

The Muslim Brotherhood: Between Democracy, Ideology and Distrust

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Abstract

Following the Arab Spring, democracy exercised through free and fair elections had allowed Islamist political parties to gain power in Egypt. There was a transformation happening in the ideology of Islamists, who were increasingly trying to influence legislation through democratic processes and social activism. It could be argued that for a time, the U.S. and other Western governments no longer viewed Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood as a threat comparable with Jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda. This did not translate into a domestic political success, however, once Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood was elected into power in 2012, it simplified good governance to a single and effective slogan: "Islam is the solution!" Yet, it had no real solution to the everyday problems of Egyptians and the sheer chaos that characterizes the daily lives of its people. In a devout region with growing inequality and poverty, religious credentials will matter less than offering specific solutions to these growing social issues. This paper argues that the myth of political Islam has been exposed in Egypt and that the Muslim Brotherhood's identity, torn between political pragmatism and religious conservatism, shaped its political actions under Morsi's rule.

Keywords

Arab Spring – political Islam – Egypt – Muslim Brotherhood – religion – democracy

Introduction

In Egypt's parliamentary elections of November 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 of 454 seats, forming the largest opposition bloc in the country. At the time, the Brotherhood's agenda was characterized by a new emphasis on democratic reform. This included demands widely backed by pro-democracy activists – namely, changing legislation that had previously allowed for the imprisonment of journalists, granting independence to Egypt's judges, and canceling a 25 year-old emergency law. Pro-democracy advocates in Egypt argued that this emergency law went against the central pillars of democracy, which includes the right of citizens to a fair trial and the right to decide who shall run their country.

Years before the January 25, 2011 revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood joined secular and liberal opposition groups calling for a genuine parliamentary democracy in Egypt. In March 2004, the organization issued a list of reform initiatives that committed itself to a parliamentary and democratic system. The Brotherhood, then, chose the path of democracy to achieve its political objectives – a strategy that has been promoted by the U.S. and other Western states. This encouraged prominent U.S. analysts such as Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke to argue that the Brotherhood must not be ignored in Washington's democracy promotion efforts across the region (Leiken & Brooke, 2007). Both at home and abroad, the organization was frequently recognized as an actor committed to the realization of democratic principles signified by a more open and free society and a transparent, accountable government. As Shadi Hamid put it in his article, "Rise of the Islamists: How Islamists Will Change Politics, and Vice Versa," "[l]ike it or not, the United States will have to learn to live with political Islam...Through engagement, the United States can encourage these Islamists to respect key Western interests, including advancing the Arab-Israeli peace process, countering Iran and combating terrorism" (Foreign Affairs, 2011, P. 40). Yet, once the Brotherhood was elected into power in 2012, we witnessed a change in their attitude toward the central pillars of democracy. This article argues that the Muslim Brotherhood identity shaped their political actions under Morsi's rule.

The Egyptian Revolution in Context

The Arab Spring has been absolutely groundbreaking and its impact is still reverberating throughout the Arab Middle East and beyond. As social change and globalization have barreled ahead, the relationship that modern

Arab citizens have with political Islam has altered as well. While the popularity of Islamists at the polls has instigated, both at home and abroad, inflammatory comparisons to the Iranian revolution of 1979, it is evident that the protest movements were not primarily, or even largely, religious in nature. Although the Egyptian Revolution was plagued with criticisms for its lack of leadership, this may in fact be a natural byproduct of a movement more focused on participating in democracy than ideology. In short, these were not protests in favor of an Islamic government; they were protests in favor of the people's right to choose. This is a significant distinction, even if the people's choices are Islamic parties.

The slogan of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution was neither Islamist nor secularist. Rather, it was concerned with issues outside of this binary. "Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice" was born from the economic and social frustrations of ordinary people in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis were surprisingly hesitant to join the youth revolution in 2011, but instead were heavily persuaded to do so by younger members of the party.

