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Explaining Absence

The Failure of Egypt's Liberals

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Explanations for the absence of liberalism in contemporary Egypt continue to rely on simplistic analyses that present the Arab world as doomed by age-old traditions and rigid texts. With a detailed discussion of Egypt's dynamic history, this chapter presents a more thorough and nuanced view of liberalism's failures in Egypt. By extension, the chapter also lays the foundation for analyzing the absence of liberalism in the broader Arab world, as well as its near-term prospects. Egypt is a quintessential encapsulation of regional trends toward authoritarianism and Islamist militancy. Its political life remains static, polarized, and trapped between limited and unsatisfactory modes of governance. The country's predicament has thus telegraphed a wider failing: it now functions as something of a negative indicator for a region that has often relied on it for intellectual, political, and cultural regeneration. This chapter is also intended as the start of a broader regional exploration of the weak performance of liberal political platforms in the Arab world.

As the initial promise of the Arab uprisings has collapsed and curdled, many have revisited nagging questions posed by political dysfunction in the Arab world. The trajectory of events moved rapidly from openness and ambition to reaction and survival, and recurrent themes of modern Arab political life have reasserted themselves. As Fouad Ajami noted in 1981, "It has been hard for the Arabs to escape from a deep historical dilemma: prison or anarchy."[1] That dilemma endures.

Amid this current resurgence of Arab authoritarianism and Islamist militancy, both liberalism and secularism have had little traction. Neither force has had a perceptible impact on recent Arab and Egyptian history; in fact, liberalism and secularism have fallen further into obscurity. The notion of open and pluralistic societies in the Arab world is more distant than ever. Egypt is a quintessential encapsulation of these many trends and now functions as something of a negative indicator for a region that has often relied on it for intellectual, political, and cultural regeneration. Egypt is, in a sense, an incubator of troublesome pathologies and a proving ground for the failure of liberalism.

The region's dysfunction remains a topic of sharp debate that has taken on increasing political salience as the ferocious autocratic response to the uprisings has coalesced alongside the rise of the Islamic State and the refugee crisis. Cumulatively, these trends have reinforced notions of the Arab world as the epicenter of global instability and conflict. The region continues to be distinct, and its seeming imperviousness to political progress has hardened Western opinions about Arab and Muslim politics and culture, with an outsized focus on how religion is shaping the region's politics and culture.

But many of these narratives are simplistic. The peculiar pathologies of the Arab world and the current failures of liberalism and secularism have emerged from the complex modern history of the region, the decisions of political and intellectual leaders, and the contingencies that shaped its political culture. Certainly, Egypt has its own unique history

and sociocultural traditions, including religion, which have shaped that political culture. But a fatalistic view of those precursors as rigid and permanent is thoroughly misguided. It is not historical destiny that is shaping Arab politics, driving the rise of religion, or producing the failure of secular and liberal forces.

In an effort to explicate this state of affairs many intellectuals and political leaders have lapsed into ahistorical readings of religion, politics, law, and culture. In this telling, liberalism's inability to take hold in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world is framed as something intrinsic and inherent, bound up in tradition and text.

Even as military-led governance and Islamist rule perform poorly, liberalism still fails to make major inroads into the Egyptian public sphere. What remains striking about Egypt's political culture are the poverty and limited boundaries of discourse. Not a single party in the era after the fall of Hosni Mubarak (president 1981–2011) could be described as putting forward, defending, and maintaining a liberal vision and approach to governance.[2] In current political discourse, the basic aspirations of liberal democracy, including individual liberty, equality of citizenship, and a tolerance for diversity, and the mechanisms by which such aspirations may be secured, such as constitutional government, separation of powers, competitive elections, a free press, and transparency, are notable by their absence. One can only assume from those choices that such a political posture was nearly universally understood to be unviable, even among the minority of political actors who themselves held liberal views in private.

To understand the contemporary predicament of liberal thought in Egypt we must examine the modern historical variables that have pushed Egypt to this bleak present. This chapter will offer a brief survey of the most salient of those variables while offering an assessment of liberalism's future prospects. The centrality of Egypt to modern Arab political life amplifies the importance of these developments; Egypt remains a regional model and indicator despite its diminished status and stunted political culture. Egypt's failures have telegraphed a wider regional failing and absence, despite the particularities of each country. Exploring the basis of those failures helps to explain why political life remains static, polarized, and trapped between limited and unsatisfactory modes of governance. This chapter is also intended as the start of a broader regional exploration of the weak performance of liberal political platforms.

Arab Failure and Religious Revival

The religious revival of the Arab world has clouded perceptions of recent history and obscured the incremental and concerted manner in which Islamism has cemented itself in contemporary political culture. "Given the prominence of Islam in public life across much of the Arab world today, it is easy to forget just how secular the Middle East was in 1981," argues Eugene Rogan.[3] Similarly, Carrie Rosefsky Wickham notes: "that there is nothing 'natural' about the success of Islamist outreach in a Muslim country is indicated by the dominance of leftist movements in the Arab world as recently

as the 1960s and early 1970s."[4]

The ubiquity of Islamism is a thoroughly modern phenomenon and represents a major shift in the political landscape of the Arab world. R. Stephen Humphreys wrote, before the Arab uprisings, that "religious language and action have permeated Middle Eastern politics…. Since the late 1970s all the most visible protest and revolutionary movements have marched under the banner of Islam."[5] Further, even in many places, such as Egypt, where Islamists have failed in formal terms, they have achieved a practical victory. Ardent opponents of Islamism, such as Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, have essentially adopted and championed key strands of Islamist thought, albeit in the service of the state.

Significantly, this rising Islamic religiosity also occurred alongside the withering of liberal political thought in Egypt, a process that began in the era of Arab nationalism, and accelerated in the wake of its demise. Tellingly, while the post-1967 moment helped to produce a new radicalism that sought to outflank the Arab nationalist regimes, this inflection point did little to rekindle broader interest in liberalism.

