



ARAB UPRISINGS

Election Season

November 28, 2011

POMEPS BRIEFINGS **7**



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The Project on Middle East Political Science

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network which aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by the Carnegie Corporation and the Social Science Research Council. It is a co-sponsor of the Middle East Channel (<http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com>). For more information, see <http://www.pomeps.org>.

On Monday, November 28, Egyptians went to the polls for the first round of parliamentary elections. Those elections are perhaps the most momentous of a recent wave of Arab elections. Tunisia's election on October 25 went almost unbelievably well. Oman's went almost entirely unnoticed. Morocco's played their assigned role. The announcement that Yemen would hold presidential elections in February has thus far been met mostly with disbelief. Elections may be on the horizon in Kuwait, after the resignation of its government, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has announced May 4, 2012 as the date for elections in the West Bank and Gaza. It's election season in the Middle East. But are elections the right way forward for these countries in transition? Will they change anything?

The question is most urgent in Egypt. The elections had been thrown into doubt after several days of intense violence and massive demonstrations in Cairo and across the country spurred by the unprecedented violence employed by the regime's security forces. But after replacing the government and offering limited political concessions, including moving the date forward for promised presidential elections to June 2012, Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi, head of Egypt's ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), announced that the parliamentary elections would go ahead as scheduled. Voting began on November 28, and will extend for three rounds over six weeks.

The argument for Egypt's elections is simple: the only way to have a transition to democracy is to start making a transition to democracy. An elected parliament, whatever its composition, will become the first civilian institution with the ability and legitimacy to stand up to the SCAF and will almost certainly move to assert its authority. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists have always been likely to do well, given their organizational presence and their determination to actually campaign, but that would be the case no matter when the elections would be held. Elections, as Rabab el-Mahdi argues, might not be sufficient for democratic change but they are a necessary step.

But the arguments against holding such elections were also strong. They would take place in the absence of a constitution, leaving the powers and role of the new elected body unclear. Many doubt that the ruling SCAF actually intends on a real democratic transition, particularly as it cracks down on protestors and offers up constitutional principles that entrench the military's power. The election law is fiendishly complex. There continues to be massive confusion about the electoral system and procedures. And the elections stretch out over six long weeks, leaving all too much time for panic over the early results. Islamist groups and former regime members have been far more active in election campaigns than their liberal or revolutionary counterparts.

Many activist groups and liberals question the very premise of the elections. Their reservations about the elections long pre-dated the violence. Many worried about legitimating a political process under military rule, by participating in elections to a fundamentally powerless legislature. Others recognized that they would not likely win, and

feared either Islamist domination or their own political marginalization. There is a genuine tension between street politics and democratic institutions. Until last week's violence, most nevertheless seemed to have decided in favor of participating in the elections. With the week of violence, many seem to have moved in the other direction, declaring their intention to boycott, suspending election campaigns, and setting up camp in Tahrir — but in the event, most seem ultimately to have opted to vote. Their participation likely won't affect the final vote very much, given that few seemed likely to win anyway and their small numbers would likely be swamped in a large overall turnout, but it could affect the perception of the legitimacy of the resulting parliament among both the foreign media and the Egyptian political class.

Beyond Egypt, elections have been a mixed bag. Tunisia defied the skeptics and on October 25 held genuinely successful elections for its Constitutive Assembly. High turnout, limited fraud, and an impressive performance by the independent election commission gave procedural legitimacy. The Islamist Party, Ennahda, won a plurality, but not enough seats to govern alone. It quickly moved to reassure other political forces, and agreed to seat the human rights campaigner and leader of a secular political party, Moncef Marzouki, as president. Tunisia's elections confirmed the general perception of positive change and seem to have achieved what can be hoped from such transitional elections.

Elections in two monarchical regimes have been less transformative. Unprecedented elections to a consultative assembly in Oman on October 15 did offer a political, institutional response to an emerging protest movement. Participation in the elections was very low, however, and the assembly had only limited powers. In Morocco, elections on November 25 had a familiar feel to them. While the mildly Islamist Justice and Development Party won a plurality, with about one quarter of the seats, and the government claimed a respectable turnout of 45 percent, the elections did not fundamentally change the political system. They took place as part of a limited reform package initiated by the monarchy and preserving all of its core powers. Most activist groups therefore boycotted, and few perceived any serious changes. In some countries, such as Qatar, this year's events even seem to have reduced the appeal of democratic change. In Kuwait, which has long had the most contentious democratic politics in the Gulf, new elections will be part of an established political game.

The turbulence in Jordan and elsewhere suggests that maintaining the status quo without accommodating the increasingly mobilized public will not be easy. For all the discontent and doubts about these elections, the hard fact is that elections are the only way to translate popular mobilization into a democratic transition. Elections will never be enough on their own to create democracy, without constitutional guarantees of political freedoms and human rights, and in some circumstances can make things worse (as in Iraq in 2005). This briefing therefore surveys the role of elections across the region, in all their promise and peril.

*Marc Lynch, Director of POMEPS
November 28, 2011*

Egypt

Egyptian elections, necessary but not sufficient

By Rabab El Mahdi, November 16, 2011

With parliamentary elections approaching rapidly, the unwarranted excitement about Egypt's democratic transition is giving way to unfounded frustration. Both inside and outside the country, analysts and political contenders have been focusing on the difficult conditions governing the elections. But while many of these concerns are valid, it is far too soon to despair. Elections are only one part of the complex political process unfolding in Egypt since the revolution.

The complaints about the elections span a wide spectrum. Whether it is the timing of the elections providing too little time for the new parties to prepare, or the pacing of the elections (between the two houses of the parliament the elections are expected to take four months) which would allow for "engineering of results," or having a mixed electoral system (proportional representation slates and individual candidates); there is increased fear that the upcoming parliament would be dominated by Islamists and ex-National Democratic Party (NDP) members. In reality, they are the two groups with financial resources and organizational experience in running campaigns. As such, many assume that the elections will be the end of Egypt's short-lived "revolution."

Such pessimistic views tend to conflate the structural limitations of elections in general with their implementation in Egypt. For example, a concern about the power of "money" in elections is not particular to the Egyptian case, nor is the shortfalls and ability to manipulate different electoral systems. Similarly, the assumption that postponing the elections would have given new contenders a better chance for competition with the Muslim Brotherhood ignores that the latter is an 81-year-old organization, and hence time alone cannot be the crucial factor in leveling the playing field.

The pessimists overlook the panoply of opportunities associated with these elections. First, it is an opportunity

to overcome the secular-Islamist divide that has long been characterizing Egyptian politics and to delve into more nuanced discussions of pressing economic and political issues. This process seems to be already unfolding with presence of more than a few "Islamist" parties competing in the elections including Al-Wasat, the MB Freedom and Justice, Al-Asalah and Al-Nour Salafi parties to name a few. Rather than running as an "Islamist" bloc the parties are competing openly and presenting different views on the state, economics, and civil rights, ending the long-held perception of a unified Islamist alternative.

It is also clear in the electoral alliance, named "The Revolution Continues" which includes leftist and liberal parties along with the Egyptian Current Party formed by young Muslim Brotherhood defectors. Similarly, the "Democratic Alliance" bloc that is headed by the MB Justice and Freedom party includes the nationalist-Nasserite Al-Karama party and the liberal Al-Ghad party among others. Hence, the elections are creating new and more diversified dividing-lines within Egyptian politics, which is a necessary first step to transcend identity politics.

Second, the elections are forcing parties from rhetoric to action in terms of both agenda setting and campaigning. It is a golden opportunity for producing a new class of politicians and party cadres who can be the basis for Egypt's much-needed new political elite, as for formulating new political projects and alternatives. Not only is this a chance for parties to learn about campaigning, but also with the rising public interest in politics they will be forced to formulate agendas and policy directions.

Even more important is that for the first time Egyptian elections are characterized by one of the most important features of democracy: uncertainty. The large expected turnout of first-time voters from more than 50 million eligible voters as opposed to only 40 million in the last elections of 2010, and for which only a meager 30 percent

voted (according to the exaggerated official figures) is forcing everyone to compete for an unknown constituency. The absence of a pre-determined majority for the NDP is forcing all parties to shift their agendas away from simply opposing Mubarak policies to addressing voters concerns. It is also forcing all contenders and political forces, including the new post-January parties and “icons” to shift their attention away from television shows which have been their main venue and focus since the revolution, to building local constituencies and to adjusting their programs accordingly.

Finally, elections are giving citizens, parties, and civil society organizations a chance to reclaim politics and to establish new links. It is allowing civil society organizations including unions, NGOs, and social movements to filter-through and find new allies within the political contenders who can champion their agendas. Hence allowing the rise of broader alliances on issues as diverse as labor-rights, civil freedoms, socio-economic, and minority rights. It is also allowing citizens to reclaim politics in a way that was shortly lived during the uprising, but soon gave away to an

elitist monopoly of politics within a narrow public sphere of experts and ‘professional activists’ debating on TV and in closed forums.

While elections are definitely not the magic solution for Egypt’s chronic political problems both inherited from the Mubarak-regime and those that have arisen with the post-January military leadership, it is still providing an invaluable opportunity for the development of Egypt’s political sphere. Seen in isolation, elections cannot provide Egyptians with the much-needed transformation they went out for in January 2011. Luckily, elections seem to be happening in parallel with other forms of political participation, including continued strikes, protests, public-campaigns, and the rise of community and workplace organizations. The challenge for Egypt’s transformation now is to build bridges between emerging institutional politics as expressed in elections, and the extra-institutional politics of the street and the workplace.

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Egypt needs a new road map, not just elections

By Leila Hilal and Khaled Elgindy, November 25, 2011

Seven days of upheaval in Cairo’s Tahrir square and other cities across Egypt have left 41 protesters dead and more than 3,000 wounded and jeopardized long-awaited parliamentary elections just days away. In a bid to quell the growing anger on the streets, the country’s ruling military authorities have appointed a new prime minister and offered to hold presidential elections by June 2012, while insisting on moving forward with parliamentary elections scheduled to begin in three days.

The concessions are not insignificant, but as today’s massive protest in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and other Egyptian cities demonstrates, they are not enough to stem the mounting resolve of protesters to see Egypt’s military rulers go following months of SCAF mismanagement and overreach. As hundreds of thousands of Egyptians across the country gather to demand an end to military rule, there is a desperate need to reset the country’s transition, starting with a postponement of elections and an immediate handover to an independent civilian authority.

The country faces a dangerous split between the military and its supporters and an emerging opposition. Some are still persuaded by the concern that delaying elections could lead to a complete unraveling of the country's democratic prospects. There are real risks associated with postponing the elections, but the dangers of holding them under present conditions outweigh any potential damage that would be caused by a temporary delay.

Practically, of course, it will be impossible to hold elections in the midst of running battles between protesters and security forces, particularly if casualties continue to rise as they have over the past several days. The atmosphere remains extremely tense and volatile on top of a pre-existing absence of law and order. But justifications for putting off elections go well beyond the current crisis.

Even if elections were logistically feasible, there is strong reason to believe that they would increase political friction and deepen the crisis of legitimacy, thus leading to greater instability and an entrenched anti-democratic trend. This is due to several foundational flaws that have long been acknowledged by Egyptian and foreign observers alike, but overlooked out of a sense of pragmatism and an eagerness to see a democratic milestone. Key among these are the various technical problems that are likely to arise from Egypt's confusing and cumbersome electoral system, including an incoherent and incomplete election law decreed by the SCAF and amended on several occasions following political wrangling.

Equally problematic is the ambiguity regarding the parliament's mandate. The parliament would not be empowered to form a new government — a power that remains in the hands of the SCAF. Other than appointing a 100-member Constitutional Assembly, which the SCAF has already attempted to usurp with its proposed "supra constitutional principles," it is unclear what role the new parliament would be able to play. Given the SCAF's track record, we can also expect the parliament's legislative and oversight functions to be severely curtailed, even if formal restrictions on those powers have not been written into law.

Most crucial of all, the poorly planned and ill-timed elections run the risk of reinforcing the already highly polarized and acrimonious environment which has prevailed throughout most of the transition period and which is only growing stronger. In the nine months since Mubarak's ouster, the social and political environment has become divisive and confrontational along ideological, sectarian, and generational lines. Not surprisingly, this fragmentation has played directly into the hands of the SCAF, which has not shied away from playing one group off another in an attempt to engineer outcomes. Once viewed as a unifying force for a country in transition, the SCAF's actions and presence have turned it into a major force of instability.

Whether out of fears for personal safety, confusion over the electoral system, or anger at the political actors, the current conditions are likely to keep large numbers of Egyptians away from the polls. Conspicuously low voter turnout — particularly if it is substantially lower than the modest 41 percent attained in the constitutional referendum last spring — would diminish domestic (and foreign) confidence in the process and the outcome. This, combined with continuing street unrest and a deepening Islamist-secularist rift, would significantly impair the parliament's ability to claim a political mandate or act as a counter weight to SCAF's executive powers. These dynamics are likely to lead to political stalemate or worse and enable the SCAF to backtrack on its commitment to handover executive power by June 2012.

Without a doubt Egypt should proceed as quickly as is practicable to elections. But as crucial as elections are to a viable democratic order, they cannot substitute for a minimal civic and political consensus and broad public confidence, and at this point are unlikely to bring about either. Given the near total breakdown in trust among all sides, it is imperative that efforts be re-focused on improving conditions for successful elections. Better conditions require an end to the SCAF's direct involvement in governance, including and especially the electoral process, as well as the inclusion of a broad range of civic and political actors that are broadly representative.

Egyptian activists and political figures have already put forth a number of proposals along these lines, such as the formation of civilian-led “presidential council” or a “national salvation government” with full executive powers. Whatever model is chosen, the new body must function with full transparency and should be representative of the country’s demographic and political constituencies. Its first tasks should be to review the existing (SCAF-decreed) election law and set a new — and specific — elections timetable. To be sure, postponing elections could provoke the Muslim Brotherhood constituency, which was poised to make substantial gains in the elections and insists on moving ahead with elections as scheduled. However, a delay of a few weeks would not significantly affect their electoral prospects and would enhance the credibility of the process as whole, which would be to its ultimate benefit.

