

Review

## Egypt and "Democracy Dilemma"

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The principal objective of this paper is to describe and analyze the failure process of democratization in the Egypt after Mubarak regime. The article continues to give an overview over the current situation inside Egypt after the revolution and collects some evidence for a changed relationship between democracy and stability inside the country. In this context, when Mohammad Morsi won the presidential election in June 2012, On 3 July, 2013, a coalition led by the Egyptian army chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi removed the President of Egypt, Mohammad Morsi, from power and suspended the Egyptian constitution, as a conscious response to Egyptian protesters who demanded the end of Morsi's administration and the initiation of early presidential elections. This vicious cycle repeats itself is authoritarian survival of the political regime, which is an intrinsic tendency in Egyptian politics. As Egypt's flawed transition after the Arab Spring requires a comprehensive analysis, this brief aims to discuss the complex nature and practice of authoritarian survival in Egypt and to offer realistic policy alternatives in dealing with this structural problem. Therefore the Egyptian revolution created a situation of transition which is by definition a period of instability and limited prediction. This is a crucial issue because the direction and orientation of a deep societal democratization process are still unclear.

**Key words:** Egypt, democracy, revolution, authoritarian, Mubarak regime.

### INTRODUCTION

Former president Hosni Mubarak has been in power for thirty-years and was removed from office during the Arab Spring. Dissatisfactions over corruption, lack of freedom of speech, economic issues as food price inflation, high unemployment, low wages and the enrichment of the ruling elite were the reasons for the protests. Within the revolution, Egypt's focus was on change in society and politics. In particular, Egypt wanted an end to Mubarak's three decades rule, and wanted to get rid of its current constitution. As the Middle East's "population and intellectual leader," Egypt is in a unique position to

demonstrate successful democratization in the Arab world. On February 11, the Egyptian Armed Forces seized power from President Mubarak in a coup d'état. The coup was staged in response to determined protests over eighteen days by hundreds of thousands of Egyptians demanding the ouster of the autocratic and corrupt Mubarak regime and its replacement with democracy. In the November elections the Muslim Brotherhood, previously illegal, was swept into power with 52 percent of the vote. In June 2012, Mohammad Morsi, a member of the Brotherhood, became the first

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Freely elected President in Egyptian history. Egypt's (seemingly) successful transition to civilian rule drew accolades from the international community. Another victory for democracy, but things were not as rosy as they seemed, and Egypt's problems do not end there.

In general, with the benefit of hindsight, most observers were too optimistic in 2011 when they predicted that the "Arab Spring or Islamic Awakening" would quickly lead to democracy. Specifically, in Egypt when Mohammad Morsi was elected in 2012, many in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including me, were hopeful that he would become a democratic president for all Egyptians. Unfortunately, his presidency quickly became a proxy for the Muslim Brotherhood, and under his leadership the country was driven to the edge of civil war. Millions took to the streets on June 30, 2013, to demand change and greater stability for Egypt. Therefore, on 3 July, 2013, a coalition led by the Egyptian army chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi removed the President Morsi from power by military coup d'état and suspended the Egyptian constitution, as a conscious response to Egyptian protesters who demanded the end of Morsi's administration and the initiation of early presidential elections.

In this respect, the Egyptian military coup appears to break the traditional mold of military coups and the positive outlook for the future in the aftermath of the revolution has been replaced with dim prospects. This means that, history repeats itself in Egypt. The academic literature, to date, has analyzed all military coups under an anti-democratic framework and viewed them as an affront to stability and democracy. Based on the above mentioned topics, there are many analyses about promoting reform and democratization in Egypt. Yet, the steps that have been taken so far have been limited, and have resulted in little more than cosmetic changes. It has not helped that most analyses on the prospects for political reform in Egypt are stymied by fears that the only alternative to the post authoritarian regime is an Islamism one. But is it really true that Egypt is inherently caught between authoritarianism and Islamism? In this regard Weber believes that the Egypt's political system and social structures, like many in the Arab world, have widely been described as authoritarian or neo-patrimonial. (Bauer, 2011: 3)

In this regard, the definition of democracy in Egypt is simply "not the current regime." Indeed as according to experts, the Cairo protest was revolutionary because for the first time, the people are taking responsibility of their government and embracing notions of a need to do something about it. Democracy is thought to encompass "individual freedom and identity, diversity, (political and economic) competition, (popular sovereignty), and political accountability". Indeed, Egypt's transition to democracy has been undermined by the legacy of almost 60 years of consecutive rule by men from the military. With attention in Egypt focused on the current political situation, it is critical to look back and understand how the

country arrived where it is today. Crucially, this entails a serious examination of the failures of democracy in Egypt. Therefore, in this paper, the discussion will be about historical dimensions of the failure of Egypt's democratic transition.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Egypt, a proud nation with an ancient history, lies at the heart of the Arab world and is often viewed as a bellwether for broader trends in the region. With a population of around 80 million and its location bridging both Africa to the Middle East and the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, Egypt has long played a pivotal role in the region. And in a region that has seen more than its share of internal political crises – military coups, civil wars, and revolutions – Egypt stands out as having experienced remarkable continuity in its domestic political scene. Nevertheless, three years after uprising, Egypt's capital is crowded, busy, confused, and messy.

The military has taken firm control, elevating its leader, Gen. Abdel Fata al-Sisi, to the presidency. He follows in the footsteps of dictators Jamal Abdel Al-Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, and Hosni al-Mubarak. Now what is democracy? Thus far, the definition of democracy in Egypt is simply "not the current regime." Indeed as according to experts, the Cairo protest was revolutionary because for the first time, the people are taking responsibility of their government and embracing notions of a need to do something about it. Democracy is thought to encompass "individual freedom and identity, diversity, political and economic competition, popular sovereignty, and political accountability" (Tessler, 2007: 109). Within the revolution, Egypt's focus was on change in society and politics. In particular, Egypt wanted an end to Mubarak's thirty-year rule, and wanted to get rid of its current constitution. As the Middle East's "population and intellectual leader," Egypt is in a unique position to demonstrate successful democratization in the Arab world (Roskin and Coyle, 2008: 292).

Now that Mubarak is overthrown and after a military coup led by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, we seek to review how Egypt's expectations align with that of their reality, even though Egypt's expectations are more so vaguely defined than they are clearly defined once culture is taken into account. Now as Egypt's military currently governs the country, we seek to examine how the debate behind Egypt's ability to democratize will play out. The country is at a very critical point between despotism and democratization is battling it out. At this critical point, the country can easily slip back into authoritarianism. Moreover regarding Egypt's fragile political state, Egypt's political history can further exacerbate this slip back into authoritarianism, which is not in favor of successful democratization. Egypt's political history poses the greatest impediment to Egypt

pursuing a democratic form of governance on account of its numerous cycles of authoritarian rule.

Democratization may prove a challenging development for Egypt because they have democratic rule to refer to in their history. In the eyes of its political history and current actions taken, military rule is not viewed positively toward shaping democracy given that Egypt has had military dictatorships in the past. This strong predominance of authoritarianism in Egypt's history and culture could explain the misconnection between where Egypt wants to be versus where they currently are now in democratizing. For this reason, Egypt's revolution faded away as the military reconstituted Mubarak's repressive structure.

### Historical context at a glance

Egypt, since its independence on February 1922, has struggled for real democracy. The constitution of 1923 established a democratic parliamentary system similar to that of many contemporary European nations. (Youssef, 1983 : 27-34 and Hilal, 1977: 12-65:) It stated that the people were the source of all powers. It also included a number of important democratic principles such as separation of powers, ministerial responsibility, and freedom of the press as well as a wide range of civil and individual liberties. But this democratic experience ended with the advent of the military on July 1952. Unfortunately, the period 1923-1952 was characterized by constant political instability. The Wafd Party, which was the unchallenged majority party during this period, was not able to remain in power for more than eight years. Thus, minority parties ruled over the rest of the period (Murray, 1973: 3-36). All in all, we may argue that the liberal experience failed to solve the socio-economic problems of the country in addition to its failure in obtaining complete independence from Britain.