A discussion of the religious revivalist current in the Arab world is of course essential to any accounting of modern Arab and Egyptian political life.[6] That revival, however, should not be understood as an authentic and inevitable expression of immutable traits. Instead, it should be seen as a highly contingent series of developments. The seminal historian Albert Hourani believed that there was merit in examining the ways in which the history and evolution of societies in the region were informed by Islam, but warned against "seeing history in terms of an endless repetition of certain patterns of behavior, derived from an unchanging system of beliefs."[7]

Egypt's catastrophic defeat by Israel in June 1967 also plays a critical role in this history, but the seeds of revivalism clearly predate it. Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski point to the 1930s as the beginnings of "a more profound cultural reorientation developing in Egypt….the return of Islam to a primary position in Egyptian intellectual discourse and public life."[8] In their description, Islam "provided the basis for the new common national culture uniting elite and mass."[9] Reflecting on these profound changes, the Egyptian intellectual Salama Musa lamented the eclipse of the ideas of Egyptian nationalists who had understood Egypt to be "the homeland of all Egyptians, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, nonbelievers and atheists, and there is no place for religion in patriotism."[10]

The grim realities of modern Arab political life have at times produced an overly romantic and nostalgic view of interwar Egypt and what has often been described as Egypt's liberal era. An exaggerated reading of that history and the liberal trends of that era have also contributed to the air of resignation and disappointment surrounding Egyptian politics.

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Notwithstanding such anachronistic exaggerations, the interwar period did produce an intellectual elite that valued and championed liberal thought and, most importantly, helped to shape the trajectory of political life and social change. Bruce Rutherford has written that "Egypt's liberal tradition incorporates the core principles of classical liberalism: a clear and unbiased legal code, the division of state power into separate branches, checks and balances among these branches, and respect for basic civil and political rights."[11] Egypt's truncated, flawed, and corrupt liberal era was marred by the machinations of the British, who continued to exert significant influence over Egyptian political life, and King Farouk, who retained significant power during his reign (1936–52) and sought to expand it. Despite these challenges, liberal thought continued to function as a significant force in public life.

The peculiar circumstances of the interwar years undermined the political possibilities of the time. The government in Egypt owed its existence to a colonial power and was tightly controlled by it, even as it sought to channel the fundamentally incompatible demands of the populace it represented, which was adamantly seeking the permanent and total expulsion of Great Britain.[12] In the face of these contradictory demands, Egypt's political order was "inevitably perceived—both by European powers and by [its] own citizens—as weak, ineffectual, and even clownish."[13] The animating intellectual currents of that era would also be tarnished by these glaring shortcomings.

Those shortcomings helped to usher in the period of military domination that has so profoundly shaped Egypt's modern history.

This process was unfolding in parallel with the reorientation of Egyptian identity away from the territorial and tightly focused nationalism that marked Egypt's struggle against colonialism. As Hourani describes the currents that produced Egyptian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he notes that "the relationship between Islam and Egyptian nationalism was not so simple: the idea of an Egyptian nation, entitled to a separate political existence, involved not only the denial of a single Islamic political community, but also the assertion that there could be a virtuous community based on something other than a common religion and revealed law."[14]

Transnational currents of both Arab nationalism and religious revivalism eclipsed Egypt's early twentieth-century nationalism. That process was aided by the dramatic demographic and social shifts that occurred during the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–70), as increased access to education and rural-to-urban migration created a new middle class, often in opposition to the old elites. That new middle class would come to represent the backbone of support for both movements, and would push liberal thought further to the edge of mainstream discourse.

Despite Nasser's crushing repression of the Muslim Brotherhood, the group continued to sustain itself both in prison and in exile. That doggedness would provide the platform for the Brotherhood's resurgence as Egypt's politics again shifted following the 1967 war and Nasser's death in 1970. That resurgence was aided by the specific shifts away from Nasser that his successor Anwar Sadat (president 1970–81) pursued, but it was also given support by the introspection and frustration of that juncture in Egyptian history. The most far-reaching political and intellectual responses to the crushing defeat of 1967 saw the failures of secular Arab nationalism as evidence of "the bankruptcy of the entire framework of secular politics."[15] That bankruptcy could be seen by "its utter futility and impotence in the face of [Egypt's] enemies."[16] Mohamed Abul Ghar, the former head of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party and a supporter of the July 2013 coup, summarized this Islamist critique: "According to the narrative of the Islamists, Egypt's military defeat by Israel in the 1967 war was an inevitable result of the country's alienation from Islam under Nasser. The same narrative suggests that the 1973 military victory under Sadat was the result of the country's re-embrace of Islam."[17]

FORMER EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT GAMAL ABDEL NASSER MEETS WITH MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD LEADERS MUHAMMAD HAMED ABU AL-NASR AND MOHAMED FARAGHLY. SOURCE: IKHANWIKI

Revivalism could be seen in the number of Arab nationalists, Marxists, and radicals who abandoned their previous creeds and adopted Islamism as the language and thought of opposition, and in the process created a newfound vernacular for reformism.[18] It was also given further purchase by the process of instrumentalization and co-option of Islam that would come to dominate Egyptian public life. Facing an upswing in both belief and fervor, autocratic rulers throughout the Arab world sought to turn faith into an instrument for their own purposes.

For Egypt, this took the initial form of Sadat's encouragement of religious forces as a counterweight to the leftist and Nasserist actors whom he saw as a threat to his ability to consolidate and rule effectively. Most notably, Sadat's cultivation of religious sources of legitimacy resulted in the adoption of Article 2 of the constitution, which made "the principles of the Islamic Sharia" a chief source of legislation. Article 2 was subsequently tightened further, making sharia "the chief source of legislation." These constitutional and legal shifts were not simply window-dressing—they reflected the ways in which the Egyptian public sphere was becoming increasingly Islamized. Cumulatively, these attempts to neuter the political challenge represented by Islamism may have helped to insulate successive Egyptian regimes from the most threatening mode of political opposition, but it came at the cost of establishing Islamist thought as the baseline for much political activity, even among non-Islamists.

The regional oil boom of the 1970s also had major implications on the trajectory of religious and political thought in the region. This massive influx of oil wealth shifted both power dynamics in the region and patterns of migration. The effect of this massive influx of private oil wealth in Egypt could be seen in the increased funding that went into the establishment and development of private mosques, either through Gulf Arab patrons or through the remittances of Egyptian workers in the Gulf.[19]

Events outside the Arab world, such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the anti-Soviet jihadist resistance, injected further energy into Islamist opposition movements and fueled their mainstreaming and their radicalization, but in both cases, helped establish their relevance.

Militarized Society

The rise of military-led governance in Egypt is far from unique and occurred elsewhere in the developing world. For Egypt, the early military domination of the state under Nasser was not the sole cause of the destruction of organized liberalism or liberal intellectual trends, but clearly played a key role, particularly when judged in conjunction with the other notable developments of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Among the first major institutional steps of the Free Officers (the small group of junior Egyptian officers who ousted

King Farouk and seized power in July 1952) was the disbanding of Egypt's parliament and the abolishing of political parties in 1953. Political power was concentrated in the hands of military leaders, who saw themselves as the country's only effective vanguard in the effort to modernize and develop the country. The Egyptian historian Anouar Abdel-Malek aptly described this state of affairs: "The fact was that the officers denied to every other social class, to any national group other than the army, the right and duty to lead the rebirth of Egypt. They alone possessed the tool of power essential to a country still under the military subjugation of imperialism."[20]

As the military regime institutionalized its social and political changes, the Egyptian military became less concerned with governance and reform and more occupied with the sustainability of a military-led political order from which it derived significant privileges and prerogatives.[21] Under Nasser, the military was visible and involved in many facets of governance. In 1966, half of the cabinet of Prime Minister Sid'qi Suleiman was composed of active-duty military officers. Despite the harsh military setback of 1967 and the reorganization of the military, the ongoing conflict with Israel and its occupation of the Sinai Peninsula provided a continuing justification for the military's outsized role in public life.

The nature of that role would evolve over time and the supremacy of the armed forces would be eroded as Egypt's authoritarianism became much more focused on the president himself. This process had its roots in Nasser's rule but accelerated under both Sadat and Mubarak. On the eve of Egypt's uprising in January 2011, it was an authoritarian state but had long ago ceased to be a military regime. Instead, Egypt was an autocratic system in which competing centers of authority had emerged, albeit one in which the military continued to be the silent guarantor of regime stability. The military was further removed from governance and civilian politics and more concentrated on the economic interests of the institution. The uprising represented a major political opening for the Egyptian military, and the aftermath of Egypt's failed political transition resulted in the military's direct intervention in and usurpation of civilian politics.

Nonetheless, the military's initial domination of post-revolutionary Egypt stunted the growth of all avenues for political expression and dissent. However, as incremental space for controlled politics emerged, the political and intellectual landscape had similarly shifted, favoring the vitality of Islamist thought, which came to be seen as the main vehicle for expressing oppositional politics in Egypt.

The Work of Repression

Among the most notable legacies of the Arab authoritarian order has been the impoverishment of political culture. The constricting of space for regional politics boosted the fortunes of political Islam in light of the lack of credible alternatives.[22] Latching on to this feature of modern Arab political life, Arab liberals themselves have adopted simplistic

rationalizations for the preeminence of Islamism as the primary mode for oppositional politics. Reflecting on his life and experiences, the Syrian dissident Yassin al-Haj Saleh has, using a familiar narrative, explained the rise of Islamism as a function of authoritarianism and repression: "Islam, in our society, is the limit of political poverty. When you don't have any political life, people will mobilize according to the lowest stratum of an imaginary community. This deeper identity is religion….But when you crush politics, when there is no political life, religious identity will prosper."[23] While this analysis at least seeks to grapple with modern history, it does little to illuminate the actual distinctiveness of the Arab world. Repression is by no means the exclusive province of the Arabs, and yet the pathologies of the Arab world remain distinct from other countries and regions that have suffered similar repression, including other Muslim-majority countries.

Still, authoritarianism and repression are certainly a part of the explanation for the rise of Islamism, particularly when assessed in conjunction with the host of other trends that have helped to produce the region's present-day political culture. Because of those trends, repression of independent political life in Egypt has been more successful in degrading non-Islamist political currents, particularly liberal thought.

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One obvious level in which these asymmetries are manifested is organizational. Tarek Masoud argues that Islamist success is primarily a function of "the different political opportunities facing Islamists and their rivals."[24] He describes these institutional advantages by arguing that Egypt is "replete with religious institutions, from mosques to religious societies to charitable associations that, though forced to be apolitical during Mubarak's reign, embed both ordinary citizens and Islamist political activists in common networks of social action, making it easy for the latter to build trust with the former when an opening in the political system finally presented itself."[25] This materialist argument largely rejects approaches to this issue that offer ideological explanations of Islamist success, and by extension, liberal weakness.

Of course, repression has not simply focused on squelching secular organizations and pathways to political expression.[26] In fact, Egypt and other regimes have also sought to suppress religiously-motivated political action, and it is their continued resilience and traction in the face of such state efforts that is distinctive. As Masoud writes, "If mosques became focal points of dissent under authoritarianism, they did this despite the presence of heavy regulation by the regime."[27]

But this inherent sympathy for Islamists and Islamist politics among significant strands of the populace is not simply a

function of superior organization. This sympathetic posture crucially relies on a fundamental openness to Islamist politics and a trust in those who deliver that message. Masoud himself puts forward a materialist theory of Islamist prominence that understands Islamists' electoral supremacy as an outgrowth of "their ability to meet preexisting, exogenous, and largely nonreligious policy demands."[28] It is also worth noting that the electoral fortunes of Islamists in Egypt have varied over time and that non-Islamists have been competitive in specific settings. In the first round of Egypt's 2012 presidential elections, for instance, the three avowedly non-Islamist candidates, Ahmed Shafik, Hamdeen Sabahi, and Amr Moussa, received more than 55 percent of the vote and finished second, third, and fifth respectively. The fourth place finisher, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, was a former member of the Brotherhood who ran as a crossover candidate and highlighted his support from both Islamists and non-Islamists. Further, following Mohamed Morsi's turbulent and truncated presidency (2012–13), popular support for the Brotherhood clearly ebbed.

Nonetheless, the initial trust placed in Islamists in the early post-Mubarak period was itself reflective of the broader social changes that have convulsed Egypt and the region and created ideological affinities with Islamist thought and receptiveness to Islamist parties. That receptiveness was also the product of concerted efforts and the cultivation of "a new, activist conception of Islam" in which it was incumbent on Muslims to "participate in the Islamic reform of society and state."[29]

Notably, despite these developments, redistributive economic policy continues to hold broad sway among the Egyptian populace. In assessing leftist underperformance in the Mubarak era, Masoud suggests that voter incentives in an era of patronage politics were skewed and that poor voters who might have been receptive to the left's economic ideas chose the immediate material rewards that patronage offered.[30] This line of argument assumes that economic policies, particularly with respect to redistributive policies, are the logical terrain upon which Egyptian politics takes place. Masoud further argues that the left was never discredited in Egypt, even after 1967, and that "Egyptians continue to identify themselves as leftists, Nasserists, or socialists in significant number."[31]

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What remained of those leftist currents, however, was a flimsy vestige of an earlier era and a testament to the shallow ideological project of Nasserism. In the post-Nasser era, and up until the present, what Egypt inherited from Nasserism

is a malleable and inchoate support for redistributive economic policies with little attachment to coherent ideology. These affinities were partly an outgrowth of Nasser's reforms, which created a new class that was largely dependent on the state for education and employment.[32] This remains the principle legacy of the Nasserist era, despite the shift in economic policies under Sadat and then Mubarak. In explaining the founding of the April 6 Youth Movement, Walid Shawky argues that the "political scene had few ideological stances for outreach or mobilization aside from the Muslim Brotherhood. Most organizations or movements are built around the coalescing of members around a founding concept, giving them a reason for joining and sustained involvement, and forming a bond between members. April 6 was different: We bonded over a shared emotional and psychological state, rather than an ideological conviction."[33] In fact, this description could be applied much more broadly, and reflects the overall health of Egyptian public life—and helps to explain the inability of many non-Islamist groups to organize effectively.