An even greater challenge will be convincing the SCAF to disentangle itself from national politics. This is not only because of the military’s desire to protect its vast economic interests and immunity from public scrutiny, but because of its solid base of support. For one thing, the SCAF has done a masterful job of conflating the “military council,” a political body appointed by the former dictator, with the “army,” a beloved national institution whose ranks are filled by the conscripted “sons of Egypt”. The SCAF has also banked on a so-called “silent majority” of Egyptians, many of whom have grown tired of highly disruptive protests and yearn for some sense of normalcy and stability. But the generals would be wise not to rest too comfortably on this assumed cushion of public support.

Although the current protests have not yet risen to the scale seen during last winter’s uprising, as Hosni Mubarak learned in just 18 days, a silent majority is often no match for a mobilized, persistent, and defiant minority. Moreover, popularity is no substitute for genuine legitimacy or stability, both of which can be rather fleeting commodities. Indeed, a poll conducted this fall by the Brookings

Institution’s Shibley Telhami found that more than twice as many Egyptians (43 percent) believe the SCAF is working against the gains of the revolution as see it as working to advance those gains (21 percent).

In any event, removing the SCAF from the political sphere need not entail immediate full relinquishing of power and return to the barracks. Even following a handover to a civilian authority, the military would still play a key role in overseeing public security and perhaps even continue playing a role in foreign affairs. But getting over this crisis will require ending the SCAF’s involvement in transitional politics and in managing day-to-day affairs, including elections and political appointments. While such a solution may seem radical, it may be the only way to restore stability and turn elections into an opportunity for democratic consolidation.

As the SCAF’s main sponsor, the United States has a critical role to play in ending the crisis. The U.S. administration’s misplaced confidence in the SCAF and relatively timid response over the past week, including the latest White House statement calling for a transfer of power “as soon as possible”, is unlikely to change the SCAF’s calculations or to impress Egyptian protesters. The administration undoubtedly has concerns about the postponement of elections as well as a diminished role for the SCAF, which has served key U.S. interests in the region. But there is too much at stake for Egypt, the region, and the United States to continue along the current course. As with the first uprising against Mubarak last winter, the United States cannot afford to end up on the wrong side of history.

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Saving Egypt's Elections

By Marc Lynch, October 2, 2011

Egypt's Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF) hastily convened a meeting with a group of political parties on Saturday, September 30, in the face of an uproar over amendments to the election law announced earlier in the week. It emerged with a document that addressed a number of the major popular demands, and which initially seemed to get Egypt back on track for crucial parliamentary elections scheduled to begin in less than two months. But within hours opposition to the agreement exploded, threatening to throw Egypt's democratic transition back into crisis.

The agreement did include a number of important concessions by the SCAF. It changed the most controversial parts of the new election law, laid out a clear timeline for a transition to civilian rule, and promised to study a more rapid lifting of the emergency law and an end to military trials. It seemed to secure Islamist agreement to a statement of supra-constitutional principles which they had previously rejected. But it introduced new problems — above all, a timeline which delayed presidential elections until 2013, and vague, unclear promises on key issues which a skeptical public felt little reason to trust.

I've just returned from a week in Cairo, my third visit in the last four months. It is impossible to miss the atmosphere of mistrust, frustration, anger, polarization, and skepticism consuming the political realm. A month ago I warned of the risk of an election boycott. By last week, such threats had erupted onto the front pages of the newspapers and had caught the SCAF's attention. But despite all this turbulence, I remain hopeful about Egypt's prospects. Any healthy democratic transition is going to involve contentions and uncertainty and frustration. The SCAF's intentions remain unclear, but the continuing challenges posed by a dizzying array of political forces, movements and parties through a contentious Egyptian media are a good sign that they will not be able to go too far against a popular consensus. The most important thing, in my

view, continues to be that Egypt move forward to holding the parliamentary elections on schedule, with a widely acceptable election law, a level playing field, and adequate international and domestic oversight. The SCAF-Parties agreement, for all its many flaws which should continue to be challenged, at least keeps hopes alive for such elections to produce a legitimate parliament which can finally begin to move Egypt toward the democracy it so desperately needs and deserves.

In sharp contrast with earlier critical moments in the months following Mubarak's fall, where massive protests forced the SCAF to backtrack from controversial steps, the revolutionary groups and street protests were not the decisive factors in forcing these SCAF concessions. The disappointing turnout of an estimated 5,000-10,000 at the Tahrir protest on September 29 likely reinforced the SCAF's evident sense of the dwindling power and relevance of the revolutionary groups. Instead, the SCAF's move came in response to a threat by numerous political parties to boycott the parliamentary elections, and to a warning by the Muslim Brotherhood of serious street protests if the law was not changed by Sunday. The SCAF does worry that the elections will not be seen as legitimate, which gives the parties some serious bargaining power — and Muslim Brotherhood leaders told me last week that they were quite serious about using it. The SCAF therefore invited the Brotherhood and the parties, not revolutionary groups, to the table since that is where they now see the greatest immediate threat.

The hostility toward the agreement expressed by many activists and revolutionary groups at least in part reflected their dismay at being bypassed as interlocutors in favor of the parties and the Muslim Brotherhood. They also fumed at not being consulted by the party representatives who signed the deal, who in their view lack legitimacy, put electoral self-interest over the collective goals of the revolution, and aren't very good negotiators. Mostafa

el-Naggar, the representative of the el-Adl party, actually retracted his signature in the face of internal dissent from party members. This conflict between activist groups and political parties is likely to become ever more intense as elections approach, since they rely on fundamentally different sources of legitimacy: parties on success at the ballot box, activist groups on claims of revolutionary legitimacy and the ability to mobilize street protests.

The best part of the agreement was the changes to the revised elections law, which had prompted the threatened electoral boycott. The law had reserved one-third of the seats in parliament to be elected as independents, with candidates affiliated with parties banned from contesting them — which was better than the 50 percent originally allocated that way, but well short of the 100 percent list system preferred by most of the parties. Most political analysts assume that the contest for individual seats will be dominated by well-known former National Democratic Party members, ensuring a dominant political role for the remnants of the old regime. The SCAF modified the law to allow party members to contest the individual seats, which will even the odds a bit. The SCAF also backed down on its original plan not to seat the new parliament until March, two months after the end of the elections. Both changes should be scored as a win for the political forces.

The worst part of the agreement is the proposed timeline for the political transition. The presidential election had been expected by April 2012, which seemed a bit long but acceptable. Presidential candidate Abd el-Moneim Abou el-Fattouh told me last week that most serious candidates agreed that this was the latest acceptable date, a position stated publicly by Amr Moussa today. The SCAF's new timeline would have the elections deferred all the way to early 2013, after the drafting of the new constitution. Such a long delay would leave the SCAF controlling executive power for another year and a half. It would guarantee continuing political instability, badly undermine the transition to legitimate civilian rule, and violate its own promises to the Egyptian people. Expect to see a lot more mobilization against this timeline and powerful demands that the SCAF go back to the spring 2012 date for a

presidential election.

The SCAF also made motions toward some of the key issues which have long generated political opposition. They promised to look into lifting the Emergency Law, to ending military trials for civil offenses, to accept international observers (not monitors) for elections, and various other points. But unfortunately, they offered only promises rather than firm, clear commitments. Most of the Egyptian political class has lost confidence in such promises, for good reason, so this will probably also produce continued mobilization and anger. It is far too early to score these vague promises as either a win or a loss — though most think that the parties should have pushed harder to get concrete commitments before signing. Finally, in a gesture toward liberals and secularists, the SCAF seemed to have secured the agreement of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi parties to the supra-constitutional guarantees which had been so controversial over the summer — but by today, the MB was already backing away from it, showing the slippery nature of such agreements.

I am ambivalent, I must say, about the potential use of the Treason Law to bar NDP politicians from elections, which has been a demand of many political trends in recent weeks. I understand the impulse behind this call, as many fear that the *falul* (regime remnants) will regain power through the ballot box. What would stop, say, Gamal Mubarak from entering parliament if he avoids conviction? There are many layers of complexity in this move, however. Defining who would be banned from politics is contentious — only top NDP officials or all of the millions of party members? And would banning ex-NDP members push them (a group including much of the country's economic elite) into active opposition to the emerging political system or provoke escalated capital flight? What's more, with the SCAF openly waging a campaign against the "foreign funding" of liberal and revolutionary groups such as the April 6 Youth Movement, the embrace of a "Treason Law" seems an extremely dangerous double-edged sword.

The SCAF-Parties agreement therefore has some positive and some negative aspects. It isn't the catastrophe which

many are painting it as nor is it enough to rescue Egypt from its ongoing political crisis. I hope that the parties and the political movements can continue to pressure the SCAF to live up to its promises and to reverse some of the bad moves (especially the presidential election date), while continuing to focus on the prize: fair parliamentary elections on schedule to finally create a legitimate civilian government. The SCAF may have every intention of manipulating the process to hold onto power, but

that doesn't mean that they will be able to do so. Their consistent pattern of blundering and over-reaching, and then backing down in the face of public outrage, do not suggest that Egypt is being ruled by a masterful, unstoppable super-genius. Egypt's creative, restless and impatient political public should not be sidetracked by side battles or take their bait. If they want a transition to real democracy, now is the time to push hard to make sure that the elections deliver it.



The effects of Egypt's election law

By Mazen Hassan, November 1 2011

Egyptians have finally begun to learn the rules that will govern their first post-revolutionary parliamentary elections, scheduled to begin on November 28. The election law announced by the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF) is remarkably complicated, generating great confusion both inside and outside of Egypt. Those poorly understood rules will play an important role in shaping the results — and are already pushing the Egyptian party scene into a polarized competition between Islamist and secular blocs, with independents somewhere in the middle with no clear political or economic agenda.

The electoral system that the SCAF has chosen for the forthcoming election is a departure from Egypt's historical practice. Egyptian elections have typically been governed by a majoritarian system in smaller constituencies (222 in total). Such a system traditionally made voting a choice between individual candidates rather than parties' programs, which put a premium on coming from a strong local tribe or from a wealthy background. The small size of constituencies made this possible because it increased the electoral weight of extended families and tribes, especially in rural constituencies.

The new law creates a mixed system, which reserves one-third of the lower house's 498 seats to be contested by a majoritarian system in 83 two-member constituencies (with each constituency more than double the size of the previous ones). The remaining two-thirds (332 seats) will be contested according to a Proportional Representation (PR) system in larger constituencies where the district magnitude ranges between 4 and 12 seats. The districts for the two systems are not identical, which means that voters will be casting votes and candidates will be campaigning in potentially radically different districts.

The closed party lists that will be used to choose two-thirds of the seats restrict personalized voting in such constituencies. From a normative perspective, this is not bad at all — in fact personalized voting was always cited as one of the major deficiencies of voting behavior in the pre-revolution era. But in practice it means that the balance will tip in the Islamists' favor. The new secular parties are still quite weak organizationally. They had no time to build party organizations capable of getting out sizable crowds to support party labels. Many of the secular parties have no option but to try to get traditional local leaders on their list (the chiefs of local tribes and wealthy families

in rural constituencies). The local clout of such figures, however, would hardly make a difference in the large PR constituencies. Instead, party organization and a clear ideological profile would be the greater asset, especially the type of organization that stretches over extended regions. In Egypt right now, only Islamists possess those advantages.

How parties order candidates on their lists will also matter. The candidates' order on party lists determines their chances of winning and losing, with those on the top winning even if a party got just one seat whereas those at the bottom would only win if that party wins all seats contested in the constituency. This creates huge internal conflicts within parties on who gets the top places. Islamist parties have the internal party discipline to enforce the order decided by the central office on their members. The story is quite different, however, for the newly created liberal and secular parties, most of which still lack the power to enforce internal discipline. Thus, for such parties, it is extremely difficult to sort the issue of candidates' ordering without strong and visible internal conflicts, conflicts that might even threaten the party's unity and existence.

Finally, there is the requirement that at least one of the two MPs elected from each majoritarian constituency has to be either a peasant or a worker, a heritage of the Nasserist era. Practically, this means that elections in majoritarian constituencies are fought through electoral alliances that are struck between pairs of candidates — usually one of them is either a worker or peasant and each comes from a different village in the constituency. Such alliances are win-win tactics as they enable each candidate to win votes from the other candidate's stronghold — votes that would never be obtainable without such alliances. History has taught candidates in majoritarian constituencies that it is extremely difficult for a candidate to win on his/her own — it is often impossible for one's stronghold to be able to secure a majority of votes in the whole constituency from the first round. This rule again favors Islamist forces, which have historically made maximum use of such alliances to penetrate the strongholds of many other contestants.

The enlarged majoritarian constituencies in the new election law will likely encourage more candidates to build such electoral alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood candidates. This is because relying on one's personal popularity, local clout, or tribal support won't guarantee a majority in such enlarged constituencies. Rather, the support of a party organization would be the only key. Moreover, these enlarged majoritarian constituencies would have the effect of increasing the number of candidates per seat, making it even more difficult for a candidate to win a 50 percent plus one majority from the first round. The logical solution in such a fragmented battlefield is to strike a deal with the only force whose party organization would still be collectively behind its candidates regardless of how many other candidates are running. These are again the Muslim Brothers. All this is not because the Muslim Brothers are the only political force in town, but because they are the most organized and the only force that could mobilize *all* its members behind a single candidate in each constituency.

The enlarged majoritarian constituencies are also likely to harm the electoral chances of the revolutionaries. The reason is that many of them are likely to run as independents — either because they failed to found their own parties or because they resent many of the established ones. Running as independents would not work in their favor, however, because only quite a few of them enjoy enough name recognition on the constituency level. In addition, the majority of them lack any experience whatsoever in running elections the Egyptian way; something that requires money and strong local connections — both of which many of them lack.

