors of stability and national unity.

The last part of the chapter gives an insight on the strong interaction between the military and the most relevant state business, national industries as well as public and private companies. Therefore, some worth-mentioning names of companies operating in strategic sectors have been reported down in a table showing also how many of their chairmen or chief executive officers were closely tied to the military elite and, hence, to the regime.

Here, cooptation mechanisms are introduced as one of the key elements for the regime's consolidation by strategies of clientelism, economic rewards, regulatory controls, state participation in joint ventures and closed-door agreements amongst the different business actors. The military hegemony over the Egyptian economy has been further strengthened by issuing new regulatory laws that have increased the regime's leverage on strategic productive sectors and landmark investments, especially through the Suez Canal Authority and with the support of foreign partners like the Italian ENI, Russia, China or the Gulf Countries for oil, power-producing plants and infrastructures.

It should not surprise, then, to find out that many of those actors involved in such an elitist business have been given parliamentary seats and political offices so that the regime may keep a stricter control also over the decision-making and this, clearly, produces strong conflicts of interest.

The remaining two chapters go more into the depth of the mechanisms which have been adopted by the regime in order to guarantee its maintenance over the last three years. In the third chapter a closer attention is drawn on the strategies of covert consolidation

because they have been used by the military regime in a subtler form and, consequently, are not so immediately perceivable. They are, firstly, legitimation analyzed both from a domestic and a foreign perspective and, secondly, cooptation, a pretty common trend in Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes.

When taking into consideration legitimation as the first of these fundamental mechanisms, it is necessary to make a definitory distinction between legitimacy, intended as the normative value according to which a ruler has the right to rule and legitimation, defined as the whole process through which legitimacy is achieved.

That said, beyond all the literature concerning the topic and its theoretical framework, as far as Egypt is concerned, a primary role was played by the ideological element or, as Scharpf defined it, the “we-identity” factor, which is based on the national, cultural and historical unity of a political community. There is wide evidence that this element of the common state interest for the sake of the country’s stability and order, coupled with favorable circumstances or a well-performing economy, at least in the very first year, is likely to have given momentum to the military regime’s consolidation.

Furthermore, it can be argued that there were also further determining factors such as the military’s expertise and high organizational ability as well as the popular support received during the transitional phase by an extensive anti-establishment propaganda. Indeed, during the transitional phase, before Sisi’s rise to power, an undoubtedly strategic role was played by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and its powerful communicative impact.

The psychological side of this process is also extremely interesting as the regime, once seized the power, exploited the fact that the Egyptians were striving to find their way after 30 years of authoritarian rule and they could not even expect that the military themselves would bring the country back on the authoritarian path. From people’s point of

view, I argue that the profound contradictions of the military's behavior throughout this complex process had a baffling effect since repression began to be enacted from the very start, but, at the same time, they were seen as the only guarantors of political stability and order in the country. Therefore, this pattern seems much close to a "cognitive dissonance" effect on people's perception of the regime and more compliance can be interpreted as the effect of such a difficult adaptation process, which is not necessarily effective to deter dissent in the long run, though.

If cooptation is, then, analyzed as the second core mechanism of the Egyptian military consolidation, it is evident that this strategy is not a complete novelty as it has always been a very common trait of Middle East politics. What can be said is that, by and large, cooptation has enabled the regime to impose hugely its monopoly over strategic sectors, for instance the economy, as it was argued earlier.

The military seem to have been able to shift their role from a merely defensive body to influential entrepreneurial actors more and more involved in state business. It has been empirically demonstrated that all the military-related or military-owned companies and industries have received a greater and unfair advantage on the market with large-scale investment projects in exchange of political support and legitimacy towards the regime. By doing so, opposition was clearly outplayed both on the economic and the political level.

This pattern has been further sustained by the foreign endorsement given to Al-Sisi's regime by important economic partners and stakeholders regardless of the human rights violation being put in place within the country. What emerges, therefore, is also the strong connection existing between cooptation and legitimation and, ultimately, repression, as argued by Gerschewski in one of his seminal studies about autocracies. If empirical studies such as the fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) have focused more on repression under the Mubarak's era, it could be helpful to turn to Freedom House reports

from 2014 to 2017 when considering repression under Al-Sisi. FH sources underline that for the current military consolidation, demobilization, too, could be added to the three variables mentioned above since it was functional to make civil society weaker and more fragmented thus reducing the risk of dissent or bottom-up reactions.

Finally, also the media coverage, hugely controlled by the SCAF, had a considerable impact on the military's legitimation process by targeting the Muslim Brothers as merely interested in merely religious affairs and detached from basic state interests thus weakening their popular support and their potential as a grass-roots movement.

On the contrary, the fourth and last chapter stresses the importance of a more evident and harder mechanism of maintenance which is repression, used increasingly more by the regime in order to keep any form of activism and popular mobilization under control and to prevent dissent from organizing and posing a threat to the military hegemony.

