The Importance of Choice: Political Intermediaries and Democratization in Egypt After the Arab Spring

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EGYPT:
The Importance of Choice

Political intermediaries and democratization in Egypt after the Arab Spring
EGYPT: The Importance of Choice

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Political intermediaries and democratization in Egypt after the Arab Spring
How have Egypt’s institutions been affected by the fall of Hosni Mubarak?

- Are they largely in tact?
- Have they changed?
- What are the implications?
In Egypt, the lack of a “clear, plausible, and critical governing alternative that threatens the governing coalition with replacement”* - i.e. ‘robust’ party competition - is causing the transition from authoritarianism to flounder.

- Dominance of the FJP -
- Incoherent political opposition -
- Disillusioned, weak civil society -

*Anna Grzymala-Busse (2007)
Role of Political Parties:

- Candidate selection, interest aggregation, policy formulation
- Connect people to the regime
- Facilitate accountability

Political Parties and Dem Transitions

- “...elite continuity, party continuity, and elite and party discontinuity” (Morfino, 2002)
- Egypt: elite and party discontinuity
The Egyptian President faces a “tangible legitimacy Problem”

- Lacks an inherent legitimacy
- Revolutionary ‘luster’ has worn off post-Nasserism
- Legitimacy derived from elections and parliament

Required dominance of parliament:

- Political parties are only allowed when they do not represent “strong social forces”

Consequently, competition in Egypt takes place between the four pillars and not within parliament
Main sources of political opposition:
<> The Muslim Brotherhood (banned as a political party)
<> Popular Protests

The political party system in Egypt:
“...until 2011 consisted of a domineering, corrupt, and creaky machine and a host of desiccated and forgotten organizations” (Brown, 2012)

The “refusal” of the regime to allow for the development of political parties and many civil-society associations, explains why **Islamism** was able to become such a dominant political force (Berman, 2013)
The Muslim Brotherhood

1970s:
- Leftist and secular national forces playing a larger role in opposition
- MB in a period of rebuilding, supportive of Sadat’s intifah
- Nasser’s legacy criticized as ‘communist’, blamed for 1967 ‘setback’

1980s:
- Rise of Gama’at Islamiyya, assassination of Sadat
- Mubarak: ‘permissive repression’, toleration of ‘informal activities’
- MB take over social welfare

1990s:
- ‘Violent elimination’, ‘indiscriminate state repression’
- Why?
- Gama’at Islamiyya severely weakened
- MB left as ‘only significant trend’ of political Islam

2000s:
- ‘Practically hegemonic’ control of student unions, professional syndicates
- Widespread support within urban poor, labor
Civil Society: other sources?

**Trade unions: Mubarak Era, ETUF**
- Since 1957 has functioned as an “arm of the state”
- Elections rigged
- Oppositional elements banned
- No direct elections for executive committees
- Historically – limited to no right to strike

**Now:**

“Professional associations and labor unions are operating at cross-purposes, with some against the Morsi government, and others in support”

(Brown, 2012)
The Islamist ‘head start’ Elections
Elections in Egypt 2011-12

First lower-house elections:
November-January 2011/12

Carter Center: “a broadly accurate expression of the will of the voters”

(results later rendered void by SCC)

**Turnout: 54% overall

First upper-house elections:
January-March 2012

“...characterized by a general lack of interest”

**Turnout: 14% (first-round), 7% (runoff)
### Elections: Party Differentiation – Non-Islamic Opposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent Descriptions</th>
<th>Vague Slogans</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“...weak... in a disarray... [and] poorly organized...”</td>
<td>‘democracy,’ ‘human rights,’ ‘people’s empowerment,’ ‘social justice,’ and ‘national unity’...</td>
<td>Many new parties, “...virtually unknown throughout the campaign process...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“...started too late in the process”</td>
<td>Lack of ‘concrete’ economic and political platforms</td>
<td>OVERALL: Failure to resonate with voters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elections: campaign tactics

Low substantive differentiation → Vague, revolutionary campaign platforms

Clientelistic, particularistic and locally-oriented behavior → FJP cooptation of tribes Particularistic benefits

High candidacy costs → Major disparities in level of organization and resources
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Brotherhood/FJP</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Tessler, Jamal, Robbins, 2012: “…which party best represents... personal political, economic, and social views”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Benstead, Lust, et al., 2013: “…recognize the leader of the FJP…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FJP</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Benstead, Lust, et al., 2013: “…clarity of political platforms”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Islamist</td>
<td>5-10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The constitution ➔ Presidential empowerment, coopt military, disempowers courts

The court ➔ Pushes against the executive/legislature

The military ➔ Strikes a ‘neutral’ stance

Back to the ‘pillars’

Back to the streets...
CONCLUSIONS
Finding Choice – the ‘silent majority’

38% of Egyptians* feel as though “their country is worse off than before the revolution”

The ‘silent majority’
- High voter apathy
- FJP vote bloc - 10 million people
- Incoherent opposition – party of ‘no’

*(Benstead, Lust, et al., 2013)
Works Cited:


