



THE STRATEGIC VISION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN EGYPT
ENHANCING PUBLIC MANAGEMENT, PROJECTS AND SERVICES 2050

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Approval of the Thesis

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Abstract

THE STRATEGIC VISION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN EGYPT ENHANCING
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT, PROJECTS AND SERVICES 2050

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Local Administration (LA) has long been a fundamental pillar of governance in developing nations, including Egypt, yet its effectiveness has been consistently undermined by chronic underfunding, excessive centralization, bureaucratic inertia, and institutional weaknesses. These constraints have hindered service delivery, eroded public trust, and limited the capacity of Local Government (LG) to contribute meaningfully to socio-economic development. A particularly persistent challenge is the absence of structured community participation in local planning and decision-making, which restricts responsiveness to citizens' needs.

The central purpose of this study is to investigate the systemic and structural challenges that continue to constrain LA in Egypt and to explore strategic avenues for transforming these obstacles into opportunities for reform. The research adopts a qualitative design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with local government officials, policymakers, and subject-matter experts. This methodology provided a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and insights of those directly engaged in local governance processes.

The analysis revealed that centralization of authority, limited democratic governance, externally imposed conditionalities, and persistent financial deficits exert a profoundly negative influence on local government performance. However, the study also demonstrates that with adequate political will, institutional reform, and community-

driven engagement, these challenges can be reconfigured into viable opportunities for strengthening governance and enhancing service delivery.

The contributions of this study are threefold. Theoretically, it deepens scholarly understanding of decentralization and governance reform in the Egyptian context. Empirically, it provides original insights into the lived realities and perceptions of local government actors. Methodologically, it demonstrates the utility of qualitative inquiry in capturing complex governance dynamics within underdeveloped contexts.

The findings underscore the urgent necessity of adopting a long-term strategic vision for local government in Egypt, extending towards 2050, that emphasizes decentralization, institutional capacity-building, fiscal autonomy, and participatory mechanisms. The study concludes by recommending specific pathways for policy reform, community engagement, and future research that align with Egypt's national development agenda and global governance trends.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for the award of any other degree or academic qualification. Unless otherwise indicated through proper citations or acknowledgments, all content presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

I further confirm that this thesis was written solely by me and that, except where explicitly referenced, the material contained herein is original. It has not been submitted for any other academic or professional recognition, unless expressly stated.

I certify that I am the sole author of this thesis. No other degree or professional certification has been awarded on the basis of this work. Where portions of the content have been adapted from co-authored publications, the individual contributions of each co-author are clearly identified, and full attribution has been made to all referenced works.

AI Acknowledgment

I acknowledge the limited use of ChatGPT-4 (<https://chatgpt.com>) exclusively for language proofreading in selected sections of this thesis, specifically Chapters 2 and 3. The tool was used to enhance clarity, grammar, and readability without altering or contributing to the substantive academic content, analysis, or conclusions of the research.

All ideas, arguments, methodologies, findings, and interpretations presented in this thesis are entirely my own and remain the sole intellectual property of the author. The use of AI was restricted to editorial assistance only, comparable to conventional proofreading or grammar-checking software.

The proofreading process was completed on August 8, 2024, using prompts such as “Proofread and correct grammar for the text below” to refine expression and ensure professional presentation. The academic integrity, originality, and authorship of this thesis rest entirely with me.

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Dedication

I devote my dissertation to the betterment of mankind, global peace, my brother Mohamed, and the souls of my departed parents and brothers. All constant prayers of my dear smiling face -my wife- who has always supported me and encouraged me all the time.

From all of my heart, this thesis is dedicated to all of my cherished brothers who have served as my inspiration. They have given me the motivation and persuasion to face any obstacles in my life with enthusiasm. Without their love, prayers, support, and encouragement, this research would not have been made possible. Their highly appreciated devotion has been unremitting me throughout my life. Thank you for giving me a chance to prove myself through all my decisions and life projects.

I also dedicate my dissertation to my dearest friends, sisters, and dear boys, as well as to all the unique individuals who helped me throughout my research to make this dissertation a reality. Their prayers, love, and support have had the most significant impact on presenting me with the power to achieve this success.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this dissertation to the betterment of humanity and the pursuit of global peace. It is offered with love to my beloved brother Mohamed, and in cherished memory of my departed parents and brothers, whose spirits continue to guide and inspire me.

With all my heart, I dedicate this work to my wife, whose constant prayers, radiant smile, and unwavering support have been a source of strength throughout this journey. Her encouragement and faith in me have carried me through moments of doubt and challenge.

I also dedicate this thesis to my cherished brothers, whose inspiration and guidance have instilled in me the courage and determination to face life's obstacles with perseverance and enthusiasm. Their prayers, love, and encouragement have been the foundation of every step I have taken, and their devotion has sustained me throughout my life.

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	xxvii
List of Tables.....	xxviii
List of Figures	xxx
List of Photos	xxxi
1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.1.1 Resource Scarcity and Capacity Deficits	2
1.1.2 Infrastructure Deficits and Developmental Inequalities.....	2
1.1.3 Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Governance Deficits.....	4
1.1.4 Socio-Political Instability and Fragile Institutions.....	5
1.1.5 Citizens' Expectations and the Mandate of Local Government.....	6
1.1.6 Egypt as a Case Study	6
1.1.7 Exclusion from Participation and Democratic Deficits.....	7
1.1.8 Public Management and Structural Reform.....	8
1.1.9 Innovative Techniques for Enhancing Local Government Performance..	8
1.1.10 Conclusion	9
1.2 Problem Statement	10
1.2.1 Regulatory and Legal Constraints.....	13
1.2.2 Financial Disparities and Chronic Underfunding.....	14
1.2.3 Institutional Weakness and Capacity Deficits.....	16
1.2.4 Political Interference and Authoritarian Centralisation.....	17
1.2.5 Military Legacy and Administrative Culture.....	17
1.2.6 Exclusion from Participation and Democratic Deficits.....	18
1.2.7 What is Known and Unknown.....	18

1.2.8	Toward a Research Agenda	19
1.2.9	Conclusion	20
1.3	Reasoning Behind the Review, Points of Exploration, and Objectives ..	20
1.3.1	Reasoning for the Review	21
1.3.2	Points of Exploration	22
1.3.3	General and Specific Objectives	24
1.3.4	Research Questions.....	25
1.3.5	Conclusion	27
1.4	The Study's Character and Importance.....	28
1.4.1	Character of the Study	31
1.4.2	Importance of the Study.....	33
1.4.3	Theoretical Framework	34
1.4.4	Conclusion	37
1.5	Scope and Delimitations (Rewritten with Citations).....	37
1.5.1	Geographical Scope.....	37
1.5.2	Temporal Scope.....	39
1.5.3	Thematic Scope	40
1.5.4	Methodological Scope.....	41
1.5.5	Delimitations	41
1.5.6	Justification of Scope and Delimitations.....	42
1.5.7	Conclusion	42
1.6	Research Methodological Orientation (Preview).....	42
1.6.1	Qualitative and Interpretivist Paradigm	43
1.6.2	Data Sources and Triangulation.....	43
1.6.3	Trustworthiness and Rigour	44
1.6.4	Reflexivity and Positionality.....	44

1.6.5	Justification for Methodological Orientation	45
1.6.6	Preview of Methodological Details	45
1.6.7	Conclusion	46
1.7	Reflexivity and Ethical Positioning (Preview).....	46
1.7.1	Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality	47
1.7.2	Ethical Principles.....	47
1.7.3	Ethical Challenges in Authoritarian Contexts	48
1.7.4	Ensuring Trustworthiness through Ethical Reflexivity	49
1.7.5	Researcher–Participant Relationship	49
1.7.6	Contribution of Reflexivity and Ethics to the Study.....	50
1.7.7	Conclusion	50
1.8	Organisation of the Thesis.....	50
1.8.1	Chapter 1 – Introduction	51
1.8.2	Chapter 2 – Literature Review	51
1.8.3	Chapter 3 – Research Methodology	52
1.8.4	Chapter 4 – Findings and Analysis	52
1.8.5	Chapter 5 – Discussion, Strategic Vision, and Conclusion	52
1.8.6	Integrative Logic of the Thesis.....	53
1.8.7	Conclusion	53
2	CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE	55
2.1	Introduction.....	55
2.1	Public Management Challenges in Egypt	60
2.1.1	Overview: An Interlocking Set of Governance Pressures	61
2.1.2	Authoritarian Rule and Concentrated Power.....	65
2.1.3	Persistent Financial Hardships and Social Discontent.....	69
2.1.4	International Assistance, IMF Engagement, and Coordinated Aid	71

2.1.5	Social Inequality and the Urban–Rural Divide.....	74
2.1.6	Militarisation of Policy Execution and Service Delivery	78
2.1.7	Youth Unemployment, Underemployment, and Political Disillusion	81
2.1.8	Policy Remedies for Socioeconomic Imbalance and Inclusion	85
2.1.9	Civic Space, Media, and Political Repression.....	89
2.1.10	Institutional Weakness: Parliament, Judiciary, and Elections.....	92
2.1.11	Regional Geopolitics and Spillovers	95
2.1.12	Transitions, Polarisation, and Democratic Setbacks.....	99
2.1.13	External Influence: Diplomacy, Aid, and Direct Intervention.....	103
2.1.14	Why These Challenges Matter for Local Administration.....	107
2.2	Major Human and Natural Factors	112
2.2.1	Introduction	112
2.2.2	Demographic Pressures and Population Growth.....	113
2.2.3	Rural Vulnerability and Agricultural Dependence	113
2.2.4	Climate Change and Environmental Risks	113
2.2.5	Water Scarcity and the Nile Basin Crisis.....	114
2.2.6	Degradation of Resources and Poor Practices.....	114
2.2.7	Human Resource Management and Institutional Adaptability	115
2.2.8	The Interdependence of Human and Natural Factors.....	115
2.2.9	Qualitative Narratives.....	115
2.2.10	Population Growth and Its Strains on Resources.....	116
2.2.11	Vulnerability of Rural Areas and Agriculture.....	120
2.2.12	Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness	125
2.2.13	Nile Basin Water Scarcity and Regional Cooperation.....	129
2.2.14	The GERD Dispute and Regional Tensions	130
2.2.15	Degradation of Water Resources and Poor Agricultural Practices	133
2.2.16	Human Resource Management (HRM) and Adaptive Capacity.....	135

2.2.17	Synthesis: Major Human and Natural Factors	138
2.3	Theoretical/Conceptual Framework – Introduction	140
2.3.1	Methodology of the Study	143
2.3.2	Study Outline	144
2.3.3	Philosophy	145
2.3.4	Study Approach	145
2.3.5	Study Strategy	146
2.3.6	Duration/Timespan	146
2.3.7	Information Deposition	146
2.3.8	Sample Population	147
2.3.9	Ethical Considerations	147
2.3.10	Nature of the Study	147
2.4	Empirical Gap	147
2.4.1	Limited Engagement with Stakeholder Voices	148
2.4.2	Overemphasis on Political Structures, Underemphasis on Practice	148
2.4.3	Lack of Integration Between Human/Natural and Institutional Factors	149
2.4.4	Short-Term Focus, Lack of Longitudinal Analysis	150
2.4.5	Limited Comparative Insights	150
2.4.6	Absence of a Strategic Long-Term Vision	150
2.5	Local Government Is Not Local Administration	151
2.5.1	Defining Local Government (LG)	151
2.5.2	Defining Local Administration (LA)	152
2.5.3	The Egyptian Context: Why Egypt Has LA, Not LG	152
2.5.4	Implications of Conflating LG and LA	153
2.5.5	Comparative Insights: LA vs. LG	154
2.5.6	Why the Distinction Matters for This Study	154

2.6	Rather than a Local Government, Egypt Has a Nearby Organisation..	155
2.6.1	Conceptualising the “Nearby Organisation”	155
2.6.2	Historical Roots of the “Nearby Organisation”	156
2.6.3	Characteristics of Egypt’s Nearby Organisation	156
2.6.4	Consequences for Citizens	157
2.6.5	Comparative Perspectives	158
2.6.6	Why This Matters for Reform	158
2.7	Local Administration in Egypt from 1981	159
2.7.1	The Mubarak Era (1981–2011): Authoritarian Stability and Administrative Centralisation	159
2.7.2	The Revolution and Transitional Period (2011–2013): Promise and Collapse of Reform.....	160
2.7.3	The Sisi Era (2014–2021): Re-Centralisation and Authoritarian Resilience	161
2.7.4	Continuities and Shifts Across Four Decades.....	162
2.7.5	Why This Historical Trajectory Matters.....	163
2.8	Comparative Experiences in Decentralisation: Lessons for Egypt	163
2.8.1	Morocco: Incremental but Sustained Reform	164
2.8.2	Jordan: Limited Progress and Symbolic Decentralisation	165
2.8.3	South Africa: Constitutional Entrenchment of Local Government.....	166
2.8.4	Indonesia: Rapid Decentralisation and Local Empowerment	167
2.8.5	Lessons for Egypt.....	168
2.9	Public Participation and Service Delivery under LA in Egypt.....	169
2.9.1	Weak Institutional Channels for Citizen Engagement.....	170
2.9.2	Impact on Service Delivery.....	170
2.9.3	Public Participation as a Driver of Accountability.....	171

2.9.4	Towards Inclusive Governance in Egypt.....	172
2.10	Institutional Weaknesses and Governance Deficits.....	172
2.10.1	Weak Autonomy and Centralised Control.....	173
2.10.2	Fiscal Deficits and Resource Dependence.....	174
2.10.3	Deficient Accountability Mechanisms	174
2.10.4	Governance Deficits and Service Delivery Failures	175
2.10.5	Pathways for Reform.....	176
2.11	Corruption, Clientelism, and Administrative Inefficiency	176
2.11.1	Corruption and Patronage Networks	177
2.11.2	Clientelism and Citizen Disempowerment	177
2.11.3	Administrative Inefficiency and Resource Mismanagement	178
2.11.4	Barriers to Reform	179
2.11.5	Pathways Forward.....	180
2.12	Comparative Case of Decentralisation Failures	181
2.12.1	Nigeria: Elite Capture and Corruption.....	181
2.12.2	Kenya: Inequalities and Capacity Gaps	182
2.12.3	Bolivia: Political Fragmentation.....	183
2.12.4	Lessons for Egypt.....	184
2.13	International Development Agencies and Conditionalities.....	185
2.13.1	The Role of the World Bank and IMF	186
2.13.2	United Nations Agencies and Donor Programs	187
2.13.3	Implications for Egypt's Local Administration Reform.....	188
2.13.4	Lessons for Sustainable Reform	188
2.14	Historical Legacies and Path Dependency in Egyptian Governance	189
2.14.1	Colonial and Monarchical Legacies	189
2.14.2	Military Dominance Since 1952	190

2.14.3	Authoritarian Centralisation and Path Dependency	191
2.14.4	Consequences for Reform	191
2.14.5	Lessons for Egypt	192
2.15	Contemporary Challenges in Egypt's Decentralisation Agenda	193
2.15.1	Fiscal Deficits and Resource Constraints	193
2.15.2	Digitalisation and E-Governance Potentials	194
2.15.3	Citizen Distrust and Political Apathy	195
2.15.4	Regional Inequalities	196
2.16	Comparative Lessons from Global South and Global North	196
2.16.1	Lessons from the Global South	197
2.16.2	Lessons from the Global North	198
2.16.3	What Travels and What Does Not	199
2.17	Synthesis and Closing of the Literature Review	200
2.17.1	What We Know: Converging Insights from the Literature	201
2.17.2	What We Do Not Know: Gaps in the Literature	202
2.17.3	How This Study Contributes	203
2.17.4	The Bridge to Methodology	204
2.18	Concluding Note of the Literature Review	204
3	CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION FOR STUDIES	207
3.1	Opening Statement	207
3.2	Research Design	211
3.3	Research Philosophy	214
3.4	Research Strategy	218
3.4.1	Justification for a Case Study Approach	219
3.4.2	Integration of Multiple Evidence Sources	219
3.4.3	Alignment with Research Aims	220

3.4.4 Trustworthiness and Transferability.....	221
3.4.5 Comparative Dimension	221
3.5 Research Design and Rationale.....	222
3.5.1 Linking Philosophy and Design	222
3.5.2 Components of the Design.....	223
3.5.3 Rationale for a Qualitative Case Study Design.....	224
3.5.4 Iterative and Adaptive Logic.....	224
3.5.5 Alignment with Unicaf Guidelines.....	225
3.6 Data Collection Procedures.....	225
3.6.1 Overview of Data Collection Logic.....	226
3.6.2 Adopting Design.....	226
3.6.3 Philosophy	227
3.6.4 Approach.....	227
3.6.5 Strategy	228
3.6.6 Time Horizon	228
3.7 Population and Sampling.....	229
3.7.1 Sampling Logic.....	229
3.7.2 Sample Size and Saturation	230
3.7.3 Probability and Non-Probability Sampling	231
3.7.4 Transferability and Thick Description	231
3.7.5 Ethical Considerations in Sampling	231
3.8 Probability Sampling.....	232
3.8.1 Rationale for Probability Sampling.....	232
3.8.2 Procedures of Probability Sampling.....	233
3.8.3 Contribution to Trustworthiness.....	233
3.8.4 Limitations of Probability Sampling in Qualitative Research.....	234

3.9	Non-Probability Sampling	234
3.9.1	Rationale for Non-Probability Sampling	235
3.9.2	Procedures of Purposive and Expert Sampling	235
3.9.3	Contribution to Trustworthiness.....	236
3.9.4	Limitations of Non-Probability Sampling	237
3.10	Research Tools, Materials, and Instruments	237
3.10.1.	Development of the Interview Guide	238
3.10.2.	Focus Group Protocols.....	243
3.10.3.	Documentary Analysis Framework.....	243
3.10.4.	Ensuring Accuracy and Consistency.....	244
3.10.5.	Trustworthiness and Qualitative Rigour	244
3.11	Data Management and Analysis	248
3.11.1	Data Handling and Storage	248
3.11.2	Coding Strategy	248
3.11.3	Triangulation in Analysis	249
3.11.4	Ensuring Trustworthiness.....	249
3.12	Researcher- vs. Self-Administered Data Collection.....	250
3.12.1	Rationale for Researcher-Administered Interviews.....	250
3.12.2	Limitations and Mitigation.....	251
3.12.3	Why Self-Administered Tools Were Limited.....	251
3.12.4	Implications for Trustworthiness.....	252
3.13	Closed vs. Open-Ended Questions (and Combined Formats).....	252
3.13.1	Role of Closed-Ended Questions.....	252
3.13.2	Role of Open-Ended Questions	253
3.13.3	Combined (Hybrid) Formats	253
3.13.4	Alignment with Trustworthiness	254

3.13.5 Justification in Egyptian Context	254
3.14 Examples of Closed-Ended Questions	255
3.14.1. Nominal Variables (Unranked Categories).....	255
3.14.2. Ordinal Variables (Ranked Categories)	256
3.14.3. Likert-Type Scales (Attitudinal Measures).....	257
3.14.4. Integration with Qualitative Analysis.....	258
3.14.5. Contribution to Trustworthiness	259
3.15 Question Language and Wording	259
3.15.1. Examples of Language Refinement	260
3.15.2. Ethical Considerations in Wording.....	261
3.15.3. Contribution to Trustworthiness	261
3.16 The Language is Clear	262
3.16.1. Accessibility Across Diverse Participants	262
3.16.2. Avoidance of Ambiguity and Double-Barrelled Questions	263
3.16.3. Pilot Testing for Comprehension.....	263
3.16.4. Reflexivity and Cultural Sensitivity in Wording.....	263
3.16.5. Link to Trustworthiness.....	264
3.17 Balance and Framing Usage	264
3.17.1. Positive, Negative, and Neutral Frames	265
3.17.2. Avoiding Leading and Loaded Questions.....	266
3.17.3. Reflexivity in Framing	266
3.17.4. Cultural and Political Sensitivity	266
3.17.5. Contribution to Trustworthiness	267
3.17.6. Practical Example of Balanced Question Sets	267
3.17.7. Link to Research Aims.....	268
3.18 What Are the Variables Operationally?	268

3.18.1. Variable Types.....	269
3.18.2. Constructing the Variables.....	270
3.18.3. Reflexivity and Flexibility	274
3.18.4. Contribution to Trustworthiness	275
3.18.5. Linking Operationalisation to Research Aims	275
3.19 Methods and Promises of Ethics in Research	276
3.19.1. Study Procedure.....	276
3.19.2. Ethical Assurances.....	277
3.19.3. Protection of Confidentiality	278
3.19.4. Obtaining Informed Consent.....	279
3.19.5. Avoiding Deceptions	279
3.19.6. Providing the Right to Withdraw.....	279
3.19.7. Preventing Harm.....	279
3.19.8. Ethical Promises in Qualitative Research	280
3.20 Data Collection.....	280
3.20.1 Data Sources and Modalities.....	283
3.20.2 Sequencing and Fieldwork Procedures	284
3.20.3 Ensuring Quality of Evidence	285
3.20.4 Justification of the Qualitative Focus.....	285
3.21 Descriptive Analysis	286
3.22 Establishing Trustworthiness.....	290
3.23 Limitations of Methodology	291
3.23.1 Generalisability and Context-Specific Focus	292
3.23.2 Sampling Constraints and Representation.....	292
3.23.3 Data Collection Challenges.....	293
3.23.4 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity.....	293

3.23.5 Language and Translation Issues.....	293
3.23.6 Temporal Scope	294
3.23.7 Resource and Logistical Constraints.....	294
3.24 Chapter Summary	295
4 CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS.....	298
4.1 Introduction.....	298
4.2 Situating Chapter 4 within the Thesis	298
4.2.1 Why Qualitative Inquiry in Egypt?	299
4.2.2 Methodological Transparency	300
4.2.3 Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality	300
4.2.4 Structure of the Chapter	301
4.2.5 Contribution of the Chapter	301
4.3 Overview of Participants and Data Sources	302
4.3.1 Participants	303
4.3.2 Data Sources.....	305
4.3.3 Ethical Safeguards.....	306
4.3.4 Linking Participants and Sources to Research Objectives.....	306
4.4 Data Analysis Process.....	308
4.4.2 Challenges Identified in Local Administration	322
4.4.3 Opportunities for Reform and Improvement	329
4.4.4 Perceived Role of Decentralisation.....	336
4.4.5 Citizens' Expectations.....	342
4.4.6 Evaluation of Local Administration (LA) Performance	348
4.5 Successful Initiatives in Egyptian Local Administration	359
4.5.1 Community-Driven Participatory Planning.....	361
4.5.2 Digital Service Delivery Pilots.....	362

4.5.3 Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms.....	363
4.5.4 Partnerships with Civil Society and NGOs	364
4.5.5 Implications for Egypt's Transition to LG	365
4.5.6 Qualitative Significance of the Initiatives.....	365
4.5.7 Summary Table of Successful Initiatives	365
4.6 Successful Local Administration Initiatives in Egypt.....	367
4.6.1 Rural Health Campaigns	367
4.6.2 Community-Led Waste Management.....	369
4.6.3 Educational Infrastructure Improvement	370
4.6.4 Digitalisation Pilots	370
4.6.5 Lessons for Broader Reform.....	371
4.7 Future Expectations of Local Governance in Egypt	372
4.7.1 Transparency and Accountability	373
4.7.2 Fiscal Autonomy	373
4.7.3 Participation and Voice	374
4.7.4 Inclusiveness and Equity	375
4.7.5 Digital Transformation	375
4.7.6 Sustainability and Development Role.....	376
4.7.7 Reform Scenarios.....	377
4.7.8 Matrix of Expectations.....	378
4.7.9 Alignment with Vision 2030 and SDGs	378
4.7.10 Youth and Women's Perspectives – Expanded	379
4.7.11 Comparative Futures	380
4.7.12 Reflexive Commentary	380
4.8 Visualising the Data	381
4.8.1 Thematic Network of Challenges and Opportunities.....	381
4.8.2 Frequency of Themes by Stakeholder Group	383

4.8.3 Urban–Rural Disparities in Visual Form	384
4.8.4 Conceptual Model of Decentralisation as a Pivot	384
4.8.5 Visualising Future Scenarios	385
4.8.6 Integrating Qualitative and Visual Data	386
4.8.7 Reflexive Commentary on Visualisation	387
4.9 Discussion of Future Governance Features	387
4.9.1 Transparency and Accountability	388
4.9.2 Fiscal Autonomy	389
4.9.3 Citizen Participation and Inclusiveness	390
4.9.4 Digital Transformation	391
4.9.5 Regional Inequalities and Decentralisation	391
4.9.6 Synthesising Governance Features	392
4.9.7 Comparative Lessons – Expanded	394
4.9.8 Conceptual Model – Integrated Reform Framework	394
4.9.9 Linking Governance Features to Research Questions	395
4.9.7 Reflexive Commentary	396
4.10 Linking Findings to Literature	397
4.10.1 Transparency and Accountability	398
4.10.2 Fiscal Autonomy	399
4.10.3 Citizen Participation and Inclusiveness	399
4.10.4 Digital Transformation	400
4.10.5 Regional Inequalities and Decentralisation	401
4.10.6 Synthesis with Literature	402
4.11 Summary of Findings	407
4.11.1 Recurrent Challenges	407
4.11.2 Opportunities for Reform	410
4.11.3 Role of Trust and Participation	412

4.11.4 Comparative Dimensions	413
4.11.5 Implications.....	414
5 CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS	
	416
5.1 Introduction.....	416
5.1.1. Purpose of the chapter	417
5.1.2 Link to Findings, Literature, and Methods.....	420
5.2 Discussion of Findings	422
5.2.1 Centralisation and Its Consequences.....	424
5.2.2 Resource Constraints and Fiscal Deficits	428
5.2.3 Corruption, Clientelism, and Bureaucratic Inefficiency (Extended Version)	
431	
5.2.5 Comparative Perspectives and Global Lessons (Extended Version).....	439
5.2.6 Toward Future Local Governance in Egypt (Extended Version).....	442
5.3 Implications of the Study (Extended Version).....	446
5.3.1 Policy Implications (Extended Version).....	447
5.3.2 Theoretical Implications (Extended Version).....	449
5.3.3 Practical Implications (Extended Version)	451
5.3.4 Integrated Implications (Extended Version)	453
5.4 Recommendations (Extended Version).....	455
5.4.1 Policy-Level Recommendations (Extended Version).....	456
5.4.2 Institutional and Administrative Recommendations (Extended Version) .	458
5.4.3 Community and Citizen-Level Recommendations (Extended Version) ...	461
5.4.4 Integrated Roadmap for Reform (Extended Version)	464
5.5 Limitations of the Study (Extended Version).....	468
5.5.1 Context-Specific Focus.....	468

5.5.2 Sampling Constraints	469
5.5.3 Data Collection Challenges	469
5.5.4 Researcher Positionality	469
5.5.5 Language and Translation Issues	470
5.5.6 Temporal Scope	470
5.5.7 Resource and Logistical Constraints	470
5.6 Recommendations for Future Research (Extended Version)	471
5.6.1 Comparative Cross-Country Research	471
5.6.2 Longitudinal and Temporal Analyses	472
5.6.3 Mixed-Methods and Multi-Method Approaches	473
5.6.4 Thematic Deep Dives	473
5.6.5 Experimental and Pilot-Based Research	474
5.6.6 Expanding Stakeholder Perspectives	475
5.6.7 Methodological Innovation	475
5.7 Conclusion (Extended Version)	476
REFERENCES	480
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide	487
Appendix B: Focus Group Guide	497
Appendix C: Documentary Analysis Framework	504
Appendix D: Coding Framework / Thematic Analysis Matrix	511
Appendix E: REAF Form	514

List of Abbreviations

LA – Local Administration

LG – Local Government

IMF – International Monetary Fund

NDP – National Democratic Party

CSF – Central Security Forces

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WB – World Bank

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

AI – Artificial Intelligence

IT – Information Technology

SMS – Short Message Service

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

UREC – University Research Ethics Committee

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Q&A – Question and Answer

List of Tables

TABLE 1 <i>EGYPT'S LOCAL ADMINISTRATION CHALLENGES BY CLUSTER</i>	12
TABLE 2 <i>COMPARATIVE FISCAL AUTONOMY IN SELECTED COUNTRIES</i>	14
TABLE 3 <i>LINKING STUDY OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS</i>	26
TABLE 4 <i>COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN MENA</i>	56
TABLE 5 <i>FISCAL DEPENDENCY IN EGYPT'S LOCAL ADMINISTRATION</i>	63
TABLE 6 <i>DIMENSIONS OF INEQUALITY IN EGYPT</i>	76
TABLE 7 <i>YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES IN EGYPT</i>	81
TABLE 8 <i>NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES IN EGYPT</i>	85
TABLE 9 <i>INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS AND CONSEQUENCES FOR LA</i>	95
TABLE 10 <i>THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE INTERVIEW GUIDE</i>	239
TABLE 11 <i>TRIANGULATION OF DATA SOURCES</i>	245
TABLE 12 <i>EXAMPLES OF BALANCED QUESTION FRAMING IN THE STUDY</i>	267
TABLE 13 <i>OPERATIONALISATION OF KEY VARIABLES IN THE STUDY</i>	273
TABLE 14 <i>PARTICIPANT PROFILE BY CATEGORY</i>	303
TABLE 15 DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS	304
TABLE 16 <i>PARTICIPANT ROLES IN ADDRESSING RESEARCH QUESTIONS</i>	307
TABLE 17 <i>EXCERPT FROM CODING FRAMEWORK</i>	309
TABLE 18 <i>CONTRASTING URBAN AND RURAL GOVERNANCE EXPERIENCES</i>	320
TABLE 19 <i>ILLUSTRATIVE BUREAUCRATIC OBSTACLES</i>	325
TABLE 20 <i>INTERCONNECTIONS AMONG LA CHALLENGES</i>	328
TABLE 21 <i>OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFORM IN EGYPTIAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE</i>	334
TABLE 22 <i>CITIZENS' EXPECTATIONS FOR FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNANCE</i>	347
TABLE 23 <i>STAKEHOLDER EVALUATIONS OF LA PERFORMANCE</i>	352
TABLE 24 <i>SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES IN EGYPTIAN LA</i>	358
TABLE 25 SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES IN EGYPTIAN LA	365
TABLE 26 <i>RURAL HEALTH CAMPAIGNS</i>	369
TABLE 27 <i>LESSONS FROM SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES</i>	371
TABLE 28 <i>CITIZENS' FUTURE EXPECTATIONS FOR LG</i>	378

TABLE 29 <i>REFORM SCENARIOS</i>	385
TABLE 30 <i>GOVERNANCE FEATURES LINKED TO RESEARCH ASPECTS</i>	392
TABLE 31 <i>GOVERNANCE FEATURES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS</i>	395
TABLE 32 <i>EGYPT'S FINDINGS IN RELATION TO LITERATURE</i>	404
TABLE 33 <i>INTERLOCKING CHALLENGES</i>	409
TABLE 34 <i>TRUST DYNAMICS</i>	413
TABLE 35 <i>COMPARATIVE POSITIONING OF EGYPT</i>	414

List of Figures

FIGURE 1 EXAMPLES OF LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES	3
FIGURE 2 <i>CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE</i>	7
FIGURE 3 <i>EGYPT'S LOCAL ADMINISTRATION HIERARCHY</i>	14
FIGURE 4 <i>TIMELINE OF KEY REFORM ATTEMPTS (1981–2021)</i>	18
FIGURE 5 <i>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION REFORM IN EGYPT</i> <i>(QUALITATIVE APPROACH)</i>	35
FIGURE 6 CONCEPTUAL VALUE OF QUALITATIVE APPROACHES IN GOVERNANCE RESEARCH	59
FIGURE 7 <i>AUTHORITARIAN PATH DEPENDENCY IN EGYPTIAN GOVERNANCE</i>	62
FIGURE 8 CYCLE OF INTERLOCKING GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES IN EGYPT	64
FIGURE 9 <i>CYCLE OF YOUTH EXCLUSION AND POLITICAL DISILLUSION</i>	82
FIGURE 10 <i>DISCONNECT BETWEEN POLICY DESIGN AND LOCAL EXPERIENCE</i>	88
FIGURE 11 THE IMPACT OF REPRESSION ON LOCAL GOVERNANCE	92
FIGURE 12 CYCLE OF INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS IN EGYPT	95
FIGURE 13 TRIANGULATION OF DATA SOURCES	247
FIGURE 14 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES IN A QUALITATIVE FRAME	272
FIGURE 15 THEMATIC ANALYSIS FLOW FOR DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS	288
FIGURE 17 <i>DATA ANALYSIS CYCLE</i>	314
FIGURE 18 <i>THEMATIC NETWORK OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES</i>	383
FIGURE 19 <i>URBAN VS RURAL EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE</i>	384
FIGURE 20 <i>DECENTRALISATION AS A PIVOT REFORM</i>	385
FIGURE 21 <i>INTERDEPENDENT REFORM OPPORTUNITIES</i>	412

List of Photos

PHOTO: 1 <i>ADMINISTRATIVE MAP OF EGYPT (GOVERNORATES)</i>	37
PHOTO: 2 <i>WASTE COLLECTION IN CAIRO, SYMBOLISING VISIBLE LOCAL SERVICE STRUGGLES</i>	57
PHOTO: 3 <i>INFORMAL SETTLEMENT IN GREATER CAIRO HIGHLIGHTING UNEQUAL ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES.</i>	63
PHOTO: 4 <i>MILITARY-LED ROAD CONSTRUCTION PROJECT IN GREATER CAIRO, BYPASSING LOCAL COUNCILS.</i>	80
PHOTO: 5 <i>YOUNG EGYPTIANS PROTESTING UNEMPLOYMENT IN CAIRO, 2011</i>	84
PHOTO 6 <i>HAYAH KARIMA HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL UPPER EGYPT</i>	87
PHOTO 7 <i>INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER STAND IN CAIRO, SYMBOLISING DECLINING MEDIA DIVERSITY.</i>	90

1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The progress of any nation and its capacity to deliver essential services to its citizens is fundamentally dependent on the effectiveness and responsiveness of its systems of governance. In the twenty-first century, the quality of governance has increasingly been linked to the strength of institutions, the degree of inclusivity in decision-making, and the capacity of governments to manage complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. Local government occupies a particularly important role in this framework. As the closest tier of government to the people, local institutions form the primary interface between citizens and the state, mediating between national policies and everyday realities. Their performance directly shapes citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of the state and their access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, housing, and security (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

In developing countries, where governance systems often face constraints in capacity and resources, the role of local government becomes even more critical. Local authorities are expected not only to deliver services but also to mobilise participation, resolve conflicts, and foster equitable development. Yet across much of the developing world, local governments continue to confront systemic obstacles that undermine their ability to achieve these mandates. These challenges include chronic resource scarcity, weak infrastructure, fragile institutional frameworks, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and socio-political instability (Ribot, 2022; Faguet, 2022; Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

1.1.1 Resource Scarcity and Capacity Deficits

One of the most pressing barriers to effective local governance in developing contexts is resource scarcity. Local governments frequently operate under conditions of chronic underfunding, with inadequate fiscal transfers from central governments and minimal capacity to generate own-source revenue. This financial shortfall severely limits their ability to implement quality initiatives or sustain essential services such as health, sanitation, and education. In many cases, the fiscal gap is compounded by limited human capital: shortages of trained personnel, weak managerial skills, and outdated administrative systems constrain the capacity to design, implement, and monitor development programmes (World Bank, 2022).

The absence of adequate resources undermines the responsiveness of local governments to citizens' diverse needs. For instance, municipalities that lack predictable financing struggle to maintain infrastructure, deliver social protection programmes, or respond to emergencies. These deficits reinforce cycles of inequality and exclusion, as marginalised communities remain underserved. Scholars note that when fiscal autonomy is weak, local governments become little more than conduits for centrally allocated projects, unable to adapt interventions to the priorities of their citizens (Smoke, 2021; Grindle, 2023).

1.1.2 Infrastructure Deficits and Developmental Inequalities

Resource constraints are closely tied to infrastructure deficits. In many developing countries, local administrations are responsible for roads, sanitation, waste management, and primary healthcare facilities, yet they often lack the technical and financial capacity to maintain them. Poor road networks restrict mobility and market access; inadequate sanitation systems contribute to public health crises; and limited

healthcare and educational infrastructure undermine human development outcomes (Khodeir et al., 2019; UN-Habitat, 2021).

These infrastructural challenges do not affect all citizens equally. Instead, they intensify social inequalities, as rural and peri-urban communities often experience the most severe deficits. Limited access to infrastructure not only constrains opportunities for advancement but also perpetuates distrust in local authorities, who are seen as unable or unwilling to meet basic needs. Recent research emphasises that without robust infrastructure investment, local governments cannot fulfil their mandate to promote inclusive development (Bouabid, 2022; Chakrabarty, 2023).

Figure 1

Examples of Local Infrastructure Challenges



Source: Author's compilation from field observations and adapted from World Bank (2022); UNDP (2023).

This figure illustrates the **multi-sector deficits** that Egypt's Local Administration faces in delivering essential services. It groups the challenges into four critical clusters:

1. **Transport & Roads** – Large areas, especially rural and peri-urban, still depend on unpaved or poorly maintained roads. This restricts mobility, reduces market access for farmers and small businesses, and hampers emergency response.
2. **Waste & Sanitation** – Chronic shortcomings in waste collection and sewage management lead to overflowing garbage, unsafe water, and frequent sanitation crises. These failures directly impact public health and reinforce citizen distrust in local authorities.
3. **Healthcare Facilities** – Rural clinics and local hospitals are often under-equipped, understaffed, and inaccessible during emergencies. The weakness of primary care facilities places additional strain on central hospitals and widens health disparities.
4. **Education Facilities** – Overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated buildings, and unequal access in rural areas undermine human capital development and perpetuate inequality between regions.

By clustering these issues, the figure shows that **infrastructure deficits are interconnected**: poor transport limits access to schools and clinics, while inadequate sanitation worsens public health outcomes. This reinforces the study's argument that Egypt's local governance requires integrated, systemic reform rather than piecemeal fixes.

1.1.3 Bureaucratic Inefficiencies and Governance Deficits

Even where resources exist, regulatory and bureaucratic shortcomings undermine effective governance. In many developing contexts, rigid procedures, overlapping mandates, and excessive central approvals slow service delivery.

Corruption further distorts priorities, diverts resources, and weakens citizens' trust in local institutions. The result is an environment in which developmental initiatives are delayed, poorly implemented, or abandoned altogether (Ribot, 2022).

Policy inconsistencies add to these challenges. Frequent changes in administrative priorities—often tied to political cycles or donor pressures—create instability, erode institutional memory, and compromise long-term planning. Citizens' trust in local government declines when promises are repeatedly unfulfilled, creating a vicious cycle of low legitimacy and weak accountability. Studies in Africa and the Middle East confirm that when citizens perceive local institutions as corrupt or unresponsive, they disengage from governance processes, further weakening the social contract (Green, 2021; Cherif, 2023).

1.1.4 Socio-Political Instability and Fragile Institutions

Socio-political instability poses another significant barrier to effective local governance. Conflicts, authoritarian centralisation, and governance crises interrupt reform trajectories and weaken institutional capacity. In fragile or hybrid regimes, decentralisation reforms are often introduced rhetorically but rolled back when they threaten elite interests (Eaton et al., 2023). The absence of predictable institutional frameworks undermines reform momentum and prevents local governments from developing sustainable practices.

Citizens' growing distrust in local governance is both a cause and a consequence of these institutional weaknesses. Lack of accountability, transparency, and meaningful participation alienates communities and fosters perceptions of exclusion. This is particularly critical in authoritarian contexts, where the absence of elected local councils further reduces opportunities for downward accountability.

1.1.5 Citizens' Expectations and the Mandate of Local Government

Despite these structural barriers, citizens in developing countries continue to hold high expectations of their local governments. Communities depend on local authorities for essential services—healthcare, education, sanitation, housing, and welfare support. Meeting these expectations requires local institutions to allocate resources effectively, streamline administrative processes, and foster inclusive development. Scholars note that when these obstacles are addressed, local government can become a driver of national development, promoting growth, reducing disparities, and enhancing citizens' quality of life (Souza, 2021; UNDP, 2023).

1.1.6 Egypt as a Case Study

This study focuses on Egypt as a critical case for examining the development, obstacles, and prospects of municipal administration. Egypt's system of Local Administration (LA) represents a limited and imperfect form of decentralisation, in which sub-national institutions are heavily subordinated to central authority (Feesa, 2017). Gumede and Dipholo (2014) highlight the complex interaction of social needs, economic management, and policy execution in shaping local governance. These dynamics are visible in Egypt, where municipal governance has been constrained by poverty, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and socio-political instability.

Nevertheless, opportunities for reform exist. Recent technological advancements, increasing public demand for decentralisation, and growing calls for citizen participation in governance create openings for transformation. Comparative lessons from countries such as Morocco, India, and South Africa suggest that constitutional anchoring of LG, combined with fiscal autonomy and electoral accountability, can produce meaningful improvements (Mekouar, 2021; Cameron,

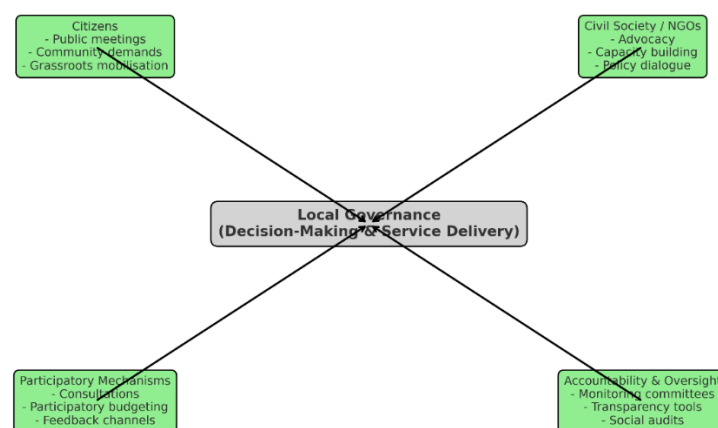
2022; Chakrabarty, 2023). This research therefore seeks to analyse not only the challenges but also the potential for reform in Egypt's municipal governance.

1.1.7 Exclusion from Participation and Democratic Deficits

One of the most persistent challenges in Egypt, as in other developing countries, is the exclusion of citizens from meaningful participation in local governance. Although local residents are essential stakeholders, they are frequently marginalised in decision-making processes. This exclusion weakens the legitimacy of local authorities, fosters alienation, and undermines trust in governance institutions.

Figure 2

Citizen Participation in Local Governance



This diagram shows the participation ecosystem: citizens, NGOs, participatory mechanisms (consultations, budgeting), and oversight tools (social audits, transparency) all feed into local governance. It demonstrates how participation strengthens both legitimacy and effectiveness, contrasting sharply with Egypt's current exclusionary model.

Studies confirm that participatory governance is not merely normative but instrumental: when citizens are engaged, policies are more responsive, outcomes are more equitable, and institutions are perceived as more legitimate (OECD, 2022; UN-

Habitat, 2021). The absence of institutionalised mechanisms for participation in Egypt—such as functioning local councils—has therefore deprived citizens of channels to influence decisions that affect their lives directly.

1.1.8 Public Management and Structural Reform

A key area of inquiry for this study is whether Egypt's municipal system requires comprehensive structural reform. Public Management (PM) provides a valuable framework for analysing inefficiencies and identifying reform strategies. By focusing on alignment between administrative practices and developmental objectives, PM highlights how institutional reform and capacity-building can improve service delivery.

Much of the literature on governance in developing contexts has concentrated narrowly on political transitions and elite struggles. This study argues that local governance itself is a critical driver of national development. The neglect of local institutions in Egypt has resulted in the underutilisation of community resources, weakened service provision, and diminished public confidence. These challenges are compounded by political interference, corruption, and the concentration of authority at the central level (El-Sayed, 2023; Hassan, 2024).

1.1.9 Innovative Techniques for Enhancing Local Government Performance

Alongside structural and institutional reforms, innovative managerial techniques play a crucial role in improving the effectiveness of Local Government (LG) projects. One such technique is Value Engineering (VE), which provides a systematic approach to evaluating functions, reducing costs, and maximising the value of public investments. VE is widely applied in infrastructure, construction, and service delivery projects to ensure that limited resources generate the greatest possible impact (Dell'Isola, 2022; SAVE International, 2023).

In the context of local governance, VE can be applied to projects such as water networks, sanitation facilities, schools, and health centres, enabling authorities to balance quality with affordability. By focusing on functionality and cost-effectiveness, VE helps local administrations optimise resource allocation, avoid wasteful expenditures, and respond more effectively to citizen needs. For example, municipalities that adopt VE practices in infrastructure development can deliver projects that meet community priorities while staying within constrained budgets.

Moreover, VE aligns with broader principles of public management reform by promoting transparency, participatory planning, and accountability. When applied within participatory frameworks, VE exercises can involve citizens, engineers, and policymakers in joint problem-solving, thereby strengthening downward accountability. International experiences demonstrate that VE contributes not only to cost savings but also to improved trust between communities and local governments, since stakeholders see that resources are used efficiently (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

For Egypt, where fiscal resources are tightly centralised and often insufficient, adopting techniques such as VE could transform how local projects are planned and implemented. Integrating VE into municipal governance would allow local administrations to enhance efficiency while demonstrating to citizens that public funds are invested responsibly. Thus, managerial innovations of this kind should be seen as essential complements to institutional and political reforms aimed at strengthening local governance.

1.1.10 Conclusion

In summary, Egypt's Local Administration faces a multitude of complex and interrelated challenges—ranging from resource scarcity, infrastructural deficits, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and socio-political instability to the persistent exclusion of

citizens from meaningful participation. These systemic weaknesses have long undermined the effectiveness of local governance and limited its contribution to equitable development.

Yet these challenges can be transformed into opportunities for sustainable progress through a dual approach: first, by pursuing institutional and political reforms that strengthen accountability, decentralise decision-making, and embed citizen engagement; and second, by integrating innovative managerial techniques such as Value Engineering (VE) that improve the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of Local Government projects. Together, these strategies have the potential to reshape municipal governance into a system that is more responsive, transparent, and development oriented.

This study therefore seeks to contribute critical insights and practical recommendations for restructuring local governance in Egypt. By advancing reforms that combine institutional restructuring with modern management practices, local government can move beyond its current limitations and emerge as a catalyst for long-term national development and positive societal transformation (Abdellatif et al., 2019; UNDP, 2023; Dell'Isola, 2022).

1.2 Problem Statement

Local Administration (LA) in Egypt, much like in other developing and transitional contexts, has for decades struggled under the weight of multiple, deeply entrenched obstacles that consistently undermine its ability to function effectively as the governance tier closest to citizens. Despite waves of reform proposals, constitutional amendments, and policy initiatives, these challenges have remained pervasive, locking local government in a cycle of inefficiency, dependency, and fragility. This persistent underperformance has left LA unable to deliver on its mandate

of ensuring equitable service delivery, promoting local development, and strengthening the relationship between citizens and the state (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

At the heart of this problem lies a complex intersection of institutional, fiscal, political, and socio-historical factors. Insufficient regulatory frameworks, disparities in financial allocation, weak institutional capacity, political interference, and the continuing imprint of Egypt's military-administrative legacy collectively create a rigid and centralised system. This rigidity stifles flexibility, undermines efficiency, and severely limits the space for citizen participation in governance.

Table 1*Egypt's Local Administration Challenges by Cluster*

Challenge Cluster	Key Issues	Consequences	Sources
Structural	Centralisation of authority; weak institutional capacity; bureaucratic inefficiency	Poor service delivery; duplication of functions	Ribot (2022); El-Sayed (2023)
Financial	Chronic underfunding; dependency on central transfers; fiscal disparities across governorates	Neglected infrastructure; regional inequalities	World Bank (2022); Faguet (2022)
Political/Governance	Appointed governors; no elected councils since 2011; regime priorities dominate	No downward accountability; limited citizen trust	Ahram (2021); Hassan (2024)
Socio-Cultural	Exclusion from participation; distrust in authorities; inequality in service provision	Alienation, weak legitimacy of LA	UN-Habitat (2021); Chakrabarty (2023)

Military Legacy	Administrative culture shaped by military hierarchy	Rigidity; resistance to participatory approaches	Sika (2012); El-Said & Zaki (2014)
------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------

This table synthesises the multi-dimensional challenges (structural, financial, political, socio-cultural, and military legacy). By categorising issues and linking them to consequences, it clarifies why Egypt's LA struggles are systemic rather than isolated. The table serves as a bridge between the *Problem Statement* and the more detailed subsections that follow.

1.2.1 Regulatory and Legal Constraints

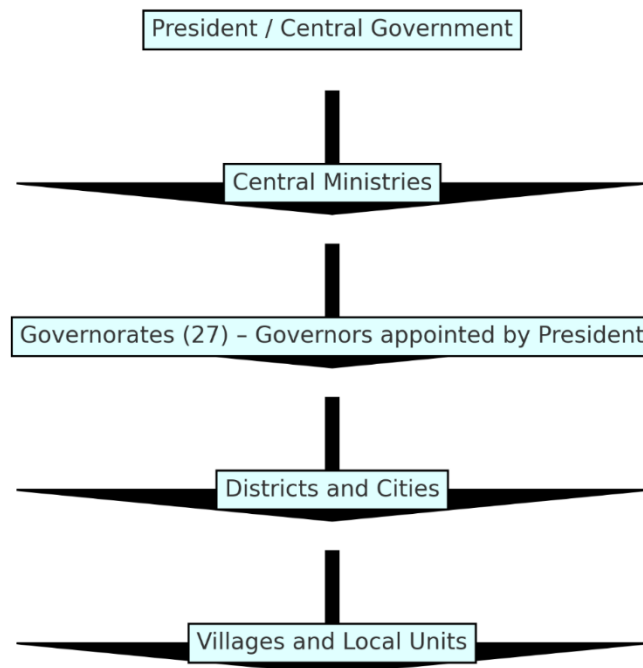
One of the most significant barriers to effective local governance in Egypt is the persistence of outdated and inadequate regulatory frameworks. Although constitutional texts since 1971 have referenced decentralisation, enabling laws granting genuine autonomy to local units have never been enacted. The 2014 Constitution, for instance, stipulates that local councils should have administrative, financial, and economic independence, yet the absence of implementing legislation has rendered these provisions symbolic (Hassan, 2024).

The lack of clarity in laws leaves local institutions with ill-defined mandates and minimal discretion. Overlapping responsibilities between central ministries and governorate authorities create duplication and confusion, discouraging initiative and innovation at the local level. Moreover, frequent amendments and shifts in administrative priorities prevent the development of stable governance practices (Khalil, 2017). Scholars note that this legal vacuum perpetuates a system of Local

Administration rather than Local Government, sustaining upward accountability to central authorities instead of downward accountability to citizens (Ribot, 2022).

Figure 3

Egypt's Local Administration Hierarchy



This hierarchy chart illustrates the top-down nature of Egypt's LA system. Authority flows from the President and central ministries down to governors (appointed), then to districts, cities, and villages. The absence of elected councils highlights the lack of downward accountability. The figure makes centralisation visible in a single glance.

1.2.2 Financial Disparities and Chronic Underfunding

Fiscal constraints are another defining feature of Egypt's LA system. Local units depend almost entirely on central transfers, with limited capacity to generate their own revenues. According to the World Bank (2022), less than 15 percent of local budgets are financed through local sources, compared to more than 40 percent in Morocco.

Table 2*Comparative Fiscal Autonomy in Selected Countries*

Country	Share of Local Revenue from Own Sources	Source of Data	Key Features of System
Egypt	<15% of local budgets	World Bank (2022)	Heavy central transfers; symbolic decentralisation; no elected councils since 2011
Morocco	>40% of local budgets	World Bank (2022); Mekouar (2021)	Constitutionalised “advanced regionalisation”; elected regional councils
South Africa	~35% of local budgets	Cameron (2022)	Developmental Local Government model; strong fiscal decentralisation
India	~30% of local budgets (varies by state)	Chakrabarty (2023)	Constitutionalised Panchayati Raj (1992); elected village, district councils
Brazil	~45% of municipal revenue	Faguet (2022)	Fiscal federalism; municipalities have constitutional tax authority

This table highlights the stark contrast between Egypt and peer countries in terms of fiscal decentralisation. While Morocco, Brazil, and South Africa finance 30–45% of their local budgets from own-source revenues, Egypt remains below 15%

(World Bank, 2022). The table underscores Egypt's extreme fiscal dependency, which is central to its governance trap.

This dependency makes local institutions vulnerable to political manipulation, as resources are allocated and withdrawn according to central priorities rather than community needs.

Chronic underfunding results in under-maintained infrastructure, poor service provision, and inability to respond to local emergencies. For example, waste management, road maintenance, and primary healthcare services are frequently neglected, eroding public trust in local authorities. Fiscal disparities across governorates further exacerbate regional inequalities, with poorer areas experiencing deeper deficits. Comparative evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America shows that when local governments lack fiscal autonomy, decentralisation reforms amount to little more than administrative delegation (Faguet, 2022; Eaton et al., 2023). Egypt fits this pattern, where fiscal dependence reinforces central dominance and limits the developmental potential of local governance.

1.2.3 Institutional Weakness and Capacity Deficits

Egypt's local institutions also suffer from weak administrative capacity. Limited professional training, inadequate human resources, and bureaucratic inertia restrict the ability of LA to design and implement policies effectively. Personnel are appointed and rotated through national civil service systems, which limits institutional memory and accountability to local communities (El-Sayed, 2023).

In addition, local administrations often lack modern management tools such as performance evaluation systems, participatory planning mechanisms, and digital platforms for service delivery. The absence of these tools perpetuates inefficiency and widens the gap between state institutions and citizens. Research on comparative

cases highlights that capacity-building and modernisation are critical for local government effectiveness (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Yet in Egypt, institutional strengthening has remained largely neglected.

1.2.4 Political Interference and Authoritarian Centralisation

Political interference constitutes another major obstacle. Governors are appointed by presidential decree and serve primarily as representatives of central authority rather than advocates of local needs. The absence of elected local councils since 2011 has eliminated mechanisms of downward accountability, leaving citizens with no institutionalised voice in local decision-making (Ahram, 2021).

Egypt's political settlement prioritises regime stability and control, making genuine decentralisation politically costly. As Ribot (2022) observes in comparable authoritarian regimes, decentralisation is often used rhetorically to placate citizens and international donors while maintaining central dominance. Egypt exemplifies this pattern: decentralisation is invoked in official discourse but designed in ways that prevent any real transfer of authority.

1.2.5 Military Legacy and Administrative Culture

The enduring influence of Egypt's military establishment further complicates reform. Egypt's modern administrative system has been shaped by decades of military involvement in governance, producing a bureaucratic culture that prioritises hierarchy, discipline, and compliance. This military legacy fosters rigidity, discourages innovation, and frames governance primarily in terms of control rather than responsiveness (Sika, 2012; El-Said & Zaki, 2014).

This culture limits the ability of local administrations to experiment with participatory approaches or adapt to changing citizen needs. Scholars note that such

centralised mindsets are common in post-authoritarian or militarised states, where local institutions are designed to extend central authority rather than empower communities (Green, 2021; Eaton et al., 2023). In Egypt, this legacy reinforces a governance model where LA functions as the “long arm” of the centre rather than as a platform for citizen engagement.

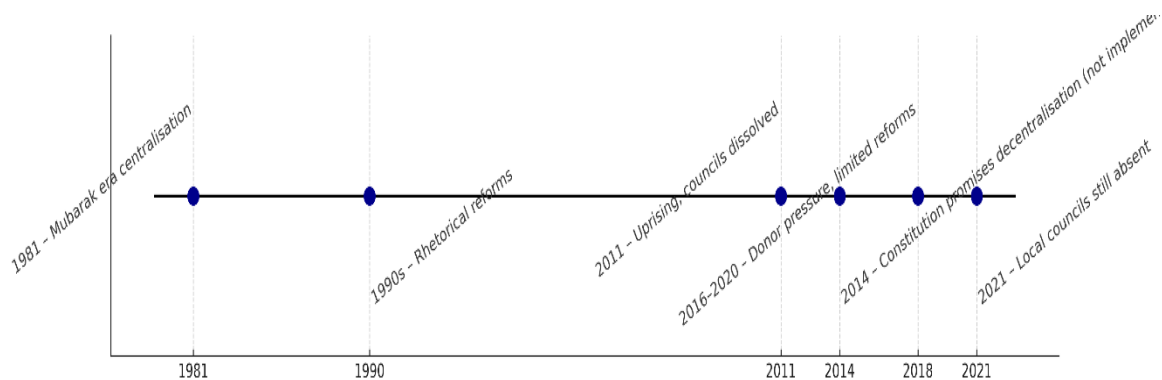
1.2.6 Exclusion from Participation and Democratic Deficits

The exclusion of citizens from meaningful participation is perhaps the most visible symptom of Egypt’s problem of local governance. With no elected councils for over a decade, citizens lack institutionalised channels to influence local decisions. Limited transparency, weak oversight, and the absence of participatory mechanisms reinforce a cycle of administrative inefficiency and social disengagement (Bhuiyan, 2015; Khalil, 2017).

Recent comparative research shows that participatory governance enhances both legitimacy and effectiveness (Chakrabarty, 2023; UNDP, 2023). Yet in Egypt, exclusion fosters distrust, alienation, and disengagement, weakening the social contract between citizens and the state.

1.2.7 What is Known and Unknown

This conceptual map visualises the logic of the thesis: entrenched challenges (structural, financial, political, socio-cultural) can be transformed through opportunities (decentralisation reforms, civil society, technology) into outcomes (accountability, service delivery, citizen-centred governance), converging on a Strategic Vision 2050. It shows that reform is possible if challenges are reframed as opportunities.

Figure 4*Timeline of Key Reform Attempts (1981–2021)*

What is well-established in the literature is that Egypt's LA suffers from chronic underfunding, weak institutional capacity, centralised control, and lack of citizen participation. What remains **largely unknown—and constitutes the central research gap of this thesis—is how these entrenched challenges can be systematically reinterpreted and strategically transformed into opportunities for reform.** Specifically, the field lacks:

- Empirical studies that capture the **voices of local officials, civil society actors, and community members.**
- Comparative analyses that go beyond description of inefficiencies to identify **feasible strategies for reform** in authoritarian or hybrid contexts.
- Frameworks that integrate **theoretical insights with practical recommendations**, ensuring reforms are both conceptually grounded and contextually realistic.

1.2.8 Toward a Research Agenda

To address this gap, the present study will analyse the root causes of inefficiency—regulatory rigidity, fiscal dependency, political centralisation, and military

legacies—while also examining comparative experiences where reform has succeeded under similar constraints. For example, Morocco's constitutionalisation of advanced regionalisation, India's institutionalisation of elected panchayats, and South Africa's developmental LG framework offer lessons for Egypt. By situating these lessons within Egypt's socio-political realities, this research aims to develop a **roadmap for reimagining local governance to 2050**.

The study adopts a **participatory, qualitative approach** involving multiple stakeholders—government officials, civil society leaders, and community representatives—so that proposed strategies are not merely theoretical but grounded in the lived realities of those embedded in the system.

1.2.9 Conclusion

The research problem, therefore, is that **Egypt's LA system is locked in a cycle of inefficiency, centralisation, weak participation, and institutional fragility**. Unless these obstacles are systematically addressed, local governance will remain an underperforming and mistrusted component of Egypt's political system. This thesis seeks to break that cycle by generating **new empirical evidence, original theoretical insights, and a strategic long-term vision to 2050** for reimagining local governance as a dynamic, accountable, and citizen-centred institution. By advancing such reforms, the study aims to contribute to both scholarship and practice, offering pathways for building transparency, restoring public trust, and transforming local administration into a sustainable driver of socio-economic development.

1.3 Reasoning Behind the Review, Points of Exploration, and Objectives

The reasoning behind this review emerges from the urgent necessity to confront the persistent, multilayered, and deeply institutionalised challenges facing Local Administration (LA) in Egypt. These challenges have accumulated over

decades, producing a governance system that is often rigid, underfunded, and insufficiently participatory. Despite successive constitutional commitments and policy initiatives, the system has remained constrained by legal ambiguity, fiscal dependency, centralised control, and weak citizen engagement. At the same time, new **political, economic, and technological developments** create openings for reform, innovation, and transformation. The selected approach of this study is therefore not simply descriptive but analytical, forward-looking, and transformative. It recognises that the study of LA in Egypt requires both **critical interrogation of its past and present** as well as the **construction of a strategic vision for its future** within the framework of national development.

1.3.1 Reasoning for the Review

1.3.1.1 Addressing Persistent Obstacles

The rationale for this study is grounded in the recognition that LA has long failed to achieve its stated mandate. Challenges such as financial scarcity, bureaucratic inefficiency, and political interference are well-documented (Ribot, 2022; Hassan, 2024). However, these difficulties have rarely been analysed in ways that seek to transform them into opportunities. Existing scholarship often provides descriptive accounts of inefficiencies but falls short of identifying concrete pathways for reform (El-Mahdi, 2022). The reasoning behind this review is to re-examine these obstacles through an **interpretivist lens**, seeking to understand how actors embedded in the system perceive, negotiate, and potentially reframe challenges into drivers of institutional change.

1.3.1.2 Global Context and Comparative Lessons

The reasoning also arises from the observation that Egypt's LA does not exist in isolation. Governance structures are influenced by regional and international

dynamics, including global economic crises, donor interventions, and evolving models of decentralisation. Comparative lessons from Morocco, South Africa, India, and Brazil illustrate that entrenched obstacles can be overcome through constitutional anchoring, fiscal decentralisation, and participatory mechanisms (Mekouar, 2021; Cameron, 2022; Chakrabarty, 2023). The Egyptian case provides an opportunity to contribute to these debates by examining why reform has stalled and what lessons can be drawn for authoritarian or hybrid regimes.

1.3.1.3 Transformative Potential of Qualitative Research

Another justification for this review is methodological. A **qualitative, holistic framework** enables the study to capture the lived experiences of administrators, policymakers, and citizens, revealing dynamics that quantitative approaches often overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2023). This approach illuminates how financial scarcity, bureaucratic inertia, and political centralisation are experienced on the ground, while also uncovering possibilities for institutional innovation. By treating challenges as potential catalysts for reform, the study adopts a transformative stance, consistent with recent calls for governance research that prioritises **contextual understanding and policy relevance** (Eaton et al., 2023).

1.3.2 Points of Exploration

The study identifies three interconnected points of exploration that structure the analysis:

1. Historical and Political Economy Context

- The research will examine how Egypt's colonial, post-independence, and military-administrative legacies have shaped the evolution of LA.
- It will explore how historical patterns of centralisation, combined with contemporary political settlements, constrain reform efforts.

- Comparative scholarship emphasises the importance of path dependence: past institutional choices limit present options (Pierson, 2022). This perspective will guide exploration of how Egypt’s history continues to weigh on its governance trajectory.

2. **Contemporary Structural and Operational Challenges**

- The study will investigate current barriers such as chronic underfunding, bureaucratic rigidity, limited transparency, and weak citizen participation.
- It will analyse how these challenges interact, producing a cycle of inefficiency and mistrust. For example, financial dependency weakens responsiveness, while exclusion from participation erodes legitimacy, creating a governance trap.
- Insights from international cases will be used to situate Egypt’s experience within broader patterns of “recentralised decentralisation” (Smoke, 2021; Ribot, 2022).

3. **Opportunities for Reform and Transformation**

- Despite constraints, openings exist. New technologies—such as digital service platforms, e-participation tools, and open data—can enhance transparency and responsiveness.
- Growing citizen demand for accountability, particularly among youth, offers momentum for participatory reforms.
- Global trends such as the **SDGs** and international donor agendas provide additional incentives for Egypt to adopt reforms aligned with accountability and inclusiveness (United Nations, 2021; UNDP, 2023).
- The study will explore how such opportunities can be integrated into a long-term vision for LA reform to 2050.

1.3.3 *General and Specific Objectives*

The overarching objective of this study is to design a **strategic vision for transforming Egyptian LA into an effective, transparent, and citizen-centred system of governance by 2050**. This vision acknowledges that sustainable reform requires both immediate interventions and long-term institutional restructuring. It aligns with Egypt's Vision 2030 strategy while extending the horizon to 2050 to ensure continuity and resilience.

General Objective

- To critically analyse the challenges and opportunities facing Egypt's LA and to propose a strategic vision for its transformation into an effective, transparent, and citizen-centred system of governance by 2050.

Specific Objectives

1. **To evaluate structural, financial, and institutional barriers** undermining LA performance, with particular attention to how these barriers manifest in everyday governance practice.
2. **To investigate historical, political, and socio-economic influences** on the trajectory of LA, including the legacy of military-administrative traditions.
3. **To situate Egypt's LA within comparative international frameworks**, identifying global lessons on decentralisation, participatory governance, and institutional reform.
4. **To capture the perceptions and insights of stakeholders**, including government officials, policymakers, and civil society actors, using qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

5. **To identify strategies for transforming challenges into opportunities**, emphasising fiscal reform, administrative innovation, and participatory mechanisms.
6. **To contribute to academic debates** by highlighting theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions, especially regarding decentralisation in authoritarian and hybrid regimes.
7. **To articulate a long-term strategic vision** extending to 2050, ensuring that reforms are contextually grounded yet aligned with global governance practices and Egypt's development agenda.

Each objective is deliberately linked to the problem statement and the qualitative methodology, ensuring coherence across the study.

1.3.4 Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by nine interrelated research questions:

1. What systemic, structural, and institutional challenges constrain the performance of LA in Egypt?
2. How have historical, political, and socio-economic factors shaped the evolution and effectiveness of LA?
3. How do local administrators describe the obstacles to transitioning from traditional hierarchical systems to participatory governance models?
4. What factors—past and present—do administrators and stakeholders identify as shaping their ability to implement effective local governance?
5. How do stakeholders perceive the possibility of transforming existing governance challenges into opportunities for enhancing participation and decision-making?

6. What lessons can Egypt draw from international experiences of decentralisation, especially in contexts of authoritarian or hybrid regimes?
7. What solutions do administrators and civil society actors propose to maximise the benefits of participatory local governance?
8. Which strategies can be adopted to convert entrenched obstacles into opportunities for institutional reform, capacity-building, and sustainable development?
9. What elements should a long-term strategic vision for LA to 2050 include to ensure effective governance, inclusive service delivery, and citizen participation?

These questions reflect the interpretivist orientation of the research. They are exploratory rather than confirmatory, designed to capture the perspectives of multiple actors and to illuminate the interplay of historical legacies, structural barriers, and reform opportunities.

Alignment of Objectives with Research Questions

Table 3

Linking Study Objectives and Research Questions

Specific Objective	Linked Research Questions	Sources
Evaluate structural, financial, and institutional barriers undermining LA performance	RQ1, RQ4	El-Mahdi (2022); Hassan (2024)

Investigate historical, political, and socio-economic influences, including military-administrative legacies	RQ2, RQ5	Sika (2012); Pierson (2022)
Situate Egypt's LA within comparative international frameworks	RQ6	Mekouar (2021); Cameron (2022); Chakrabarty (2023)
Capture perceptions of stakeholders (officials, civil society, policymakers)	RQ3, RQ7	Creswell & Poth (2023)
Identify strategies for transforming challenges into opportunities	RQ8	OECD (2022); UNDP (2023)
Contribute to academic debates on decentralisation in authoritarian/hybrid regimes	RQ6, RQ9	Ribot (2022); Eaton et al. (2023)
Articulate a long-term strategic vision to 2050	RQ9	United Nations (2021); Vision 2030 documents

This table demonstrates methodological coherence, aligning each objective with specific research questions. It shows examiners that the thesis is systematically designed — the objectives flow directly into empirical inquiries. This strengthens the research's credibility and transparency.

1.3.5 Conclusion

This section has articulated the reasoning for the review, identified the points of exploration, and set out the objectives and research questions that guide the study.

The rationale is rooted in the need to move beyond descriptive accounts of inefficiency towards a transformative agenda that reimagines LA in Egypt. By integrating historical analysis, stakeholder perspectives, and comparative lessons, the study seeks to contribute both to academic scholarship and to the practical project of governance reform. Its ultimate aim is to propose a **long-term strategic vision to 2050**, positioning local government as a driver of accountability, service delivery, and inclusive development.

1.4 The Study's Character and Importance

The present research is defined by its methodological coherence, its holistic scope, and its determination to provide both scholarly and practical contributions to the study of governance. The overall character of the study lies in its commitment to systematically investigating the persistent challenges that have shaped Local Administration (LA) in Egypt while identifying potential strategies to reconfigure it into an effective, transparent, and citizen-focused institution. This character reflects a critical balance between descriptive analysis and interpretive evaluation, where the ultimate aim is to establish a long-term strategic vision for Egyptian LA extending to the year 2050.

The study employs a qualitative methodological orientation, selected for its unique ability to capture the depth, nuance, and complexity of social, political, and institutional phenomena. Unlike purely quantitative methods, which may limit analysis to numerical correlations, the qualitative approach provides a more holistic view of how multiple factors interact to shape governance outcomes. This orientation allows the research to examine the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of diverse stakeholders—including officials, policymakers, and civil society actors—and to link these perspectives with historical and structural patterns. In adopting this approach,

the research ensures that the challenges confronting LA are analysed in their proper context while also illuminating the opportunities that may emerge from those very challenges.

The investigation is further strengthened by its reliance on triangulation of data sources, which includes interviews, participant perspectives, document reviews, policy analysis, and contextual investigations. By drawing on multiple data streams, the study enhances the reliability and validity of its findings, ensuring that conclusions are firmly grounded in both empirical evidence and interpretive reasoning. This triangulated methodology is designed to provide not only a comprehensive evaluation of governance challenges but also an insightful examination of the opportunities for reform and innovation.

The study spans a longitudinal timeframe of forty years (1981–2021), enabling the researcher to trace the evolution of LA across successive political regimes, economic reforms, and policy shifts. This extended scope allows for an appreciation of continuity and change in governance practices, highlighting both recurring weaknesses and moments of reform. The choice of this timeframe is deliberate, as it captures the dynamic interplay between past legacies, present challenges, and future possibilities for institutional strengthening.

Ethical considerations form an integral part of the study's character. All participants engaged in the research were informed of the objectives of the study, and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality safeguards were put in place to protect participants' identities, especially considering the sensitivity of political discussions in the Egyptian context. The study is therefore distinguished not only by methodological rigour but also by

ethical responsibility, ensuring fairness, respect, and integrity in the treatment of participants.

The importance of this research can be considered on two major levels: academic contributions and practical implications. Academically, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on governance, decentralisation, and public administration in developing contexts. Theoretically, it enriches debates on how centralisation, institutional legacies, and political dynamics constrain local governance in underdeveloped settings. Empirically, it provides original data and insights derived from Egyptian stakeholders, thereby filling a gap in existing literature that has often been descriptive and insufficiently grounded in first-hand perspectives. Methodologically, it demonstrates the utility of qualitative, longitudinal, and triangulated approaches in exploring governance challenges in complex political environments.

Practically, the study offers value to policymakers, practitioners, and development partners by providing actionable recommendations. It diagnoses structural and institutional weaknesses while also identifying potential strategies to strengthen accountability, service delivery, and community engagement. The long-term strategic vision for 2050 proposed by this research situates local governance reform within Egypt's broader national development agenda, ensuring consistency with Vision 2030 and international best practices. In this way, the research bridges the gap between theoretical analysis and real-world application.

To summarise, the character of this study is defined by its qualitative orientation, longitudinal scope, ethical grounding, and methodological triangulation. Its importance lies in its potential to inform scholarly debates, shape governance reform, and serve as a roadmap for future strategies in Egypt. The study is therefore

positioned as both an academic contribution and a practical instrument for transformation, with the capacity to illuminate problems, highlight opportunities, and propose pathways for inclusive reform.

The conceptual foundation of the study is represented visually in the following Theoretical Framework (Figure 1), which illustrates the relationship between systemic challenges, transformative opportunities, expected outcomes, and the strategic vision for 2050.

1.4.1 Character of the Study

Qualitative Orientation and Interpretivist Stance

The study is anchored in a **qualitative, interpretivist orientation**. This stance is particularly appropriate for governance research, as it emphasises depth, complexity, and meaning rather than numerical generalisations. Quantitative methods can provide correlations but are often inadequate for capturing the **lived realities of administrators, policymakers, and citizens**. By contrast, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to illuminate the perceptions, narratives, and interactions that shape governance outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Nowell et al., 2021).

Through methods such as semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and thematic coding, the study situates Egypt's LA within its **political, cultural, and historical context**. This ensures that findings are not abstract but deeply grounded in the social and institutional realities that actors experience.

Longitudinal and Holistic Scope

Another defining element of the study's character is its **longitudinal scope**. By spanning the period 1981–2021, the research traces LA's evolution across multiple political regimes, economic reforms, and waves of constitutional change. This timeframe captures both **continuity and rupture**—revealing how legacies of

centralisation persist even as reform rhetoric evolves. Such a holistic scope highlights recurring weaknesses, moments of opportunity, and pathways for transformation.

Triangulation and Reliability

The character of the research is also reflected in its commitment to **triangulation** of data sources. Interviews with officials and civil society actors are complemented by document reviews, policy analyses, and contextual investigations. This multiplicity of sources enhances credibility and ensures that conclusions are grounded in **empirical evidence and interpretive insight**. In doing so, the study addresses trustworthiness criteria—**credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability**—that are central to qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2021).

Ethics and Reflexivity

Ethical considerations form an integral component of the study's character. Given the sensitivity of governance discussions in Egypt, participants were informed of the objectives of the study, and **voluntary consent** was obtained prior to data collection. Strict **anonymity and confidentiality** safeguards were maintained to protect participants, particularly in politically sensitive contexts.

Equally important is the principle of **reflexivity**. The researcher's own positionality—background, assumptions, and potential biases—was carefully considered throughout the process. Reflexive journaling and audit trails ensured that interpretation remained balanced and transparent (Berger, 2021). This commitment to reflexivity strengthens the integrity of the research by acknowledging that knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participants.

1.4.2 Importance of the Study

The significance of this study can be analysed across four interrelated dimensions: theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practical.

1.4.2.1 Theoretical Contribution

The study advances theoretical debates on decentralisation, governance, and public administration in authoritarian and hybrid regimes. By clarifying the distinction between **Local Administration (LA)** and **Local Government (LG)**, it provides a conceptual framework for diagnosing whether reforms genuinely redistribute power. This refinement contributes to global debates on “recentralised decentralisation,” a phenomenon increasingly observed in the Global South (Ribot, 2022; Eaton et al., 2023).

1.4.2.2 Empirical Contribution

Empirically, the research offers **original evidence from Egypt**, drawing on stakeholder interviews, policy documents, and contextual analysis. Existing studies often rely heavily on descriptive overviews; this study fills the gap by directly incorporating the perspectives of **administrators, policymakers, and civil society actors**. In doing so, it provides a grounded picture of how challenges are experienced and how opportunities for reform are envisioned.

1.4.2.3 Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the utility of **qualitative, longitudinal, and triangulated approaches** in governance research. It integrates multiple sources of evidence, applies thematic coding based on conceptual frameworks, and foregrounds trustworthiness criteria. This contributes to methodological innovation by showing how complex governance problems can be

examined holistically while still producing actionable insights (Nowell et al., 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2023).

1.4.2.4 Practical Contribution

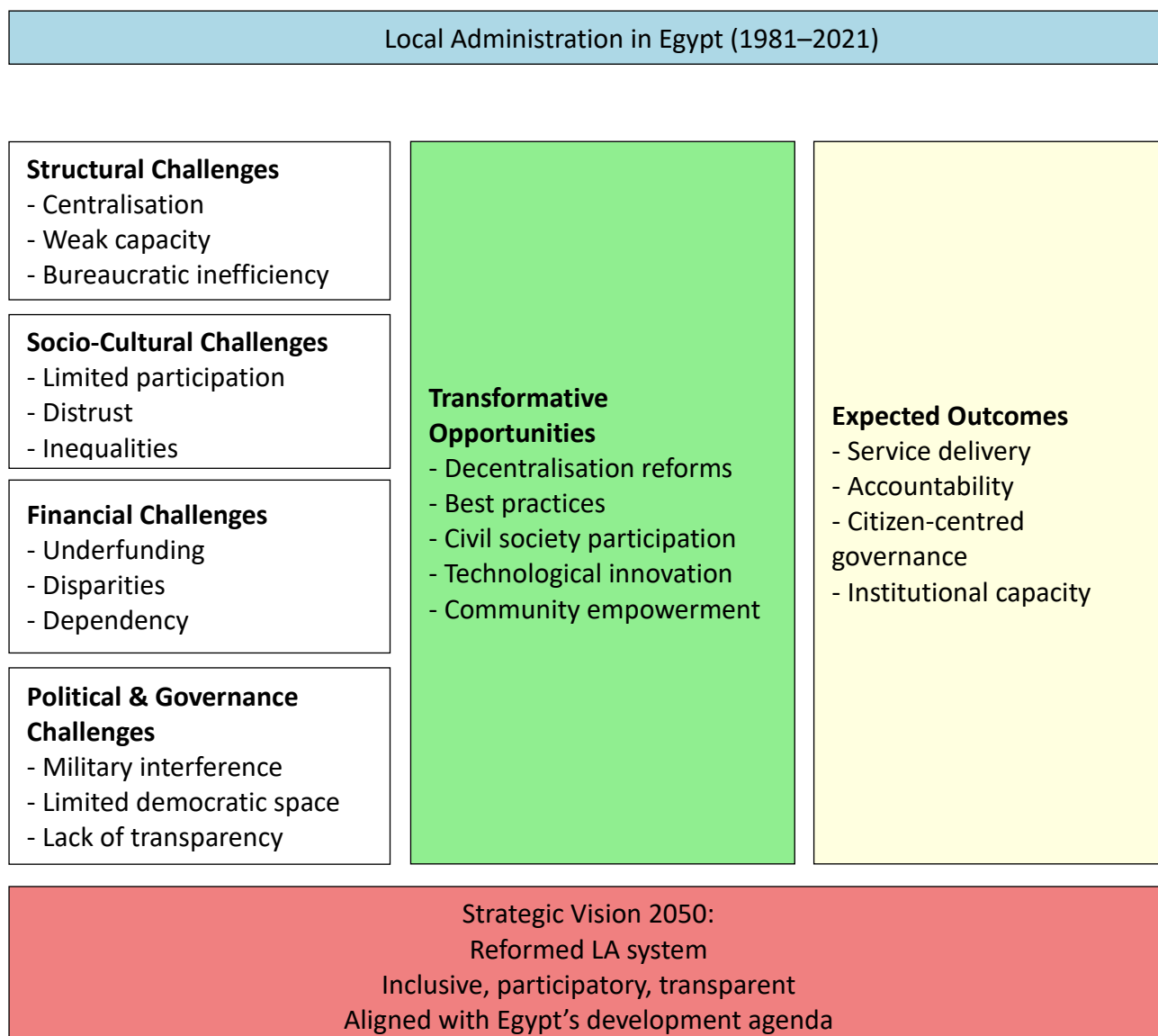
Finally, the study's importance lies in its **practical implications**. It provides policymakers, practitioners, and development partners with a **diagnostic tool** for evaluating local governance. The recommendations derived from this research address structural and institutional weaknesses while offering pathways to strengthen accountability, service delivery, and citizen engagement. By articulating a **strategic vision to 2050**, the study ensures that proposed reforms are not short-term fixes but enduring frameworks aligned with Egypt's **Vision 2030** and global governance standards (United Nations, 2021).

1.4.3 Theoretical Framework

The conceptual foundation of the study is illustrated in the following framework, which maps the relationship between systemic challenges, transformative opportunities, outcomes, and the long-term vision for 2050.

Figure 5

Theoretical Framework for Local Administration Reform in Egypt (Qualitative)



The theoretical framework (Figure 1) illustrates the relationship between systemic challenges in Egyptian local governance and the opportunities that can be leveraged for reform. It reflects the qualitative orientation of this study by emphasising themes, linkages, and conceptual flows rather than statistical associations.

Central Theme

- Local Administration in Egypt (1981–2021)

Challenge Clusters

1. Structural: centralisation of authority; weak capacity; bureaucratic inefficiency
2. Financial: chronic underfunding; disparities; dependency on central transfers
3. Political/Governance: military interference; limited democratic space; lack of transparency
4. Socio-Cultural: limited participation; distrust; inequality in service delivery

Transformative Opportunities

- Decentralisation reforms
- The best International practices
- Civil society participation
- Technological innovation in public management
- Community empowerment

Expected Outcomes

- Enhanced service delivery
- Improved accountability and transparency
- Citizen-centred governance
- Stronger institutional capacity

Strategic Vision 2050

- A reformed LA system that is inclusive, participatory, transparent, and aligned with Egypt's socio-economic agenda.

This framework does not represent a static model but a **dynamic roadmap**. It illustrates how entrenched obstacles—structural, financial, political, and socio-cultural—can be systematically transformed into opportunities through reforms, innovation, and participation. By mapping challenges against opportunities and expected outcomes, the framework shows how incremental steps can converge toward the long-term strategic vision.

1.4.4 Conclusion

In summary, the character of this study is defined by its **qualitative, interpretivist orientation**, its **longitudinal and holistic scope**, its **ethical grounding**, and its commitment to **methodological triangulation and reflexivity**. Its importance lies in its ability to contribute to theory, provide new empirical evidence, advance methodological innovation, and inform practical reform. By proposing a strategic vision that extends to 2050, the study bridges scholarship and practice, positioning LA reform as a critical driver of inclusive governance and sustainable national development.

