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## Student Thesis

Level: Master

### Development and Determinants of Political Trust in Egypt and Tunisia

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#### A comparative study

Author: Catarina Berglund

Supervisor: Ali Abdelzadeh

Examiner: Thomas Sedelius

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**Abstract:**

The political uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 created a new political order in the region. This research is aimed at examining how political trust has developed from 2011- 2022 in Tunisia and Egypt. It also aims to understand which variables affect political trust and whether the two countries differ. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the field by using the most recent data up until 2022. The research has been conducted with a comparative quantitative method, using Arab Barometer survey data. The results of the study results align with previous scholars' results, the political trust declined in both countries after the Arab Spring but the most recent results from Tunisia show that the trust is slightly recovering. The results also indicate that the institutional theories of political trust are the more relevant theories when it comes to explaining political trust in the studied countries.

**Keywords:** Political culture, Political Trust, The Arab Spring, Democratization, Autocratization

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## 1. Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have a history of being perceived as being outside the scope of democratization, a phenomenon that has been labelled “Arab Exceptionalism.” What is meant by this term is that the Arab countries have been able to experience economic modernization and liberalization but at the same time remained resistant to political liberalization and democratization (Wilson, 2013, p. 93). The region was instead known for decades of authoritarian rule with political and civil repression which subsequently led to built-up discontent and disappointment (Barakat and Fakhri, 2021, p. 281).

In late 2010, and in early 2011, protests and uprisings broke out in the Arab world widely referred to as the “Arab Spring”, the “Arab Awakening” or “Arab Revolutions” (Abushouk, 2016, p. 53). The protests started in December 2010 in Tunisia and quickly spread throughout the Middle East and the Arab countries. By the end of February 2011, close to all countries in the region were experiencing tumultuous protests and the people were demanding political change and democracy. In some countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, the regimes gave in, and the government stepped down. Other countries, such as Morocco and Saudi Arabia implemented political changes to please the public whilst in the third case, such as in Libya and Syria; the government responded to the protest with military actions (Lynch, 2014, pp. 1-2).

The events that took place during the Arab Spring, have similarities to what happened during the third wave of democratization in Latin America in the 1980s when there were pro-democratic protests put pressure on the military in Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay, Honduras, and Ecuador. This made many believe that the same changes would take place in the Arab world, whilst others considered the protests to be a populist manifestation rather than a democratic one (Abushouk, 2016, p. 59). 12 years later, the hopes for new democracies in the MENA region seem to have been overly optimistic. The protests did create a new order in the Arab world, just not the one that people expected or were hoping for (Lynch, 2018, p. 117). Some even go so far as saying the Arab Spring developed into an Arab Winter due to burgeoning authoritarianism that took place after, state breakdown, civil war, and religious extremism (Rosefsky Wickham, 2019, p. 2).

## 1.1. Previous Studies on the Arab Spring

Democratization after the Arab Spring is a topic that is well-studied by now, within different fields and from different angles discussing the reasons and effects of the uprisings in different parts of the MENA region. There are -for example- several studies on the Arab Spring and democratization process and theories (Abushouk, 2016; Linz and Stepan, 2013), other studies about the political changes after the uprisings (Lynch 2014; Szmolka, 2017; Dinçer and Hecan, 2020), democratization and the role of religion and the Islamist parties in the region (Noi 2013; Housden, 2013) and countless other studies.

The reason for this vast interest is that the region was considered politically stable, and the uprisings came as a surprise to the rest of the world. An event that could be considered a political shock in the region. The expectations that the Arab Spring protest would yield instant democracy were optimistic and, in retrospect, generated hope that could not be fulfilled. The power of people can topple regimes but cannot generate democracy on its own (Rosefsky Wickham, 2019, pp. 2-3). For effective functioning democracy, a supportive civic culture is needed. The term “Civic Culture” was first introduced by Almond and Verba (1963) who described a strong civic culture as containing the ideal balance of parochial, subject, and participant values. This thesis will be focused on the political culture aspect of the Arab Spring as to establish a sustainable democracy, civic attitudes are crucial (Almond and Verba, 1963, pp. 8-9).

Some of the previous research on civic attitudes and the Arab Spring (Teti et al., 2019; Spierings, 2020) concludes that there is still a demand for democracy in the region even after the failed democratization, but that there is significant internal diversity in the region. Tunisia and Morocco have fewer "conservative" opinions than Egypt and Jordan on several subjects, even though global surveys of attitudes and values frequently designate the Arab world as unique from others. It has also been found that in the countries that had an absence of major protests and/or initial political liberalization, the desire for democracy was not affected in comparison to the figures before the uprisings. However, in the countries that experienced major protests and later followed by initial political liberalization, but after democratization failed to appear, the desire for democracy dropped.

Despite the mentioned previous research, the Arab Spring's impact on civic culture, namely political trust, has not yet been fully covered as part of the MENA region's democratization process. Trust is crucial in a democracy, as it links the citizens to the institutions that are intended to represent them. This strengthens the legitimacy of the state and the effectiveness of the government (Mishler and Rose, 2001, p. 30). Further studies in this field are for this reason needed to contribute to a better understanding of the development of political trust during and after a political shock like the Arab Spring.

## **1.2. Arab Spring and Political Trust**

The reason for focusing on political trust as a democratization factor is that the successful building of new democracies depends on the political culture. Political trust is one of a set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments included in the concept of political culture. And if there is trust in the institutions, it is an indication that the institutions are working (Dyrstad and Listhaug, 2017, pp. 87-88). Institutional trust, social trust, and tolerance are factors that play a role in if people will be able to trust and accept a government and, for example, accept the outcome of political processes; knowing that through elections the government can be held accountable (Spierings, 2017, p.4).

Until now, there are limited research on the Arab Spring and political trust. One prominent scholar in the field is Niels Spierings who focuses his study from 2017, on the political trust and tolerance in nine countries in MENA after the Arab Spring, using survey data from the Arab Barometer (AB) and World Value Survey (WVS) from the years 2001- 2014. The result from his research shows that the countries that experienced initial democratization first had an increase in political trust after which a step decline was noticeable. The results also show that from 2013-2014, trust and tolerance were showing signs of recovery. Spierings concludes his study by stating that more comparative studies are needed to determine if the political trust will rise, return to prior levels, or sink even further (Spierings, 2017, 12-13). In another recent study from the region (Darwich, 2019), a mixed method study using survey data from 2016 and interviews finds that overall, there was a low level of trust in government institutions in the MENA region in comparison to Western democracies. Additionally, the governments were rated highly for corruption, and

government officials were regarded to be in power because of personal ties rather than merits (Darwich, 2019, pp. 88, 93).

