

The background of the entire page is a photograph of an Egyptian flag (red, white, and black horizontal stripes with a golden eagle in the center) waving against a blue sky with white clouds. In the lower right, a person's arm is raised, holding a flagpole. The image has a distressed, scratched texture.

EGYPT Revolution INTERRUPTED?

We may have
to rise up again,
but millions of Egyptians
won't be ignored.

The future
belongs to us.

STUDY GUIDE

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Outreach/Study Guide


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EGYPT is by far the largest Arab country—with a population of 85 million—and traditionally the center of Arab media, scholarship, and popular culture. Despite limited oil or other natural resources, the country has had one of the stronger economies in the region due to tolls from the Suez Canal, tourism, and the largest industrial capacity in the Arab world.

Egypt's identity as a nation is perhaps the oldest in the world, going back at least 4000 years. The country remained largely under foreign rule for nearly two millennia, however, achieving formal independence from Great Britain in 1922 after a protracted nonviolent civil resistance campaign. The British maintained heavy influence on their former possession, however, until a coup by left-leaning nationalist army officers in 1952 brought down the monarchy and expelled the British.

Under the leadership of Gamal Abdul-Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, the government embarked on an ambitious socialist-influenced agenda which broke up the feudalistic landholding system, nationalized major industries, and developed the country's infrastructure. Nasser's regime was authoritarian and often inefficient, but increased access to education, health care, and other services by the country's poor majority. Egypt became recognized as a leader in both the Arab world and other newly-independent former colonies of the Global South, challenging Western strategic and

economic domination. While advocating non-alignment in the Cold War, Egypt developed an informal alliance with the Soviet Union. Nasser died suddenly in 1970 and was succeeded by his vice-president Anwar Sadat.

Within a few years, Sadat began dismantling Nasser's socialist initiatives by encouraging foreign investment, privatizing industries, and cutting subsidies and other services for the poor. In foreign affairs, Sadat dramatically re-oriented the country toward the West. Under the leadership of President Jimmy



Anwar El-Sadat



Gamal Abdel Nasser

Carter, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in 1978, returning the Sinai Peninsula—captured by Israel in the June 1967 war—to Egypt and establishing full diplomatic relations and security guarantees, the first Arab country to do so. The United States has sent nearly \$2 billion in military and economic assistance annually to Egypt ever since.

Sadat was assassinated in October 1981 and was succeeded by his vice-president, Hosni Mubarak, a career military officer and former air force chief. During the subsequent three decades, he and his family accumulated a vast personal fortune, with military leaders and crony capitalists similarly enriching themselves at the expense of the majority of Egyptians. Despite the shift in its ideological and geopolitical orientation since Nasser, Egypt remained autocratic. Under Mubarak, a simple gathering of five or more people without a permit was considered illegal. Peaceful pro-democracy protesters were routinely beaten and jailed. Martial law had been in effect since Sadat's assassination. Independent observers were banned from monitoring the country's routinely rigged elections, from which the largest opposition party was banned from participating, and other opposition parties were severely restricted in producing publications and other activities.



Hosni Mubarak

Amnesty International and other reputable human rights groups documented gross and systematic human rights abuses against perceived regime opponents, including torture, massive detention without due process, and extra-judicial killings. Targets of government repression included not just radical Islamists, but leftists, liberal democrats, feminists, gay men, Coptic Christians, independent-minded scholars, and human rights activists.

After thirty years under Mubarak, Egypt's left-wing opponents had largely been marginalized. On the right, the Muslim Brotherhood, a well-organized conservative Islamist movement, was able to operate a network of social services and served as the regime's most visible opposition, but remained formally banned and in no position to assert political power. Violent Islamist extremists had engaged in a series of terrorist attacks, but brutal counter-measures by the regime and popular revulsion at their tactics had largely eliminated them as a serious threat. As a result, the assumption in Western capitals was that Egypt, despite its many problems, would remain stable for the indefinite future.