Perhaps most importantly for present purposes, in correctly identifying the Egyptian left as a natural competitor to Islamists, Masoud implicitly concedes the near total organizational absence of liberalism as a political force. This points to an important legacy of Nasser and his particular brand of repression and ideology, which cultivated leftist economic impulses and produced fragile constituencies of supporters for such policies. Diminished in that era was any significant or meaningful ideological or political work focusing on liberalism, which had been tarnished by the failures of interwar politics and undermined by the expansion of a new middle class and urban elite that benefited from Nasser's social policies. That legacy has produced a constricted political culture in which Islamists and statists continue to represent the only viable political movements capable of contesting national power. In the face of the Brotherhood's missteps, non-Islamist political currents were emboldened, but this turnaround did little to boost the prospects of liberalism.

A Tunisian Exception?

Egypt's failures have been broadly predictive of the poverty of modern Arab political life, and that broader landscape has shared in many of the same historical processes that produced the illiberalism that defines the region. Nonetheless, those historical processes remain the critical factor in understanding the elaboration and sustainment of political culture, and it is also why the case of Tunisia offers interesting and contradictory outcomes. Within the present-day Arab world, the counterexample of Tunisia exemplifies the ways in which the contingencies of history can alter and shape societies and political cultures. While this brief comparison is only intended as a reference point, deeper comparative study would be useful in elucidating the mechanisms that have produced divergent outcomes despite a degree of shared history.

The decisions of leaders and the variance in historical development in Tunisia have affected the trajectory of politics, culture, and society. Of course, since the fall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (president 1987–2011), Islamists have done quite well in electoral terms. But what is distinct about Tunisia is the fact that secularism (as distinct from liberalism) exists as a potent political force with a vibrant and active constituency. This is not to equate secularism with liberal politics, although the two currents of thought are often functional complements. Instead, the example of secularism in Tunisia is reflective of the ways in which specific decisions and approaches have helped to shape a distinctive intellectual history that stands in stark contrast to the evolution of thought in the rest of the region. It is a concrete example of the ways in which political cultures cannot stand apart from history, law, and politics, and are instead a direct product of such contingent and variable processes.

Rory McCarthy argues that "under presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali, the state sought to subordinate religion and to claim the sole right to interpret Islam for the public in an effort to win the monopoly over religious symbolism."[34] While this approach differs from a classic separation of religion and state, the fact remains that post-independence Tunisia's aggressive approach to modernization has produced a viable set of politics that posits the necessity of a secular state. While not wholly abandoning Islam, Habib Bourguiba (president 1956–87) could confidently state that "what was just a century ago appears today as unjust."[35] Of course, such views did not go unchallenged within Tunisian society and produced various kinds of opposition and backlash. They would also be revisited by Bourguiba himself and later Ben Ali as the social and cultural mores of the Arab world evolved during the wave of religious revivalism. Nonetheless, this approach to religion, politics, and identity was unique in the Arab World, and has produced a unique outcome.

Politics in Tunisia is varied to the extent that "actors on both the Islamist and secular-leftist sides of the political spectrum struggled against purists within their respective camps to forge cross-ideological compromises, both before and after the revolution."[36] Speaking in 2013, Beji Caid Essebsi, the current president of Tunisia and then the head of the political party Nidaa Tounes, could state clearly that "a modern society needs a secular state where religion doesn't intervene."[37] Such a stance is scarcely imaginable for even a fringe politician in Egypt, and yet in the context of Tunisia, this political platform was one that could propel Essebsi to the presidency. Tunisia's historic efforts at controlling religious discourse failed in producing a thoroughly secular and homogenous society, but clearly did result in the creation of a vocal secular component that could compete politically by prioritizing the themes of secularism. The influence of those historical and political currents is such that Rachid al-Ghannouchi, the head of Ennahda, an Islamist party, has explicitly stated that his party "doesn't oppose secularism—it opposes laicité."[38]

Acknowledging the possibility of establishing and sustaining different kinds of secularist politics in the Arab World should not be understood as an endorsement of Tunisia's approach to modernization and development, which was flawed for a variety of reasons. However, it is an example of the ways in which history, contingency, and agency can

produce outcomes that diverge significantly from the conventional script assigned to Arab societies. That particular history has produced in Tunisia "a delicately counter-balanced set of actors that simply does not exist in any other Arab country."[39] In this specific example, one can see broader possibilities for alternatives to the recurrent Arab political dilemma, including liberalism.

Few Liberals to Be Found

In the immediate post-Mubarak political environment, few political currents put forth an avowedly liberal platform. Several parties, such as the Wafd Party, the Free Egyptians, and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party offered elements of liberal thought, but fell far short of active engagement on a liberal agenda.

The animating rationales of the uprising were a frustration with authoritarian excess—whether in the form of police abuse or corruption—inchoate calls for accountability, a vague commitment to redistributive economic policies, and platitudes about freedom. In one sense, these broad and unspecific themes represented a kind of lowest common denominator and a tactical choice by the broad-based constellation of divergent forces that made up and produced the mass mobilization that eventually helped force the ouster of Mubarak. Conspicuously, social and cultural issues were studiously avoided, in large part because these issues would raise inevitable tensions and fears among non-Islamists and would threaten the viability of the anti-Mubarak alliance. For the Islamists, who were keen not to be seen as the guiding power behind the protest movement—both in terms of how the uprising would be perceived by domestic and foreign audiences—setting aside social and cultural matters was a logical choice in light of their own confidence in their prospective political prospects. The time for such matters would come, but not before a transition had been set in motion.

