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What is to be done?

Challenges facing the independent
trade union movement in Egypt

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Contents

Preface	5
Introduction	6
Analyzing unions as unions	8
Egyptian unions in context	9
The legal framework	9
The political context	11
The marketplace context.....	12
Associational power	14
Ability to organize	14
Measures of success.....	20
A fragmented union movement?.....	22
Positive compromise or zero-sum game?	25
Challenges and Objectives	28
A legal framework recognizing their existence	28
Stronger institutions.....	28
Recommendations	29
Conclusion	31
References	32
Appendix I: Methods and analytical approach	34
Appendix II: The questionnaire	36

Preface

This paper is a result of a research collaboration between Fafo and the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR). It springs out of a research project made possible by a generous grant from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Norwegian Embassy in Egypt. We would like to thank the Embassy for its support and constructive dialogue throughout the project. The authors wish to extend their gratitude to all the Egyptian unionists and workers who contributed to the research. We would especially like to thank Nadeem Mansour, the former Director General of ECESR, for his help in establishing the project and conducting much of the data gathering. We also appreciate the feedback of Mark Taylor, Fafo, on an early draft of the paper.

Oslo and Cairo, Fall 2018

Kristian Takvam Kindt and Heba Khalil

Introduction

Egyptian independent unions were hailed as one of the strongest forces in Egyptian civil society in the years preceding, and the first years after the uprisings in 2011. From the mid-2000s until 2011, workers contributed in creating a ‘culture of protest’, which has been viewed as an important factor in the success of the 2011 uprisings against Mubarak (Beinin 2012, Bishara 2012). In 2011-2013, over a thousand new independent unions were registered, and the numbers of labor disputes rose sharply. This led observers to view the labor movement both as a potentially important player on the political field and as one of the most important champions of ordinary Egyptians’ interests (Kindt 2014, Alexander 2012).

Since the ousting of Muhammed Mursi in July 2013 and al-Sisi’s takeover of the presidency, there are growing concerns about the strength of the independent labor movement. Increasing repression of strikes, a hostile legal framework and a tightening space for free media has led some analysts to conclude that, ‘the labor movement is likely to wane in the near future’ (Ramadan and Adly 2015). In 2015, Jano Charbel, a close observer of the independent labor movement in Egypt, found that, ‘[i]ndependent labor unions flourished across Egypt with the popular uprising of 2011, but this growth translated neither into unity nor strength, and these independent associations appear to have withered away since the military-led regime change in July 2013’ (Charbel 2015). Others, however, have a more positive outlook. Joel Beinin, for instance, has argued that ‘the workers have not lost their voice, even as many of Egypt’s post-2011 achievements have been undone, (Beinin 2015:123). Before he was killed, the Italian researcher Giulio Regeni wrote that independent unions in Egypt ‘refuse to give up’ and that they had been given ‘a second life’, despite the difficult circumstances under the al-Sisi regime (Regeni 2015).

In this paper, we will attempt to empirically address the strength of the independent labor movement in Egypt. Have they died or withered away as a movement since 2013, or do they still have the potential to become a strong force in Egyptian civil society? And what, if anything, can the international community do if they wish to assist or strengthen trade unions in Egypt? Taking into account both the structural constraints facing unions in Egypt and their organizational capabilities, we seek to answer these overarching questions:

- How strong are the independent unions in Egypt?
- What are their main challenges?
- How should the unions face such challenges?
- Can the international community play a role in supporting the independent unions?

We utilize a number of different sources to analyze the strength of Egypt’s independent unions. First, we draw on a database comprising information from all social and economic protests in Egypt since the revolution. It was established by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR). Second, Fafo and ECESR have prepared and implemented a survey of independent unions in Egypt, which was used to

collect fairly detailed facts about their activities. Third, Fafo and ECESR have conducted 12 in-depth qualitative interviews with leading figures from a number of trade unions. The interview subjects represent a broad spectrum of industrial sectors and geographical locations. However, due to concerns about their safety, no names or affiliations are disclosed in the paper. In addition to these primary sources, we have drawn on a number of secondary sources, such as previous research and newspaper articles.¹ Together, this constitutes a rich empirical foundation on which to analyze the strength of the independent union movement and suggest recommendations for the way forward.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section lays out the framework for analyzing independent unions in Egypt. The second section assesses the structural strength of the independent unions before examining more closely their associational strength. Finally, we describe what we see as the independent unions' main challenges and how these can be faced and tackled by the unions, and how the international community can assist them.

¹ Some additional information on the methodology of the survey and the database can be found in Appendix 1.

Analyzing unions as unions

How can we assess the strength of a labor movement in the Egyptian context? Research on trade union movements in non-democratic societies usually analyzes the trade unions as political actors and assesses their strength in terms of their capacity to contribute to political democratization. This literature often advises unions to ally themselves with the national elite, maintain a strong centralized organization and forge links with civil society (see, for example, Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992: 282, and Adler and Webster 1995). We argue that this approach is ill fitted to study the Egyptian case, because it takes for granted the existence of a relatively stable and strong trade union movement that represents workers. In Egypt, however, the independent labor movement is very young, and rather disorganized (Bishara 2012, Beinin 2015, Kindt 2014). Second, we also do not take for granted that the goal of trade unions is to contribute to political democracy. The literature on independent unions in Egypt has shown that their main goal is not to bring about parliamentary democracy in Egypt, but rather to function as a trade union movement, that is to be able to secure higher wages and better working conditions for their members (Kindt 2014). Therefore, we will not analyze how strong the union is in terms of how successful it is in bringing about democracy in Egypt. If that was their main goal, we would conclude right from the start that they are failing. Rather, we will assess their strength in how successful they are in representing the workers and implementing their demands. In other words, we will analyze the trade unions as trade unions, not as political actors.

This analysis has a normative dimension in that we see strong independent trade unions as a positive contribution to Egyptian civil society. First, we assume that the Egyptian independent trade unions are inherently democratic. A democracy can be defined as a political system where ‘citizens hold the ultimate control over collective decisions in a securely institutionalized manner’ (Ringen 2009:25). In absence of real electoral democracy, trade unions can play a role as a social institution through which citizens gain control over collective decisions. Second, trade unions can contribute to depolarization. Previous research has shown that trade unions have the potential to bridge the divide between different political factions in Egypt. Unlike many institutions in Egypt, independent unions are institutions through which workers who are Islamists, socialists, liberals or of no political affiliation come together to work for the same cause (Kindt 2014). Since the Egyptian political scene is highly polarized, all organizations that are able to defuse this polarization are having a positive effect. Third, we argue that it is in the interests of all parties—the state, the employers and the workers—to have a well organized labor market with dialogue between the different parties. This would lower the level of conflict and one would escape a situation where workers have to strike every time they disagree with an employer’s decision. These positive contributions of independent unions are contingent on whether they have the power to influence decisions and on whether they are true representatives of workers.

Egyptian unions in context

In this section, we examine the current context and do not provide an historic account of trade unionism in Egypt. The movement of independent unions came to life before the revolution, but really evolved only in the years after.²

Workers in Egypt today have to organize and negotiate within a rather hostile environment characterized by high unemployment, rising inflation, repressive laws, and a lack of legitimacy, all amidst a repressive political context, where protests and labor action are viewed as unpatriotic and potentially terrorist (Amnesty International 2016). In the following, we look at the legislative framework in Egypt and the way it has developed in the past five years, particularly with regard to the independent unions and industrial action. Then, we situate this legislative framework within the political context of Egypt and within the context of its labor market, characterized by rising unemployment and deteriorating living standards of living.

The legal framework

In a country immersed in political upheaval, the legal framework has remained a rather stable factor throughout the past five years. Stability, however, does not imply that Egyptian legislation is contributing positively to the 'health' and growth of independent unions. In fact, the legal framework comes out of our survey as one of the most significant challenges of the independent unions. It has been a challenge in three principal ways: firstly, in acknowledging the right of workers to form unions outside of the official federation; secondly, in regulating the relationship between the official federation and the independent unions/ federation; and finally, in securing basic entitlements to workers, including the right to strike. In the following, we will concentrate on the first two legal challenges.

At present, the independent unions in Egypt rely on two sources for their legal recognition: (i) the 1948 ILO convention; and (ii) the 2011 Declaration on Union Freedom prepared by the then Minister of Manpower Ahmad al-Borai, which served as the legal basis for the registration of the new independent unions with the Ministry. Besides opening up for registration of new independent unions, the declaration did nothing to change the existing legal atmosphere that the unions had to operate within. The everyday legality of independent unions remained the same, meaning that it was still illegal to collect membership fees, they had no formal position from which to negotiate with employers, and they had no legal standing in front of governmental bodies. Law No. 35/ 1976 regulates labor unions, as do several other legal documents, such as the Egyptian constitution, ministerial decrees, and several laws in the penal code, especially those dealing with the issue of strike and industrial action. In addition, court precedents are relevant, although these tend to be contradictory in their view of independent labor unions and the legitimacy of strikes (Ali 2016:7).

² For an introduction to the rise of the independent labor movement in Egypt, see for example Beinin (2012), Kindt (2014) and Bishara (2012).

The legal struggle for independent unions continued well into 2016, through a struggle over pluralism in Egyptian trade unionism. Because the official Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) fills the space of labor organization, at least nominally, it is commonly argued that Egypt already fulfills its obligations regarding the right to association, because workers have the right to join the official union structure. Despite many years of independent trade union organizing, Gebaly Al-Meraghy, the head of ETUF, had declared that the ‘independent union project’ was a misinterpretation of international agreements by the Muslim Brotherhood regime and a conspiracy to divide Egypt’s workers and cause ‘chaos’ (Yousef 2016). Advocates of this view have also asserted that the freedom of association is granted since Law no. 1/1981 makes membership in the official union voluntary.

In this way, the legitimacy of the very existence of independent labor unions depends on whether plural structures are permitted or not, a conflict that has not been settled yet. Nevertheless, the struggle for an improved legislative framework continues to this day: In June 2016, ECESR’s founder and labor lawyer Khaled Ali represented a diversity of independent unions in front of the Administrative Court challenging the Labor Union Code No. 35/1976. This initiative resulted in an Administrative Court order to refer the current Labor Union Code to the Constitutional Court, challenging its shortcomings in providing full rights of association to Egyptian workers, as guaranteed by international agreements, principally the 1948 ILO Convention (Emad 2016).

