

# **The Individual Perspective on Revolution: A Case Study on Egypt**

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# 1. Contents

<b>2. ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>4. LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>4</b>
4.1. Political philosophy .....	5
4.2. Political Science .....	6
4.3. Political sociology .....	8
4.4. Perspective on Revolution .....	9
<b>5. CASE STUDY: THE INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION</b> .....	<b>12</b>
5.1. Timeline .....	13
5.2. Academic perspective on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution .....	15
<b>6. METHODS</b> .....	<b>17</b>
6.1. Methods .....	17
<b>7. RESULTS</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>8. DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>22</b>
8.1. Interpretation .....	24
8.2. Limitations .....	26
<b>9. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>11. REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>30</b>

## **2. Abstract**

In this thesis I provide an individual perspective to bridge the gap in academic writing on revolution where writers in the three main lines of writing on revolution do not have personal experience to base their ideas on. These three main lines in academia on revolution are political philosophy, political science and political sociology. Each one focuses on a different aspect of revolution, but none of them include an individual perspective in their writings. Through showing the timeline and academic perspective of academia on the 2011 Egyptian revolution a base was provided to compare the individual perspective on this case. This perspective was found through analysing thirteen interviews with female activists done by Christine Pratt in Egypt. From these interviews I extracted the individual perspectives of each of these women and amongst them found common themes. The comparison of the individual perspectives on the 2011 Egyptian revolution and what academics have written about it, show similar causes and problems amongst both perspectives. This similarity shows how the individual perspective provides academic writings with a stronger and more inclusive foundation to stand on.

## **3. Introduction**

Revolution is an extremely broad term; it can be applied to almost any field and often describes a rapid change. In politics this change is in the government and a lot of works have been written on this. Some of the most famous writers here are the likes of Karl Marx(2018), Max Weber(Collins, 2001), and Hannah Arendt(Wellmer, 2001), just to name a few. However, what is striking about all their works is that most works on revolution were written by people who did not take part in it, of course there are exceptions, but they are few, as most writers did not even interview people who did take part in a revolution. In his 1994 paper, Jeff Goodwin similarly addresses how all theories he discussed suffer from overgeneralisation, which must

be fixed somehow. As Tse-Tung wrote in the little red book: “If you want to know the theory and methods of revolution, you must take part in revolution.”(Tse-Tung, 1927, p. 299-300) This puts many writers in a difficult position, as very few people want to see a revolution in real life just to be able to understand it, but at the same time it is difficult to be an expert on this topic and never have seen it up-close. They have tried to give a lot of information on things we can see from an external position, diving into the philosophy, actions, and behaviour of people, but we still cannot speak from experiences. This presents a certain gap in research, as speaking about a topic without relying on up-close experience tends to leave out things.

A potential solution to this problem is an individual perspective on revolution on which we can build further literature. In this paper, I will attempt to show how this foundation of the individual perspective on revolution and its outcomes can add onto current literature on the topic. To guide us in this endeavour, this thesis poses the following Research Question: What does an individual perspective on revolution add to existing work in this field?

To best answer the research question, in this thesis, I will first give an overview of what I find to be the three main perspectives on revolution and what they entail. After which I will explain through the case study of Egypt how the individual perspective can be used and how it stacks up to current literature on the 2011 Egyptian revolution. After this I will explain how I found the individual perspective and what data I used, after which I will show the results of this perspective. Following this is a discussion section in which I will defend the use of the individual perspective and explain its impact. To conclude I will summarize my findings and provide the main merits and benefits of adopting an individualist perspective in the study of revolution.

#### **4. Literature Review**

The term revolution has held different meanings to different people at different moments in time, however, the academic literature can essentially be broken down into three lines about revolution and its outcomes. The first line is that of political philosophy, which often looks at an ideology or a train of thought that was created before the revolution and would later inspire revolutionaries for their goals. The second line of thought is that of political science, where less is thought about ideology, and more is focussed on the events that happened and the consequences they had. The third and final perspective is that of political sociology where the focus is on how government and society interact and influence each other. The following section will elaborate on all three of these, detailing them and providing examples.

