

Trust in government is essential for social cohesion and well-being as it affects the government's ability to govern and enables government to act without coercion

Building Trust in Government

Egypt Network for Integrated Development

Policy Brief 027

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BACKGROUND:

When citizens trust government, it means they have confidence that it is mostly doing the right things and there is overall congruence between their expectations and the perceived government's performance. Perception is a key word here. According to Gallup (2015) when Egyptians revolted in 2011, it was not a problem of poverty or unemployment alone, but mainly of perception between what is, and what ought to be.

LITERATURE:

Overall there is a general agreement on the importance of trust for the sustainability of political systems, for their legitimacy, and for the effective performance of governments. Trust is important for the success of many public policies that require citizens' cooperation and compliance (OECD, 2015). "Trust in Government is a social capital without which a democratic society cannot function" (Musgrave, 1998, p.9). "Trust in government is a mainstay of democracy" (Christensen & Laegreid, 2003). "Public Trust in the motives, effectiveness and transparency of government is an essential dimension of institutional legitimacy" (Burnett et al, 2008). "Trust in government is essential for social cohesion and well-being as it affects the government's ability to govern and enables government to act without coercion" (OECD, 2013, p. 40). "Building trust in government is at the core of the world's quest for peace and well-being" (Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary General, as quoted in Cheema, 2010, p.1).

NURTURING TRUST IN EGYPT:

Governments worldwide are interested in raising citizens' trust in their abilities and potential. Without citizens' trust in government, whether at the national or local level, little can be achieved. Egypt has been going through a period of transition and political turbulence over the past five years. In the quest for a better quality of life for citizens, for a smoother and more effective governance system, the current policy paper assumes that building a higher level of trust between citizens and government would be beneficial for all parties involved. The question thus posed is: how can the Egyptian government nurture citizens' trust in its abilities?

To be able to answer that question, a number of issues are investigated, including:

- Can the concept of trust be deconstructed?
- What are the main determinants of trust?

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- What empirical measures of citizens' trust in government are available on an international level, and more specifically in Egypt?
- What should the Egyptian government do if it is interested in raising the level of citizens' trust in its abilities?

CONCEPT OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT:

Trust is a complex and multifaceted concept. The literature abounds with various typologies for the concept of trust and various attempts at analyzing and de-constructing the concept. Some typologies for categorizing trust in government focus on the object of citizens' trust. Citizens may thus be looking into government's good will and good intentions, its competencies and technical abilities, the procedures used to deliver services, or its actual performance and results achieved. Alternatively, citizens may also focus on specific government institutions and develop trust based on their focus on either parliament, the police, the judicial system, or the military (Cheema & Popovski, 2010).

Another more inclusive trust typology however distinguishes between its political and social dimensions, and how each of those can be broken down in many different ways. Political trust is when citizens assess the performance of political institutions and political leaders and perceive them to be fair, honest, efficient and keeping their promises. Political trust can be categorized based on the object of trust versus the motivation for trust. The object of trust can be the political institutions, and this is referred to as '*macro trust*', or it can be the individuals in office and is referred to as '*micro trust*'. As for the motivation for trust, it can be rational, based on evidence and facts regarding performance, or it can be emotional, based on feelings, subjective perceptions and psychological factors. Meanwhile, the social dimension of trust is related to the overall trust by citizens in one another, and it is perceived to be strongly related to political trust. If citizens trust one another they are more likely to work together more in civil society organizations. The less they are willing to engage in civic activities, the more distrusting of government they usually are (Blind, 2006).

Other discussions of the concept of trust focus on its various determinants and what leads to either an increase or a decrease of citizens' trust in their governments. Five of the main determinants identified are as follows:

1. Effective policies and implementation mechanisms;
2. Committed visionary leaders;
3. Economic growth and economic opportunities;
4. Quality provision and delivery of public services such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation services;
5. Good governance including effective public administration and civil service, rule of law, human rights, transparent and participatory decision making processes, and effective macroeconomic policies (Cheema & Popovski, 2010).

MEASUREMENTS OF TRUST:

Multiple international organizations are interested in measuring citizens' trust in government. Gallup maintains historical trends for trust in the American

government and has data going back to the early seventies. Using a Likert scale citizens are asked to express their level of confidence in government's performance at large, or in specific sectors – executive, legislative and judiciary – or regarding domestic versus international problems (Gallup, 2015b). The results of many surveys conducted either by Gallup, UNDP, Transparency International, BBC and others point out to a declining level of trust by citizens towards their political institutions in many parts of the world (Blind, 2006; Cheema, 2010) so it is not only an issue in the developing world. Many challenges are also noted when measuring trust. Notable on that list of challenges is the impact of citizens' expectations on the level of trust perceived. Whenever people have higher expectations of their government, they are most likely to view it negatively. Additionally, building trust takes time and things may get especially complicated in times of crises (Cheema, 2010).

THE EGYPTIAN CONTEXT:

Egypt has been going through a turbulent political period ever since the Revolution of the 25th of January 2011 and up till the present day, with expected highs and lows in levels of trust in government over that period of time. On analyzing the Egyptian context using the earlier discussed theoretical model for Trust and its categorization into Macro Political Trust, Micro Political Trust and Social Trust, we may note the following:

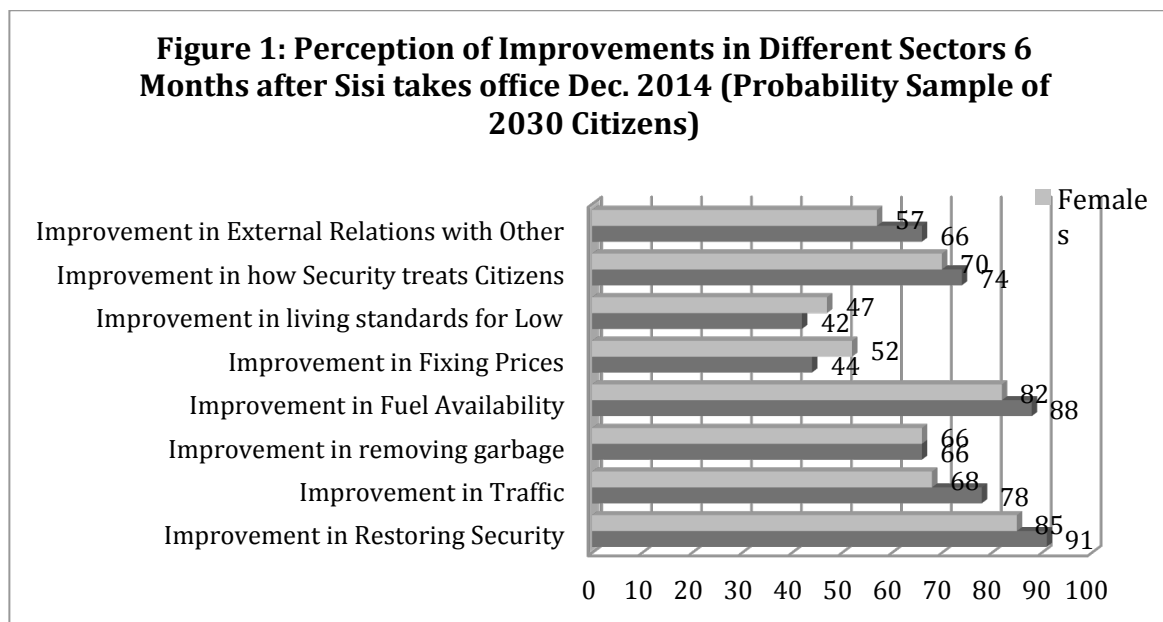
Macro Political Trust: To what extent Egyptians trust their institutions? This would include the government bureaucracy in delivering the services it is supposed to deliver, the cabinet of ministers in making rational, just and fair decisions, the parliament in making effective policies and in discussing the issues that matter to the people. Noted here is that the Egyptian bureaucracy suffers from many challenges; including: overstaffing, centralization, rigidity and low productivity, and these problems do not go unnoticed. The quality of services provided, especially education and health services, has deteriorated over the years. Egypt's position on many international rankings has fallen. Additionally, Egypt has been functioning without a parliament for the most part of the five years since the 2011 Revolution and its cabinet of ministers has changed nearly eight times in five years. All these issues would have an impact on the level of macro political trust by Egyptians.

A series of Gallup polls have marked the fluctuations in Egyptian citizens satisfaction with their government over the past few years. According to a Gallup 2013 poll conducted in Egypt two weeks before President Mohamed Morsi was ousted in July 2013, eighty percent of Egyptians perceived that Egypt was worse off compared to what it was before the stepping down of President Mubarak, and fifty percent believed that it will continue to be worse off five years down the line (Younis, 2013). This marked an overall drop in the level of Macro Trust. In another Gallup poll conducted in June 2014, after the ousting of President Morsi, 52% of Egyptians perceived that their national economy is improving, with younger people reported to be more 'cynical' than their elders; 47% of young people between 15 and 29 coming up with a positive response compared to 62% for those above the age of fifty. These views were expressed before actual

improvements in macroeconomic indicators, but were largely based on hopes and aspirations with the change of leadership (Younis, 2014), a fact that emphasizes the importance of perception in building trust.

Meanwhile, during the last six months of 2014, the Egyptian independent opinion polling center, Baseera, implemented a diverse set of polls to assess the degree of citizens' satisfaction with their President's performance, and with the Prime Minister's performance and whether citizens have perceived any improvement in their quality of life. The Baseera survey was conducted on a probability sample of Egyptian citizens in the age category 18 years or more.

Among the questions asked was how did Egyptians perceive improvements in specific sectors of the government's performance six months after President Sisi took office?



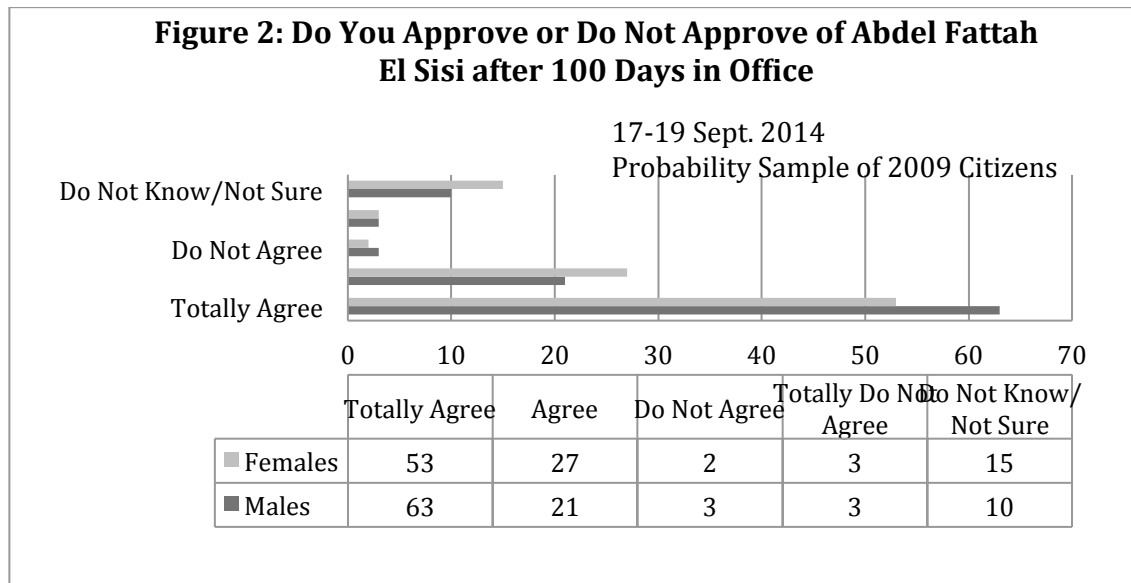
Source: Baseera (2014).

