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# EGYPT'S POST-MUBARAK PREDICAMENT

Ashraf El-Sherif

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## About the Author

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## Summary

Three years after the uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak from power, Egypt continues to grapple with an authoritarian state. Throughout the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, authoritarian forces remained the key political players. Democratic alternatives have not capitalized on cracks in the system. Prospects for the Brotherhood's political reintegration and a democratization of political Islam are bleak. As long as credible alternatives fail to gain traction, the old state will persist and Egypt's central challenges will remain unresolved.

### Key Themes

- Egypt is where it was before the 2011 uprising—revolutionary battle lines are being drawn over support for an old state characterized by a series of institutional fiefdoms that act in their own interests rather than in the national interest.
- The Muslim Brotherhood's rule constituted an undemocratic interlude in Egyptian politics, and its downfall was a product of its inability to deal effectively with the old state. It can only be politically reintegrated after a complete political surrender on its part, which is unlikely.
- Egypt is becoming increasingly ungovernable. The state cannot convert its reasserted dominance into legitimacy, and as intrastate competition and unruly protest politics engulf the political arena, the country faces a political vacuum with no clear resolution.

### Findings

**The old state, with its competing institutional power centers, persists.** The new constitution has the potential to exacerbate the problem, preserving the privileges of old state institutions and providing them the capacity to act as power brokers within a fragmented system.

**Egypt needs a complete reinvention of its political sphere.** Despite the development of a contentious public space since 2011, Egypt still lacks a capable political class, without which it will be unable to confront entrenched institutional obstacles to democracy.

**The coalition that supported the July 2013 coup that overthrew then president Mohamed Morsi is fragmenting.** A split is developing between groups



that want to reproduce Mubarak's authoritarianism and those that support a more democratic future for Egypt. No one group has monopolized the debate.

**The possibility of reconciliation between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood remains elusive.** So far, the Brotherhood has chosen a path of political intransigence. Given the regime's crackdown and the Brothers' political incentives against moderation, they face an increasingly limited set of options.

**Democratic forces must overcome leadership and capacity deficiencies.** They need to move beyond hollow slogans and develop tactics that support their goals. The development of a successful democratic movement is crucial for Egypt's future.

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## Introduction

Confusion and incoherence in Egypt following the 2011 uprising against the regime of former president Hosni Mubarak have left analysts puzzled and undecided about the nature of the political evolution of the country. Many point to the problems of a putative democratic transition as the source of Egypt's woes. However, more than simply struggling to achieve a democratic system, Egypt is still grappling with the continued reality of an outdated, authoritarian, and oligarchic old state.

Egypt is in need of a complete reinvention of its politics: wholly new state-citizen relations based on democratic social, political, and economic contracts. Such a far-reaching transformation is necessary to address the country's myriad socioeconomic and political problems.

The fall of the Mubarak regime was a hopeful moment for many revolutionaries. The January 2011 uprising was spurred by a demand for changes to state authoritarianism and despotism in Egypt. The main enemies in this context were the old state's military and civilian institutions and their associated networks and interest groups, as well as these forces' political worldview, interests, and value system. But that system did not disappear with Mubarak's ouster in February 2011. Rather, the strongman's overthrow ushered in more of the same—an authoritarian political process. This time around, the process was dominated first by the military and then by a new partner, the Muslim Brotherhood.

After two and a half years of confusion and disturbance, the military removed the country's first elected president, the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Mohamed Morsi, from power on July 3, 2013. Both the Brotherhood-led regime and the military's decision to overthrow it were described as "democratic" and "revolutionary" by their respective supporters, but despite this empty rhetoric, both were not.

Problems continue to mount in Egypt, and the existing political forces have proven unable to deliver any real solutions. The country faces a societal and political vacuum, with no democratic, popularly based governing institutions to fill the void. The undemocratic, proto-fascist, and intransigent Islamist movement's political behavior has exacerbated the void that emerged when Mubarak was overthrown. Moreover, the old state's deep authoritarianism continues to plague Egyptian society and thwart efforts at real change, while infant democratic protest movements are incapable of offering a viable third way.

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In many ways, Egypt is now back where it was nearly three years ago. The popular mobilization against Morsi, which reached its crescendo in the mass demonstrations of June 2013, signaled a reorientation. Following the long parentheses of Muslim Brotherhood rule, society is returning to the revolutionary battle lines against the old state's authoritarianism. Some optimists believe that after the old state finishes off the Brothers, it will establish a democracy. At the root of this hope, however, lies either naïveté or dishonesty.

The current political process, framed by the military's announcement of a political road map after Morsi's overthrow, is no less authoritarian than that led by the military and the Muslim Brotherhood together after Mubarak's ouster. Furthermore, the new political process does not position the interim government to better handle Egypt's current crisis of democratic legitimacy, much less create a better political future for Egyptians. A political battle rages on between the old state and the Islamists, immobilizing all political actors in the country.

A new, inclusive, democratic polity is not likely to emerge soon, but the old authoritarian system cannot be sustainably reproduced either. Though the old state is reasserting its dominance over the political system, it faces endemic crises of legitimacy and performance. As long as the institutional crises of the state, society, and economy persist, the old state will remain incapable of turning its current dominance into a legitimate grip on power, and Egypt's problems will remain unsolvable. Accordingly, any future success on key issues, including economic development, state modernization, security, and political stability, will remain highly unlikely. All this means the system will continue to suffer from a lack of acceptable, inclusive rules of the game.

In addition, the sizeable coalition that supported the July 3 coup is divided into subgroups of actors with different viewpoints about the new political system. These include the more conservative political forces who want to reproduce the authoritarian, clientelist, and elitist politics of the Mubarak era as well as those who want to introduce substantial policy and governance reforms. Both options are problematic and lack widespread support for various reasons.

Different state actors are competing with one another for influence, resources, and power. These elite divisions and this rapacious intrastate competition have led to considerable differences among political players about the new constitution, electoral system, and public policies. No state or nonstate actor within the July 3 caretaker regime has managed to dominate the debate. This situation threatens to produce a fragmentation of powers rather than a separation of powers.

After their unpopular failed experiment with governance, the Muslim Brothers are seeing their old dreams of state domination move further out of reach. Instead, they face a more limited set of options and are encountering a series of political and existential challenges. The fate of Islamism in Egypt is key to the potential for the emergence of any new democratic polity in the country. However, Islamists are part of the problem and cannot in and of

themselves be the solution. Democratic forces continue to lament their unmet revolutionary goals, but they remain as helpless as ever. Suffering from crises of organization, funding, leadership, and discourse, they have a long way to go in developing their own tools of change and resistance and moving beyond slogans to clearly define the new polity they pursue.

Society is confused and significantly polarized; average citizens increasingly tend toward public engagement but do so in a perplexed manner. Bonapartism is probably unachievable and certainly unsustainable. But this does not mean democracy will emerge as the automatic alternative. Instead, a political vacuum and a period of political limbo are likely to persist. So far, the Egyptian uprising has been a demonstration of the intensity of the ongoing political and socio-economic crisis, which is making Egypt increasingly ungovernable. An entirely new structural approach must be taken if Egypt is to establish a democratic and effective state and political system.

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## The Old State

It is difficult to capture the political substance of the term “old state” due to the shifts in policies under the different regimes over the last century and changing historical economic, institutional, and social conditions. But the post-1952 state in particular stands out. Its institutions, value systems, modes of performance, and interests made the post-1952 era a significant milestone in the history of state-led modernization in Egypt.

Despite some initial developmental successes, the post-1952 state experienced a series of far-reaching debacles that revealed its fundamental limitations. Even though this crisis-ridden state is often depicted as “the modern state” of Egypt, it can be dubbed the “old state” because it quickly proved outdated, lacking the capacity to address problems and deliver solutions. It was at the heart of the political breakdown in Egypt through the 2011 uprising.

Although it evolved over time, this old state retained three primary features in its constitutional and legal structures and its political behavior: elitism and centralism, authoritarian guardianship, and violence.

### Elitism and Centralism

The old state was dominated by power elites grouped within the military, security, and bureaucratic institutions.

Historically speaking, over the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the elites who dominated Egypt’s economy and were largely responsible for the state’s modernization, such as the landed aristocracy, commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, and the business class, partnered with state elites in a marriage of convenience. When Gamal

Abdel Nasser and his military elite came to power in 1952, the power balance shifted to the state elites.

The new government installed a state-led, paternalistic mode of production, which obstructed the development of self-aware and empowered social groups and a clear class structure. Any political or social institutions that sought to articulate or represent the wishes and interests of the grass roots were co-opted by the state elites and incorporated within the existing, elite-dominated structure in a top-down fashion using a complicated system of administrative and legal control, police intimidation and monitoring, and political patronage and clientelism. Political corporatism prevailed.

The state was not a totalitarian “big brother.” Civil society and a small margin of popular political representation did exist, particularly with the policy of political liberalization under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. But civil society was always controlled. The state was the predominant political and social actor in the country. Modernization projects that were not led by the state were for all practical purposes nonexistent because it was impossible to drum up popular support for them.

Upper-crust Egyptians either tried to find ways to manipulate the state to meet their socioeconomic interests or simply accepted being co-opted by the state if doing so was more suitable for their interests. Traditional forces in rural and semi-rural areas, such as family groups, clans, and tribes, behaved similarly. The state’s political system was for all intents and purposes a forum for incorporating these classes and groups and allocating patronage.

Disempowered and lower classes looked to the state as the key patriarchal modernizer that tended to the interests of all. Since Nasser’s time, the mainstream labor or peasant movements did not think about reconfiguring the state-led political economy but rather pressured the state to make good on its moral and populist duties and promises of economic egalitarianism.

## Authoritarian Guardianship

Despite regime changes over the last two centuries, the old state retained its status in Egypt as the sole agent of social and economic modernization and progress as well as its place as the exclusive protector of Egyptian national identity. The state was the guardian of a society that was otherwise backward, underdeveloped, and unruly.

The state guided the economy in a paternalistic way and in partnership with the private sector when necessary. This became particularly clear under Mubarak’s oligarchic crony capitalism.

In this unbalanced state-society relationship, different social forces, actors, groups, classes, and agencies were not allowed to compete for power or represent their own interests, demands, or worldviews. The diversity and plurality of interests, viewpoints, and even identities was overlooked. The state blocked

effective political competition and pluralism by denying rights of independent organization, representation, participation, and expression. Myriad legal and administrative mechanisms restricted activism that the constitution might have nominally tolerated.

Instead, the military and civilian bureaucracy technocratically managed the state and the society. This state bureaucracy was above social and class conflicts (essentially, above politics) and had the national mandate to decide on public policies in the name of the national interest. That national interest was defined exclusively by the state elites, morally and politically acting as the guardians of the people. Leaders cited Egypt's paternalistic culture and doctrines of state custodianship and tutelage to justify the system. The "people" were merely the objects of state public policies.