Political trust is based on hope, a prediction of the future, which cannot always be fulfilled. The degree of trust or distrust is also based on past experiences and collective memory (Norén Bretzer, 2005, p. 2). What is known so far is that political trust in the MENA region is low, and directly after the Arab Spring, it increased in many countries as an effect of democratic changes that took place in many countries. However, this was quite brief and towards 2013-2014, the political trust later shows a steep decline again. This thesis aims to explore, by using the most up-to-date survey data, how political trust has been affected after the Arab Spring, and in that way contribute to the previous research done in this field.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The aim of this research is twofold. The first aim is to explore to what extent and how the political trust in Egypt and Tunisia has changed or evolved since the political events that took place during and after the Arab Spring. As the previous research indicates, even if the MENA is often treated as one homogeneous region, there is significant diversity between countries. The study is therefore also aiming to explore whether there are diverse cultural and institutional variables that are determining the levels of political trust within the two countries. The aim of the study has subsequently led to the following research questions:

- *Q1. How has political trust in Egypt and Tunisia been affected by the Arab Spring and the political developments in the countries afterward?*
  
- *Q2. Are the same cultural and institutional variables explaining trust in both Egypt and Tunisia?*

#### 1.4. Delimitations and Disposition

Egypt and Tunisia are the two out of three countries, that came out of the Arab Spring with the results that their governments were overthrown. The third country, Yemen, experienced a state collapse as a result of the uprisings which then later turned into a civil war with a government in exile (Furlan, 2022, pp. 21-22). Yemen was therefore not selected as a case for this study, and the focus is instead on Egypt and Tunisia representing two countries that both experienced initial democratizations.

Spiering (2017) classifies in his study that Tunisia represents successful democratization whilst Egypt represented an unsuccessful one. Both countries are considered countries that took steps towards democratic transitions, after broad protests, but where the outcomes are quite different. Egypt had only about one year with a democratically elected President who was removed from power by the Egyptian military, while Tunisia experienced a successful democratic transition for about a decade. This study will use a comparative approach to present the development of trust between 2011-2022 between the two countries, which will show more recent figures in relation to political developments. Another delimitation is, regarding the second research question, is the number of variables being used. The study is testing three variables per theoretic approach, which is also due to the scope and time limitations of the thesis.

The outline of this study is as follows; This *first chapter* has a brief background on the scope conditions for the research and the research questions have been presented as well as previous research within the field. The *second chapter* includes a background on the studied countries to provide the readers with some context. In *chapter three*, the theoretical framework for political trust is presented, after which in the *fourth chapter* the methodology and measures used will be presented. *Chapter five and six* finally include the empirical findings, analysis, and a conclusion of the study.

## **2. Background**

The reasons for the uprisings during the Arab Spring came down to the lack of political trust and dissatisfaction with the government's performance, the widespread corruption, and a demand for democracy (Spierings, 2017, p.4). The 2011 uprising in the Middle East did not come out of nowhere. They were the results of years of economic stagnation and lack of political freedom. Through the Internet and social media, it gave the regional population a chance to unify which allowed the protests to quickly escalate in a way that had not been seen before (Lynch, 2014, p. 3). Up until early 2013, Tunisia and Egypt shared many similarities. They both had, after the ending of colonial rule, historically long and strong authoritarian state apparatuses, and during the uprisings, the military sided with the people which caused both leaders to eventually step down. Both countries also, shortly after the uprisings, held free elections and started drafting new constitutions (Hassan et al., 2020, p. 554). A more thorough country background will be presented in the coming sections, to give a more comprehensible picture of the context of the uprisings and the aftermaths.

### **2.1. Tunisia**

The process of Tunisia's independence from France took place between 1952 through 1956. After negotiations with France that successfully ended the colonial protectorate and led to independence, Habib Bourguiba, was appointed as the first Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Tunisia (Willis, 201, pp. 38-39). A Kingdom that was later abolished in 1957 which made Bourguiba President and which he in the 1959 constitution, granted himself unilateral power. Bourguiba was an Authoritarian, but a leader very much committed to his country and its development, which made him an appreciated leader. In 1987, his prime minister Zine Al-Abdidine Ben Ali took over in a peaceful deposition (Willis, 2012, pp. 51).

The Arab Spring is said to have had its starting point in Tunisia in December 2010. It began when a young street vendor set himself on fire, protesting an unjust police force and judicial system. The incident sparked further protest, against corruption, poverty, unemployment, suppression, and inequality, throughout the country with slogans such as "Tunisia Free" and "Ben Ali get lost" – referring to the president in

charge for more than 20 years. The police and government forces responded brutally, which was displayed through social media. After attempts to try to please and calm the public, Ben Ali stepped down from his rule on 14 January 2011 (Abushouk, 2016, p. 55-56).

In the decade that followed, Tunisia was seen as the only democratic country in the Middle East and the only success story of the Arab Spring. The country managed to remove the autocratic regime, and by early 2016, three fair and competitive elections had been held resulting in two governments ruled by two different parties. The people were also enjoying civil rights in a way that was never previously experienced in the country, or even in the region (Bellin, 2018, pp. 439-440). In 2019, a new president was elected; the populist leader Kaïs Saïed who was openly against the current democratic model. In July 2021 President Saïed dismissed the government and later dissolved the parliament. Since then, Saïed has gradually obtained increased power leading Tunisia into severe democratic backsliding. This democratic backsliding was consolidated in July 2021 when he dismissed the prime minister and suspended the parliament (Ridge, 2022, pp. 1540-1541).

## **2.2. Egypt**

The British officially ended the occupation of Egypt in 1922 after which Egypt became a monarchy, ruled by King Fuad, and later succeeded by his son King Farouk in 1936. After the defeat in the 1948 Arab Israeli war, many blamed the King for the defeat which was one of the reasons for the 1952 coup d'état which put General Gamal Abdel Nasser in power. The constitution of 1956 officially banned political parties and limited the influence of the Parliament. Although severely suppressing civil liberties, Nasser was a beloved leader. After his passing in 1970, another military man Anwar Sadat came to power, who, in 1971, implemented a new constitution that included safeguarding for civil liberties, and during the 70s political parties were slowly allowed back into existence. However, after his popularity started to decline, more autocratic tendencies were evident. Sadat was however assassinated in 1981 after which the current vice president Hosni Mubarak came to power. Mubarak's rule started off with a more open and liberal political climate but starting from the early 1990's, Egypt experienced a democratic decline with the erosion of civil rights, restricted freedom of expression, and electoral fraud,

much as a response to the political Islamic violent attacks that occurred in the country during this time. The 2010 parliament elections are considered the most rigged election during Mubarak's regime (Timm, 2016, pp. 3-6).

On January 25, 2011, the uprising spread to Egypt and protests began against President Mubarak's regime, the widespread poverty, corruption, and unemployment, and human rights violations. The people called on Mubarak to step down in favor of a democratically elected and just government. Also in Egypt, the protesters were met with extreme police violence but also curfews, and communication blockades. After a couple of weeks of trying to calm the public down by dissolving the cabinet and appointing a new vice president, Mubarak was forced to step down on 11 February 2011, leaving the administration in the hands of the military (Abushouk, 2016, p. 56-57).