After the Brotherhood was elected into power, its history of moderation as a democratic actor became somewhat questionable. The Brotherhood's political success had accompanied varying degrees of discomfort, with some predicting a slide into theocracy or authoritarianism. The Brotherhood should have responded by reaffirming its democratic intents not only in rhetoric, but also in practice. During this critical stage, as the Brotherhood was securing power, it was important that the organization de-emphasize its ideological and organizational advantages and recognize that in a fragile process of democratization, the perception of authoritarianism – regardless of having a popular mandate – can be extremely damaging indeed. When it came into power, the Brotherhood's political discourse revealed a movement that sought to integrate itself into a democratic state system that can be better attentive to changing circumstances, but it was beset by ideological dilemmas.¹

The Egyptian Revolution created a political vacuum, allowing groups like the Brotherhood to use elections as a means to achieve and sustain power. Islamists and liberals alike attempted to use democratic participation as a

1 See also L. Brynjar, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928–1942* (London: Ithaca Press, 1998); R. Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989); S. Abed-Kotob, 'The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.27 (1995), pp.321–39; M. El-Ghobashy, 'The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Brothers', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.37 (2005), pp.373–95.

means to secure political gains. Meanwhile, detractors of each camp pointed to ways in which the other was “undemocratic.” Despite the Brotherhood’s electoral success, some Arab and Western journalists and officials argued that the party could never be a genuine actor in Egypt’s path toward democracy. Former *New York Times* columnist and currently President Emeritus and Board Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, Leslie H. Gelb, wrote an article in January 2011, “Beware Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood,” in which he asserted that if the Muslim Brotherhood gains control of Egypt, it will “be almost impossible for the people to take it back. Just look at Iran” (*The Daily Beast*, 29 January 2011). Eric Trager also wrote in *The Atlantic* that “the Muslim Brotherhood may well remain deeply hostile toward even one of the most basic and defensible of American interests in the Middle East – that of securing Americans from terrorism” (*The Atlantic*, 3 May 2011). Moreover, Senator Mark Steven Kirk, an Illinois Republican, said in a floor speech on February 2 2011, that “[w]hile we support human rights and democracy, we must heed growing warnings about the Muslim Brotherhood, their leaders and plans for taking Egypt back to the 13th century” (*The Washington Times*, 3 February 2011). Clearly there was great apprehension on the part of many US officials and analysts on the Muslim Brotherhood’s true commitments to democracy in Egypt. On the other hand, Islamists argued that their opponents’ failure to respect the Brotherhood’s repeated success at the polls was evidence of their undemocratic behavior. Yet, if the implementation of a democratic government is to succeed in Egypt, both Islamists and opposition groups needed to go beyond the rhetoric formed by these types of ideological confrontations.

The political and social challenges of modern Egypt were not created by the now ousted President Mohammed Morsi’s policies and actions. Instead, these challenges stem from a result of a wider political culture of cynicism and distrust among politicians and citizens. Moreover, the extent of distrust often masks the similarities between Egyptian liberals and Islamists. For example, both groups believe that Islam and Islamic law are compatible with democracy. They also both claim to champion and cherish democracy. As the two camps become further polarized, an “us versus them” mentality has emerged, resulting in serious threats to the social fabric and political life of a post-Mubarak Egypt.

Following the decrees enacted by President Morsi, some opposition and revolutionary figures began to characterize him as well as the Brotherhood not just as flawed democrats, but as militants, terrorists, and fascists – the old stereotypes of political Islam. After canceling the November 2012 decree that sparked the protests in the spring of 2012, some opposition groups discredited all measures Morsi sought to control, because the cancellation of the decrees

kept previous decisions taken by Morsy unpopular. Protests have also focused on the 2012 amended constitution, which opposition critics have condemned as illiberal. Therefore, the main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front (NSF) led by Mohammed ElBaradei called for protests in a peaceful expression of anger against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood who, they think, want to impose their will on the people. On the other hand, Morsi and the Brotherhood further undermined their position in the eyes of their critics in their continued to claims that there were a number of conspiracies laid out against them. It became routine for the group's officials to insinuate (and with little evidence), that an opposition figure had been bought, held bias, or had a 'foreign agenda'.

