

Modernization Theory and the Democratization of Egypt

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When two million Egyptian citizens gathered in Tahrir Square on January 25th, 2011 to demand an end to Hosni Mubarak's regime, scholars around the world speculated that Egypt would finally formulate a consolidated democracy. However, four years after Hosni Mubarak's resignation, there has been little progress in the development of an Egyptian democracy. By using Huntington's modernization theory, I will explain the long term causes of the 2011 uprisings and analyze the role that the Egyptian Security of Armed Forces and the Muslim Brotherhood have played in Egypt's attempt to rebuild a new, democratic regime.

In his essay "Revolution and Political Order", Huntington emphasizes the role that revolutions play in regime transition defining revolution as "a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activities and policies" (Goldstone 37). Because Huntington's modernization theory only applies to regime transitions in which all social, political, economic, and cultural views of a society are changed, he argues that transitions cannot take place in any type of society at any given period in time. Huntington suggests that all revolutions develop as a nation begins to transition from a traditional agrarian society to a modern industrial society.

According to Huntington, modernization of a society begins with the commercialization of agriculture. New methods of production are introduced to the market improving efficiency, productivity and yield. Land is consolidated to meet the increase in agricultural demands and peasants face demographic pressure to migrate to urban areas where industry and urban work force are expanding. As

business and government grow with the urban population, the middle class increases and education is enhanced to meet the skills needs of the industry (40).

Following the death of Nasser in 1970, Vice President, Anwar Sadat assumed power. Sadat quickly dismissed Nasser's socialist perspective on political and economic policies, re-instating a multi-party system and imposing the "infatih" policy on Egypt's economy (Ufiem 14). Infatih opened the door to private investment in Egypt, ending the domination of the public sector in Egypt's economy and encouraging foreign and domestic investment within the private sector (Springborg 63). While Sadat's intention was to increase the size of the middle class through the development of a substantial private sector that would be conducive to democracy, the policy was ultimately too ambitious and too rooted in Western ideology to succeed (Ufiem 15). Infatih failed to connect the government to the working class and middle class Egyptians who had benefited from Nasser's socialist policies were marginalized within the public sector as their salaries were cut and their taxes increased.

When he discusses the differences between the application of modernization theory in Western and Eastern societies, Huntington emphasizes that while "Western revolutions are precipitated by weak, traditional regimes, Eastern revolutions [are precipitated] by narrow, modernizing ones" (Goldstone 42). This is first exemplified in the 1970's by Sadat's attempt to modernize Egypt's economic policy in order to keep up with the capitalist, hegemonic West, and again in the 1990's by Mubarak's neoliberalization of Egypt's economy. Opposition to the capitalization and westernization of Egypt's economy was demonstrated throughout

the 1970's by the "return of the veil" and increase in Islamification (Springborg 63). Discontent with Sadat's Infitah policies eventually led to his assassination in 1981.

The assassination of Anwar Sadat reinstated Egypt's Emergency Law declaring vice president, Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's leader. The Emergency Law extended police rights, suspended constitutional rights, and legalized censorship, making Egypt a semi-presidential republic (Springborg 57). Mubarak won the first election following Sadat's assassination through a referendum in the People's Assembly, which made him the only candidate (Brownlee 9). In 1982, Egypt's external debt crisis exploded as a repercussion of the 1980's International Debt Crisis and worsened in the late 1980's with the sharp decline in oil prices (Roccu 428). In hopes of renegotiating its external debt, Egypt signed a stabilization package with the IMF authorizing 250 million dollars of special drawing rights, but it was not a long-term solution (428). By 1991, external debt was so severe that Egypt was forced to sign an Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program with the IMF and World Bank on the condition that it would promote export-oriented growth via privatization of state owned enterprises (428). Law 96 of 1992 reversed Nasser's agrarian relation law, inflicting demographic pressures on peasants in the countryside, and spurring a process of "land-grabbing" authorized by state officials on the behalf of the land-owning elite (Brownlee 12). Peasants who could no longer afford their land migrated to cities where urban industry was growing and there was a high demand for workers (Roccu 430).

Egypt's structural adjustment program was incredibly successful at eliminating external debt, reducing the budget deficit from 15.3% in 1991 to 1.3% in

1996 (429). By 1998, Egypt's Structural Adjustment Program was ranked fourth in the world, placing Egypt in a position where it was capable of facilitating real economic growth that would allow an improvement in living conditions and an increase in job opportunities (430).

In 2004, a second wave of neoliberal reforms took place and 130 previously state-owned enterprises were sold (Roccu 430). The reforms included holdings that were originally placed within "off-limit sectors", including cement, oil refineries, and banks. The state divested 94% of its joint venture banks, leading to the full privatization of the Bank of Alexandria (430). Not even a decade after the first of Mubarak's neoliberal reforms were imposed, the majority of restrictions on capital movements had been removed.

While economic evidence suggests that Egypt endured a neoliberal turn at the end of the 20th century, a number of scholars have suggested that it is impossible to capture the nature of Egypt's neoliberalization by looking exclusively at economic policies because they fail to address the informal practices that undoubtedly influenced Egypt's sociopolitical economy. An alternative analysis alleges that the fiscal status of Egypt was so detrimental by the end of the 1980's that external aid was inevitable and could only take place with "strings attached" (431).

Consequently, because Egyptian leaders were opposed to some of the conditions set by the World Bank and IMF, it is likely that "economic reforms were only carried out according to what was deemed acceptable by the ruling block" (431). Therefore, because the main objective of the elite was to maintain the regime, any accumulated capital was first used to sustain and strengthen the ruling bloc's political power.