Beyond these tactical considerations, however, the broad sloganeering that characterized this early phase was a reflection of the poverty of Egyptian political life and political culture. As the April 6 member Walid Shawky reflected, "Politics was represented by groups of people with similar ideas and a political project they then persuaded others to support—although, due to oppression and corruption, even this was not the reality at the time, despite the decorative presence of political parties and a parliament."[40] To the extent that there was broad societal consensus on key issues, they were largely defined by the dominant modes of Egyptian political thought, namely Nasserism and Islamism. As such, broad traction could be found in the economic realm and on the fraught issue of the role of Islam in public life.

The resonant message of economic justice through greater redistributive economic policies remains a stubborn legacy of Nasserism, despite the fact that many political currents, including the Muslim Brotherhood, had practically abandoned such an economic vision in their own party platforms. Despite years of efforts at market-based economic reform focused

on economic growth, "the evidence suggested that—regardless of whatever tangible improvements those policies had made—they were at odds with the sensibilities of the majority of the people."[41] Tellingly, the public-facing electioneering of the post-Mubarak period was dominated by vague calls for redistributive economic policy.[42]

Similarly, on the issue of Islam and public life, there seemed to exist a great deal of societal consensus, and the political discourse surrounding the role of sharia in the constitution was indicative of a foundational shift. Hamdeen Sabahi, the Nasserist political leader who would later contest the 2012 presidential elections, in 2011 explicitly stated his support for Article 2.[43] Even ostensibly liberal political parties or individuals advocated a status quo approach to the issue, often as a defensive measure to ensure that even more restrictive clauses were not formally adopted. In numerous private conversations with non-Islamist political leaders and activists in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Mubarak, it was assumed that the existing constitutional approach to sharia represented a floor and that any efforts to re-litigate the issue would redound to their detriment.

Of course, the scope of liberal political currents in Egypt is not solely defined by the approach toward redistributive economic policy or the role of sharia, and in the case of the former, not necessarily even in tension. However, in response to these political realities, even ostensibly liberal parties opted not to defend liberalism or even provide a liberal political platform or agenda. In practice, such a worldview lacked serious traction among the intellectual and political elite and also the broader populace.

Re-Militarization of State and Society

Since the coup that unseated Morsi in 2013, the role of the Egyptian military has expanded even further in both political and economic terms. As previously discussed, the period from the fall of Mubarak and the ouster of Morsi had already seen the transformation of the Egyptian military's role away from the quiescence that characterized much of the Mubarak period, particularly after the ascension of Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi to minister of defense in 1991.

This outcome was not a certainty following the ouster of Mubarak and was primarily a function of the fragmenting of the broad-based yet weakly-connected opposition. The collapse of that tactical alliance was the key event that shaped the ill-fated transition period. It also opened the door to military control of the political process and placed the armed forces in the role of arbiter of disputes among political parties and currents. That period allowed the military to triangulate among

the various political parties and leaders of that time, but also came at some cost to the reputation of the military.[44] Nonetheless, that period transformed how the armed forces related to politics and would provide the foundation upon which the July 2013 coup was launched.

The military has dominated the post-coup period, and the hierarchies within the regime have evolved in a way that prioritizes the military and the security establishment more broadly. With the ascension of Sisi to the presidency, military personnel are ubiquitous in the decision-making organs of the state. The reliance of President Sisi on a close circle of military figures is matched by the regime's continued distrust of civilian politics and civilian politicians. In fact, the attitude of the regime is actively hostile to the very notion of independent political life and it has instead sought to cultivate a civilian political sphere that would serve as an obedient supporter of government policies.

In that vein, Sisi has opted to remain above political party life. Instead, the military-backed regime led an effort to create a pro-Sisi parliament in the 2015 elections. The state and the security establishment were central in putting together the pro-Sisi electoral list For the Love of Egypt (FLE), which won 120 seats in an election with poor voter turnout levels. Derided as "the security establishment list" by the Wafd Party (which later joined it, as did many other parties that were initially opposed), the FLE effort was led by former general Sameh Seif al-Yazal.[45] In addition, the military helped fund the campaign of the pro-Sisi Nation's Future Party, which won fifty-three seats. Provincial politics reflect a similar influence—Sisi has again favored the appointment of military and former military leaders to provincial governorships. As of September 2016, when Sisi appointed five more former generals as governors, only eight of the twenty-seven provincial governors had civilian backgrounds.

EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT ABDEL FATTAH EL-SISI CELEBRATES AT THE OPENING CEREMONIES FOR THE NEW SUEZ CANAL. SOURCE: FACEBOOK/ABDEL FATTAH ELSISI

The corollary to the growing influence of the security establishment in all facets of society has been the neutering of civilian political life. To the extent that politics exist as a forum for adjudicating policy disputes, it has essentially become confined to the regime itself and the different institutions of the state. As Amr Adly argues, the Sisi regime "has so far relied on a sociopolitical alliance made up of the military and security forces and groups of public sector employees that was formed in opposition to the January 2011 uprising against Mubarak, to secure its own legitimacy and maintain social stability."[46]

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The end result of these developments is a further fragmented and stunted civilian political sphere. It has also meant that the Sisi regime has limited tools to cultivate support for its policies and initiatives and there are very limited "institutionalized channels for mediation and interest representation of the social groups whose support it seeks to maintain."[47] The legacy of this period will further hamper the already damaged prospects for the normalization of

Egyptian political life and the re-emergence of civilian leadership. The statist authoritarianism of the regime is a further blow to the prospects of any form of independent politics, let alone liberalism, and, of course, a calamity for the prospect of good governance.