After the collapse of the monarchy in 1952, the free officers decided not to share power and instead established an authoritarian regime. On January 16, 1953, they promulgated a law banning all political parties. During the period 1962-1976, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) was the sole, legitimate political party. The regime monopolized all political activities and suppressed all forms of opposition, secular and religious. Some scholars argued that the crucial factors of the legitimacy and survival of the regime came from Nasser's charismatic appeal. However, Nasserism failed to institutionalize itself as an ideology that could ensure its long-term durability and mobilize the social forces that had benefited from its founder's policies. It was clear that Nasser's regime, by the late 1960s, faced a number of crises, chief among which was a participation crisis (Hassan, 2010: 319-320).

Following Nasser's death in 1970, his successor, President Anwar Sadat tried to legitimize his rule using three slogans: The rule by law; government by institutions; and; political freedom. Sadat himself spearheaded the

critique of the ruling ASU by issuing the October 1974 Manifesto which basically outlined the Sadat regime's plans to liberalize the Egyptian polity, as a major departure from the Nasser regime. So, with the official adoption of a policy of economic and political liberalization, Egypt witnessed the dawning of a new political climate. The issue of democracy became a public concern, which the system could not afford to ignore any longer.

Upon ascending to the presidency after Sadat's assassination in 1981, Mubarak took some steps designed to turn the wheels of governance from authoritarianism to democratization. One major measure was his decision to release political prisoners. Another measure was the call for national reconciliation, especially among Egypt's polarized political factions. Significantly, Mubarak re-inaugurated the process of political liberalization. In doing so, he won a considerable goodwill from all Egyptians. However, Mubarak first test was his handling of the 1984 parliamentary elections (Hilal, 1986). The elections were conducted for the first time in Egyptian history according to the proportional representation electoral system. In early 2005, the Mubarak regime had another opportunity to reverse the tide of authoritarianism and set Egypt on the path to democratization. But this evolution is also not effective.

On April 30, 2006, the Egyptian Parliament voted by a large majority to renew the emergency law. This law grants the president extraordinary powers to detain citizens, prevent public gatherings, and issue decrees with little accountability to Parliament or the people. The vote was a familiar ritual: the Egyptian Parliament has routinely approved the emergency law for most of the past forty years.

A few months prior to the April vote, the Supreme Constitutional Court issued a ruling that substantially limited the scope of the president's authority under the emergency law. The Court's decision prohibited the president from using the emergency law to assert government control over private property in non-emergency situations, and admonished the prime minister for applying it in a manner that disregarded the constitutional rights of Egyptians. Many civil society groups also challenged the law, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. It organized several demonstrations to protest the parliamentary vote and criticized the law extensively in the media. Its parliamentary delegation denounced the measure as contrary to the principles of Islam because it ignored the wishes of the Egyptian people and failed to serve the public interest.

After the Egyptian transition experience from the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, in June 2012, Mohamed Morsi won the presidential election with 51.73% of total votes to become the first democratically elected president of Egypt, but on 28 April 2013, "Tamarod" was started as a grassroots movement to collect signatures to remove Morsi by 30 June. (Ahrum

Online, 30 June 2013) They called for peaceful demonstrations across Egypt especially in front of the Presidential Palace in Cairo. The movement was supported by the National Salvation Front, April 6 Youth Movement and Strong Egypt Party. Then a coalition led by the Egyptian army chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi removed the President of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, from power. On this basis, once again, Egypt's transition to democracy has been undermined by the legacy of almost 60 years of consecutive rule by men from the military. These events illustrate a growing contradiction in contemporary Egypt. An observer could easily conclude that the country is a classic example of stable authoritarianism. The regime controls much of the media, dominates political life, and suppresses its opponents with a vast array of legal and extra-legal tools. It also carefully monitors and manipulates civil society groups and political parties. And yet, Egyptian political life includes several features that suggest a different picture.