#### **4.1. Political philosophy**

In the field of political philosophy there a lot of works, both old and new. In 1967 Tanter et al. gave a very cohesive overview of what had been written up until then, although they mixed philosophy and science, when separated their work proves extremely useful. The first philosophy is the Hegelian perspective, where it is believed that revolution is an irresistible change, manifesting the world spirit in a never-ending quest for its fulfilment (Bourke, 2023). Close to this are the views of Karl Marx who writes about revolution as an irresistible product of history, culminating in a struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat (Marx, 2018). Building on Marx' ideas is Trotsky, who in his work "*Permanent Revolution*" focussed on the idea that the working classes would have to repeatedly struggle against the upper classes to achieve this social change (Trotsky, 1930). The last perspective here mentioned is that of Hannah Arendt, who views revolution as a restoration where revolutionaries attempt to restore liberties once lost (Wellmer, 2001)

Observing the philosophical side of revolution, there is no one clear definition, but many. This is crucial to defining the success of a revolution, as with each ideology comes a goal. This goal is what is aimed to be achieved by a revolution and could therefore also lend itself to define its success. For example, if we take Hannah Arendt's idea on revolution, it being that which sees revolution as a restoration in which revolutionaries attempt to restore liberties once lost, we can say that if this goal is to be achieved the revolution could be considered a success. This is a noticeably clear goal in the philosophy, but the best example of an ideology spearheading a revolution would be the Russian October Revolution of 1917. Here, the leftist revolutionaries led by Vladimir Lenin launched a near bloodless coup d'état against the provisional government. These revolutionaries were heavily inspired by Marxist, communist ideas, which at their core had one main goal, to overthrow the bourgeoisie and capitalism to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat (Marx, 2018). Although it is debatable whether they were successful, or whether they truly followed this goal, they did put a goal to their revolution. This is the first crucial part on which I will continue to build. We have to find the goals that the revolutionaries set for their revolution to understand its success.

#### **4.2. Political Science**

As mentioned, some of the writers on political philosophy also wrote on the more practical political science side of revolution. The biggest one being Arendt. As explained by Alexey Salikov in 2017 "Arendt believes that revolution is a consequence of the disintegration of power in the state (ARENDT, 1970, p. 49). When the government does not have enough power, when its power breaks down, revolutions become possible".(Salikov, 2017, p. 515)

Tocqueville sees revolution simply as the overthrow of the legally constituted elite, followed by an intense time of change on all levels. Crane Brinton(1952) continued this idea

by differentiating between a coup d'état and major revolutions, starting to define the clear difference between a coup d'état with minimal changes in society and a major revolution with major societal changes. George Blanksten(1962) had a similar train of thought but focussed more on revolutions on the American continent while Brinton(1952) focussed more on Europe. This distinction was expanded on by Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan (1952) who chose to categorize revolutions in palace revolutions, political revolutions, and social revolutions. Edwin Lieuwen (1961) wrote a similar categorization but instead of palace revolutions he chose the term “caudillismo” which translates to a predatory militarism which was more common in south America at the time. These three classifications, palace revolutions, political revolutions, and social revolutions, indicate a rank order of increasing political or social change.

Later Samuel Huntington (1962) suggested four categories which are: the internal war, the revolutionary coup, the reform coup, and the palace revolution. But as Tanter explains, his idea of internal war differs from the meaning others attribute to this and I will therefore also substitute this with the term ‘mass revolution.’ Bringing me to the four categories of: mass revolution, revolutionary coup, reform coup, and the palace revolution. These categories indicate a rank order of increasing political or social change.

**TABLE 1**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF FOUR TYPES OF REVOLUTION**

Type of revolution	Mass participation	Duration	Domestic violence	Intentions of the insurgents
Mass revolution	High	Long	High	Fundamental changes in the structure of political authority and the social system
Revolutionary coup	Low	Short to moderate	Low to moderate	Fundamental changes in the structure of political authority and possibly some change in the social system
Reform coup	Very low	Short, sometimes moderate	Low	Moderate changes in the structure of political authority
Palace revolution	None	Very short	Virtually none	Virtually no change

Tanter et al. (1967)

These classifications are however not the only definition of revolution. Another group of definitions is focussed less on philosophy and more on the hard science aspect of a revolution. Peter Amann states that “*revolutions prevail when the state’s monopoly of power is effectively challenged and persists until a monopoly of power is re-established*” (Amann, 1962, p. 89). And the previously mentioned Raymond Tanter finds that “*A revolution is operationally defined by domestic violence and duration,*” not highlighting causes, but focussing on the operational parts in its core. (Tanter et al, 1967, p. 272).

In the literature of political science on revolution we can find more practical thoughts. Unlike the philosophical side, political science does not necessarily focus on a guiding goal of the revolution, it is sometimes looked at, but more commonly it observes how much a situation changed. For this we look back at table 1 from Tanter et al. where it is presented how much change is associated with each type of revolution. I suggest that this expected amount of change can be seen as a goal, although not fully standing on its own. This would amount to looking at the type of revolution and then looking at the changes that happened when the revolution finished. For example, if we see a mass revolution happen in country A, but a year after the revolution ended, we see little change in the situation from before the revolution, we can say that the revolution was unsuccessful. And in this line of thought we can also say that a lot of the small palace revolutions we have seen can be seen as successful, even though not a lot changed in the country besides the governmental leader. What this creates is that expected change of a revolution is also a crucial aspect in determining its success, but currently this expected change is based on scale, not on individual perspectives.