An Opposition Emerges

At the turn of the new century, crushing poverty, increasing human rights abuses, rampant inflation, institutionalized corruption, a deteriorating educational system, and high unemployment spawned massive protests. Many thousands took to the streets in Cairo, Alexandria, and other major cities despite brutal police attacks on demonstrators, widespread torture of detainees, and other repressive measures.

Between 1998 and 2010, more than two million Egyptians participated in over 3300 strikes, demonstrations, and factory occupations. A 2007 sit-in by 3000 municipal workers at the finance ministry ultimately won higher salaries and the right to form an independent union. In the spring of 2010, thousands of workers staged rotating sit-ins in front of the parliament building despite efforts by police to disperse them by force. As protests grew, the government announced a freeze on further privatization and gave in on other economic demands.



There had been a dramatic growth in Egyptian civil society during the final decade of Mubarak's rule, with an increasing number of labor strikes and small, but ever-larger, demonstrations led by such youthful, secular pro-democracy groups as Kefaya (meaning "Enough!") and the April 6 Movement (named after a nationwide strike and protest on that date in 2008). Towards the end of 2010, dissatisfaction with Mubarak was driven by increasing government repression, the murder by police of a popular blogger for exposing government corruption, worsening economic conditions, blatantly rigged parliamentary elections, and the implication of security forces in a church bombing that appeared designed to stoke sectarian tensions. Some activists believed that popular sentiments against the regime were deep and widespread enough that change was indeed possible. The successful uprising in Tunisia, leading to the downfall of the Ben Ali regime on January 14, 2011, made some Egyptians believe a similar uprising might be successful in their country as well.

EGYPT TODAY



Official name Arab Republic of Egypt

Capital Cairo (population 18.77 million)

Land Desert plateau interrupted by Nile valley and delta. *Arable land:* 2.8%

Agricultural products Cotton, rice, corn, wheat, beans, fruit, vegetables, cattle, sheep, goats

Natural resources Petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, phosphates, manganese, limestone

Industries Textiles, food processing, tourism, chemicals, hydrocarbons, metals

Population 88.5 million *Urban:* 43% *Under 25 years:* 50%

Religion 90% Muslim (mostly Sunni); 10% Christian (mostly Coptic)

Language Arabic *Literacy* 73.8%, age 15 and over

GDP \$943.1 billion *Inflation* 10.1%

Unemployment 13.4% est; *Unemployment, age 15-24:* 24.8%



The Tipping Point

A demonstration was scheduled for January 25, 2011, a national holiday honoring the country's police, notoriously brutal and corrupt. Hundreds of feeder marches surged through the back alleys of Cairo growing block by block. By the time they fed into Tahrir Square, they numbered in the tens of thousands. Similar scenes unfolded throughout the country, as millions took to the streets in most of Egypt's major cities. Police responded brutally, but protesters held Cairo's Tahrir square and other key points throughout the country. Two days later, the regime shut down virtually all Internet and mobile phone service, but the crowds continued to swell. While overwhelmingly peaceful, there was some rioting, looting and vandalism. On January 28, the headquarters of the ruling National Democratic Party was burned. A full-scale revolt was in progress. The police were overwhelmed and withdrew as the army was called in to try to maintain order.

