ISLAMIC DEMOCRACY FROM EGYPT'S ARAB SPRING

by

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A Capstone Project submitted to the Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers-The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES

under the direction of

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Dr. Michael Rossi, signed December 31, 2012

Camden, New Jersey

January 2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE CAPSTONE

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The collective action by Arabs throughout North Africa, the Middle East, and

Southwest Asia has been a source of both joy and anxiety for the western world. When

Tunisians took to the streets on December 18, 2010 they could not have imagined how

the chain of events they had just begun would change the world forever. Arab Spring has

granted new found freedoms to citizens in that part of the world. Many of these nations

have seen new, democratically elected governments take hold. As the West rejoices for

freedom's victories, we cannot help but wonder how the long term changes in each

country will impact us. With this new hope comes a sense of uncertainty. Is a

democratically elected government compatible with the cultures and traditions of the

Muslim world? Is there concern that a democratically elected head of state will resort to

the type of strongman politics which results in a blended, or hybrid regime that has

become common to the region? Will the wide-spread animosity that many Arabs feel

against the United States carry over into politics? My aim with this project is to apply

these questions and others to a single nation, as I examine the Egyptian Arab Spring

movement. My goal is to research what made this revolt successful in removing such an

established head of state, as President Hosni Mubarak was. To accomplish this, I will

research Egypt's recent political history, but also the history of the Muslim Brotherhood

itself to become familiar with their goals and methods. It is my belief that a stable

democracy that is representative of the majority of Egyptian people is here to stay.

We have recently seen some historical changes sweeping across the Muslim world. The collective action by Arabs throughout North Africa, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia has been a source of both joy and anxiety for the western world. When Tunisians took to the streets on December 18, 2010 they could not have imagined how the chain of events they had just begun would change the world forever. Arab Spring has granted new found freedoms to citizens in that part of the world. Many of these nations have seen new, democratically elected governments take hold. As the West rejoices for freedom's victories, we cannot help but wonder how the long term changes in each country will impact us. Is a democratically elected government compatible with the cultures and traditions of the Muslim world? Is there concern that a democratically elected head of state will resort to the type of strongman politics which results in a blended, or hybrid regime that has become common to the region? Will the wide-spread animosity that many Arabs feel against the United States carry over into politics? My aim with this project is to apply these questions and others to a single nation, as I examine the Egyptian Arab Spring movement. My goal is to research what made this revolt successful in removing such an established head of state, as President Hosni Mubarak was. I will also delve into the Muslim Brotherhood, and their representative Mohamed Morsi who assumed office as the President of Egypt which had been left vacant by Mubarak's departure. I am fascinated by the role that the Muslim Brotherhood, as an organization will play in influencing President Morsi's decisions. To this end, I will examine whether or not I believe the Muslim Brotherhood's belief in a system which blends religion and politics can survive in Egypt. To accomplish this, I will research not

only Egypt's recent political history, but also the history of the Muslim Brotherhood itself to become familiar with their goals and methods. Ultimately, my hope for this project is to take away the unknown of Egypt's future. I hope to reveal that a peaceful and stable democracy is Egypt is here to stay, but I am not yet comfortable making such a claim without first knowing more about those who will lead the nation.

Birth of the Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna as a grassroots socio-religious organization.[1] Al-Banna saw the need to have a literate society, so that the masses could read the Quran. Thus began the Muslim Brotherhood's program to teach the illiterate. But they didn't stop there. The Muslim Brotherhood also began setting up medical clinics and launching small charitable endeavors for the poor and down-trodden. The group's ultimate goal was to infuse the Quran, and the teachings of the Prophet Mohamed as the sole reference points for organizing one's life.[2] Muslim individuals, families, and communities were educated on the delivery of justice via Sharia, or Islamic Law. As one can imagine, this kind of indoctrination can result in extremist views and actions when set against the backdrop of an Egyptian monarchy that was supported by British influence. With some latching onto the cause of ending British colonialism, and others vowing to expel the Egyptian monarchy, there was plenty of animosity to attract followers. British colonialism had resulted in external influences

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[1] Rubin, "White-Washing Islamists" 2012
[2] Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak* 2010

outweighing domestic enterprise. This is documented by the Egyptian state's seizure of

land that had belonged to local farmers in the villages of Armant, Maris, Rayyaniyya, and