Presence of the Brotherhood in Egypt

Following the January 25th Revolution, the Brotherhood gained power by working intensely within the framework of democracy: "[a]n Islamist organization that had spent most of its existence denied legal status...was now in charge of the very apparatus once used to repress it. And it had reached those heights not by way of coup or revolution but through the ballot box" (Wickham, P. 1). If it expects to maintain this image, the group will need to exemplify its honest, peaceful, cooperative impulses to the Egyptian public as well as to opposition groups. These principles could be achieved through four main efforts: 1) engage in self-criticism and acknowledge recent policy mistakes, 2) maintain a regard for peaceful protests, 3) emphasize the importance of societal dialogue and 4) provide assurance that the Muslim Brotherhood will not impose its interpretation of Islam on the rest of society.

The opposition, on the other hand, needs to re-evaluate its current notions of democracy and participation. The post-Mubarak era had revealed the Egyptian opposition's weak organizational structure and policy, which cannot support a sustained revolutionary process. It seems that the Revolution and the fall of Mubarak did not push the opposition to resist the corrupting influence of power and abide by the rules of the democratic process. Thus, when Morsi failed to commit to the promises he made during his campaign, opposition groups could have used Morsi's failure to dissuade people from voting for the Brotherhood in the future. Some, however, have argued that no matter how democratic Islamists become, liberals and secularists will always view them as aggressive and totalitarian. For example, Emad Al-Din Hussein, editor-in-chief of *Al-Shorouk News* wrote an article titled, "Classes to Teach the Muslim Brothers Democracy" where he suggests that the extremist Brotherhood

leaders should attend classes to eradicate dictatorship from their minds, and implant democracy instead. (*The Daily News Egypt*, October 28, 2012). Regardless of how these groups view Islamists, they should have resisted their impulse to reject all cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups. The Egyptian opposition, for example, should have accepted the new constitution of 2012, particularly given that it was approved by a majority of citizens in a referendum; despite that Egyptians backed a constitution that managed to deeply polarize the country. In this current state of political reality, there is no way to provide the stability needed to assist an extremely fragile Egyptian economy and development of a democratic process. There was, and still is, a need to have the time and will for the democratic process to take hold and become part of the culture of Egypt.

Before it was dissolved in June of 2012, Egypt's first revolutionary parliament showed that the current political landscape forces liberals and Islamists to work with each other on issues of common concern to both parties such as commitment to the January 25th Revolution and its values of democracy, and respect for political and civil rights. It is argued that only these efforts at cooperation will diminish current levels of polarization. Both Islamists and liberals should take into consideration, however, that there are new actors, including labor unions, employers' associations, revolutionary organizations and other civil society groups that have gained a sense of empowerment after the revolution. Often, it is these groups that are most able to cross ideological lines and represent social interests of bread, freedom, social justice; the demands of the Egyptian January 25th Revolution. They constitute the real revolution in Egyptian society, and provide an example that politicians would do well to follow.

Islamists and the West in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring

Since the Middle Ages, Islam has been discussed and thought by Orientalists within a framework of passion, prejudice and political interests (Said, 1997, p. 24). As far as Orientalism is concerned, Islam poses a serious challenge to Christianity (Said, 1997, p. 5). During the early period of the European Renaissance, Islam was considered to be 'a demonic religion of apostasy, blasphemy and obscurity' (Said, 1997, p. 5). Viewed largely as 'a formidable competitor', Islam was regarded as one of the greatest political challenges to the West. For hundreds of years, armies of the Islamic world – real and imagined – threatened Europe, destroyed its outposts and colonized its domains (Said, 1997, p. 5), and the prevailing fear was that that these "barbaric" and "primitive"

Muslims would overrun the rest of Europe, end Christendom and destroy Western civilization (Said, 1997, p. xxix). Some have even assumed that Islam and Muslims are antithetical to modernity. The reasons for those assumptions include:

First, the foundations on which colonialism started were built on the dehumanization of the indigenous populations. Secondly, post independence; the Cold War defined the relationship between the developed and less developed worlds, which had its repercussions on the Muslim world. Third, with the rise of Islamic activism in the late 1970s (after the 1979 Iranian Revolution), the literature on modernity again emphasized the contradiction between modernity and Islam, based on the Iranian experience. Fourth, Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" (1993) again emphasized the differences between Islam and its followers, and the Judeo-Christian tradition in terms of modernization and democratization. Fifth, the role Muslims played in their writings, whether they were mainstream like Qutb, or marginal, stated that an Islamic community has to be run by the "Sovereignty of God" (Hakimiyat Allah).

