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NOT BY ACCIDENT: HOW EGYPTIAN CIVIL SOCIETY SUCCESSFULLY  
LAUNCHED A REVOLUTION

BY

HELEN-MARGARET NASSER

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Center Faculty in Political Science in partial  
fulfillment of the degree requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City  
University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science  
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## ABSTRACT

### NOT BY ACCIDENT: HOW EGYPTIAN CIVIL SOCIETY SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHED A REVOLUTION

By

Helen-Margaret Nasser

Advisor: Susan L. Woodward

This thesis examines the role of civil society in Egypt and argues that it was central to the success of the 2011 revolution that ended in the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak. I will discuss the development of civil society under Mubarak and demonstrate its strength. In understanding civil society in Egypt, this thesis will discuss the strengths of groups such as associations, Islamist movements, women's groups, labor activism, and youth movements. I also demonstrate that it is important to understand the precedents established that shaped the state's stance towards civil society. As such, this thesis will also discuss the authoritarian norms of former presidents Nasser and Sadat and an examination of Mubarak's own tools of domination aimed to limit the agitations of a strong civil society. Given this understanding, I will explain the events of 2011 as well as the aftermath and prospects for democracy in Egypt, carefully explaining the role Egypt's civil society will continue to play as the country develops a new political strategy.

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## Introduction

In many ways, the Egyptian revolution of 2011 was viewed as unpredictable and practically impossible. How did the Egyptian masses, after nearly 30 years of tacit acceptance towards their authoritarian ruler, effectively and swiftly remove president Hosni Mubarak from power in a mere 18 days? Certainly, the event has caught many scholars of Egypt off-guard.<sup>1</sup> With an aim to explain these events and the future for Egypt's democratic prospects, this thesis will seek to address the mechanisms of civil society formation and its strengths, explore the origins of Egypt's robust tradition of authoritarianism, understand the events that led to the tipping point of the Egyptian revolution of 2011, and seek to understand the road that lies ahead in Egypt's prospects for democracy. Understanding state-society relations, legacies of authoritarian rulers, and theories of revolution will help illustrate the role of civil society in Egypt. This close look at the role of civil society offers significant explanatory power in explaining a paradox; an authoritarian regime involves the narrowing of civil society, yet revolutions involve cohesion of civil society actors. I will demonstrate that civil society in Egypt was strong – albeit suppressed – under authoritarianism. The fact that these civil society groups existed in Egypt eased organization all over Egypt during the revolution and accelerated Mubarak's resignation. Even though events continue to unfold, I draw on the insights of Egyptian political scientists, Middle East scholars and activists to understand the nature of civil society's role in shaping Egypt's future.

Chapter one of this thesis will present the development of civil society in Egypt and briefly introduce some of the barriers the government imposed to restrict its

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory F. Gause III. "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability." *Foreign Affairs* (2011).

formation. It will also highlight some key civil society organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, women's groups, the *Kefaya* movement, labor groups, and youth activists. An understanding of these groups and their history will help understand the events of 2011. Chapter two will explain the authoritarian legacies of Egypt's presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat and the policies of Mubarak that served as the central target of the 2011 protests. It will also introduce the tools of repression used by authoritarian regimes and make a parallel to the leadership style of Hafez Al-Assad of Syria. This explanation of the authoritarian tendencies will illustrate the repression of civil society groups and the tactics these groups used to circumvent them. The third chapter takes us to 2011 – the tipping point – and reflects on the role of civil society in the unfolding of the events of 2011. The concluding chapter will address the role of civil society as Egypt embarks on a path towards democratization and political opening.

I advance this research with the caveat that it is hard to shoot a moving target, and in much the same way, it is difficult to theorize about something that continues to unfold. For that reason, this thesis will not discuss the events of July 2013 that have been described as the “coup” that removed Mohammed Morsi from power though it is indicative of the continued role of civil society in Egypt and its earnest determination to assert itself in state affairs. Instead, it will focus on Egypt's modern history with brief descriptions of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak's authoritarian legacies and stance towards civil society, the factors that led up to the 2011 uprisings, and the period from 2011 to 2013 as Egypt begins its democratic experiment. Throughout and where appropriate, parallels to other cases will be drawn to help highlight Egypt's course.



## Chapter 1: State-Society Relations in Egypt

Effective state-society relations focus on the interactions and interdependence between the state and society. However, how can this relationship persist if there is no dialogue or communication between the two? Mubarak's Egypt serves as a case where, through mechanisms of martial rule, police brutality, inequality and repressive practices, the state sought to strengthen itself while weakening society. The repression of civil society by the government reveals that civil society was strong and did pose a threat to the government. As such, as Joel Migdal would argue, Mubarak's control could be seen as an effort to overcompensate for its weaknesses and try to combat an empowered civil society. The literature on state-society relations argues various perspectives on how the state and society are to interact. These exchanges, and their degree, facilitate decisions such as negotiating how public resources should be allocated and establishing different modes of representation and accountability. Despite nuances to a definition of state-society relations, scholars in the field similarly deduce that society provides crucial elements of support for a state to be effective, and that a state is critical to collective action in society.<sup>2</sup>

To make good use of this definition, however, one must first define a state. Migdal draws from Max Weber's definition of a state that emphasizes the state's institutional character (as an organization or set of organizations), its functions (especially regarding the making of rules), and its recourse to coercion ("monopoly of the

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey M. Sellers, "State-Society Relations Beyond the Weberian State." *Handbook of Governance*. Ed. Mark Bevir. (London: Sage Publications, 2010) 2.

legitimate use of physical force”).<sup>3</sup> Migdal also applies Michael Mann’s conception of “power” of the modern state as having the capacity to penetrate civil society and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm.<sup>4</sup> Ideally, for Migdal, the state is not a fixed ideological entity. Rather, it embodies an ongoing dynamic, a changing set of goals, as it engages with other social groups.<sup>5</sup>

What, then, is civil society? Several scholars have offered definitions of the term. Helmut Anheier offers an important caveat with regards to the term, “Any definition of civil society will evolve over time, and it neither can be regarded as given nor seen as something that can be imposed.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, nuances in the definition also offer richness and help us to understand the role of civil society in Mubarak’s Egypt. For Ernest Gellner, civil society operates parallel to the state and can keep the state in check. In his view, civil society is the set of “institutions, which are strong enough to counterbalance the state, and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbiter of major interests, can, nevertheless, prevent the state from dominating and atomizing the rest of society.”<sup>7</sup> Jurgen Habermas presents a more communicative role of civil society as a messenger to the state. For Habermas, “civil society is made up of more or less spontaneously created associations, organizations, and movements, which find, take up, condense and amplify the resonance of social problems in private life, and pass it on to the political realm or public sphere.”<sup>8</sup> These different

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<sup>3</sup> Joel Migdal. “The State in Society: An Approach to Struggles for Domination.” *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*. Ed. Migdal, J. Kohli, A. Shue, V. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 11.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Helmut K. Anheier. “How to Measure Civil Society.” *London School of Economics and Political Science*. <http://fathom.lse.ac.uk/features/122552/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

definitions highlight the special relationship required between civil society and the state. For both Gellner and Habermas, civil society is seen as a barometer for the state of what society needs and how the state is delivering. In Mubarak's Egypt, this relationship was always fraught with conflict. The established authoritarian regime, despite its allusions to democratic tendencies, had little interest in the demands of civil society. This only made civil society more agitated and poised to advocate for itself.

Ibrahim Arafat makes the case that Egypt is a weak state.<sup>9</sup> Theoretically, he asserts, a strong state is one that can independently turn its own policy preferences into authoritative actions and act with total disregard for the preferences of powerful social actors. A weak state, in contrast, is acquiescent to private interests, vulnerable to their representatives, and incapable of penetrating society and regulating social relationships. Arafat argues that this is an appropriate description of Egypt beginning in the 1970s and continuing well into the 1980s as the country has shown weak resistance to the pressures of powerful private interests that lobby through associations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Association of Importers and the Association of Bankers.<sup>10</sup> Through these associations, private interests actually succeeded in getting the state to approve the exchange rates and interest rates that they favored. Arafat argues, however, that Egyptian civil society is also weak and unable to articulate its demands on the state, which suppresses civil society formation through its laws of association. Vickie Langohr elaborates this point by arguing that the nature of civil society groups in Egypt – largely focused on specific issues such as the proliferation of human rights, women's and environmental groups, and non-governmental organizations – mitigates against a

<sup>9</sup> Ibrahim Arafat. "Weak State, Weak Society: The Labyrinth of Political Impotency in Egypt." *The Arab Studies Journal* (1.2 1993). 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

cohesive civil society able to challenge the power of the state. These groups, she argues, “generally advocate the interests of a specific group or the importance of a particular principle, making them ill-equipped to mobilize a much broader set of constituencies around a larger goal, such as regime change.”<sup>11</sup> Langohr wrote these words in 2004, right before an important emergence of civil society activism in Egypt. Nevertheless, the following sections will demonstrate that Egypt has had a strong history of civil society that has played an important role in Egypt.