### **Egypt's uprising and its vicious cycle**

In Egypt, approximately 60 percent of the population is under age the age of 30, many of whom are educated yet unemployed (Alterman, 2012: 9). This clearly aligns with Huntington's observation that "the higher the level of education of the unemployed, alienated, or otherwise dissatisfied person, the more extreme the resulting destabilizing behavior." (Huntington, 2006, 48) Kimenyi agrees with Huntington using sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset who said that "the demand for democracy is a result of broader processes of modernization and development. In the long run, it is very difficult for societies that have attained high living standards to tolerate living under autocratic regimes." (Kimenyi, 2011: 1) Kimenyi also points out that once a significant percentage of the population has access to education, it becomes more difficult for elites "to continue to justify the exclusion of resources and privileges to the general population." (Kimenyi, 2011: 2).

Furthermore, Kimenyi greatly observes that indeed, the Egyptian revolution was led by young college graduates forming the country's middle class "that are no longer willing to live under semi-feudal autocrats." However, the high rate of unemployment makes reading "emerging middle class" rather difficult; and yet it is plausible that this unemployment could also be because the significantly inequitable income distribution that is present in Egypt. In Egypt, approximately 40.5 percent of the population is poor (Nawar, 2007: 33). Also, these recent college graduates or "emerging middle class" have access to technology and digital information, whereas the mass does not. Currently in the Middle East, including Egypt, there are only the elite and then there are the masses, neither of whom would suggest a revolution.

Egyptian selected January 25, 2011 as the official

protesting day because that day in Egypt is Police Day, and that day followed briefly after Tunisia overthrew their president. The people's demands during the protests were as follows: Mubarak must immediately resign. The national assembly and senate must be dissolved. A "national salvation group" must be established that includes all public and political personalities, intellectuals, constitutional and legal experts, and representatives of youth groups who called for the demonstrations on Jan. 25 and 28. This group would form a transitional coalition government for a transitional period. The group would also form a transitional presidential council until the next presidential elections. A new constitution must be written to guarantee the principles of freedom and social justice. Those responsible for killing of hundreds of martyrs in Tahrir Square must be prosecuted. Detainees must be released immediately.

Not surprisingly that the Egypt as a Muslim country during the protest, everything stopped for prayer and then the protest resumed. This indicated great respect for culture, even though the organizers themselves were secularists. As Benson and Snow (2000: 621-622) point out, the more relatable the movements' framings are to the daily experiences and cultures of targeted populations, "the greater their salience, and the greater the probability and prospect of mobilization." With that in mind, it is also important to point out that numerous groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, participated and helped lead the protests at Tahrir Square. Political diversity, an element of democracy that Tessler mentioned, has merged in the fight to overthrow Mubarak.

During the 18 days of protest, Mubarak sent the military to contain protestors. Certainly in accordance to Brinton's (1965), anatomy of a revolution, the military ultimately sided with the people and helped to overthrow Mubarak. Yet in Egypt, the army tends to side with the people – or the people tend to trust and count on the military. Haass (2011) states that Egypt's revolution occurred because of three decades of Mubarak's rule, planned hereditary of presidency, corruptions, and economic reforms not helping the majority of Egyptians. Haass (2011) also notes that while some protestors in Egypt want complete democracy, the majority of Egyptians simply want a less corrupt government, greater ability to participate in politics, and a better economy than that of the overthrown regime.