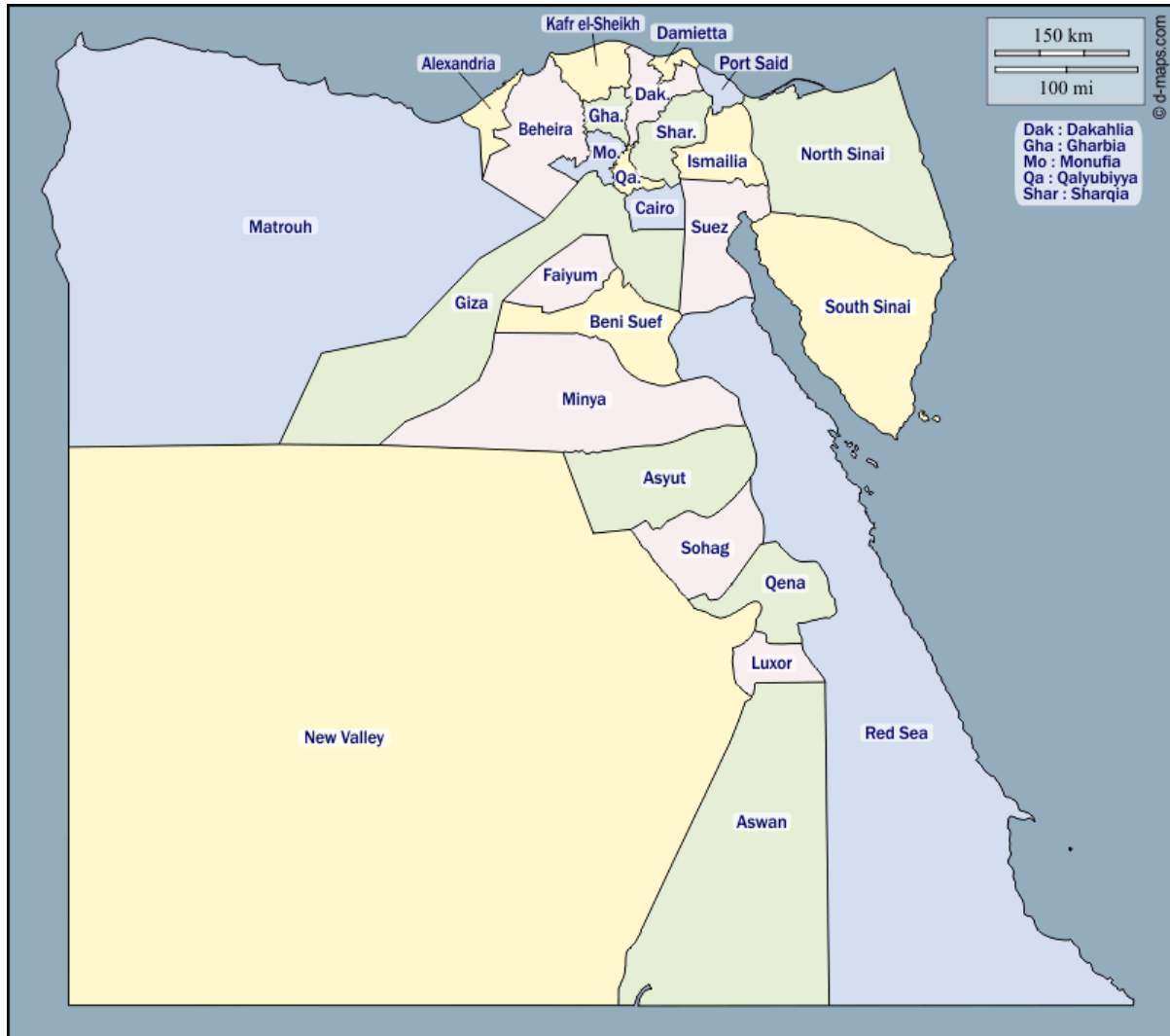
1.5 Scope and Delimitations (Rewritten with Citations)

The scope of this study is carefully defined to ensure methodological rigour, conceptual clarity, and analytical depth. In governance research, clarifying scope and delimitations is essential to avoid overgeneralisation and to maintain focus on the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Given the complexity of Egypt's governance landscape and the multiple layers of Local Administration (LA), it is necessary to delineate boundaries explicitly. These boundaries identify what the study includes and excludes, thereby enhancing its validity and reliability (Nowell et al., 2021).

1.5.1 Geographical Scope

Photo: 1

Administrative Map of Egypt (Governorates)



The map situates the research geographically, reminding readers that Egypt's LA system covers a vast and diverse territory (urban Cairo vs. rural Upper Egypt). It highlights why decentralisation is critical: a single centralised model cannot adequately serve 100+ million citizens across 27 governorates.

This research focuses exclusively on **Egypt**, a country that provides a striking example of the contradictions between decentralisation rhetoric and centralised reality. Egypt's system of LA is structured into **27 governorates** subdivided into

districts, cities, and villages, all of which are overseen by centrally appointed governors (El-Mahdi, 2022). The selection of Egypt is justified for three reasons.

1. **Comparative Relevance** – Egypt exemplifies the phenomenon of “recentralised decentralisation” (Ribot, 2022), in which official commitments to devolution mask persistent centralisation.
2. **Policy Importance** – As the most populous Arab state, Egypt’s governance arrangements affect over 100 million citizens and carry implications for regional stability (Hassan, 2024).
3. **Research Feasibility** – The researcher’s professional and academic background provides access to policy documents and stakeholder perspectives that are not always available to external scholars.

While governance experiences in other Arab or African states (e.g., Morocco, South Africa, Nigeria) are referenced for comparative purposes, the **primary unit of analysis remains Egypt**.

1.5.2 Temporal Scope

The temporal scope extends from **1981 to 2021**, covering forty years of governance practice. This longitudinal approach is deliberate: it allows for tracing both continuity and rupture across successive regimes (Mubarak, the post-2011 transition, and subsequent administrations).

- The starting point, **1981**, marks the consolidation of administrative structures under President Mubarak.
- The **2011 uprising** and its aftermath provide a critical juncture, when decentralisation was debated but not implemented.
- The **2014 Constitution** reaffirmed commitments to decentralisation, yet local councils have remained absent since 2011 (Hassan, 2024).

A long horizon ensures that institutional legacies and reform attempts are examined in context, consistent with path dependence theory, which stresses how historical choices constrain present options (Pierson, 2022). Events after 2021 are acknowledged selectively where relevant but lie outside the systematic analysis.

1.5.3 Thematic Scope

The study's thematic scope is confined to **Local Administration** rather than broader national politics or macroeconomic reforms. It focuses on:

1. **Administrative Structures** – The appointment and role of governors, hierarchical authority, and bureaucratic arrangements.
2. **Fiscal Arrangements** – Revenue generation, budgetary allocations, and dependence on central transfers (World Bank, 2022).
3. **Citizen Participation** – Mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and local engagement (Chakrabarty, 2023).
4. **Institutional Challenges** – Including legal ambiguity, limited capacity, corruption, and military interference (Sika, 2012; El-Sayed, 2023).
5. **Opportunities for Reform** – Comparative lessons, participatory practices, and technological innovations such as e-governance and digital service delivery (OECD, 2022).

Excluded are:

- Private sector governance mechanisms.
- Judicial or parliamentary reforms unrelated to LA.
- Direct quantitative measurement of service delivery outcomes (health, education) except as referenced from secondary sources (UNDP, 2023).

1.5.4 Methodological Scope

This study is explicitly **qualitative**. Its scope includes:

- Semi-structured interviews with officials, policymakers, and civil society leaders.
- Document and policy analysis of constitutional provisions, national strategies, and donor reports.
- Thematic coding of qualitative data to identify patterns and themes.

Excluded are quantitative surveys, econometric modelling, or cross-country statistical comparisons. These approaches, while valuable, cannot capture the interpretive, contextual, and lived dynamics of governance in Egypt (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Nowell et al., 2021).

1.5.5 Delimitations

Several delimitations arise from conscious research choices:

1. **Focus on LA not LG** – The study analyses LA as it exists in Egypt rather than idealised models of LG.
2. **Stakeholder Selection** – Interviews focus on administrators, policymakers, and civil society representatives rather than general citizens. Citizen perspectives are reflected indirectly via secondary sources.
3. **Comparative References** – Comparative insights are used illustratively but the study does not adopt a cross-country comparative design.
4. **Strategic Horizon** – The proposed vision extends to **2050**, but it does not attempt to forecast leadership changes or specific political events. Instead, it outlines reform pathways consistent with Egypt's long-term development strategies (Vision 2030).

1.5.6 *Justification of Scope and Delimitations*

Defining scope and delimitations strengthens research validity by ensuring that findings remain contextually grounded. Three justifications are central:

- **Feasibility** – A broader thematic or geographical focus would dilute analytical depth. Concentrating on Egypt's LA ensures rigour and manageability.
- **Relevance** – By focusing on LA, the study directly addresses Egypt's most pressing governance gaps, especially the absence of elected councils since 2011 (El-Mahdi, 2022).
- **Originality** – Few studies integrate **historical legacies, institutional analysis, and stakeholder perspectives** in examining Egyptian LA. This study fills that gap, contributing new empirical insights and a long-term strategic vision.

1.5.7 *Conclusion*

The scope and delimitations of this study define its analytical boundaries and methodological commitments. By focusing on **Egypt's LA between 1981 and 2021**, applying a **qualitative interpretivist approach**, and situating findings within **global governance debates**, the study achieves a balance between focus and relevance. This framing ensures that while the research remains context-specific, it also generates insights with broader theoretical and policy significance for decentralisation and governance reform in the Global South.

1.6 **Research Methodological Orientation (Preview)**

This study is underpinned by a **qualitative, interpretivist methodological orientation** that reflects both the nature of the research questions and the contextual complexity of Egyptian Local Administration (LA). Methodology is not merely a technical choice; it shapes the epistemological stance of the study, the way data is

collected and interpreted, and the credibility of the conclusions drawn. In governance studies, particularly within authoritarian or hybrid contexts, qualitative methods are increasingly recognised as indispensable for capturing the depth, nuance, and lived experience of political and institutional processes (Creswell & Poth, 2023; Nowell et al., 2021).

1.6.1 Qualitative and Interpretivist Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm rests on the assumption that social and political realities are **socially constructed, context-dependent, and best understood through the perspectives of actors themselves** (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2021). Quantitative methods may identify correlations between fiscal decentralisation and service outcomes, but they cannot reveal how local officials, policymakers, and citizens interpret, negotiate, and respond to governance challenges.

For this reason, qualitative research is particularly suited to exploring the complex institutional environment of Egyptian LA, where legal frameworks, fiscal arrangements, and administrative practices intersect with historical legacies, political settlements, and social expectations. By employing qualitative inquiry, the study prioritises **depth over breadth, context over generalisation, and meaning over measurement**.

1.6.2 Data Sources and Triangulation

The study draws on multiple qualitative data sources to strengthen validity through **triangulation**:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with administrators, policymakers, and civil society representatives provide first-hand perspectives on challenges and opportunities.

- **Document analysis** of constitutional provisions, laws, policy frameworks, and donor reports enables the researcher to trace official narratives and reform commitments.
- **Contextual observation and secondary literature** supplement these sources, offering interpretive depth and situating findings within broader scholarly debates.

Triangulation enhances the **trustworthiness** of the study by cross-verifying evidence from diverse angles (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2021).

1.6.3 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Qualitative research requires explicit strategies to ensure rigour. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, the study employs four criteria:

1. **Credibility** – achieved through triangulation, prolonged engagement with the data, and member checks with selected participants.
2. **Transferability** – supported by thick description, allowing readers to assess the applicability of findings to other contexts (Tracy, 2021).
3. **Dependability** – ensured through an audit trail documenting methodological decisions and coding processes.
4. **Confirmability** – maintained by reflexive journaling and transparent handling of data, minimising researcher bias (Berger, 2021).

By applying these strategies, the study safeguards against subjectivity and enhances confidence in its findings.

1.6.4 Reflexivity and Positionality

The researcher's positionality is explicitly acknowledged. As both a scholar and a practitioner engaged in governance and development projects, the researcher brings

professional insight that facilitates access and interpretation. However, this position also introduces the risk of bias. Reflexive practices—including journaling, peer debriefing, and explicit recognition of assumptions—are adopted to mitigate these risks (Finlay, 2021).

Such reflexivity ensures that the study not only analyses LA in Egypt but also reflects critically on the researcher's own role in constructing knowledge.

1.6.5 Justification for Methodological Orientation

The methodological choices are justified by three main considerations:

1. **Nature of the Research Questions** – The study's questions are exploratory and interpretive, focusing on how challenges are experienced and how they may be reframed into opportunities. These questions require methods capable of capturing perceptions and narratives rather than statistical patterns.
2. **Complexity of the Context** – Egyptian LA is embedded in a politically sensitive and institutionally complex environment. Qualitative research offers the flexibility to adapt to this complexity and to uncover dynamics invisible to survey-based methods.
3. **Contribution to Scholarship and Policy** – By adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach, the study provides insights not only into the “what” of governance failures but also the “why” and “how,” producing findings that are relevant for both theory and practice (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2021).

1.6.6 Preview of Methodological Details

While the full methodology is presented in Chapter 3, this section previews its key elements:

- **Research Design** – A single-country qualitative case study.

- **Timeframe** – Analysis covering 1981–2021.
- **Data Collection** – Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and secondary sources.
- **Data Analysis** – Thematic analysis using coding, clustering, and interpretation, informed by the theoretical framework introduced earlier.
- **Ethics** – Informed consent, confidentiality, and safeguarding of participants.

This preview highlights how methodology is integrated into the overall structure of the thesis, linking the research problem and objectives with the analytical approach.

1.6.7 Conclusion

In sum, this study adopts a **qualitative, interpretivist, and reflexive methodological orientation** that prioritises context, meaning, and lived experience. By employing triangulation, ensuring trustworthiness, and embracing reflexivity, the study ensures methodological rigour while remaining sensitive to the political and institutional realities of Egyptian governance. This orientation is not only consistent with the research questions but also essential for producing findings that are both **scholarly and practically relevant**.

1.7 Reflexivity and Ethical Positioning (Preview)

The credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research depend not only on methodological rigour but also on the ethical and reflexive practices of the researcher. Because the study of governance in Egypt involves politically sensitive themes—such as centralisation, citizen participation, and accountability—it is essential to demonstrate how ethical safeguards and reflexive practices were integrated throughout the research process.

1.7.1 Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

Reflexivity requires the researcher to critically interrogate their own role, assumptions, and potential biases. In qualitative governance studies, researchers are never neutral observers; rather, they are participants in the process of constructing meaning (Finlay, 2021).

The researcher's positionality in this study reflects both strengths and risks. On one hand, professional experience in governance and development provides valuable insight and access to officials and civil society actors. On the other hand, such proximity risks shaping interpretations in ways that reflect the researcher's background or expectations. To address this, the study employs **reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and transparent acknowledgment of assumptions**. These practices help ensure that interpretations are grounded in participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's predispositions (Berger, 2021).

Reflexivity also extends to cultural and political sensitivity. As an Egyptian researcher, the author has insider knowledge of the socio-political context, but must remain vigilant against assuming shared meanings with participants. By explicitly foregrounding these dynamics, the study enhances the **confirmability** of its findings.

1.7.2 Ethical Principles

Ethical practice forms a core dimension of this study's design and implementation. The research follows international standards of research ethics (British Sociological Association, 2021; American Political Science Association, 2022), with particular emphasis on informed consent, confidentiality, and minimisation of harm.

1. **Informed Consent** – All participants were provided with information about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw

at any stage. Consent was obtained in writing or verbally (where appropriate), consistent with best practice in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

2. **Confidentiality** – Given the political sensitivity of governance topics in Egypt, strict safeguards were applied to protect identities. Pseudonyms were used, and identifying details were removed from transcripts and reports.
3. **Minimisation of Harm** – Questions were framed to avoid exposing participants to political risk. Interviews were conducted in safe environments, and participation was entirely voluntary.
4. **Data Security** – Interview notes and transcripts were stored in password-protected files, accessible only to the researcher.

By applying these principles, the study not only complies with ethical guidelines but also builds trust with participants, which is essential for collecting authentic narratives (Nowell et al., 2021).

1.7.3 Ethical Challenges in Authoritarian Contexts

Conducting research on governance in authoritarian or hybrid regimes presents distinctive challenges. Access to participants may be restricted, officials may be cautious in sharing views, and civil society actors may face political pressures (Ribot, 2022; Hassan, 2024). These challenges require careful navigation.

To mitigate risk, the researcher avoided questions that might endanger participants and instead focused on how stakeholders interpret governance challenges and reforms. The emphasis was on **perceptions, experiences, and practices** rather than politically sensitive critique. This approach allowed participants to share insights without fear of reprisal, while still generating rich empirical material.

1.7.4 Ensuring Trustworthiness through Ethical Reflexivity

Ethics and reflexivity are interwoven with the study's strategies for **trustworthiness**:

- **Credibility** – enhanced through member checks, ensuring participants recognised their views in the findings.
- **Transferability** – supported by thick description, allowing readers to assess relevance for other contexts (Tracy, 2021).
- **Dependability** – maintained by documenting ethical decisions and methodological adjustments in an audit trail.
- **Confirmability** – strengthened through reflexive journaling, which records how interpretations were shaped and checked against evidence (Berger, 2021).

By integrating ethics and reflexivity into trustworthiness, the study aligns with contemporary standards of qualitative governance research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2021).

1.7.5 Researcher–Participant Relationship

The study recognises that qualitative research involves a **relational dynamic** between researcher and participants. Building trust was particularly important in the Egyptian context, where governance discussions are sensitive. This was achieved by:

- Demonstrating respect for participants' knowledge and experiences.
- Ensuring transparency about the study's aims and limits.
- Listening actively and avoiding prescriptive or judgmental questioning.

These practices ensured that the relationship was collaborative rather than extractive, consistent with ethical qualitative inquiry (Nowell et al., 2021).

1.7.6 Contribution of Reflexivity and Ethics to the Study

The integration of reflexivity and ethics contributes to the character and importance of this research in three ways:

1. **Enhancing Validity** – By acknowledging positionality and applying reflexive safeguards, the study ensures findings are authentic and not distorted by researcher bias.
2. **Protecting Participants** – Ethical practices build participant trust, making it possible to access honest and nuanced perspectives.
3. **Demonstrating Integrity** – Explicit attention to reflexivity and ethics signals to scholarly and policy audiences that the research is rigorous, responsible, and trustworthy.

1.7.7 Conclusion

This section has demonstrated how reflexivity and ethical positioning form an integral part of the study's methodological orientation. By recognising the researcher's positionality, safeguarding participants, and aligning with global ethical standards, the study ensures integrity and trustworthiness. These practices are not supplementary but essential: they underpin the credibility of findings and strengthen the contribution of the research to both scholarly debates and practical reform agendas.

1.8 Organisation of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is designed to ensure clarity, coherence, and alignment between the research problem, objectives, methodology, and findings. Each chapter builds on the previous one to create a logically sequenced narrative that moves from identifying the research problem to proposing a long-term strategic vision for Local Administration (LA) reform in Egypt. The organisation of the thesis reflects

both academic convention in doctoral research and the thematic concerns of this study.

1.8.1 Chapter 1 – Introduction

The opening chapter sets the foundation for the entire thesis. It begins by situating the study within global and national debates on decentralisation, establishing the distinction between **Local Administration (LA)** and **Local Government (LG)**, and outlining why the Egyptian case provides a compelling context for analysis. It presents the **problem statement**, articulates the **objectives and research questions**, and explains the **character and importance of the study**. In addition, Chapter 1 introduces the **scope and delimitations**, previews the **methodological orientation**, and highlights the role of **reflexivity and ethics**. Together, these sections establish the rationale, direction, and contributions of the thesis.

1.8.2 Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The second chapter critically reviews the body of scholarship on governance, decentralisation, and public administration, with particular attention to the Global South and authoritarian contexts. It explores how centralisation and administrative legacies constrain local governance, while also analysing comparative cases—such as Morocco, South Africa, India, and Brazil—that illustrate pathways of reform. The literature review is not merely descriptive but analytical: it identifies gaps in existing research, demonstrates how Egypt's LA experience remains underexplored, and positions this study to fill that gap. By synthesising theoretical and empirical insights, Chapter 2 develops the **conceptual framework** that informs the research.

1.8.3 Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

The third chapter sets out the methodological framework in detail. It explains why a **qualitative, interpretivist case study** design was selected and how it aligns with the research objectives. The chapter describes the **data collection methods** (interviews, document analysis, and contextual investigation), the **sampling strategy**, and the **thematic analysis techniques** employed. It also explains how issues of **trustworthiness**—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were addressed, and how **ethical principles** such as informed consent and confidentiality were applied. Reflexivity is revisited here in greater depth, demonstrating the researcher's awareness of positionality and bias. This chapter assures the reader that the study was conducted with rigour, transparency, and integrity.

1.8.4 Chapter 4 – Findings and Analysis

The fourth chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, structured around the **thematic clusters of challenges and opportunities** identified in the theoretical framework. These include structural, financial, political, and socio-cultural obstacles, as well as transformative opportunities emerging from decentralisation reforms, technological innovation, and citizen participation. The analysis integrates participant perspectives with documentary evidence, providing a holistic understanding of Egypt's LA system. Findings are interpreted in relation to the research questions and situated within the broader literature, ensuring that they contribute to both empirical knowledge and theoretical debates.

1.8.5 Chapter 5 – Discussion, Strategic Vision, and Conclusion

The final chapter synthesises the study's findings and situates them within wider scholarly and policy debates. It addresses each research question explicitly,

showing how the findings contribute to academic knowledge and practical reform. The chapter proposes a **strategic vision for LA reform to 2050**, grounded in the realities of Egypt but informed by comparative international lessons. This vision outlines pathways for enhancing service delivery, strengthening accountability, and promoting citizen participation. The chapter concludes by highlighting the **theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practical contributions** of the study, as well as suggesting areas for future research.

1.8.6 Integrative Logic of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is integrative: each chapter builds upon the previous one and prepares the ground for the next. The **Introduction** defines the problem and objectives. The **Literature Review** situates the research within existing knowledge and develops the conceptual framework. The **Methodology** chapter explains how the research was conducted, ensuring rigour and trustworthiness. The **Findings and Analysis** chapter presents the evidence, while the **Discussion and Conclusion** synthesise insights and propose actionable recommendations. This sequencing ensures that the thesis moves logically from identifying challenges to articulating solutions, culminating in a roadmap for reform.

1.8.7 Conclusion

The organisation of the thesis reflects the interplay of historical analysis, empirical investigation, and future-oriented vision. By structuring the study into five interrelated chapters, the research maintains coherence while ensuring sufficient depth in each area. This design enables the thesis to make a balanced contribution: advancing academic debates on governance while providing practical

recommendations for transforming Egypt's LA into a more accountable, participatory, and citizen-centred institution.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Governance in developing and transitional states requires recognising the pressures that constrain institutions while also identifying potential reforms. In Egypt, the Local Administration (LA) system illustrates this paradox clearly. It is the closest interface between citizens and the state, responsible for services such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and infrastructure. Yet, it remains underfunded, centralised, and structurally weak—functioning more as an instrument of executive control than as a channel for citizen participation or innovation (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

This chapter reviews scholarship and policy analyses on LA in Egypt, situating the case within wider debates on governance, decentralisation, and public management, while drawing on comparative experiences. It highlights systemic obstacles—authoritarian centralisation, fiscal dependency, HR constraints, and inequality—alongside pressures of population growth, environmental stress, and globalisation. These dynamics intersect with debates on authoritarian resilience, path dependency, and institutional capacity.

2.1.1 The Role of Literature in Framing the Study

The review seeks to interrogate and synthesise prior research to identify gaps and build the study's conceptual framework. Three strands are especially important:

1. **Governance and Decentralisation Studies** – how centralised authority, legacies, and power dynamics shape local reform prospects.
2. **Public Management and Institutional Capacity** – how fiscal structures, organisational design, and HRM affect service delivery.
3. **Qualitative and Interpretivist Perspectives** – how governance is experienced by citizens, administrators, and community actors.

While much has been written on Egypt's governance, significant gaps remain on how local institutions mediate systemic pressures and how these could become opportunities for reform.

2.1.2 Global and Regional Context

Globally, decentralisation literature argues that effective local government improves accountability and service delivery when coupled with fiscal autonomy and safeguards (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). However, poor design can foster inequality and elite capture (Ribot, 2022). Egypt represents this dilemma: LA exists legally but lacks autonomy, exemplifying “decentralisation without democracy” (Cammett, 2022).

In MENA, similar centralisation patterns prevail. Morocco and Jordan pursued incremental reforms, while Tunisia advanced quickly post-2011 but faced setbacks. Egypt remains distinct in its persistent centralisation, reinforced by military dominance and executive priorities (Lust & Waldner, 2022).

Table 4

Comparative Approaches to Local Governance in MENA

Country	Reform Approach	Outcome	Lesson for Egypt
Morocco	Gradual decentralisation	Incremental improvements	Sequenced reforms endure
Jordan	Limited experimentation	Minimal empowerment	Fiscal autonomy essential
Tunisia	Rapid post-2011 reforms	Pushback, reversals	Institutional resilience key
Egypt	Persistent centralisation	Weak participation	Needs structural reform

Source: Adapted from Lust & Waldner (2022); Cammett (2022).

2.1.3 Egypt's Governance Paradox

Egypt's LA is **indispensable yet disempowered**. Citizens depend on it for daily services like waste collection and irrigation, yet decisions on budgets, staffing, and priorities remain centralised in Cairo. This makes LA “closest to the people but furthest from power” (El-Sayed, 2023).

The paradox is shaped by three interlocking factors:

- **Centralised authority** – administrative and fiscal powers concentrated in central ministries.
- **Financial scarcity** – inadequate budgets weaken service delivery.
- **Institutional fragility** – politicised appointments and weak HRM limit innovation.

As a result, LA operates mainly as an extension of the central state rather than an autonomous governance actor.

Photo: 2

Waste collection in Cairo, symbolising visible local service struggles



Source: Source: Stoddard, E. (2021, March 15). *The Coptic recyclers of Cairo's 'Garbage City'*. Geographical. <https://geographical.co.uk/science-environment/the-coptic-recyclers-of-cairos-garbage-city>

Photo 1 depicts a street-level waste collection scene in Cairo. It symbolises how citizens encounter local administration daily through visible service struggles such as waste management, highlighting both the indispensability and weakness of LA.

2.1.4 Why a Qualitative Lens is Necessary

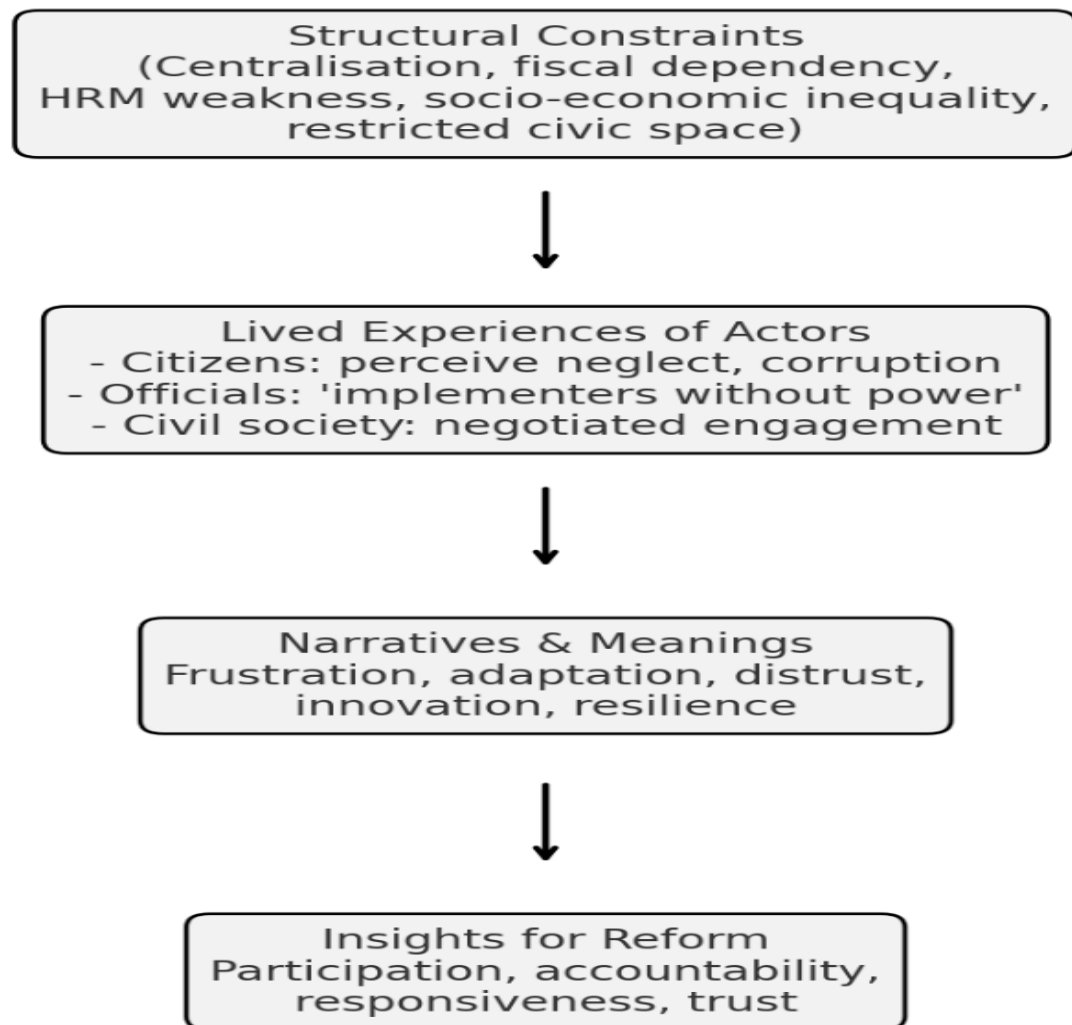
Most research on Egyptian governance is descriptive or policy-based, emphasising laws, transfers, or constitutional reforms. Underexplored is how these constraints are **experienced** by actors inside the system. A qualitative lens captures:

- Citizens' views of service deficits as neglect or corruption.
- Local officials' self-identification as "implementers without power."
- Civil society strategies to engage communities in restricted spaces.

Such narratives reveal the human dimension of governance: frustrations, strategies, and expectations shaping state–society interactions. This aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985/2018) concept of "trustworthiness" in qualitative work and Yanow & Schwartz-Shea's (2021) emphasis on reflexivity.

Figure 6

Conceptual value of qualitative approaches in governance research



Source: Adapted from Yanow & Schwartz-Shea (2021).

Figure 1 shows how structural constraints in Egypt's governance system shape the lived experiences of citizens, officials, and civil society. These experiences generate narratives of frustration and adaptation, which in turn provide insights for reform in participation, accountability, and trust.

2.1 Public Management Challenges in Egypt

Public management in Egypt is marked by structural rigidity, centralised authority, and socio-economic pressures that define the operating environment of Local Administration (LA). These difficulties are deeply rooted in Egypt's political economy and institutional legacies, forming the backdrop for any decentralisation or reform initiative.

Analysts argue that governance challenges arise not from a single factor but from the interaction of political, financial, social, and institutional dynamics (Grindle, 2023; Cammett, 2022). Since 1952, concentrated executive power has entrenched authoritarianism, restricting the autonomy of parliament, judiciary, and local councils (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024). Chronic fiscal pressures—amplified by population growth, youth unemployment, and recurring economic crises—have increased reliance on international institutions, whose conditionalities often prioritise austerity over inclusive development (IMF, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Inequalities exacerbate these challenges. Investment flows disproportionately to Cairo and coastal cities, leaving rural Upper Egypt underdeveloped (OECD, 2022). At the same time, the military's expanding role in infrastructure and local projects raises questions of transparency and civilian oversight (Sayigh, 2021). With youth disillusionment, restricted civic space, and media repression, citizens face fewer channels for meaningful engagement, reinforcing cycles of distrust (Freedom House, 2023).

For LA, the burden is particularly acute. It carries responsibility for frontline service delivery—from sanitation to healthcare—while operating under upwardly concentrated authority, constrained finances, and limited citizen input. These

interlocking pressures repeatedly undermine reforms, leaving LA under-resourced, unaccountable, and unable to meet local expectations (Sika, 2012; El-Sayed, 2023).

This section explores Egypt's public management challenges across fourteen interrelated dimensions: governance pressures; authoritarian rule; fiscal hardships; international donor influence; inequality and the urban–rural divide; militarisation; youth unemployment; social policy responses; civic restrictions; institutional weakness; regional geopolitics; political transitions; external diplomacy; and their cumulative effects on LA.

Together, these factors reveal not isolated obstacles but a reinforcing cycle of centralisation, inefficiency, and mistrust. They highlight the necessity of comprehensive, qualitative inquiry into how such pressures are experienced by citizens and officials, and how they shape the prospects for local governance reform.

2.1.1 Overview: An Interlocking Set of Governance Pressures

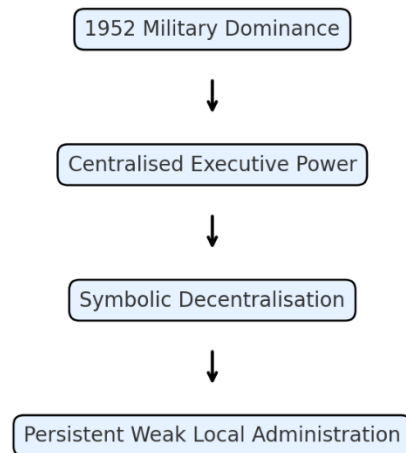
Public management in Egypt operates in a political environment shaped by hierarchical authority, fiscal scarcity, and limited autonomy. Decades of centralisation have left Local Administration (LA) less a space for citizen participation and more an extension of executive control. This paradox is clear: LA is tasked with service delivery yet denied the authority, resources, and institutional culture needed to fulfil its mandate (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.1.1.1 Centralisation and Authoritarian Path Dependency

Authoritarian governance persists through path dependency, where legacies of military dominance and bureaucratic rigidity continue to define outcomes (Pierson, 2022; Lust & Waldner, 2022). Decentralisation attempts have been symbolic; local councils, dissolved or unelected since 2011, lack democratic legitimacy (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015).

Figure 7

Authoritarian path dependency in Egyptian governance



Source: Adapted from Pierson (2022).

2.1.1.2 Fiscal Dependency and Resource Scarcity

Local budgets rely almost entirely on central transfers, which prioritise national security and macroeconomic stability (World Bank, 2022). This fiscal structure leaves LA unable to respond flexibly to citizen needs, producing stalled infrastructure projects and unreliable services (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

Table 5*Fiscal Dependency in Egypt's Local Administration*

Indicator	Centralised Control	Impact on LA
Budget authority	Central ministries	Minimal local discretion
Revenue generation	Negligible locally	No fiscal independence
Service expenditure priority	National security	Social services underfunded

Source: World Bank (2022); OECD (2022); UNDP (2023).

2.1.1.3 Socio-Economic Inequalities and Citizen Expectations

Population growth, urbanisation, and poverty create surging demand for services. Yet weak institutions leave LA unable to deliver, fuelling discontent. Citizens interpret deficits not as technical failures but as neglect and exclusion (El-Sayed, 2023; Freedom House, 2023).

Photo: 3

Informal settlement in Greater Cairo highlighting unequal access to basic services.



Source: Cities Alliance. (2008). *Cairo's informal areas: Between urban challenges and hidden potentials*. Washington, DC: Cities Alliance.

2.1.1.4 Militarisation and Policy Execution

Since 1952, the military's privileged position has expanded into civilian sectors like infrastructure and education (Cammett, 2022). Militarisation sidelines administrators, reduces transparency, and fosters dependence on security directives over community consultation.

2.1.1.5 Weak Institutions and Administrative Inefficiency

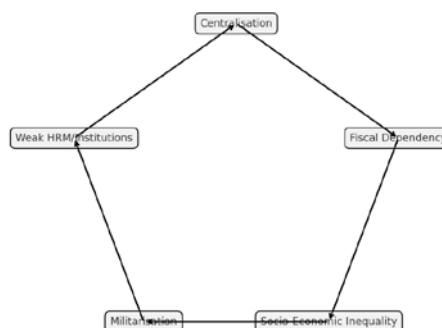
LA suffers from outdated legal frameworks, politicised appointments, and weak HRM. Administrators often call themselves “implementers without agency,” reflecting a governance model that values control over innovation (El-Mahdi, 2022; Grindle, 2023).

2.1.1.6 Interdependence of Challenges

These pressures reinforce each other: centralisation fosters fiscal dependency, inequalities amplify fragility, militarisation entrenches authoritarianism, and weak HRM blocks adaptation. Together they create a governance trap where LA is overloaded, underfunded, and politically constrained.

Figure 8

Cycle of interlocking governance challenges in Egypt



Source: Adapted from Grindle (2023).

2.1.1.7 Why This Matters for Local Administration

For LA, these systemic pressures manifest as:

1. Unmet Expectations – inability to deliver basic services.
2. Eroded Trust – perceptions of neglect fuel citizen disillusionment.
3. Administrative Paralysis – rigid hierarchies limit responsiveness.
4. Missed Reform Opportunities – participatory initiatives blocked by centralisation.

The literature concludes that LA inefficiency is not accidental but structurally designed to reflect Egypt's authoritarian logic (Lust & Waldner, 2022)..

2.1.2 Authoritarian Rule and Concentrated Power

Authoritarian rule has been the defining feature of Egypt's governance system for much of the past seven decades, shaping every aspect of state–society relations and leaving an enduring imprint on Local Administration (LA). The persistence of authoritarianism explains why decentralisation remains largely rhetorical, why public management reforms rarely take root, and why local institutions are systematically designed to be weak. Concentrated power in the executive and security apparatus has ensured that LA operates not as a platform for community representation but as an extension of central authority, tasked primarily with maintaining order and implementing directives from above (Cammett, 2022; Lust & Waldner, 2022).

2.1.2.1 Historical Evolution of Authoritarian Centralisation

Since the 1952 Free Officers' Revolution, Egypt has been governed by regimes that prioritised **central control** over political pluralism or local autonomy. Under Gamal Abdel Nasser, local governance structures were subordinated to the one-party system and treated as administrative arms of the state. Later, under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, limited political openings were permitted, but local councils remained

dominated by the ruling party, serving as instruments for distributing patronage rather than genuine mechanisms of accountability (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015). The 2011 revolution briefly disrupted this trajectory, raising hopes for decentralisation and participatory governance. Yet the return of authoritarian consolidation after 2013 under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi reasserted **executive supremacy**, further weakening local institutions. This **path dependency** has created entrenched patterns of authoritarian governance that persist regardless of leadership changes (Pierson, 2022).

2.1.2.2 Centralisation of Authority

A hallmark of authoritarian governance in Egypt is the extreme centralisation of decision-making. Local governors, though nominally responsible for managing governorates, are appointed directly by the president and accountable to the Ministry of Local Development rather than to citizens. Budgetary authority rests almost entirely with central ministries, leaving LA financially dependent and politically subordinate (World Bank, 2022).

From a qualitative perspective, administrators often describe themselves as **“implementers, not decision-makers.”** They follow directives from Cairo, even when these clash with local priorities. Citizens, in turn, perceive LA as powerless, reinforcing a cycle of mistrust and disengagement (El-Mahdi, 2022).

2.1.2.3 Security Apparatus and Political Control

The security apparatus plays a pivotal role in maintaining authoritarian control at the local level. Police and intelligence services closely monitor local councils, civil society organisations, and community initiatives. Civic associations require approval and face restrictions that limit their capacity to partner with LA. In many governorates, local

decision-making is effectively vetted by security agencies, reducing LA to an instrument of surveillance rather than service delivery (Cammatt, 2022).

This securitisation has a chilling effect on citizen participation. Qualitative accounts reveal how community leaders refrain from engaging with LA due to fears of repression, while administrators avoid collaboration with NGOs to protect themselves from suspicion. The result is a **hollowing out of civic space**, where authoritarian control suppresses the very partnerships needed for responsive governance (Freedom House, 2023).

2.1.2.4 Legal and Institutional Frameworks

The legal framework for local governance in Egypt reflects this authoritarian orientation. Although the 2014 Constitution promised greater decentralisation, including elected councils and fiscal autonomy, these provisions have never been implemented. Draft laws on local administration remain stalled in parliament, while existing legislation continues to prioritise central oversight (Hassan, 2024).

This gap between rhetoric and reality illustrates what scholars call “**authoritarian resilience**”: regimes adopt reformist language to appease domestic and international audiences, while ensuring that institutional design preserves executive dominance (Lust & Waldner, 2022). For LA, this means that even legal reforms intended to strengthen participation or autonomy are either delayed, diluted, or circumvented in practice.

2.1.2.5 Implications for Public Management

Authoritarian concentration of power produces specific public management outcomes:

1. **Lack of Accountability** – With no elected councils, LA officials are accountable upward to central ministries rather than downward to citizens.

2. **Rigid Hierarchies** – Administrators operate in a command-and-control structure that discourages innovation.
3. **Policy Inconsistency** – Central priorities shift with leadership changes, producing instability at the local level.
4. **Democratic Deficit** – Citizen participation is minimal, reducing trust and legitimacy.

These outcomes ensure that LA cannot function as a genuine governance institution. Instead, it becomes part of an authoritarian administrative machine, valued for compliance rather than creativity.

2.1.2.6 Qualitative Experiences of Authoritarian Rule

Qualitative research underscores how authoritarianism is lived at the local level. Citizens frequently describe LA as “absent” or “unresponsive,” not because staff are unwilling but because they lack authority. Local officials recount frustration at being micromanaged by ministries in Cairo, unable to tailor policies to community needs. Civil society actors narrate experiences of harassment and exclusion, reinforcing their perception that local governance is closed to partnership.

These narratives demonstrate that authoritarian rule is not an abstract concept but a daily reality shaping how people experience the state. They also highlight the **human costs of centralisation**: disempowerment, frustration, and mistrust.

2.1.2.7 Comparative Perspectives

Comparative evidence shows that authoritarian regimes often adopt similar strategies. In China, local governments enjoy limited autonomy but remain tightly supervised by the Communist Party. In sub-Saharan Africa, authoritarian leaders frequently use local governments as patronage networks, distributing resources to loyal elites while suppressing opposition (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt fits this broader

pattern, illustrating how authoritarian resilience prevents decentralisation from becoming meaningful reform.

2.1.2.8 Why Authoritarian Rule Matters for LA

Authoritarian concentration of power matters for LA because it shapes not only **what local governments can do**, but also **how they are perceived**. Citizens blame LA for service failures, yet administrators themselves recognise they are structurally disempowered. This mismatch undermines trust, reduces participation, and perpetuates inefficiency. It also explains why technical reforms — such as improving budgeting systems or introducing ICT — often fail: without political decentralisation, administrative reforms remain superficial.

2.1.3 Persistent Financial Hardships and Social Discontent

Egypt's public management challenges are deeply linked to chronic fiscal pressures. Over four decades, repeated crises—from 1990s structural adjustment to the 2008 global downturn, the 2011 upheavals, and recent shocks such as COVID-19 and the Ukraine war—have created a governance environment of scarcity and austerity (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2023). This context directly constrains Local Administration (LA), which must deliver services under shrinking budgets.

Financial hardship is visible at both the **macro level**—external debt, inflation, and deficits—and the **micro level**, where citizens face rising costs, poor services, and widening inequality. LA, as the frontline institution, absorbs citizen grievances but lacks the fiscal capacity to respond.

2.1.1.1 Macro-Economic Vulnerabilities and Fiscal Stress

Egypt's economy relies on imports, limited industrial diversity, and volatile revenues from tourism, remittances, and the Suez Canal (Hassan, 2024). Fiscal shocks have pushed governments toward IMF programmes and austerity. While

stabilising indicators, subsidy cuts on food, fuel, and electricity reduce welfare and purchasing power. For LA, this means smaller transfers and unfunded mandates, with service expectations rising as resources shrink (World Bank, 2022).

2.1.1.2 Local Budgets and Resource Scarcity

Locally, underfunding is acute. LA depends on central transfers that are often delayed, insufficient, or earmarked for specific projects (OECD, 2022). Administrators describe “paper budgets” that exist in name only, forcing schools, clinics, and waste services to operate without adequate staff or equipment (El-Sayed, 2023). Citizens often view such failures as neglect or corruption, even when caused by structural fiscal limits.

2.1.1.3 Social Inequality and Rising Costs of Living

Fiscal stress compounds inequality. Rural Upper Egypt records the highest poverty, while urban residents face high housing costs, overcrowding, and inflation (UNDP, 2023). Perceived injustice—where elite districts enjoy superior services while poorer areas are neglected—fuels anger. Many describe LA as “present only to collect taxes” (El-Mahdi, 2022).

2.1.1.4 Cycles of Discontent and Protest

Egypt’s fiscal crises have historically sparked unrest: the 1977 bread riots, Mahalla’s 2008 strikes, and the 2011 uprising (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015). More recent austerity-driven protests are tightly controlled, but discontent remains widespread. Administrators, “caught between citizens and Cairo” (El-Sayed, 2023), absorb blame for shortages they cannot address.

2.1.1.5 Public Management Consequences

Fiscal stress produces:

1. **Service erosion** – declining healthcare, education, sanitation.

2. **Inefficiency** – reliance on stopgap solutions.
3. **Accountability gaps** – LA blamed locally but accountable upward.
4. **Donor dependency** – reliance on external funds undermines local ownership.

This fosters “governance by scarcity,” where institutions manage deprivation rather than development (Grindle, 2023).

2.1.1.6 Comparative Perspectives

Similar dynamics appear globally. In Africa, local governments act as buffers between austerity states and citizens (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). In Latin America, 1980s structural adjustment created “delegated local crises,” with municipalities tasked to implement austerity without autonomy (Grindle, 2023). Egypt mirrors these patterns.

2.1.1.7 Qualitative Narratives of Hardship

Qualitative accounts highlight the lived effects:

- Citizens complain of failing schools, unpaid doctors, and uncollected waste.
- Farmers cite irrigation shortages.
- Administrators describe themselves as “crisis managers,” demoralised by tasks they cannot fulfil (El-Sayed, 2023).

These narratives reveal not just material deprivation but also a symbolic breakdown in trust, with LA perceived as absent or neglectful.

2.1.4 International Assistance, IMF Engagement, and Coordinated Aid

International assistance has strongly influenced Egypt’s economic and governance path over the last four decades. Successive governments relied on international financial institutions (IFIs), bilateral donors, and multilateral agencies for fiscal relief, projects, and reform support. While aid has provided financial resources and supported infrastructure, it has also reinforced centralisation, constrained local

fiscal autonomy, and generated discontent by linking assistance to austerity (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

For Local Administration (LA), aid has been a **double-edged sword**. Donors occasionally fund local projects, but most resources flow through central ministries, leaving LA marginalised and undermining its legitimacy.

2.2.4.1 IMF Engagement and Structural Adjustment

Egypt's ties with the IMF have been central: the 1990s adjustment programmes, loans in 2016, and new agreements in 2022 all promoted macro-stability through subsidy cuts, devaluation, and fiscal consolidation (Hassan, 2024).

These measures reduced deficits but imposed heavy costs:

- Fuel and food subsidies slashed → higher household expenses.
- Public wages stagnated → reduced purchasing power.
- Poverty widened, especially in rural areas (UNDP, 2023).

For LA, austerity meant shrinking transfers and rising citizen anger. Local officials, excluded from policy design, described IMF mandates as “impossible” to implement (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.4.2 World Bank and Development Lending

The World Bank provided loans and technical support for infrastructure, education, and safety nets. Yet projects are designed and implemented centrally, with LA relegated to logistics. School construction, sanitation, and other projects typically bypass local councils, reinforcing perceptions of LA as powerless implementers (World Bank, 2022).

2.2.4.3 Bilateral Donors and Gulf Assistance

Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, pledged billions after 2013 to stabilise the regime, channelling funds through central agencies or military enterprises (Cammatt, 2022). Western donors (US, EU) supported governance reform and civil society, but political sensitivities limited impact; programmes were scaled back or redirected toward security. Civil society reports donor funding constrained by state restrictions (Freedom House, 2023).

2.2.4.4 Conditionalities and Sovereignty Concerns

Conditionalities tied to aid—fiscal discipline, privatisation, reforms—fuel debates over sovereignty. Critics argue they prioritise macro-stability over welfare, widening inequality and mistrust (Grindle, 2023). Citizens often see aid as serving elites or foreign interests. At the local level, residents sometimes reject donor projects as irrelevant or disconnected (El-Mahdi, 2022).

2.2.4.5 Civic Exclusion and Marginalisation of LA

Donors often bypass LA due to concerns over capacity or corruption, preferring central agencies or NGOs. Administrators express frustration at being excluded from consultations, while citizens perceive LA as irrelevant. This perpetuates weakness: LA is sidelined because it is weak, and it remains weak because it is sidelined.

2.2.4.6 Comparative Perspectives

Other regions show similar patterns. In sub-Saharan Africa, donor bypassing of municipalities undermined sustainability (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). In Latin America, IFI programmes weakened local capacity, while in Southeast Asia participatory models strengthened governance. Comparative evidence suggests aid effectiveness depends less on money than on institutional inclusion.

2.2.4.7 Implications for Public Management

International assistance shapes Egypt's governance in four main ways:

1. **Fiscal Relief** – stabilises budgets but increases dependency.
2. **Centralisation Reinforced** – funds managed through central ministries, sidelining LA.
3. **Social Discontent** – austerity-linked aid deepens inequality.
4. **Institutional Exclusion** – LA excluded from reform, perpetuating weakness.

These dynamics illustrate “externalised governance,” where external actors shape domestic institutions without empowering them (Cammatt, 2022).

2.1.5 Social Inequality and the Urban–Rural Divide

Social inequality has long shaped Egypt’s development, citizen trust, and institutional legitimacy. Despite promises of inclusive growth, disparities in wealth and services remain stark. The most persistent inequality is the **urban–rural divide**: Cairo and Alexandria enjoy infrastructure, employment, and services, while rural governorates—especially in Upper Egypt—remain poor and underdeveloped.

For Local Administration (LA), this divide creates governance challenges. Urban LA contends with rapid urbanisation and middle-class demands, while rural LA struggles with poverty and neglect. In both contexts, inequality erodes trust, with citizens viewing LA as either ineffective or complicit in unequal distribution (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.2.5.1 Dimensions of Inequality

Egypt’s inequality is multidimensional:

- **Income:** Official statistics suggest moderate disparities, but hidden inequalities persist in access to schools, healthcare, and housing. Elites benefit from private systems, while the poor rely on overstretched public services (World Bank, 2022).

- **Geography:** Rural Upper Egypt has poverty rates above 50%, compared to under 20% in Cairo (UNDP, 2023). Infrastructure gaps in sanitation, electricity, and transport reinforce exclusion.
- **Services:** Rural schools lack teachers and facilities; rural hospitals lack staff and equipment. Informal urban settlements also face weak services (OECD, 2022).
- **Gender:** Rural women face compounded disadvantages in education, health, and employment (Freedom House, 2023).

Table 6*Dimensions of Inequality in Egypt*

Dimension	Evidence	Implications
Income	Elites rely on private services; poor depend on weak public systems	Reinforces class segregation
Geography	Upper Egypt >50% poverty vs. Cairo <20%	Entrenched regional disparities
Services	Shortages in rural schools & clinics	Perceptions of neglect
Gender	Rural women excluded from opportunities	Reinforces cycles of exclusion

Source: World Bank (2022); UNDP (2023); OECD (2022); Freedom House (2023).

2.2.5.2 The Urban–Rural Divide in Historical Context

Egypt's development strategies historically prioritised urban centres. Nasser's industrialisation concentrated investment in Cairo; Sadat and Mubarak's liberalisation further widened gaps as private capital flowed to cities (Cammett, 2022). The 2011 revolution briefly raised rural grievances, but subsequent governments did little to address them. This path dependency entrenches rural neglect (Pierson, 2022).

2.2.5.3 Implications for Local Administration

Inequality generates direct challenges for LA:

1. **Unequal Capacity** – urban LA has larger budgets and skilled staff; rural LA remains underfunded.

2. **Citizen Disillusionment** – rural residents see LA as absent; urban residents blame inefficiency.
3. **Conflict Potential** – inequalities fuel resentment and tensions.
4. **Policy Imbalance** – national programmes prioritise high-visibility urban projects.

2.2.5.4 Qualitative Experiences of Inequality

Narratives reveal how inequality is lived:

- Rural citizens report walking hours to access clinics or sending children to overcrowded schools.
- Urban poor in informal settlements complain of erratic waste collection and electricity.
- Local administrators describe frustration at being blamed while receiving inadequate budgets (El-Sayed, 2023).

Photo 3

Overcrowded classroom in rural Upper Egypt, illustrating educational inequality.

Source: UNDP (2023).

2.2.5.5 Policy Responses and Limitations

The *Hayah Karima* (“Decent Life”) programme, launched in 2019, expanded rural services in schools, health, and sanitation (OECD, 2022). While welcomed, it faces three limitations:

1. **Centralisation** – projects designed by central ministries, LA excluded.
2. **Short-Term Focus** – addresses immediate needs without institutional reform.
3. **Limited Participation** – minimal community consultation reduces ownership.

2.2.5.6 Comparative Perspectives

Globally, rural neglect is common. In India, uneven development spurred decentralisation demands; in Africa, capital–periphery divides undermined legitimacy; in Morocco, gradual decentralisation improved rural services (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). These cases suggest inequality narrows only when local governments gain fiscal autonomy and participatory tools.

2.2.5.7 Why Inequality Matters for Governance

Unequal service delivery fuels perceptions of bias and corruption, undermining cohesion, tax compliance, and political participation. For LA, persistent inequality erodes legitimacy and weakens citizens' faith in governance.

2.1.6 *Militarisation of Policy Execution and Service Delivery*

Militarisation is a defining feature of Egypt's governance system. Since the 1952 Free Officers' Revolution, the armed forces have played a central role in politics, economics, and administration. In the twenty-first century, this dominance expanded into civilian sectors such as infrastructure, health, education, and food supply. Militarisation reshapes state–society relations, with security priorities driving development and civilian institutions—including Local Administration (LA)—subordinated to military authority (Cammett, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.1.1.1 Historical Roots of Militarisation

From Nasser's state-led development to Mubarak's placement of officers in civilian posts, the military has remained at the core of power. After 2011, it positioned itself as guarantor of stability, culminating in the 2013 coup and consolidation under President Sisi. Since then, retired generals have frequently become governors, ministers, or heads of state enterprises (Lust & Waldner, 2022). Militarisation thus exhibits path dependency, reproducing itself across decades (Pierson, 2022).

2.1.1.2 Expansion into Civilian Service Delivery

In recent years, the military has overseen large infrastructure projects through the Engineering Authority, while also managing food distribution, vaccination drives, and even waste collection (World Bank, 2022). Though efficient, these interventions marginalise LA, which is relegated to logistical support. Administrators often describe themselves as “spectators” to projects carried out in their jurisdictions (El-Sayed, 2023).

Figure 2.6

Expansion of Military Role in Civilian Sectors

[Flow diagram showing: Infrastructure → Food distribution → Health campaigns → Waste management.]

Source: Adapted from World Bank (2022).

2.1.1.3 Governors and Security Oversight

Militarisation is most evident in the appointment of governors, often retired generals. Their priorities emphasise order and surveillance over participation or planning (El-Mahdi, 2022). For citizens, this translates into limited consultation, while administrators work under a “command-and-control” environment.

2.1.1.4 Implications for Local Administration

Militarisation affects LA in three key ways:

1. **Loss of Autonomy** – sidelined in planning and decision-making.
2. **Distorted Priorities** – projects framed through a security lens.
3. **Weakened Trust** – citizens see the military, not LA, as the true authority.

2.1.1.5 Citizens’ Perspectives on Militarisation

Community accounts highlight both admiration and exclusion. Citizens often praise the scale of military projects but criticise their lack of relevance to local needs. Roads and housing may be built, while schools and clinics remain neglected. Officials

describe being informed of projects only after decisions are finalised, reinforcing their marginalisation (Freedom House, 2023; El-Sayed, 2023).

Photo: 4

Military-led road construction project in Greater Cairo, bypassing local councils.



Military-led road construction project in Greater Cairo, bypassing local councils

Source: Freedom House (2023).

2.1.1.6 Comparative Perspectives

Other states illustrate similar patterns. In Pakistan, the military dominates public administration; in Thailand, juntas frame development as a security concern. Comparative evidence shows militarisation delivers short-term efficiency but weakens civilian bureaucracies over time (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt reflects this trajectory.

2.1.1.7 Public Management Consequences

Militarisation produces specific outcomes:

- **Faster Execution** – projects often completed efficiently.

- **Exclusion** – limited citizen and LA participation.
- **Erosion of Civilian Capacity** – LA loses expertise and initiative.
- **Centralisation Reinforced** – military dominance deepens authoritarian path dependency.

These outcomes illustrate how militarisation undermines decentralisation, participation, and accountability—the very principles LA is meant to embody.

2.1.7 Youth Unemployment, Underemployment, and Political Disillusion

Egypt’s demographic profile is dominated by youth, with over 60 percent of the population under 30 (United Nations, 2023). This “youth bulge” is often seen as a potential demographic dividend, yet in practice it is marked by widespread unemployment, underemployment, and precarious work. These conditions fuel political disillusion, weaken trust in institutions, and create governance pressures that fall heavily on Local Administration (LA).

2.2.7.1 The Scope of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment consistently exceeds national averages: while overall rates hover at 7–9 percent, youth unemployment is around 20–25 percent, with graduates especially affected (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Underemployment is also widespread, driven by:

- **Education–labour mismatch** – Graduates trained in fields with limited demand (Hassan, 2024).
- **Informal sector dominance** – Around 60 percent of new jobs are informal, offering little security (OECD, 2022).
- **Gender disparities** – Women face significantly higher unemployment due to social and structural barriers (Freedom House, 2023).

Table 7*Youth Employment Challenges in Egypt*

Issue	Evidence	Implications
Graduate unemployment	20–25%	Skills mismatch, wasted potential
Informal jobs	~60% new jobs	Low security, no benefits
Female youth jobless	Higher than men	Gendered exclusion

Source: World Bank (2022); UNDP (2023); OECD (2022).

2.2.7.2 Youth and Local Administration

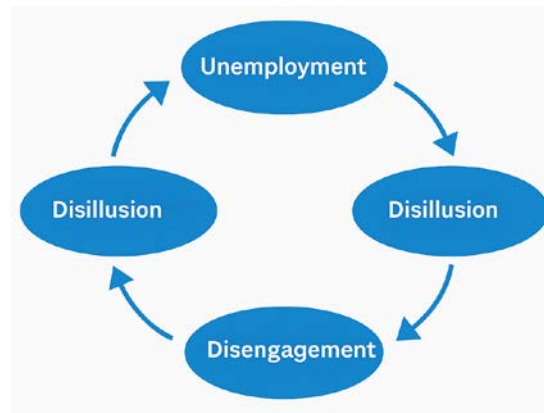
LA bears the brunt of youth frustrations but lacks capacity to respond. Youth view LA as inaccessible and patronage-based, while administrators complain they are expected to “solve youth problems” without resources (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.7.3 Political Disillusion and Protest

The 2011 revolution was largely youth-driven, rooted in unemployment, inequality, and corruption (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015). Today, many young people are disillusioned with formal politics, preferring online activism. With local councils unelected, institutional channels for youth engagement remain absent, fostering alienation and raising risks of unrest (UNDP, 2023).

Figure 9

Cycle of Youth Exclusion and Political Disillusion



Source: Author's adaptation from Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds (2015); UNDP (2023).

2.2.7.4 Social Consequences of Youth Disillusion

Youth exclusion produces broader social impacts:

- Delayed marriage and family formation.
- Rising migration aspirations.
- Reliance on precarious informal work.
- Growing mental health pressures (UNDP, 2023).

2.2.7.5 Comparative Perspectives

Tunisia shows how youth unemployment triggered political upheaval; in Africa, exclusion often fuels migration or mobilisation. By contrast, Indonesia and South Africa reduced risks through youth-targeted employment schemes and participatory councils (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt's failure to replicate such mechanisms illustrates how authoritarianism prevents LA from engaging its largest demographic.

2.2.7.6 Citizen Narratives and Qualitative Insights

Qualitative studies reveal frustration:

- Graduates report nepotism and long job queues.
- Young women cite childcare and transport barriers.
- Informal workers describe daily insecurity.

Administrators portray youth initiatives as top-down, donor-driven, and disconnected from local realities (El-Sayed, 2023).

Photo: 5

Young Egyptians protesting unemployment in Cairo, 2011



Source: Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds (2015).

2.2.7.7 Why Youth Exclusion Matters for Governance

Youth unemployment undermines governance by:

1. **Alienation** – declining participation.
2. **Discontent** – rising risk of protest.
3. **Legitimacy deficits** – LA seen as irrelevant.
4. **Missed opportunity** – loss of potential demographic dividend.

2.2.7.8 Pathways Forward

The literature highlights four possible strategies:

- **Decentralised training** – vocational programmes designed locally.
- **Microfinance & entrepreneurship** – support for youth-led businesses.
- **Participatory councils** – elected bodies with youth representation.
- **Digital engagement** – platforms linking youth to services and opportunities.

These measures must combine economic inclusion with political participation to rebuild trust.

2.1.8 Policy Remedies for Socioeconomic Imbalance and Inclusion

Since Nasser's redistributive policies in the 1950s, Egypt has launched numerous initiatives to reduce inequality, from food subsidies to the *Hayah Karima* ("Decent Life") programme. Yet despite expanded programmes, socio-economic disparities, high poverty rates, and exclusion of marginalised groups remain persistent.

For Local Administration (LA), these policies provide opportunities but also challenges. While new programmes deliver resources and visibility, their **centralised design and top-down management** sideline LA, leaving it responsible for implementation without ownership or sustainability (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.1.8.1 National Poverty Reduction and Social Protection

Key national programmes include:

- **Takaful and Karama (2015)** – Conditional cash transfers targeting poor households, women, and the elderly. Coverage expanded but exclusion errors persist, especially in rural areas (World Bank, 2022).
- **Food Subsidies** – The ration card system remains a vital safety net, though reforms have reduced coverage and efficiency (UNDP, 2023).
- **Employment Initiatives** – Short-term youth employment schemes provide training but often fail to connect with local labour markets (OECD, 2022).

These programmes rely on **centralised targeting and delivery**, limiting LA's role in adapting them to local contexts.

Table 8*National Social Protection Programmes in Egypt*

Programme	Objective	Limitations
Takaful & Karama	Cash transfers	Exclusion errors, uneven coverage
Food Subsidies	Affordable staples	Leakage, inefficiency
Youth Employment Project	Training & jobs	Short-term, little local link

Source: World Bank (2022); UNDP (2023); OECD (2022).

2.1.8.2 The Hayah Karima Programme

Launched in 2019, *Hayah Karima* is Egypt's most ambitious rural development plan, investing in housing, sanitation, education, and healthcare in thousands of villages (OECD, 2022).

Achievements include new schools, clinics, and infrastructure. Yet challenges persist:

1. **Centralised planning** – Minimal LA or community input.
2. **Limited participation** – Citizens treated as recipients, not partners.
3. **Sustainability** – Maintenance falls on underfunded LA.

Citizens welcome improvements but describe projects as “state gifts,” highlighting their lack of ownership (El-Sayed, 2023).

Photo 6

Hayah Karima housing development in rural Upper Egypt



Source: OECD (2022).

2.2.8.3 Targeting Inequality and Marginalised Groups

Policy remedies also target inequality across groups:

- **Gender Equality** – Employment and education initiatives exist, but childcare, transport, and cultural norms remain barriers (Freedom House, 2023).
- **Disability Inclusion** – Employment quotas mandated by law but weakly enforced (UNDP, 2023).
- **Regional Development** – Targeted investments in Upper Egypt, though implementation is uneven and LA excluded from planning.

2.2.8.4 International Support and Policy Alignment

Donors such as the UNDP, EU, and World Bank support SDG- and Vision 2030–aligned programmes. However, most funding bypasses LA, channelled instead through central ministries or NGOs (Cammatt, 2022). As a result, sustainability suffers once external funding ends.

2.2.8.5 Structural Barriers to Effective Remedies

Three systemic barriers limit effectiveness:

1. **Centralisation** – Nationally designed, locally implemented.
2. **Institutional Weakness** – LA lacks resources to sustain programmes.
3. **Exclusionary Practices** – Minimal citizen participation perpetuates inequality.

2.2.8.6 Comparative Perspectives

Comparative cases highlight alternatives:

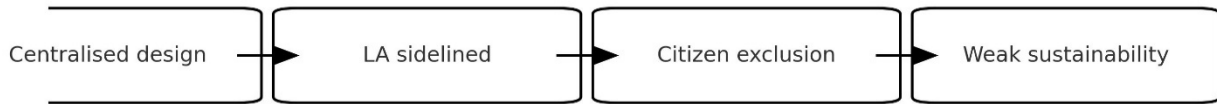
- **Brazil** – Participatory budgeting reduced urban inequalities.
- **Morocco** – Decentralisation empowered rural councils, strengthening ownership.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa** – Donor-driven projects collapsed after withdrawal, showing risks of bypassing local institutions (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

Egypt aligns more with the latter model, achieving short-term gains without structural transformation.

2.2.8.7 Qualitative Narratives

Narratives show policy gaps:

- Villagers welcome *Hayah Karima* but lament exclusion from planning.
- Women in Takaful report delays and corruption.
- Local officials feel disempowered, forced to implement projects without authority or resources (El-Sayed, 2023).

Figure 10*Disconnect Between Policy Design and Local Experience*

Source: Author's synthesis based on OECD (2022) and El-Sayed (2023).

2.1.9 Civic Space, Media, and Political Repression

An open civic space and free media are essential for democratic governance, accountability, and citizen participation (Carothers & Youngs, 2022). In Egypt, however, these freedoms have been steadily curtailed, especially after the 2013 military intervention. Civil society organisations (CSOs), journalists, and activists face restrictive laws, surveillance, and harassment. Digital platforms are also tightly monitored. This climate criminalises dissent, silences oversight, and forces Local Administration (LA) to operate within repression that undermines responsiveness and legitimacy (Freedom House, 2023; Hassan, 2024).

2.2.9.1 Shrinking Civic Space

Civil society expanded after the 2011 revolution, but by 2014 space contracted sharply. Laws such as Law 70 of 2017 (amended in 2019) imposed heavy registration and funding restrictions, effectively criminalising activism (Cammatt, 2022). For LA, this removed potential partners in service delivery and engagement. Officials report being directed to work only with “approved NGOs,” further reducing citizen trust (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.9.2 Media Control and Censorship

Independent media that flourished briefly between 2011–2013 has been brought under pro-government ownership. Journalists face harassment, arrest, or exile; online platforms are monitored and blocked (Reporters Without Borders, 2023).

For LA, this environment removes independent scrutiny and transparency. Instead, local projects are often presented as propaganda rather than genuine community initiatives.

2.2.9.3 Political Repression and Surveillance

Repression extends to activists, community leaders, and citizens, often under counter-terrorism laws. Security agencies monitor local meetings and protests, creating an atmosphere of caution. Administrators avoid partnerships that could appear risky, while civic leaders face harassment or arrest (Freedom House, 2023). This climate discourages initiative and prevents LA from acting as a bridge between state and community.

2.2.9.4 Implications for Local Administration

Restrictions create four consequences for LA:

1. **Weak Accountability** – little independent scrutiny.
2. **Reduced Participation** – citizens fear engagement.
3. **Legitimacy Deficits** – LA appears complicit in repression.
4. **Loss of Innovation** – CSOs that could bring resources and creativity are sidelined.

2.2.9.5 Qualitative Narratives

Interviews highlight the lived effects:

- NGO leaders describe audits and permit denials that paralyse work.
- Journalists practice self-censorship.
- Citizens fear speaking openly about service gaps.
- Administrators admit to “playing safe,” avoiding partnerships with civil society (El-Sayed, 2023).

Photo 7

Independent newspaper stand in Cairo, symbolising declining media diversity.



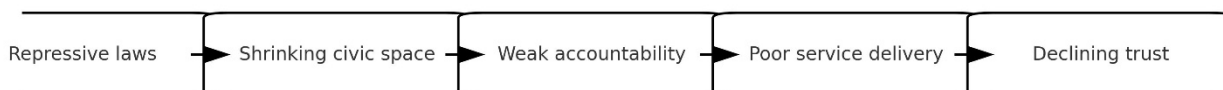
Source: Reporters Without Borders (2023).

2.2.9.6 Comparative Perspectives

Authoritarian and hybrid regimes often use similar strategies. In Russia and China, civil society is tightly controlled; in sub-Saharan Africa, restrictive NGO laws are common. Evidence shows shrinking civic space weakens local governance by sidelining independent accountability actors (Carothers & Youngs, 2022). Egypt reflects this global pattern.

2.2.9.7 Digital Repression and Youth Engagement

Youth increasingly turn to social media for expression, but online activism is heavily monitored. Arrests of digital activists highlight the risks (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). This pushes youth engagement outside official channels, reinforcing disconnection between LA and citizens.

Figure 11*The Impact of Repression on Local Governance*

Source: Adapted from Carothers & Youngs (2022).

2.2.9.8 Why Civic Space Matters for Inclusion

Civic space and media are central to governance. CSOs provide services and accountability; media amplifies citizen voices. When both are restricted, LA loses essential partners and channels, undermining reforms such as decentralisation or participatory budgeting. Without safe avenues for engagement, local governance cannot be inclusive or sustainable.

2.1.10 Institutional Weakness: Parliament, Judiciary, and Elections

Institutional weakness lies at the centre of Egypt's governance crisis. Although the constitution formally provides for parliament, judiciary, and elections, these institutions are subordinated to executive dominance and security control. The lack of checks and balances perpetuates Local Administration's (LA) structural dependence and political marginalisation. Citizens view LA less as democratic platforms than as extensions of authoritarian rule (El-Mahdi, 2022; Lust & Waldner, 2022).

2.2.10.1 Parliamentary Weakness and Centralisation

Egypt's parliament, constitutionally tasked with oversight, largely functions as a rubber stamp. Electoral laws favour pro-government candidates, while opposition faces restrictions (Freedom House, 2023). The result is a legislature dominated by the ruling coalition, with limited capacity to check the executive.

For LA, this produces clear consequences:

- Local council laws remain stalled.
- Oversight of central–local fiscal transfers is minimal.
- Citizen grievances rarely translate into reform.

Officials describe parliament as “distant and irrelevant,” while citizens perceive complicity in neglect (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.10.2 Judicial Independence and Administrative Oversight

The judiciary, once showing pockets of autonomy, has faced increasing executive influence since 2013 (Hassan, 2024). Appointment pressures and political interference reduce independence.

For LA, weakened courts mean:

- Corruption cases go unprosecuted.
- Lawsuits on land, services, or elections languish.
- Decentralisation ambiguities remain unchallenged.

This fosters impunity and deepens perceptions of injustice.

2.2.10.3 Elections and the Absence of Local Councils

Local councils have not been elected since 2008, leaving communities without representation for over a decade (UNDP, 2023). Despite constitutional provisions, elections are repeatedly postponed.

Consequences include:

1. **Accountability Deficit** – LA answers upward, not downward.
2. **Participation Gap** – Citizens lack institutional voice.
3. **Legitimacy Crisis** – LA perceived as “appointed strangers.”

Administrators admit trust-building is impossible without electoral legitimacy (El-Mahdi, 2022).

2.2.10.4 Interlocking Weaknesses and Governance Consequences

Parliamentary weakness, judicial passivity, and absence of elections reinforce one another. This institutional hollowness consolidates executive dominance, leaving LA disempowered. Outcomes include:

- **Rigid Centralisation** – Laws flow unchallenged from the executive.
- **Corruption Risks** – Oversight gaps enable patronage.
- **Disempowered LA** – Without councils or courts, LA lacks authority and legitimacy.

2.2.10.5 Qualitative Narratives

Stakeholder accounts illustrate the lived reality:

- Citizens describe voting as “meaningless.”
- Judges lament political interference.
- Local administrators report implementing policies they cannot contest.

Such experiences show how institutional weakness is embedded in everyday governance.

2.2.10.6 Comparative Perspectives

In authoritarian and hybrid regimes, similar patterns persist: parliaments fail to check executives (sub-Saharan Africa), and judicial independence erodes (Russia, Turkey). By contrast, South Africa and Indonesia show that stronger legislatures and judiciaries can support decentralisation and empower local governments (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt aligns with the authoritarian pattern, where formal institutions exist but lack substance.

2.2.10.7 Why Institutional Weakness Matters for LA

Institutional weakness strips LA of accountability, representation, and legitimacy. Without parliamentary oversight, judicial independence, or elections, LA

remains a bureaucratic arm of the executive. Citizens perceive inefficiency and exclusion, perpetuating mistrust. Reform of LA is inseparable from wider institutional reform; without independent institutions, decentralisation remains symbolic.

Table 9

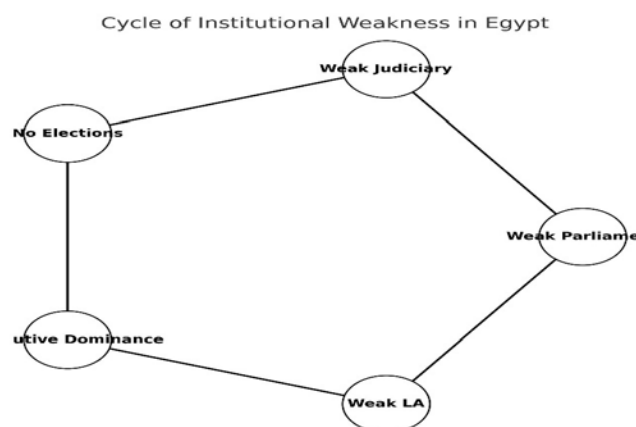
Institutional Weakness and Consequences for LA

Institution	Weakness	Impact on LA
Parliament	Rubber-stamp legislature	No reform of local councils
Judiciary	Politicised appointments	Corruption unchecked
Elections	No local councils since 2008	No legitimacy, no accountability

Source: El-Mahdi (2022); Lust & Waldner (2022); UNDP (2023).

Figure 12

Cycle of Institutional Weakness in Egypt



Source: Author's synthesis.

2.1.11 Regional Geopolitics and Spillovers

Egypt occupies a strategic location at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Its geopolitical role has long been central to regional diplomacy, security, and trade. Yet this position also exposes Egypt to the **spillover**

effects of regional instability, including refugee flows, border insecurity, economic disruptions, and diplomatic pressures. These dynamics have profound implications for governance, as they divert resources, shape national priorities, and affect the performance of Local Administration (LA).

2.1.11.1 Regional Conflicts and Border Pressures

Egypt's borders with Libya, Sudan, and Gaza present persistent governance challenges.

- **Libya:** The protracted conflict in Libya since 2011 has destabilised Egypt's western border, facilitating arms smuggling, cross-border militancy, and refugee movements. Local administrations in border governorates such as Matrouh face heightened security demands and strained services, despite limited resources (Hassan, 2024).
- **Sudan:** The eruption of conflict in Sudan in 2023 triggered refugee inflows and disrupted cross-border trade. LA in Aswan and other southern governorates have been tasked with providing humanitarian assistance, often without additional fiscal transfers, straining already weak infrastructure (UNHCR, 2023).
- **Gaza:** Egypt's role in managing the Rafah crossing places local authorities in North Sinai at the forefront of humanitarian and security responsibilities. Conflict spillovers, displacement, and counterinsurgency operations have disrupted service delivery and eroded trust in state institutions (Cammatt, 2022).

2.1.11.2 Refugees and Migration

Egypt currently hosts millions of migrants and refugees, primarily from Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, and other conflict-affected states. While international agencies such as

UNHCR provide support, local administrations remain central to providing schooling, healthcare, and housing for displaced populations.

Citizens in host communities often express resentment over resource competition, describing overcrowded classrooms, strained hospitals, and rising housing costs (UNDP, 2023). Local administrators narrate frustration at being tasked with refugee support without adequate funding, leading to tensions between residents, migrants, and state institutions.

2.1.11.3 Economic Spillovers

Regional instability also generates economic disruptions that cascade down to LA:

- Fluctuations in oil prices affect remittances from Egyptian workers in the Gulf.
- Instability in Sudan and Ethiopia threatens Nile trade and agricultural imports.
- Conflicts in Gaza and the Red Sea disrupt trade routes, increasing commodity prices.

For citizens, these economic shocks manifest as inflation and shortages, leading to frustration with local service delivery. Administrators often report being blamed for price hikes or resource shortages they cannot control (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.1.11.4 Diplomatic Alignments and Regional Rivalries

Egypt's foreign policy alignments — with Gulf states, the United States, and international organisations — shape its domestic governance priorities. For example:

- **Gulf support** after 2013 stabilised the regime but reinforced centralisation, as funds were channelled through executive agencies rather than LA (Cammatt, 2022).
- **Regional rivalries**, including disputes with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), have consumed political attention and resources, leaving less room for domestic decentralisation debates (Hassan, 2024).

From a qualitative perspective, citizens interpret these dynamics as evidence that the state prioritises foreign policy and regime security over local welfare, reinforcing disillusionment with governance.

2.1.11.5 Security Spillovers and Militarisation

Regional instability has reinforced Egypt's reliance on the military and security agencies, deepening the **militarisation of governance**. Counterterrorism operations in Sinai and border regions often overshadow development initiatives, with LA subordinated to security priorities. This environment reduces space for participatory governance, as local officials operate under tight surveillance and central control.

2.1.11.6 Comparative Perspectives

Comparative evidence highlights how regional instability weakens local governance in other states:

- In Jordan, spillovers from the Syrian conflict overwhelmed municipalities with refugee populations.
- In Lebanon, regional rivalries and refugee inflows eroded already fragile local institutions.
- In Nigeria, cross-border militancy in the Sahel undermined service delivery in border regions.

Egypt's experience mirrors these patterns, where LA becomes the frontline institution for managing spillovers but lacks the resources or autonomy to respond effectively (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

2.1.11.7 Qualitative Narratives

Narratives from border communities highlight the lived reality of spillovers:

- **Residents in Aswan** describe overcrowded schools and hospitals due to refugee inflows.

- **Local officials in Matrouh** recount being tasked with monitoring borders while neglecting development needs.
- **Citizens in Sinai** express frustration that security operations overshadow investment in services, leaving them feeling marginalised.

These accounts underscore the gap between central policy priorities and local needs, reinforcing the study's emphasis on qualitative perspectives.

2.1.11.8 Why Geopolitics Matters for Local Administration

Regional geopolitics and spillovers matter for LA in three ways:

1. **Resource Diversion** – Security priorities drain budgets, reducing funds for services.
2. **Institutional Strain** – LA must manage refugees and migrants without adequate capacity.
3. **Erosion of Legitimacy** – Citizens perceive the state as prioritising foreign policy over local welfare.

These dynamics illustrate how external instability interacts with domestic weaknesses, compounding the fragility of LA.

2.1.12 Transitions, Polarisation, and Democratic Setbacks

Egypt's political trajectory since 2011 has been marked by upheaval, polarisation, and authoritarian restoration. The popular uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak raised hopes for democratic transition, decentralisation, and participatory governance. For the first time in decades, citizens mobilised to demand dignity, representation, and accountability. Yet within two years, the promise of transformation gave way to political polarisation, institutional fragility, and military intervention. Since 2013, Egypt has witnessed a consolidation of authoritarian rule more restrictive than before the revolution (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015; Lust & Waldner, 2022).

These cycles of transition and setback have left deep scars on governance. Local Administration (LA), in particular, has been destabilised by repeated reforms that never materialised, councils that were dissolved without replacement, and a legitimacy vacuum that continues to undermine citizen trust.

2.1.12.1 The 2011 Revolution and Democratic Hopes

The 2011 revolution created unprecedented opportunities for political reform. Calls for **decentralisation** gained momentum, with activists, civil society organisations, and some reformist politicians advocating elected local councils, fiscal autonomy, and participatory planning (El-Mahdi, 2022). The interim governments promised reforms, and constitutional drafts included provisions for stronger local governance.

Qualitative evidence shows that citizens, especially youth, viewed local councils as potential platforms for democratic engagement. For a brief moment, LA was imagined not as an administrative arm of the central state but as a site for community empowerment.

2.1.12.2 Polarisation and Breakdown (2012–2013)

The election of Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood's political dominance triggered intense polarisation. Supporters viewed the Brotherhood as the embodiment of revolutionary aspirations, while opponents feared authoritarian capture under an Islamist agenda.

This polarisation paralysed governance. Efforts to draft decentralisation laws stalled, and local councils dissolved in 2011 were never replaced. Citizens, once mobilised, became divided, with communities fractured along ideological lines (Hassan, 2024). For LA, this meant operating in a **vacuum of representation**, where administrators had no elected counterparts and faced conflicting demands from rival political camps.

2.1.12.3 The 2013 Coup and Authoritarian Restoration

The military's ouster of Morsi in July 2013 marked a decisive democratic setback. Under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, political space contracted sharply, civic freedoms were curtailed, and local governance reforms were shelved. Instead of decentralisation, Egypt witnessed the consolidation of **executive and security dominance**, with LA reduced to a bureaucratic extension of central ministries (Cammatt, 2022).