The growth of the military's political role has also been tracked by the change in its economic role, which was sizeable long before it seized power. While anecdotal assessments of the military's share of the economy are often exaggerated and lack credible supporting data,[48] the military's economic role has grown consistently since the 1980s. The initial impulse for increasing military involvement in the economy has often been misunderstood. The expanded economic portfolio of "the military and its affiliates can be traced back to the 1980s, when Egypt set on the path to economic transformation. This military economy has coexisted with the multifaceted expansion of the private sector and the emergence of a major capitalist class in the past two decades."[49] However, the post-2013 period has marked a qualitative and quantitative shift, as the military has become integral to economic policy and planning. The increasing role of the Egyptian military has not solely been a function of venality—although that is a factor. It has also been driven by a lack of trust in nonmilitary alternatives, the administrative/regulatory ease of military-led projects, an immediate focus on job creation, and an affinity for megaprojects that also serve propaganda aims and echo an earlier period of Egyptian history. In this setting, the regime has generally turned to the military and affiliated business entities as the vehicle to push "for public investment and implementing projects in vital sectors such as energy, infrastructure, housing, and transportation."[50]

The scope of those military-led economic projects has ranged from large-scale infrastructure projects like the Suez Canal development (estimated to cost around $8 billion)[51] to fish farming, solar energy, and the importation of infant milk formula.[52] In January 2017, the Egyptian military obtained the license required to form a pharmaceutical company.[53]

Regardless of the specific motivations and the exaggerated reporting on the military's share of the overall economy, it is clear that much of the business community is wary of the regime and is increasingly skeptical of its ability to undertake consistent and coherent economic policies. There are also reasonable fears that the private sector will begin to suffer from the more recent expansion and diversification of military economic activities. However, elements of the business community will likely be cowed by the selective rewarding of specific business constituencies. It is likely that the key economic role of the state and the military will produce its own version of a crony capitalist class that would be dependent on state favoritism. On a political level, the fears of the business community about the sustainment of the current political order will outweigh short-term frustrations with military-led governance and retard the emergence of a politically-minded and independent business community, which could be a future proponent of a liberal political and economic order.

Destruction of Civil Society

In the Mubarak era, a semicontrolled civil society space was permitted to function within the boundaries of acceptable practice. Much like the media of that time, this entailed both intermittent and varying levels of harassment and repression and a cognizance of regime red lines. This semicontrolled space nonetheless allowed for various forms of civil society to test boundaries and to demonstrate different modes of civic engagement. Many of these organizations, particularly the human rights community, played an important role in the Egyptian uprising and its aftermath, serving to both document and amplify regime abuses and advocate for various kinds of rights-based reform.[54]

For the reconfigured regime following the July 2013 coup, the lessons of that earlier era were quite clear, and the security establishment's approach to civil society has been marked by unremitting hostility and unprecedented levels of repression in an effort to squelch even nascent efforts for reform, transparency, and accountability. Even prior to the July 2013 coup, the transitional authorities demonstrated a fundamental suspicion of such efforts, particularly as it pertained to the issue of foreign funding. Their prosecution of foreign and domestic democracy-promotion organizations—including the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, and Freedom House—was stark evidence of this suspicion.

That attitude has become more pronounced under the Sisi regime's coordinated assault on civil society. The regime's repression has expanded well beyond the human rights community and has also targeted a much broader cross-section of NGOs, including "cultural initiatives, independent media outlets, feminist organizations, Nubian associations, and even co-working spaces or cafes where young people gather."[55]

At present, the civil society community is under relentless pressure and its activities have been severely curtailed. The preexisting limitations of Egyptian civil society suggest that even without the current campaign of repression, it was not a viable vehicle for supporting popularly-grounded democratization and reform efforts. Vincent Durac argues that "a conceptualization of Arab civil society in liberal terms is destined to disappoint since liberal and democratic values have much shallower roots than would be required for successful challenge to authoritarian rule. Indeed, evidence is lacking either for the prodemocratic orientation of civil society in the Arab world or its capacity to drive democratic reform."[56] Without drawing definitive conclusions about this assessment, there are two obvious observations that can be made based on recent history. First, the small and isolated human rights wing of Egypt's civil society community, which has always been dependent on foreign sources of funding, is insufficient as an anchor for pushing forward a rights-based agenda. Second, it is clear that the current steps, largely successful, to eviscerate that human rights community and to hobble civil society will surely be even more of a setback for any potential future process of democratization—and by extension, liberalization—in Egypt.[57]

Existential Fears

The winner-takes-all structure and the particular trajectory of Egypt's failed political transition after the ouster of Mubarak heightened the perception of existential stakes and produced an illiberal politics across the political divide. Subsequently, the instability ushered in by the ouster of Morsi produced a different strain of existential fear both among regime supporters and in a broad cross-section of the populace, focused on the rising threat posed by radicalization, anti-state violence, and terrorism. In both cases, any possible liberal political currents were blunted by the existential fears that gripped and distorted the political calculations of the regime and its supporters, non-Islamist opposition actors, and much of the general public.

This existential crisis was a function of the unexpectedly dominant position of Islamist parties in Egypt's first freely-elected parliament. While most prognostications assumed Muslim Brotherhood electoral ascendancy, the extent to which they dominated the elections shocked Egypt's non-Islamists and reoriented the politics of the period. The Muslim Brotherhood and the other more reactionary Salafi parties captured a supermajority in those elections and were then firmly in control of the constitutional drafting process. For Islamists, who had experienced an unprecedented political opening and astonishing early electoral victories, the moment seemed ripe for reappraising their political ambitions upward. Perhaps as importantly, the Muslim Brotherhood came to see the right-wing Salafi parties as a potential threat to their future electoral fortunes, and sought to foreclose the possibility of challenges from the Islamist right. Accordingly, Islamist ambition dominated the politics of this juncture. Relatedly, Islamists were no longer reliant on consensual transitional politics and were emboldened to embark on a majoritarian path, untethered from non-Islamist concerns and reservations.

For non-Islamists, the stakes at this foundational juncture were heightened and the means for influence seemingly limited. As a result, non-Islamists came to see the military and the institutions of the state as the primary defense against Islamist ambitions to remake the state and redefine Egyptian identity. These tendencies fostered support for military intervention into political life and paved the way for the July 2013 coup. This defensive posture also produced a cautious politics more focused on stymying Islamist consolidation than achieving political and policy goals. Needless to say, this confluence of events was not conducive to producing an open and pluralistic style of politics, particularly as the military-led political order shed its connections to civilian-led politics.

The post-coup political and security environment again presented Egyptian society with a sense of existential struggle. After the coup, popular fears of state collapse and anti-regime violence, often cultivated by the regime, became a key source of regime legitimacy. The radicalization of certain Islamist groups and the threat of violence and terrorism

became a first-order priority and emboldened the security establishment. In this setting, those fears have strengthened collectivized notions of the common good and further eroded respect or concern for individual rights and freedoms.[58] This has produced a decidedly authoritarian approach to governance, politics, and dissent.