And on the other hand, when the Egyptians speak of good and bad government, they speak of justice versus injustice as opposed to freedom versus restrictions. Islamic tradition states that a just ruler has rightly obtained power and is required to righteously exercise that power. It appears to be that to justly obtain power, the people may have to concur that the ruler is the rightful one, but Allah (or his Prophet) must approve of this ruler. Islamic tradition also stresses obedience for Muslims should "obey God, obey the Prophet, obey those who

hold authority over you” except “in sin;” then subjects have the responsibility to revolutionize and defy. Some experts believe that it is not possible for Egypt, along with other countries to democratize, because in Islam, Muslims stress that Allah is the ultimate authority.

Generally, in the Arab countries, good versus bad government is more closely aligned with justice and injustice as opposed to liberties or freedom. There were two points made concerning proper conduct of the government in relation to the ruler:

- 1) Consultation, where the ruler adheres to “consultants” such as advisors, cabinet members, and any other sort of governmental body and vice-versa; and
- 2) Consent and contract, where both rulers and subjects are accountable toward each other (Lewis, 2011).

One could think of these two points as a sort of checks and balances, since the “consultants” could very easily get rid of a ruler and subjects can ultimately overthrow a ruler. However, it is thought that modernization would lead to ending Islamic checks and balances because unlike in many Western governments, Islamic societies had many levels in-between restricting the ruler’s powers. Modernization typically gets rid of traditions (Roskin and Coyle, 2008).

Very importantly, Egypt has had millenniums of non-democratic rule. Their ancient era consisted of monarchies, military dictatorships, conqueror rule (including that of the Ottomans) and colonial rule (France and Britain) through various conquerors as well as original settlers until 1952, when Abdul Nasser became the country’s leader (Roskin and Coyle, 2008). Hence, Egypt really does not have its political history to look to as a source for forming their democracy. Even under the rule of Nasser, “there was no democracy; elections were fake” (Roskin and Coyle, 2008: 88). Then came the presidency of Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak after the assassination of Sadat. While, since 1952, presidents came to power by democratic means or processes, their rule and leadership have been authoritarianist. Recently, right before the Egyptian revolution, many members of Muslim Brotherhood claimed to be “independent” to gain seats in Parliament, especially because the Brotherhood in itself is “still technically illegal for advocating Islamic rule.

Nowadays, after the new government, still polling in Egypt is notoriously weak; the Egyptian military used its control of the state media to discourage further revolutionary activity after Mubarak fell; and the current regime has quashed dissent substantially. Indeed, a true revolution never happened in the first place. This is what a crucial bloc of Egyptians wanted: stability, as they defined it, rather than the deep institutional reforms that a true revolution required.

In fact, during all of the major political developments of the past four years, many Egyptians have explained their

actions to achieve “stability.” In this vein, they welcomed the military’s assumption of power after Mubarak fell, trusting the military as a stabilizing force. Many of them similarly supported the Muslim Brotherhood’s overwhelming victory in the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections and Mohamed Morsi’s narrow victory in the June 2012 presidential elections, viewing the Brotherhood as a well-organized political movement that could provide stability – a word the Brotherhood used frequently during its various campaigns. And when Morsi’s November 2012 power grab catalyzed massive discontent and months of political upheaval, a critical mass of Egyptians similarly welcomed the military takeover that ousted him in mid-2013 as a stabilizing force once again. These Egyptians now bristle when others (accurately) call Morsi’s ouster a “coup,” because for them, the primary goal was never procedural democracy.

In this regard, when an Egyptian court dismissed all criminal charges against former dictator Hosni Mubarak in November 29, 2014, many called it the final nail in coffin of the “revolution” that ousted Mubarak from power in February 2011. “Egypt’s revolution is dead, “the January revolution is over; they ended it,” the majority of independent Medias reported. After the July 2013 ouster of Egypt’s first freely elected president and the subsequent rise of another former military general to the presidency, the end of Mubarak’s criminal case looks like the Snake and Ladder on Egypt’s counterrevolutionary game.