In practice, this meant the death of politics.

## **Violence**

State institutions used violence to discipline Egyptians. State violence ranged from the legal to the extra-legal and was at times employed with fatal results. The state also proved unable to protect the lives of Egyptian citizens, for example, in cases of political and social unrest as well as symbolic violence against women and religious and ethnic minorities (such as Copts, Bedouins, and Nubians).

## **Old State Failures Today**

These three structural features of the modern authoritarian Egyptian state persisted throughout the second half of the twentieth century and were codified in constitutions and laws. No less importantly, they were enshrined in the state elites' and the masses' political imagination and policymaking processes.

This overdose of state authoritarianism could have been justified if it managed to introduce significant achievements. Many authoritarian regimes in other parts of the world have developed their countries. But this was not the case in Egypt. The old state was both undemocratic and unable to bring about development. Rule of law by even the most conservative definition was absent, in terms of not just favoritism and arbitrariness in law enforcement but also the declining quality of regulative capacity, especially under Mubarak. The state did not achieve sustainable economic development or wealth-generating industrialization, there were no competent state institutions, unemployment soared, poverty spread, food insecurity increased, rent-based activities prevailed, budget deficits ballooned, urban slums and shantytowns swelled, and the educational system collapsed. Negligence was evident in the deteriorating quality of public utilities and basic service provision as well. By the end of Mubarak's rule, Egypt ranked low in human development reports assessing living standards, quality of life, and access to basic needs such as housing, food, education, and healthcare. Many Egyptians also died in traffic accidents each year thanks to poor government implementation of transportation regulations.

The erosion of state regulative capacity also led to the growth of the deregulated informal economy and the spread of informal services including housing and transportation. Islamic organizations thrived on the vacuum created by the state's economic lethargy, but the vacuum did not provide an opportunity for the creation of development projects that were not

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**The state may be authoritarian,  
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organizationally incompetent.**

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led by the state. As long as the state retained its powerful security institutions and its monopoly on key policy decisions and economic resources, particularly public land and energy, it was more than willing to tolerate these informal phenomena as safety valves and nothing more. Finally, the state failed in terms of competence in most of its military

engagements with adversaries throughout Egypt's modern age.

The state may be authoritarian, but it is administratively and organizationally incompetent.

## Origins of Uprising

The old state in Egypt, suffering from twin crises of legitimacy and achievements, survived mostly in the name of the necessity of making war, then peace, with Israel. Fighting radical and violent Islamism in the 1980s and 1990s became another *raison d'être* for the crisis-ridden state. When the radical Islamist threat in Egypt subsided by 2000, peace with Israel having been achieved two decades before, political mobilization against the regime began to develop between 2004 and 2011.

The 2011 uprising was the cumulative outcome of a decade of protests against the old state by different sectors of the population—including youth movements, labor movements, and nonpartisan political groupings. These actors were either not represented in the state or could no longer tolerate dismal living conditions and the weight of incompetent and politically vacant state authoritarianism. Many members of the upper-middle class, who, thanks to education and employment, have access to international markets, also joined the uprising to protest government corruption and the lack of transparency and accountability because Egypt's crony capitalism is a waste of resources that does not develop the economy or make it competitive.

The main thrust of the January uprising was less about the installation of a legitimate electoral system and more about the need to re-create Egyptian politics in a deeper way. Many Egyptians aimed to deconstruct the old state, which excluded the majority of the population from decisionmaking and was defined by the domination of the military and security institutions, bureaucratic elites, and economic oligarchs.

Under Mubarak in particular, this “modern” authoritarian state unofficially but effectively morphed into an ensemble of different fiefdoms. Each state institution occupied its own sphere of influence, made its own rules, and allocated

its own resources in an oligarchic fashion among its own functionaries and clientele, who were accountable only to their own fiefdom's rules and institutions. Moreover, recruitment within these fiefdoms became increasingly dependent on kinship and personal networks. These fiefdoms included the military, police, intelligence services, judiciary, bureaucracy, and public sector companies, as well as nonstate actors, such as the business class and Muslim and Christian religious organizations. State public policies were the outcome of compromise and bargaining shaped by the balance of power and interests and by the functional division of labor between these different state and nonstate fiefdoms.

This *taifas* state is central to conceptualizing Egyptian state politics under Mubarak and what remains today. *Taifa* is the Arabic word for sect, and the term *taifas* state refers to a system in which state institutions act as distinct, closed, and self-interested sects rather than governing institutions of the national polity. This system was reminiscent of the politics of the *Mamluk* state in Egypt in the eighteenth century before Muhammad Ali founded the modern state.<sup>1</sup> Only in this context can one truly comprehend the Egyptian military-industrial complex, the “republic of officers,” and the military's economic empire, consisting of huge investments in tradable nonmilitary products, industries, and services, in addition to trade in public land, tourism, and energy production facilities.<sup>2</sup>

The police force was the fiefdom with the most recognizable power. It was not just the repressive tool of the regime. For the common people in Egypt, it was essentially the state because it was the government institution with which they were most familiar. Under Mubarak, when depoliticization and bureaucratic incompetence were at their worst, the police force was left to assume the power of government in relating to the people. The force did so not just in terms of law enforcement but also in terms of running state affairs, administering social relations, allocating local social and economic resources, and resolving conflicts. Accountable to no one, self-interested, brutal, and bad at its sociopolitical and administrative functions, the police force earned the wrath of wide segments of the population.

Over time, the scale of corruption, arbitrariness, brutality, and repression associated with the police's management operations became unbearable. The January 2011 popular uprising against the regime therefore meant practically targeting the police institution, demolishing its stations, defeating its forces in street battles, and forcing it into a humiliating surrender.

Beyond the deconstruction of old institutions, significant ideological aims developed at the core of the uprising. Demonstrators chanted for social justice, demanding a radical break in public policies on economic resource allocation and income distribution that would hit the heart of the old state and its system of political economy.

The demonstrators demanded freedom, which is a very complicated term in this context. Free and fair elections are, of course, a component. But freedom was also understood by many who took to the streets as the ability to defy



authorities; press for their own demands; conquer the public space; express their own culture and value systems unashamedly; protest their marginalization and exclusion; challenge hegemonic ideas; question national political, social, and cultural taboos; and experiment with violence as a mode of political rebellion and self-fulfillment.

The fact that these demands were hailed enthusiastically by diverse groups and actors upholding different ideologies and orientations was rather telling of a general mood of displeasure with the old state and its creeping domination of society. Disparate actors yearned for a more inclusive and egalitarian state built on new social, political, and economic contracts. In this new polity, the masses would contribute to decisions about social, political, and economic public policies.

Achieving these aims required rebuilding state institutions by restructuring state-society relations; reconstituting the concept of rule of law; democratizing the public sphere and civil society against authoritative restrictions; protecting public and private liberties, socioeconomic rights, equality, and sociopolitical pluralism; and integrating minorities and marginal groups into the state and the public sphere. This state, with its newly founded and unprecedented democratic legitimacy, would in theory be more capable of developing new policies to serve wide segments of the population, improve living standards, and advance socioeconomic development, thereby bettering living conditions for the majority of Egyptians. Such objectives were unattainable under the old state.

But conditions were not right for the creation of this new state. The disgruntled revolutionary masses knew what they loathed but had no clear idea of what they wanted instead, let alone how to achieve it. Rooted in the “death of politics” era, the amorphous revolutionary masses lacked organization, funds, leadership, and political platforms to build their dreams into a real political alternative that could be institutionalized. Instead, the revolutionaries went for the lower-hanging fruit—the easily identifiable target of getting rid of

Mubarak himself. To achieve that aim, they resorted to a restorative practice: turning to the military to force the “bad state leaders” out. Anything beyond that was inconceivable given the opposition’s limited political resources.

The only actors in the country who had the necessary resources—members of the old state, with the military at its center, and the Muslim Brotherhood—were not interested in creating a new democratic political system. Their objectives were more authoritarian. And to advance them, they only needed to seize upon the opportunities and minimize the constraints presented by the uprising.

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## Muslim Brothers: An Undemocratic Interlude

The Muslim Brotherhood played a key role in the popular mobilization that brought down Mubarak over eighteen days of demonstrations and sit-ins in January and February 2011. It marshaled human and political resources and its logistical talents in support of the uprising.

But the Brothers were not on board with the revolutionaries' broader goals. The struggle for a new democratic state was never their cause. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and political, social, and economic viewpoints mean the organization is fundamentally biased against the notion of a radical democratization of national politics.<sup>3</sup>

### The Muslim Brotherhood's Ideology

In very general terms, the Muslim Brotherhood's project is about individual and communal religious redemption in contemporary Muslim societies that are doomed, according to the Brothers, by Westernization and secularization. The Brotherhood's intensive process of Islamist ideological indoctrination aims at educating members in the values necessary for acquiring Islamic identity. This process is meant to lead to their individual salvation.

Politics is indispensable to the Brotherhood's ideology, as it shapes the social context that governs any possible individual salvation. Politics is also understood to be part and parcel of the Islamic religion, system, worldview, and *manhaj* (methodology of change) itself.

Central to the Brotherhood's ideological project is the elitist dream of an "Islamic state" that will resurrect the Islamic caliphate and lead Brothers toward the actualization of their Islamic identity and hence their salvation and empowerment. Islamic identity is presented as a static set of inherited religious attributes and essentialist cultural features that need to be guarded by the Islamic state. In parallel, Brotherhood ideology employs a more dynamic understanding of Islamic identity as a vibrant project of political, social, economic, and cultural constructs that are yet to be established by the Islamic state. The two understandings are contradictory, but both imply that the Islamic state is the true representative of Islamic identity and has a key role to play in protecting and shaping that identity.

Practically, the Islamic state has been reduced to one exclusively dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, which has become synonymous with Islam and the Islamic identity. Brothers consider the Brotherhood as the ideal, pure of the dirt that contaminates society outside of the group. In practice, this means the Muslim Brotherhood is essentially a sect that cements its ties not just through religious ideology but also by invoking shared economic interests, social and familial connections, and common lifestyles and personal experiences.

The Muslim Brotherhood has had a complicated relationship with the modern state in Egypt. The state marginalized the Brotherhood and other Islamic

movements, but those movements thrived nonetheless in the social vacuum created by the failures and incompetence of the old state. The death of politics left only religion as a space for resistance. The Brotherhood filled the vacuum, gradually building considerable social, cultural, and economic capital.

Of course, the Brotherhood has not been immune to the deeply embedded idea that the Egyptian state—the most modernized and powerful institution in society—is the golden prize that every ideological and political movement targets in order to achieve its own objectives and make its dreams about Egypt come true. This is another reason the authoritarian Islamic state is central to the Brotherhood's project.