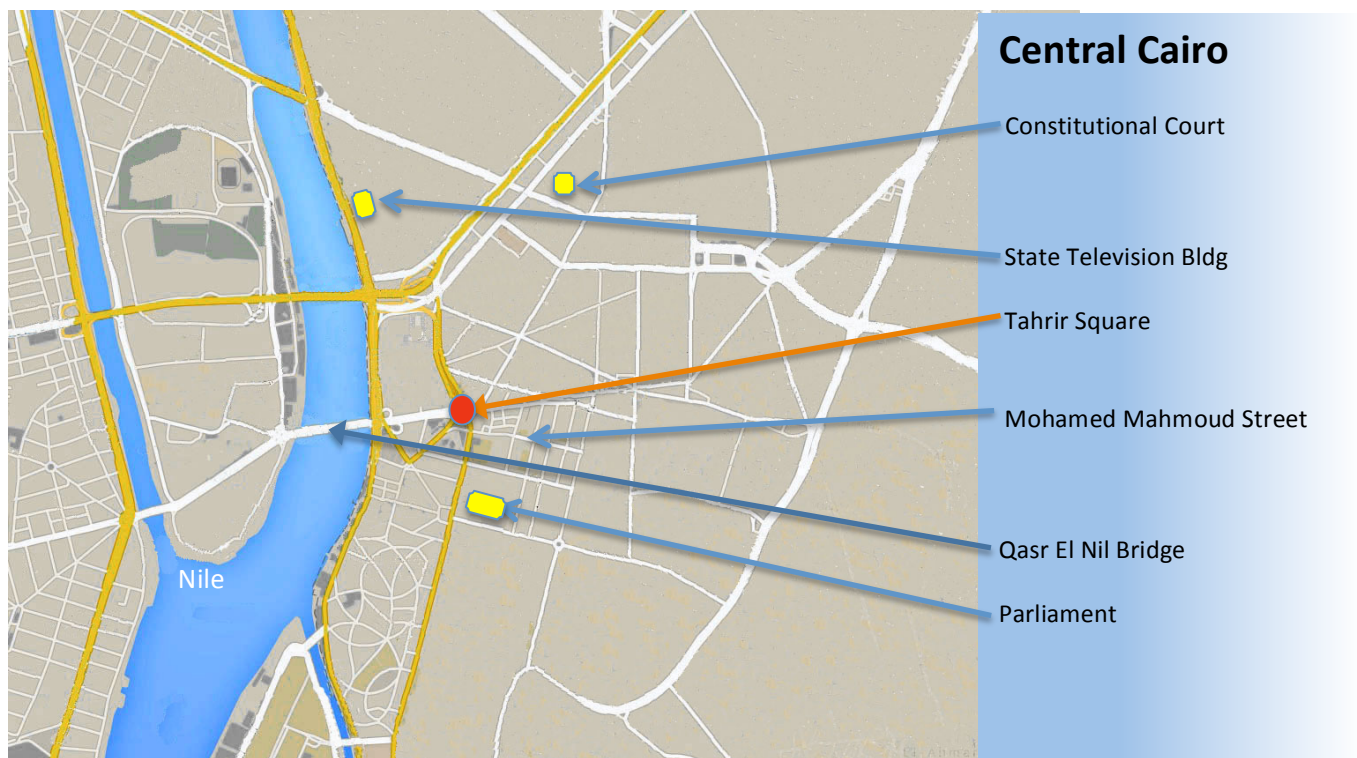


At first, the regime tried to appease the protesters with minor reforms. Mubarak appointed a vice-president and reshuffled his cabinet. Three days later, he announced he would not seek re-election, that his son would not succeed him, and he would reform the constitution. By this point, however, it appeared that nothing short of the downfall of the regime would satisfy protesters as the crowds swelled into the millions in cities and towns throughout the country, with as many as twelve million Egyptians on the streets demanding Mubarak's resignation.

In Cairo, Alexandria, and elsewhere, the Mubarak regime unleashed its thugs to attack demonstrators, journalists and others. Government snipers gunned down hundreds of largely peaceful protesters. There was a mass

release of criminals from prison and, with the police in disarray, it appeared the government was deliberately sowing enough

chaos that Egyptians would demand a strong government crackdown. By this time, with the death toll approaching a thousand, international criticism was rising—including from the United States, the Mubarak regime's most important foreign backer. Despite initial hesitation, the Obama administration began quietly pushing for the dictator to step down. Fearing that the growing uprising might not only eventually oust Mubarak but challenge the military's leading role in the country, Egyptian generals successfully forced Mubarak to resign on February 11 and formed an interim military government, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).