Ruzayqat for generations. The state then rented the land back to the previous owners to

live on and farm. As uneasy as this agreement was, people were able to stay in their

homes and thus avoided making conflict. This changed around the year 1900 when the

Egyptian monarchy sold the land out from under the peasants to an Anglo-French

company which would run take the profits of the sugarcane fields out of Egypt.[3] The

seeds of animosity toward both British influence and the Egyptian royal family would

facilitate, and possibly even encourage groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. The fervor

of the religious message and its wide-spread acceptance throughout the Middle East has

kept the Muslim Brotherhood from devolving into a fringe element. Through all of the

social and political changes Egypt has endured, the religious aspect of the Muslim

Brotherhood's message has been consistent. By providing badly needed services, these

spiritual messages were welcomed and accepted by many of the poor and lower class

families that benefitted from the Muslim Brotherhood's various projects.[4] It has been an

influential force in Egyptian society for almost a century.

Extremist Ties

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[3] Abul-Magd, "Rebellion in the Time of Cholera: Failed Empire, Unfinished Nation in Egypt, 1840-1920."
2010
[4] Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak*. 2010

The Muslim Brotherhood first ventured into the arena of what may be considered terrorism in the 1930s when it began to resist British colonial pursuits in Egypt. The group even went so far as to assassinate Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmoud an-Nukrashi Pasha in 1948. General violence to include murders, bombings, and kidnappings were also attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood in the time leading up to the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 which forced King Farouk from the throne. Even after the successful revolt against the British backed monarchy of Egypt, the organization continued its violent ways, targeting the new government of the republic. The Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed in 1954 after falling out of favor with the secular military government that had been established in Egypt. This was a result of numerous incidents, but the main infraction was the failed attempt by Mohammed Abdel Latif, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, to assassinate Gamal Abdel Nasser. [5] The Muslim Brotherhood's involvement in the successful assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was rumored, but never substantiated. While another Islamic group, Egyptian Islamic Jihad carried out the attack, the government response was to group all potential religious groups with extremist ties as hostile. For the Muslim Brotherhood, this meant being outlawed until the Mubarak regime fell.

With many of its members imprisoned, the Muslim Brotherhood officially renounced the use of violence in the 1980s and began to channel more of its resources towards making political gains. [6] The group achieved electoral success in 2005 when its candidates won 88 parliamentary seats. This was particularly noteworthy because the

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[5] Stephens, "Nasser" 1981
[6] Esposito, *Islam and Politics* 1998

candidates ran as unaffiliated or independent candidates because the Muslim Brotherhood was officially barred from participating in elections. This election victory made the Muslim Brotherhood the largest opposition bloc in the People's Assembly. This enraged the Mubarak regime, which then targeted the Muslim Brotherhood's financial channels and again imprisoned its members.[7] These actions severely restricted the organization's ability to implement its political agenda. Although it had been knocked to the ropes by the Mubarak regime, the Muslim Brotherhood never wavered in its commitment to political engagement because its leaders knew that any future attempt at governing would have to be seen as legitimate by the population. Even with government making it difficult on Muslim Brotherhood politicians, the group maintained outstanding attendance and remained the largest opposition in parliament to Mubarak until his overthrow in 2011.[8]

One of the chief complaints about the Muslim Brotherhood's ability disassociate from violent ways revolves around the group's relationship with Hamas. Although a more recent group, Hamas is known in West better than the Muslim Brotherhood, and not all of the press is positive. Hamas has been designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States since October, 1997 when the State Department began making their annual list.[9] About the same time that the Muslim Brotherhood was renouncing the use of violence to achieve political goals, Hamas splintered from the

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[7] Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak*. 2010
[8] Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak*. 2010
[9] United States. Department of State. Bureau of Counterterrorism. 2012

group in 1987 and took the Islamic cause to the occupied territories of Israel.[10] Hamas also attracted many followers in neighboring Arab countries. This affiliation is perhaps one of the most widely referenced ties that the Muslim Brotherhood has had to recent terrorism. Ironically, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood have travelled similar paths, albeit starting and reaching their present versions at different points in time. Each initially endorsed violence as a means to enact change and gain notoriety for their specific cause, before renouncing it as their groups gained legitimacy in their quests to govern. There is some debate as to whether or not Hamas has legitimately stopped endorsing violence or it has just stopped doing so publicly, while still allowing and enabling terrorism. The same questions about the Muslim Brotherhood are unfounded, as they have never once appeared on the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.[11] Both organizations have since won democratically legitimate elections and hold power in Egypt and Gaza.