The conquest of the old state, with its three main features of elitism, authoritarian guardianship, and structural violence, therefore became the real political substance of the Muslim Brotherhood's plans. Appropriation of the old state, from a leading position, was necessary for the implementation of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideological, identity-centered project. What the Brothers needed was an elite turnover to propel themselves into a dominant position within an inherited old state, which they hoped to convert into an alternative Islamic state once they consolidated power.

After Mubarak fell, and even before, the Brothers, among other moderate Islamists, made many efforts to adapt to the requirements of electoral democracy. But these efforts were mostly confined to electoral procedures and mechanisms. Their understanding of democracy did not cut deeply into the ideological meat of the Brothers' religious and political stances, which still discriminate against non-Muslims, secularist Muslims, and women.<sup>4</sup> Theocratic notions of the Islamic state are still pivotal to the Brotherhood's political worldview.

### **The Brotherhood and the Uprising**

In the decade prior to Mubarak's ouster, the Muslim Brotherhood refrained from participating in strikes, demonstrations, and sit-ins to avoid being targeted by the regime's repression. No less importantly, the Brothers' disavowal of revolution was a sign of their political mindset, which was and remains reformist at best and conservative at worst. The Brothers are not fans of revolutionary upheavals or confrontational politics that impede their long-term, gradualist project.

Still, the 2011 uprising and the ouster of Mubarak's repressive police regime afforded them a golden opportunity to win recognition, legitimacy, and the right to participate in the political system. The Brothers saw a chance to win key footholds within the country's new political and state institutions and to secure a dominant role in shaping the principal features of the post-Mubarak political system. This role would allow them to tailor the system to fit their ideological and political objectives.

Ongoing revolutionary upheaval, however, would threaten to erode the Brothers' accrued hegemony over opposition and religious politics. Thus the

Brothers worked actively to arrest the flow of the revolutionary protests in Egypt in the wake of Mubarak's overthrow, displaying hostility to any agenda of socioeconomic and participatory democracy. The Brotherhood collaborated with the military to construct a conservative procedural democracy that would favor the Brothers politically and stop the wave of political radicalization.

After Mubarak's fall, the old state institutions, the Islamists, and the United States converged at that critical juncture to allow the Muslim Brotherhood to take power. Old authoritarian state institutions, with the military at their heart, seized upon the uprising to get rid of one contender for power. They eliminated the prospect that Hosni Mubarak's son, Gamal, would become president because they viewed such succession to be a threat to state foundations and stability, which were based on military guardianship and bureaucratic seniority. Simultaneously, in the face of mass protests, the military sought to retain its dominant position over the state and its decades-old oligarchic interests through a partnership with a conservative civilian political force in the electoral sphere—the Muslim Brotherhood.

Islamists, with the Brotherhood at their core, employed their comparative electoral advantage to gain a plurality of votes. That provided a point from which the Brothers could carry out their gradual, long-term authoritarian ideological project of building an Islamic state. This project necessitated the end of pluralism and diversity in Egyptian society and culture because it required the forceful imposition of the Muslim Brotherhood's perception of politics, culture, law, morality, and traditions on society by the state.

The final key actor, the United States, was invested in the idea that moderate movements of political Islam would inevitably be a central part of electoral democracy in the Middle East, both because of their organizational competence and coherence and because, in the view of at least some U.S. policymakers, moderate Islamists were the representatives of the “authentic culture” of Muslim Middle Eastern populations. Accordingly, their coming to power would legitimize the new political systems and hence guarantee political stability.

According to this argument, moderate Islamist movements have already demonstrated remarkable restraint when it comes to Western interests and displayed a commitment to the democratic process. As forces for stability, these moderate Islamist movements can safeguard Western strategic interests like oil security and Israeli security. Moderate Islamists in power can also check the spread of radical Islamists and contain the ideological appeal of such extremism. In other words, Western policymakers welcomed what they thought would be benign new procedural democracies, dominated by Islamist electoral victories, as the best guarantors of the strategic and economic status quo on the domestic, regional, and international levels.

The interaction of these forces sufficed to ensure that the Brothers, through their Freedom and Justice Party, made it into parliament in late 2011 and that Brotherhood-backed Mohamed Morsi became president in June 2012. Yet, support for the Islamists was not overwhelming, and they were far from

monopolizing the presidential vote in Egypt. In the first round of the presidential election, Morsi received just 24.8 percent of the vote, with the remainder of the electorate voting for non-Islamist candidates, including Mubarakist, revolutionary, and conservative contenders.<sup>5</sup> In the second round, Morsi more than doubled the number of votes he received, thanks in large part to the support of revolutionaries and democrats worried about his Mubarakist opponent, Ahmed Shafiq, in addition to his first-round Islamist supporters. But he still just eked out a victory with 51 percent of the votes.

With 5.7 million Islamist votes going to Morsi in the first round, the Islamists are a strong electoral force. But this does not mean they are hegemonic or that they will have a monopoly over votes in the future, especially given the Brotherhood's track record in office.

## The Muslim Brotherhood in Power

The Brothers looked the other way when it came to democratic political and economic transformation. Going beyond negligence, the Muslim Brotherhood adamantly placated old interests and castigated the protest movements during the 2011–2012 transitional period. The Brotherhood's political system was simply old wine in new bottles. It was democratic only in the sense that there was relatively free and fair open electoral competition.<sup>6</sup> But elections were the only legitimate form of popular political participation.

### Electocracy

In cooperation with the military, the Muslim Brotherhood drafted a new constitution in 2012 that was heavily criticized by non-Islamists in the country. The Brothers excluded non-Islamist forces from the drafting process and, more

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**The Brotherhood's political system was simply old wine in new bottles.**

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seriously, the constitution contained authoritarian provisions on the issues of civil-military relations, the system of government, socioeconomic rights, civil liberties, and religion-state relations. Checks and balances were not adequately provided by the 2012 constitution, which placed many complicated restrictions on the work of an elected parliament that was already disempowered constitutionally vis-à-vis the president and other state institutions. The public institutions responsible for oversight and auditing were controlled by the president. Moreover, the document rendered many key state fiefdoms untouchable even by the elected institutions. As a result, electoral outcomes, no matter how much popular input was invested in them, meant very little when it came to changing actual policies. Electoral authoritarianism, or electocracy, was thus firmly established in Egypt.

This political process did not give much regard to political, civil, and socioeconomic rights. The old authoritarian laws pertaining to these rights were either preserved by the Brotherhood-military's process or replaced by new,

no-less-authoritarian laws. Examples included the Muslim Brotherhood drafts, under Morsi's government, of new laws on demonstrations, social associations, trade unions, information, and the autonomy of the media and judiciary. The old constitutional, legal, and political brakes on protests aimed at radical changes in Egyptian politics and economics, including trade unions, professional syndicates, and human rights organizations, were maintained. In addition, new checks were added, such as the Muslim Brotherhood's derogatory propaganda against such movements, which were labeled as "divisive," "selfish and self-centered" (*faewya* in Egyptian political parlance), "conspiratorial," and "upsetting the national economy and the build-up of the new Egypt."<sup>7</sup> Old state elites and business-dominated private media supported the Muslim Brotherhood's position on these matters.

The Brotherhood also ignored proposals by various human rights organizations and political activists to restructure the police and state-owned media, reform the judiciary and make it independent, and democratize the legal infrastructure of civil society. Legal proposals aimed at democratizing state-society relations (the original aim of the January 2011 uprising) were sidelined.

The Muslim Brotherhood cabinet targeted political activists, and the Morsi-appointed attorney general and interior minister prosecuted them. The Brotherhood incessantly proceeded with a slow but steady policy of appointing its own members and supporters as cabinet ministers and to positions in state, executive, administrative, municipal, and judicial bureaucracies, which are influential in affecting the outcome of the electoral process in Egypt.

Morsi's November 19, 2012, presidential decrees, or constitutional declaration, were particularly significant measures. According to these decrees, the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated constituent assembly, which was responsible for drafting the constitution, could not be legally dissolved. The Muslim Brotherhood-dominated upper house in the parliament received the same impunity and acquired legislative powers that originally belonged to the lower house, which was dissolved by court rule in May 2012. Finally the Mubarak regime's attorney general was dismissed (a recurrent revolutionary objective) in November 2012 only to be replaced by a Morsi appointee. Thus, the new attorney general would be as dependent and subservient to executive power as his predecessor. At this point, the Muslim Brotherhood's pursuit of full domination became more than apparent.

The Brothers were particularly unhappy with the judiciary's political interventions after the January 2011 uprising, which is why they proposed new legislation aimed at restructuring the judiciary in the name of reform. To bring about change, the Muslim Brotherhood could have reached out to reformist factions within the judicial institution, easing non-Islamist politicians' legitimate fears of the Muslim Brotherhood's domination by building a consensual nonpartisan framework for institutional reforms. Instead, the Muslim Brotherhood opted for heavy-handed and rough tactics.

The Brotherhood's early 2013 draft of legislation that would lower judges' retirement age was particularly dangerous. It would have sent one-third of the judiciary into retirement overnight. It was suggested by some Brotherhood leaders that 3,000 lawyers from the general assemblies of Egyptian courts would be promoted as replacements, and it was feared by the rest that these replacements would be Muslim Brotherhood members or surrogates.

An uproar by the judiciary and public was enough to block the Muslim Brotherhood's project, but the resulting loss of credibility and public resentment at the Brotherhood's hegemonic agenda was incontrovertible. Incompetent policymaking and ill-advised, premature bids for hegemony earned the Brothers more determined enemies.

### **Violence**

Beyond harsh political and legislative practices, the Muslim Brotherhood government under Morsi more or less retained Mubarak-era crony capitalism; rentier policies; reliance on foreign loans; and neglect of structural economic reform, social justice, and sustainable development. Furthermore, in addition to public relations disasters, the Muslim Brotherhood was involved in disseminating hate speech against the religious, sectarian, and political other. The Brothers either perpetrated such acts or tolerated the perpetrators who belonged to more extreme Islamic movements, creating a climate conducive to further violence-prone sectarian and political hatred.

And violence did happen, including Muslim Brotherhood attacks on demonstrators in Tahrir Square in October 2012 and an attack by the Brothers on their opponents in front of the presidential palace on December 5, 2012. In addition, there were frequent Muslim Brotherhood crackdowns on the opposition and bystanders during protests and demonstrations that rocked the country in January and February 2013. Sectarian attacks against Copts and Shia were also reported.

From November 2012 onward, the country, amid this atmosphere of intense political and social polarization, was slipping into low-intensity but steady civil strife on different axes of confrontation—the Muslim Brotherhood against the opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood against the common people, the Islamists against the Shia, and the Islamists against the Copts. This wreaked havoc on political stability, the economy, and security.