Despite continued calls since 2011 for a new law regulating independent unions, the state in 2016 rejected this possibility: by presenting amendments to the existing law regulating independent unions, the state indicated that there will be no new legislation, but also that the state is not willing to concede space to independent unions. In July 2016, the parliament approved amendments (Law 61/2016) to the pre-existing Law 35/1976 regulating labor unions. These amendments have generally empowered the official unions and their board members, for example by re-enforcing the same law (35/1976), which contains articles that have been ruled unconstitutional (Abdel Barr 2016), but also by revoking Law 97/2012 that banned ETUF members aged 60 and above from becoming board members. The latter decision in effect allowed existing, pro-state ETUF board members to keep occupying board seats they had held since 2006—despite the board being dissolved by Manpower Minister Borai in 2011. Influence over board composition remains one of the principal mechanisms the state employs to control the ETUF, and one of the reasons why ETUF cannot be reformed from within. State control and a lack of progressive reforms represent a challenge to workers’ organizations and explain why continued efforts to strengthen independent unions are required (Abdel Barr 2016).

In addition, the 2016 amendments to the law 35/1976 failed to mention—or recognize for that matter—the independent unions, and instead included an article on raising the minimum number of workers required to establish a new union committee from 50 to 100 workers, setting a minimum of 250 thousand members for the formation of a union federation, and differentiating between the legal status of official unions and ‘other’ associations, the status of which was left to the Minister of Manpower to decide on (Nour 2016).

It is noteworthy that workers and civil society groups have been advocating for a new law governing independent unions for the past five years. In fact, a draft law supported by independent unions and other civil society organizations and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in November 2011, was later opposed by two key actors: the official federation, ETUF, and the Supreme Council for Armed Forces (SCAF). The

refusal of the latter to ratify the new law resulted in an impasse. By 2016, the window of opportunity to pass a progressive law that acknowledges union plurality and representational rights of independent unions had been closed.

Furthermore, the state-led, official workers' federation ETUF launched a court case in 2016 challenging the legitimacy of the independent unions. The case sought to annul independent unions due to their extra-legality, as described by the official federation members. At the same time, the Ministry of Interior decreed that the stamps of independent trade unions would no longer be recognized as valid on official documents, thus stripping these unions of their official recognition achieved in 2011 under the declaration of union freedoms (FLA 2016) and undermining their ability to negotiate and make agreements with employers. The Ministry of Education followed the same path and declared it would no longer recognize the independent union stamps in March 2016, a decision that may gain precedence and spread to other sectors and further limit the legal recognition of independent unions (Hussein 2016).

The struggle for legal recognition has crucial financial consequences. Recognizing the independent unions once registered with the Ministry of Manpower does not lay out the procedure for collecting membership fees, transferring memberships from ETUF to independent unions, joining the pension funds, or even licensing professional and labor activities. As a result, the independent unions have not been able to reach out to ordinary workers, who would otherwise be tempted to join a representative body that advances their interests.

Because independent unions are not recognized as per the Law 35/1976, companies and private enterprises repeatedly harass workers who attend independent union activities. In these cases, workers only have recourse to justice if they take the case to court and win the court's sympathy, attempts that have had mixed results so far (Ali 2016). The absence of a legal framework also results in practical impediments, such as the financial insecurity of members of the independent unions. If the unions are not legally recognized, the freezing of union funds by orders of the Ministry of Interior becomes easier and is harder to challenge.

The political context

In January 2015, the head of the official union for the workers in the public services declared that independent unionists are attempting to spread chaos and delays in work and production. He stated that his union had brought an official complaint to the general prosecutor, exposing 'the destructive actions' of independent unionists 'in support of terrorist groups' in the electricity power plants and other service sectors in Egypt (Yousef 2016).

This story is indicative of the political environment in which the independent unions operate. With the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood government and the ascendance to power of a military-backed government, Egypt has faced increased restrictions on, and repression of, basic rights and liberties such as free speech, fair trial and the right to protest. Within this context, SCAF criminalized strike activities for workers in 2011 through Decree no. 24/2011, which was followed by the 2013 Protest Law and the 2016 Anti-Terror Legislation, which together form the legal foundations for political repression. Amidst this, the military and police have harassed workers, interfering in protests and strikes, arresting workers or forcing them to sign resignation documents (ANHRI 2014). Workers from the Alexandria Shipyard company were tried in military courts, and 15 workers faced military trials for taking part in a strike

demanding better pay and protesting inadequate occupational health and safety measures (Daily News Egypt 2016).

The proliferation of political parties in Egypt, which occurred with the uprisings in 2011, has resulted in an increase in the quantity but not improvement in the quality of political activism (Hamid 2014). The failure of newly established parties to engage with social, economic and workplace issues has deprived them of taking on an active role and becoming an agent of transformation. Similarly, the workers' refusal to regard their mobilization as political (Kindt 2014), with all the negative connotations of a thirst for power that come with the word political, has also meant that they have not attempted to form a political party to represent workers' interests. Independent unions are therefore left in a situation with no allies in the political establishment, a government-backed federation that works against them, and no political party of their own.

The marketplace context

In addition to the challenges faced by the legal and political context, the marketplace power of Egyptian workers is weak. Egypt's official poverty rate increased from 19.6 per cent in 2004/2005 to 25.2 per cent in 2010/11 and 26.3 per cent in 2012/13, and more recently to 27.8 per cent in 2015. The young are harder hit by poverty than others and more than half of Egypt's youth population lives below the poverty line. This is exacerbated by steadily increasing unemployment rates: The average unemployment rate climbed to 12.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2016 (CAPMAS 2016); increasing from an average of nine per cent between 2006 and 2010. Compliant with poverty statistics, Egypt's youth are more severely affected by unemployment than other people as one-third of the youth seeking employment is unemployed.

Egypt has a large informal sector, sometimes estimated to make up 60 per cent of Egypt's entire economy. This sector benefitted from the independent unions, as informal workers could finally organize and attempt to form a front to improve their vulnerable position—the independent union of street vendors being a good example in this respect. But with the enormous structural challenges facing Egypt's independent unions, the informal workers were unable to exploit their associational power in full, even though they might be the ones most in need of it. Yet, with rising poverty amongst informal workers—reaching 53 per cent according to CAPMAS (2016)—and bad working conditions, including the complete absence of job security and health insurance, and bad occupational health and safety measures, the informal sector remains a space that could benefit considerably from the local independent unions.

Finally, Egypt's labor force is unskilled. With more than 40 per cent of Egypt's workforce being illiterate (Al-Arabi 2009) and having received no or poor-quality vocational training, has resulted in a low-skilled workforce, not competitive regionally despite its large size (Global Security 2016). As a result, Egypt's workforce has low productivity rates, which have been decreasing in the industrial sector (Al-Arabi 2009).

Consequently, Egyptian workers have few options: if they hold a job, they strive to keep it, and if unemployed, they struggle to get a job even in the worst conditions. The market-based power of labor is not enhanced by a particular skill set or training, while in negotiation situations, labor cannot predict if the employer will recognize them, or resort to the security forces to disperse them in various ways.

In short, the structural power of Egyptian workers is weak. Employers can easily replace workers if they protest. Independent unions are not recognized legal entities.

They face a political context with no allies, only adversaries trying to diminish their influence through repression, both directly and through legal means.

Associational power

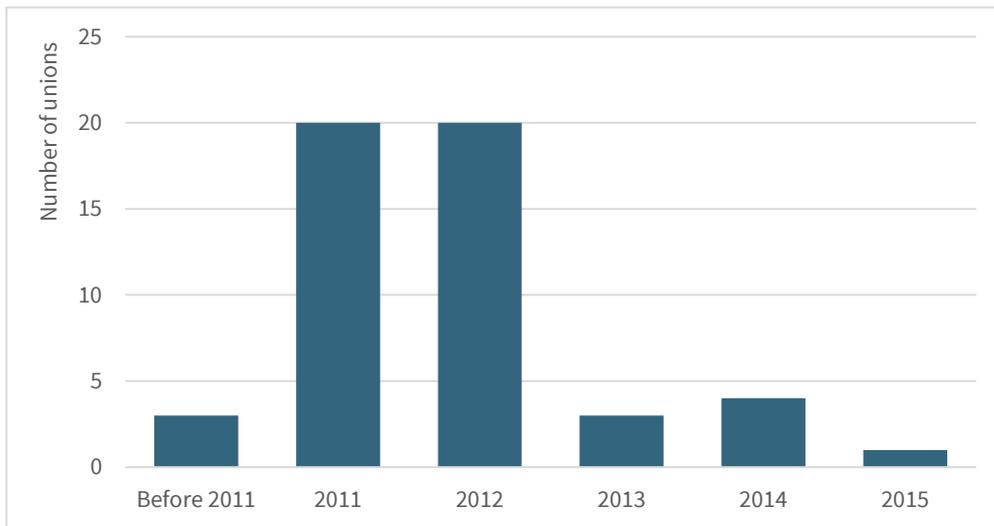
Given the lack of structural power, one would not expect the independent labor movement in Egypt to thrive. And it is precisely the context described above that has led to the observation mentioned in the introduction, namely that the independent unions are disappearing. We will now empirically investigate this claim by examining what associational power is left for the independent unions and to what extent it is exercised.