Regional Instability, Global Reaction

When viewed regionally, the Arab uprisings appeared to represent a moment of cascade. While each individual uprising was a product of country-specific conditions, as the uprisings spread from Tunisia to each successive country, it was clear that they drew upon a common vocabulary and sought motivation, inspiration, and confidence from events elsewhere in the Arab world. While the dreams of Arabism are long dead, the Arab world still shares, to a great extent, a common media space and a linked political consciousness and identity. Much as those initial moments of optimism and openness shaped the region's political climate, the violence, repression, instability, and sectarianism of the current juncture have an outsized impact on political developments.

In many respects, this instability had produced a reactionary sentiment and a reduction in expectations. Regional examples of state collapse and civil war—such as Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen—have created political cautiousness and an aversion to political tumult. For Egypt, recent history and the regional landscape make for a cautionary tale that now inhibits politics and risk-taking. Regional insecurity now limits the possibilities for genuine political openings and inhibits liberal politics, which have been overwhelmed by hypernationalism, statism, economic deprivation, fear, and Islamist militancy.

These regional trends toward reactionary politics are also being strengthened by the global environment, which has witnessed an upsurge in right-wing populist demagoguery, serial setbacks to the liberal international order, and intensified great power competition and friction. This moment of globalized instability has been a major setback to liberalism and has seen a rise in authoritarian currents in previously unimaginable settings. This has been a boon to authoritarian leadership throughout the world, and the Sisi regime has warmly embraced these shifts.

Of course, the preferences of outside parties have never had a determinative impact upon Egypt's politics. In fact, in many ways the post-Mubarak era has been notable for the inability of key Western and Arab countries to exercise meaningful leverage on Egyptian decision-making. Nonetheless, outside preferences and pressure can have some impact on the margins, particularly when that support is channeled in directions favored by the Egyptian regime. While negative leverage has proved ineffectual, the shifts in the international environment, particularly in the wake of the 2016 presidential election in the United States, are likely to reinforce and strengthen current political trends in Egypt. These international shifts represents yet another factor that will support regime sustainability and limit the willingness to

allow for meaningful forms of political expression and dissent. In short, international politics, while not decisive, will only serve to hinder political reform, and the international political environment will undercut any potential efforts to cultivate liberal politics in Egypt. Egypt has long been an inhospitable environment for liberalism and outside influences will only further reinforce that inhospitableness.

Bleak Path Forward

The future of liberalism in Egypt is tightly bound up with the broader trajectory of the country's political, social, and cultural indicators. As with all other political factions, the prospects of liberal political currents remain reliant on the regime's approach to civilian politics. Any shift in popular attitudes will likely require a softening in the regime's approach to political expression, dissent, and organizing. Even in the case of a political opening, the fate of liberal politics will depend on revitalizing what has now been reduced to a niche and situational set of political attachments. The prospects for such a daunting project are of course heavily linked with the broader health of Egyptian society. In this sense, assessments of Egypt's current and future prospects more generally are an important gauge for understanding the likelihood of political, social, and economic regeneration.

Faced with overwhelming disappointment at the state of Egypt and the region, some analysis now suggests that the current juncture is merely a phase along an inexorable path to progress. "On the surface, the political upheavals look like failed revolts against dictatorships. But dig a bit deeper into the societies of these Arab countries and there are reasons to believe what we see is not a simple revolt, but an epochal revolution," argues Koert Debeuf, using the trajectory of revolutions in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe as a reference point.[59] Others have sought to portray the positive legacies sustaining the initial impetus for the uprising: "Even after four years of repression and political engineering, the regime has failed to revive the stable authoritarian order that once existed in the country. More importantly, the social struggles that paved the way for the January 25 revolution continue to challenge the new ruling establishment and, at points, have exposed its weakness and kept it on the defensive."[60] Guarded optimism will almost certainly be proven correct if the timeframe for analysis is essentially open-ended, but isn't particularly enlightening about the present and immediate future.

Alaa Abdel Fattah, a prominent Egyptian activist who is currently imprisoned, offers a more realistic and decidedly pessimistic assessment. "The revolution has been defeated and everything is ruined," he wrote from jail. "The clique that is now in power is attempting to control every aspect of public life, this endeavor is doomed to failure but the price is the devastation of people's lives." There are no bold predictions about success or resistance here—just a focus on the inevitable failure of the current authoritarian political project.[61]

While the current course of the Egyptian regime is doomed to be unsuccessful, this does not assure any kind of political shift or rupture. In fact, the more likely course of failure is incremental.

The failure of the current regime will not necessarily bring liberalism, or for that matter, anything that represents an improvement. While the current course of the Egyptian regime is doomed to be unsuccessful, this does not assure any kind of political shift or rupture. In fact, the more likely course of failure is incremental. Many of the structural factors previously discussed—such as the fragmented state of political opposition, unmitigated state repression, societal fatigue, fear of both state collapse and broad-based retributive violence, regional instability, and a lack of effective political alternatives—all ensure that the current regime remains sustainable despite its ineffectiveness. Any efforts to regenerate political vitality will necessarily be long-term projects, particularly as politics in Egypt and the Arab world are intimately tied to the broader political and intellectual currents in the region. Those currents are by no means immutable, but they are also not prone to immediate shifts. A viable liberal politics is neither inevitable nor doomed, but will once again depend on the course and contingencies of history.

BANNER IMAGE: A PROTESTER IN TAHRIR SQUARE HOLDS UP A PICTURE OF FORMER EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT GAMAL ABDEL NASSER. SOURCE: FLICKR/SARAH.249

About This Project

This policy report is part of "Arab Politics beyond the Uprisings: Experiments in an Era of Resurgent Authoritarianism," a multi-year TCF project supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Studies in this series explore attempts to build institutions and ideologies during a period of resurgent authoritarianism, and at times amidst violent conflict and state collapse. The project documents some of the spaces where change is still emerging, as well as the dynamic forces arrayed against it. The collected essays will be published by TCF Press in June 2017.

Notes

1. Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 27.

2. Michael Wahid Hanna, "Egypt's Non-Islamist Parties," in *Egypt After the Spring: Revolt and Reaction*, ed. Emile

Hokayem and Hebatalla Taha (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016), 107.

3. Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 399.

4. Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 206.

5. R. Stephen Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 131.

6. Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 9. Agrama argues that it is curious that this trend toward Islamic religiosity is "seen as a problem within social theory." Without delving too deeply into the theoretical basis of this hesitance or the necessity that such religiosity will create illiberal tendencies, the practical ramifications of this increased religiosity for Egyptian society and the types of politics it has inspired or legitimated are indeed problematic for their impact on civil and political rights.

7. Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 100. Hourani went on to argue the dangers of drawing "a sharp distinction between the 'true' Islam and something else, or to give a privileged position to the formal statements of textbooks of law or theology." (Hourani, Islam in European Thought, 101.)

8. Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, R*edefining the Egyptian Nation 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54.

9. Ibid., 55.

10. Ibid., 77.

11. Bruce K. Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 32. Rutherford also notes that these basic notions of liberalism were first codified in Egypt's 1882 "Fundamental Law."

12. Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire*, 116.

13. Ibid., 116.

14. Hourani, *Islam in European Thought*, 193.

15. Ajami, *The Arab Predicament*, 74.

16. Emmanuel Sivan, "Arab Nationalism in the Age of the Islamic Resurgence," in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 222.

17. Mohamed Abul Ghar, "Farag Fouda: The Man Who Died for the Love of Egypt," *Ahram Online*, June 23, 2016.

18. Sivan, "Arab Nationalism in the Age of Islamic Resurgence," 219.

19. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, 97–98, 122.

20. Anouar Abdel Malek, *Egypt: Military Society: The Army Regime, The Left, and Social Change Under Nasser* (New York: Random House, 1968), 178.

21. Steven A. Cook, *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 15.

22. Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire*, 146.

23. Murtaza Hussain and Marwan Hisham,“Syria’s ‘Voice of Conscience’ Has a Message for the West,” *The Intercept*, October 26, 2016.

24. Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class and Elections in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 31.

25. Ibid., 6.

26. Ibid., 23.

27. Ibid., 23.

28. Ibid., 32.

29. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, 120.

30. Masoud, *Counting Islam*, 47.

31. Ibid., 59.

32. Amr Adly, “Egypt’s Regime Faces an Authoritarian Catch-22,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, July 21, 2016.

33. Walid Shawky, “How the Margins Became the Center: On Protest, Politics and April 6,” *Mada Masr*, November 25, 2016.

34. Rory McCarthy, “Re-Thinking Secularism in Post-Independence Tunisia,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 5 (2014): 3.

35. Ibid., 7.

36. Monica Marks, “Purists vs. Pluralists: Cross-Ideological Coalition Building in Tunisia,” in *Tunisia’s Democratic Transition in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Alfred Stepan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 3. Marks points out that the most effective opposition to cross-ideological cooperation between Islamists and secularists often came from the most vehement Tunisian secularists, and that intra-secularist debate about the appropriate approach to Islamists was longstanding (pp. 3, 8). In short, secularism is a varied and potent political force in Tunisia.

37. Ibid., 5.

38. Quoted in Marks, “Purists vs. Pluralists,” 27. Marks suggests that Ennahda has sought to push forward Anglo-American understandings of secularism in contrast to the much more rigid approach of French laicité.

39. Monica Marks’s chapter in this volume, “Tunisia’s Unwritten Story.”

40. Shawky, “How the Margins Became the Center: On Protest, Politics and April 6.”

41. Masoud, *Counting Islam*, 127.

42. Ibid., 147. Masoud’s statistical research has also produced counterintuitive results with respect to voter preferences and perceptions. While many Islamists have adopted market-based economic policies, “Egyptians appear to think that Islamists favor redistribution over growth, and they think that Islamists believe that the government is responsible for the welfare of individuals. More important, respondents appeared to think that Islamists are *more redistributive* and *more welfare-statist* than parties such as the NPUR [Nationalist Progressive Unionist Rally], a party that describes itself as ‘the party of workers and farmers.’”

43. Ibid., 140.

44. For further discussion of the role of the armed forces in the political transition, see Michael Wahid Hanna, “Egypt’s

Non-Islamist Parties," 116–20.

45. Hossam Bahgat, "Anatomy of an Election," *Mada Masr*, March 14, 2016.

46. Adly, "Egypt's Regime Faces an Authoritarian Catch-22."

47. Ibid.

48. As Abdel-Fatah Barayez argues, "though limited, hard data shows that [the military] is present in many sectors but does not occupy a commanding position in any, and indeed has no presence in a range of crucial economic sectors." (Abdel-Fatah Barayez, "'This Land Is Their Land': Egypt's Military and the Economy,"*Jadaliyya*, January 25, 2016.) Unfounded suggestions that the military controls up to 40 percent of Egypt's economy are presented without factual basis and are unbelievable on their face when considering that Egypt's 2015 GDP was $330.8 billion. During the Mubarak era, the military did seek to "provide senior officers with post-retirement career tracks and financial security, and the armed forces as a whole with major income streams." (Yezid Sayigh, "Above the State: The Officers' Republic in Egypt,"Carnegie Middle East Center, August 2012.) But that growing economic role occurred alongside the expanding private sector, which has grown significantly since the introduction of Sadat's economic reforms in the 1970s. (Barayez, "This Land is Their Land.") This is not to suggest benign or fringe impact with respect to the military's economic activity. As Barayez argues, "the current regulatory and legal framework and its rentier repercussions are negatively impacting the cost of investment, the social cost of housing for middle and poorer classes, and the overall question of the access to assets in Egypt." (Ibid.) It is also possible that the impact of the more recent post-Sisi economic shifts and expansion will have a more significant effect on the private sector in the future.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. "Egypt Awards Suez Project to Group Including Army,"*Reuters*, August 19, 2014.

52. Lina Attalah and Mohamed Hamama,"The Armed Forces and Business: Economic Expansion in the Last Twelve Months," *Mada Masr*, September 9, 2016.

53. "Egypt's Military to Enter Pharmaceutical Industry," *Reuters*, January 22, 2017.

54. See Khaled Mansour's forthcoming Century Foundation report in this project, "Egypt's Human Rights Movement: Repression, Resistance, and Co-optation."

55. Amy Austin Holmes, "The Attack on Civil Society Outside Cairo,"*Sada*, January 26, 2017.

56. Vincent Durac, "A Flawed Nexus?: Civil Society and Democratization in the Middle East and North Africa,"*Middle East Institute*, October 15, 2015.

57. Mansour, "Egypt's Human Rights Movement."

58. Michael Wahid Hanna, "Public Order and Egypt's Statist Tradition,"*The Review of Faith and International Affairs*13, no. 1 (2015): 23.

59. Koert Debeuf, "The Arab Spring Is Far From Over," *Politico*, January 22, 2017.

60. Jadaliyya Egypt Editors, "January 25 at Six," *Jadaliyya*, January 25, 2017.

61. "Arab Spring Revisited—The Battle for Democracy in Egypt,"*The Economist*, January 25, 2017.

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