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# ***Egypt's Political Actors Post-2011 Revolution: Incomplete Struggle for Democracy***

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## **Abstract**

Considering historical developments, this article discusses the conditions that have impeded Egypt's political actors to lead a democratic transition following the 2011 revolution. In this context, I argue that the failure of Egypt's major political actors to effect a democratic transition post-2011 revolution is largely due to the obstruction of Egypt's actors before the revolution. This argument is based on a historical assessment of Egypt's political actors' development and engagement in opposition activities over two periods: post-1952 military coup and post-2011 revolution. The article suggests that a democratic transition in post-revolution countries like Egypt, which did not achieve a decisive victory over authoritarianism, requires strong pro-democracy actors to face anti-democracy actors and lead a democratization process.

## **Keywords**

Egypt's 2011 revolution; 2013 military coup; Political actors; Political opposition; Democratic transition

## **Introduction**

In the wake of Egypt's January 25th, 2011 revolution (25J), which had brought an end to president Mubarak's 30 years of authoritarian rule, Egypt witnessed a democratic awakening with respect to the freedom of speech, press, assembly and elections. These democratic gains did not last long, where a military coup, occurring in July 3, 2013 (officially called a revolution), has produced a much more authoritarian regime. This dramatic transformation — from the revolution to the coup — raises an important question regarding the reasons for the inability of the revolution to effect a long-lasting democratic change.

One of the most important aspects of this inability is the failure of Egypt's pro-revolution actors to consolidate power and lead the political opposition, following Mubarak's ouster, and thus the setback of democratic transition opportunities. The failure of these political actors in

the last seven years cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the strength of such actors in the past. In this context, this article raises the question: How were the efforts of Egypt's recent political actors to bring about a democratic transition post-2011 revolution affected by the official obstruction of political actors post-1952 military coup? In answering this question, I discuss the development of Egyptian political actors and the way they engaged in opposition activities over the past decades, leading to the 2011 revolution and its outcomes.

More clearly, following a chronological approach, I describe Egypt's political actors and opposition activities across two time periods: (1) the emergence of authoritarianism following the 1952 military coup, and (2) the eruption of the 2011 revolution and its aftermath. The reason for linking pre-and post-revolution periods in this article is to identify how recent political actors have been affected by previous regimes' policies directed against political actors and opposition activities. In this article I argue that undermining political actors after 1952 contributed to the failure of post-2011 political actors to effect a democratic transformation. In order to validate this argument, a historical assessment of pre- and post- revolution opposition activities is used, following four key guidelines:

1. identifying chronologically the main opposition activities taking place in Egypt based on major relevant studies;
2. characterizing major political actors that came to affect Egyptian opposition activities;
3. assessing political actors' effectiveness and the democratic progress they could achieve; and
4. extracting evidence that supports the article's argument based on political actors' strengths and achievements before and after the revolution.

This article is structured in four sections, including this introduction. Section two discusses how Egypt's major political actors were undermined, from the time of the 1952 military coup to the 2011 revolution. In section three, I explain how new political actors emerged and collided with the old actors post-2011 revolution. In the final section, I conclude with a summary of the main points related to the argument of this article.

### **Political Actors Under the 1952 Authoritarianism: From Naguib to Mubarak**

The story of the current Egyptian political regime originates in the middle of the last century, when a group of military officers who called themselves the *Free Officers* overthrew King Farouk (1936–1952) on July 23rd, 1952 and eradicated the monarchy. Egypt was declared a republic in 1953, and General Mohammed Naguib, who had led the coup, was inaugurated as its first president (Kassem, 2004: 12–13). This fundamental change would have long-standing

consequences for Egypt's political power, which would remain in the possession of the military.

One of the early major outcomes of the 1952 coup (officially called a revolution) was the conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Evacuation in 1954, under which British troops departed the country (by 1956) after more than 70 years of occupation, leaving behind a small number of staff in the Suez Canal region (Tignor, 2011: 260). This departure was exploited for the glorification of the Free Officers, and the day of the military coup (July 23rd) became a national day of celebration. Furthermore, soon after the coup, contentions occurred between Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser (a prominent figure among the Free Officers) regarding the method of governance, which led to Naguib's disposal and house arrest in 1954 (Abdel Ghafar, 2017: 51). Consequently, Nasser was able to secure control over the country, and he increased this control after his formal election as president<sup>1</sup> in 1956 (Baker, 1978: 33).

In the first four years after the military takeover, several destructive consequences were inflicted on Egyptian politics, from which Egypt has not fully recovered. The most notable of these relate to four areas that would come to negatively affect Egypt's political actors over the long term: public freedoms, political parties, press freedom, and judiciary independence. First, public freedoms significantly deteriorated because the authorities had the right (under martial law) to detain people without recourse to the judiciary (Alsayed, 2002: 224). Second, political parties were dissolved<sup>2</sup> in 1953 and replaced by a single-party system under the name of the *Liberation Rally*, which was replaced by the *National Union* in 1956; the latter was subsequently replaced by the *Arab Socialist Union* in 1962. The main task of these boards was to mobilize people to support and protect the new political order and to confront former politicians (Cook, 2012: 51–52). Specifically, the latter two boards had the authority to exclude parliamentary candidates, and the parliament itself — the *Nation Council (Magles Al'uma)* — became akin to a branch of the government (Kassem, 2004: 17–18). Hence, the new authority was keen to clear the scene of any competing political force, and this policy constituted a persistent approach of governance. The absence of any organizational opposition secured the military-based rule for decades, despite its structural disadvantages. Third, press freedom significantly deteriorated, as newspapers were placed under military and civil censorship, journalists were detained and dismissed from work, and the Syndicate of Journalists was dissolved in 1954. Fourth, judiciary powers were reduced by the *Revolution Command Council (RCC)*,<sup>3</sup> judges were fired, exceptional courts were established, and the Egyptian Lawyers Syndicate was dissolved in 1954 (Alsayed, 2002: 227–232).