Ability to organize

What is the mobilizational potential of Egyptian trade unions? In previous research, this has been addressed in different ways. Some point to the number of independent unions founded. Since 2011, the number has soared. In 2013, the two leading federations for independent unions (the Egyptian Federations for Independent Trade Unions, EFITU, and the Egyptian Democratic Labor Confederation, EDLC) claimed that 1,800 unions had been founded since 2011 with more than three million members. Such numbers should, however, not be taken at face value. In several of our interviews, trade union leaders claim that a majority of these unions are ‘paper unions’, implying that they exist in name only, but do not actually organize workers. A close observer of the independent unions argued in an interview with Mada Masr that, ‘many of them [independent unions] are not affiliated to any federation, other unions have quit federations, while others are still forming federations, and yet others are merely unions on paper, not really existing in workplaces’ (Charbel 2015). Joel Beinin argues similarly that this figure put forth by EFITU and EDLC was ‘surely an exaggeration’. Yet he adds that, ‘even much smaller figures would be impressive’ (Beinin 2015:114). Given the absence of a legal framework for independent unions, registration is impossible and as a result it is difficult to arrive at a precise number of unions and to establish how many are active.

What seems to be clear, however, is that 2011 marked the peak of union registration and that it has been more difficult to organize new unions after 2012. This is mentioned in several of the qualitative interviews and was also confirmed in the survey only a tiny fraction of the unions were founded after 2012, while the vast majority was established in 2011 and 2012 (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Distribution of surveyed independent unions by year of establishment (N=51).

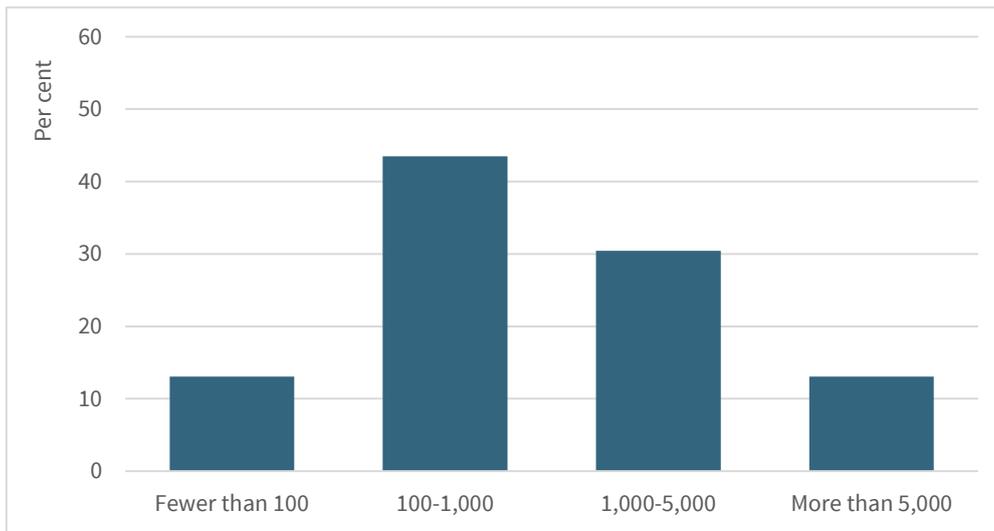


Trade union density is one of the most commonly used indicators in the literature on industrial relations. It is, however, impossible to find a reliable measure of trade union density for Egypt as independent unions are not properly registered. While the Egyptian federations for independent trade unions claim to have millions of members, the general consensus is that these numbers are exaggerated. For example, former EFITU board member Hoda Kamel argues that the ‘total membership of all independent unions and federations probably does not exceed a few hundred thousand’ (quoted in Charbel 2015). Yet, this number is also merely an estimate—there is simply no trustworthy statistics available.

In our survey, we asked how many members the unions had and also enquired about the proportion of workers at the workplace(s) they represented that were organized. Among the unions in our survey, a majority had between 100 and 1,000 members, the median being 786 members (Figure 2)³.

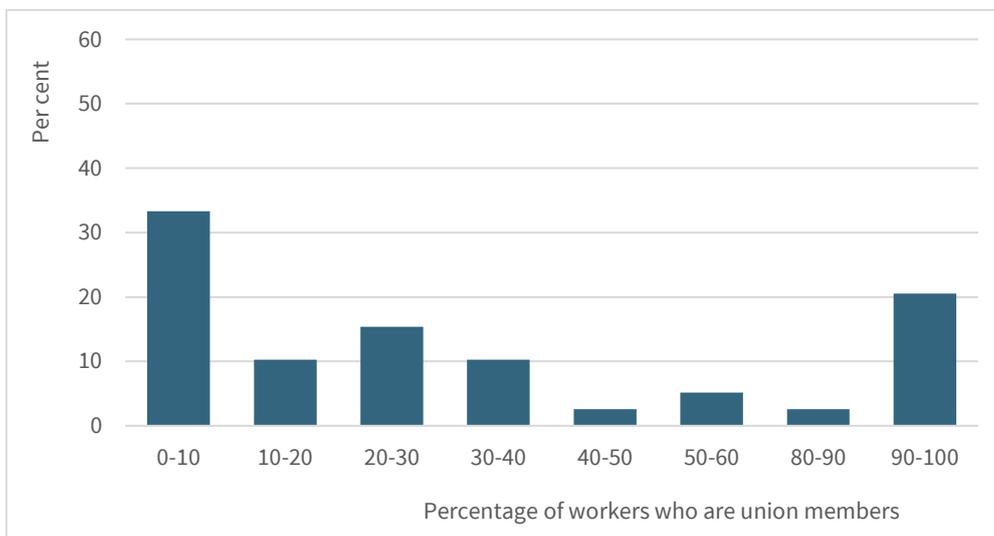
³ Six of the surveyed unions were unable to provide an estimate of their membership base.

Figure 2 Distribution of surveyed independent unions by size (N=45).



If we look at the percentage of workers organized at the workplace, the median and mean density or coverage rate is respectively 22 and 35 per cent based on the self-reported number of members and self-reported number of employees at the workplace (Figure 3)⁴. About four in ten unions have less than 20 per cent coverage, while around one-fifth have a very impressive coverage rate of over 90 per cent.

Figure 3 Distribution of surveyed independent unions by 'trade union density', i.e. the coverage or share of workers organized at the workplaces where they are represented (N=39).

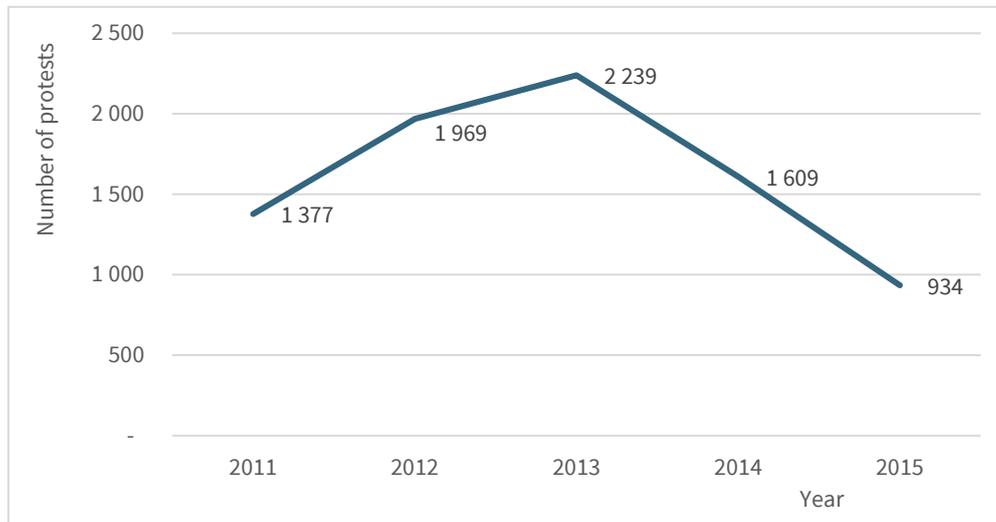


A more reliable measure for the independent unions' ability to organize is the number of labor protests they organize. According to the ECESR database, the number of protests increased from 2011 until 2013, peaking at over 2,000 protests, and then dropped to less than 1,000 protests in 2015 (Figure 4). Despite the decline, this is still

⁴ Another six unions did not provide information on the share of workers organized at the workplace.

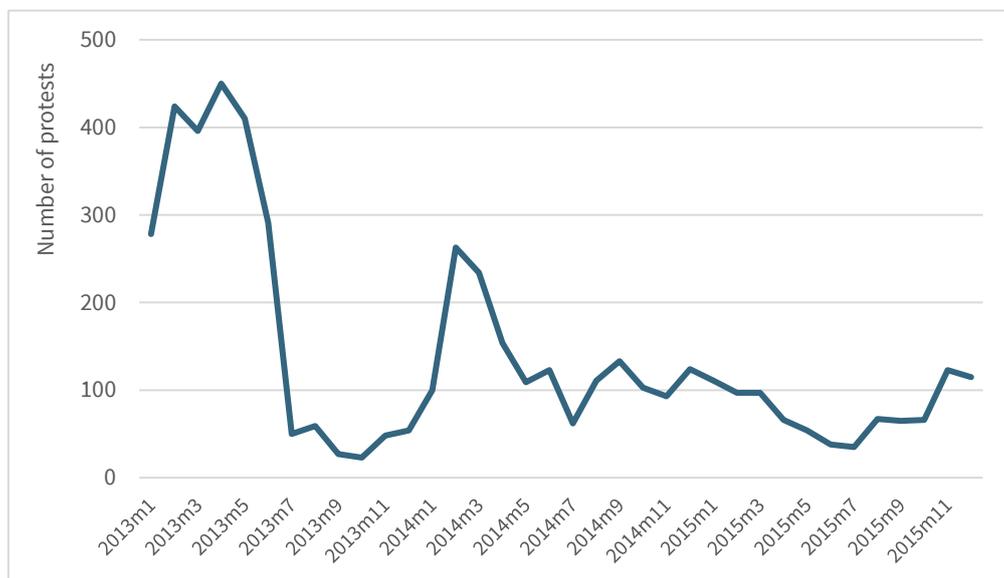
significantly higher than in the years preceding 2011 as even during the strike wave of 2006-2009, the number of strikes and protests did not exceed 800 per year.

Figure 4 Number of protests in Egypt by year. Source: the ECESR data base.



Examining the period 2013-2015 more closely reveals that the number of protests dropped sharply in July 2013, when president Mursi was ousted by the military. Since then, the number of protests remained at a fairly low but steady level, with the exception of a spike in February 2014 (Figure 5). It is worth noting that even at its lowest levels, the number of protests each month exceeded one protest per day.