The conventional wisdom in Egypt right now is that even with the many institutional advantages, the likely outcome is that Islamist forces would end up only with a plurality rather than a majority of seats, making the future parliament a fragmented one in which no single party has a majority. This expectation has to be followed by a caveat however; if the electoral weight of the Salafis turns out to be really significant, a majority of seats could materialize. Right now there is no reliable assessment whatsoever for the

size of the Salafis' force. Judging by the recent exchange of attacks between the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis, some commentators think that the Muslim Brotherhood's strategy is to try to distance themselves from the Salafis — at least during the election campaign — so as to portray themselves as the moderate Islamist force. Irrespective of both parties' attempts to position themselves during the election (although some electoral coordination is likely to happen), the reality of Egyptian politics right now is likely to push Islamist forces to coalesce at some point. If not during the campaign, then at any point after the parliament is formed when the religious-secular debate starts to take shape during the deliberation of the new constitution. After all, their agendas on many constitutional issues are quite congruent.

Having said the above, it is not fragmentation of the upcoming parliament that is likely to be the most problematic for the country's early steps toward democracy. Instead, it is the unprecedented polarization that is created in parallel between the Islamist bloc on the one hand and the secular bloc on the other. If this divide holds during the campaign and is reflected in the structure of parliament membership (where government is dominated by one bloc and opposition by the other), then political competition in the country for the coming years will remain to be fought along the religious-secular axis. This diminishes, to a great extent, the room available for common ground and comprises — both urgent necessities to confront the country's embedded economic and social problems.

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How Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood will win

By Shadi Hamid, November 3, 2011

The performance of the Islamist party Ennahda in the October 23 Tunisian elections, in which it won 41.5 percent of the seats, has refocused attention on the upcoming Egyptian elections scheduled to begin on November 28. Some analysts have minimized the Muslim Brotherhood's prospects for success by pointing to polls suggesting that the group — the largest and best organized in Egypt — hovers between 15 to 30 percent approval. It may be true that the Brotherhood isn't as popular as we might think. But elections aren't popularity contests. In fact, as the campaign unfolds, it appears likely that Egypt's Islamists will do even better than expected, just like their Tunisian counterparts.

In the run-up to the Tunisian elections, Ennahda was polling around 20 percent. Yet they ended up with nearly

double. In elections — particularly founding elections in which new parties need to introduce themselves to voters across the country — organization and strategy are what counts, not high approval ratings. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood excels on both counts. While most liberal and leftist parties are effectively starting from scratch, the Brotherhood already has a disciplined ground game, fine-tuned from three decades of contesting syndicate and national elections.

During last November's parliamentary contest — arguably the most fraudulent Egypt had ever seen — I had the chance to witness the Brotherhood's "get-out-the-vote" operation up close. One Brotherhood campaign worker, perhaps unaware it would sound somewhat implausible, told me that the organization has an internal vote turnout

of nearly 100 percent. In other words, everyone who is an active Muslim Brotherhood member is expected to vote and actually does. Even if this is a stretch, it is true that the Brotherhood, in part because it is a religious movement rather than a political party, has the sort of organizational discipline of which competing parties can only dream.

This discipline is deeply rooted in the organization's culture. Each Muslim Brotherhood member signs on to a rigorous educational curriculum and is part of something called an *usra*, or family, which meets weekly. If a Brother chooses to stay home on election day, other Brothers will know. But it's not just a matter of peer expectations. At each polling station, there is a Brotherhood coordinator who essentially does a whip count. Because the number of voters at a particular polling station can be quite small — with the number of Brothers in the hundreds — this is feasible in many districts. The “whip” stays there the entire day, watching who comes and goes and tallies up the figures. If you were supposed to go and didn't, the whip will know. Perhaps sensing my skepticism, one such whip assured me, “Well, you have to understand — I know every single Brother who lives in the area.

With an electoral system that is, in the words of one activist, “algorithmically complicated,” knowing your district takes on even more importance. As Daphne McCurdy pointed out in a recent POMED report on Tunisia, “Most polling in Tunisia has focused on nationwide levels of support, entirely overlooking variation within specific electoral districts.” Ennahda was the only party that had coverage throughout the country, with tailored strategies for each district, including rural areas. Here, the Brotherhood has yet another built-in advantage. With 88 deputies in the previous parliament (2005-2010), the group was able to provide a greater array of services on the local level and build stronger relations with constituents.

What about the Brotherhood's competition? The Brotherhood's political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), is joined by Ayman Nour's liberal al-Ghad party, the Nasserist Karama party, and a smattering of

smaller parties, forming the “Democratic Alliance” list. There are four other major lists, three of which have a liberal or leftist orientation (Egyptian Bloc, the Revolution Continues, and the Wafd list). With their considerable funding and patronage networks, the right-of-center Wafd party, headed by multi-millionaire Al-Sayyid Badawy, and remnants of the old ruling National Democratic Party, are also well positioned to secure a significant share of the vote.

For their part, the newly formed liberal parties have suffered from an inability to articulate a clear ideology or agenda — a major failing in a country where “liberalism” continues to have a negative connotation. Many liberal parties have sometimes appeared to stand for little more than not being Islamist, opting to stoke public fears of impending theocracy. Such a strategy is likely to backfire in a country where 67 percent of Egyptians say that laws should strictly follow the Quran's teachings, while another 27 percent say that they should in some way follow the values and principles of Islam, according to an April Pew poll. In Tunisia, the Progressive Democratic Party, which positioned itself as the anti-Islamist choice, got pummeled in the polls, while the two liberal parties that maintained good relations with Ennahda — Congress for the Republic and Ettakatol — fared relatively well, finishing in second and third place respectively.

This leaves an obvious course for leftist and liberal parties, one that offers considerably more promise — a razor-sharp focus on Egypt's mounting economic troubles. But this, too, is challenging, as most parties — leftist or not — use similar rhetoric on the economy: Poverty is bad; jobs are good; social justice is better, and so on. As Ayesha Sabayala of the Economist Intelligence Unit pointed out regarding Tunisia, “If you look at parties' manifestos, with the exception of the far left parties, most have the same economic objectives: to reduce unemployment and increase infrastructure in interior.” The Muslim Brotherhood has smartly positioned itself as a voice for the poor, even though its economic platform (something designed more for foreign investors and the international community) is surprisingly free market-oriented. Recently,

for example, the group launched “Millioniyyat al-Khayr” (the million-man act of goodwill), an initiative to provide 1.5 million kilos of meat to 5 million Egyptians for the Eid al-Adha holiday.

There is still the possibility that the Brotherhood may underperform — as they did in the recent Doctors’ Syndicate elections. But, be careful what you wish for. The alternative to moderate Islamists may very well be *less* moderate Islamists. Well before the Arab Spring, Brotherhood leaders often told me that their youth were increasingly being swayed by Salafi ideas. One Brotherhood official told me that Salafis outnumbered them five to one. Salafi groups have repeatedly sounded ambitious notes, with one leader claiming that they would win 30 percent of the seats. Ambitious as they are, Salafis are political novices, with virtually no experience running parliamentary campaigns. But they are proving quick learners and have managed to unify their ranks, bringing together four Salafi parties under the banner of the “Islamic alliance.” Moreover, liberal claims (or hopes) that Salafis are well outside of the mainstream may be wishful thinking. In a December 2010 poll, 82 percent of Egyptians said they favored stoning adulterers, while 77 percent supported cutting off the hands

of thieves. The only movement besides the Brotherhood with a nationwide grassroots base, Salafis have taken to organizing traffic in congested areas of Alexandria, engage in door-to-door education campaigns, and provide health services to the poor.

These elections, then, are not necessarily about ideas. They are about voters. And, in this respect, Egypt’s elections are looking a lot like they do in the United States. The “good guys,” whoever they are, don’t always win. Indeed, if Islamist parties do as well they might — winning upwards of 50 percent of the vote — the alarmism and hand wringing from Western quarters will be considerable. The important metric for Egypt’s troubled transition, though, isn’t who wins, but rather, if Egyptians have the opportunity to choose their own representatives free of intimidation and interference. Democracy, as Western democracies have long known, is about the right to make the wrong choice.

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Do Egypt’s liberals stand a chance?

By Evan Hill, November 16, 2011

MINYA, Egypt – The desert road south from Cairo to Minya, a well-paved army highway in a country where potholes and cracked pavements make speedy driving a roller-coaster ride of dips and jolts, curves in from the barren east, leading the driver through a dour vista of limestone quarries and half-built suburban apartment blocks — New Minya, a sign proclaims — before giving way abruptly to fertile green fields, palm trees, and the dusty alleys of the city proper.

Minya, a city of perhaps 300,000, marks a border of sorts between the comparatively cosmopolitan bustle of the north — Cairo, Alexandria, the Nile Delta — and the traditionally more tribal Upper Egypt of Asyut, Sohag, Qina, and Aswan to the south.

Well-established, moneyed families, many of whom by necessity allied themselves with the former ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), still hold much sway here, and the

city itself, the seat of the Minya governorate, is a busy hub for industry. Minya's factories refine local sugar cane and produce cement and other materials, including the white limestone brick ubiquitous in the area's cheaper buildings.

Outside the city's few main streets, Minya's countryside is dominated by lush farmland and dotted by hamlets, the province of Egypt's agricultural labor class, the *fellaheen*. Coptic Christians, estimated at around 10 percent of the Egyptian population, are heavily represented here, comprising perhaps a third of the governorate's 4.7 million people and a majority in some villages.

Under Egypt's three-stage system for electing its first post-revolution parliament, which begins Nov. 28, Minya will vote in the final group, on Jan. 3. It will account for 24 of the 498 representatives delivered to the new People's Assembly.

In January and February, while the world fixated on Cairo's Tahrir Square, Minya had its own revolution. Patches of well-maintained graffiti still cover downtown walls, and the main square — once named for Suzanne Mubarak, the ex-president's wife and a Minya native — is now called Martyrs' Square.

But as seemed to be the case in other midsize towns outside Cairo, Minya's revolution was different. Protests were small and kept in check by the security forces, residents told me, and nobody remembered any serious violence. Kerolos Emad Abeid, the 17-year-old son of a Christian farmer and political candidate, said he and his friends stayed home during the protests, preferring to use days of school closures to study for their exams.

Although Minya's Christian population makes it a demographic outlier, the city and surrounding countryside pose a bellwether question: How much has Egypt really changed outside the big cities?

In a country of more than 80 million people, sentiments can swing wildly between Bedouin settlements in the Sinai, working-class factory cities in the Delta, and agrarian townships in the south. But if Minya's story reflects

broader sentiments, Egypt's first parliament since the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak will be dominated by Islamists and heavily influenced by power brokers associated with the fallen regime.

Even here, where one might expect Christians to counterbalance the Islamist surge, most expect the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party, to take the most seats. With more than 80 years of proselytizing and street-by-street charitable work under its belt, the Brotherhood is perfectly positioned to reap political benefits. Liberals and leftists, long powerless unless co-opted by the regime, for now look destined to remain splintered on the sidelines.

One night, in the dingy manager's office of a budget hotel in one of the city's darkened back alleys, I sat with Mohammed Ismail Abdelhalim, a local organizer for the Free Egyptians. Founded and funded by billionaire Christian telecommunications magnate Naguib Sawiris, it is considered perhaps Egypt's most well-organized new liberal party.

Abdelhalim and his friend Osama Naguib, a Christian candidate with the nearly unknown Socialist Popular Alliance Party, chain-smoked and sipped tea as they dissected the impending fate of Egypt's left.

I brought up the Wafd, the country's most established opposition party, just as old as the Muslim Brotherhood and with a direct connection to Egypt's 1920s independence struggle, though sullied by years of obeisance to the NDP. Perhaps, without the regime's repression, they and others would finally get their chance.

Naguib dismissed the idea. When the regime briefly allowed a semblance of free and fair voting in 2005, it was the Brotherhood and not the Wafd that easily snapped up one-fifth of the People's Assembly, he pointed out.

"It has nothing to do with being old or young. It has to do with the language you speak. Wafd has been around forever, and it has no support because it doesn't know how

to speak to people,” he said. “Wafd won’t succeed — no party will succeed — if they sit around and talk politics like we are now, which is what all the parties are doing except for the Muslim parties. What we should do is take the way that they are reaching the people and use it. We need to do what they’re doing.”

One night when Naguib was younger, he said, his uncle fell seriously ill. Most of the nearby pharmacies were owned by Brotherhood members, who tend to go into fields like engineering and medicine, so the family rushed to a neighbor who was a Brother, asking him to open a shop. Not only did they open a pharmacy; they delivered the medicine to his uncle’s home.

“If I wasn’t a leftist Christian, I would’ve joined the Brotherhood,” Naguib said.

On the television in the corner, presidential candidate Hazem Abu Ismail, a charismatic and staunchly conservative Islamist who has attracted support from strictly fundamentalist Salafi Muslims, was being interviewed on a major Egyptian satellite channel. Smoke filled the room.

Upper Egypt, called the Saeed after the Arabic word for plateau, has long been stereotyped as the country’s clannish backwaters. It is in the Saeed, Egyptians say, where honor killings remain prevalent, sectarian mobs flare up regularly, and feuds are settled by ceremonial reconciliation committees. Minya, I’m quickly told, is known as the “Bride of Upper Egypt,” and it’s true that the city’s leafy corniche, set across the river from sandy cliffs with an “El Minya” sign spelled out in yellow block letters, is a relief from the soot of Cairo.

Large families have traditionally been able to exert outsized political power in the Saeed, and many here say they — and perhaps the Christian community, were it to vote as a bloc — represent the only force that rivals the Islamists in influence.

The Dakrouris are one such family.

When I first met Ahmed Dakrouri, a fuel shortage in Upper Egypt was spawning gas queues, 20-liter rations, and protests in Sohag, about 140 miles to the south. He picked me up in his black, older-model Land Rover — a “gas guzzler,” he called it — and drove us to a second-floor restaurant by the Nile.

Dakrouri’s family has a long history with the NDP. Even in Cairo, political operatives know the name. His great-grandfather was elected to Egypt’s first parliament, in the 1920s, and his father, an NDP member, left parliament in 1995. Dakrouri tried to run with the NDP in 2010 but was disqualified. This year, he has decided to sit out the election.

A tall, exceedingly polite engineer with graying hair who was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), he spoke English with an accent that would not have been out of place at a sales conference in Buffalo.