### ***The Development of Civil Society in Egypt***

Throughout the country’s history, Egyptians have asserted themselves in a quest for greater representation and political participation as evidenced by the Urabi revolt in 1879 and its quest for independence and the Wafd party’s demand for self-determination in 1919. According to Tarek Osman, the development of Egyptian civil society began in the 1920s with the creation of welfare associations, community development and professional advocacy agencies, feminist groups, trade unions, and in 1928, the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>12</sup> Such demonstrations of activism and political organization have met challenges, however. Since Egypt’s independence in 1922, there have been different waves of government leadership agendas, styles, and visions. This inconsistency has made it difficult for Egypt to develop a lasting relationship between state and society, since the parameters – for instance, which powers comprised the state and how did they view society – of both state and society changed with the policies of each president. As a

<sup>11</sup> Vickie Langohr. "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics: Egypt and Liberalizing Arab Regimes." *Comparative Politics* 36.2 (2004): 182.

<sup>12</sup> Tarek Osman. *Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). 41.

result, Egypt doesn't have the “self-regulating” relationship between society and state as described by Mohamed Hedi Cherif.<sup>13</sup>

Sami Zubaida identifies two contrasting conceptions of civil society in Egypt – one secular-liberal, the other Islamic-communal.<sup>14</sup> The first, introduced by Saad Eddin Ibrahim in 1991, relies on the formation and strengthening of voluntary associations as the condition for building up democratic sentiments and institutions. Voluntary associations, as defined by Ibrahim, include trade unions, professional syndicates, voluntary societies and clubs, pressure groups and political parties. These organizations have value in that they can serve as outlets of expression and demands vis-à-vis the state and the wider society. The strength of these associational groups is crucial in making demands on the government. Ibrahim describes Egypt during the 1990s where the government imposed arbitrary and ambiguous laws. He argues that associational groups were the most effective means to demanding that the rights enshrined in the constitution were honored and that the government followed its own laws in a regular fashion. The arbitrary use of law by the Egyptian state puts these rights in jeopardy.

In 1988, Tariq al-Bishri introduced the second conception of civil society as an informal network of relationships deliberately distanced from the government, whose regulation would contaminate its authenticity. For al-Bishri, authenticity and Islamic legitimacy are fundamental to civil society. As such, government only soils the purity and authenticity of civil society and as a result, for society to remain pure and untainted, it

<sup>13</sup> in Christopher Alexander. "Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia." *Middle East Research and Information Project* (268, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Sami Zubaida. "Islam, the State and Democracy: Contrasting Conceptions of Society in Egypt." *Middle East Report* (179, 1992): 4.

must “not be stifled by the dead hand of bureaucracy.”<sup>15</sup> Using the example of Islamic investment companies, al-Bishri’s vision for civil society is one based on the formation of informal networks and social relations of reciprocity or dependence as the essence of civil society with a focus on property and business. Rather than resort to government control and regulation, Al-Bishri offers a parallel vision based on traditional practices of business and commerce, for instance. Why trust a stranger – the government – with your money or business when one could rely on a local merchant or landowner to whom one is connected by personal networks? This understanding of civil society, one that relies on the bonds of association, strengthens al-Bishri’s conception of state-society relations.

### ***War on Associations***

The Egyptian government, since the time of Nasser to Mubarak, has used laws to restrict the formation of civil society groups. The Law of Associations has gone through several iterations, yet each improvement comes with several steps backwards, making it difficult to ascertain which law was actually beneficial. Zubaida’s 1992 article notes that many of the voluntary associations agitated against Law 32 of 1964, which “seriously impede[d] the formation and functioning of voluntary associations.”<sup>16</sup> Under this law, government officials had the power to reject a group’s formation, its board candidates, and board decision-making without being pressed for a reason. Furthermore, officials possessed the power to dissolve or amalgamate any groups at any time. Certainly, President Hosni Mubarak, who inherited this law, found little fault with it and continued to endorse it. Among the groups impacted by this law was Nawal al-Saadawi’s Arab Women’s Solidarity Association that was forced to close in 1982.

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<sup>15</sup> Zubaida, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 43.

In 1994, the Egyptian government had an opportunity to show some leniency towards associations when it hosted the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development. As a consequence of hosting this international conference and the subsequent increase in global scrutiny on the regime, civil society activities in Egypt expanded dramatically in the 1990s. A period of intense local lobbying led the government in 1998 to announce its intention to reform the 1964 law of associations and quickly implemented law 153 in 1999. This law, however, was hardly an improvement. The law explicitly empowered the Egyptian government to interfere with the formation (Article 8), activities (Article 11), association (Article 16), and funding (Article 17) of NGOs.<sup>17</sup> It represented a stifling of Egyptian civil society and scant steps towards opening. Supporters of Law 153 maintained that the law protected civil society in that it balanced the national duties and rights of the state with the right to freedom of association. Although the Egyptian government legally may regulate the formation and activities of NGOs, the regulations should not infringe unnecessarily upon the right to freedom of association. An additional revision was passed with law 84 of 2002, after more pressure from civil society groups for change. Although it eased some of the worst restrictions of the 1964 law, it also eliminated some of the improvements codified in the 1999 law. Overall, it created an enduring legal regime that gives the state excessive latitude to dissolve, reject, or slowly deprive any organization financially, should it wish to do so.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Cochrane Alexander. *Human Rights Brief* Volume 7, Issue 2, (2002). <http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/07/2law153.cfm>.

<sup>18</sup> Arch Puddington. "Freedom of Association Under Threat: The New Authoritarians' Offensive Against Civil Society." *Freedom House*. Web. 19 Dec 2013. <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-association-under-threat-new-authoritarians-offensive-against-civil-society/egypt>>.

This brief legal explanation illustrates the back-and-forth between state and society regarding rights for association. It illustrates that there was no clear victor in these matters and at some points the state won, and in others, the society won. In short, it does illustrate an important dialogue between state and society. It also illustrates that when the state did lose, it had the ability to fall back on its emergency law. Yet, amid government repression, civil society continued to form against the dictates of the laws to assert itself against the government.

### ***Action amid Repression***

One former Muslim Brotherhood member commented to Al-Jazeera in 2012 that “When you don't have a platform to express your political views you try to find another way. People had to use mosques, churches and professional syndicates as platforms for political expression. That was the regime's fault.”<sup>19</sup> As such, Mubarak's repression only challenged civil society to find ways to thrive. As Eva Bellin accurately states, one cannot look at the state of civil society without looking at the role of the coercive apparatus to repress it in being “exceptionally able and willing to crush reform initiatives from below.”<sup>20</sup> The Egyptian state under Mubarak was structurally weak, despite the façade of strength his repressive forces presented. It had faced many threats since the early 1990's and as a result, the Mubarak government played a defensive game – constantly trying to thwart any potential for opposition. This highly reactive tactic shows that Mubarak was unable to truly suppress the stirrings of civil society. Yet, where Mubarak did succeed was in complicating these avenues, limiting options, and relying on

<sup>19</sup> “The Brotherhood and Mubarak,” Al-Jazeera World.  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraeworld/2012/05/2012517131828948619.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Eva Bellin. “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective.” *Comparative Politics* (36.2 (2004): 144.



the manipulation of law to give the final blow. A series of articles added to the Egyptian constitution 2007 heavily skewed the constitution in favor of Mubarak and his National Democratic Party (NDP). In particular, Articles 75, 76, and 77 gave the president the power to impose emergency law, limited elections to candidates of registered parties (effectively, of the ruling NDP), and permitted the president to remain in office for an unlimited number of terms.<sup>21</sup> A further tactic used to preserve the president's political longevity was the controversial grooming of his son, Gamal Mubarak. As early as the mid 1990's rumors spread that Mubarak was planning to have his son take his place as President – that the presidency was to be a *de facto* inherited position. Mubarak was careful to deny these speculations, however, as Michael Hanna explained, "Mubarak [made] certain there is no public figure in a position to challenge the political prospects of his son."<sup>22</sup> A New York Times article from 1995 highlights the dead-end Egyptians faced:

The Egyptians tell us that if they hold free elections the Islamic militants will win," a senior European diplomat said. "They tell us that if they sell off the state industries and throw people out of work there will be riots. And they tell us that if they divide the currency their economy will collapse. All this is true."<sup>23</sup>

Rather than discourage Egyptians with these newly introduced articles and aforementioned laws, the reaction was quite different, demonstrating the true strength and resilience of Egyptian civil society. In response to these additional articles and Mubarak's capricious use of the rule of law to debilitate civil society, Egyptians were instead emboldened and reinvigorated.

<sup>21</sup> Kildani, Edward O'Connell and Audra K. Grant. "The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative." (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008) <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG778>. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Wahid Hanna. "The Son Also Rises: Egypt's Looming Succession Struggle." *World Policy Journal* 26.3 (2009): 107.

<sup>23</sup> Chris Hedges. "Mubarak's Challenges." *The New York Times* April 3, 1995.

### ***Mubarak vs. Islamists***

The Muslim Brotherhood has been playing a long game of cat-and-mouse with Egypt's presidents. When Sadat came to power in 1970, many of the Muslim Brothers were still imprisoned as a result of Nasser's secularist agenda. In an effort to win their support, Sadat freed the imprisoned party members and courted their favor. The 1970's were a decade of buildup and strength for the Muslim Brotherhood, but just one month before his assassination, growing weary of emerging radical plots, Sadat ordered a massive roundup of dissidents and return to prison. Upon assuming the presidency in 1981, Mubarak made no effort to restrain his distrust for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic parties and outlawed the party and arrested many of the prominent leaders and overt supporters. Mubarak went so far as to amend the constitution to ban the formation of any religious political parties.