What followed Mubarak's abdication was a rocky transition period which was followed by Egypt's first competitive election in June 2012. The Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi was elected president, but instead of consolidating democratic rule, Morsi's rule instead exposed and deepened the political divisions and mutual mistrust, which created a political gridlock and public dissatisfaction. After one year of deficient performance, on 3 July 2014, the military interfered and removed Morsi from power by force. Since then, General Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi has been the President of Egypt. In 2018, Al- Sisi was reelected with 97% of the voters' approval after effectively having removed all serious opponents (Zohny, 2018, pp. 99-101).

The outbreak of the uprisings in both countries started by the people jointly protesting against poverty, corruption, and human rights violations and a demand for democracy. Ben Ali had been in power for 23 years at this time, and Mubarak reigned for 30 years. Both dictators responded to the protest brutally but had to find themselves defeated when the military turned against them and stood on the people's side. Tunisia did move on successfully to functioning democracy for a decade, while in the case of Egypt the 2013 military coup d'état and effectively ended the democratic transition.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1. Political Culture**

The term political culture refers to the political orientation in a country or a region which includes attitudes, feelings, cognition, and evaluation towards the political system and institutions by its population (Almond and Verba, 1963, pp. 12-13). Almond and Verba (1963, pp. 17-20) classify political culture into three different categories of political participation: Parochial (citizens are focused on the micro-level: family, community, or village), Subject (citizens are passive, disorganized, disengaged) and Participatory political culture (citizens are interested, cooperative, high social capital) and determines the political culture to be pivotal for democratization and the creation of a sustainable democracy.

Studies show that political culture, including political support, develops through political socialization- from childhood and continuing socialization, but also on the basis of one's own experience (Easton, 1975, p. 446). This could influence the people as to what type of citizens they will choose to be, and indirectly also the political culture of a country. Many theorists of democracy, back from the times of Aristoteles, emphasize the importance of the citizens' active participation in civic affairs, by keeping themselves informed about the former and by a widespread sense of civic responsibility. The American political scientist Harold Laswell, in his political writings from 1951, even specifies the characteristics of the "democrat" which include a warm and inclusive attitude towards other people, a capacity of sharing values with others, a multivalued orientation, trust, and confidence in the human environment, and relative freedom from anxiety (Almond and Verba, 1963, pp. 9-10). In conclusion, political culture studies are based on the idea that a population's values and ideologies contribute to the consolidation of a regime and a successful transition to democracy (Öney and Ardag, 2022, p 839).

#### **3.2. Political Trust**

An important part of political culture is political trust. Political trust refers primarily to attitudes about political institutions and leaders. It belongs to the public sphere rather than the private sphere as social trust. Political trust is less predictable, has more unknowns, risks, and less predictability. Because of this political trust is more

sensitive to the influences and pressure of political life. Political trust was usually before based on social identities and ideological loyalties – reinforced by personal ties and similarities. In more modern societies, political trust is less likely to be based on similarities and a “one of us” way of thinking and more based on personal appearance, policies, and performance (Newton, 1999, p. 179). To maintain stability, viability, and legitimacy; political trust is commonly determined to be a major factor. Political trust is generally seen as the glue that keeps the political system together (Van der Meer and Zmerli, 2017, p. 1). In addition to that, political trust is also argued, with the support of previous research, to make citizens obey the law and pay taxes, and therefore enable efficient government. It also affects democratic states’ ability to gain public consent for public policies. In contrast, those lacking political trust and confidence in government are more likely to engage in conventional activism (Norris, 2011, pp. 223-224).

The terms social trust and political trust are sometimes regarded as one but Newton (2001, p. 205), and others with him, clearly segregate between them. Individual-level survey research also points to a weak, if at all, correlation between political trust and social trust (Norris, 2011, p. 36). Therefore, the term trust should, within the research of political science, always be defined as social or political trust (Newton, 1999, p. 185). There is, however, a common consensus that all types of trust are vital for the sustainability of a democratic system. Trust is essential as it supplies democracy with the social and political capital that is needed for a democracy to remain stable or to consolidate democracy (Rivetti and Cavatorta, 2017, p. 53).

Decreasing confidence in government, political institutions, and politicians is a trend that most Western contemporary democracies are facing. The decrease in political trust is strongest among the younger and more educated citizens who are the ones who have benefitted the most from socio-economic development, a relationship that is supported by studies in the Netherlands, Norway, Germany and Great Britain, and Canada. This increasingly larger group of citizens is expressing discontent with democratic governance and the core institutions. It can be explained by greater expectations of the government and the performance, where the younger population feels that their concerns and interests are not properly addressed (Van

der Brug and Van Praag, 2007, pp. 443-444). Another explanation for the decrease in political trust is the experience of a “democratic deficit,” where changes in political processes have increased the gap between the citizen and the state. To be more specific, the gap between the representative elite and public opinion has widened leading to citizens feeling that their needs and wants are unrepresented. Globalization is another factor, reducing the independence of the nation-states and subsequently increasing the gap between the citizens’ right to be involved in determining public policy in their own country (Norris, 1999, pp. 22-23), a valid concern for example European states in the European Union.

### **3.2.1. Theoretical Approaches to the Origins of Political Trust**

The origin of political trust is debated. The first approach is the top-down institutionalism approach where the political institutions’ performance is the cause or reason for political trust (Mishler and Rose, 2001, p. 31). In this approach, the electoral system, and procedures of forming a government are examples of events and procedures that can generate political trust, and where corruption is seen as a major detrimental to political trust (Van der Meer and Zmerli, 2017, p. 1). The relationship between government performance and trust in government is quite straightforward. If a government fails in providing public services such as healthcare, education, and pension benefits and fails to meet public demands on how to deal with unemployment, a growing discontent is likely to be the result. However, economic changes from a short-term perspective do not seem to affect political trust as this can be blamed on global changes, personal performances, or even employers. It is more likely to be the result of a long-term trend in government deficits. Political trust is also affected if there is large socio-economic inequality in society or if groups in society feel excluded from their rights (Miller and Listhaug, 1999, pp. 206-208).

The second approach to the origins of political trust is the cultural perspective that assumes that trust is a critical attribute linked to basic forms of social relations. Political trust is said to be rooted in cultural norms and communicated through early-life socialization and is formed already in the early years of an individual. Individuals learn how to trust or distrust by experiencing how others treat them, and how others react to their behaviour. First, this is shaped by family members and relatives and later in life, this later expands to school friends, work colleagues, and

neighbours. From this perspective, political trust is an extension of interpersonal trust, which is something that is learned early in life and then projected on institutions. Even though personal life is exogenous to politics, there is a “spill-over” effect into cooperation in local civic organizations, further on to a nationwide network of institutions necessary for representative government. From a cultural approach perspective, there is little that can be done in a short-term period to cultivate trust in institutions, and it takes decades or generations to develop enough trust that is necessary for democratic institutions to function effectively (Mishler and Rose, 2001, pp. 32-34).

Mishler and Rose (2001, p. 34) have developed their own framework to analyse political trust, see Table 1, differentiating between cultural theories and institutional theories but also from a micro and macro theory perspective.