Figure 5 Number of protests in Egypt 2013-2015 by month. Source: the ECESR data base.



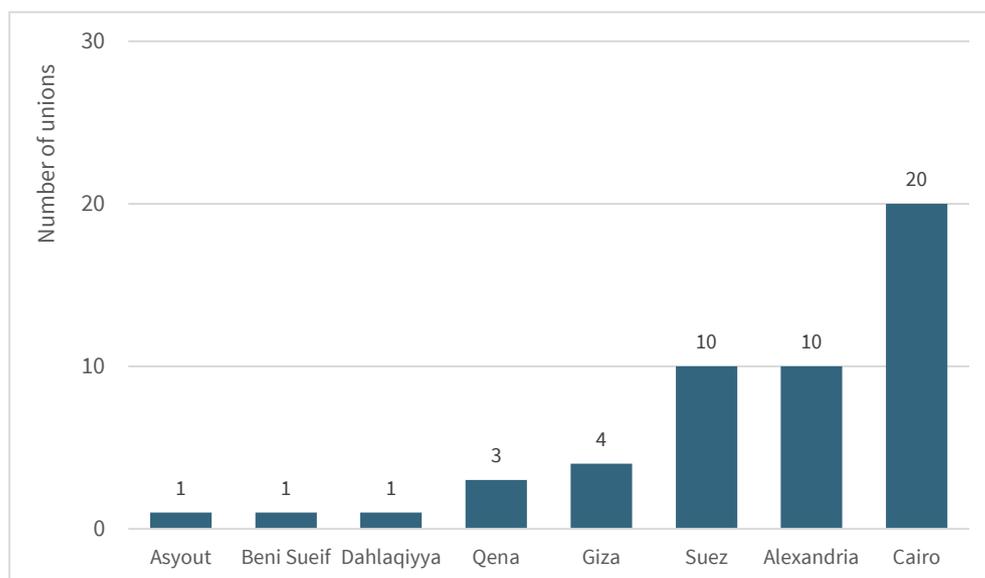
During 2013-2014, Cairo witnessed the largest number of protests. As a matter of fact, about one-third of all protests took place there (Table 1). Of the remaining governorates, Gharibiyya, Alexandria, Sharqiyya, Giza and Suez exhibit the largest number of protests during these two years. This result partly overlaps with the survey,

where Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and Giza are the governorates where the highest number of unions is based (Figure 6).

Table 1 Number of protests in 2014-2015 by governorate and year. Source: the ECESR data base.

	2013	2014	Total
Daqhlaqiyya	118	79	197
Beheira	113	108	221
Kafr al-Shaykh	158	77	235
Munifiyya	162	73	235
Suez	173	70	243
Giza	145	109	254
Sharqiyya	189	88	277
Alexandria	175	143	318
Gharibiyya	215	121	336
Cairo	641	551	1,192
Total	2,089	1,419	3,508

Figure 6 Distribution of surveyed independent unions by governorate (N=50).



Government institutions (civil servants) dominate the protest statistics for the years 2014-2015, whilst public companies and the private sector experienced a substantially lower number of protests (Figure 7). This is in accordance with our survey, where the largest share of the unions was based in the government sector (Figure 8).

Figure 7 Number of protests in 2014-2015 by sector and year. Source: the ECESR data base.

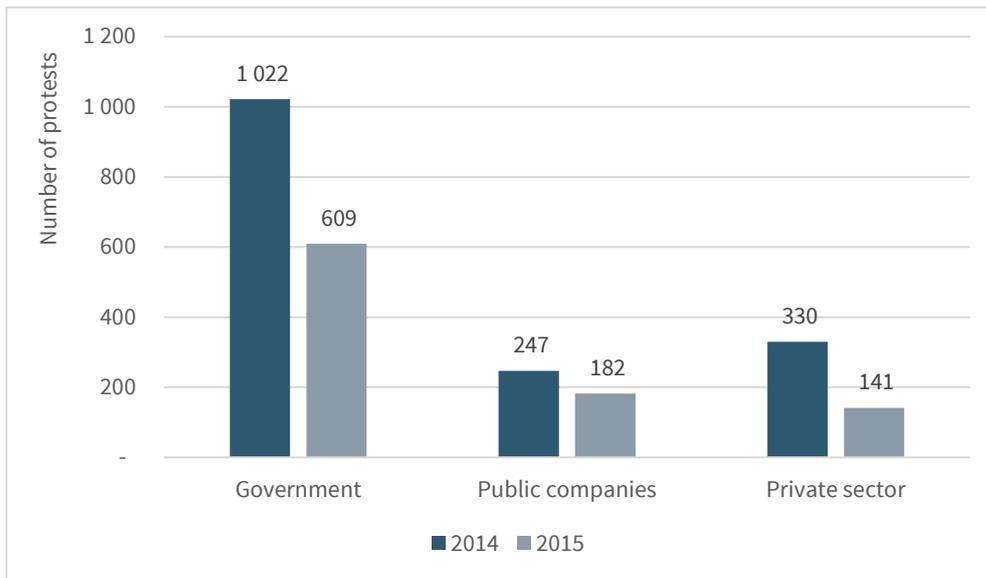
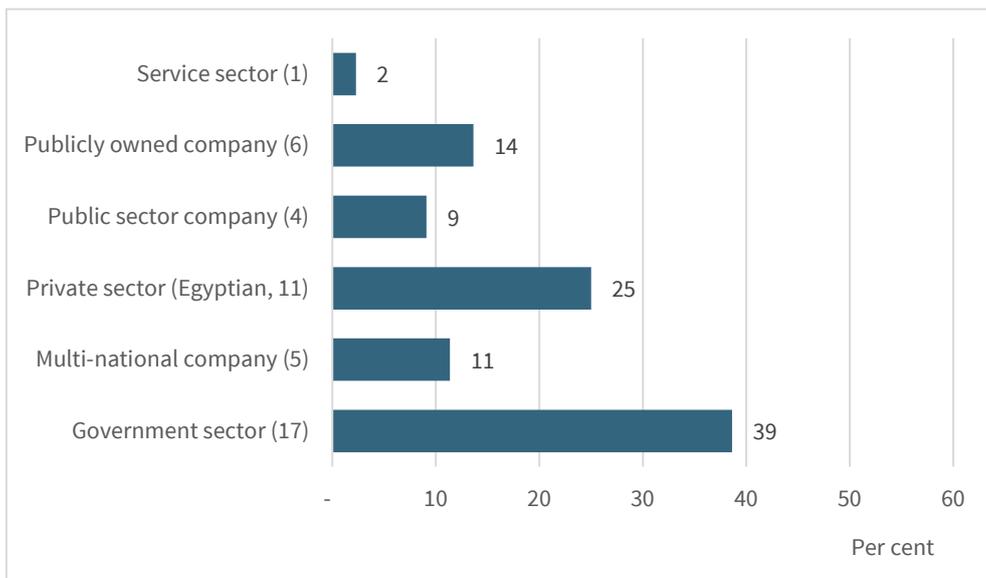


Figure 8 Distribution of surveyed independent unions by sector. Percentage (N=44).



Taken together, the numbers just presented show that the trade unions are present on the ground in Egypt and organize workers to protest several times per day, on average. Although the number of protests was significantly higher immediately after the 2011 uprisings, the mobilizational capacity has been remarkably consistent even from 2013 onwards, a period characterized by increasing governmental repression. The public sector still dominates, and the independent unions have only succeeded partially in spreading to the private sector. The service sector and multinational companies seem out of reach. Furthermore, the large informal economy, employing an estimated 30-40 per cent of the Egyptian workforce, is a sector where the independent unions have huge difficulties getting a foothold.

The relatively high number of protests organized by the independent unions is, however, not information enough to judge their strength. A high number of protests can be a sign of (increasing) strength but can also be a sign of desperation and fading impact. In Northern-European countries, for example, the number of strikes and protests is exceedingly low, but the associational power of the unions is high. This is mainly because they are institutionalized into the national power structures and have a solid ability to implement demands through non-strike channels. In the next section we will examine to what extent the Egyptian independent unions are able to implement their demands and how well they function as institutions.

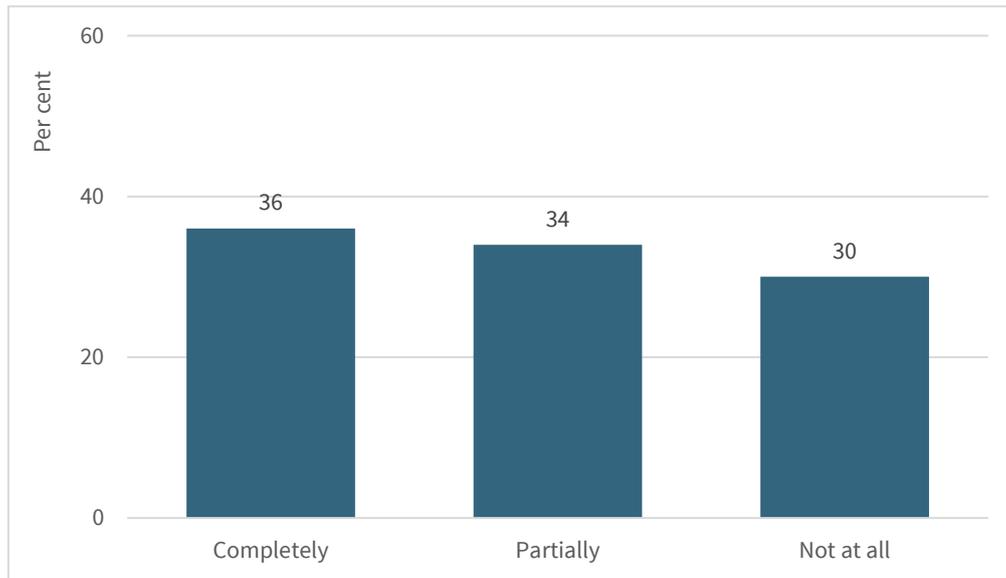
Measures of success

The ability of unions to realize their objectives, to ensure that their demands are met, is one of the most important indicators in assessing the strength of unions. However, there are different ways of going about measuring it. Many observers of the independent unions point to their inability to implement any structural changes. They have been unable to achieve the implementation of the trade unions freedom law, to hinder harsh repression of strikes and to stop the government from strengthening the old ETUF rather than the new independent unions. Their only structural demand, which has been implemented, is a national minimum wage.