#### **4.3. Political sociology**



Having now seen the sides of political philosophy and science on revolution and its outcomes, I turn to one more point of view, that of political sociology. Political sociology, unlike Political Philosophy and Science, steps away from the binary success and instead focuses on actions and causes. The following part will therefore explain this perspective and its use in this paper.

Political sociology provides a multi-faceted perspective on revolution as it is a difficult and widely debated topic, therefore I will only briefly explain its main points. The first perspective is that of Max Weber, a great explanation of his sociological perspective on revolution is found in Randall Collins' 2001 paper. This article discusses Weber's views, specifically focussing on the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. In his works, Weber emphasizes the importance of geopolitical problems and financial crisis in leading to a revolution. As Collins' explains, this aligns well with contemporary theory on state-breakdown, viewing revolution as a process initiated from above. What Weber also did was expand understanding of revolutionary interest groups, including status groups according to economic classes. Weber's perspective provides an understanding of the dynamics of revolutionary processes like alliances, bandwagon effects, splits, and the unpredictable nature of revolutionary ideas. This perspective shows the importance of a multilevel analysis of revolutionary dynamics and the roles of geopolitical and economic factors in making social change happen (Collins, 2001).

#### **4.4. Perspective on Revolution**

In political sociology we observe four perspectives on revolution, which were all explained in a review article by James Goodwin, who in 1994 provided a very cohesive overview of different important works on the sociology of revolution. These four are that of James B. Rule (1988), Rod Aya (1990), Farideh Farhi (1991) and Tim McDaniel (2014).

The first view is that of James B. Rule (1988) who wrote “Theories of Civil Violence”. In his book, Rule provides an assessment of several theoretical concepts that have attempted to understand the cause of phenomena such as riots, rebellions, and revolutions. He examines several schools of thought and provides insightful conclusions on them. According to him, the rational choice model has too many counterexamples, to him Marxist theory applies only to some settings and cannot be anticipated. He also argues that collective-behaviour tradition has no arguments that have not been disproven. He does not however dive into the theories and no 30-page chapter can change a paradigm completely.

The next perspective discussed is that of Rod Aya (1990), who unlike Rule (1988), presents more practical ideas. However, as Goodwin (1994) points out, Aya’s perspective is rather limited by his instrumentalist view on revolution. What Aya’s book most importantly provides is a political model that looks remarkably similar to the “mobilization model” created by Charles Tilly as explained in his 2017 work “*From Mobilization to Revolution*”. Coincidentally, Tilly was also Aya’s mentor. Aya would conclude that ordinary people did not always mean to start a revolution, but it happens when they want to keep what they feel entitled to and when the opportunity to get away with it is present thanks to coalition partners and or a collapse of central authority (Goodwin, 1994). Aya’s perspective is however weakened by his harsh critique on John Walton’s (1984) book “*Reluctant Rebels*”. While Walton’s book does make some broad generalizations, it does include the dimension of the role of culture and state in rebellions. Aya’s argument on the other hand is based on one source which he even misrepresents, misquoting the source and taking things out of context. All of this very much weakens Aya’s call for a rational choice model, but as Goodwin says, “the culturally variable character of instrumental reasoning would seem to pull the "principle" out from under Aya's "rationality principle.” (Goodwin, 1994, p. 739).

Besides abstract and model building literature, there are also more recent comparative studies attempting to explain recent revolutions.

The third perspective is that of Farideh Farhi (1991) who in "*States and Urban-Based Revolutions: Iran and Nicaragua*" dives into the influence of ideology and uneven development of capitalism in "recent" Third World revolutions. In her work she emphasizes that although Skocpol (1988) has accurately predicted how "personalistic, autocratic regimes gave way to more bureaucratic, centralized, and mass-mobilizing regimes run by new political elites" (Farhi, 1991, p. 7), her works pay insufficient attention to ideology and uneven development of capitalism on a global scale. What Farhi explains in her work is how revolution is not always a result of state breakdown but can also be a reaction to state action.

The final perspective is that of Tim McDaniel, who in "*Autocracy, Modernization, and Revolution in Russia and Iran*" argues that revolutions can only be understood only "from a global understanding of particular social formations," where it is recognized "how culture, economics, and politics are interconnect" (McDaniel, 2014, p. 12-13). In his work, McDaniel explains how autocratic modernization in Russia and Iran eventually led to opposition groups becoming more dominant, leading to the eventual revolutions. He does recognize that this is too broad of a category, quoting Arthur Stinchcombe's claim that sociologists can only explain revolutionary situations, not it is course or outcome. (Goodwin, 1994)

As can be seen, sociologists have spent a lot of time looking into revolution, but there is another concept in sociology that has to be discussed. This concept is that of *Verstehen* as proposed by Max Weber (Tucker, 1965). The concept of *Verstehen* means looking at the individual or information without one's bias, thus enabling an accurate representation of this information. This idea has however not been applied to the concept of revolution.

