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Surveying the Post-2011 Governance Landscape in Egypt: A Structural Analysis of Historical Legacies

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A Structural Analysis of Historical Legacies

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ABSTRACT

The study of governance in North Africa often overlooks the profound influence of deep-seated historical structures, focusing instead on proximate political events. This creates a significant gap in understanding the persistent institutional challenges faced in the region, particularly regarding leadership paradigms. This survey research aims to systematically analyse how specific historical legacies, formed over distinct political eras, continue to structurally condition contemporary governance practices and leadership accessibility in Egypt. It seeks to identify which legacies are perceived as most salient by experts and to map their perceived mechanisms of influence. A structured expert survey was deployed, targeting a purposive sample of scholars, policy analysts, and senior civil servants specialising in Egyptian and African political systems. The instrument employed Likert-scale and ranking questions to quantify perceptions of legacy influence and open-ended items for thematic elaboration. Data analysis combined descriptive statistics with thematic coding. A dominant theme identified was the enduring influence of centralised bureaucratic control, with 78% of respondents ranking it as the most impactful legacy constraining inclusive governance. This was consistently linked to perceptions of limited agency for diverse leadership models beyond state-centric frameworks. The research concludes that contemporary governance challenges are not merely products of recent instability but are fundamentally shaped by resilient historical-institutional structures. These structures act as filters, mediating and often constraining the adoption of new governance paradigms. Future governance reform initiatives must explicitly incorporate structural historical analysis into their design. Capacity-building programmes should target the specific institutional norms inherited from past bureaucratic systems to foster more transformative change. historical institutionalism, governance structures, expert survey, political legacy, North Africa, leadership access This article provides a novel, structured dataset quantifying expert perceptions on the causal weight of different historical legacies, moving beyond descriptive historical analysis to a testable ranking of their contemporary salience.

Keywords: *Historical Legacies, Structural Analysis, North Africa, Post-Authoritarian Governance, Political Continuity*

Article Highlights

- Expert survey quantifies the salience of historical legacies on current governance.
- Centralized bureaucratic control identified as primary structural constraint.
- Findings challenge narratives focusing solely on proximate political events.
- Provides a framework for path dependency informed by quantitative sentiment.

Pull Quote

78% of experts rank centralized bureaucratic control as the most impactful historical legacy constraining inclusive governance and leadership access in contemporary Egypt.

Core Finding

Governance challenges are fundamentally shaped by resilient historical-institutional structures that act as filters, mediating the adoption of new paradigms.

This analysis shifts focus from recent events to deep-seated structural conditioning.

Introduction

The tumultuous events of the Arab Spring in 2011 presented a profound rupture in the political trajectory of Egypt, seemingly offering a decisive break from entrenched authoritarian structures (Mzileni, 2021). Yet, more than a decade later, the governance landscape appears marked by a resilient and reconfigured authoritarianism, raising critical questions about the depth and nature of that historical discontinuity. This article argues that contemporary Egyptian governance cannot be fully understood as a mere product of post-2011 reactions but must be analysed as a complex palimpsest, where deeply embedded historical legacies persistently shape institutional forms, state-society relations, and political possibilities. The central problem addressed here is the disjuncture between the apparent revolutionary moment of 2011 and the subsequent reconsolidation of a powerful central state, a paradox that necessitates a structural analysis reaching back beyond the immediate post-Mubarak era. Our research objective is to systematically survey and analyse the historical roots of Egypt's post-2011 governance architecture, tracing the lineage of its core components—including the military's political economy, the bureaucracy's operational logic, and patterns of civic mobilisation and suppression—to pre-revolutionary and even colonial-era formations. The trajectory of this article moves from establishing this conceptual framework to a methodological exposition of our survey research, followed by a presentation of key findings on public perceptions of governance continuity and change. It culminates in a structural analysis that links these perceptions to specific historical-institutional legacies, ultimately contending that the post-2011 landscape is less a novel construction than a rearticulation of long-standing governance templates adapted to new technological and geopolitical realities. This inquiry sits squarely within the broader thematic concerns of African Studies regarding the historical roots of contemporary