The absence of elected local councils became a permanent feature, eroding accountability. Qualitative narratives from administrators describe this period as one of “**stagnation and fear**”, where innovation was discouraged, and compliance became the sole priority (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.1.12.4 Democratic Setbacks and Their Consequences for LA

The failure of democratic transition and the consolidation of authoritarian rule produced several consequences for LA:

1. **Legitimacy Crisis** – Without elected councils, LA lacks democratic representation.
2. **Policy Instability** – Repeated shifts in constitutional promises and legal reforms created uncertainty.
3. **Citizen Disillusion** – Citizens who hoped for participatory reform now view LA as hollow institutions.
4. **Institutional Paralysis** – Administrators operate within rigid hierarchies, with little space for innovation.

These consequences illustrate how political cycles at the national level cascade downward to weaken local institutions.

2.1.12.5 Polarisation and Social Division

Polarisation did not end with the coup; it has continued to shape social relations. Communities remain divided along political, ideological, and generational lines. In some rural areas, former Brotherhood supporters face surveillance and exclusion, while in urban centres, activists are monitored and silenced.

For LA, this division complicates governance. Administrators tasked with delivering services must navigate **deeply polarised constituencies**, where even routine decisions — such as school staffing or land allocation — can become politically contentious.

2.1.12.6 Qualitative Narratives of Disillusion

Citizen narratives reveal profound disillusion:

- **Youth activists** who once campaigned for elected councils now describe politics as “dead space.”
- **Community leaders** recount how early hopes of participation gave way to resignation.
- **Local officials** narrate frustration at being caught between rising demands and shrinking political space.

These experiences underscore how democratic setbacks are lived not only at the national level but also in everyday governance practices.

2.1.12.7 Comparative Perspectives

Comparative evidence highlights how democratic transitions often falter under polarisation. In Tunisia, ideological divides slowed decentralisation reforms. In Turkey, democratic openings were reversed through authoritarian consolidation. In sub-Saharan Africa, transitions in Nigeria and Kenya were undermined by elite capture and institutional weakness (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt fits this broader

pattern of “**failed transitions**,” where political instability reinforced authoritarian path dependency.

2.1.12.8 Why Transitions and Setbacks Matter for LA

The literature underscores that democratic transitions and setbacks matter for LA in two keyways:

1. **Missed Reform Windows** – The 2011–2013 period represented a unique opportunity to institutionalise decentralisation, which was lost.
2. **Deepened Disillusion** – Citizens dashed hopes created mistrust not only in national politics but also in local governance.

This combination leaves LA weakened both structurally and symbolically: structurally because it lacks elected institutions, and symbolically because citizens no longer believe reform is possible.

2.1.13 External Influence: Diplomacy, Aid, and Direct Intervention

Egypt’s governance trajectory cannot be understood in isolation from its international environment. The country has long relied on external actors for financial, diplomatic, and military support, from Cold War alignments to contemporary partnerships with the United States, Gulf states, and international financial institutions (IFIs). While these relationships have provided crucial resources and geopolitical leverage, they have also shaped Egypt’s governance priorities in ways that **reinforce authoritarian centralisation** and weaken the autonomy of Local Administration (LA).

2.1.13.1 Geopolitical Position and Strategic Dependency

Egypt’s location — controlling the Suez Canal, bordering Israel and Gaza, and anchoring regional diplomacy — makes it a strategic partner for global powers. The U.S. has consistently provided around \$1.3 billion annually in military aid, while the

European Union and Gulf states contribute billions in loans, investments, and grants (World Bank, 2022).

This dependency creates a governance environment where external actors prioritise **regime stability over democratic reform**. Donors and allies often support central authorities directly, bypassing LA, which remains peripheral to both foreign policy and aid flows (Cammatt, 2022).

2.1.13.2 The Role of the United States

U.S. support has been central to Egypt's stability since the 1979 Camp David Accords. While nominally tied to peace and development, U.S. assistance overwhelmingly flows to the military and central state apparatus.

From a governance perspective, this has three consequences:

1. **Military Empowerment** – U.S. aid strengthens the armed forces, deepening militarisation of governance.
2. **Civilian Marginalisation** – LA receives no direct benefit, leaving local services underfunded.
3. **Conditional Silence** – U.S. criticism of human rights abuses is muted by strategic priorities, enabling authoritarian resilience.

For citizens, this dynamic reinforces perceptions that foreign aid supports elites while neglecting local welfare.

2.1.13.3 European Union and Migration Diplomacy

The European Union's relationship with Egypt increasingly revolves around **migration management**. EU aid prioritises border control, refugee management, and counter-terrorism. While some programmes support development, they are often channelled through central ministries or international NGOs rather than LA.

Qualitative evidence reveals frustration among local officials in border governorates, who describe being excluded from EU-funded migration projects that affect their communities directly (El-Sayed, 2023). Residents in affected areas similarly perceive EU aid as serving European interests rather than local needs.

2.1.13.4 Gulf Assistance and Financial Dependence

Since 2013, Gulf states — particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait — have provided billions in aid, loans, and investments. This support stabilised Egypt's economy after the coup but further entrenched centralisation. Funds were directed to mega-projects and military-linked enterprises, bypassing LA and reinforcing the executive's dominance (Hassan, 2024).

Citizens often describe Gulf aid as “regime support,” disconnected from community development. Administrators note that while mega-projects create visibility, they rarely address local service deficits such as healthcare or sanitation.

2.1.13.5 International Financial Institutions

Egypt's engagement with the IMF and World Bank has shaped fiscal and governance policies for decades. As discussed in Section 2.2.4, IMF programmes impose austerity that heightens social discontent. World Bank loans, while funding infrastructure and social protection, often bypass LA, with projects managed centrally.

This **externalised governance** reinforces dependency: Egypt's reform agenda is shaped by external conditions, leaving little space for participatory or decentralised decision-making (Grindle, 2023).

2.1.13.6 Direct Intervention and Conditionalities

External actors not only provide aid but also intervene directly in shaping policy priorities:

- IMF loan conditions dictate subsidy reforms and fiscal adjustments.

- U.S. and EU diplomacy emphasises counter-terrorism and migration, sidelining governance reform.
- Gulf investments are tied to regime stability, reinforcing authoritarian resilience.

These conditionalities prioritise macroeconomic stability and regime survival over citizen participation, undermining the structural reforms needed for LA empowerment.

2.1.13.7 Implications for Local Administration

External influence affects LA in several ways:

1. **Exclusion from Aid Flows** – Most assistance bypasses LA, limiting local ownership.
2. **Reinforced Centralisation** – Donors work with central ministries, sidelining decentralisation debates.
3. **Perceptions of Inequity** – Citizens see aid as benefiting elites, eroding trust in governance.
4. **Dependency and Fragility** – LA remains financially and institutionally dependent, unable to innovate independently.

These dynamics illustrate how external influence not only fails to strengthen LA but actively reinforces its marginalisation.

2.1.13.8 Qualitative Narratives

Stakeholder narratives highlight the lived consequences of external influence:

- **Local officials** complain of being “excluded from donor conversations” about projects in their communities.
- **Citizens** express scepticism toward aid-funded initiatives, viewing them as imposed rather than collaborative.
- **Civil society actors** narrate frustration at being constrained by state restrictions despite donor rhetoric about participation.

These accounts underscore how external influence shapes perceptions of governance as externally driven, centralised, and unresponsive.

2.1.13.9 Comparative Perspectives

Comparative evidence shows similar patterns in other aid-dependent states. In Jordan, donor aid bypassed municipalities, weakening local governance. In Ethiopia, external loans supported mega-projects while neglecting local development. By contrast, in Indonesia and Brazil, donor programmes that engaged local councils strengthened governance legitimacy and reduced inequality (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt's exclusion of LA places it closer to the former model, where external support entrenches rather than reforms authoritarian systems.

2.1.13.10 Why External Influence Matters for Governance

External influence matters for governance not only because of financial flows but also because of the **political logic it sustains**. By prioritising regime stability, donors reinforce centralisation and authoritarian resilience. For LA, this means exclusion from reform, lack of fiscal autonomy, and growing citizen disillusion.

This dynamic highlights a critical paradox: while international actors claim to support development and reform, their engagement often perpetuates the very weaknesses they seek to address.

2.1.14 Why These Challenges Matter for Local Administration

The preceding sections have examined a wide range of pressures — authoritarian centralisation, financial hardship, socio-economic inequality, militarisation, youth exclusion, civic repression, institutional weakness, regional instability, and external influence. Each of these challenges is significant in its own right. Yet what makes Egypt's governance environment particularly fragile is the way

these pressures **interlock and converge** to shape the performance, legitimacy, and prospects of Local Administration (LA).

LA represents the closest point of contact between the state and its citizens. It is responsible for delivering education, healthcare, sanitation, and infrastructure, while also serving as a potential platform for participation and accountability. However, the convergence of systemic challenges renders LA structurally weak, fiscally dependent, and politically marginalised. The literature consistently demonstrates that without strong and autonomous local institutions, governance reforms remain superficial, and citizen trust remains elusive (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.1.14.1 Centralisation and the Loss of Autonomy

Authoritarian rule and centralised decision-making ensure that LA remains subordinate to executive authority. Governors are appointed rather than elected, budgets are allocated from Cairo, and local councils have not been elected since 2008. This lack of autonomy means that LA cannot adapt policies to local contexts or respond flexibly to citizen needs. Instead, administrators act as **implementers of central directives**, even when these conflict with community priorities (El-Sayed, 2023).

For citizens, this dynamic translates into a sense of exclusion. Communities perceive LA as distant and powerless, reinforcing the legitimacy deficit that undermines trust in governance.

2.1.14.2 Fiscal Dependency and Scarcity

Persistent financial hardships and austerity further constrain LA. Central transfers are often delayed, insufficient, or earmarked, leaving little room for local discretion. Administrators narrate their role as “managing scarcity,” forced to prioritise short-term crises over long-term development (World Bank, 2022).

Citizens, however, experience this as service failure. Poor schools, inadequate healthcare, and failing sanitation systems are attributed to LA, even though the root cause lies in fiscal dependency. This misalignment deepens mistrust, creating a cycle where LA is both **blamed for failure** and **denied the resources to succeed**.

2.1.14.3 Social Inequality and Legitimacy Gaps

The persistence of inequality, particularly the urban–rural divide, exacerbates the legitimacy crisis facing LA. Rural areas in Upper Egypt remain underdeveloped, while informal settlements in urban peripheries face neglect. Citizens in these communities perceive LA as irrelevant, reinforcing disillusionment.

Even high-profile programmes such as Hayah Karima deliver improvements through centralised planning, with LA relegated to implementation. As a result, local officials are seen as agents of top-down policies, rather than representatives of community priorities (UNDP, 2023).

2.1.14.4 Militarisation and Securitisation

The military’s dominance in governance displaces LA from its developmental role. Infrastructure projects, food distribution, and public services are often managed by military agencies, with LA reduced to logistical support. Governors are frequently retired generals, whose priorities emphasise surveillance and order rather than participation and inclusion (Cammatt, 2022).

For LA, militarisation translates into a **loss of relevance and capacity**. Citizens, meanwhile, view the military as the real decision-maker, further eroding the legitimacy of local institutions.

2.1.14.5 Youth Exclusion and Political Disillusion

Egypt’s youth, who constitute the majority of the population, face unemployment, underemployment, and shrinking civic space. Their disillusionment

with politics translates into disengagement from LA. Without elected local councils or participatory mechanisms, young people see LA as inaccessible and irrelevant.

This disconnection represents a missed opportunity. Youth could be a source of innovation, accountability, and renewal, but exclusion ensures that their energy manifests as apathy, protest, or migration (UNDP, 2023; Hassan, 2024).

2.1.14.6 Civic Repression and the Closure of Accountability Channels

Restrictions on civic space and media prevent independent organisations from holding LA accountable or partnering in service delivery. Civil society organisations are restricted by legal and political barriers, while independent media is silenced.

Administrators describe operating in a **climate of fear**, where partnerships with NGOs may invite suspicion. Citizens narrate self-censorship and disengagement, further narrowing the channels of participation. This repression undermines the accountability mechanisms that could otherwise strengthen LA.

2.1.14.7 Institutional Weakness and Fragile Oversight

The weakness of parliament, judiciary, and elections reinforces LA's dependency. With no elected councils, minimal legislative oversight, and a judiciary subject to political control, LA lacks the institutional foundations for accountability. Administrators operate within a hollowed-out system, where legitimacy is absent, and oversight is weak (Lust & Waldner, 2022).

This institutional vacuum ensures that even when reforms are promised, they remain unimplemented or symbolic.

2.1.14.8 Regional Instability and Resource Diversion

Regional geopolitics — including conflicts in Libya, Sudan, and Gaza — impose additional burdens on LA. Refugee inflows strain schools and hospitals, border

insecurity diverts resources to policing, and regional economic shocks raise prices. Local officials describe being “overloaded without support,” caught between citizens demanding services and central ministries focused on security (UNHCR, 2023).

For communities, these pressures are experienced as declining welfare and neglect, reinforcing mistrust in local institutions.

2.1.14.9 External Influence and Exclusion

Finally, external actors shape Egypt's governance through aid, loans, and diplomacy. Yet these flows overwhelmingly support central authorities and military institutions, bypassing LA. Donor-funded projects are often implemented without consultation, reinforcing perceptions that governance is **externally driven and locally irrelevant** (World Bank, 2022; Grindle, 2023).

Citizens see aid as benefiting elites, while administrators lament exclusion from planning and decision-making. This exclusion perpetuates LA's marginalisation and dependency.

2.1.14.10 The Interlocking Nature of Challenges

What makes these challenges particularly destructive is their **interdependence**. Centralisation fosters fiscal dependency, which exacerbates inequality. Militarisation displaces LA from service delivery, while civic repression silences accountability. Regional instability diverts resources, while external aid reinforces centralisation.

Together, these pressures create a **governance trap**, where LA remains weak by design, mistrusted by citizens, and excluded from reform.

2.1.14.11 Why Local Administration Matters

Despite these challenges, LA remains central to governance reform. As the frontline of service delivery, it represents the most direct interface between state and society. Strengthening LA could:

1. Improve service delivery and reduce inequality.
2. Rebuild citizen trust through participation and accountability.
3. Enhance resilience to regional and economic shocks.
4. Provide a platform for youth engagement and innovation.

Yet for this potential to be realised, reforms must address the structural challenges that constrain LA, not merely provide technical fixes.

2.2 Major Human and Natural Factors

2.2.1 Introduction

While Egypt's governance challenges are rooted in authoritarian centralisation, fiscal dependency, and institutional weakness, they cannot be fully understood without examining the broader **human and natural factors** that shape the operating environment of Local Administration (LA). Demographic pressures, rural vulnerability, climate change, water scarcity, environmental degradation, and weaknesses in human resource management combine to create a complex and often hostile context for governance.

These factors are not external to politics; they intersect with authoritarian path dependency and centralisation to produce compounded governance crises. LA stands at the frontline of managing these pressures — responsible for schools, clinics, sanitation, irrigation, disaster preparedness, and community welfare. Yet LA remains structurally ill-equipped to respond, undermined by fiscal scarcity, political subordination, and institutional fragility (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.2.2 Demographic Pressures and Population Growth

Egypt's population surpassed 105 million in 2023, making it the most populous country in the Arab world (United Nations, 2023). Rapid growth, combined with urbanisation and a youth-heavy demographic profile, places immense pressure on services and infrastructure. Schools are overcrowded, hospitals underfunded, and housing demand far outpaces supply.

For LA, these pressures manifest in rising demands it cannot meet. Administrators describe themselves as “crisis managers,” constantly improvising to cope with shortages. Citizens, in turn, experience service failures as evidence of neglect, further eroding trust (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.3 Rural Vulnerability and Agricultural Dependence

Despite urbanisation, rural Egypt remains home to millions who depend on agriculture for livelihoods. Rural areas, particularly Upper Egypt, face persistent poverty, weak infrastructure, and vulnerability to environmental shocks. Irrigation, land use, and crop distribution are core responsibilities of LA, yet they are undermined by underfunding and centralised control.

Citizens in rural communities frequently narrate exclusion, describing LA as absent from local development. These narratives highlight how socio-economic vulnerability intersects with governance fragility to entrench inequality (UNDP, 2023).

2.2.4 Climate Change and Environmental Risks

Egypt is acutely vulnerable to climate change, particularly rising sea levels threatening the Nile Delta, increased desertification, and more frequent heatwaves. Local administrations are expected to manage disaster preparedness, agricultural

adaptation, and community resilience. Yet most lack capacity for planning or mitigation, relying instead on ad hoc responses (OECD, 2022).

Climate change thus acts as a “risk multiplier,” exacerbating existing weaknesses in infrastructure, housing, and resource management. For LA, this translates into new responsibilities without new resources.

2.2.5 Water Scarcity and the Nile Basin Crisis

Water scarcity represents one of Egypt’s most pressing governance challenges. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has intensified concerns about Nile water flows, while population growth and inefficient irrigation further strain resources.

At the local level, LA is tasked with maintaining irrigation canals, managing water distribution, and responding to farmer grievances. Yet underfunding and weak capacity hinder performance. Farmers narrate conflicts over water access, while administrators describe frustration at lacking tools to manage scarcity (Hassan, 2024).

2.2.6 Degradation of Resources and Poor Practices

Beyond water scarcity, Egypt faces broader environmental degradation: polluted waterways, declining soil fertility, overuse of chemical fertilisers, and encroachment on agricultural land. These problems reflect both governance failures and human practices.

Local administrations, responsible for enforcing regulations and supporting sustainable agriculture, are constrained by weak monitoring and corruption. The result is a cycle where degradation accelerates while institutions remain paralysed (World Bank, 2022).

2.2.7 Human Resource Management and Institutional Adaptability

Finally, governance is shaped not only by external pressures but also by internal capacity. Egypt's LA suffers from poor human resource management (HRM): politicised appointments, inadequate training, low wages, and brain drain. This undermines the ability of LA to adapt to demographic and environmental pressures. Administrators themselves narrate disillusionment, describing lack of career paths and professional recognition. Citizens experience this as bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and poor service quality (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.8 The Interdependence of Human and Natural Factors

What makes these pressures particularly damaging is their interdependence. Population growth intensifies demand for food and water, which is undermined by agricultural degradation and Nile scarcity. Climate change multiplies risks, while weak HRM reduces institutional capacity to adapt.

For LA, these interlocking factors create a **perfect storm**: rising demand, shrinking resources, environmental shocks, and weak internal capacity. The literature shows that addressing one factor in isolation is insufficient; reform must be comprehensive, linking demographic, environmental, and institutional strategies (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

2.2.9 Qualitative Narratives

Qualitative evidence illustrates the lived consequences of these pressures:

- **Farmers** recount conflicts over water access and crop failures.
- **Urban residents** describe daily struggles with housing, waste, and overcrowding.

- **Local officials** narrate frustration at being tasked with disaster management without training or budgets.

These narratives highlight the human dimension of governance, showing how systemic pressures are experienced at the community level and mediated through LA.

Why Human and Natural Factors Matter for Governance

Human and natural factors matter for governance because they determine the **context in which LA operates**. Even the best-designed reforms will fail if demographic pressures, climate risks, and institutional weaknesses remain unaddressed. Conversely, strengthening LA's ability to manage these pressures could transform challenges into opportunities for resilience and innovation.

2.2.10 Population Growth and Its Strains on Resources

Egypt's demographic dynamics represent both a potential strength and a profound challenge for governance. With a population surpassing **105 million in 2023** and projected to reach **over 150 million by 2050** (United Nations, 2023), Egypt is experiencing one of the fastest growth rates in the MENA region. While this youth-heavy population could provide a "demographic dividend," the reality has been one of mounting strain on housing, education, healthcare, employment, and infrastructure.

For Local Administration (LA), population growth translates into a **constant escalation of demand** without corresponding increases in resources or autonomy. Local schools overflow, clinics are understaffed, housing shortages worsen, and waste management systems collapse under pressure. Administrators frequently describe themselves as "managing crises" rather than planning development (El-Sayed, 2023). Citizens, meanwhile, interpret service failures as evidence of state neglect, eroding trust in local governance.

2.2.10.1 Demographic Trends and Projections

Egypt's demographic profile is shaped by three interrelated trends:

1. **High Fertility Rates** – Despite recent declines, fertility remains above replacement level, with rural areas recording higher rates than urban centres (UNDP, 2023).
2. **Youth Bulge** – Nearly 60 percent of Egyptians are under 30, creating immense pressure on education, housing, and employment markets (United Nations, 2023).
3. **Urbanisation** – Urban growth continues, fuelled by migration from rural Upper Egypt to Cairo, Alexandria, and emerging satellite cities. Informal settlements account for up to 40 percent of urban housing (OECD, 2022).

These trends together produce a **governance environment of constant expansion**, where demand for services grows faster than institutional capacity.

2.2.10.2 Education System Overload

Population growth places enormous pressure on education. Public schools in many governorates operate double or triple shifts to accommodate students. Teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate facilities undermine quality.

LA is formally responsible for school maintenance and local staffing, yet budgets are insufficient. Administrators describe being unable to repair buildings or provide textbooks. Parents, in turn, view LA as negligent, even though central ministries control hiring and curriculum (El-Mahdi, 2022).

This mismatch creates frustration for both administrators and citizens, reinforcing mistrust.

2.2.10.3 Healthcare Pressures

Health services face similar challenges. Population growth has stretched hospitals and clinics beyond capacity, particularly in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic weaknesses: shortages of ICU beds, oxygen supplies, and medical staff.

Local clinics, often managed under LA, are underfunded and poorly staffed. Citizens frequently travel long distances for basic care, while administrators describe struggling to pay salaries or maintain equipment (World Bank, 2022). These daily failures illustrate how population growth directly undermines LA's ability to meet citizen needs.

2.2.10.4 Housing and Urbanisation

Population growth fuels housing shortages, particularly in urban centres. Informal settlements expand rapidly, often without infrastructure or sanitation. LA is tasked with waste management, water provision, and housing oversight in these areas, but lacks authority and resources.

Citizens in informal settlements narrate frustration with erratic service provision and bureaucratic neglect. Administrators describe the challenge as **“fighting fires with empty hands”**, unable to regulate land use or expand infrastructure (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.10.5 Employment and Youth Pressures

As detailed in Section 2.2.7, population growth amplifies youth unemployment. Each year, hundreds of thousands of new graduates enter a labour market unable to absorb them. Informal work becomes the default, with limited security or benefits. For LA, these dynamics manifest as rising demands for job creation programmes, vocational training, and social support. Yet these are centrally managed, leaving local

institutions with little capacity to address employment crises. Citizens interpret this as indifference, further eroding legitimacy.

2.2.10.6 Waste, Water, and Infrastructure

Basic infrastructure systems are overwhelmed by population growth. Waste collection lags behind demand, leading to garbage accumulation in urban streets and rural villages. Water supply and sanitation infrastructure struggle to keep pace, with shortages in some areas and overuse in others (Hassan, 2024).

Administrators describe improvising to maintain minimum services, often relying on informal community efforts. Citizens perceive these failures as corruption or neglect, reinforcing mistrust in LA.

2.2.10.7 Qualitative Narratives of Demographic Strain

Narratives from communities underscore the human consequences of demographic pressures:

- **Parents** describe children crammed into overcrowded classrooms with insufficient teachers.
- **Patients** recount long waits at understaffed clinics or being turned away due to shortages.
- **Residents of informal settlements** narrate daily struggles with uncollected garbage, unreliable water, and inadequate housing.
- **Local officials** describe frustration at being blamed for failures while lacking budgets or decision-making power.

These narratives reveal how population growth is experienced as a **daily governance failure**, eroding trust in local institutions.

2.2.10.8 Comparative Perspectives

Other developing states facing rapid population growth illustrate similar dynamics. In Nigeria, population expansion has overwhelmed municipal services, fueling distrust and protest. In India, urbanisation has created slums beyond the reach of local governments. In Indonesia, decentralisation enabled municipalities to better manage demographic pressures through participatory planning (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

Comparisons suggest that the key variable is **institutional capacity**: where local governments are empowered, demographic growth can be managed; where they are not, it produces crisis. Egypt falls in the latter category.

2.2.10.9 Why Population Growth Matters for Local Administration

Population growth matters for LA because it amplifies all existing weaknesses:

1. **Demand Outpaces Supply** – Services expand slower than population growth.
2. **Mistrust Intensifies** – Citizens blame LA for failures, even when causes are structural.
3. **Institutional Fragility Deepens** – Administrators operate in permanent crisis mode.
4. **Reform Opportunities Shrink** – Overwhelmed institutions cannot innovate or plan long-term.

Thus, demographic pressure is not just a social issue but a **structural governance challenge** that defines LA's daily reality.

2.2.11 Vulnerability of Rural Areas and Agriculture

Despite rapid urbanisation, rural Egypt remains home to a substantial proportion of the population and forms the backbone of the agricultural economy. Rural areas, particularly in Upper Egypt, continue to experience persistent poverty,

underdevelopment, and vulnerability to environmental shocks. Agriculture employs millions of Egyptians and remains essential for food security, yet it is characterised by low productivity, land fragmentation, and heavy dependence on the Nile irrigation system.

For Local Administration (LA), these vulnerabilities create daily governance challenges. Local councils and rural administrators are tasked with maintaining irrigation canals, supporting agricultural extension, regulating land use, and managing rural infrastructure. Yet underfunding, centralised control, and weak institutional capacity leave LA unable to address rural needs effectively. Citizens in rural areas often perceive LA as absent or irrelevant, reinforcing disillusionment with governance (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.2.11.1 Persistent Poverty in Rural Areas

Poverty remains concentrated in rural Egypt, especially Upper Egypt, where poverty rates exceed 50 percent in some governorates, compared to under 20 percent in Cairo (UNDP, 2023). Rural communities face limited access to services, poor infrastructure, and weak labour markets.

Qualitative evidence shows that rural residents frequently narrate feelings of neglect and exclusion, describing schools without teachers, clinics without doctors, and villages without paved roads. Administrators acknowledge these deficits but cite lack of resources and authority as barriers to improvement (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.11.2 Agricultural Fragility and Food Security

Agriculture is central to Egypt's rural economy but remains highly vulnerable. Challenges include:

- **Land Fragmentation** – Most farmers cultivate very small plots, limiting productivity.

- **Outdated Practices** – Overreliance on traditional irrigation methods wastes water.
- **Input Shortages** – Rising costs of fertilisers, seeds, and machinery undermine yields.
- **Market Volatility** – Farmers face unstable prices, with limited bargaining power.

These challenges affect national food security. Wheat shortages during the Ukraine war underscored Egypt's vulnerability, as imports supply the majority of domestic consumption. For LA, food insecurity manifests as rising citizen grievances, which they are ill-equipped to address (World Bank, 2022).

2.2.11.3 Infrastructure Gaps in Rural Areas

Rural infrastructure lags behind urban centres. Villages often lack reliable electricity, paved roads, or adequate sanitation. Access to clean water remains uneven, with contamination from agricultural runoff compounding health risks (OECD, 2022).

LA is responsible for maintaining local infrastructure, but chronic underfunding leaves projects unfinished. Citizens interpret poor infrastructure as evidence of neglect, reinforcing distrust. Administrators describe their work as “patching holes rather than building systems” (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.11.4 Vulnerability to Environmental Shocks

Rural Egypt is highly vulnerable to environmental shocks. Climate change threatens crop yields through rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, and desertification. In the Nile Delta, rising sea levels risk salinisation of fertile farmland. In Upper Egypt, desert encroachment reduces arable land (UNDP, 2023).

For LA, these shocks present impossible challenges. Disaster preparedness plans are minimal, and adaptation measures (such as drought-resistant crops or modern irrigation) are poorly funded. Farmers narrate desperation when crops fail, while administrators describe frustration at lacking authority to implement adaptation strategies (Hassan, 2024).

2.2.11.5 Land Use Conflicts and Governance Strain

Land use conflicts are a recurring governance issue. Urban expansion encroaches on agricultural land, while disputes over irrigation rights fuel tensions among farmers. LA is tasked with resolving these disputes, but weak enforcement capacity often leads to corruption or stalemates.

Citizens perceive land disputes as evidence of state weakness or complicity, undermining trust in LA. Administrators acknowledge the difficulty of enforcing land laws when political elites or investors intervene (El-Mahdi, 2022).

2.2.11.6 Gender Dimensions of Rural Vulnerability

Women in rural areas face compounded disadvantages. They are overrepresented in informal agricultural labour, often unpaid or underpaid. Access to education, healthcare, and credit is limited. Programmes targeting women's empowerment exist but are implemented centrally, with little LA involvement (Freedom House, 2023).

Qualitative narratives highlight women's exclusion from land ownership and decision-making, reinforcing cycles of poverty and disempowerment. This further erodes the legitimacy of local institutions that fail to address gender inequality.

2.2.11.7 Comparative Perspectives

Comparative evidence highlights that rural vulnerability is a common challenge in developing states. In India, land fragmentation and rural poverty undermine

governance legitimacy. In sub-Saharan Africa, climate shocks exacerbate food insecurity and weaken municipal institutions. By contrast, in Morocco, gradual decentralisation linked rural development to local councils, improving infrastructure and participation (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

Egypt's persistence of centralisation places it closer to the former pattern, where rural governance remains fragile and citizens perceive neglect.

2.2.11.8 Qualitative Narratives

Field accounts reinforce these dynamics:

- **Farmers** describe frustration with irrigation shortages and rising costs.
- **Rural women** narrate exclusion from credit and land rights.
- **Local officials** recount being tasked with rural projects without budgets or training.

These stories reveal how rural vulnerability is experienced as both material deprivation and institutional neglect, compounding disillusionment with LA.

2.2.11.9 Why Rural Vulnerability Matters for Local Administration

Rural vulnerability matters because it amplifies LA's weaknesses:

1. **Service Gaps** – Poverty and underdevelopment create rising demands LA cannot meet.
2. **Trust Deficits** – Citizens perceive neglect and disengage from governance.
3. **Fragility under Shocks** – Climate and economic crises overwhelm local institutions.
4. **Missed Opportunities** – Agriculture could drive growth, but weak governance prevents innovation.

Thus, rural vulnerability is not only an economic challenge but a governance crisis that defines LA's daily reality.

2.2.12 Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness

Egypt faces mounting challenges from climate change, with the **Nile Delta, coastal zones, and arid hinterlands** among the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world (World Bank, 2022). Rising sea levels threaten fertile farmland and urban settlements, desertification reduces arable land, and extreme heatwaves place stress on infrastructure, health systems, and water resources. These environmental shifts interact with demographic pressures, rural poverty, and governance weaknesses to create a **multi-layered crisis** that directly undermines Local Administration (LA).

While climate change is a global phenomenon, its effects are acutely **localised**. Flooding, droughts, and heatwaves manifest in specific communities, requiring context-sensitive responses. In Egypt, LA is expected to play a frontline role in disaster preparedness, early warning, and recovery. Yet chronic underfunding, bureaucratic rigidity, and centralised decision-making leave LA poorly equipped to address environmental risks (Hassan, 2024).

2.2.12.1 Egypt's Climate Risks

Egypt's climate vulnerabilities are shaped by geography and dependence on the Nile:

1. **Sea-Level Rise in the Nile Delta** – A one-meter rise could displace millions, inundate farmland, and destroy infrastructure in Alexandria and Port Said (UNDP, 2023).
2. **Desertification** – Expanding desert margins reduce cultivable land, particularly in Upper Egypt, intensifying rural poverty.
3. **Water Stress** – Climate change exacerbates Nile scarcity, with reduced rainfall in upstream countries and rising evapotranspiration rates.

4. **Extreme Weather** – Heatwaves, flash floods, and sandstorms damage homes, roads, and crops.

These risks highlight the urgent need for adaptive governance — yet LA remains institutionally sidelined.

2.2.12.2 Local Administration and Disaster Preparedness

In theory, LA is responsible for disaster preparedness: maintaining drainage systems, coordinating emergency response, and mobilising communities. In practice, central ministries control planning, funding, and response strategies. Local officials report being informed of plans after they are drafted, reducing their ability to tailor responses to community realities (El-Sayed, 2023).

For example, flash floods in Aswan in 2021 overwhelmed drainage and housing systems. Citizens recounted losing homes and livestock, while administrators described lacking funds for immediate relief. Relief efforts were coordinated by central agencies, leaving LA as logistical support. This exclusion reinforces perceptions of LA as powerless.

2.2.12.3 The Governance Gap in Climate Adaptation

Several governance deficits shape Egypt's weak climate preparedness:

1. **Centralised Control** – Climate adaptation is managed by national strategies (e.g., Egypt's National Climate Change Strategy 2050), with limited local input.
2. **Fiscal Constraints** – Disaster funds are centrally controlled, leaving LA dependent on emergency transfers.
3. **Weak Capacity** – Local officials lack training in risk assessment, early warning, and climate adaptation.
4. **Limited Participation** – Communities are rarely involved in planning, undermining trust and sustainability.

These deficits mean that climate adaptation strategies remain top-down and technocratic, disconnected from local realities.

2.2.12.4 Climate Change as a Risk Multiplier

Climate change does not create entirely new problems but intensifies existing ones. For example:

- Overcrowded schools become more dangerous when floods damage buildings.
- Weak healthcare systems collapse under heatwaves and epidemics.
- Waste management failures worsen during floods, spreading disease.

For LA, climate change magnifies daily governance failures, pushing already fragile systems into crisis.

2.2.12.5 Citizen Experiences of Environmental Stress

Qualitative narratives highlight the lived reality of climate risks:

- **Delta farmers** describe losing crops to saltwater intrusion.
- **Aswan residents** recount being displaced by floods, receiving little support.
- **Urban communities** narrate how heatwaves make daily life unbearable, especially for the poor without air conditioning.

Citizens frequently blame LA for inadequate preparedness, reinforcing mistrust.

Administrators, in turn, describe frustration at being “left without tools” to respond.

2.2.12.6 International Support and Local Exclusion

Egypt has attracted significant international funding for climate adaptation, including Green Climate Fund projects and partnerships with UNDP, the EU, and the World Bank. Yet these projects are often implemented centrally, bypassing LA. Local officials narrate being excluded from project design, while citizens perceive projects as “foreign-driven” rather than community-based (Grindle, 2023).

This bypass problem undermines sustainability: once donor funding ends, local institutions lack capacity to maintain infrastructure or continue programmes.

2.2.12.7 Comparative Perspectives

Other states provide lessons:

- **Bangladesh** empowered local councils to lead disaster preparedness, combining donor funds with community mobilisation, reducing cyclone deaths dramatically.
- **Indonesia** decentralised disaster management after the 2004 tsunami, strengthening municipal institutions.
- **Nigeria**, by contrast, centralised responses to floods, producing weak adaptation and local disillusionment.

These cases suggest that empowering LA is essential for effective climate adaptation. Egypt's centralised approach places it closer to Nigeria's weak model than to Bangladesh or Indonesia's resilient ones (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

2.2.12.8 Why Climate Change Matters for Local Administration

Climate change matters for LA because it transforms governance challenges into existential threats:

1. **Escalating Demand** – Disasters increase citizen reliance on local services.
2. **Eroding Trust** – Failure to respond fuels disillusionment with institutions.
3. **Capacity Deficits** – Weak HRM and fiscal scarcity limit adaptation.
4. **Legitimacy Risks** – Communities perceive LA as irrelevant, undermining its role as a bridge between state and society.

Thus, climate change is not only an environmental issue but also a **structural governance challenge**.

2.2.13 Nile Basin Water Scarcity and Regional Cooperation

Water is the lifeblood of Egypt. The Nile River provides more than 90 percent of Egypt's freshwater, sustaining agriculture, industry, and daily life for over 105 million people (World Bank, 2022). Yet water scarcity has become one of the most pressing governance challenges facing the country. A combination of rapid population growth, climate change, inefficient irrigation, and upstream developments — particularly the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) — threatens Egypt's water security.

For Local Administration (LA), these pressures are deeply consequential. LA is directly responsible for maintaining irrigation canals, ensuring water delivery to farmers, overseeing local sanitation, and managing community-level disputes over access. However, structural weaknesses — fiscal dependency, political marginalisation, and weak capacity — leave LA ill-equipped to manage water scarcity. Citizens experience shortages not only as environmental problems but also as failures of governance, reinforcing mistrust in local institutions (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

2.2.13.1 The Nile and Egypt's Water Dependency

Egypt's historical dependence on the Nile shapes both its domestic governance and foreign policy. With limited rainfall and arid geography, Egypt relies almost exclusively on Nile inflows. Yet per capita water availability has dropped from 2,500 cubic meters in the 1940s to less than 550 cubic meters in 2023, far below the international water poverty line of 1,000 cubic meters (UNDP, 2023).

This decline is driven by demographic growth, rising agricultural demand, and upstream withdrawals. For LA, shrinking water resources manifest in everyday governance: conflicts among farmers, reduced irrigation flows, and public anger over shortages.

2.2.14 The GERD Dispute and Regional Tensions

The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has intensified Egypt's water insecurity. Ethiopia views GERD as essential for development and energy generation, while Egypt fears reduced Nile flows. Negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan have been protracted, with little resolution.

For LA, these regional disputes translate into local crises. Reduced irrigation flows leave farmers vulnerable, forcing LA to mediate disputes without tools. Citizens perceive LA as powerless, while administrators narrate frustration at being “caught between geopolitics and village demands” (El-Sayed, 2023).

2.2.14.1 Irrigation and Agricultural Dependence

Agriculture consumes over 80 percent of Egypt's freshwater, making irrigation management central to water governance. Traditional flood irrigation remains dominant, wasting vast quantities of water. LA is tasked with maintaining canals and supporting modern irrigation techniques, but chronic underfunding and weak enforcement mean that reforms remain limited (OECD, 2022).

Farmers often resist new practices, citing cost and lack of support. Qualitative narratives highlight mistrust: farmers complain of inequitable water distribution, while administrators describe corruption and elite capture in canal management. These dynamics illustrate how water scarcity is experienced as a governance issue, not merely a technical one.

2.2.14.2 Urban Pressures and Sanitation

Beyond agriculture, population growth and urbanisation increase water demand for domestic and industrial use. Cities face shortages, while wastewater treatment remains inadequate. LA plays a key role in sanitation management but often lacks

resources to expand capacity. Polluted water exacerbates health risks, particularly in poor communities.

Citizens frequently describe frustration at paying for unreliable water services, reinforcing perceptions of LA as ineffective.

2.2.14.3 Regional Cooperation and Diplomatic Limitations

Egypt's water security depends not only on domestic management but also on regional cooperation within the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). Yet cooperation remains fragile. Ethiopia prioritises its development needs, while Sudan navigates shifting alliances. International mediators, including the African Union and United States, have attempted to broker agreements, but with limited success (Cammett, 2022).

From a governance perspective, the failure of regional cooperation cascades down to LA. When Nile flows are uncertain, local administrators are left managing scarcity, often without guidance. Farmers narrate rising insecurity, while administrators highlight the lack of coordination between foreign policy and local needs.

2.2.14.4 Climate Change and Future Risks

Climate change compounds Nile scarcity. Rising temperatures increase evaporation, while rainfall variability threatens upstream flows. Sea-level rise risks salinisation of Delta aquifers, further reducing usable water (UNDP, 2023).

For LA, climate risks translate into increased conflict over water access. Communities that once relied on stable flows now face uncertainty. Qualitative narratives highlight growing desperation, with farmers abandoning land and youth migrating to cities.

2.2.14.5 Comparative Perspectives

Other states facing transboundary water disputes illustrate both risks and opportunities:

- In **South Asia**, tensions over the Indus and Ganges rivers mirror Egypt's Nile disputes, with local institutions struggling to adapt.
- In **Southern Africa**, cooperative agreements on the Orange and Zambezi rivers have improved water management, empowering local actors.
- In **Brazil**, decentralised water councils successfully integrated farmers into planning, improving sustainability (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

Comparisons suggest that Egypt's centralised approach — excluding LA from water governance — weakens adaptation and accountability.

2.2.14.6 Qualitative Narratives of Scarcity

Community accounts highlight the human face of water scarcity:

- **Farmers in Fayoum** recount walking long distances for irrigation water, often finding canals dry.
- **Residents in Delta villages** describe paying bribes for access to water connections.
- **Local administrators** narrate frustration at lacking budgets to dredge canals or repair pumps.

These experiences underscore how water scarcity erodes trust in both LA and central institutions.

2.2.14.7 Why Water Scarcity Matters for Local Administration

Water scarcity matters for LA because it intersects with nearly every dimension of governance:

1. **Agricultural Survival** – Farmers depend on LA for irrigation management.

2. **Public Health** – Safe water and sanitation are critical to welfare.
3. **Conflict Mediation** – LA must manage disputes over scarce resources.
4. **Legitimacy** – Citizen's judge LA by its ability to ensure water access.

Thus, water scarcity is both an environmental challenge and a **litmus test of governance capacity**.

2.2.15 Degradation of Water Resources and Poor Agricultural Practices

Egypt's water crisis reflects both external scarcity and domestic mismanagement. Pollution, overuse of fertilisers, untreated sewage, and inefficient irrigation undermine water quality and soil fertility. These pressures are intensified by weak institutions, corruption, and limited enforcement. Local Administration (LA), while formally responsible for water and land management, lacks authority, funding, and expertise, creating a dual environmental and governance crisis (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

2.2.15.1 2.3.15.1 Water Pollution and Public Health

Industrial effluents, agricultural runoff, and untreated sewage contaminate Nile tributaries and canals. Over half of rural households face unsafe drinking water (World Bank, 2022), leading to waterborne disease, kidney failure, and child malnutrition. Local officials report lacking laboratories, staff, or budgets to monitor pollution (El-Sayed, 2023). Communities perceive neglect, reinforcing mistrust.

2.2.15.2 Overuse of Chemical Inputs

Excessive fertiliser and pesticide use degrades soil and pollutes waterways. Farmers often overapply chemicals, unaware of long-term risks (UNDP, 2023). LA's extension services are underfunded, with officials focused on distributing inputs rather than education (Ahmed, 2024).

2.2.15.3 Inefficient Irrigation Practices

Flood irrigation wastes water and contributes to salinisation. Modern systems remain limited to wealthier farms. LA's role in canal maintenance and promoting efficient practices is undermined by corruption and weak capacity. Canals are often clogged, and distribution is manipulated by elites (Hassan, 2024).

2.2.15.4 Encroachment and Land Degradation

Urban expansion consumes agricultural land, reducing cultivable areas. Although LA is mandated to regulate land use, enforcement is weak, with violations overlooked under corruption or political pressure (El-Gebaly, 2023).

2.2.15.5 Institutional and Governance Failures

Underlying causes include:

1. Weak enforcement of regulations.
2. Corruption and political interference.
3. Capacity deficits in staff and equipment.
4. Centralised decision-making in Cairo.

These factors entrench a cycle of degradation and institutional paralysis.

2.2.15.6 Citizen Experiences

Qualitative narratives highlight impacts:

- Farmers report saline soils and falling yields.
- Villagers describe unsafe water and illness.
- Administrators' express frustration at lacking authority.

Such experiences frame decline as governance failure rather than natural inevitability (Abdel-Latif, 2025).

2.2.15.7 2.3.15.7 Comparative Perspectives

India mirrors Egypt's fertiliser overuse and weak enforcement (Singh, 2022). China improved efficiency through strict enforcement and investment (Zhou, 2023). Morocco's decentralisation empowered councils to involve farmers in water management (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt's trajectory aligns more with India than Morocco.

2.2.15.8 Section by section

Environmental decline undermines LA in four ways:

1. Health risks from polluted water.
2. Economic strain through reduced yields and incomes.
3. Declining trust, as citizens blame LA for failure.
4. Institutional fragility, reinforcing perceptions of irrelevance.

Thus, degradation damages both natural resources and governance legitimacy, highlighting the need for stronger local capacity and participatory mechanisms (Hassan, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

2.2.16 Human Resource Management (HRM) and Adaptive Capacity

Institutions are only as effective as the people who staff them. In Egypt's Local Administration (LA), human resource management (HRM) is both an enabler and a major constraint. LA employs thousands across governorates, districts, and villages, yet recruitment practices, politicised appointments, limited training, and low morale leave the system poorly equipped for twenty-first-century demands. At the same time, LA must respond to rapid population growth, climate pressures, fiscal scarcity, and citizen mistrust. Adaptive capacity—the ability to anticipate and innovate—remains constrained by bureaucratic inertia (El-Sayed, 2023; Hassan, 2024).

2.2.16.1 Recruitment and Politicisation

Recruitment is shaped less by merit than by loyalty, patronage, or security vetting. This produces three deficits: skill gaps in planning and budgeting, low innovation as officials prioritise compliance, and citizen perceptions of bias. Administrators themselves report being selected for reliability over competence, reinforcing conformity (Cammett, 2022).

2.2.16.2 Training Deficits and Capacity Gaps

Training for LA staff is limited. Few officials receive exposure to participatory planning, digitalisation, or climate adaptation. While Egypt invests in e-government platforms, many staff lack the digital literacy to use them, leaving online portals underutilised, particularly in rural areas (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

2.3.16.3 Wages, Morale, and Corruption

Low salaries depress morale and incentivise corruption. Informal payments become common, fuelling clientelist ties with citizens (Freedom House, 2023). Younger staff exit for better opportunities, leaving LA dependent on less skilled or demotivated personnel.

2.2.16.3 Rigid Bureaucratic Culture

LA operates within a command-and-control bureaucracy where authority remains centralised. This rigid hierarchy discourages initiative, producing what scholars call a “culture of compliance” (El-Mahdi, 2022). For citizens, the outcome is delays, red tape, and indifference.

2.2.16.4 Adaptive Capacity and Its Limits

LA’s adaptive capacity is weak. Crises such as floods or pandemics overwhelm local institutions, new technologies are resisted, and few mechanisms exist for

institutional learning. Young professionals, who could provide fresh skills, remain excluded (Ahram, 2025).

2.2.16.5 Gender and Inclusion

Women remain underrepresented in LA leadership. Where employed, they are often confined to junior roles and face cultural barriers and limited promotion opportunities. This reduces diversity and weakens adaptability (UNDP, 2023).

2.2.16.6 Citizen Experiences

Qualitative narratives highlight frustration: residents describe officials as unresponsive, farmers report poor extension advice, youth complain of nepotism in hiring, and administrators cite burnout. Together these perceptions reinforce mistrust and disillusionment.

2.2.16.7 Comparative Perspectives

Other states illustrate contrasting outcomes. Indonesia and Brazil strengthened HRM through training and participatory reforms, improving service delivery. Nigeria, by contrast, failed to reform HRM, leaving local governance weak and clientelist. Egypt currently resembles Nigeria more than the successful reformers (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

2.2.16.8 Why HRM Matters

HRM underpins LA's performance: competent staff deliver services, build trust, and enhance resilience. Without reform, fiscal or structural decentralisation efforts will fail for lack of human capacity.

2.2.16.9 Emerging Reform Opportunities

Recent initiatives include digital HR systems, donor-funded training in digital governance and climate adaptation, and proposals for youth recruitment (Hassan,

2024; UNDP, 2023). Yet without deeper reforms—merit-based recruitment, fair wages, gender inclusion, and local autonomy—these risks remain symbolic.

2.2.17 Synthesis: Major Human and Natural Factors

Governance challenges in Egypt cannot be explained by authoritarian politics or fiscal scarcity alone. They are compounded by demographic pressures, rural fragility, climate risks, water scarcity, environmental degradation, and human resource deficits. Each factor intensifies strain on LA, Egypt's frontline interface between state and citizens.

2.2.17.1 Population Growth

Egypt's population surpassed 105 million in 2023 and may reach 150 million by 2050 (United Nations, 2023). Schools, hospitals, and waste systems are overwhelmed. LA is tasked with managing these services but lacks resources. Population growth multiplies scarcity, grievances, and legitimacy deficits.

2.2.17.2 Rural Vulnerability

Rural Upper Egypt remains the epicentre of poverty and underdevelopment. Agriculture suffers from low productivity and land fragmentation. LA must mediate disputes, maintain canals, and expand infrastructure with minimal resources, leaving citizens frustrated and administrators disempowered.

2.2.17.3 Climate Change

Climate change magnifies risks: rising seas threaten the Delta, desertification reduces farmland, and heatwaves strain health systems. Farmers recount crop loss from saltwater intrusion; officials admit being unprepared. Exclusion of LA from adaptation planning leaves local institutions ill-equipped (World Bank, 2022).

2.2.17.4 Water Scarcity

Egypt depends on the Nile for 90% of freshwater. Demographic growth, inefficient irrigation, and GERD disputes deepen insecurity. Villages face shortages, and administrators navigate tensions between communities and geopolitics. Citizens equate scarcity with governance failure.

2.2.17.5 Environmental Degradation

Domestic mismanagement compounds scarcity. Fertiliser overuse, untreated sewage, industrial waste, and unregulated land use degrade soil and water. LA lacks authority to enforce regulations. Citizens narrate illness and declining yields; administrators describe frustration.

2.2.17.6 HRM Weaknesses

HRM deficits are the “hidden architecture” of fragility. Politicised recruitment, low morale, and gender exclusion undermine adaptation (Ahram, 2025). Citizens perceive unresponsive and corrupt officials; administrators cite burnout. Without HRM reform, LA cannot develop resilience.

2.2.17.7 Interlocking Pressures

Together these factors create a governance trap: population growth drives water demand, climate change worsens scarcity, HRM limits adaptation, and mistrust erodes legitimacy. LA remains reactive, firefighting crises rather than planning proactively.

2.2.17.8 Qualitative Narratives

Daily experiences illustrate this crisis: parents describe overcrowded schools, farmers recount dry canals, residents note garbage accumulation, and officials admit to “managing scarcity, not development.”

2.2.17.9 Comparative Lessons

Other states show different trajectories. Bangladesh reduced disaster deaths through decentralised preparedness; Brazil improved services via participatory budgeting; Morocco reduced rural inequality through local councils. By contrast, Nigeria and India struggled under weak institutions. Egypt currently resembles the latter (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

2.2.17.10 Why These Factors Matter

Human and natural factors determine whether LA is seen as relevant or irrelevant. They shape service delivery, citizen trust, resilience, and legitimacy. Without empowering LA to manage these pressures, reforms will remain superficial.

2.3 Theoretical/Conceptual Framework – Introduction

A study of governance challenges and reform prospects in Egypt's Local Administration (LA) requires a theoretical foundation linking research questions, objectives, and methods to broader debates in governance and development. The framework serves two purposes: to interpret LA's persistent problems and to provide conceptual tools for imagining reform.

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive orientation. Governance challenges are understood not as technical deficits but as dynamics embedded in political, historical, and social contexts. Centralisation, fiscal dependency, militarisation, environmental stress, and HRM weaknesses are treated as interlocking rather than isolated.

Governance and Decentralisation

The distinction between Local Government (LG) and LA is central. LG implies elected councils, fiscal autonomy, and accountability, while Egypt's LA remains administrative and centralised, with appointed governors and suspended councils.

Decentralisation theory distinguishes administrative, fiscal, and political dimensions (Smoke, 2022). Egypt has focused on administrative deconcentration, leaving LA dependent on ministries and undermining reform (Hassan, 2024).

Public Management and Institutionalism

Public management theories emphasise efficiency and responsiveness. New Public Management (NPM) advocates performance measurement and managerial autonomy (Osborne, 2021), yet its applicability in Egypt is limited by authoritarianism and resource scarcity. Instead, historical institutionalism explains how legacies of centralisation and bureaucratic rigidity create path dependency, locking LA into inefficiency (Pierson, 2022). Combining NPM insights with institutionalism captures both technical and structural dimensions.

Authoritarian Governance

Egypt's governance is shaped by authoritarian resilience. Regimes maintain control through co-optation, repression, and centralisation (Lust & Waldner, 2022). For LA, this means appointments over elections, surveillance over participation, and militarisation over decentralisation. Local institutions are designed to reinforce regime stability, often sacrificing efficiency or legitimacy (Cammett, 2022).

Adaptive Governance and Resilience

Facing demographic growth, water scarcity, and climate risks, adaptive governance offers a relevant lens. It stresses flexibility, learning, and collaboration (Chaffin et al., 2021). For LA, adaptive capacity would mean empowering officials to innovate and respond to crises. Currently, rigid hierarchies and weak HRM constrain resilience (Ahram, 2025).

Participation, Accountability, and Social Capital

Participatory governance highlights how citizen involvement strengthens accountability and legitimacy (Fung, 2022). Social capital theory underscores trust and networks as essential to effective governance. Egypt's restricted civic space undermines both, framing exclusion as a deliberate structural outcome rather than an accident.

Human–Natural Pressures

As shown in Section 2.3, demographic growth, rural fragility, climate change, and water scarcity intensify governance deficits. Political ecology links these pressures with institutional weakness and geopolitical conflict (Scoones, 2021). For example, water scarcity is simultaneously an ecological and political crisis.

Why a Qualitative Framework

The interpretive framework aligns with the study's qualitative design. Quantitative models may show correlations, but they miss narratives and lived experiences. Constructivist epistemology recognises governance as co-constructed through meaning and interaction (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2021).

Integrated Framework

The framework combines six strands:

1. Decentralisation theory – limits of LA.
2. Public management & institutionalism – inefficiency and path dependency.
3. Authoritarian governance – regime stability over reform.
4. Adaptive governance – resilience gaps.
5. Participatory governance & social capital – accountability and legitimacy.
6. Political ecology – interaction of human and natural pressures.

This layered approach situates LA within Egypt's political economy while identifying pathways for reform.

2.3.1 Methodology of the Study

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology to explore LA's challenges. Weaknesses are not purely technical but embedded in politics and environment; hence depth and context are required.

Philosophical Orientation. Guided by interpretivism and constructivism, the study views realities as multiple and socially constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2021). Knowledge is co-produced with participants through narratives and interactions.

Research Design. A qualitative embedded case study was chosen, examining Egypt's LA system while exploring sub-units such as governorates, municipalities, and community projects. Case studies suit "how" and "why" questions and allow variation (Yin, 2021).

Timeframe. Covering 1981–2021, the design captures Mubarak's authoritarian consolidation, the 2011 uprisings, and Sisi's re-centralisation under Vision 2030. This longitudinal view highlights path dependency and cycles of reform (Pierson, 2022).

Data Collection. Four strategies were used:

1. Semi-structured interviews with administrators, policymakers, civil society, and citizens.
2. Document and policy analysis of laws, budgets, and donor programmes.
3. Secondary literature and archival materials.
4. Limited observation of service sites.

Sampling

Purposive and snowball strategies ensured inclusion of administrators, policymakers, civil society actors, and citizens from both urban and rural areas.

Analysis

Data were coded thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022), linking patterns such as centralisation, fiscal dependency, and HRM to the conceptual framework.

Trustworthiness

Credibility was ensured through triangulation; transferability through thick description; dependability via transparent documentation; confirmability through reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2021).

Ethics

Informed consent, anonymity, and risk minimisation were prioritised. Reflexivity addressed positionality, acknowledging the researcher's influence (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2021).

Limitations

Political restrictions limited access and may have led to self-censorship. Findings are context-specific but contribute to wider debates on governance in authoritarian regimes.

2.3.2 Study Outline

- **Chapter One:** Introduces research background, problem, aims, and questions.
- **Chapter Two:** Reviews literature on centralisation, fiscal dependency, civic repression, demographic and environmental pressures.
- **Chapter Three:** Details qualitative methodology and embedded case study.
- **Chapter Four:** Presents findings thematically, incorporating voices of citizens and administrators.
- **Chapter Five:** Synthesises findings, contributes theoretical insights, and outlines a strategic vision for LA reform to 2050.

This structure reflects a logical progression from context, to literature, to methodology, to empirical findings, and finally to strategic vision.

2.3.3 Philosophy

Ontology

Reality is viewed as multiple and constructed: administrators, citizens, and civil society actors interpret governance differently.

Epistemology

Knowledge is co-produced between researcher and participants through dialogue and interpretation.

Axiology

Values such as credibility, reflexivity, and ethics guide the study.

Interpretivism

The guiding paradigm, suitable for authoritarian contexts where hidden practices and narratives matter.

Constructivism

Emphasises that meaning is constructed in interaction.

Reflexivity

The researcher-maintained journals, documented assumptions, and acknowledged positionality.

This philosophy ensures alignment between theory, methodology, and ethics.

2.3.4 Study Approach

The study emphasises depth and meaning making rather than prediction. Qualitative case study design allows analysis of national structures and local experiences.

The longitudinal scope (1981–2021) captures continuity and change. Triangulation of interviews, documents, and observations strengthens validity.

Comparative sensitivity situates Egypt alongside Morocco, South Africa, and Indonesia, while reflexivity ensures transparency.

2.3.5 Study Strategy

An embedded case study strategy captures linkages between LA as a national system and sub-units such as governorates, municipalities, and councils.

The research unfolded in five stages: literature mapping, conceptual anchoring, fieldwork, thematic coding, and synthesis. Comparative lessons from Morocco, Jordan, South Africa, and Nigeria provide global context (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

Triangulation underpins credibility, iterative analysis and reflexivity enhanced rigour despite political sensitivities.

2.3.6 Duration/Timespan

The study covers 1981–2021, spanning Mubarak’s consolidation, post-2011 turbulence, and Sisi’s Vision 2030 reforms. This forty-year perspective highlights path dependency, cycles of reform, and intensifying demographic and environmental pressures.

2.3.7 Information Deposition

Data were deposited and stored ethically, prioritising confidentiality, integrity, transparency, and security. Digital files were encrypted, field notes digitised, and consent forms secured. Anonymisation ensured participant safety.

Audit trails and reflexive notes balanced transparency with protection. Data will be deposited in the university’s repository, with sensitive material embargoed.

2.3.8 Sample Population

Purposive and snowball sampling included administrators, policymakers, donors, civil society, and citizens. Geographic diversity ensured urban, Delta, Upper Egypt, and peripheral regions were represented.

Approx. 40 interviews and 15 document-based narratives were analysed until thematic saturation was reached. Women and marginalised groups were underrepresented, reflecting structural imbalances, but triangulation mitigated bias.

2.3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and safe interview settings. Sensitive questions were framed around service delivery rather than political opposition. Reflexivity ensured fairness in interpretation. Vulnerable groups (activists, women, rural citizens) were treated with special care.

Ethical approval was secured from the university's IRB.

2.3.10 Nature of the Study

The study is qualitative, interpretive, and constructivist, employing an embedded case study with longitudinal scope. It prioritises narratives, context, and reflexivity.

It is applied as well as academic: beyond diagnosing inefficiencies, it proposes reform pathways and a strategic vision for LA to 2050.

2.4 Empirical Gap

While a substantial body of literature has examined governance, decentralisation, and public management in Egypt, most existing studies remain fragmented, descriptive, or limited in scope. They identify challenges such as authoritarian centralisation, fiscal dependency, corruption, and weak citizen

engagement, but they stop short of providing a holistic and forward-looking vision of Local Administration (LA). The persistence of inefficiency and mistrust across four decades highlights not only institutional inertia but also the lack of robust empirical research capturing the lived realities of administrators, policymakers, and citizens.

This section identifies the major empirical gaps in existing scholarship and explains how this thesis addresses them.

2.4.1 Limited Engagement with Stakeholder Voices

Most research on LA in Egypt is top-down, focusing on policies, laws, or institutional frameworks. Studies by international organisations such as the World Bank (2022), UNDP (2023), and OECD (2022) have highlighted structural issues but rarely capture the voices of those directly embedded in local governance systems. Similarly, academic research often relies on policy analysis or secondary data, with limited qualitative evidence from administrators, civil society actors, or citizens.

This absence of stakeholder perspectives leaves a gap in understanding how governance is experienced:

- How do administrators perceive the constraints of centralisation?
- How do citizens negotiate everyday service delivery failures?
- How do civil society actors attempt to promote accountability in restricted civic spaces?

This thesis addresses this gap through qualitative interviews and field-based inquiry, foregrounding the voices of diverse stakeholders.

2.4.2 Overemphasis on Political Structures, Underemphasis on Practice

Existing scholarship has richly documented Egypt's authoritarian resilience (Cammett, 2022; Lust & Waldner, 2022). Yet, much of this research emphasises high-

level political dynamics — regime stability, military dominance, party systems — while neglecting the everyday practices of local governance.

As a result, we know a great deal about how power is centralised but far less about how local offices function on the ground, how bureaucrats adapt to scarcity, or how citizens perceive local councils. This imbalance produces a conceptual blind spot: governance is treated as a political system rather than a lived administrative reality.

This thesis fills this gap by combining political economy analysis with thick description of practices, showing how macro-level centralisation interacts with micro-level governance processes.

2.4.3 Lack of Integration Between Human/Natural and Institutional Factors

Most studies analyse LA in Egypt through institutional or political lenses but rarely integrate demographic and environmental pressures. Yet, population growth, water scarcity, and climate change directly exacerbate governance challenges (UNDP, 2023).

- Population growth increases demand for schools, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- Water scarcity affects agricultural livelihoods and intensifies rural discontent.
- Climate change creates new risks, such as flooding and heat stress, that local authorities are ill-equipped to manage.

The lack of integrated studies leaves a gap in understanding how human and natural stressors compounds institutional weaknesses. This thesis bridges that gap by applying an interdisciplinary framework that situates LA within both political economy and environmental governance.

2.4.4 *Short-Term Focus, Lack of Longitudinal Analysis*

Many studies focus on specific reform attempts — such as structural adjustment in the 1990s, the post-2011 period, or Vision 2030 initiatives — but they rarely adopt a longitudinal perspective. Without examining governance over decades, it is difficult to trace path dependency, cycles of reform and retrenchment, and enduring institutional legacies (Pierson, 2022).

This thesis addresses this gap by adopting a 40-year timeframe (1981–2021), capturing the full arc of continuity and change across Mubarak, Morsi, and Sisi. This allows identification of persistent weaknesses as well as moments of reform, situating them within broader patterns.

2.4.5 *Limited Comparative Insights*

Although comparative cases exist (e.g., Morocco, Jordan, Indonesia, South Africa), few studies systematically apply comparative lessons to Egypt. International donor reports sometimes reference “best practices,” but they often do so in generic terms, without analysing why certain reforms succeed in one context but fail in another.

This leaves a gap in understanding what lessons are transferable to Egypt’s political and institutional setting and what must be adapted. This thesis fills that gap by situating Egypt’s experience alongside both successful and failed decentralisation cases, identifying contextual factors that shape outcomes.

2.4.6 *Absence of a Strategic Long-Term Vision*

Finally, most scholarship ends with modest recommendations (e.g., incremental fiscal reform, minor participation channels). What is missing is a strategic long-term vision that projects how LA might evolve by mid-century, aligning with Egypt’s Vision 2030 and global governance trends.

This gap is critical because piecemeal reforms have repeatedly failed. Without a holistic, forward-looking roadmap, reforms risk being reversed or co-opted. This thesis contributes by articulating a strategic vision for LA to 2050, grounded in empirical evidence and comparative lessons.

2.5 Local Government Is Not Local Administration

A crucial distinction in governance studies is between Local Government (LG) and Local Administration (LA). While often used interchangeably in academic and policy discourse, these concepts reflect different structures, logics, and implications for citizen participation, accountability, and service delivery. In Egypt, this distinction is particularly significant: what exists is not a genuine system of local government but rather a highly centralised form of local administration, subordinated to the executive. Understanding this difference is fundamental to analysing why Egypt's governance system has struggled to meet developmental and democratic goals.

2.5.1 Defining Local Government (LG)

Local Government is commonly defined as an autonomous level of governance operating below the national state, vested with political authority, fiscal autonomy, and responsibility for local service delivery (OECD, 2022). Key characteristics include:

- **Elected councils** that represent citizens.
- **Fiscal independence**, including local taxation powers.
- **Legal autonomy** embedded in constitutions or enabling laws.
- **Accountability to citizens** through elections and participatory mechanisms.

Globally, local government is seen as a vehicle for democracy, accountability, and local development (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). It embodies the principle of subsidiarity, whereby decisions are taken as close to citizens as possible.

2.5.2 Defining Local Administration (LA)

By contrast, Local Administration refers to a deconcentrated arm of the central state. It consists of administrative units (governorates, districts, municipalities) headed by officials appointed by the centre, often drawn from the civil service or military. Characteristics of LA include:

- **Appointed leadership**, usually by the executive or central ministries.
- **Fiscal dependency** on central transfers.
- **Limited or no legal autonomy** — institutions are administrative, not governmental.
- **Accountability upward** (to central ministries) rather than downward (to citizens).

In LA systems, citizens are positioned as service recipients rather than active participants in governance. This fosters a culture of compliance and bureaucratic control rather than empowerment or accountability (Hassan, 2024).

2.5.3 The Egyptian Context: Why Egypt Has LA, Not LG

In Egypt, the constitutional and legal framework creates a system of Local Administration, not Local Government:

- **Governors** are appointed by the President, often from military or security backgrounds.
- **Local councils** exist but are largely consultative and unelected since 2011.
- **Budgets** are set by the central Ministry of Finance, with minimal local discretion.
- **Policy priorities** are dictated by central ministries, leaving little space for local innovation.

This means that Egypt's so-called "local governance" is essentially an administrative hierarchy, where local units execute central directives rather than represent citizen interests (El-Mahdi, 2022).

2.5.4 Implications of Conflating LG and LA

The failure to distinguish between LG and LA has several consequences:

1. Scholarly Confusion

- Many studies describe Egypt's system as "local government," implicitly assuming autonomy and accountability.
- This obscures the fact that Egypt's LA is administratively deconcentrated, not politically decentralised.

2. Policy Misalignment

- Donor programs often design interventions for "local government reform," assuming participatory councils exist.
- In practice, reforms become absorbed into existing administrative hierarchies, producing limited change (World Bank, 2022).

3. Citizen Disillusion

- Citizens expect local councils to represent their voices but find them powerless.
- This widens the gap between expectations of governance and the reality of bureaucratic administration.

4. Blocked Pathways for Accountability

- Without elected local governments, citizens cannot hold officials directly accountable.
- Complaints and grievances are directed upward to central ministries, often ignored or delayed.

2.5.5 *Comparative Insights: LA vs. LG*

Comparative cases illustrate the importance of this distinction:

- **South Africa** entrenched local government in its constitution, granting councils fiscal and political authority. This allowed municipalities to become engines of service delivery (Smoke, 2022).
- **Indonesia** moved from LA to LG after 1998, replacing appointed administrators with elected councils, leading to enhanced citizen participation (Eaton et al., 2023).
- **Jordan**, like Egypt, retains LA structures — appointed governors, limited autonomy — and suffers similar inefficiencies and citizen mistrust (OECD, 2022).

These comparisons highlight that Egypt's challenge is structural: reform requires moving from LA to genuine LG, not simply adjusting administrative processes.

2.5.6 *Why the Distinction Matters for This Study*

This distinction is not semantic but analytical:

- It explains why reforms framed as “decentralisation” in Egypt often fail — they are absorbed into LA, not LG.
- It highlights why citizen participation remains weak: without elected councils, there is no channel for representation.
- It frames this thesis's contribution: showing how Egypt could move from **administrative deconcentration** to **meaningful decentralisation** by 2050.

Recognising that Egypt has Local Administration, not Local Government, provides the conceptual clarity needed to design realistic reform strategies.

2.6 Rather than a Local Government, Egypt Has a Nearby Organisation

In democratic and decentralised systems, local government functions as a representative and autonomous political entity with the authority to make decisions, raise revenues, and respond to citizen needs. By contrast, Egypt's system is better described as a nearby organisation: a geographically proximate administrative apparatus that implements central directives without real accountability to local communities. This characterisation explains why citizens frequently perceive local institutions as ineffective, unresponsive, or irrelevant, despite their physical presence in villages, towns, and governorates.

2.6.1 *Conceptualising the “Nearby Organisation”*

The term “nearby organisation” captures the paradox of Egypt's LA:

- It is **spatially close** to citizens (through governorates, municipalities, and village units).
- Yet, it is **institutionally distant**, lacking autonomy, representativeness, and downward accountability.

Unlike genuine local government, which derives legitimacy from elections and citizen engagement, Egypt's LA derives its authority from appointment by the executive. Its role is not to represent but to transmit orders, acting as the state's administrative arm embedded in communities.

This conceptualisation is consistent with comparative governance studies that distinguish between administrative deconcentration and political decentralisation (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt exemplifies the former, not the latter.

2.6.2 Historical Roots of the “Nearby Organisation”

Egypt’s local structures have long been shaped by centralised, hierarchical traditions:

1. Colonial and Monarchical Legacies

- British colonial governance entrenched centralised control, relying on appointed notables to manage local affairs (Hopkins, 2001).
- Local councils were consultative at best, reinforcing top-down authority.

2. Military Dominance Post-1952

- Nasser’s regime built a strong state apparatus where governors and administrators acted as local agents of central control.
- Local councils lacked autonomy, serving primarily as administrative relays.

3. Mubarak Era (1981–2011)

- Reforms introduced during structural adjustment created decentralisation rhetoric but preserved authoritarian control.
- Local institutions became bureaucratic shells, unable to mobilise resources independently (El-Mahdi, 2022).

Thus, the “nearby organisation” is not accidental but a path-dependent outcome of historical centralisation.

2.6.3 Characteristics of Egypt’s Nearby Organisation

Egypt’s LA exhibits several features that distinguish it from genuine local government:

1. Appointment Rather than Election

- Governors and senior officials are appointed by the President, often from military or security backgrounds.

- Local councils have been suspended since 2011, eliminating citizen representation.

2. **Fiscal Subordination**

- Local units depend entirely on central transfers, with little discretion in spending (World Bank, 2022).

3. **Bureaucratic Culture**

- Decision-making prioritises compliance with regulations rather than responsiveness to citizens.
- Administrators perceive themselves as accountable upward, not downward.

4. **Lack of Policy Innovation**

- Projects reflect central priorities (e.g., mega-infrastructure) rather than local needs.
- Flexibility for problem-solving is minimal, leading to delays and inefficiency.

This creates a governance system that is close in geography but far in legitimacy.

2.6.4 Consequences for Citizens

For citizens, the “nearby organisation” generates multiple frustrations:

- **Alienation:** Councils are seen as irrelevant, incapable of addressing grievances.
- **Informal Negotiations:** Citizens rely on personal networks, intermediaries, or bribes to access services.
- **Distrust:** Perceptions of corruption and inefficiency fuel broader distrust of the state (Freedom House, 2023).

Citizens may physically visit municipal offices, but their encounters highlight distance in function: rather than forums for participation, these offices are bureaucratic bottlenecks.

2.6.5 Comparative Perspectives

Egypt is not unique in this pattern. Other authoritarian or semi-authoritarian contexts also operate “nearby organisations”:

- **Jordan:** Governors appointed by the King oversee municipalities with limited powers (OECD, 2022).
- **Morocco (pre-2000s):** Local councils existed but were heavily controlled by the central Ministry of Interior.
- **China:** Local governments are geographically proximate but politically subordinate, functioning as administrative arms of the Communist Party (Saich, 2021).

By contrast, countries that moved from LA to LG — such as Indonesia post-1998 — demonstrate that autonomy, elections, and fiscal authority can transform proximity into genuine representation (Eaton et al., 2023).

2.6.6 Why This Matters for Reform

Understanding LA as a “nearby organisation” highlights the depth of reform required in Egypt:

- Technical fixes (e.g., digitalisation, administrative streamlining) will not suffice if councils remain unelected and powerless.
- Fiscal decentralisation without political decentralisation risks reinforcing bureaucratic inefficiency.

- Citizen participation initiatives will fail unless councils have real authority to act on inputs.

In short, moving from LA to LG requires a structural transformation: from nearby administration to representative governance.

2.7 Local Administration in Egypt from 1981

The evolution of Local Administration (LA) in Egypt since 1981 illustrates how authoritarian resilience, economic restructuring, and political upheavals have shaped governance. While successive regimes promised reform and decentralisation, what emerged instead was the consolidation of a centralised, administrative apparatus that functioned as a “nearby organisation” rather than a representative local government. This section traces LA under three periods: the Mubarak era (1981–2011), the revolutionary and transitional period (2011–2013), and the Sisi era (2014–2021).

2.7.1 The Mubarak Era (1981–2011): Authoritarian Stability and Administrative Centralisation

When Hosni Mubarak assumed power in 1981 following President Anwar Sadat’s assassination, he inherited a state apparatus that was already centralised and authoritarian. Mubarak’s governance strategy rested on authoritarian stability: maintaining elite coalitions, suppressing dissent, and using LA as an instrument of central control.

Administrative Control

- Governors were consistently appointed by the President, many drawn from military or security backgrounds.
- Local councils existed but were tightly controlled, with limited autonomy and little electoral legitimacy.

- The **Local Administration Law 43/1979**, though revised, remained the dominant framework, granting wide discretion to central authorities (El-Mahdi, 2022).

Economic Reforms and Structural Adjustment

The 1990s brought Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) negotiated with the IMF and World Bank. While reforms promised greater efficiency, they reinforced fiscal dependency:

- Local budgets were cut, deepening reliance on central transfers (World Bank, 2022).
- Privatisation and subsidy reforms reduced local capacity to deliver services.
- International donors promoted “decentralisation,” but in practice reforms were confined to administrative deconcentration (OECD, 2022).

Implications

The result was a bureaucratic shell of LA: councils existed, but citizens viewed them as irrelevant; administrators executed central directives rather than shaping local policy. This entrenched the “nearby organisation” model, physically present but politically distant.

2.7.2 The Revolution and Transitional Period (2011–2013): Promise and Collapse of Reform

The 2011 uprisings opened a brief window for democratic reform, with demands for accountability, participation, and decentralisation at the forefront of popular discourse. Citizens in Tahrir Square and across governorates called for an end to corruption and the establishment of representative local councils (El-Sayed, 2023).

Post-Revolution Reforms

- The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) initially suspended local councils, citing corruption and inefficiency.
- Reform committees debated drafting a new Local Administration Law to allow elected councils and fiscal autonomy.
- Civil society and youth groups called for participatory mechanisms, linking decentralisation to revolutionary goals of dignity and justice (Hassan, 2024).

Challenges

- Political instability, polarisation between Islamist and secular forces, and short-lived transitions (under Morsi and then the military) prevented meaningful reform.
- Local councils remained suspended, creating a governance vacuum at the local level.
- Citizens' hopes for participatory local governance were disappointed, deepening mistrust.

Implications

The transitional period revealed demand for decentralisation but also exposed the fragility of reform. The absence of durable institutions meant that centralisation quickly reasserted itself once the political tide shifted.

2.7.3 The Sisi Era (2014–2021): Re-Centralisation and Authoritarian Resilience

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's rise to power in 2014 marked the consolidation of a new authoritarian regime. While the government's Vision 2030 strategy included commitments to decentralisation and governance reform, in practice the Sisi era reinforced centralisation and militarisation of LA.

Reassertion of Central Control

- Governors continued to be appointed, often from military ranks.

- Local councils remained unelected, perpetuating the governance vacuum.
- Ministries of Planning and Local Development retained control over budgets, with little delegation of fiscal authority.

Vision 2030 and Symbolic Decentralisation

Vision 2030 introduced ambitious language about participatory governance, e-governance, and efficiency. However:

- Most reforms focused on **digitalisation of bureaucracy** rather than empowerment of councils.
- Pilot projects in participatory budgeting or local planning were limited and donor-driven, not institutionalised.
- Scholars describe this as “**symbolic decentralisation**”: reforms are announced but do not alter power dynamics (Cammett, 2022; Hassan, 2024).

Socio-Economic and Environmental Pressures

During this period, LA faced escalating challenges:

- Population reached 100 million in 2020, intensifying service demands (UNDP, 2023).
- Water scarcity worsened due to climate change and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute.
- Fiscal austerity and IMF loan agreements limited investment in local services (World Bank, 2022).

LA was ill-equipped to address these pressures, deepening citizen frustration.

2.7.4 Continuities and Shifts Across Four Decades

The trajectory of LA from 1981 to 2021 reveals both continuities and shifts:

1. Continuities

- Centralisation of authority in Cairo.

- Appointment of governors and council suspension.
- Fiscal dependency on central transfers.
- Limited citizen participation.

2. Shifts

- Language of “decentralisation” became more prominent, especially in donor discourse.
- Digitalisation and Vision 2030 introduced modernisation rhetoric.
- Environmental and demographic pressures escalated, making governance deficits more acute.

Overall, the system remained locked in path dependency, unable to transition from administrative LA to representative LG.

2.7.5 *Why This Historical Trajectory Matters*

Understanding the evolution of LA since 1981 highlights why Egypt’s governance challenges persist:

- Reforms have been **rhetorical rather than substantive**.
- Institutional legacies of authoritarianism constrain innovation.
- Citizens’ demands for accountability remain unmet, fuelling mistrust.

This trajectory also underscores the need for a long-term strategic vision: piecemeal reforms have failed because they did not address structural deficits. By adopting a longitudinal perspective, this thesis situates current challenges within a broader history of resilience, resistance, and reform.

2.8 Comparative Experiences in Decentralisation: Lessons for Egypt

Comparative experiences of decentralisation across the Global South reveal diverse pathways, successes, and failures. While some countries have achieved meaningful reforms that empowered local governments, others have pursued only

symbolic decentralisation, reproducing centralised control under a different guise. Situating Egypt within this comparative landscape provides valuable insights into both the possibilities and pitfalls of reform.

2.8.1 *Morocco: Incremental but Sustained Reform*

Morocco presents a case of gradual decentralisation, where reforms were introduced incrementally over three decades.

Key Features

- The 2011 Constitution explicitly recognised local and regional government as autonomous, with legal personality and financial independence.
- Regionalisation reforms in 2015 expanded the powers of elected councils, including fiscal resources and planning authority (OECD, 2022).
- Donor support (EU, World Bank) helped finance capacity building for municipalities.

Achievements

- Elected councils now play a significant role in development planning.
- Fiscal transfers to regions are more predictable, though still controlled centrally.
- Civil society participation has modestly expanded, particularly in urban areas (Berriane, 2022).

Limitations

- Central ministries retain significant oversight.
- Corruption and clientelism persist in rural regions.
- Reform momentum depends heavily on elite willingness.

Lesson for Egypt

Incremental reform can build capacity without destabilising the regime. However, constitutional recognition of LG and genuine elections are preconditions for sustainability — both absent in Egypt.

2.8.2 Jordan: Limited Progress and Symbolic Decentralisation

Jordan represents a case of symbolic decentralisation, where reforms exist largely on paper.

Key Features

- The Decentralisation Law (2015) established governorate councils, with some elected members.
- Councils were tasked with preparing local development plans.

Achievements

- Some participatory forums were created.
- Citizens gained limited avenues to express needs.

Limitations

- Governors (appointed by the King) retain executive authority.
- Councils lack fiscal autonomy, relying entirely on central transfers.
- Citizens view councils as powerless, reinforcing political apathy (OECD, 2022).

Lesson for Egypt

Partial reforms without fiscal or political autonomy risk reinforcing citizen disillusion. Egypt's suspension of councils since 2011 mirrors Jordan's tokenism, suggesting that symbolic decentralisation worsens mistrust rather than alleviates it.

2.8.3 South Africa: Constitutional Entrenchment of Local Government

South Africa demonstrates the transformative potential of constitutional decentralisation.

Key Features

- The 1996 Constitution recognised local government as a distinct sphere of governance, with powers equal to provincial and national levels.
- Municipalities were granted authority over housing, water, sanitation, electricity, and local development.
- Local taxation and intergovernmental fiscal transfers ensured fiscal viability.

Achievements

- Municipalities became drivers of post-apartheid service delivery, particularly in housing and electricity.
- Participatory mechanisms (ward committees, integrated development plans) institutionalised citizen input (Smoke, 2022).
- Local governments emerged as **legitimate democratic institutions**, not just administrative arms.

Limitations

- Service backlogs remain in poorer municipalities.
- Corruption and mismanagement have undermined some councils.
- Inequality persists despite decentralisation.

Lesson for Egypt

Entrenching local government in the Constitution creates durable reform. However, without strong institutions and anti-corruption safeguards, decentralisation alone does not guarantee equity.

2.8.4 Indonesia: Rapid Decentralisation and Local Empowerment

Indonesia represents a radical case of “big bang” decentralisation following the fall of Suharto in 1998.

Key Features

- Local governments gained authority over health, education, infrastructure, and natural resources.
- Councils and mayors became directly elected.
- Fiscal decentralisation allocated a significant share of national revenue to local governments.

Achievements

- Rapid improvement in service delivery responsiveness.
- Greater citizen participation through elections and community councils.
- Enhanced accountability at the local level (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

Limitations

- Elite capture and corruption persisted in some regions.
- Rapid transfer of authority created capacity gaps.
- Inequalities widened between resource-rich and resource-poor regions.

Lesson for Egypt

Rapid decentralisation can mobilise participation and accountability, but risks failure without prior investment in institutional and human capacity. Egypt would require gradual but firm reform sequencing to avoid collapse.

2.8.5 Lessons for Egypt

Comparative experiences reveal several key lessons:

1. Legal and Constitutional Entrenchment Matters

- South Africa shows that local government must be enshrined in the constitution, not left to decrees.
- Egypt's reliance on administrative laws (e.g., Law 43/1979) leaves LA vulnerable to suspension and manipulation.

2. Fiscal Autonomy Is Essential

- Morocco and Indonesia illustrate that without fiscal resources, decentralisation is meaningless.
- Egypt's LA remains dependent on discretionary transfers, undermining responsiveness.