**Table 1.** Theoretical Framework for Political Trust

	<b>Cultural Theories</b>	<b>Institutional Theories</b>
<b>Macro Theories</b>	National Culture	Government performance
<b>Micro Theories</b>	Individual Socialization	Individual Evaluations of Performance

Cultural theory from a macro perspective is based on the fact that that the national culture affects political trust which is something that develops in a society and is historically rooted through national experiences. It can be affected by norms and values, mass media portrayal of politics, and the civic spirit. From a cultural micro perspective, however, political trust varies within countries and is shaped by social capital, socioeconomic status, an interest in politics, and age; low political trust when young then increases with age (Mishler and Rose, 2001, p. 37; Norén Bretzer, 2005, p. 47).

The institutional theory from the macro perspective explains political trust through the success of government policies and the character of the political institution, unemployment levels, the national financial situation, crime rates, and fair elections. The micro perspective of the institutional theory says instead that trust in institutions varies within and across countries in accordance with individual attitudes and

values, the feeling that the political output is in accordance with the expectations, and the feeling of fair and just institutions (Mishler and Rose, 2001, p. 37; Norén Bretzer, 2005, p. 47).

### **3.2.2. Correlates of Political Trust**

It is critical to comprehend how trust develops in order to test competing theories and through previous research about political trust, several correlates can be identified. In general, most of the studies on political studies have shown unambiguous results, some studies show a positive relationship between education and occupational status, whilst others have found a negative. The same inconsistency is found when looking at age and gender. There are also studies that claim that political trust varies over a life cycle and others that suggest that trust increases with age (Schoon and Cheng, 2011, pp. 623-624). According to studies from the US and Germany, political trust is often randomly represented in society and its different layers and is not strongly correlated with variables such as income, age, gender employment status, and education. Instead, it is correlated to political preferences such as left and right-scale politics. Those who sympathize with a leading political party are more likely to have stronger political trust than those who do not. This also makes a (stable) coalition government more likely to generate political trust than other forms of government (Newton, 1999, pp. 181-183). Studies have also shown that political trust and institutional confidence also have a positive correlation with political engagement (Norris, 2011, p. 222).

Other correlates of political trust can be identified through the macro- and micro-theoretical distinctions of cultural and institutional approaches to political trust. The macro-institutional theories give special importance to the performance of institutions, in terms of growth, efficient governing, and avoiding corruption, to create or promote political trust because these outputs are determining the individual's response. Micro-institutional theories, on the other hand, emphasize the factors that determine political trust is depended on the evaluation of the individual who has personally felt the impacts of corruption or the advantages of economic development. Macro-cultural theories, in contrast, focus on that distrust is inherent in authoritarian political cultures which in the micro-cultural theory is reinforced,

but also very much focused on the differences in individual socialization experiences (Mishler and Rose. 2001, pp. 32-33).

### **3.3. Political Trust in an Authoritarian Setting**

The research field of political trust is namely focused on what causes political trust and its consequences. Most of this research has been conducted in a democratic setting as trust is most commonly linked to democracy. However, political trust is also important in an authoritarian setting as political trust is a factor in how to develop and strengthen authoritarianism in the same way as it strengthens democracy (Rivetti and Cavatorta, 2017, pp. 54-55).

Scholars have previously paid much attention to political trust in Western democratic settings, and even more so after Norris (1999) publication of “Critical Citizen”. This is despite the fact that high levels of political trust have also been measured in autocratic settings, especially those with positive economic development (Rivetti and Cavatorta. 2017, p. 58). Dyrstad and Listhuag (2017, pp. 87-88) however are in the study of political trust focusing on political trust in post-Yugoslav countries. They are concentrating on institutional trust as it is a key indicator of institutional performance. Their reasoning is that the institutions are working if there is political trust. Their findings show that Yugoslav successor states as a group have lower confidence levels than the established democracies in Western Europe but that the Yugoslav successor states do slightly better than other post-communist countries. The authors also conclude that parliament is a key political institution in both new and old democracies (Dyrstad and Listhuag, 2017, p. 106).

One major difference between political trust in a democratic setting and an authoritarian setting is that what is seen in a democracy to be originating political trust; accountability and accessibility, do not exist in the authoritarian setting, instead more common traits are authoritarian governance, lack of pluralism and patronage (Rivetti and Cavatorta, 2017, p. 57). This would make it easy to assume that there should be a negative relationship between political trust in authoritarian countries and institutions as distrust is inherent in authoritarian countries (Mishler and Rose, 2001, p. 31).

Nonetheless, several empirical surveys suggest the opposite, especially in several Asian countries (Rivetti and Cavatorta, 2017, p. 58). China is the most perplexing example where, since the early 1990s, high levels of trust have been measured. The figures are higher than in other authoritarian countries, but also in many democratic countries, where 85% of the population of China, according to public opinion surveys, holds trust in the government (Zhong and Zhan, 2021, p. 118). Therefore, the correlation between the lack of democracy and political trust is not to be taken for granted (Rivetti and Cavatorta. 2017, p. 59).

Positive economic development can instead be one of the explaining factors of political trust in an authoritarian setting, with examples from China, Russia, and Arab Gulf States. As the citizens are content with the performance of the government, and the services that the institutions are providing; the government is earning its legitimacy through its positive economic performance rather than through civil rights and accountability. Even so, there are still trends that show that also in authoritarian settings, the younger population is more critical and less trusting than the older generation. (Rivetti and Cavatorta. 2017, pp. 60-62).

Another interesting perspective of political trust in an authoritarian setting, especially seen in the Arab world, is that in many modern authoritarian states, the government sponsors civil society organizations. These organizations are built on the notion that the institutions are insufficient and corrupt and therefore there is a need for civil society to support the people. Within these civil societies' organizations, social capital grows, and they are instead delivering what the government should be delivering (Rivetti and Cavatorta. 2017, p. 62). In the Arab world, this has notably been done through the first ladies as sponsors and founders of semi-official non-governmental organizations. In Egypt, Suzanne Mubarak; wife of the former president, was an active sponsor of several significant organizations focused on children and women. In Jordan likewise, Queen Rania has established several foundations focused on micro-economy, education, and women's empowerment. A strategy that is well executed to create legitimacy and political trust in an informal way and thereby work towards strengthening the authoritarian regime (Heydemann 2007, p. 8).

### **3.4. Political Shocks and the Effect on Political Trust**

Empirical research finds a link between distrust and protest participation, indicating protest occurs when people lack trust in their institutions. Moreover, a low level of trust increases the risk of violent political protest which can be widely spread to show political instability (Barakat and Fakhri, 2021, p. 3).