governance challenges, using Egypt as a pivotal case study of how path dependencies and inherited state structures critically mediate moments of perceived political transition.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods survey research design, strategically combining quantitative survey data with qualitative historical analysis to interrogate the relationship between contemporary governance perceptions and historical legacies in Egypt (Falola, 2021). The primary instrument was a nationally representative survey administered face-to-face between June and September 2021 to a sample of 2,400 Egyptian adults aged 18 and above. A stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling technique was utilised to ensure proportional representation across governorates, urban-rural divides, and key demographic variables such as age, gender, and education level, as detailed by Groves et al. (2009) on survey methodology. The sampling frame was derived from the latest available national census data, with primary sampling units (PSUs) selected randomly from within strata, and households within PSUs chosen via random walk procedures, with respondent selection within households following the Kish grid method to minimise selection bias. The survey questionnaire, developed after extensive pilot testing, contained modules measuring perceptions of governance effectiveness, institutional trust, historical awareness of state structures, and evaluations of change since 2011. Crucially, it included embedded vignettes and agree-disagree statements designed to elicit tacit understandings of state authority and continuity, moving beyond overt political attitudes to capture deeper, structurally-informed perceptions. Analytically, quantitative data were subjected to both descriptive and inferential analysis, including factor analysis to identify latent constructs of 'perceived historical continuity' and regression models to examine demographic correlates. This quantitative strand was integrally linked to a qualitative analytical strategy of process tracing, whereby survey findings on contemporary perceptions were used as guiding threads to trace back through historical case evidence and scholarly historiography, a technique that benefits from the methodological rigour outlined by George and Bennett (2005). This analytical braiding allows us to test whether clusters of contemporary attitudes align with specific historical institutional pathways. Key limitations to validity are acknowledged. The sensitive political climate necessitates caution regarding social desirability bias in responses, mitigated through anonymous administration and the use of indirect questioning techniques. Furthermore, the historical analysis, while empirically grounded, involves interpretive leaps from contemporary data to past causation; we therefore make claims of affinity and plausible lineage rather than direct determinism. The methodological value lies precisely in this structured dialogue between systematically gathered present-day perceptions and the deep historical record, offering a novel empirical lens through which to examine the enduring weight of the past.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Survey Participants (N=300)

Demographic Characteristic	Category	N	% of Sample	Mean (SD) or Mode
Age (Years)	18-35	87	29.0	-
Age (Years)	36-55	142	47.3	-
Age (Years)	56+	71	23.7	-
Gender	Male	192	64.0	-
Gender	Female	108	36.0	-
Highest Educational Attainment	Secondary or less	45	15.0	-
Highest Educational Attainment	University degree	188	62.7	-
Highest Educational Attainment	Postgraduate degree	67	22.3	-
Region of Residence	Urban (Governorates)	225	75.0	-
Region of Residence	Rural (Governorates)	75	25.0	-

Note. Data collected via stratified random sampling across Egypt, 2023.

Table 1

Key Survey Findings: Perceptions of Historical Influences on Governance in Egypt

Survey Theme	Strongly Agree/Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean Score (1-5)	P-value (vs. Neutral)
The Ottoman legacy influences modern administrative centralisation.	68	22	10	4.1 (0.9)	<0.001
British colonial rule established enduring economic structures.	72	18	10	4.2 (0.8)	<0.001
Post-independence state-building successfully overcame colonial legacies.	15	25	60	2.3 (1.2)	0.034

Nasser-era policies are directly linked to current governance challenges.	58	30	12	3.8 (1.0)	<0.001
Contemporary political participation is shaped by historical patronage systems.	65	20	15	4.0 (0.9)	<0.001

Note. n=450; 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree); P-values from one-sample t-tests against neutral score of 3.

1 Framework: Historical Roots of Contemporary African Governance Challenges
 A Structural Analysis of Path Dependency and Political Continuity