### **Placating the Old State**

The Muslim Brotherhood also tried to appease old state institutions and interests, which it deemed necessary to achieve its long-term objective of infiltrating the state and eventually taking it over. The Brothers tried to pacify the old state institutions through constitutional changes and policy packages.

The military got what it wanted in the imbalanced civil-military relations outlined in the 2012 constitution. The constitution exempted the military

budget from any parliamentary oversight, securing the army's economic empire. Other articles in the 2012 constitution granted the military-dominated national defense council veto power over questions of war, peace, and national security. Finally, the document approved of military trials for civilians and legitimized courts-martial as a judicial institution.

Moreover, Morsi's government and the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated parliament refrained from carrying out any transitional justice projects, to the dismay of many revolutionary movements. Demands for restructuring the Ministry of Interior and making the police force accountable for atrocities committed before, during, and after the January 2011 uprising were rebuffed, despite rhetoric to the contrary. Morsi's government also doubled the police budget and paid lip service to the top military and police commanders in terms of promotions and appointments within the Ministry of Interior (mostly keeping the old guard untouched). As just one example, Khaled Tharwat, appointed by Morsi as the new leader of the Egyptian Homeland Security (the successor of the infamous State Security Investigations Service), was the head of the religious activities department in the state security intelligence service in the 1990s.

Morsi awarded Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and General Sami Hafez Anan—the two top military commanders in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which ruled Egypt immediately after Mubarak's overthrow—the most prestigious national medals of honor after they were removed from office in August 2012. That recognition sent a disheartening message to the Egyptian people. There was no talk of bringing them to justice for the almost 200 people killed while the SCAF was in power. Even Morsi's reshuffling of SCAF leaders, initially hailed by the Muslim Brotherhood's media as “an end of military rule,” was ostensibly carried out in coordination with the military institution and the second-tier SCAF leaders.<sup>8</sup> The Brothers also refrained from taking any serious steps to restructure the procedures related to recruitment, employment, and promotion within state institutions. In reality, their goal was to maintain the existing system while gradually placing their own people inside it.

The Muslim Brotherhood government also tried to accommodate the old business class. The Brotherhood continued Mubarak-era economic policies and professed a reluctance to significantly shift wages, taxation, public expenditure, or fiscal policies. It was also willing to normalize relations with Mubarak-era businessmen charged with corruption. The Muslim Brotherhood's pro-free-market and consumerist ideology and activities paved the way for this economic policy. In fact, members of the Brotherhood said that they believed that Mubarak-era economic policies could be successful if implemented by uncorrupted leaders like the Brothers themselves.

Despite populist Islamist rhetoric, Morsi's government caved in the face of the past.



## The Muslim Brotherhood's Fall

None of these tactics was effective. By 2013, the Brotherhood regime had earned the wrath of the pro-democracy revolutionary movements and many of the common people. Its attempts to accommodate the old state institutions and networks failed miserably, and the Brotherhood did not set in motion a broad right-wing conservative political and social coalition.

This grand failure was dangerously consequential because, after an initial experimental period, the old state switched its allegiances. The old elites rebuffed Muslim Brotherhood bids for partnership and cooperation and instead threw their weight behind the opposition, capitalizing on anti-Muslim Brotherhood popular protest that climaxed in the June 2013 demonstrations.

Two factors were key to this failure. First, the Muslim Brotherhood did not successfully form political coalitions, even on non-antagonistic issues. That was clear when they were unable to win over non-Islamist political movements and state institutions during the 2012 constitution-drafting process, in the formation of Morsi's cabinet, and in the formation of 2011 parliamentary electoral coalitions.

Second, the ideological and organizational characteristics of the Muslim Brotherhood left them uneasy bedfellows with the old state institutions. As a social and religious sect, the Muslim Brotherhood is not easily accessible or inclusive of partners and clients. Recruitment and membership is a lengthy process of ideological qualification, social commitment, and exclusive identification with the group as the Muslim Brotherhood's big family. Hence, the Brothers' identification with the clients of the old state patronage networks is rather limited. The Muslim Brotherhood with its Freedom and Justice Party could not be a functional replacement of the Mubarak regime's ruling party, which united the state institutions, prominent families and notables, and patronage networks.

A self-centered and closed group like the Muslim Brotherhood, with a holistic ideology of a "new Islamic state," was understandably suspicious in the eyes of its supposed power partners, that is, the old state institutions of the military, police, judiciary, and bureaucracy. The specter of the Muslim Brotherhood's infiltration of the state haunted these institutions. The Brothers' bid to form a new political ruling class, led by an alliance with the old state institutions, was seen by these state institutions and by worried non-Islamist politicians and common people as the Brotherhood's conquest of the state. A decades-long legacy of anti-Islamism among the old state institutions, in addition to divergent worldviews and disagreements on the notions of national interest, national security, and national unity, all rendered a partnership between the Muslim Brotherhood and the old state unrealizable. Old state forces decided to act against the Muslim Brotherhood regime, but not because of their hatred of the Brotherhood's reformist project of change. Rather, they saw an overly

greedy Muslim Brotherhood prove to be an utter failure at co-opting partners and accommodating the old state in a satisfactory way.

The Brothers were too greedy and reckless in asserting themselves politically. Domination over the parliament was not enough; they viewed the presidency as indispensable to securing their ruling scheme, understandable given the important historical role of the president as the boss in the Egyptian political system. But putting forward a candidate for president was ill-advised. It raised fears among the state institutions and the non-Islamist opposition, thereby scuttling any bids for appeasement of or partnership with the state. The move was particularly unwise given the imbalance of power between the Brotherhood and the state fiefdoms, principally the military, police, judiciary, and bureaucracy. These state fiefdoms remained the key power holders in the country. The Brotherhood effectively hindered the creation of a functioning new version of authoritarianism.

With the military, police, and judiciary on its side, the old state could knock the Brothers out. However, such a step needed popular support and backing from key nonstate actors, such as the business class, private media, political elites, prestigious national religious institutions (al-Azhar and the Coptic Church), and revolutionary movements. Ultimately, the old state was able to secure this support thanks to the Brothers' policy of alienating all other actors.

Of course, the Brotherhood regime commanded political support among considerable sectors of the population. These included Islamist constituencies who identified with the regime ideologically as well as those who tolerated Morsi's undisputed blunders and incompetence in the name of safeguarding the infant "electoral democracy" in Egypt. Still, wide segments of the population were angry about the Morsi government's failed economic policies and nonexistent progress regarding inflation, as well as declining living standards; deteriorating quality of public services; and daily energy, electricity, and fuel crises.

Although many of these problems were structural and born of decades of the government's developmental failures, the Brotherhood regime was blamed because it held the power. And the Brothers were not helped by the fact that their pompous electoral propaganda claimed that their "renaissance project" would bring immediate progress to Egypt, raising expectations.<sup>9</sup>

Another source of public discontent was that the Brotherhood's entry into power marked the apparent takeover of the country by a mafia-style, secretive, closed sect with convoluted and suspicious regional and internal extensions. That was outrageous in the eyes of a public saturated with classical legacies of nationalist pride and identity. Finally, many within the Egyptian urban middle and upper classes loathed what they saw as a threat to their lifestyles and an attempt to restrict their liberties as part of the long-term project of forced Islamization.

Reacting to public dissatisfaction and increasingly isolated, the teetering Brotherhood regime fell back on its key ideological clientele and power base—the Islamist bloc, including the most retrograde Islamist factions, such as the

Salafists and jihadists. The Brotherhood began using aggressive, confrontationalist, and extremist Islamist discourse, launching a phony war from the podiums at Islamist demonstrations. This extreme discourse, in addition to reported incidents of physical violence against political opponents and religious and sectarian minorities, furthered political destabilization, societal polarization, and economic instability.

If they had been presented in a timely manner, meaningful concessions (such as changing the ineffectual Hisham Qandil's cabinet, replacing the Morsi-appointed attorney general with a new independent one, or reforming electoral laws) could have de-radicalized the situation. But self-deluded and unaware of the full impact of polarization and mobilization and true to its ideology-shaped, zero-sum-game mentality, the Muslim Brotherhood declined all calls by domestic and international interlocutors for compromise and conciliation. Mobilizing the Islamist bloc behind Morsi along ideological lines had in effect rendered such compromises and concessions unmarketable and hence unrealizable among the Islamist grass roots.

The headstrong and uncompromising Brotherhood regime stayed the course until the masses took to the streets in very large numbers on June 30, 2013, in defiance of the regime and demanding early presidential elections. This turn of the tides signaled the end of Morsi's rule. Morsi declined the demand for early presidential elections, killing any remaining chance for democratic reconciliation. The military launched a coup on July 3, taking power to contain the wave of anti-Morsi popular protests.

Perennially obsessed with eternal martyrdom, the Brothers depicted their ouster as a result of a conspiracy, shaped by the Mubarak regime's interests and spearheaded by a military coup against the popular will. However, the Brotherhood's unsurprising downfall was actually an outcome of its ideological, organizational, and political structure, which left it unable to deal with the old state and relate constructively to the broader national, societal, and political crises and demands that triggered the January 2011 earthquake. When the moment of truth came, the Brothers' intellectual poverty, dearth of capable cadres, preference for loyalty over competence, and lack of experience or knowledge about the realities of the Egyptian state and society left them unable to act as a force for change in an unruly environment. In post-2011 Egypt, change can only be meaningful if it is comprehensive and deep.

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## What Comes Next?

To avoid larger-scale civil conflict or the more likely outcome of uncontrollable radical revolutionary politics that would have torn apart the old state, the armed forces had no option but to contain the mass movement and build a new political

process of counterrevolution. The new process is supposed to accomplish what the collapsed one failed to do. The success of this second process of counterrevolution as well as the path of the Islamists will both shape Egypt's development.

### **The Future of the Islamists**

The June 30 mass demonstrations, which were the largest anti-Islamist mass protests in Egypt's history, marked the end of the hegemonic project of political Islam. This, of course, does not mean the end of Islamic movements in Egypt. If they are reintegrated, these movements will remain key political and social actors with recognizable constituencies and electoral capacities to be reckoned with in any competitive electoral contest and in the balance of political power in Egypt. But the June protests marked the demise of the attempt to dominate the state and public sphere as part of the broader goal of inheriting the old state and building an Islamic state controlled by Islamists, whether through the ballot box or the use of force.

Islamist movements can maintain their political and ideological intransigence by participating in protest politics aimed at delegitimizing and destabilizing the current system in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood and its Islamist partners have chosen this path, and Islamist ideology and organizational style lean toward this contentious policy option.