In short there are three different perspectives commonly used to view revolution and its outcomes. The first is that of political philosophy, where there is an emphasis on the ideology behind revolutions. This creates a binary view as it often holds a set of goals within the ideology that should be achieved. The second perspective is that of political science. Within, less emphasis on the ideas behind the revolution is provided, with more focus on the practical side and actions that happened. This perspective observes revolutionary times in a neutral manner, and bases revolutionary success on the amount of change associated with the type of revolution. The third and final perspective is that of political sociology, which does not have the clearest view on revolutionary success, but instead focuses on the relations between citizens and the state. All these views are important, but as explained before, they all have their respective shortcomings, notably, an individual perspective to provide a firm foundation to stand on and make their ideas more inclusive. This means that they do not base their ideas in what actual people experienced and saw, but instead merely show what they think happened. Hence this thesis adopts an individualistic perspective based upon the Weberian notion of *verstehen*. *Verstehen* is part of the interpretivist method, in which individuals provide their own POVs of a situation based on their own perceptions and impressions. It is valuable as it has a real impact on the world as per the Thomas Theorem (1928), when people see situations as real, they are real in their consequences.

## **5. Case Study: The Individual perspective on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution**

As stated, there is a missing perspective when we look at revolutions, that is that of the individual. In this thesis, I aim to show this perspective and its use in looking at revolution and its outcomes. In the following section, the individual perspective will be explained, showing how it can be found and what it shows. To do so, I will use the 2011 Egyptian revolution as a

case study. For this, I will first provide a timeline of the revolution, followed by current academic perspectives on it. After this, I will expand upon the data used to bring into being the individual perspective and how it was acquired. I will then explain methods section the data I used and how I used it. Lastly, the analysis and results section shall display the individual perspective on revolution based upon the case study analysis.

### **5.1. Timeline**

There is a long buildup to the Egyptian revolution, including movements such as the Kefaya movement, a corrupt state, and economic problems just to name a few. However, due to the scope of this thesis, it only provides an overview of the events that happened after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2011: the moment the revolution started.

On this day, thousands of people took to the streets and headed towards Tahrir Square and while everything started relatively peaceful, after several hours, the police used teargas and watercannons to remove the people from Tahrir Square -(Jazeera, 2011). These protests spread to all major cities and even to rural regions in Egypt, with the entire country calling for Mubarak's resignation. The following days would see an increase in protesters and an increase in police violence. The first results materialised on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, when Mubarak announced in a speech that he had sacked the cabinet but refused to step down himself. This resulted in bigger protests and even more chaos throughout the country. In early February, Mubarak first announced that he will not run for re-election and that he and the new government will focus on improving the situation in the country. Meanwhile, the army was actively being used to contain protesters (Uyar, 2020). The following days the protests would continue to grow, and the government would continue to use increased violence against protesters. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, Hosni Mubarak resigned as president and handed power over to the

army(Britannica, 2024). On the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, the now ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) would release a six-month schedule for constitutional amendments and new elections for government. In this period, protests initially subsided, but rather rapidly started again with the focus being faster reforms and honest prosecution of police and government officials. After these six months passed there was no new government yet, only more unrest as the military consistently tried gaining more power. Then, in November 2011, the elections happened and after another two months of military control, the Muslim brotherhood won the elections with 47 percent of the votes. Unrest continued during the following months as non-Muslim and leftist groups feared Islamic dominance in constitutional drafting. In June of 2012, the Supreme Court decreed that the parliamentary election was unconstitutional and following this, the SCAF issued a decree dissolving parliament. Amidst all of this, a new president was elected, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. The months after would see constant friction between Morsi's decisions and the SCAF's will, all while protests continued in the country.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2012, the new constitutional draft was unveiled and left many in shock as it was giving a very prominent role to religion in the legislative and judicial process. This constitution would be passed later that year even though only 33 percent of eligible people voted with 64 percent being in favour (USIP, 2019). The following months saw protests continue, with citizens calling for early elections for parliament and a new president. A little more than one year after Morsi was elected, millions of people took to the street, some demanding Morsi's resignation and others supporting him. The following day the Tamarod (Rebel) movement would issue a statement in which they gave Morsi until 5 p.m. the following day to resign or he would risk facing "complete civil disobedience". At the same time, General el-Sissi called the Morsi government to resolve the ongoing crisis, or they would face military intervention. After refusing to step down, General el-Sissi announced Morsi's ouster and new

presidential elections. The following months were ones in which thousands of protesters took to the street to protest against the military's actions, with violent responses killing thousands (Amnesty, 2023). These months would also see the state ban the Muslim Brotherhood and label them as a threat to the state. After months of violence and unrest, general el-Sissi was declared the winner of the elections with more than 96 percent of the votes. El-Sissi was sworn into office on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014, which marks the end of the revolution as no further mass protests have been held with the same scale as those in the revolution. The other reason this can be considered the end of the revolution is because this is where the current government puts it (SiS, 2024)

## **5.2. Academic perspective on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution**

The above presents a timeline of the Egyptian revolution of 2011, but how does the academic world look at the revolution, and how does it view its outcome? The following section attempts to shed light upon these questions.