By the beginning of the 21st century, Neoliberalism in Egypt had succeeded at one thing: accumulating capital. However, the increase in accumulated capital constructed devastating social consequences, visible in the extreme increase in inequality within urban areas and the countryside (Ufiem 13). The social classes that were most affected had been deprived of the rights they had benefited from under Nasser's social pact (Aoude 246). Peasants in the rural countryside were displaced and urban workers experienced decline in factory wages and working conditions (247). Additionally, the middle class, composed primarily of public sector employees, was squeezed (247). Their wages deteriorated as private sector employees began to dominate the workforce (Roccu 434). The middle class vocalized their opposition to Mubarak's regime in the months preceding the 2005 election through the Kefaya, or Egyptian Movement for Change, in which citizens demanded an end to the Emergency Law and all other laws restricting freedom (De Smet 28).

The inability of Mubarak's regime to respond effectively to the grievances of Egyptian citizens produced an alliance between the middle and working classes and two broad bases of protestors emerged (Roccu 435). One base was composed of those whose lives were not made particularly worse by reforms, but whose discontent with the regime's oppressive practices had intensified (436). The second base was made up of the "dispossessed" and included those who had been removed from their land, dismissed from factories, and marginalized within the public sector (436). As Huntington mentions in his analysis, revolutions "are most likely to occur in societies which have experienced some social and economic development and

where the process of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the process of social and economic change” (Goldstone 38). The modernization and capitalization of economic and social policies during Egyptian neoliberalization coupled with absence of democratic political institutions constructed widespread political instability that until 2011, Mubarak’s administration was able to effectively repress.

The impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis on the countryside combined with the sharp rise in food prices drew the urban poor closer to middle class protest movements as they sought consolidation through Islamic values and principles (391). Ultimately, the unprecedented increase in food prices drove young revolutionaries to organize a mass protest over Facebook. Following in the footsteps of Tunisia, millions of Egyptians gather in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011 to demand the ousting of Hosni Mubarak (Ufiem 6). Their cries for “bread, freedom, and social justice” make the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 a cry for democracy.

Though less than four years have passed since the revolution, the outcome of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution exemplifies the outcome of Eastern revolutions predicted by Huntington’s modernization theory. Huntington explains that although a period of anarchy often follows Western Revolutions, in which moderates, radicals, and revolutionaries all compete for power, Eastern Revolutions are followed by a prolonged period of dual power in which revolutionaries expand their political participation while the government continues to exercise its rule (Goldstone 42). Since Hosni Mubarak’s resignation, a dueling battle has emerged

between The Egyptian Security of Armed Forces and the Muslim Brotherhood for control over Egypt (Anderson 6).

While Huntington's modernization theory explains why the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 occurred, it does not explain why Egypt has failed to develop democratic institutions during the years that have followed. When examining the events subsequent to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution it is important to note that the constitution of modern Egypt has always given the president absolute power over the decision making process while the Egyptian military has historically played a more pivotal role in society than other Arab militaries.

The Egyptian army's enormous influence over society became evident when it assumed control of Egypt after Mubarak's resignation (Anderson 4). During the 2011 Revolution, "the Armed Forces were perceived as a national force defending the general good, instead of as a state structure with particular interests of its own" because the military's gradual loss of political and economic power allowed it to evade the criticism and disapproval the public directed toward Mubarak's regime (De Schmet 28). Though the SCAF's interests didn't fully concur with the capitalists, National Democratic Party, or the Ministry of Interior, they did not fully coincide with the revolutionary masses either. In fact, civil demands for democracy actually threatened the privileges that the neoliberal bloc provided to the Armed Forces (29). The SCAF was placed in a conflicting position as it tried to defend its own interests while still attempting to meet the expectations of the public. The SCAF lost some of the popularity it had gained from breaking its ties with the Mubarak

Administration, the neoliberal capitalists, the NDP and the Ministry of Interior when it expressed its opposition to redeveloping the public sector.

The military's absolute control over Egypt began to wind down in March 2011 with the development of constitutional referendums, parliamentary and presidential elections, and the writing of a new constitution (32). Though supposedly aimed at creating a revolutionary process of democratic change, elections and referenda turned out to be tools used for restoration. Elections were rapidly conducted, allowing little time for activists to connect the politically elite to the mass base of workers, farmers, and the urban poor (31). Meanwhile, instead of being conducted from the bottom-up, elections were installed from the top down, allowing state officials and elites to control most of the process. During the reconstruction of Egypt's government, popular demands of the uprising like, "bread, freedom, and social justice", disappeared as new themes like religion came to head.

The transition to "identity politics" granted additional power to the Muslim Brotherhood whose victory in the 2011 Parliamentary elections polarized Egyptian politics. Leadership was divided between legislative branch, dominated by Islamists, and the executive branch, controlled by the Ministry of Defense (32). In the 2012 presidential elections, Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohamed Morsi, defeated Ahmed Shafiq, but his presidency was short-lived. Morsi's decision to enact a new constitutional declaration that temporarily granted him absolute executive and legislative power foreshadowed his demise. Following the Tamarod Rebellion, on July 3, 2013, Morsi was forced out of office by the Egyptian Armed Forces and replaced by Adly Mahmoud Mansour, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court,

until elections could take place. When presidential elections took place in spring of 2014, former commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi was sworn into office after securing over 95% of the popular vote.

In conclusion, Egypt is a classic example of how the inability of political institutions to adapt to growing demands for economic opportunities provides conditions conducive to democracy. When analyzing the case of Egypt, it becomes obvious that the greatest threat to Egyptian democracy is the chance that Egypt will regress to a military dictatorship. While many doubt that Egypt will ever develop a legitimate democracy, others are optimistic. Ultimately, whether Egypt will fully democratize in the decades to come will depend on whether the military is willing to retreat from political life, whether the state is able to create democratic institutions, and whether the state is able to redevelop the public sector.

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