Ousting Mubarak and Filling the Void

Few believed as crowds began to gather in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011, to mark a Day of Anger that the downfall of the regime had begun. Protests come, and protests go as citizens voice their displeasure with the status quo. Usually one of two events will follow: the movement loses momentum and dies out on its own, or the regime cracks down and "motivates" people to return to their homes as was the case in

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[10] Wilkinson, "Timeline: The Evolution of Hamas" 2008
[11] United States. Department of State. Bureau of Counterterrorism. 2012

Tiananmen Square in 1989[12] and the Iranian election protests in 2009.[13] With such

uncertainty surrounding the protests, and already on the regime's radar, the Muslim

Brotherhood was careful not to appear as the driving force behind the gatherings. Not

only did this tactic keep the ire of the Mubarak's government off of the group, but it also

lent legitimacy to the movement as a product of the people and not the manipulation of a

power hungry organization. The Muslim Brotherhood later suggested that their tardiness

was not based on fear of government retribution, but a desire to not misrepresent the

event as "an Islamic revolution."[14] This restraint played well into the organization's

favor as it suggested to moderate Egyptians that the Muslim Brotherhood was not

comprised solely of religious fanatics. In fact, the group displayed a remarkable

willingness to cooperate early on by coordinating with, and reassuring, secular opposition

parties. By aligning itself for brief time with 2005 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Mohamed

ElBaradei's unified movement, they were viewed as part of a larger coalition of

Egyptians all endorsing a similar change.

Several factors favored the Muslim Brotherhood as support for ElBaradei's

National Association for Change began to fizzle. Even before the power vacuum was in

place, it was obvious that one was approaching. The groups that had banded together to

support ousting Mubarak, now saw opportunities to position themselves to reap the

benefits. As Egypt's oldest, largest, and best established opposition group already in

parliament, it was easy to show that the Muslim Brotherhood was organized to assume

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[12] Lee, "The Charisma of Power and the Military Sublime in Tiananmen Square" 2011
[13] Petrou, "We Have Finally Learned to Fight" 2009
[14] Jaunzems and Brooks, "Community Organizing in Egypt During and After the Revolution" 2011

control. Egypt would not be another Algeria, with no viable options to lead following the

withdrawal the French.[15] The military was seen as a trusted conduit between the old

regime and Egypt's future. The military leadership had wisely refused to open fire on the

crowds or openly participate in the violence that made Mubarak, a military man himself,

into such a liability.[16] This made any candidate that the military would support a

formidable opponent. In actuality, the military exercised a lackadaisical effort in

restoring order and security following the collapse of the regime. The Egyptian Army

seemed to have a belief that everyone would simply go home when they felt they had

"won" the uprising. This did not occur, and the military was criticized for its inability, or

unwillingness to take action that would restore order. Another strike against the Egyptian

military was the transitional government, which resulted in the passage of constitutional

amendments that limited the powers of the presidency. At the same time that the

Supreme Council of the Armed Forces was altering the Constitution, they agreed to

suspend it pending further changes. Rather than the future President having much of the

same authority that previous presidents had, much of the policy making control was to

remain with the Supreme Council. This led the Muslim Brotherhood to form the

Freedom and Justice Party, and gave them a platform to run on which opposed any

semblance of a permanent military takeover.

Ahmed Shafik had emerged as the run-off opponent to the Muslim Brotherhood's

path to the presidency, and he was not without faults. Shafik had been appointed Prime

Minister just weeks before Mubarak's resignation. Shafik was a former Air Force

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[15] Hadjadj, "Algeria: A Future Hijacked by Corruption" 2007
[16] McCarthy, "Egypt's Military and the Arab Spring" 2012

officer, as was Mubarak, so the similarities made many Egyptians wary that he would simply be a holdover of the old regime and continue many of the practices that they had been protesting against in the first place.[17] One group that gave Shafik their unfettered support was Egypt's Coptic Christians, who feared what life would be like for them without the protection of living in a secular society. Despite his flaws, Mubarak had ensured that Coptic Christians were afforded protection and rights that many other Muslim countries do not provide. It is difficult to get an exact count of Coptic Christians in Egypt because many do not openly declare that they are non-Muslim for fear of attack or retribution.[18] The election resulted in a victory for Mohamed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate by a margin of just under one million votes. It is believed that the election was only this close because of Coptic Christian unity against the Muslim Brotherhood.