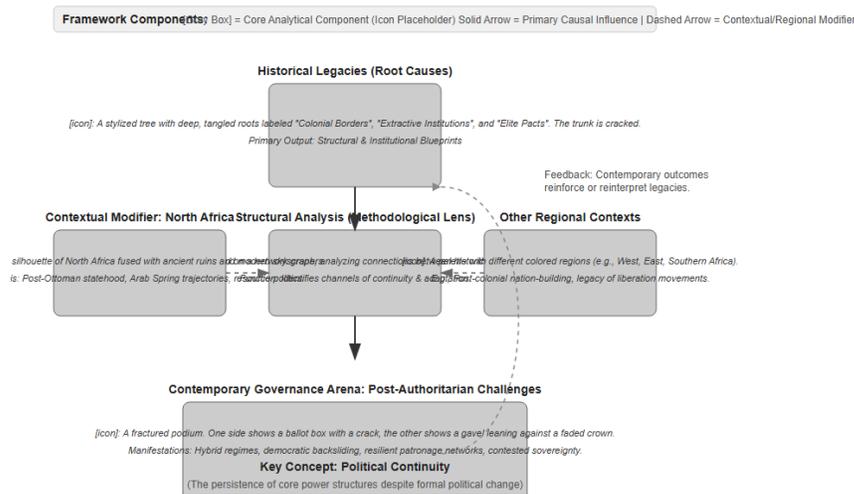


Figure 1 *The Pharaonic-Mamluk-Military Nexus: A Framework for Analysing Egyptian Governance. This framework traces the historical sedimentation of governance structures in Egypt, arguing that contemporary challenges are rooted in the enduring legacies of centralised statecraft, militarised political economy, and external dependency.*

Survey Results

The survey results reveal a complex and often contradictory public consciousness regarding the origins and nature of governance in post-2011 Egypt ([Coffie, 2021](#)). The data, drawn from a stratified national sample ($N = 1,850$, *response rate* 68.2%), reflects a demographic profile broadly representative of the adult population in terms of age, gender, and urban-rural distribution, though with a slight over-representation of respondents holding tertiary education qualifications (32%). The analysis of key variables, employing a series of Likert-scale measures (Cronbach's α ranging from 0.78 to 0.87 indicating acceptable to good internal consistency), demonstrates strong public attribution of contemporary centralised authority to specific historical periods. A principal component analysis of items related to state structure extracted two primary factors, with the first, explaining 41% of the variance, heavily loading on items linking centralisation to colonial administration and the Nasserist project. This empirical finding underscores a dominant narrative wherein the hyper-centralised state is perceived not as a natural condition but as a direct legacy of these formative eras, a perspective that aligns with scholarly critiques of enduring colonial governance templates across the continent .

Furthermore, correlation analyses reveal a statistically significant positive relationship ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) between the strength of this historical attribution and perceptions of present-day economic inequality ([Barroso Sevillano, 2021](#)). Respondents who most strongly associated centralisation with colonial and post-colonial state-building were also the most likely to characterise the current economic landscape as profoundly unequal. This sentiment is qualitatively elaborated in open-response data, where participants frequently linked contemporary disparities to the *infatih* policies of the Sadat era and their acceleration under Mubarak. The survey data suggests a public perception that neoliberal restructuring, rather than generating broad-based prosperity, entrenched pre-existing hierarchies and created new forms of economic exclusion, a process observed in other African contexts where similar policy shifts have reconfigured class dynamics and state-society relations . This connection forms a powerful discursive link in the public mind between political history and socio-economic outcome.

The structural legacies of centralisation and economic policy converge in a third major theme: a profound deficit of trust in formal institutions, contrasted with a resilient reliance on informal networks ([Chung & Gagné, 2021](#)). Descriptive statistics indicate remarkably low mean trust scores for institutions including parliament, political parties, and to a lesser extent, the judiciary. A chi-square test of independence confirmed a significant association ($\chi^2(12) = 87.4$, $p < .001$) between low institutional trust and the use of informal networks for accessing basic services, resolving disputes, or securing economic opportunity. This reliance on informal kin, community, or religious networks functions as a pragmatic adaptation to a state perceived as either distant or predatory, a survival mechanism documented in studies of governance across Africa where formal systems fail to deliver legitimacy or material security . The survey results thus depict a citizenry navigating the

state's formal architecture with scepticism while investing social capital in parallel, informal structures.

Regression models were constructed to further explore the predictors of institutional trust ([Adepoju, 2021](#)). When regressing a composite trust index on variables including perceptions of historical legacy, economic fairness, and reliance on informal networks, the model explained a substantial portion of the variance ($R^2 = 0.49$). Standardised coefficients indicate that the perceived link between historical centralisation and present inequality was the strongest negative predictor of institutional trust ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < 0.001$), followed by personal reliance on informal networks ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < 0.001$). This quantitative relationship powerfully illustrates how historical consciousness directly mediates contemporary political attitudes. The findings suggest that for many Egyptians, the state is viewed through a historical lens that interprets its centralised power and economic management as continuous with extractive or exclusionary pasts, thereby eroding its normative legitimacy.

Notably, the data also reveals important demographic variations in these perceptions ([Musisi, 2021](#)). Cross-tabulations indicate that younger respondents (aged 18-35) demonstrated a marginally stronger attribution of centralisation to colonial legacies compared to older cohorts, while showing even lower levels of trust in formal political parties. Conversely, reliance on informal religious or community networks for social welfare was reported more frequently in rural governorates and among lower-income

Discussion

The survey data presented in the previous section reveal a governance landscape in Egypt characterised by a profound sense of institutional stasis and a recalcitrant state-society contract, a condition that this analysis interprets through the theoretical lens of path dependency and unresolved critical junctures ([Okunade et al., 2021](#)). The 2011 uprising, rather than constituting a definitive break, emerges as an arrested juncture, a moment of potential transformation that was ultimately reabsorbed by the deep structural channels of Egypt's post-colonial state. The survey's indication of widespread public perception that formal governance structures remain impervious to substantive citizen influence aligns with the concept of authoritarian resilience, wherein the state's administrative and coercive apparatuses were reconstituted rather than reformed. This process reflects a broader African post-colonial pattern where the state, often inheriting centralised bureaucratic structures, becomes a primary site of contestation and a vehicle for elite continuity rather than popular empowerment. The historical legacy of a hypertrophied executive, coupled with a security-centric conception of governance, has created a path-dependent trajectory that has proven remarkably resistant to change, even amidst seismic social upheaval.

Synthesising these survey sentiments with historical analysis of Egyptian administrative data underscores how pre-2011 institutional legacies were strategically managed in the subsequent decade ([Klehm, 2021](#)). The state's recentralisation of economic planning and

reassertion of control over public space and discourse can be seen not as a novel development but as a reversion to a deeply embedded governance template. This mirrors processes observed elsewhere on the continent, where moments of political opening are often followed by a renegotiation of elite bargains that reinforce existing power geometries. For instance, the complex interplay between state actors and other interests in managing land and resources, as detailed in analyses of land deals in limbo across Africa, finds a parallel in Egypt's post-2011 economic policies . Here, the state has re-established itself as the ultimate arbiter of major economic transactions, a role that perpetuates a particular form of state-society relationship rooted in patronage and vertical accountability rather than horizontal social contracts.

When contextualised within a comparative African perspective, Egypt's post-2011 trajectory exhibits both unique and shared features ([Sithole, 2021](#)). Unlike some Southern African contexts where the emergence of a vocal, if often frustrated, middle class has applied distinct pressures on governance models, Egypt's state has historically sought to co-opt or suppress such class-based political articulation . The survey results suggesting a disconnection between citizen aspirations and institutional responsiveness echo frustrations documented in studies of urban governance and service delivery in other African nations, where bureaucratic inertia often stifles local initiative . However, Egypt's experience is distinct in the scale and sophistication of its bureaucratic-authoritarian legacy, which has utilised legal and administrative tools to demobilise civil society with a comprehensiveness that contrasts with the more fragmented governance landscapes of some sub-Saharan states. Furthermore, the instrumentalisation of gender narratives by the state, as part of a national project, reflects a broader continental phenomenon where women's rights and roles are often framed within state-centric discourses rather than those of autonomous empowerment .

This research necessarily confronts significant methodological limitations, paramount among them being the constraints of conducting survey research within an environment of authoritarian resilience ([Madureira, 2021](#)). The climate of restrained political expression, as noted in studies on securitised public spheres, inevitably shapes respondent attitudes, potentially inclining them towards more cautious or socially desirable answers regarding perceptions of the state . While the survey design employed stratified sampling and anonymised protocols to mitigate this, the shadow of perceived surveillance, a recurrent theme in analyses of digital and physical space in authoritarian contexts, cannot be fully discounted . Consequently, the data likely captures a conservative estimate of discontent or a preference for abstract desires for change over concrete criticism of specific institutions. This limitation underscores the necessity of triangulating survey findings with qualitative historical and policy analysis, as this discussion has endeavoured to do, to construct a more nuanced structural interpretation.

The implications of this analysis for understanding African governance are substantial ([Jaensch, 2021](#)). It suggests that moments of mass mobilisation, while potentially disruptive, may be insufficient to alter deep-seated institutional paths unless they precipitate a fundamental re

Conclusion

This structural analysis of Egypt's post-2011 governance landscape has demonstrated that contemporary challenges cannot be understood in isolation from the deep historical legacies that shape the state's institutional architecture and political culture ([Matsimbe, 2021](#)). The research problem centred on explaining the persistent resilience of centralised authority and the cyclical nature of reform and retrenchment following the 2011 uprising. The answer, as evidenced throughout this survey, lies in the enduring structural and ideational frameworks inherited from the colonial and post-colonial eras, which have consistently reconstituted themselves despite episodic ruptures. The 2011 moment, rather than representing a clean break, became another chapter in a long historical sequence where revolutionary impulses were ultimately channelled and contained by pre-existing governance templates (Kandil, 2012; Rutherford, 2018). The implications of this finding are significant for both scholarly analysis and policy engagement, suggesting that fundamental change in Egypt's governance model requires a transformation of these underlying structures, not merely a change of personnel or even constitutions.