“I’m a development guy,” he said, mentioning projects he pursues during regular trips from the capital, where he now lives, to his family’s historical stronghold in Minya.

Dakrouri is a precise man, and when he gives directions, he gives exact kilometers. The distance between Tahrir Square and his house in Cairo’s Mohandeseen district? Seven kilometers. The exactitude is at play even in the decidedly un-MIT-like universe of Minya politics, where families like his will inevitably attempt to exert their gravitational pull on the election.

“In the Saeed, if it’s my village, I can go stand in front of a polling place, and if 30 Islamists are marshaling 200 to 300 people, they won’t vote because of my power to prevent it,” he said.

The ability to stop and start voter mobilization, while perhaps somewhat exaggerated in Dakrouri’s case, will be key in the elections, especially in the Saeed and smaller cities, where turnout depends more on religious and family networks than individual ideological preferences.

In the restaurant, Dakrouri introduced me to his “political

advisor,” a tall, well-built man with the high-and-tight buzzed haircut typical of Egyptian plainclothes cops. It quickly emerged that the advisor, who asked to remain anonymous if he was going to speak candidly, was both Dakrouri’s relative and an employee of the state security services. The man, whom I’ll call Farid, seemed to function as Dakrouri’s all-purpose political fixer, called in during campaigns and times of need.

“In six months we went from being completely absent from the scene to [No.] 1 or 2, and he was behind it,” Dakrouri said of the 2010 campaign, smiling. “This is what we do.”

Egypt’s electoral system seems deliberately designed to befuddle all but the deepest insiders. The governorate of Minya is divided into two districts, urban north and rural south, for candidates running on multiparty lists (think of them as coalitions) where the percentage of votes determines who and how many list members get into parliament. A further four subdistricts, two in the north and two in the south, are reserved for candidates running as individuals.

Confusingly, individuals can still belong to lists, and there are three of national importance: the Democratic Alliance, fronted by the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party; the Egyptian Bloc, featuring the liberal Free Egyptians and Social Democrats; and the Islamist Alliance, to which hard-liners such as the Salafi Nour Party and Islamic Group’s Building and Development Party belong. The Wafd, riven by some key departures and internal divisions, is running alone.

Farid quickly sketched out his vision of the Minya playing field.

Hordes of candidates have entered the race in the individual districts; 113 in one, 79 in another, he said. Ninety percent are “nobodies,” Dakrouri added, though the individual seats are where candidates with the most fame and local sway will likely do best.

As for the lists, the Islamists — primarily the Freedom and

Justice Party, followed by the Salafis — will take the most seats, Farid said. The Brotherhood, particularly influential in the northern districts, will itself earn around 35 percent of the vote, he guessed (others believe it could win even more).

Beyond the Islamists, the Egyptian Bloc will place well, in addition to two new parties — Our Egypt and Reform and Development — which have allied with one another, he said. The latter two had not attracted much national attention, and I was later told they are among roughly a dozen parties running ex-NDP candidates, known disparagingly as *felool*, or remnants of the regime.

(Talaat Sadat, founder of Reform and Development and a nephew of assassinated President Anwar Sadat, briefly tried to revive the NDP after Mubarak’s downfall, while Rami Lakah, founder of Our Egypt and a business tycoon, was known for handing out “stipends” to constituents during a previous run for parliament.)

Dakrouri and Farid went on to describe political tactics. Some less-powerful parties, they said, will make their lists top-heavy with “workers” and “farmers,” since 1950s-era Egyptian law requires half of parliament be filled with candidates who fit those descriptions, while the other half is composed of “class” candidates.

A major party’s list may win 75 percent of the vote, but because the district’s farmer and worker seats must be filled, a party with few votes but workers and farmers at the top of its list might find a disproportionate number of its candidates picked to fill the quota.

Nobody trusts the worker-farmer system, but Egypt’s military rulers have decided to keep it. Farid said that in the 2010 election, dozens of Interior Ministry generals ran as workers or farmers. Police officers are widely known to retire, buy land, and run as farmers.

Another favorite political tactic is to not-so-secretly insert and support unknown candidates in certain races to secure a favor from a prominent opponent in exchange for pulling the candidate out.

I wondered whether I was seeing this at play when Dakrouri asked whether I wanted to meet Iman, a woman running for an independent seat. When she arrived, I asked Farid whether she had a chance. He grimaced and shook his head. In fact, Iman is a relative of his, he said.

Once the questions began, Iman became nervous. She offered a few platitudes about improving education. I asked whether she had ever run before. She had, in 2010. I asked whether she won. Yes and no, she said. She glanced at Dakrouri and then said she had been “forged out” of the race. Dakrouri and Farid asked my interpreter not to translate that detail. When I asked whether I could follow up later, she said she wouldn’t talk without Dakrouri around.

After Iman left, they called another candidate, Ali Hassenein of Our Egypt, offering to arrange an interview for me. I suggested I set it up myself the next day. Hassenein, as it turned out, wouldn’t talk alone either — when I rang, he never picked up his phone.

Dakrouri told me he didn’t think the upcoming election will see the kind of fraud and occasional violence that marred previous votes in 2005 and 2010, helping to deliver the NDP more than 90 percent of parliament last year. But he said he feared the rise of the Islamist parties.

“They have a very well-developed and arranged system, and they can almost plot how many votes they’ll get,” he said of the Brotherhood. “The general mood now is toward religion. In times of difficulty, people find a safe haven in religion.”

Later, he turned to Farid and spoke in Arabic: “The people had given us a license to vote for them, and we abused it. Now they want to vote for themselves, and it will be chaos.”

Farid looked at my interpreter. “Don’t translate that.”

As we prepared to leave, Farid suggested we visit some tourist sites around Minya. He offered to arrange a guide or drive us himself. He also wanted to know whom we would meet.

We declined. The next day, when we met in our hotel cafe with Hussein Sultan, the local spokesman for the Freedom and Justice Party, another man sat down at the next table. As we spoke, he smoked cigarettes and made phone calls.

Barely changed by the revolution, the security services were still watching, though whether at the behest of their superiors or Dakrouri was unclear. Yet Sultan, who under Mubarak would have never met so easily in the open with a journalist, seemed unfazed.

“See the man with the cigarette?” he asked. “Oh well, not a problem.”

Sultan, a middle-aged man who is also running in the election, comes from a village called el-Kom el-Ahmar. He mentors students in Arabic at a local teaching center. Like almost all the Brotherhood candidates whom journalists meet, he was well groomed — wearing a suit and tie — and made encouragingly moderate policy prescriptions in well-formed statements.

Sultan is running at the top of the party’s South Minya list; Saad el-Katatny, the secretary general of the party, is running at the top of the list in the north.

According to Sultan, the Freedom and Justice Party’s own street polling shows it winning 60 percent of the vote. Although some Christians said they would vote for the party, Sultan said he wasn’t counting on their support.

Despite a government ban on campaigning in houses of worship, Sultan noted that when he “presented” the Freedom and Justice Party platform to a mosque in his village, many Christians attended.

He believed the Coptic community was being influenced by scaremongering Western media and rumors that Islamist parties were stirring up Muslim supporters with religious slogans like the Brotherhood’s tag line: “Islam is the solution.” That wasn’t the case, he insisted.

“Muslims and Christians are equal, have always been equal in Egypt, and should still be equal under the constitution,”

he said. “[Christians] should have the same rights, and our party will give them that.”

He pointed out that Rafiq Habib, a Coptic intellectual who associated himself with the moderate Islamist al-Wasat Party when it splintered from the Brotherhood in 1996, was now the third-ranking official in the Freedom and Justice Party, with the title of vice president.

In districts such as Cairo, Alexandria, and Sohag, the party was even running Christians on its lists, though not in Minya, he admitted.

Sultan tried to assuage fears that the Brotherhood would push for strict Islamic law when it came time for the new parliament to select the 100-member body that will write Egypt’s new constitution.

His party wants to “use the basics of sharia,” including freedom of thought and religious beliefs, to write the constitution, he said.

“Our vision for politics [is that] there must be a very strong ruling party, but there must also be a very strong opposition, regardless of what this opposition is. Whether they’re democratic or socialist or liberals or Salafis, they must exist in order to create a sort of watchdog over the ruling party, and they must be given the freedom to exist,” he said. “That is the only way to have a well-functioning democracy.”

The party’s top priorities — improving health care and education — were not sectarian, he said.

I pressed Sultan on what, then, separated Freedom and Justice from the Salafis on one side and liberals on the other.

“Our party wants to give Egypt a confined freedom within the religion, with respect for Egyptian culture and tradition,” he said.

Salafis such as those in the Nour Party lack the political experience to be effective in parliament, he argued, while

“liberals want to give Egypt a foreign freedom that is adopted from the West, a freedom that is disrespectful for the culture and traditions, and it doesn’t really work well with the religion.”

Shortly after we finished the interview with Sultan, the man at the next table followed us out of the hotel. As we waited by our car for our next contact to arrive, he drove up, waited, and then drove away. If he wanted to let us know we were being watched, he had succeeded.

A few blocks away, at the downtown YMCA, we met Emad Abeid, a Christian farmer from the village of Saft el-Laban, seven miles north of Minya, who is running with the Nasserist Party. Abeid — bald and missing two front teeth, wearing a traditional galabeya and flicking through a string of prayer beads — was joined by his friends Rafik Labib, a Christian high school math teacher, and Mohammed Saeed, a Muslim high school Arabic teacher.

The three men said they viewed Minya’s politics as a contest between large families like the Dakrouis, whose influence was waning, and Islamist parties using religion to mobilize support. The new liberal parties, their figures and platforms, were mostly unknown.

Abeid said his party might win one seat, but he hoped they were laying the groundwork for a better showing in later elections.

“There are still family mafias that are controlling everything. They’re influential, own land, hand out favors; it’s not necessarily about fear,” Abeid said. “Only religious movements are challenging the families. They believe no one is above God, but they’re doing it in a very backwards way.”

The men said Christians were feeling isolated by post-revolution sectarian violence that culminated on Oct. 9 in a bloody Army crackdown on a protest in Cairo at the state television building, known as Maspero, leaving 28 people dead.

Minya governorate itself is no stranger to sectarian tension. In the town of Samalout in January — before the revolution — an off-duty policeman boarded a train and shot dead one Copt while wounding five others. When Coptic protesters gathered the same day at the Christian hospital where the victims were being treated, police fired tear gas, some of which landed inside the building.

In August, Labib said, a church that had been built across the street from a mosque was “surrounded by Salafis” who demanded it be moved. They complained that prayers from both houses of worship were drowning each other out, despite the fact that Christians and Muslims observe different holy days. The crisis was resolved when a Christian agreed to allow the church to use his property if he could live on the church’s old grounds, Labib said.

He said he wanted to keep his Muslim friends and normal life as long as he could.

“A lot of Copts are trying to leave to other countries as refugees,” he said, and concerned friends were calling him regularly while he attended his second job as a shopkeeper, warning him not to stay out late.

“There’s no safety [and] a bad economy. Someone was kidnapped three days ago in Minya, and I don’t feel like the country is very secure.”

Late that night, when I met with Abdelhalim, the Free Egyptians organizer, and Naguib, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party candidate, in the hotel manager’s office, they too said they thought the influence of the big families was waning, especially because the dozen or so districts that used to allow Minya clans to dominate local constituencies had been consolidated for the new election.

The men’s real concerns were the Islamists and liberal disorganization. Naguib feared the imposition of Islamic law — cutting off the hands of thieves and forcing women to wear hijab. Abdelhalim shook his head.

“That’s a phantasm,” he said.

His fear, near-term and political, was that Islamist parties like Freedom and Justice would rely on the Brotherhood’s time-tested tactics, busying their network of supporters to polling stations and handing out free meat, food, and cooking oil to win loyalty.

“Egyptian people are not used to voting for someone based on ideology. It’s basically personal gain, if someone has done charity in their neighborhood, and the Brotherhood has been very successful at this,” he said.

But where Naguib was a pessimistic doomsayer, saying the Brotherhood and military — “fascists” both — were conspiring to control the election, for instance by campaigning in mosques, Abdelhalim accepted the challenge as a fact of life. Campaigning only takes place in certain mosques, he said, and is technically banned by the government. He doesn’t see it in the mosques he attends.

Although he admitted the liberal parties have little historical base and “have not been able to reach people” like the Islamists, he still guessed they would win 20 percent of parliament to the Islamists’ 40 percent.

I asked Abdelhalim whether he could talk about the Free Egyptians in his mosques. He wouldn’t want to, nor is it allowed, he said. “This is democracy. Whoever gets a majority wins.”

After I left Minya, I returned to Cairo and met with Ramy Yaacoub, a senior strategist in the Free Egyptians and a member of the party’s political office who helped craft campaigns and occasionally directly advised Sawiris, the tycoon founder.

His assessment of the liberals’ fate was dire. Weeks of negotiations with the other parties in the Egyptian Bloc, most importantly the Social Democrats, had been more or less a disaster, in his opinion. Bickering over which candidates to run in which districts had led many smaller groups and locally influential figures to abandon the bloc. Many had joined up with the felool parties.

It was only four days before the candidate registration deadline in October that he and others were assigned to sit down with the remaining parties — Social Democrats, Tagammu, and the Democratic Front — to hash out their unified lists.

But metrics and criteria were quickly thrown aside as “primitive” bickering took hold, he said. Party negotiators yelled out governorates they wanted to claim and insisted that old promises made to local politicians could not be broken.

On the final day, the negotiators abandoned unified lists altogether. Instead, they allocated districts among the parties. The 400 or so candidates the Free Egyptians had planned to run dropped to around 133. Now the party will take responsibility for only 26 of Egypt’s 46 list districts, while the Social Democrats will handle 14.

The bloc won’t compete in at least six districts, and in some, its lists were disqualified. North Giza, a district that includes parts of Cairo, with at least 2 million people of voting age and 10 representatives to send to parliament, has neither a Free Egyptians nor a Social Democrats list, he said. Meanwhile, the Democratic Front had dropped out of the bloc.

Yaacoub did not want to say publicly how many seats he thinks the Free Egyptians will win, but the number he gave was a fifth of what he said he had once predicted when the party formed.

In Minya, the Free Egyptians will run three independent candidates, but the bloc’s list will be handled by Social

Democrats, in whom Yaacoub had little faith.

Yaacoub did insist that Sawiris was a good leader and had never forced his personal opinions on the party.

“In fact, I believe the process was overly democratic; he actually believed in the democratic process excessively,” Yaacoub said.

But there were other problems hampering the Free Egyptians. For one, the party never conducted its own polls, choosing instead to rely on independent civil society groups, Yaacoub said. Each time he arranged to hire analysts, he would be overruled or told there was not enough money.

“It was a complete mess,” he said.

Now he estimates the Freedom and Justice Party will win 40 percent, the Salafis another five percent and the felool parties 30 to 40 percent. The Social Democrats might take six seats, he said.

And though the latter’s party leadership, drawn from practiced political hands and old-school activists, may know how to survive as the loyal opposition, the Free Egyptians have no such luxury, Yaacoub said.

“We don’t have the political credibility; we don’t have the political history; we don’t have the sustenance to survive that”

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Egypt's elections: don't panic!

By Marc Lynch, November 15, 2011

Egypt's first post-Mubarak elections are scheduled to begin in less than two weeks. It would be hard to exaggerate how badly the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has prepared for these pivotal transitional elections. The election law is baffling and incoherent. Election preparations seem haphazard. The rules keep changing. People barely know what or who they are voting for. Some activists plan to boycott. Islamists seem poised to win big. The election is shaping up to be far messier and difficult than it needed to be.

And yet despite all of that, holding these elections is still the right move. For Egypt to make a transition to a more democratic, legitimate, and accountable political order it has to actually start making that transition. And that means elections. And here, there are some all too rare good signs. There has been no backsliding on the SCAF's commitment to hold these elections despite ample opportunity to postpone them, and there will even be international observers of a sort. On the other side, while some activists have decided to boycott the election they seem to be in the minority. And the Obama administration recognizes the importance of the election and is determined to do what it can to hold the SCAF to its commitments and to assist with the transition. Holding elections now still remains the best choice for Egypt. But everyone needs to prepare for the likely outcome to make sure that the vote actually does begin a real transition to a democratic Egypt rather than digging its early grave.

I remain broadly optimistic that Egypt, like Tunisia, will make its democratic transition despite all the turbulence. This is not because the SCAF has demonstrated any real commitment to democracy or the rule of law. It is because there is a broad and deep public consensus in support of democracy, and enough powerful competing forces to prevent any easy return to Mubarak-style authoritarian rule. It is also because the Obama administration at the highest levels is determined to help get Egypt right, and

has been working hard — often behind the scenes — to push the SCAF in the correct direction.

It is also because the SCAF has proven to be politically incompetent. Even if they do hope to remain in power and are scheming to abort the revolution, they just aren't very good at it. For all of their deep and justifiable frustrations, Egypt's activists and the ornery, contentious Egyptian media and new political class have succeeded in making life miserable for the SCAF. The military hasn't gotten comfortable in power. Nor has it been able to demonstrate that it holds the key to restoring public order or getting the economy back on track. Its efforts to impose its authority, with its continued resort to military courts and arrests of prominent activists and increasing censorship, have only made things more unstable. The violence against Copts last month, as well as the military clashes with protestors, left many people frightened. And this may be taking a toll. While public opinion surveys have consistently shown strong support for the SCAF, a new survey published last week shows their public approval dropping by 25 points in the last five months (from 86 percent to 61 percent).

There has been a lot of criticism of the decision to hold these elections now. But the other alternatives are all worse. The turbulence, chaos, abuses, and violence of SCAF's months in power have proven that their remaining in power does not guarantee stability, a steady hand, or economic revival. If the SCAF had postponed elections further, as some had hoped, everyone would now be rightly complaining that this proved their intention of holding on to power. If the SCAF had opted to first draft the constitution, everyone would now be complaining about the composition of the drafting committee and the content of leaked drafts while elections remained only on the distant horizon.

And that's why it has always been so important that the elections go forward. That said the election process in

Egypt has been an inexcusable mess. The election law wasn't announced until shortly before the election, and then amended again in the face of political uproar. This left little time for political parties to organize electoral strategies or coalitions. The law itself is nigh-incomprehensible, allocating two-thirds of the seats by lists and one-third to individual winners. Two weeks before the election, it is difficult to get even basic information about the parties, electoral coalitions, or candidates. That's worrying.

What's more, the rules keep changing, creating extreme uncertainty. The election law took forever to be released, and then changed. Right in the middle of the short election campaign, the SCAF dropped a controversial document of constitutional principles, which seemed to enshrine the military's power in the emerging political order. It will probably back down on parts of it in the face of public pressure, including Friday's threatened Islamist protest / campaign rally. But nobody really knows. Same thing for the presidential election, which will probably not really be postponed all the way to 2013, but nobody really knows. And then, of course, without a constitution nobody really knows what the Parliament will do. Ex-NDP candidates may or may not be banned. Egyptians abroad got the right to vote less than a month before the election. It's obviously not good to have this kind of uncertainty about the basic rules in the midst of such a transition.

The other big source of incipient panic is the one thing upon which almost everyone now agrees: that the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party is likely to do well. There's no great secret to the FJP's likely success. After years of electoral participation, and with a large, disciplined organization and significant financial resources, the Muslim Brotherhood has a very effective campaign machine. It has been organizing in the field for many months, at a time when most of its competitors were not. It has been carefully selecting candidates, holding rallies, constructing a Get Out the Vote machine, hanging banners, and doing all the things which political parties that want to win votes are supposed to do. The FJP has many problems, and its efforts could still be short-circuited by a massive turnout which swamps its organizational advantages, but for now it is looking strong compared to its rivals.

It's hard for anyone, even the MB and FJP's leaders, to say exactly how well it will do in the election. When I spoke to a number of them in late September, they said that their goal of winning 30 to 40 percent of the seats remained unchanged. Tunisia-like numbers would represent something of a best-case scenario, forcing them to form coalitions rather than ruling alone. But their electoral strategy, they told me even then, was complicated by the confusion surrounding the election law, the rapidly shifting electoral coalitions, and the weak preparations by some of their chief rivals. It is all too plausible to see something like the 2006 Palestinian election unfold, where Fatah's disorganization handed victory to Hamas (for example, multiple liberal candidates contesting the same seat handing a safe liberal seat to a unified Islamist vote). It now seems possible that the MB, alone or in coalition with other Islamists, could end up winning a Parliamentary majority. Even that would not be cause for panic, given the limits on Parliament's power, but it would be far more difficult to navigate than an Islamist bloc under 40 percent.

With or without a majority, everyone needs to be prepared for Islamists to do well. It is almost impossible for there to be a free and fair Egyptian election in which Islamists do not win a sizable share of the vote. But even though it is expected, their success will likely prompt a media and political frenzy. This will be made even worse by the fact that Egypt's election will extend over three rounds, rather than being completed in one day. This means that there will be long weeks for rumors of Islamist victories to circulate, for polarization and recriminations, and — worst of all — for calls for the army to step in and cancel elections as in Algeria in 1991.

To avoid such a catastrophic failure, everyone will need to avoid over-reaction. The Muslim Brotherhood will need to demonstrate a lot more political maturity than it has shown in recent months. It will need to emulate Tunisia's Rached al-Ghannouch, who has since Ennahda's big electoral victory done everything possible to reassure Tunisians and the West that his party will not impose Islamist rule on Tunisia. The Egyptian MB will need to do the same, and back those words with deeds by proving that it will not seek to dominate or to impose its agenda. I have heard a lot over the years

from MB leaders about their true democratic convictions, their recognition of the fears they provoke in others and their desire to avoid repeating the Algerian or Palestinian experiences. This is their chance to prove it.

Egyptian secularists, leftists, liberals, and Christians will also need to show restraint, especially with regard to the temptation to call for the elections to be interrupted if they seem to be going badly. That doesn't mean rolling over — those forces should absolutely continue to challenge and push the MB on their democratic commitments at every opportunity, and call them out when they don't live up to them.

The United States and outside observers will also need to resist the tidal wave of recrimination and scare-mongering which is nearly certain to flood the media as the election unfolds. The Obama administration has tried to show that it will respect the outcome of democratic elections, and that it will be willing to work with Islamist parties that demonstrate respect for democratic rules, human rights, and non-violence. There has been a growing recognition that

you can't have a representative democracy which excludes a major political trend such as the Islamists, and that including Islamists in the political game is better than forcing them into the shadows. Most now see that lumping together the wide variety of often sharply competing Islamists into one vast Islamic menace is shoddy analytic bunk.

But that balance is going to be far harder to maintain in Egypt than it was after Ennahda's victory in Tunisia. The stakes are higher, the media glare hotter, and the Egyptian MB less forthcoming than their Tunisian counterparts. But doing so has never been more important. For years there was a bipartisan rhetorical consensus in the United States about supporting Arab democracy. This will be the most important test yet of that commitment to Arab democracy — for the administration, for Congress, for the media, and for the academic and policy communities. Did they, and we, really mean it?

The best advice, as in most parts of the universe: don't panic. The election isn't going to be pretty, but it's necessary.



The Second Republic of Tahrir

By Ashraf Khalil, November 22, 2011

CAIRO – Tahrir Square is back. For the past four days, protesters opposed to military rule have done battle with Egyptian security forces — and on Tuesday, Nov. 22, the tide appeared to finally turn in their favor. Buoyed by crowds that exceeded 100,000, the protesters forced the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to announce an accelerated transition to civilian rule. But with mistrust between the two sides running high, nobody is celebrating just yet.

“The Armed Forces do not seek power and are ready to leave power immediately through the holding of a popular referendum if necessary,” SCAF chairman Field Marshall Mohamed Tantawi said in a televised address. “Some tried to drag us into confrontation ... But we will control ourselves to the maximum. We will never kill a single Egyptian.”

Nevertheless, the Health Ministry reported that at least 29 people had died during the latest spasm of unrest — and

Egyptians' growing disenchantment with the SCAF has certainly been on full display. On the night of Nov. 20 in Tahrir Square, a raucous mob enveloped the steps leading to the Omar Makram mosque. About an hour earlier, a combined army and police charge — backed by waves of tear gas — had violently cleared the area. The soldiers didn't stay long, pausing only to set fire to the collection of tents in the square.

In the wake of that attack, a pair of senior army officers ventured to the mosque to address the crowds, and apparently negotiate some sort of *détente*. But the protesters quickly turned on them, and the situation devolved into a frantic rescue. Volunteers from the mosque formed a human chain to stave off the enraged crowds seeking to reach the two officers inside.

One bearded man standing on the steps shouted, "These men are under our protection. Any hand that touches them will be cut off!"

The stand-off eventually was defused and the army officers were hustled out of the building, making their getaway in a waiting ambulance. "It's over. They're gone," said one witness. Then he laughed and turned sarcastic, adding, "They turned over Gilad Shalit. The hostage is free."

It's safe to say that SCAF officials, riding high in February after being embraced by the revolutionary movement intent on toppling Hosni Mubarak's regime, could never have imagined that army officers would be fleeing from an angry mob in Tahrir just a few months later.

Some, such as prominent activist and blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy, presciently argued from Day One against Egyptians putting their faith in the military. "A real democratic Egypt is not necessarily the Egypt that the generals and the United States want to see," Hamalawy told al Jazeera on Feb. 11, the night of Mubarak's resignation. "I do not trust those generals."

But critics like Hamalawy were then swimming against the national tide. Inside and outside Tahrir, the army and

SCAF were hailed as heroes, and the country was widely regarded as being in capable and trusted hands.

It has been mostly downhill from there.

Since February, the SCAF has managed to alienate just about every force in the Egyptian political landscape. This collection of senior generals has proven to be arrogant, tone-deaf, secretive, and strangely thin-skinned about any public criticism. As a result, the list of grievances held by the protesters in Tahrir Square has grown long: The universally demanded purge and overhaul of the Interior Ministry proved to be shallow and cosmetic. The trials of Mubarak and his senior lieutenants have been chaotic and, in the eyes of many, insincere. An estimated 12,000 Egyptian civilians have been sentenced before non-transparent military trials. Prominent activists such as Alaa Abdel Fatah and Asmaa Mahfouz have faced charges simply for speaking out against the SCAF. Military censors have guaranteed that SCAF is treated respectfully on state television, which has muted direct criticism of the ruling generals during the current unrest and painted the new Tahrir protesters as fanatics intent on sabotaging the country's democratic transition.

Alaa Al Aswany, author of *The Yacoubian Building* and a longtime political activist, theorized that the career military men who hold power in the SCAF simply didn't have the background or mindset to handle being thrust into a raucous, newly democratic environment like post-Mubarak Egypt.

"You're talking about a military mentality. It's the first time anyone has tried to discuss anything with them," Al Aswany told me, in an interview before the current waves of unrest began. "A normal military general, he's either giving orders or receiving orders and carrying them out. The idea that we can sit down together and I can tell them, 'This decision was wrong,' it's outside of their culture."

These latest waves of public anger serve as a mass acknowledgement that the revolution is only half-finished. What started as a genuine popular uprising on Jan. 25

actually ended 18 days later in a palace coup — with the regime’s military wing tossing the Mubarak cabal overboard in order to preserve their influence.

Now the thousands of angry, mostly young, protesters battling security forces in Tahrir, Alexandria, and elsewhere want to press the reset button on the entire endeavor. These new revolutionary cadres are far from unified in their demands. There’s definitely no consensus on whether the parliamentary elections — scheduled to start on Monday, Nov. 28, and continue in three regional rounds through early January — should be delayed. But there did seem to be universal agreement that the SCAF must accelerate its proposed transitional timetable that would leave it holding executive power through all of 2012.

That demand was granted late on Tuesday, when Tantawi proposed moving the final transition date up by more than eight months, to June 2012. How that offer will be received inside of Tahrir remains an open question — but it will probably resonate in the world outside of the square, where residents are deeply weary of post-revolutionary uncertainty and eager for any plan that promises a rapid return to something resembling normality. Those planning to insist on Tantawi’s immediate departure run the very real risk of being marginalized and vilified.

Tantawi also said he had accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Essam Sharaf’s entire government. But Sharaf, who assumed the post with a great deal of credibility among the activists, has long since been dismissed by many here as simply too weak to stand up to the SCAF. There’s no talk just yet of who might replace the premier, but there is renewed discussion of some sort of ruling presidential council involving Nobel Laureate and opposition activist Mohammed ElBaradei, a representative from the Muslim Brotherhood, and others.

“Right now, there are no elections,” said the secular activist Mohamed Ghoneim, as he emerged coughing from the front lines on Monday night with a gas mask dangling

from his neck. “We’re back to square one, and anyone who doesn’t see this doesn’t know these people.”

The new revolutionary Tahrir is a very different animal than the original version. It’s an angrier and more violent place. The front lines have settled into World War I-style trench warfare, with protesters and combined police and military forces battling for days over the same parcel of asphalt on Mohammed Mahmoud Street, right in front of the former campus of American University in Cairo. It’s exhausting to even be near the front lines for very long, amidst the regular whump of freshly launched tear gas canisters, the painful burn of the gas, and the very real threat of being trampled in a panicked mass retreat. Tahrir now is uplifting and inspiring in many ways, but also tense and nerve-wracking.

Behind the front lines, the trademark Tahrir organization and community spirit has already taken hold. The volunteer cleanup crews are constantly at work, diligently bagging the enormous amounts of garbage produced by a mass gathering. But there are also new wrinkles appropriate for the Republic of Tahrir’s current war footing. Teams of motorcycle couriers stand ready to ferry the wounded straight from the front lines to an array of well-stocked medical clinics. A steady stream of ambulances evacuate the more seriously wounded to local hospitals. Other volunteers form human chains to clear a path for the motorcycles to deliver their injured charges. As new protestors approach the front lines, vinegar-soaked rags and a novel, milky yeast-and-water solution that counteracts the effects of the tear gas are offered.

But unlike January, this isn’t a festival; it’s a fight. That old revolutionary spirit may be burning bright in Tahrir again, but nobody there would think of holding a concert right now.

Ashraf Khalil is a journalist and author of the forthcoming Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation.

Blame the SCAF for Egypt's problems

By Joshua Stacher, October 11, 2011

On Sunday evening, Egyptian plainclothes police and the army attacked a protest by peaceful demonstrators. Dozens were killed and hundreds wounded, while state television spread inflammatory news of Copts attacking soldiers. Many immediately concluded that sectarianism was to blame, rather than the military command which oversaw the bloodbath. The ability of Egypt's Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF) to avoid accountability for its actions lies at the heart of the problems in today's Egypt.

This myth about Egypt's transition runs deep. It blames the stagnation of the country's transition on the divided protest movement, unsatisfied public sector workers, factory labors, and rural farmers. When this narrative does not suffice, the established but ineffective political parties, various Islamist parties greedy for electoral competition, and weak cabinet members are marshaled from their supporting roles to take the fall. Either way, they implicitly place the blame for Egypt's shaky transition on the doorstep of the civilians who made the revolution. Even the focus on parliamentary elections, the policy positions of Egypt's current presidential contenders, or a constitution yet to be written diverts the focus from where it belong — the people actually in power.

The consensus view of the SCAF seems to be that the Council is comprised of honorable men who haphazardly rule, clumsily respond, and do not lust for power. Their repeated failures are blamed on incompetence rather than malevolence. In this account, the SCAF wants to oversee a transition to democracy but repeatedly blunders as it tries to deal with the contradictory demands of an impatient public and a never-ending series of crises. That attitude is not limited to the West — public opinion polls in Egypt show a consistent 90 percent public support for the military, suggesting that their strategy is at least in some ways working.

Blame for the sorry state of the Egyptian transition should not be shared. The SCAF is disproportionately in charge and it is disproportionately to blame for how the transition has been structured. Whether by initiating new laws against protests, strategically deploying military trials against activists and opponents, continuing to apply Emergency Law, devising electoral laws that encourage social fragmentation, framing clashes with a sectarian hue, or intimidating and censoring the press, Egypt under the SCAF represents an attempt to continue the practices of the Mubarak era despite the social changes unleashed by the revolution's popular mobilization. It is no accident that many of the activists who participated in the January 25 revolution now vehemently oppose the SCAF.

The SCAF's actions over the last seven months leave no doubt as to the Council's culpability. These are elites from a regime only partially changed, who are attempting to reconstitute the system in their own image. While they were weakened because of the unpredictable surprise of popular mobilization, the SCAF is intent on reconfiguring executive power much in the same way that authority operated during the tenure of Mubarak. The difference is that now the SCAF *is* the executive.

The key to understanding their actions is not to view them as rooted in incompetence. There is an underlying strategic but purposeful drive to maximize its power and to shape a system that it can control. The outcome does not always work according to plan. But the generals have used every opportunity to maximize their legal authority in ways that do not lead to the construction of a more inclusive political arena: writing their role into the constitution extra-constitutionally in March, resorting to military courts against civilian protestors, extending the Emergency Law, disregarding their promise to leave power within six months, seeking to keep their budget exempt from parliamentary scrutiny, and more. The record is clear.

The SCAF has used the many advantages of incumbency to try to reconfigure and reinforce the authority of the executive. By sanctioning the use of repression and manipulating the legal system, SCAF is trying to gain veto power over the transition to ensure that no substantive change to Egypt's system occurs. By operating beyond the range of institutional checks, formal channels that could call SCAF to account for their actions are blocked. Even its promise to hold elections and transfer power to civilian rule has been designed to minimize the threat to its power. The controversial election law announced unilaterally in late September and then revised under popular pressure guarantees a leading position for Islamists and former National Democratic Party members, while extending the timeline for presidential elections into 2013.

Some argue that an acceptable bargain can be found with a civilian president but the military retaining its privileges, which includes no civilian oversight of its budget or challenges to its economic holdings. Yet, there is little difference between holding power and maintaining privileges. The arrangement would be indistinguishable from the generals' role in the Egypt of Mubarak — or, indeed, give the generals a stronger place than they enjoyed under Mubarak's leadership.

The SCAF and its powerful foreign allies seem comfortable with, or perhaps affectionately remember, an Egypt with a dominant executive. Indeed, some of the language

and actions from U.S. officials is beginning to return to old form. In June 2009, President Obama said that Mubarak was “a force for stability and good” in the region. The Secretary of State modified the statement before proclaiming that SCAF was “a force for stability and continuity” in Egypt on September 28. Meanwhile, the Secretary of Defense even managed to snag an “impromptu” moment to bowl with SCAF's leader, General Tantawi, during his visit to Cairo on October 4.

Such a situation in which SCAF's attempts to redesign hegemonic executive authority and reinstate Mubarak's menu of manipulation will not be unchallenged by the architects of the uprising. It will require and necessitate continued popular mobilization if democratic voices are to be heard. The protest movement used a decade and more of learning to overwhelm and physically defeat an extremely capable coercive apparatus last January and February. They will not sit by and allow the military to quietly resume its unchallenged authority over the country. The SCAF's effort to enforce stability and control over revolutionary Egypt is the very thing dragging the country down into crisis.

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What Egyptians mean by democracy

By Michael Robbins and Mark Tessler, September 20, 2011

Egyptian activists took to the streets on September 9 calling to “correct the path” of a revolution which they see slipping away. They particularly focused their ire on the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which they see as leading a counter-revolution against the will of the Egyptian people. But part of their problem is that, according to a survey carried out by the Arab Barometer this summer, 94.5 percent of Egyptians responded that they trusted the SCAF and 93.5 percent thought it was doing a good job — far more than they do any other part of Egyptian society.

While 78.7 percent of Egyptians agreed that “despite its problems democracy is the best form of government,” their support for democracy is at least in part driven by a belief that such a system is good for the economy. Of the respondents, 64.4 percent defined the most essential characteristic of democracy as either a low level of inequality or the provision of basic necessities for all citizens. Another 12.1 percent stated that it is eliminating corruption. By contrast, *only 6.0 percent* defined democracy’s most essential characteristic as the ability to change the government through elections and only 3.9 percent defined it as the right to criticize those in power. With 84.2 percent of respondents saying that the economy represents Egypt’s greatest challenge, these findings should offer some powerful lessons to all of those interested in supporting Egypt’s transition.

The Arab Barometer project is dedicated to carrying out nationally representative surveys throughout the Arab world and is nearing the completion of its second wave, covering eleven countries. In Egypt, the results demonstrate that at the time of the survey (interviewers were in the field from June 16-July 3) most Egyptians were satisfied and optimistic about political matters. It found that virtually all Egyptians believe the revolution will achieve its goals. We asked if respondents believed that the revolution would be successful in six areas: achieving

a democratic political system, improving economic opportunities, increasing respect for human rights, increasing the rule of law, increasing levels of social justice, and bringing Egypt a greater role in international affairs. In each case, over 95 percent of the respondents agreed that the revolution would achieve the objective.

While they *approved* of the SCAF and of the government of Prime Minister Essam Sharaf (77.7 percent gave him positive marks), Egyptians were less satisfied with their *achievements*. On a 10-point scale measuring satisfaction, with 10 indicating high satisfaction, only 52.2 percent of the respondents rated them at a six or higher. This rating is similar to the belief that personal safety is assured (52.3 percent) and that the government is doing a good job managing the economy (50.7 percent). Lower still are the number of respondents who said the current economic situation is good (24.1 percent), the government is doing well in creating jobs (25.3 percent), or the government has done a good job in narrowing the gap between rich and poor (31.3 percent).

However, most Egyptians remain optimistic about the future. Of those surveyed, 84.4 percent believe the government will be able to solve the country’s economic problems within five years. Similarly, although 81.7 percent consider government corruption a serious problem, 79.2 percent believe that the government is taking significant steps to address the problem. The majority of citizens perceive the government to be working for their good. For example, 71.9 percent believe the government is doing all it can to provide needed services, and 69.1 percent stated that the government is knowledgeable about the needs of ordinary citizens. We cannot know for sure how much these ratings have changed since Mubarak’s fall, since we were unable to get government approval to do a survey in Egypt for the first wave of the Barometer. We did ask respondents about their past level of satisfaction with Mubarak’s regime on this survey, however. On a scale of

1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), 72.6 percent gave Mubarak's regime a 1 and only 7.7 percent rated it as a 6 or better. These figures suggest there is a dramatic increase in government satisfaction over the previous regime.

Looking toward this fall's elections, currently scheduled to begin in November, the Arab Barometer survey indicates that attachments to most political factions are relatively weak. Trust in political parties is mixed, with 55.6 percent of the respondents expressing a significant degree or quite a lot of trust in parties while about one-third indicated that party affiliation would be an important consideration in their vote choice. Only 3.7 percent stated that this would be the most important consideration, and just 9.4 percent of respondents expressed support for a specific party.

The factors that ordinary citizens consider to be most important are primarily specific to candidates. The three most common considerations affecting vote choice are the candidate's level of education, religiosity, and position on important issues at 31.0 percent, 24.9 percent, and 24.3 percent, respectively. Thus, it seems likely that well-known candidates will have an important advantage in the balloting.

The Muslim Brotherhood may be well positioned to contest the elections because of its organizational capacity and past experience, but attitudes toward the Brotherhood at best are mixed. Less than half of the respondents (47.3 percent) stated that they have trust in the Brotherhood and only 3.2 percent stated that the Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party most closely approximates their own political beliefs.

These low levels of support for the Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party could be in part explained by the views of ordinary citizens toward religion and politics. Although less than 2 percent of respondents indicated that

they were not religious, the majority of ordinary Egyptians do not favor a significantly greater role for religion in the political system. Only 36.8 percent of respondents stated that religious leaders *should* influence decisions of government while 86.8 percent said that religious leaders should *not* influence how people vote in elections. Less than half (46.9 percent) believed it would be better for Egypt if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office. Most notably, 79.7 percent responded that they believe that religion is a private matter and should be separate from social and political life. If the Brotherhood fares well in the upcoming elections, it does not appear that this outcome should be interpreted as a popular call for a more religious political system.

The Arab Barometer survey makes clear that, despite current frustrations by some members of society, the vast majority of Egyptians are satisfied with the direction in which the country is moving. Most appear to be less concerned about political reform than economic performance, and most also appear to understand that progress will take time. Indeed 88.8 percent stated that reform should proceed gradually rather than all at once. Accordingly, at least for the time being, it seems unlikely that the frustration of Egyptian activists over the lack of progress toward democracy will bring large numbers of ordinary Egyptians back into the streets. If activists hope to appeal to voters in the upcoming elections, they should instead take heed of the overwhelming focus on the economy and the hope for a better future.

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Winning Back the Revolution

By Dalia Mogahed, November 28, 2011

As Egyptians go to the polls for the first time since the fall of former President Hosni Mubarak, the country is deeply divided. The protests of recent weeks — which began with a call for the military to relinquish its hold on power — have descended into violent street clashes between angry youth and the police, with as many as 40 killed and hundreds injured in the fighting. Even now, thousands remain camped out in Tahrir Square and in front of the parliament building in downtown Cairo.

Most Egyptians have likely not welcomed the most recent round of protests with the same enthusiasm as the uprising that brought down Mubarak. According to nationally representative Gallup surveys conducted across the country in four rounds between late March and September, most Egyptians long for a return to normalcy, and see the country's biggest problems as economic, not political. Among the wider public, the military is popular, while continued demonstrations that are viewed as crippling the economy and prolonging instability are not. But by responding to the protesters with brute force, Egypt's ruling generals may have squandered that good will. While Egyptians oppose continued sit-ins, they reject attacks on civilians with even greater fervor.

Following are some of the most notable highlights from this groundbreaking survey.

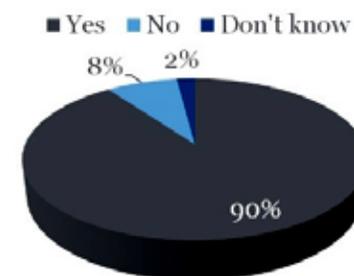
Most Egyptians support the revolution

- **83 percent** supported the protesters who called for former President Mubarak's resignation
- **11 percent** participated in the protests

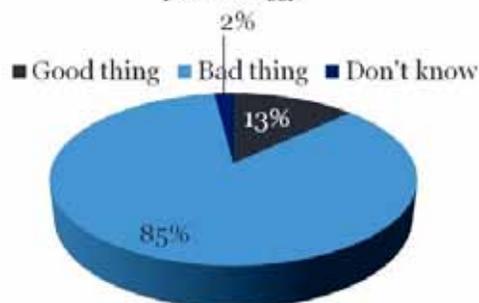
The clashes and chaos in Tahrir and elsewhere in Egypt over the past several days stand in stark contrast to the euphoria in the weeks after mostly peaceful mass protests succeeded in ousting Mubarak after 30 years in power.

In late March/early April, 83 percent of Egyptians said they supported these demonstrations and 11 percent reported personally participating in them. While those who said they took to the streets were most likely to be young, educated, and male, the demonstrators included the entire demographic spectrum. Most importantly, their average household income reflected the public at large. In a country where the deepest political divides often fall along class lines, the demands of Egypt's Jan. 25 uprising represented the will of the vast majority of Egyptian society, transcending traditional economic differences.

In Egypt, do you have confidence in each of the following, or not? How about the Military

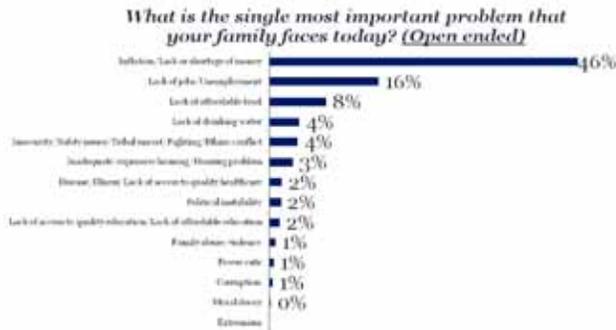


Do you think each of the following is a good thing or a bad thing for the country? The continued protests in Egypt

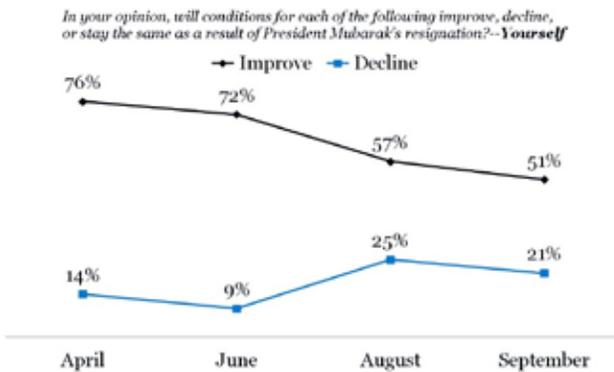


As much as Egyptians supported the 18-day demonstrations calling for Mubarak's resignation, they oppose continued protests with equal spirit. This, coupled with the military's popularity, makes the public unlikely to support demands for the Supreme Council of the Armed

Forces to step down — especially if it means prolonging the economic and political instability during the transition to civilian rule.



Egyptians' top concerns are economic — inflation, unemployment, and lack of affordable food — in contrast to activists' demands that center around political reform. For many, ongoing protests likely appear to exacerbate these economic problems and destabilize the country.

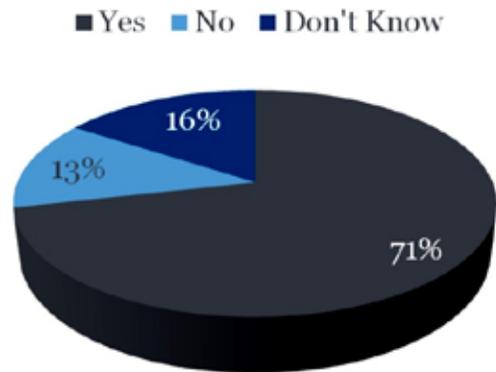


The lack of tangible improvement in many Egyptians' everyday lives since Mubarak's resignation has taken its toll. The once-robust majority who believed their lives would improve in post-Mubarak Egypt has shrunk since April. The growing number of revolution skeptics are less likely than those who expect life to improve after Mubarak's ouster to have confidence in political institutions such as the judicial system, the national government, or in the honesty of elections.

Although, according to Gallup research, the poor were as likely as the rich to have demonstrated against Mubarak in the Jan. 25 uprising, those who expect life to get worse

are significantly more likely to be poor, live in rural areas, and have a lower education. This group is also more likely to perceive the national economic situation and their personal economic situation as worsening generally, suggesting that they see neither political nor economic benefits from Mubarak's ouster, and are likely the hardest hit by the country's post-uprising economic downturn.

Do you think that the upcoming parliamentary election will be fair and honest, or not?

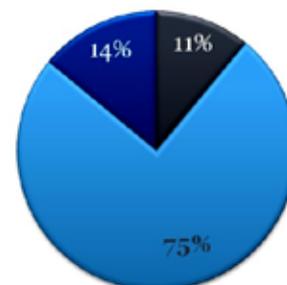


Most Egyptians continue to believe the elections will be fair and honest and 74 percent plan to participate — a far cry from the months before the uprising, when less than one-third had confidence in the fairness of the electoral system. Although faith in the honesty of elections has declined slightly since April amid political jousting over the electoral format and timetable, the enduring strength of the public's trust suggests that unlike many activists who proclaim the current military leadership as no better than Mubarak, most Egyptians believe a great deal has improved in Egypt's political reality since his ouster.

Do you think each of the following is a good thing or a bad thing for the country?:

Delaying parliamentary and presidential elections

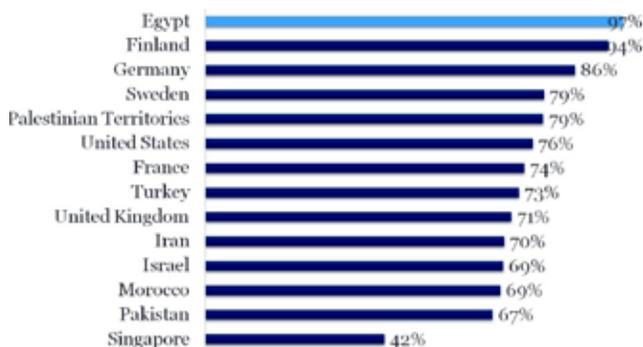
Legend: Good thing (dark blue), Bad thing (light blue), Don't know (black)



Most Egyptians want to speed up the transition period and return to normalcy. The vast majority in September saw delaying elections as a bad thing for the country, another important chasm between some protesters, many of whom have vowed to boycott the polls, and the majority of the public.

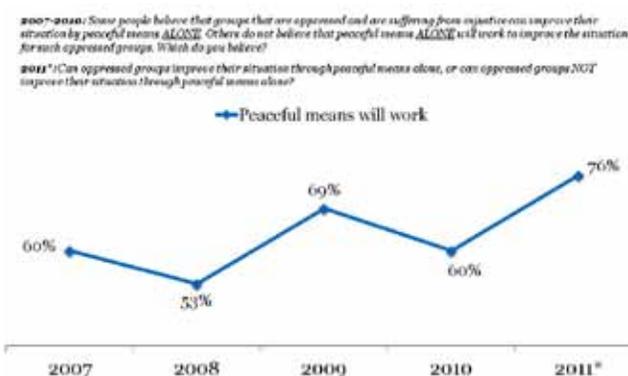
Political Party	Support	Do Not Support
Muslim Brotherhood	23%	61%

The main rationale for delaying elections comes from those who fear an Islamist-dominated transitional parliament, the government body in charge of pushing forward constitutional amendments for Egypt’s new political order. This view, however, shared by many in the West, is likely exaggerated. While the Muslim Brotherhood enjoy support from a significant segment of Egyptian society, more Egyptians see a parliament in which the group holds a strong, influential position as bad for the country. But the majority do not put their concern about a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated parliament before their desire for legitimate elections to replace the transitional government.



Egyptians are the most likely population in the world to unconditionally reject individual and military attacks on civilians.

With the public so averse to continued instability, it might seem that those protesting have little chance of winning public sympathy, giving SCAF carte blanche in how it chooses to end the sit in. Yet while Egyptians oppose ongoing protests, they reject attacks targeting civilians with even greater zeal. Egyptians are the most likely people of any country in the world to say the targeting and killing of civilians is never justified (97 percent). The initial attack on a few hundred people staging a sit-in in Tahrir Square, especially at the hands of not the army, but the much less popular Central Security Forces, may have temporarily tilted a public that was largely supportive of the military council toward the opposition.



Not only do Egyptians reject civilian attacks on moral grounds, but most also believe peaceful means are effective for correcting injustice. During the five years that Gallup has been conducting surveys in the country, the majority of Egyptians have said they believe that peaceful means alone are sufficient to improve the circumstances of oppressed groups. With Mubarak’s ouster, Egyptians’ confidence in nonviolent means of change has surged. If the elections do not succeed in stopping the violence, or even exacerbate it, that may not only shake Egyptians’ faith in their military council, but in peaceful means of change — perhaps the greatest blow to Egypt’s revolution.

Dalia Mogahed is director and senior analyst at the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center.

Tunisia



The day after Tunisia's elections

By Erik Churchill, October 25, 2011

At 6:30 a.m. yesterday, the elections workers on Hope Street were scurrying and the army had taken their positions. My neighborhood elementary school was being taken over to hold the first elections since the overthrow of Ben Ali in January. A small group of voters gathered around the gates on Rue Amel (Hope Street) to cast the first ballots.

The orderly conduct of voters, observers, elections officials, and security personnel was a constant refrain throughout the day. Tunisians I spoke with almost seemed surprised that their bureaucracy could function so well. Hedia, a family friend excitedly told me, "The observers didn't try and do anything — they just let us vote on our own." Living in a country that has never held free elections, Tunisian voters seemed to surprise themselves by the efficacy of the process. Now, all attention will turn to the outcome — not just who won seats, but how the new assembly will be formed and where it will take the new Tunisia.

There were four great tests for the Tunisian election: non-violence, turnout, pluralism, and fairness. Their success was anything but assured.

Many Tunisians worried about the potential for violence during the elections. The war in Libya has created a major security threat for Tunisia. Throughout the summer, the Tunisian press reported on small caches of arms that were found, or criminals in possession of weaponry traced to Libya. The government arrested thousands in pre-election sweeps and deployed 42,000 additional police and National Guard troops to ensure the elections went smoothly. In the end, there were no incidences of Election Day violence reported to the authorities, clearing the way for peaceful elections.

There were also serious concerns that Tunisians would not turn out to vote. After a lackluster voter registration drive over the summer and a widespread sense of

disgruntlement with the slow transition process, officials worried that voters would avoid the polls. Despite a massive communications campaign, it was unclear that Tunisians would show engagement in the political process. Although official results are yet to be tallied, unofficial reports indicate that upwards of 70 percent of the population voted, not only legitimizing the elections themselves, but the entire process of writing a new constitution for the country.

Third, many worried that the Electoral Commission would prove biased, leading to illegitimate elections. But the Tunisian elections appear to have been remarkably free and fair. Despite some reported infractions, international and domestic elections observers have largely agreed that the elections were conducted according to international standards of transparency. More importantly, with very few exceptions in certain regions, the Tunisian people, for the first time, saw their officials conduct elections competently and without prejudice. Although there will undoubtedly be some angst over voting infractions and abnormalities, these elections will be viewed as a reasonable expression of the Tunisian people's will. Likewise, despite fears that the elections would be manipulated by outsiders, these elections do not show any signs of outside influence of any kind.

Finally, there were great fears about the prospects of a victory by the Islamist party Ennahdha. Although full results are not yet in, preliminary results show Ennahdha with a commanding lead, perhaps winning as much as 50 percent of the total seats in the assembly. The civil war in Algeria, which started after the military overturned elections won by Islamists, is fresh in the minds of many Tunisians. In the week prior to Tunisia's election, Ennahdha's leader Rached al Ghannouchi raised alarms by calling for his supporters to revolt if the elections were deemed fraudulent. Secularists issued furious warnings about the dangers of Islamist rule. The widely expected Ennahdha victory raised the uncomfortable question

of whether Ennahdha would truly be given a fair shot, whether their secular opponents would accept it, and whether the Islamists would live up to their pre-election promises to form a broad coalition government.

In the days following the election, Ennahdha has already reached out to two secular parties, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettaktol, to form a government of national unity. Both parties have agreed to discuss this possibility with Ennahdha. Meanwhile, the Progressive Democratic Party, which had always refused to ally with Ennahdha (and lost badly on Sunday), announced that it would respect the results of the election and be a part of the opposition. While it is too early to judge, these initial signs of collaboration also point to a major success for the elections and for the coalition building that will be necessary in the Constituent Assembly.

The road ahead will be a difficult one for Tunisia. The plurality of views will make consensus building difficult. Ennahdha supporters, after their substantial victory, may be resentful of challenges to the government and unwilling to compromise on their core values. There are already calls for protests by liberal groups, who Ennahdha supporters are calling sore losers. Tunisian civil society has expanded in the last few months and it will look to influence the Constituent Assembly on human rights, freedom of expression, and censorship. However, if civil society workers display constant challenges to the Islamist majority, they may come to be seen as partisan players rather than defenders of these shared values. Lastly,

the economy remains a grim challenge to whichever government emerges. While the Tunisian economy will likely stabilize after the elections, the insecure global economy, particularly that of Europe — Tunisia's largest trading partner — will likely be unable to provide the growth needed to cure the endemic unemployment.

U.S. officials thus far have signaled that they are not worried about Ennahdha's victory. But nobody really knows how the international community will react to the seating of an Islamist government, or what policies such a government will pursue abroad. Already, resentment is building at the hysterical reaction of the French press to Ennahdha's victory. Additionally, there will be great temptation for the new government to offer symbolic support for Islamic causes abroad, including the Palestinian issue. It will take great restraint on both sides to manage this politically sensitive relationship.