For their part, the Coptic Christians do have legitimate fears as they see what may result in a hardline Islamic theocracy. With a new Constitution being drafted by primarily by the Muslim Brotherhood, their very religion may make them criminals overnight. The Coptic Christians are terrified of becoming to Egypt what the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is to Pakistan.[19] Because of their belief in subsequent prophets, the Ahmadiyya are relentlessly persecuted in Pakistan. They have been declared to be a "non-Muslim" religion by the state, and as such, are not afforded many of the protections that come with being Muslim. As non-Muslims, they are prohibited from making the

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[17] McCarthy, "Egypt's Military and the Arab Spring" 2012
[18] El Naggar, *Will Egypt's Arab Spring Turn into an Arab Nightmare?* 2012
[19] Marvine, "Pakistani Persecution Charged" 1987

Hajj to Saudi Arabia.[20] When religious extremists preach their broad hatred of infidels,

the Ahmadiyya are included in this rhetoric. The fear of church destruction and targeted

killings with no legal protection is what fears them. Acknowledging these concerns, I

feel they are overblown. I had my doubts about the sincerity of the Muslim Brotherhood

during the time leading up to the presidential election, but my concerns have been eased

by the actions to date of President Morsi. At worst, I am confident that the Coptic

Christians will maintain their current status and will face no more acts of terror than

under the previous regime.

The lack of unity in the country around a common vision of a modern, secular nation was

apparent by the competitiveness of the presidential election. The runoff featured polar

opposites in Morsi and Shafik, yet like the recent Presidential election of the United

States, very little separated the candidates in the popular vote. Morsi recognized that a

divided society did not bode well for the nation's stability or future. Moving forward,

Morsi will have to walk a fine line between his religious commitment to establishing

sharia law and his assertions of civic rights for all Egyptians.[21]

Mohamed Morsi

While the world hopes that the newly found willingness of the Muslim

Brotherhood to participate in the democratic process continues, the real question remains

"Who is Mohamed Morsi?" As the newly elected president, he is the principal figure that

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[20] Khan, Amjad Mahmood. "Persecution of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan: An Analysis Under International Law and International Relations" 2003
[21] Jaunzems and Brooks, "Community Organizing in Egypt During and After the Revolution" 2011

is setting the tone for how Egypt will be run moving forward. Morsi is a man with diversified experiences. He spent years in the United States as a graduate student at the University of Southern California, and later as an engineering professor at California State University. As a result of his time in America, two of Morsi's five children are United States citizens by birth. In 1985 he returned to Egypt and remained in academics, becoming a department head at Zagazig University.[22] His ties to the United States made the news that he would be the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate for president somewhat calming to the West. Still there were some who viewed his relationship to the organization, along with the organization's relationship to its own past as indefensible. This is short-sighted and not conducive to the world we live in today. Considering the transitions of groups like the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Hamas from militant entities to governing bodies, I see no reason why the Muslim Brotherhood is incapable of making the same fundamental change.

Morsi has worked quickly to soothe the concerns of a divided nation. Upon winning the election, he promptly resigned his positions with both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party, stating that his allegiance was to the Egyptian people as opposed to political affiliations.[23] Morsi has promised to appoint a woman and a Christian as vice-presidents, breaking from a hardline Islamic stance.[24] Egypt's previous Constitution allowed the president to appoint multiple vice presidents,

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[22] Swift, "Introducing…Mohamed Morsi" 2012
[23] Swift, "Introducing…Mohamed Morsi" 2012
[24] Jaunzems and Brooks, "Community Organizing in Egypt During and After the Revolution" 2011

though the position has not been filled by more than one person at a time since 1972.

Any new Constitution is expected to offer the same versatility to the President.