Moreover, there are signs that their power at the national level is diminishing. In 2011, pressure from workers and independent unions helped ensure the substitution of the Minister of Manpower from a figure of the Mubarak regime to Ahmad Al-Borai, who was positive to union pluralism. He was also responsible for opening the door for registration of independent unions. Unfortunately, his tenure was short-lived and in 2012 the former minister was reinstated. Although they opposed the move, the independent unions were powerless to prevent it (Beinin 2015:9). In 2013, an independent labor leader, Kamal Abu Eita, assumed the post as Minister of Manpower. However, he changed his progressive attitude towards unions and ended up pursuing an anti-independent union agenda. The independent unions' ability to influence decisions in the ministry seems to have disappeared.

However, the unions' capacity to implement demands should not only be judged by what they achieve on the structural or national level, but also their effectiveness at the local level. In our survey, we asked the unions to record each protest and strike they had organized, and whether their demands were fully met, partially met or not met at all. Figure 9 paints a picture of a fairly successful union movement, in that only one-third of the protests totally failed at achieving their objectives whilst one-third partially achieved their objectives and one-third had their demands met in full.

Figure 9 Level of success of local protests. Percentage of protests where demands were fully met, partially met or not at all met (N=44)⁵.



The types of demands reported as being successfully met were largely financial or job security-related: most of the successes were demands for slightly higher wages or bonuses. In some cases, demands met included the reinstatement of illegally fired workers. In other words, victories were made on local bread-and-butter issues of great importance to union members.

Through the qualitative interviews, we were able to identify some crucial reasons why strikes failed. One major explanation is repression from the police or government in collusion with business owners. It is not uncommon that strike leaders are arrested and then fired. One of the unions we interviewed told us how the government broke a strike through arresting the union leader. He was released after one month after which he was fired from the company for failing to attend work. When he argues to the courts that he was absent because of his arrest, which was unlawful, they refused to listen. This led not only to the failure of this particular strike, but also removed the union leader from the workplace, instilling fear of union work in many of the employees. After this incident, the union has been unable to gather support for a strike.

We found such stories to be common. In 2011 and 2012, it was easier for workers to have demands met. One worker described the situation in 2011 thus: 'We knew that SCAF gave orders to companies to implement workers' demands to end the strikes, as it was the only way to do so [end the strikes]'. From 2013 onwards, this has been replaced by a tactic where arrests and threats are more common. One union leader, for instance, reported that as they attempted to organize a strike, a police officer told them that, 'I'll shoot whoever is going to protest here'. Such increasing repression is bolstered by the new protest law, mentioned previously, which gives the authorities the right to declare almost any protest illegal and take measures accordingly. While the repression has not made it impossible to organize strikes, it represents a much larger risk for workers to engage in such activity.

⁵ Three unions in our sample had not participated in any protests and four unions did not wish to give their opinion.

In short, the independent unions have a limited and shrinking ability to influence decisions at the national level. This is a significant weakness limiting their opportunity to grow and sustain themselves. However, they are able to obtain concessions at the local level to a degree that has to be deemed impressive given the harsh environment.

A fragmented union movement?

The last indicator of power is organizational strength. To what degree are the independent unions well organized and centralized, or disorganized and fragmented? As mentioned above, a well-organized and centrally coordinated labor movement is usually seen as a sign of strength in the literature. An organized and centralized movement can speak with one voice to employers and the state, projecting common demands. Without robust internal organization, unions can wither away upon the retirement of their founding fathers (or mothers). Regular elections and clear decision making structures in addition to financial viability is paramount to survive.

In terms of internal organization, the results are mixed. On the one hand, there are signs of democratic decision making structures. Virtually all the interviewed independent unions had held general assemblies and elections since their establishment. Two thirds had changed their president in the years since the founding. Asked about decisions to go on strike or stage a protest, the majority of unions either decided by taking it to a membership vote or by having the board decide following democratic procedures (Table 2).⁶

Table 2 Who in the unions decide to go on strike or protest? (N=43).

The decision maker	Number of unions
The union board	18
The members vote	14
The workers, spontaneously	6
Different every time	2
The president	1
The general assembly	2
Total	43

However, despite having formal democratic structures in place, there are signs of weak internal organizing. Almost all our informants complained about internal divisions within their unions. Several of them were plagued by leadership battles and different fractions opposing one another. Besides, the unions tend to face massive financial difficulties. Due to the legal framework, it is challenging, and possibly illegal, for the independent unions to collect membership fees. Despite this, 78 per cent of the unions collect fees, usually between three and 10 Egyptian pounds per month. This is, however, not enough to save up cash for a strike fund. Not a single union we interviewed reported financial support from another organization. The inability to compensate workers for wage losses during a strike, to cover the cost of legal aid, or

⁶ Three unions in our sample did not respond because they had never protested and five unions answered that they did not know.

to provide any other services to their members, is indicative of the limits of union power.

At the local level, the movement of independent unions is democratic with clear decision making structures, but their organizations are weak, lack financial strength and are therefore vulnerable.

Another entry point to determine the degree of movement strength or fragmentation is considering the cooperation between local unions and the federations. There exist several federations for independent unions, both at the national and regional levels, and that organize unions within the same industry sector. Observers have criticized the federations for not providing services to unions and being unable to function properly because of lack of resources (Kindt 2014, Beinin 2015). It is also clear from our survey and interviews, that all protests are initiated locally, and not by the federations. Our survey enquired which federations the unions were members of and how they perceived their services.

Nearly one-half of the independent unions are members of a national federation. A similar share is member of a regional federation whilst one-fifth is member of a sectoral federation (Figure 10). Only one-fifth of the independent unions were not member of any federation. An interesting finding is that 60 per cent of the unions report to be co-operating with NGOs.

Figure 10 Affiliation of independent unions. The percentage that is member of federations, that is not member of any federation and that collaborates with NGOs (N=50).

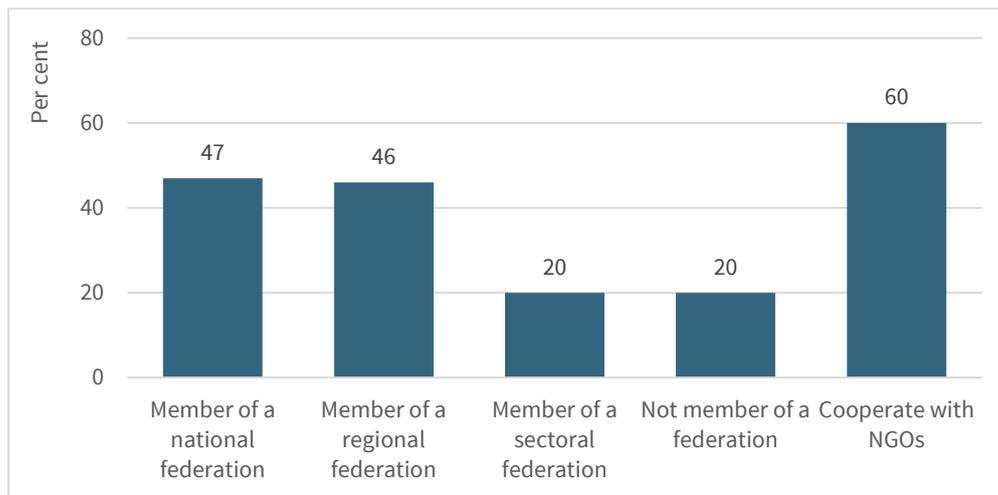


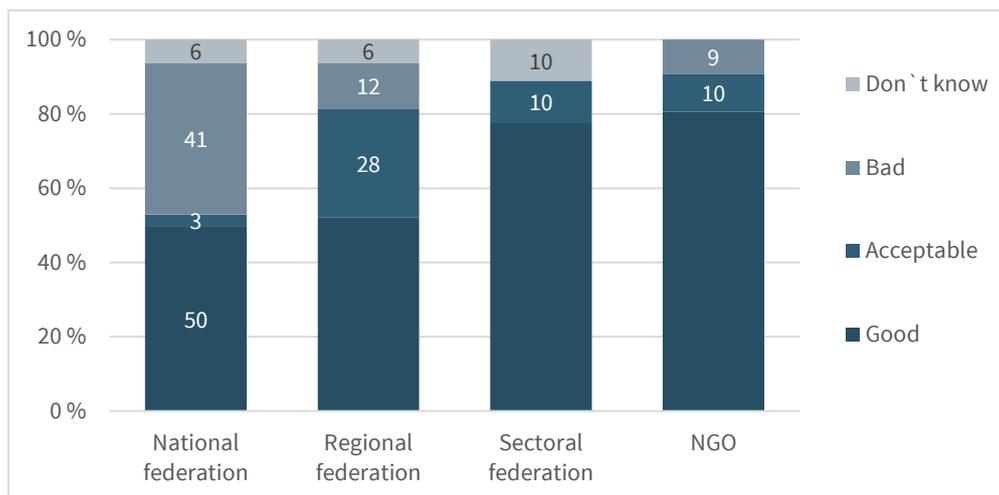
Table 3 shows the type of services the federations and NGOs provide to the independent unions. Training sessions of various kinds is the service most often provided by all kinds of partner organizations. The national federations score low on absorbing demands from local unions and inserting them into their agendas. Furthermore, the national federations are rarely reported to help organizing strikes or provide assistance to negotiations that the independent unions have with employers. On the latter two activities, the sectoral federations seem to be more important. Overall, the NGOs provide many of the same services that the federations do, and play a particularly important role as providers of training courses and legal support.

Table 3 Type of services or support that the federations and NGOs provide to the independent unions. Percentage of unions that report the various services by type of organization they receive the service from (N=40)⁷.