What emerges from this chapter is that, repression, despite being widely defined by as the backbone of autocracies, turns out to be costly in the long run and needs to be supported by mechanisms such as legitimation and cooptation. In addition, further empirical studies have recently demonstrated that repression is effective up to a certain threshold beyond which it has actually the effect to stiffen rather than deter political opposition.

As far as the Egyptian more specific case, the degree of repression has arguably increased since the military began to consolidate their power and this fact is empirically supported by the so-called Political Terror Scale (PTS) indices. This is an extremely valid instrument providing useful information on the intensity of repression in the country as measured by yearly reports of Amnesty International, the U.S State Department and Human Rights Watch until 2015. In a scale from 1 to 5, Egypt is reported to score 4 thus confirming the high level of repression within the country. In the following years, Amnesty International

and Human Rights Watch, again, reveal that there are more and more cases of civil and political rights restrictions, societal and religious discrimination, widespread corruption, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, tortures, ill-treatments and death sentences. Moreover, all this is further justified by the regime as necessary measures in order to fight the IS terrorism and the threat of Islamic fundamentalism.

In addition, this chapter tackles demobilization achieved intentionally by the regime and it is explained by presenting a variety of regime's suppressive actions within the country against those strategic actors of civil society which can foster mobilization and protests restrained by a more pervasive role of military courts in criminalizing them. After providing a general outline on the Egyptian civil society's activism since the workers' revolts happened in the city of Mahalla al-Kubra under the Mubarak regime, the analysis stresses how NGOs, human rights associations and independent syndicates have recently become the main target of regime's repression and demobilizing action. This should not surprise as the key actors for popular rebellion, strikes and dissent have always been syndication and professional organizations. As a result, it is reported that the majority of the existing NGOs and syndicates have been monopolized and brought under the regime's control by means of an intense cooptation. The activity of the remaining independent NGOs and other civil society's actors, such as the Al Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, has been dramatically curtailed also by means of strict regulatory laws criminalizing their action.

Repression also targeted foreigners and non-Egyptian citizens since an increasing sense of fear and paranoia towards external menaces was spread by the regime and the media coverage was deeply affected by this as a result of the strict governmental control.

Finally, together with some other examples showing how the regime is to be blamed for human rights violations, the case of Giulio Regeni's murder is presented bearing in mind that this case is not an exception in new authoritarian Egypt but it has sadly become a reality,

indeed. Giulio was only one of the many victims of regime's repression and some of them still must face forced imprisonment without due process and tortures just for expressing their criticism towards the regime, whose authorities are neither responsive nor accountable for crime allegations.

By reading the chapter, it is also evident how such cases of harsh repression are often overshadowed by geopolitical reasons, for the strategic and relevant role played by Egypt in the Mediterranean area and the its close partnership, particularly in the military sector and in the arms trade, with Western countries like the United States, the European Union and some Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This fact is linked to what was argued in the third chapter, in the sense that it represents a source of external legitimation, helping the regime to strengthen its suppressive measures with trade and funding and allowing a highly repressive authoritarian system to survive.

To sum up, because of the constraints deriving from the scarce presence of updated information, above all from the economic point of view and the fact that the regime is still ruling Egypt, it appears a rather hard task to forecast the direction that Egypt will take in the next years.

By looking at the different dimensions of such consolidation, what emerges is that the regime has used to a considerable extent a vast array of strategies and one of them, that is repression, has been used even more intensely.

Terrorism and fundamentalism have been used by the regime as scapegoats thus justifying the widespread violence and the random raids caused by official security forces with the collaboration of security services and sophisticated secret agencies. As in any authoritarian system, police and security forces have been made watchdogs so that a severe control is constantly kept on anyone's action, much resembling Bentham's concept of Panopticon or the Foucauldian pervasive mass surveillance's system.

However, the extent to which over time repression has exceeded the two other variables considered fundamental for an authoritarian government's maintenance and consolidation may suggest that the current Egyptian regime has gradually come to be weaker and threatened by inward and outward pressures. Certainly, the rhetoric as well as the psychological devices on which pro-regime propaganda has been based is not likely to guarantee the regime an endless popular sustain. Moreover, dissent might find other effective ways to organize and to revert this consolidation process.

If it is true that, on the one hand, syndicates and workers have been made weaker, on the other hand, it seems also difficult for the military to be able to deal with more and more challenges in the long run, especially after that the Egyptians have already once demonstrated to be capable of organizing dissent when dissatisfaction reaches a high pitch.

Furthermore, "Sisinomics", which is the whole set of economic measures taken by Al-Sisi, according to a Springborg's definition, has not allowed the Egyptian economy to perform successfully up to now, as unemployment and high inflation rates are still reported to be one of the most serious problems faced by the country.