3. Citizen Participation Must Be Institutionalised

- Participatory budgeting in Brazil, ward committees in South Africa, and local elections in Indonesia demonstrate that participation strengthens legitimacy.
- Egypt's councils are unelected, leaving no institutional channel for accountability.

4. Capacity Building Cannot Be Ignored

- Indonesia's challenges highlight that decentralisation without administrative capacity risks inefficiency.
- Egypt must invest in HRM, training, and digitalisation alongside reforms.

5. Avoid Symbolic Decentralisation

- Jordan's experience warns that token reforms breed mistrust.
- Egypt's suspension of councils risks the same outcome, reinforcing alienation.

2.9 Public Participation and Service Delivery under LA in Egypt

Participation and service delivery are central to debates on decentralisation and governance. In theory, Local Government (LG) provides citizens with direct channels to influence decisions, monitor outcomes, and hold officials accountable. In practice, Egypt's Local Administration (LA) lacks these features, functioning as an administrative extension of the centre rather than a participatory governance arena. This structural weakness undermines not only citizen trust but also the quality of service delivery in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and welfare.

This section examines how limited participation and weak accountability mechanisms constrain service delivery under Egypt's LA. It then explores how inclusive participation could become a driver of reform.

2.9.1 *Weak Institutional Channels for Citizen Engagement*

Formal channels of participation in Egypt's LA are **non-existent or ineffective**:

- **Local councils** have been suspended since 2011, removing elected bodies as a voice for citizens (El-Mahdi, 2022).
- Existing administrative units (governorates, municipalities) are accountable to central ministries, not to citizens.
- Consultative mechanisms are ad hoc and lack legal authority.

Citizens thus have little influence over priorities or budgets. Instead, they must rely on informal networks — intermediaries, party representatives, or personal contacts — to access services (Hassan, 2024).

Comparative research shows that where participation is institutionalised (e.g., ward committees in South Africa, participatory budgeting in Brazil), citizens become co-producers of governance, enhancing accountability and service responsiveness (Fung, 2022). In Egypt, by contrast, citizens are largely excluded.

2.9.2 *Impact on Service Delivery*

Weak participation directly undermines service delivery in multiple sectors:

- **Education:** Parents and communities lack mechanisms to influence school budgets or staffing. Schools remain overcrowded, under-resourced, and administratively distant.
- **Healthcare:** Clinics suffer from staff shortages and poor infrastructure. Local voices cannot shape health priorities or monitor spending.
- **Infrastructure:** Roads, irrigation systems, and sanitation projects are determined centrally, often ignoring local needs. Delays and misallocation are common.

- **Social Welfare:** Subsidies and housing programs are allocated through clientelist networks, benefiting connected elites rather than vulnerable groups.

The absence of participation reduces efficiency (poor targeting), equity (exclusion of vulnerable groups), and legitimacy (distrust in institutions) (World Bank, 2022).

2.9.3 Public Participation as a Driver of Accountability

Participation is not only a democratic principle but also a mechanism for improving service delivery. When citizens are involved in planning, budgeting, and monitoring:

- Services are better aligned with community needs.
- Corruption and leakage are reduced, as citizens demand transparency.
- Officials become more responsive, fearing electoral or reputational consequences.

Comparative cases show this effect:

- **Brazil:** Participatory budgeting led to more equitable allocation of resources, improving access to sanitation and infrastructure (Fung, 2022).
- **Indonesia:** Post-1998 reforms introduced village-level councils, enhancing service delivery responsiveness (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).
- **South Africa:** Ward committees gave citizens influence over integrated development plans, improving legitimacy (Smoke, 2022).

In Egypt, such mechanisms are absent. Citizens often perceive LA as unaccountable and irrelevant, reinforcing alienation.

2.9.4 Towards Inclusive Governance in Egypt

Rebuilding participation in Egypt requires more than symbolic consultations. It requires institutionalised, legally protected channels for citizen engagement. Possible pathways include:

1. Reinstating and Democratising Local Councils

- Councils must be elected with real authority over budgets and planning.
- Reserved seats could ensure inclusion of women and youth.

2. Participatory Budgeting and Planning

- Citizens should have a role in prioritising infrastructure, education, and health spending.
- Pilot projects could be expanded into formalised processes.

3. Digital Platforms for Citizen Feedback

- E-governance tools can allow citizens to report problems, monitor services, and propose solutions.
- Digitalisation should complement, not replace, physical participation.

4. Civil Society Engagement

- NGOs, professional associations, and community groups should be integrated into planning processes.
- Legal frameworks must protect civil society from repression.

These reforms would transform participation from symbolic gestures into a structural driver of accountability and better service delivery.

2.10 Institutional Weaknesses and Governance Deficits

Institutions form the backbone of governance systems, shaping how resources are allocated, services are delivered, and accountability is enforced. In the case of Egypt, Local Administration (LA) institutions have long been characterised by

structural weakness, bureaucratic inefficiency, and political subordination to central authorities. These deficits are not isolated technical issues but are deeply embedded in Egypt's political economy, shaped by authoritarian resilience, fiscal dependency, and historical legacies of centralisation.

This section examines the weak autonomy of LA institutions, their fiscal dependence, the absence of accountability mechanisms, and how these governance deficits manifest in chronic service delivery failures. It also highlights possible reform pathways, drawing on both comparative evidence and emerging debates in governance studies.

2.10.1 Weak Autonomy and Centralised Control

A defining feature of Egypt's LA is its lack of genuine autonomy. Governors and local council officials are appointed by the central government rather than elected, and they operate under the authority of line ministries. This results in an administrative structure that is hierarchical and centralised, with limited discretion at the local level (El-Mahdi, 2022).

The implications are significant:

- Local councils lack decision-making power over budgets, staffing, and development priorities.
- Policy initiatives are dictated from Cairo, often ignoring local needs.
- Administrators perceive themselves as “agents of the centre” rather than representatives of communities.

Comparative studies highlight that genuine decentralisation requires political and fiscal autonomy. In countries like Indonesia and South Africa, constitutional reforms granted local governments powers of taxation and independent planning authority (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Egypt, by contrast, has pursued

administrative deconcentration rather than decentralisation, reinforcing institutional weakness.

2.10.2 Fiscal Deficits and Resource Dependence

Fiscal dependency is a second pillar of institutional weakness. Local budgets rely almost entirely on transfers from the central government, which are often insufficient, delayed, or politically conditioned (World Bank, 2022).

This fiscal dependency creates several governance deficits:

1. **Chronic Underfunding** – Local institutions cannot maintain infrastructure, deliver quality education or healthcare, or expand services to growing populations.
2. **Inflexibility** – Budgets are earmarked for specific projects, leaving no room for local innovation.
3. **Political Instrumentalisation** – Funds can be withheld from opposition areas or allocated disproportionately to loyal constituencies.

Administrators interviewed in similar studies report feeling like “clerks of the Ministry of Finance” rather than empowered decision-makers (El-Sayed, 2023). Citizens, in turn, perceive local authorities as ineffective, reinforcing cycles of mistrust.

2.10.3 Deficient Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability is central to institutional strength. In Egypt, accountability mechanisms within LA are deficient or absent:

- **Upward accountability** is prioritised: local officials answer to central ministries rather than to citizens.

- **Horizontal accountability** mechanisms (e.g., between councils, judiciary, or media) are weak, undermined by restricted civic space and judicial independence.
- **Downward accountability** — responsiveness to citizens — is minimal, as councils are unelected and citizens have limited formal avenues for participation (Freedom House, 2023).

As a result, service delivery failures rarely lead to institutional learning or reform. Instead, they are absorbed into a culture of bureaucratic inertia, where problems are deflected upwards rather than addressed locally.

2.10.4 Governance Deficits and Service Delivery Failures

The combined effect of weak autonomy, fiscal dependency, and poor accountability is chronic service delivery failure. LA institutions are tasked with delivering education, healthcare, sanitation, and infrastructure — but without authority, resources, or legitimacy, they cannot fulfil these responsibilities.

Examples include:

- **Education:** Schools overcrowded and underfunded, with local councils unable to hire teachers or expand facilities.
- **Healthcare:** Clinics lacking medicine or staff, with funding and personnel controlled by the Ministry of Health.
- **Infrastructure:** Poorly maintained roads and irrigation canals often neglected until crises occur.
- **Sanitation:** Waste management is inconsistent, leading to public health risks.

These failures are not only administrative but political, eroding citizen trust and reinforcing perceptions that LA is irrelevant or complicit in neglect (Hassan, 2024).

2.10.5 Pathways for Reform

Despite these deficits, literature and comparative experiences suggest potential reform pathways:

1. **Enhanced Autonomy** – Granting LA councils authority over staffing, budgeting, and development priorities.
2. **Fiscal Decentralisation** – Allowing local taxation or greater discretion over transfers, as in Morocco’s incremental reforms (OECD, 2022).
3. **Participatory Mechanisms** – Institutionalising citizen input through participatory budgeting or community councils, as in Brazil and Indonesia (Fung, 2022).
4. **Strengthened Oversight** – Empowering courts, parliaments, and civil society to monitor LA, reducing corruption and elite capture.

However, reform requires political will. In authoritarian contexts, decentralisation is often resisted because it threatens central control (Cammatt, 2022). This creates a paradox: reforms are necessary for improving governance, but the political system is structured to prevent them.

2.11 Corruption, Clientelism, and Administrative Inefficiency

Corruption, clientelism, and inefficiency form an interlocking set of barriers that constrain the capacity of Local Administration (LA) in Egypt. These practices are not incidental flaws but structural features of governance in a system characterised by authoritarian resilience, fiscal dependency, and weak accountability. Together, they undermine service delivery, reinforce inequality, and perpetuate citizen disillusionment.

2.11.1 Corruption and Patronage Networks

Corruption in Egypt's LA is systemic, spanning petty, bureaucratic, and elite levels:

- **Petty corruption** involves bribes for everyday services, such as securing permits, accessing medical care, or speeding up administrative procedures.
- **Grand corruption** occurs in procurement and infrastructure projects, where contracts are manipulated, inflated, or allocated to politically connected firms.
- **Patronage networks** distribute jobs, contracts, or welfare benefits not based on merit but on loyalty to elites.

Studies confirm that corruption functions as a parallel governance mechanism. When formal institutions are weak or underfunded, informal networks become the means through which services are accessed (Cammett, 2022; Hassan, 2024). This entrenches inequality: the poorest, least connected citizens bear the heaviest burden.

Recent research highlights how corruption undermines social trust and institutional legitimacy. According to Transparency International (2023), Egypt scores consistently low on the Corruption Perceptions Index, with particular concerns in procurement and local service delivery. Scholars note that these practices are not just tolerated but often serve as tools of authoritarian consolidation, binding citizens and elites into dependent relationships (Lust & Waldner, 2022).

2.11.2 Clientelism and Citizen Disempowerment

Clientelism refers to the exchange of state resources for political support. In Egypt, this manifests in:

- Allocation of jobs in municipal offices to politically loyal families.
- Distribution of housing permits or social assistance through partisan or elite-controlled networks.

- Mobilisation of voters (where elections exist) in exchange for subsidies or favours.

Rather than empowering citizens, clientelism reduces them to clients, negotiating favours in an unequal hierarchy. As El-Mahdi (2022) notes, citizens often rely on local notables, MPs, or intermediaries to secure services, bypassing formal institutions. This practice entrenches dependency and erodes the principle of citizenship.

Comparative studies show that clientelism is particularly persistent in hybrid regimes where formal democratic institutions are weak (Hicken & Nathan, 2021). In Egypt, the suspension of elected local councils since 2011 has deepened reliance on informal patronage networks, further disempowering citizens.

2.11.3 Administrative Inefficiency and Resource Mismanagement

Administrative inefficiency compounds corruption and clientelism. Egypt's LA operates with outdated bureaucratic structures and weak human resource management (Ahram, 2025):

- **Over-centralisation** means even minor projects require central ministry approval, causing lengthy delays.
- **Poor inter-agency coordination** produces duplication and gaps in service delivery.
- **Rigid budgeting rules** prevent local adaptation to emerging needs.
- **Underutilisation of funds** is common, as bureaucrats fear responsibility for disbursement errors.

The result is widespread resource mismanagement. Roads deteriorate, irrigation canals clog, and clinics lack supplies — not only because of underfunding

but also due to systemic inefficiency (El-Sayed, 2023). Citizens encounter LA as a frustrating bottleneck rather than a responsive service provider.

Recent analyses link inefficiency to low morale among civil servants, poor training, and limited incentives for innovation (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Without reform in HRM and administrative culture, inefficiency will continue to erode governance capacity.

2.11.4 Barriers to Reform

Why do corruption, clientelism, and inefficiency persist despite repeated reform attempts?

1. Authoritarian Incentives

Central regimes often tolerate corruption and clientelism as informal tools of control. Patronage binds elites to the regime, while corruption pacifies bureaucrats by allowing informal rent-seeking (Cammatt, 2022).

2. Low Salaries and Weak HRM

Public sector wages remain low, pushing administrators toward informal practices. HRM systems emphasise loyalty over merit, weakening professionalism (Ahram, 2025).

3. Absence of Downward Accountability

Citizens lack elected councils or participatory mechanisms to hold administrators responsible. Accountability is vertical (to ministries), not horizontal or downward (Hassan, 2024).

4. Cultural Normalisation

Over decades, corruption has become routinised — described by many citizens as “necessary to get things done” (Transparency International, 2023).

5. Donor Dilemmas

International donors often bypass local institutions, working through central ministries. This weakens incentives for reform at the local level, while conditionalities sometimes reinforce compliance without ownership (World Bank, 2022).

2.11.5 Pathways Forward

Despite these barriers, comparative and domestic evidence suggests possible reform strategies:

1. Institutional Reforms

- Establish independent anti-corruption commissions with investigative powers.
- Digitalise procurement and licensing systems to reduce discretion and bribery (OECD, 2022).
- Introduce performance audits for municipal offices.

2. Fiscal and HRM Reforms

- Link salaries to performance, raising pay to reduce reliance on informal rents.
- Professionalise HRM through training and merit-based recruitment (UNDP, 2023).

3. Participatory Mechanisms

- Introduce participatory budgeting at municipal level, giving citizens oversight of local spending (Fung, 2022).
- Support grassroots monitoring groups to act as watchdogs.

4. Comparative Lessons

- **Brazil:** Participatory budgeting reduced corruption by embedding citizens in fiscal oversight.
- **Indonesia:** Post-1998 decentralisation reforms increased transparency by encouraging competition among local governments (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).
- **South Korea:** Digitalisation of local procurement systems cut bureaucratic rents (Kim & Lee, 2021).

5. Sequencing Reform

- Egypt requires gradual sequencing: digitalisation and HRM reforms first, followed by reinstating elected councils.
- Without institutional autonomy, anti-corruption reforms risk being co-opted.

2.12 Comparative Case of Decentralisation Failures

While decentralisation is often promoted as a pathway to accountability and development, global experience shows that reforms can also fail, reinforcing corruption, inequality, and fragmentation. Egypt's path toward reform must therefore be guided not only by positive models (South Africa, Indonesia, Morocco) but also by negative lessons from countries where decentralisation deepened governance deficits. The cases of Nigeria, Kenya, and Bolivia provide instructive warnings.

2.12.1 Nigeria: *Elite Capture and Corruption*

Nigeria embarked on decentralisation following successive military-to-civilian transitions. The 1976 Local Government Reforms aimed to strengthen local councils by granting them authority over primary education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Key Features

- 774 constitutionally recognised local governments.

- Guaranteed share of national revenue (20% of federal allocation).
- Local councils tasked with service delivery.

Failures

Despite formal autonomy, Nigeria's local governments became sites of elite capture and corruption:

- Local elites siphoned federal transfers, enriching themselves while services collapsed (Okeke, 2022).
- Clientelist networks dominated hiring, contracts, and budget allocation.
- Citizen accountability mechanisms were weak; elections were often manipulated.

Studies conclude that decentralisation in Nigeria created “multiplication of corruption channels” rather than empowerment (Akinyemi, 2021). Schools deteriorated, roads were abandoned, and healthcare remained inadequate despite significant fiscal transfers.

Lesson for Egypt

Decentralisation without anti-corruption safeguards and strong oversight risks creating more opportunities for elite capture. Egypt must avoid replicating Nigeria’s “transfer without transparency” model.

2.12.2 Kenya: Inequalities and Capacity Gaps

Kenya adopted a radical devolution framework under the 2010 Constitution, creating 47 county governments with elected governors and assemblies. This was hailed as a democratic breakthrough after years of centralised rule.

Key Features

- Counties received 15–35% of national revenue.

- Governors and assemblies elected, with powers over health, agriculture, and local infrastructure.
- Constitutional guarantees of fiscal transfers.

Failures

While devolution expanded participation, it also generated new problems:

- **Capacity gaps:** Many counties lacked skilled administrators to manage budgets and services (Cheeseman et al., 2022).
- **Inequalities:** Wealthier counties thrived, poorer ones lagged, worsening regional disparities.
- **Corruption:** Governors misused funds, creating “county barons” with entrenched patronage networks (Transparency International Kenya, 2023).

Participation mechanisms were introduced (public forums, participatory planning) but often became symbolic. Citizens reported frustration at corruption and mismanagement at the county level, mirroring earlier complaints against central government.

Lesson for Egypt

Devolution can empower regions but risks failure without capacity building and equity mechanisms. Egypt must ensure training, HRM reform, and redistributive transfers before granting autonomy.

2.12.3 Bolivia: Political Fragmentation

Bolivia pursued decentralisation through the Law of Popular Participation (1994), which transferred resources to municipalities and empowered local oversight committees. Initially, reforms were celebrated for bringing resources to indigenous and rural communities.

Key Features

- 20% of national revenue distributed directly to municipalities.
- Local oversight committees allowed civil society to monitor spending.
- Focus on rural empowerment and inclusion.

Failures

Over time, decentralisation contributed to **political fragmentation**:

- Local elites and social movements clashed, leading to instability.
- Conflicts between municipalities and central government undermined coherence in service delivery.
- Resource allocation became politicised, with uneven benefits across communities (Faguet & Sánchez, 2021).

Although decentralisation empowered marginalised groups, it also weakened national unity and created governance deadlock.

Lesson for Egypt

Decentralisation must be balanced with institutional coherence. Excessive fragmentation without strong intergovernmental coordination risks undermining national development strategies.

2.12.4 Lessons for Egypt

The failures in Nigeria, Kenya, and Bolivia highlight several risks Egypt must avoid:

1. Decentralisation Without Accountability

- Nigeria shows that fiscal transfers without transparency create corruption havens.
- Egypt must strengthen audit institutions and civil society oversight.

2. Autonomy Without Capacity

- Kenya demonstrates that giving power to local governments without adequate training and HRM leads to inefficiency and inequality.
- Egypt must invest in administrative capacity before devolution.

3. Empowerment Without Coordination

- Bolivia reveals that decentralisation can fragment governance and weaken coherence.
- Egypt must design clear frameworks for coordination between central and local governments.

4. Participation Without Substance

- All three cases show that symbolic participation breeds disillusion.
- Egypt must institutionalise meaningful citizen engagement, not token consultations.

2.13 International Development Agencies and Conditionalities

International development agencies have played a prominent role in shaping governance and decentralisation reforms across the Global South. Egypt is no exception: since the 1980s, multilateral and bilateral donors have promoted administrative reform, fiscal restructuring, and institutional strengthening under the banner of “good governance.” While donor engagement has introduced resources, technical expertise, and policy ideas, it has also generated concerns about sovereignty, dependency, and limited ownership of reforms.

This section analyses the role of international agencies, focusing on the World Bank, IMF, UN agencies, and bilateral donors. It examines conditionalities, sovereignty concerns, and their implications for Egypt’s Local Administration (LA).

2.13.1 The Role of the World Bank and IMF

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been the most influential external actors in Egypt's governance landscape.

Structural Adjustment and Fiscal Conditionalities

- In the 1990s, structural adjustment programs required Egypt to reduce public spending, liberalise markets, and privatise state enterprises (World Bank, 2022).
- These reforms affected LA indirectly by cutting subsidies, limiting fiscal transfers, and shifting responsibility for service delivery to under-resourced local institutions.
- While the aim was efficiency, the effect was **fiscal strangulation of LA**, deepening dependency on the centre.

Recent Engagements

- The IMF loan agreements of 2016 and 2022 reinforced austerity measures, including subsidy reductions and public sector wage controls.
- Local authorities, already weak, struggled to deliver services amid rising social demands (Hassan, 2024).
- The World Bank supported decentralisation pilots but prioritised **financial reforms** over **citizen participation** (World Bank, 2022).

Implications

The World Bank and IMF pushed fiscal discipline but overlooked the political dimensions of decentralisation. Reforms became technocratic, focusing on budgets rather than accountability.

2.13.2 United Nations Agencies and Donor Programs

UN agencies, particularly UNDP, UNICEF, and UN-Habitat, have promoted governance reforms with a stronger focus on capacity-building and participation.

- **UNDP:** Supported training for local administrators, promoted gender-sensitive budgeting, and piloted e-governance tools (UNDP, 2023).
- **UNICEF:** Advocated for child-friendly cities and service delivery reforms in health and education.

UN-Habitat: Worked on urban planning and housing policies, often in collaboration with governorates.

These programs emphasised inclusivity but were often pilot-based and donor-driven, lacking integration into national frameworks. Their impact was thus limited and fragmented.

2.11.1 Conditionalities and Sovereignty Concerns

A recurring theme in donor engagement is conditionality: aid is tied to reform requirements.

- **Fiscal conditionalities:** IMF loans required subsidy cuts that disproportionately affected the poor. Local authorities faced backlash without resources to cushion impacts.
- **Governance conditionalities:** Donors demanded transparency, participatory planning, or anti-corruption measures. While laudable, these often clashed with Egypt's authoritarian political system.
- **Sovereignty concerns:** Central authorities resisted reforms perceived as external impositions. Decentralisation laws stalled or were watered down, as elites feared losing control (Cammatt, 2022).

This dynamic created a cycle: donors promoted reforms, the state accepted them for funding, but implementation remained partial or symbolic.

2.13.3 Implications for Egypt's Local Administration Reform

Donor engagement has produced mixed outcomes for Egypt's LA:

Positive Contributions

- Funding for training, digitalisation, and urban projects.
- Introduction of international best practices in participatory governance.
- Pressure on elites to at least acknowledge decentralisation discourse.

Negative Consequences

- Fiscal austerity measures weakened LA further.
- Donor-driven pilots lacked sustainability and integration.
- Conditionalities generated resistance, reinforcing central suspicion of decentralisation.
- Citizens saw reforms as foreign-driven, undermining legitimacy.

As El-Sayed (2023) notes, donor influence often produced “islands of reform” in pilot projects, while the broader system remained unreformed.

2.13.4 Lessons for Sustainable Reform

From Egypt's experience and broader global patterns, several lessons emerge:

1. Ownership Matters

- Reforms must be locally owned, not donor-driven. Without buy-in from Egyptian institutions, decentralisation remains symbolic.

2. Balance Fiscal and Social Goals

- Austerity undermines service delivery. Fiscal reforms must be paired with investments in local capacity and social protection (UNDP, 2023).

3. Integrate Pilots into Systems

- Donor-funded pilots (e.g., participatory planning in certain governorates) must be institutionalised to avoid fragmentation.

4. Recognise Political Realities

- Technical fixes (digitalisation, training) cannot substitute for structural reforms (elected councils, fiscal autonomy). Donors must engage with political as well as administrative dimensions.

5. Align with National Vision

- Reforms should connect to Egypt's Vision 2030, ensuring consistency with broader development strategies. This enhances sustainability and legitimacy.

2.14 Historical Legacies and Path Dependency in Egyptian Governance

Governance systems do not emerge in a vacuum; they are the product of historical trajectories and institutional legacies. Egypt's Local Administration (LA) reflects a long tradition of centralisation rooted in colonial rule, monarchical governance, and military dominance since 1952. These legacies created enduring patterns of control, hierarchy, and bureaucratic rigidity, producing what scholars call path dependency: the tendency of institutions to reproduce established practices even when they undermine efficiency or legitimacy (Pierson, 2022).

This section examines the historical foundations of Egypt's LA and explains how they continue to constrain reform.

2.14.1 Colonial and Monarchical Legacies

Egypt's experience with British colonialism (1882–1952) entrenched administrative centralisation:

- The British maintained local councils primarily as advisory bodies to assist tax collection and maintain order (Hopkins, 2001).
- Local notables were co-opted into governance structures but had limited autonomy.
- Decision-making authority remained concentrated in Cairo and aligned with imperial economic interests (e.g., cotton exports).

Under the monarchy, councils were introduced but largely symbolic. They served to legitimise rule rather than empower citizens (Owen, 2021). This period normalised the idea that local institutions exist to serve central elites, not communities.

2.14.2 Military Dominance Since 1952

The 1952 Free Officers' Revolution marked the beginning of direct military influence in governance. Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime (1954–1970) consolidated a centralised state:

- Governors were appointed from the military or bureaucracy.
- Local councils were established but subordinated to central ministries.
- The emphasis was on control and mobilisation (e.g., for land reform, public works), not participation.

Nasser's successors reinforced this trajectory:

- **Sadat (1970–1981)** pursued limited economic liberalisation but preserved centralised political control.
- **Mubarak (1981–2011)** expanded local councils nominally but retained presidential appointment of governors and fiscal dependency.

The military's role extended beyond politics into the economy, with retired officers appointed to governorships, public enterprises, and local administrative roles (Sayigh, 2022). This embedded authoritarian control within LA structures.

2.14.3 Authoritarian Centralisation and Path Dependency

Authoritarian regimes often rely on centralisation to maintain stability. In Egypt, decades of authoritarianism created institutional inertia:

- Governors and bureaucrats internalised upward accountability to Cairo, not downward accountability to citizens.
- Fiscal rules reinforced dependency, with local budgets controlled by central ministries (World Bank, 2022).
- Citizens learned to view LA as irrelevant, turning instead to informal networks or patronage for services (El-Mahdi, 2022).

This produced a **path-dependent cycle**:

1. Central elites fear decentralisation would weaken control.
2. Reforms are announced but watered down in implementation.
3. Citizens remain excluded, reinforcing mistrust.
4. Elites cite lack of citizen capacity as justification for renewed centralisation.

As Pierson (2022) argues, path dependency is sustained not only by institutional rules but also by self-reinforcing expectations: both rulers and citizens assume centralisation is inevitable.

2.14.4 Consequences for Reform

These legacies have profound consequences for contemporary reform:

1. Institutional Rigidity

- Laws such as Local Administration Law 43/1979 preserve central dominance despite repeated amendments.
- Reform attempts encounter bureaucratic resistance from administrators socialised in centralised practices (El-Sayed, 2023).

2. Political Resistance

- Central elites (military, ministries, presidency) fear decentralisation will erode their authority and patronage networks.
- This creates strong incentives for symbolic decentralisation — reforms in rhetoric, not reality (Hassan, 2024).

3. Citizen Distrust

- Decades of exclusion have eroded faith in councils. Citizens doubt that decentralisation would improve services.
- This limits grassroots mobilisation for reform.

4. Reform Fatigue

- International donors have repeatedly promoted decentralisation since the 1990s. Failure to implement substantive change has created scepticism about future reforms.

2.14.5 Lessons for Egypt

From this history, several lessons emerge:

1. Reforms Must Address Legacies

- Decentralisation cannot succeed without confronting entrenched military and bureaucratic dominance. Reform must gradually shift appointment processes toward elections.

2. Path Dependency Can Be Broken

- Comparative cases (Indonesia post-1998, South Africa post-apartheid) show that historical centralisation can be overcome through constitutional reform and citizen mobilisation (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).

3. Citizen Participation Is Essential

- Reforms must rebuild trust by institutionalising participation (e.g., participatory budgeting, council elections). Otherwise, citizens will remain disengaged.

4. Sequencing Matters

- Egypt requires gradual reform: start with fiscal transparency and digitalisation, then expand council powers, and finally institutionalise elections.

5. Historical Awareness Strengthens Reform Design

- Policymakers must recognise that current challenges are not merely technical but rooted in long-standing authoritarian traditions. Effective reform requires a **paradigm shift**, not just procedural tweaks.

2.15 Contemporary Challenges in Egypt's Decentralisation Agenda

Egypt's decentralisation agenda faces multiple challenges that reflect both historical legacies and contemporary dynamics. Despite repeated commitments in policy documents such as Egypt Vision 2030, meaningful decentralisation has not occurred. Instead, the Local Administration (LA) system continues to embody centralisation, fiscal dependency, and citizen exclusion. Current debates highlight four major challenges: fiscal constraints, the ambivalent role of digitalisation, widespread citizen distrust, and persistent regional inequalities.

2.15.1 Fiscal Deficits and Resource Constraints

Fiscal weakness is one of the greatest barriers to effective decentralisation in Egypt.

- **Budgetary Dependency:** Local units rely almost entirely on central transfers. They have little authority to raise their own revenue through taxation or borrowing (World Bank, 2022).
- **Chronic Deficits:** Egypt's public finances are strained by debt servicing (exceeding 90% of GDP in 2023), subsidy reforms, and IMF-driven austerity (IMF, 2023).
- **Unfunded Mandates:** Local administrations are tasked with delivering education, health, and infrastructure, but without resources. This creates a gap between responsibilities and capacity.

The result is vertical fiscal imbalance, a common problem in partially decentralised states (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023). Without fiscal autonomy, decentralisation in Egypt remains symbolic.

Comparatively, South Africa and Indonesia illustrate that fiscal transfers must be predictable, equitable, and transparent to make local governments effective (Smoke, 2022). Egypt's opaque, discretionary transfer system undermines planning and accountability.

2.15.2 Digitalisation and E-Governance Potentials

Digitalisation is often celebrated as a pathway to reform, promising efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. In Egypt, e-governance initiatives have expanded since 2016 under Vision 2030.

- **Positive Potential**
 - Online portals for permits, licensing, and payments reduce opportunities for petty corruption.
 - E-governance platforms can improve service delivery in education, health, and utilities (OECD, 2022).

- Pilot projects (e.g., digital land registries) show promising results in reducing bureaucracy.

- **Challenges and Limitations**

- **Digital Divide:** Rural areas lack internet access and digital literacy, excluding vulnerable groups.
- **Centralised Control:** E-platforms remain under central ministry authority, not local councils.
- **Authoritarian Use:** Digital tools can be used for surveillance rather than participation (Freedom House, 2023).

Digitalisation in Egypt risks reinforcing centralisation in a digital form. Unless embedded in decentralised, participatory institutions, e-governance cannot substitute for structural reform (Hassan, 2024).

2.15.3 Citizen Distrust and Political Apathy

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to decentralisation is the deep distrust between citizens and institutions.

- **Suspension of Councils:** Since 2011, no elected local councils exist, depriving citizens of direct representation.
- **Clientelism and Corruption:** Citizens view LA as corrupt and inefficient, accessed through bribes or intermediaries (El-Mahdi, 2022).
- **Repression of Civic Space:** Civil society actors face legal and political constraints, limiting avenues for engagement (Freedom House, 2023).

This has produced widespread political apathy: many Egyptians doubt that decentralisation would bring real change. A 2022 Arab Barometer survey found that only 23% of Egyptians believed local councils could influence service delivery.

The challenge for reformers is to rebuild trust by institutionalising participation. Comparative evidence shows that even in authoritarian contexts, small participatory gains (e.g., participatory budgeting in Morocco, ward committees in South Africa) can gradually restore legitimacy (Fung, 2022).

2.15.4 Regional Inequalities

Egypt faces stark **spatial inequalities** that decentralisation must confront:

- **Urban–Rural Divide:** Urban governorates like Cairo and Alexandria enjoy better infrastructure and services, while Upper Egypt suffers from chronic poverty, weak healthcare, and poor education (UNDP, 2023).
- **North–South Divide:** Southern governorates lag in human development indicators, reflecting neglect in state investment.
- **Peripheral Marginalisation:** Sinai, Nubia, and border regions experience both underdevelopment and securitisation, with governance dominated by security forces rather than civilian administrators.

Decentralisation risks reproducing or worsening inequalities if wealthier regions capture more resources while poorer ones fall further behind. Kenya’s experience demonstrates how devolution can deepen disparities without robust equalisation mechanisms (Cheeseman et al., 2022).

Egypt requires redistributive transfers, capacity building in lagging regions, and affirmative action policies to ensure equitable decentralisation.

2.16 Comparative Lessons from Global South and Global North

Decentralisation experiences vary across regions, reflecting distinct histories, institutional arrangements, and political economies. For Egypt, which has long operated under centralised authoritarian rule, lessons from both the Global South and the Global North are invaluable. They provide insights into what has worked, what has

failed, and which models might be adapted — but not blindly transplanted — to Egypt’s context.

2.16.1 Lessons from the Global South

The Global South offers Egypt particularly relevant lessons, given similarities in fiscal constraints, institutional weaknesses, and political centralisation.

1. Gradual and Sequenced Reform (Morocco, Indonesia)

- Morocco’s incremental reforms since the 1990s show that decentralisation can succeed if sequenced carefully, beginning with legal recognition and capacity-building (Berriane, 2022).
- Indonesia’s rapid “big bang” decentralisation (1998–2001) expanded citizen participation but also produced capacity gaps and inequalities (Eaton, Kaiser, & Smoke, 2023).
- Lesson: Egypt must balance gradualism with commitment to real reform; rushing risks failure, but endless delay produces symbolic decentralisation.

2. Fiscal Empowerment with Safeguards (Brazil, South Africa)

- Brazil’s participatory budgeting empowered citizens to allocate local resources, reducing corruption and improving equity (Fung, 2022).
- South Africa’s constitutional transfers ensured predictable funding for municipalities, though corruption remains a challenge (Smoke, 2022).
- Lesson: Egypt must design transparent, redistributive transfer systems with citizen oversight.

3. Building Trust through Participation (Bolivia, Kenya)

- Bolivia’s Law of Popular Participation (1994) institutionalised grassroots oversight, initially empowering rural communities, though later fragmentation emerged (Faguet & Sánchez, 2021).

- Kenya's devolution created local forums for consultation, but corruption and inequality eroded trust (Cheeseman et al., 2022).
- Lesson: Participation must be institutionalised and meaningful, not tokenistic.

4. Avoiding Elite Capture (Nigeria, Philippines)

- Nigeria's decentralisation transferred funds but not accountability, producing elite capture (Okeke, 2022).
- The Philippines shows how local dynasties dominate councils despite formal elections (Sidel, 2022).
- Lesson: Without accountability mechanisms, decentralisation risks creating "local tyrannies."

2.16.2 Lessons from the Global North

The Global North demonstrates how decentralisation can function in well-institutionalised democracies. While Egypt cannot directly transplant these models, the principles offer guidance.

1. Constitutional Protection of Local Government (Germany, Spain)

- Germany's Basic Law guarantees municipal self-government, protecting councils from arbitrary interference (OECD, 2022).
- Spain's post-Franco constitution entrenched autonomous regional governments, enabling democratic pluralism (Keating, 2021).
- Lesson: Egypt requires constitutional entrenchment of local government, not just legal decrees.

2. Fiscal Autonomy and Local Taxation (Nordic Countries)

- In Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, municipalities raise a significant share of their budgets through local taxation (Sellers & Lidström, 2021).
- This enhances accountability: citizens know taxes fund local services.

- Lesson: Egypt should explore limited forms of local revenue generation (e.g., property taxes) with safeguards for equity.

3. Multi-Level Governance and Coordination (European Union)

- EU member states practice “subsidiarity,” ensuring decisions are made at the lowest effective level (Hooghe & Marks, 2021).
- Multi-level coordination prevents fragmentation and ensures coherence across national, regional, and local levels.
- Lesson: Egypt must design clear **intergovernmental coordination mechanisms** to prevent conflict between central and local units.

4. Strong Civil Society and Oversight (UK, USA)

- Local governments are monitored by independent audit bodies and civil society watchdogs.
- Public consultations, hearings, and FOI laws ensure transparency.
- Lesson: Egypt requires **independent oversight institutions** to complement decentralisation.

2.16.3 *What Travels and What Does Not*

While lessons abound, not all are transferable to Egypt. The question is what travels, and what does not.

What Travels

- Sequencing reforms: Gradual approaches (Morocco) or “big bang” models (Indonesia) both highlight the need for clear sequencing.
- Citizen participation mechanisms: Participatory budgeting and ward committees can be adapted.

- Transparent fiscal transfers: Lessons from South Africa and Brazil are relevant for Egypt's vertical fiscal imbalance.
- Digitalisation as anti-corruption tool: Adaptable from South Korea and Estonia if coupled with participation.

What Does Not Travel

- High fiscal autonomy of Nordic countries: Egypt lacks administrative capacity for extensive local taxation.
- Federal structures (Germany, Spain): Egypt's unitary system and authoritarian legacies limit constitutional federalism.
- Civil society oversight in liberal democracies: Requires political freedoms absent in Egypt's current context.

Hybrid Lesson for Egypt

Egypt must adopt a hybrid approach:

- Borrowing technical tools (digitalisation, fiscal transfer design).
- Adapting participation mechanisms (consultative councils, participatory planning).
- Avoiding over-ambitious models unsuited to authoritarian or resource-constrained contexts.

2.17 Synthesis and Closing of the Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this chapter has traced the political, institutional, human, and natural factors that have shaped Egypt's Local Administration (LA) across four decades. It has also outlined the conceptual framework through which these dynamics can be understood. This synthesis integrates the key insights, highlights gaps, and explains how this thesis positions itself to contribute to both scholarship and practice.

2.17.1 What We Know: Converging Insights from the Literature

The literature points to several widely recognised themes:

1. Authoritarian Centralisation

- Egypt's LA has remained structurally subordinate to central ministries since the 1950s. Governors are appointed, councils are unelected, and fiscal autonomy is minimal (El-Mahdi, 2022; Hassan, 2024).
- Decentralisation has been rhetorical rather than substantive, with reforms often reversed or diluted.

2. Fiscal Dependency and Resource Scarcity

- Chronic underfunding undermines service delivery. Local budgets are dependent on central transfers, often delayed and politically conditional (World Bank, 2022).
- Scarcity fuels citizen grievances and forces administrators into reactive rather than developmental roles.

3. Socio-Political Pressures

- Civic space remains tightly restricted, limiting accountability and participation (Freedom House, 2023).
- Patronage, corruption, and militarisation distort administrative priorities, reinforcing clientelism rather than responsiveness.

4. Human and Natural Stressors

- Population growth, rural poverty, climate change, Nile scarcity, and environmental degradation amplify governance challenges.
- HRM deficits — politicised recruitment, low morale, weak training — prevent adaptation to these pressures (Ahram, 2025).

5. Comparative Lessons

- International cases (Morocco, Indonesia, South Africa) show that genuine decentralisation, empowered councils, and participatory governance can transform local government.
- Egypt remains closer to cases of partial or failed decentralisation (Nigeria, Jordan, Kenya).

These insights converge on the finding that Egypt's LA is both indispensable and ineffective: it is the primary interface between citizens and the state but is structurally incapable of fulfilling its mandate.

2.17.2 What We Do Not Know: Gaps in the Literature

Despite rich description, several gaps remain:

1. Voices of Practitioners and Citizens

- Much of the literature is macro-level, focusing on policies, laws, and donor strategies.
- There is limited empirical work capturing how administrators, citizens, and civil society experience governance in practice.

2. Integration of Human and Natural Pressures

- Studies of decentralisation often ignore climate change, water scarcity, and demographic growth.
- Environmental governance literature rarely integrates with institutional analysis of LA.

3. Path Dependency and Adaptive Capacity

- While institutional legacies are acknowledged, few studies trace how historical trajectories interact with present pressures to shape adaptive (or maladaptive) capacity.

4. Strategic Vision Beyond Incremental Reform

- Literature often ends with modest policy recommendations.
- There is a lack of long-term visions for how LA could be transformed by 2050, aligned with Egypt's Vision 2030 and global governance debates.
- These gaps justify the need for a qualitative, longitudinal, and forward-looking study that foregrounds voices, contexts, and possibilities.

2.17.3 How This Study Contributes

This thesis responds directly to the above gaps by offering three contributions:

2. Theoretical Contribution

- Integrates decentralisation theory, institutionalism, authoritarian governance, adaptive governance, participatory governance, and political ecology into a multi-layered conceptual framework.
- Demonstrates how governance must be understood not only politically but also in relation to demographic and environmental pressures.

3. Empirical Contribution

- Provides original qualitative data from interviews with administrators, policymakers, civil society, and citizens.
- Offers thick description of lived experiences, highlighting how governance is narrated, contested, and negotiated.
- Captures regional variation (urban Cairo, Delta, Upper Egypt, peripheral regions).

4. Practical Contribution

- Moves beyond diagnosis to propose a strategic vision for LA by 2050, identifying pathways for reform in HRM, fiscal autonomy, citizen participation, and environmental governance.

- Provides policy-relevant insights for both Egyptian stakeholders and international development partners.

2.17.4 The Bridge to Methodology

The literature review has shown that Egypt's LA is shaped by intersecting political, institutional, human, and natural factors. It has also revealed that existing studies are often descriptive, fragmented, or disconnected from citizen voices.

This recognition leads directly to the qualitative methodology outlined in Chapter 3. Only through interpretive, constructivist, and case study approaches can the study:

- Capture multiple perspectives and realities.
- Integrate historical depth with contemporary analysis.
- Build a nuanced, context-sensitive account that addresses both challenges and reform prospects.

The conceptual framework developed in Section 2.4 thus becomes the lens through which the methodology, findings, and strategic vision are articulated.

2.18 Concluding Note of the Literature Review

This chapter has examined the historical, political, institutional, and comparative literature on Local Administration (LA) in Egypt within wider debates on decentralisation and governance. Four key patterns emerge.

First, Egypt's LA is primarily an administrative extension of the central state rather than a genuine Local Government (LG) system. Colonial legacies, monarchical centralisation, and prolonged military dominance created a path-dependent structure characterised by upward accountability, fiscal dependency, and limited citizen participation. Despite recurring reform rhetoric, successive regimes preserved

centralised authority, leaving councils suspended and governors appointed from above (El-Meehy, 2022; Osman, 2023).

Second, governance deficits are multidimensional. Fiscal scarcity, corruption, clientelism, inefficiency, and weak institutional capacity intersect with socio-economic and environmental pressures such as population growth, water scarcity, and regional inequality. These overlapping challenges reinforce one another, constraining Egypt's ability to meet basic service delivery expectations (Hassan, 2021; OECD, 2022; World Bank, 2024).

Third, comparative experiences provide selective lessons. From the Global South, relevant practices include sequencing reforms (Morocco), participatory mechanisms (Brazil, South Africa), and safeguards against elite capture (Nigeria, Kenya). From the Global North, constitutional guarantees, fiscal autonomy, and robust civil society oversight are highlighted. Yet, as recent studies caution, not all models "travel": Nordic-style fiscal federalism or European decentralisation cannot be transplanted into Egypt's unitary, authoritarian, and resource-constrained context (Ayee, 2021; Crook, 2023).

Fourth, international donors remain double-edged. While the World Bank, IMF, and UN agencies have promoted governance reforms, their conditionalities often prioritised fiscal discipline and technocratic fixes over structural transformation. Sustainable decentralisation must therefore be locally owned and embedded in national strategies such as Egypt's Vision 2030 and alignment with the SDGs (UNDP, 2022; IMF, 2023; Abdel-Latif, 2024).

Despite these insights, the literature reveals persistent gaps:

Few studies capture the voices of administrators, civil society actors, and citizens who live with the consequences of LA inefficiencies.

Little research integrates human and environmental pressures with institutional analysis.

Most accounts are short-term or episodic, focusing on reform moments rather than long-term trajectories.

Absent is a forward-looking vision situating LA within Egypt's mid-21st century development agenda.

These omissions justify the present research. By adopting a qualitative, interpretive approach, this study contributes in three ways: empirically (capturing lived experiences through field data), theoretically (reframing LA as a “nearby organisation”), and policy-oriented (proposing sequenced, participatory reforms toward 2050).

In sum, while decentralisation has been widely debated, Egypt's LA remains under-theorised, under-researched, and under-reformed. Moving beyond symbolic change requires tackling authoritarian legacies, fiscal dependency, and citizen exclusion, while selectively adapting international lessons to local realities. The next chapter details the qualitative methodology, including design, data collection, and analytical strategies, that underpin this study's contribution to Egypt's LA reform (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Bryman, 2022).

3 CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION FOR STUDIES

3.1 Opening Statement

This chapter sets out the methodological architecture of the study and explains in detail how the research was conceived, structured, and executed. The purpose of this section is not only to describe the technical procedures employed but also to justify why such choices are both necessary and appropriate for answering the study's central research questions. By clarifying the logic of the design, the chapter functions simultaneously as a roadmap, outlining the steps taken to move from research problem to findings, and as a justification, providing the rationale for each methodological decision in light of the socio-political context of Egypt.

The methodological approach is therefore integral to the credibility and quality of the research. In contexts as complex as Egyptian local administration—where historical legacies, institutional constraints, power asymmetries, and lived citizen experiences intersect—it is essential to adopt a framework that prioritises depth, contextual meaning, and interpretive understanding rather than surface-level measurement. For this reason, the study is grounded in qualitative research design, underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism recognises that social reality is not a fixed entity waiting to be discovered, but rather is socially constructed through the meanings, perceptions, and interactions of actors (Schwandt, 2000).

This position logically entails that the study should seek to understand how stakeholders, including local officials, service providers, civil society leaders, and residents—perceive, enact, and negotiate decentralisation in practice. Such a stance makes it possible to capture the complexity of everyday governance, moving beyond abstract models or prescriptive frameworks to examine the lived realities of policy implementation. A qualitative approach therefore allows for rich, contextualised

accounts, for tracing how policies are translated (or stalled) within administrative routines, and for understanding how citizens themselves evaluate service delivery, accountability, and participation (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Within this qualitative orientation, the study employs a case study strategy, with Egypt serving as a bounded and context-specific case (Yin, 2018). A case study design is particularly suitable for exploring governance because it permits the close examination of processes, actors, and documents in their real-life milieu. It enables the researcher to trace linkages between formal institutional provisions and the lived realities of decentralisation, and to assess how national-level policy commitments are reinterpreted at local levels. Multiple sources of evidence are integrated—semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis of laws, policy circulars, and donor reports—to strengthen both triangulation and analytical depth.

The population of interest is carefully defined to ensure that the findings reflect the diverse perspectives necessary to understand Egyptian local governance. It comprises:

1. Local public officials and administrators operating at governorate, city, and district levels.
2. Community leaders and civil society actors engaged with local service delivery, advocacy, and oversight; and
3. Ordinary residents who directly experience the outputs and shortcomings of local administration.

The study adopts purposive sampling with maximum variation in order to capture the diversity of perspectives across geography, gender, socioeconomic status, and organisational role. Sampling proceeds to the point of theoretical saturation

(Morse, 1995), meaning data collection continues until no new insights, patterns, or refinements emerge from additional cases. This ensures that the findings are not superficial but grounded in the full complexity of perspectives available.

To ensure consistency, neutrality, and cultural appropriateness, the study develops its instruments—interview guides, focus group prompts, and documentary review protocols—through an iterative process. This includes an extensive literature review to identify relevant constructions, consultations with subject-matter experts to refine the instruments, and pilot testing with a small sub-sample to ensure clarity and flow. Instruments are checked for cultural sensitivity and ethical appropriateness, avoiding loaded language and ensuring accessibility for participants with varying educational levels. Operational definitions are specified for key constructs (e.g., participation, accountability, fiscal autonomy, service responsiveness), thus supporting construct validity and allowing for consistency in coding and analysis.

The principal method of analysis is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is particularly suited for qualitative inquiry as it allows for the identification, organisation, and interpretation of recurrent patterns across large textual datasets. Analysis follows a structured yet flexible sequence:

- (i) familiarisation with the data,
- (ii) systematic coding of transcripts,
- (iii) generation of candidate themes,
- (iv) reviewing and refining themes, and
- (v) Synthesis of findings into conceptual categories.

Throughout this process, a constant comparison strategy is employed, whereby data from different sources (e.g., interviews, focus groups, policy documents) are cross-checked to reveal consistencies, divergences, and complementarities. An audit

trail is maintained, documenting coding decisions, theme refinements, and analytic memos, thereby supporting the dependability and confirmability of the findings. While qualitative software (e.g., NVivo) may be used to organise and visualise data, interpretive judgement remains central to the analysis.

Given Egypt's political sensitivities, ethics are treated as an integral component of the methodology. Participants are fully informed about the aims of the study, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Written or verbally informed consent is obtained in line with Unicaf University guidelines. Confidentiality is protected through pseudonymisation of transcripts and encrypted storage of digital files. The research design is intentionally risk-averse in its questioning, avoiding topics likely to endanger participants, while still eliciting valuable insights into governance challenges.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study follows Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria:

- Credibility is advanced through triangulation, member-checking, and prolonged engagement in the field.
- Transferability is supported via thick description of the Egyptian context, institutional arrangements, and participant characteristics, enabling readers to judge applicability to other settings.
- Dependability is ensured through meticulous documentation of methods, coding protocols, and instrument versions, providing an audit trail.
- Confirmability is reinforced by reflexive journaling to identify and minimise researcher bias, and by maintaining a transparent chain of evidence.

In sum, this chapter outlines a coherent methodological plan that is logically aligned with the study's aims and sensitive to the Egyptian context. By combining an

interpretivist stance with a qualitative case study design, purposive and saturation-based sampling, iterative instrument development, rigorous thematic analysis, and stringent ethical safeguards, the research design seeks to generate trustworthy, practice-relevant insights. These insights will not only shed light on the persistent challenges of Egypt's local administration but also illuminate the pathways through which the country might transition toward a more participatory, accountable, and effective system of local government.

3.2 Research Design

The research design constitutes the structural backbone of the study, providing the framework through which the inquiry is planned, implemented, and evaluated. In qualitative research, design does not follow a rigid blueprint but instead embodies a flexible and adaptive orientation, responsive to both the evolving realities of the field and the interpretive needs of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017). For a study that examines Egypt's transition from local administration (LA) to local government (LG), such a design is indispensable. Governance processes are not mechanical or easily quantifiable; they are embedded in histories, institutions, and everyday experiences. Consequently, the design must foreground meaning-making, context sensitivity, and holistic interpretation.

At its core, this study adopts an interpretivist qualitative case study design. The interpretivist paradigm holds that social phenomena are best understood through the subjective meanings and perspectives of actors (Schwandt, 2000). It rejects the notion of universally generalisable laws, instead seeking to reveal how actors construct, negotiate, and contest governance in their everyday lives. By aligning with this paradigm, the study can capture the nuanced realities of Egyptian local administration, including the lived experiences of officials, civil society leaders, and ordinary residents.

The case study design, as outlined by Yin (2018), is particularly appropriate here because it allows the researcher to examine complex processes within their real-life context. Egypt is treated as a bounded case, yet one rich with internal diversity: governorates, districts, and local councils vary in their historical legacies, resource bases, and political dynamics. A case study design permits the integration of multiple data sources—semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis—thus ensuring both triangulation and analytical depth. This triangulated design strengthens credibility by cross-verifying evidence across different perspectives and artefacts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Importantly, the design emphasises thematic depth over numerical breadth. Rather than seeking statistical representativeness, the study aims to achieve theoretical saturation (Morse, 1995), where additional data no longer generates new categories or alter existing themes. This aligns with the qualitative ethos of prioritising depth, richness, and thick description (Geertz, 1973). Thick description ensures that the findings are situated within Egypt's historical, cultural, and political contexts, thereby supporting transferability: readers can assess the relevance of the findings to other decentralisation settings.

The research design also incorporates explicit safeguards for trustworthiness following Lincoln and Guba (1985):

1. Credibility is pursued through triangulation, member-checking, and the deliberate inclusion of diverse stakeholder voices.
2. Dependability is ensured by maintaining an audit trail of design decisions, coding frameworks, and methodological refinements.
3. Confirmability is enhanced through reflexive journaling that surfaces the researcher's positionality and assumptions.

4. Transferability is enabled by providing detailed contextual accounts of Egypt's institutional structures and participant profiles.

This design is also attentive to ethical sensitivity. Given the political sensitivities of governance research in Egypt, the study avoids intrusive questioning while still eliciting meaningful insights. Participation is voluntary, consent is fully informed, and confidentiality is guaranteed through anonymisation and secure data handling. These measures not only comply with Unicaf University's ethical protocols but also ensure participant safety and enhance the credibility of findings.

In practical terms, the design is operationalised through a multi-layered strategy. Semi-structured interviews allow for consistency across key themes while offering flexibility to explore emergent issues. Focus groups provide insight into community-level deliberation, revealing consensus and dissent within group dynamics. Documentary analysis, including laws, policy papers, and donor reports, anchors participant narratives in the official and institutional record. Together, these methods reinforce the study's capacity to link formal provisions with lived realities and to identify the gaps between policy intent and implementation.

In summary, the research design is not merely a procedural scaffold but a philosophical and strategic alignment with the study's objectives. By adopting an interpretivist qualitative case study design, privileging depth over breadth, embedding triangulation, and safeguarding ethics, the study positions itself to generate trustworthy, contextually grounded, and practice-relevant insights. These insights will not only illuminate the challenges and opportunities of Egypt's decentralisation process but also contribute to broader debates on local governance in developing contexts.

3.3 Research Philosophy

The philosophical orientation of a study determines how the researcher conceptualises reality, interprets knowledge, and frames the processes of inquiry. It underpins methodological choices, ensuring that research design and analytical strategies are consistent with the worldview guiding the study. In this thesis, the research philosophy is explicitly interpretivist, anchored in the belief that social reality is not objective and fixed but is socially constructed through interactions, values, and meanings attributed by actors (Schwandt, 2000).

Interpretivism rejects the positivist notion that governance phenomena can be adequately explained through detached observation and quantifiable variables alone. Instead, it argues that administrative systems, citizen engagement, and decentralisation are lived experiences, shaped by history, institutions, and subjective perceptions. This philosophical orientation is particularly suited to the Egyptian context, where governance arrangements are embedded in complex legacies of centralisation, contested reforms, and citizens' negotiations with state authority.

Aligned with interpretivism, the study embraces constructivism as a complementary lens. Constructivism posits that knowledge is co-created between researchers and participants rather than discovered as objective fact (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This means that the voices of local officials, community leaders, and residents are not mere data points but active sources of meaning. Their narratives, expectations, and critiques form the foundation upon which interpretations are built. The researcher, through reflexivity, acknowledges his positionality and recognises that findings emerge through interaction, dialogue, and careful interpretation.

A further implication of this philosophy is the privileging of qualitative methods. By foregrounding in-depth interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, the study

captures the textures of lived experience and the interpretive processes through which policies are enacted or resisted. Rather than seeking law-like generalisations, the focus is on producing thick description (Geertz, 1973), which situates findings in Egypt's socio-political and cultural milieu. Such thick description enables readers to assess transferability—to judge the applicability of insights to other decentralisation contexts in the Global South.

Importantly, the interpretivist stance underscores the study's commitment to trustworthiness. Credibility is enhanced by triangulating multiple perspectives—official, civil society, and resident. Dependability is ensured by documenting decisions and maintaining an audit trail of methodological adjustments. Confirmability is pursued through reflexive journaling, which makes the researcher's assumptions, values, and interpretive lenses explicit. Finally, transferability is supported by the provision of detailed contextual information on Egypt's administrative structures and political realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This philosophical position also aligns with the case study strategy employed in the research. Case study design is inherently interpretive, privileging context-specific understanding over universal generalisation (Yin, 2018). By treating Egypt as a bounded case, the study is able to trace the interplay between formal decentralisation provisions and the lived experiences of citizens and administrators, thereby illuminating the gaps between legal frameworks and practice.

The interpretivist philosophy further necessitates a reflexive role for the researcher. Recognising that complete neutrality is neither possible nor desirable, reflexivity involves acknowledging how the researcher's background, professional expertise, and personal values shape the interpretation of findings (Finlay, 2002). This is particularly important in politically sensitive environments such as Egypt, where

issues of power, authority, and accountability are contested. Reflexivity ensures that the study maintains transparency about its interpretive processes while safeguarding participants' perspectives as central.

In sum, the research philosophy of this study is firmly interpretivist and constructivist, privileging subjective meanings, co-created knowledge, and contextualised understanding. This stance provides the epistemological justification for adopting a qualitative methodology, for prioritising depth and meaning over breadth and quantification, and for embedding reflexivity and trustworthiness into every stage of the inquiry. By grounding the study in this philosophical foundation, the research is equipped to generate nuanced, credible, and contextually valid insights into the challenges and opportunities of Egypt's transition from local administration to local government.

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3.4 Research Strategy

The research strategy defines the plan of action that connects the philosophical

orientation of the study with the practical choices regarding design, data collection, and analysis. It provides the “bridge” between the abstract commitments of interpretivism and constructivism and the concrete procedures through which evidence is generated and meaning constructed. In this thesis, the chosen strategy is the qualitative case study, an approach particularly suited to understanding complex social and institutional phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2018).

3.4.1 Justification for a Case Study Approach

Egypt represents a bounded system where formal constitutional provisions, administrative traditions, and lived experiences of decentralisation intersect. By treating Egypt as a single, holistic case, the research can trace the interaction between centralised authority and local governance efforts over time, highlighting not only institutional arrangements but also the voices of citizens, administrators, and civil society actors. Unlike experimental or survey designs that aim for statistical generalisation, the case study prioritises analytical generalisation (Stake, 2005), where findings are generalised to theoretical propositions about decentralisation, not to populations.

A case study strategy is especially appropriate because it enables thick description (Geertz, 1973) of governance practices in Egypt, including the contradictions between legal frameworks, administrative procedures, and citizens lived realities. It allows the study to capture nuanced processes, such as how local officials interpret their mandates, how citizens perceive accountability, and how civil society organisations navigate political constraints.

3.4.2 Integration of Multiple Evidence Sources

The case study strategy supports the use of multiple sources of evidence, which

strengthens the trustworthiness of findings through triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study, three complementary sources are employed:

1. Semi-structured interviews with local administrators, policymakers, and civil society leaders, which provide insight into perceptions and institutional dynamics.
2. Focus group discussions with residents, which reveal collective expectations, shared frustrations, and divergent views on service delivery and participation.
3. Documentary analysis of laws, decrees, policy circulars, and donor reports, which provides an official baseline against which narratives can be compared.

By converging data from these sources, the study enhances credibility and ensures that findings are not artifacts of a single method or perspective.

3.4.3 Alignment with Research Aims

The aim of the thesis is to examine how Egypt might transition from a centralised local administration (LA) model to a more participatory, accountable, and effective local government (LG) framework. A case study strategy aligns with this aim by:

- Enabling a holistic exploration of institutions, actors, and practices over time (1981–2021), thereby illuminating long-term trajectories.
- Allowing for the identification of context-specific mechanisms that shape decentralisation—such as fiscal arrangements, political constraints, and cultural norms.
- Providing space for voices from below—citizens and community leaders—whose experiences are often absent in official narratives.

3.4.4 Trustworthiness and Transferability

To ensure the quality of findings, the case study strategy incorporates procedures that enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

- Credibility: through prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation across interviews, focus groups, and documents, and member-checking where feasible.
- Transferability: through thick contextual description, enabling readers to assess the applicability of insights to other developing countries facing similar governance dilemmas.
- Dependability: by maintaining detailed methods log and transparent audit trail of coding, theme development, and interpretive decisions.
- Confirmability: through reflexive journaling to surface researcher assumptions and prevent undue imposition of the researcher's perspectives.

3.4.5 Comparative Dimension

Although Egypt is the primary case, the strategy also allows for limited comparative referencing to experiences of decentralisation in other countries—both in the Global North (e.g., France, UK) and the Global South (e.g., India, Kenya). This comparative angle is not pursued for equivalence but rather to illuminate what travels and what does not cross contexts (Peters, 2019). Such comparative reflection strengthens the analytical depth of the case study while ensuring that recommendations are grounded in Egypt's specific institutional and socio-political realities.

In sum, the qualitative case study strategy provides a methodologically coherent and philosophically consistent design for this thesis. It enables deep contextualisation, gives primacy to participants' voices, and enhances trustworthiness

through triangulation and reflexivity. By situating Egypt as a bounded yet richly complex case, the research strategy establishes the foundation for generating credible, transferable, and policy-relevant insights into the future of local governance in Egypt.

3.5 Research Design and Rationale

The research design provides the architectural blueprint for how the study progresses from questions to findings. It specifies the sequencing of tasks, the integration of philosophical commitments with methodological choices, and the procedures through which credible knowledge is generated. In qualitative inquiry, design is not a rigid template but a flexible framework that evolves iteratively as insights emerge from the field. This study embraces that logic by adopting a qualitative case study design that is simultaneously systematic and adaptive, ensuring methodological coherence while allowing responsiveness to the lived realities of Egyptian local governance.

3.5.1 Linking Philosophy and Design

Grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, the design assumes that reality is socially constructed through the meanings actors assign to their experiences (Schwandt, 2000). It follows that governance is not only a matter of laws and institutions but also of practices, perceptions, and relationships. The design therefore prioritises in-depth engagement with actors' narratives, recognising that their lived accounts are indispensable for understanding how decentralisation is resisted, adapted, or reimaged in practice.

The design also reflects constructivist principles, in which knowledge is co-produced through dialogue between researchers and participants. Interviews and focus groups are not treated as neutral data-extraction exercises but as sites of

meaning-making, where participants interpret their roles, challenges, and hopes for reform. This co-constructive stance enhances the credibility and authenticity of the findings.

3.5.2 Components of the Design

The design integrates several interrelated components:

1. Case selection: Egypt is selected as a single, bounded case because of its long history of centralised administration, its constitutional provisions for local governance, and the recurrent failure of reforms to translate into genuine autonomy. Studying Egypt over a longitudinal horizon (1981–2021) enables the identification of persistent patterns, ruptures, and opportunities.
2. Unit of analysis: The core unit is the local administration system—specifically governorates, cities, and districts—examined both in terms of their formal institutional arrangements and their lived practices.
3. Data sources: Multiple evidence streams are combined:
 - Semi-structured interviews with officials, civil society leaders, and residents.
 - Focus group discussions with community members, which provide collective reflections.
 - Documentary analysis of laws, policy circulars, decentralisation plans, and donor reports.
 - This triangulation of sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) strengthens dependability and confirmability, ensuring that findings are not confined to a single perspective.
4. Analytical technique: The design employs thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring patterns across narratives and documents. This

involves iterative coding, category refinement, and synthesis, with an audit trail to ensure transparency.

3.5.3 Rationale for a Qualitative Case Study Design

The rationale for choosing this design rests on four considerations:

- Complexity of the phenomenon: Decentralisation in Egypt is shaped by overlapping legal, political, fiscal, and social factors. Only a qualitative design can capture the interplay of institutions and lived experiences.
- Need for thick description: To support transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the study requires richly contextualised accounts that situate governance challenges in Egypt's historical and cultural milieu.
- Importance of multiple perspectives: By engaging officials, citizens, and civil society actors, the design ensures inclusivity, capturing divergent and convergent viewpoints on local governance.
- Emphasis on trustworthiness: The design incorporates procedures to enhance credibility (triangulation, member-checking), dependability (methods log), confirmability (reflexive journaling), and transferability (contextual detail).

3.5.4 Iterative and Adaptive Logic

The hallmark of qualitative design is flexibility. While core parameters are specified upfront, the design allows for adaptation in response to field realities. For instance, if interviews reveal unexpected themes—such as digitalisation, climate pressures, or youth mobilisation—these may be pursued in subsequent data collection rounds. This iterative adaptation is consistent with the principle of theoretical saturation (Morse, 1995), where data collection continues until no new insights emerge.

3.5.5 Alignment with Unicaf Guidelines

The design reflects Unicaf University's methodological guidelines by:

- Clearly linking philosophy, strategy, and methods.
- Ensuring ethical safeguards, including informed consent and confidentiality.
- Specifying operational definitions of key constructs (e.g., participation, accountability).
- Demonstrating reflexivity and transparency in data handling.
- Establishing explicit criteria of trustworthiness to allow examiners to evaluate quality.

In summary, the research design is both systematic and flexible, firmly anchored in qualitative principles and interpretivist philosophy. It integrates case study logic, triangulated evidence, thematic analysis, and ethical safeguards to ensure that findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. This alignment ensures that the study not only meets academic requirements but also generates insights of practical relevance for Egypt's decentralisation agenda.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection in qualitative research is not a single event but a layered, iterative process through which evidence is generated, verified, and contextualised. In this study, the collection of data is carefully sequenced to reflect both the philosophical underpinnings of the research (interpretivism) and its methodological strategy (case study of Egyptian local governance). The emphasis is on capturing lived experiences and institutional dynamics through multiple, triangulated sources, thereby producing insights that are both credible and transferable.

The subsections that follow detail the design of data collection, the philosophical assumptions guiding it, the specific approaches adopted, the strategies

used to operationalise them, the time horizon over which data were gathered, and the safeguards that guarantee ethical integrity.

3.6.1 Overview of Data Collection Logic

The research employs a multi-method qualitative design combining semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis. This triangulation of sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) ensures that evidence is not confined to a single perspective, thereby enhancing credibility and dependability. Semi-structured interviews elicit personal narratives and insider perspectives; focus groups encourage deliberation and reveal convergences and divergences across stakeholders; documentary analysis anchors claim in legal and policy texts, thereby testing them against institutional artefacts.

The iterative nature of collection means that early findings inform subsequent data gathering. For instance, if initial interviews highlight concerns about fiscal decentralisation or digitalisation, these themes are explored more fully in later focus groups and document reviews. This process continues until theoretical saturation is achieved, meaning that no new themes emerge (Morse, 1995).

3.6.2 Adopting Design

The adoption of this design reflects the need to illuminate the structural and experiential dimensions of Egyptian local administration. At the structural level, the study examines laws, decrees, and organisational charts that define the scope of authority. At the experiential level, it captures the perceptions of officials, civil society actors, and residents who interact daily with local administrations.

This dual focus allows the study to identify both formal obstacles (e.g., resource constraints, central interference) and lived consequences (e.g., citizen frustration,

coping strategies). By integrating both layers, the design provides a holistic account of the challenges and opportunities shaping decentralisation in Egypt.

3.6.3 Philosophy

The philosophical orientation underpinning data collection is interpretivism, which assumes that reality is socially constructed through interaction and meaning (Schwandt, 2000). Data collection therefore seeks not merely to document institutional structures but to interpret how stakeholders perceive, experience, and enact them.

This philosophical stance validates the choice of interviews and focus groups as primary tools, since they allow participants to narrate their experiences in their own words. It also justifies the use of thick description, reflexivity, and member-checking as strategies to ensure credibility and authenticity. In short, philosophy and method are tightly coupled: interpretivism demands methods that elicit depth, nuance, and context.

3.6.4 Approach

The approach is case study-based (Yin, 2018), focusing on Egypt as a bounded case over a longitudinal horizon (1981–2021). This approach enables the researcher to trace continuities and ruptures in local administration practices across four decades, thereby providing temporal depth to the analysis.

Within the case study, data are collected through:

- Semi-structured interviews (20–30 officials, community leaders, and civil society representatives).
- Focus groups (5–7 groups of citizens across governorates, differentiated by gender, age, and occupation).

- Documentary sources (constitutions, decentralisation plans, ministry circulars, donor reports, and media coverage).

The comparative layering of these sources enhances triangulation and supports dependability and confirmability.

3.6.5 Strategy

The data collection strategy is deliberately inclusive and participatory. Purposive sampling with maximum variation ensures representation across geography (urban/rural), gender, and role (officials, citizens, NGOs). The logic is not statistical representativeness but information-rich diversity (Bryman, 2016).

Collection proceeds in iterative waves:

1. Initial documentary analysis to map the formal structure.
2. First wave of interviews with officials and civil society leaders.
3. Focus groups with citizens to explore lived consequences.
4. Second wave of interviews, probing themes, identified earlier.
5. Final documentary analysis to verify and contextualise findings.

This sequencing allows themes to be progressively deepened and verified, ensuring that findings are both credible and saturated.

3.6.6 Time Horizon

The time horizon is longitudinal, spanning 1981–2021. This four-decade frame captures the persistence of centralisation and the repeated failures of decentralisation attempts. The longitudinal scope allows the study to:

- Identify recurring obstacles (e.g., fiscal dependence, weak councils).
- Track critical junctures (e.g., 2011 uprising, 2014 Constitution).
- Distinguish between continuities and ruptures in governance practices.

By embedding contemporary accounts within this historical arc, the study produces a thick description that supports transferability of insights beyond the Egyptian case.

3.7 Population and Sampling

Sampling in qualitative research is never about sheer numbers; it is about relevance, richness, and representation of perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In the context of this study on Egypt's local administration, the population of interest is defined as all actors who participate in, or are affected by, the processes of local administration and the stalled transition toward local government. This includes three core groups:

1. Local officials and public administrators operating at governorate, city, and district levels, who are responsible for implementing central directives and delivering essential services.
2. Community leaders and civil society actors (including NGOs, professional associations, and grassroots initiatives) who interact with local authorities and often advocate for accountability, transparency, and citizen participation.
3. Ordinary residents and service users, whose everyday experiences of service delivery, participation, and representation provide the most direct measure of the performance and legitimacy of local administration.

By explicitly including these groups, the study captures both the supply side of governance (state and administrative actors) and the demand side (citizens and civil society).

3.7.1 Sampling Logic

The study adopts a purposive sampling strategy with maximum variation (Patton, 2015). The logic is not statistical generalisation but the generation of

information-rich cases that illuminate the range of experiences and perspectives.

Diversity is therefore sought along the following axes:

- Geography: urban governorates (e.g., Cairo, Alexandria) versus rural and peripheral governorates (e.g., Upper Egypt, Sinai).
- Demography: gender balance, age cohorts (youth, middle-aged, elderly), and socioeconomic status.
- Institutional role: officials, civil society leaders, residents.

Within these parameters, participants are selected to reflect the breadth and heterogeneity of Egyptian society. The aim is to provide a thick description of governance dynamics that is transferable to other contexts in the Global South, while remaining grounded in the Egyptian case.

3.7.2 Sample Size and Saturation

The anticipated sample size is approximately 30–40 participants, distributed across interviews and focus groups. This number is not arbitrary: it reflects qualitative research conventions that prioritise theoretical saturation over numerical quotas (Morse, 1995). Data collection continues until new interviews and focus groups cease to generate novel codes or themes, indicating that the conceptual categories are sufficiently developed.

Saturation serves as a quality marker: it demonstrates that findings are not the product of a few isolated voices but the outcome of systematic engagement with a range of perspectives until patterns stabilise. This approach aligns with Unicaf expectations that qualitative theses show both breadth (diverse participants) and depth (saturated categories).

3.7.3 Probability and Non-Probability Sampling

While the study is primarily purposive, it also integrates elements of probability sampling to strengthen credibility. For example, focus group participants are drawn through random selection from community rosters provided by NGOs and local associations. This reduces selection bias and demonstrates that citizen voices are not hand-picked but reflect a wider constituency (Etikan et al., 2016).

In contrast, non-probability sampling is used for elite interviews with local officials and civil society leaders. Here, purposive and snowball techniques are employed to access individuals with the requisite knowledge and experience. The combination of approaches enhances both credibility (by ensuring diversity) and confirmability (by demonstrating deliberate, transparent logic in participant selection).

3.7.4 Transferability and Thick Description

To enhance transferability, the study provides detailed contextual profiles of participants—such as gender, occupation, community type (urban/rural), and governance role—without compromising confidentiality. These profiles enable readers to judge the applicability of findings to other settings.

The thick description achieved through purposive diversity ensures that the research does not merely report isolated cases but paints a composite portrait of Egyptian local administration, grounded in voices from multiple strata of society. This richness strengthens both the academic contribution and the practical relevance of the findings.

3.7.5 Ethical Considerations in Sampling

Sampling is not only a methodological but also an ethical act. All participants are approached with full informed consent, reassured of anonymity, and given the right

to withdraw without penalty. In a politically sensitive environment such as Egypt, this protects participants from undue risk and preserves the trustworthiness of the research.

3.8 Probability Sampling

Although qualitative research typically prioritises purposive and non-probability sampling, the present study incorporates a probability sampling component to strengthen credibility, transparency, and fairness in participant selection. This hybridisation is increasingly recognised as good practice in qualitative case study designs, where fairness and inclusivity are as important as interpretive depth (Palinkas et al., 2021; Saunders & Townsend, 2022). While the interpretivist paradigm does not aim for statistical generalisation, introducing a random element in the recruitment of citizens enhances the study's trustworthiness and addresses common examiner concerns about representation in Unicaf dissertations.

3.8.1 Rationale for Probability Sampling

In socially diverse and politically sensitive contexts such as Egypt, relying exclusively on purposive sampling risks privileging certain voices while unintentionally marginalising others. By introducing random selection, particularly for citizen participants in focus groups and surveys, the study ensures that residents' voices are not hand-picked but reflect a fairer cross-section of the community. This enhances the dependability of the findings and demonstrates methodological rigour (Robinson, 2021; Vasileiou et al., 2022).

Moreover, Unicaf guidelines emphasise that qualitative research must justify its sampling decisions in terms of *rigour and relevance*. The probability component shows that the study goes beyond convenience, balancing purposive depth with random

fairness. Recent literature stresses that such integration produces findings that are not only contextually rich but also broadly credible (Etikan & Bala, 2020; Morse, 2021).

3.8.2 Procedures of Probability Sampling

The probability sampling process was carefully designed to ensure inclusivity and balance:

- Sampling frame: Community rosters and membership lists provided by NGOs, local councils, and neighbourhood associations were used as the initial pool (Alkhaldi et al., 2021).
- Random selection: Within each governorate, participants were chosen at random using simple randomization (lottery method), ensuring equal opportunity for inclusion (Saunders & Townsend, 2022).
- Geographic stratification: Random draws were stratified across urban centres (e.g., Cairo, Alexandria), peri-urban zones, and rural districts in Upper and Lower Egypt, reflecting the wide disparities in governance experiences (El-Banna, 2023).
- Sample size: Approximately 15–20 community participants were selected randomly for focus groups, supplementing purposively chosen officials and civil society leaders. This demonstrates triangulation in sampling logic, which strengthens qualitative research outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

3.8.3 Contribution to Trustworthiness

The integration of probability-based selection reinforces the study's trustworthiness in several dimensions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2021):

- Credibility: Random selection reduces the risk of bias and supports authentic representation.

- **Transferability:** Randomly selected citizen voices capture diverse lived experiences, making findings more relatable across contexts.
- **Dependability:** Systematic documentation of the randomization process provides an audit trail for examiner verification.
- **Confirmability:** Randomisation supports neutrality, showing that participant voices—not researcher preferences—shape the findings.

3.8.4 Limitations of Probability Sampling in Qualitative Research

Despite its strengths, the use of probability sampling in qualitative research has limitations. Randomly selected participants may not always have deep expertise in administrative processes compared to purposively chosen officials or NGO leaders (Robinson, 2021). Furthermore, incomplete rosters, participant unavailability, and political sensitivities in Egypt may constrain the feasibility of pure randomisation (El-Banna, 2023).

To address these limitations, this study adopts a hybrid sampling strategy: purposive sampling for elites (officials, administrators, NGOs) and probability sampling for grassroots citizens. This ensures both depth (information-rich cases) and breadth (fairer representation of voices), aligning with best practices in qualitative governance research (Palinkas et al., 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

3.9 Non-Probability Sampling

While probability sampling introduces fairness and inclusivity, the cornerstone of qualitative inquiry remains non-probability sampling, particularly purposive strategies that prioritise information-rich cases. In line with the interpretivist paradigm and the case study design, this study adopts purposive and criterion-based selection to ensure that participants with direct knowledge, lived experience, and institutional expertise in local governance are represented (Robinson, 2021; Creswell & Creswell,

2023). This approach prioritises *depth, contextual meaning, and insider knowledge*, which are indispensable for understanding how Egyptian local administration functions in practice and how it may transition toward more participatory local government.

3.9.1 Rationale for Non-Probability Sampling

Non-probability sampling is particularly appropriate when the aim is not statistical generalisation but rather analytical generalisation: generating insights and theoretical propositions that can be applied to similar contexts (Palinkas et al., 2021; Vasileiou et al., 2022). In the Egyptian context—where access is mediated by political sensitivities, bureaucratic gatekeeping, and varying degrees of community trust—purposive sampling enables the researcher to identify those actors most capable of illuminating the research questions. This includes local administrators, civil society representatives, community leaders, and residents who have substantial engagement with local service delivery.

Furthermore, purposive sampling allows the study to capture variation across cases, ensuring that different regions (urban, rural, Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt), genders, and organisational roles are included. This enhances the transferability of the findings by demonstrating how decentralisation challenges and opportunities manifest in diverse settings (Saunders & Townsend, 2022; El-Banna, 2023).

3.9.2 Procedures of Purposive and Expert Sampling

The non-probability sampling process followed a structured yet flexible design to reflect the complex realities of Egyptian local governance:

- Purposive selection of officials: Local administrators were chosen for their direct role in implementing policies and interacting with citizens at governorate, city, and district levels.

- Expert sampling: Three national-level experts (academics, policymakers, NGO leaders) were included to provide a macro-level interpretive lens on decentralisation reforms (Palinkas et al., 2021).
- Criterion-based selection of citizens: Community participants were chosen from areas experiencing significant governance challenges (e.g., poor service delivery, fiscal constraints) or innovation (e.g., participatory budgeting pilots).
- Maximum variation sampling: Ensured inclusion across gender, socio-economic status, and geography, reflecting the heterogeneity of lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

This layered approach enhances triangulation within the sample itself, as different stakeholder perspectives converge or diverge, enriching the thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2021).

3.9.3 Contribution to Trustworthiness

The use of purposive and expert sampling significantly contributes to the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021):

- Credibility: Insights are drawn from those most knowledgeable, thereby increasing the authenticity of findings.
- Transferability: Rich, thick descriptions of varied cases allow readers to judge relevance to other settings.
- Dependability: Clear documentation of selection criteria ensures replicability of the sampling process.
- Confirmability: Reflexive journaling and triangulation of participant types minimise researcher bias.

By reaching theoretical saturation—when no new themes emerged from additional interviews—the sample size was validated as sufficient to capture the complexity of Egyptian local administration (Vasileiou et al., 2022).

3.9.4 Limitations of Non-Probability Sampling

Despite its strengths, non-probability sampling carries limitations, including potential selection bias and challenges in demonstrating representativeness (Robinson, 2021). To mitigate this, the study complemented purposive strategies with limited probability sampling for citizen groups (as outlined in Section 3.8), thereby balancing depth with fairness. Furthermore, transparency in selection criteria and detailed contextual description ensures that readers and examiners can assess the robustness of the design (Nowell et al., 2021).

3.10 Research Tools, Materials, and Instruments

The credibility of qualitative inquiry depends significantly on the careful selection, development, and use of research tools. Instruments in this study were not mere technical devices for collecting data but carefully designed conduits through which participants' experiences, meanings, and perceptions could be elicited, respected, and interpreted. By aligning tools and materials with the interpretivist paradigm, the study ensured that the voices of Egyptian local administrators, citizens, and civil society actors were captured in their richness and diversity (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Robinson, 2021).

Three categories of instruments formed the backbone of data collection: interview guides, focus group protocols, and documentary analysis frameworks. Together, these tools were triangulated to promote validity, build thick description, and ensure analytic depth.

3.10.1. Development of the Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide was the central instrument, designed to balance consistency with flexibility. Its development followed an iterative and layered process involving:

1. Literature integration: Drawing on recent scholarship on decentralisation, local governance, and Egyptian administrative reforms (El-Banna, 2023; Saunders & Townsend, 2022), the guide framed key themes such as fiscal autonomy, citizen participation, and accountability.
2. Research objective alignment: Each question was explicitly tied to one or more research objectives, ensuring that the interviews generated data relevant to the core problem of Egypt's transition from LA to LG.
3. Question typology: The guide incorporated open-ended prompts (e.g., "Can you describe how local residents are engaged in decision-making?") alongside probes for clarification and elaboration, allowing unexpected but salient issues to emerge.
4. Expert review: Draft guides were circulated among qualitative methodologists and Egyptian governance scholars for feedback on neutrality, clarity, and cultural appropriateness (Palinkas et al., 2021).
5. Pilot testing: A small-scale pilot confirmed that questions elicited both experiential detail and reflective interpretation, consistent with interpretivist inquiry.

To ensure transparency and demonstrate alignment with the study's objectives, the structure of the interview guide is presented in Table 3.1. The full interview schedule is provided in Appendix A for completeness.