After Mubarak

Over the next six months, smaller protests continued in Tahrir Square and elsewhere demanding more substantive political change until an army crackdown in August 2011. A new round of pro-democracy protests in November were brutally suppressed. Despite this, increasing press freedoms and civil liberties, along with upcoming competitive parliamentary and presidential elections, gave many Egyptians hope that a genuine democracy would eventually emerge.

While the first round of presidential elections in 2012 resulted in a slight majority for more democratic and secular candidates, the top two candidates who made the runoff represented the military and the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan), considered to be the worst possible first round outcome by leaders of the pro-democracy uprising.

Mohamed Morsi, the Ikhwan candidate, won the presidency with a narrow victory in the second round of voting. While attempting to assert a degree of civilian primacy over the military, Morsi alienated millions with his conservatism and semi-autocratic style. Quietly encouraged by the military, Egyptians came into the streets once again, demanding new elections.



Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was president of Egypt 2012-2013.

In July 2013, popular anger at Morsi led Egypt's military to remove him in a coup. He had been president for only a year. A brutal crackdown followed. More than 1000 Muslim Brothers engaged in a mostly peaceful sit-in were massacred the following month. Together with the Brotherhood and other Islamists, pro-democracy forces were suppressed as well. Many of the left-leaning secular leaders of the 2011 civil insurrection against Mubarak found themselves in prison. Presidential elections in May 2014,

widely criticized as neither free nor fair, resulted in the election of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the commander who led the coup. El-Sisi has effectively prohibited protests and banned the leading pro-democracy groups, which had led the movement against Mubarak.



Banner in support of Gen. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi (left) with images of past presidents who were also military heroes --Gamal Abdel Nasser (center), and Anwar Sadat.

Opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood and the more extreme Islamists—and concerned about the negative economic impact of years of protests and political instability—most Egyptians have embraced the new authoritarianism and support the Sisi regime. However, dissent is growing, especially among a younger generation opposed to both Islamic and military autocracy. They are hungry for greater freedoms and social justice, and cognizant of the power of large-scale strategic nonviolent action in bringing down dictatorship.

Strategic Nonviolent Action

In recent years there has been a dramatic growth of the use of strategic nonviolent action against authoritarian rule worldwide. In contrast to armed struggles, these nonviolent insurrections are movements of organized popular resistance to government authority, which either consciously or by necessity, eschew the use of weapons of modern warfare. Unlike conventional political movements, nonviolent campaigns usually employ tactics outside the mainstream political processes of electioneering and lobbying. These tactics may include strikes, boycotts, mass demonstrations, the popular contestation of public space, tax refusal, destruction of symbols of government authority (such as official identification cards), refusal to obey official orders (such as curfew restrictions), and the creation of alternative institutions for political legitimacy and social organization.



Chilean pro-democracy activists campaign in the referendum which defeated Augusto Pinochet, 1988

Freedom House produced a study in 2005 which examined 67 transitions from authoritarian regimes to varying degrees of democratic governments over the past few decades. It concluded that the vast majority came about as a result of democratic civil society organizations using nonviolent action and other forms of civil resistance. Such transitions did not result from foreign invasion and only rarely came about through armed revolt or through voluntary, elite-driven reforms.¹ In another study on civil resistance of more than 300 struggles for self-determination against colonialism, military occupation, and colonial rule over the past century, Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth noted that nonviolent struggles were more than twice as likely to succeed as armed struggles.²

Nonviolent Strategy in the Middle East

Middle Eastern countries have witnessed this phenomenon even prior to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. In Iran, the tobacco strike in the 1890s and the constitutional revolution in 1906 were both cases of mass nonviolent resistance against neo-colonialism and authoritarian rule. In Egypt, the 1919 Revolution, consisting of many months of civil disobedience and strikes, eventually led to independence from Britain. Civil insurrections in Sudan in 1964 and 1985 overthrew dictatorial regimes and led to brief periods of democratic governance. In Iran, the largely unarmed insurrection against the Shah toppled the monarchy in 1979 and brought a brief hope for freedom prior to hardline Islamists consolidating their power. Iran's aborted 2009 uprising may be a harbinger of a more complete democratic revolution in the future. In Lebanon, the 2005 Cedar Revolution forced Syria to withdraw its troops and end its domination of Lebanese government.