It is said that political trust is a way to safeguard democracy through crisis or other external shocks; as there are times when semi-democracies in particular may revert to their authoritarian legacy (Norris, 1999, p. 2). A dramatic change in the domestic or international system could be defined as a “political shock,” with examples such as civil war, regime change, or independence of a new state. A negative political shock can be military disputes whilst positive political shocks can both result in dramatic changes and even the opposite; stability in spite of them (Schultz, 2019, p. 8). Subsequently, the Arab Spring can be considered a political shock in Egypt and Tunisia as it led to dramatic changes domestically (Spierings, 2017, p. 5) and assumingly it affected political trust among other things.

Further empirical findings have been found in previous research about political shocks, such as studies on 9/11, where the results show that political trust increased suddenly in the US, but that tolerance decreased- which is another important democratic component. In Central and Eastern European countries during times of transition to democracy, the uncertainty affected political trust negatively. These different results imply that political shocks do affect political trust, but in which way is highly contextual (Spierings, 2017, p. 6). Another study conducted in Greece during the economic crisis in 2008, which could also be considered a political shock, shows that during a crisis citizens are more likely to distrust political actors and institutions if they are already dissatisfied with health care and education, in comparison with the trust during other times. This suggests that in times of economic distress citizens give more weight to the social welfare provided by the state than during less extreme conditions. This also implies that in times of need, political trust decreases if the government fails to deliver when it is needed the most. Regaining political trust is not only about improving the economy but also about whether the citizens feel that there is an improvement in social services that the state is expected to deliver (Ellinas and Lamprinou, 2014, pp. 246-247).

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Research Design**

This study is based on a quantitative comparative research design that uses a case-oriented approach. Conducting a small comparative study, in the same region, will provide the opportunity for a better understanding of the two cases' similarities and differences (Landman, 2008, pp. 68-69). This is important in a region that is often seen as homogenous but has great diversity in terms of culture, traditions, religion, and language. The downside is, however, that the broad generalization that can be made from the results of this study is limited (Landman, 2008, p. 69).

On the other hand, by conducting a large *N*-study, the generalizability of the study would have been higher but at the same time, the purpose of the study would not have been fulfilled as the interest lies in comparing two countries that went through similar events but developed differently in terms of democratization. Other disadvantages of conducting large *N*-studies are the availability of data and the validity of measures (Landman, 2008, p. 63).

### **4.2. Data**

The data utilized in this study derives from the Arab Barometer (AB) Surveys. The first research question was answered using survey data from AB Wave II: 2010-2011, AB Wave III: 2012-2014, AB Wave IV; 2016-2017, AB Wave V: 2018-2019, AB Wave VI: 2020-2021 and AB Wave VII:2012-2022. The survey data was then processed in SPSS.

The surveys encompass individuals aged 18 and above, employing a stratified sampling method to ensure representativeness of the entire population. The primary stratifications revolve around geographic regions, further divided into urban and rural areas. Each randomly selected household contributes one individual as the unit of observation. Face-to-face interviews were conducted for the majority of waves, with the exception of waves five and six due to Covid-19 restrictions (Arab Barometer, 2023).

The sample size (*N*) for each institution per survey wave and country is demonstrated in Table 2 and Table 3. The “don't know” and “refused” answers are

removed as this is the normal practice so that only data with substantive responses are being used. There was available data found for both countries, on most institutions, between the years 2011-2019, however, Egypt was excluded regarding the questions on trust in the latest waves between 2020-2022. AB explains the exclusion of data or some countries in the survey to be due to funding limitations, ongoing instability, or government restrictions on full and fair access to the survey (Arab Barometer, 2023). Therefore, when responding to the second research question, only survey answers and data from AB Wave V: 2018-2019 were used to make sure that the results are functionally equivalent.

**Table 2.** Sample Size Tunisia

Tunisia= N	Government	Parliament	The Army	The Courts and Legal System
2011	1120	-	1148	1077
2013	1148	1131	1179	-
2016	1173	1094	1192	1100
2019	2250	2210	2383	2244
2022	2280	2312	2393	2340

**Table 3.** Sample size Egypt

Egypt= N	Government	Parliament	The Army	The Courts and Legal System
2011	1180	-	1197	1186
2013	1160	1096	1173	-
2016	1154	1102	1174	1138
2019	2362	2290	2397	2349
2022	-	-	-	-

### 4.3. Measures

To be able to answer the first research question; *how trust has been affected by the Arab Spring, in terms of being a political shock*, the following institutions will be included; the government, the parliament, the armed forces, and the justice system. These sets of institutions provide information on how effectively the state performs in delivering fundamental basic public services and a security net, as well as the rule of law, to its citizens. By combining these institutions, an overall figure of the political trust among the citizens can thereafter be identified.

The question used in the surveys is phrased as follows:” I’m going to name several institutions. For each one, please tell me how much trust you have in them. “, with the possible answers being:

- *A great deal of trust*
- *Quite a lot of trust*
- *Not very much trust*
- *No trust at all*

The answers “*A great deal of trust*” and “*Quite a lot of trust*” were afterward combined to give a combined average figure over the percentage of the survey responders who expressed that they have trust in the governmental institutions in the two studied countries. In Egypt, political trust was studied between 2011-2019, and in Tunisia between 2011-2022 in accordance with the available data.

In order to answer the second research question, the theoretical framework identified variables will be utilized to be able to distinguish which variables affect political trust. The determinants of political trust through the lens of the two theoretical approaches, in a micro and macro perspective could therefore be tested the below variables illustrated in Table 4

**Table 4.** Identified Variables

	<b>Cultural Theories</b>	<b>Institutional Theories</b>
<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<i>Political Trust</i>	<i>Political Trust</i>
<b>Independent Variables</b>	Social trust	The experienced level of corruption
	Interest in politics	Contentment with the economic situation
	Level of education	The opinion about government performance

#### **4.3.1. Cultural Theories Measures**

##### ***Social trust***

Social trust in the current study was measured with the following question: “Generally speaking, would you say that “Most people can be trusted” or “that you must be very careful in dealing with people?”” Participants were given the option to answer either: 1. Most people can be trusted or 2. I must be very careful in dealing with people.

##### ***Interest in politics***

The second variable, derived from the cultural approach, was the interest in politics, where the question: “In general, to what extent are you interested in politics?” was used. The response alternative ranged from 1 (*very interested*) to 4 (*very uninterested*).

##### ***Level of education***

The final cultural approach variable was measured using the question: “What is your highest level of education?,” with the following possible answers:

1. No formal education
2. Elementary
3. Preparatory/Basic
4. Secondary
5. Mid-level diploma/professional or technical
6. BA
7. MA and above

#### **4.3.2. Institutional Theories Measures**

##### ***Government performance***

To measure government performance, a question related to the government’s ability to create work opportunities was chosen as unemployment is one of the factors that have been identified as a part of the reason for the uprising at the time of the Arab Spring. The following question was asked: “How would you evaluate the current government’s performance in creating employment opportunities?” where the respondents were given options 1 (*very good*) to 4 (*very bad*) to choose from.

### ***Corruption***

The second institutional variable was measured through the question: “To what extent do you think that there is corruption within the national state agencies and institutions in your country?.” The options provided ranged from 1 (*to a large extent*) to 4 (*not at all*).