Yet this narrative misunderstands what Egypt’s Tahrir Square revolt meant to many Egyptians, particularly those from the country’s political center, which is overwhelmingly rural and traditional, although not necessarily Islamist. Far from desiring the far-reaching – revolutionary – political reform that the “Arab Spring or Islamic awakening” narrative embodied, many of these Egyptians endorsed only the uprising’s two most basic goals: ending Mubarak’s 30-year rule and preventing the succession of his son Jamal. From their perspective, Mubarak had simply ruled for too long, and his apparent attempt to install Jamal as his successor reeked of pharaonism. For these Egyptians, the “revolution,” as they refer to the uprising, didn’t die with Saturday’s trial verdict, because Mubarak still isn’t president. And ever since Mubarak was overthrown, their goal has been to return to normalcy, even if that falls short of democracy.

Of course, the youth activists who catalyzed the Tahrir Square uprising had a very different view: They wanted a real revolution that completely overhauled the previous regime, and they hesitated to leave Tahrir Square even after Mubarak fell. The Mubarak regime, they argued, wasn’t just composed of one man and his family, but encompassed a whole set of repressive state institutions that remained firmly in place. So in the months that followed Mubarak’s ouster, the activists demonstrated repeatedly against the military junta that succeeded him, and staged multiple attacks on the Interior Ministry. But

with each new round of mobilization, the activists found their numbers shrinking, as the Islamists focused on electoral campaigning while the centrists wanted all protest activity to cease immediately.

Yet in those early months after Mubarak's ouster, the activists still had one rallying cry that could draw large numbers to Tahrir Square: "Put Mubarak and his cronies on trial!" Although many Egyptians saw little use in trying Mubarak, an 82-year-old ex-dictator with no prospect of returning to power, they didn't object to it either. So starting in late March 2011, the activists organized demonstrations demanding Mubarak's arrest. Fearing that it could become the target of the next uprising, the military complied and detained Mubarak on April 13. The fact that Mubarak's indictment was political (and it undoubtedly was) contributed to the dropping of charges against him on Saturday, November 29, 2014.

Once Mubarak was on trial, however, the activists were rarely able to mobilize the masses on their own. Meanwhile, sensing the activists' alienation from the broader Egyptian public, the military junta increasingly repressed the ongoing demonstrations with brutal force. Dozens were killed in the year after Mubarak's ouster, and thousands more wounded – with minimal popular outcry beyond the activists' ranks. When the current regime effectively banned massive demonstrations last year, its large "stability"-oriented base naturally hailed the move.

The current regime's support within this segment of the population is likely to evaporate if President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi does not provide political and economic stability. But even then, support for far-reaching institutional change – a real revolution – probably would remain slim within Egypt. The violent chaos that has overtaken other "Arab Spring" revolutions, that many Egyptians prefer to avoid. But even before these civil wars exploded, many Egyptians already were wary of revolution, and content to settle for Mubarak's ouster.

### **Authoritarianism and uncertainty: the dominant paradigm**

Countries frequently face course of action crises and great events that change their future by turning from one way to another. Egypt is not an exception to that rule, as we see by the Egyptian revolution in 1952 and 2011. One week before 23 July, 1952, Egypt was an authoritarian occupied country by Britain, despite the many features of democracy especially in parliamentary elections and party system but it was all formal features, while in reality the British governor kept all powers in his hand. And after him comes the king with his authority. One week before the revolution of 25th January, Egypt was a stable, authoritarian regime, prospects of change were minimal and every expert in the world would have bet on the endurance of its regime. However, on January 25, a great

revolution took place in Egypt.

When General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi deposed and arrested President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, he delivered the coup de grace to an already ailing democratic process in Egypt. Now the country is most likely bracing for more years of autocratic rule under field marshal and national hero al-Sisi. Why did Egypt miss the chance to build democratic governance? Moreover, what does the astonishing popularity of another military strongman tell us about Egyptian politics? There is sufficient evidence to argue that reckless human action, more than structural constraints or some innate culture (Al-Anani, 2013), caused Egypt's democratic fiasco. Yet the problem seems to go much deeper than the political actors' bad behavior or miscalculations.