Even prior to the wave of protests beginning in 2011, there were ongoing nonviolent popular struggles against foreign military occupation, including those by Palestinians in the West Bank, Syrian Druze in the Golan Heights, and Sahrawis in Western Sahara, as well as significant pro-democracy protests in such countries as Kuwait, Bahrain, and elsewhere. Predominantly Muslim countries outside the Middle East which have witnessed successful nonviolent uprisings have included Bangladesh (1990), Mali (1991), Indonesia (1999), Maldives (2008), and Burkina Faso (2014). While these and other struggles have been chronicled in such books as Maria Stephan's *Civilian Jihad*,³ there is little appreciation of this history in the West.

¹ Adrian Karatnycky, *How Freedom is Won: From Civil Resistance to Durable Democracy*, Washington: Freedom House, 2005

² Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* New York:

² Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)

³ Maria J. Stephan, *Civilian Jihad: Nonviolent Struggle, Democratization and Governance in the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009

Despite Western stereotypes to the contrary, Islamic countries have been at least as prone to large-scale nonviolent struggles as other societies. One of the great strengths in Islamic cultures, which make unarmed insurrections possible, is the implied social contract between a ruler and subject. Prophet Muhammad's successor, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, stated this explicitly: "Obey me as long as I obey God in my rule. If I disobey him, you will owe me no obedience." Such a pledge was reiterated by other caliphs, including Imam Ali, who said, "No obedience is allowed to any creature in his disobedience of the Creator." Indeed, most Islamic scholars have firmly supported the right of the people to depose an unjust ruler. The decision to refuse cooperation is a crucial step in building a nonviolent movement. Massive noncooperation with illegitimate authority is critical for any successful pro-democracy struggle.

A Strategic Choice

The leaders and the vast majority of participants in the Egyptian protests were not pacifists, but recognized that nonviolent methods would generate greater support from the population and greater divisions with the security forces and state apparatus than if they used violence. Although some did fight back when attacked by police and thugs, in most cases they did no more than necessary for self-defense. A remarkable degree of nonviolent discipline was maintained in these occupations of central squares and thoroughfares in Egyptian cities.

The military's decision in 2011 to remove Mubarak after eighteen days of massive protests was more a *coup de grace* than a *coup d'état*. The Army's refusal to engage in a Tiananmen Square-style massacre in Tahrir Square came not because the generals were on the protesters' side — indeed, they had long been the bedrock of Mubarak's regime — but because they could not trust their own soldiers, disproportionately from the poor and disenfranchised sectors of society, to obey orders to fire on their own people.

The Egyptian Revolution was one of the first in which the role of social media became a factor. It was a communication tool that helped expose the abuses of the regime and evade censorship prior to the uprising and during the revolt, social media enabled tactical coordination. It is important to note, however, that less than 15% of the Egyptian population had access to the internet (mostly through cafes heavily policed by the regime) and, for five key days early in the struggle, it was shut down completely. Ironically, the shutdown may have helped the movement in some cases, as a number of residents in Cairo, Alexandria, and other cities came onto the streets to see what was happening first hand since they could not learn from the internet. Indeed without cell phone service, worried parents came to the streets to look for their children, only to be swept up in the mass popular mobilization.

The United States had supplied the Egyptian military with close to \$50 billion worth of sophisticated armaments during Mubarak's nearly thirty-year rule, as well as training and other support. Yet this weaponry and training was ultimately powerless in the face of massive noncooperation by millions of largely nonviolent protesters. Even if a government has a monopoly of military force and enjoys the support of major world powers, it can be powerless if the people refuse to recognize its authority. Through general strikes, filling the streets, mass refusal to obey official orders, and other forms of nonviolent resistance, even the most autocratic regime cannot survive. Ultimately, a ruler is only as powerful as a people's willingness to obey.