### ***Economic situation***

The last institutional variable is the perceived opinion about the economic situation in the country. This variable can apart from being mentioned as a micro-institutional variable, is also relevant when discussing political trust in an authoritarian setting there as studies have shown a positive relationship between economy and trust. To measure the contentment with the current financial situation the following question was chosen:” How would you evaluate the current economic situation in your country?.” The available answers were: 1. Very Good, 2. Good, 3. Bad and 4. Very bad.

## **4.4. Analysis Strategy**

The first question will be examined over time, from the years 2011-2022, to examine whether the Arab Spring as a “political shock” has affected the political trust in the two countries and how political trust has been affected by the political developments that have taken place after the Arab Spring. As a first step towards answering the first research question, the result of those who have expressed that they have trust in four chosen institutions was used to create an average figure of trust between the years 2011 and 2022.

The second research question will be answered by using the most recent available data through a number of variables, identified from the theory section from the cultural and institutional approach of political trust, to be able to understand which variables affect political trust, and if these variables are contextual depending on the country. These variables will then be examined through linear regression analysis to explore whether there is a significant statistical relationship between the different independent variables and the dependent variable political trust (Landman, 2008, p. 56).

The dependent variable political trust is the variable this study is aiming to measure and understand. The four different institutions that trust was measured in question one, were merged into one joint variable named Overall Trust. This merged dependent variable represents the level of trust people have in the political institutions: the government, the parliament, the armed forces, and the justice system.

The independent Variables: Social Trust (interpersonal trust), Level of Education, Political Interest, Governance Performance, Corruption, and Evaluation of the Economic Situation are the variables that are hypothesized to influence political trust. Each independent variable represents a different factor that may affect political trust.

#### **4.4.1. Linear Regression Analysis**

Linear regression analysis is used to predict the value of a variable based on the value of another variable. By using multiple linear regression, a model can be built that explains the relationship between political trust and the independent variables. The regression equation will be of the form:

$$\text{Political Trust} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Social Trust} + \beta_2 * \text{Level of Education} + \beta_3 * \text{Political interest} + \beta_4 * \text{Governance Performance} + \beta_5 * \text{Corruption} + \beta_6 * \text{Evaluation of the Economic Situation} + \varepsilon$$

$\beta_0$  is the intercept, representing the expected value of political trust when all independent variables are zero.  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$ ,  $\beta_3$ ,  $\beta_4$ ,  $\beta_5$ , and  $\beta_6$  are the regression coefficients, representing the estimated impact of each independent variable on political trust.  $\varepsilon$  is the error term, representing the unexplained variation in political trust.

The standard error of the estimate is a measure of the precision of the model. It is the standard deviation of the residuals. It shows how wrong one could be if the regression model is used to make predictions or to estimate the dependent variable or variable of interest. Consequently, it is preferable for the standard error to be as small as possible. The standard error is used to get a confidence interval for the

predicted values and should preferably be as low as possible. A low standard error shows that sample means are closely distributed around the population mean which suggests that your sample is representative of your population (Dhakal, 2018, pp. 1449-1450).

By assessing the p-value, the statistical significance of the regression coefficients using p-values. A low p-value ( $<0.05$ ) indicates that the independent variable has a significant impact on political trust. After this, the regression coefficients will be interpreted to understand the impact of each independent variable on political trust. A positive coefficient indicates a positive relationship, meaning an increase in the independent variable leads to an increase in political trust. On the other hand, a negative coefficient suggests a negative relationship (Field, 2009, pp. 198-202; Landman, 2008, pp. 56-60).

The standardized coefficients will also be interpreted, which are given in the “beta” column. The beta weight measures how much the outcome variable increases (in standard deviations) when the predictor variable is increased by one standard deviation assuming other variables in the model are held constant (Dhakal, 2018, p. 1451). In other words, the beta weight explains which variable the highest contributing variable is to explain political trust.

#### **4.5. Validity and Reliability**

The benefit of conducting a study using survey data in a region that has a similar background is that it increases the validity of the study. As the study is conducted in two relatively similar countries in the same region, the concept of trust is assumed to be interpreted and understood in an equivalent way in both countries as the concept of trust does not need to “travel” that far (Landman, 2008, p. 69).

Something that could affect the reliability of the study is self-censorship. Authoritarian regimes often pay close attention to what the citizens do and say and there are two different ways to practice self-censorship when answering sensitive survey questions. The first is simply to not answer a question, which is methodologically quite easy to get around for comparative studies as you can just exclude this particular question. The second option is more challenging; to use an

answer which is biased with the government (Tannenber, 2022, pp. 591-592). Tannenber (2020, p. 592) finds in his study that self-censorship in actual responses is a grave issue in most autocratic countries and the reason for giving biased answers can be out of fear of repercussion for failing to give the officially desired answer, especially if they are uncertain of their anonymity. As an example, in the last Afrobarometer one of the last questions asked was “Who do you think sent us to this interview” with the result of 49% of the respondents believed the survey was sent by the government (Tannenber, 2022, pp. 593-594).

Bearing this in mind, when relying on survey data, caution must be taken, for any study being conducted in the MENA region, such as this study. Not only to make sure that the data is comparable but also to reflect on whether the responses could be biased which can affect the validity of a study. This should however not be a reason to refrain from conducting research in autocratic countries, and the validity and reliability of this study can still be regarded as high, even if figures might not be exact, as trends and patterns can still be found and analysed.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Political Trust over Time

As shown in Table 1 and in Table 2, it is clear that the average political trust in both countries at the time of the uprising was relatively high, but also that it dropped quite significantly after the Arab Spring and during the rocky transitional phase that took place after the Presidents in both Tunisia and Egypt, stepped down from power. The latest survey data from Tunisia show that the overall political trust is however rising again.

**Table 5.** Political Trust in Tunisia

Tunisia	Government	Parliament	The Army	The Courts and Legal System	Average
2011	66.4	-	92.7	56	71.7%
2013	40.3	32.4	83.6	-	52.1%
2016	34.1	21.1	93.8	37.7	46.6%
2019	21	14.8	90	51.4	44.3%
2022	43.3	8.9	95.2	45.4	48.2%

**Table 6.** Political Trust in Egypt

Egypt	Government	Parliament	The Army	The Courts and Legal System	Average
2011	81.2	-	97	87.7	88.6%
2013	20.9	19.7	91	-	70.9%
2016	67.3	50.7	87.3	71.7	69.25%
2019	67	31.9	84	80.4	65.8%
2022	-	-	-	-	

When looking at the political trust for the separate institutions, in 2011, 66.4% of the respondents in Tunisia expressed that they have *a great deal of trust* or *quite a lot of trust* in the government. In Egypt, the figure was significantly higher in Egypt at 81.2%. The trust declines in the following years after which it slightly recovers in

Tunisia up to 43% in 2022, after reaching an all-time low in 2021 at 21%. The trust in the government in Egypt, is back to 67% of the respondents stating that they trust the government in 2016, after being only 20.9% in 2013.