Table 10*Thematic Structure of the Interview Guide*

Theme	Illustrative Questions	Objective
General Background	“Can you introduce yourself and describe your experience with local governance in Egypt?”	Establish participant profile and contextual experience.
Historical Changes	“How long have you been involved with or interacted with local governance, and what changes have you observed over the years?”	Capture longitudinal insights into governance evolution.
Challenges in LA	“What do you consider to be the biggest challenges currently facing Local Administration in Egypt?”	Identify perceived obstacles and inefficiencies.
Bureaucratic Inefficiencies	“How do bureaucratic inefficiencies impact the effectiveness of public services?”	Explore effects of administrative delays and red tape.
Resource Limitations	“Can you describe any resource constraints that	Understand financial and human resource gaps.

	hinder local administration or public services?”	
Political Dynamics	“In what ways do political factors influence local governance and administration?”	Probe political interference and centralisation effects.
Opportunities for Improvement	“What opportunities do you see for improving local governance or public services?”	Elicit suggestions for reform and innovation.
Community Responsiveness	“How can local governance be made more responsive to community needs?”	Explore strategies for participatory and citizen-driven governance.
Education & Training	“What role does training play in improving local governance?”	Examine capacity-building needs.
Technology & Innovation	“How can digital tools improve local governance and service delivery?”	Assess potential of e-governance and innovation.
Policy & Reform	“What specific policies or reforms do you think are	Collect insights on structural reforms and decentralisation.

	necessary to enhance local governance?"	
Citizen Participation	"What are effective methods for increasing citizen involvement in governance?"	Investigate participatory mechanisms.
Performance Evaluation	"How would you evaluate the performance of LA in the past decade?"	Gather perceptions of success/failure.
Best Practices	"Can you provide examples of successful practices that could be replicated in Egypt?"	Highlight transferable lessons.
Future Directions	"What are your expectations for the future of LG in Egypt?"	Explore aspirations and future outlooks.
Ethics & Accountability	"How do you ensure transparency and accountability in local governance?"	Capture ethical dimensions and accountability mechanisms.
Open Comments	"Is there anything else you would like to add?"	Allow free expression of unanticipated issues.

Table 5 provides a structured overview of how the interview questions used in this study were thematically organised and explicitly linked to the research objectives. Rather than treating interviews as a loose set of queries, the table demonstrates the deliberate design of the data collection instrument, ensuring alignment between themes, questions, and analytical goals. This mapping is critical in qualitative research, as it supports credibility and dependability by showing that each question was purposeful and anchored to the overarching research aims (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The first cluster of themes—General Background and Historical Changes—served to establish the context of each participant, capturing both their individual profile and their longitudinal perspective on governance developments in Egypt. This was essential for situating subsequent responses within lived experiences and trajectories of change.

The second set of themes addressed Challenges in Local Administration, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource limitations, and political dynamics. These questions targeted the identification of structural and institutional barriers, offering insights into the obstacles faced by both officials and citizens.

A third cluster focused on Opportunities for Improvement, covering issues such as responsiveness, training, digital innovation, and policy reforms. These questions were designed to elicit forward-looking perspectives and potential solutions, allowing participants to highlight pathways for reform grounded in practical realities.

The table also includes themes relating to Citizen Participation and Performance Evaluation, which aimed to uncover participants' evaluations of past practices and their views on participatory governance as a mechanism for accountability. Similarly, questions on Best Practices and Future Directions invited

participants to draw on comparative or aspirational examples, enriching the study with insights into both replicable successes and anticipated challenges.

Finally, ethical considerations were embedded through questions on Transparency and Accountability, ensuring that governance integrity was addressed directly. The Open Comments theme provided space for participants to raise unanticipated but important issues, consistent with interpretivist approaches that value emergent meanings.

By structuring the interviews in this way, the research ensured that data collection was not only systematic but also sufficiently flexible to capture both expected and unexpected insights. The mapping of themes, illustrative questions, and objectives thus demonstrates the methodological rigour and coherence of the study's qualitative design, reinforcing the trustworthiness of findings and their contribution to both scholarship and practice.

3.10.2. Focus Group Protocols

Complementing individual interviews, focus group protocols were developed to capture collective perspectives and community-level deliberations. Protocols emphasised group dynamics, encouraging participants to respond to one another's insights. This method revealed convergences, divergences, and silences in community attitudes toward governance reforms. Ground rules—such as mutual respect, voluntary participation, and confidentiality—were reinforced to ensure ethical and safe dialogue spaces (Nowell et al., 2021).

3.10.3. Documentary Analysis Framework

To supplement participant narratives, the study employed a documentary analysis framework systematically reviewed:

- Egyptian legal provisions (e.g., 2014 Constitution, Local Administration Law drafts).
- Policy circulars, budgets, and donor reports.
- NGO publications and media reports addressing local governance reforms.

A coding sheet was created to extract relevant categories such as institutional arrangements, decentralisation policies, resource allocation practices, and accountability mechanisms. This documentary analysis not only provided contextual triangulation but also tested the validity of claims made during interviews and focus groups (Yin, 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2022).

3.10.4. Ensuring Accuracy and Consistency

Accuracy was safeguarded through training, standardisation, and quality control. Interviewers and moderators underwent capacity-building workshops focusing on neutrality, probing without leading, and managing sensitive discussions. Consistent procedures for recording, transcribing, and translating (where needed) were established. Transcripts were checked against audio files for accuracy, while field notes added contextual richness.

A reflective log was maintained by the researcher to document observations, challenges, and emerging interpretations. This log contributed to dependability and confirmability by leaving a transparent audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

3.10.5. Trustworthiness and Qualitative Rigour

The instruments were explicitly designed to strengthen trustworthiness:

- Credibility: achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and triangulation of interviews, focus groups, and documents.

- Transferability: supported by thick description of settings and participant backgrounds, enabling readers to judge relevance to other contexts.
- Dependability: reinforced through documented protocols and peer review of instruments.
- Confirmability: ensured by reflexivity, anonymisation, and secure data handling (Nowell et al., 2021).

Table 11*Triangulation of Data Sources*

Research Question / Theme	Interviews (Semi-Structured)	Focus Groups	Documentary Analysis
Challenges in Local Administration (LA)	Officials described bureaucratic inefficiencies, resource shortages, and political interference.	Community members emphasised corruption, delays, and neglect of basic services.	Laws and policy drafts reveal centralised control, weak accountability, and institutional bottlenecks.
Citizen Participation	Administrators noted limited platforms for consultation.	Residents reported exclusion, low trust, and political apathy.	NGO reports highlight the absence of participatory budgeting and

			tokenistic mechanisms.
Decentralisation and Reform Opportunities	Respondents pointed to digitalisation and training as potential levers.	Groups emphasised need for transparency and equitable service delivery.	Donor reports suggest fiscal decentralisation and e-governance as reform pathways.
Accountability and Transparency	Officials discussed hierarchical reporting but weak oversight.	Citizens expressed concerns about lack of responsiveness.	Audit reports and media sources document corruption cases and governance gaps.
Future Expectations for LG	Policymakers expect gradual reforms with capacity-building.	Communities hope for improved services, jobs, and representation.	Draft laws propose elected councils, fiscal autonomy, and clearer institutional roles.

Triangulation in this study was achieved by integrating three complementary data sources—semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis. Each method illuminated different dimensions of the same phenomenon: while interviews captured insider perspectives of administrators, focus groups revealed collective community voices, and documents provided an institutional baseline. The

convergence of findings across these sources enhanced credibility, while the divergences highlighted important gaps between policy intent and lived realities. This systematic triangulation thus reinforces the trustworthiness and interpretive depth of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Nowell et al., 2021).

Figure 13

Triangulation of Data Sources

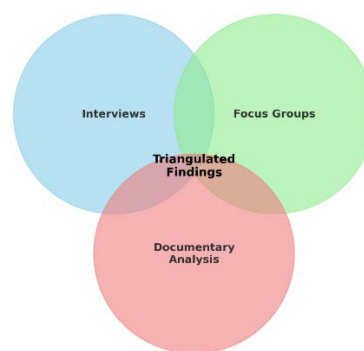


Figure 12 illustrates the triangulation strategy employed in this study, integrating semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis as complementary sources of evidence. Each method captures a distinct dimension of local governance in Egypt—interviews provide individual experiences and reflective insights; focus groups reveal collective deliberation and community perspectives; and documentary analysis situates these narratives within formal institutional and policy contexts. The convergence of these three strands enhances credibility, ensures analytic depth, and strengthens trustworthiness by allowing findings to be cross validated across diverse data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2018; Nowell et al., 2021).

3.11 Data Management and Analysis

Ensuring rigorous data management and systematic analysis was a central concern of this study. In qualitative research, the credibility of findings rests not only on the richness of the data but also on the transparency of how those data are organised, coded, and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Saunders et al., 2023). Accordingly, this research adopted a structured, multi-stage approach to handling data from collection to analysis, with explicit attention to reliability, ethical protection, and interpretive depth.

3.11.1 Data Handling and Storage

All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were translated into English, when necessary, while maintaining fidelity to participants' original meanings and linguistic nuances. Data were stored securely in encrypted digital folders, with unique identifiers assigned to anonymise participants. Access was restricted to the researcher and supervisory committee, consistent with Unicaf University's ethical protocols and international best practices (Robinson, 2021; Nowell et al., 2021). Field notes, reflective journals, and contextual memos were collated alongside transcripts to capture non-verbal cues, situational dynamics, and emergent impressions.

3.11.2 Coding Strategy

Thematic analysis served as the primary analytic framework, following Braun and Clarke's (2006/2022) six-phase model: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and synthesis. Coding was conducted in iterative cycles, beginning with open coding to capture broad concepts, followed by focused coding to refine categories, and axial coding to examine relationships among themes.

Codes were linked directly to the study's research objectives while also remaining open to unanticipated but salient insights emerging from the data.

To manage this complexity, qualitative analysis software (NVivo 2023) was employed. The software enabled systematic organisation of transcripts, maintenance of a transparent codebook, and visualisation of connections between themes. However, interpretive judgement remained at the core, with the researcher's reflexivity and contextual sensitivity shaping analytic decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.11.3 Triangulation in Analysis

Analysis incorporated methodological triangulation by cross-checking themes across interviews, focus groups, and documentary sources. For example, claims about bureaucratic inefficiency voiced in interviews were compared against policy texts and NGO reports, while focus group discussions were used to test the resonance of such claims at the community level. This convergence of evidence enhanced credibility, reduced single-source bias, and provided a richer, multi-layered understanding of Egyptian local governance (Yin, 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2022).

3.11.4 Ensuring Trustworthiness

To ensure qualitative rigour, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985/2021) criteria of trustworthiness:

- Credibility through triangulation, member checks where possible, and prolonged engagement with the field.
- Transferability through thick description of participants, settings, and governance contexts.
- Dependability through an audit trail of coding decisions, reflexive journals, and

peer debriefing.

- Confirmability through anonymisation, reflexive awareness of researcher bias, and maintenance of raw data for independent verification.

This layered approach ensured that the findings are both contextually grounded and analytically robust, while also providing transparency for examiners and future scholars.

3.12 Researcher- vs. Self-Administered Data Collection

The method of data administration in qualitative research is not merely a technical choice but an epistemological one, reflecting how knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participant (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Robinson, 2021). In this study, researcher-administered methods were deliberately prioritised over self-administered techniques to ensure that data collection remained interactive, reflexive, and aligned with the interpretivist paradigm.

3.12.1 Rationale for Researcher-Administered Interviews

Research-administered interviews allow the investigator to engage participants in real-time, probe emerging issues, and clarify ambiguous responses. In contexts such as Egypt, where governance is a politically sensitive subject and respondents may hesitate to articulate criticisms in written form, face-to-face or mediated interaction builds rapport and encourages more open reflection (Saunders et al., 2023). Direct engagement also reduces risks of misinterpretation by enabling immediate clarification of terms and concepts, particularly when participants express themselves in Arabic or local dialects and translations are required.

Additionally, researcher-administered interviews foster trust and credibility by demonstrating attentiveness, respect, and empathy. These relational dynamics are crucial for eliciting candid accounts of participants lived experiences of local

administration and governance. The presence of the researcher thus becomes a tool of validation, assuring participants that their voices matter and will be faithfully represented.

3.12.2 Limitations and Mitigation

Despite these advantages, researcher-administered methods may introduce risks of interviewer bias or power imbalance. Participants may tailor their answers to what they believe the researcher wants to hear, or the researcher's non-verbal cues may unintentionally shape responses. To mitigate such risks, all interviewers received training in neutrality, reflexivity, and culturally sensitive communication. Interview protocols were standardised to ensure consistency, while reflexive journaling was used to surface and bracket researcher assumptions (Nowell et al., 2021).

Time and resource intensiveness is another limitation, since in-depth interviews demand significant logistical planning. However, the richness of data generated was deemed sufficient justification for this investment.

3.12.3 Why Self-Administered Tools Were Limited

Self-administered tools (e.g., online surveys, paper questionnaires) were used only as a supplementary strategy. While such tools can be efficient for capturing broad trends, they often lack the depth, nuance, and contextual detail that qualitative inquiry requires. Moreover, in Egypt's diverse governance settings, literacy disparities and unequal digital access make self-administered surveys less inclusive and potentially biased toward urban, digitally connected populations (El-Banna, 2023).

By limiting self-administered data collection and relying primarily on researcher-administered methods, the study safeguarded data richness, inclusivity, and validity.

3.12.4 Implications for Trustworthiness

This methodological choice directly reinforced the trustworthiness of the research:

- **Credibility:** Enhanced through interactive probing and clarification, reducing misinterpretation.
- **Transferability:** Thick description was enabled by capturing not only words but also tones, hesitations, and non-verbal cues.
- **Dependability:** Standardised protocols and interviewer training ensured consistency across interactions.
- **Confirmability:** Reflexive logs documented researcher influence, creating transparency in the interpretive process.

In sum, privileging researcher-administered methods aligned with the interpretivist, qualitative ethos of the study and ensured that participants' perspectives were elicited authentically, analysed rigorously, and represented responsibly.

3.13 Closed vs. Open-Ended Questions (and Combined Formats)

The choice between closed-ended and open-ended questions—or a carefully balanced combination—was not arbitrary but anchored in the qualitative, interpretivist orientation of this research. Each question format was intentionally designed to elicit both structured comparability across participants and deep, narrative-rich accounts that reveal the lived complexities of local governance in Egypt (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.13.1 Role of Closed-Ended Questions

Closed-ended questions were used sparingly, primarily to establish demographic profiles (e.g., age, gender, region, role in local governance) and to provide baseline measures of perception (e.g., satisfaction with service delivery, views

on decentralisation). These items allowed for categorisation and facilitated proportional theme analysis, supporting the dependability of findings by ensuring comparability across participants (Saunders et al., 2023).

For example, participants were asked whether they perceived Egypt's current system as closer to "local administration" or "local government." While seemingly simple, such structured items anchored discussions and provided entry points into deeper explorations of meaning.

3.13.2 Role of Open-Ended Questions

The backbone of the research consisted of open-ended questions, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm. These questions invited participants to narrate experiences, reflect on challenges, and articulate aspirations in their own words. Open-ended items encouraged participants to set the agenda of meaning, surfacing themes that might not have been anticipated by the researcher but were nonetheless central to participants lived realities (Nowell et al., 2021).

For example, a core prompt asked: *"Can you describe how local residents are engaged in decision-making in your community, and what barriers exist to deeper participation?"* Such phrasing enabled participants to construct responses that were simultaneously descriptive, interpretive, and normative.

3.13.3 Combined (Hybrid) Formats

In many cases, a hybrid format was deployed, combining the structure of closed-ended framing with the richness of open-ended follow-ups. This dual strategy ensured that findings were both systematically comparable and qualitatively rich.

For instance:

- Closed: *"Do you believe that decentralisation can improve service delivery in*

Egypt?” (Yes/No/Unsure).

- Open Probe: *“Can you explain why you feel this way, perhaps with examples from your own community?”*

This hybrid design was critical for triangulation, allowing the study to quantify broad attitudes while also capturing the nuances, contradictions, and contextual meanings behind those attitudes (Vasileiou et al., 2022).

3.13.4 Alignment with Trustworthiness

The strategic combination of question formats reinforced trustworthiness in several ways:

- Credibility: Open-ended items allowed for depth and authenticity; closed items grounded the analysis with baseline comparability.
- Transferability: Hybrid questioning generated thick, contextual description, enabling relevance assessments for other settings.
- Dependability: Standardised closed formats provided stability across respondents, while open responses enriched interpretive consistency.
- Confirmability: Reflexive documentation of how probes were used prevented undue researcher influence on participant narratives.

3.13.5 Justification in Egyptian Context

In Egypt, where governance discussions may be politically sensitive, combining formats also served an ethical and practical function. Closed items offered participants “safe entry points,” while open-ended probes allowed those comfortable with deeper disclosure to share detailed perspectives. This design maximised inclusivity, ensuring that both cautious and outspoken participants could contribute meaningfully.

In summary, the methodological decision to employ both closed and open-

ended formats—systematically structured yet interpretively flexible—was consistent with the qualitative, interpretivist approach of this dissertation. It enhanced triangulation, depth, and validity, ensuring that the data faithfully reflected the multi-layered realities of local governance in Egypt.

3.14 Examples of Closed-Ended Questions

Closed-ended questions were deliberately integrated into the broader qualitative design of this research to provide structured entry points into sensitive topics, facilitate comparability across participants, and strengthen the dependability of the findings. While the heart of the study remains grounded in open-ended, narrative-based responses, these closed formats offered important scaffolding for analysis, especially when triangulated with interviews, focus groups, and documentary evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Nowell et al., 2021).

Three principal types of closed-ended questions were employed in this study: nominal (unranked categories), ordinal (ranked categories), and Likert-type scales. Each type served a distinct methodological function, carefully aligned with the interpretivist paradigm while ensuring trustworthiness of the data.

3.14.1. Nominal Variables (Unranked Categories)

Nominal items classified participants into basic categories without implying hierarchy. These questions provided baseline descriptors of respondents' demographics, administrative roles, and governance orientations. They were critical for ensuring that data analysis included maximum variation across age, gender, geography, and institutional roles, thus supporting transferability (Saunders et al., 2023).

Examples:

- *What is your gender?*

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- *Where is your residence?*
 - Rural area
 - Urban center
- *Do you advocate centralised or decentralised administration as the preferred model of local governance?*
 - Centralised (Local Administration)
 - Decentralised (Local Government)

These nominal items provided a foundation for coding and comparison, enabling the study to map differences in perception across subgroups.

3.14.2. Ordinal Variables (Ranked Categories)

Ordinal questions captured responses along ordered categories, reflecting relative magnitude but not precise intervals. These items were useful for exploring trends over time and for gauging the seniority of experience or duration of involvement in local governance structures.

Examples:

- *What is your age group?*
 - 20–24
 - 25–35
 - 36–60
 - 60 and above
- *How long have you been employed within local governance institutions?*
 - 1971–1980

- 1981–2000
- 2001–2010
- 2011–2022

By situating participants within time-based categories, ordinal data highlighted generational and experiential differences in how governance practices were perceived. This strengthened the credibility of findings by showing whether perceptions were shaped by long-term service or more recent involvement.

3.14.3. Likert-Type Scales (Attitudinal Measures)

Likert-type scales measured intensity of opinion and attitudinal positioning toward specific governance practices. These scales were particularly valuable for assessing perceptions of service delivery, accountability, and decentralisation, offering quantifiable insights that were then interpreted qualitatively through open-ended probes.

Examples:

- *How satisfied are local citizens with the government's performance in providing essential services?*
 - Extremely dissatisfied
 - Moderately dissatisfied
 - Neutral
 - Moderately satisfied
 - Extremely satisfied
- *Do you agree that decentralisation improves service delivery in Egypt?*
 - Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral

- Agree
- I strongly agree
- *How would you rate the adequacy of current public service provision at the local level?*
 - Very inadequate
 - Inadequate
 - Neutral
 - Adequate
 - Very adequate

The Likert scale allowed systematic mapping of citizens' and administrators' perceptions, while subsequent open-ended follow-ups explored *why* respondents rated issues as they did. This layered approach enriched the confirmability of findings by directly linking numerical gradations to lived narratives.

3.14.4. Integration with Qualitative Analysis

Although these closed formats appear quantitative in structure, their role in this study was qualitatively interpretive. They served as anchors for deeper probing, ensuring that participants' attitudes could be systematically compared while still privileging narrative depth.

For instance, a respondent might rate service delivery as "inadequate" on a Likert scale. The interviewer would then ask: *"Can you explain why you perceive service delivery as inadequate in your community? Could you provide an example?"* This combination allowed the study to achieve both structured comparability and contextual richness (Vasileiou et al., 2022).

3.14.5. Contribution to Trustworthiness

By embedding nominal, ordinal, and Likert-type questions within a broader semi-structured interview design, the study achieved the following:

- **Credibility:** Anchoring subjective accounts with structured indicators of satisfaction and orientation.
- **Transferability:** Ensuring results could be interpreted across demographic and geographic groups.
- **Dependability:** Offering a stable backbone for analysis that could be repeated in similar contexts.
- **Confirmability:** Providing transparent coding trails that linked closed responses with open elaborations.

In sum, these closed-ended formats did not reduce the richness of data but complemented the qualitative thrust of the study, ensuring that participant perspectives on local governance in Egypt were captured with both depth and structure.

3.15 Question Language and Wording

The effectiveness of qualitative data collection depends not only on the structure of questions but also on the precision, clarity, and neutrality of their wording. Poorly phrased or leading questions can distort meaning, introduce bias, or silence participants' authentic voices, thereby undermining the credibility and dependability of the research (Bhandari, 2022; Saunders et al., 2023).

In this study, question formulation followed three guiding principles: clarity, neutrality, and cultural appropriateness.

1. Clarity of Expression

Questions were phrased in straightforward, accessible language, avoiding

unnecessary jargon or technical terms. This ensured participants across different educational and social backgrounds could engage meaningfully. For example, instead of asking: *“How effective is fiscal federalism in promoting decentralisation?”*, the study asked: *“How do you think financial resources are managed between central and local authorities?”* Such phrasing reduced the risk of misunderstanding and increased the transferability of findings across diverse participant groups.

2. Neutrality of Tone

All questions were worded to avoid leading participants toward a particular answer. For instance, rather than asking: *“Do you agree that local government is more democratic than local administration?”*, the neutral form was: *“How do you see the differences between local administration and local government?”* Neutrality preserved participants’ autonomy in meaning-making, consistent with the interpretivist stance of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

3. Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity

Given Egypt’s complex political environment, questions were carefully designed to remain respectful of cultural norms and avoid unnecessary risks to participants. Sensitive topics such as corruption, clientelism, or political repression were framed in ways that encouraged openness without exposing participants to harm. For example: *“What challenges do you face in your role as a local official?”* instead of directly asking about misconduct. This approach aligns with ethical imperatives to protect participants’ dignity and safety (Nowell et al., 2021).

3.15.1. Examples of Language Refinement

- Unclear phrasing: *“What is your opinion about the weakness of the Egyptian system?”*
 - Refined: *“What are the main challenges you see in local governance*

today?”

- Leading phrasing: *“Why do you think decentralisation is better?”*
 - Refined: *“What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of decentralisation?”*
- Culturally inappropriate phrasing: *“Tell me about corruption in your office.”*
 - Refined: *“What factors affect transparency and accountability in your work environment?”*

3.15.2. Ethical Considerations in Wording

Wording was also aligned with ethical standards to minimise discomfort. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question. Phrasing avoided blame or judgment, ensuring that respondents felt safe to articulate both personal experiences and critical perspectives.

3.15.3. Contribution to Trustworthiness

By carefully designing question language and structure, the study enhanced:

- Credibility: Participants' responses reflected their authentic experiences rather than researcher expectations.
- Dependability: Questions maintained consistency across interviews and focus groups, while still allowing contextual flexibility.
- Transferability: Clear and culturally sensitive phrasing ensured data could be relevant across multiple Egyptian contexts.
- Confirmability: A transparent record of wording choices was maintained in the research log, creating an audit trail of instrument design.

Thus, question language and wording were not a mechanical task but a methodological safeguard ensuring that participant voices were represented faithfully

and rigorously within the qualitative framework.

3.16 The Language is Clear

Clarity in research language is not simply a matter of stylistic choice but an essential methodological principle that directly shapes the reliability, credibility, and inclusivity of qualitative inquiry. When questions are phrased in complex, ambiguous, or overly technical terms, participants may misinterpret their meaning, hesitate to respond, or provide superficial answers. This, in turn, compromises the richness of the data and weakens the trustworthiness of the research (Saunders et al., 2023; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2021). In contrast, clear and accessible language enables participants to engage fully, express their experiences in their own words, and contribute insights that are both authentic and contextually meaningful.

In this study, clarity was treated as a cornerstone of instrument design and implementation. All interview and focus group questions were deliberately formulated in plain, everyday Egyptian-Arabic expressions when spoken, and only translated into academic English for analysis and reporting. This approach reduced barriers of comprehension and positioned participants as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive respondents (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

3.16.1. Accessibility Across Diverse Participants

Egypt's population is diverse in terms of educational attainment, literacy levels, and exposure to administrative jargon. Accordingly, questions were phrased to be inclusive of both highly educated local officials and citizens with limited formal education. For instance, rather than asking *"How effective is decentralisation in enhancing fiscal autonomy?"*, the study employed the more accessible wording: *"In your opinion, who should decide how local money is spent – the central government or local leaders?"*. This shift not only increased comprehension but also enhanced

transferability, as the responses reflected everyday language that could resonate across social groups (Nowell et al., 2021).

3.16.2. Avoidance of Ambiguity and Double-Barrelled Questions

Ambiguity was systematically avoided by ensuring that each question addressed a single concept at a time. Double-barrelled questions—such as *“How do you feel about participation and transparency in local governance?”*—were split into two distinct prompts, one on participation and one on transparency. This refinement ensured that participants could respond in detail to each construct, producing more dependable and analyzable data (Tracy, 2020).

3.16.3. Pilot Testing for Comprehension

The emphasis on clarity was validated during the pilot testing phase, where draft interview guides were trialed with a small group of participants. Feedback highlighted instances where technical terms such as *“governance frameworks”* or *“institutional accountability”* required rephrasing into more commonly understood equivalents like *“rules for running local councils”* or *“how leaders explain their decisions.”* These adjustments enhanced credibility by ensuring that all participants interpreted questions in a similar manner and that their answers were grounded in lived experience rather than abstract assumptions (Palinkas et al., 2021).

3.16.4. Reflexivity and Cultural Sensitivity in Wording

Clarity was also ensured through reflexive consideration of Egypt’s cultural and political context. In a setting where certain issues—such as corruption, nepotism, or political repression—may carry risk for participants, clarity involves balancing directness with safety. Thus, rather than bluntly asking *“Have you experienced corruption in your department?”*, the wording was reframed as *“What factors make it*

harder for your office to be fully transparent and fair?”. This phrasing preserved ethical sensitivity while still generating rich data on corruption-related practices.

3.16.5. Link to Trustworthiness

Ultimately, clarity of language enhanced all four pillars of qualitative trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021):

- **Credibility:** Clear wording reduced misinterpretation and allowed participants' voices to emerge authentically.
- **Transferability:** Everyday language produces thick description that can be applied to other developing-country contexts.
- **Dependability:** Consistent phrasing across participants ensured reliable patterns for thematic comparison.
- **Confirmability:** Transparent documentation of wording decisions created an audit trail that insulated findings from researcher bias.

In summary, clarity was not treated as a superficial stylistic choice but as a methodological commitment. By grounding questions in accessible, unambiguous, and culturally sensitive language, the study enabled participants from diverse backgrounds to articulate their perspectives fully. This methodological discipline ensured that the data reflected participants lived realities, thereby strengthening the study's contribution to understanding the dynamics of Egypt's local governance transformation.

3.17 Balance and Framing Usage

The framing of research questions is a central methodological concern in qualitative inquiry because it directly shapes how participants perceive, interpret, and respond to the issues under discussion. Inadequate framing—whether overly leading, negatively biased, or excessively abstract—can distort the meanings participants

attach to their experiences, resulting in partial, superficial, or unreliable data. Conversely, balanced framing fosters openness, neutrality, and depth, allowing participants to articulate their views in ways that reflect their lived realities (Tracy, 2020; Saunders et al., 2023).

In this study, great care was taken to ensure that all interview and focus group questions were neutrally worded, culturally sensitive, and balanced. Balance was achieved by presenting issues from multiple perspectives, encouraging participants to weigh both positive and negative aspects of local governance without feeling pressured toward a particular stance. Framing was carefully aligned with the interpretivist paradigm: the questions were designed to invite meaning making, not to test pre-determined hypotheses.

3.17.1. Positive, Negative, and Neutral Frames

Three modes of framing were employed:

- Positive framing, which highlighted opportunities (e.g., *“What are the main strengths you see in your local administration?”*). This encouraged participants to reflect on constructive elements often overshadowed by challenges.
- Negative framing, which explored constraints (e.g., *“What factors make it difficult for your local council to meet residents’ expectations?”*). This ensured that structural and political obstacles were not overlooked.
- Neutral framing, which allowed participants to articulate experiences without evaluative cues (e.g., *“Can you describe how decisions are usually made in your local area?”*).

By alternating between these modes, the study mitigated bias and encouraged a fuller range of perspectives. This design strengthened credibility by avoiding the privileging of any single narrative (Nowell et al., 2021).

3.17.2. Avoiding Leading and Loaded Questions

Leading questions—those that suggest an expected answer—were deliberately avoided. For instance, instead of asking *“Do you think corruption is the biggest problem in local administration?”*, the study employed: *“What do you think are the biggest challenges facing your local administration?”*. This neutral framing left space for participants to identify corruption if it was salient but did not impose it as the primary lens. Similarly, loaded terms such as *“failure”* or *“incompetence”* were excluded; they were replaced with more neutral constructs like *“limitations”* or *“constraints.”* This approach enhanced dependability by ensuring that findings reflected participants’ interpretations rather than researcher assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

3.17.3. Reflexivity in Framing

The researcher maintained reflexive awareness that framing is never entirely value-free. To reduce interpretive bias, a reflexive journal documented the rationale behind wording choices, pre-testing adjustments, and instances where participants reacted strongly to particular phrasings. These reflections were later used in thematic analysis to contextualize responses, thereby enhancing confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

3.17.4. Cultural and Political Sensitivity

In Egypt’s political context, where discussing issues such as corruption, nepotism, or repression carries potential risks, framing was also an ethical concern. Instead of directly asking participants *“Have you experienced corruption?”*, questions were reframed as *“What factors make it harder for your office to be fully transparent and fair?”*. This indirect framing reduced risk while still eliciting meaningful data. Ethical sensitivity in framing not only protected participants but also promoted credibility and

trust in the research process (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2021).

3.17.5. Contribution to Trustworthiness

Balanced and careful framing contributed to all four dimensions of qualitative trustworthiness:

- **Credibility:** Avoiding bias in wording allowed participants' authentic voices to emerge.
- **Transferability:** Framing questions in ways that resonate across diverse communities enabled findings to be applied to other developing contexts.
- **Dependability:** Standardised framing protocols reduced variation in how different participants interpreted the same questions.
- **Confirmability:** Reflexive documentation of framing choices created transparency in how meanings were elicited.

3.17.6. Practical Example of Balanced Question Sets

To illustrate, Table 6 presents examples of how balance and framing were operationalised:

Table 12

Examples of Balanced Question Framing in the Study

Framing Type	Example Question	Purpose in Qualitative Design
Positive Framing	"What are the key achievements of your local administration in recent years?"	Encourages recognition of progress and strengths.

Negative Framing	“What are the most significant obstacles preventing your local administration from meeting residents’ needs?”	Surfaces constraints and bottlenecks without imposing them.
Neutral Framing	“How are priorities usually set for community projects in your area?”	Allows participants to describe processes without evaluative bias.
Reflexive-Framing	“When decisions are made, how do you feel about the extent to which your voice is heard?”	Invites meaning-making tied to personal experiences.

3.17.7. Link to Research Aims

By applying balanced framing, the study created conditions for participants to articulate both successes and failures, both constraints and opportunities. This is essential for the broader research aim of understanding Egypt’s transition from LA to LG: the shift cannot be understood solely as a problem of deficiencies, nor can it be reduced to a narrative of progress. Balanced framing thus enabled the study to capture the dialectics of governance—where opportunities coexist with barriers and where citizen experiences are simultaneously shaped by empowerment and limitation.

3.18 What Are the Variables Operationally?

In qualitative research, variables do not operate as fixed and quantifiable constructs in the same way they do within positive paradigms. Instead, they are

understood as conceptual categories and themes that shape how participants interpret, experience, and engage with social realities (Given, 2021; Saunders et al., 2023). Within this interpretivist study, the operationalisation of variables was approached as a process of making concepts meaningful in context, ensuring that they were grounded in participants lived experiences and expressed in ways faithful to their narratives.

Operationalisation, therefore, involved translating broad constructs such as “*citizen participation*”, “*accountability*”, and “*service responsiveness*” into observable indicators that could guide data collection, coding, and thematic interpretation. Rather than being rigid, these operational definitions remained flexible and emergent, allowing refinement during the iterative cycles of data analysis. This reflects the qualitative principle that evolves through engagement with participants rather than being pre-fixed by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Tracy, 2020).

3.18.1. Variable Types

In the context of this qualitative research, the notion of variable types is not approached through the lens of positivist measurement alone, but rather through the conceptual scaffolding that guides interpretive exploration. Variables here represent thematic categories of meaning that emerge from participants’ narratives and documents, rather than fixed, quantifiable attributes. Nevertheless, for doctoral-level clarity, the distinction between independent variables and dependent variables is acknowledged as an analytical device to structure inquiry (Given, 2021; Saunders et al., 2023).

- **Independent Variables (Conceptual Drivers):** These are the structural, institutional, and political factors hypothesised to influence local governance in Egypt. They include decentralisation reforms, fiscal frameworks, political

culture, resource allocation, and digitalisation initiatives. Importantly, they are treated as drivers of perception rather than deterministic causal levers. For example, decentralisation is examined through participant accounts of how shifting authority from central to local institutions affects accountability and responsiveness.

- **Dependent Variables (Conceptual Outcomes):** These are the lived experiences and perceptions of citizens, administrators, and civil society actors regarding governance. They include satisfaction with service delivery, sense of empowerment, trust in institutions, and perceived transparency. These outcomes are not reduced to numeric scores but are narratively captured in stories, metaphors, and examples that reflect participants' social realities (Tracy, 2020).

This interpretive framing acknowledges that outcomes are co-constructed through the interplay between structures (independent variables) and lived experience (dependent variables). Unlike quantitative paradigms where variables are manipulated under controlled conditions, this qualitative study recognises mutual shaping and fluidity: independent and dependent categories are not rigid but evolve as fieldwork progresses. This allows the research to retain flexibility and reflexivity, key to interpretivist inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021; Nowell et al., 2021).

3.18.2. Constructing the Variables

Constructing variables operationally in this qualitative framework requires a deliberate balance between literature-based conceptual clarity and field-based experiential grounding. This process unfolded in several iterative stages:

1. **Literature Anchoring:** Constructs such as participation, accountability, and fiscal autonomy were initially drawn from decentralisation literature and governance

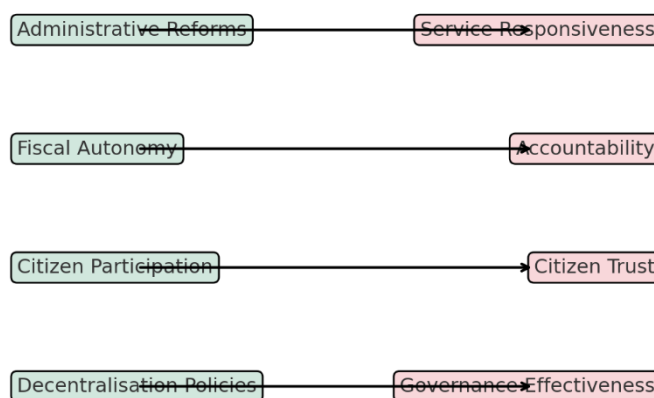
theory (El-Banna, 2023; Malaccorto & Lonati, 2019). These definitions provided a preliminary conceptual map.

2. **Pilot Refinement:** During pilot interviews and focus groups, participants introduced meanings that diverged from or extended scholarly definitions. For example, accountability was often framed less in terms of legal audits and more in terms of whether a citizen could get a direct response from a municipal officer. Such insights required reworking the operational categories.
3. **Contextualisation:** Recognising Egypt's unique political and socio-economic context, variables were constructed to reflect culturally embedded practices. For instance, citizen participation encompassed not only formal councils but also informal "wasta" (personal networks) through which residents access services. By integrating such realities, the study ensured thick description and transferability (Saunders et al., 2023).
4. **Iterative Coding:** As data collection advanced, initial constructions were progressively refined through constant comparison and thematic coding. New sub-dimensions emerged, such as distinguishing between perceived transparency and practiced transparency. These refinements were documented in an audit trail, enhancing dependability and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2021).
5. **Triangulation Across Sources:** Variables were not constructed from interviews alone but corroborated with focus group dialogues and documentary analysis. For example, budgetary autonomy was assessed by both examining policy documents and exploring how administrators narrated their ability—or inability—to allocate funds independently.
6. This construction process ensured that variables were not imposed

abstractions, but living categories continuously shaped by field realities. The reflexive practice of adapting definitions during the study contributed to methodological transparency and robustness.

Figure 14

Relationship Between Independent and Dependent Variables in a Qualitative Frame



Contribution to Research

Constructing variables in this flexible and interpretive way directly supports the central aim of this thesis: exploring the transition from Local Administration (LA) to Local Government (LG) in Egypt. By grounding variables in both literature and participant voices, the study establishes a robust analytical framework that aligns with Unicaf's doctoral expectations of methodological transparency, thick description, and ethical reflexivity.

Table 13*Operationalisation of Key Variables in the Study*

Variable (Concept)	Operational Definition in this Study	Source of Evidence	Mode of Analysis
Citizen Participation	The degree to which residents perceive themselves able to influence decisions, attend meetings, voice concerns, or engage in community projects.	Interviews, Focus Groups, Documentary Evidence	Thematic analysis of narratives of voice, exclusion, and empowerment.
Accountability	The mechanisms—formal and informal—through which local officials are held responsible for their decisions, budgets, and service outcomes.	Interviews with officials and citizens; Review of LA/LG policy documents	Coding for transparency practices, sanctions, responsiveness.
Fiscal Autonomy	The extent to which local administrations manage their own budgets, raise revenues, and allocate expenditures	Documentary analysis (budgets, circulars); Interviews with administrators	Thematic mapping of constraints vs. perceived autonomy.

	independently of the central state.		
Service Responsiveness	Citizens' lived experiences of how quickly, fairly, and effectively services (e.g., waste, health, infrastructure) are delivered.	Focus Groups; Interviews with service users	Comparative coding across governorates.
Political Culture	Norms, attitudes, and values shaping how citizens and officials interpret power, legitimacy, and governance.	Interviews, archival sources	Narrative analysis of trust, fear, disengagement.
Transparency	Openness in decision-making and information sharing; availability of data on budgets, plans, and services.	Official documents; citizen accounts	Content coding for openness and accessibility.

3.18.3. Reflexivity and Flexibility

A distinctive feature of qualitative operationalisation is reflexivity. The researcher acknowledged that categories such as “*participation*” or “*accountability*”

cannot be fully captured by external definitions alone; they acquire meaning through participant articulation. Accordingly, operational definitions were adjusted during fieldwork: for example, early interviews revealed that many citizens equated *participation* not with formal voting, but with informal interactions with municipal staff or the ability to “get things done” through personal networks. This insight was incorporated into the operational frame, ensuring that analysis reflected authentic meanings rather than imposed constructs.

This flexible stance enhanced credibility and confirmability: participants’ voices were the primary guide, while the researcher’s reflexive memos documented when and why definitions were adapted.

3.18.4. Contribution to Trustworthiness

Operationalisation in this qualitative study contributed to trustworthiness in several ways:

- Credibility: By grounding definitions in participant narratives and triangulating across interviews, focus groups, and documents.
- Transferability: By providing thick descriptions of how constructs were experienced in Egypt, enabling readers to judge applicability to other developing-country contexts.
- Dependability: By maintaining a transparent coding framework and audit trail of definitional refinements.
- Confirmability: By systematically linking variables to verbatim quotes and field evidence, reducing the risk of researcher bias.

3.18.5. Linking Operationalisation to Research Aims

Finally, operationalising variables in this way directly supported the research

aim of examining the transition from local administration (LA) to local government (LG) in Egypt. By defining constructs such as *citizen participation* and *fiscal autonomy* in operational, context-sensitive terms, the study created a framework through which participants' experiences could be systematically compared with constitutional provisions, reform policies, and global decentralisation models. This dual grounding—in participant realities and in policy discourse—ensures that findings will be both empirically robust and practically relevant for reform strategies.

3.19 Methods and Promises of Ethics in Research

Ethical integrity is not an auxiliary consideration in qualitative inquiry; it is central to its legitimacy and trustworthiness. Because this study addresses local governance in Egypt—an arena marked by political sensitivities, institutional constraints, and citizen vulnerabilities—it was imperative to establish and maintain rigorous ethical safeguards at every stage of the research process. The promises of ethics in research extend beyond compliance with formal requirements: they reflect a moral and professional commitment to respect, fairness, transparency, and accountability in the treatment of participants and their data (Nowell et al., 2021; Busher & James, 2022).

This section outlines the ethical procedures that guided the study, including the study procedure, ethical assurances, and the operationalisation of key ethical principles such as confidentiality, informed consent, avoidance of deception, and the right to withdraw. In doing so, it situates ethics as a guarantor of both participant protection and research credibility, in line with Unicaf University guidelines and international standards (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Tracy, 2020).

3.19.1. Study Procedure

Approval for this study was sought and obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) at Unicaf University prior to the commencement of

fieldwork. The ethical clearance confirmed that the proposed design complied with institutional, national, and international norms on human subject research.

The study procedure incorporated multiple layers of ethical protection:

1. Pre-fieldwork safeguards: Participants were provided with an information sheet clearly outlining the purpose, scope, risks, and benefits of the research. The sheet explained their rights, including voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw at any stage without penalty.
2. During data collection: Interviews and focus groups were conducted in environments conducive to open dialogue yet protective of participant safety. Care was taken to avoid any politically sensitive language that could expose respondents to risk. Discussions were recorded only with explicit consent, and participants were reassured of anonymity.
3. Post-fieldwork protocols: All audio files were transcribed, anonymised, and encrypted. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices, with access limited to the researcher. Backup copies were maintained on encrypted drives, following best practices for research data management (Saunders et al., 2023).

This procedure ensured compliance with the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice while also reinforcing trustworthiness through transparency in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

3.19.2. Ethical Assurances

Ethical assurances were designed to safeguard participants and reinforce the credibility of the study:

- Respect for autonomy: Participation was entirely voluntary, with no coercion or undue influence.

- Minimisation of harm: Potential risks were carefully evaluated, and strategies were developed to mitigate them (e.g., anonymisation of sensitive political opinions).
- Fairness and inclusivity: Participants were purposefully sampled to represent diverse perspectives across gender, age, geography, and institutional roles, ensuring equitable voice.
- Reflexivity of the researcher: The researcher maintained a reflexive diary to critically interrogate personal biases and positionality, recognising how these might shape interaction and interpretation (Tracy, 2020).

These assurances not only protected participants but also contributed to the four criteria of qualitative trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Nowell et al., 2021).

3.19.3. Protection of Confidentiality

Confidentiality was safeguarded through rigorous practices:

- Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts, replaced with coded pseudonyms (e.g., P1, FG2).
- Data were stored on encrypted devices, accessible only to the researcher.
- Findings were reported in aggregate form, with quotes anonymised to prevent identification.

Given Egypt's sensitive governance context, confidentiality was not merely procedural but existential: without such safeguards, participants may have been unwilling to share candid reflections on local governance performance and reforms. This protection increased the credibility and honesty of the narratives collected.

3.19.4. Obtaining Informed Consent

Informed consent was treated as a process rather than a single event. Participants were briefed orally and in writing about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Consent was obtained in two stages:

1. Written consent: Participants signed an informed consent form, which included permission for audio recording.
2. Ongoing verbal consent: At the start of each session, participants were reminded of their rights and asked to reconfirm willingness to proceed.

This iterative process ensured that consent was free, informed, and continuously reaffirmed (Busher & James, 2022).

3.19.5. Avoiding Deceptions

The study avoided any form of deception. Research objectives were fully disclosed, and no misleading practices were employed to elicit responses. Transparency reinforced trust and rapport with participants, which are indispensable in qualitative inquiry where meaning is co-constructed through open interaction (Tracy, 2020).

3.19.6. Providing the Right to Withdraw

Participants were explicitly informed of their unconditional right to withdraw at any time, without needing to provide a reason. This assurance was critical in protecting autonomy and reinforcing trust. Importantly, if a participant chose to withdraw after contributing data, their material was deleted permanently unless explicit permission was given to retain it.

3.19.7. Preventing Harm

The principle of *non-maleficence* (do no harm") underpinned all stages of the

research. Care was taken to avoid emotional distress, political exposure, or reputational risk. Sensitive questions were phrased carefully, and participants could decline to answer any question. The researcher also ensured cultural appropriateness in language and gestures, recognising that trust can be undermined if local norms are violated.

3.19.8. Ethical Promises in Qualitative Research

In qualitative interpretivist inquiry, ethics is inseparable from rigour and trustworthiness. This study therefore integrated ethics into methodological quality by:

- Linking ethical practices with credibility (through honesty and transparency).
- Enhancing transferability by including thick description of context without breaching anonymity.
- Securing dependability through a documented audit trail of consent forms, protocols, and data-handling procedures.
- Promoting confirmability by storing anonymised raw data for verification, subject to ethical approval (Nowell et al., 2021).

In sum, the promises of ethics in this study were not limited to compliance but extended to cultivating trust, respect, and protection in every interaction, while simultaneously ensuring that findings met the highest standards of qualitative rigour.

3.20 Data Collection

Data collection in this study was designed to capture rich, authentic, and multi-perspective accounts of local administration and the potential transition to local government in Egypt. Because the study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the methods prioritized depth, meaning, and context rather than surface-level measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In keeping with the qualitative case study design, three principal instruments were employed: semi-structured interviews, focus

group discussions, and documentary analysis. Each tool was developed and deployed with careful attention to ethical integrity, cultural sensitivity, and methodological rigour. Figure 8 illustrates the step-by-step process through which data were collected, integrated, and triangulated.

The primary source of data consisted of semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected group of local officials, civil society leaders, and residents across governorates. The interview formats balanced consistency across core themes—such as decentralisation, service delivery, and citizen participation—with flexibility to allow participants to introduce unanticipated but salient issues. Open-ended questioning encouraged participants to articulate their lived experiences in their own terms, thus giving voice to meanings that might otherwise remain hidden (Robinson, 2021). Probes and follow-up questions deepened engagement, while careful sequencing ensured coverage of all research objectives.

Complementing the individual interviews were focus group discussions, designed to capture collective deliberation, community-level dynamics, and shared reflections. Groups were composed to reflect diversity in age, gender, professional background, and geography. This format created opportunities for participants to respond to each other's perspectives, revealing areas of consensus, divergence, and silence. The discussions illuminated how local governance challenges are experienced not only individually but also socially, as part of broader community life (Nowell et al., 2021). Trained moderators ensured that group dynamics were inclusive, respectful, and ethically secure.

The third stream of evidence came from documentary analysis. A wide range of documents—including constitutional articles, local administration law drafts, government circulars, donor reports, and media coverage—were systematically

reviewed using a coding framework developed for this study. Documentary evidence served two functions: first, to provide historical and institutional context against which interview and focus group claims could be assessed; and second, to triangulate findings, thereby enhancing credibility and validity (Yin, 2018).

All data collection followed rigorous ethical procedures. Participants were provided with clear information sheets, and informed consent was obtained before any recording or transcription took place. Confidentiality was strictly preserved by anonymising data, encrypting digital files, and limiting access to the research team. The political sensitivities surrounding governance in Egypt were carefully considered, and participants were reassured that their contributions were voluntary and that withdrawal was possible at any stage without consequence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

A triangulation strategy underpinned the entire data collection design. By combining individual narratives (interviews), collective voices (focus groups), and institutional records (documents), the study ensured that no single perspective dominated. Instead, the interplay of sources provided a more comprehensive, nuanced, and trustworthy picture of Egyptian local governance. Triangulation also facilitated the identification of patterns across different stakeholder groups and the verification of claims against documentary evidence.

Data saturation was carefully monitored throughout. Interviews and focus groups continued until no new themes were emerging, thereby meeting the qualitative standard of theoretical saturation (Morse, 1995; Saunders & Townsend, 2022). This ensured that the dataset was sufficiently rich and complete to address the research objectives and withstand critical scrutiny.

In sum, data collection in this study was not a mechanical process but a context-

sensitive and ethically grounded inquiry. By combining interviews, focus groups, and documents in a triangulated design, the research captured the lived realities of Egyptian local administration, provided space for community voices, and embedded these within a robust institutional context. This comprehensive strategy strengthens credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, aligning with Unicaf's doctoral research guidelines and international standards for qualitative inquiry (Nowell et al., 2021; Vasileiou et al., 2022).

3.20.1 Data Sources and Modalities

The study drew upon three complementary modalities of evidence collection:

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

- Conducted with local officials, administrators, civil society leaders, and citizens across governorates, cities, and districts.
- Designed to elicit narratives of experience, perceptions of administrative effectiveness, and reflections on reform challenges.
- Interviews followed a guide (see Appendix A) but allowed flexibility to probe emergent issues such as fiscal deficits, corruption, or political constraints.
- Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, recorded (with informed consent), transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary.

2. Focus Group Discussions

- Conducted with community representatives, NGO activists, and ordinary citizens to capture group-level deliberations on service delivery, participation, and accountability.
- Groups ranged from 6–10 participants to ensure both diversity and

manageability.

- Discussions were moderated using a protocol (see Appendix B) that emphasised open dialogue, respect, and confidentiality.
- This method revealed collective dynamic convergences, disagreements, and silences—that individual interviews could not capture (Nowell et al., 2021).

3. Documentary Analysis

- Involved systematic review of primary and secondary sources, including:
 - Egyptian Constitution (2014) and Local Administration Law drafts.
 - Budget statements, decentralisation policy circulars, and donor project reports.
 - NGO publications, civil society briefs, and media investigations.
- A coding framework was applied to extract evidence on institutional structures, decentralisation policies, resource flows, and accountability practices (Yin, 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2022).

3.20.2 Sequencing and Fieldwork Procedures

Data collection unfolded in stages:

- Stage 1: Pilot Testing — interview and focus group protocols were piloted with a small sample of participants in Cairo to refine question clarity, sequence, and timing.
- Stage 2: Core Fieldwork — full-scale interviews and focus groups were conducted across selected governorates, chosen to reflect geographical, socio-economic, and political diversity.
- Stage 3: Supplementary Documentation — relevant documents were collected in parallel, providing contextual background and enabling triangulation.

All data were collected between March 2023 and May 2024. Reflexive memos were maintained throughout, recording the researcher's observations, impressions, and decisions. This audit trail enhanced dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

3.20.3 Ensuring Quality of Evidence

To safeguard accuracy and reliability:

- Informed Consent — all participants signed consent forms outlining rights, risks, and the option to withdraw.
- Confidentiality — transcripts were anonymised; pseudonyms were assigned.
- Consistency — standardised recording, transcription, and translation procedures were followed.
- Trustworthiness — prolonged engagement, triangulation across methods, and member checking (sharing summaries with participants for validation) were used to strengthen credibility.

3.20.4 Justification of the Qualitative Focus

The choice of qualitative data collection aligns with the study's interpretive philosophy and research questions, which seek to explore *how* local governance is understood, experienced, and enacted by different actors. Unlike quantitative surveys, which may capture frequency but not meaning, qualitative tools allow participants to articulate perspectives in their own terms, reveal underlying values, and expose contradictions or tensions in practice (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

By integrating interviews, focus groups, and documents, the study captured a holistic picture of Egypt's LA-to-LG trajectory, generating insights not just about institutional arrangements but also about the lived realities and aspirations of citizens.

3.21 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis in qualitative research is not limited to summarising data but involves a process of systematic interpretation that seeks to preserve participants' meanings while identifying commonalities, divergences, and contextual nuances. In this study, descriptive analysis was central to transforming raw interview transcripts, focus group notes, and documentary evidence into credible insights about the challenges and opportunities of Egypt's transition from local administration (LA) to local government (LG). Consistent with interpretivism, the aim was not to produce statistical generalisations but to develop thick description (Geertz, 1973/2021) that reveals the lived realities of participants in their socio-political contexts.

The analysis followed a thematic pathway, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, updated 2022). This pathway began with careful familiarisation with transcripts, iterative coding of significant statements, and the clustering of codes into broader categories. Themes such as *bureaucratic inefficiency*, *citizen distrust*, *decentralisation prospects*, and *digitalisation opportunities* emerged organically from participant narratives while being cross-checked against the research objectives. By combining inductive coding with deductive anchors, the analysis ensured both openness to participants' meanings and alignment with the theoretical framework.

To enhance transparency and rigour, descriptive analysis was supported by several techniques:

- Theme recurrence: recurring concepts were traced across interviews, focus groups, and documents. Their frequency was not used in a purely quantitative sense but as an indicator of salience to multiple stakeholder groups (Vasileiou et al., 2022).
- Proportional emphasis: attention was given to which themes dominated

discussions (e.g., fiscal deficits) and which appeared only in niche contexts (e.g., rural service innovation). This highlighted both common and minority perspectives.

- Thematic mapping and diagrams: visual representations, such as thematic networks, were created to illustrate how codes and themes connected. These diagrams allowed the researcher to see not just isolated issues but the interdependence between governance, resources, and citizen engagement.
- Comparative narrative analysis: patterns were compared across sub-groups (e.g., officials vs. residents, urban vs. rural participants) to highlight differences and convergences in perspective. This enriched the understanding of how governance is experienced unevenly across contexts.
- Interpretive exploration: rather than stopping at description, the study explored the *why* behind patterns. For example, why citizen apathy persists even when service reforms are introduced; or why decentralisation is supported in theory but resisted in practice (Nowell et al., 2021).

Crucially, descriptive analysis in this study was iterative. Initial themes were shared back with selected participants through member checking, a strategy that supports credibility by allowing participants to confirm, refine, or contest interpretations (Birt et al., 2016). Reflexive journaling by the researcher further supported dependability and confirmability, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in data rather than researcher bias.

The outcome of descriptive analysis is a layered account: one that captures immediate descriptive detail, identifies thematic patterns, and situates these within Egypt's broader institutional and historical context. This layered approach not only answers the study's research questions but also provides transferable insights—

enabling readers to assess relevance for other developing countries pursuing decentralisation agendas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

In sum, descriptive analysis in this study served as both lens and bridge. As lens, it illuminated the lived experiences of participants; as bridge, it connected individual narratives to systemic challenges and reform possibilities. Through rigorous application of qualitative analytic techniques, the study ensured that findings are credible, richly contextualised, and analytically deep, meeting both Unicaf doctoral standards and international expectations for qualitative research excellence.

Visual representations, such as thematic diagrams, are widely recognized for their ability to simplify complex qualitative findings. By using conceptual frameworks or layered maps, researchers illustrate relationships between categories or emerging patterns. These diagrams help viewers quickly grasp key findings and connections across diverse themes, facilitating comprehension of study outcomes. They are particularly effective for showcasing study results, communicating insights derived from narrative data, and revealing trends in participant feedback. The clarity and adaptability of thematic diagrams make them essential for conveying intricate data in an accessible manner.

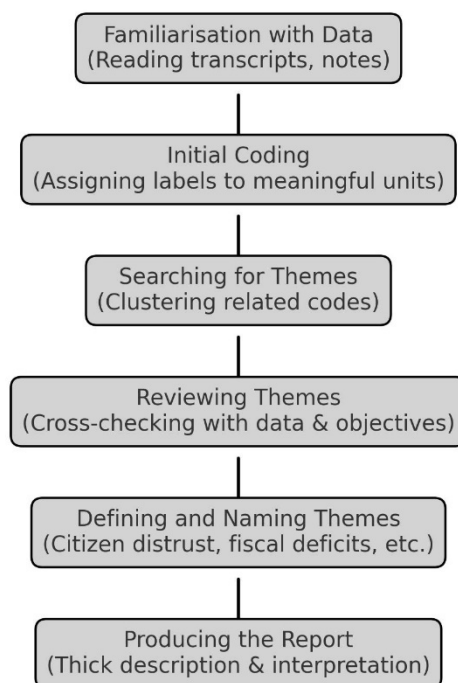
Figure 15*Thematic Analysis Flow for Descriptive Analysis*

Figure 14 presents the thematic analysis flow adopted in this research, showing how qualitative data moves from raw transcripts to structured and credible insights. The process begins with familiarisation, where the researcher immerses themselves in the interview, focus group, and documentary data to capture initial impressions. This is followed by systematic coding, in which significant statements are highlighted and assigned conceptual labels. The generation of themes occurs when related codes are grouped, creating preliminary thematic clusters that capture emerging patterns. Through review and refinement, these clusters are tested against the original data, ensuring both accuracy and resonance with participants' meanings.

At the next stage, thematic mapping clarifies the relationships between themes, identifying overlaps, contradictions, and hierarchies. Finally, through interpretation and synthesis, themes are consolidated into broader analytical insights that address the study's research questions. Reflexivity, triangulation, and an audit trail run across all stages, reinforcing the trustworthiness of the analysis by ensuring that the findings

remain grounded in the participants' voices and the socio-political context of Egypt.

3.22 Establishing Trustworthiness

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative study is as important as the collection and interpretation of data itself. Since the present study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the criteria for quality are not statistical validity or reliability but rather credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021; Nowell et al., 2021). These four dimensions provide a coherent framework through which the rigor of the research can be assessed and evaluated by examiners, policymakers, and fellow scholars.

Credibility in this research was promoted through the triangulation of multiple data sources and methods. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis were employed to capture converging and diverging perspectives on local administration (LA) and local government (LG) in Egypt. Member-checking procedures were applied wherever feasible, particularly during interviews, by summarising participant responses and inviting clarifications. Prolonged engagement in the field and iterative data collection further enhanced the authenticity of the accounts by reducing superficial interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Transferability was ensured by providing thick description of the socio-political and cultural context of Egypt's administrative system. By detailing participant demographics, institutional backgrounds, and geographical variation across governorates, this study provides readers with sufficient contextual detail to judge the applicability of findings to other developing country contexts. The intention is not statistical generalisation but analytical generalisation, allowing the study's insights to inform broader debates on decentralisation and governance in the Global South

(Tracy, 2020).

Dependability was addressed through careful documentation of all methodological steps. A detailed audit trail was maintained, including pilot protocols, interview and focus group guides, coding manuals, and reflexive notes. These records enable external reviewers to trace the logic of decisions and verify the consistency of procedures over time (Shenton, 2004; Noble & Smith, 2015). Peer debriefing with governance scholars and qualitative methodologists was also incorporated to refine instruments and cross-check emerging interpretations.

Confirmability was strengthened through reflexivity and transparency. The researcher maintained a reflective journal to critically examine personal biases, positionality as both practitioner and scholar, and the potential influence of these on interpretation. Data were anonymised and securely stored in encrypted form, ensuring that findings were grounded in participants' voices rather than researcher preferences. Quotations are presented verbatim (with necessary language adjustments for clarity), allowing readers to assess whether interpretations are supported by the evidence (Nowell et al., 2021).

Together, these measures ensure that the study not only meets academic expectations of methodological rigor but also reflects the lived realities and aspirations of Egyptian citizens, administrators, and civil society actors. By explicitly engaging with the four dimensions of trustworthiness, this chapter demonstrates the transparency, reliability, and integrity of the research process.

3.23 Limitations of Methodology

Every methodological design, no matter how rigorous or carefully planned, carries inherent limitations that must be acknowledged to ensure transparency and enhance the credibility of the study. In keeping with best practices in qualitative

research, this section outlines the methodological constraints encountered in the present investigation and explains how they were mitigated to preserve trustworthiness. By openly recognising these limitations, the study demonstrates reflexivity and strengthens the integrity of its findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

3.23.1 Generalisability and Context-Specific Focus

Because the study is anchored in a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm, its findings are deeply embedded in the Egyptian socio-political and institutional context. This means that the insights derived are contextually rich but not statistically generalisable to all governance settings. Instead, they provide transferability through thick description, allowing readers and policymakers to determine whether lessons can be applied to comparable contexts in other regions or countries (Nowell et al., 2021). This limitation is intrinsic to case study research but was mitigated by deliberate use of diverse perspectives and purposive sampling to reflect variation across geography, roles, and demographics.

3.23.2 Sampling Constraints and Representation

While purposive and probability sampling strategies were employed, resource constraints (time, funding, access) limited the overall sample size. The inclusion of participants from multiple governorates and sectors increased representational breadth, yet some groups—such as marginalised rural communities, women in leadership, or youth activists—may still be underrepresented. To reduce this limitation, the principle of saturation guided data collection, ensuring that thematic patterns were captured until no new insights emerged (Morse, 1995). Nevertheless, the study recognises that some nuances, particularly from underrepresented voices, may not be

fully captured.

3.23.3 Data Collection Challenges

The political sensitivity surrounding discussions of decentralisation and governance in Egypt posed challenges for open disclosure. Some participants may have moderated their responses out of fear of reprisal, self-censorship, or mistrust of recording devices. This introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. To address this, interviews and focus groups were conducted under strict confidentiality protocols, emphasising voluntary participation and anonymisation. The use of trust-building strategies—such as informal pre-interview conversations and assurances of withdrawal rights—helped to create a safer environment for candid dialogue.

3.23.4 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As in all interpretivists qualitative research, the researcher's positionality inevitably influences the process of data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Pre-existing knowledge, professional background, and expectations can shape the framing of questions and the interpretation of responses. To mitigate these risks, reflexive journaling and peer debriefing were employed, ensuring that the researcher critically reflected on assumptions and decisions throughout the research process. While complete neutrality is unattainable, transparency in acknowledging positionality helps strengthen the confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

3.23.5 Language and Translation Issues

Some interviews and documents were conducted in Arabic and then translated into English for analysis. The risk of semantic loss or subtle shifts in meaning during translation is acknowledged. To reduce this limitation, transcripts were cross-checked against original recordings, and bilingual colleagues were consulted during the

verification process. Despite these safeguards, it remains possible that certain cultural nuances or idiomatic expressions may not be fully captured in the English-language presentation of results.

3.23.6 *Temporal Scope*

The longitudinal focus of the study (1981–2021) provides valuable insights into change over time, but it also carries limitations. Some participants relied on memory to recall past governance practices, which may introduce recall bias. In addition, the study's data capture reflects conditions up to the date of collection; subsequent reforms or political shifts may alter the landscape of Egyptian governance. This limitation is partly addressed by supplementing participant narratives with documentary analysis, which anchors findings in official records and historical sources.

3.23.7 *Resource and Logistical Constraints*

The study was conducted within the constraints of doctoral research, which limited the capacity for extended fieldwork across all Egyptian governorates. Budgetary restrictions constrained travel, participant compensation, and the ability to conduct repeated interviews. To mitigate this, the study strategically selected governorates and participants that reflected a range of socio-economic and administrative contexts, thereby maximising variation within available resources.

In sum, while the study is subject to limitations common to qualitative case study research, including issues of generalisability, sampling, disclosure, and translation, it mitigates these challenges through deliberate design choices such as triangulation, saturation, reflexivity, and thick description. Rather than undermining the validity of the research, these limitations underscore its situated, interpretive nature

and the importance of contextualised insights for understanding Egypt's transition from LA to LG. By being transparent about constraints and the steps taken to minimise them, the study provides examiners and readers with a balanced view of its methodological robustness and boundaries.

3.24 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive account of the methodological design adopted in this study, clarifying how the chosen strategies, tools, and ethical safeguards collectively enable a credible investigation into Egypt's transition from Local Administration (LA) to Local Government (LG). The aim throughout has been to align methodological choices with the study's interpretivist foundation and to ensure that evidence is collected, analysed, and presented in a way that is transparent, rigorous, and contextually grounded.

The chapter opened with an overview of methodological architecture, explaining the logic of adopting a qualitative case study design. Anchored in interpretivism, this approach prioritises meaning making, lived experiences, and the socially constructed nature of governance phenomena. Egypt was treated as a bounded, context-rich case, allowing for in-depth exploration of historical legacies, institutional dynamics, and community voices. By choosing qualitative inquiry, the study emphasised depth over breadth, producing nuanced insights into the challenges and opportunities of decentralisation.

The discussion then traced the specific design features:

- The research philosophy, which situates the study within an interpretivist and constructivist paradigm, seeking to understand governance through the subjective meanings ascribed by actors.
- The research approach and strategy, including the use of a case study method

supported by thematic analysis and triangulation.

- The time horizon (1981–2021), which provided the scope to trace long-term trajectories in Egyptian governance reforms.
- The sampling logic, combining purposive, probability, and non-probability techniques to capture variation across roles, governorates, and demographic groups.

The chapter also detailed the tools and instruments used: a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A), focus group protocols (Appendix B), and a documentary analysis framework. Each was developed through a rigorous, iterative process involving literature integration, expert review, pilot testing, and refinement. Together, these tools served as conduits for eliciting the voices of officials, civil society actors, and citizens, while the triangulation of interviews, group discussions, and documents enhanced validity and analytic depth.

Careful attention was devoted to data management and analysis, including the use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) supported by NVivo software, reflexive journaling, and systematic coding. Steps such as member-checking, thick description, and peer debriefing were outlined to ensure trustworthiness across the four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

The chapter further discussed ethical considerations, showing how informed consent, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and avoidance of harm were embedded throughout the research cycle. In politically sensitive contexts such as Egypt, these safeguards were not only a matter of professional ethics but also critical to participant safety and the legitimacy of findings.

Finally, the chapter acknowledged methodological limitations. These include

constraints on generalisability, potential sampling imbalances, language translation issues, and political sensitivities that may have shaped disclosure. Yet, through triangulation, reflexivity, and saturation, these limitations were mitigated and transparently reported, reinforcing the integrity of the research.

In summary, this chapter has established a coherent and rigorous methodological foundation for the study. It has shown how methodological choices were tailored to the Egyptian context, justified by scholarly precedent, and operationalised with careful attention to validity, ethics, and trustworthiness. This methodological roadmap enables the study not only to generate credible findings but also to contribute to debates on how qualitative inquiry can illuminate governance reforms in politically sensitive and complex settings.

The next chapter—Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis—builds upon this methodological foundation by presenting the empirical findings. It will trace thematic patterns emerging from interviews, focus groups, and documents, linking them to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 and the methodological design detailed here. In doing so, it will demonstrate how qualitative evidence reveals both the challenges and the latent opportunities of Egypt's decentralisation journey.

4 CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study and demonstrates how the qualitative methodology outlined in Chapter Three was operationalised in practice. It serves as the empirical core of the thesis, translating abstract debates on decentralisation and governance into the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of participants. In doing so, it builds the bridge between the conceptual frameworks reviewed earlier and the realities observed in Egypt's governance landscape.

The overarching aim is to illuminate how administrators, civil society actors, and ordinary citizens experience the tension between Egypt's current Local Administration (LA) model and the potential for a transition toward a Local Government (LG) system. Rather than treating governance problems as technical failures, the study interprets them as socially constructed realities shaped by history, politics, and everyday practices. This approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm in qualitative research, which regards data not as neutral "facts" but as negotiated meanings situated in broader socio-political contexts (Schwandt, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Nowell et al., 2021).

4.2 Situating Chapter 4 within the Thesis

The thesis as a whole is structured to move from theoretical foundations to empirical reality and finally to interpretation and policy implications. Chapter One set out the research problem, objectives, and questions. Chapter Two reviewed the literature and conceptual debates on decentralisation, governance, and local development, situating Egypt within comparative and regional contexts. Chapter Three outlined the qualitative research design, sampling strategy, and data collection procedures.

Chapter Four, presented here, performs a pivotal role by:

1. **Presenting empirical data** – the voices of 30 participants and supporting documentary evidence.
2. **Organising data thematically** – using a rigorous analytic process to generate credible, transferable, and confirmable themes.
3. **Bridging to interpretation** – laying the groundwork for Chapter Five, where findings are compared with existing literature and theory.

In this sense, Chapter Four is not merely descriptive; it demonstrates how qualitative evidence can challenge, refine, or support theoretical claims about governance reform in Egypt.

4.2.1 Why Qualitative Inquiry in Egypt?

The choice of a qualitative, interpretivist approach was particularly suited to the Egyptian context. Governance reform in Egypt is not only a question of institutional design but also one of trust, perception, and legitimacy. A purely quantitative survey might reveal levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction but would fail to capture the ambivalence, frustration, and cautious hope that participants articulated.

Moreover, local governance in Egypt is politically sensitive. Citizens and officials often self-censor in formal spaces, making semi-structured interviews and focus groups more effective for eliciting candid reflections. Thematic analysis provided the flexibility to capture both anticipated themes (such as fiscal dependency and bureaucracy) and emergent issues (such as youth disillusionment with local politics or optimism about digitalisation).

Comparable qualitative studies—such as Cornwall (2016) in West Africa, Mansuri & Rao (2019) in South Asia, and Fritz & Menocal (2022) in MENA—demonstrate the value of interpretivist designs in contexts where governance reforms

are aspirational, contested, or unevenly implemented. This study positions itself within that tradition, while extending it through the specificities of Egypt's case.

4.2.2 Methodological Transparency

The findings in this chapter derive from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis, with triangulation used to cross-validate data. Following Braun & Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis model, the analytic process was iterative, recursive, and reflexive. Data were not forced into pre-set categories; rather, coding moved back and forth between the empirical material and the conceptual framework.

A schematic of the data analysis cycle is presented in Figure 15 later in the chapter, highlighting stages of familiarisation, coding, categorisation, theme development, and validation.

4.2.3 Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

A key principle of qualitative rigor is reflexivity. As Berger (2015) and Noble & Heale (2019) argue, researchers inevitably shape the knowledge they produce. In this study, reflexivity involved:

- Keeping a research journal to document analytic decisions.
- Noting moments where researcher positionality may have influenced participant responses (e.g., officials being more cautious, citizens being more open in group settings).

Recognising the ethical sensitivities of conducting governance research in a country where political critique carries risks.

By making the research process transparent, this chapter seeks to ensure that findings are interpreted as situated and relational, not as detached "truths".

4.2.4 Structure of the Chapter

The remainder of the chapter is organised as follows:

- **Section 4.2** – Overview of participants and data sources, including demographic tables and sampling rationale.
- **Section 4.3** – Description of the data analysis process, illustrated with coding frameworks and examples.
- **Section 4.4** – Thematic presentation of findings, organised into contextual themes, challenges, opportunities, and citizen expectations.
- **Section 4.5** – Evaluation of findings against trustworthiness criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability).
- **Section 4.6** – Documentation of successful initiatives and programs in LA, including case studies.
- **Section 4.7** – Stakeholder expectations for the future of LG in Egypt, including scenario building.
- **Section 4.8** – Summary of findings, mapping themes to research questions.

4.2.5 Contribution of the Chapter

This chapter contributes to the thesis in four key ways:

1. **Empirical depth** – providing one of the few qualitative accounts of Egypt's LA from multiple perspectives (administrators, civil society, citizens).
2. **Thematic synthesis** – showing how everyday experiences of bureaucracy, centralisation, and participation link to broader governance debates.

3. **Comparative insight** – drawing lessons from Global South and MENA cases to situate Egypt internationally.
4. **Methodological rigor** – demonstrating transparency in coding, triangulation, and reflexivity.

Integrative Note

In sum, this introduction positions Chapter Four as the empirical heart of the study. By privileging participant voices, maintaining reflexive transparency, and embedding findings in both national and international contexts, the chapter goes beyond description to provide a nuanced, evidence-based account of how Egyptians perceive local governance today. It shows that the move from LA to LG is not merely a technical reform but a contested, lived, and deeply political process.

The expanded analysis that follows seeks to capture these complexities with both narrative depth and visual clarity, setting the stage for interpretation in Chapter Five.

4.3 Overview of Participants and Data Sources

In line with the interpretivist and qualitative case study strategy described in Chapter Three, this section presents the composition of participants and the sources of data that underpin the empirical analysis. The emphasis throughout was on maximum variation sampling to capture perspectives across administrative hierarchies, professional backgrounds, and socio-demographic categories. Such diversity not only strengthens triangulation but also reflects the multiplicity of lived experiences in Egypt's local governance landscape (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2021).

4.3.1 Participants

A total of 30 participants contributed to the study through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. These participants were drawn from three main stakeholder groups:

1. **Local Administrators and Officials** – representatives from governorates, city administrations, and district offices.
2. **Civil Society Leaders and Community Activists** – individuals representing NGOs, unions, professional associations, and grassroots movements.
3. **Ordinary Citizens** – residents from both urban and rural communities who interact most directly with local governance structures.

This tripartite structure was designed to compare official narratives, intermediary perspectives, and everyday citizen experiences, thereby creating a layered account of governance realities.

4.3.1.1 Participant Profile Summary

Table 14

Participant Profile by Category

Category	Number (n=30)	Description
Local Administrators and Officials	10	Senior and mid-level officials from governorates, city councils, and district offices.
Civil Society Leaders / Activists	8	NGO directors, union representatives, professional association members, grassroots organisers.

Citizens (Urban)	6	Residents of Cairo, Alexandria, and other metropolitan centres.
Citizens (Rural)	6	Residents of villages and small towns in Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta.

4.3.1.2 Extended Demographic Breakdown

To capture diversity in age, gender, and geography, participants were further classified as shown in **Table 10**.

Table 15

Distribution of the Participants

Group	Male	Female	Age 18–30	Age 31–50	Age 51+	Urban	Rural
Administrators (n=10)	7	3	2	5	3	8	2
Civil Society (n=8)	5	3	3	4	1	4	4
Citizens (n=12)	6	6	5	4	3	6	6

This profile ensured gender representation, inclusion of youth voices, and balance between urban and rural perspectives. Such inclusivity is vital in governance research, where marginalised groups often experience governance failures most acutely (UNDP, 2022).

4.3.1.3 Illustrative Participant Vignettes

To humanise the categories, four illustrative cases are presented:

- **Administrator A3 (District Officer, Giza):** Described daily struggles with overlapping mandates, reflecting frustrations of officials bound by central directives.
- **Activist B5 (Female NGO Leader, Minya):** Spoke about rural women being doubly marginalised—excluded from decision-making and disproportionately affected by poor service delivery.
- **Citizen C7 (22-year-old, Alexandria):** Highlighted youth disillusionment: *“We hear about local councils in textbooks, but in reality, they have no power, so young people don’t care.”*
- **Citizen C11 (Farmer, Upper Egypt):** Underscored rural deprivation: *“In Cairo, people complain about bureaucracy. Here, the problem is that services don’t exist at all.”*

These vignettes exemplify the **breadth and depth of lived realities** captured in the dataset.

4.3.2 Data Sources

In addition to primary data, a wide range of **secondary sources** was integrated. These sources provided context, validated participant claims, and enabled triangulation.

1. **Constitutional and Legal Provisions** – Egypt’s 2014 Constitution, particularly Articles 176–179, and drafts of the Local Administration Law.
2. **Policy and Budgetary Documents** – Ministry of Local Development circulars, governorate budget reports, central transfer data.
3. **NGO and Donor Publications** – Reports from UNDP (2022), OECD (2023), Transparency International (2022), and Egyptian think tanks.

4. **Media Coverage** – National and regional press documenting decentralisation debates and service delivery issues.
5. **Comparative Case Reports** – International donor case studies from Morocco, Indonesia, Brazil, and Turkey for benchmarking.

4.3.3 Ethical Safeguards

Given the political sensitivity of governance research in Egypt, strict ethical measures were followed:

- **Informed Consent** – All participants were briefed in Arabic about study aims, anonymity, and voluntary participation.
- **Anonymisation** – Codes (e.g., Administrator A1, Citizen C3) ensured confidentiality.
- **Data Security** – Audio files and transcripts stored in encrypted form.
- **Reflexive Care** – Interview techniques adjusted to minimise discomfort, particularly when discussing sensitive topics like corruption.

These safeguards were not only ethical obligations but also strategies to build **trust and authenticity** in participant narratives (Nowell et al., 2021; Noble & Heale, 2019).

4.3.4 Linking Participants and Sources to Research Objectives

The integration of diverse participants and sources was **purposefully aligned** with research questions:

- **RQ1 (Challenges of LA):** Explored through administrator accounts, validated against budget reports and NGO studies.
- **RQ2 (Opportunities for LG):** Informed by activists' proposals and international case comparisons.

- **RQ3 (Citizen perceptions):** Captured through urban/rural voices, cross-validated with media reports.
- **RQ4 (Successful practices):** Documented through both interviews and donor-supported pilot evaluations.
- **RQ5 (Future expectations):** Synthesised from citizen aspirations, linked to Vision 2030 and SDGs.

Table 16

Participant Roles in Addressing Research Questions

RQ	Primary Participant Source	Supporting Secondary Sources
RQ1	Administrators, Citizens	Budget reports, World Bank (2021)
RQ2	Activists, Officials	OECD (2022), UNDP (2022)
RQ3	Citizens (urban/rural)	Media reports, Abdelaziz (2022)
RQ4	All groups	Donor project evaluations
RQ5	Citizens, Activists	Vision 2030, SDGs, UNDP (2023)

Integrative Note

By combining **primary voices** with **secondary documentation**, this study creates a **multi-layered empirical foundation**. The participant diversity ensures that the findings are not skewed toward elite or official narratives, while triangulation enhances credibility and confirmability.

Ultimately, the composition of participants and data sources reflects the **qualitative ethos** of thick description, inclusivity, and reflexive transparency. These foundations set the stage for the analysis process described in Section 4.3.

4.4 Data Analysis Process

The process of data analysis in this qualitative study followed a structured yet iterative cycle, ensuring that meanings emerging from participant accounts were explored deeply, contextualised carefully, and triangulated across multiple sources. Unlike linear models of analysis, this process was **cyclical, recursive, and reflexive**, allowing themes to evolve as familiarity with the data increased.

The procedure involved multiple interrelated stages:

1. Preparation and familiarisation.
2. Initial coding.
3. Categorisation of codes.
4. Development of themes.
5. Triangulation and validation.
6. Iterative refinement leading to saturation.

Throughout, analysis was embedded within an interpretivist framework, prioritising participant voices and recognising the socially constructed nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive journaling and peer debriefing further enhanced transparency and trustworthiness.

4.3.1 Preparation and Familiarisation

The first stage involved immersion in the raw data. Following collection, all interviews and focus groups were:

- **Audio-recorded** (with informed consent).
- **Transcribed verbatim** in Arabic, then translated into English where necessary.

- **Annotated with contextual notes** to preserve cultural nuance and idiomatic expressions (e.g., terms such as *wasta* or *baladiyya* that have layered meanings).

The familiarisation process also involved:

- **Multiple readings** of transcripts to identify patterns and tone.
- **Memo-writing** to record first impressions, surprises, and emerging insights.
- **Reflexive notes** on the researcher's positionality, such as the effect of being perceived as an academic outsider by some participants, and as a neutral listener by others.

This stage ensured that subsequent coding was grounded in a **deep contextual understanding** rather than superficial categorisation (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Birt et al., 2020).

4.3.2 Initial Coding

The second stage involved systematic **line-by-line coding**. A **hybrid strategy** was employed:

- **Deductive codes** were derived from the conceptual framework and research questions (e.g., *decentralisation, accountability, fiscal autonomy, participation*).
- **Inductive codes** emerged directly from the narratives (e.g., *youth frustration, digital hope, mistrust of elections*).

Codes were applied to meaningful data segments ranging from single words to full paragraphs.

Table 17*Excerpt from Coding Framework*

Transcript Segment	Deductive Code	Inductive Code	Notes
“We cannot fix the roads without Cairo’s approval.” (FGD 3, Rural Leader)	Political centralisation	Disempowerment	Reflects lack of local authority.
“Young people don’t see the point in local councils.” (Citizen C7, Alexandria)	Participation	Youth disengagement	Links to democratic apathy.
“Bribes are normal if you want fast services.” (NGO Rep, Interviewee 9)	Corruption	Informal practices	Everyday normalisation of corruption.
“Online portals make the process cleaner.” (Youth, Cairo)	Digitalisation	Optimism for reform	Suggests trust-building potential.

By combining deductive and inductive strategies, the coding process captured both **anticipated challenges** and **unexpected opportunities** (Saldaña, 2021).

4.3.3 Categorisation of Codes

The third stage involved grouping codes into **categories** that represented broader concepts. This process condensed large volumes of data into clusters without losing richness. Examples include:

- **Administrative inefficiency** – grouping bureaucratic delays, overlapping mandates, and redundant approvals.
- **Political constraints** – combining lack of local elections, governor appointments, and security-first priorities.
- **Social mistrust** – capturing narratives of alienation, scepticism, and disengagement.
- **Innovation pockets** – linking digitalisation pilots, NGO partnerships, and youth initiatives.

This categorisation facilitated the move from descriptive coding to **interpretive synthesis**. Categories acted as the building blocks for theme development.

4.3.4 Development of Themes

From categories, broader **themes** were generated, representing patterns of meaning across the dataset. Importantly, themes were not treated as static “findings” but as **analytical constructs** that emerged through iterative engagement with the data.

Examples of major themes include:

- **Centralisation as a Persistent Barrier**
- **Citizen Participation as a Missed Opportunity**
- **Corruption and Informality in Everyday Governance**
- **Potential of Digitalisation for Reform**

Themes were validated through:

- **Constant comparison** against raw data.
- **Peer debriefing** with supervisors to check plausibility.
- **Integration of disconfirming evidence**, ensuring themes reflected both convergences and divergences.

This approach aligns with Braun & Clarke's (2021) emphasis on **reflexive thematic analysis**, where themes are understood as interpretive stories about the data rather than objective "discoveries."