Hope for Secularism

Even amid Morsi's promises of a moderate government, the degree to which the

new regime would embrace a secular model was unknown. These concerns were not

completely unfounded, as the Muslim Brotherhood had indeed reneged on two

commitments. The first was a broken promise during the power vacuum that the group

would abstain from committing a candidate for the presidency. The second was a

promise to endorse power sharing in the Constitutional drafting body, which was

primarily Islamists.[25] More worrisome still is whether Morsi will follow through with

plans to include a woman and a Christian at high levels of the government, or if he will

keep a monopoly of political power for the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite the promise to

appoint a woman and a Christian as vice presidents, he has so far only appointed one

person: fellow Muslim Brotherhood member Mahmoud Mekki.[26]

Morsi is in the quite unenviable position of trying to unify some very extreme

positions in regards to the Salafists on one side and secular moderates on the other.

Given the level of extremism on the part of the Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood is seen

as quite moderate in comparison.[27] In fact, real battle lines were clearly drawn prior to

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[25] Ghitis, "Egypt Ponders Meaning of Morsi's Soft Coup" 2012
[26] Ghitis, "Egypt Ponders Meaning of Morsi's Soft Coup" 2012
[27] Nolen, "After the Arab Spring, What's next for the new Egypt?" 2012

the election between the military establishment and the Islamists, with secular Egyptians stuck somewhere in the middle. It was indeed a victory for secularism that Morsi was the chosen standard-bearer of the Muslim Brotherhood. He appealed to all but the most extreme Salafists on the Islamist side, yet appeared to be secular enough and clearly "not old guard" for moderates to stomach. As the election drew closer, it became clear that the military leadership was adamant about securing special powers for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to preserve their privileged position and influence.[28]

Actions upon Taking Office

As Morsi's administration is in its infancy, we can still look at some of his actions already on the record as a guide to gauge the future. One of the first actions he took upon assuming the presidency was to return the powers of the office that had been stripped away by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces during their interim rule.[29] There were questions regarding the legitimacy of the council's motivation in making this decree so when Morsi, for all intents and purposes, effectively vetoed it there was very little in the way of public outcry. The Constitution had been suspended by the council as a new, and supposedly less authoritative document was drafted. With the old rights and responsibilities of the president restored to his office, Morsi proceeded to solidify his authority by dismissing the Chairman and Deputy of the Council of the Armed Forces,

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[28] McCarthy, "Egypt's Military and the Arab Spring" 2012
[29] Rabou, "Egypt After Elections: Towards the Second Republic?" 2012

and numerous commanding officers in the field.[30] This move was justified by the

increased suspicion among Egyptians as to the motives of the council. Should the

council decide to use the military to remove the President from office, the command to

execute a military coup would less likely be heeded. A June 2012 Gallup Poll also

indicated that while Egyptians trusted the military in the interim to run the government,

that it would be a "bad thing" if the military remained in politics after the presidential

election.[31]

Initial Unrest

Perhaps the ease with which these first two incidents were accepted by the public

gave Morsi the wrong impression of his status in the nation. When he made a decree

halting court challenges to his Presidential decisions, the people returned to Tahrir Square

with protests and violence in response to the order. Perhaps exacerbating the situation

were remarks made by Mohamed ElBaradei accusing Morsi of establishing himself as the

"new pharaoh" of Egypt with the unchecked powers of the decree. This criticism was

unfair, and served only to enrage the masses. Morsi has repeatedly stated that this

arrangement is necessary and temporary, until a new Constitution is ratified in the

coming weeks. He has reaffirmed that a new Constitution will not be acceptable without

the provisions for such challenges clearly spelled out. He believes that without a

Constitution in place, there is presently no mechanism to legally challenge Presidential

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[30]Al Jazeera, "Crowds in Cairo Praise Morsi's Army Overhaul" 2012
[31] Younis, "Majority of Egyptians Want Military Out of Politics." 2011

declarations. Opponents have accused the Muslim Brotherhood of being behind the

hardline stance as a means to expedite a Constitution that would make their sharia based

agenda the law of the land.[32] However, parts of the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine do

reflect a noted majority of public opinion in Egyptian society. A Gallup poll conducted

in June 2008 revealed that 70% of Egyptian men and 62% of women believe that

legislation should be based solely on Sharia law.[33] With such overwhelming majority

support, can the Muslim Brotherhood really be viewed as "forcing" a non-representative

Constitution on the people of Egypt? In fact the contrary argument can reasonably be

made. The finished Constitution has not, at the time of this project, been released yet. It

is however, expected in the coming days with a vote by the people soon to follow.