In the midst of these autocratic measures, a student movement erupted in 1954 against the military rule. As described by Cook (2012), the RCC confronted the movement using “a

combination of what was called the ‘University Guard’ (policemen stationed in each university department); the Ministry of Interior’s state security agents; the military police; and informants within the student body, faculty, and administrators” (p. 81). Thus, the early aftermath of the 1952 military coup marked the new authority’s vigorous efforts to assert control over political forces; this was an important sign of what was to come. As a result of the authority’s dissolution of political parties and violation of press freedom, opposition activities declined and lost their organizational context. Even the universities that witnessed demonstrations of leftist, liberal, and Islamist groups failed to survive depoliticization.

After Nasser’s (1956–1970) inauguration, public freedoms continued to significantly deteriorate. This was manifested through a variety of autocratic measures: the detention of thousands of political opponents, the nationalization of newspapers, the legal restriction of private ownership of newspapers under the Press Organizing Law of 1960, the dissolution of the board of the Judges Club in 1963 and 1969, the annulment of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary in 1969, and the firing of 189 Judges in 1969 (Alsayed, 2002: 233–242). One of the things that might be exploited by Nasser to impose such autocratic measures is the state of war the country underwent in the 1950s and 1960s<sup>4</sup>.

On the ground of the 1967 Israeli occupation of Sinai (located northeastern Egypt), workers and students demonstrated in February 1968, demanding additional freedoms and political reform (Abdalla, 2008: 149–158). In responding to these demonstrations, Nasser “positioned himself as a reformer” (Cook, 2012: 105) and provided a plan for the future (the *30 March Program*) that stressed the adoption of democratic practices (Abdalla, 2008: 143). Meanwhile, the exchange of fire between the Egyptian and Israeli militaries continued across the Suez Canal. These clashes, which Nasser called the *War of Attrition*, escalated in 1969, as Egypt aimed at inflicting losses on the Israeli military (Cook, 2012: 109). Nasser died in 1970, in the midst of this, leaving behind an occupied territory and a difficult economic situation.

Before turning to the post-Nasser stage of Egypt’s history, I will reflect on his 16-year autocratic rule on Egypt’s political actors. In order to win the post-1952 power struggle and secure his position, Nasser undertook four main procedures: (1) overthrowing Naguib and sidelining voices calling for democracy within the Free Officers; (2) eliminating political forces, including political parties (*Al-wafd*, in particular), the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and leftist groups; depoliticizing universities; and diminishing the power of labor unions; (3) strengthening the role of single-party boards; and (4) achieving socio-economic progress. These procedures not only empowered Nasser, but also enabled the military to emerge as the central political actor and major source of power. Significantly, Nasser’s policy, based on sidelining challengers and controlling political forces, would later characterize the governance

of his successors (Sadat, Mubarak, and Al-Sisi) and their methods of stabilizing power. Thus, it can be said that Nasser's suppression of civil political actors was a key factor that, in the long run, enabled the military to remain the central political actor.

Nasser was succeeded by his vice president, Anwar al-Sadat (1970–1981), who faced two main challenges in his early years in power. The first challenge was the power struggle that emerged between him and the *Nasserites*, due to his perception that they disrespected him and opposed his leadership. In what was called the *Correction Revolution* (*Thawrat Altashih*), Sadat partially ended this struggle (in his favor) by arresting more than 100 Nasserites in 1971. Those who were arrested, who were influential in the country's institutions — especially the military and police — were charged with plotting to overthrow the government (Abdel Ghafar, 2017: 84–85). In addition, Sadat released Islamists from prison and encouraged their activities in order to counter the influence of the Nasserites and leftists (Osman, 2013: 90; see also McDermott, 1988: 198–199; Abdel Ghafar, 2017: 100–101). The second challenge was the Israeli occupation of Sinai, which remained, for many years, the country's first concern and main cause of opposition. In the academic year 1972–1973, students across many universities demonstrated against Sadat's lack of decisiveness over the Sinai and called for a liberated political system (Abdalla, 2008: 176–178). In the wake of these demonstrations, the Egyptian military launched a massive attack on the east bank of the Suez Canal in October 1973, forcing Israeli forces to withdraw into Sinai. However, the Israeli military launched a rapid counter attack against the Egyptian military, achieving considerable gains. At this point, the US and the Soviet Union intervened diplomatically and imposed a truce between the warriors, which later paved the way for a final compromise (Tignor, 2011: 277). Despite the controversy over Egypt's gains from the war, the war was used to legitimize Sadat's leadership and, later, the leadership of his successor, Hosni Mubarak, who led the air force during the war. In this way, the legitimacy of the post-1952 regime, which had been strongly shaken by the 1967 defeat, was renewed.

The point that can be made here is that Sadat's power was initially challenged by the regime's inner circle, not by an organizational opposition that had previously been eliminated. This continued the tradition marked by Naguib and Nasser, who had also both been challenged by their colleagues in the RCC. Of course, the tradition would later be broken at the end of Mubarak's rule, which would be marked by a popular revolution in 2011. However, it should be noted that this challenge to Mubarak's rule occurred in the absence of strong secular political organizations, which contributed, as I argue in this article, to the failure of the revolution to achieve a democratic transition (see the next section for further discussion). Thus, the lesson

that Egypt's presidents learned after 1952 is that political power can be secured using two procedures: first, sidelining rivals within the regime; and second, restricting political actors.