The Source of Political Power

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, like the uprisings that brought down well-armed authoritarian governments such as Marcos in the Philippines, the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, Pinochet in Chile, and Milosevic in Serbia, challenge the



Members of the Otpor ('resistance') movement march against Slobodan Milosevic, in Serbia, 2000.

realist paradigm that power flows downward from the state through military force. Instead, these revolutions and the U.S. reaction appear to support more pluralistic concepts of power put forward by Hannah Arendt, and—most notably—Gene Sharp, the American theorist on strategic nonviolent action whose writings were studied extensively by some of the leading activists of Egyptian Revolution. These are not solely Western ideas. As far back as the 14th century, North African social historian Ibn Khaldun noted that a ruler is not powerful by himself, but depends ultimately on the people.

A related challenge to traditional perspectives on political power is the relative quickness with which the United States felt compelled to reverse its decades-old policy of supporting Mubarak, not out of choice as much as necessity.

Despite the fatalistic view of many Arabs that what happens on the proverbial “Arab street” would be determined by what transpired in Washington, the new reality is that Washington was forced to react to what transpired on the Arab street. While the post-Cold War world has left the United States as the one remaining superpower, it raises questions as to how significant that designation may be in terms of influencing internal events in foreign countries. There has long been a tendency for both supporters of an interventionist role for the United States on the right as well as critics of such policies on the left to exaggerate the power, for good or for ill, the United States can wield in an increasingly complex world. The United States did not have the power to save Mubarak even if the Obama administration had attempted to do so.

Indeed, throughout the greater Middle East, there has been a generational shift in the understanding of political power. There is recognition that power is no longer simply in the hands of despots, military establishments, secret police, or Western governments. If enough people withhold their support, the state no longer possesses the mechanisms of control, and even the most entrenched autocrats—despite their massive security apparatuses and the backing of the world’s sole remaining superpower— can still be brought down by ordinary unarmed citizens.

EGYPT Timeline



2010

- June Khaled Said, 27, dies after beating by police in Alexandria. A Facebook group, 'We are all Khaled Said,' attracts thousands; the Facebook page later used to mobilize for 25 January 2011 protests.
- Nov-Dec Parliamentary elections held, described as the most fraudulent in Egypt's history by Human Rights Watch. Mubarak's party wins 91%.

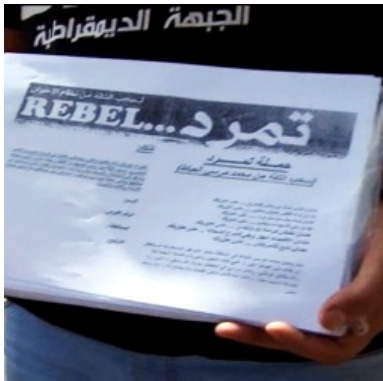
2011

- 25 Jan Police Day Protests begin in Cairo and major cities .
- 28 Jan Massive protests following Friday prayers; internet and cell phone service cut. NDP headquarters set ablaze. Police disappear.
- 31 Jan Mubarak vows he will not seek re-election.
- 8 Feb Workers join protests.
- 11 Feb Mubarak steps down; hands power to armed forces (SCAF).
- 9 Mar Army violently disperses Tahrir Square sit-In.
- 19 Mar Constitutional Referendum. SCAF schedules parliamentary elections for November.
- 9 Oct Coptic demonstrators attacked by security forces at State TV building; 28 killed.
- 18 Nov Mass protests against SCAF proposal to control constitution-writing
- 16 Nov Activists and security police clash in Mohamed Mahmoud Street, near Tahrir Square, the start of a six-day battle which kills 51. Muslim Brotherhood declines to participate.
- 28 Nov Parliamentary elections begin (ending 11 Jan. 2012). Brotherhood and Islamists win 70%