	National federation	Sectoral federation	Regional federation	NGO
Took up our demands as part of their agenda	5	9	14	15
Provided training sessions	45	26	30	40
Helped in negotiations with employer	7	17	9	0
Helped in organizing strikes	11	17	7	0
Solidarity with our actions	16	17	18	12
Provided legal aid	16	9	14	31
Other services/ support	0	4	9	2

To what extent are the independent unions satisfied with the services provided by collaborating institutions? Representatives of 40 independent unions were asked to rate the services as good, acceptable or bad. Figure 11 shows the result. The NGOs score better than any of the federations. The national federations score the lowest, followed by respectively the regional and sectoral federations. This trend is confirmed by our qualitative interviews, where informants express frustration with the federations. There seems to be few concrete links between the unions and federations, and a lack of cooperation. This is perhaps not surprising given that the federations also receive very little or no funding with the consequence that it is difficult to provide services and implement organized activities. The result is that the local independent unions cannot rely on the federations for support of any significance. In interviews with members of the federations, the point was also made that the federations do not want to ‘dictate’ to the local unions but rather give them freedom to operate independently. The end result seems to be higher satisfaction with the services provided by the NGOs than those provided by the federations.

Figure 11 Satisfaction with services received from various types of collaborating institutions. Percentage rating the service as good, acceptable or bad (N=40).



⁷ Unions not affiliated with any federation or collaborating with NGOs did not respond to this question.

These findings lend weight to the general conclusion that the independent trade union movement remains fragmented. We have seen that these unions are characterized by inadequate internal organization, weak links between federations and unions as well as low satisfaction with the services provided by the federations. The high presence of NGOs is testimony to the fact that the local unions need assistance but that the federations today are, to a large degree, unable to provide that.

This is not to say that the only way forward is to build a centralized movement. Given the political context, it may simply be next to impossible to build a strong independent national federation. If nothing else, building a strong hierarchy of unions closely connected to a national federation would make it easier for the government to dismantle the entire movement.

Finally, most of the unionists we talked to take pride in the independence of the unions, suggesting that strong ties to a federation are tantamount to give up some of that independence. Although their fragmentation is a challenge, in terms of national impact, an arguably better option for the independent unions is to keep addressing their organizational weaknesses at the local level rather than seeking to strengthen the federations. As Kindt (2014) has argued previously, establishing a coherent union at the national level ‘risks alienating their base, destroying their depolarizing potential, increasing the risks of co-optation and hence threatening their very existence’. If the unions are able to build a movement from below, they are in a much stronger position to resist government oppression, to advance the demands of their members at the local or sectoral level and to survive in the current hostile environment.

Positive compromise or zero-sum game?

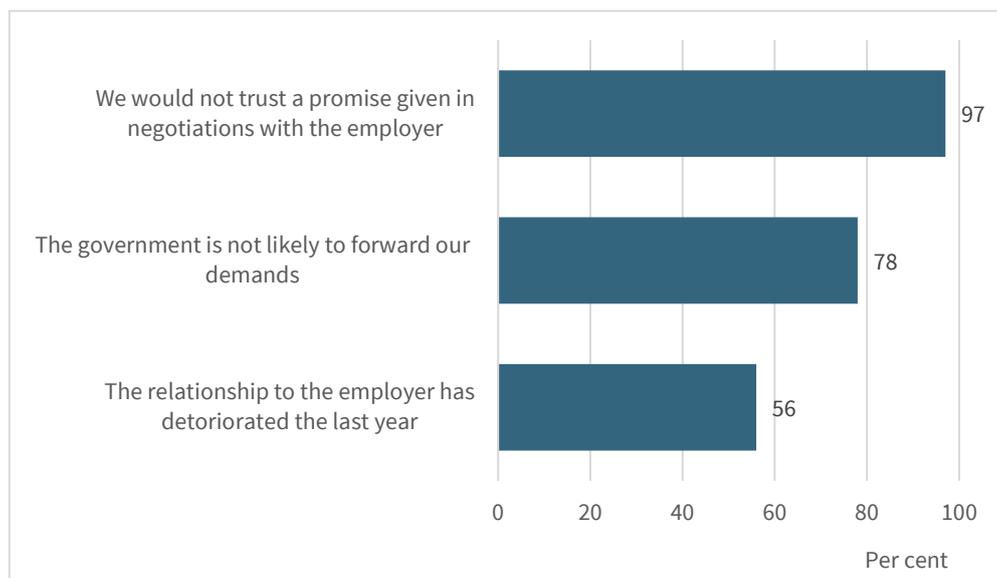
An interesting difference between the federations and the NGOs are their political outlook. While the federations, like EFITU and the Centre for Trade Unions and Workers Services (CTUWS), were positive to the military takeover of government in 2013 and show reluctance to criticizing the current regime, the labor NGOs were more direct in their criticism of the regime (Beinin 2015: 117-120). The NGOs’ skeptical outlook to the regime seems to be more aligned with the perceptions of the local unions. Although all of them, in interviews, profess to be ‘non-political’, they all agree that the current government is not helping but rather hurting workers and working against the interests of the independent unions. This suggests that, in addition to a lack of resources to function properly and difficulties in being able to provide services to the satisfaction of the unions, it appears that federations are out of sync with the workers’ attitudes. The opposite seems to be the case with respect to NGOs, with which local union members seem to have more in common politically. It should be added, however, that when asked directly about NGOs, all union leaders stress that they do not want the NGOs to influence or dictate their policies. They accept their help, and appreciate it, but they want to remain completely independent and don’t want to allow NGO interference in their work and agendas. What we have before us, in other words, is not collaboration like we have seen in South-Africa, where unions and civil society allied themselves to reach a political goal (Webster & Adler 1995). Instead, the NGOs provide services to the unions, helping them achieve basic work-related objectives, but do not translate this cooperative relationship into political alliances.

The final indicator of the independent unions’ strength relates to their relationship to the government and the employers. In the introduction, we mentioned that strong unions would be in the interest of all parties: the state, the employers and the

workers. Trade unions can enter into what has been called a ‘positive class compromise’ where all agree that they can better their position through ‘various forms of active, mutual cooperation’ (Wright 2000). In practice, this often manifests itself in a tripartite dialogue between the workers, employers and the state where they collaboratively agree on rules regulating the labor market. The opposite is a situation where all parties consider the struggle between employers and workers a zero-sum game and compete, or fight, to get as large a piece of the cake as they can and to exclude their opponents. Generally, the countries where unions are considered strong are countries, like those in Scandinavia, where unions have entered into positive class compromises of various sorts. Are Egyptian workers in a position where they can work towards a positive class compromise?

Our data suggests that this is not the case. As of today, there is no real tripartite dialogue in Egypt. The old ETUF federation is regarded by the government and many employers as the legitimate representative of workers despite not being present on the ground, whilst the independent unions are not being brought into any negotiations. Our survey suggests that the unions’ trust in the employers and the Egyptian government is meagre (Figure 12). Nearly four out five unions doubt that the Government will consider their demands. Nearly all unions surveyed state that they would not trust promises given by employers in negotiations and more than half of the unions are of the opinion that their relations with employers have worsened the past year.

Figure 12 Independent unions’ relation to the Egyptian government and employers. Percentage of union representatives who agree to each statement (N=51).



The general attitude to the Government can be summed up in the quote of one union leader: ‘The government is robbing the workers’. There are several explanations for the lack of trust in both the Government and the employers. The Government is responsible for the increased repression of strikes and refuses to legally recognize the freedom of association. The vast majority of union leaders have personally experienced such repression in the form of arrest or strike-breaking by security forces. In addition, nearly all union leaders report feeling betrayed by their employers as they have negotiated with them and achieved an agreement only to see it broken by the

employer at a later stage. Here is the reaction of one unionist when his employer asked for negotiations:

Union leader: Of course we knew that this [the negotiations] is bullshit and that they just wanted to end the strike calmly. We asked them to present their promises on paper and they refused. We suggested taking minutes from the meeting and they refused. Of course this implies a bad intention on their part.

Interviewer: Now, would you trust them in future new negotiations?

Union leader: No. Never.

This lack of trust leads to a situation where the union leaders do not see any benefit in developing a better relationship with the employers or the state. It does not make up a process whereby the unions work towards positive compromises, but where they, and their counterparts, see the relationship as a zero-sum game. A victory for the workers is considered a loss by the employers, and vice-versa. As one union leader phrased it: 'Their demands always reduce our gains, and our demands cut into their profit. So, the more rights we take, the more their profits decrease. It is inversely proportional.'

Without any signs of trust between workers, employers and the state, it is difficult to imagine an institutionalized trade union movement in the short or medium term. Tripartite dialogue is a system of checks and balances, but is also based on the view that it is beneficial to all parties to have strong unions and organized employers. However, given the current context of repression, the situation is likely to continue as a war of position, where the workers are most ill-equipped, and the Government seems to be siding with the employers rather than workers. To be able to build positive class compromises, independent unions must first become legally recognized and respected as representative actors for workers. If not, the fight is likely to remain a zero-sum game, which is harmful both to the state and the workers. It is bad for the workers because they are weak compared to the employers and the state, and might end up losing the battle in the long run. However, it is also harmful to the employers and the state because even though they can stifle the current movement of independent trade unions, they cannot dispose of their *raison d'être*—the workers' demands. Repression is short-term solution at best and over the longer term is a risky strategy that might lead to an escalation of the conflict and future unpredictable forms of protest

Summing up their strength, it is evident that the Egyptian independent unions still have impressive organizing capabilities at the local level. They are able to organize protests and win concessions despite a hostile environment. However, it is equally clear that the local unions to a large extent operate alone with limited resources and with minimal support from federations. There is also a lack of will from the Government and the employers to pursue the establishment of a more institutionalized and predictable framework that enables independent unions. The government is doing its best to suppress the independent unions and retain ETUF as the sole representative of workers in Egypt.