In 1974, under the *October Paper* (*Warakat October*), Sadat identified a new strategy based mainly on building a strong country (Baker, 1978: 135). In contrast to Nasser, Sadat directed Egypt's foreign policy toward the Western bloc — especially the US — and adopted an economic liberalization policy (Abdel Ghafar, 2017: 88–89). For this transformation, Sadat enacted a multi-party system in 1976, establishing three political platforms (*Manaber*): the right (the *Socialist Liberal*), the left (the *National Progressive Union*), and the center (the *Arab Socialist*). In the same year, these platforms were transformed into political parties and allowed to establish newspapers (Cook, 2012: 139–141). In addition, in 1978, Sadat established and chaired the *National Democratic Party* (NDP) (Waterbury, 1983: 369–371), which would come to win the majority in all elections until it was dissolved in the wake of 25J. Finally, the *Al-wafd* party (the *Delegation*), which had held the majority before the 1952 coup, was re-established in 1978 (Tayel, 2014: 89).

Through this action, partisan life was revived after 23 years of dissolution. However, the newly established political parties — and many others to follow — remained restricted by administrative and legislative procedures that often prevented political parties from functioning in society and winning the majority in any election. The only political party that enjoyed freedom and institutional support was the ruling party (the NDP). Thus, it can be said that Sadat's initiative to allow political parties aimed at giving the regime a democratic façade by creating a restricted opposition that could not challenge the military monopoly of political power. In this sense, this step can be considered a continuation of Nasser's policy of sidelining the opposition, but using more experienced and less repressive policies.

Demonstrations returned to the forefront on January 18th and 19th, 1977, when Sadat reduced the subsidies of some commodities. These demonstrations, known as the *Bread Uprising*, were fueled by massive participation from students, workers, and leftists (Baker, 1978: 165). Because the police failed to control the situation, military forces were deployed in the streets on January 20th to control the demonstrations, even after Sadat rescinded his decision (Cook, 2012: 142–143). The Bread Uprising ultimately left approximately 79 dead, 1,000 injured, and 1,250 jailed. (Baker, 1978: 165). Relative to previous demonstrations, the Bread Uprising was characterized by two significant features: it forced the president to cancel his decision and it took a leftist form, both because leftist slogans were raised and because labor and leftist groups participated in force.

In addition to facing strong economic opposition, Sadat also faced political opposition due to his rapprochement with Israel. This rapprochement began in 1977, when Sadat visited

Jerusalem to initiate peace talks with the Israelis (Tignor, 2011: 277). On the basis of these talks, an agreement for a *Framework for Peace in the Middle East* was signed at Camp David in 1978 by both sides, followed by the *1979 Peace Treaty*. This treaty ended Israel's occupation of Sinai and guaranteed Israel the freedom to navigate in the Suez Canal, the Strait of Tiran, and the Gulf of Aqaba (Cook, 2012: 150). In an attempt to contain the opposition against the treaty, Sadat waged a massive crackdown in September 1981, detaining more than 1,500 figures from different fields, and banned all opposition newspapers (Waterbury, 1983: 363). In the wake of these actions, Sadat was assassinated by Islamist militants in a military parade held in October 1981 (Tignor, 2011: 280).

In general, Sadat's reign saw the obvious activity of political actors who had suffered in the massive crackdown during Nasser's rule. Islamist actors enjoyed the largest share of freedom in society and were used by Sadat to counter the influence of leftists and the Nasserites. The honeymoon period between Sadat and the Islamists saw the latter active in society and less inclined to oppose Sadat — that is, until he started a rapprochement with Israel. In the context of this article's argument, it is important to emphasize that Sadat's policy did not enable the emergence of strong secular political opposition, and his policy was also followed by his successor.

Turning to Mubarak's tenure (1981–2011), Mubarak began his rule by releasing many of the September 1981 political detainees and engaging in a reconciliation policy with political actors (McDermott, 1988: 198; Tayel, 2014: 78). However, in general, he undermined Sadat's liberalization measures by proclaiming an uninterrupted state of emergency, repeatedly arresting MB members, and imposing more restrictions on the press (Tignor, 2011: 286).

During the first two decades of Mubarak's rule, there was political stagnation, in terms of the lack of opposition and voices calling for democracy. However, two significant events challenged Mubarak in that period. First, in 1986, Central Security units (anti-riot forces) rebelled against an uncertain decision to extend their service from three to four years and reduce their salaries. The rebellion was suppressed by military forces following bloody clashes that left 107 killed and 719 wounded. In addition, thousands of Central Security members were arrested, and 21,000 were expelled from service. Surprisingly, the rebellion was condemned by the major liberal (*Al-wafd*) and leftist (*Al-tagammu*) parties, which were supposed to support the legal rights of the rebels in seeking better working conditions (al-Sahari, 2006). Second, between 1992 and 1997, Egypt witnessed a wave of terrorist attacks carried out by the Islamic Jihad Group<sup>5</sup> on politicians, writers, and foreign tourists, which left approximately 1,300 killed. In response, Mubarak declared a war against extremism, under which Islamic Jihad Group and MB members were detained and sentenced to long terms in prison (Cook, 2012: 166–167).



In the 2000s, political opposition gradually expanded, creating consequent waves of political dynamism during which pro-democracy voices rose significantly after decades of political stagnation (Shehata, 2011). In the early years of that decade, many external issues-based demonstrations were organized, especially by students, such as those supporting the Palestinian Second Intifada and opposing the US war on Iraq. Such opposition activities were crystallized in what was called the *Cairo Conference*, which was held in late 2002 against US and Israeli activity in the Middle East (Browsers, 2009: 111–112).

The rise of this external issues-based opposition drove an increasing number of movements, beginning in early 2004, focusing on Egypt's political reform. The formation of these movements outside the umbrella of the law can be considered a direct result of the failure of any political party (since 1976) to achieve democratic progress. As described by Tignor (2011), the movements focused on several issues, such as the lack of power devolution, the expansion of the police state, and Mubarak's intention to transfer power to his son (Gamal). In addition, they flourished — according to Hanafi (2007: 288–289) — for two reasons: internal anger, which created a space for opposition voices; and US pressure on Middle Eastern countries to engage in political reform.

One of the most important political movements that shaped the opposition against Mubarak in the last decade was the *Egyptian Movement for Change*, known as *Kifaya*, which was established in July 2004. Kifaya, which included members from different ideological orientations — leftist, liberal, and Islamist — demanded no extension for Mubarak beyond 2005 and no transfer of power to his son, generating an unprecedented political dynamism (Browsers, 2009: 112). Nevertheless, Kifaya's role began to decline after it failed to stop Mubarak's monopoly of authority when he was elected for a fifth term in September 2005 (Nasrawy & Younis, 2007: 67).

In addition to Kifaya and other movements' opposition activities, the MB, which intensified its presence in the country's institutions under Mubarak (Tayel, 2014: 83), organized demonstrations in 2005 in many Egyptian cities, demanding political reform. This was considered a transformation in its strategy toward Mubarak, which had previously been based on reconciliation. Furthermore, the Egyptian Judges' Club also put forth reformative demands. The club organized, for example, sit-ins and large demonstrations in 2005, demanding the establishment of a full judicial supervision of elections (Browsers, 2009).

In what was seen as a response to growing opposition and foreign pressure, in 2005, Mubarak asked parliament to amend Article 76 of the 1971 constitution, in order to allow people to elect the president<sup>6</sup> directly from multiple candidates. However, this amendment, according to Abdel Hafiz (2005: 55–56), practically prevented independent candidates from

running, as the conditions were difficult to fulfill. Under the amendment, the first multi-candidate presidential election was conducted in September 2005, with ten candidates. The result was a landslide victory in favor of Mubarak. Although the election was described by Mady (2008: 73–74) as unfree, unfair, and ineffective, it expanded political dynamism in Egypt and opened a space for the flow of democratic ideas in society. In the wake of this election, a parliamentary election, which many saw as minimally free (e.g., Shehata, 2007), was conducted in late 2005, resulting in an MB majority. In addition, in 2006–2007, further constitutional amendments were made to 34 articles, negatively affecting, according to Hamzawy (2007: 58–61), the integrity of the electoral system, the independence of the judiciary, and personal freedoms. Thus, these later amendments marked the end of the political dynamism that Egypt had witnessed between 2004 and 2007, from which Mubarak emerged victorious in his struggle with the new political movements and the MB.

Following this wave of political opposition, a socio-economic-based opposition was born outside any stable organizational entity, including political parties, labor unions, the MB, and new political movements (Alagaty, 2014: 241–243). This new form of opposition started with a labor strike organized in the textile industry town, Al-mahala, in September 2006 (Shehata, 2012: 112). However, it quickly escalated, with the overall number of activities reaching 202 in 2005, 266 in 2006, 614 in 2007, 609 in 2008, and more than 650 in 2009 (Alagaty, 2014: 241). The most notable example of the opposition was the general strike on April 6th, 2008, with a large number of people either staying at home or participating in labor demonstrations in Al-mahala. These demonstrations entailed confrontations with police forces, leaving at least 50 injured and hundreds arrested (Shehata, 2012:114–115). In conjunction with this general strike, a new political movement, known as the *April 6 Youth Movement*, was established by a group of youth who knew each other through Facebook. The main goal of this movement, which did not adopt a specific ideology, was to change the political regime; they organized several demonstrations in this regard (April 6 Youth Movement, 2011).

The political opposition took a new turn when the liberal figure Mohammed Al-Baradei (a former secretary general of the International Atomic Energy Agency) established the National Association for Change in 2010, demanding political reform (Cook, 2012). The association, which called for free elections, launched a petition and a nationwide paper- and web-based signature campaign that collected hundreds of thousands of signatures (Ghonim, 2012: 44–45). The momentum that surrounded this movement started to decline as the 2010 parliamentary election approached, as the election was heavily manipulated in favor of the NDP, which ultimately won 97% of the seats (Shehata, 2011: 29).

Taken together, the three abovementioned movements (Kifaya, the April 6 Youth Movement, and the National Association for Change) created remarkable political dynamism in Egyptian society. The emergence of such movements, which were not based on formal organizations, marked the failure of official political parties to compete with the NDP and to put pressure on Sadat and Mubarak for political reform. The failure of these parties — of which there were 24 at the end of Mubarak’s rule — was normal in light of the restrictions imposed on them under Sadat and Mubarak. Therefore, it was also normal that serious political reform movements emerged outside of formal political entities. However, the lack of a strong organizational body to guide these movements, along with the security pursuits of their activities, reduced their effectiveness in society. Hence, it is important, in the context of this article’s argument, to clarify that Mubarak worked to undermine both new political movements and political parties, and he managed to considerably empty the political space from any strong secular organizational opposition.

### **Political Actors Post Mubarak’s Ouster: Pro- and Anti- Revolution Conflict**

A closer look at the end of Mubarak’s rule, nearly 60 years after the Free Officers’ pledges of integrity, democratization, and prosperity, reveals fundamental insufficiency in various fields. This insufficiency generated an unprecedented political and economic opposition at the end of Mubarak’s rule, which made the country ripe for a drastic transformation. In this atmosphere, and under the momentum gained from the Tunisian revolution, a Facebook page titled *We Are All Khaled Said*<sup>7</sup> (Kullena Khaled Said) called for a revolution through an event named *January 25: Revolution Against Torture, Poverty, Corruption, and Unemployment* (Ghonim, 2012). In response to this call, mass demonstrations against Mubarak erupted across the country on January 25th, 2011, under the slogan “The People Demand the Fall of the Regime.” Significantly, the revolution, which had been mainly prompted by the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook group in the first days, gained momentum over time and attracted the participation of the MB, liberals, and leftists.

The government undertook several strategies, including repressive measures, to halt the revolution. Nevertheless, the number of demonstrations against Mubarak increased, ultimately leading to his resignation on February 11th, at which point he relinquished power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) (Bakr, 2012: 57). According to the Fact-Finding National Commission — authorized by the cabinet in 2011 to report the events of the revolution — at least 846 protestors were killed and 6,467 injured between January 25th and February 16th, 2011 (Fact-Finding National Commission About the 2011 Revolution, 2011: 8).

Two key points can be inferred from Mubarak's fall. First, while Mubarak had managed to eliminate organizational opposition to a large extent, he ultimately failed to stop the mass disorganized opposition. This failure occurred, although Mubarak expanded, as noted by Osman (2013: 185), *the State Security Investigations Service* (Mabaheth Amn Aldawla) authorized to deal with radical Islam and political opposition issues and *the Central Security* (Alamn Almarkazy) authorized to combat riots and protests. It is worth mentioning here that the revolution was led by youth groups and was initially rebuffed by political parties; however, these parties interacted with it later (Osman, 2012: 64). In addition, several youth groups came together during the revolution to form the *25 January Youth Coalition*. This coalition included various youth movements from liberal, leftist, and Islamist backgrounds, and it was regarded as a representation of the revolutionary youth before it dissolved itself in 2012 (al-behiri, 2012). Second, Mubarak also failed to secure his position among the inner circle of the military leadership (SCAF), which eventually abandoned and succeeded him in power. This abandonment was traced back, by many Egyptians, to the refusal of the military to concede to Mubarak's intention to relinquish power to his son.

The SCAF's transitional tenure, as described by Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds (2015: 187), was "an attempt to continue the practices of Mubarak's era," which, in turn, made protest actions an ongoing process. Early after Mubarak's overthrow, the SCAF, headed by Field Marshal Mohammed Hussien Tantawi, issued a constitutional declaration on February 13th, 2013, under which the parliament was dissolved, and the 1971 constitution was suspended, pending amendments (*Egypt's Official Gazette*, 2011: 3–4). These amendments were made, and they were then approved on 19 March through a referendum by 78% of the electorates. On the basis of these amendments, the SCAF issued another constitutional declaration that served as an interim constitution until a final constitution was approved (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2013).

The approval of these amendments caused an early division between revolution counterparts, especially the MB and the revolutionary youth (specifically, the 25 January Youth Coalition). While the MB supported the amendments, the revolutionary youth opposed them (Osman, 2012: 64). Indeed, the contention between these actors ran even deeper. On the one hand, soon after the revolution, the MB boycotted anti-SCAF demonstrations, labelling them illegitimate. On the other hand, the revolutionary youth opposed the SCAF's policies and protested in support of a civil-moderated transitional period (Martini & Taylor, 2011: 133–134).

During the SCAF's rule, the revolutionary activities did not stop. Numerous demonstrations — mainly organized by the revolutionary youth — frequently saw clashes

between protestors and security forces (military and police). Four activities stand out as particularly worthy of note. First, the *Maspero Demonstrations*: in October 2011, peaceful Coptic demonstrations were organized in front of the headquarters of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (Maspero) to oppose the demolition of a Coptic church. The demonstrations were confronted by military forces using decisive force, leaving 28 dead (Della Porta, 2016: 268). Significantly, these demonstrations marked — again — the MB's tendency to align with the SCAF. This alignment, along with the military's popular affection, facilitated the military's endeavor to lead the post-Mubarak transition (Diamond, Fukuyama, Horowitz, & Plattner, 2014: 90).

The second noteworthy action was the *Mohammed Mahmoud events*: starting November 19th, 2011, strong clashes erupted between protestors and police forces on Mohammed Mahmoud street in downtown Cairo, before spreading to Tahrir Square,<sup>8</sup> particularly on November 25th. These events saw the participation of most political forces, except the MB. The police and Central Security forces used deadly force against the protestors, leaving 38 dead and more than 3,800 injured. The protests culminated in forcing the SCAF to dismiss the Essam Sharaf government and schedule a presidential election (Kassem, 2012). The third action was the so-called *cabinet events*, because protestors did not accept the prime minister (Kamal al-Ganzory), who had been nominated by the SCAF in the wake of the Mohammed Mahmoud events, they engaged in a sit-in in front of the cabinet headquarters on December 16th. This developed into clashes between protestors and military/police forces, leaving 18 dead and 1,917 injured (al-Shafeai, 2015, para. 1–2).

The fourth event was the *Port Said Stadium riot*. Following a football match between the Cairo (*Al-ahly*) and Port Said (*Al-masry*) clubs on February 1st, 2012, 72 fans were killed, and hundreds injured. This large number of victims resulted from the violent clashes that erupted when some people chased and attacked Al-ahly fans with knives, clubs, and stones (Khalifa, 2015: 103). This event was repeated against fans of the Cairo club (*Zamalek*) on February 8th, 2015. In this latter event, 22 Zamalek fans were killed in front of the Air Defense Stadium as a result of tear gas shot by police forces when the fans were trying to enter the stadium to watch a match.

These four events significantly marked the SCAF's intention to reproduce Mubarak's repressive policies against opposition groups, attempting to punish those who participated in the revolution. They also marked the organizational weakness of the revolutionary youth, despite their enormous mobilization capabilities via social network sites. This organizational weakness represented their lacking physical presence in Egyptian cities, as those of the MB and NDP, for example. Even the 25 January Youth Coalition, which was supposed to

strengthen its structure in society, dissolved itself in mid-2012, leaving the political arena to the MB and military. As such, the revolutionary youth could not, to a large extent, confront the repression or impose their approach in the transitional period. In addition, older secular political parties (e.g., the Delegation and the National Progressive Union), which had long been restricted, and new parties (e.g., the Free Egyptians and the Constitution), which lacked experience, were not able to impose themselves, particularly in election events against Islamist parties (e.g. the Freedom and Justice, and the Light).