Despite these measures, the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated endurance as the largest opposition party; however, the Brotherhood faced challenges and had to find creative ways to beat the government. Barred from legal political participation, the Brotherhood was forced to field candidates as independents in elections since the party was outlawed and these candidates had to conceal their allegiances. Despite being targeted by the government, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to sustain a strong base of support. For many who were fed up with a passive government unwilling to respond to the needs of the people, the Brotherhood demonstrated action and delivered on promises. One such example was their reaction to the Heliopolis earthquake in 1992. The Egyptian state was lethargic in its response to the devastation that killed 370, injured 3,300, and

left many without homes.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the government's shoddy relief efforts, the Muslim Brotherhood response was quick and efficient. Within hours, a core of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated doctors, pharmacists, and engineers began to provide relief to those in need. This event illustrates the Muslim Brotherhood's comfort zone. Being forced to operate outside of the state actually suited the Muslim Brotherhood, because in such times, they were able to prove their efficiency in acting better than the state. As Cook explains, "the Brotherhood had long become adept at using their social services to build and nurture mass movement; a practice that officials generally overlooked because it relieved the government of having to attend to the needs of many of its citizens."<sup>25</sup>

### ***Women's Groups under Mubarak***

Nawal al-Saadawi, one of Egypt's leading feminist activists, wrote "Solidarity between women can be a powerful force of change, and can influence future development in ways favorable not only to women but also to men."<sup>26</sup> The role of women in Mubarak's Egypt was troubled. While Egyptian women were able to exercise political rights through voting, standing for elections, or joining government-approved associations, they faced opposition from two sources – from Mubarak and from the Islamic opposition. Mubarak's stance towards women's rights and activism was largely measured by the reaction his policies towards women would elicit from Islamic groups. Intent on keeping this under control, Mubarak tempered his position towards women in careful consultation with Islamic groups so as not to create too much of an upset to his

<sup>24</sup> "Earthquake in Egypt Kills 370 and Injures 3,300." *The New York Times* October 13, 1992.

<sup>25</sup> Steven A. Cook. *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 166.

<sup>26</sup> Nawal Al-Saadawi. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*. London: Zed Books, 1980.

political order. Selma Botman explains the dual opponents women's groups faced, "while Islamist women [were] forwarding revised categories of female behavior, progressive women [were] silenced by government decree and hostile legislation."<sup>27</sup> Progress was slow. The 2006 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report noted that Egypt "performed poorly overall (ranking 109th out of 134 countries) but was particularly impaired by its ranking on political participation and economic empowerment and opportunity."<sup>28</sup>

Over time, women began to find avenues for their expression through the formation of nongovernmental organizations. For instance, el-Saadawi's Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA) was founded in 1984 with an aim to encourage women's fuller participation in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the country. The organization also founded a journal, *Nun*, which was used as an outlet of expression regarding many topics of importance to women and their views on Egypt. Topics included family life, marriage, work, poverty, Palestine, the Quran, and fashion.<sup>29</sup> Unsurprisingly, the publication was forced to shut down in 1990 following the strictures of the Law of Associations that prohibited groups from speaking out about issues related to politics and religion. In 1991, the AWSA was dissolved by administrative decree for addressing such controversial topics.

### ***Enough! The Kefaya Movement***

When tracing the uprisings of 2011, it is erroneous to say that political activism and opposition were nonexistent in Egypt. The *Kefaya* (meaning, 'enough' in Arabic) movement that emerged in late 2004 demonstrates the frustrations of many Egyptians

<sup>27</sup> Selma Botman. *Engendering Citizenship in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. 97.

<sup>28</sup> Ricardo Hausman, Laura D. Tyson, Saadia Zahidi. *The Global Gender Gap Report*. Geneva, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Botman, 93.

towards the abuses and excess of the Mubarak regime. From the outset, *Kefaya*, also known as the Egyptian Movement for Change, was not a political party, but rather, a social movement. In essence, *Kefaya* was a coalition of political parties, all joined by their demand for a shift in the balance of power. They called for the president to cede power, opposed absolute rule, refused the grooming of Gamal Mubarak as a successor, and ultimately endeavored to “break the paralysis of Egyptian politics and discourse and to promote a new political environment more conducive to democracy.”<sup>30</sup> The advancement of Gamal Mubarak as a potential presidential successor was the *coup de grace* that really manifested *Kefaya*'s grievances with the existing government. The movement was unique in its composition of various political parties and its secular nature. It included communists, nationalists, and Islamist members in an historic coalition of disparate groups who had never before seen eye-to-eye. In commenting on its composition, one scholar observed:

It is not strange to find that its members—as is documented on the movement's website ([www.harakamasria.com](http://www.harakamasria.com))—include many low-level professionals (plumbers, carpenters, launderers, etc.) as well as their middle-class counterparts (journalists, researchers, students, businessmen, accountants, university professors, doctors, professionals, artists, etc.). It also includes members from upper-class groups such as politicians and bank employees.<sup>31</sup>

With broad support, the movement was emboldened to take action and not afraid to voice their opposition to Mubarak. The constitutional amendments of 2007 triggered a response from movement members and they took to the streets in protests, many of them facing violence and arrest. The *Kefaya* movement is significant in that it represents

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<sup>30</sup> Kildani et al, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 12.

disparate civil society groups working together. This cooperation fostered trust and would facilitate the unity and resilience that would come to represent the protesters in 2011.

### ***Labor vs. Mubarak***

“A fair-minded analysis of the performance of the Egyptian economy during the Mubarak years would give the country passing grades but not stellar ones,” Tignor explains. The annual economic growth rate between 1995 and 2005 was an impressive 4.2 per cent and rose to 6 per cent in 2006 and 2007.<sup>32</sup> Some could look at Egypt’s private sector, which in the late Mubarak period accounted for 70 per cent of all economic activity, and assume all was well with Egypt’s economy. However, a larger problem extended beyond the sight of the regime. In the shadows of new western-style shopping malls were neglected quarters and a population where 16 million Egyptians lived on about \$2 a day. There was growing inequality in Egypt and a lack of trickle down consequences and Egyptians who were living on the margins were getting desperate.

As a reaction to these straining economic conditions, a series of labor strikes made waves in Egypt from 2006 to 2008. The call for a national strike was the first major attempt by opposition groups to turn labor unrest and rising anger over the economy into a wider political protest against the government. As the Al-Jazeera headline indicates, “textile town mirrors nation’s mood.” The political and economic issues Mubarak tried to turn a blind eye to were reaching inexcusable levels for everyday Egyptians.<sup>33</sup> The town referenced, Mahalla El Kobra, is home to the El-Ghazl factory, Egypt's largest textile company with more than 20,000 workers. In 2008, factory workers took to the

<sup>32</sup> Robert L. Tignor. *Egypt: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. 289.

<sup>33</sup> Adam Makaray and Michaela Singer. "Textile Town Mirrors Nation's Mood." *Al Jazeera*. July 20, 2008. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2008/04/200852519328624478.html>

streets demanding better working conditions and better wages defying government threats of suppression. In a remarkable feat and the first anti-Mubarak demonstration since the president came to power in 1981, 10,000 workers took to the streets to protest against privatization and corruption, they chanted “Down with Hosni Mubarak.” The workers received broad support from the country at large that faced similar depressed living and working conditions. The defiant factory protest served as a momentous step towards breaking the barrier of fear and a clarion call was delivered to the regime. The event would serve as a catalyst for other protests against the regime, culminating with the anti-Mubarak uprisings of 2011.

### *Egypt’s Youth Bulge*

The situation of the youth in Egypt resembles Langston Hughes’ poem, “A Dream Deferred.” “What happens to a dream deferred?” he asks. After musing over several possibilities such as rotting or festering, he asks; “or does it explode?”<sup>34</sup> The youth in Egypt, after realizing that Egypt would not help deliver their dreams, were ready for an explosion. The Egyptian state excluded youth from participating in government and shaping their future. External organizations began to pressure the Egyptian government to create a more inclusive agenda and give the youth greater opportunities to shape their future in a state where political involvement was discouraged and even punishable. Egypt’s youth “can be a formidable force for development if conditions are put in place for an inclusive society where all young Egyptians feel valued.”<sup>35</sup>

Sheer numbers reflected the urgency of the youth’s calls. A United Nations Development Program report from 2010 stated that one-quarter of Egypt’s population

<sup>34</sup> *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Random House Inc., 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Heba Handoussa. *The Egypt Human Development Report 2010*, 2010. United Nations Development Programme. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/arabstates/egypt/name,20494,en.html>

(19.8 million people) were between the ages of 18 to 29 and approximately 75 per cent of Egypt's population were under the age of 35.<sup>36</sup> With approximately 500,000 people entering the labor market every year, the Egyptian economy did not grow fast enough to absorb these job seekers in addition to the already long-term unemployed and under-employed.<sup>37</sup> Prospects were bleak for Egypt's youth. Under Mubarak's regime and the stagnant economic performance, rampant government corruption, and reliance on bribery, options for advancement were scant. More and more, the Mubarak regime was offering little to the majority of young Egyptians. A Gallup poll finding shows that young Egyptians' perceptions experienced one of the largest declines: fewer than 3 in 10 15- to 29-year-olds say Egypt's leadership maximizes youth potential in 2010, down from almost 4 in 10 in 2009.<sup>38</sup> The various demands, ambitions and restlessness of a young population compelled the regime to rely more on force – turning to confrontation and coercion rather than mere containment. There was no place for the youth's expression in Egyptian society.