2012

- 25 Jan Massive marches and rallies on first anniversary of Police Day protests.
- 23 May Presidential election, first round. Runoff election 16-17 June.
- 2 Jun Mubarak and Interior Minister convicted for failure to stop killings in Jan. 2011.
- 15 Jun Supreme Court dissolves parliament; invalidates law governing elections; SCAF assumes legislative power.
- 24 Jun Mohamed Morsi declared winner of presidential election.
- 23 Nov Morsi declares that courts have no power to review his actions.
- 30 Nov Constituent Assembly approves draft constitution.
- 4-5 Dec Violent clashes with protesters at presidential palace, leave 8 dead.
- 15 Dec Begin voting in referendum on constitution; low turnout; approved by 56%



2013

- 25 Jan Second anniversary of revolution; massive anti-Morsi protest.
- 18 Feb Supreme Court invalidates electoral law.
- 26 Apr Tamarod launches Facebook page, begins petition drive, calls for mass protests in June.
- 30 Jun Millions protest against Morsi. Muslim Brotherhood offices attacked.
- 1 July Military issues 48 hour ultimatum to Morsi.
- 3 July SCAF deposes and arrests Morsi; announces 'roadmap' for constitution and elections.
- 26 July El Sisi asks for mandate to fight terror.
- 14 Aug Army and police violently disperse Brotherhood sit-ins. Over 900 dead.
- 25 Dec Muslim Brotherhood is declared a terrorist organization.

2014

- 15 Jan Military-sponsored Constitution passes in referendum.
- 28 May El-Sisi elected president with 96% of votes cast. Inaugurated 8 June.



Discussion Questions

1. Protests against Mubarak's rule had been increasing in the years leading up to the 2011 revolution and civil society was becoming increasingly mobilized. Why, then, did the revolution come to so many as a surprise? Why did so many commentators refer to the uprising as "spontaneous" despite the planning and organization by such groups as Kefaya and the April 6 Movement?
2. Traditionally, political scientists have measured a government's political power in terms of its control of key political institutions, ability to win elections, size of its security forces, support of wealthy business interests, and powerful international allies. The Mubarak regime had all of these, yet lost power relatively quickly when forcefully challenged by millions of ordinary Egyptians. What do largely nonviolent civil insurrections like what occurred in Egypt in 2011 teach us about the real nature of political power?
3. Why were the mostly young secular pro-democracy activists unable to successfully to maintain their leadership following the overthrow of Mubarak? What allowed the older conservative leaders of the Muslim Brother and the military to come to power rather than the more progressive elements who led the revolution?
4. As political power has shifted increasingly toward civil society and away from well-armed governments, how influential can foreign powers like the United States be in influencing events within allied countries? When a ruler has lost legitimacy in the eyes of his people, is there anything a foreign government realistically can do at that point to keep him in power?
5. Sometimes disruptive tactics by activists can mobilize the population they are trying to win over and other times they can alienate the population. In early 2011, millions felt empowered to join the protests throughout Egypt against the Mubarak regime as they did again in 2013 against Morsi's government. Subsequently, however, there has been little sympathy for pro-democracy protesters. Much of the popular support that Sisi and the military have received has come from the desire by many Egyptians to end the "instability." What accounts for this change?
6. For many years, strategic analysts in the United States and other Western countries justified their security assistance to autocratic regimes in the Middle East on the grounds that Arabs and Muslims were not really interested in democracy and that they were largely content with authoritarian rule. How would pro-democracy activists in Egypt respond to such claims?
7. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was justified by the Bush administration in part to help bring democracy to the Middle East, yet the pro-democracy forces in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries largely opposed it. Why was this the case?
8. The U.S.'s eventual decision to stop supporting Mubarak in the final days of the uprising was viewed by the Israeli government and some autocratic Arab allies in the region as a kind of betrayal, but it was welcomed by millions of ordinary people in Egypt and other Arab countries. Which group is more important to have on the side of the United States and why?
9. Were there any positive achievements of the 2011 uprising, or was it all in vain?
10. What might the pro-democracy movement have done differently that would have resulted in a more positive outcome?

Additional Resources – Books

Egypt

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