KRISHNA-HENSEL, 2012, p. 31

The role of Islam in the Arab Spring polity can therefore be explained as a culmination of a long debate between scholars on the question of whether Islam is compatible with democracy. Some scholars view Islam as a religion that should not be charged with the duty of governing – that Islam and democracy are therefore not compatible.² Others, however, argue that Islam is not only a religion, but also a system that has religious, legal, political, economic, and social components.³ Political Islam is on the rise in the Middle East, gaining votes through democratic elections long before the Arab Spring – for example,

2 Kepel, Gilles (1985), *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: the Prophet and the Pharaoh*, University of California Press, p. 47; Haddad, Yvonne (1983), 'Sayyid Qutb: ideologue', in John Esposito (ed.), *Voice of Resurgent Islam*, Oxford University Press, pp. 67–69; Abu Khalil, As'ad (1994), 'The incoherence of Islamic fundamentalism: Arab Islamic thought at the end of the twentieth century', *Middle East Journal*, 48:4, 677–694, cf. p. 683; Mortimer, Edward (1982), *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 245.

3 Watt, W. Montgomery (1961), *Islam and the Integration of Society*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, pp. 178–180; Mawdudi, Abu al-A'la (1973), *Islamic Way of Life*, Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, pp. 40–46; Hamidullah, Muhammad (1970), *Introduction to Islam*, Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, pp. 107–109; Weiss, Leopold (1980), *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus Ltd, pp. 1–4.

Hezbollah in Lebanon winning 18% in the parliamentary election in May 2005, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood winning 20% in the parliamentary election in November 2005, and Hamas winning the majority vote in the parliamentary election in Palestine Territories in January 2006. Moreover, there is a deeply embedded perception in the West that political Islam is 'inexorably on the march,' fortifying its supposed aggressive and totalitarian ideology against Western interests (Fawaz, 2006, P. 9).

Some American commentators, for example, have identified members of the Brotherhood as "radical Islamists" and [as] 'a vital component of the enemy's assault force...deeply hostile to the United States. Al-Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahiri sneers at them for lur[ing] thousands of young Muslim men into lines for elections...instead of into the lines of jihad" (Leiken, 2007, P. 107).

However, what many Western pundits and media accounts fail to recognize is that political Islam has taken the path of democracy to achieve political objectives, a path that was, indeed, promoted by the U.S. government and in particular propagated by the administration of George W. Bush (Traub, 2007. p. 44). The challenge for Islamists is to adopt a positive dialogue about relations between civilizations, as a response to Huntington's still prevalent theory of a "clash of civilizations." This dialogue should not be only government-based, but should expand the meaning of diversity by including people/groups typically shut out from the political process. In short, it should be people to people based. Islamists must also offer a model for cooperation between diverse groups and political players and should resist grouping Western powers together as part of the "hostile" West, as such notions would hamper the possibility of future cooperation. Orientalist theory reproduces narratives of difference and oppositional terms that must be rejected by both the West and the East. The Ennahda Party in Tunisia, for example, has learned from the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and works to ensure that its overtly Islamic identity still protects civil rights and support democracy. This was evident when Ennahda party stepped down in September 2013 to cede power to a more secular, technocratic government. Moreover, Tunisian Islamists realize that it is quite necessary to craft a fair constitution accepted by most Tunisians and one that will withstand any type of setback in the future. The lesson of Egypt to Islamists in Tunisia is that political stability and compromise are inseparable.

There is little doubt that this dialogue of cooperation and engagement amongst different groups and "civilizations" will be fraught with challenges. The Arab Spring was an expression of public discontent with internal corruption and despotism, but these are themselves linked to global economic and political structures as evident in Western geopolitical interests that prop up

authoritarian leaders in the name of 'stability.' The Arab Spring's call for democracy was heralded globally as an emphatic rejection of corruption and a cry for integrity, and it seems that the international community responded positively to the message. There is therefore a need to explore the extent that regional changes affect international relations and vice versa. The question of whether the Arab Spring will usher in a new Arab world order, which will determine Arabs' relations locally and internationally, remains open. Regardless, attention ought to be drawn to the role of values and perspectives in the study understanding Arab Spring politics.

Reiterations of Power: The Arab Spring and Western Hegemony

The roles played by foreign interests in the Arab Spring in Egypt – be they Arab, regional or international – and how they managed to achieve their objectives are extremely important in understanding the complex scene of contemporary Egypt. The neglect of these issues has resulted in the absence of national agreement that is evident in the confusion in administering post-Mubarak Egypt, as well as the failure of opposition to offer national alternatives and to agree to a national project to move the country beyond the instability of the revolution. In contrast, some point out that the U.S. had conversations with the Muslim Brotherhood back in 2005 – long before the outbreak of the Revolution in 2011 – as an example of the Brotherhood's willingness to engage in more open democratic discussions. Seeing that the Mubarak regime might collapse, and understanding that it was not in its interests to provoke a confrontation with Arab Spring nations over the choices of their voters, the US had wanted to safeguard a stable transition of power in a post-Mubarak Egypt.

Washington, therefore, had begun engaging with the Muslim Brotherhood as the most important moderate Islamic group and the largest opposition bloc, not only in Egypt, but also in other Arab Spring nations as well. Moreover, American officials were surprised to discover that the Muslim Brotherhood was ready to reach a settlement regarding most of the core issues related to American foreign policy and national security in Egypt, as exemplified in the way the Brotherhood showed commitment to diplomatic treaties signed by former regimes, including the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood presented a shared view of preserving the neoliberal economic system, to which the pro-business Brotherhood members were in complete agreement.

Hence, it could be argued that the U.S. no longer saw the Brotherhood as a threat comparable with Jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda. Rather, the US

regarded the Brotherhood as an important political actor. What is more, this position of the Brotherhood as a major political player in the Arab world also presents an opportunity – despite its ‘rhetorical support’ for Hamas, the Brotherhood could actually be the sort of moderate mediator the U.S. administration needs in order to exercise some influence on Palestinian groups, as evident in the 2012 Gaza crisis. The former U.S. ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk, noted during Morsi’s rule that “the United States and Egypt — one using its influence with Israel, the other with Hamas — to put together a cease-fire package as the foundation for a wider resolution of the conflict” (*Time*, Nov.21, 2012).

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Cultural Scene

Even before the Egyptian Revolution, the Egyptian cultural scene had been dominated by a fear of the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, and the Islamist trend in general. Such apprehension was nurtured on the one hand by the propagandist secular media, and by the conservative, parochial perspective and clumsy performance of the Brotherhood on the other. In his article “Unpacking Anti-Muslim Brotherhood Discourse” in *Jadaliyya*, Mohamad Elmasry states that, “[t]he opposition’s propaganda machine – aided by a plethora of private television networks and newspapers owned by Mubarak-friendly businessmen like Ahmad Bahgat, Salah Diab, and Mohamed al-Amin – has successfully manufactured discourses designed to designate the Brotherhood and Morsi as lacking in basic integrity and unworthy of political participation.” Elmasry refers to the dominant theme used in Egyptian media and political discourse that argues that the Muslim Brotherhood “is bent on occupying all state institutions and hoarding power. This “brotherhoodization” (“akhwana,” in Arabic) thesis dovetails nicely with other discourses about the Brotherhood’s alleged desire to sell off Egypt and its disloyalty to the nation” (*Jadaliyya*, June 28, 2013). It is these images created by Egyptian media that have been used by some Egyptians to justify the massacre committed against the pro-Brotherhood *Rabaa* and *al-Nahda* sit-ins. That said, the Brotherhood themselves have undermined their standing with opponents by their failure to adequately deal with Egypt’s chronic social, economic and political crises after taking over for the Mubarak regime.

The Brotherhood failed to deal with the harsh economic conditions and security threats that have long kept Egyptians under the yoke of a military-led dictatorship. Moreover, in its attempt to “reform” the nation’s consciousness and remold the country’s identity, the Brotherhood targeted the ministry of

culture as a means of affecting change in Egyptian values and moral standards, without acknowledging the desire among everyday Egyptians to break away from conservative restrictions on all forms of expression and creativity.

The Brotherhood therefore engaged in open confrontation with Egypt's leading intellectuals and writers, who – sensing the dangers of repression – organized a sit-in at the office of the Brotherhood-appointed minister, Alaa Abdel-Aziz. In addition, the Brotherhood's apparent apathy towards freedom of expression, its immoderate and substance-free rhetoric focusing on a Renaissance plan (Nahda Project), and its inability to achieve progress in handling substantial issues, such as the economy, corruption and unemployment, disheartened its supporters and stoked the suspicions of its opponents. The Brotherhood's apparent apathy towards freedom of expression was clearly evident when thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters surrounded Media Production City in Cairo, three times to intimidate both journalists and the television guests trying to enter the TV stations. The Brotherhood supporters viewed the media coverage as being biased against Morsi and the Islamic project. While artists, writers and intellectuals look at the Islamist-led government attempt to monopolize artistic circles at the expense of other voices, as efforts to "Brotherhoodize" the arts to exert their influence on the lives of Egyptians and to force their religious agenda on the Ministry of Culture. Moreover, they believe that the Minister of Culture wants to fix the history of the Brotherhood over the past 80 years by appointing a new director to the National Library and Archives. Indeed, the Brotherhood clashes with artists and intellectuals increased many woes, whether real or unreal, that certain freedoms would not be protected as long as the Muslim Brotherhood is in charge.

Another reason for the Brotherhood's failure to win public support is the organization's inability to work out a long-needed internal restructuring process that acknowledges the January 25th Revolution. It has even failed to separate the social and the religious from the political. The Brotherhood, indeed, has long viewed social service provision as a way to demonstrate its commitment to helping the poor, reducing inequality among social classes. Such overlap between the religious, social and the political, however, has promoted long-held public distrust towards the Brotherhood's ideologies and policies. Added to this is the organization's authoritarian repression of Egyptian plurality and diversity through the state censorship of almost all platforms of expression through pursuing criminal and vague allegations of "spreading wrong information," "disrupting peace," "insulting the president," and "insulting religion" against many media figures (Bassem Yousef, the Egyptian satirist, is the most famous case in this regard), which also fanned public discontent and rejection of its presence in power.

It can be argued that a process of social and cultural Islamisation or the growing influence of a certain ideological and political interpretation of Islam in the Egyptian cultural and social scene, which has taken place over the past three decades or so, has changed the way Muslims regard their religion. As Olivier Roy, professor of social and political theory, has argued,

The paradox of Islamisation is that it has largely depoliticized Islam. Social and cultural re-Islamisation – the wearing of the *hijab* and *niqab*, an increase in the number of mosques, the proliferation of preachers and Muslim television channels – has happened without the intervention of militant Islamists and has in fact opened up a ‘religious market,’ over which no one enjoys a monopoly. In short, Islamists have lost the stranglehold on religious expression in the public sphere that they enjoyed in the 1980s.

New Statesman, February 15, 2011

Instead of the group’s adaptation to the new scene through the engagement with an inclusive reconciliation process, the Brotherhood attempted to enforce respect for discipline, authority and hierarchy among a public that is fighting to break away from such authoritarianism. For many, this old guard and its spare tire of a leader, President Morsi – the new buffoon-like president who rambled, failed to inspire, and embarrassed his citizens, made little to no progress on almost all socio-economic indicators – was worse than Mubarak.