As far as Egypt's military consolidation is concerned, if a more objective analysis is to be given in the end, what should be taken into consideration is also that such a consolidation has been also the result of a badly-managed transition after the 2011 Revolution. There is no doubt that the military power kept being strong all through this phase, but it was even more determined by the fact that transition was not effectively conducted and valid political alternatives were actually missing. In circumstances where the opposition, that is the Muslim Brotherhood led by Morsi, could have taken advantage of the political vacuum in order to give the country a new alternative, opposition was strongly divided and fragile and the military represented themselves as the best guarantors of national salvation. This aspect has certainly given the military a clear-cut advantage over the other

political forces allowing them to enact a system of military elite privileges that had somehow remained embedded in the Egyptian political fabric. The January revolution had had a great impact on Egypt ousting Mubarak's authoritarian rule but also, at the same time, leaving the country in a somewhat chaotic state. It was because of this that the military, through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, proved able to lead the country more than the opposition did, thus keeping a broad control over state affairs and exploiting the fact the Egyptians had to find their way, again, after thirty years of authoritarian rule.

Therefore, having all this in mind, the military and non-democratic consolidation undergone by Egypt can be justified more easily, especially if compared to the opposite process occurred in Tunisia, where the transitional government's party Ennahda proved to be far more capable of leading the country towards a democratic consolidation and where the military played a more marginal role than the Egyptian transition.

Ultimately, it can be said that repression as enacted by Al-Sisi, despite having a relatively effective deterrence role in the short term, does not seem so compatible with a long-lasting consolidation process, which requires more inclusiveness amongst the different political forces and, sooner or later, the situation will no longer be sustainable for the military as a whole. What it takes to make a consolidation process as enduring as possible is a strong internal cohesion and this might not be always present within the military elite due to the unavoidable emergence of clashing interests. Economic incentives and privileges cannot be relied on so much as either external or internal pressures or constraints may come about thus producing shifts in the overall equilibria or they might as well be detrimental to the regime's stability. Consequently, divisiveness in the broad network of corporate interests may result in a weaker military power and in a higher risk of desertion.

Regardless of state repression and violence, the experience of 2011 January Revolution has not been forgotten and has remained deeply rooted in two ways: one lodges in the fear and threat perceived constantly and obsessively by the regime and the other dwells on young people and activists' hopes that a change is likely to happen very soon. Even if not taking into considerations these factors and if looking at how things are actually going in the country, then it can be claimed that the military consolidation led by Al-Sisi's regime does not promise much longevity.

Despite some difficulties in making forecasts when dealing with human and social affairs, I argue that if, on the one hand, democracy in Egypt will still find some obstacles to develop and consolidate in the next years, on the other hand, the current regime will not be able to go far beyond a certain threshold of consolidation and nor will it remain as stable and enduring as the Mubarak's regime was.

However, at the end of the day, my attempt was mainly to answer the primary question concerning how the military have been able to consolidate their power after Morsi transitional era and, in light of this, I intended to present current Egypt's scenario both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective hoping to have given also a satisfactory and rather complete answer to the question and not to have overlooked any relevant detail in this work.

Last but not least, I dedicate the following thesis to the PhD researcher Giulio Regeni for being an outstanding example of courage and perseverance, to his family but also and not less importantly to all those people, still alive or not, who have had or have the strength to resist regime's repression day by day, to hope and fight for truth, freedom or simply for a change.

What is reported in the following page is a very meaningful part of a famous poem called "Al-Midan" written by an Egyptian poet, Abdel Rahman Al-Abnoudi, on the occasion of the January Revolution and read out publicly ten days after the Tahrir Square sit-in.

“الميدان”

ايادي مصرية سمرا ليها في التمييز
ممددة وسط الزئير بتكسر البراويز
سطوع لصوت الجموع شوف مصر تحت الشمس
آن الأوان ترحلي يا دولة العواجز
عواجز شداد مسعورين اكلوا بلدنا اكل
ويشبهوا بعضهم نهم وخسة وشكل
طلع الشباب البديع قلبوا خريفها ربيع
وحققوا المعجزة صحوا القتل من القتل
اقتلني قتلي ما هيعيد دولتك تاني
بكتب بدمي حياة تانية لأوطاني
دمي دة ولا الربيع الاتنين بلون اخضر
ويبتسم من سعادتني ولا احزاني؟

“The Square”

*Egyptian hands, tawny and discerning
In lightning, stretched, the stands,
smashing.
People's voice shines. Egypt is
unveiled under the sun.
O state of the barren, begone!
Greedy and dull, it devoured our land.
In form, greed and disgrace, all of the
same brand.*

*There arose wonderful youth
blossoming autumn into spring
Making the miracle, raising the
phoenix from the ashes.*

*Kill me, it matters not. Your reign is
gone.
For my land, my blood writes a new
tomorrow.
Is it blood or Spring? Both green as
one.
And do I smile of happiness or sorrow?*