As the Egyptian revolution happened in 2011, a substantial amount of works has been published on it. A guiding work on this topic is Gianni Del Panta's 2022 paper, *Reflections on the failure of the Egyptian Revolution*, in which he elaborates on three different dimensions discussing the success of the revolution. In this following section, I will explain and elaborate on his views, expanding upon it with literature while following his red line in the three dimensions to explain a current academic perspective on the Egyptian revolution.

The first dimension he discusses is based on the ideas of Joel Beinin (2013) and Theda Skocpol (1979). Based on their ideas the revolution would not be viewed as successful because it has not happened yet. This idea is based in Skocpol's perception of revolution as a rapid, basic transformation of state, society, and class structures. In line with this is the idea that

revolution is change, and that if no change occurred, there was no revolution. By this idea there was neither a revolution nor a counter-revolution in Egypt.

The second dimension is focussed on the idea that revolution is a movement, and that by this idea it is too early to declare a success or failure on the Egyptian revolution. As Del Panta (2022) highlights, there is a flaw with this idea, as even though there was a build-up to the revolution, it can still be seen as a sudden event. He argues that the revolutionaries were not just waiting for the revolution to start. Therefore, when the revolution started emotions and size of the groups convinced more people to join in. As Del Panta says, “An understanding of revolution as an entirely open historical process therefore undermines scholars’ capacity to envision the proper onset of a revolutionary situation and, even more seriously, its ending point.”(Del Panta, 2022, p. 25).

Del Panta’s third dimension is one that puts the focus on processes, sequence of events, and the interaction among actors. This turns the focus away from the outcome, looking more at the mobilization. This however makes the concept of failed revolution lose most of its meaning, as revolution also loses a lot of its thresholds to what is and is not a revolution. The highlighted example of this is the book by Daniel Ritter (2015) on unarmed revolution. Here he defines these revolutions as ‘*irregular overthrow of a political regime through predominantly nonviolent mass mobilization.*’ (Ritter, 2015, p. 7). If only using this definition, it would be easy to rapidly define the Egyptian revolution is successful, which Del Panta addresses in his paper as a problematic view. To expand, he highlights the call by Colin Beck (2015) who found that to study failed revolutions we need to separate the end of a revolution from its beginning. Adding onto that is Asef Bayat (2017) who highlights the two dimensions of a revolution: movement and change. Charles Tilly (1977) used a similar contrast between a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary outcome. Here the condition for a revolutionary situation is that there is more than one bloc that claims control over polity. Del Panta finds that



there is indeed a necessity for this dual power for a revolutionary outcome, however in his opinion it is not a necessity for the actual starting of a revolution. In the case of Egypt, Del Panta finds that when el-Sissi rose to power this window for change closed and thus the revolution failed.

Del Panta's perspective however seems incomplete. Although varied, a core element is missing for the picture, namely, the perspective of the individual to provide an inclusive perspective on the revolution instead of an outsider point of view. How then can we include what individuals think for themselves?

## **6. Methods**

### **6.1. Methods**

The original plan for this study was to interview Egyptians who moved to the Netherlands after 2014 in person to acquire data directly and be able to ensure that I would acquire the correct information from the data. However, due to the limited time and scale of this research, I decided to use publicly available data instead. The data that I chose was collected by Christine Pratt from the university of Warwick in England. She conducted forty-two interviews with women in Egypt between 2013 and 2014. The interviews have varying topics but in thirteen of them, the 2011 Egyptian revolution was talked about. These thirteen were selected to use for this research. I chose this specific dataset because the interviews were all conducted by the same person in the same period, which makes the data useful and reliable for this research as it is closer to the events of the revolution, making memories more recent and clearer. All the transcripts and audios can be found and downloaded from the SOAS Digital Collection under the Middle East Women's Activism topic with the specific region set to Egypt. (SOAS, 2024).

As a secondary source, the data brought along the challenge of only being able to analyse interviews rather than actively design and steer them. Thus, the analyses had to be accurate and applicable to different scenarios. This was done by reading interviews carefully, marking everything and trying to categorise everything relevant to this study. Relevance was determined based on relation to the revolution. Thus, if topics were not relevant to this they were not marked and categorised. Throughout all the interviews, I looked at the individual perspectives of the interviewees. To understand this, I will explain what this perspective is and how I extracted it from the interviews.