In the summer of 2013, Tamarod, another young people’s movement, took to the streets with many of the same goals as the April 6 movement⁴: a return to a respectable liberal-democracy. But unlike the April 6 movement, they were happy to accept the old guard as Egypt’s savior once again. In cahoots with the military, Mubarak-era cronies, elite backers, and the aging liberal secular elites like Mohamed El Baradie and technocratic members of the interim cabinet, the Tamarod movement used its bottom-up signature collecting campaign to overthrow Morsi and the Brotherhood. “It’s not a coup, but a continued revolution!” cried Egyptians celebrating the military’s removal of President Mohamed Morsi from power after the mass demonstrations in Tahrir Square.

4 The April 6 Youth Movement is an Egyptian activist group established in Spring 2008 to support the workers in El-Mahalla El-Kubra, an industrial town, who were planning to strike on April 6. The movement was the catalyst of the political upheaval that brought about the downfall of Mubarak.

The Post July 3rd, 2013 Scene⁵

The Egyptian military has vilified the Muslim Brotherhood and all those who support it and deposed President Mohammed Morsi. The Brotherhood refuses to accept the outcome of the June 30 protests,⁶ denouncing all those who marched against their leader. The ‘us versus them’ narrative propagated by both sides is becoming entrenched and what little middle ground was left after the coup has eroded. Egyptians are internalizing contrasting versions of what has happened to their country since Hosni Mubarak fell. And with each impassioned telling, reconciliation recedes further into the distance.

The Egyptian military has been riding high on a platform of populism and nationalist fervor that has not been seen in decades. Since July 3rd, 2013, the Egyptian airwaves have been filled with anti-Brotherhood rhetoric. In the name of protecting the integrity of the Egyptian state, the army says it will “clean the streets” of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood has been painted as an internal security threat with global tentacles that reach out and feed off of Turkey, Qatar and even the United States.

This propaganda appeals to the masses searching for foreign scapegoats to Egypt’s debilitating domestic problems. The vilification of the Brotherhood as terrorists has been an easy sell across much of Egyptian society. The Muslim Brotherhood has equally vilified those who support the coup. Brotherhood members and supporters have claimed that Coptic Christians’ financial ties to the West were behind the demise of the Brotherhood and the coup. Coptic churches, homes, and businesses have been burned. Making up around 10 percent of Egypt’s 90 million people – many of whom reside in the rural countryside where poverty, illiteracy, and ignorance reign supreme – Christians are easy targets for zealots and vengeful supporters of the Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood is willing to be sacrificed in the name of pursuing its own grand ideology. The military is content with killing hundreds of Brotherhood supporters with the support of many Egyptians who will cheer and carry soldiers on their shoulders. These two very powerful narratives leave no room in the middle for moderates, for those, in other words, who may be liberals and democrats strongly against emergency law and military violence. Not surprisingly, Mohamad El Baradei quit as vice-president, and the April 6

5 On 3 July 2013, the Egyptian army chief General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi removed the country’s elected president Mohamed Morsi from power and suspended the Egyptian constitution, a move that came after the massive anti-Morsi demonstrations on June 30, 2013.

6 Mass protests on June 30, 2013, brought out millions of Egyptians demanding President Mohammed Morsi’s ouster.

revolutionary movement that gave birth to the Jan. 25, 2011 overthrow of Mubarak authoritarianism also rejected the increasing military and police clamp down.

As time goes on, the death toll and number of injured will continue to rise, the curfew will be ignored by hardline supporters of the Brotherhood (and thus lead to further clashes with security forces), and the hate and rhetoric of both sides will be elevated to new highs. Breaking up the Brotherhood sit-ins is easier than mending the wounds of an increasingly polarized society. There are no winners, and all Egyptians will pay the price of constant vilification of the other today, and in the future.

Conclusion

Recognizing the Brotherhood's electoral gains, liberals and secularists now point to what they see as a disturbing trend: the rise of "illiberal democracy." This illiberal aspect of the Brotherhood's democratic agenda is in part evident in the apparent absence of any internal factions within the group – or at least the disappearance of group faction when it arises. Some might claim that the absence of infighting is evidence of a lack of democratic credentials. As a political party, the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) should comprise a diversity of views, but the Brotherhood succeeds in presenting a unified message to voters, something that the opposition has continuously failed to do.