After waiting for a long time for Mubarak to open a door for them, the youth in Egypt took matters into their own hands. Emboldened by the weight of repression, more and more youth activists were making their voices heard, acting publicly against the regime, and bravely facing the violent reactions of police forces. One outlet for youth expression became the April 6th Youth Movement, a youth activist group founded in 2008 to support the workers in the Mahalla El-Kobra strikes. Another event that drew widespread support from the youth was the tragic torture and murder of twenty-eight year

<sup>36</sup> Source: MDG database, UN statistics division.

<sup>37</sup> Cook, 177.

<sup>38</sup> Magali Rheault. "Young Egyptians Increasingly See Their Potential Untapped: Many young Arabs less likely to say leaders harness their talents." Gallup World. February 9, 2011. Accessed 5/16/2012. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/146018/Young-Egyptians-Increasingly-Potential-Untapped.aspx>



old Khaled Saeed by secret Egyptian police in June 2010. Photos of his beating went viral and revealed the brutality of the regime. Saeed's beating became another rallying cry for youth all over Egypt with chants of "We Are All Khaled Saeed," and support on the Internet.

In such a way, the Internet became a valuable outlet for young activists to skirt government media control. The ability to use the Internet was a vital instrument for Egyptians who faced censorship in the press and media and feared speaking out against the government in public; it became the new frontline for democracy activists in Egypt. As Wael Ghonim, internet activist, described, the internet was "the key vehicle to bringing forth the first spark of change...it is a means of communication that offers people in the physical world a method to organize, act, and promote ideas and awareness. The Internet was going to change politics in Egypt."<sup>39</sup> The Internet allowed for anonymity and helped foster a growing network of people who were gathering the courage to speak out. As such, the Internet helped craft a new space for civil society.

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<sup>39</sup> Wael Ghonim. *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power*. Boston: Mariner Books, 2013. 51.

## Chapter 2: The Authoritarian Norm

The prevalence of authoritarianism in Egypt predates Hosni Mubarak and can help explain the state's position towards civil society. As Steven A. Cook details, “none of Egypt's leaders have ever developed a compelling vision of society...and as a result they have been vulnerable to political challenges and unable to establish the loyalty of the Egyptian people and have relied almost exclusively on the use of force to maintain control.”<sup>40</sup> Despite claims of democratic rule, Egypt's presidents were far from democratic and far from inclusive. Each president expressly sought to eliminate threats to their rule, suppress freedoms, and to sweep the concerns of certain pests under the rug. Suspicious elections, blocked political party participation, and violence at polling stations were not uncommon for Egypt's “democracy.”

### *Nasser's Precedent*

To truly understand the origins of Egypt's authoritarianism and its treatment of civil society, one must go back to modern Egypt's first president and the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser. While one could look favorably on Nasser's projects for the country, he did lay a foundation for authoritarian curtailment of freedoms that would endure long after his rule. Nasser's political tactics revealed a disinterest in democratization and apathy towards political freedoms and civil society development. One such example was his treatment of professional syndicates, such as the syndicates of lawyers, journalists, engineers, doctors, dentists, and pharmacists, all of which were founded before Nasser's tenure as president. The mission of these syndicates was primarily to protect professional

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<sup>40</sup> Steven A. Cook. "Egypt's Democratic Quest: From Nasser to Tahrir Square." Ed. Council on Foreign Relations, 2011. Ed. Hagit Ariav. <http://www.cfr.org/egypt/egypts-democratic-quest-nasser-tahrir-square/p26137>

interests of their members, including salaries, pensions, conditions of work, and regulation of entry into the profession. To a lesser degree, and as Robert Springborg explains, in a largely intermittent manner, they have pressed demands on the government that go beyond a narrow definition of professional self-interest.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, these syndicates caught Nasser's eye because they represented vehicles through which the regime could attempt to control behavior, and in some instances, mobilize the support of the professionals. The government, to insure acquiescence of professionals to its rule, could manipulate the syndicates.<sup>42</sup> The extent of his control, for example, can be seen as early as 1955 where Nasser issued a new press law that encroached on the legal status of the journalists' syndicate that had previously been beholden only to its own bylaws approved by its members. Between 1965 and 1968 laws were passed to "democratize" the syndicates in an effort to strip the experienced syndicate activists of their power bases, and breaking down membership barriers. As a consequence, the efficacy of these syndicates became diluted. Furthermore, government itself became more distant to Egyptians and Nasser continued to erect barriers to participation. He repressed any group that posed a threat against him and made clear that Egypt was not ready for democracy. In 1965, for instance, he swept to a 99.99% electoral victory, harkening the rigged elections that would become routine under Mubarak.

### ***Sadat's Egypt***

Anwar Sadat's desire to distance himself from Nasser's policies was a staple of his rule and extended to the way he shaped Egyptian civil society. In his first 10 years in office, Sadat changed the civil society power centers Nasser had created, favoring

<sup>41</sup> Robert Springborg. "Professional Syndicates in Egyptian Politics, 1952-1970." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9.3 (1978): 279.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 279.

loyalists of rightist and Islamist inclinations and purging leftists and secular forces that had dominated on university campuses, in the media, and in professional syndicates.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, his economic policies turned Nasser's populist reforms upside down and made a shift towards liberal capitalism.

The shortcomings of Sadat's economic policies tarnished his political reputation. The situation for the everyday Egyptian, who earned an average of \$5 per week in the mid 1970's, became even more ominous with the threat of a curtailment of food subsidies and an increase in food prices. As such, in January 1977, the public's rage forced Sadat to restore food subsidies, but when the army stepped in to quell rioters, 800 were injured, 80 were killed, and more than 1,000 were imprisoned in a remarkable show of disapproval towards Sadat. This momentous event, as Steven Cook explains, made it clear to Sadat that "the prestige he derived from the [Yom Kippur] War could not insulate him from the vicissitudes of Egyptian policies and the related challenges of his economic reform program."<sup>44</sup> Sadat came face-to-face with his growing unpopularity and distance from the Egyptian people's struggles.

Sadat, sensing the situation getting further out of hand, responded in 1980 by lifting the emergency law that had been in place since the 1967 war, adopting a number of populist economic policies, and engineering five constitutional amendments that Egyptians approved with a vote that May. The amendments called for steps towards democracy and social justice with the creation of a multiparty system in 1967 and a Consultative Council, the *Majlis al Shura*.<sup>45</sup> These changes were intended to deflect the growing record of dissatisfaction toward the regime. It was ineffective, however. As the

<sup>43</sup> Kirk J. Beattie. *Egypt During the Sadat Years*. New York: Palgrave, 2000. 93.

<sup>44</sup> Cook, 142.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 153.

political and economic situation worsened and opposition members voiced their criticisms, Sadat, like his predecessor and successor, suppressed his political foes. Sadat's patience had run out on September 2, 1981 when the regime launched a massive crackdown. Cook describes the extent of the arrests:

More than 1,500 people across the spectrum of the opposition from political parties such as the Tagammu, Socialist Labor Party, and the already disbanded Wafd to the tolerated Muslim Brotherhood and extremist groups were arrested. All opposition publications were banned and mosques were placed under the direct supervision of the government.<sup>46</sup>

The tides quickly turned on Sadat who had tried to preserve a position of power for himself – but who never fully gained the trust of the Egyptian people. About one month after this crackdown, there would be one last act of opposition. On October 6, 1981, during the annual victory parade in Cairo, Sadat was assassinated by an Islamic jihadist in protest at Sadat's rapprochement with Israel.

### ***Mubarak's Egypt***

While Nasser and Sadat's tenure in office shaped Egyptian civil society and set important precedents for how the state interacts with society, the uprisings of 2011 were directly against the exaggerated tenure of Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak, vice president under Sadat, assumed power in 1981 after Sadat's assassination. Many believe that Mubarak, like Sadat, was selected to serve as vice president because of his mediocrity, which posed no direct threat to the president.<sup>47</sup> It did not take long for Mubarak to settle into the role of president and he made sweeping changes to the agenda of his predecessor. Upon assuming the presidency, Mubarak proclaimed a state of emergency (which was never lifted for the duration of his rule), arrested Muslim Brotherhood members and banned the

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<sup>46</sup> Cook, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Tignor, 285.

political party, and curtailed press freedoms. This “deliberalization” extended to the reinstatement of controls on political parties, elections, Islamic activity, and civil society organizations. Mubarak’s first years in office, as Jason Brownlee explains, never represented a sincere dedication toward liberal democracy, but only a “tactical and precarious *tolerance*.”<sup>48</sup>

Mubarak sought to create an aura of invincibility about the state. Joel Migdal explains that the more powerful the state seemed, the more likely subjects were to accept it in their ordinary lives and, in the process, reduce the burden of enforcing all its dictates.<sup>49</sup> This framework does not appear as an exaggeration of Mubarak’s conception of the power of the Egyptian state and his prime role within it. By maintaining emergency law for the entirety of his tenure in office, he empowered himself by making decisions without any explanation, in defense of the security and stability of the state. These bold actions were often made at the expense of the Egyptian people. Of course, such a silencing of civil society did not occur by accident and Mubarak sought to quell any avenues for discontent. While claiming to encourage “all kinds of democracy” in Egypt, participation and pluralism suffered extremely low levels during Mubarak’s presidency; the lowest occurring during the 2000’s.<sup>50</sup> The decline in pluralism and participation was a reaction to Mubarak’s political opening of the 1980s and very early 1990s that did, in fact, very little to open opportunities for power beyond Mubarak. Calls for greater participation were widespread among scholars in the early 2000’s appealing for domestic and international actors to “compel the Egyptian president to cede power to other branches of government and to allow civil society organizations to operate

<sup>48</sup> Jason Brownlee. "The Decline of Pluralism in Mubarak's Egypt." *Journal of Democracy* 13.4 (2002): 8.