The central government in Cairo is unlikely to be in a position anytime soon to certify that Egypt is on the road to democracy and the story now unfolding in Egypt will be a long one and largely beyond people's control. The country's politics do not represent a dichotomy between democracy and autocracy or Islamism and secularism, but rather the interplay between several large forces (an entrenched bureaucracy, a sprawling military, political Islam) to which a new and potent force has been added: the people's expectation of political participation.

Continuing this approach as indicated above, the biggest challenge for democracy in the Egypt is history, for the predominance of authoritarianism would make democratizing a rather difficult, if not lengthy, process. As Tessler (2007: 108) quoted, "democracy is not attained simply by making institutional changes through elite-level maneuvering. Its survival depends also on the values and beliefs of ordinary citizens." According to Brown (2011: 129), "the opposition would like to see a whittling down of the powers of the presidency; firm institutional guarantees of judicial independence, largely in form of a more autonomous and powerful judicial council; judicial monitoring of elections; an end to exceptional courts and Egypt's state of emergency; more robust instruments for protecting rights and freedoms; and a truly pluralist party system." Brown suggests that while Egyptians may not exactly opt for an American-type of "checks and balances," they tend to discuss a more literal "separation of powers."

Generally, thought-of hindrances to establishing a democracy in Egypt as well as the Arab countries as a whole include, but are not limited to deep roots of authoritarianism, lack of a civil society, and lack of Islamic political thought of what "citizenship" is or means (Lewis, 2011). Roskin and Coyle mentioned that "at a certain point during the modernization process, demands for democratization rise." Usually poorer countries (whose GDP per capita is less than \$5,000) failed to democratize, while better off countries (whose GDP per capita is more than \$6,000) successfully democratized (Roskin and Coyle, 2008: 279). The CIA World Factbook estimated GDP per capita for Egypt as of 2010 is \$6,200

(in purchase parity power, or PPP). Attempts at democracy in poor lands tend to fail as populist demagogues or military officers turn themselves into authoritarian leaders (Roskin and Coyle, 2008: 279). Based on income alone, modernization theory suggests that Egypt should successfully democratize, but its current praetorianism combined with the people's typically extraordinary trust in the military could lead this attempt at democratization to fail, or military officers would have "turned themselves into authoritarian leaders."

Currently, el-Sisi is Egypt's eighth president since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1953, the year after a military coup. With the exception of Morsi and two civilians who served in an interim capacity, all of Egypt's presidents have come from the armed forces. But the fate of Egyptian presidents in the last 60 years was not particularly bright: Nasser died of a heart attack, Sadat was assassinated, and the last two presidents, Mubarak and Morsi, are serving time in jail. Since the overthrow of Morsi until the presidential election, el-Sisi was concerned with four key issues: changing the slogan of the ousted president from "Islam is the solution" to "security is the solution"; passing the "anti-protest law," banning the Muslim Brotherhood and designating them as a terrorist organization; and holding a referendum in January 2014 to seek electoral legitimacy for his policies. And the other hand, el-Sisi was responsible for overthrowing the Muslim Brotherhood regime headed by Mohammad Morsi in July 2013. These events have resulted in the death of 2,500 Egyptians, approximately 16,000 members ended up in prison, along with 20,000 or so revolutionaries, opposition leaders, journalists and regime opponents. In addition, TV channels were shut down, satirical shows taken off the air, and private newspapers were banned (Perlov, 2014).

But after four years the revolution: great challenges and empty slogans regarding the economy, terrorism and stability. Workers' strikes, power cuts, energy and gas crises, high unemployment rates, a collapsing lower middle class, students killed on university campuses, soaring food prices, a serious water shortage due to a mismanagement of water resources, a dwindling tourist industry, an untrained workforce and truncated productivity, domestic terrorism and a fight against jihadists in northern Sinai, a polarized society as volatile as a powder keg – all of these are part of the reality the new president must face should he wish to have a different end to his tenure, even before he tackles the demands of the revolution for social justice, freedom and democracy.