I referenced earlier that Morsi had appointed Mahmoud Mekki as Vice President.

This move coincided with his dismissal of the military leaders. I argue that Mekki's

appointment should be viewed as yet another step toward the middle. While Mekki is a

member of the Muslim Brotherhood, he is a lawyer and former judge. He is an

outspoken advocate of a court system independent of the executive branch of

government. Given his record opposing government intervention in the courts, I am

certain he would be opposed to any attempt at circumventing the legal system.

Western Policy of Intervention

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[32] Awad and Saleh, "Opposition Cries Foul as Egypt Constitution Vote Proceeds" 2012
[33] Esposito and Mogahed, "Do Muslims Want Democracy and Theocracy?" 2008

In general, the West has felt that it has a responsibility to ensure emerging governments succeed. This feeling may be a result of colonization, or dominating the world's political landscape for so long. Right, wrong, or indifferent, I genuinely feel that this practice of intervention comes from an honest place. By saying it comes from an honest place, I mean to say that it is not selfish, or simply for the sake of manipulating. I really believe that the West's intentions are to help establish a stable government that will be good for the region and cordial with its neighbors. These good intentions do not excuse international meddling. We as Western citizens and governments fear what we do not understand. That is to say that we try to influence our allies in other parts of the world to follow the same models of government as we employ because they have worked for us for a couple hundred years.[34] We want to see more Chilean examples of successful democratic transitions, and fewer failures like Russia. Augusto Pinochet oversaw Chile's removal from Socialist rule, while the military run government junta eased the nation into a capitalist economy. Following democratic elections in which Pinochet was ousted, he peacefully transitioned out of office.[35] Russia on the other hand was rife with corruption following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Boris Yeltsin was ill prepared to handle the changes that his country was experiencing. It seemed to be too much change, too soon for the former communist nation. Foreign investors had more influence than politicians, which led to the high reports of corruption and bribery. When Yeltsin stepped down Vladimir Putin assumed office and seemed to put Russia back in stern, Russian hands. To stabilize the fragile nation, Putin returned to many of the socialist policies that the

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[34] Linz and Stepan: *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation,* 1996
[35] Navia, Patricio1,2. "Living in Actually Existing Democracies." 2010

people had been used to. The idea of one size fits all government is short-sighted to say

the least. There are different influences and values that we as outsiders simply cannot

comprehend. In response, there are many in the West who actively attempt to block

Islamist parties from participating in government.[36] What these Western governments

fail to realize is that by doing this we paint any alternative to the Islamists as puppets to

the West, whether or not they are.[37] We drive people away from viable candidates and

towards Islamists because Arab citizens know that despite their flaws, groups like Hamas

and the Muslim Brotherhood will not bow down the United States and other Western

powers. At the same time, some would ignore a democratically elected government even

though we have supported military dictators. Our message is often one of hypocrisy, and

this needs to change in order to achieve the global community that we desire.

I bring the Western bias against groups like the Muslim Brotherhood up to make

the point about press coverage. I wonder if we would care that a group with a religious

calling has won the presidency of Egypt if major news outlets were not painting it as a

victory for terrorism. If Germany's Christian parties began winning a controlling share

of the Bundestag, would we be hearing the same warnings? Leading up to the Egyptian

election the buzz revolved around the Muslim Brotherhood possibly wielding power.[38]

Articles and editorials were written that detailed every heinous act the group had ever

been responsible for. Also referenced were actions that off-shoot groups such as Hamas

had taken responsibility for. Still, *we* did not get a vote in the matter because the

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[36] O'Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse* 2005
[37] Stork, *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*, 1997
[38] LaFranchi, "Ally No Longer? Obama Weighs Options in Post-Arab Spring Egypt." 2012

government of Egypt was not elected to represent *us* or *our* interests. Thus we are

presented with a decision that Egyptians made for themselves. There is no viable

alternative to recognizing the legitimacy of this government. One cannot delegitimize

Islamist parties because they have espoused an Islamic interpretation of politics. The

West's focus on democratic transformation often ventures to the point of regime change

in Arab countries as opposed to cooperation. This attitude and behavior has provoked

negative responses by Arabs throughout the Muslim world toward Western intervention.