In the context of the completion of the post-revolution constitutional frame, three elections were held. First, a People's Assembly (*Maglis Alshaab*) election<sup>9</sup> was held in late 2011/early 2012, resulting in an Islamist majority. Most notably, the MB's Freedom and Justice party (*Alhoryia wa Aladala*) won 46.3%, followed by the Salafist Light party (*Al-nour*) with 24.2%, the Delegation party (*Al-wafd*) with 7.5% (Shabaan, Tantawi & Ali, 2012: 1). Second, a Consultative Council (*Maglis Alshoura*)<sup>10</sup> election was held in early 2012, with the result of also bringing Islamist actors to the forefront. Most notably, the Freedom and Justice party won 58.3% of the seats, followed by the Light with 25%, and the Delegation with 7.7% (al-Kasem & al-Danan, 2016: 63). However, both parliamentary chambers (the People's Assembly and the Consultative Council) were later dissolved — the former by the SCAF in June 2012 (Cook, 2012: 323) and the latter by the interim president Adly Mansour in July 2013 (*Egypt's Official Gazette*, 2013a: 2). Third, the first presidential election after the revolution was held on May 23–24, 2012 in its first round, between 13 candidates; and on June 16–17 in its second round, between the two qualified candidates: Mohammed Morsi (the MB candidate) and Ahmed Shafik (Mubarak's final prime minister). The election resulted in a very narrow victory for Morsi, with 51.7% of the vote (Egypt's High Elections Committee, 2012).

The results of these three elections prove what I previously mentioned: the revolutionary youth did not have organizational roots in society that could qualify them to run in elections (Tohami, 2015). This insufficiency was manifested, for example, in the 2012 presidential election, in which at least two candidates belonging to the revolution (Khaled Ali & Hamdeen Sabahi) lost in the first round. The revolutionary youth's lack of organizational capabilities was normal for such a new actor, and the failure of the older political parties was also normal, given their decades-long restriction. Thus, the ground was prepared for the other two major actors (the MB and the military) to lead the political scene in Egypt.

Morsi was inaugurated on June 30th, 2012, and early on, he collided with two institutions: the military and the judiciary. First, in countering the political role of the military, he sacked the defense minister, Mohammed Hussien Tantawi, and the chief of staff, Sami Annan. In addition, he cancelled the constitutional declaration of June 17th, 2012, which had

granted the military a central political role (Brownlee et al., 2015: 120–121). At the time, these procedures were seen as a victory of the MB over the military, but this victory would soon turn sour. Second, in facing the judiciary, Morsi issued a constitutional declaration on November 22nd to limit the influence of the attorney general and the Supreme Constitutional Court. Morsi's opponents opposed this procedure and formed the National Salvation Front, which included liberal, leftist, and nationalist political parties and movements. The front demanded that Morsi rescind the declaration and they participated in massive demonstrations against it (Della Porta, 2016: 334–345).

The most notable demonstrations that erupted against the declaration were organized in front of the presidential palace on December 4th. These demonstrations also opposed a draft of a final constitution that was pending popular referendum. On the next day, Morsi's supporters stormed opponents' sit-in in front of the palace, provoking clashes between both sides and leading to the death of several people and the injury of hundreds. What temporarily alleviated the conflict was the approval of the final constitution by 63.8% of voters in a referendum held on December 15th and 22nd (Khalifa, 2015: 151–154). Hence, the power struggle between the MB and secular forces (liberal and leftist) was significantly growing. From that point on, advocates of the Mubarak regime (NDP remnants and their media channels) increased the severity of this struggle and, ironically, came together with revolutionists to oppose Morsi's policies.

The opposition against Morsi took a stronger stance with the establishment of a youth political movement called *Rebel (Tamarrud)* in April, 2013. In contrast to several opposition groups that first emerged on social network sites, Tamarrud was established offline. It started a petition to withdraw confidence in Morsi and call for an early presidential election. The movement was supported by significant political forces, such as the National Salvation Front, Kifaya, and the April 6 Youth Movement. Tamarrud claimed that it collected 22 million signatures on this petition and mobilized people to demonstrate against Morsi in support of its goal (Khalifa, 2015: 165). On June 30th, 2013, massive demonstrations against Morsi erupted across the country, with the participation of revolutionists and an overwhelming presence of anti-revolution actors (e.g. NDP remnants supported by country's institutions). The demonstrations received the support of the military, which overthrew and detained Morsi on July 3rd (Brownlee et al., 2015: 124–125). Morsi's disposal was based on a statement delivered by the defense minister Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, whose power had also been provisionally relinquished to the Chief of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, until a new president was elected (*Egypt's Official Gazette*, 2013b: 3).

The reactions of Morsi's supporters to his ouster were swift. Many vigorous demonstrations were organized in opposition to the military's intervention, seeking to reinstate Morsi. The most notable opposition activities were three demonstrations organized in front of the Republican Guard Club, al-menasa, and Ramsees, respectively, as well as two major sit-ins at Rabea al-adweya and Nahdat Misr squares. These actions were faced with massive repression and detention, especially in the early months following Morsi's overthrow, which left, according to Human Rights Watch (2014, p. 532), more than 1,300 dead and 3,500 arrested, among MB supporters. This countering of the protests following the military coup left the democratic gains of 25J, as described by al-Arian (2014: 123), "very much in doubt."