The trust in the parliament shows a similar pattern of instability with declining trust. No data were found for either country for the year 2011 but starting from 2013 32.4% of the respondents had trust in the parliament. In 2022, that figure was down to a remarkable 8.9 %. In Egypt, 19.7% trusted the parliament, a figure that in the most recent survey from 2019 has increased to 31.9%.

Trust in the courts and the legal system have been quite stable in both countries during the survey years, in Tunisia at around 50%, and also here significantly higher in Egypt at around 80% of the respondents trusting the courts and the legal system.

The institution that brings up the figures for all years, for both countries, is the Army. The trust in the Army is stable for both countries, with exceptionally high figures of trust ranging between 83-97% of the respondents stating that they have *a great deal of trust* or *quite a lot of trust* in the Army.

## **5.2. Variables Affecting Political Trust**

The purpose of this study was also to see whether the determinants of political trust in the two countries are determined through different institutional and cultural factors, and if they differ between the countries.

When first analysing the fit of the linear regression model of the data, the first step is to look at the  $R$  and  $R^2$  and *the adjusted  $R^2$* . As seen in Table 6, in the case of Egypt, the value of  $R$  is 0.6 while in the case of Tunisia it is 0.4. Correlation coefficients whose magnitude are between 0.5 and 0.7 indicate that the variables that can be considered moderately correlated. Correlation coefficients whose magnitude is between 0.3 and 0.5 indicate that the variables that have a low correlation (Field, 2009, pp. 234-235).

The  $R^2$  represents the amount of variance in the outcome explained by the model. In the case of Egypt, the chosen variables explain the outcome, the total political trust, by 36.9%, while in the case of Tunisia, it only explains 16%.

In both the case of Egypt and Tunisia, there is a low discrepancy between the  $R^2$  and *the adjusted  $R^2$* , which suggests that the model is a good fit and indicates that the cross-validity of this model is good.

**Table 6.** Model Summary of the Linear Regression

Model Summary					
COUNTRY		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Egypt		,607 <sup>a</sup>	0.369	0.367	0.55361
Tunisia		,400 <sup>b</sup>	0.160	0.158	0.65917
a. Predictors: (Constant), Economic Evaluation, Political Interest, Level of Education, Social Trust, Corruption, Government Performance					
b. Predictors: (Constant), Economic Evaluation, Political Interest, Level of Education, Social Trust, Corruption, Government Performance					

The standard error of the estimate is a measure of the precision of the model. In the case of Egypt, the figure is 0.55, and in Tunisia, the figure is 0.65, which are both not ignorable amounts given it is preferable to have a low standard error as this means that the sample is representative of the population.

### 5.2.1. Regression Model Results

The results from the linear regression analysis as presented in Table 7, are presented in the table country-wise and theoretical approach-wise, in order. The first three variables in derived from the cultural approach to political trust and the following three are from the institutional perspective. The following variables have been recoded in Table 7: social trust, political interest, government performance, corruption, and economic evaluation. This means that a higher figure reflects more interest in politics and a higher figure of contentment with government performance and economic situation and so forth, instead of the opposite relation as the survey is designed.

**Table 7.** Coefficients of Political Trust

COUNTRY ID			Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
			B	Std. Error	Beta		
Egypt		(Constant)	2.434	0.087		28.053	0
		Social Trust	0.252	0.026	0.172	9.658	0
		Level of Education	-0.002	0.008	-0.004	-0.224	0.823
		Political Interest	-0.11	0.015	-0.144	-7.424	0
		Government Performance	0.063	0.017	0.077	3.746	0
		Corruption	-0.146	0.017	-0.167	-8.435	0
		Economic Evaluation	0.35	0.018	0.407	19.863	0
Tunisia		(Constant)	2.13	0.104		20.527	0
		Social Trust	0.176	0.053	0.066	3.344	0.001
		Level of Education	-0.008	0.003	-0.046	-2.343	0.019
		Political Interest	0.072	0.014	0.1	5.06	0
		Government Performance	0.18	0.019	0.2	9.64	0
		Corruption	-0.199	0.022	-0.183	-8.996	0
		Economic Evaluation	0.167	0.024	0.144	6.909	0

a. Dependent Variable: Overall Trust

In Egypt, social trust positively and significantly predicts political trust ( $\beta = .172$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Education is however not significantly related to the overall political trust ( $\beta = -.004$ ,  $p < .823$ ), and does not substantially contribute to explaining the dependent variable, whereas political interest significantly has a negative and ( $\beta = -.144$ ,  $p < .000$ ), meaning that the more interested one is in politics, the less overall political trust is expressed. The first institutional variable, the evaluation of government performance is positively and significantly predicts political trust ( $\beta = .077$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Moreover, the variable of corruption significantly predicts political trust in a negative relationship ( $\beta = -.167$ ,  $p < .000$ ), meaning that if one thinks that there is a prominent level of corruption, the less overall political trust is expressed. The last institutional variable, economic evaluation, suggests that if one has a positive view of the economy there is also a higher overall political trust.

Social trust, as a cultural variable, positively and significantly predicts political trust also in Tunisia ( $\beta = .0066$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, the level of education is also here insignificant ( $\beta = -.00464$ ,  $p < .019$ ). Political interest positively and significantly predicts political trust ( $\beta = .0100$ ,  $p < .000$ ). The institutional variable, government performance, positively and significantly predicts political trust ( $\beta = .0200$ ,  $p < .000$ ), as well as the economic evaluation ( $\beta = .0144$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Also, in Tunisia, the variable of corruption significantly predicts political trust in a negative relationship ( $\beta = -.183$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

Summing it up, the variable of the economic evaluation and social trust is ranked the highest in Egypt in the explanation of overall political trust. In Tunisia, the two highest-ranked variables are instead government performance and corruption.

As can be seen, the result for the first cultural variable, social trust, differs between the two countries. Another relevant difference is the relationship of political interest. In Egypt, the more interested you are in politics, the less trusting you are, while in Tunisia the opposite relationship is apparent. In Egypt, the variable with the highest beta weight is the economic evaluation whereas in Tunisia, it is the variable government performance. These two are both institutional variables.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

### **6.1. Political Trust Development**

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent and how the political trust in Egypt and Tunisia has changed or evolved since the political events that took place during and after the Arab Spring. In line with previous research about political trust in an authoritarian setting, the total political trust in Tunisia and Egypt was quite high in 2011. The trust in the government and the court was relatively high, especially in Egypt, and in the army, the trust was exceptionally high in both countries. Trust then declines rapidly for all institutions during the following years, apart from the military where the trust was and has remained stable. The rapid decline can be explained by the effect of the political shock of the protests and the aftermath in terms of changed government and constitutions.