<sup>49</sup> Migdal, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Brownlee, 6.

independently,” citing bleak hopes for any meaningful political contestation otherwise.<sup>51</sup> Recognizing this extensive disapproval, Mubarak opened legislative elections in 2000. However, vying for his own reelection, he campaigned on the slogan “continuity for the sake of stability,” alluding that any change from his rule would have detrimental and backward effects.<sup>52</sup> As Amy Holmes summarizes, “for almost 30 years, Mubarak maintained his hold on power by courting the elite, coup-proofing the military, ensuring a steady flow of American military aid, and keeping the lid on social unrest through a combination of hard and soft power deterrents.”<sup>53</sup> Corruption was also ubiquitous in Mubarak’s Egypt. Little could be accomplished without *wasta*, or connections. Police bribery was an acceptable way to skirt the imposition of arbitrary laws. This contributed to the hopelessness felt by Egyptians in Mubarak’s Egypt.

Egypt, as illustrated by the reign of these three prominent presidents, can be defined as an authoritarian regime. Individual freedoms were frequently denied, political parties and opposition movements existed but were frequently stifled, declarations of martial law were used, and, ultimately, it was clear that the president and his men were indifferent to any democratic tendencies. As Eva Bellin explains, Egypt was not unique in its resistance to democratic tendencies in the Middle East. The robustness of these authoritarian regimes, she explains, “lies less in absent prerequisites of democratization and more in present conditions that foster robust authoritarianism, specifically a robust coercive apparatus in these states.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Brownlee, 6.

<sup>52</sup> For an account of the 2000 elections, see Vickie Langohr’s piece in the Middle East Report, *Cracks in Egypt’s Electoral Engineering The 2000 Vote* published November 7, 2000. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero110700>

<sup>53</sup> Amy Austin Holmes. *A Revolution in Three Waves: Mass Risings Against the Mubarak Regime, the Military Junta, and the Muslim Brotherhood*. (unpublished). 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Bellin, 143.

It was against Mubarak and his government's repression that the Arab Spring emerged. Egyptians sought greater political freedoms and rights. When faced with increasing demands from their people, Arab leaders tend to repress these voices rather than respond with genuine reform. Yet, popular mobilization did not make leaders consider democracy; instead, it made them even more repressive and less likely to enact meaningful reforms as was the case in Libya, Syria, and Egypt. In Jordan, the monarchy escaped threats to its legitimacy by anticipating the demands of the popular mobilization and provided adequate reforms to quell the demands of the masses. Yet, the foundations established by Nasser and perpetuated by Sadat and Mubarak reveal something in common – the resiliency of authoritarianism.

### ***Mubarak's Political Brand***

For his second term as president that began in 1987 Mubarak claimed that democracy was his goal for Egypt but that it had to be administered "in doses." Regardless of this feeble commitment to democracy, it is important to look at his regime as a type of hybrid. However, characterizing the type of hybrid is challenging. In one sense, Mubarak could be assessed using Levitsky and Way's concept of competitive authoritarianism. Under such a hybrid political system, "formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority."<sup>55</sup> Mubarak, like other incumbents in a competitive authoritarian government, violated the rules to ensure a fair race frequently and extensively with the consequence that the regime failed to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy. Elections are held yet incumbents deny the opposition a fair playing field, intimidate opposition

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<sup>55</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13.2 (2002): 52.



candidates and their supporters during campaigning, thwart and threaten voters at the polls, and manipulate electoral results. This sounds like an adequate portrayal of Mubarak’s government, except for the fact that Mubarak was more heavy-handed in electoral fraud, and elections were few and certainly not fair. It is important to note that competitive authoritarian regimes are confined to maintaining the structures and institutions of democracy and are thus limited – they are not able to eliminate them or reduce them to a mere façade. Mubarak secured his political tenure by suppressing the formation of political parties, arbitrarily arresting anyone who tried to challenge him in an election (such as the cooked-up arrests of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the liberal sociologist and founder of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, in 2000 and candidate Ayman Nour in 2005). These corrupt measures to control the competition truly limited the democratic merit of these elections. Jason Brownlee once boldly likened Mubarak to Fidel Castro’s dictatorship since it bore no resemblance to a democracy despite elections and election “monitoring.”<sup>56</sup>

Given Mubarak’s abuse of elections and institutions, his regime is better categorized as a “façade” electoral regime. In such regimes, electoral institutions exist but yield no meaningful contestation for power. That explains how Mubarak has won all his elections with over 90% of the vote. As Levitsky and Way explain, “façade” electoral regimes can also be referred to as pseudo-democracies, virtual democracies, and electoral authoritarian regimes. For Levitsky and Way, these are simply all synonyms for full-scale authoritarianism whereby civil society is obstructed.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Brownlee, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Levitsky and Way, 54.

### *Tools of Domination*

At this point, it is clear that Mubarak had no inclination towards allowing civil society to thrive. Albrecht and Schlumberger assert “the persistence and durability of all political systems...crucially depends on legitimacy or repression – and in almost all cases, on a combination of both.”<sup>58</sup> In such a way, Egypt’s presidents used authoritarian rule to assert itself against civil society. Their tactics of repression towards the opposition were skillfully used to safeguard their control. As G. Hossein Razi defines it, legitimacy “refers to the extent to which the relevant portion of the population *perceives* that the regime is behaving.”<sup>59</sup> I will draw a parallel to the case of Hafez al-Assad’s rule in Syria and examine how power is used in an overtly oppressive state because it will allow for a better understanding Mubarak’s use of these tools of repression and the impact it had on Egyptian civil society, [please say here WHY you are making this comparison to understand Mubarak’s use of ...? I asked this on the previous draft, too]. Here, echoing questions raised about the Egyptian uprisings of 2011, I ask why the population was silent for so long. What grip on power did the ruler possess that allowed him to hold onto his power and at the grave expense of his own people?

Syria under Hafez al-Assad is a clear case of a closed and repressive society, yet the uses of power were mixed. It was not simply the use of force, or even the threat of force. Rather, Assad played on the heartstrings of his citizens and manipulated their conceptions of his power and the role of the state to a point where they were expected, and almost trained, to revere him. Lisa Wedeen’s *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics*,

<sup>58</sup> Holger Albrecht and Oliver Schlumberger. ""Waiting for Godot": Regime Change without Democratization in the Middle East." *International Political Science Review* 25.4 (2004): 373.

<sup>59</sup> G. Hossein Razi, “Legitimacy, Religion and Nationalism in the Middle East.” *American Political Science Association*. 48.1 (1990): 70.

*Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, offers a thorough account of the cult of personality, power, and ubiquity of Hafiz al-Assad. Assad's three-decade rule was masterfully maintained by means of perpetuated myths, elaborate spectacles, and extensive censorship. Yet, while the Syrian masses participated and complied with the boundaries of appropriate behavior and speech, these myths were not believed. Syrians were merely going through the motions out of fear of the repercussions.

Assad's spectacles were effective in setting the tone of pomp desired by the regime. In one such example, Wedeen describes an instance where university gates were locked and students were cornered to attend festivities that honored the president.<sup>60</sup> These are certainly not spontaneous or genuine demonstrations of loyalty; rather they are shallow and empty pretenses that serve to reassure the president that he is loved, adored, and powerful. Wedeen argues that these spectacles were effective in perpetuating the cult of Assad as they 1) use the *physical* bodies of the people involved and thus demonstrated a sense of obedience, 2) dramatized state power "by providing occasions to enforce obedience, thereby creating a politics of pretense in which all participate, but few actually believe," and 3) served as a visible and tangible demonstration of power that may be more salient than other methods.<sup>61</sup>

Making a parallel to the days leading up to the 2011 demonstrations in Egypt, Mubarak's Egypt thrived on many of the same tactics as Assad. Effusive expressions of praise for Mubarak were offered regularly in the media for anything that went well in Egypt. Coincidentally, anything that went wrong was blamed on someone else. Mubarak's overt control of the media and its content helped shape his desired image. In

<sup>60</sup> Lisa Wedeen. *Ambiguities of Domination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

Egypt, like Syria, respect for the regime was nearly obligatory and expressions against the government were punishable. It was not uncommon to see posters of Mubarak in shops and homes, “not because they love[d] him, but because the system [was] self-enforcing and people [were] accustomed to it. People have internalized the control.”<sup>62</sup> Egyptians lived in fear and knew that speaking openly about their discontent toward Mubarak would have repercussions. Shehata parallels this concern with the rise of political jokes: “when open political expressions became dangerous in Egypt, the political joke emerged as a vehicle for the criticism of political leaders, their policies, and government.”<sup>63</sup> Shehata explains this powerful tool and how it was useful for Egyptians during the presidencies of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, granting them the “power to ridicule and laugh,” a power that is difficult for the ruler to trace and punish.<sup>64</sup> This is similar to Scott’s concept of the hidden transcript that allows for the critique of power that occurs offstage, which power holders do not see or hear, or in the case of the joke, cannot trace the origin.<sup>65</sup>

For those in power, the desired outcome of such a repressive climate is a stifled civil society. Assad and Mubarak used these tools of repression to control their citizens and insulate themselves from any opposition. However, such tactics are unhealthy for the development of both the state and civil society. Yet, it is important to note that these leaders, despite their efforts to make themselves omnipotent, were ultimately sowing the

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<sup>62</sup> Wedeen, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Samer Shehata. “The Politics of Laughter: Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarek in Egyptian Political Jokes.” *Folklore* 103.1 (1992): 75.