According to Figure 1, citizens' responses regarding their satisfaction with the government's performance in specific sectors, six months after President Sisi took over, were as follows: the first ranking portfolio where citizens perceived an improvement was 'International Relations', followed by 'fuel availability', followed by 'regaining safety', then fourth 'government dealings with citizens'. Sectors perceived with low degree of satisfaction were: 'traffic' and 'garbage collection', while the two areas with the least degree of satisfaction were 'price regulations' and 'improvement in the standards of living' (Osman, 2015).

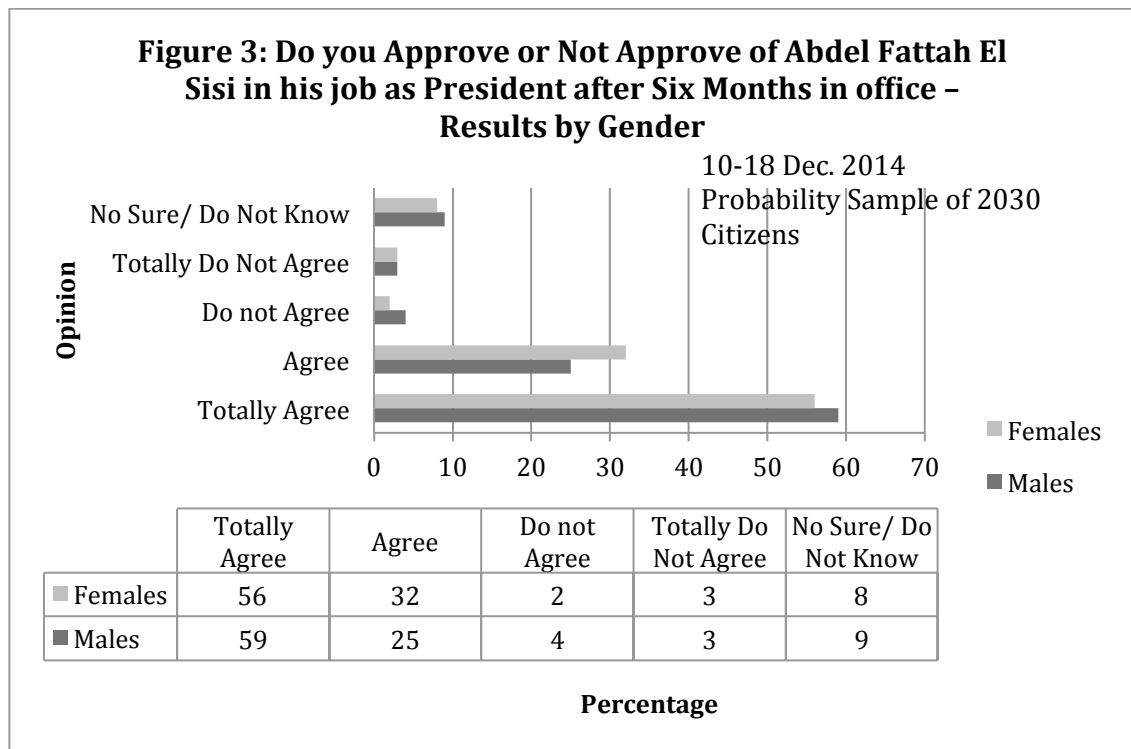
Micro Political Trust: This would include citizens' trust in their President over time, in the Prime Minister, in leading political figures such, as head of parliament, ministers, and ruling party figures. Over the past four years, the level of Micro Political Trust has fluctuated significantly with the change in presidents, cabinets and in leading political figures. With every change there was

polarization among the different political and ideological groups in society, and this impacted the level of Micro Political Trust.

According to the Baseera (2014) poll, checking for citizens satisfaction with President Sisi after 100 Days in Office, in Figure 2, both males and females were satisfied with the President's performance, with males satisfaction equaling 84%, while females' satisfaction equaling agreement at 80%. Figure 3 shows nearly the same levels of positive satisfaction continued for both men and women after the President Sisi spent six months in office, with men noting an 84% approval rate and women an 88% approval rate.