Challenges and Objectives

Given the above assessment of the independent unions' strength and weaknesses, what are the major challenges they must meet to survive and grow as a movement? The unions themselves emphasized the lack of a legal framework, a hostile political environment, unfriendly employers, lacking awareness among workers and too few members. We argue that their description of the challenges and the analysis of the unions' strength and weaknesses provided above can be summarized as two overarching challenges that need to be addressed if the unions are to survive and thrive: (i) an unfavorable legal framework that threatens to undermine their very existence and (ii) weak institutions.

A legal framework recognizing their existence

Many of the problems facing independent unions in Egypt today can be traced back to the legal and institutional framework they have to operate within. It is not uncommon for unions anywhere to face opposition from the ruling government or to be fought by employers. In Egypt, the situation is worse as the unions lack a legal or institutional framework to operate within. In accordance with current legislation, Egyptian police can harass and arrest workers on strike because no union outside the ETUF is recognized. This hinders recruitment of workers to the independent unions as doing so is akin to recruiting someone to join an illegal organization. It also perpetuates several practical problems: they cannot legally collect membership fees; they cannot represent workers at the regional or national level in negotiations; and they often face problems when attempting to represent workers in international fora, such as the ILO conventions. In fact, the lack of recognition of independent unions is a breach of the 1948 ILO Convention, which Egypt has ratified. Therefore, the central objective of the independent unions must be to push for a legal framework which acknowledges and safeguards their very existence. As we have seen, they are able to do impressive work, but in the long run it is difficult to sustain a de facto clandestine union movement. Without legal recognition, the likelihood is high that the independent union movement will wither.

Stronger institutions

The second principal challenge facing the independent unions is connected to the first challenge. In the absence of a framework, which recognizes them, they must build stronger institutions so that it becomes more difficult, if not impossible, for the Egyptian Government to ignore them. The growth of the independent union movement came about through struggle, when they challenged the regime. It was through protests that the Government was forced to recognize their existence in 2011. If the independent unions are to survive in a hostile environment and push towards a change the legal framework, they must be able to show continued presence on the ground.

Recommendations

Several international organizations and governments are interested in helping Egyptian civil society grow. We argue that the independent unions should be seen as a central part of Egyptian civil society, as they are amongst the few actors able to organize and voice concrete demands in the current context. However, as should be clear from this paper, the independent unions need support if they are to survive. How can the international community assist the independent unions?

First, it is important to be conscious of what not to do. Since 2011, there have been several attempts by international organizations to assist independent unions—with mixed results. Many activities have occurred in a foreign country, like conferences, congresses or training sessions in Europe. While these events have often been appreciated by those who attended, they have created some problems on the ground back in Egypt. Almost all the union leaders we talked to emphasized that a ‘five-star hotel training session’ was not what they wanted. Such training (abroad) creates internal division and competition over who should go. Moreover, it is often unclear what the practical positive impact of the training is at the institutional level.

Second, it is difficult and non-advisable to give direct funding to the local unions or the federations. There are legal hurdles, as well as practical difficulties. While many of the unions lack finances, to simply provide cash would not help.

The survey asked union representatives what they would want international organizations to provide. The main feedback, partly contradicting the interview information referred to above, included training and capacity building. Such answers are understandable as many of the unionists responding to the survey were inexperienced and lacked opportunities to learn about union work, how to build and run a union, etc. Furthermore, according to the survey the independent unions want the international community to show stronger solidarity with their demands and to exert stronger pressure on the Government to better their circumstances.

With the above in mind, we propose that international organizations do the following to address the legal challenges facing independent unions:

- Pressure the Egyptian government to recognize freedom of association. Make it a priority to push Egypt to revoke or amend repressive laws, and end oppressive practices against workers and especially independent unionists. In particular, key cooperation frameworks can be utilized to this end, such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The annual recommendations of the European Commission should deal concretely with the suppressive measures undertaken by the Egyptian government. The Commission’s report should provide critique of specific laws and legal articles, as well as pressure Egypt to grant legal recognition to independent unions. Such concrete recommendations can be drafted in cooperation with labor NGOs in Egypt, such as CTUWS and ECESR.

- Pressure the International Labor Organization (ILO) to include independent unions in their analyses, meetings and recommendations. In particular, push the ILO office to recognize the repression of the independent union movement and to work towards blacklisting Egypt (again) until the government officially recognizes independent unions.
- Support existing labor NGOs that are giving legal aid and training sessions to workers. In particular, back their continued organization of campaigns around labor issues and ability to maintain a critical voice despite the repressive context. Campaigns have proven so far the only sustainable voice of the independent unions, as well as one of the few spaces where unions work together with political parties and other political groups. The ‘Towards a Fair Labor Law’ campaign has fulfilled many goals throughout the past two years, such as networking, capacity building and advocacy. Equally important is the more recent Solidarity campaign with the Tarsana Workers (workers tried in military courts), which brings together a variety of political and labor actors, and maintains a critical voice.

To assist the institution-building of independent unions, international organizations and governments can:

- Design practical capacity-building activities. Do not organize large-scale training activities outside of Egypt, but deploy organizational experts and trade unionists to the workplaces where the unions operate to define their concrete needs and the type of help needed. Such expertise exists in Egypt, but the exchange of information, know-how, and networking with international organizations are missing. Capacity building also requires considerable organization skills and solid funding and a legitimate and protective framework (such as an EU conference, as opposed to an ECESR conference that can be raided at any moment) is critical. These are some of the crucial gaps that European and international groups can help fill.
- Explore different ways of providing economic support to the independent union movement beyond funding the unions or their lead members directly, as this practice has proven to be either not beneficial or even seen to corrupt the unions. In fact, the more sustainable independent unions so far are the Suez unions, which are exclusively self-funded. Instead, invest in networking, workshops, capacity building activities (led by local partners) and advocacy assistance, all of which are highly beneficial activities, but also expensive and unattainable with the poor funding of unions and even labor NGOs at this point.

Conclusion

The independent labor movement is still, six years after the revolution, one of the most visible forces of Egyptian civil society. However, they are under extreme pressure. The legal, political and economic context makes it difficult and dangerous for them to organize. Despite this, they are still able to mobilize more than two protests per day, on average. It is possible for the international community to assist workers both by helping them build stronger institutions and by pressuring the Egyptian government to accept independent trade unions as legal. If independent trade unions are unable to operate, their demise as a movement is not impossible.

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Appendix I: Methods and analytical approach

Analytical approach

To analyze the power of trade unions, we draw on a framework introduced by Erik Olin Wright (2000) and developed by Beverly Silver (2003). They argue that there are two fundamental sources of power for the workers: *structural power* and *associational power*. *Structural power* is the type of power that derives from the workers' position in the labor market. There are three main factors that are important to assess the trade unions' structural power. First, the legal framework that sets the limits and possibilities for the labor movement. Second, the political opportunity structure, meaning the possibilities and constraints in the political context in which unions operate. Can they influence political parties? Do they have any allies amongst the political elites? Third, the labor market situation, or their marketplace power. Workers marketplace power is high if (1) workers have specific skills that are needed by the employer. This makes it difficult to fire them and thus the workers are in a strong bargaining position. (2) A low level of general unemployment, which makes it difficult for companies to replace workers. (3) The worker can pull out of the labor force and survive on nonwage sources of income (for example a social safety net). The opposite, high unemployment, easily replaceable workers and no other options (no safety net) for workers mean they have low marketplace power.

Associational power is power that derives from workers organizing. The stronger and more efficient the trade unions are, the higher their associational power. While the trade unions structural power gives an image of the potential for influence of trade unions, their associational power answers how well they are using that space. Associational power and structural power should therefore be analyzed in tandem. Drawing on the union revitalization literature (Frege & Kelly 2003) we can distinguish between some core elements in measuring unions' associational power. (i) Their ability to organize workers. This includes how many protests they organize, how large their membership base is and their capacity to mobilize behind their core demands. ii) The degree of institutionalization. Are the unions fragmented or centralized and how established are communication channels between the unions and the employer and the state. This dimension includes questions of elections, decision making structures and also cooperation between local unions and federations. This gives an image of how robust the trade unions are. Are they completely dependent on some key persons or have they been able to build strong institutions that will survive? iii) Ability to implement demands. How many of the demands they put forward have been implemented? Are the workers satisfied with their unions in this regard? (Frege & Kelly 2009:9) Together, these dimensions give an answer to how much associational power the union has.

There are several advantages of using the structural/associational power framework for analyzing trade union strength. First, it does not treat the trade unions power on their ability to influence a political process or political transition. Rather,

the focus is seeing how well the unions function as unions. Second, it enables us to take into account both structural factors pertaining to the political, legal and economic context as well as how well the workers are organized. Whereas the structural power defines the limits and possibilities of the trade union movement, the degree of associational power defines how well unions are able to exploit the space given by the structures. In a very repressive context, even small successes of the trade unions should be viewed a success, while the same amount of associational power in an open context, with more opportunities means that the trade unions do not live up to their potential.

Data

As mentioned in the introduction, the analysis in this paper draws on several data sources. First, the *protest database* enables us to break down the protest by sector, date, geographic location, type of protest and main reason for the protest. This is a very useful tool to get an overview of the strength of mobilizational capacity. The database is the result of information collected daily from newspapers. A team of researchers have basically scanned all newspapers and recorded all available information about each strike or protest.⁸

Second, the *survey* of independent unions had a final sample size of 52. To reach that number, approximately 150 unions were contacted. Nearly 100 of them were either non-existent or unwilling to talk to us. To our knowledge, this is the first effort to survey these unions. The survey included questions on membership, activities, financial situation, and also some more detailed questions about the protests and strikes that had been undertaken. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by an experienced interviewer from the ECESR team, and the web-based questionnaire was filled during the interview. An English version of the questionnaire is found in Appendix II⁹.

The total number of independent unions interviewed was 51. However, all unions did not respond to all questions in the survey. Those that answered 'do not know' or did not provide an answer have been excluded from all tables and graphs in this report, except one.

Third, Fafo and ECESR have conducted 12 *in-depth qualitative interviews* with leading figures in a number of trade unions. The interview subjects represent a variety of industrial sectors and geographical locations. However, due to concerns about their safety, no names or affiliations have been disclosed in the report

⁸ For details on the methodology see, <http://ecesar.org/en/2014/07/07/ecesar-publishes-major-report-on-2013-protests-in-egypt/>.