<sup>64</sup> In the jokes described by Shehata, Mubarak is described as a donkey, monkey, and overall inadequate, stupid, and ineffective. One popular joke was “when Nasser became president he wanted a vice president who was dumber than he was, so as not to cause him trouble or pose a threat to his power, so he chose Sadat. When Sadat became president he too wanted a vice president dumber than he was and he picked Mubarak. Mubarak has not yet found anyone in Egypt dumber than himself!” (Shehata, 87).

<sup>65</sup> James Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

seeds for their own demise. Their obsession with control actually made them vulnerable. While this may seem counterintuitive, I argue that the more excluded citizens feel from the government, the more central civil society groups become. As we will continue to see in the case of Egypt told here, Mubarak's tactics to bolster his rule were, in fact, opportunities for the opposition to agitate against it.

This discussion about authoritarian rule is important in our understanding of civil society in Egypt. The government, through laws, arbitrary arrests, corruption, and the fluctuating economic environment that it perpetuated, created difficult conditions for civil society. As a result of the restrictions on association, civil society had to fabricate alternative methods for expression, for assembly, and for ways to influence their fate. One Egyptian reflected in 1995 on the limitations placed on his freedom of expression stating, "No Egyptian is allowed to criticize, or even question, the president or any member of his family. We are sliding closer and closer to an absolute dictatorship, and as we are, we are sliding closer and closer to an explosion."<sup>66</sup> This Egyptian was right, and though it took some time for the explosion to arrive, Egyptians, by means of civil society organizations, were slowly beginning to assert themselves and organize despite the limitations the state placed on them. These agitations build up to the 18 fateful days in 2011.

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<sup>66</sup> Mubarak's Challenge, Chris Hedges, NY Times Published: April 3, 1995.

### Chapter 3: Revolution of 2011

Unthinkable. That is the word that has been used to describe the events that led to the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in merely 18 days in 2011. While the Egyptians have succeeded in removing President Mubarak from office, the resulting political system is still unknown. As such, the Egyptian revolution is as yet incomplete. Harkening Zhou Enlai's famous words in the 1970's regarding the French Revolution: it is "too early to say" how things will develop in Egypt. Despite this uncertainty, the achievements of Egyptians in January 2011 are remarkable.

#### *Understanding Revolution*

Defining revolution has puzzled many theorists for some time, as it is difficult to find one generalizable framework to explain revolutions in different parts of the world and under varying conditions. At its core, however, the term revolution is used to represent a fundamental change in a country brought about by mass participation, often using violence, and resulting in a new ruling makeup and form of government. While the root causes and actors involved can vary, as Lawrence Stone summarizes, "fundamental to all analyses...is the recognition of a lack of harmony between the social system on the one hand and the political system on the other."<sup>67</sup> Samuel Huntington defines 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 activity and policies."<sup>68</sup> He explains that revolution requires "not only political institutions which resist the expansion of participation but also social groups which

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence Stone. "Theories of Revolution." *World Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Jan., 1966) 165.

<sup>68</sup> Samuel P. Huntington. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. 264.

demand that expansion.”<sup>69</sup> Given our understanding of Egypt’s authoritarian legacy and the emergence of civil society, Egypt seems to quite sufficiently fit these requirements. As such, it is important to understand Egypt’s state-society relations and the strength of its civil society with respect to revolution.

Charles Kurzman offers another useful framework for the analysis of revolutions by examining the political, organizational, cultural, economic, and military explanations. With respect to the political, Kurzman echoes de Tocqueville by saying that when a people which has put up with an oppressive rule over a long period without protest suddenly finds the government relaxing its pressure, it launches a case against it. With regards to organizational explanations, revolutions occur when oppositional groups are able to amass sufficient resources to contest the regime. Cultural explanations are important because they allow opposition forces to draw on the norms, ideologies, and beliefs and rituals that already resonate within a society. Economically, Kurzman reiterates Davies’ explanation that revolutions occur when economic conditions worsen, especially after a period of long prosperity. Finally, Kurzman’s military explanation for revolution cites that revolutions occur when the state’s repressive capability collapses and the state is unable to suppress or quell the protest.<sup>70</sup> These five areas offer a useful schema by which revolutions can be studied and better understood and are especially pertinent when one looks to explain the case of Egypt.

Huntington and Kurzman’s theories of revolution help us to understand the political, economic, and social factors that can lead a society to revolt. They help us find a place for the discontent that became common among Egyptians and understand their

<sup>69</sup> Huntington, 276.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Kurzman. *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

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grievances and frustrations that would lead them to take action. Economic and political concerns were chief among the complaints of Egyptians. As evidenced in chapter I, Egyptians were experiencing unemployment, poverty, and difficulty meeting basic needs under Mubarak's status quo economic performance. Further exacerbating the economic torpor was an insignificant employment rate that grew only 2.6 percent per year between 1990 and 2005.<sup>71</sup> As we have seen from the labor protests in Mahalla, economic issues, such as deteriorating labor conditions, low pay, and abrupt increases in food prices became the fuel for unrest in Egypt. The fact that Egyptians were denied access to participation in government and outlets of expression to attempt to remedy these concerns heightened their dissatisfaction even more.

### ***The Limit***

“Egyptians are like camels,” Egyptian author Alaa Al-Aswany wrote, “they can put up with beatings, humiliation and starvation for a long time but when they rebel they do so suddenly and with a force that is impossible to control.”<sup>72</sup> This quote helps grasp the tenacity of the Egyptian people as they revolted against Hosni Mubarak. While the conditions that existed in Egypt that compelled the Egyptian people to rally against Mubarak's autocratic rule were not new, 2011 represented a tipping point for Egyptians where they launched a relentless and valiant effort – ousting Mubarak in 18 days. The effort represented the culmination of the plight of the Egyptian people who protested against the government's repressive rule under thirty years of emergency law, worsening economic conditions, and a disconnected and indifferent government.

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<sup>71</sup> Tignor, 289.

<sup>72</sup> Alaa Al Aswany. *On the State of Egypt: What Made the Revolution Inevitable*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011.



Egyptians had been building up to this moment. As Robert Dreyfuss reported in February 2011 that the protestors in Tahrir Square and throughout Egypt represented a “movement led by tech-savvy students and twentysomethings – labor activists, intellectuals, lawyers, accountants, engineers – that had its origins in a three-year-old textile strike in the Nile Delta and the killing of a 28-year-old university graduate, Khaled Said, has emerged as the centre of what is now an alliance of Egyptian opposition groups, old and new.”<sup>73</sup> The political and economic issues that comprised much of immediate criticisms against the state were able to cross sectors of society in Egypt. As mentioned above, Egypt has one of the youngest populations in the world, with approximately two thirds of its people under the age of 30. This youth bulge in Egypt left the young at the margins of the economy and with grim prospects for the future. Joining the youth in their complaints against the worsening political and economic conditions in Egypt were all sectors of society, from the poor to the professionals, men and women, secular and religious. Even those who had left Egypt were called upon to join in the struggle against Mubarak; it was a tapestry of the Egyptian people. As the world was swept by the dynamism and determination in Tahrir Square, they were also captured by powerful images of solidarity. This was truly the power of the Egyptian people, fed up with the injustices of their government, stripped of a fear that had made them paralyzed to act, and strengthened by their convictions to remove a corrupt leader and have hope for a different future. The success of the revolution would not have been possible without this massive show of solidarity and support. It represented their volition and their initiative to unite and bring down Mubarak.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Dreyfuss. "Who is behind the Egyptian protests?." *Guardian* 2.2.2011. Web. 19 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/feb/02/who-is-behind-egyptian-protests>>.

Such a collective action is instrumental for Misagh Parsa and his conception of successful revolution. In his study of Iran in 1979, Parsa attributes revolutionary success to the strength and reach of collective action whereby “groups develop new collective definitions of the world and of themselves that elaborate new goals, norms of behavior, and justifications for the power of authorities. The collective actions of any group follow from its initial commitment to such a particular belief system.”<sup>74</sup> As such, it is easier to find a common enemy in the state and create ripe conditions for collective action. Such an ouster could not have been executed individually by only one group as they all had hindrances in some shape or form. In the case of Iran, Parsa explains that the intelligentsia, students, merchants, shopkeepers, clerics, and industrial and white collar employees all seized the opportunity and effectively mobilized for collective action. Egyptians in 2011 recognized the power of collective action. The factory workers and white-collar employees, the secular organizations, and the Islamists developed an agenda that demanded Mubarak’s ouster in a united front against the regime. As a result, this collective action effort successfully applied enough pressure toward the regime that sent shockwaves and reached all sectors of society.