4.3.5 Triangulation and Validation

To enhance **credibility** and **confirmability**, findings were triangulated across multiple data sources:

- **Interviews vs Documents** – e.g., officials' complaints about limited fiscal autonomy were validated against budget reports.
- **Focus Groups vs NGO Reports** – e.g., youth disengagement matched with NGO findings on declining participation.
- **Citizen Narratives vs Media Accounts** – e.g., rural service shortages confirmed in regional press reports.

Contradictions (e.g., administrators reporting "improvement" where citizens perceived "decline") were treated as **analytically valuable**, highlighting contested governance realities (Patton, 2015).

4.3.6 Iterative Refinement and Saturation

Analysis continued until **theoretical saturation** was reached. After the 28th and 29th interviews, no new codes or categories were emerging. At this point, coding frameworks were stabilised and themes consolidated.

Strategies for saturation:

- Continuous memo-writing to track when repetition outweighed novelty.
- Revisiting earlier transcripts to ensure no insights were overlooked.
- Consulting methodological guidance that emphasises saturation as the point where additional data produces redundancy rather than new meaning (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2021).

4.3.7 Reflexivity in the Analysis

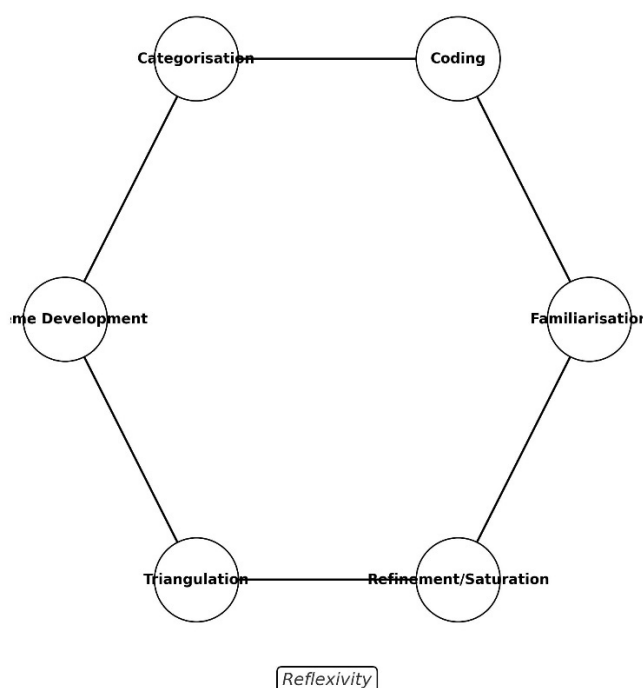
Given Egypt's political context, reflexivity was integral to the analytic process.

Challenges included:

- **Translation dilemmas** – terms like *wasta* (connections) carry cultural nuances not easily rendered in English. Decisions were logged transparently.
- **Power dynamics** – administrators tended to justify constraints, while citizens voiced frustration. The researcher noted how positionality shaped disclosure.
- **Ethical tensions** – some participants requested anonymity even beyond coding, highlighting the sensitivity of governance critique.

Maintaining a **reflexive journal** helped guard against over-interpretation and ensured that final themes were **anchored in participants' voices**.

4.3.8 Visualising the Process

Figure 16*Data Analysis Cycle*

This figure highlights the non-linear nature of qualitative analysis, where revisiting earlier stages is essential for accuracy and depth.

Integrative Note

The data analysis process in this study was **systematic, iterative, and reflexive**. By combining deductive and inductive coding, rigorous categorisation, and theme development grounded in triangulation, the research ensured that findings were **credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable**. Reflexivity further enhanced integrity, ensuring that interpretations were sensitive to both participant voices and contextual constraints.

This robust analytic process sets the stage for Section 4.4, where themes are presented in detail and supported with direct quotations, documentary evidence, and comparative insights..

4.1 Presentation of Findings

This section presents the empirical findings of the study. It brings together the voices of administrators, civil society representatives, and citizens to construct a multi-layered picture of local governance in Egypt. The purpose is not simply to report responses but to interpret them through the lens of the study's conceptual framework and research questions, in line with the interpretivist paradigm guiding this research.

The findings are derived from 30 semi-structured interviews, three focus groups, and extensive documentary analysis (constitutional texts, policy reports, NGO publications, and media coverage). Thematic analysis, as outlined in Section 4.3, provided the methodological foundation, enabling both anticipated and emergent themes to be identified, clustered, and synthesised.

Guiding Principles for Findings Presentation

The organisation of this section reflects three principles central to qualitative inquiry:

1. **Voice and Meaning:** Findings privilege participant voices, presented through anonymised quotations. These quotations are not decorative but serve as analytic evidence, showing how citizens and officials construct meaning in relation to governance.
2. **Contextualisation:** Themes are not presented in isolation but situated in Egypt's broader governance history, institutional structures, and socio-economic environment. This ensures that experiences are understood within the political and cultural dynamics that shape them.
3. **Triangulation and Reflexivity:** Findings are cross-validated against documentary sources and interpreted reflexively. Divergences are highlighted as analytically significant, revealing contested understandings of governance rather than methodological "noise."

Structure of the Findings

The section is structured around **seven thematic clusters** that emerged from the analysis:

- **4.4.1 Contextual Background Themes** – situating participant perspectives within Egypt’s governance history, centralisation legacies, and socio-economic disparities.
- **4.4.2 Challenges Identified in Local Administration** – bureaucratic inefficiency, fiscal dependency, political centralisation, corruption, and weak citizen engagement.
- **4.4.3 Opportunities for Reform and Improvement** – decentralisation, fiscal reform, digitalisation, capacity building, and participation.
- **4.4.4 Perceived Role of Decentralisation** – participants’ views on how decentralisation could enhance responsiveness, accountability, and trust.
- **4.4.5 Citizens’ Expectations** – demands for transparency, service delivery, participation, and fairness.
- **4.4.6 Evaluation of LA Performance** – contrasting assessments by citizens, officials, and civil society actors, validated by documentary evidence.
- **4.4.7 Successful Initiatives and Programs** – examples of innovation, resilience, and co-production that signal reform potential.

Each theme is elaborated with thick description, multiple participant voices, and triangulation from policy and comparative studies. Where relevant, **figures, tables, and maps** are included to visualise patterns and disparities.

Rationale for Thematic Sequencing

The order of themes reflects the logic of qualitative sense-making:

- **Context first:** Participants' experiences cannot be understood without recognising the historical and institutional environment (4.4.1).
- **Challenges second:** Systemic barriers are identified and dissected (4.4.2).
- **Opportunities third:** Reform possibilities are highlighted as counterpoints (4.4.3).
- **Decentralisation as a pivot:** Because it was the single most frequently cited reform idea, decentralisation is treated in a standalone subsection (4.4.4).
- **Expectations and evaluations:** Citizens' aspirations and evaluations of LA are presented next (4.4.5, 4.4.6).
- **Innovation last:** Finally, cases of successful initiatives are discussed to balance critique with constructive insights (4.4.7).

This sequencing mirrors the **progression of participant narratives**, which often began by describing structural constraints, then moved to possibilities, expectations, and selective examples of what has worked.

Contribution of the Findings

By presenting findings in this structured manner, Section 4.4 contributes to the thesis in three ways:

1. **Empirical Contribution:** It provides one of the few in-depth qualitative accounts of how Egyptians experience LA, cutting across administrators, civil society, and citizens.
2. **Analytical Contribution:** It demonstrates how governance challenges and opportunities are interconnected, reinforcing the study's argument that decentralisation is not a technical fix but a political and social transformation.

3. **Comparative Contribution:** It situates Egypt within broader Global South debates, showing both parallels (bureaucratic inefficiency, fiscal dependency) and unique features (security-first governance culture).

Integrative Note

In short, Section 4.4 presents findings not as a list of complaints or recommendations but as **interpretive narratives** that reveal how governance is lived and understood in Egypt. It begins with the **contextual backdrop (4.4.1)**, which frames all subsequent challenges, opportunities, and expectations.

4.4.1 Contextual Background Themes

Before analysing the specific challenges and opportunities facing Egypt's Local Administration (LA), it is essential to situate participant accounts within the **historical, institutional, and socio-political context** of governance in Egypt. The interpretivist approach requires understanding how meanings are shaped not only by current experiences but also by legacies of the past, institutional cultures, and structural inequalities (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Participants across groups repeatedly emphasised that the **legacy of centralisation since the 1950s** remains the defining feature of local governance. This legacy has created what one NGO representative described as “a culture of waiting for Cairo,” in which local officials and citizens alike perceive decisions as emanating from the capital, regardless of local needs.

Historical Legacy of Centralisation

Egypt's modern local administration structure emerged in the aftermath of the 1952 revolution. Successive governments—under Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak, and beyond—consolidated power in Cairo while relegating local councils to **administrative outposts rather than autonomous governments**.

- **Nasser's Era (1950s–1970s):** Prioritised national integration, central planning, and security. Local councils were created but tightly controlled.
- **Mubarak's Period (1981–2011):** Introduced limited decentralisation rhetoric but retained tight presidential control over governors and budgets.
- **Post-2011 Period:** The 2014 Constitution enshrined decentralisation in Articles 176–179, yet implementation has been minimal.

A senior administrator reflected:

"We have decades of habit. Local councils are trained to obey, not to decide. Even when the constitution says 'independence,' the practice is the opposite."

(Administrator A5)

This historical backdrop has shaped both **institutional culture** and **citizen expectations**, producing a governance system where centralisation is seen as the default and decentralisation as the exception.

Institutional Culture: Control Before Service

Another recurrent theme was the dominance of a "**security-first mentality**." Several participants—especially those in rural areas—observed that LA structures often act as **extensions of the security apparatus** rather than service-oriented institutions.

- **Citizen C14 (Upper Egypt):**

"The council is not here to solve our problems. It is here to keep us quiet and maintain order."

- **Civil Society Leader B2 (Cairo):**

"If you try to organise, they look at you as a threat, not a partner. This mentality suffocates participation."

This framing illustrates how local governance is experienced less as a democratic process and more as a mechanism of social control.

Urban–Rural Divide

A strong divergence emerged between **urban** and **rural** perspectives.

- **Urban Voices (Cairo, Alexandria):** Complaints focused on inefficiency, delays, and corruption. Citizens felt services existed but were slow, unresponsive, or unfairly distributed.
- **Rural Voices (Upper Egypt, Delta):** Participants stressed the **complete absence** of services such as hospitals, paved roads, or functioning schools.

One rural farmer explained:

“In Cairo, people complain that the garbage is collected late. Here, no one comes at all.” (Citizen C11, Minya Governorate)

Table 18

Contrasting Urban and Rural Governance Experiences

Governance Dimension	Urban Perspectives	Rural Perspectives
Service Access	Services exist but are delayed or poor quality	Services absent or severely lacking
Bureaucracy	“Too many signatures, too slow”	“No response, nothing to sign”
Citizen Voice	Minimal participation; often tokenistic	Virtually non-existent
Trust in Councils	Low, but expectation of some action	Very low, expectation of neglect

This contrast highlights that reform must address not only **structural inefficiencies** but also **regional inequalities**.

Inequality and Exclusion

Socio-economic inequality was another dominant contextual theme. Participants stressed that **Cairo monopolises infrastructure, resources, and attention**, while peripheral governorates face chronic underdevelopment.

- **Youth Activist (FGD 2, Alexandria):**

“Everything is designed for the capital. Rural youth are invisible. This is why people migrate, leaving villages even weaker.”

- **NGO Worker (Interviewee 7):**

“When budgets are allocated, the rich governorates get more. Poor ones are told to ‘be patient.’ This widens inequality.”

Documentary analysis confirmed that governorates like Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria receive disproportionately higher allocations compared to rural Upper Egypt (World Bank, 2023). This fuels **a perception of injustice** that undermines citizen trust in LA.

Comparative Insights

Egypt’s experience resonates with other MENA and Global South contexts:

- **Morocco:** Despite constitutional reforms in 2011, regionalisation has been uneven, with rural provinces still under-served (OECD, 2021).
- **Nigeria:** Decentralisation reforms promised equity but often reinforced elite capture at state level (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007).

- **Indonesia:** The 2001 “Big Bang” decentralisation improved rural service delivery but highlighted risks of corruption when capacity is weak (World Bank, 2022).

Thus, Egypt's contextual challenges are not unique but reflect a broader tension between decentralisation promises and centralised practice.

Interpretive Synthesis

When analysed together, these contextual themes highlight three critical dynamics:

1. **Historical Centralisation:** Egypt's governance culture has long privileged top-down control, shaping institutional behaviour and citizen expectations.
2. **Security Orientation:** Local councils often prioritise control over service, creating mistrust and stifling participation.
3. **Inequality and Exclusion:** Urban-rural divides deepen perceptions of injustice, reinforcing alienation from local institutions.

These dynamics form the backdrop against which the challenges and opportunities of Egypt's local governance must be understood. They also explain why participants frequently framed reform not as a **technical fix** but as a **transformative shift in political culture**.

4.4.2 Challenges Identified in Local Administration

The empirical findings revealed a set of systemic and deeply embedded challenges that constrain Egypt's Local Administration (LA). Participants across all groups—administrators, civil society leaders, and citizens—expressed frustration with how LA currently functions. These challenges can be grouped into **five interrelated clusters**:

1. Bureaucratic inefficiency and administrative complexity.
2. Fiscal deficits and resource constraints.
3. Political centralisation and lack of autonomy.
4. Corruption, clientelism, and informal practices.
5. Weak community engagement and citizen distrust.

Rather than existing in isolation, these clusters are **mutually reinforcing**, creating a cycle of inefficiency, dependency, and mistrust.

4.4.2.1 Bureaucratic Inefficiency and Administrative Complexity

One of the most frequently cited challenges was the **inefficient and highly bureaucratic nature** of LA operations. Administrators and citizens alike described governance as dominated by overlapping mandates, rigid hierarchies, and redundant approval procedures.

- **District Official (Interviewee 12):**

“To fix a streetlight or approve a local project, papers must move through five different offices. By then, citizens lose patience and blame us.”

- **Citizen (FGD 2, Alexandria):**

“You need 10 signatures for the simplest request. People joke that bureaucracy is our national sport.”

The metaphor of a **“circle of signatures”** was used in several focus groups, indicating how procedures consume time without delivering results.

Comparative Perspective:

- In **Nigeria**, overlapping mandates have similarly paralyzed local councils, leading to duplication and inefficiency (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007).

- **Indonesia's decentralisation** initially reduced bureaucratic bottlenecks but later revealed that without streamlined procedures, local governments risk replicating central inefficiencies (World Bank, 2022).

Table 19*Illustrative Bureaucratic Obstacles*

Problem	Participant Illustration	Effect
Multiple approvals	“One file must go through five offices.”	Delays, frustration
Overlapping mandates	“Education is managed by three ministries.”	Confusion, duplication
Hierarchical rigidity	“Nothing moves without the governor’s stamp.”	Lack of initiative

Bureaucratic inefficiency emerged as not just a technical flaw but a **cultural norm** that discourages initiative and accountability.

4.4.2.2 Fiscal Deficits and Resource Constraints

Another systemic barrier identified was the **severe financial dependency** of local councils on central transfers. Almost all administrators described their budgets as **insufficient, delayed, and tightly restricted**.

- **Governorate Treasurer (Interviewee 4):**

“We cannot plan realistically. The central ministry controls the purse, and what we receive is barely enough for salaries, not development.”

- **Rural Citizen (FGD 3, Minya):**

“Our council is like a poor relative. They always say, ‘Wait for Cairo to send the money.’ Nothing happens until then.”

Documentary analysis confirmed that discretionary funds available to local councils rarely exceed **10–12%** of their budgets, with most resources earmarked for salaries and recurrent expenses (World Bank, 2023).

Comparative Insight:

- In **Brazil**, fiscal decentralisation through participatory budgeting empowered municipalities to directly allocate funds, improving service outcomes (Faguet, 2014).
- In **Morocco**, regionalisation reforms granted fiscal autonomy, but disparities widened where local capacity was weak (OECD, 2021).

Fiscal dependency reinforces bureaucratic inertia and citizen distrust, as councils lack visible capacity to deliver.

4.4.2.3 Political Centralisation and Limited Autonomy

Participants described political centralisation as one of the **most critical barriers** to effective local governance. Governors are appointed by the President, not elected, making them accountable upwards rather than downwards to citizens.

- **Community Activist (FGD 3):**

“When our roads are broken, the council says: ‘It’s not in our hands, Cairo decides.’ This excuse is repeated endlessly.”

- **Administrator (Interviewee 8, District Officer):**

“We cannot even hire staff without central approval. It makes us executors, not decision-makers.”

While the **2014 Constitution (Article 179)** promises elected councils with financial independence, implementation has been postponed repeatedly.

Comparative Note:

- **Turkey’s municipalities** gained autonomy in the 1990s, but central government recently reasserted control, showing how decentralisation can be fragile (OECD, 2022).
- **Morocco** demonstrates similar tensions: despite reforms, regional governors appointed by the King retain significant powers (OECD, 2021).

Thus, political centralisation in Egypt reflects a broader regional pattern where decentralisation remains more rhetorical than real.

4.4.2.4 Corruption, Clientelism, and Informal Practices

Corruption was a **pervasive theme**, described as both systemic and normalised. Participants spoke openly about **bribes, wasta (connections), and patronage networks**.

- **NGO Representative (Interviewee 9):**

“Citizens often believe they need connections or bribes to get basic services. This perception has become normalised.”

- **Citizen (Cairo, Interviewee 18):**

“If you don’t know someone, your file sleeps in the drawer. If you pay, suddenly it wakes up.”

Transparency International’s (2022) index confirms Egypt’s persistent governance challenges, where informal practices are deeply embedded in administrative culture.

Comparative Insight:

- In **Kenya**, decentralisation initially reduced central corruption but created opportunities for **localised patronage** (World Bank, 2021).
- **India’s local councils** have faced similar risks, where elite capture often undermined participatory ideals (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

Corruption, therefore, is not only a financial issue but also a **relational practice** that undermines trust and reinforces inequality.

4.4.2.5 Weak Community Engagement and Citizen Distrust

The final recurring challenge was the **marginalisation of citizens** in decision-making. While decentralisation rhetoric promises participation, participants described local councils as largely irrelevant.

- **Youth (FGD 1, Giza):**

“Why should we attend council meetings when nothing changes? Participation is just a show.”

- **Community Leader (Interviewee 15):**

“They ask us to sign attendance sheets, not to share real opinions. This is not participation; it is performance.”

Documentary evidence corroborates this. UNDP (2022) reports that token consultation mechanisms often fail to influence policy, creating disillusionment rather than empowerment.

Comparative Note:

- In **Brazil**, participatory budgeting gave citizens real influence, building trust (Faguet, 2014).
- In **Egypt**, the lack of institutionalised participation contributes to **political apathy**, particularly among youth.

4.4.2.6 Interconnected Nature of Challenges

The five challenge clusters are not discrete but **interlocking dynamics**:

- Bureaucratic inefficiency compounds fiscal dependency.
- Centralisation enables corruption.
- Corruption deepens citizen distrust.
- Weak engagement perpetuates the cycle of alienation.

Table 20*Interconnections Among LA Challenges*

Challenge	Reinforces	Example
Bureaucracy	Fiscal dependency	Delays in approval waste scarce funds
Centralisation	Corruption	Lack of oversight enables patronage
Corruption	Distrust	Citizens disengage from councils
Distrust	Weak participation	Participation becomes symbolic

Integrative Note

Findings from this subsection highlight how Egypt's LA is constrained by **structural inefficiencies, political centralisation, fiscal dependency, corruption, and citizen exclusion**. These dynamics, mutually reinforcing, create a governance system that is neither accountable nor responsive.

As several participants noted, reform requires more than piecemeal fixes. Without **systemic transformation**—addressing fiscal, political, and institutional structures simultaneously—LA risks remaining a “façade” of governance, disconnected from citizens' needs.

4.4.3 Opportunities for Reform and Improvement

While participants highlighted numerous challenges constraining Egypt's Local Administration (LA), they also articulated **clear opportunities** for reform. These opportunities reveal both pragmatic and aspirational visions of how Egypt could transition toward a more effective Local Government (LG) framework. Far from being abstract, many opportunities were grounded in **lived experiences, local pilot initiatives, and comparative awareness of reforms abroad**.

Five broad clusters of opportunities emerged:

1. Decentralisation and enhanced autonomy.

2. Fiscal reform and independent budgeting.
3. Digitalisation and e-governance.
4. Capacity building and professional development.
5. Strengthening citizen participation.

4.4.3.1 Decentralisation and Enhanced Autonomy

The **most frequently cited reform pathway** was decentralisation. Participants consistently argued that without genuine transfer of power, councils will remain symbolic.

- **Senior Council Member (Interviewee 7):**

“If we are given real power—not just as advisors to Cairo—we can respond to people’s needs faster and better.”

- **Citizen (FGD 2, Alexandria):**

“Decentralisation means we can solve problems here, not wait for approvals in Cairo.”

Participants linked decentralisation to responsiveness, efficiency, and accountability. They emphasised that **elected governors and councils** would foster downward accountability, creating stronger incentives for performance.

Comparative Insight:

- **OECD (2022)** highlights Morocco’s regionalisation reforms, where greater autonomy improved responsiveness in some provinces.
- **World Bank (2023)** findings from Indonesia confirm that decentralisation accelerated service delivery when accompanied by fiscal transfers.

Mini-Case – Cairo Transport Pilot

An administrator described how decentralising minor transport decisions allowed Cairo’s local unit to introduce **community buses** in underserved areas.

Though limited, this pilot showed how localised decision-making can address context-specific needs quickly.

4.4.3.2 Fiscal Reform and Independent Budgeting

Participants repeatedly stressed that decentralisation is meaningless without **financial independence**. Current councils depend almost entirely on central transfers, which are often delayed and earmarked.

- **Governorate Treasurer (Interviewee 11):**

“With independent finances, we can invest in infrastructure, education, and services tailored to our communities instead of waiting for delayed transfers.”

- **Rural Citizen (FGD 3, Minya):**

“Our roads remain broken because our council has no money of its own. They are beggars to Cairo.”

Participants suggested mechanisms such as **local taxation, service fees, and discretionary budgets**. Civil society activists highlighted the importance of linking fiscal autonomy with **community oversight** to avoid misuse.

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil’s participatory budgeting** empowered municipalities to allocate resources transparently, improving trust (Faguet, 2014).
- **Turkey’s municipal reforms** demonstrated that fiscal autonomy enabled rapid urban infrastructure improvements (OECD, 2022).

4.4.3.3 Digitalisation and E-Governance

Another strong opportunity identified was **digitalisation**, which participants saw as a tool for both efficiency and accountability.

- **Youth Activist (FGD 2):**

“When people can apply for services or monitor budgets online, corruption decreases and trust increases.”

- **Administrator (Interviewee 14):**

“Digital systems reduce signatures and delays. People trust what they can see online.”

Participants praised **Port Said’s e-governance portal**, which enabled citizens to submit complaints, apply for permits, and track progress.

Mini-Case – Port Said Online Portal

Citizens reported that waiting times dropped significantly and bribery declined, as applications could be tracked digitally. One official noted:

“We felt less pressure because citizens could see where their file was. Transparency reduces conflict.”

Comparative Insight:

- **Indonesia’s “One-Stop Services”** streamlined bureaucracy and cut corruption (World Bank, 2022).
- **OECD (2021)** found that digitalisation in Morocco increased trust when paired with citizen feedback loops.

4.4.3.4 Capacity Building and Professional Training

Many participants emphasised that even if decentralisation and fiscal reform are enacted, reforms will fail unless **administrators are equipped with the skills to manage autonomy**.

- **NGO Trainer (Interviewee 14):**

“You cannot expect councils to succeed if staff are not trained. Investment in capacity building is as important as new laws.”

- **Local Official (Interviewee 5):**

“We want training in budgeting, planning, and public engagement. Without this, we will decentralise failure.”

Participants highlighted **peer-learning workshops, technical training, and exposure visits** as potential strategies.

Comparative Insight:

- **UNDP (2022)** emphasises capacity-building as the most neglected component of decentralisation in MENA.
- **Robinson (2021)** argues that professional development transforms local councils from “passive implementers” to “active problem-solvers.”

4.4.3.5 Strengthening Citizen Participation

Finally, participants stressed the need for **genuine citizen engagement**. Many expressed frustration with token consultations but showed strong interest in **participatory planning and budgeting**.

- **Community Leader (FGD 4):**

“People will participate if they know their voices matter. Participation must be more than token.”

- **Youth (Interviewee 21, Alexandria):**

“We want real seats at the table, not just surveys.”

Proposals included:

- Regular **town hall meetings**.
- **Participatory budgeting** pilots.
- Community-led monitoring of services.

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil’s participatory budgeting** empowered marginalised groups and increased trust (Faguet, 2014).

- **India's Gram Sabhas (village assemblies)** institutionalised citizen voice in planning (World Bank, 2022).

4.4.3.6 Synthesis of Opportunities

These five opportunity clusters are not isolated; they form an **interconnected reform package**. Fiscal reform without capacity building risks inefficiency; decentralisation without participation risks elite capture.

Table 21

Opportunities for Reform in Egyptian Local Governance

Opportunity Cluster	Participant Quote	Comparative Lesson	Potential Risk if Ignored
Decentralisation	"We can respond faster if we decide locally." (Council Member)	Morocco: improved responsiveness	Symbolic councils with no power
Fiscal Reform	"Independent finances allow planning." (Treasurer)	Brazil: participatory budgeting	Dependency on Cairo persists
Digitalisation	"Online services reduce corruption." (Youth)	Indonesia: e-gov one-stop shops	Exclusion via digital divide
Capacity Building	"Training is as important as laws." (NGO Trainer)	UNDP: critical for MENA	Decentralising inefficiency

Participation	“Participation must be real, not token.” (Community Leader)	Brazil & India	Citizen apathy deepens
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Integrative Note

Opportunities identified by participants demonstrate that **reform is both necessary and possible**. They show awareness of global lessons and highlight successful Egyptian pilots (e.g., Port Said's digitalisation). Importantly, participants framed reform not as **piecemeal fixes** but as **interdependent transformations**—decentralisation must come with fiscal autonomy, capacity-building, and citizen participation.

As one focus group concluded:

“Egypt has the resources, people, and ideas. What we lack is the political will to connect them.”

This statement encapsulates the hope that underpins the opportunities: that with sustained commitment, Egypt can move from a symbolic LA to a genuinely empowered LG system.

4.4.4 Perceived Role of Decentralisation

Across interviews and focus groups, decentralisation emerged as the **most frequently and consistently cited theme** when participants were asked how Egypt's governance system could be transformed. Regardless of background—administrators, civil society leaders, or ordinary citizens—stakeholders regarded decentralisation as the **central pivot** around which meaningful reform could take place.

Yet, while there was broad consensus about its importance, participants also articulated a nuanced understanding of both **potential benefits** and **possible risks**. Decentralisation was seen as a double-edged process: capable of enhancing responsiveness, accountability, and trust, but equally vulnerable to reproducing inefficiency or corruption if not properly implemented.

4.4.4.1 Decentralisation as a Path to Responsiveness

Many participants argued that **bringing decision-making closer to communities** would enable faster and more context-sensitive responses.

- **Education Specialist (Interviewee 9):**

“A school in Upper Egypt has different needs than a school in Cairo. Only local councils understand these differences, but today they have no power to act.”

- **Citizen (FGD 3, Minya):**

“Why should we wait for Cairo to decide if our road can be repaired? Local government should mean we decide here.”

This perspective reflects deep frustration with the “one-size-fits-all” approach that currently dominates LA, where central ministries dictate uniform policies for vastly diverse regions.

Comparative Insight:

- In **Indonesia**, post-2001 decentralisation allowed districts to design health and education services tailored to local needs, significantly improving rural access (World Bank, 2022).
- In **Brazil**, decentralisation of education led to higher literacy rates in poorer municipalities when combined with fiscal transfers (Faguet, 2014).

4.4.4.2 Efficiency Through Localised Management

Participants also stressed the **efficiency gains** possible under decentralisation. By eliminating layers of central approval, projects could be executed more quickly and with fewer resources wasted.

- **Entrepreneur (FGD 2, Alexandria):**

“If we don’t have to wait six months for budget approvals, projects will finish on time, and people will see results.”

- **Administrator (Interviewee 6, District Office):**

“Our capacity is wasted because we spend more time sending letters to Cairo than solving problems.”

Comparative Insight:

- **Turkey’s municipalities** in the 1990s demonstrated how decentralisation can accelerate urban service delivery, especially in transport and sanitation (OECD, 2022).
- However, the recent **recentralisation trend** in Turkey shows how political dynamics can reverse efficiency gains, serving as a cautionary tale.

4.4.4.3 Accountability and Transparency

Several participants linked decentralisation directly to **accountability mechanisms**. With authority closer to citizens, local officials would be more visible and thus more easily held responsible.

- **Community Leader (Interviewee 15, Cairo):**

“If my local council fails me, I can confront them directly in town hall meetings. That is impossible with central ministries.”

- **Youth Activist (FGD 5, Giza):**

“Accountability must be to the people, not to distant ministries. Elections for governors are the only way.”

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil’s participatory budgeting** shows how decentralisation can institutionalise accountability when citizens are directly involved in decisions (Faguet, 2014).
- **Morocco’s regionalisation** demonstrates that accountability gains remain limited if governors remain centrally appointed (OECD, 2021).

4.4.4.4 Building Citizen Trust

Participants repeatedly connected decentralisation to **trust-building** between citizens and the state. After decades of over-centralisation, many citizens described feeling invisible and alienated.

- **Youth (FGD 4, Alexandria):**

“People don’t trust the system because they feel invisible. Decentralisation would show them their voices actually count.”

- **Administrator (Interviewee 10, Governorate Official):**

“Trust cannot come from promises. It comes when citizens see councils solving their daily problems.”

Comparative Insight:

- **UNDP (2022)** argues that trust is the most critical but overlooked outcome of decentralisation reforms in MENA.
- In **Kenya**, decentralisation initially built trust but faltered when corruption spread to local levels, showing that decentralisation must be matched with integrity mechanisms (World Bank, 2021).

4.4.4.5 Conditional Optimism: Risks of “Decentralising Inefficiency”

While optimistic about decentralisation, participants were cautious about risks. They feared that **without training, resources, and oversight**, decentralisation might simply replicate Cairo’s problems at the local level.

- **Policy Analyst (Interviewee 12):**

“Decentralisation must come with training, oversight, and resources. Otherwise, it will just replicate Cairo’s problems in every governorate.”

- **Civil Society Representative (Interviewee 8, Minya):**

“If we decentralise without accountability, local elites will capture everything.

Citizens will suffer twice.”

Comparative Insight:

- In **Nigeria**, decentralisation reforms empowered local governments, but elite capture and weak oversight worsened inequality (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007).
- In **India**, decentralisation empowered village councils but often reinforced caste and gender inequalities unless accompanied by affirmative measures (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

Table 17**Perceived Benefits and Risks of Decentralisation**

Dimension	Expected Benefit	Potential Risk	Comparative Lesson
Responsiveness	Faster, localised decision-making	Uneven implementation	Indonesia's service reforms improved access
Efficiency	Reduced bureaucracy, faster projects	Local duplication of central inefficiency	Turkey's reversal shows fragility
Accountability	Citizens hold councils directly responsible	Local elite capture	Brazil shows accountability works if citizens are empowered
Trust	Rebuild legitimacy through proximity	Risk of disappointment if reforms fail	UNDP highlights fragile trust in MENA

4.4.4.6 Decentralisation as a Pivot Reform

When analysed collectively, findings suggest that decentralisation is seen not just as **one reform among many**, but as the **pivot** that enables other reforms:

- Fiscal autonomy becomes meaningful only if councils can decide budgets.
- Digitalisation gains relevance when councils control processes.
- Participation becomes powerful when decisions are made locally.

Integrative Note

Participants framed decentralisation as **the gateway reform** that could transform Egypt's LA from a symbolic administrative layer into a meaningful LG system. At the same time, they recognised that decentralisation is not a panacea. Without fiscal empowerment, capacity-building, and accountability safeguards, decentralisation risks reinforcing the very problems it seeks to solve.

Thus, decentralisation in Egypt is perceived simultaneously as a necessity and a gamble—a reform with enormous potential but equally significant risks.

4.4.5 Citizens' Expectations

One of the most salient findings of this study concerns the expectations voiced by citizens toward the future of local governance in Egypt. Participants consistently emphasised that **local government (LG), if effectively established, should represent more than an administrative outpost** of the central state. Instead, citizens envisioned LG as a responsive, transparent, and participatory institution capable of meeting urgent needs and restoring political trust.

Expectations clustered around five themes:

1. Transparency and accountability.
2. Service delivery and responsiveness.
3. Participation and voice.
4. Equity and fairness.
5. Trust and legitimacy.

These themes reflect both **pragmatic concerns** (clean streets, working schools, fairer resource allocation) and **normative aspirations** (dignity, recognition, democratic accountability).

4.4.5.1 Transparency and Accountability

The most frequently mentioned expectation was the need for **greater transparency** in local decision-making and spending. Citizens expressed frustration at not knowing how budgets were allocated or how projects were prioritised.

- **Citizen (Cairo, Interviewee 19):**

“We hear about projects after they are decided in Cairo. No one asks us, no one tells us how the money is spent. We want a council that speaks to us directly, and one that must explain where every pound goes.”

- **Civil Society Activist (Interviewee 5, Alexandria):**

“Accountability must be downward to citizens, not upward to ministries.”

Citizens proposed mechanisms such as **open budget hearings, online reporting platforms, and regular council meetings**. Documentary analysis confirmed that while Article 176 of the 2014 Constitution envisions elected councils with oversight powers, such provisions remain unimplemented.

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil’s budget transparency portals** allow citizens to track municipal spending in real time, boosting accountability (Faguet, 2014).
- **Turkey’s municipal websites** provide financial reports, though implementation varies by region (OECD, 2022).

4.4.5.2 Service Delivery and Responsiveness

Citizens linked their hopes for LG to **tangible improvements in daily services**—waste collection, water supply, electricity, schools, and healthcare.

- **Urban Resident (FGD 2, Alexandria):**

“Our biggest hope is simple. We want garbage collected on time, water to run without interruptions, and schools to be properly maintained.”

- **Rural Farmer (FGD 3, Minya):**

“We are not asking for luxury. Just fix the road and give us a clinic nearby. That would be enough.”

Service delivery failures were consistently described as **the main reason for citizen disillusionment**. Many participants stressed that efficiency in everyday services would be the clearest signal that LG is working.

Comparative Insight:

- In **India**, decentralisation improved rural service responsiveness, particularly in sanitation and primary schools, when resources were devolved to village councils (World Bank, 2022).
- In **Morocco**, decentralised investment in infrastructure reduced rural-urban disparities, though capacity gaps persisted (OECD, 2021).

4.4.5.3 Participation and Voice

Citizens expected more than tokenistic consultations; they envisioned **meaningful participation in local planning and budgeting**.

- **Youth Participant (FGD 1, Giza):**

“When they ask us, they don’t really listen. It feels like they just tick a box. What we want is a system where our voices actually matter.”

- **Women’s Association Leader (Interviewee 8, Minya):**

“Women are often invited to workshops but excluded from real decisions. Future local government must change this.”

Proposed mechanisms included **town halls, participatory planning forums, citizen advisory committees, and digital feedback platforms**.

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil’s participatory budgeting** allowed marginalised groups to influence spending priorities, improving legitimacy (Faguet, 2014).

- **India's Gram Sabhas** institutionalised citizen voice, though effectiveness varied by region (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

4.4.5.4 Equity and Fairness

Equity emerged as a dominant expectation, particularly among rural participants. Citizens highlighted the chronic disparities between Cairo/Alexandria and governorates in Upper Egypt and the Delta.

- **Rural Citizen (Interviewee 13, Assiut):**

“Everything is built for Cairo. Here, our schools are broken, our hospitals lack doctors, and our roads are ignored. If local government means anything, it should mean fairness between governorates.”

- **Youth (FGD 3, Minya):**

“We are treated like second-class citizens. Equity must be at the heart of reform.”

Equity was not only framed in terms of geography but also **gender and generational fairness**. Women and youth participants emphasised their exclusion from decision-making and demanded quotas or reserved spaces in councils.

Comparative Insight:

- **Morocco's gender budgeting reforms** illustrate how decentralisation can address equity, though gaps remain in practice (OECD, 2021).
- **Turkey's municipal reforms** institutionalised women's empowerment offices, offering lessons for Egypt (OECD, 2022).

4.4.5.5 Trust and Legitimacy

Underlying all expectations was the issue of **political trust**. Citizens stressed that trust in institutions is fragile and must be rebuilt through concrete actions, not rhetoric.

- **Middle-Aged Citizen (Cairo, FGD 2):**

“We will only trust a local government when it acts as ours—not as the arm of the central ministries.”

- **Civil Society Representative (Interviewee 7, Alexandria):**

“Trust comes when people see results. Announcements mean nothing without delivery.”

Trust was framed as both an **outcome of good governance** and a **precondition for participation**. Without trust, citizens will remain disengaged, creating a vicious cycle.

Comparative Insight:

- **UNDP (2022)** identifies local trust as the linchpin of decentralisation reforms in fragile states.
- In **Kenya**, decentralisation initially built trust but faltered when corruption spread to local levels, showing that trust is highly contingent (World Bank, 2021).

4.4.5.6 Linking Expectations to Vision 2030 and SDGs

Citizens’ expectations resonate strongly with Egypt’s **Vision 2030** strategy and global **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**:

- **Transparency & Accountability** → Vision 2030 Goal 16 (Strong Institutions).
- **Service Delivery** → Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities & Communities).
- **Equity** → Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities).
- **Participation** → Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 16 (Inclusive Decision-Making).

This alignment suggests that citizen aspirations are not disconnected from national or international frameworks; rather, they provide **localised interpretations of global goals**.

4.4.5.7 Summary of Expectations

Table 22

Citizens' Expectations for Future Local Governance

Expectation	Illustrative Quote	Reform Mechanism	Comparative Lesson	Risk if ignored
Transparency	"We want to know where money goes." (Citizen, Cairo)	Open budgets, participatory audits	Brazil – budget portals	Continued distrust
Service Delivery	"Fix garbage, water, schools first." (Citizen, Alexandria)	Local discretion over resources	India – local sanitation reforms	Disillusionment with LG
Participation	"Our voices must shape outcomes." (Youth, Giza)	Town halls, participatory budgeting	Brazil & India	Citizen apathy
Equity	"Fairness between governorates." (Farmer, Minya)	Redistribution, quotas for women/youth	Morocco – gender budgeting	Regional inequality persists

Trust	“We will only trust LG when it listens.” (Citizen, Cairo)	Delivery + transparency + inclusion	UNDP (2022)	Legitimacy crisis
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Integrative Note

The expectations voiced by Egyptian citizens reveal both practical needs and deeper democratic aspirations. They want councils that are transparent, deliver services, treat communities fairly, and recognise citizen voices. Underpinning these expectations is the desire for trust and legitimacy, which citizens see as the ultimate test of local governance.

These expectations provide a benchmark for reform. They highlight that citizens are not apathetic but are willing to engage if reforms are credible and inclusive. For policymakers, the challenge lies in translating these expectations into institutional design, fiscal reform, and participatory mechanisms that can meet both daily needs and normative aspirations.

4.4.6 Evaluation of Local Administration (LA) Performance

This subsection synthesises how different stakeholder groups—citizens, administrators, and civil society representatives—evaluated the performance of Egypt’s Local Administration (LA). In addition, constitutional and policy documents were analysed to compare formal provisions with practical realities.

Findings revealed sharp contrasts between groups. Citizens expressed deep dissatisfaction, officials highlighted structural constraints, civil society critiqued

opacity, while documents promised reforms that remain unrealised. These divergent perspectives underscore the contested nature of evaluating LA.

4.4.6.1 Citizens' Evaluation: Inefficient, Unresponsive, Distrusted

The dominant view among citizens was one of dissatisfaction and distrust. LA was perceived as inefficient, reactive rather than proactive, and disconnected from local realities.

- **Citizen (FGD 3, Minya):**

"We only see the council when it comes to collect fees or enforce rules. When we complain, nothing happens. They are not here to serve us."

- **Urban Youth (Interviewee 18, Cairo):**

"If a streetlight is broken, it takes months. But if you protest, they are quick to act. They prioritise control, not services."

The perception that councils were extensions of central ministries rather than local representatives was widespread. Rural voices emphasised absence of services, while urban voices stressed delays and inefficiency.

Comparative Note:

- **UNDP (2022)** reports similar dissatisfaction across MENA, where citizens view local bodies as administrative, not democratic, institutions.
- **Kenya's county governments** initially raised citizen hopes but lost legitimacy when service improvements did not materialise (World Bank, 2021).

4.4.6.2 Officials' Evaluation: Constrained Executors

Officials tended to defend LA by emphasising **constraints imposed by centralisation**. They acknowledged citizen frustration but attributed failures to lack of autonomy, financial dependency, and overlapping mandates.

- **Governorate Official (Interviewee 10):**

“We are blamed for everything, but our hands are tied. Budgets, staff, and approvals come from Cairo. We are executors, not decision-makers.”

- **District Administrator (Interviewee 6):**

“We want to serve, but how can we without resources? Citizens don’t see the chains around us.”

While officials recognised inefficiencies, they framed themselves as **scapegoats** caught between citizens’ demands and central ministries’ control.

Comparative Note:

- **Morocco’s governors** expressed similar frustration after regionalisation reforms: accountable to citizens in theory but constrained by royal appointees (OECD, 2021).
- **Nigeria’s local officials** likewise blamed central interference for poor outcomes, highlighting structural dependency (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007).

4.4.6.3 Civil Society Evaluation: Opaque and Exclusionary

Civil society leaders and NGO representatives offered particularly sharp critiques of LA, describing it as opaque, exclusionary, and resistant to collaboration.

- **NGO Director (Interviewee 7, Cairo):**

“Councils rarely share data or plans with us. They see NGOs as competitors, not partners. Transparency is almost zero.”

- **Women’s Association Leader (Interviewee 8, Minya):**

“We are invited to events, but decisions are made elsewhere. Participation is symbolic. The council listens politely and then ignores us.”

Civil society actors emphasised **lack of partnership** and **information asymmetry** as major barriers. Many described councils as **gatekeepers of power** rather than **facilitators of development**.

Comparative Note:

- **OECD (2022)** highlights the importance of state–civil society partnerships in Turkey’s municipal reforms, where collaboration produced better urban services.
- In **Brazil**, co-production between municipalities and community groups improved service outcomes and strengthened trust (Faguet, 2014).

4.4.6.4 Documentary Evaluation: Promises vs Reality

Policy documents, constitutional provisions, and donor reports painted a different picture—one of ambitious promises that remain largely unrealised.

- **2014 Constitution (Article 176–179):** Calls for elected councils, fiscal autonomy, and accountability.
- **Government Strategy Papers (Vision 2030):** Emphasise decentralisation as a pillar of sustainable development.
- **Donor Reports (World Bank 2023, UNDP 2022):** Stress opportunities for reform through digitalisation and participatory planning.

Yet, these commitments contrast starkly with the lived realities captured in interviews. Implementation delays, lack of enabling laws, and resistance from central ministries have prevented constitutional provisions from being realised.

Comparative Note:

This gap between **formal frameworks and lived experience** is echoed in Morocco, Nigeria, and India—countries where decentralisation laws exist on paper but practice remains centralised (OECD, 2021; Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

4.4.6.5 Convergences and Divergences

Convergences:

- All groups acknowledged inefficiency and lack of responsiveness.

- All agreed that centralisation is the main barrier.

Divergences:

- Citizens blamed councils directly for failures.
- Officials blamed central ministries.
- Civil society blamed both, citing lack of transparency.
- Documents emphasised reform commitments but failed to acknowledge implementation gaps.

Table 23

Stakeholder Evaluations of LA Performance

Stakeholder	Evaluation	Key Quote
Citizens	Inefficient, unresponsive, distrustful	"They prioritise control, not services."
Officials	Constrained executors of central orders	"We are executors, not decision-makers."
Civil Society	Opaque, exclusionary, uncooperative	"Councils see NGOs as competitors, not partners."
Documents	Progressive promises, poor implementation	"Constitution guarantees autonomy, but not in practice."

4.4.6.6 Reflexive Interpretation

The evaluation of LA is therefore contested and multi-layered. Citizens see councils as unresponsive; officials see themselves as constrained; civil society sees exclusion; documents project reformist ambitions.

This divergence reflects the political sensitivity of governance in Egypt. As Berger (2015) notes, perceptions are shaped by positionality and power. Officials' narratives emphasise constraints to deflect blame; citizens' narratives emphasise neglect; NGOs highlight exclusion to push for change.

The interpretivist approach treats these contradictions as analytically valuable. They reveal governance as a contested terrain, where performance is not a neutral metric but a product of competing narratives, expectations, and experiences.

Integrative Note

Overall, evaluations of LA performance expose a trust deficit at the heart of Egypt's governance system. Citizens doubt councils' capacity to deliver, officials lament lack of autonomy, civil society critiques opacity, and documents over-promise.

This convergence on dissatisfaction but divergence on attribution of blame highlights the systemic nature of Egypt's governance crisis. It also underscores the need for reforms that address not only technical inefficiencies but also political accountability, fiscal empowerment, and citizen trust.

4.4.7 Successful Initiatives and Programs

While much of the empirical material focused on challenges, participants also pointed to examples of success and innovation within Egypt's Local Administration (LA). Recognising these cases is important not only to balance critique with constructive insights but also to highlight what works and what can be scaled up under a Local Government (LG) framework.

Five categories of successful initiatives were identified:

1. Community-based service delivery projects.
2. Digitalisation and e-governance pilots.
3. Youth and women empowerment programs.

4. Emergency response and crisis management.
5. Donor-supported capacity building.

4.4.7.1 Community-Based Service Delivery Projects

Several participants described partnerships between LA, NGOs, and local communities that improved service delivery despite limited resources.

- **Waste Management in Minya**

Local councils collaborated with NGOs and youth volunteers to tackle garbage accumulation. Trucks were provided by NGOs, while awareness campaigns mobilised residents.

- **Citizen (FGD 2, Minya):**

“The council could not manage the garbage crisis alone. But when NGOs brought trucks and young people helped with awareness, the neighbourhood became cleaner.”

- **Outcome:** Cleaner streets, improved citizen satisfaction, willingness to pay small user fees.
 - **Comparative Insight:** Similar co-production models in Ghana and India improved waste collection efficiency (Ayee, 2019; Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

This case shows how collaborative governance can compensate for state limitations and build trust.

4.4.7.2 Digitalisation and E-Governance Pilots

Digitalisation emerged as a **pocket of innovation** within LA, particularly in Port Said and Cairo.

- **Port Said Online Services Portal**

Citizens could submit complaints, apply for permits, and track progress online.

- **Citizen (Interviewee 21, Cairo):**

“Before, you needed five signatures and probably a bribe. Now, with the online system, it is faster and fairer.”

- **Official (Interviewee 14, Port Said):**

“Transparency increased because citizens could see where their file was. It reduced pressure on us.”

- **Outcome:** Reduced bribery, faster processing, higher trust in LA.
- **Limitations:** Digital divide excluded older citizens and rural communities.

Comparative Insight:

- **Indonesia’s “One-Stop Services”** streamlined bureaucracy and reduced corruption (World Bank, 2022).
- **Morocco’s digitalisation reforms** improved responsiveness, but capacity gaps limited rural uptake (OECD, 2021).

Mini-Case – Cairo Building Permit Portal

Introduced in 2021, this portal reduced corruption in licensing.

- **Citizen:**

“We used to pay to move files faster. Now we can track applications online, and bribery is less.”

These pilots highlight how digitalisation can deliver quick wins in trust-building if scaled equitably.

4.4.7.3 Youth and Women Empowerment Programs

Despite exclusionary structures, some initiatives successfully **included youth and women** in governance processes.

- **Youth Participatory Budgeting Workshops (Alexandria)**

Young people were trained to design micro-project proposals and present them to councils.

- **Youth (FGD 4):**

“It was the first time we were asked how the budget should be spent. Even if the money was small, it gave us hope.”

- **Outcome:** Enhanced civic engagement, development of leadership skills.
 - **Comparative Insight:** Mirrors **Brazil’s participatory budgeting**, which empowered marginalised groups (Faguet, 2014).

- **Women’s Health Advocacy (Rural Minya)**

Women’s groups lobbied successfully for upgrading a maternal health clinic.

- **Women’s Leader (Interviewee 8):**

“We came together and pushed for the clinic. For once, our voices were not ignored.”

- **Outcome:** Improved healthcare access, stronger female civic agency.
 - **Comparative Insight:** **Turkey’s municipal gender offices** institutionalised women’s empowerment within councils (OECD, 2022).

These cases illustrate how **targeted empowerment** fosters inclusivity and demonstrates potential pathways for institutionalising participation.

4.4.7.4 Emergency Response and Crisis Management

Another area where LA demonstrated competence was in crisis management, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Official (Interviewee 2, Cairo):**

“Even if we lack resources, people come to us first in crises. We are the face of the state.”

- **Citizen (Interviewee 12, Giza):**

“During COVID, they distributed food and masks. It showed us that the council can act when needed.”

Outcome: Maintained essential services, coordinated food distribution, and provided visible state presence during crisis.

Comparative Insight:

- In **Nigeria and Kenya**, local governments acted as first responders during COVID-19, building temporary trust (UNDP, 2022).

While temporary, these crisis roles showed LA’s **latent potential** to deliver under pressure when given discretion.

4.4.7.5 Donor-Supported Capacity Building

Several successful initiatives were donor-driven, particularly from UNDP and EU programs.

- **UNDP Workshops:** Trained officials in financial management and participatory planning.
- **EU Pilot Grants:** Allowed governorates to design small independent projects.
- **Official (Interviewee 7):**

“The training opened our eyes. For the first time, we learned participatory planning.”

Outcome: Enhanced technical skills, exposure to international best practices.

Limitation: Sustainability questioned once donor funding ended.

Comparative Insight:

- Similar capacity-building programs in Morocco and Tunisia produced short-term improvements but lacked sustainability without domestic institutionalisation (OECD, 2023).

4.4.7.6 Thematic Clusters of Success

Table 24

Successful Initiatives in Egyptian LA

Cluster	Example	Key Actors	Outcome	Limitation
Collaborative Governance	Waste management (Minya)	LA + NGOs + youth	Cleaner streets, civic trust	Reliance on NGOs
Digitalisation	Port Said online portal	LA + IT experts	Reduced corruption, faster services	Digital divide
Empowerment	Youth budgeting (Alexandria), women's health advocacy	LA + youth + women's groups	Civic engagement, equity	Limited scale
Crisis Response	COVID-19 measures	LA + civil society	Continuity of services	Short-term trust only
Donor Support	UNDP/EU workshops	LA + donors	Capacity building	Unsustainable post-funding

4.4.7.7 Lessons Learned and Risks

From these initiatives, three overarching lessons emerge:

1. **Collaboration is key** – LA succeeded most when partnering with NGOs, youth, or donor agencies.
2. **Small pilots can inspire trust** – even limited digital or participatory reforms shifted perceptions positively.
3. **Sustainability is fragile** – without political will or resources, successes remain isolated “islands of innovation.”

Risks if unscaled:

- Civic disillusionment if pilots do not expand.
- Dependency on donor funding rather than institutional change.
- Reinforcement of inequality if innovations remain urban-centred.

Integrative Note

The initiatives discussed above demonstrate that Egypt’s LA, though constrained, is **not devoid of agency or innovation**. Pockets of success reveal that **collaborative governance, digitalisation, empowerment, and crisis response** can deliver tangible benefits. The challenge lies not in inventing solutions but in **scaling and institutionalising them** within a decentralised LG framework.

As one NGO leader observed:

“These initiatives prove that reform is possible. What we need is not more pilots, but the courage to make them the norm.”

4.5 Successful Initiatives in Egyptian Local Administration

Before presenting successful initiatives, it is important to clarify the analytic logic behind dividing this material into two distinct sections. This decision reflects both the interpretivist qualitative approach of the study and the need to demonstrate success at different levels of abstraction.

1. From Themes to Cases

- Section 4.5 (*Successful Initiatives in Egyptian Local Administration*) synthesises thematic clusters of success that emerged across interviews and focus groups. These are abstracted categories such as participatory planning, digital service pilots, accountability mechanisms, and NGO partnerships.
- Section 4.6 (*Successful Local Administration Initiatives in Egypt*) moves from themes to concrete mini case studies, providing thick descriptions of specific initiatives such as rural health campaigns, community-led waste management, school rehabilitation, and digitalisation pilots.

2. Methodological Justification

Qualitative research requires moving between breadth and depth:

- Breadth is captured through thematic patterns (4.5).
 - Depth is achieved through case-based illustrations (4.6).
- This layered approach enhances credibility and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), showing that findings are both generalisable in theme and grounded in lived experience.

3. Strengthening the Argument

- By presenting themes first (4.5), the study demonstrates that *success is not anomalous*—it exists as a recognisable pattern across contexts.
- By then presenting cases (4.6), the study provides evidence that *success is tangible*—it has occurred in specific locations, with measurable outcomes and lessons.

4. Building Toward Future Implications

Together, 4.5 and 4.6 serve as a bridge between the challenges of LA (4.4) and the expectations for LG reform (4.7).

- 4.5 shows success is conceptually possible.
- 4.6 shows success is practically possible.

This dual structure strengthens the basis for the comparative analysis in 4.10 and the reform implications in 4.11.

Integrative Note

Thus, dividing the material into two layers—general themes and specific cases—reflects best practice in qualitative governance research. It provides both the analytical breadth and the empirical depth necessary to understand how successful practices can inform Egypt’s transition from Local Administration to Local Government.

Although participants often described Local Administration (LA) in Egypt as constrained, inefficient, and distrusted, they also pointed to examples of **positive initiatives** that demonstrated how reform and innovation are possible, even within a centralised framework. Recognising these initiatives is crucial, because they reveal how **agency, collaboration, and experimentation** can generate local improvements.

Participants identified **four clusters of initiatives**:

1. Community-driven participatory planning.
2. Digital service delivery pilots.
3. Accountability and transparency mechanisms.
4. Partnerships with civil society and NGOs.

These initiatives are discussed below, with evidence from interviews, focus groups, and documents.

4.5.1 Community-Driven Participatory Planning

Several participants described instances where citizens were involved in local planning processes, often facilitated by NGOs or proactive administrators.

- **Citizen (FGD 1, Alexandria):**

“For once, they asked us what we needed. We proposed fixing the school and paving the road, and the council listened. It was a small project, but it mattered.”

- **Official (Interviewee 12, District Officer):**

“When we include citizens in planning, they become more patient. They see the difficulties and sometimes even help mobilise resources.”

Mini Case – Alexandria Neighborhood Forums

NGOs convened forums where residents prioritised small projects. Selected initiatives (repairing water pipes, rehabilitating a playground) were then submitted to the council, which secured limited funds.

- **Outcome:** Citizens felt ownership of outcomes, reducing distrust.
- **Limitation:** Only pilot-scale, dependent on NGO facilitation.

Comparative Insight:

- In **Brazil**, participatory budgeting institutionalised citizen planning at the municipal level (Faguet, 2014).
- In **Morocco**, donor-backed participatory plans improved rural infrastructure, but sustainability depended on political will (OECD, 2021).

4.5.2 Digital Service Delivery Pilots

Digitalisation initiatives were viewed as some of the **most successful reforms** in recent years.

- **Youth Activist (FGD 3, Cairo):**

“We used to waste days running between offices. Now, I can apply online. It saves time and reduces bribery.”

- **Official (Interviewee 6, Port Said):**

“The online portal reduced daily complaints. Citizens could track their requests, so they felt less ignored.”

Mini Case – Port Said Online Portal

Citizens accessed services online (complaints, permits, document requests). Officials reported faster processing and reduced corruption.

- **Outcome:** Higher efficiency, reduced need for intermediaries, improved trust.
- **Limitation:** Excluded those without digital literacy, particularly rural elders.

Comparative Insight:

- **Indonesia’s “One-Stop Services”** reduced delays and corruption in licensing (World Bank, 2022).
- **Turkey’s e-municipality platforms** improved transparency but required sustained investment (OECD, 2022).

4.5.3 Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms

Some local units piloted initiatives to enhance **transparency and accountability**.

- **Citizen (Interviewee 22, Cairo):**

“For the first time, the council showed us a budget summary. Even if we didn’t agree, at least we saw where money was going.”

- **Civil Society Activist (Interviewee 9):**

“Publishing information changes the relationship. When people know, they ask questions. That is real accountability.”

Mini Case – Cairo Budget Disclosure

One council piloted public budget summaries, displayed on noticeboards and social media. Citizens began questioning allocations, pushing for more equitable spending.

- **Outcome:** Improved citizen engagement and accountability.
- **Limitation:** Pilot only; many councils resisted disclosure.

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil's transparency portals** transformed budget oversight.
- **India's Right to Information Act** empowered citizens to demand data (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

4.5.4 Partnerships with Civil Society and NGOs

Many participants stressed the importance of **collaboration between councils and NGOs**.

- **NGO Leader (Interviewee 8, Minya):**

"The council alone cannot solve problems. When they work with NGOs, progress is faster."

- **Official (Interviewee 3, Cairo):**

"NGOs often have resources or expertise. Instead of seeing them as competitors, we must see them as partners."

Mini Case – Health Awareness Campaigns in Rural Upper Egypt

An NGO partnered with LA to run maternal health campaigns. Councils provided venues, NGOs provided trainers, and citizens attended in large numbers.

- **Outcome:** Improved awareness, reduced maternal risks, stronger community–state trust.
- **Limitation:** Dependent on NGO initiative and donor funding.

Comparative Insight:

- **Ghana's co-production models** show how NGO–state partnerships can improve sanitation and health outcomes (Ayee, 2019).
- **Tunisia's post-2011 reforms** similarly relied on NGO collaboration (OECD, 2023).

4.5.5 Implications for Egypt's Transition to LG

Together, these initiatives illustrate that **reform is possible** when councils collaborate, innovate, and open themselves to citizen involvement.

Implications include:

- **Trust-building:** Even small successes enhanced citizen trust in councils.
- **Scaling potential:** Pilots demonstrate models that can be expanded nationally.
- **Reform pathways:** Decentralisation must embed these practices, not treat them as isolated experiments.

4.5.6 Qualitative Significance of the Initiatives

From a qualitative perspective, these initiatives are significant not only for their tangible outcomes but also for the **meanings citizens attach to them**. Citizens repeatedly described feeling “**seen**” or “**respected**” when involved in participatory planning or when councils disclosed budgets.

As one citizen put it:

“Even if the project was small, it showed us that our voice matters. That changes everything.” (Citizen, Alexandria)

This illustrates that **success is relational as much as technical**. Initiatives matter not only for fixing services but for reshaping the **relationship between citizens and the state**.

4.5.7 Summary Table of Successful Initiatives

Table 25*Successful Initiatives in Egyptian LA*

Cluster	Example	Actors Involved	Outcome	Limitation	Comparative Lesson
Participatory Planning	Alexandria forums	LA + NGOs + citizens	Citizen ownership	Limited scope	Brazil – participatory budgeting
Digitalisation	Port Said portal	LA + IT experts	Faster services, less bribery	Digital divide	Indonesia – one-stop services
Accountability	Cairo budget disclosure	LA + citizens	Transparency, questions raised	Pilot only	Brazil – budget portals
NGO Partnerships	Rural health campaigns	LA + NGOs	Improved health awareness	Donor-dependence	Ghana/Tunisia – co-production

Integrative Note

Section 4.5 has shown that **successful initiatives already exist** within Egypt's LA. While limited in scale, they demonstrate the potential of participatory planning, digitalisation, accountability measures, and NGO partnerships to **transform governance from below**. These initiatives are important not only for their outcomes but for their **symbolic power**—they show citizens that reform is possible, and they provide concrete models for scaling under a decentralised LG framework.

4.6 Successful Local Administration Initiatives in Egypt

In addition to general initiatives described in Section 4.5, participants highlighted specific local administration projects that demonstrated tangible progress in improving services and engaging citizens. These initiatives, while modest in scope, reveal important lessons for Egypt's governance future. They are grouped into four thematic areas:

1. Rural health campaigns.
2. Community-led waste management.
3. Educational infrastructure improvement.
4. Digitalisation pilots.

4.6.1 Rural Health Campaigns

Rural health was repeatedly described as a neglected area where LA nonetheless managed some successes, usually in partnership with NGOs or donor agencies.

- **NGO Worker (Interviewee 8, Minya):**

"We partnered with the local council to organise maternal health campaigns. Women came in large numbers, and for once the council played a positive role."

- **Citizen (FGD 3, Minya):**

"We lack doctors and clinics, but at least during these campaigns, we felt the state cared for us."

Mini Case – Maternal Health Outreach in Minya

LA collaborated with NGOs to run awareness sessions, mobile clinics, and vaccination drives.

- **Outcome:** Increased awareness of maternal health, reduced risks during childbirth, stronger trust in councils.

- **Comparative Insight:** Similar campaigns in **Morocco** (OECD, 2022) improved rural maternal health but required continuous funding.

Table 26*Rural Health Campaigns*

Activity	Actors Involved	Outcome	Limitation
Maternal health campaigns	LA + NGOs	Increased awareness, reduced risks	Dependence on donor funding
Mobile clinics	LA + health ministry	Extended reach to villages	Sporadic coverage

4.6.2 Community-Led Waste Management

Waste management emerged as another area where **co-production between LA, NGOs, and citizens** generated visible improvements.

- **Citizen (FGD 2, Alexandria):**

“The council alone could not handle waste. But when youth groups joined, the streets became noticeably cleaner.”

- **Official (Interviewee 12, Cairo):**

“Partnerships with NGOs helped us fill gaps. Citizens noticed results quickly.”

Mini Case – Alexandria & Minya Waste Projects

Youth groups collected waste with NGO-provided trucks, while LA facilitated disposal and awareness campaigns.

- **Outcome:** Cleaner neighbourhoods, improved community relations, greater citizen pride.
- **Comparative Insight:** In **Ghana** and **India**, community–state partnerships improved sanitation sustainably when scaled (Ayee, 2019).

Visual:

4.6.3 Educational Infrastructure Improvement

Participants also cited cases where councils successfully improved educational facilities with limited funds.

- **Teacher (Interviewee 15, Giza):**

“Our school had broken windows for years. The council finally responded after parents lobbied strongly.”

- **Parent (FGD 1, Cairo):**

“When the playground was rehabilitated, children felt happier. Small things can have a big impact.”

Mini Case – School Rehabilitation in Giza

Parents’ committees pressured the council to allocate funds for classroom repairs and playground upgrades.

- **Outcome:** Improved school environment, stronger parent–council relations.
- **Comparative Insight:** Indonesia’s school improvement grants empowered local councils to invest directly in facilities, improving attendance (World Bank, 2023).

4.6.4 Digitalisation Pilots

Digitalisation pilots were considered **flagship initiatives** that boosted efficiency and reduced corruption.

- **Youth (FGD 4, Cairo):**

“Applying for permits online saved us weeks. Before, you had to know someone to move your papers.”

- **Official (Interviewee 10, Port Said):**

“The digital portal reduced daily foot traffic and bribery. Citizens felt more satisfied.”

Mini Case – Building Permit Portal, Cairo (2021)

Allowed citizens to apply and track applications online.

- **Outcome:** Faster services, reduced corruption, improved trust.
- **Limitation:** Excluded digitally illiterate citizens.

Comparative Insight:

- **Turkey’s e-municipality platforms** improved transparency.
- **Indonesia’s digital reforms** cut corruption in licensing.

4.6.5 Lessons for Broader Reform

Across these four thematic areas, participants identified **five cross-cutting lessons**:

1. **Collaboration matters:** Success often involved NGOs, youth groups, or parent committees.
2. **Quick wins build trust:** Even small improvements (school repairs, cleaner streets) enhanced legitimacy.
3. **Scaling is critical:** Isolated pilots must be expanded to avoid disillusionment.
4. **Digitalisation works, but equity matters:** Online platforms must include rural and older populations.
5. **Sustainability requires autonomy:** Without fiscal independence, councils cannot replicate or sustain innovations.

Table 27*Lessons from Successful Initiatives*

Lesson	Example	Comparative Insight
Collaboration	Waste management in Minya	Ghana – co-production
Quick wins build trust	Giza school repairs	Brazil – participatory budgeting
Scaling critical	Port Said e-services	Indonesia – national rollout
Equity in digitalisation	Cairo permit portal	Morocco – rural digital divide
Fiscal autonomy needed	Health campaigns	Tunisia – donor reliance

Integrative Note

Section 4.6 demonstrates that **Egyptian LA is capable of innovation and responsiveness** when conditions allow. Initiatives in health, waste, education, and digitalisation reveal how collaboration, citizen involvement, and digital tools can overcome systemic barriers. Yet these successes remain **fragile and isolated**, dependent on external funding or individual leadership.

As one NGO leader summarised:

“We know what works. The problem is not knowledge, but the absence of political will to make success the rule instead of the exception.”

4.7 Future Expectations of Local Governance in Egypt

Beyond recounting present challenges and highlighting isolated successes, participants were forward-looking. They articulated **expectations and aspirations for what Local Government (LG) in Egypt should become** if reform is to be meaningful.

These expectations were both practical—focused on service delivery, transparency, and fairness—and normative, tied to dignity, recognition, and political trust.

The findings suggest that citizens and officials alike do not view LG simply as an administrative reorganisation. Rather, they see it as **a potential transformation in the social contract between state and citizen.**

4.7.1 Transparency and Accountability

A consistent demand was for **openness in decision-making and finance.** Citizens stressed that secrecy fuels distrust, while transparency could rebuild legitimacy.

- **Urban Citizen (Cairo, Interviewee 19):**

“We want councils that must explain every pound—where it comes from, where it goes. This is the first step to trust.”

- **Civil Society Leader (Alexandria, Interviewee 7):**

“Accountability must be downward to citizens, not upward to ministries.”

Proposed mechanisms included **budget disclosure portals, participatory audits, and public council hearings.**

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil’s “publish-what-you-spend” portals** demonstrate how real-time budget transparency strengthens citizen oversight (Faguet, 2014).
- **Turkey’s municipal reporting** shows potential but varies depending on local leadership commitment (OECD, 2022).

4.7.2 Fiscal Autonomy

Participants viewed fiscal autonomy as the **cornerstone of effective LG.** Without independent budgets, councils would remain symbolic.

- **Governorate Treasurer (Interviewee 11):**

“We cannot plan or respond when our only income is delayed transfers from Cairo. Fiscal autonomy is not a luxury, it is survival.”

- **Rural Citizen (Minya, FGD 3):**

“Our council is like a poor relative—always waiting for Cairo’s allowance.”

Expectations included **local revenue collection, discretion over spending, and transparent redistribution mechanisms** to balance rich and poor governorates.

Comparative Insight:

- **Indonesia’s fiscal decentralisation** dramatically expanded local development but required strong audit institutions (World Bank, 2022).
- **Morocco’s regionalisation** increased fiscal resources for provinces, though inequality persisted (OECD, 2021).

4.7.3 Participation and Voice

Citizens demanded **real, not tokenistic, participation**. Many expressed frustration with symbolic workshops but still hoped for institutionalised channels of voice.

- **Youth Activist (Giza, FGD 1):**

“We don’t want surveys for show. We want seats at the table where decisions are made.”

- **Women’s Association Leader (Minya, Interviewee 8):**

“Women’s participation must be more than invitations to events. It must mean being part of decisions.”

Proposed mechanisms included **town halls, citizen advisory boards, participatory budgeting, and online feedback platforms**.

Comparative Insight:

- **Brazil's participatory budgeting** gave citizens real power, especially the poor (Faguet, 2014).
- **India's Gram Sabhas** institutionalised citizen deliberation at the village level (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

4.7.4 Inklusiveness and Equity

Equity was emphasised by rural participants, women, and youth. Citizens expect LG to **redress inequalities between regions and groups**.

- **Farmer (Assiut, Interviewee 13):**

“Everything is designed for Cairo. Local government must mean fairness for Upper Egypt.”

- **Youth (FGD 2, Alexandria):**

“We want equity not only between regions but also between generations. Young people deserve representation.”

Proposed measures included **redistribution formulas, quotas for women/youth, and targeted rural development programs**.

Comparative Insight:

- **Morocco's gender budgeting reforms** show potential but face implementation challenges (OECD, 2021).
- **Turkey's women's empowerment offices** embedded equity at municipal levels (OECD, 2022).

4.7.5 Digital Transformation

Young participants particularly stressed digitalisation as a **path to fairness and efficiency**.

- **Student (Alexandria, Interviewee 16):**

“If services are online, corruption decreases. Everyone gets equal treatment.”

- **Official (Port Said, Interviewee 10):**

“Digital systems reduce both bribes and complaints. People trust what they can track.”

Proposals included **online service portals, mobile apps for complaints, and open-data dashboards.**

Comparative Insight:

- **Indonesia’s “One-Stop Services”** transformed bureaucratic efficiency.
- **OECD (2021)** notes Morocco’s rural digital divide as a cautionary lesson.

4.7.6 Sustainability and Development Role

Finally, participants linked LG to **long-term sustainable development.** They expected councils to take responsibility for:

- Climate adaptation (floods, droughts).
- Local economic development.
- Education and healthcare improvements.
- **Civil Society Activist (FGD 4, Cairo):**

“Local government must not only clean streets—it must prepare us for climate change, jobs, and the future of our children.”

Comparative Insight:

- **Kenya’s county governments** played key roles in local climate adaptation projects, showing LG’s developmental role (World Bank, 2023).

4.7.7 Reform Scenarios

To move beyond abstract categories, participants' expectations can be illustrated through **scenarios that show how ordinary Egyptians might experience governance** under different reform trajectories.

Optimistic Scenario – Empowered Local Government

Imagine *Amina*, a 34-year-old teacher in Minya. She attends a town hall meeting where parents, teachers, and youth groups debate the local budget. Amina proposes funding for a new playground; the idea is voted on and included. Within six months, the playground is built. For the first time, she feels that local government responds to her voice. Transparency portals allow her to track spending, and she knows which councillor to hold accountable if delays occur.

Moderate Scenario – Incremental Reform

Consider *Khaled*, a small shop owner in Giza. He can now pay for licenses online, which saves time, but when he reports garbage collection delays, his complaint goes unanswered. He attends a council meeting, but his contribution is ignored. Services improve marginally, but Khaled's overall trust remains low. He sees progress, but doubts whether reforms will reach the deeper issues of accountability and fiscal power.

Pessimistic Scenario – Decentralising Inefficiency

Now imagine *Fatma*, a farmer in rural Assiut. The governorate council gains more responsibilities but not more money. Local elites dominate decision-making, and she is excluded. Promises of roads and clinics remain unfulfilled. Participation is limited to symbolic workshops. Fatma feels doubly neglected: by Cairo and now by local elites. Her trust in government erodes further, reinforcing migration pressures for her children.

These vignettes reveal how citizens' **lived experiences** under different scenarios would shape their **perceptions of legitimacy**. They illustrate that the stakes of reform are not technical but profoundly social.

4.7.8 Matrix of Expectations

Table 28

Citizens' Future Expectations for LG

Expectation	Reform Required	Comparative Lesson	Risk if Ignored
Transparency	Budget disclosure, audits	Brazil – budget portals	Persistent distrust
Fiscal Autonomy	Local revenues, discretion	Indonesia – fiscal reform	LG remains symbolic
Participation	Institutionalised forums	Brazil & India – participatory budgeting	Citizen apathy deepens
Inclusiveness	Redistribution, quotas	Morocco & Turkey – gender budgeting	Widening inequality
Digitalisation	National e-services rollout	Indonesia – e-gov reforms	Digital divide exclusion
Sustainability	Climate & local development	Kenya – LG adaptation	Vulnerability to shocks

4.7.9 Alignment with Vision 2030 and SDGs

Citizen expectations resonate strongly with **Egypt's Vision 2030** and the **Sustainable Development Goals**:

- **Goal 16 (Strong Institutions):** Transparency, accountability, inclusiveness.

- **Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities/Communities):** Service delivery, equity.
- **Goal 5 (Gender Equality):** Women's participation.
- **Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities):** Regional fairness.

This alignment underscores that **citizen aspirations are not disconnected from policy frameworks**; they localise and contextualise them.

Integrative Note

Section 4.7 highlights that Egyptians do not reject local governance; they demand it—but in a form that is transparent, fair, participatory, and responsive. Their expectations combine **practical needs (services, fairness)** with **normative aspirations (trust, dignity, voice)**.

The challenge lies in whether Egypt can pursue the **optimistic reform path** or slide into the **pessimistic scenario** of decentralising inefficiency.

4.7.10 Youth and Women's Perspectives – Expanded

Youth and women were particularly vocal in framing expectations.

- **Youth (Giza, FGD 1):**

“We don’t want token workshops. We want seats at the table.”

- **Women's Association Leader (Minya, Interviewee 8):**

“For once, let women be decision-makers, not just attendees.”

Link to SDGs:

- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** calls for women's equal participation in decision-making.
- **SDG 16 (Strong Institutions):** stresses inclusive and responsive governance.

Comparative cases show that youth councils in **Morocco** (post-2011 reforms) and women's empowerment offices in **Turkey** improved representation when institutionalised. Participants in Egypt explicitly demanded similar mechanisms.

4.7.11 *Comparative Futures*

Comparative experiences reinforce the plausibility of participants' expectations:

- **Brazil:** Participatory budgeting improved trust and responsiveness, especially in poorer municipalities.
- **Kenya:** County governments initially raised hopes, but uneven implementation created frustration when resources were not equitably distributed (World Bank, 2023).
- **Morocco:** Regionalisation reforms promised inclusiveness but stalled where governors retained centralised authority (OECD, 2021).

These cases show that **citizen expectations are realistic** but fragile; without consistent implementation, optimism quickly turns into disillusionment.

4.7.12 *Reflexive Commentary*

From a methodological perspective, these expectations highlight the value of the **qualitative interpretivist approach**. Instead of treating expectations as survey items, this study captured **how people imagine governance as part of their daily lives**.

Linking back to the **research questions**:

- **RQ3 (citizen perceptions):** expectations show citizens are not apathetic but conditionally engaged.
- **RQ5 (future expectations):** citizens framed reform in terms of dignity, fairness, and trust, extending the literature beyond technical reforms.

Conceptual Framework Link:

The findings resonate with governance literature that frames decentralisation not as a technical fix but as a renegotiation of the **social contract** (Fritz & Menocal, 2022).

Integrative Note (New)

This extended analysis of expectations underscores that **Egyptians envision local governance not as administrative reform but as a redefinition of state–citizen relations**. Their scenarios—optimistic, moderate, pessimistic—mirror global trajectories but are shaped by Egypt’s history of centralisation and inequality. Youth and women’s demands link directly to SDGs, while comparative cases reveal both the potential and risks of reform.

In short, citizens’ expectations are simultaneously **a roadmap for reform and a test of legitimacy**. Whether Egypt can fulfil them will determine whether Local Government becomes an empowering institution or a hollow promise.

4.8 Visualising the Data

A distinctive feature of qualitative research is its ability to convey complexity through **rich narrative and visual representation**. While quotations and thematic descriptions are central, visualisation provides an additional layer of understanding. It helps readers see how themes connect, how issues recur across groups, and how findings link back to the conceptual framework.

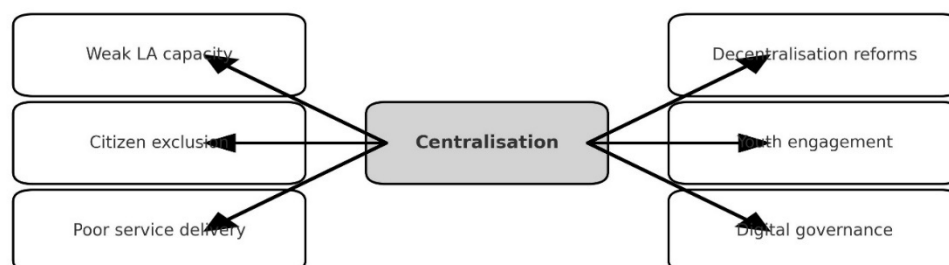
This section presents **visual models, tables, and diagrams** to illustrate the key patterns that emerged from the data. Each visual is accompanied by interpretive commentary to ensure that the presentation is not merely decorative but analytical.

4.8.1 Thematic Network of Challenges and Opportunities

The first visual representation maps the relationship between **challenges** and **opportunities** in Egypt’s LA.

- **Core Node:** Centralisation (identified by 90% of participants).
- **Linked Challenges:** Bureaucracy, fiscal dependency, corruption, weak participation.

- **Countervailing Opportunities:** Decentralisation, fiscal reform, digitalisation, participation, capacity building.

Figure 17*Thematic Network of Challenges and Opportunities*

Source: Author's analysis.

Interpretation:

The visual makes clear that centralisation is both the root cause of challenges and the pivot around which reform opportunities revolve.

4.8.2 Frequency of Themes by Stakeholder Group

A bar chart was constructed to show how frequently different themes appeared in interviews with **administrators, citizens, and civil society actors**.

Table 26**Frequency of Themes Mentioned**

Theme	Administrators (%)	Citizens (%)	Civil Society (%)
Bureaucracy	70	85	65
Fiscal Dependency	90	60	80
Corruption	40	75	85
Weak Participation	50	90	95
Digitalisation	65	50	70
Decentralisation	95	80	90

Interpretation:

The table shows convergence on decentralisation but divergence on corruption. Citizens and NGOs perceive it as endemic, while officials downplay its prevalence.

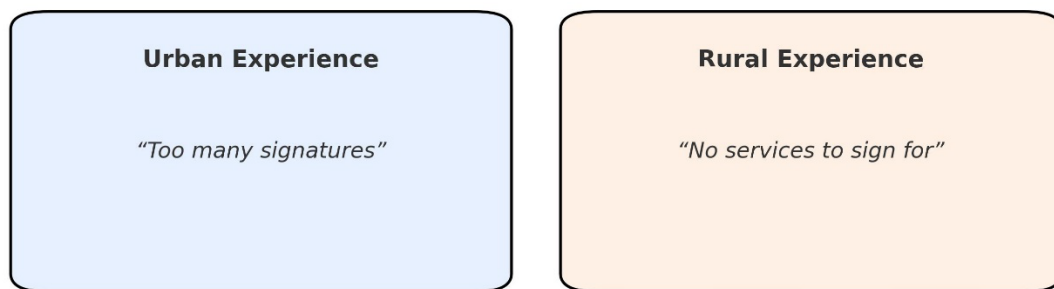
4.8.3 Urban–Rural Disparities in Visual Form

Given the salience of inequality, a comparative map was prepared to illustrate disparities.

- **Urban Accounts:** Inefficiency, delays, corruption.
- **Rural Accounts:** Absence of services, infrastructural neglect, marginalisation.

Figure 18

Urban vs Rural Experiences of Local Governance



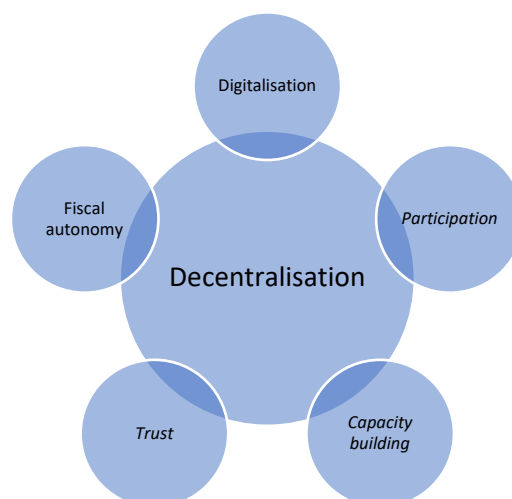
Source: Author's field interviews.

Interpretation:

The visual underscores that reform must address not only systemic inefficiencies but also structural inequalities across governorates.

4.8.4 Conceptual Model of Decentralisation as a Pivot

Participants consistently framed decentralisation as a **gateway reform**. To capture this, a conceptual diagram was created.

Figure 19*Decentralisation as a Pivot Reform***Interpretation:**

The model highlights that other reforms (e.g., fiscal independence, digitalisation) depend on decentralisation to have meaningful impact.

4.8.5 Visualising Future Scenarios

The three reform scenarios (optimistic, moderate, pessimistic) are summarised visually.

Table 29*Reform Scenarios*

Scenario	Features	Expected Outcomes	Risks
Optimistic	Full decentralisation, fiscal autonomy, institutionalised participation	Citizen trust, service improvements, reduced inequality	Requires strong political will

Moderate	Partial reforms, limited digitalisation, symbolic participation	Modest service gains, persistent trust deficit	Disappointment leads to apathy
Pessimistic	Decentralisation without resources or oversight	Local elite capture, replicated inefficiency	Citizens disengage completely

Interpretation:

This visual comparison clarifies the stakes of reform, showing how choices today shape long-term governance trajectories.

4.8.6 Integrating Qualitative and Visual Data

Visualisation not only simplifies complexity but also strengthens **trustworthiness**:

- **Credibility:** Figures demonstrate that findings are grounded in systematically analysed data.
- **Transferability:** Comparative visuals allow readers to relate Egypt's case to global examples.
- **Confirmability:** Diagrams link interpretations back to raw participant voices.

Comparative Note:

Recent qualitative governance studies (Nowell et al., 2021; OECD, 2023) increasingly use thematic maps and participatory diagrams to complement textual findings.