⁹ The Arabic web-version of the questionnaire is found here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1C1O-W0dJL7agwLUWelfpXQu5yAho0BKeRl0rbLcQIX4/view-form?edit_requested=true#responses.

Appendix II: The questionnaire

The below questionnaire is a translation of the original version, which was developed in Arabic and turned into a web survey. See, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ClO-W0dJL7agwLUWelfpXQu5yAho0BKeRl0rbLcQIX4/viewform?edit_requested=true#responses.

A number of so-called skips, whereby the answer to one question decides which question is asked next, are not marked.

Section 1: Introduction	
What is the name of your union?	Name: _____
How many members does your union have?	Number: _____
When was the union established?	Date (or year): _____
How was the union established?	Through a protest Call from/ initiative by a worker With the help of a human rights centre With the help of a trade union Other: _____
Does the union have an independent office?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
If the answer is no, what is the reason?	Financial reasons Security reasons Employer intervention Lack of space Fear from internal divisions in the union Other: _____
Where is the union's office located?	Inside the work place In an office of the trade union / a partner union Outside the work place Other place: _____ Don't know No answer
Where does the union conduct its main activities?	List of all Egypt governorates: Cairo; Alexandria; Suez; Ismailia; ...
Does the union have more than one branch?	Yes, more than 10 Yes, 5-10 Yes, 1-4 No, one office Don't know No answer
What is your position in the union?	President Member of the board of directors Ordinary member Don't know No answer
What is the period of your work in this institution?	Number of years: _____
What is your age?	Age: _____
What is the percentage of women in the board of directors of your union?	Percentage: _____
What is the percentage of women in your union?	Percentage: _____

Section 2: The union	
How many general assemblies have been organized since the foundation of the union (including the constituent assembly)?	0; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; More than 5
If the answer is none: Why you did you not organize a general assembly?	Financial reasons Security reasons Employer intervention Lack of space Fear of internal divisions in the union Other: _____ Don't know No answer
How many members attended the first general assembly after the foundation?	Number of attendees: _____
Why you did you not organize more than one general assembly?	Financial reasons Security reasons Employer intervention Lack of space Fear of internal divisions in the union Other reason: _____ Don't know No answer
How many members attended the first general assembly after the foundation?	Number of attendees: _____
How many members attended the second general assembly after the foundation?	Number of attendees: _____
Select Yes to continue the questionnaire	
How many elections have been organized since the foundation of the union (incl. the founding elections)?	0; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; More than 5
If the answer is none: Why you did you not organize elections?	Financial reasons Security reasons Employer intervention Lack of space Fear of internal divisions in the union Other reason: _____ Don't know No answer
How many members voted in the first election?	Number of votes: _____
How many members voted in the most recent election?	Number of votes: _____
Did you ever select a new president as a result of elections?	Yes, more than once Yes, once No, we have had the same president since the foundation. Elected. No, we have had the same president since the foundation- Elected by acclamation. No, we did not have any elections Don't know No answer
How many members does your board of directors have?	Number of board members: _____
Do you have any of the following positions at the board of directors?	President Vice president Secretary general Treasurer Secretary of education Other: _____
Who decides whether to go on strike or start a demonstration?	The president The board of directors The members by voting The workers Different decision-making process every time Other: _____
Have you written basic laws and regulations for the union?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer

Who helped you prepare these laws?	Lawyers Human right's center Other union General trade union No one helped us Other: _____
Was the regulation approved by a general assembly?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
If yes, what was the percentage voting in favor of the laws and approving them?	50 – 60 % 60 – 70 % 70 – 80 % 80 – 90 % 90 – 100 % Don't know No answer
Are yours the only union at your workplace?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
Which are the other union or unions at the workplace?	Other independent union(s) Brach of the General Federation of Trade Unions of Egypt
In case of another independent union, when was it established?	Date: _____

Section 3: Federations and NGOs	
Federations	
Is your union member of any federation of trade unions?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
Are there other independent unions which represent workers from the same occupation?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
<i>The following questions in this section are posed regarding the local union's membership and relations to various forms of umbrella organizations: national federations, regional federations, and federations for various industry sectors. The questions are identical for these three types of federations.</i>	
Is your union member of a national/regional/sectoral federation?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
Which federation?	_____
Do you pay membership fees to the federation?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
How much is the annual fee?	Amount (in Egyptian pounds): _____
How do you communicate with the federation?	We never met We met once We meet once a month We meet once a week We meet many times a week Don't know No answer
Are you personally, or the president of the union, or some union leaders, member of the federation's central committee?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
Did you ever receive any of the following services from the federation?	Training sessions Help to organize strikes Help in negotiations Legal aid Solidarity with your demands or your activities Adopting general demands of unions Other: _____
In general, how good do you think the services provided by the federation(s) are?	Excellent; Very good; Good; Acceptable; Bad; Don't know; No answer
Why?	_____
Collaboration with NGOs	
Have you ever cooperated with an NGO?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
If yes, please list the NGO's	_____ ; _____ ; _____ ; _____ ; ...

Did you receive any of the following services from the NGOs?	Training sessions Help to organize strikes Help in negotiations Legal aid Solidarity with your demands or your activities Adopting general demands of unions Other: _____
In general, how good do you think the services provided by the NGOs are?	Excellent; Very good; Good; Acceptable; Bad; Don't know; No answer
In your opinion, what are the services the NGO's should provide to you?	Training sessions Help to organize strikes Help in negotiations Legal aid Solidarity with your demands or your activities Adopting general demands of unions Other: _____

Section 4: Collective action															
How many protests has your union participated in?	0; 1; 2; 3; 4; ... 9; 10; More than 10														
<i>The questions below are asked for each protest</i>															
What is the type of protest?	Strike Sit-in Work stoppage Demonstration Other: _____														
When did the protest start and for how long did it last?	Date: _____ Days: _____														
Where did the protest take place?	List of all governorates: Cairo; Alexandria; Suez; Ismailia; ...														
What was the role of the union at the protest?	The initiator/ organizer Key participant Participant Other: _____ Don't know No answer														
What were the demands?	Wages Improve/stop bad treatment of workers Contracts Arbitrary dismissal Arbitrary transfer Other: _____														
Were the demands met?	Yes, completely; Yes, partially; No; Don't know; No answer														
Were the demands met through negotiations?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer														
If yes, who were present at the negotiations?	Representative of the independent union Employer 's representative Representative of the federation Representative of the Ministry of Labor Representative of another government body Other person: _____														
Did the negotiations happen before, during or after the protest?	Before; During After; No answer														
How many negotiation meetings took place?	0; 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; More than 5														
What was the most important outcome of the negotiations?	Stop or suspension of the protest Escalation of the protest Other: _____														
On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is unsuccessful and 5 is very successful), how successful was the negotiation?	<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td></td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>4</td> <td>5</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Unsuccessful</td> <td>*</td> <td>*</td> <td>*</td> <td>*</td> <td>*</td> <td>Successful</td> </tr> </table>		1	2	3	4	5		Unsuccessful	*	*	*	*	*	Successful
	1	2	3	4	5										
Unsuccessful	*	*	*	*	*	Successful									

Section 5: The union at the workplace	
Relations between the union and the employer	
How would you describe the relationship between the union and the employer? Use a scale where 1 means “constant disagreement” and 5 means “complete cooperation”.	<p style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Disagreement * * * * * Cooperation</p>
If the employer promises to raise wages for your workers, to what extent do you trust that the employer will apply his promise? Use a scale where 1 means total distrust and 5 means total trust	<p style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Distrust * * * * * Trust</p>
Do you trust the employer enough to enter into negotiation? Use a scale where 1 means total distrust and 5 means total trust	<p style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Distrust * * * * * Trust</p>
How has the relation to the employer developed in the past 2 years?	Improved; No change; Deteriorated; Don't know; No answer
Financial situation	
Are the membership fees collected from your members?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
How much does each member pay per month?	Amount (in Egyptian pounds): _____
How is the fee collected?	Paid cash by hand to the union representative Deducted from salary and paid by company/employer Other: _____
Do you receive money from any of the following sources?	Employers NGO's International unions (ILO, ITUC) Payment from services provided to members Other: _____
How much is the monthly income of the union?	Amount (in Egyptian pounds): _____
Does the union have an emergency fund for employees?	Yes; No; Don't know; No answer
Work place	
How many workers are employed in this establishment/company (work place)?	Number of workers: _____
What is the name of this establishment/company?	Name: _____
What type of establishment/company is it?	Government sector Public sector company General business sector Private sector (Egyptian) Multinational company Other: _____
What is the average monthly salary of employees in this establishment/company?	Amount (in Egyptian pounds): _____
Challenges	
How would you rate the current work of the union on a scale from 1 (bad) to 5 (excellent)?	<p style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Bad * * * * * Excellent</p>
On a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely), how likely do you think it is that your demands will be implemented next year?	<p style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Unlikely * * * * * Very likely</p>
On a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely), how likely do you think it is that the current government will help implement the workers' demands?	<p style="text-align: center;">1 2 3 4 5</p> <p>Unlikely * * * * * Very likely</p>
Of the following factors/challenges, which is the most important obstacle to your demands being met? <i>Select 1 or 2 items</i>	The repressive political environment The legal framework Internal splits in the union Members are too few to be strong Hostile employer Other: _____
Please mention 3 unions in Egypt that you think are good examples to follow?	_____ _____ _____
Please mention 3 unions in Egypt that you think are bad examples to follow?	_____ _____ _____
Do you have any final comments?	_____ _____

What is to be done?

Whilst under extreme pressure, Egypt's independent labor movement is one of the most visible forces of the country's civil society. Although the legal, political and economic context makes it difficult for them to organize, independent trade unions mobilize more than two protests per day, on average. The international community can provide support to organized workers both by helping them build stronger institutions and by pressuring the Egyptian government to legalize the independent labor movement. If independent trade unions are unable to operate, their demise as a movement is probable.



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