Beyond the power of collective action and solidarity in Egypt, it is still important to ask the question, why did the revolution of 2011 happen when it did? Mona El-Ghobashy points to the three T’s – technology, Tunisia, and tribulation.<sup>75</sup> All of these elements came together to give Egyptians the strength and resilience to achieve a long-held goal.

<sup>74</sup> Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989). 3.

<sup>75</sup> Mona El Ghobashy. "The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution." *Middle East Research and Information Project* 41.258 (2011).

Tunisia was the spark. The bold actions taken by Tunisians against Ben Ali's autocratic regime helped Egyptians lose their fear and show them what can be accomplished. Much like the French Revolution, the actions in Tunisia "cracked the modern consciousness and made men realize that revolution is a fact that a great revolution may occur in a modern, progressive society."<sup>76</sup> Finally, their trials, 30 years of stagnant growth, and unmet promises brought Egyptians over the edge. El-Ghobashy astutely draws on Tilly in explaining that the success in Egypt was due to the decline in the efficiency of government coercion. As she explains:

What shifted the balance away from the regime were four continuous days of street fighting, January 25–28, that pitted the people against police all over the country. That battle converted a familiar, predictable episode into a revolutionary situation...By January 25, 2011, a strong regime faced a strong society versed in the politics of the street. In hindsight, it is simple to pick out the vulnerabilities of the Mubarak regime and arrange them in a neat list as the ingredients of breakdown. But that retrospective temptation misses the essential point: Egyptians overthrew a strong regime.<sup>77</sup>

Technology played a central role in Egypt's revolution. It eased communication, especially given monitoring, Internet shutdowns, and media repression. Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and smart phones greatly facilitated organization, meeting points, and communication for the revolutionaries. One of Wael Ghonim's most popular Twitter posts called on all the "well-educated Egyptians around the world...[to] come back ASAP and build our nation."<sup>78</sup> The impassioned YouTube video of Asmaa Mahfouz, for instance, went viral as it implored all Egyptians to join her in Tahrir Square on January 25th and saying, "if we still have honor and want to live in dignity on this land, come to

<sup>76</sup> Pettee, *The Process of Revolution*, in Huntington, 265.

<sup>77</sup> El-Ghobashy.

<sup>78</sup> Ghonim, Wael (Ghonim). "A call to all well-educated Egyptians around the world. Come back ASAP to build our nation." January 27, 2011. Tweet.

Tahrir.”<sup>79</sup> Videos captured on phones helped reveal the violence of the government against the protestors.

This was a collective effort. The photo below shows the masses of Egyptians determined to dictate their terms. Chants of “go home Mubarak” filled the streets. Makeshift tents were erected. Pop-up shelters, and deliveries of food helped sustain the revolutionaries. Egyptians, despite pressure from the military, made it clear that they were not going to back down. They did not disband; they did not step down. Such resilience was demonstrated all over Egypt, in Alexandria and Suez fueled by a determination to ouster Mubarak. Despite a regime that tried in vain to thwart any attempt at dissent and curtail civil society, the Egyptian people proved the strength of mass mobilization and the power of Egypt’s civil society.



*Source: Al-Jazeera, In Pictures: Egypt’s Revolution*

<sup>79</sup> Iyad El-Baghdadi. “Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution.” Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, Feb. 11, 2011. Web. Dec. 19, 2013.

## Chapter 4: Post-Revolution

In 1975, Taha Hussein, a 20th century Egyptian writer, wrote these prescient words: “We must not stand before freedom and independence in contented admiration. Like all advanced nations, Egypt must regard them as a means of attaining perfection...I fear that they [freedom and independence] may beguile us into thinking that we have come to the end of the road when in fact we have just reached the beginning.”<sup>80</sup>

Eighteen days to take down a rooted authoritarian seems easy in comparison to the task that now faces Egypt. Since the revolution, Egypt had struggled to determine what type of government is to be established. This is where the real work begins and continues to pose challenges for Egypt as they close the book on Mubarak’s regime and look forward to something new and different. In keeping with Huntington’s theory of revolution, as he explains, a “complete revolution, however, involves a second phase: the creation and institutionalization of a new political order...The measure of how revolutionary a revolution is is the rapidity and the scope of the expansion of political participation. The measure of how successful a revolution is is by the authority and stability of the institutions to which it gives birth.”<sup>81</sup> Civil society in Egypt must now continue their quest for greater participation in political affairs.

<sup>80</sup> Taha Hussein, the future of culture in Egypt, 1975.

<sup>81</sup> Huntington, 266.

### ***Transition and Experimentation***

*“...but I’d seriously like to see the Muslim Brotherhood come to power. ‘Why do you want them to come to power?’ I asked. ‘Because we’ve tried everything,’ he said. ‘We tried the king and he was no good. We tried socialism with Abdel Nasser, and even at the peak of socialism we still had bashas from the army and the intelligence. After that we tried the centre and then we tried capitalism but with government rations and a public sector and dictatorship and emergency law, and we became Americans and little by little we’ll turn into Israelis, and it’s still no good, so why don’t we try the Brotherhood and maybe they will work out, who knows?’ ‘You mean just as an experiment?’ I said. ‘You can try wearing baggy trousers or a tight shirt, but you can’t experiment with the future of a country.’”<sup>82</sup>*

In the weeks after Mubarak’s resignation, the euphoria of being free of an increasingly corrupt and repressive government gave way to concerns about the sudden void in political leadership. The void was evident in the fact that no group in Egypt was ready – or ever groomed – to assume this leadership role; too much was expected in such a short time. Consequently, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) entered as an interim political body until elections for a new president could be held. According to Gallup polls conducted after the revolution in 2011, Egyptians were more likely to back the Muslim Brotherhood, but not at a level much higher than that for Mubarak’s deposed National Democratic Party (15% versus 10% respectively).<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the Muslim Brotherhood, long denied political salience as they were deemed a threat to the Egyptian presidency, was finally in a position to win.

The elections of June 2012 held Mohamed Morsi, a candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, and Mubarak’s former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik as the front-runners. Shafik was viewed as an outpost of Mubarak’s old regime and was an active player during SCAF rule. Morsi had gotten much of the support from

<sup>82</sup> Khaled Alkhamissi. *Taxi*. Trans. Jonathan Wright. London: Aflame Books, 2008. 69-70.

<sup>83</sup> Gallup World. “Egypt From Tahrir to Transition” June 20, 2011. Web Accessed 12/16/2013 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157046/egypt-tahrir-transition.aspx>.

the revolutionaries, who were skeptical and opposed the idea of a former member of Mubarak's cabinet taking the seat as president. After a contested ballot counting, confusion over who the victor was, protests against Shafik and the SCAF, Morsi was finally named the winner in Egypt's first competitive presidential election, earning 51.5% of the votes.

Morsi's tenure in office began with hope and enthusiasm for a change in Egyptian politics. Within his first few months in office, he had already spoken at the United Nations calling for the support and rights of the Palestinians, he reached out to China on his first presidential visit to encourage economic opportunities and investment with the powerhouse country, he attended the meeting of the nonaligned states in Iran and spoke openly about his position on the Arab-Israeli issue. In short, he emerged as a president whose foreign policy put Arabs first and sought to realign Egypt in the region and the world. This was a breath of fresh air after the status-quo policies of Mubarak.

President Morsi even made allusions to power sharing during his tenure in office, perhaps taking a cue from the initial success of the Tunisian power-sharing arrangement. He made an appeal for unity towards the opposition, by imploring the opposition to "...look forward, not back. Let's reconcile with those who seek reconciliation... I call on everyone to sit down together and dialogue, even if we disagree on points of view."<sup>84</sup> Yet, this appeal was short-lived and hollow. After two years of transition and ten months of Brotherhood administration, Morsi failed to restore a sense of accountability to the government of Egypt; the hopes and promises of democracy fizzled. Governing for the Muslim Brotherhood became more of a task of keeping Pandora's box shut, advancing



their own agenda, and keeping opposition forces at bay. As the pessimistic adage goes, “the more things change, the more they remain the same,” and as such, not much had changed for civil society despite Morsi’s claims of otherwise.