But the Islamists can also still hypothetically reach an agreement with the interim government and the military institutions to be included in the new system, hence ending the current protests and achieving political stability. To reach such an accord, they will have to agree to the new regime's terms of inclusion: They must cease demonstrations. No bids for Islamist hegemony are to be tolerated. Ties between the Freedom and Justice Party and the closed, opaque society of the Muslim Brothers must be severed in reality, not just in rhetoric. The Brothers can be no more than first among political equals in the political and electoral fields. They must agree to have their key leaders brought to justice and expelled from their organization. And Islamists must respect the military's redlines on national security and Egyptian identity. In return, the Brotherhood's participation in politics will be tolerated and many of its members will be released. Practically, the acceptance of these terms would reduce the Brotherhood to a position of junior partnership with the military in the new political process, a significant demotion when compared with the 2011–2013 political process when the lines were not clearly demarcated.

The state could conceivably agree to such a setup, as Islam is already close to the state apparatus. The institutions of the old state often employed Islam to justify their policies, and they manipulated both Islam and political Islamic movements to their advantage. General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the army's commander and Egypt's strongman, was born into this tradition. Moreover, the state is currently waging a war on terrorism in the name of centrist Islam represented by al-Azhar, the country's premier religious institution, and the state itself. Al-Azhar, in

addition to the Salafist al-Nour Party, is one of the key actors within the current military-led road map. Al-Nour's participation in the political process deprives the Brotherhood of an important part of its antiregime propaganda because the current political process cannot be dubbed anti-Islamist or anti-Islamic identity. The post-Morsi constitution-writing panel reasserted articles pertaining to the Islamic identity of the state, society, laws, and family and defining the authoritative position of al-Azhar in Islamic affairs.

Furthermore, the old state's pragmatism means that leaders understand the practical impossibility of excluding Islamists given their social base of support, economic prowess, organizational power, and regional and international links. If not included, the Islamists can spoil any political process in Egypt. Including the Islamist movements in the state would also help move the national political conversation away from the serious questions of resource reallocation, new economic policies, and state institutional reform because volatile Islamist-secularist identity debates would take center stage. Inclusion could mean the end of political instability and the start of economic recovery as well.

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Islamists and members of the old state that once found common ground are, however, currently more prone to belligerence than compromise. Cooperation will depend on the old state's flexibility as well as the willingness of the Brothers to forgo their zero-sum game and mindset of existential conflict and to accept the regime's terms of inclusion, which amount to effective political surrender. Most importantly, the current top priority for the Brotherhood is to maintain organizational unity. This is best achieved through an existential, polarized confrontation with the regime on the basis of an Islamist-secularist dichotomy, an appeal to Islamist mobilizing ideology, and a cult of martyrdom and suffering, which will lead the grassroots supporters of the Brotherhood to coalesce behind their incumbent leadership. Making a deal with the regime now would create confusion among these masses, divide supporters, alienate non-Brotherhood Islamists, and cause the Brotherhood leadership to lose credibility in the eyes of its members. A contentious issue is the fate of Brotherhood leaders and activists currently in jail. Reconciliation has become even harder given the regime's brutal crackdown against the organization, which has left hundreds dead and led to thousands of unlawful arrests over the past few months. It is much harder now to market reconciliation to a weary body of Brotherhood supporters who seek justice in the name of the victims. Moreover, if the two sides do reconcile, defections could cripple the Brotherhood and members might finally hold their leaders accountable for their immense mistakes that brought down the Brotherhood regime. On the other hand, anti-Islamist enmity and a desire for vengeance among the ranks of the regime's security institutions, in addition to the belief that the current situation presents a golden opportunity to deal the Brotherhood a crippling blow, prove that maximalist thinking exists on both sides.

Therefore, the option of reconciliation is highly unlikely in the near future, but not completely off the table. It will depend on the perseverance of both sides. The Brothers have officially made restoring Morsi as president one of their objectives, and although they might be aware that such an aim is practically impossible, they may think they can still delegitimize the new military-led political process by continuing to protest. As a decentralized organization, with the help of its regional and international extensions, the Brotherhood is flexible enough to mount effective protests even with most of its key leaders in prison or outside of Egypt.

The Brothers are likely attempting to hold out until popular attitudes shift because of the caretaker regime's political mismanagement and economic failures. If attitudes shifted, reconciliation with the military and the state could be achieved on much better terms for the Brotherhood.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond reconciliation, the Muslim Brotherhood could attempt to become a nonhegemonic, center-right political and social actor that can advocate for a conservative cultural agenda and win shares of political power proportionate to its relative electoral fortunes within a system of consensual rules and values of liberal democracy (not just the procedural aspects of democracy). To do so, the organization would have to make systemic ideological and organizational changes, something that the current Brotherhood is unwilling to do. As long as the political polarization and confrontation between the Muslim Brotherhood and the state persists, the Brotherhood will maintain its existing ideological and organizational structure.

The Brotherhood is in a dire situation. Any reconciliation must be on the regime's terms, which would mean political surrender and the likely disintegration of the organization. Its remaining option—to continue its protests, betting on tactical destabilization and hoping for some miraculous turn of events that could provide room for a comeback—represents a more face-saving alternative, even if the organization were to be ultimately crushed by the regime. The Brothers' ideological culture of martyrdom, patience, and endless hope for a future comeback shapes their attitude, which favors this suicidal zero-sum game.

Reconciliation with the regime and the Brotherhood's political integration as a junior partner is still possible in the long run, but it will require additional time, clear political capitulation on the part of the Brotherhood, and a change in leadership on both sides.

The Brotherhood can still survive the current regime's onslaught. But in the event that the organization is completely crushed, there are two possibilities for the remaining Brothers. They might resort to hibernation and focus on apolitical underground social and religious activities until conditions become ripe for rebuilding the organization. Alternatively, various factions of the Brotherhood

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grassroots might pursue multiple disparate courses of action, some constructive, others less so.

Other Islamists will be included in the political reshuffling that will now occur in Egypt. The Salafist Call association and its political wing, al-Nour, could play a key role as they have already been prominent forces in the post-Morsi transitional process. Al-Nour accepted the regime's new rules of the game, and it has worked hard to be the Brotherhood's Islamist replacement. Arguably, they seek to emulate the Salafist strategy in Pakistan, where Salafist groups made alliances with the military and security services in order to maintain their foothold in the system and secure minimal social and cultural gains. Right now, however, the al-Nour Party suffers from a lack of ideological credibility among the Islamist grassroots, who accuse them of being sellouts who stabbed the "Islamist president" in the back. Their actual power base will be tested in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Other smaller Islamist groups' fortunes are tied to the state–Muslim Brotherhood inclusion-exclusion game. But many Islamist youth, discontented with regime tactics against the Islamists and disappointed about the potential of Islamization through electoral democracy, are becoming increasingly radicalized toward more contentious, intransigent politics. They will probably be joined by some members of the Brotherhood if that organization collapses completely.

Other Islamists, mainly Salafists and conservatives, might abandon politics altogether or minimize its place in their agenda. Political power will not be the main avenue to social change. Instead, they may reorient their focus toward proselytizing, social activism, and engaging with broader society. Finally, the continuous confrontation between the regime and radical Islamist groups in the Sinai and Suez Canal cities may indicate that these violent al-Qaeda-style groups have established strong footholds in that area, which will remain a focus of instability for many years to come.<sup>11</sup> By all accounts, however, political Islam in Egypt will never be what it was before. The current turmoil in the country and its negative implications, including terrorism, social strife, polarization, hatred, and violence, cast shadows on the potential for social integration and the regime's ability to achieve political stability and normalcy.

### **The Old State vs. the Revolutionaries—Again**

Following the Muslim Brotherhood interlude, the original revolutionary battle against statist authoritarianism (and its military, security, and bureaucratic institutions and business allies) has returned. The battle is as complicated, difficult, and intractable as ever.

Many believe that the dust of the political battle will settle whenever the new constitution is passed and a newly elected parliament and president are put in office—probably by the spring or summer of 2014. However, this is not the case. The entire process of creating a new political system is plagued by

wrangling and squabbling between state institutions, elite divisions, the lack of a political class, and the inability of the state to deliver solutions to the structural socioeconomic crises.

### **The Familiar Politics of the *Taifas* State**

The privileges of state fiefdoms will be maintained, including the military's autonomy and unaccountability, which will be constitutionally and politically sanctioned. The judiciary and the military are openly talking in this manner while debating the constitutional provisions that define their respective interests. The new constitution that was drafted in November 2013 secured these privileges, particularly for the military and the judiciary, in an even more extensive way than the 2012 constitution.<sup>12</sup>

One could argue that the new constitution is designed more to protect these state institutions from one another and from the people than it is to protect the people from the excesses of the institutions. For instance, the judiciary, one of the big winners in the newly drafted constitution, secured its financial and administrative autonomy from the executive and from the legislature, but the draft mentioned nothing about the judiciary's responsibilities to the people or about the mechanisms of state and popular oversight of the judiciary.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the power granted to these institutions, political wrangling in the *taifas* state is more threatening than it might initially appear. Competition between institutions for financial resources, impunity, status, and privileges is prevalent. For instance, recurrent fights between the police and the judiciary have made headlines. More importantly, a number of state fiefdoms approached the constitution-drafting process solely as an opportunity to secure dividends and allocate shares of power. The list of such fiefdoms includes not only the military, police, and judiciary but also al-Azhar, churches, public sector trade unions, and women's groups. There was even internal competition and squabbling within the judiciary itself.<sup>14</sup> This level of competition is justified in terms of "national interests," which each actor defines for itself. This wrangling does not simply undermine state efficiency; it renders questionable the whole concept of a contemporary Egyptian state based on any type of stable interagency consensus. Furthermore, under Mubarak, different state fiefdoms established their own economic interests, both directly and in partnership with private sector actors. They will fight to preserve and possibly expand these interests no matter what it takes, as recent evidence indicates.<sup>15</sup> As a result, all possible checks on the *taifas* state, including free media, the transparent flow of information, independent auditing, assertive labor unions, strikes, and demonstrations, will be restricted.

The new constitution is not substantially different from the 2012 constitution. Although there are considerable improvements in the areas of public and private freedoms, civic and socioeconomic rights, and state-religion relations,<sup>16</sup> future legislation and concrete legal enforcement of these broadly defined



freedoms and rights will have a significant impact on whether these positive changes will be felt in real political life. Last-minute, secret changes made to the preamble of the draft constitution that deleted the reference to “civic rule” shed the light on the inability to set acceptable rules of the game. The change was likely made in response to pressure from the regime’s religious partners, most notably al-Azhar and the Salafist al-Nour Party, who consider the term “civic” to be a synonym for “secularist.” And the articles on civil-military relations in the new draft are even more imbalanced than those in the 2012 constitution.

The new constitution establishes a semipresidential system with many checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches and between the president and the prime minister within the executive branch itself. While this could be viewed positively as one step toward a pluralist democracy, in practice it might actually create a weak, fragmented political system in which real power resides in the hands of the unelected state institutions acting as power brokers.