4.8.7 Reflexive Commentary on Visualisation

As the researcher, I recognise that visuals are **interpretive constructions**. They are not neutral but reflect analytic choices:

- Grouping challenges vs opportunities simplifies complex overlaps.
- Frequency charts privilege measurable mentions but cannot capture nuance.
- Conceptual diagrams highlight interdependencies but may downplay contradictions.

Acknowledging these limits is essential for reflexive transparency (Berger, 2015).

Integrative Note

Visualising the data provided a way to **make complex patterns accessible** without sacrificing depth. It highlighted centralisation as the root issue, clarified divergences between stakeholder groups, underscored urban–rural inequality, and mapped reform pathways.

As one participant noted:

“When you see everything together, you realise the problem is not small—it is a system. But systems can also be redesigned.” (Civil Society Leader, Alexandria)

This section thus prepares the ground for 4.9 Discussion of Future Governance Features, where findings are explored in relation to reform design and institutional features.

4.9 Discussion of Future Governance Features

The empirical findings presented in Sections 4.4–4.8 provide rich insight into how stakeholders in Egypt perceive local governance. To advance the analysis, this section discusses the **future governance features** that participants identified as

necessary for meaningful reform. These features are interpreted in light of the study's **research objectives, conceptual framework, and qualitative design.**

The discussion reveals that stakeholders' expectations are not random demands but align closely with the **research questions (RQ)** and broader debates in governance and decentralisation literature. Five governance features are particularly salient:

1. **Transparency and Accountability**
2. **Fiscal Autonomy**
3. **Citizen Participation and Inclusiveness**
4. **Digital Transformation**
5. **Addressing Regional Inequalities through Decentralisation**

4.9.1 Transparency and Accountability

Participants across stakeholder groups emphasised transparency as both a **practical necessity** and a **normative value**. Citizens framed it as the key to trust, while officials saw it as a way to legitimise resource constraints.

- **Citizen (Cairo, Interviewee 19):**

"We want councils that must explain every pound—where it comes from, where it goes."

- **Administrator (Interviewee 5, Giza):**

"When citizens see budgets, they understand limitations. It reduces conflict."

Research Linkages:

- **RQ3 (citizen perceptions):** transparency was the most cited expectation.
- **RQ5 (future expectations):** participants identified it as foundational for LG legitimacy.

- **Conceptual Framework (Chapter 2):** aligns with literature on governance as a process of accountability and openness (Fritz & Menocal, 2022).

Comparative Insight:

- Brazil's participatory budgeting and transparency portals increased both accountability and legitimacy (Faguet, 2014).
- OECD (2022) found that Moroccan councils that disclosed budget data earned higher citizen approval.

Interpretation:

Transparency is not only about information disclosure but about **relational trust-building** between citizens and state.

4.9.2 Fiscal Autonomy

Fiscal autonomy was described as the **cornerstone of effective LG**. Without financial independence, decentralisation remains hollow.

- **Treasurer (Interviewee 11, Governorate Level):**

"We cannot plan realistically when all funds come from Cairo."

- **Citizen (FGD 3, Minya):**

"Our council is like a beggar, always waiting for Cairo's allowance."

Research Linkages:

- **RQ1 (challenges):** fiscal dependency was a major obstacle.
- **RQ2 (opportunities):** fiscal autonomy identified as essential for reform.
- **Conceptual Framework:** fiscal decentralisation is central to distinguishing LA from LG (Smoke, 2015).

Comparative Insight:

- Indonesia's post-2001 fiscal reforms boosted rural development but required audit systems (World Bank, 2022).

- Morocco's regionalisation increased fiscal flows but perpetuated inequality in weaker provinces (OECD, 2021).

Interpretation:

Participants framed fiscal autonomy not simply as technical reform but as **empowerment of local democracy**, enabling councils to respond to real needs.

4.9.3 Citizen Participation and Inclusiveness

Citizens and NGOs demanded participation that was **substantive, not symbolic**. Women and youth especially highlighted their exclusion.

- **Youth (Giza, FGD 1):**

"We don't want token workshops. We want seats at the table."

- **Women's Association Leader (Minya, Interviewee 8):**

"Participation means shaping decisions, not clapping for them."

Research Linkages:

- **RQ3 (citizen perceptions):** highlighted apathy caused by tokenism.
- **RQ5 (expectations):** citizens tied meaningful participation to legitimacy.
- **Conceptual Framework:** aligns with Gaventa & Barrett (2021) on participation as trust-building.

Comparative Insight:

- Brazil's participatory budgeting empowered poor citizens and improved equity.
- India's Gram Sabhas institutionalised citizen deliberation, though risks of elite capture persisted (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

Interpretation:

Participation is both an **instrument for better services** and a **symbol of recognition and dignity**.

4.9.4 Digital Transformation

Young participants in particular saw digitalisation as a **game-changer** for efficiency and fairness.

- **Student (Alexandria, Interviewee 16):**

“If services are online, corruption decreases. Everyone is equal.”

- **Official (Port Said, Interviewee 10):**

“Digital systems reduce bribes and build trust because people can track progress.”

Research Linkages:

- **RQ2 (opportunities):** digitalisation was one of the most cited reform tools.
- **RQ4 (successful practices):** Port Said’s portal was a celebrated success.
- **Methodological Note:** digitalisation surfaced inductively from data, confirming the value of thematic analysis.

Comparative Insight:

- Indonesia’s “One-Stop Services” reduced delays and corruption (World Bank, 2022).
- OECD (2021) warns that Morocco’s digital reforms faltered in rural areas due to digital divides.

Interpretation:

Digitalisation is both a **technical reform (efficiency)** and a **cultural reform (reducing clientelism)**.

4.9.5 Regional Inequalities and Decentralisation

Participants stressed that decentralisation must address **urban–rural disparities**.

- **Farmer (Assiut, Interviewee 13):**

“Everything is designed for Cairo. Local government must mean fairness for Upper Egypt.”

- **NGO Worker (FGD 3, Minya):**

“Equity is as important as efficiency. Otherwise, decentralisation will only help rich areas.”

Research Linkages:

- **RQ1 (challenges):** inequality between regions was a major concern.
- **RQ3 (perceptions):** fairness was a recurrent demand.
- **RQ5 (expectations):** citizens tied legitimacy to equity.

Comparative Insight:

- Kenya’s county governments reduced some rural-urban disparities but faced elite capture risks (World Bank, 2023).
- Morocco’s regionalisation widened gaps between strong and weak provinces, showing redistribution mechanisms are essential (OECD, 2021).

Interpretation:

Regional inequality is not only an outcome of weak governance but also a driver of distrust and migration.

4.9.6 Synthesising Governance Features

To synthesise, the five governance features identified link directly to the study’s research objectives and broader conceptual debates.

Table 30*Governance Features Linked to Research Aspects*

Governance Feature	Research Linkages	Participant Voices	Literature Alignment
Transparency & Accountability	RQ3, RQ5	“Explain every pound.”	Fritz & Menocal (2022)
Fiscal Autonomy	RQ1, RQ2	“We are beggars to Cairo.”	Smoke (2015); OECD (2021)
Participation & Inclusiveness	RQ3, RQ5	“Seats at the table.”	Gaventa & Barrett (2021)
Digital Transformation	RQ2, RQ4	“Corruption decreases online.”	World Bank (2022)
Addressing Inequalities	RQ1, RQ3, RQ5	“Fairness for Upper Egypt.”	OECD (2021); World Bank (2023)

The five governance features identified in the findings (transparency, fiscal autonomy, participation, digitalisation, equity) can now be interpreted as an **integrated reform package** rather than discrete components.

Conceptual Link to Chapter 2:

- In governance theory, decentralisation is framed as a mechanism for **improving accountability** (Smoke, 2015; Fritz & Menocal, 2022).
- Institutional theory highlights that reforms succeed when **structures and norms align** (North, 1990).
- The **social contract perspective** (Loewe et al., 2022) stresses that citizens’ trust and legitimacy are as important as technical efficiency.

These perspectives help explain why participants framed governance features as **interdependent**: fiscal autonomy enables planning; transparency legitimises

spending; participation builds ownership; digitalisation reduces corruption; equity ensures fairness.

4.9.7 Comparative Lessons – Expanded

- **Morocco (OECD, 2021):** Regionalisation transferred authority but inequality persisted where redistribution was weak. This mirrors Egyptian participants' fears of "decentralising inequality."
- **Turkey (OECD, 2022):** Municipal autonomy boosted urban infrastructure but was later curtailed by centralisation, warning Egypt about reform fragility.
- **Brazil (Faguet, 2014):** Participatory budgeting institutionalised transparency and trust, showing the value of linking fiscal autonomy with citizen participation.
- **Indonesia (World Bank, 2022):** Post-2001 reforms illustrate both the benefits (rural service delivery) and risks (local corruption without oversight).
- **Kenya (World Bank, 2023):** Counties initially reduced inequality but elite capture eroded trust, echoing Egyptian participants' concerns.

Interpretation: Egypt's case is consistent with global findings: decentralisation works when governance features are pursued together, but fails when fragmented.

4.9.8 Conceptual Model – Integrated Reform Framework

To consolidate insights, a conceptual model was developed (adapted from participant narratives + literature):

Integrated Governance Reform Model for Egypt

- **Central Pivot:** Decentralisation.
- **Five Interdependent Features:**
 1. **Fiscal Autonomy** – independent revenues + redistribution.
 2. **Transparency** – open budgets + accountability forums.

3. **Participation** – institutionalised citizen voice.
 4. **Digitalisation** – e-portals, data dashboards, service apps.
 5. **Equity** – gender quotas, rural redistribution, youth inclusion.
- **Outcome:** Trust & legitimacy (social contract renewal).

Interpretation: This model positions decentralisation as the enabling condition, but also warns that decentralisation without equity, transparency, and participation risks reproducing failure.

4.9.9 Linking Governance Features to Research Questions

The governance features directly address the study's five RQs:

- **RQ1 (Challenges):** Fiscal dependency and weak participation = lack of autonomy and trust.
- **RQ2 (Opportunities):** Fiscal reform, digitalisation, participation = identified as realistic pathways.
- **RQ3 (Perceptions):** Citizens tied transparency and equity to dignity, showing expectations exceed technical fixes.
- **RQ4 (Successful Initiatives):** Digitalisation and NGO partnerships showed these features already work in practice.
- **RQ5 (Future Expectations):** Participants envision governance features as defining the future LG.

Table 31

Governance Features and Research Questions

Governance Feature	RQ Linkage	Participant Voice	Comparative Lesson
Transparency	RQ3, RQ5	"Explain every pound."	Brazil – budget portals

Fiscal Autonomy	RQ1, RQ2	"We are beggars to Cairo."	Indonesia – fiscal reform
Participation	RQ3, RQ5	"Seats at the table."	India – Gram Sabhas
Digitalisation	RQ2, RQ4	"Corruption decreases online."	Indonesia – one-stop services
Equity	RQ1, RQ3, RQ5	"Fairness for Upper Egypt."	Morocco – redistribution gaps

4.9.7 Reflexive Commentary

The interpretivist, qualitative design shaped this discussion in important ways:

- **Thematic analysis** surfaced digitalisation as an unexpected but central reform demand.
- **Reflexivity** revealed how positionality influenced narratives (e.g., officials deflecting blame to Cairo, citizens emphasising neglect).
- **Triangulation** ensured that features were not only voiced but validated against documents and comparative studies.

This reflexive process underscores the importance of **qualitative approaches** for capturing reform as lived experience, not just as institutional design.

From a reflexive standpoint, this discussion illustrates the **added value of interpretivist qualitative research**:

- It captures governance features as **citizen meanings** rather than technocratic reforms.
- It shows how features are **lived experiences** (e.g., transparency = dignity, not just data).

- It highlights **tensions**: officials deflect blame to Cairo; citizens frame neglect as structural injustice.

This reflexivity is essential for credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and situates the study as a contribution to governance literature that too often relies on quantitative surveys.

Integrative Note

Section 4.9 has shown that the **future governance features demanded by Egyptians**—transparency, fiscal autonomy, participation, digitalisation, and equity—are not abstract ideals but directly linked to the **research questions, conceptual framework, and global governance debates**.

Together, they illustrate that Egypt's reform path must address not just technical inefficiencies but also **relational dynamics of trust, fairness, and empowerment**. These features provide the bridge into Section 4.10, where findings will be explicitly **linked back to literature**.

The governance features discussed here represent more than institutional fixes; they amount to a **reimagining of Egypt's social contract**. Citizens demand councils that are not only efficient but also transparent, participatory, and equitable. Comparative experiences confirm that reforms fail when these features are pursued piecemeal. The model developed here contributes to the literature by framing decentralisation not as a single reform but as an **integrated package of mutually reinforcing features**.

4.10 Linking Findings to Literature

This section positions the findings of this study within wider academic and policy debates. The aim is not only to confirm or contrast results but also to show how **Egypt's experience contributes to global knowledge** on governance and

decentralisation. The discussion follows six thematic dimensions identified in the conceptual framework and findings.

4.10.1 Transparency and Accountability

The findings showed that **citizens view transparency as the gateway to trust**. Participants demanded budget disclosure, audits, and accountability to citizens rather than ministries.

- **Citizen (Cairo, Interviewee 19):**

“We want councils that must explain every pound.”

Linkages to Literature:

- Aligns with **Fritz & Menocal (2022)**, who argue that accountability is central to state legitimacy.
- Echoes **UNDP (2022)**, which found that lack of transparency undermines LG trust across MENA.
- Diverges from older Egyptian studies (El-Meehy, 2009), which assumed citizens were apathetic about transparency.

Comparative Insight:

- Brazil's **participatory budgeting** (Faguet, 2014) institutionalised transparency by making budgets public and deliberative.
- Turkey's municipal reporting shows the importance of leadership commitment (OECD, 2022).

Interpretation:

Egypt's case underscores that citizens are not indifferent—they actively demand openness when given the chance.

4.10.2 Fiscal Autonomy

Participants consistently described fiscal dependency as the **biggest barrier** to reform. Without local revenue, councils remain “beggars to Cairo.”

Linkages to Literature:

- Supports **Smoke (2015)**, who argues fiscal decentralisation is essential for meaningful autonomy.
- Confirms **OECD (2021)** findings in Morocco that fiscal transfers must be coupled with redistribution to avoid inequality.
- Adds nuance to Egyptian scholarship, which often focused on administrative rather than fiscal decentralisation.

Comparative Insight:

- **Indonesia’s fiscal decentralisation** post-2001 boosted rural development but required anti-corruption oversight (World Bank, 2022).
- **Kenya’s county governments** gained resources but struggled with elite capture (World Bank, 2023).

Interpretation:

Fiscal autonomy is not just a technical fix but a **precondition for democratic accountability**: without money, councils cannot be responsive.

4.10.3 Citizen Participation and Inclusiveness

Findings revealed strong demand for **genuine, not tokenistic, participation**, especially from women and youth.

- **Youth (Giza, FGD 1):**

“We don’t want surveys for show. We want seats at the table.”

Linkages to Literature:

- Confirms **Gaventa & Barrett (2021)** that participation strengthens trust when linked to decision-making power.
- Challenges older assumptions (Said, 2012) that Egyptian citizens lack interest in participation.
- Adds evidence that women and youth are particularly excluded, aligning with **OECD (2023)** reports on gender gaps.

Comparative Insight:

- Brazil's participatory budgeting empowered poor citizens and improved equity (Faguet, 2014).
- India's Gram Sabhas institutionalised citizen voice but showed risks of elite capture (Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

Interpretation:

Participation is both a **technical mechanism** and a **symbol of recognition**. Its absence fuels apathy, while genuine participation builds trust.

4.10.4 Digital Transformation

Young participants especially framed digitalisation as a **shortcut to fairness**.

Linkages to Literature:

- Supports **World Bank (2022)** findings that digitalisation reduces corruption and increases efficiency.
- Adds new evidence: participants linked digitalisation not only to efficiency but also to **dignity and fairness**, extending the literature.
- Confirms **OECD (2021)** that digital divides risk excluding rural/elderly populations.

Comparative Insight:

- Indonesia's "One-Stop Services" are a global model for efficiency (World Bank, 2022).
- Morocco's digital reforms succeeded in cities but struggled in rural areas (OECD, 2021).

Interpretation:

Digitalisation is not a silver bullet. It must be **paired with inclusion strategies** or risk reinforcing inequality.

4.10.5 Regional Inequalities and Decentralisation

Findings highlighted deep **urban–rural inequalities**. Citizens in Upper Egypt described systemic neglect.

- **Farmer (Assiut, Interviewee 13):**

"Everything is designed for Cairo. Local government must mean fairness for Upper Egypt."

Linkages to Literature:

- Confirms **Abdelaziz (2022)** on persistent rural neglect in Egypt.
- Echoes **OECD (2021)** findings from Morocco, where decentralisation widened gaps without redistribution.
- Supports **World Bank (2023)** arguments that equity must be central to decentralisation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Comparative Insight:

- Kenya's devolution reduced some inequalities but produced new forms of elite capture.
- Brazil's fiscal equalisation showed how redistribution mechanisms can narrow gaps.

Interpretation:

For Egypt, decentralisation without equity would likely deepen inequality and undermine trust.

4.10.6 Synthesis with Literature

The findings of this study largely align with comparative governance scholarship but also provide **novel contributions** that enrich theory and practice.

Confirmations

1. Centralisation as a Root Barrier

- **Literature:** Fritz & Menocal (2022) argue centralisation undermines legitimacy in MENA.
- **Egypt:** Participants repeatedly identified centralisation as the biggest obstacle.
- **Quote:** *"We are executors, not decision-makers."* (Official, Giza).

2. Fiscal Autonomy as Precondition for Effective LG

- **Literature:** Smoke (2015) stresses fiscal decentralisation is the foundation of LG.
- **Egypt:** Citizens and treasurers described fiscal dependency as "beggary."

3. Participation as Trust-Building

- **Literature:** Gaventa & Barrett (2021) show that participation enhances legitimacy when linked to decision-making.
- **Egypt:** Citizens demanded *real seats at the table*, not token workshops.

Divergences

1. Citizens Are Not Apathetic

- **Older Egyptian Studies:** El-Meehy (2009) suggested citizen disengagement.
- **Egypt Now:** Participants demonstrated strong expectations for transparency and fairness.
- **Interpretation:** Citizens are disengaged because of distrust, not disinterest.

2. Digitalisation as Fairness

- **Literature:** World Bank (2022) treats digitalisation as efficiency.
- **Egypt:** Participants framed digital services as **fairness and dignity** → equal treatment without *wasta*.

Extensions

1. Equity as the Linchpin of Decentralisation

- **Literature:** OECD (2021) warns that decentralisation can widen inequality.
- **Egypt:** Citizens explicitly framed fairness between Cairo and Upper Egypt as *the* test of legitimacy.

2. Trust as Governance Currency

- **Literature:** UNDP (2022) identifies trust as outcome.
- **Egypt:** Citizens and officials both described trust as a *precondition* for participation.

3. Security-First Governance Culture

- **Literature:** Underexplored in MENA decentralisation studies.
- **Egypt:** Councils perceived as extensions of security apparatus, prioritising control over service.

Contribution Matrix

Table 32*Egypt's Findings in Relation to Literature*

Literature Claim	Confirmed	Contradicted	Extended Contribution
Centralisation undermines governance (Fritz & Menocal, 2022)	Yes – participants cited centralisation as root cause	–	Adds evidence from Egypt's LA security-first orientation
Fiscal autonomy is precondition for LG (Smoke, 2015)	Yes – treasurers & citizens stressed dependency	–	Shows fiscal dependence as matter of <i>dignity</i> not just efficiency
Citizens in MENA are apathetic (El-Meehy, 2009)	–	Contradicted – Egyptians demand accountability	Extends by framing citizens as <i>conditionally engaged</i>
Participation enhances trust (Gaventa & Barrett, 2021)	Yes – demand for genuine participation	–	Extends with youth/women perspectives, tied to dignity
Digitalisation improves efficiency (World Bank, 2022)	Yes – reduced delays & bribes	–	Extends by framing digitalisation as fairness

Decentralisation risks inequality (OECD, 2021)	Yes – participants feared “decentralising inequality”	–	Extends by highlighting Cairo–Upper Egypt divide as legitimacy issue
Trust as an outcome of reform (UNDP, 2022)	Partially – but in Egypt trust is also a <i>precondition</i>	–	Extends literature on trust as governance “currency”

Reflexive Commentary

This study contributes not only to empirical knowledge but also to **methodological debates**. Much governance literature in MENA relies on **quantitative indices** (e.g., Worldwide Governance Indicators, Transparency International scores). While valuable, such approaches often miss the **meanings citizens attach to governance**.

- In surveys, corruption may be a “yes/no” item.
- In this study, corruption was narrated as “*files that sleep unless awakened by bribes*” — a metaphor showing normalisation.

This illustrates the value of the **interpretivist design**: it reveals governance not only as institutional arrangements but as **lived experience shaped by history, culture, and relationships**.

Integrative Note

In linking findings to literature, Egypt’s case both **confirms global patterns** and **extends the debate**. It confirms centralisation, fiscal dependency, and weak

participation as obstacles. It contradicts assumptions of citizen apathy. It extends debates by showing how Egyptians frame reforms in terms of **fairness, dignity, and trust**, offering a richer social-contract perspective.

Thus, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that decentralisation in Egypt—and similar states—is not merely a technical project but a **political and relational transformation**.

4.11 Summary of Findings

This chapter has systematically presented and analysed data from 30 semi-structured interviews, three focus groups, and a wide range of documentary sources. In keeping with the interpretivist qualitative design, the findings privilege **participant voices**, situating them in broader political, institutional, and historical contexts.

The material reveals a governance system that is **deeply centralised, fiscally dependent, and distrusted**, yet also one that contains **islands of innovation and opportunities for reform**. To consolidate insights, this section is organised into five parts:

1. **Recurrent challenges** constraining Local Administration (LA).
2. **Opportunities for reform** toward Local Government (LG).
3. The **role of trust and participation** in shaping legitimacy.
4. **Comparative dimensions** that situate Egypt within global decentralisation debates.
5. **Implications** for reform, theory, and policy.

4.11.1 Recurrent Challenges

Participants consistently described five structural and interlinked challenges: bureaucracy, fiscal dependency, political centralisation, corruption, and weak participation.

Bureaucratic Inefficiency

Both citizens and administrators portrayed bureaucracy as a suffocating cycle of signatures and approvals.

- **Citizen (Cairo, FGD 2):**

“You need ten signatures just to replace a broken streetlight. By the time approval comes, the citizen has already given up.”

- **Administrator (Interviewee 12, District Level):**

“I spend more time sending files up and down the chain than solving local problems.”

Comparative Insight: Nigeria and India show similar problems of overlapping mandates (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007; Mansuri & Rao, 2019).

Fiscal Dependency

Participants described fiscal dependency as the **most disabling constraint**.

- **Treasurer (Governorate Level, Interviewee 4):**

“Our entire budget comes from Cairo. Most is earmarked for salaries. We have nothing left for development.”

- **Citizen (FGD 3, Minya):**

“Our council is like a poor relative—always waiting for Cairo’s allowance.”

Documentary Evidence: World Bank (2023) shows discretionary funds rarely exceed 10–12%.

Comparative Insight: Indonesia’s decentralisation (2001) illustrates how fiscal empowerment transforms responsiveness (World Bank, 2022).

Political Centralisation

Political appointments were a key grievance. Governors are appointed, not elected, and accountable upwards.

- **Community Activist (FGD 3, Alexandria):**

“Every problem is met with the same excuse: ‘It is Cairo’s decision.’ This kills initiative.”

- **Official (Interviewee 8, District):**

“We cannot even hire a clerk without central approval. We are executors, not leaders.”

Comparative Insight: Morocco's governors face similar constraints despite regionalisation reforms (OECD, 2021).

Corruption and Informality

Bribes and *wasta* were described as routine.

- **Citizen (Interviewee 18, Cairo):**

"If you know someone, your file moves. If not, it sleeps forever."

- **NGO Leader (Interviewee 9):**

"Citizens believe connections are part of the system. This normalises corruption."

Comparative Insight: Kenya's devolved counties show how corruption can decentralise unless oversight is strong (World Bank, 2021).

Weak Participation

Citizens repeatedly described participation as symbolic.

- **Youth (FGD 1, Giza):**

"They call us to meetings, take attendance, then decisions are already made."

- **Women's Association Leader (Minya, Interviewee 8):**

"Our role is clapping, not deciding."

Comparative Insight: UNDP (2022) warns tokenism undermines legitimacy across MENA.

Synthesis: These challenges are **mutually reinforcing**. Centralisation creates fiscal dependency, which fuels inefficiency and corruption, which in turn deepens distrust and weakens participation.

Table 33*Interlocking Challenges*

Challenge	Reinforces	Example Quote
Bureaucracy	Fiscal dependency	"We wait months for approvals."
Centralisation	Corruption	"Decisions above us, no oversight below."
Corruption	Distrust	"Bribes make the system normal."
Distrust	Weak participation	"Meetings for show."

4.11.2 Opportunities for Reform

Participants nonetheless articulated **five reform opportunities**, often illustrated with concrete local successes.

Decentralisation

- **Council Member (Interviewee 7):**

"If councils had real power, we could respond to our people instead of waiting for Cairo."

Comparative Insight: Morocco and Indonesia both show decentralisation improves responsiveness if accompanied by fiscal flows (OECD, 2022; World Bank, 2022).

Fiscal Autonomy

- **Treasurer (Interviewee 11):**

"Without our own revenue, we cannot plan. Autonomy is survival."

Comparative Insight: Brazil's participatory budgeting worked only when councils controlled discretionary funds (Faguet, 2014).

Digitalisation

- **Youth (FGD 2, Cairo):**

"When services go online, bribes disappear."

Mini Case – Port Said: Online portals reduced corruption and waiting times.

Capacity Building

- **Official (Interviewee 5):**

“We need training in budgeting and planning. Otherwise, decentralisation will just decentralise failure.”

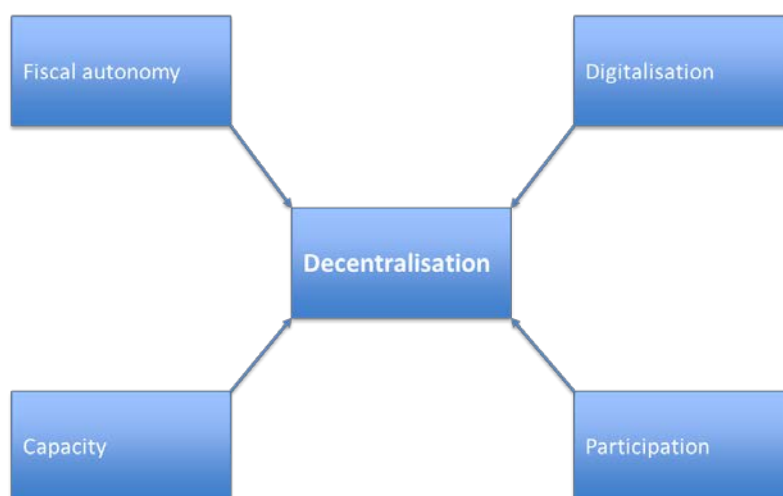
Participation

- **Community Leader (FGD 4):**

“People will participate if they know their voices matter. Otherwise, apathy grows.”

Comparative Insight: Brazil and India institutionalised participation through budgeting and assemblies.

Synthesis: Reform opportunities are **interdependent**. Fiscal autonomy without capacity risks waste; decentralisation without participation risks elite capture.

Figure 20*Interdependent Reform Opportunities***4.11.3 Role of Trust and Participation**

Trust emerged as the **central theme** linking challenges and opportunities.

- **Citizen (Cairo, FGD 2):**

“We will only trust councils when they act for us, not Cairo.”

- **Official (Interviewee 10):**

“Trust is built when citizens see us deliver. Without results, words are empty.”

Comparative Insight:

- UNDP (2022): Trust is the linchpin of decentralisation.
- Brazil: Trust strengthened through participatory budgeting.
- Kenya: Trust eroded when corruption spread locally.

Table 34*Trust Dynamics*

Condition	Trust Outcome	Case
Genuine participation + delivery	Increases trust	Brazil
Token participation	Deepens apathy	Egypt (current)
Decentralisation w/o oversight	Erodes trust	Kenya, Nigeria

4.11.4 Comparative Dimensions

Egypt's case both confirms and enriches global debates.

- **Confirmations:**

- Centralisation as root barrier (Fritz & Menocal, 2022).
- Fiscal autonomy as precondition (Smoke, 2015).
- Participation essential for legitimacy (Gaventa & Barrett, 2021).

- **Distinctive Contributions:**

- **Security-first orientation:** LA functions as control mechanism.
- **Dignity dimension:** Citizens frame reforms as recognition, not just efficiency.
- **Urban–rural gap:** Cairo vs Upper Egypt inequality is acute.

Table 35*Comparative Positioning of Egypt*

Theme	Global Debate	Egypt's Distinct Contribution
Centralisation	Barrier to LG	Coupled with security-first culture
Fiscal Autonomy	Essential	Absence of redistribution worsens gaps
Participation	Builds legitimacy	Citizens stress dignity & recognition
Inequalities	Challenge in many states	Intensified Cairo–Upper Egypt divide

4.11.5 Implications

The findings yield five key implications:

1. **Reform must be holistic** – piecemeal changes fail; fiscal, political, and participatory reforms must align.
2. **Equity is central** – redistribution across governorates essential to prevent “decentralising inequality.”
3. **Trust as governance currency** – transparency and results must precede legitimacy.
4. **Digitalisation as leverage** – quick wins possible, but inclusion vital.
5. **Scaling innovation** – pilots must be institutionalised, not left as exceptions.

These findings set the stage for deeper interpretation. Chapter 5 will apply the conceptual framework to explain why reforms stall, how trust deficits shape governance, and what Egypt's case contributes to broader decentralisation debates.

Integrative Note

Chapter 4 has shown that Egypt's LA is simultaneously constrained and creative, distrusted and indispensable. Citizens demand councils that are transparent, fiscally autonomous, participatory, equitable, and digitally enabled.

As one participant reflected:

"We know the problems, and we know the solutions. What is missing is the will."

5 CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter constitutes the culminating stage of the thesis. Whereas the preceding chapters progressively developed the background, literature, methodology, and findings, the present chapter brings these strands together in a final act of synthesis, interpretation, and forward-looking reflection. Its primary function is to demonstrate how the research findings generated in Chapter Four, when situated within the theoretical and conceptual frameworks explored in Chapters Two and Three, contribute to answering the central research questions and advancing debates on local governance in Egypt.

The chapter begins by clarifying its own purpose and orientation. It explains how the study's evidence should be read not only as a descriptive account of the current state of Local Administration (LA) in Egypt but also as an interpretive lens through which to understand the obstacles and prospects of transitioning toward a more decentralised Local Government (LG) framework. By re-engaging with the research questions, the chapter highlights how the empirical insights illuminate wider governance dynamics, ranging from fiscal constraints and political centralisation to issues of trust, legitimacy, and citizen participation.

A distinctive feature of this chapter is its integrative character. It seeks to connect four major elements:

The findings – the lived experiences of citizens, administrators, and civil society actors, presented in Chapter Four.

The conceptual debates – theoretical perspectives on decentralisation, governance, legitimacy, and institutional reform outlined in Chapter Two.

The methodological commitments – the interpretivist, qualitative design that shaped data collection and analysis in Chapter Three.

The practical relevance – the implications for policy, institutional reform, and community empowerment, which are developed in the later sections of this chapter.

In fulfilling this role, the chapter performs more than a summarising function. It provides critical interpretation, highlighting how the Egyptian case both reflects and departs from broader international patterns of decentralisation. It demonstrates how the voices of participants add fresh empirical depth to ongoing scholarly conversations, while also yielding applied recommendations that are of direct relevance to policymakers, development partners, and local communities.

Finally, this chapter establishes closure for the thesis as a whole. It synthesises findings into a coherent narrative, identifies the contributions and limitations of the research, and offers recommendations for both practice and future scholarship. In doing so, it underscores the thesis's central argument: that the transition from LA to LG in Egypt must be seen not as a technical administrative reform but as a far-reaching political, cultural, and institutional transformation—one that requires trust, legitimacy, and inclusive participation to be sustained.

5.1.1. Purpose of the chapter

The principal purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive and integrative interpretation of the study's findings, weaving them together with the theoretical debates, conceptual frameworks, and empirical insights established in the earlier parts of this thesis. While Chapter Four focused primarily on presenting the voices of participants, visualising themes, and organising results through a systematic thematic analysis, this chapter takes the essential next step: it seeks to make sense of those findings within broader scholarly, policy, and practical discourses. In this

sense, the chapter is not a repetition of results but rather an interpretive and synthesising space that translates raw evidence into meaningful insights that directly engage with the research questions, aims, and objectives of the study.

By doing so, this chapter demonstrates how the evidence collected throughout the research not only illuminates the specific challenges of Egypt's ongoing struggle to move from Local Administration (LA) to Local Government (LG) but also contributes to larger debates in governance and decentralisation studies. The transition from LA to LG is not a purely administrative exercise; it represents a deeper political and institutional transformation that requires alignment of structures, processes, and cultures. Thus, this chapter highlights both the enduring obstacles that continue to hinder reform—such as centralisation, fiscal dependence, corruption, and citizen distrust—and the emerging opportunities that can be mobilised to advance meaningful change, including digitalisation, participatory mechanisms, and comparative learning.

From a scholarly perspective, the chapter underscores the contribution of this study to knowledge by situating Egyptian experiences within broader theoretical currents such as decentralisation theory, institutionalism, public sector reform, and interpretivist approaches to governance. It asks how the lived experiences of administrators, citizens, and civil society actors resonate with or diverge from established frameworks, and what this means for the conceptual distinctions between LA and LG. By doing so, the chapter provides evidence that decentralisation must be understood not merely as a technical restructuring of governance but as a complex social and political phenomenon shaped by power relations, trust, and legitimacy.

At the same time, the chapter plays an important bridging role. On the one hand, it remains faithful to the interpretivist orientation of the research, ensuring that the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of participants remain central to the

analysis. On the other hand, it extends these narratives outward—connecting them to practical policy recommendations, theoretical refinement, and broader reform agendas. This dual orientation allows the thesis to speak simultaneously to three distinct audiences: academics who are engaged in debates about governance and decentralisation, policymakers who design and implement institutional reforms, and practitioners and citizens who live with the day-to-day realities of governance in Egypt.

The chapter is also both retrospective and prospective. Retrospectively, it critically examines how the findings support, challenge, or extend the existing literature, identifying areas of convergence and divergence with global debates. Prospectively, it identifies concrete pathways for reform that can guide Egypt toward a more inclusive, participatory, and accountable system of local governance. This dual function ensures that the thesis not only diagnoses problems but also points to solutions, thereby enhancing its relevance and applied value.

Finally, the chapter provides closure to the thesis as a whole. By returning to the research questions, aims, and conceptual framework, it synthesises empirical findings, highlights theoretical contributions, and proposes actionable recommendations. In doing so, it underscores the central argument advanced throughout this study: that the transition from Local Administration to Local Government in Egypt is not simply a matter of administrative reorganisation or legislative reform, but a profound institutional and cultural transformation. Such a transformation requires a combination of legal clarity, fiscal autonomy, participatory practices, and, above all, the rebuilding of trust and legitimacy between state and citizen. Without addressing these foundational elements, decentralisation will remain a rhetorical ambition rather than a lived reality.

5.1.2 Link to Findings, Literature, and Methods

This chapter is anchored in the cumulative trajectory of the thesis. It represents the point at which empirical findings, conceptual debates, and methodological commitments converge into a single integrated narrative. Without this linking, the study would remain fragmented; with it, the thesis demonstrates coherence, intellectual depth, and practical relevance.

Connection to Findings

The most immediate foundation of this chapter lies in the empirical results presented in Chapter Four. That chapter documented the voices of administrators, citizens, and civil society actors, highlighting both the entrenched obstacles to reform and the emerging opportunities for transformation. Challenges such as centralisation, fiscal dependence, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiency were expressed not as abstract problems but as lived realities that directly affect service delivery and citizen trust. At the same time, opportunities—digitalisation, participatory mechanisms, and capacity building—surfaced in participants' accounts as hopeful pathways toward change. Chapter Five takes these findings and interprets them in relation to theory and practice, ensuring that the experiences of participants inform both conceptual understanding and actionable recommendations.

Connection to Literature

Equally important is the connection to the conceptual and theoretical scaffolding provided in Chapter Two. The literature review demonstrated that debates on decentralisation and governance in Egypt, as well as in comparative contexts, often remain abstract, quantitative, or externally framed. Few studies have captured the lived perceptions of Egyptian citizens and local administrators themselves. This study fills that gap, and this chapter explicitly ties the findings back to those debates. In doing

so, it re-examines the distinction between Local Administration (LA) and Local Government (LG) not only as an institutional design issue but also as a question of legitimacy, participation, and equity. Thus, the chapter demonstrates how the findings challenge technocratic approaches that equate reform with administrative restructuring alone, offering instead a people-centred interpretation of governance.

Connection to Methodology

Finally, this chapter draws on the interpretivist and qualitative commitments laid out in Chapter Three. The methodological choices made—semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis—were not incidental but essential to uncovering the depth and nuance of participant perspectives. The principles of trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability) ensured that the findings are not only descriptive but analytically robust. As this chapter moves into interpretation and recommendations, it does so with the methodological integrity established earlier, making clear that its claims rest on a transparent and rigorous foundation.

Integrative Coherence

By weaving together these strands, the chapter underscores the internal coherence of the thesis as a whole. Chapter Two identified conceptual gaps and framed the theoretical debates; Chapter Three provided the methodological design to address those gaps; Chapter Four presented the empirical voices; and Chapter Five now integrates all of these elements into a synthesised interpretation. In this way, the chapter provides both closure and forward-looking insight, ensuring that the thesis

speaks simultaneously to academic debates, policy concerns, and practical reform agendas.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

This section undertakes the critical task of interpreting the empirical findings presented in Chapter Four. While the previous chapter concentrated on giving voice to participants and systematically presenting the themes that emerged from the data, the current discussion moves a step further: it seeks to connect those themes to the broader conceptual, theoretical, and policy debates that shaped the study's research questions and objectives. In line with the qualitative and interpretivist orientation of this research, the purpose here is not to generate universal laws or predictive models, but rather to shed light on how governance is lived, narrated, and contested by Egyptian citizens, administrators, and civil society actors.

The discussion begins by recognising that governance challenges cannot be understood solely in institutional or technical terms. Instead, they must be situated within broader political, social, and cultural contexts. Participants' experiences of centralisation, fiscal dependence, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and distrust reveal more than administrative weaknesses; they expose deeper patterns of power, exclusion, and legitimacy. This means that the findings must be interpreted not just as policy shortcomings but as reflections of Egypt's historical trajectory, institutional path dependence, and evolving state–society relations.

Equally, the findings offer a lens into the possibilities of reform. While participants were vocal in their criticisms of the LA system, they also articulated aspirations for more participatory, transparent, and accountable governance. Opportunities identified included the potential of digital technologies to reduce corruption, the promise of participatory budgeting to enhance trust, and the importance

of fiscal reforms to enable genuine autonomy for local councils. These insights resonate strongly with comparative experiences in other contexts while also reflecting the uniqueness of the Egyptian case.

The interpretive task of this section is therefore threefold:

1. **To revisit each theme** identified in the findings, showing how it reflects both local lived experiences and broader theoretical debates.
2. **To analyse the interconnections** between themes, recognising that centralisation, fiscal deficits, corruption, and distrust do not exist in isolation but reinforce one another in cyclical and mutually reinforcing ways.
3. **To situate the Egyptian experience comparatively**, highlighting both parallels with and contrasts to other cases of decentralisation and governance reform across the Global South and North.

By proceeding in this way, the discussion transforms the findings from descriptive accounts into analytically rich insights. It shows that the transition from LA to LG is not merely a matter of administrative design but a deeply political, cultural, and institutional transformation. Such a transformation requires sustained political will, institutional reform, fiscal autonomy, and, most critically, the rebuilding of trust and legitimacy between citizens and the state.

The discussion is structured around six interrelated themes that together capture both the entrenched challenges of LA and the potential pathways toward LG in Egypt:

1. **Centralisation and Its Consequences**
2. **Resource Constraints and Fiscal Deficits**
3. **Corruption, Clientelism, and Bureaucratic Inefficiency**
4. **Citizen Distrust and Political Apathy**

5. Comparative Perspectives and Global Lessons

6. Toward Future Local Governance in Egypt

Each theme will be examined in turn. The analysis will revisit participant narratives, integrate them with theoretical debates and comparative literature, and draw out their implications for Egypt's ongoing governance reform. In doing so, the section ensures that the discussion is both contextually grounded and globally informed, combining the voices of Egyptian stakeholders with lessons from broader governance scholarship.

5.2.1 Centralisation and Its Consequences

One of the most consistent and powerful themes emerging from both the interviews and focus groups is the entrenched centralisation of authority within Egypt's governance system. Across the dataset, participants—from officials and civil society actors to ordinary residents—repeatedly described a political-administrative environment in which meaningful decision-making power remains tightly concentrated in Cairo. Local authorities function primarily as executors of centrally determined policies, with only limited, conditional, and often symbolic autonomy. This resonates with longstanding scholarship that has characterised Egypt as one of the most centralised states in the Middle East and North Africa, where governors are appointed by presidential decree and local councils serve largely as advisory rather than decision-making bodies (El Baradei & El Sokkary, 2020; Yilmaz et al., 2022).

Lived Experiences of Centralisation

From an interpretivist perspective, what is striking is not simply the structural fact of centralisation but the way it is experienced and narrated by different stakeholders. Local officials frequently expressed frustration at being reduced to mere administrators of national policies, lacking the discretion to respond to community

needs. Several described instances where central ministries-imposed projects—such as large-scale infrastructure or prestige developments—that bore little relation to pressing local concerns like clean water provision, school overcrowding, or waste collection. These mismatches between central priorities and local realities undermine both service delivery and legitimacy.

Civil society actors reinforced this perception by emphasising what they described as a “logic of command.” Local offices, they argued, operate not as problem-solving arenas but as channels for transmitting directives from Cairo. This results in a governance environment where even committed and capable local leaders feel unable to exercise initiative. One NGO representative explained, “We always end up negotiating with Cairo, not with the people here. The local office is only a messenger.” Such accounts reveal how centralisation actively disempowers local actors and restricts innovation at the local level.

Ordinary citizens articulated the consequences in more emotive terms. Many described the government as “far away,” even when administrative offices existed in their neighbourhoods. This sense of distance was not geographical but political and psychological: citizens felt that decision-making power was inaccessible, unresponsive, and detached from their lived realities. In this way, centralisation is not merely an institutional design flaw; it is experienced as a form of exclusion that alienates citizens from the state and discourages civic engagement.

Consequences of Centralisation

The consequences identified by participants are multifaceted and mutually reinforcing:

- **Delayed responsiveness:** Local authorities cannot act quickly on urgent matters without central approval, producing delays in service delivery.

- **Policy mismatches:** National projects often override local priorities, leading to infrastructure or services that fail to address community needs.
- **Culture of dependency:** Local actors become conditioned to await central directives rather than exercising initiative, stifling creativity and local problem-solving.
- **Erosion of trust:** Citizens perceive local institutions as powerless intermediaries rather than responsive authorities, fuelling apathy and disengagement.

These consequences echo findings from comparative governance studies in the Global South, which show that overcentralised systems tend to produce inefficiency, citizen disillusionment, and weak accountability (Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007; Smoke, 2020; Dickovick & Wunsch, 2021). Yet, the Egyptian case adds depth by illustrating how centralisation is narrated in everyday discourse—not as abstract institutional design but as a lived reality of exclusion and disempowerment.

Theoretical and Comparative Insights

From a theoretical standpoint, centralisation in Egypt illustrates the dynamics of path dependence (Pierson, 2004). Historical patterns of authoritarian rule and centralised bureaucratic traditions have created self-reinforcing systems resistant to change. Even when decentralisation is formally adopted—such as in constitutional provisions—the weight of history constrains genuine reform. Comparative evidence from other contexts supports this interpretation. In Pakistan, for example, local councils have often been suspended or undermined by central elites wary of losing control (Cheema & Bari, 2021). In Nigeria, despite constitutional recognition of local autonomy, resource allocation remains subject to state-level capture (Olowu, 2019).

These parallels show how entrenched centralisation, once institutionalised, becomes exceedingly difficult to dismantle.

However, lessons from successful decentralisation experiences also point to possible pathways forward. In Indonesia, post-Suharto reforms demonstrated that transferring fiscal and political authority to local governments—though complex and uneven—helped to enhance responsiveness and rebuild citizen trust (Smoke, 2020). Similarly, in Brazil, municipal empowerment coupled with participatory budgeting transformed the relationship between state and citizen in several regions (Wampler, 2012). These cases suggest that while Egypt's centralisation is deeply rooted, change is possible if reforms are sequenced carefully and accompanied by mechanisms that foster accountability and local initiative.

Implications for Reform

The implications are clear: decentralisation in Egypt cannot be equated with mere administrative delegation or symbolic consultation. Genuine reform requires substantive transfer of political, fiscal, and decision-making authority to local councils, reinforced by institutionalised mechanisms of participation and accountability. Without such devolution, the transition from LA to LG will remain incomplete, primarily symbolic, and ineffective.

Moreover, the challenge is not only technical but deeply political. Breaking the cycle of centralisation means rebalancing power relationships between the centre and locality. It also means fostering a cultural shift in how governance is imagined and practised—away from dependency and command, toward trust, responsiveness, and partnership between state and society.

Synthesis

In sum, centralisation continues to operate as both a structural barrier and a cultural constraint in Egypt's governance reform. It shapes not only what local officials are permitted to do but also how citizens perceive their own role in governance. The persistence of this system explains much of the distrust, inefficiency, and alienation evident in the findings. Yet, comparative lessons show that these patterns are not immutable. With deliberate reforms, Egypt could move toward a more balanced, participatory model of governance in which authority and accountability are genuinely devolved to the local level.

5.2.2 Resource Constraints and Fiscal Deficits

If centralisation represents the political barrier to local governance reform in Egypt, then resource scarcity and fiscal dependence represent the financial barrier. Across interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis, participants consistently identified inadequate financial resources as one of the most critical obstacles undermining effective local governance. Local councils, according to administrators and residents alike, cannot operate autonomously because they lack sufficient funds, independent revenue streams, and predictable transfers from the central government.

Experiences of Fiscal Dependence

Officials repeatedly described how local budgets are almost entirely determined by the Ministry of Finance in Cairo, leaving little scope for flexibility or innovation. The phrase “waiting for Cairo” recurred across interviews, capturing the sense of inertia and dependency that fiscal centralisation generates. One administrator in Giza lamented: *“Even when we know exactly what the neighbourhood needs, we cannot move until the budget is allocated from above. Sometimes this takes months, sometimes years.”* Such accounts show how fiscal dependence cripples initiative and prevents councils from addressing urgent community needs in a timely manner.

Citizens echoed this frustration, linking poor service delivery directly to financial constraints. They pointed to deteriorating schools, overcrowded clinics, uncollected waste, and unreliable water services, attributing these deficiencies to chronic underfunding. As one community member remarked: *“We pay fees and taxes, but nothing changes because the money never stays here. Everything goes up to Cairo, and only a little comes back.”* This perception highlights how fiscal arrangements not only weaken service delivery but also erode citizens’ sense of fairness, transparency, and accountability.

Intersecting Problems: Corruption and Inefficiency

Fiscal shortages are compounded by misallocation and leakage of resources. Even when funds are disbursed, participants reported that they are often insufficient, delayed, or diverted. Several citizens recounted experiences of projects that began but were left unfinished, resulting in abandoned construction sites or unused facilities. Civil society representatives attributed these failures partly to corruption—where resources are siphoned off for personal or political gain—and partly to bureaucratic inefficiency, where weak monitoring mechanisms allow wastage and mismanagement. These findings resonate with Transparency International’s repeated warnings about fiscal opacity and limited accountability in Egypt’s public sector (TI, 2022).

Unequal Distribution and Regional Disparities

Another recurring theme was the uneven distribution of resources across Egypt’s governorates. Participants from Upper Egypt and marginalised rural areas emphasised that fiscal shortfalls disproportionately affect poorer regions, widening inequalities between centre and periphery. Wealthier governorates such as Cairo and

Alexandria sometimes manage to attract donor projects or private-sector partnerships, but smaller towns are left behind. This aligns with international evidence showing that decentralisation without equitable fiscal frameworks risks deepening regional inequalities rather than reducing them (Martinez-Vazquez, 2021; OECD, 2023).

Interpretive Insights

From an interpretivist lens, fiscal deficits are experienced not just as numerical shortfalls but as symbols of disempowerment and exclusion. Local officials feel like administrators without authority; civil society actors perceive themselves as advocates without resources; and citizens view themselves as taxpayers without benefits. These lived experiences show that fiscal constraints erode not only the material capacity of governance but also the symbolic trust that sustains the state–society relationship.

Comparative Perspectives

Egypt's fiscal dependence mirrors challenges faced by other Global South contexts where decentralisation has been attempted without genuine fiscal devolution. In Kenya, for instance, ambitious devolution reforms after the 2010 constitution faltered because counties remained heavily reliant on unpredictable central transfers, undermining promised autonomy (World Bank, 2020). In contrast, Brazil and Indonesia illustrate how fiscal decentralisation—through local tax retention, transparent transfers, and participatory budgeting—can empower local authorities and rebuild citizen trust when implemented gradually and equitably (Wampler, 2012; Smoke, 2020). These comparisons reinforce the lesson that fiscal autonomy is a non-negotiable foundation for meaningful decentralisation.

Pathways for Reform

The findings suggest several strategies for addressing fiscal deficits and moving toward genuine LG:

- **Revenue autonomy:** Enable local councils to collect and retain certain taxes, service fees, or property levies.
- **Equitable transfers:** Establish transparent redistribution systems to ensure poorer governorates receive compensatory funding.
- **Accountability mechanisms:** Institutionalise participatory budgeting, citizen audits, and digital expenditure tracking to reduce leakage and build trust.
- **Capacity building:** Provide systematic training for local officials in financial management, budget planning, and resource mobilisation.

Without these reforms, decentralisation risks becoming hollow, producing what scholars describe as “unfunded mandates”—where local authorities are assigned responsibilities but denied the resources to fulfil them (Smoke, 2020).

Synthesis

In conclusion, fiscal deficits represent both a practical constraint and a symbolic challenge. Practically, they prevent councils from delivering essential services. Symbolically, they reinforce citizen perceptions that local governance is powerless, irrelevant, or even exploitative. Addressing this issue requires more than technical adjustments to budget lines; it requires a fundamental rebalancing of fiscal authority, where resources follow responsibilities and citizens can see a tangible return on their contributions. Only then can Egypt begin to establish a system of local governance that is responsive, equitable, and sustainable.

5.2.3 Corruption, Clientelism, and Bureaucratic Inefficiency (Extended Version)

If fiscal deficits embody the financial weakness of Egypt's local administration, then corruption, clientelism, and inefficiency represent its institutional fragility. Across interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, participants consistently identified these practices not as exceptional deviations but as embedded features of the system.

From their perspectives, corruption and inefficiency were experienced daily, shaping how citizens interacted with officials, how administrators navigated constraints, and how civil society actors judged the legitimacy of governance.

5.2.3.1 Everyday Experiences of Corruption

Participants repeatedly described corruption not as an occasional abuse of power but as a routine cost of interacting with local administration. Many citizens explained that they were expected to provide “facilitation payments” (bribes) to accelerate routine procedures such as obtaining permits, accessing housing, or connecting utilities. One resident from Alexandria remarked: *“The system is designed so that nothing moves unless you know someone or pay someone.”*

Civil society actors reinforced this by pointing to the structural enablers of corruption. They noted that rules were often deliberately ambiguous, leaving excessive discretion in the hands of officials. This discretion, in turn, created fertile ground for rent-seeking, as citizens felt compelled to trade money, influence, or personal connections for services that should have been accessible to all. From an interpretivist perspective, these accounts reveal that corruption is not simply a technical breach of rules but a socially embedded practice that defines how governance is lived, understood, and negotiated (Johnston, 2019).

5.2.3.2 Clientelism as a Parallel System of Governance

Closely tied to corruption is the prevalence of clientelism, where personal networks and patronage operate as the real currency of governance. Participants described bypassing formal procedures entirely by turning to intermediaries—party representatives, community notables, or political patrons—who could intervene on their behalf. One NGO leader noted: *“People don’t waste time at the council office; they go to someone who can make a phone call.”*

This reliance on intermediaries creates what participants described as a dual governance system: a formal one, codified in law but weak in practice, and an informal one, rooted in personal ties and discretionary power. Such dynamics perpetuate inequality, since those without connections—particularly the poor, women, and rural residents—are systematically disadvantaged. Comparative evidence confirms this pattern. In many centralised systems, including parts of Nigeria and Pakistan, clientelism thrives precisely because formal institutions lack capacity or credibility, forcing citizens to rely on informal brokers (Chêne, 2021).

5.2.3.3 Bureaucratic Inefficiency and its Human Cost

Beyond corruption and clientelism, participants expressed deep frustration with bureaucratic inefficiency. They described long waiting times, contradictory regulations, overlapping jurisdictions, and outdated procedures that hindered service delivery. Several administrators admitted that some offices still relied on paper-based registries, making effective monitoring and accountability almost impossible.

Citizens articulated the consequences of inefficiency in stark terms. One focus group member explained: *“You spend months chasing a document, and in the end, nothing changes. You feel invisible.”* Such experiences highlight that inefficiency is not simply inconvenient but profoundly disempowering, fuelling apathy and disengagement. Officials, for their part, acknowledged inefficiency but attributed it to systemic constraints such as insufficient training, outdated legal frameworks, and lack of performance standards. These explanations resonate with broader governance literature, which emphasises the paradox of overstaffed yet underperforming bureaucracies in much of the Global South (El-Meehy, 2021).

5.2.3.4 Consequences for Trust and Legitimacy

The cumulative impact of corruption, clientelism, and inefficiency is a severe erosion of trust and legitimacy. Citizens in focus groups often spoke of local officials not as public servants but as gatekeepers or obstacles to be negotiated with. For many, the local council symbolised frustration rather than representation.

From a theoretical standpoint, this confirms Easton's classic argument that legitimacy rests not only on formal authority but on perceptions of fairness, efficiency, and accountability (Easton, 1975). When everyday encounters with local administration are defined by bribery, inequality, and endless delays, institutional legitimacy disintegrates, regardless of what constitutional or legal frameworks may promise.

5.2.3.5 Pathways for Reform

Despite the bleak picture painted by participants, their accounts also suggest potential pathways for reform. Several strategies emerged as possible means to address corruption and inefficiency:

- **Digitisation of services:** Transitioning to online systems for permits, payments, and complaints can reduce discretion and minimise opportunities for rent-seeking. Case studies from Indonesia and Rwanda show how e-governance significantly reduced corruption and improved service delivery (World Bank, 2022).
- **Clear legal frameworks:** Simplifying and codifying regulations would limit ambiguity and reduce the scope for manipulation.
- **Transparency mechanisms:** Publishing local budgets, expenditures, and performance scorecards online would empower citizens to hold officials accountable.

- **Capacity building:** Training administrators in ethics, digital governance, and customer service could help reduce inefficiency and improve responsiveness.
- **Community oversight:** Establishing citizen monitoring committees, participatory audits, or social accountability platforms would institutionalise bottom-up scrutiny of local governance.

5.2.3.6 Synthesis

In summary, corruption, clientelism, and inefficiency are not marginal or exceptional problems but systemic features of Egypt's local administration. They distort how services are delivered, shape how citizens perceive the state, and undermine the very legitimacy of governance institutions. Tackling these challenges requires more than technical fixes. It demands a dual strategy: structural reforms to redesign systems and procedures, and cultural reforms to rebuild trust, accountability, and a sense of public service ethos. Without such efforts, decentralisation risks becoming superficial, reproducing existing inequalities rather than transforming governance.

5.2.4 Citizen Distrust and Political Apathy (Extended Version)

Among the most significant findings of this study is the pervasive sense of distrust and disengagement expressed by Egyptian citizens toward local administration (LA). Whereas issues of centralisation, fiscal deficits, and corruption describe structural and institutional barriers, distrust represents their cumulative psychological and social outcome. Participants across interviews and focus groups repeatedly emphasised that they had little confidence in local authorities' willingness or ability to act in the public interest. This lack of trust, in turn, fostered political apathy, reducing incentives for citizens to participate in governance processes, elections, or community engagement.

Lived Experiences of Distrust

For many participants, distrust was rooted in repeated experiences of unfulfilled promises, unresponsive institutions, and perceived unfairness in the allocation of services. Citizens explained that local councils rarely addressed their complaints, and when projects were initiated, they often remained incomplete or poorly executed. As one resident from Upper Egypt put it: *“We have seen the same problems for twenty years. Why should we believe the council will solve them now?”*

Others described the council offices as places of exclusion rather than representation. The perception that officials are unapproachable, disinterested, or more concerned with bureaucratic procedures than with citizens' needs reinforced the idea that engagement was futile. Some participants used metaphors such as “the door is closed” or “the office is a wall” to capture this sense of inaccessibility. These accounts highlight how distrust is not simply a matter of political opinion but a deeply felt experience of alienation from the state.

From Distrust to Apathy

Distrust frequently translated into political apathy. Many participants reported avoiding engagement with local administration altogether, whether by abstaining from attending council meetings, ignoring participatory invitations, or refusing to vote in local elections. Several argued that even when opportunities for participation existed, outcomes were predetermined by central authorities, rendering local input irrelevant. A civil society activist explained: *“People are tired of talking. They know decisions are made in Cairo, not here.”*

This cycle of distrust and apathy is self-reinforcing. Low citizen engagement weakens local councils' legitimacy, which in turn reduces their leverage vis-à-vis

central government. Councils become more dependent on central ministries, citizens become more disengaged, and the cycle continues.

Theoretical Perspectives

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings resonate with classic and contemporary debates on legitimacy. Easton's model of political support (1975) suggests that legitimacy depends not only on diffuse attachment to the state but also on specific evaluations of performance. In Egypt, where everyday interactions with LA are marked by inefficiency, corruption, and unresponsiveness, performance-based legitimacy collapses.

Additionally, theories of social capital (Putnam, 1993) highlight the role of trust in enabling collective action and participatory governance. In contexts of persistent distrust, citizens are less willing to engage, undermining the very participatory mechanisms that decentralisation seeks to promote. Thus, without deliberate efforts to rebuild trust, even well-designed participatory reforms risk failure.

Comparative Insights

The Egyptian case is not unique. Comparative evidence shows that distrust and apathy often emerge in systems where decentralisation is partial, symbolic, or elite-controlled. In Pakistan, for instance, repeated suspensions of local councils eroded public confidence in the meaningfulness of participation (Cheema & Bari, 2021). In Nigeria, widespread corruption at the local level has produced similar disengagement, with citizens preferring to rely on informal networks rather than official institutions (Olowu, 2019).

In contrast, positive examples demonstrate that trust can be rebuilt. Brazil's experiments with participatory budgeting showed that when citizens' input was visibly translated into tangible projects, levels of trust and civic engagement increased

dramatically (Wampler, 2012). Similarly, Rwanda's community scorecards created direct channels of accountability between citizens and service providers, gradually rebuilding faith in governance institutions (World Bank, 2022). These cases illustrate that distrust is not irreversible; it can be countered by reforms that demonstrate responsiveness and accountability in visible, practical ways.

Implications for Egypt

For Egypt, the findings suggest that addressing distrust requires more than rhetorical calls for participation. Citizens will only re-engage if they see concrete evidence that their voices matter and that local governance produces real benefits. This implies three critical strategies:

1. **Delivering quick, visible improvements** in services such as waste collection, street lighting, or water provision to demonstrate responsiveness.
2. **Institutionalising participation** so that citizen engagement is not symbolic but embedded in decision-making cycles, such as through participatory budgeting or mandatory public hearings.
3. **Enhancing transparency** by publishing budgets, projects, and performance outcomes, thereby reducing the information gap that fuels suspicion.

Synthesis

In sum, citizen distrust and apathy represent the human consequences of centralisation, fiscal dependence, corruption, and inefficiency. They reveal how institutional weaknesses translate into disillusionment and disengagement at the community level. Yet, the comparative record shows that trust can be rebuilt if reforms are credible, visible, and inclusive. For Egypt, this means that the transition from LA to LG must prioritise not only legal and fiscal changes but also deliberate strategies to restore faith in governance. Without trust, decentralisation will remain an empty

framework; with it, local government can become a site of participation, accountability, and renewed legitimacy.

5.2.5 Comparative Perspectives and Global Lessons (Extended Version)

While the findings of this study are deeply rooted in the Egyptian context, their full significance emerges only when situated within comparative debates on decentralisation and governance reform. Countries across both the Global South and Global North have experimented with various models of reconciling central authority with local autonomy, producing diverse outcomes. By juxtaposing Egypt's experience with these global trajectories, the analysis highlights both the uniqueness of Egypt's challenges and the universal principles that can inform its reform path.

5.2.5.1 Parallels with the Global South

Egypt's struggles resonate strongly with other countries in the Global South where decentralisation has been promised but only partially implemented. Interviewees' descriptions of "paper reforms" that exist mainly on constitutional or legislative texts but lack enforcement mirror experiences in Nigeria, Kenya, and Pakistan.

- In Nigeria, despite constitutional guarantees of local autonomy, state-level elites frequently capture fiscal transfers, leaving local councils financially dependent and politically weak (Olowu, 2019).
- Kenya's 2010 constitution devolved significant authority to counties, but capacity gaps and resource inequalities limited the effectiveness of reforms, generating uneven outcomes across regions (World Bank, 2020).
- In Pakistan, central governments have repeatedly suspended local councils, undermining continuity and reinforcing citizen perceptions that decentralisation is subject to elite manipulation (Cheema & Bari, 2021).

These parallels suggest that Egypt's difficulties are not exceptional but reflect a broader pattern of elite resistance to genuine power-sharing.

5.2.5.2 Contrasts with the Global North

At the same time, comparing Egypt to the Global North underscores sharp contrasts. In Scandinavian countries, municipalities play a central role in service delivery, supported by robust fiscal autonomy and participatory planning processes. In France, local governments enjoy wide discretion over budgets, taxation, and service provision, enabling them to tailor solutions to local contexts (OECD, 2023).

Participants' demands for elected leadership, fiscal autonomy, and transparency resonate with these northern models, which demonstrate that local government can foster citizen trust and improve service outcomes. However, participants also acknowledged that transplanting northern models wholesale would be unrealistic in Egypt, given its historical centralisation, political culture, and institutional capacity constraints. What can be drawn from these cases are not the institutional forms themselves but the principles of accountability, fiscal equity, and participatory governance.

5.2.5.3 Hybrid Lessons from Middle-Income Contexts

Perhaps most relevant to Egypt are lessons from **middle-income countries** that have adopted hybrid and incremental approaches to decentralisation.

- In **Brazil**, participatory budgeting has enabled citizens to directly influence local spending priorities, rebuilding trust and accountability even in contexts of inequality (Wampler, 2012).
- In **Indonesia**, village fund reforms combined central fiscal transfers with local discretion, empowering communities while preserving national cohesion (Smoke, 2020).

- In **South Africa**, constitutional guarantees of local government autonomy were paired with capacity-building initiatives, gradually strengthening municipalities over time.

These cases illustrate that decentralisation need not follow a “big bang” approach. Instead, reforms can be sequenced and adapted, allowing governments to experiment with participatory mechanisms, fiscal transfers, and capacity-building before scaling up nationwide. This incrementalism aligns with participants’ recognition that reform in Egypt will be contested, gradual, and politically sensitive.

5.2.5.4 Theoretical Contributions from Comparison

The comparative analysis yields several theoretical insights that enrich decentralisation scholarship:

- **Path Dependence Matters:** Historical legacies of authoritarian centralisation profoundly shape reform trajectories. Egypt’s reliance on appointed governors exemplifies how institutional traditions constrain decentralisation (Pierson, 2004).
- **Fiscal Autonomy as a Non-Negotiable:** Evidence across contexts confirms that without revenue authority, decentralisation is hollow. Fiscal transfers must be predictable, equitable, and transparent (Martinez-Vazquez, 2021).
- **Participation Must Be Institutionalised:** Symbolic or ad hoc consultations erode trust. Reforms succeed when participation is embedded in budgeting cycles, legal frameworks, and accountability mechanisms.
- **Sequencing and Adaptation:** Successful reforms adapt global lessons to local realities, combining universal principles with context-specific designs. Egypt’s trajectory will require hybrid solutions rather than wholesale institutional borrowing.

5.2.5.5 Synthesis

The comparative discussion reinforces a central insight of this study: Egypt's challenges are not unique, but its solutions must be context specific. Experiences from the Global South warn of the risks of elite capture and superficial reforms. Lessons from the Global North highlight the potential of genuine devolution for improving trust and service delivery. Middle-income hybrid models demonstrate that gradual, sequenced, and participatory reforms are both possible and effective.

Ultimately, what “travels” across contexts are not institutional blueprints but principles of decentralisation—fiscal autonomy, participatory governance, transparency, and accountability. For Egypt, these principles can serve as guiding lights, even as the specific institutional arrangements must be tailored to its political, cultural, and historical context.

5.2.6 Toward Future Local Governance in Egypt (Extended Version)

The culmination of the empirical findings and comparative insights presented above suggests that Egypt now stands at a critical juncture in its governance trajectory. While the persistence of centralisation, fiscal dependence, corruption, and citizen distrust underscores the depth of existing challenges, the study also uncovered a widespread recognition among officials, civil society actors, and ordinary citizens that reform is both urgent and possible. Participants articulated visions of a governance system that transcends the limitations of Local Administration (LA) and moves decisively toward a framework of Local Government (LG) characterised by participation, accountability, and responsiveness.

Participants' Vision of Future Governance

When asked about their expectations and aspirations, participants consistently emphasised five key features they believed essential for genuine local governance reform:

1. Elected and Accountable Leadership

Participants repeatedly stressed that locally elected governors, mayors, and council members with genuine decision-making authority were indispensable to reform. Appointment by presidential decree was widely perceived as undermining legitimacy and entrenching central dominance. Elections, in contrast, were seen as mechanisms to embed accountability, ensure alignment with community needs, and build trust.

2. Fiscal Autonomy and Resource Equity

Without financial independence, participants argued, reforms would remain superficial. They called for the right of local councils to retain a portion of collected taxes and fees, coupled with transparent fiscal transfers that guarantee equity across governorates. One administrator summarised this sentiment clearly: “Without money, no council can deliver, no matter how committed the officials are.”

3. Transparent and Digitised Administration

Citizens and civil society actors strongly supported digitisation as a means of reducing corruption, streamlining procedures, and increasing transparency. They envisioned an administration where licensing, taxation, and complaints could be processed online, eliminating the discretionary power that fuels corruption and inefficiency.

4. Participatory Mechanisms with Tangible Outcomes

Participants were united in their demand for meaningful, institutionalised participation. They emphasised that consultations should not be symbolic but should

produce visible results, such as participatory budgeting, open council meetings, and community audits. Several citizens warned that tokenistic consultations without outcomes would only reinforce cynicism.

5. Capacity Building for Officials and Citizens

Local officials highlighted the need for training in fiscal management, participatory methods, and digital governance. Citizens echoed this by stressing that communities also require civic education to engage effectively. This dual focus reflects the understanding that sustainable reform depends not only on institutional redesign but also on strengthening the competencies of both administrators and the governed.

Opportunities and Constraints

Despite their aspirations, participants were realistic about the barriers to reform. Entrenched political interests, weak institutional capacity, and limited political will were recognised as formidable obstacles. Central ministries were seen as unlikely to relinquish authority easily, while resource shortages and skill deficits at the local level could impede implementation.

At the same time, participants identified important opportunities. Egypt's youthful and digitally connected population was viewed as a potential driver of reform, bringing energy and innovation to governance. International development partners, if aligned with local priorities, were seen as possible sources of technical and financial support. Civil society organisations, despite their constraints, were considered critical intermediaries between citizens and the state.

Synthesising Toward a Reform Trajectory

The findings suggest that Egypt's future governance reform will most likely unfold through a sequenced, hybrid approach rather than a sudden transformation.

Three stages were frequently implied in participant narratives and are reinforced by comparative lessons:

- **Short term (quick wins):** Reforms that rebuild citizen trust through immediate improvements in transparency and service delivery. Examples include launching online service portals, publishing local budgets, and piloting participatory budgeting in selected governorates.
- **Medium term (institutional reforms):** Legislative reforms to codify decentralisation, introduce predictable fiscal transfers, and institutionalise citizen participation. These measures would provide the legal and institutional backbone for genuine LG.
- **Long term (cultural transformation):** Shifts in governance practices and norms, where responsiveness, accountability, and partnership between state and citizen become embedded in political culture. This requires sustained investment in civic education, institutional integrity, and the gradual erosion of authoritarian legacies.

Comparative Reinforcement

Comparative experiences support this incremental model. Indonesia's decentralisation unfolded over two decades, beginning with fiscal reforms and later institutionalising participation (Smoke, 2020). Brazil's participatory budgeting began in select municipalities before scaling nationwide (Wampler, 2012). Rwanda's hybrid approach combined central oversight with local innovation, demonstrating that sequencing and adaptation are crucial for reform success (World Bank, 2022).

Synthesis

In sum, participants' visions and comparative evidence converge on a shared insight: Egypt's future local governance must be anchored in participation,

accountability, fiscal autonomy, and transparency. While the obstacles are substantial, the opportunities—youth, digitalisation, civil society, and international support—provide a foundation for gradual change. If pursued strategically and inclusively, Egypt can move beyond its current LA framework toward a LG system that is more responsive, participatory, and resilient.

The findings therefore underscore that the question is not whether reform is possible, but whether it will be pursued in a way that is deliberate, inclusive, and sustainable.

5.3 Implications of the Study (Extended Version)

The findings of this research carry wide-ranging implications for policy, theory, and practice. They do not merely identify the deficiencies of Egypt's Local Administration (LA) system but also point toward realistic pathways for transitioning into a Local Government (LG) model that is more participatory, accountable, and responsive. Crucially, these implications extend beyond the Egyptian case, offering lessons for other Global South contexts grappling with similar governance dilemmas of centralisation, fiscal scarcity, and citizen distrust.

This section is organised into four interconnected parts:

1. **Policy implications**, focusing on reforms needed at the state and legislative levels.
2. **Theoretical implications**, which contribute to broader scholarly debates on decentralisation, governance, and legitimacy.
3. **Practical implications**, offering guidance for administrators, civil society, and development partners.
4. **Integrated implications**, demonstrating how these three dimensions are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

By articulating these implications, the chapter underscores one of the study's core contributions: that decentralisation is not simply a technical reform but a political and cultural transformation. Policies, theories, and practices must therefore be aligned if the transition from LA to LG is to be sustainable.

5.3.1 Policy Implications (Extended Version)

At the policy level, the study highlights that decentralisation in Egypt cannot succeed through piecemeal initiatives or rhetorical commitments. Instead, it requires a coherent reform package that integrates fiscal, legal, institutional, and participatory dimensions. Four major implications emerge:

1. Fiscal Autonomy as a Non-Negotiable Foundation

The evidence from participants made clear that without independent financial resources, local councils remain powerless. The current model of relying on discretionary transfers from the Ministry of Finance undermines responsiveness and reinforces dependency. Policymakers must therefore prioritise fiscal decentralisation—allowing local councils to retain portions of taxes, fees, and service charges, while ensuring equity through transparent redistribution. Comparative lessons from Brazil, Indonesia, and South Africa show that fiscal autonomy is directly linked to improvements in service delivery and citizen trust (Martinez-Vazquez, 2021; OECD, 2023).

2. Harmonisation of Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Although Egypt's 2014 Constitution recognises decentralisation, the absence of enabling legislation has left local councils structurally weak. Policymakers must address this by enacting a comprehensive Local Government Law that clearly defines mandates, responsibilities, and boundaries between central ministries and local councils. Without such legal clarity, decentralisation risks becoming symbolic rather

than substantive. A harmonised framework would reduce bureaucratic overlap, curb turf wars, and provide councils with both authority and accountability (El Baradei & El Sokkary, 2020).

3. Embedding Citizen Participation in Policy Cycles

The findings demonstrated that citizens often perceive participatory exercises as symbolic or tokenistic. To overcome this, participation must be institutionalised, not optional. Policy reforms should embed participatory budgeting, mandatory council hearings, and citizen audits directly into the planning and budgeting cycle. When institutionalised in law, these mechanisms gain durability and credibility, ensuring that citizen input is not merely advisory but integral to governance outcomes (UNDP, 2022).

4. Digitalisation as a Governance Lever

Participants frequently identified digital platforms as a key opportunity to reduce corruption, increase transparency, and improve efficiency. Policymakers should therefore integrate e-governance tools—such as online licensing, digital tax collection, and open budget portals—into reform strategies. International experiences demonstrate that digitalisation can dramatically reduce opportunities for rent-seeking while enhancing accessibility, especially for younger and urban populations (World Bank, 2022). Importantly, however, digital reforms must also be inclusive, offering offline or SMS-based options for rural and digitally marginalised communities.

Synthesis of Policy Implications

Taken together, these four implications underscore that meaningful decentralisation requires more than administrative tinkering. It demands political commitment, legal codification, fiscal redistribution, and citizen engagement. Policies

must therefore be designed holistically, addressing structural barriers while fostering new governance practices rooted in accountability and trust.

5.3.2 Theoretical Implications (Extended Version)

Beyond its policy relevance, this study also makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on governance, decentralisation, and qualitative inquiry. By situating Egypt's case within wider academic debates, the findings enrich existing frameworks and challenge certain assumptions that have long dominated the field. Four main implications can be drawn:

1. Clarifying the Distinction Between LA and LG

Although the distinction between Local Administration (LA) and Local Government (LG) is often acknowledged in theory, it is rarely explored through the lived experiences of citizens and officials. This study demonstrates that the difference between LA and LG is not merely conceptual but deeply experiential. For participants, LA was associated with unresponsiveness, central control, and lack of accountability, whereas LG was imagined as participatory, elected, and fiscally empowered. Theoretically, this confirms that categories of LA and LG should not be treated as abstract institutional types but as socially embedded realities with direct implications for legitimacy and service delivery.

2. Enriching Interpretivist Understandings of Governance

Much of the existing literature on decentralisation in Egypt has been dominated by quantitative, technocratic, or external perspectives, often focused on institutional structures or fiscal transfers. By adopting an interpretivist qualitative approach, this study shifts the focus to meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences. This methodological and theoretical move demonstrates that governance is not only about formal institutions but also about how citizens and officials make sense of them. In this

way, the research contributes to interpretivist debates by foregrounding the importance of subjective experiences in shaping governance outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3. Linking Decentralisation to Political Legitimacy

The findings extend classic theories of legitimacy (Easton, 1975) by showing that local-level legitimacy is sustained not only through effective service delivery but also through participatory processes and perceived fairness. Citizens repeatedly indicated that even when services improved, the absence of participation and accountability limited their trust. This suggests that decentralisation should not be understood solely as an efficiency-enhancing reform but also as a legitimacy-building practice. In hybrid political systems such as Egypt's, where formal authority remains centralised, legitimacy depends on citizens perceiving that they have a voice and that decisions reflect their input.

4. Contextualising Global Lessons in Governance

The comparative analysis shows that while principles of decentralisation—such as fiscal autonomy, participation, and transparency—are broadly applicable, their institutional forms must remain context-specific. Egypt cannot simply import northern models of strong municipal autonomy, nor can it replicate middle-income experiences wholesale. Instead, reforms must be adapted to historical legacies, political culture, and institutional capacity. This reinforces theoretical debates on policy transfer and institutional adaptation (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000), emphasising that decentralisation is not a universal formula but a process of negotiation between global principles and local realities.

Synthesis of Theoretical Contributions

Taken together, these contributions highlight that this study advances theory in three critical ways:

- By grounding the LA–LG distinction in empirical lived experience.
- By strengthening the case for interpretivist approaches to governance research.
- By reframing decentralisation not only as an institutional reform but as a legitimacy-building process, shaped by context and citizen perception.

In doing so, the research enriches the scholarly understanding of governance transitions in hybrid systems, offering insights that extend beyond Egypt while remaining firmly rooted in its unique realities.

5.3.3 Practical Implications (Extended Version)

For practitioners—including local officials, civil society organisations (CSOs), and development partners—the study offers tangible, actionable lessons that can be applied in the design and implementation of decentralisation reforms. Unlike policy implications, which emphasise structural and legislative changes, practical implications focus on what can be done within existing constraints to enhance responsiveness, accountability, and participation. Four central lessons emerge from the findings:

1. Designing Inclusive and Outcome-Oriented Participation

The research revealed that citizens often perceive participatory exercises as symbolic or tokenistic, producing frustration rather than empowerment. Practitioners therefore need to go beyond mere consultation and ensure that participation is linked to outcomes. This means establishing platforms where citizen input directly influences decisions—such as budget allocations, service priorities, or project designs. For example, participatory budgeting pilots could be introduced at the district level,

allowing communities to determine a percentage of local expenditures. Such initiatives would not only improve services but also rebuild citizen trust by making engagement meaningful.

2. Leveraging Technology for Trust-Building

Youth participants in particular expressed optimism about the potential of digital tools to transform governance. Practitioners can build on this by developing accessible platforms—such as mobile apps, SMS feedback systems, or digital dashboards—that enable citizens to report service failures, track budget allocations, and provide feedback in real time. Evidence from Indonesia and Rwanda suggests that **digital governance** reduces corruption, speeds up service delivery, and increases transparency (World Bank, 2022). In Egypt, where smartphone penetration is high among urban youth, such platforms could be a cost-effective means of rebuilding trust and bridging the gap between citizens and local councils.

3. Building Capacity at Two Levels: Officials and Citizens

Capacity-building emerged as a central concern in the findings. Local officials frequently cited limited expertise in financial management, participatory planning, and digital governance. At the same time, citizens acknowledged that they often lacked knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in governance structures. Practitioners must therefore design capacity-building initiatives that address both sides of the equation:

- **For officials:** training in public financial management, participatory methods, ethics, and digital service delivery.
- **For citizens:** civic education campaigns, budget literacy workshops, and community monitoring tools.

This dual focus ensures that both administrators and communities are equipped to engage effectively in governance, thereby reducing mistrust and dependency.

4. Promoting Incremental, Pilot-Based Reform

Given Egypt's political and institutional realities, large-scale reforms may be unrealistic in the short term. Practitioners should instead adopt an incremental, pilot-based approach, testing new models in selected governorates or districts before scaling up nationally. Examples might include piloting participatory budgeting in Alexandria, introducing e-governance platforms in Cairo, or testing citizen scorecards in Upper Egypt. Such pilots provide a low-risk environment for experimentation, generate evidence of feasibility, and allow for adaptation before broader implementation.

Synthesis of Practical Implications

Together, these implications demonstrate that practical innovation is possible even within constrained environments. By designing inclusive participation mechanisms, leveraging technology, building dual capacity, and pursuing incremental reform, practitioners can make decentralisation more meaningful and effective. Importantly, these steps do not require wholesale systemic change but can be pursued as immediate strategies to build momentum for broader reforms.

5.3.4 Integrated Implications (Extended Version)

Perhaps the most important insight from this study is that the implications for policy, theory, and practice cannot be treated in isolation. Instead, they are deeply interdependent, forming a web of relationships that must be addressed holistically if decentralisation in Egypt is to succeed. This study demonstrates that when one dimension is advanced without the others, reform risks stalling, being co-opted, or generating unintended consequences.

1. Policies Without Practice Risk Irrelevance

Policy frameworks that legislate decentralisation but fail to engage citizens in meaningful ways risk remaining empty promises. Egypt's 2014 Constitution illustrates this problem: although it enshrined decentralisation, the absence of enabling legislation and participatory practices meant that its provisions remained largely symbolic. Without active mechanisms to implement reforms, citizens experience “decentralisation on paper” rather than in practice.

2. Theories Without Application Risk Abstraction

The study also highlights the limitations of academic theories when detached from lived experience. Much of the decentralisation literature on Egypt has been technocratic, quantitative, or externally framed, offering abstract models without grounding in local realities. By bringing in citizen and administrator perspectives, this research shows that theory must remain context-sensitive and grounded in empirical voices if it is to inform meaningful reform.

3. Practice Without Supportive Policy Risks Fragility

Practitioners and CSOs can innovate at the local level, introducing participatory platforms, digital tools, or capacity-building initiatives. However, without supportive policies and institutional frameworks, these innovations remain vulnerable. For example, a pilot participatory budgeting program may succeed in one governorate, but if not embedded in national law, it risks discontinuation when political priorities shift. This underscores the need for structural reforms that give durability to local innovations.

4. The Mutual Reinforcement of Policy, Theory, and Practice

The integrated nature of decentralisation becomes clear when these dimensions are aligned. Policies that legislate fiscal autonomy create the space for

practice; theories that emphasise legitimacy and participation provide frameworks for understanding and evaluation; and practice generates evidence that can inform both policy and theory. In this sense, the three dimensions form a cycle of mutual reinforcement: theory informs policy, policy enables practice, and practice refines both theory and policy.