Source: Baseera Survey (2014)



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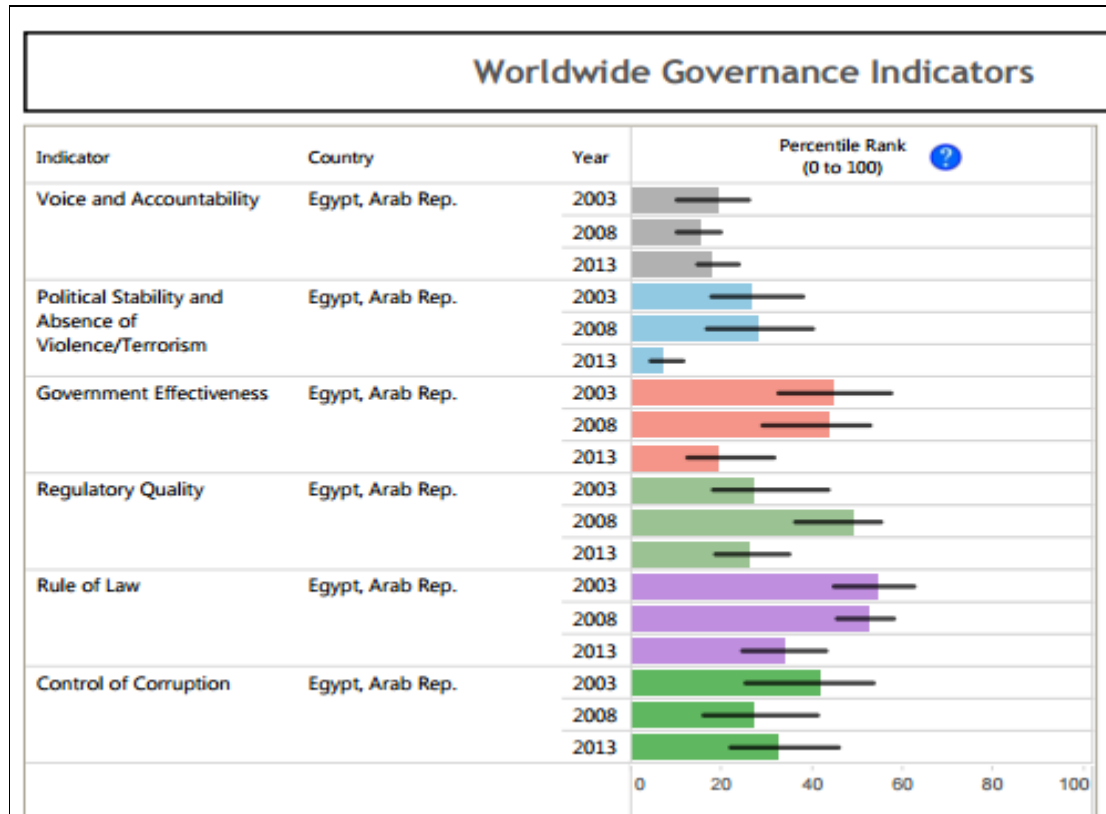
Social Trust: This can be measured by the extent of people's civic engagement, participation in political parties, movements, nonprofit organizations, local administration councils, syndicates, etc. Right after the 2011 Revolution, Egyptian citizens were very engaged politically like never before. For the first time in decades, there was a very high turnout in the elections and referenda that followed the Revolution because citizens felt that their votes mattered. Citizens turned into political experts, voicing opinions regarding projected road maps and debating serious political issues such as 'Constitutional legitimacy', as exhibited in intensive press and television coverage. Currently, five years after the Revolution, the situation has diluted. Political parties remain weak, the opposition has been reduced, nonprofits are under much more stringent scrutiny by the government, and Egypt still awaits the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

If we try to analyze the five determinants of citizens' trust mentioned earlier, we note that for many of the determinants there is definitely modest performance in the current period.