After Morsi's ouster, three elections were held, with very meaningful results. First, the 2014 constitutional referendum: since the July 3rd statement imposed a temporary suspension of the 2012 constitution until some of its articles were amended (*Egypt's Official Gazette*, 2013b: 3–4), a committee was formed to make the required amendments. These amendments, which were presented for referendum on January 14–15, 2014, were approved by 98.1% of the electorate, with a participation rate of only 38.6% (Egypt's High Elections Committee, 2014).

Second, the 2014 presidential election: nearly one year after the July 3rd military coup, a presidential election was held on May 26–28, 2014, between two candidates — the former defense minister, al-Sisi, and the leader of the Egyptian Popular Current, Sabahi. The election, which resembled the pre-revolution referendums, was won by al-Sisi with 96.9% of the valid vote and a participation rate of 47.45% eligible voters (Egypt's Presidential Election Committee, 2014). It is noteworthy that the election was held in a repressive atmosphere, prompting the MB and a significant proportion of revolutionary youth to boycott it. The response of the election committee to the low turnout was to extend the voting process for a third day and threaten to penalize the boycotters (Ninet & Tushnet, 2015: 244).

Third, the 2015 parliamentary elections: following the constitutional amendments and the presidential election, a parliamentary election held in late 2015 represented the final stage in completing the political structure that was designed after the 2013 military coup. According to Bahgat (2016), the General Intelligence Agency intervened in the election by forming an electoral list called *For the Love of Egypt*, which won all the seats that had been specified for lists. The election intervention reflected that the election turnout did not exceed 28.2%, according to Egypt's High Elections Committee (2015:19). This flagrant intervention was enough to dominate parliament, which would come to serve as an obedient puppet of the president.

Taken together, the security intervention in the elections following the 2013 military coup seemed more explicit than it had during Mubarak's reign; it resembled the interventions of the



single-party boards (the National Union and the Arab Socialist Union) in selecting parliamentary candidates during Nasser's reign. In addition, the results of these election events (very close to 100% in favor of the regime) make clear that there has been no room for opposition or free elections in Egypt.

When al-Sisi assumed power in mid-2014, the voice of secular and Islamic opposition had already been silenced. However, a few oppositional actions periodically broke this silence, and two of these are quite important. First, the death of the activist Shaimaa Alsabagh brought the revolution atmosphere to the forefront. Alsabagh was killed on January 24th, 2015, when the police interrupted a peaceful march heading to Tahrir Square to commemorate the protesters killed during 25J. The photo of her killing went viral, sparking anger on the following day, the fourth anniversary of the revolution (Malsin & Laurent, 2015). As a consequence, many protests broke out in different cities against the killing event and the regime's repression. Some clashes erupted between protesters and police forces — especially in Matariya, located northeast of Cairo — leaving 25 dead (Egyptian Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, 2015). Second, another important event that fueled people's discontent against al-Sisi was the relinquishment of two strategic Egyptian islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia. This created a sharp polarization between those who supported and opposed the ceding of the islands. Massive demonstrations were organized in Cairo against al-Sisi's decision, especially on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2016; these were officially countered with arbitrary detentions, prosecutions, and fines (Aljazeera, 2017). In order to enforce this unprecedented resolution, all national institutions — including the judiciary, parliament, universities, the police, media, and even the military — were crudely mobilized to support the president.

However, it should be noted that these two demonstrations did not see massive participation on a scale similar to the revolutionary events that occurred both during and early after the revolution. There are three main reasons for this: (1) the deep divisions between secular and Islamist opposition forces that started early after the revolution and deepened after Morsi's ouster; (2) the continuous and unprecedented repression of opponents after the 2013 military coup; and (3) the wave of terrorism<sup>11</sup> that struck the country after the military coup, which was exploited by the regime to distract people's attention from political and economic affairs.

Under the pretext of combating terrorism and political disorder, two important laws were issued imposing greater restrictions on political forces and opposition activities. First, the Protest Law, which was issued in 2013 allowing meetings and protests (gathering of more than 10 persons) after notifying the police, which was given the absolute power to cancel, forcibly break and disperse gatherings. The law also imposed arbitrary punishments for those who might violate its loose articles (Egypt's Official Gazette, 2013c). Second, the Anti-Terrorism

Law, which was issued in 2015 to establish special courts and grant additional protection to police and army forces against prosecution. The law also banned the publication of any information about terrorism that contradicted official statements (*Egypt's Official Gazette*, 2015) and thus violated the freedom of the media, placing it under increasing restrictions and subordinating it through implicit nationalization. It is worth noting that both laws remain in effect.

Under such laws and the state of emergency enacted since April 2017, the public sphere and political actors in Egypt have been largely handcuffed. Unfortunately, these conditions have led to an unprecedented number of human rights violations. According to the Human Rights Watch organization, since the 2013 military coup at least 60,000 people have been detained, hundreds have been forcibly disappeared, hundreds have received preliminary death sentences, thousands of civilians have been tried in military courts and 19 new prisons have been created (Human Rights Watch, 2017, para. 7).

The military has not only dominated the political situation in Egypt, but it has also expanded its domination over the Egyptian economy, at the expense of the private sector. This domination, associated with mismanagement and corrupt policies, has brought about rapid deterioration in the economic sector in the past few years. For example, economic indicators provided by Trading Economics (2017) show that the Egyptian currency has lost about 150% of its value, external debt has increased more than 50%, and inflation has increased more than 200%. Overall, it would not be exaggerating to say that the economic situation in the past few years has become frustrating and unbearable for a large sector of Egyptians, and this is likely to overshadow the political situation in the short term.

### **Conclusion**

The approach to understand the strength of Egypt's post-2011 revolution political actors is to identify how such actors were developed and how the political regimes dealt with them over the last decades. In this article, I observed the development of political actors over two time periods: pre- and post-2011 revolution to fully understand why pro-revolution actors have failed to consolidate power after Mubarak's ouster and to lead a democratic transition process. It turned out that Egypt's political actors underwent a systematic obstruction by consecutive autocratic regimes, which negatively affected the shape and the strength of post-2011 revolution political actors.

For the pre-revolution period, Egypt's three presidents (Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak) shared similar autocratic policies based on sidelining challengers, whether these originated from within the regime or from political forces. The monopoly of power by these presidents

(coming from the military) manifested in the adoption of a single-party system under Nasser and a restricted multi-party system under Sadat and Mubarak, aiming at and resulting in a lack of strong political parties and entities. This long-term obstruction of political parties left them, for example, unable to win a majority in any election or to establish a popular base in Egyptian cities. Such policies represented a political crisis that has continued to obstruct the democratic transition and has left the military the only strong actor over the long term.

As a result of the failure of political parties to represent the Egyptians' grievances, new informal political movements (e.g., Kifaya, the April 6 Youth Movement, and the National Association for Change) emerged between 2004 and 2010, demanding a radical political reform. These movements faced two challenges: the lack of a strong presence in society and repression practiced against them. These challenges, which also faced political parties after 1976, resulted in no influential political actor prior to 25J. Thus, before the revolution, Egypt's political actors (mainly political parties and movements) were undermined and could not develop their organizational capabilities.

However, the obstruction of political actors did not prevent the fall of Mubarak's regime due to the massive revolution in 2011, which depended mainly on the efforts of politically unaffiliated individuals and disorganized groups. Since then, the landscape of political actors in Egypt has been in flux. The inability of the revolutionary youth — who emerged as a strong but disorganized political actor after 25J — to form a strong organizational entity scattered them among various political groups. This shortcoming, associated with the revolutionary youths' lack of experience, enabled the long existing actors (the MB and the military) to take turns in power.

Even the new secular political parties (e.g., the Free Egyptians and the Constitution), which emerged after 25J, were not able to impose themselves upon society. This allowed the MB to win the first parliamentary and presidential elections held after 25J. In addition, the existence of the MB in the forefront of the Egyptian political scene after 25J facilitated the endeavors of the military to restore power in 2013, continuing its long-term monopolization of power and renewing the legitimacy of its authoritarianism. This, clearly, means that the long-standing organized actors (the military and the MB) could gain control over new political actors (revolutionary youth and political parties) which inherited the legacy of previous ruined parties and movements.

Ultimately, in the decades following the 1952 coup, the obstruction of political actors was the regime's central approach to governance, leaving the political arena free of any strong secular actor capable of leading the scene after Mubarak's overthrow. It is only the military that could achieve its goal by continuing its long-term monopolization of power and renewing

the legitimacy of its authoritarianism established after the 1952 military coup. Hence, it can be deduced that the lack of strong secular political parties or movements before the revolution obstructed the efforts toward democratic transition after 25J and would continue to shadow the power struggle in Egypt in the following years. This indicates that a democratic transition in post-revolution countries, which did not decisively defeat the old order, is largely unreachable without strong political actors able to neutralize anti-democracy actors.

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## **Notes**

1. Nasser was nominated as president and a new constitution was issued, replacing the previous provisional constitution issued in 1953. Both Nasser and the new constitution were approved by a referendum in 1956 (Bishku, 2013: 58). Under the new constitution and three subsequent and consecutive constitutions issued in 1958, 1962, and 1964, respectively, Nasser was granted very broad powers (Kassem, 2004: 17–18).
2. Prior to 1954, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was the only legally permitted organization (Tignor, 2011: 259).
3. After removing King Farouk from power in 1952, the RCC was established as a transitional authority under Naguib's leadership. After Naguib's overthrow, Nasser was appointed chairman of the RCC and prime minister (Bishku, 2013: 58).
4. Three main wars Egypt underwent in the 1950s and 1960s: (1) the 1956 Tripartite Aggression waged on Egypt by Israel, the United Kingdom and France; (2) the 1967 Israel occupation of Sinai; (3) participation in the 1960s war in Yemen in supporting Yemeni republicans against the royalists, a participation that followed the 1961 collapse of the three years old union formed between Egypt and Syria.
5. The Islamic Jihad Group was established in the 1970s, following Sadat's release of Islamist detainees to counter the challenge of the Nasserites and leftists.
6. Before adopting a multi-candidate presidential election system in 2005, Egypt used a referendum system (adopted after the 1952 coup), under which people had the right to vote for only one candidate, who was nominated by parliament.
7. Khaled Said was an Alexandrian young man who was brutally beaten to death by police forces in June 2010. A Facebook page (We Are All Khaled Said) was established by an Egyptian activist named Wael Ghonim, to commemorate Khaled's death. Several demonstrations were also organized to protest his killing, and Khaled became a symbol for the revolution.
8. Tahrir Square (Maidan AlTahrir) is the major square in downtown Cairo. It gained symbolic significance because it witnessed the main large gatherings of the 2011 revolution.
9. The People's Assembly is one of the two chambers of the Egyptian parliament. Its name was changed to the House of Representatives (Maglis Alnowwab) by the 2014 constitution.
10. The Consultative Council represented the second chamber of the Egyptian parliament until it was abolished by the 2014 constitution.
11. Terrorist attacks against police/military forces and Coptic churches increased after 25J. According to Al-behiri (2017), the number of attacks between February 11th, 2011 and June 29th, 2012 was 25, all centered in the northern Sinai Peninsula. This number decreased to 11 between June 30th, 2012 and July 3rd, 2013. But again, the attacks significantly increased in number to 222 between July 4th, 2013 and June 7th, 2014, reaching 1,003 between June 8th, 2014 and January 25th, 2017.

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