The long-awaited constitution, promised by Morsi to be progressive and arrived at by consensus, demonstrated the shortcomings of Egypt’s new democracy. There were problems with the content and the context in which the draft constitutional was devised. While the constitution fulfilled some of the central demands of the revolution such as the end of an all-powerful presidency, a stronger parliament and provisions against torture or detention without trial, it would also return to Egypt’s generals much of the power and privilege they had during the Mubarak era and would reject the demands of ultraconservative Salafis to impose puritanical moral codes. Citing flaws and ambiguities in the constitution, claiming that it did not represent the views of all Egyptians, and that the document will not last, groups began to boycott the referendum. Egypt’s Copts, believed to amount to about 10 per cent of Egypt’s population, were instructed by their leaders to boycott the vote. Mohamed ElBaradei stated confidently that the that constitution was no different than the charters that Egypt’s former authoritarian rulers passed in rigged plebiscites and that “[the constitution] will not survive.”<sup>85</sup> Liberals and secularists also objected to the preservation of the clause that grounding Egyptian law in the principles of Islamic laws. Given these objections, the document proved to be divisive and despite this discord, Morsi called for an almost immediate referendum on the draft constitution in November 2012. The revisions were passed in a referendum vote, perhaps more so out of a desire for some stability and structure than truly supporting the

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<sup>85</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick. “Egyptian Islamists Approve the Constitution Despite Objections.” *The New York Times*. November 29, 2012.



document. Protests reemerged in Cairo and other major cities, maintaining the fervor to communicate dissatisfaction with the government. This example demonstrates that Egypt's democracy was still a work in progress and creating a new culture of political inclusion and participation would take time.

### ***Prospects for Democracy in Egypt***

It is not too soon to conclude that the long era of authoritarian hegemony in the Middle East is over. In two dramatic months the Middle East lost its longstanding distinction as the only world region never to have experienced a transition from authoritarian rule...However, it is also clear that authoritarianism will remain a prominent feature of Middle East Politics.<sup>86</sup>

Transitions to democracy in the Middle East have largely been based on an “as-needed” basis. The main feature of Egyptian “political democracy” is domination by the executive, long perpetuated by Mubarak. As explained earlier, Mubarak never ran against an opponent and his attempts at fair elections were superficial. Mubarak’s claim of employing “doses of democracy” was not false, although these doses were only short-term remedies to social problems he sought to appease. As Zubaida explains, such a reactionary approach to democracy is customary in the Middle East. In the Middle East, political control was based on the ruling regime’s ability to:

dispense resources in accordance with a political calculus of advantage, and to maintain a welfare system which provides a safety net for growing and mostly impoverished populations. The decline of these resources and the ever-expanding commitments with growing populations, rising expectations at all levels, and security investments, brought an end to the short-lived equilibrium.<sup>87</sup>

Zubaida continues to explain that population growth and diminishing resources made it more difficult for the government to find short-term fixes. The 1970s and 1980s saw

<sup>86</sup> Heydemann and Leenders, 2.

<sup>87</sup> Sami Zubaida. “Civil society, community, and democracy in the Middle East.” *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*. Ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani. Cambridge: University Press, 2001. 232-249. Web. 20 Dec. 2013.

greater demands on governments from external financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and calls for structural adjustment. As such, governments sought to lower their welfare commitments and limit the size of their debts. Some governments in the Middle East also took this as an opportunity to liberalize and make progress towards democratization, yet evidently, these measures were as enduring as their financial problems.

What will bring about a genuine political transition? Albrecht and Schlumberger argue that Middle Eastern authoritarianism is propped up on two factors: the ability to supply economic resources (in a semi-rentier state, like Egypt), and the demands of the global paradigm that seems satisfied with superficial democracies in exchange for stability in the region.<sup>88</sup> Authoritarian rulers in the Middle East, they argue, as consequently accountable on these two counts, must remain vigilant to properly manage the distribution of their resources or risk losing their legitimacy. Many leaders try and escape pressures for democratization by adopting liberalization policies instead. Liberalization includes reformist measures to allow free expression of opinion, to place limits on the arbitrary exercise of power, and to permit political association. This modicum of progress still falls short of full democratization that Norton describes as including freely contested elections, popular participation in political life, and “the unchaining of the masses.”<sup>89</sup>

This thesis has illustrated the centrality and efficacy of civil society groups. As post-revolution Egypt advances towards democracy, civil society’s inclusion is integral to its success and longevity. As Zubaida explains, the state “has colonized, controlled, and

<sup>88</sup> Albrecht and Schlumberger, 4.

<sup>89</sup> A.R. Norton, "The Future of Civil Society in the Middle East." *Middle East Journal*. 47.2 (1993): 207.

penetrated society and crippled the forces of social autonomy. To reverse this process, it is not enough to hold elections and license political parties: democracy must be based on autonomous and voluntary institutions and associations.”<sup>90</sup> For Ali Reza Abootalebi, genuine democratization is dependent upon the breadth of resource distribution, such as social welfare policies and reforms, among groups within society and between society and its state. He argues that the success or failure of democratic processes of government in developing countries is a function of the degree of redistribution of socioeconomic and resources in the society.<sup>91</sup> He argues that democracy is more than just a political system; to be truly democratic, society requires the rise of new social, economic, and political groups who are capable of challenging the state. However, realizing such a change is difficult when these resources are in the hands of a few loyalists to the regime. Not only is redistribution required to give more Egyptians a greater share of their country, rulers who are aware of their mission to their polity is imperative. Until officials are ready to share their exaggerated piece of the pie, true democracy will remain stalled.

How can democracy, opportunity, and choice emerge from a system that hardly valued the contributions of society? According to Langohr, “opposition parties would need to become the key locus of democratization efforts for democratization to be successful because advocacy nongovernmental organizations, even at their strongest, are not equipped to carry out successful campaigns for democratization.”<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, this is not likely anytime soon in Egypt. Regrettably, despite Mubarak’s persona as a nationalist and lover of Egypt, his obsession with protecting himself led to a profound

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<sup>90</sup> Norton, 207.

<sup>91</sup> Ali Reza Abootalebi. “Islam and Democracy: State-Society Relations in Developing Countries, 1980-1994.” *Comparative Studies in Democratization*. Ed. Andrew Appleton. New York: Garland, 2000. 213.

<sup>92</sup> Langohr, 182.

decay in Egypt. As such, civil society groups and opposition parties continue to assert themselves and occupy a new space in a country where their agendas were taken for granted,

Unfortunately, the uncertain political situation, factored in with the neglected economic situation leaves some longing for the old days. Howard Wiarda warns of this fragile situation, “if democracy is to flourish beyond the mere formal level, free unfettered associability, genuine social and political pluralism, and civil society must also be encouraged, enhanced, and nurtured. If we are wise, that transition can be managed smoothly; if we are not, it can produce upheaval, instability, fragmentation, and a likely return to authoritarianism.”<sup>93</sup> The road thus far has been challenging. As Nabiha Ben Said, an unemployed seamstress in Tunisia lamented, “My wish? That Tunisia would stop and go back to the way we lived before. Life has gotten more expensive, too expensive in Tunisia. The population can’t handle freedom. It’s true. I swear to God. Look what freedom has done, where it’s taken us.”<sup>94</sup> This is a reflection of the same challenge that faces Egypt – how to achieve a much needed balance between the state and society and to offer economic relief to the masses. A Gallup poll from July 2013 revealed that only 14 per cent of Egyptians believe their country is better off than it was before Mubarak resigned. An overwhelming 80 per cent say it is worse off. Furthermore, most say the economy has gotten worse - seventy-one per cent say private-sector job

<sup>93</sup> Howard J. Wiarda. *Civil Society: The American Model and Third World Development*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2003. 4.

<sup>94</sup> *Three Years After Revolution, Tunisia Struggles with Democracy*. PBS Newshour Extra. 25 Nov. 2013. Web. 09 Dec. 2013.

opportunities have deteriorated and 68 per cent echo these views with respect to public-sector jobs.<sup>95</sup>

These are urgent, yet regrettably long-term, issues that Egypt must confront when considering its democratic future. Egyptian civil society must remain involved in the process, stay vocal, but also be patient with the course that lies ahead.

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<sup>95</sup> Younis, Mohamed. "Egyptians See Life Worse Now Than Before Mubarak's Fall." Gallup World. August 16, 2013. Web accessed 12/18/2013. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164015/egyptians-life-worse-mubarak-fall.aspx>

## Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that the recent Egyptian “revolution” has a logical foundation in the history of civil society in Egypt. Despite relentless efforts by authoritarian leaders to suppress its strength, civil society continued to see the value and urgency in finding ways to express their needs, desires, and demands despite government crackdowns. This fervor for organization, whether it was labor, youth, religious groups, or a union of all these entities, helped fuel the 2011 protests that spread across Egypt. Without this drive and determination, the crowds could have easily been dissipated by the government’s reaction. Instead, they were strong in their convictions that they could bring about the change they had longed for during 30 years of stagnation. The subtitle of Wael Ghonim’s 2013 book, *Revolution 2.0*, truly captures the role civil society played in 2011: the power of the people is greater than the people in power.

As made clear in this thesis, one cannot look at civil society in isolation. The politics of the government in power plays a significant role in its formation. As we have seen in this case of Egypt, authoritarian regimes sought to preserve power and remove any threats, yet this only served to further embolden civil society actors as they found ways to circumvent the laws, or, defiantly acted against the laws aimed at restricting association and expression. The role of civil society in revolution is also important to understand. While revolutions are defined as mass demonstrations against a government, its success lies in the movement’s resilience and unity. Egypt’s strong track record of civil society groups, joined by a common displeasure with the Mubarak regime, was fundamental to the movement’s speed and success.

Moving forward, of course, it is imperative that Egyptians maintain this momentum as they chart a path towards more open government and democracy. Consolidating different conceptions of the state will be a challenge. Nevertheless, the events leading up to and including 2011, have awakened a more vocal and demanding Egyptian population who understand their stake in Egypt's future path and their ability to successfully influence it.

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