1. *Effective policies and implementation mechanisms:* Egypt's rank on the Global Competitiveness Index 2014-2015 is 119 out of 144 countries, and for Egyptian exports as a percentage of GDP Egypt ranked 134 out of 144 countries (The World Economic Forum, 2014).
2. *Committed visionary leaders:* The review of the Baseera Center's detailed survey results reveals that Egyptian citizens in 2014 had confidence in President Sisi— a form of micro trust - and were satisfied to a great extent with his performance. The case is not the same for all ministers and public officials who have taken office over the past five years; the frequent change in cabinet being one indicator of public dissatisfaction with their performance.
3. *Economic growth and economic opportunities:* Egypt is currently operating under a budget deficit, and unemployment rates are increasing. For the government budget balance as a percentage of GDP, Egypt ranks 142/144 countries; while for women in the labor force as a ratio to men, Egypt ranks 139/144 countries (The World Economic Forum, 2014).
4. *Quality provision and delivery of public services:* The quality of many public services such as garbage collection are perceived to be low, judging by multiple in-depth press and television reports, as well as the Baseera Survey. When citizens were asked specific questions about the improvements in economic and social services, there were areas of less positive support, such as over the government's role in fixing prices and in alleviating hardships for the lower income groups. Further, in 2014, Egypt's ranking in terms of quality of education was 141 out of 144 countries, while the quality of the higher education system was also 141/144 countries; the capacity for innovation 132/144, and the quality of scientific research institutions 135/144 (World Economic Forum, 2014).
5. *Good governance including effective public administration and civil service, rule of law, human rights, transparent and participatory decision making processes, and effective macroeconomic policies:* Egypt's performance on the majority of good governance indicators is taking a downturn. As per Figure 4 below, in 2013 the performance of Egypt in Political Stability, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, and Rule of Law had deteriorated compared to 2008 figures. However,

during the same time frame, some improvements were realized in Voice and Accountability and in Control of Corruption.

Figure 4: Good Governance in Egypt from 2003 to 2013



Source: The World Bank Governance Indicators

Although Control of Corruption on the World Bank Governance Indicators showed improvement from 2008 to 2013, yet according to Transparency International, there were some alarming figures as to the percentage of people who felt institutions in their country (Egypt) were corrupt or extremely corrupt; 72 % of respondents perceived political parties were corrupt or extremely corrupt; 71% of respondents viewed parliament as corrupt/extremely corrupt; 67% viewed the educational system was corrupt/extremely corrupt; 65% viewed the judiciary as corrupt/extremely corrupt; and 78% viewed the police as corrupt/extremely corrupt (Transparency International Egypt Country Report, 2013).

The majority of the determinants for Egyptian citizens' trust in government are poor, which may mean that there is a looming threat of a serious trust deficit. As noted in the definition of the concept of trust, it is not only about government's performance, but also about how citizens perceive this performance to be.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

What should the government do to build the level of citizens' trust in its abilities? In a nutshell, good governance, with its various dimensions, is a basic requirement for trust and alternatively, trust is a prerequisite for good governance. For public administration to function effectively, it needs public support and trust, and similarly, an effective democratic governance system results in the enhancement of citizens' trust. Based on that premise, a myriad number of policy recommendations are proposed that capitalize on international experiences, but after contextualizing them to the Egyptian case (Blind, 2006; OECD, 2013; OECD, 2015; Sherif, 2015; Osman):

Policy Recommendation # 1: A Responsive and Accountable Government:

- Encourage the establishment and operation of nationwide *independent polling centers*, that would act as radars for citizens' opinions. Results of the polls should be communicated effectively to citizens and governments as an important input to the public policy making process. Polling centers should consistently measure citizens' perceptions of government over time, and keep track of the variations in their levels of trust, whether as directed to the performance of government as a whole, per sector, per branch, trust in leaders and political figures, satisfaction regarding the level and quality of services offered, and expectations for the future.
- Government ministries and organizations should establish their own *observatories* to track citizens' satisfaction with services offered and understand changes in public opinion regarding their field of work, services, performance and overall outputs and impact.
- Encourage *research centers* to analyze results of polls and surveys to identify and keep track of changes plus propose creative ways of responding to needs
- Establish a government wide *performance management system* encompassing continuous monitoring and evaluation of government's performance. It is not sufficient to have a Ministry for Planning but there should be a independent authority responsible for monitoring and evaluation to which all ministries report, possibly reporting to the Prime Minister's office or the President's Administration. The aim of the Monitoring and Evaluation system should be twofold: to derive lessons learnt and to hold managers accountable for results. Managers who do not deliver agreed to results based on pre-set quantifiable measures for performance, should be asked to step down.

