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### Egyptian and American Regime Disruptions and Interest in the MPA and MPP

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## **Egyptian and American Regime Disruptions and Interest in the MPA and MPP**

**Both Egypt and the United States have undergone significant shifts in political regimes, along with other systemic disruptions in recent decades. 2010-2018 time series data from two large graduate programs in the capital cities of both countries—the American University in Cairo (AUC) and George Washington University (GWU)—captured in the above diagrams, show how dramatic shifts in the political environment correlated with applications for their MPA and MPP degrees.** The Cairo data include such periods of upheaval as the overthrow of H. Mubarak, M. Morsi's election and toppling and the advent of the current President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. The D.C. data cover disruptions such as 9/11, soaring unemployment and the transforming elections of Barack Obama, and then Donald Trump.

In the 2018 NASPAA Conference in Atlanta, one of the conference keynote speakers, Yascha Mounk, spoke about the witnessed drift from democratic values in different parts of the world, how citizens have become more willing to accept authoritarian alternatives and how many are losing hope in their ability to influence public policies. His speech was followed by a live poll administered to the conference participants. One question stood out on how concerned participants were about the health of, "Liberal democracy." The results were that 61% percent of participants were, "Very concerned," 31% were, "Somewhat concerned," and only 7% were, "Not concerned," with 1% of the votes choosing, "Not applicable." This sent a very strong message, and invoked an important question. With the perceived move away from democracy in different parts of the world, are students as well moving away from the study of Public Policy and Public Administration?

Our review of the preliminary application data in both universities shows some provocative and unexpected findings. In Egypt, there was a major burst of interest after the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution and the fall of Mubarak, where a lot of students got interested in Public Affairs and started applying for the three programs offered by the Public Policy and Administration Department, namely: the Master of Public Administration, the Master of Public Policy and the Master of Global Affairs. This continued from 2011 to 2013, at which point, the number of applications started showing a downward trend. The year 2013 marks the time when the elected regime of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, with all its imperfections, was toppled by the army, and the Arab Spring in Egypt started moving into being more of an, "Autumn," or a, "Winter."

The severe drop in number of applicants to the AUC MPA and MPP programs, after Morsi was ousted, and the continuing drop after Al-Sisi became president, is remarkable. One interpretation is that the field of Public Policy and Public Administration was not as attractive as before, right after the revolution. All the active, enthusiastic youth, who were very keen on understanding what Public Administration and Public Policy were all about, and who had hopes in playing a more active role in governing their country, were losing interest. The political environment was becoming more restrictive, the regime was moving away from democracy, political parties were becoming weaker and less space was made available for freedom of speech and civil society.

Turning to George Washington University's Trachtenberg School, MPA and MPP applications showed a large increase with the Great Recession, the election of Obama and 9/11 terrorism; arguably the three most powerful political disruptions since 2000 before the election of Trump. In 2001, within a year after the 9/11 terrorist attack, applications rose sharply. Applications again surged after the election of President Obama, but this also correlated strongly with increasing unemployment rates. The higher the unemployment rates, the greater the demand for GW's MPP and MPA programs, suggesting that graduate studies may be seen as a good investment while waiting for the job market to improve.

Other factors may have affected the application numbers in both universities, including cost of tuition fees and availability of scholarship opportunities at AUC, or the experimental period at GWU at which GRE exams were required for application. However, the correlation between the rise and fall of application numbers to the public affairs programs and the major political events in each of the two countries is still thought provoking. Interest in public affairs graduate programs, as measured by number of applications, may be especially inspired in times of hope, following the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution in Egypt and the election of Obama in the United States. At the same time, the negative setting of unemployment seems to drive more students toward graduate studies! Both programs definitely prefer that an increase in the number of applications to their programs be correlated with *hope*.