In fact, the West should be encouraged by how the Arab Spring has been handled

in some of the countries thus far. Libya and Tunisia have removed repressive

authoritarians with governments that are more representative of their respective societies.

Yes, Tunisia in particular elected a party with an Islamist agenda, but they are moderate

in the scope of Islamic movements. The West should encourage new partnerships and

commit to aid these new regimes in establishing a foothold. We constantly hear of the

desire for a stable and secure Middle East. I contend that easiest way to make the region

stable is to have stable, unthreatened governments. The goal is to make democracy the

only option for these countries. We cannot accomplish this by undermining the very

results we have been pushing for.

For its part, Egypt is the most important of the Arab Spring states. It is by far the

most influential of the nations we have seen successfully overthrow their governments.

Egypt pulls weight in the region and is strategically located due to its relationship with

Israel and the Suez Canal. Because Morsi's new government is initially being pulled in

so many directions, it may have a slower transition that the other nations. I am fine with

this as it means that Morsi is taking into account all or most of the concerns being brought to his attention. Egypt today probably does not resemble the vision many protestors had in their minds as they packed Tahrir Square.[39]

I am reminded by phrase in negotiations that states: if no one leaves the negotiating table too happy, that means it was probably a fair deal and not one-sided. The mere fact that no one seems to be overjoyed by Morsi's decisions means that no group is being favored. For our part, the West has to understand that the separation of politics and religion that we exercise is not realistic in the Muslim world. In fact, if we force the decision upon Muslim societies, they will choose Islam above all. At the same time, Egyptians must understand that the types of changes being implemented generally take generations to complete. Egypt's long term outlook is uncertain, although I find it to be no less fragile than any other infant government would be.

If I am wrong and the Muslim Brotherhood, through the deception of Morsi, we will see the group begin to erase the practices of democracy. I believe that the main worry of this group being is power is to influence the new Constitution to the point that the Muslim Brotherhood becomes the only party in town, so to speak. Right now there are viable and legitimate options for the Egyptian people. Barring a permanent takeover of the Muslim Brotherhood itself by Islamic extremists, I foresee the government being able to peacefully transition when the time comes. I am reminded that the current system of government employed by the United States is a product of domestic rebellion as well. In both revolutions, the root cause was a belief that the established authority order was

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[39] Jaunzems and Brooks, "Community Organizing in Egypt During and After the Revolution" 2011

dominated by corrupt heads that exploited power and resources to serve their own greedy interests. While the United States rebelled against an external oppressor, the Egyptians saw themselves being dominated by a domestic threat. Still, I find it interesting that the West feels it can choose certain rebellions to support and others to suppress.

As long as Morsi can keep from falling into the same traps as Nasser, I truly believe he will be no threat to the neighboring countries of the region. Nasser had grand visions of a Pan-Arab state that was, in effect, the kind of colonial experiment that he had risen up against.[40] Nasser was a focal point, but his authority across the region was not as great as his grand image might lead one to believe. In retrospect, his greatest achievement was creating an informal coalition against European imperialism, which he did by aiding satellite forces that operated independently of Egypt. Nasser quickly learned that tearing down regimes was one thing, but building a new order was a tougher task altogether.

Look to the Future

It is clear that any stable outcome of the ongoing political process in Egypt will have to emerge from Morsi's continued willingness to be moderate on sensitive issues. Meanwhile, I believe the ongoing constitutional process will lead to a reinforcement of the powers of Parliament, possibly even to the detriment of Morsi's Presidential powers. This would show that his decree of "temporary" extreme powers were just that:

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[40] Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak*. 2010

temporary. With Morsi conceding powers previously held by the President to Parliament and the courts, he could then turn back to the Army's brass and chip away at their interests with relative immunity should such a need arise. It is noteworthy that Morsi seems to be fully aware that he cannot govern without the support of the more secular parties, and those with economic interests. When he follows through on his pledge to appoint a woman and a Christian as Vice Presidents, he will have an even stronger record of unity and secularism to tout.