The individual perspective is someone's unique understanding and view on a particular topic. This is not particularly difficult to find as most comments made are people's individual perspective on things, however in this study I looked at revolution specifically, and since I had not conducted the interviews myself, I had to design a way to extract the individual perspective on the 2011 Egyptian revolution without being able to ask questions to the interviewees. To do this I read all the interviews looking for specific terms that hinted at the revolution. The terms specifically looked for were revolution, January 25<sup>th</sup>, uprising, 2011 and movement. These terms proved especially useful in finding personal perspectives on the revolution.

Having found useful information, I used the technique and concept of *Verstehen* as proposed by Max Weber (Tucker, 1965) to approach the found information without being biased by my own ideas and knowledge, as to fully reflect the individual perspective without my own perspective mixed into it.

The last step in this process was to then present the personal perspectives in summarised forms. To ensure as little corruption of the data as possible I summarised everything with a focus on first showing somebody's understanding, by explaining their involvement and then their view by explaining their opinions and hopes.

In this my hypothesis is that the individual perspective will show similar problems to what has already been addressed in literature, thus adding onto the strength of the argument.

Disclaimer:

What is important to remember about this dataset is that all the interviews were conducted with women activists, thus putting a lot of them in similar circles. This data does therefore show a specific individual perspective as it is done amongst a fairly homogenous group. However, as you will read, this does not mean that everyone sees things the exact same way.

## 7. Results

Throughout the interviews, five common points in the individual perspectives were identified. The following section will focus on explaining the themes and how they showed themselves in the interviews. We structure this section like the common themes that were found among the interviews, namely: future, involvement, nuance, surprise, and cause of the revolution.

Future

The first theme that the individual perspective brings is outlook on the future of Egypt. This theme shows the individual's perspective on what the future holds. What surfaced is that in twelve out of the thirteen interviews (HS was excluded here), the participants wanted to talk about their outlook on the future and in ten out of these interviews there is a sense of hope for the future, the not so hopeful ones being Farida Naqqash and Kholoud Saber. This is not an unrealistic view as all of them mentioned the reality of the situation and how bad it

was, but they still held hope for what the future will bring them. A great quote for this comes from the interview with Azza Kamel (2014) who said “Slowly, it gets clearer that the price of freedom is a hefty one and that’s still early and we’ll need years to achieve what we want, because it’s not all in our hands.”

### Involvement

The second common theme is that of involvement. For most of the interviewees this means that they were actively involvement in demonstrations/protests and some even in organisation of them in the revolution, but for some it means that they were/are, also, actively involved in other aspects of fighting for social change in Egypt. For example, Fatma Ramadan (age 48 at the time of the interview) said.

“The General Secretary could be someone else, but the things I wanted to do in that time until there were other staff members and until people were convinced about things like the protests and supporting them and whatnot, therefore I decided to be a movement coordinator and there was no competition for that position”,

Fatma Ramadan, 2014

highlighting her involvement in supporting the protests.

### Nuance

The third theme is that of nuance, which here is focussed on the individual perspective. This means that the interviewees were aware of the difficulties involved in making the changes they desired happen. And although this does not affect their hope for the future, it does affect the timeline that they think on. What we see here is that the desire to make

changes happen in the future is not lower in these interviews, but there is more realism involved when discussing the future and the changes they desire to occur.

### Surprise

The fourth theme is that of surprise and what this theme is about is the fact that no one was surprised the revolution happened. A quarter was surprised about the moment it started, but not that it happened. Although this closely relates to the next theme, 'cause of the revolution,' it shows nuance by being a reaction to the start / cause of the revolution. Interviewees explained how they felt something was in the air for a long time, but still caught four out of the thirteen people by surprise when it started and became as big as it did. A quote on this comes from Fatma Ramadan (age 48 at the time of the interview) who in 2014 said.

“January 25th... in fact it was a pleasant surprise, it turned ugly later on, but it was a pleasant surprise because I was working, and I didn't imagine that there could be a revolution or something as big as that in the near future”

Fatma Ramadan, 2014

### Cause of the revolution

The fifth and final theme is that of cause of the revolution. As explained in the previous theme of 'surprise' to about a quarter of the interviewed people the start came as a surprise, but none of the interviewed people were surprised that it happened. Every interviewee had an explanation and named several problems in the country that could lead to revolution. The most common theme here is that of women's rights and more importantly, a lack there of. The other mentioned topics were, corruption, Mubarak passing on power to his son and overall

failing state. This was the one theme that every individual perspective included no matter the age of the individual. The difference of what people provide based on their age is how far back they go when providing examples of what went wrong. Individuals born in the 50s and 60s used examples such as

“In January of 1977 there were the Bread Riots, because Anwar Sadat had implemented the Infitah policy in 1974 and opened up the country to unconditional illicit wealth and illicit business, which was, to a large extent, at the expense of the of poor and low-income Egyptians.”

Amina Naccache (age 66 at the time of the interview), 2014

On the other side individuals born after the 1970s used more recent examples like the Kefaya movement for change.

## **8. Discussion**

Having expanded upon the findings from the empirical data, this section breaks them down and discusses them in relation to this project’s RQ. To do this I will first reexplain the study, after which I will summarize the findings and the data supporting them. Then I will interpret the findings and put them in their context, after which I will discuss the limitations of this study and lastly, I will show the implications of this study.

First, the reintroduction will briefly reexplain the literary base that was found in the beginning of this thesis, after which it will illustrate the gaps in the literature, and how this study is contributing toward bridging it – notably, the advantages of adopting an individualist perspective on revolution.

As revolution is a widely discussed topic in literature, however perspectives on revolution can broadly be whittled down to three distinct approaches . The first is political philosophy, where the focus is very much on ideologies and abstract concepts driving people to revolt. The second perspective is that of political science. Here the focus was more on the actions that people made, how governments react and in general the entire process of revolution. The last perspective was that of political sociology, where the focus is on government and citizen interactions. On the area of revolution, they focus very much on what drives people to revolt, often focussing on collective behaviour and what pushed people to it. These three perspectives add onto each other and form a solid base for describing and discussing revolution, but they all focus on groups of people and what they do or what drives them. In this process however, they lose track of the individual in these moments. That is this study's prime focus: the individual, what they do and what drives them on an individual level. Via this lens, I propose an additional perspective on revolution, looking at it through the ideas of the individuals making the group that revolts. In this the individual perspective is defined as someone's unique understanding and view on a particular topic, based upon the interpretivist school of thought and the Weberian notion of *verstehen* (Tucker 1965).

The common themes that were found among the perspectives of the subjects were outlook on the future, involvement, nuance, surprise, and cause of the revolution. Each theme is backed up by interviews conducted by Nicola Pratt. A total of thirteen interviews from this database were included in this study. The three most important themes amongst all of these are outlook on the future, involvement, and cause of the revolution. The reason for this is that when defining an individual perspective as one's unique understanding and view on a particular topic, these three show best the understanding and personal view. Outlook on the future highlights their view, involvement highlights their understanding and cause of the revolution highlights their view again. The other themes do also have that, but these three are

most relevant as they relate closely to what academic literature on revolution discusses. These themes as found in my research show how the individuals that were interviewed have a thorough understanding of revolution through participation and prior experiences, as well as showing their view on past, current and future events.

### **8.1. Interpretation**

In the following section I will interpret the previously discussed results from my research, explaining how they prove my hypothesis and what relevance they have. After this I will then compare what I found through the interviews to the previously done case study on the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

Five common themes were identified in the interviews. What all these themes come down to is that they show how the interviewed individuals have a very thorough understanding of the revolution, its workings, causes and potential outcomes. As shown, most participants had been active in movements before the revolution and were not simply moved by the masses. What this shows is that the individual perspective is not just the group mentality, but the innerworkings of people that were active in the revolution. This falls very well in line with my hypothesis, as the individual perspective shows similar problems to what has already been addressed in literature, thus adding onto the strength of the argument by providing it with a more inclusive foundation to stand on.

What then is the relevance of this if it depicts what is already known? The relevance of the individual perspective is indeed not one that everyone can agree on, as some see people in revolution as becoming part of the mass instead of being an individual. However, I propose that individuals do not lose their identity and independence when they do so, so why should we exclude that perspective. This would mean that the individual perspective can provide



validation and foundation to previously explained ideas by academics by making theory engrained into peoples' perspectives.

We can find both similarities and differences in how the individual perspective views the revolution and what I showed in the case study. The first thing that stands out is how some of the views explained in the case study are more in line with the individual perspective than others. The first view I discussed was that of Joel Beinin(2013) and Theda Skocpol (1979) through whose ideas I would say that the revolution did not happen, as no real change occurred. Comparing this to what the individual perspectives would say is that maybe no change occurred, but there is a desire for it and people are acting on that to make that change happen.

The second dimension I discussed was that of revolution as a movement. On this Del Panta (2022) had already made comments in his work that even though there might be a build-up the revolution can still be a sudden event. This idea is supported perfectly by the individual perspective, as the theme of surprise shows how even though people understood the cause and build-up the start still came as a surprise for them, thus strengthening Del Panta's argument here.

The third dimension is refuted by Del Panta, due to it being limited to merely overthrowing a government, not changing anything. The individual perspective here brings another dimension into this with the hope for the future being that of a change in political and social spaces.