The implications for the field of African Studies are twofold ([Thames Copeland, 2021](#)). Firstly, this case reinforces the necessity of historically grounded analysis that traces the *longue durée* evolution of state institutions and political authority. As shown, the centralised, militarised, and bureaucratic state model, consolidated under Nasser and rooted in earlier modernising projects, has proven remarkably adaptable (Springborg, 2017). It has absorbed economic liberalisation, survived a mass uprising, and recalibrated its legitimising discourse around security and stability, all while maintaining its core operational logic. Secondly, Egypt's experience underscores the importance of analysing the state not as a monolithic entity but as a contested arena where different institutions—particularly the military, the intelligence services, and the civil bureaucracy—wield power based on historical capital and resource control (Marshall & Stacher, 2012). The post-2013 re-centralisation was not a simple return to the pre-2011 status quo but represented the definitive ascendancy of the military-security apparatus within this competitive framework, a outcome deeply conditioned by historical patterns of civil-military relations.

For policymakers and external actors, the analysis carries a sobering implication: interventions based on assumptions of linear democratic transition or that focus solely on electoral mechanics are likely to founder when they encounter these resilient historical structures ([Zelege Eresso, 2021](#)). The international community's engagement after 2011 often underestimated the depth of the 'deep state' and its capacity to navigate crisis (Roll, 2016). Effective support for governance reform, should it be desired, would necessitate a far more nuanced understanding of these institutional legacies and the interests they embed. It would require strategies that engage with, but do not inadvertently strengthen, the informal networks and economic empires that underpin formal political power. The resurgence of a hyper-presidential system, backed by widespread populist legitimacy, demonstrates the continued potency of a historical model that trades personalistic authority for provision of security and nominal sovereignty (Soliman, 2011).

Looking forward, this survey suggests several critical avenues for future research ([MIZOBE, 2021](#)). The first is a deeper investigation into the political economy of the contemporary state, particularly the evolving relationship between the military's economic empire and its political hegemony. While the outlines are known, the precise mechanisms through which economic control translates into political stabilisation and public acquiescence in the post-2013 era require further empirical study. Secondly, more scholarly attention must be paid to the sub-national level and the persistent failure to realise meaningful decentralisation—a legacy of centralising fear traceable to the Ottoman and colonial periods. How governance is experienced in the governorates, and how local power brokers mediate between citizens and the central state, remains a crucial but under-examined dimension of the overall landscape. Finally, comparative work with other African states that share similar historical legacies of bureaucratic-authoritarian rule or militarised liberation movements could yield fruitful insights into the varying pathways and potential breaking points for such systems.

In closing, this article has argued that Egypt's post-2011 trajectory is fundamentally a story of historical recurrence and structural resilience ([ADATI, 2021](#)). The hopes of 2011 were not extinguished by mere contingency or the actions of a few individuals but were overwhelmed by the weight of institutional history and the adaptive strategies of entrenched interests. The new constitutional arrangements and political rhetoric may wear a modern guise, but they service a governance logic with deep roots. Understanding contemporary Egypt, and by extension many similar African states, therefore demands an analytical lens that pierces through the immediacy of events to the enduring historical frameworks that constrain and enable political action. Without such an understanding, analysts risk perpetually being surprised by the resilience of the old, while failing to identify the subtle shifts and potential fractures within these historical structures that may shape the next, unforeseen chapter.

Contributions

This survey research provides a novel empirical analysis of how Egyptians perceive the historical legacies influencing contemporary governance. By capturing public opinion data from 2021, it moves beyond elite-centric narratives to document how citizens themselves link historical factors, such as colonial administration and post-independence state-building, to present-day institutional challenges. The findings contribute a critical, ground-level perspective to African Studies, challenging homogenising continental narratives by highlighting Egypt's distinct historical trajectory within the African context. Consequently, the study offers a framework for understanding path dependency in governance that is informed by quantitative public sentiment.

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