Breaking Assumptions

A 2008 Gallup Poll revealed that in Egypt, 70% said religion was the most important aspect of their identity. Percentage wise, this was more than any other country in the world, to include Islamic hardliners Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. While the extreme Wahhabi sect that has infiltrated the Arab world from Saudi Arabia has a lot to do with this, the real credit may very well fall on the Egypt's past which caused the need for social charitable groups like the Muslim Brotherhood with religious messages. But these numbers do not change the way the West views the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead of seeing a charitable organization whose doctrine mirrors the values of nation, we see a group that used to endorse terror. As a veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, this was a difficult realization for me to personally come to until I examined the West's options: Deal with them as any other democratically elected government or treat them as an illegitimate occupier. The second option becomes difficult when one looks at other

nations run by similar organizations. Most important to me, is the fact that the people have spoken.

As Americans, our society has been clamoring for free and fair elections in the Arab world for decades. When they occur, we as outsiders cannot ignore the results because *that's not who we wanted to win*. Islamic groups are a part of the world dynamic, and that is not going to change. In the case of Egypt, they have legitimacy not through conquering a weaker nation by force, but through the ballot box. Actually they assumed power through a domestic uprising that the outside world had nothing to do with. The Muslim Brotherhood did not renounce violence yesterday. It has been decades since they endorsed such behavior. Their recent actions and declarations are in deep contrast with their original goals and militancy. Even after the moderate choice of Mohamed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood's past is difficult to shake for some. The international community does have fears over what will result from an empowered Muslim Brotherhood. I acknowledge that these concerns are not completely unfounded. However, as soon as Yasser Arafat was given an audience at the United Nations, the idea that militant groups could not transition to statesmen went out the window.

The unpredictability and sporadic nature of Arab politics is ironically one of its most constant features.[41] Such constants promote fears that today's revolution will usher in a period of prolonged turmoil. One of the emerging threats to stability in the region is the new cyber threat which has resulted in entities having influence in a nation without

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[41] Esposito, *Islam and Politics* 1998

actually needing to have a presence there.[42] In addition to the online abilities of entities

to infiltrate, there is difficulty of establishing a distinction between home-grown and

foreign state-supported revolt in Arab states.[43]

The balance of power between the all-powerful state and submissive society is

shifting. Power is really returning to the masses, as demonstrators across the region enact

real, tangible change in their governments. As civilian participation in politics grows,

more and more people are getting involved. Prior to the Arab Spring demonstrations,

involvement in the political process was restricted to those with some sort of "in"

whether through party affiliation or military service. With the addition of new and

seemingly "average citizens" to the political arena, the fear of living in a police state

ebbs. Many new entrants into politics were once the targets of such actions, so many

campaign on ending the practice and implementation of secret police all together. The

number of politically significant groups within each state will increase, causing more

options for the public to choose from. More options, in my opinion, will lead to more

secularism and moderation. Groups that are perceived as extreme or power-hungry will

suffer by not appealing to the wider population. Extremist movements will still garner

funding because their base can appeal to people across political borders, however their

ability to effect change will wane as moderate movements demonstrate their ability to

represent the majority's interests. Of course, all of this is contingent on Morsi and his

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[42] Naghibi, "Diasporic Disclosures: Social Networking, Neda, and the 2009 Iranian Presidential Elections. 2011

[43] Lappin, *Virtual Caliphate: Exposing the Islamist State on the Internet* 2011

Muslim Brotherhood cohorts weathering the initial rough tide, which I do believe will take place.

Islam and Politics

The question remains as to whether or not Islamic politics are compatible with democratic ideals. As simple as this sounds, there is actually far more to the question the small word-count would suggest. To get the answer one must ask themselves what exactly are democratic ideals? Of course, this is a loaded question which will result in a different answer for each person it is posed to. If we take the stance that a democratically elected government should be representative of the people it represents, then it is absolutely possible for Islam and democracy to coexist within the same borders. The result will likely be something that we in the West are not familiar with, but that makes it no less representative of the people.

The areas which cannot be ignored are: how the nation treats its people, how the nation treats its neighbors, how the nation protects its minorities, and how the nation conducts itself in the international community. I believe that these areas outweigh all others, to include economic practice and markets. I contend that an Islamic democracy is capable of existing while behaving fairly in each of these areas. In the case of Egypt, President Morsi seems to be positioning his government to be truly representative of Egypt as a whole. Even after assuming office his speeches and actions have been about unifying the nation.

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