Hence, Egypt's democracy debacle was not simply the consequence of bad decision-making by political actors. Rather, it was part of a normative approach to mediating conflicts of power and interests. When in doubt, deferring to an arbitrator seems to be the default position in Egyptian political culture. To argue that political culture is the main cause of Egypt's transition failure does not

mean that the country has no potential for democratization or no democratic culture. On the contrary, millions of Egyptians took great risks in 2011 and again in 2013 precisely to topple authoritarian rule. The month-long, daily mass demonstrations in January 2011 were driven (at least in part) by democratic ideals including the rule of law, the desire to end corruption and nepotism, respect for human rights, free elections, and political representation. Even the acute institutional instability and political battles that followed Mubarak's departure showed that political legitimacy and popular sovereignty now matter.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that, since July 2013, el-Sisi has been a key, if not the key, player in the Egyptian political scene. He banned the Muslim Brotherhood, rounded up its leaders along with the revolutionary youth, undermined the political parties, and allowed the media to create an atmosphere of a personality cult around him. All was done in the name of averting civil war and restoring the state, which in fact no longer functions as a rational, non-partisan and non-ideological entity but rests mainly on coercive institutions, such as the security apparatus and the military, aided by the judiciary and the media. Egypt is increasingly becoming ungovernable and fragile according to the 2014 Fragile States Index where it ranked the country at 31 amongst 177 countries (Fragile State Index, 2014, Fund for Peace Foundation). Such authoritarian tendencies make it difficult for a healthy and competitive polity to emerge. With el-Sisi's polarizing discourse and fear-building repressive measures, it is hard to reach a consensus or achieve stability. His disregard for lawmaking and representative institutions, like the parliament, will further shrink his support base and discourage investors. He might keep himself afloat through the institutions of coercion and through regional support and the international complicity, but this situation might not be sustainable for long.

## Conclusion

Nowadays, Egypt is a corrupt military dictatorship with grim prospects. Historically, Egypt has been an authoritarian state. The roots of authoritarianism can be traced to the Pharaonic tradition. Each modern regime - from the monarch to the current one, has maintained the authoritarian core of the Pharaonic tradition. Huntington (2006: 29) stated that invasion of foreign ideas spark revolutions. Especially if those foreign ideas are dramatically different than that domestically, the revolution is sparked only to be left with how to reconcile traditions starkly different than modernity. Such culturally ideological differences lead Egypt's expectations of democratization to optimistically exceed that of reality. Yet, as "the Arab brains are in Cairo," Egypt is key to figuring how to intertwine democracy with Islamic culture.

However, revolutionary and modernization theory suggests that intellectual, educated, middle-income Egypt should be able to successfully democratize, under presumptions that the Muslim Brotherhood would adhere to their sayings that they will embrace diversity more. This is very important if Egypt is to democratize, given that the majority would vote for Muslim Brotherhood, and Egyptians view them as the hopeful way of change. Today, Egypt really is not where they do want to be, and its political history significantly widens this expectation of the democratizing process versus where the democratizing process actually stands. The greatest issue within the revolution to bring democracy to Egypt is the millennia of authoritarianism the country has had. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without inclusive democracy, rule of law, and meaningful reforms. Even if el-Sisi succeeded, his policies might generate growth, but not balanced development. Ignoring poverty and unemployment, alienating youth, overlooking the parliament, and disrespecting the political process will lead to neither market reforms nor democracy.

Finally, the fact that today, the millions of Egyptians who swarmed into Tahrir Square in January 2011 demanding that Mubarak step down, and then again in June 2013 asking for the overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi, have learned how to use "people power." A wall of fear has been broken, and it would be difficult for another autocratic regime to succeed in ruling Egypt for an extended period of time.

## Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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