The Muslim Brotherhood has positioned itself as a moderate force in Egypt's political life. The leaders have emphasized their preference for a civil rather than a religious state by embracing democratic principles and opposing violence. The Brotherhood could have been a model for Islamist political movements across the Arab Middle East. However, following the establishment of the group's Freedom and Justice Party, and given the course that it has taken thus far, some have begun to doubt the Brotherhood's intention to adhere to the principles of democracy. While both the Brotherhood and SCAF emphasize their deep commitment to "democracy," they have differing views on what "democracy" actually means, both in theory and in practice.

The myth of Islamist political ideology as a solution to all political and economic woes has been shattered. Political Islamists throughout the Arab world were forced into the background of political life, or to go underground, during the years that most Arab governments were busy steadily undermining their right to participate in political life. But the fact that these Arab regimes were often corrupt, basing their support on crony capitalism and sham elections, actually helped Islamists. Repression empowered them, ironically, as it let

them stand as champions of virtue, clean government, social welfare, and justice. With the single slogan “Islam is the solution,” they effectively captured the imagination and hope of millions in the Arab world, making people believe that they had an alternative to tyranny.

This first year under the Morsi government in Egypt – by far the largest pilot project ever staged for Islamists’ political ideology – has exposed the myth that Islamists offer a real alternative.

Under Mr. Morsi, no new economic or political ideas were brought to the political table. True, the Egyptian “deep state” of Hosni Mubarak-era cronies prevented change, particularly in the judiciary and elements of the public sector. But Islamists had no real solution to the everyday problems of Egyptians such as traffic, garbage, insecurity, unemployment and the sheer chaos that characterizes the everyday lives people lead. Like his predecessors, Mr. Morsi tried to court foreign capital, international donors, and international creditors such as the International Monetary Fund. In essence, Mr. Morsi’s economic policies were business as usual. Undoubtedly Mr. Morsi inherited an economic mess and a system rife with corruption that would take more than a year to weed out. Moreover, one could argue that like all countries, Egypt must play by the international economic rules and it has, indeed, taken an economic beating with a depreciating exchange rate and rising debt burdens. Islamists are also capitalists themselves, albeit small-to-medium-sized business owners and not national oligarchs – so Islamists are not likely to shake the economic system underpinning Egypt. Yet, the point here is that Islamists never claimed that governing was hard; in essence they simplified good governance to a single and effective slogan: “Islam is the solution!” To many Egyptians this is now an empty promise, and demand for real policy ideas is increasing. This is a good thing as it sets the stage for political parties to mature beyond rhetoric and develop policy platforms.

Islamists will continue to command respect simply for having cleaner hands than those associated with the Mubarak regime, but Egyptians – and perhaps Arab electorates in other countries in the midst of transition – will demand more. In a devout region, the religious credentials of political parties will increasingly matter less than their ability to offer specific solutions to the struggle of daily life.

The Egyptian people are in a state of hysteria – mixed with nationalistic fervour – that makes it difficult to have a rational conversation about the state of affairs with many in the country. Indeed, the June 30, 2013 overthrow of a democratically-elected Islamist president – Mohamed Morsi – was a moment of national pride for many Egyptians. To deny the many Egyptian people the hope and pride they feel is akin to being a buzz-killer – though coup critics have been called worse, specifically a terrorist-sympathizer who is undermining

the security of the great Egyptian revolution. Egyptian prisons are full of these buzz killers; their crime was nothing more than to report, criticize, tweet, or offend the current regime. Without the restructuring of the Egyptian economy, society, and culture, however, there is little hope for survival or success in a globally competitive and modernizing world. Sadly, Egyptians on this high will crash and rock bottom will be a deep hole indeed. As Egypt descends into economic failure and a violent insurgency, the Egyptian body politic will search for a new fix and Sisi could, ironically, be the next target of mass protest.

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