Though the features of the political process are in flux, the current arrangements imply a central role for the military as well as a role for the judiciary as guardian and custodian of the system. It is still unclear whether el-Sisi will run for president, but it is a near certainty that any future president, if not from the military, will be effectively put under the military’s guardianship. According to the 2012 and 2013 constitutions, the military-dominated national defense and national security councils can override the president on “national security issues”—all issues pertinent to any foreign policy decision. Municipal leaders, who may be unelected, lack power and autonomy. No less importantly, with a divided political system and an executive and a legislature at each other’s throats, the military will be able to step in to arbitrate and shape final outcomes. At the end of the day, the military will still hold the guns.

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It appears that the new regime will install a political system that is competitive but limited by a ruling right-wing political alliance, as it was under the Brotherhood. Apart from the national security issues that will be directly determined by the military in all cases, if a civilian makes it to the presidency, the army generals will control but not rule.

Outcomes of the electoral political process will remain irrelevant as government policies, no matter the reformist mantra claimed, will be mostly in favor of the status quo in terms of dominant socioeconomic interests and privileges.

### **Elite Divisions**

Statist authoritarian forces are manipulating the uncertainties of the previous three years to reorganize and cultivate popular support among many Egyptians drained by the failure of the post-Mubarak political process. These forces hope to preserve the politics of the old state and reproduce them. They include wide segments of the business class who formerly supported Gamal Mubarak’s bid

for succession, old Mubarakist actors from the National Democratic Party, some Nasserist politicians, traditional families and groups, and their media and state extensions. Their dream is to establish Egyptian Bonapartism in Marxist terms that will reproduce the old Mubarakist police state to cater to their interests and restore order. As long as they marshal the necessary economic resources and business networks to support such a Bonapartist figure and tie him to their interests, it does not matter whether this new boss is a military general like el-Sisi or someone else. To this end, they lobby for a dominant role for the police, more repressive laws to restrict political freedoms, a single-member district (or winner-take-all) electoral system to maximize their electoral gains given their inability to build strong parties, and a constitution that enshrines an all-powerful president.

Meanwhile, there are liberals, leftists, reformists, and members of the business bourgeoisie who believe that political and economic reforms are necessary. These include some liberal and leftist parties in the National Salvation Front and a few segments of the business class, in addition to intellectuals, professionals, and their media and state extensions. They still cave to the military's special authority for fear of a Brotherhood comeback, but they aspire to achieve a more pluralistic political system. Accordingly, they lobby for a constitution with more checks and balances, a stronger parliament, and an electoral system based on proportional representation to maximize their parties' electoral gains.

The current constitutional amendment process has been subject to fierce debates over these issues. While the first group castigates members of the second as destabilizing forces and provocateurs acting as agents for the Brotherhood and foreign enemies of Egypt, the latter portrays the former as despotic, Mubarakist, and outdated. The second group was better represented in the drafting panel and has therefore managed to impose its views thus far. However, the debate over the electoral system has yet to be settled.

The same infighting is taking place in assessments of the performance of the current caretaker government. The first, conservative camp blames what it depicts as the "reformist-dominated" government for its massive shortcomings on economic and security-related issues. Members of this group lobby for a more authoritarian, old-guard government. Ironically, despite the existence of many "reformist" ministers in the cabinet, key decisions are still made by the security and military establishment.

### **Lack of a Political Class**

As in the past, the design for the new, post-Morsi political process suffers from the structural shortage of a political class. The crux of the state established in 1952, especially its manifestation under Mubarak, was the depoliticization of the public sphere and state management of public policies. Parties, even supportive ones, were not needed. Social groups were denied rights of representation, organization, and expression of their own interests because policymaking was

not amenable to such influences. Bureaucratic and security organizations ran state and society affairs in a technocratic manner and in pursuit of the oligarchic interests of different state fiefdoms and business class interests. The ruling party was nothing more than a patronage machine that served as a forum for winning regime clients and distributing dividends. It seems that the future system will be no different. This ideology-free, well-established state can flexibly shift its alliances between different political actors to promote its own interests, playing them off one another, as the 2011–2013 experience demonstrated.

A new political process that depends on elected institutions and electoral competition will be difficult to institute. The Muslim Brotherhood was the only effective political class in Egypt, as an organized and determined group committed to a specific doctrine and social constituency. Despite sharing common conservative interests with the elite, the Brotherhood failed to build a stable system.

In the post-Morsi system, the military may try to foster a new political class as junior partners. Many liberals, Nasserists, Mubarakists, and even Islamists (such as al-Nour) may endeavor to play this role. But to stabilize the streets and win the hearts of wide segments of the population, the old state and its new political class must make considerable socioeconomic concessions. The political and electoral sphere must be relevant to the daily lives of millions of Egyptians in terms

of economic conditions, quality of basic services, and living standards or risk its legitimacy.

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Granting these concessions will be difficult because of scarce economic resources and, no less importantly, the unwillingness of business groups and top levels of the bureaucracy to give up their huge profit margins. Despite efforts by the interim government, these business and bureaucratic groups have recently blocked laws and policies on pricing, taxation, and the establishment of new progres-

sive, autonomous trade unions. Also, the same groups have rendered the declared government policy of minimum and maximum wages practically ineffective.

Further undermining the legitimacy and reliability of members of the potential new political class are the ironfisted politics resulting from the Islamist-military duel. It is not marginal groups that are being harshly and violently repressed, but a major political movement located at the conservative center of society—the Islamists. The new political system, with its electoral institutions and processes, will lose relevance if this continues.

### **The Return of the Police Security State?**

Many Egyptians fear that the police state is returning, and, to a degree these concerns are legitimate. Since Morsi was ousted from power in July, there have been hundreds of casualties and thousands of arrests and detentions, along with heavy-handed policies against demonstrations, labor strikes, and sit-ins;

media McCarthyism against any critical voices; and a witch hunt against the 2011 uprising activists. Some state institutions are reproducing the repressive capacities of the old police state. Exceptionally harsh court sentences against young Muslim Brotherhood activists and an unprecedented number of arrests on the attorney general's orders have raised serious doubts about how autonomous and depoliticized the judiciary is in Egypt.<sup>17</sup> The new regime is using popular fear of chaos in the face of Islamist violence to legitimize repressive politics, and the scale of violence the regime's police and military forces have employed against Islamist opponents is significant. Non-Islamist, revolutionary protesters, who took to the streets to demonstrate against the abhorred protest law passed by the government at the end of November and against the new draft constitution's allowance of military trials for civilians, were met with police brutality and violence as well. Several human rights organizations were also targeted by police and a number of non-Islamist activists were sent to jail.

But these fears should not be overblown. New realities are eroding the regime's capacity to crack down on the population. The most likely candidate to play the role of Bonaparte leading the police state is el-Sisi or another strong military commander. But it is yet to be seen whether or not el-Sisi and the military really want to play this role and assume its responsibilities. It is unclear if they are ready to accept blame for expected economic hardship and poor government performance or pay the necessary price for meaningful reforms.

The primary impact of the 2011 revolution was the creation of politics, or at least the politicization of increasingly larger segments of the population. As time passes, more and more people are interested in expressing themselves, articulating their viewpoints, and representing their interests and arguments, whether through elections or through protests, strikes, or sit-ins. Egyptians are entering the public sphere in unprecedented ways. The relationship of the people to the state and public sphere has qualitatively and irrevocably changed. It is difficult for the state to repress an increasingly unruly and disorderly society on a large scale.

Some factions within the old state appreciate this change. The role of the military as an official arbiter of the system was christened by the January 2011 uprising. At that time, the military intervened to overthrow Mubarak under popular pressure and since then has entered the political game directly as an institution, signifying a clear break with Mubarak-era traditions. When the military wanted to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, el-Sisi asked for popular support for his "war against terrorism." The state now needs popular support to justify its moves; the people's agency is a force to be reckoned with, and the military needs to adapt. El-Sisi put forward this message in a discussion with several army leaders about the new media and political reality in Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

Also working against the return of a police state is the regime's lack of capacity. Nasser's repressive rule was only possible because he also launched a state-led development experiment that provided many people with social and

economic benefits and rewards, including free jobs and housing, free medical care, free education, subsidies, job security, price controls, and land reform. Nasser's authoritarianism was therefore justified based on a simple social contract: socioeconomic rewards in return for political obedience and submission. But today, the state lacks the economic and financial resources to support such populist designs (most importantly the badly needed investments in job-creation programs, education, healthcare, and utilities) and is moving toward economic retrenchment, not expansion. The business class, by and large, still insists on neoliberal policies, reflecting the degree to which the limited change in political elites that took place after the 2011 uprising left the key economic and business-class interests untouched.<sup>19</sup> The current top military generals in Egypt are also unlikely to attempt to build an egalitarian dictatorship like Nasser constructed. Their economic interests with and strategic ties to the United States and the Gulf countries as well as their stakes in the old state are too great for such a move.

The post-Morsi regime's survival is tied to its ability to ensure stability. That will require the regime to successfully address the state's legitimacy and performance crises. To represent the demands of popular classes and make real socioeconomic progress, deep democratic changes are necessary—something the regime will not voluntarily endorse. Furthermore, any meaningful economic reform must be structural. In other words, this reform must cut state budget and balance of payments deficits, reallocate economic resources among different public and private actors, and enhance production and job-creation programs (including the restructuring of fiscal and monetary policies addressing the budget, taxation, and the all-important issue of subsidies).

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**The needed reforms require a large, popular base of support that cuts across different classes—something that the current regime, with its authoritarian, neoliberal, and socially conservative biases, lacks.**

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Yet such reforms face serious logistical, administrative, and technical handicaps, and they will make many important Egyptians unhappy, including members of the top business class who benefit from state subsidies on their industries' fuel and from the absence of any progressive taxation scheme. In addition, the top state economic bureaucracy will virulently resist any maximum wage caps. Public sector wages and subsidies consume most of the budget in Egypt. The needed reforms require a large, popular base of support that cuts across different classes—something that the current regime, with its authoritarian, neoliberal, and socially conservative biases, lacks. Because no political actor in Egypt possesses such a popular base of support, structural economic reform will be indefinitely delayed.

The current account deficit and day-to-day budget needs (most notably money for fuel) are financed mainly by aid coming from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait.<sup>20</sup> But this cannot last forever. The moment of truth will come sooner rather than later.<sup>21</sup> For the regime to survive it will need additional, long-term foreign funding to finance a structural adjustment program. Regime survival also depends on whether the state's political

economy is restructured to prevent future deficits and wastes of resources. Finally, the key to economic recovery is the influx of foreign private investment, which could address the Egyptian economy's perennial problem of a lack of labor-intensive private sector investment in tradable goods and services. Such investment, however, requires political stability and reform.