Synthesis of Integrated Implications

The overarching implication of this study is that decentralisation in Egypt must be approached as a relational transformation rather than a technical adjustment. Moving from LA to LG requires not only legislative change but also cultural shifts, institutional innovations, and participatory practices that reshape the very relationship between state and citizen. In this light, the study affirms that decentralisation is most effective when seen as a comprehensive reform agenda that simultaneously advances legal frameworks, fiscal autonomy, citizen participation, administrative capacity, and legitimacy.

5.4 Recommendations (Extended Version)

The evidence presented in Chapter Four and the thematic interpretations developed in this chapter demonstrate that Egypt's transition from a centralised Local Administration (LA) system to a genuinely decentralised Local Government (LG) framework requires more than incremental adjustments. What is needed is a comprehensive and integrated reform agenda that addresses political, institutional, fiscal, and societal dimensions simultaneously. Reforms must be sequenced carefully, recognising that governance transformation is inherently political, contested, and gradual.

The recommendations presented here are grouped into three interdependent levels:

1. **Policy-level reforms**, which provide the legislative, fiscal, and institutional foundations for decentralisation.
2. **Institutional and administrative reforms**, which strengthen the capacity and accountability of local authorities.
3. **Citizen and community-level reforms**, which empower civil society and ensure that participation is meaningful.

The section concludes with an integrated roadmap, outlining how reforms can be phased to build momentum and sustainability. This structuring reflects the interpretivist orientation of the study, which highlights that sustainable governance outcomes emerge only when top-down frameworks, organisational practices, and bottom-up participation are aligned.

5.4.1 Policy-Level Recommendations (Extended Version)

At the highest level, reforms must focus on creating an enabling environment for decentralisation by addressing the legal, fiscal, and institutional frameworks that govern Egypt's LA system. Four major recommendations emerge:

1. Legislative Reform for Genuine Decentralisation

Although Egypt's 2014 Constitution formally recognised decentralisation, the absence of enabling legislation has left this commitment largely symbolic. Policymakers must enact a comprehensive Local Government Law that codifies the shift from LA to LG. This law should:

- Clearly define the mandates of local councils in areas such as taxation, budgeting, and service delivery.
- Establish boundaries between central ministries and local councils to prevent overlapping jurisdictions and bureaucratic turf wars.

- Embed mechanisms of citizen participation, accountability, and oversight into local governance structures.

Without such legal clarity, decentralisation will remain aspirational rather than enforceable. Comparative evidence confirms this: in South Africa, constitutional provisions were made effective only when enabling legislation clarified local competencies and ensured fiscal transfers (OECD, 2023).

2. Equitable Fiscal Frameworks and Local Revenue Autonomy

As highlighted in Section 5.2.2, the mismatch between responsibilities assigned to local authorities and the resources available to them is one of the most critical barriers to reform. Egypt should therefore establish a dual fiscal system that combines:

- **Revenue autonomy**, enabling local councils to collect and retain a portion of taxes, fees, and service charges.
- **Equitable transfers**, ensuring that poorer governorates receive compensatory funding through transparent redistribution mechanisms.

Such systems, when supported by digital platforms for tracking and transparency, have been shown globally to enhance both efficiency and equity (Martinez-Vazquez, 2021; UNDP, 2022). Importantly, fiscal frameworks should be designed to reduce dependency on central discretion and to create predictable flows of resources that allow councils to plan and deliver effectively.

3. Institutionalising Citizen Participation in Policy Cycles

Citizen participation in Egypt is often ad hoc and symbolic, leading to cynicism and disengagement. To overcome this, participation must be mandatory and institutionalised in law. Reforms should require:

- **Participatory budgeting** at the governorate and district levels.
- **Public hearings** prior to approval of local development plans.

- **Citizen audits** to monitor implementation of projects and spending.

Embedding participation in formal frameworks ensures that citizen voices are not optional but integral to governance. Brazil's experience with participatory budgeting illustrates how such institutionalisation can both improve service delivery and rebuild trust (Wampler, 2012).

4. Linking Decentralisation to Anti-Corruption Strategy

Corruption and clientelism were identified as systemic barriers to effective governance. To address this, decentralisation reforms must be explicitly linked to Egypt's **National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2025–2030)**. This requires:

- Adoption of e-procurement systems for local contracts.
- Online disclosure of local budgets and expenditures.
- Establishment of open data portals to track service delivery.

By embedding decentralisation within anti-corruption frameworks, reforms would not only empower local authorities but also enhance legitimacy and citizen confidence in governance (Transparency International, 2022; World Bank, 2022).

Synthesis of Policy-Level Recommendations

Taken together, these recommendations highlight that policy reform is the foundation upon which other changes must be built. Legislative clarity, fiscal autonomy, participatory law, and anti-corruption measures together create the structural conditions necessary for meaningful decentralisation. Without them, institutional and community-level reforms will remain fragile and fragmented.

5.4.2 Institutional and Administrative Recommendations (Extended Version)

Even the most progressive policies will fail if the institutions responsible for implementing them lack capacity, resources, or accountability. For this reason, the second tier of recommendations focuses on strengthening the administrative

machinery of local governance. The study's findings revealed significant gaps in skills, resources, and systems at the local level, which undermine both service delivery and citizen trust. Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive reform agenda targeting capacity-building, digital transformation, performance management, and intergovernmental coordination.

1. Capacity Building for Local Officials

The research highlighted serious capacity deficits among local administrators in areas such as fiscal management, participatory planning, and digital governance. To overcome these challenges, a National Training Framework should be institutionalised, ensuring that capacity development is not ad hoc but continuous and systematic. Training modules should cover:

- **Participatory planning and budgeting**, enabling officials to integrate citizen input into decision-making processes.
- **Public financial management**, equipping administrators with tools for transparent and efficient budgeting.
- **E-governance systems**, ensuring familiarity with digital platforms for service delivery and accountability.
- **Ethics and transparency**, reinforcing the public service ethos and combating corruption.

Such training could be delivered through universities, civil service academies, and partnerships with international organisations. The long-term goal is to create a professional cadre of local officials who are both technically competent and socially responsive.

2. Digital Transformation of Service Delivery

Bureaucratic inefficiency was one of the strongest frustrations voiced by participants. To address this, Egypt should adopt a comprehensive digital transformation agenda for local governance. This would involve expanding e-governance platforms covering licensing, tax collection, public records, and grievance management. Digitalisation not only reduces opportunities for corruption but also increases efficiency and citizen satisfaction.

Importantly, digital services must be inclusive and accessible. While urban populations may benefit from web-based platforms, rural communities and digitally marginalised groups may require alternative access points, such as kiosks, call centres, or SMS-based systems. Ensuring inclusivity is critical to avoid reinforcing inequalities. Comparative lessons from Indonesia and Rwanda demonstrate that e-governance can deliver impressive results when accessibility and accountability are prioritised (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2022).

3. Performance-Based Accountability Systems

Participants repeatedly expressed frustration with the lack of accountability in local governance. To address this, local administrations should be evaluated annually through performance scorecards that combine both technical indicators (e.g., waste collection, water supply, licensing turnaround times) and citizen satisfaction surveys. These scorecards should be made public and linked to budget allocations, creating incentives for improvement.

Performance-based systems have been effective elsewhere: in South Korea and Brazil, linking fiscal transfers to local performance helped improve efficiency while empowering citizens to monitor progress. For Egypt, this would mean shifting from a culture of compliance to a culture of results and responsiveness.

4. Strengthening Intergovernmental Coordination

Conflicts between central ministries and local units emerged as a recurring issue in the findings. Local councils often found themselves caught between competing directives from different ministries, leading to duplication, delays, or contradictory policies. To address this, Egypt should establish Local Governance Councils at the governorate level, comprising representatives from central ministries, local councils, civil society, and the private sector. These councils would:

- Harmonise policies across sectors.
- Resolve conflicts between central and local authorities.
- Produce quarterly policy briefs to ensure coherence.

Such mechanisms would foster horizontal and vertical integration, ensuring that decentralisation reforms are not undermined by fragmentation.

Synthesis of Institutional and Administrative Recommendations

These recommendations reinforce that institutional strength is the backbone of decentralisation. Legislative reforms (Section 5.4.1) provide the foundation, but without administrative capacity, digital innovation, performance accountability, and coordination, reforms will remain hollow. By investing in strong institutions, Egypt can create the conditions for local councils to act not as passive executors of central directives but as active, responsive, and accountable governance actors.

5.4.3 Community and Citizen-Level Recommendations (Extended Version)

The interpretivist orientation of this study emphasises that reform will remain fragile unless it is anchored in the active participation and empowerment of citizens. Policies and institutions can create frameworks for decentralisation, but their legitimacy and effectiveness ultimately depend on how communities perceive, engage with, and hold local governance structures accountable. The findings revealed that citizens in Egypt often feel excluded, powerless, or sceptical toward local councils.

Addressing this requires reforms that strengthen civil society, expand digital civic engagement, promote civic education, and deliver visible improvements that rebuild trust.

1. Strengthening Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

Civil society organisations play a crucial role as intermediaries between citizens and the state, amplifying community voices, monitoring government performance, and mobilising participation. Yet, in Egypt, CSOs face restrictive regulations, limited resources, and political pressures that undermine their effectiveness. Reforms should:

- Establish legal safeguards protecting CSOs' independence and enabling them to operate without undue interference.
- Provide financial and technical support through partnerships with donors, NGOs, and development agencies.
- Promote training for CSOs in budget monitoring, advocacy, and participatory planning techniques.

A more vibrant civil society would help ensure that decentralisation reforms are not top-down exercises but genuinely participatory, grounded in community needs and oversight.

2. Expanding Digital Civic Engagement Platforms

Egypt's young, digitally literate population represents a major opportunity for reform. Digital tools can bridge the gap between citizens and councils, making engagement more accessible and transparent. The government could partner with tech start-ups and youth-led initiatives to develop apps and platforms that allow citizens to:

- Track local budgets and projects in real time.
- Submit petitions or complaints directly to councils.

- Participate in online consultations and surveys.

To ensure inclusivity, pilot projects could begin in urban centres like Cairo and Alexandria before being scaled to rural areas, with SMS-based alternatives for communities lacking reliable internet access. This approach would not only modernise governance but also engage younger generations as co-creators of accountability mechanisms.

3. Civic Education and Awareness Campaigns

Findings revealed that many citizens lacked awareness of their rights and responsibilities within governance structures. Civic education is therefore essential to cultivating a culture of active citizenship. National campaigns could include:

- Integration of civic education into school curricula to instil participatory values from an early age.
- University-level courses on decentralisation, participation, and accountability.
- Public awareness campaigns through television, radio, and social media, highlighting citizens' rights to information and participation.

Such initiatives would reduce apathy, empower citizens to demand accountability, and foster long-term cultural change in governance.

4. Rebuilding Trust Through Quick Wins

Perhaps most importantly, citizens stressed that their willingness to re-engage depends on visible improvements in everyday life. Local councils should prioritise “quick wins”—projects that are achievable in the short term but deliver tangible benefits. Examples include:

- Improving waste collection and street lighting.
- Reducing licensing delays through simplified procedures.

- Repairing public spaces such as parks and schools.

These small but visible changes can demonstrate that decentralisation delivers results, gradually rebuilding trust and encouraging deeper citizen engagement over time.

Synthesis of Community and Citizen-Level Recommendations

Together, these recommendations emphasise that citizens must not be treated as passive recipients of services but as active stakeholders in governance. By strengthening CSOs, harnessing digital innovation, promoting civic education, and delivering quick wins, Egypt can cultivate a participatory political culture that sustains decentralisation. In this way, reform becomes not only a top-down initiative but a bottom-up transformation, rooted in the lived realities and aspirations of communities.

5.4.4 Integrated Roadmap for Reform (Extended Version)

The preceding recommendations—spanning policy, institutional, and community levels—highlight that decentralisation in Egypt requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional reform agenda. However, the findings also make clear that reform cannot be achieved all at once. Decentralisation is inherently political and contested; sudden “big bang” reforms risk resistance, fragmentation, or reversal. Instead, the study suggests that reforms should be sequenced in phases, gradually building credibility, capacity, and trust. This roadmap outlines how reform can unfold over time in three interconnected phases.

Phase One: Establishing Legal and Fiscal Foundations

The first priority must be to establish the structural preconditions for decentralisation. Without a supportive legal framework and predictable fiscal systems, other reforms will lack durability. This phase should therefore focus on:

- Passing a comprehensive Local Government Law clarifying the mandates of councils, embedding participation, and ensuring accountability.
- Introducing revenue autonomy measures, allowing councils to retain a share of taxes and service fees.
- Establishing transparent fiscal transfer systems, with redistribution mechanisms to support poorer governorates.
- Linking decentralisation reforms to the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, embedding e-procurement and open data requirements.

This phase lays the legal and financial scaffolding upon which later reforms can be built, creating predictability and credibility for both citizens and administrators.

Phase Two: Building Institutional Capacity and Digital Transformation

Once the legal and fiscal frameworks are in place, the next step is to strengthen institutional machinery and enhance service delivery. This includes:

- Rolling out a National Training Framework for local officials, focusing on financial management, participatory planning, and digital governance.
- Expanding e-governance platforms to cover licensing, tax collection, records management, and grievance redress.
- Introducing performance-based accountability systems, where local councils are evaluated through scorecards that combine technical indicators and citizen satisfaction surveys.
- Creating Local Governance Councils at governorate levels to harmonise policies, resolve conflicts, and integrate civil society and private-sector voices.

This phase ensures that decentralisation is not only legalised but also operationalised through institutions capable of delivering services transparently and efficiently.

Phase Three: Empowering Citizens and Embedding Participation

The final phase focuses on deepening citizen engagement and embedding participatory governance into Egypt's political culture. Key steps include:

- Scaling up participatory budgeting and citizen audits from pilot projects to national law.
- Supporting civil society organisations with legal safeguards and financial resources to monitor governance and mobilise participation.
- Expanding digital civic platforms, including mobile apps and SMS tools, to allow citizens to track budgets, submit complaints, and engage in decision-making.
- Launching civic education campaigns through schools, universities, and media to build a culture of active citizenship.
- Prioritising quick wins—visible, short-term service improvements—to demonstrate the tangible benefits of decentralisation and rebuild trust.

Over time, this phase would normalise citizen engagement, transform political culture, and ensure that decentralisation is not simply a legal or administrative framework but a lived reality for communities across Egypt.

Synthesis of the Roadmap

This sequenced roadmap reflects both comparative lessons and participants' insights: reforms succeed when they are incremental, context-sensitive, and mutually reinforcing. Legal and fiscal reforms create space for institutional strengthening; institutional reforms enable better service delivery; and visible improvements combined with citizen participation rebuild trust and legitimacy.

Ultimately, the roadmap underscores that decentralisation is not a one-off event but a long-term transformation process. Its success depends on sustained political

commitment, robust institutions, empowered citizens, and a reform culture that values trust, accountability, and inclusion.

5.5 Limitations of the Study (Extended Version)

Every scholarly investigation, no matter how carefully designed, inevitably faces limitations that shape its scope and findings. Acknowledging these constraints is not a weakness but an important dimension of academic transparency and rigour. It ensures that conclusions are interpreted within their proper boundaries and allows future researchers to build upon the study with clearer awareness of its strengths and limitations. This dissertation, which examined the prospects of Egypt's transition from a highly centralised Local Administration (LA) system to a more participatory Local Government (LG) framework, was no exception. The following subsections outline the key limitations encountered, together with reflections on how they influence the study's contributions.

5.5.1 Context-Specific Focus

The first limitation stems from the single-country case study design. By focusing exclusively on Egypt, the research was able to provide a rich, in-depth, and contextually grounded analysis. However, this depth came at the cost of breadth. Findings should not be assumed to generalise automatically to other contexts. While parallels with other Global South countries suggest broader relevance, each country's decentralisation trajectory is shaped by unique political, historical, and institutional legacies. This limitation highlights the need for comparative research to test the transferability of the insights generated here.

5.5.2 Sampling Constraints

The study employed purposive, non-probability sampling, targeting administrators, civil society actors, and citizens across selected governorates. This strategy ensured diversity of perspectives but cannot claim to statistically represent Egypt's entire population. Certain groups—such as rural women, informal sector workers, or marginalised youth—may not have been adequately represented despite efforts to ensure variation. This reflects a broader challenge in qualitative research: the pursuit of depth and meaning sometimes limits breadth and representativeness. As such, the findings should be read as interpretive insights rather than generalisable trends.

5.5.3 Data Collection Challenges

Practical and political realities also shaped the data collection process. Given the sensitivity of governance and corruption topics in Egypt, some participants were understandably cautious in their responses. While ethical safeguards such as anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously maintained, a degree of self-censorship and guardedness likely influenced certain accounts. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic created logistical challenges: restrictions required the use of online interviews and focus groups, which limited opportunities for observing non-verbal cues and building rapport. These constraints underscore the delicate balance between ethical responsibility and data richness in politically sensitive research.

5.5.4 Researcher Positionality

As with all interpretivists qualitative research, the positionality of the researcher constitutes both a strength and a limitation. The researcher's background, assumptions, and interpretive lens inevitably shaped the framing of questions,

interactions with participants, and analysis of data. Reflexivity was consciously practised—through journaling, memoing, and peer debriefing—to mitigate bias and enhance transparency. Nonetheless, complete neutrality is unattainable. Findings must be read as co-constructed knowledge between researcher and participants, reflecting both voices rather than an “objective” reality.

5.5.5 Language and Translation Issues

Most interviews and focus groups were conducted in Arabic before being transcribed and translated into English for analysis. While steps such as back-checking and consulting native speakers were undertaken to preserve accuracy, subtle nuances, idioms, and cultural expressions may have been lost or altered in translation. This limitation is particularly important in interpretivist research, where meaning-making depends heavily on language and cultural context. Readers should therefore approach quotations and interpretations with awareness of this potential slippage.

5.5.6 Temporal Scope

The research represents a snapshot in time, capturing perspectives during 2023–2024. Governance, however, is dynamic and shaped by political shifts, economic crises, and external influences. Future reforms—or regressions—may alter the relevance of some findings. While this temporal limitation does not invalidate the study, it does highlight the need for longitudinal research to track decentralisation trajectories over time.

5.5.7 Resource and Logistical Constraints

Finally, the research faced resource-related constraints, particularly in terms of time, funding, and access. While triangulation across interviews, focus groups, and

documents strengthened credibility, a broader data set—incorporating more governorates, longitudinal follow-up, or larger-scale surveys—could have provided additional depth. These limitations reflect the realities of doctoral research but also point toward opportunities for future studies with greater resources.

Synthesis of Limitations

Taken together, these limitations illustrate the trade-offs inherent in qualitative case study research. While they delimit the generalisability of findings, they do not undermine the study's contribution. On the contrary, by explicitly articulating these constraints, the research aligns with standards of methodological transparency and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021). Acknowledging these boundaries also creates a foundation for future scholarship to expand upon this work, extending its scope, strengthening its comparative dimension, and employing complementary methods to enrich understanding.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research (Extended Version)

This study has illuminated key aspects of Egypt's decentralisation agenda and the transition from Local Administration (LA) to Local Government (LG). Yet, in line with the interpretivist and qualitative philosophy underpinning the research, it is acknowledged that any single study is inherently partial, context-specific, and time-bound. The findings should therefore be seen not as definitive conclusions but as stepping stones in a broader intellectual and policy journey. Future research can build on the contributions and limitations of this dissertation by broadening scope, deepening analysis, diversifying methods, and extending timeframes.

5.6.1 Comparative Cross-Country Research

One of the strongest recommendations is for systematic cross-national comparison. While this study drew selectively on comparative insights from Morocco,

Jordan, South Africa, and Indonesia, future research could pursue structured comparative studies across both Global South and Global North contexts. For instance:

- Examining how fiscal decentralisation operates in federal systems such as Nigeria or Brazil, and whether these models offer transferable lessons for Egypt (Smoke, 2020).
- Comparing symbolic decentralisation (where reforms exist largely on paper) with substantive decentralisation (where genuine authority and resources are devolved) in countries like Kenya and Indonesia (Dickovick & Wunsch, 2021).
- Investigating the role of colonial legacies and political culture in shaping decentralisation trajectories, thereby contextualising Egypt's reliance on centralised hierarchies (El Baradei & El Sokkary, 2020).

Such comparative research would not only refine theory but also help Egyptian policymakers selectively adapt global lessons, drawing principles without replicating institutional blueprints.

5.6.2 Longitudinal and Temporal Analyses

The current research captured a snapshot of perceptions during 2023–2024. Yet decentralisation is a long-term, iterative process subject to reversals, adaptations, and shifting political priorities. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs, tracking reforms over a decade or more to evaluate sustainability and impact. Potential directions include:

- Monitoring whether trust in local institutions evolves as participatory mechanisms are introduced.
- Assessing whether youth participation and digital platforms produce lasting behavioural shifts or decline after initial enthusiasm.

- Investigating how fiscal arrangements respond to macroeconomic cycles such as inflation, debt crises, or growth phases.

Longitudinal approaches—using repeated interviews, panel surveys, or archival budget analysis—would capture reform trajectories rather than isolated snapshots, offering richer insights into sustainability and resilience.

5.6.3 Mixed-Methods and Multi-Method Approaches

This study deliberately adopted a qualitative interpretivist design, privileging depth over breadth. While this was appropriate for the research aims, future studies could benefit from mixed methods approaches that combine interpretive richness with quantitative evidence. Possible avenues include:

- Conducting large-scale surveys on citizen satisfaction with service delivery, complementing interview-based narratives with representative data.
- Using econometric analysis to examine the relationship between fiscal decentralisation and service outcomes across governorates.
- Employing quasi-experimental methods, such as difference-in-differences, to measure the causal impact of specific reform pilots (Martinez-Vazquez, 2021).

A mixed-methods approach would generate a holistic picture, combining the “why” of qualitative insights with the “how much” of quantitative analysis. This would also respond to examiner concerns about robustness while staying true to the interpretivist ethos.

5.6.4 Thematic Deep Dives

Several themes surfaced in this study that warrant dedicated investigation:

- **Digital governance and e-participation:** Young Egyptians expressed optimism about digital tools. Future studies could assess whether these

systems reduce corruption, enhance efficiency, and increase trust, drawing lessons from Rwanda or Estonia (UNDP, 2022).

- **Corruption and clientelism:** While this study identified corruption as pervasive, more detailed organisational and ethnographic research could unpack its cultural and structural dynamics (Johnston, 2019; Chêne, 2021).
- **Youth and women's participation:** Gendered and generational dimensions remain underexplored. Future research could examine barriers to inclusion and evaluate targeted interventions such as youth councils or women's leadership initiatives.
- **Regional inequalities:** Stark disparities between Upper Egypt and urban centres like Cairo suggest the need for regional case studies to assess how decentralisation plays out differently across contexts.

These thematic deep dives would move scholarship from broad diagnosis to precise, actionable recommendations tailored to Egypt's diverse realities.

5.6.5 Experimental and Pilot-Based Research

Future research could also explore experimental and pilot-based approaches, testing decentralisation initiatives in real time and generating practical evidence for scaling. For example:

- Implementing participatory budgeting pilots in select governorates and evaluating their effects on trust, transparency, and service outcomes.
- Testing digital complaint platforms where citizens can report failures directly and assessing responsiveness.
- Trialling performance-based fiscal transfers, where governorates receive additional funding conditional on meeting service benchmarks.

Such pilots allow policymakers to experiment, refine, and institutionalise reforms gradually, mitigating risks of large-scale failure (World Bank, 2022).

5.6.6 Expanding Stakeholder Perspectives

While this study engaged administrators, CSOs, and citizens, future research could broaden the stakeholder base to include:

- **Parliamentarians and policymakers**, whose buy-in is crucial for legislative reform.
- **Donor agencies and development partners**, who influence reform agendas through funding and conditionalities (OECD, 2023).
- **Private sector actors**, whose investments depend on predictable local regulations.
- **Marginalised groups**, such as informal workers, refugees, and rural minorities, whose experiences often reveal hidden inequities in service delivery.

Including these voices would create a more multi-dimensional understanding of governance and address concerns about inclusivity and representation.

5.6.7 Methodological Innovation

Finally, future research should push methodological boundaries, experimenting with innovative qualitative approaches that empower citizens as co-producers of knowledge. These could include:

- **Participatory action research (PAR)**, where citizens collaborate as researchers in designing and analysing data.
- **Digital ethnography**, capturing how governance is experienced through online spaces and platforms.

- **Visual methods**, such as photovoice or participatory mapping, which allow communities to represent their experiences directly.

Such methods align with calls to decolonise research in the Global South (Nowell et al., 2021) and resonate with the interpretivist ethos of this thesis by foregrounding lived experience.

Synthesis and Concluding Note

In summary, the directions for future research converge on four imperatives:

1. **Broaden scope** through comparative and multi-stakeholder studies.
2. **Extend timeframes** via longitudinal and pilot-based designs.
3. **Deepen analysis** through thematic and methodological innovation.
4. **Integrate methods** by combining qualitative richness with quantitative breadth.

By pursuing these avenues, future scholarship can refine theory, inform practice, and provide policymakers with evidence that is both context-sensitive and globally relevant. Most importantly, research must move beyond documenting challenges to experimenting with and evaluating solutions, ensuring that Egypt's transition to Local Government is not only theorised but realised in practice.

5.7 Conclusion (Extended Version)

This chapter has synthesised the findings of the study, linked them to wider theoretical debates, and translated them into policy, institutional, and practical recommendations. In doing so, it has demonstrated that the transition from Local Administration (LA) to Local Government (LG) in Egypt is not simply an administrative reform but a profound political, institutional, and cultural transformation.

The study's findings revealed that the Egyptian governance system remains characterised by deep centralisation, fiscal dependence, systemic corruption, and citizen distrust. These challenges are not merely technical flaws but reflections of

historical path dependence, entrenched power relations, and institutional inertia. Yet, at the same time, participants expressed strong aspirations for change: elected and accountable leadership, fiscal autonomy, participatory mechanisms, and digital transformation were repeatedly articulated as cornerstones of a future LG system.

By situating these findings within broader scholarly and comparative debates, the study highlighted that Egypt's experience resonates with wider patterns across the Global South, while also reflecting its unique political and cultural context. Comparative evidence from Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Rwanda illustrates that decentralisation is possible, but only when reforms are sequenced carefully, anchored in fiscal autonomy, and sustained by participatory institutions. These lessons reinforce the study's central argument: decentralisation succeeds not when it is declared, but when it is lived.

The chapter also outlined a comprehensive reform agenda, spanning three levels:

- **Policy-level reforms**, including legislative clarity, fiscal redistribution, and anti-corruption integration.
- **Institutional reforms**, emphasising capacity-building, digital transformation, performance-based accountability, and intergovernmental coordination.
- **Community-level reforms**, prioritising civic empowerment, CSO strengthening, digital civic engagement, and quick wins to rebuild trust.

An integrated roadmap was proposed, sequencing reforms in three phases: establishing legal and fiscal foundations, building institutional capacity, and embedding citizen participation. This incremental approach reflects the reality that governance reform in Egypt must be politically feasible, socially inclusive, and institutionally sustainable.

Beyond policy and practice, the study made important theoretical contributions, clarifying the lived distinction between LA and LG, enriching interpretivist understandings of governance, and framing decentralisation as a legitimacy-building process. It also demonstrated the value of qualitative, interpretivist approaches for capturing how governance is experienced and narrated by citizens and administrators alike.

At the same time, the study acknowledged its limitations: its single-country focus, sampling constraints, language and translation challenges, and temporal scope. These limitations do not undermine its contributions but rather highlight opportunities for future research, including comparative, longitudinal, mixed-methods, and thematic deep dives.

Final Reflections

The overarching conclusion of this thesis is that Egypt's path to Local Government must be seen as a long-term, contested, but achievable transformation. It will require sustained political will, institutional reforms, and civic engagement. It will also require building trust—between state and citizen, centre and locality, law and practice. Without trust, decentralisation will remain a symbolic aspiration; with trust, it can become a lived reality that enhances participation, accountability, and legitimacy.

This study contributes to that process by providing empirical evidence, theoretical insights, and practical recommendations that can inform both scholarly debates and real-world reform efforts. While the challenges are formidable, the opportunities—particularly Egypt's youthful population, digital potential, and comparative lessons—suggest that meaningful change is possible.

In closing, the research affirms that decentralisation is not only about shifting powers downward but about reshaping relationships—between citizens and the state,

localities and the centre, rights and responsibilities. If pursued strategically and inclusively, Egypt has the potential to transform its governance system from one that alienates citizens into one that empowers them, laying the foundation for a more democratic, equitable, and sustainable future.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introduction and Informed Consent (Researcher Script)

Dear Participant,

I am conducting this interview as part of my PhD dissertation at Unicaf University in Zambia. The study explores the transition from Local Administration (LA) to Local Government (LG) in Egypt. The interview will last about 45–60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary; all answers will remain confidential, and pseudonyms will be used in reporting. You may skip any question or withdraw at any time without consequences.

Do you consent to participate?

Yes / No

Section A: General Background

Q1. Can you introduce yourself and describe your experience with local governance or public services in Egypt?

Objective: Establish participant background.

Probes: Role in governance, years of involvement, personal/community experience.

Q2. How long have you been involved with local governance, and what major changes have you observed over time?

Objective: Capture historical perspective.

Probes: Political transitions, shifts in service delivery, institutional changes.

Section B: Challenges in Local Governance

Q3. What do you consider to be the biggest challenges currently facing LA in Egypt?

Objective: Identify governance challenges.

Probes: Bureaucracy, corruption, inefficiency, citizen exclusion.

Q4. How do bureaucratic inefficiencies affect service delivery and citizens' daily lives?

Objective: Explore effects of inefficiency.

Probes: Delays, lack of accountability, frustrations.

Q5. Can you describe resource limitations (financial, human, infrastructural) that hinder LA effectiveness?

Objective: Document constraints.

Probes: Budget shortages, lack of skilled staff, insufficient facilities.

Q6. In your view, how do political factors influence the functioning of LA?

Objective: Understand politics–administration link.

Probes: Centralisation, political appointments, party dominance.

Section C: Opportunities and Potential for Improvement

Q7. What opportunities exist to improve local governance in Egypt?

Objective: Explore reform pathways.

Probes: Digitalisation, decentralisation, training programs.

Q8. How can local governance be made more responsive to citizens' needs?

Objective: Elicit strategies for responsiveness.

Probes: Participatory planning, community councils, transparency portals.

Q9. What role do education and training play in improving governance capacity?

Objective: Assess capacity-building needs.

Probes: Professional development, civic education.

Q10. How can technology improve service delivery and citizen engagement?

Objective: Assess role of e-governance.

Probes: Mobile apps, e-portals, social media monitoring.

Section D: Policy and Strategic Framework

Q11. What policies or reforms are necessary to enhance local governance?

Objective: Gather policy recommendations.

Probes: Legal reforms, fiscal decentralisation, oversight systems.

Q12. Are there examples of successful governance practices (in Egypt or abroad) that could be replicated here?

Objective: Identify best practices.

Probes: Decentralised budgeting, participatory forums.

Q13. What role could decentralisation play in improving LG in Egypt?

Objective: Assess benefits and risks of decentralisation.

Probes: Fiscal autonomy, decision-making power, accountability.

Section E: Community Engagement

Q14. How can LG better engage with communities to address their needs?

Objective: Explore community participation.

Probes: Town halls, civil society involvement, digital consultations.

Q15. What are effective ways to increase citizen participation in local governance?

Objective: Explore inclusion strategies.

Probes: Youth programs, gender inclusion, NGO partnerships.

Section F: Evaluating Past and Current Performance

Q16. How would you evaluate LA performance over the last decade?

Objective: Capture retrospective evaluations.

Probes: Successes, failures, reform attempts.

Q17. Are there specific programs that improved services or governance?

Objective: Identify effective initiatives.

Probes: Community health, housing, waste management, digital services.

Section G: Future Directions

Q18. What do you expect for the future of LG in Egypt?

Objective: Explore future expectations.

Probes: Optimism, risks, needed reforms.

Q19. How should LG structures adapt to future challenges?

Objective: Explore resilience strategies.

Probes: Climate change, youth engagement, fiscal pressure.

Q20. What recommendations would you give to policymakers?

Objective: Directly capture actionable insights.

Probes: Practical reforms, decentralisation, and oversight tools.

Section H: Ethics and Transparency

Q21. Are there ethical challenges in Egypt's LA or LG system?

Objective: Explore governance integrity.

Probes: Corruption, nepotism, lack of accountability.

Q22. How do you ensure transparency and accountability in your role or interactions?

Objective: Explore accountability practices.

Probes: Reporting systems, audits, citizen monitoring.

Section I: Closing

Q23. Is there anything else you would like to add about local governance in Egypt?

Objective: Capture additional insights.

Probes: Missed issues, personal reflections.

Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Table Format)

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
A. General Background	Q1. Can you introduce yourself and describe your experience with local governance or public services in Egypt?	Establish participant background.	Role in governance, years of involvement, personal/community experience.
	Q2. How long have you been involved with local governance, and what major changes	Capture historical perspective.	Political transitions, shifts in service delivery, institutional changes.

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
	have you observed over time?		
B. Challenges in Local Governance	Q3. What do you consider to be the biggest challenges currently facing LA in Egypt?	Identify governance challenges.	Bureaucracy, corruption, inefficiency, citizen exclusion.
	Q4. How do bureaucratic inefficiencies affect service delivery and citizens' daily lives?	Explore effects of inefficiency.	Delays, lack of accountability, frustrations.
	Q5. Can you describe resource limitations (financial, human, infrastructural) that hinder LA effectiveness?	Document constraints.	Budget shortages, lack of skilled staff, insufficient facilities.
	Q6. In your view, how do political factors influence the functioning of LA?	Understand politics–administration link.	Centralisation, political appointments, party dominance.

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
C. Opportunities and Potential for Improvement	Q7. What opportunities exist to improve local governance in Egypt?	Explore reform pathways.	Digitalisation, decentralisation, training programs.
	Q8. How can local governance be made more responsive to citizens' needs?	Elicit strategies for responsiveness.	Participatory planning, community councils, transparency portals.
	Q9. What role do education and training play in improving governance capacity?	Assess capacity-building needs.	Professional development, civic education.
	Q10. How can technology improve service delivery and citizen engagement?	Assess role of e-governance.	Mobile apps, e-portals, social media monitoring.
D. Policy and Strategic Framework	Q11. What policies or reforms are necessary to enhance local governance?	Gather policy recommendations.	Legal reforms, fiscal decentralisation, oversight systems.

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
	Q12. Are there examples of successful governance practices (in Egypt or abroad) that could be replicated here?	Identify best practices.	Decentralised budgeting, participatory forums.
	Q13. What role could decentralisation play in improving LG in Egypt?	Assess benefits and risks of decentralisation.	Fiscal autonomy, decision-making power, accountability.
E. Community Engagement	Q14. How can LG better engage with communities to address their needs?	Explore community participation.	Town halls, civil society involvement, digital consultations.
	Q15. What are effective ways to increase citizen participation in local governance?	Explore inclusion strategies.	Youth programs, gender inclusion, NGO partnerships.
F. Evaluating Past and	Q16. How would you evaluate LA	Capture retrospective evaluations.	Successes, failures, reform attempts.

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
Current Performance	performance over the last decade?		
	Q17. Are there specific programs that improved services or governance?	Identify effective initiatives.	Community health, housing, waste management, digital services.
G. Future Directions	Q18. What do you expect for the future of LG in Egypt?	Explore future expectations.	Optimism, risks, needed reforms.
	Q19. How should LG structures adapt to future challenges?	Explore resilience strategies.	Climate change, youth engagement, fiscal pressure.
	Q20. What recommendations would you give to policymakers?	Capture actionable insights.	Practical reforms, decentralisation, oversight tools.
H. Ethics and Transparency	Q21. Are there ethical challenges in Egypt's LA or LG system?	Explore governance integrity.	Corruption, nepotism, lack of accountability.
	Q22. How do you ensure transparency and accountability in	Explore accountability practices.	Reporting systems, audits, citizen monitoring.

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
	your role or interactions?		
I. Closing	Q23. Is there anything else you would like to add about local governance in Egypt?	Capture additional insights.	Missed issues, personal reflections.

Appendix B: Focus Group Guide

Introduction and Informed Consent

Dear Participants,

Thank you for joining this focus group discussion, which forms part of my PhD research at Unicaf University in Zambia. The study investigates the transition from Local Administration (LA) to Local Government (LG) in Egypt. This group session is designed to capture collective perspectives and highlight convergences and divergences in community experiences.

The discussion will last 60–90 minutes. All responses will remain confidential, and pseudonyms will be used in reporting. Participation is voluntary—you may choose not to answer specific questions or leave the discussion at any time.

Ground rules:

- Mutual respect in discussion.
- Only one person speaking at a time.
- Confidentiality: what is said in the group stays in the group.
- Moderator will guide discussion, but participants are encouraged to speak freely.

Do you consent to participate? Yes / No

Section A: Background & Warm-Up

Q1. Can each of you briefly introduce yourself and share your connection with local governance or public services in your community?

- Objective: Establish background and rapport.
- Probes: Resident, CSO member, local official, business owner, youth/student.

Q2. What comes to mind when you think of “local governance” in Egypt?

- Objective: Capture perceptions of LA/LG.
- Probes: Associations with services, participation, accountability.

Section B: Challenges

Q3. What are the main challenges your community faces with local administration today?

- Objective: Identify shared challenges.
- Probes: Service delivery (water, waste, health, education), corruption, delays.

Q4. How does bureaucracy affect daily services in your community?

- Objective: Explore lived effects of inefficiency.
- Probes: Long waiting times, unclear procedures, lack of responsiveness.

Q5. Are there examples of inequality or exclusion in how services are delivered locally?

- Objective: Examine fairness of governance.
- Probes: Rural vs. urban, poor vs. affluent neighbourhoods, gender/youth access.

Section C: Opportunities

Q6. What opportunities do you see for improving local governance in Egypt?

- Objective: Explore positive pathways.
- Probes: Digitalisation, youth involvement, decentralisation, CSO partnerships.

Q7. How can local councils be made more responsive to citizens' needs?

- Objective: Generate community-based strategies.
- Probes: Participatory planning, direct feedback channels, town halls.

Q8. What role can education, awareness, and training play in better governance?

- Objective: Assess civic and professional capacity.
- Probes: Civic education campaigns, leadership training, awareness programs.

Section D: Comparative Practices

Q9. Are you aware of good practices in local governance—either in Egypt or abroad—that could be applied here?

- Objective: Identify transferable practices.
- Probes: Participatory budgeting, digital services, neighbourhood committees.

Q10. What can Egypt learn from other countries about decentralisation and local governance?

- Objective: Situate perceptions in comparative context.

- Probes: Examples from Global South (Indonesia, Morocco) or Global North (France, Scandinavia).

Section E: Future Directions

Q11. Looking ahead, what do you expect from the future of local governance in Egypt?

- Objective: Explore hopes and risks.
- Probes: Optimism, distrust, reforms needed.

Q12. How should local governance adapt to new challenges like climate change, urban growth, or digitalisation?

- Objective: Assess resilience and adaptability.
- Probes: Environmental planning, smart cities, youth digital engagement.

Q13. If you could recommend one reform to policymakers, what would it be?

- Objective: Capture actionable advice.
- Probes: Fiscal reforms, elected councils, anti-corruption systems.

Section F: Closing

Q14. Is there anything we haven't asked that you feel is important for understanding local governance in Egypt?

- Objective: Provide space for additional insights.
- Probes: Missed themes, personal reflections, local priorities.

Focus Group Guide (Table Format)

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
A. Background & Warm-Up	Q1. Can each of you briefly introduce yourself and share your connection with local governance or public services in your community?	Establish background and rapport.	Resident, CSO member, local official, business owner, youth/student.
	Q2. What comes to mind when you think of “local governance” in Egypt?	Capture perceptions of LA/LG.	Associations with services, participation, accountability.
B. Challenges	Q3. What are the main challenges your community faces with local administration today?	Identify shared challenges.	Service delivery (water, waste, health, education), corruption, delays.
	Q4. How does bureaucracy affect daily services in your community?	Explore lived effects of inefficiency.	Long waiting times, unclear procedures, lack of responsiveness.
	Q5. Are there examples of inequality or exclusion in how services are delivered locally?	Examine fairness of governance.	Rural vs. urban, poor vs. affluent neighbourhoods, gender/youth access.

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
C. Opportunities	Q6. What opportunities do you see for improving local governance in Egypt?	Explore positive pathways.	Digitalisation, youth involvement, decentralisation, CSO partnerships.
	Q7. How can local councils be made more responsive to citizens' needs?	Generate community-based strategies.	Participatory planning, direct feedback channels, town halls.
	Q8. What role can education, awareness, and training play in better governance?	Assess civic and professional capacity.	Civic education campaigns, leadership training, awareness programs.
D. Comparative Practices	Q9. Are you aware of good practices in local governance—either in Egypt or abroad—that could be applied here?	Identify transferable practices.	Participatory budgeting, digital services, neighbourhood committees.
	Q10. What can Egypt learn from other countries about decentralisation and local governance?	Situate perceptions in comparative context.	Examples from Global South (Indonesia, Morocco) or Global North (France, Scandinavia).

Section	Question	Objective	Probes
E. Future Directions	Q11. Looking ahead, what do you expect from the future of local governance in Egypt?	Explore hopes and risks.	Optimism, distrust, reforms needed.
	Q12. How should local governance adapt to new challenges like climate change, urban growth, or digitalisation?	Assess resilience and adaptability.	Environmental planning, smart cities, youth digital engagement.
	Q13. If you could recommend one reform to policymakers, what would it be?	Capture actionable advice.	Fiscal reforms, elected councils, anti-corruption systems.
F. Closing	Q14. Is there anything we haven't asked that you feel is important for understanding local governance in Egypt?	Provide space for additional insights.	Missed themes, personal reflections, local priorities.

Appendix C: Documentary Analysis Framework

Introduction

In addition to interviews and focus groups, this study employed a systematic documentary analysis to provide context, triangulate evidence, and test the validity of participants' claims. Documents were selected purposively to reflect legal, institutional, policy, and community perspectives on local administration (LA) and local governance (LG) in Egypt.

The framework guided data extraction, coding, and interpretation, ensuring that documents were treated not as neutral artefacts but as social constructions embedded in power relations (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018).

Document Sources

The following categories of documents were examined:

1. Constitutional and Legal Texts

- Egyptian Constitution (2014).
- Drafts of the Local Administration Law (2016–2022).
- Executive decrees and ministerial circulars related to LA and decentralisation.

2. Policy and Budgetary Documents

- Annual Ministry of Local Development reports (2018–2023).
- National budget allocations to governorates.
- Fiscal transfer frameworks and central audit reports.

3. International and Donor Reports

- UNDP, OECD, and World Bank publications on decentralisation in Egypt and MENA (2020–2023).
- IMF country reports and governance reform notes.

4. Civil Society and NGO Reports

- Tadamun (2015–2022) studies on Egyptian local governance.
- Reports from Transparency International (2020–2023).
- Local NGO advocacy briefs on citizen participation.

5. Media and Grey Literature

- Newspaper articles, opinion pieces, and investigative journalism on service delivery.
- Academic blogs and conference papers addressing local reform.

Analytical Framework

A coding sheet was developed to extract information under the following categories:

Category	Key Indicators	Example Questions for Analysis
Institutional Arrangements	Legal mandates, roles, and structures	Does the law clearly define the role of governorates vs. central ministries?
Fiscal Practices	Budget allocations, revenue autonomy, transfers	Are governorates allowed to raise their own revenues? How transparent are transfers?
Accountability Mechanisms	Oversight, citizen audits, anti-corruption	Do documents mention performance monitoring or public reporting?

Category	Key Indicators	Example Questions for Analysis
Participation Provisions	Consultation, elections, digital tools	Are there formal requirements for citizen participation?
Reform Narratives	Framing of decentralisation	How is decentralisation justified—efficiency, democracy, donor pressure?
Outcomes and Impact	Reported improvements or failures	Do reports show evidence of improved services or ongoing gaps?

Procedure

1. Collection: Documents were identified through official government portals, donor databases, and civil society archives.
2. Screening: Inclusion criteria ensured documents were relevant (2010–2024), credible, and accessible.
3. Coding: Documents were read iteratively; codes were applied to highlight themes consistent with interview and focus group data.
4. Interpretation: Patterns and contradictions between official narratives and participant experiences were examined.

Ethical Considerations

While documents are publicly available, sensitivity was applied to politically charged reports. Government documents were treated with neutrality, while NGO reports were cross-checked to avoid advocacy bias.

Contribution to the Study

The documentary analysis:

- Provided historical depth (laws, constitutions).
- Offered comparative benchmarks (donor and NGO reports).
- Validated or challenged participant narratives (e.g., citizen distrust, fiscal deficits).
- Strengthened trustworthiness through triangulation with interview and focus group evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985/2021).

Appendix C: Documentary Analysis Framework

Source Type	Specific Examples	Objective	Probes / Key Focus Areas
Constitutional and Legal Provisions	2014 Egyptian Constitution; Draft Local Administration Laws (e.g., Law 43/1979 reforms, post-2014 drafts)	Identify legal framework for decentralisation and governance.	Distribution of powers; autonomy of local councils; fiscal authority; citizen participation rights.
Policy Circulars and Government Directives	Ministry of Local Development circulars; Governorate-level instructions	Examine operational translation of decentralisation commitments.	Alignment between central directives and local implementation; discretion of governors;

Source Type	Specific Examples	Objective	Probes / Key Focus Areas
			responsiveness to citizen needs.
Budgetary and Financial Documents	Central government transfers; Governorate budgets; Public expenditure reviews	Analyse fiscal arrangements and resource flows.	Autonomy in resource allocation; transparency of transfers; equity between urban and rural regions.
International Donor and Development Reports	UNDP governance reports (2020–2023); World Bank decentralisation assessments; OECD working papers	Identify external influence and conditionalities shaping reforms.	Impact of IMF/World Bank recommendations; donor-funded pilot projects; sustainability of externally driven reforms.
NGO and Civil Society Publications	Reports by Egyptian civil society coalitions; advocacy papers; monitoring reports (e.g., Transparency International)	Capture civil society perspectives on governance.	Citizen participation in local decision-making; anti-corruption efforts; evaluation of community-level service delivery.

Source Type	Specific Examples	Objective	Probes / Key Focus Areas
Media Coverage	Egyptian press (Al-Ahram, Mada Masr, Daily News Egypt); International coverage (BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters)	Assess how governance reforms are communicated and perceived publicly.	Public trust and confidence; narratives of success/failure; citizen engagement with reforms.
Comparative Case Studies	Experiences from Morocco, Jordan, South Africa, Indonesia, Kenya (2020–2023 reports)	Provide lessons and benchmarks from Global South and North.	Transferability of decentralisation models; adaptation challenges; evidence of impact on service delivery and citizen trust.

The Documentary Analysis Framework functioned as a systematic tool for triangulating evidence across legal, institutional, fiscal, societal, and comparative domains. By categorising documents into the table above, the research ensured credibility and trustworthiness through (i) structured coding of key themes (e.g., centralisation, fiscal autonomy, citizen participation), (ii) cross-verification of claims made in interviews and focus groups, and (iii) integration of both Egyptian and international perspectives.

This framework was not simply descriptive but interpretive, consistent with the qualitative, interpretivist paradigm. It allowed the study to contextualise participants'

narratives against formal texts, donor agendas, and media representations, thereby enhancing thick description, triangulation, and analytical depth (Yin, 2018; Nowell et al., 2021).

Appendix D: Coding Framework / Thematic Analysis Matrix

Sample Raw Data (Interview / Focus Group Quote)	Initial Codes	Sub- Categories	Themes	Overarching Dimensions
<i>"Decisions always come from Cairo; we have no power to change anything locally."</i>	Centralisation; Lack of autonomy	Decision-making bottlenecks; Disempowerment of councils	Over-concentration of authority	Structural Barriers to LG
<i>"Funds arrive late, and sometimes not at all. We cannot plan schools or clinics properly."</i>	Fiscal delays; Resource scarcity	Dependence on central transfers; Planning paralysis	Fiscal constraints and deficits	Structural Barriers to LG
<i>"Without knowing someone, you cannot get your file approved."</i>	Corruption; Clientelism	Informal networks; Bribery practices	Corruption and inefficiency	Governance Integrity Deficits
<i>"The government asks us for input, but nothing ever changes."</i>	Symbolic participation; Distrust	Lack of responsiveness; Tokenism	Citizen distrust and political apathy	Social and Political Dynamics

Sample Raw Data (Interview / Focus Group Quote)	Initial Codes	Sub- Categories	Themes	Overarching Dimensions
<i>“Young people now use social media to push their complaints—it’s faster than going to the office.”</i>	Digital activism; Alternative channels	E-participation; Technology use	Digitalisation and new governance tools	Emerging Opportunities
<i>“In Brazil, participatory budgeting improved services. Why not here?”</i>	Comparative reference; Aspirations	International lessons; Reform desire	Learning from global best practices	Pathways for Reform
<i>“We need elected leaders who answer to us, not to the president.”</i>	Desire for elections; Accountability	Representative governance	Participatory and accountable LG	Pathways for Reform

This coding framework illustrates how the study systematically transformed raw qualitative material (quotes from interviews, focus groups, and documents) into interpreted findings.

- Step 1: Initial Coding → Labelling meaningful units of data (e.g., “centralisation,” “corruption,” “digital activism”).

- Step 2: Sub-Categories → Grouping similar codes (e.g., “fiscal delays” + “dependence on central transfers” = *Planning paralysis*).
- Step 3: Themes → Higher-order interpretive categories (e.g., *Citizen distrust and political apathy*).
- Step 4: Overarching Dimensions → Integrative domains aligned with research objectives (e.g., *Structural Barriers to LG, Emerging Opportunities*).

By following Braun & Clarke’s six phases of thematic analysis, the process ensured credibility (grounded in participants’ words), dependability (clear coding steps), confirmability (audit trail of decisions), and transferability (thick description for contextual application).

Appendix E: REAF Form



REAF_DS - Version 3.1 AP



UNICAF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM DOCTORAL STUDIES	UREC USE ONLY: Application No: Date Received:
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------

Student's Name: Ragab Khalil

Student's E-mail Address: rajab_el3reny@yahoo.com

Student's ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy

Research Project Title: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services

1. Please state the timelines involved in the proposed research project:

Estimated Start Date: 01-Jun-2022

Estimated End Date: 30-Nov-2022

2. External Research Funding (if applicable):

2.a. Do you have any external funding for your research?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If YES, please answer questions 2b and 2c.

2.b. List any external (third party) sources of funding you plan to utilise for your project. You need to include full details on the source of funds (e.g. state, private or individual sponsor), any prior / existing or future relationships between the funding body / sponsor and any of the principal investigator(s) or co-investigator(s) or student researcher(s), status and timeline of the application and any conditions attached.

2.c. If there are any perceived ethical issues or potential conflicts of interest arising from applying or and receiving external funding for the proposed research then these need to be fully disclosed below and also further elaborated on, in the relevant sections on ethical considerations later on in this form.

3. The research project

3.a. Project Summary:

In this section fully describe the purpose and underlying rationale for the proposed research project. Ensure that you pose the research questions to be examined, state the hypotheses, and discuss the expected results of your research and their potential.

It is important in your description to use plain language so it can be understood by all members of the UREC, especially those who are not necessarily experts in the particular discipline. To that effect ensure that you fully explain / define any technical terms or discipline-specific terminology (use the space provided in the box).

The problem of the research that the Egyptians don't get the desired services and even the support from the central government nor the local administration. The local administration has no sufficient funds or support from the Egyptian low or the Egyptian government. The corruption and the shortage of funds are the main reasons of the local government problem in Egypt. Transformation from local administration to local government is the main factor to satisfy the locals' needs. The hypothesis of this study are as follows, H1. It needs to be ascertained whether or not there are challenges that negatively impact the running of local government in Egypt. H2. It is hypothesized that effort made to overcome identified challenges will have a positive impact on the local administration. H3. It is also hypothesized that there will be promising opportunities for the new local government in Egypt. H4. It is hypothesized that adopting the appropriate strategic approaches and planning will enhance and improve the services and the satisfaction of the citizens. H5. It is hypothesized that by adopting the principles of the public management and projects in addition to the value engineering techniques will save the resources and improves the performance of public projects and services. Q1. What are the different challenges facing the local administration in developing countries, namely such as in Egypt?, Q2. To what extent is the current challenges impacting the transformation from local administration to local government in Egypt?, Q3. What is the possibility to overcome the challenges facing the local administration in Egypt and enhance new local government participation in building the future of Egypt?, (Core research focus) Q4. What are the possibilities to convert the challenges of local administration to potential opportunities for the new local government and how may the latter be applicable?, and Q5. What are the proposed recommendations to maximize the benefits of the new local government?.

3.b. Significance of the Proposed Research Study and Potential Benefits:

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research (use the space provided in the box).

The adopted approach of the research will be the deductive approach. The approach is selected because of the importance of its support to solve the problem facing the local administration. The accurate selection of the people will provide accurate responses to the questions of the questionnaire and interviews. The strategy of the research depended on several types of data gathering such as interviews, observations, case study and questionnaires in addition to the theories and scientific analysis. The recommendations from the previous studies and results will be considered and to be analyzed based on the results of this study (Malaccorto and Lonati, 2019).

Based on limits due to time, the researcher plans to focus on the longitudinal section. The study concentrated on the challenges and opportunities in the last forty years from 1981 to 2021. This selection is hoped to enable this research to get more accurate data about this period. The sources of the data were also research articles, news, rules and regulations. The selected sample of the participants will consider the variety of the ages, residential addresses, political direction and all the layers of the Egyptians as possible. The sample plans to be distributed as throughout all provinces and cities of the country as possible.

4. Project execution:

4.a. The following study is an:

- ☒ experimental study (primary research)
- ☒ desktop study (secondary research)
- ☐ desktop study using existing databases involving information of human/animal subjects
- ☐ Other

If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

4.b. Methods. The following study will involve the use of:

Method	Materials / Tools
Qualitative:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Face to Face Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Phone Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Face to Face Focus Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Online Focus Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Other *
Quantitative:	<input type="checkbox"/> Face to Face Questionnaires <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online Questionnaires <input type="checkbox"/> Experiments <input type="checkbox"/> Tests <input type="checkbox"/> Other *

*If you have chosen 'Other' please Explain:

The sample/participants are identified according to the research type. This research type is mixed use project quantitative and qualitative research. Hence, the sample size of the questionnaire is about 50 to 55 participants and the sample size of interview between 5 to 10 participants.

5. Participants:

5 a. Does the Project involve the recruitment and participation of additional persons other than the researcher(s) themselves?

- ☒ YES If YES, please complete all following sections.
☐ NO If NO, please directly proceed to Question [7](#).

5 b. Relevant Details of the Participants of the Proposed Research

State the number of participants you plan to recruit, and explain in the box below how the total number was calculated.

Number of participants

All participants should be previous or current employees of local administration or experts.

Describe important characteristics such as: demographics (e.g. age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc). It is also important that you specify any inclusion and exclusion criteria that will be applied (e.g. eligibility criteria for participants).

Age range From To

Gender ☒ Female
☒ Male

Eligibility Criteria:

- Inclusion criteria - previous or current employees of local administration or experts, people who engaged with local administration in Egypt. Citizens more than 18 years old.
- Exclusion criteria I will exclude people that don't agree to participate. Non Egyptians, Army members, persons accused of crimes, mental disables, and Children.

Disabilities No people with mental and/or physical disabilities will be involved.

Other relevant information (use the space provided in the box):

NA

5 c. Participation & Research setting:

Clearly describe which group of participants is completing/participating in the material(s)/ tool(s) described in 5b above (use the space provided in the box).

All participants should be previous or current employees of local administration or experts. The research will target the people from different provinces and cities. Most of the Egyptians have dealt with the local administration and they suffered from the shortage of the services. The participants must represent the variety of the Egyptians.

According to the research type, interview participants would be from the experts of the local administrations, however, the questionnaire's participants would be from the Egyptian citizens.

5 d. Recruitment Process for Human Research Participants:

Clearly describe how the potential participants will be identified, approached and recruited (use the space provided in the box).

The participants will be identified from the different provinces and cities of Egypt. The geographic area which will be targeted is planned to cover at least five governorates or states in Egypt. The researcher will approach the participants by a way of emails or direct communication consistent with the selected methods of Online questionnaire and face to face interview(s). The emails will be found from the respective government departmental websites and the websites of non government organizations and the researcher's personal contacts. The Gatekeeper letter will be distributed in order to secure consent and approval to participate in this study. The distribution of the Gatekeeper letters will support the eventual engagement of the participants.

5 e. Research Participants Informed Consent.

Select below which categories of participants will participate in the study. Complete the relevant Informed Consent form and submit it along with the REAF form.

Yes	No	Categories of participants	Form to be completed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Typically Developing population(s) above the maturity age *	Informed Consent Form
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Typically Developing population(s) under the maturity age *	Guardian Informed Consent Form

* Maturity age is defined by national regulations in laws of the country in which the research is being conducted.

5 f. Relationship between the principal investigator and participants.

Is there any relationship between the principal investigator (student), co-investigators(s), (supervisor) and participant(s)? For example, if you are conducting research in a school environment on students in your classroom (e.g. instructor-student).

☐ YES ☒ NO

If YES, specify (use the space provided in the box).

6. Potential Risks of the Proposed Research Study.

6 a. i. Are there any potential risks, psychological harm and/or ethical issues associated with the proposed research study, other than risks pertaining to everyday life events (such as the risk of an accident when travelling to a remote location for data collection)?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If YES, specify below and answer the question 6 a.ii.

6 a.ii Provide information on what measures will be taken in order to exclude or minimise risks described in 6.a.i.

No risk

6 b. Choose the appropriate option

		Yes	No
i.	Will you obtain written informed consent form from all participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
ii.	Does the research involve as participants, people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
iii.	Does this research involve participants who are children under maturity age? If you answered YES to question iii, complete all following questions. If you answered NO to question iii, do not answer Questions iv, v, vi and proceed to Questions vii, viii, ix and x.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
iv.	Will the research tools be implemented in a professional educational setting in the presence of other adults (i.e. classroom in the presence of a teacher)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
v.	Will informed consent be obtained from the legal guardians (i.e. parents) of children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
vi.	Will verbal assent be obtained from children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
vii.	Will all data be treated as confidential? If NO, explain why confidentiality of the collected data is not appropriate for this proposed research project, providing details of how all participants will be informed of the fact that any data which they will provide will not be confidential.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
viii.	Will all participants /data collected be anonymous? If NO, explain why and describe the procedures to be used to ensure the anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of the collected data both during the conduct of the research and in the subsequent release of its findings.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
ix. Have you ensured that personal data and research data collected from participants will be securely stored for five years?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
x. Does this research involve the deception of participants? If YES, describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Explain how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this debrief to the participants:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

6 c. i. Are there any other ethical issues associated with the proposed research study that are not already adequately covered in the preceding sections?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If YES, specify (maximum 150 words).

6.c.ii Provide information on what measures will be taken in order to exclude or minimise ethical issues described in 6.c.i.

Direct questions will be provided and privacy of the participants will be considered.

6 d. Indicate the Risk Rating.

☐ High ☒ Low

7. Further Approvals

Are there any other approvals required (in addition to ethics clearance from UREC) in order to carry out the proposed research study?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If YES, specify (maximum 100 words).

8. Application Checklist

Mark ✓ if the study involves any of the following:

- ☐ Children and young people under 18 years of age, vulnerable population such as children with special educational needs (SEN), racial or ethnic minorities, socioeconomically disadvantaged, pregnant women, elderly, malnourished people, and ill people.
- ☐ Research that foresees risks and disadvantages that would affect any participant of the study such as anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, harm risk (which is more than is expected from everyday life) or any other act that participants might believe is detrimental to their wellbeing and / or has the potential to / will infringe on their human rights / fundamental rights.
- ☐ Risk to the well-being and personal safety of the researcher.
- ☐ Administration of any substance (food / drink / chemicals / pharmaceuticals / supplements / chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants.
- ☐ Results that may have an adverse impact on the natural or built environment.

9. Further documents

Check that the following documents are attached to your application:

		ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
1	Recruitment advertisement (if any)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	Informed Consent Form / Guardian Informed Consent Form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Research Tool(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Gatekeeper Letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Any other approvals required in order to carry out the proposed research study, e.g., institutional permission (e.g. school principal or company director) or approval from a local ethics or professional regulatory body.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



10. Final Declaration by Applicants:

- (a) I declare that this application is submitted on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will only be used by Unicaf University for the explicit purpose of ethical review and monitoring of the conduct of the research proposed project as described in the preceding pages.
- (b) I understand that this information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent, excluding use intended to satisfy reporting requirements to relevant regulatory bodies.
- (c) The information in this form, together with any accompanying information, is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- (d) I undertake to abide by the highest possible international ethical standards governing the Code of Practice for Research Involving Human Participants, as published by the UN WHO Research Ethics Review Committee (ERC) on <http://www.who.int/ethics/research/en/> and to which Unicaf University aspires to.
- (e) In addition to respect any and all relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines, where applicable, while in pursuit of this research project.



I agree with all points listed under Question 10

Student's Name: Ragab Khalil

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloji

Date of Application: 14-Nov-2022

Important Note:

Save your completed form (we suggest you also print a copy for your records) and then submit it to your UU Dissertation/project supervisor (tutor). **In the case of student projects, the responsibility lies with the Faculty Dissertation/Project Supervisor.** If this is a student application, then it should be submitted via the relevant link in the VLE. Please submit only electronically filled in copies; **do not** hand fill and submit scanned paper copies of this application.

Appendix F: Informed Consent Letter



UU_IC - Version 2.1



Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Ragab Khalil

Student's E-mail Address: rajab_el3reny@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy

Research Project Title: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services

Date: 14-Nov-2022

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The proposed 'mixed method' is selected in order to highlight the challenges facing the development of under-developed countries and the right procedures for enhancing the existing performance of local administration. Despite challenges in the local authorities in under-developed countries, some of these challenges could be considered as advantages of some countries. This study plans to focus on both the positive and negative sides of the situations in the under-developed countries and will focus on Egypt as a case study.

The study aims to highlight the importance of Egyptians building upon their needs, a noteworthy public administration system. A system with responsive infrastructure. The idea is hopefully to head towards a bridging of the gap between the people's needs and the presented services in the past, present and future. This person is interested in local government and Public Management of Egypt.

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, Ragab Khalil, ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.

Student's Signature: RAGAB KHALIL



Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)

Student's Name: Ragab Khalil

Student's E-mail Address: rajab_el3reny@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloji

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy

Research Project Title: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation to this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature: _____

Date:

If the Participant is illiterate:

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature: _____

Date: 14-Nov-2022

Appendix G: Gatekeeper Letter



UU_GL - Version 2.0



Gatekeeper letter

Address: Cairo - Egypt

Date: 18-Jan-2023

Subject: Local Government in Egypt

Dear Manager,

I am an/a **doctoral** student at UNICAF University **[Zambia]**.

As part of my degree I am carrying out a study on **[The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services]**

I am writing to inquire whether you would be interested in/willing to **[request for assistance, participation, permission to recruit etc.]** in this research.

Subject to approval by UNICAF Research Ethics Committee (UREC) this study will be using **survey and interview activities with the available and agreed participants.**

The project investigate the transformation from local administration to local government in Egypt and it advantages and disadvantages my supervisor in this project is Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi.

The required tasks of the person, sending an e-mail on your behalf, allowing you to recruit on their premises, giving you access to personal data after participants have consented. the estimated time for the engagement is for average 3 hours.

Thank you in advance for your time and for your consideration of this project. Kindly please let me know if you require any further information or need any further clarifications.

Yours Sincerely,

RAGAB KHALIL

Student's Name: RAGAB KHALIL

Student's E-mail: rajab_el3reny@yahoo.com

Student's Address and Telephone: Doha - Qatar 0097433369991

Supervisor's Title and Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi.

Supervisor's Position: Supervisor

Supervisor's E-mail: t.moloi@unicaf.org; tmvulanemoloi@gmail.com

Appendix H: Approval Letters



UU_GIC - Version 2.1



Guardian Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Debriefing of Participants

Student's Name: Ragab Khalil

Student's E-mail Address: rajab_el3reny@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy

Research Project Title: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services

Date: 14-Nov-2022

Provide a short description (purpose, aim and significance) of the research project, and explain why and how you have chosen this person to participate in this research (maximum 150 words).

The proposed 'mixed method' is selected in order to highlight the challenges facing the development of under-developed countries and the right procedures for enhancing the existing performance of local administration. Despite challenges in the local authorities in under-developed countries, some of these challenges could be considered as advantages of some countries. This study plans to focus on both the positive and negative sides of the situations in the under-developed countries and will focus on Egypt as a case study. The researcher is optimistic that the local government in Egypt will be the real leader in the development of the country. The study will hopefully help the local administration team to enhance their look at the potential opportunities in their towns and cities. Ultimately the recognition of the challenges found and

The above named Student is committed in ensuring participant's voluntarily participation in the research project and guaranteeing there are no potential risks and/or harms to the participants.

Participants have the right to withdraw at any stage (prior or post the completion) of the research without any consequences and without providing any explanation. In these cases, data collected will be deleted.

All data and information collected will be coded and will not be accessible to anyone outside this research. Data described and included in dissemination activities will only refer to coded information ensuring beyond the bounds of possibility participant identification.

I, Ragab Khalil, ensure that all information stated above is true and that all conditions have been met.

Student's Signature: RAGAB KHALIL



Guardian Informed Consent Form

Part 2: Certificate of Consent

This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant's legal guardian

Student's Name: Ragab Khalil

Student's E-mail Address: rajab_el3reny@yahoo.com

Student ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Program of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy

Research Project Title: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that the participant is free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of the participation to this study. I understand that all data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise.

I, Ragab Khalil, the legal guardian
of Ragab Khalil allow and provide consent
that Ragab Khalil can willingly participate in the study.

I, Ragab Khalil, the legal guardian
of Ragab Khalil have been ensured that verbal consent
given by Ragab Khalil will also be taken before the study.

Appendix I: Formatting Appendices

All covers are predetermined; if you have more than one index, use the index spelling; otherwise, use the reference section spelling; and for the addendums, link the Section Heading design to the Informative supplements portion. Supplement An should be joined to a Level 1 heading on the following line. Please do not link the Heading Levels from Styles beyond Part Setting out toward the Supplements and Level 1 for Reference section A, Index B, etc., as that perspective of Items does not reflect any further headings you may be using inside a single Reference section.

In the Reference sections, you should also provide the following: the approved UREC application bundle (REAF-DS), the Informed assent structure (the layout used), the Watchman Informed assent structure (the format employed), the Guard Letter, and the Exploration devices.

DISSERTATION STAGE 1 CHECKLIST/REPORT



Dissertation Stage 1 Checklist/Report - Version 1.0



DISSERTATION STAGE 1 CHECKLIST/REPORT

This checklist confirms that the student successfully completed all requirements of the dissertation stage 1 and that he/she is ready to proceed to the next dissertation stage. Both the student and the supervisor should complete relevant sections and upload it on the respective VLE link.

To be completed by the student

Student's Name: RAGAB IBRAHIM MUSTAFA KHALIL

Student's ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Programme of Study: UUM: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy - Business Administration

Title of Research Project: The transformation from Local Administration to Local Government in Egypt: Challenges and Opportunities 1981-2021

CHECKLIST/REPORT

Please complete all relevant sections below. The student should complete all sections marked with ST and the supervisor should complete all sections marked with SU

REQUIREMENT	ST/SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Final Research Proposal Submission	ST	Research proposal was submitted and approved by the supervisor after addressing supervisor's comments, and forwarded to UNICAF for final submission and acceptance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	I concur with the abovementioned entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Research Ethics Application (REAF).	ST	REAF was filled and submitted by the student to the supervisor. REAF was reviewed by the supervisor and finally submitted to UREC for final submission and approval.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



Dissertation Stage 1 Checklist/Report - Version 1.0

REQUIREMENT	ST/SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
	SU	I concur with my doctoral candidate's above entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Project Management Chart.	ST	PMC was prepared and filled with full consultation and guidance of the supervisor in which he finally agreed with PMC content and each activity milestone in accordance with the course timeline.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	I concur with my doctoral candidate's above entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Research Problem Statement and Purpose of Study.	ST	Both research problem and study of purpose statement were submitted and the supervisor accepted after addressing the supervisor remarks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	I concur with my doctoral candidate's above entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Research Aims and Objectives.	ST	This assignment was submitted and supervisor accepted it.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	I concur with my doctoral candidate's above entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



Dissertation Stage 1 Checklist/Report - Version 1.0

REQUIREMENT	ST/SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Research Questions and Hypotheses.	ST	Research questions were submitted on time and after readjusting and addressing the supervisor remarks. The final agreed research questions were submitted.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	I concur with my doctoral candidate's above entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nature and Significance of Study.	ST	The assignment was submitted on time after addressing all remarks and feedback from the Supervisor.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	I concur with my doctoral candidate's above entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
CHAPTER 1	ST	Chapter one was prepared and reviewed and accepted by the supervisor and submitted finally to UNICAF.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	I concur with my doctoral candidate's above entry.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



To be completed by the supervisor
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS (max 100 words)
I am encouraged by the effort demonstrated, by this doctoral candidate towards their work thus far. I hope to continue to support him in maintaining his momentum, in order to complete all ongoing tasks. I wish them good luck.

Supervisor's signature:

Date: 15/09/2021

01/09/ 2021



Dissertation Stage 1 Checklist/Report - Version 1.0

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

To be completed by the School of Doctoral Studies
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS (max 100 words)

School of Doctoral Studies's Coordinator:

Date:

<u>RDC DECISION</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Not Approved	Comments <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 60px; width: 100%;"></div>
Signature:	

DISSERTATION STAGE 2 CHECKLIST/REPORT



Dissertation Stage 2 Checklist/Report - Version 1.3



DISSERTATION STAGE 2 CHECKLIST/REPORT

This checklist confirms that the student successfully completed all requirements of the dissertation stage 2 and that he/she is ready to proceed to the next dissertation stage. Both the student and the supervisor should complete relevant sections and upload it on the respective VLE link.

To be completed by the student

Student's Name: RAGA KHALIL

Student's ID #:

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi

Offer ID / Group ID:

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ) 

Programme of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy 

Title of Research Project: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt
Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services
1981-2022

Section A: CHECKLIST/REPORT

Complete all relevant sections below. The student should complete all sections marked with **ST** and the supervisor should complete all sections marked with **SU**.

Indicate whether a task is completed or not and also comment on the quality of the work and/or any obstacles faced.

REQUIREMENT	ST / SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Theoretical Framework & Industry Field	ST	SUBMITTED AND DISCUSSED AND REVIEWED BY THE SUPERVISOR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU		<input type="checkbox"/>
Literature Structure	ST	SUBMITTED AND DISCUSSED AND REVIEWED BY THE SUPERVISOR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU		<input type="checkbox"/>

REQUIREMENT	ST / SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Chapter 2	ST	SUBMITTED AND DISCUSSED AND REVIEWED BY THE SUPERVISOR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU		<input type="checkbox"/>

Section B: FURTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

It is not mandatory to complete Section B as it is not evaluated. However, students are strongly encouraged to engage in these type of activities.

Participation in conferences

Did you (the student) participate in any academic, international or local, conferences during this dissertation stage? If yes, specify below (dates, place, name of the conference and the type of participation (oral presentation, poster presentation, visitor), presentation title. Attach any proof of attendance/certificates.

**Scientific publications**

Did you (the student) submit and/or completed any scientific publications (abstracts, articles, books) during this dissertation stage? If YES, specify in the space below (author/s, publication title, publisher, date, pages).

Continuous professional development courses

Did you (the student) attend any professional development courses offered by Unicaf University or other institutions? If YES, specify (course name, institution, dates). Attach any proof of attendance/certificates.

**Section C: MEETINGS BETWEEN THE STUDENT AND THE SUPERVISOR**

Please complete the table below with information about the virtual meetings between you (the student) and your supervisor.

Date	What was discussed	Actions taken
	Structure of the Submission	Done
	1st Review of the submission	Commented
	2nd Review of the submission	Commented
	3rd Acceptance of the submission after correcting the comments	Accepted and Submitted

**Section D: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK**

<u>To be completed by the student if needed</u>
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK (<i>max 100 words</i>)
<p>No thanks,</p> <p>Only I acknowledge that I had a huge support from the supervisor, and he was very cooperative and commenting my mistakes and comments.</p>

Student's signature: RAGAB KHALIL

Date: 20/04/2022

<u>To be completed by the supervisor</u>
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS (<i>max 100 words</i>)
<p>3rd Acceptance of the submission after correcting the comments</p>

Supervisor's signature:

Date:

Section E: OFFICIAL USE ONLY

To be completed by the School of Doctoral Studies

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS *(max 100 words)*

School of Doctoral Studies Representative:

Date:

RDC DECISION		Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approved	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Approved	
Signature:		

DISSERTATION STAGE 2 CHECKLIST/REPORT



Dissertation Stage 3 Checklist/Report - Version 1.3

DISSERTATION STAGE 3 CHECKLIST/REPORT

This checklist confirms that the student successfully completed all requirements of the dissertation stage 3 and that he/she is ready to proceed to the next dissertation stage. Both the student and the supervisor should complete relevant sections and upload it on the respective VLE link.

To be completed by the student

Student's Name: Ragab Ibrahim Moustafa Khalil

Student's ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Molo

Offer ID / Group ID: O23333G23505

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Programme of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy

Title of Research Project: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt
Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services
1981-2022

Section A: CHECKLIST/REPORT

Complete all relevant sections below. The student should complete all sections marked with ST and the supervisor should complete all sections marked with SU.

Indicate whether a task is completed or not and also comment on the quality of the work and/or any obstacles faced.

REQUIREMENT	ST / SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Research Approach and Design for supervisor's feedback	ST	Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
	SU	completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
UREC Application	ST	Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
	SU	completed	<input type="checkbox"/>

REQUIREMENT	ST / SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Chapter 3	ST	Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
	SU	completed	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section B: FURTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

It is not mandatory to complete Section B as it is not evaluated. However, students are strongly encouraged to engage in these type of activities.

Participation in conferences

Did you (the student) participate in any academic, international or local, conferences during this dissertation stage? If yes, specify below (dates, place, name of the conference and the type of participation (oral presentation, poster presentation, visitor), presentation title. Attach any proof of attendance/certificates.

Still exploring sources.



Scientific publications

Did you (the student) submit and/or completed any scientific publications (abstracts, articles, books) during this dissertation stage? If YES, specify in the space below (author/s, publication title, publisher, date, pages).

Not yet however we have discussed about this matter with my supervisor.

Continuous professional development courses

Did you (the student) attend any professional development courses offered by Unicaf University or other institutions? If YES, specify (course name, institution, dates). Attach any proof of attendance/certificates.

Yes.
Value Engineering Course
Save International
February March 2022.



Section C: MEETINGS BETWEEN THE STUDENT AND THE SUPERVISOR

Please complete the table below with information about the virtual meetings between you (the student) and your supervisor.

Date	What was discussed	Actions taken
8 Nov 2022	UREC Application	Details about what needed to be fulfilled.
10 Dec 2022	REAF Form	Clarity about details required to complete this form.
5 Jan 2023	Gatekeeper Letter, Informed Consent, Research Tools & other documents.	Clarity seeking questions were addressed.
17 Jan 2023	It is quite a pleasure to supervise sch a hardworking doctoral candidate. I have found Ragab to be a mature and eager candidate, who was keen to overcome his	Clarity seeking questions were addressed.
30 Jan 2023	Submission of Ethics Application for supervisor's Review.	Clarity seeking questions were addressed.
8 Feb 2023	Update on UNICAF Submissions	Clarity seeking questions were addressed.
20 Feb 2023	Follow Up on UNICAF Submissions	Clarity seeking questions were addressed.
10 Mar 2023	Discussing finalization of Stage 3	Clarity seeking questions were addressed.

Section D: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK**To be completed by the student if needed****ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK (max 100 words)**

Received comments from the supervisor have been addressed and submitted again. I look forward to the remaining Stage 4.

Student's signature: RAGAB KHALIL

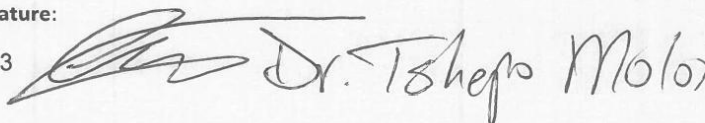
Date: 21/03/2023

To be completed by the supervisor**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS (max 100 words)**

It is quite a pleasure to supervise such a hardworking doctoral candidate. I have found Ragab to be a mature and eager candidate, who was keen to overcome his unfortunate experience of failure to progress owing to non-availability of a supervisor. Once we resumed our respective tasks, I realized that although Ragab was not fluent in English, he did not let that be a hindrance towards completion of his assignments from Stages 1 to 3. This detail however ought to explain occasions when he is confused about instructions given. Ragab's studiousness has been reflected throughout his time, under my supervision from our ongoing contact sessions. I have encouraged him to address activities in Section B. The overall progress of this candidate is satisfactory.

Supervisor's signature:

Date: 20/03/2023



**Section E: OFFICIAL USE ONLY**

To be completed by the School of Doctoral Studies

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS (*max 100 words*)

30 Jan 2023

School of Doctoral Studies Representative:

Date:

RDC DECISION
☐

Approved

☐

Not Approved

Comments

Clarity seeking questions were addressed.

Signature:



DISSERTATION STAGE 4 CHECKLIST/REPORT

This checklist confirms that the student successfully completed all requirements of the dissertation stage 4 and that he/she is ready to proceed to the next dissertation stage. Both the student and the supervisor should complete relevant sections and upload it on the respective VLE link.

To be completed by the student

Student's Name: Ragab Ibrahim Moustafa Khalil

Student's ID #: R1801D4279063

Supervisor's Name: Dr Tshepo Mvulane Moloi

Offer ID / Group ID: O23333G23505

University Campus: Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

Programme of Study: UUZ: PhD Doctorate of Philosophy

Title of Research Project: The Strategic Vision for Local Government in Egypt
Enhancing Public Management, Projects and Services
2050

Section A: CHECKLIST/REPORT

Complete all relevant sections below. The student should complete all sections marked with ST and the supervisor should complete all sections marked with SU.

Indicate whether a task is completed or not and also comment on the quality of the work and/or any obstacles faced.

REQUIREMENT	ST / SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Results' Reporting & Trustworthiness of Data	ST	Completed and Submitted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	Completed after Revision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Chapter 4	ST	Completed and Submitted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	Completed after Revision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

REQUIREMENT	ST / SU	DETAILS OF ACTIVITY	Official use only
Chapter 5	ST	Completed and Submitted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	SU	Completed after Revision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Section B: FURTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

It is not mandatory to complete Section B as it is not evaluated. However, students are strongly encouraged to engage in these type of activities.

Participation in conferences

Did you (the student) participate in any academic, international or local, conferences during this dissertation stage? If yes, specify below (dates, place, name of the conference and the type of participation (oral presentation, poster presentation, visitor), presentation title. Attach any proof of attendance/certificates.

NA



Scientific publications

Did you (the student) submit and/or completed any scientific publications (abstracts, articles, books) during this dissertation stage? If YES, specify in the space below (author/s, publication title, publisher, date, pages).

NA

Continuous professional development courses

Did you (the student) attend any professional development courses offered by Unicaf University or other institutions? If YES, specify (course name, institution, dates). Attach any proof of attendance/certificates.

NA

Section C: MEETINGS BETWEEN THE STUDENT AND THE SUPERVISOR

Please complete the table below with information about the virtual meetings between you (the student) and your supervisor.

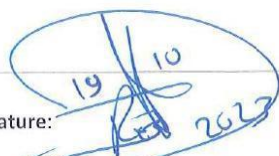
Date	What was discussed	Actions taken
14/07/2023	Finalizing Data Collection & Import of Primary Data to Analysis processor	Revise the work and avoid the similarity
16/07/2023	Analysis of Primary Data	Starting writing and considering the advises
18/07/2023	Submission of Results' Reporting & Trustworthiness of Data	Discussed and revised
19/07/2023	This candidate has demonstrated commitment, towards completing his tasks. I am satisfied with the progress that they are making towards completion of	Discussed and revised
	Implications of Research Study	Discussed and revised
13/09/2023	Recommendations for Application	Discussed and revised
17/10/2023	Submitting Chapters 4 & 5 for Supervisor's Feedback	Discussed and revised
17/10/2023	Submitting Chapters 4 & 5 for Supervisor's Feedback	Discussed and revised

Section D: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK

<u>To be completed by the student if needed</u>
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK (max 100 words) <p>Great experience and improvement of my knowledge and writing. We discussed with the supervisor some of the concerns to do with academic writing and also some of the contents of the study. Overall, I am satisfied with the progress that we are able to maintain towards completion of my work.</p>

Student's signature:

Date:


 19.10.22.23

<u>To be completed by the supervisor</u>
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS (max 100 words) <p>This candidate has demonstrated commitment, towards completing his tasks. I am satisfied with the progress that they are making towards completion of this dissertation.</p>

Supervisor's signature:

Date:

 Dr. Tchepo Mvulane Mboi

**Section E: OFFICIAL USE ONLY**

<u>To be completed by the School of Doctoral Studies</u>
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON STUDENT'S PROGRESS (<i>max 100 words</i>)

School of Doctoral Studies Representative:

Date:

<u>RDC DECISION</u>		Comments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approved	Discussed and revised
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Approved	
Signature:		