Policy Recommendation # 2: Greater Integrity and Fairness:

- *Fighting corruption* in all forms and shapes as there is a high correlation between trust in government and perceptions of corruption;
- Careful *reference checking* for appointed officials, with integrity preceding technical efficiency, as a criterion for recruitment.
- Clearer policies for dealing with potential conflicts of interest.
- Expanding on the use of *e-governance* tools which not only expedites the provision of government services, and distances the service provider from the end beneficiary to eliminate chances for corruption, but also gives space for increased citizens' participation in public affairs.

Policy Recommendation # 3: Openness and Transparency:

- Allowing citizens' more *access to information* whether at the national or local level, would lead to increased trust. This includes budget transparency and communicating fiscal information to the public in a digestible format that is easy to comprehend by the layperson.
- Citizens should not be surprised continuously with decisions made by government behind closed doors without public hearings and open consultations with different stakeholder groups; examples being the recent proposed civil service law and the decision to establish a new capital for Egypt.
- Government should be more open about the decisions made in all sectors, for example, the reasons for ministerial changes, for resource allocations, for initiating grand national projects, their feasibility and potential costs and benefits.
- In managing elections at the various national and local levels, there should be maximum transparency in all phases of the process and monitoring should be facilitated for the local and international civil society organizations.

Policy Recommendation # 4: Rule of Law:

- *Respect* for the Constitution mandates
- Application of the laws without discrimination or prejudice and all citizens should be *treated equally* regardless of political affiliation or ideology.
- *Compliance* by all government officials to the legal system without exceptions.

Policy Recommendation # 5: Inclusive Policy Making:

- This entails greater *transparency* in policy making plus use of reliable, information and evidence to formulate policies.
- Moving towards more *democratic* means in public policy making;
- Adopting *inclusive growth policies* that do not focus on mere improvements in growth rates and GDP, but that target results that would make a difference in people's lives, create more jobs, provide better health services, and lead to overall sustainable development. This implies also effective governance institutions.
- Implementing *participatory budgeting* at the local levels of administration.

Policy Recommendation # 6: Sound Fiscal Management:

- Having a *clear budget* showing the sources and uses of funds in a transparent manner that is comprehensible by citizens.
- *Rationalizing spending* and eliminating waste.
- Openly sharing information about *sources and uses of funds* and priorities for allocation. Currently there is a lot of ambiguity regarding the received Arab loans and grants, the funding of the grand national projects, and the mechanisms used for setting expenditure priorities.

Policy Recommendation # 7: A secure and safe environment for citizens:

- Effective and efficient policing focusing primarily on the *safety and security of citizens* and their well-being, rather than on political stability as claimed by former regimes
- Respectful treatment of citizens in police stations

Policy Recommendation # 8: Effective Public Sector Management:

- Moving towards a greater degree of *decentralization*
- Introducing more IT and *e-government* tools for greater government efficiency
- Opening *One-Stop Shops* at the local level for all government services to make them more accessible to citizens.
- *Effective Human Resource Management* system enabling the recruitment of staff based on merit only.

Policy Recommendation # 9: More Effective Communication:

- Public officials and ministers should be trained and coached in *effective public communication* means and tools
- *Evidence and honesty* should be the main ingredients of government communications to citizens to establish trust.
- *Periodic* communication of results achieved and performance realized.
- Implementing an *Open Government initiative* where information about governmental activities is accessible to all citizens, government departments disclose information proactively and respond readily to information requests.

In short, this paper has argued that trust is essential for governments' legitimacy and effective performance, and that good governance is key to building citizens' trust, and. For public administration to function effectively, it needs public support and trust, and an effective democratic governance system results in the enhancement of citizens' trust.

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