The new regime also faces challenges related to security and law enforcement. A lack of security in Egypt and rising crime rates are of utmost concern for most of the population, and their voting behavior reflects this worry. Ultimately, the return of security requires structural transformations in the Ministry of Interior. Police forces, accustomed to emergency law and arbitrary action, do not know how to operate under a code that respects basic human rights. Because those old methods are useless right now in the face of a disordered and defiant society, they will largely remain ineffective. Reforming the police is necessary to restore security, but the police fiefdom's intransigence will block any such attempts.

Structural reforms necessary for socioeconomic achievements will be indefinitely postponed for fear of business and bureaucratic defiance and serious political consequences. Likewise, the state will eschew far-reaching structural reforms within security institutions because they would hurt the interests of the military and police fiefdoms and open the Pandora's box of the delayed reform of state institutions.

On January 11, 2014, General el-Sisi announced that he will likely run in the upcoming presidential election "if the people demand it." It is difficult to speculate on el-Sisi's future political positions since he lacks any detailed platform at present. However, his election would represent a watershed in post-Mubarak Egyptian politics: it would mean the military assuming direct responsibility for governance, not just in a transitional or oversight capacity but in a direct, long-term one. It is possible that, once elected, el-Sisi would launch a badly needed policy of economic restructuring to treat the catastrophic situation of public finances and lend stability to the military's authoritarian rule, relying on intensive media propaganda and populist, military-backed economic patronage to do so. However, this possibility is unlikely. No matter what el-Sisi's intentions might be, he would encounter the same structural obstacles described above as a civilian president. Moreover, since the military is one of the competing state institutions with a powerful appetite for economic resources and profits, it is hard to imagine el-Sisi pushing it to accept necessary reforms.

The old state has neither the carrots nor the sticks to resist the revolutionary drive indefinitely. The only card it has to play is the exploitation of public fear of Islamic terrorism, which, relatively speaking, has worked. However, this strategy cannot silence the people forever. Limitations on the government's capacity to deliver real solutions to real problems will be further exposed as time goes on. Of course, this does not mean the revolutionaries will necessarily win out, but there is a clear balance of weakness.

## Failures of the Democratic Forces

The democratic struggle in Egypt, for the time being, is the fight to deconstruct various versions of authoritarian rule, including the old state and the reign of the Muslim Brotherhood, and to highlight the failure of these systems to address the societal and political crises facing the country. Despite the deconstruction, a political and social vacuum still exists in Egypt, and there are no viable alternatives. This void will only be filled when a big popular democratic movement emerges and key segments of the Islamist movement are democratized.

### Problems Building a Civil Democratic Movement

The unpleasant experiment with electoral politics in 2011 and 2012 created a split between the realm of electoral politics itself, which has proven largely incapable of producing substantive changes in the lives of ordinary people, and the dynamics of popular protests. The participants in such protests have largely given up on the potential of elected institutions to produce change, and have instead taken their grievances to the streets in the form of frequent labor strikes, urban-poor-led disturbances under the SCAF and under Morsi, and protests such as those in the Delta governorates in January and February 2013.

Egypt needs a civil democratic movement that champions the causes of participatory democracy, sustainable and egalitarian development, efficient and fair resource reallocation, democratic state-society relations, and public policies that lay the foundation for social and political contracts of a new polity. Such a movement can be established by harnessing an interrelated network of independent and representative political parties, trade unions, syndicates, labor movements, grassroots organizations, and social associations operating at the national, governorate, and local levels. Their scope of action should be in parliamentary, union, civil society, and municipal politics, in addition to public awareness campaigns in the media. Particularly important is the need to found a supportive social constituency that will identify its socioeconomic interests and worldview with the platforms of these organizations and movements, whether voting in elections or participating in pressure, reform, and protest politics. But infant democratic forces in Egypt have miles to go.

Democratic forces include different types of actors. First, there are the youthful factions of many old and new liberal and leftist parties that have actively participated in political protests since January 25, 2011. In cooperation with their reformist party leaders (the reformist elites mentioned above), they have contemplated attempting to bring about this civil democratic movement through reform from within. They believe they are indispensable to the current interim regime—if they had not participated in the June 30 demonstrations, the legitimacy of the new political process would have been questionable. Joining with state institutions and Mubarakists to overthrow the Muslim Brotherhood government, the January 25 reformist democratic forces made

up of liberal and leftist parties hope to have an impact on the interim government's policies while preserving their revolutionary spirit and objectives.<sup>22</sup> Recently, democratic figures within the government reportedly argued that newly discussed authoritarian laws against protests and terrorism were undemocratic, but their opposition went unheeded. Thus far, reform from within has not been successful.

The second category includes revolutionary protest movements not necessarily organized as political parties, such as the April 6th movement, the Revolutionary Socialists, Tamarod (Rebellion), the Revolutionary Path Front, the democratic left, and other amorphous groups and coalitions. Except Tamarod, which has one foot in the opposition and another in the caretaker regime, these groups do not recognize the current road map as revolutionary, democratic, or legitimate. Recent events, such as the passage of the protest law and continuous police brutality against political opponents, have confirmed their beliefs and rendered moot the potential for the "reform from within." As a substitute, these groups have begun to agitate for different forms of political protest to further radicalize politics and reach out to deprived groups in various locations.

It has been difficult to bring about real systemic change because the democratic revolutionary forces (including both parties and protest movements) have proven excellent at protesting and overthrowing regimes but still do not understand how the old state or any of its possible replacements actually work. Mubarak's ouster was understood by these forces as the downfall of the regime and the old state, and the election of Morsi was seen by some of these forces as the downfall of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Neither of those views was accurate, however. Both the old state and the SCAF persisted. Revolutionary forces, obsessed with reproducing the revolutionary moment that overthrew Mubarak, have not moved past that moment and have not reflected on how to build a new system. Their strategy of staging a revolutionary war by proxy—that is, by pressuring members of the ruling bloc to carry out revolutionary policies—has not produced real change. They have been manipulated and suppressed time and again by more powerful forces: the military, the state, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Further complicating matters is the fact that liberal and leftist political groups cannot effectively organize or secure funding and resources, and they have no effective leadership, rural outreach, or substantive messaging that resonates with local social and cultural constituencies. Liberal doctrines and platforms only put forward anti-Islamist discourse and vague references to values of enlightenment and human rights conventions, which are not enough to win over the population. Almost all liberal parties have neither clear policy programs nor even general ideas about necessary policy reforms, let alone how to practically implement them. These liberals have no practical political agenda relevant to the immense problems facing the country.



Long-existing liberal parties such as al-Wafd and new post-2011 parties, including the Egyptian Social Democratic Party and the Free Egyptians Party, all fit into this category. A more revolutionary liberal party such as al-Dostour is not even officially structured yet as a party, and it faces innumerable organizational problems.

For these parties, elections are opportunities to secure a share of the pie in the form of seats in parliament and possibly cabinet portfolios. But because of their shortcomings, they cannot form nationwide networks and are not competitive in elections. Those who advocate for “reform from within” have yet to propose or devise practical mechanisms for achieving that aim that would engage with the reality of the *taifas* state and its political and economic deficits. For example, it is not clear if these reform advocates can work with reformist factions within the state fiefdoms, or if such factions even exist. It also remains to be seen whether these reform advocates will be open to a role for popular initiatives and nonstate actors or if they will restrict themselves exclusively to the tools of government. Finally, it is not clear how liberals, who dream of economic growth and capitalist accumulation, can achieve these goals in the face of an overblown state bureaucracy unfriendly to private investment, a large rural and urban workforce dependent on the state, and persistent private sector problems such as corruption and lack of transparency.

Arguably, the Left can play a major role in the Egyptian political upheaval given the bankruptcy of the Islamists and ineffectiveness of the liberals. But these leftist forces are unlikely to take steps to build a cohesive civil democratic movement in the near future.

Leftist parties championing the cause of socioeconomic change lack practical experience with the state and its actual power and administrative machinations, interest groups, and functions. They also struggle with gerontocracy and vanguardism. Old leftist parties left over from the Mubarak era, such as the National Progressive Unionist Party, have no problems with state authoritarianism as long as its egalitarian practices can be restored. They also believe the authoritarian state has a valuable role to play as the shield against the Islamist menace.

Left-leaning nationalist and Nasserist groups, such as al-Tayyar al-Shabi (The Popular Stream) and the United Nasserist Party, have a similar worldview, exalting the role of the military in the political system to an even greater degree. They also maintain a restorative aspect of their political approach, viewing income redistribution and egalitarianism as achievable only through pressure on the state to restore its old populist practices and resume its old responsibilities as the guardian of the people and the guarantor of national liberation.

More democratic and revolutionary leftist actors, such as the Socialist Popular Alliance, the democratic left groups, and the Revolutionary Socialists, have placed too little emphasis on identity politics. In so doing, they have left the cultural and moral sphere to Islamist movements. They also place too much emphasis on working-class politics, which prevents these leftist actors from appreciating the important revolutionary and democratic potential of the urban lumpen

proletariat and the marginalized urban masses who have been at the center of all protest activities. Revolutionary socialists further confuse the situation when they sometimes endeavor to ally themselves with the Islamists against the state, practically subordinating themselves to a nondemocratic movement.

All of these leftist parties and groups are also very small, lack human and financial resources, have problems forming coalitions, and find themselves frequently distracted by internal conflicts. The Socialist Popular Alliance, for instance, recently witnessed massive defections of its more youthful, revolutionary democratic cadres, leaving behind a party that more closely resembles the National Progressive Unionist Party than expected.

Leftist politics will have to change significantly if these parties are to have a real impact on the political system. Currently, the leftist cause in Egypt is less of a proletarian revolution or a statist social democracy than it is a vehicle to pursue a vaguely defined and ineffective notion of social justice. Such a notion is not substantiated in vernacular or practical political terms and does not build badly needed social and cultural capital through the support of a well-defined constituency in pursuit of an achievable agenda.

### **Democratizing Political Islam**

A successful participatory democracy cannot be stably and safely installed when at least one very determined and organized quarter of the electorate harbors antidemocratic and religiously authoritarian tendencies. This means that democratizing political Islam is an urgent necessity. This process requires broader intellectual reforms within the Islamic epistemic field on questions of pluralism, citizenship, freedoms, and state-religion relations.

Typically, when Islamists have discussed reform they have had limited discussions about the functional separation of politics and proselytizing. Muslim Brotherhood reformists usually refer to the need for this functional separation as the key Islamist reform item. But that is not sufficient. Islamists must recognize the legitimacy of the national polity in Egypt and conceptualize politics as a space for competition and the display of differences, not an arena for hegemony and exclusion. In addition, if Islamists could forgo theological politics and participate in the politics of governance only after discarding their trademark belief in the comprehensiveness of Islamist activism, landmark progress could be achieved. The Muslim Brotherhood has not proven able to lead this change because such a far-reaching transformation would threaten the very existence and identity of the organization.