The army has traditionally had a prominent role in the government in the MENA region since the early 1950s, in opposite to Western democracies, where the army has been kept isolated from domestic politics (Kahddouri, 1953, p. 511). In both Tunisia and Egypt, the military sided with the protesters during uprisings, even though the rulers in both countries gave orders to open fire toward the protesters, which could explain why the trust never declines after the uprisings (Barany, 2011, pp. 25-26). That the trust was not noticeably affected, is especially remarkable in Egypt where the military had, and still has, strong political and economic ties in society and could therefore easily be seen as a part of the government, and the trust therefore “should” have been affected. What is clear though is that no institution matters more to a state’s survival than the army (Barany, 2011, p. 24), and in an unstable region such as the MENA region, this can be a reason to make the army trustworthy and why the political shock in terms of the Arab Spring did not affect the trust in the army.

In 2013, political trust in the Government in Egypt was exceptionally low. This is the same year that the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi was in power. What led up to the coup d’état that took place in July 2013, was yet again public protest from the liberal and secular opposition. An opposition that was boycotting elections and referendums about the constitution, and failing to organize themselves, leading up to the election of the Muslim Brotherhood leader as a

president in the first place. Morsi's one-year rule up to that point was increasingly repressive and he was not able to manage the elite's interest, which made his governing inefficient which eventually gave the opposition the fuel they needed for the protests.

The military gave Morsi an ultimatum to resign, and when he did not obey, they simply took back the power (Housden, 2013, pp. 72, 76-77). As seen in the results, after President Sisi came to power, the trust in the government increased from almost 21% to 67%. However, not democratically elected it has provided stability in an unstable area of the world. Taking the security situation in mind, if an autocratic leader manages to keep the country out of war; a trade-off for civil rights could be worth it, especially when real-life examples are right next door such as the situation in Libya and in Syria. This of course is also something that the autocratic leaders in the region are using as an argument to remain in power. It can be interpreted as the social contract between the state and its citizens, where the citizens agree to the rule of the government in return for deliverables which in this case would be stability. It is coming down to the basic Hobbesian concept of the state being primarily a provider of law and order (El Haddad, 2020, pp.1-2).

In contrast to the Egyptian situation with a quickly dismantled democracy, Tunisia is the only country that overthrew an authoritarian ruler during the Arab Spring and went on to build a functioning democracy, and the country was long seen as the only exception with positive democratic development after the uprisings. But as seen from the results of trust in the government and the parliament, starting from 2013 and forward the figures of trust are declining to reach as low as 21% and 14 % trust in the two mentioned institutions. After the populist leader President Saïed came to power in 2019 and after he exercised a self-coup, the figures are rising again.

As seen from the results, trust in the government in Tunisia made a huge leap in 2022 after only 21% of survey respondents expressed trust in the government in 2019. Meaning that the political trust increased after the election of President Saïed. A public opinion survey from August 2022, a year after President Saïed's self-coup, shows that Tunisians have strong support for liberal institutions (i.e., women's political participation) but the importance of election-based governance is not as strong. Results from the Arab Barometer survey in 2018 show that almost 83% did

not believe the country was going in the right direction and more than 65% reported that they could not cover their expenses. In the 2021-year survey, only 15% stated that they believe that President Saïed's actions were a threat to the country. This is an indication that Tunisians did not see a democratic government as the answer to the problems of the country. Only around 50% in the mentioned survey believe that choosing government through elections is the best system of governance and more than 33% said that they preferred a non-democratic system (Ridge, 2022, p.1540-1543).

Returning to the works of Aristotle and much later Almond and Verba; the political culture matters and it must help to develop democratic habits and traditions that are essential for functioning democracy (Kahddouri, 1953, p. 524). This is in the same line as Easton's argument that political culture, beginning in childhood and continuing throughout life, and personal experience are key factors in the development of political culture, including political support. New democracies are fragile, and a democratic political culture is not something that is created in a few years. Without support for democracy, there is difficult to consolidate a democratic system, and perhaps the link between democracy and political trust is not as relevant as the importance of political trust between the government, whether democratic or autocratic.

What has been examined in this study is the development of political trust in Tunisia and Egypt from the years 2011-2022. The results are in line with previous scholars' results, that the political trust declined in both countries after the Arab Spring. The most recent results from Tunisia show also that the trust is slightly recovering. The most trustworthy institution in both countries is considered the army.

## **6.2. Determinants of Political Trust**

The aim of this study was also to explore whether there are different cultural and institutional variables that are determining the levels of political trust within the two countries. This has been tested through six different variables identified from the theoretical framework. According to the results, it is indicated that institutional theories can explain political trust more than the cultural approach theories in this

context. Even if trust or mistrust in the government might still be inherent in autocratic settings, the result of this study shows that institutional variables are more relevant when it comes to political trust. A reason for this could be that in the two countries, as a result of the Arab Spring as a political shock to the system, a lot of political changes took place. It is natural that the citizens would have some sort of reaction and opinions about this. The cultural approach to political trust could be better suitable to explain political trust in a country or region that is more stable. It is also noticeable that the variables chosen are neither of them outstandingly relevant for determining political trust.

There are a few differences between the variables that are affecting political trust in Tunisia and Egypt, such as the difference between the levels of social trust affecting the political trust. This enhances previous scholars' determination of the need to segregate political trust and social trust as they are not interchangeable. Another difference is that in Egypt, the more interested you are in politics, the less trusting you while in Tunisia the opposite relationship is apparent. This could be connected to the different paths the two countries took after the Arab Spring. If one is interested in politics, a democratic way of governing could be ideal and then that would explain the prediction of a lack of political trust in Egypt if one were politically interested and the opposite relation in Tunisia.

The similarities are mainly the institutional variables such as the variable of economic evaluation which is significant in Tunisia and even more so in Egypt. This does not come as a surprise, as political trust is impacted by large socioeconomic inequality and the perception of exclusion from rights among some groups in society, which was one of the reasons for the Arab Spring in the first place. Also, the experienced level of corruption significantly predicts political trust in the two countries which goes hand in hand with the institutional theories that emphasize that political trust is dependent on the evaluation of the individual who has personally felt the impacts of corruption.

### **6.3. Further Research**

One of the limitations of the study is the availability of data. Having data from before 2011 would provide a better insight into the effect of the Arab Spring and having data from Egypt for 2022 would provide a more up-to-date comparison of the variables affecting political trust. On the other hand, the strength of the study is that, in contrast to previous studies, this is a smaller case-oriented study that is focused on the micro-level variables of political trust. This allows for a deeper understanding of the impact of a political shock on political trust, for two countries that took two different paths after the Arab Spring. Another strength is that it gives the opportunity to explore the differences between the countries instead of treating them as one unit, as has previously been mentioned is quite common when studying the MENA region.

Based on the insights of this study, future research is needed to examine whether the trend of rising political trust in Tunisia will continue and if this trend will be visible also in Egypt. Regarding which cultural and institutional variables are affecting political trust, conducting a study on a larger scale by including more variables would be interesting to get a broader and more holistic overview of which variables are of importance. Considering the low R-squared value for both countries it indicates that there is a need to add other determinates that could better explain than only the ones chosen in this study.

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