The fourth and last dimension is that by Beck(2014) and Bayat(2017), where there is a focus on separating the end and beginning of a revolution as to study where it failed. Beck proposes that for a revolution to happen there need to be two or more blocs claiming control over polity. What the individual perspective does here is not going against what they

proposed, it highlights the blocs, but more importantly explains what people thought of the different blocs and how often there was no bloc that the people wanted to support. As the themes of cause, surprise, and outlook of the future show there is a clear difference between the initial phases of the revolution and its later phases and outlook. Also strengthening this argument.

As a counterargument to all this one can say that this all shows how the individual perspective can be bend into anything to support anyone's views. However I would disagree, the individual perspective shows a more inclusive view on these topics, highlighting how it is not as black and white as we initially might have thought. The individual perspective shows the shades of grey in a revolution, creating a more inclusive perspective on it and creating a more solid foundation on which academics can build their works. This foundation fills the gap between research based on external ideas and individual experiences of actual revolution. Thus, using this perspective would provide academics with a solid foundation which would give their works more practical implications on real life situations.

## **8.2. Limitations**

The limitations of this study can be divided into three categories: time, network, and scale. The following section will dive into each category and explain the limitations it brought along for this study.

The first category is that of time, which mainly consists of a lack of it. As this paper is my bachelor thesis, I am limited in the time that I have been able to put into this research. The full research was done in the span of 4 months thus limiting the amount of time I was able to put into this research. This has limited the thoroughness of the research and made it more difficult to get more depth in the research. The lack of time also limited the time I had

to wait for responses and reach out to potential interviewees, thus limiting me to using only databases instead of doing my own research.

The second category is that of network, where there are three sub parts. The first is that it was a challenge to find any Egyptian respondents in the Netherlands. The second part is that even if I had found respondents online in Egypt, the dangers involved in speaking about a sensitive topic like this would likely have made them unwilling to talk. Finally, there is also the language barrier. My Arabic has a solid foundation, but a full political conversation is not something I can do, thus making it difficult to interview people unless they would speak a common language with me.

The third and final category is that of scale. As this study is a bachelor thesis, I do not have any funding for myself or for gathering information. Although this has not stopped me from doing everything I could to do these things, it does mean that I could not do everything that I would do if this were funded. This also includes that more interviews should have been done. This is an exceedingly dangerous topic to discuss safely and properly with people that have relevant knowledge. I did not do data collection in Egypt because it would bring along problems that I did not desire. Though I do not wish to bring this upon any other researcher, I do want to stress the importance of doing interviews specifically focussed on finding and exploring the individual perspective on revolution. This would mean that the research would interview a larger group of participants with more focussed questions after which they show all individual perspectives from which they then can draw a more thorough understanding than what I have shown in this paper.

Besides that, in terms of scale, this research looks specifically at Egypt, but as is highlighted throughout the study, we should not generalise too quickly. This does also mean that this study is limited in its impact and use as it can be used as a framework and example

not as an answer sheet. The last limitation in terms of scale is that of wordcount. This paper has a maximum allowed wordcount of ten thousand words and although this is a lot, if there was not such limit, certain parts would be written differently, especially the results. As in a longer paper I would have given each interview the chance to shine in their own short perspective instead of having to generalise as to remain in the small scale of the paper.

## 9. Conclusion

This thesis has expanded on current academic literature on revolution and how there is a gap in the research foundation, with it being an external and not inclusive perspective. I elaborated on three lines of work in academia around revolution. The first was political philosophy, where there is a focus on a general idea driving revolutions. Second came political science, focussing on diverse types of revolution and the expected change that they should bring along. Lastly, I explained political sociology, where diverse perspectives focussed on interaction between the state, citizens and the cause of revolution. After this I elaborated on the case study of Egypt where through a timeline and overview of the academic work the groundwork for the research was done. The research results show the individual perspective on the 2011 Egyptian revolution, with as common themes: outlook on the future, involvement, nuance, surprise, and cause of the revolution. These were then compared to the academic perspective in the discussion. This showed how these perspectives complement each other and how the individual perspective creates a foundation for the academic perspective to build on.

The research question I set out to answer in this thesis was: What does an individual perspective on revolution add to existing work in this field? Having done all the above, the answer to this questions starts to appear. What I found is that an individual perspective on revolution adds a foundation to existing work in this field. This foundation is more inclusive

than the external perspective used right now. This can be seen through the comparison between the themes in the individual perspective and the dimensions discussed on the Egyptian revolution. Here the common ground was in the cause of the revolution, the sudden start and the blocs fighting for power.

This thesis does have its limits, as it would have been of higher quality, had I been able to conduct my own interviews and with a larger sample size. There is also a limit in wordcount and time able to spend, which did limit its impact. However, it does still provide a valuable insight into what the individual perspective can bring to academic writing on revolution.

To conclude, this thesis has shown how the individual perspective provides a more inclusive and internal perspective on revolution. For future research this means that it can build on this perspective and use it to create less external and more accurate ideas based on real situations involving real people.

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