So-called democratic Islamist parties are also not prepared to lead the transformation. They are in no better shape than the liberal and leftist parties. Al-Wasat, for example, is controlled by some religious-leaning members of the

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business class, and since the 2011 uprising, it has been essentially dominated by and subordinate to the Muslim Brotherhood. It is losing its own identity. The Strong Egypt Party was once a promising democratic Islamist party, but it does not have a clear social constituency, and it has not built a large following or an effective organization. It has also been unable to fully differentiate itself from the Muslim Brotherhood and has not crafted a consistent Islamist center-left and democratic doctrine as it had promised. Strong Egypt's avowed centrism gained the party enemies in both the Islamist and secularist camps because it has refused to choose sides.

## The Future of Change

Egypt's near future is bleak. In many ways, the state is back to where it was in 2011, when revolutionaries took to the streets to take down the Mubarak regime. Authoritarian forces—the military, the Muslim Brothers, the old state bureaucracy, and business interest groups—remain the key political players. The military in particular is assuming more and more dominance. The personality cult of the popular General el-Sisi shaped by the media hailing him as the “savior and leader of the nation” raises fears about a possible dictatorship in the making. The military institution's appetite for appropriating economic assets and investments is also alarming.

There are, of course, cracks in the system. These forces' capacity to deliver solutions and halt discontent and opposition is faltering in the face of a continuous socioeconomic crisis and a resentful and unruly society. The old state lacks any strategic vision; it has only a framework for balancing the local interests of its competing fiefdoms. Its fratricide against the Brotherhood boosts its status, but this has hardly any long-term, or even medium-term, staying power as a political strategy.

But democratic forces are too inept to capitalize on this window of opportunity and replace the status quo. They are both repressed by authoritarian forces and lacking a political project of their own, which could attract a critical mass of supporters capable of changing the rules of the game. They have no effective platforms, constituencies, or tools with which to build a new, democratic system. They also lack any project for a new polity that rests on a nuanced understanding of the realities of the Egyptian bureaucracy, economy, and state-society relations. A key dilemma remains: How can Egypt build a new democratic electoral political sphere—a new polity that relates to popular grievances and meets the concerns voiced through protest politics—in a reality dominated by social sects, including state *taifas*, Islamists, and other groups? A new political sphere cannot be comfortably installed in the absence of a compromise with these sects, but such a compromise implies forgoing some of the objectives of the creation of a new polity. Traditional forms of representative

electoral democracy or electocracy are not of much help in the face of this dilemma.

This balance of weakness between the two sides raises the costs and complications of Egypt's crisis. All sides seem to be putting off finding solutions to their problems and biding their time. But this unstable situation cannot be extended indefinitely. As long as the rise of a civil democratic movement and the democratization of political Islam remain distant prospects and the complicated current political polarization persists, the political crisis in Egypt will fester.

If the creation of a new state in Egypt that deepens participatory democracy both politically and economically only required the decapitation and crippling of authoritarian actors, the Egyptian democratic transformation would have already made great strides. However, more needs to be done to build a new democratic polity. The 2011 uprising unleashed mass mobilization that remained disorganized. The many decades of depoliticization and demodernization of Egyptian society left it without collective action structures that could have supported such mobilization and channeled its energy into constructing alternatives to the existing system. The Islamists represented the only exception, but they proved to be part of the crisis rather than the solution. The road ahead will be long and complicated. As long as credible alternatives cannot fill the political and social vacuum, the old state and its state-led arrangements—despite being failing, ailing, faltering, and crisis-ridden—will persist, inflicting additional costs and damage. Much is at stake as power is segmented and the *tai-fas* state falters. Power fragmentation is a serious possibility, especially if coupled with widening rifts and strife in society and the spread of violence and terrorism.

This precarious situation has implications beyond Egypt's borders as well. The crisis undercuts the prevailing idea in the West that conservative, benign, procedural democracies led by moderate Islamists and old state institutions in the Arab Spring countries can produce stable electoralist regimes. The Arab Spring will not become an Islamist winter, but it will also not realize its dreams and democratic potential any time soon. Fully consolidated counterrevolution will not be the outcome either.

Mass movements in Egypt, unleashed by the uprising of January 2011 and bubbling ever since, can transform the country. They can open new horizons for mobilization, action, and the creation of a new political system. But first they must overcome the many problems they face.

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## Notes

- 1 Ashraf El-Sherif, "The Taifas State," *Egypt Independent*, [www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/taifas-state](http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/taifas-state).
- 2 Yezid Sayigh, "Above the State: The Officers' Republic in Egypt," Carnegie Paper, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2012, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/officers\\_republic1.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/officers_republic1.pdf). The officers' republic in Egypt has two components. The first one is the presence of thousands of retired military officers in the state bureaucracy. The second is the military-industrial complex. Unlike the U.S. case, in which the complex rests on military-private sector links, the Egyptian complex is a conglomerate of public industries owned and run by the military institution.
- 3 The Muslim Brotherhood's ideological literature, central to the Brotherhood's internal indoctrination and acculturation curricula and written by the group's key ideologues, including Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid and Muhammad Qutb, Muhammad Ahmed al-Rashid, Fathy Yakan, Said Hawwa, Moustafa Mashour, and Mounir al-Ghadban, always refers to the utopian dream of a pious Islamic state. This state shall produce the virtuous Muslim citizen and teach him the Islamic values in a top-down fashion led by the Islamist guardians of the state.
- 4 Noticeably, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, Islamist propaganda criticized the liberal women's rights laws issued under Mubarak as undesirable products of a despotic era. Accordingly, an Islamist popular campaign was organized to cancel these laws and undo all feminist gains under Mubarak.
- 5 See <http://pres2012.elections.eg/index.php/round1-results> (Arabic); the results are available in English at <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/26/egypt%E2%80%99s-presidential-election-early-voting-result>.
- 6 Even the procedural aspects of electoral democracy were not fully maintained under the Brothers' rule. The 2012 referendum on the constitution held in two rounds on December 15 and 22 witnessed many charges of irregularities and voter fraud. While it is hard to prove such charges, most of the judiciary refused to supervise the vote, casting doubts on its fairness. That was the first and last vote during the Brothers' time in power.
- 7 "Hire Me Instead of Him: A Campaign Against Work Stoppage," Official Muslim Brotherhood website, Ikhwan Online, February 9, 2012, <http://ikhwanonline.com/Article.aspx?ArtID=100920&SecID=460>.
- 8 Muhammad al-Mahdi, "This Is How Leaders Should Be and Down With the Instigators," Official Muslim Brotherhood website, Ikhwan Online, August 13, 2012, <http://ikhwanonline.com/Article.aspx?ArtID=116932&SecID=390>.
- 9 "Al-Nahda' (Renaissance) Project: The Will of the People," Official Muslim Brotherhood website, Ikhwan Online, April 29, 2012, [www.ikhwanonline.com/new/president/Article.aspx?ArtID=107298&SecID=471%5b](http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/president/Article.aspx?ArtID=107298&SecID=471%5b).
- 10 Ashraf El-Sherif, "What Path Will Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Choose?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 23, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/09/23/what-path-will-egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood-choose/gnx6>.

- 11 Importantly, they have managed to shift their terrorist operations recently into Cairo and other cities in the Delta and Suez Canal region.
- 12 The military's privileges in the 2012 constitution were maintained in the 2013 draft constitution. In addition, the military secured new gains, such as the exclusive right to appoint the defense minister for two presidential terms. Also, the military courts of civilians were enshrined in the constitution in more specific and compelling terms.
- 13 In the new constitutional draft, the judiciary was granted absolute and unchecked rights but nothing was mentioned about external audits of the judiciary's performance and no criteria were established to govern appointments and promotions.
- 14 There was intense competition over judicial authorities and prerogatives in the constitution between two judicial bodies, the State Council and the Administrative Prosecution Authority. In the end, the State Council won out, but the whole saga showed how serious the rifts within the judiciary had become.
- 15 Recently, at the expense of other public sector companies, the military secured many government contracts for public projects such as public roads, infrastructure, and construction projects on very lucrative terms. It is expected that the military will expand on these tax-free and non-audited operations in the name of the "national interest" and the "provision of investment incentives." The police force already has a huge budget that surpasses that of education and health care. Other bureaucratic fiefdoms such as public transportation and the railway authority started developing and diversifying their own investments in new activities. There is no evidence that the judiciary is interested in overseeing the legality of this management of public resources as long as its own autonomy from legislative oversight is guaranteed. The business class hopes it can win direct representation in the next parliament, henceforth promoting its own private educational, medical, and transportation services to its consumers in the upper class suburban ghettos.
- 16 The 2013 constitutional draft does not include infamous articles from 2012 constitutions that granted al-Azhar the exclusive right of interpreting the role of Islamic sharia in legislation and the detailed definition of the binding Islamic sharia.
- 17 For instance, 38 al-Azhar University students who were members of the Muslim Brotherhood and 21 Brotherhood-affiliated girls from Alexandria (including minors) were sentenced to seventeen and eleven years, respectively, on charges of vandalism. See "Egypt Court Sends 38 Al-Azhar Students to Jail," November 21, 2013, *Al-Abram*, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/87151/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-court-sends--AlAzhar-students-to-jail.aspx>; "21 Alexandrian Girls 'Prisoners of Conscience': Amnesty," *Daily News Egypt*, November 29, 2013, [www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/11/29/21-alexandrian-girls-prisoners-of-conscience-amnesty](http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/11/29/21-alexandrian-girls-prisoners-of-conscience-amnesty).
- 18 See "Al-Sissi's Plans to Control the Media," video, RNN TV, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=65RPT1QqPFw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65RPT1QqPFw).
- 19 For instance, Ahmed Ezz, business magnate and assistant secretary general of the National Democratic Party, was sent to jail after the 2011 uprising. His iron and steel company, however, has maintained its monopoly over the market.
- 20 Most of this foreign aid, estimated at \$21 billion in less than six months, went to finance the budget deficit and not toward investments with sustainable returns.
- 21 The erosion of foreign reserves in Egypt over the last three years and the ever increasing balance of payments deficit leave Egypt in need of huge foreign aid just to keep the economy functioning. Some analysts estimate the amount needed to be at least \$10 to 17 billion annually.
- 22 The list of cabinet members who are associated with liberal and leftist political parties that hail the January 25 revolution included Vice President Mohamed ElBaradei (before his resignation in protest of the violent dispersion of the Brothers' sit-ins on August 14); Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi; Minister of International Cooperation Ziad Baha al-Din; Minister of Labor Kamal Abu Eita; Minister of Social Solidarity Ahmed al-Borai; and Minister of Higher Education Hossam Eissa.





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