Post-election Tunisia faces serious challenges. But the debates, for once, will not take place behind closed doors. They will be in the open, in the press, and on the internet. The process will not be easy, but Sunday's elections were a pretty good first step on the road toward democracy in Tunisia.

Erik Churchill is an independent development consultant based in Tunisia. His blog, "A 21st Century Social Contract," offers a perspective on life in Tunis since the fall of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.



The limits of anti-Islamism in Tunisia

By Melani Cammett, October 31, 2011

Most commentary about the results of Tunisia's historic election on October 23 has focused on the success of the moderate Islamist party Ennahda. With 41.5 percent of seats in the Constitutional Assembly, Ennahda certainly did score an impressive victory. But two other results of equal importance should not be overlooked. Several liberal and leftist parties also did well, giving strong representation to the major political trends in the forthcoming assembly. And even more striking, the parties that banked upon an explicitly anti-Islamist campaign message lost badly.

By any standard, Tunisia's elections marked a crucial step toward the institutionalization of democracy in a country that has endured decades of dictatorship. The peaceful and orderly process of holding elections sets an important regional precedent. But the election campaign exposed an important rift between Islamists and secularists that will have enduring effects on Tunisian politics. How the new assembly and the competing political forces deal with those issues will be decisive in determining whether the elections now pave the way for a genuine democratic transition.

Ennahda's performance demonstrated its very real strength across the country. Although Ennahda's share of the popular vote was lower in many districts given the number of "wasted" votes for parties that failed to win seats, the results clearly show that Islamists have significant appeal across the country — not just in the poor and marginalized districts of the south and west but also in the wealthier, more developed coastal areas. Ennahda has enjoyed widespread legitimacy because its members were the most repressed under Ben Ali's rule, particularly in the 1990s when many in its leadership and rank and file endured torture and long prison sentences. The party is also viewed as honest and not corrupt, a perception that holds a lot of weight in light of the abuses of the Ben Ali and Trabelsi families. As many Tunisians told me, "They are not thieves."

However, Ennahda is not the only actor in Tunisian politics that is seen as honest, and there are other elements that contributed to the party's success. Key figures in Ettakatol or the Forum Démocratique pour le Travail et les Libertés (FDTL), the Congrès pour la République (CPR), and the Pôle Démocratique Moderniste (PDM), among other parties and political figures, also enjoy "clean" reputations. Ennahda also ran an extremely professional and effective campaign, with a ground game that put its rivals to shame. When I asked Ennahda officials how they managed to develop an extensive grassroots presence in Tunisia in a short time period and despite decades of exile, imprisonment, and repression, they replied, «We were always there.» Neighborhood residents have known Ennahda supporters for decades, and were impressed by their good behavior, honest dealings with other citizens, and commitment to their principles. Furthermore, the message of Ennahda resonates broadly in the population. Clearly, religion and apparent respect for Islam matters to many Tunisians, and Ennahda benefited from this, particularly in light of perceived attacks on religious values in the weeks leading up to the elections.

The second-ranked party, the CPR, gained about 14 percent of the seats and the third-ranked party, Ettakatol, received about 10 percent of the seats in the assembly. Fourth place went to Mohamed Hechmi Hamdi's Aridha Chaabiya, or Popular Petition, list (at the time of this writing, it remained unclear whether the disqualification of parts of that list for alleged campaign violations would stand). Based in London, Hamdi is a former member of Ennahda who split from the party and apparently had some dealings with Ben Ali. Despite almost no local media coverage during the campaign, Hamdi's lists won 19 seats, allegedly because he appealed to voters in his own region of the historically marginalized south and because he promised lavish social benefits.

The elections highlighted and heightened the apparent Islamist-secularist cleavage in contemporary Tunisia. The vote for the members of the Constitutional Assembly was presented by some secularists and Ennahda officials alike as akin to a referendum on the cultural identity of the country. In the months leading up to the elections, secularists expressed their fears about the prospect of an Ennahda victory, claiming that the party's leadership continually engage in «double speak» by failing to present strong positions defending free expression and women's rights and by craftily concealing a longer-term agenda to impose «sharia law» on Tunisia. In the campaign's closing days, the Parti Démocratique Progressiste (PDP) aired an inflammatory advertisement warning about the extreme measures that Ennahda would supposedly impose on the «Day After» its election.

The recent outcry following the airing of the film «Persepolis» on Nessma TV, a private television station, likely worked in favor of Ennahda and hurt those parties, such as the PDP and PDM, which defended the station's right to show the film and, by extension, the right to free speech even when it offends the religious sensibilities of some people. Although Ennahda leaders renounced the acts of violence against the home of Nessma's owner, they remained opposed to the station's decision to air the film, which includes a visual depiction of God, as an affront to religion. This position likely appealed to a portion of the electorate. Ennahda supporters often claim that Tunisian secularists espouse foreign values and aim to impose their own, alien vision of society on what is at base a more conservative society.

In the end, the parties that played the anti-Ennahda card most vehemently lost while those that presented themselves as more tolerant and open to possible coalitions with the Islamist party performed relatively well. Moncef Marzouki's CPR and Mustapha Ben Jaafar's Ettakatol are run by longstanding secular opponents of the Ben Ali regime who chose to adopt a relatively conciliatory tone vis-à-vis Ennahda. As an official from Ettakatol told me, «We don't attack Ennahda directly because everyone who cares about religion will think we're against religion

and that only Ennahda defends it.» But Ahmed Néjib Chebbi's PDP and the secular leftist PDM both rejected an alliance with Ennahda and made opposition to the Islamist party a key part of their platforms. These two parties fared poorly in the elections with 17 and 5 seats out of 217 in the assembly, respectively.

These mutual suspicions have characterized the post-revolutionary institution building process. From the beginning, Ennahda was concerned that the High Commission for the Fulfillment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform and Democratic Transition, which has acted as the main policy making body and selected the electoral rules, was disproportionately staffed by members of leftist and secularist opposing groups. Although Ennahda had representatives in the High Commission, periodic tensions flared up over specific issues and the party ultimately resigned when the body opted to adopt decisions by majority vote rather than consensus. In part to allay its fears that the elections would be rigged, Ennahda placed monitors in each of the more than 7,000 polling stations across the country. Based on information gathered from its extensive network of representatives at the ballot boxes, the party preemptively announced its victory less than one day after the elections and well before the official results were released. At a press conference held by the National Democratic Institute held the day after the elections, Said Ferjani, a member of the party's political bureau, told me and several journalists a fairly precise estimate of the number of seats and margin of victory that the party would obtain, even as candidates from other parties emphasized on television talk shows that the votes were not yet tallied.

While Islamists have feared that transitional governing institutions were stacked against them, their secularist opponents now worry that Ennahda will use its newfound power to impose its social and religious agenda on Tunisians and, therefore, they will lose their hard-won liberties as well as the rights bestowed on women under the dictatorship. The split between Islamists and secularists is the defining issue of Tunisian society and politics at this juncture and, with such deep-seated mutual suspicions

and seemingly irreconcilable positions on what constitutes «free speech» and liberties, it is difficult to see how a resolution can be achieved.

The election results most directly affect the composition of the new government and the process of writing new rules of the game. It is almost axiomatic in politics that victors aim to rewrite the rules in their favor. The relative weights of the different parties and their respective preferences for the design of executive institutions and electoral laws will therefore shape the structure of the new governing system. But Ennahda has demonstrated considerable sensitivity to the fears it provokes in the West and at home. Ennahda claims that it is open to negotiations with all willing partners and, even before the results were officially announced, established alliances with other parties elected to the assembly. This may reassure some of its critics that the Islamist party will not fully dominate the process of writing the new constitution.

Ennahda claims that it is a moderate party along the lines of the Turkish Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP). Indeed, the intellectual foundations of the two parties are intertwined — leaders of the AKP were apparently inspired by the work of Rachid al-Ghannouchi, the Ennahda party leader, whose writings emphasize the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Nonetheless, the AKP analogy does not reassure Ennahda's staunchest opponents who claim that the Kemalist legacy of secularism, constitutional

guarantees, and the prospect of accession to the EU put automatic constraints on the Turkish Islamist party that are not present in Tunisia. The AKP's growing control over the media and different branches of government give some Tunisian secularists further misgivings about the AKP model. Bridging this deep divide and building trust between Islamists and secularists will require continuous dialogue and debate over the long-term.

The Constitutional Assembly will now appoint a government to run the everyday affairs of the country, in addition to taking responsibility for drafting a new constitution. Ennahda leaders have repeatedly stated that they do not wish to hold a majority in the assembly, in part because they will be all the more vulnerable to popular criticisms if they fail to deliver quick improvements to living conditions and to address the crises of youth unemployment and regional disparities in Tunisia. The new government will need to work extremely quickly to install an interim government and write a new constitution while at the same time bringing tangible improvements to people's lives. Whether it can do so, while avoiding controversial issues that divide Tunisians, will ultimately determine whether the elections should be seen as a success.

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Morocco

Morocco's new elections, just like the old elections?

By Daphne McCurdy, November 28, 2011

Last week was a critical moment for democracy in the Middle East: Egyptians fought to reclaim their revolution in massive demonstrations, the Bahraini government accepted the findings of a frank report on its human rights record, and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh finally signed an agreement to give up power. But in a more subdued iteration of the Arab Spring, Morocco held early parliamentary elections on Nov. 25 that, while not particularly eventful, actually tell us quite a bit about the country's political climate: The current path of reform initiated by the monarchy is not aggressive enough to satisfy demands for greater democracy and political parties are seen to be incapable of bringing about that change themselves.

Like the rest of the Middle East and North Africa, Morocco was faced with popular protests earlier this year. However, in contrast to other rulers who responded to demonstrations with force and refused to make concessions until too late, King Mohammad VI quickly promised constitutional reforms, getting ahead of protesters and effectively undermining their influence. Democracy activists saw this as little more than the king's tried and true strategy of implementing superficial changes to appease the public without changing the country's fundamental power structure. Indeed, while the amended constitution empowers the parliament and prime minister, ultimate authority still remains in the hands of the king. Nonetheless, the king remains immensely popular among the general public and the constitutional referendum on July 1, which was seen more as a referendum on the king rather than for the details of the reform package, was approved by 98 percent of the voters. Human rights and opposition groups, however, questioned the legitimacy of the vote, citing pressure from both mosques and local officials to vote yes, media propaganda, lack of voter education, and alleged vote-rigging.

Long seen as one of the most moderate and progressive countries in the Arab world, Morocco now risks falling

behind the curve as democracy movements sweep the region. Coming on the heels of the constitutional referendum, the parliamentary elections last week were a first test of whether Moroccans continue to have faith in the king's approach of gradual reform. More so than the election results, voter turnout was seen to be the real indicator of whether people bought into the system. While the youth-led February 20 movement and several left-wing and Islamist political parties called for a boycott of the parliamentary elections and organized protests in the major cities in the days before the election, the government actively encouraged citizens to vote through ubiquitous poster campaigns and televised public service announcements.

With 45 percent voter turnout, it appears that the general population lies somewhere in between these two extremes: not openly supporting the February 20 movement, which remains a diffuse group with popularity limited to the major cities, but also not eager to participate in a political process that is unlikely to bring about real change.

In the charming but quiet medieval city of Meknes — the 5th largest in Morocco — where I traveled for the final day of campaigning and election day, there were barely any signs of an election at all. Areas designated for political posters were completely blank, and there were no boycott protests or major political rallies on the streets. This lack of excitement and political activity appears to have been a problem throughout the country. The government has presented the 45 percent turnout rate as a sign of voter enthusiasm, or at the very least, an improvement on the historically low rate of 37 percent in 2007 elections. But these numbers can be misleading since they refer to the percentage of registered voters, and the number of registered voters has actually decreased from 15.5 million in 2007 to 13.5 million today. Furthermore, one would expect voter participation to be much higher than 45 percent in elections heralding a new era for the country,

particularly when compared to the 51.6 percent turnout in 2002 and the 58.3 percent posted in the 1997 polls.

Perhaps even more troubling is the high number of spoiled ballots — up to 30 percent of all ballots cast at some polling stations — which represents another form of protest against the status quo. Although the number of invalid ballots was also an issue in the 2007 elections, this time around the ballots were spoiled with striking intensity and anger. Many were marked with a large X or forceful scribble across the page. One instructive ballot I came across had all the parties crossed off individually with “Party of Donkeys” written prominently on the paper.

Indeed, in conversations I had with people on the streets, political analysts, and civil society organizations, there appears to be a great deal of disdain for political parties, particularly among the youth. In a system where patronage and loyalty to the king and his “makhzan” (palace elite) guarantee victory at the polls and other benefits, parties have little incentive to develop programs that could advance the needs of the broader citizenry. Many people complained to me that party leaders only acknowledge their existence during the electoral campaign and then forget about their needs quickly after being voted into power. Although parties have repeatedly promised to change candidates in the face of voter malaise, the same corrupt actors return year after year. Moreover, perceptions are that the palace often plays the various parties against one another to ensure submission. In these elections, eight political parties with little in common ideologically were cobbled together to create the “G8” coalition that is accused of being a royalist attempt to counterbalance the moderate Islamic Justice and Development (PJD) party (which ended up garnering the highest total of votes). The constitutional reforms have marginally strengthened the role of parliament vis a vis the king, but the incompetence and inability of the traditional parties to stand up to the monarch obfuscates the positive democratic changes.

Some were hopeful that political parties could effect real change by incorporating principles enshrined in the new

constitution into specific legislation. But the electoral laws issued in October suggest that the parties will squander future opportunities to improve the system. Electoral laws were initially drafted by the Ministry of Interior and then deliberated in closed-door sessions with entrenched party leaders, shutting out civil society actors and party members. The resulting electoral framework therefore maintained many of the weaknesses of previous laws. This included disproportionate districting and proportional representation with a largest remainder system that precludes any one party from getting a sizable plurality and encourages vote buying, as well as a separate list for the women’s quota that marginalizes female candidates within parties. As one young man crudely explained to me, “these reforms are like putting makeup on a pretty girl, wait take that back, an ugly girl! They aren’t real change.”

The victory of the PJD in the elections is a testament to this desire for a fuller makeover by those who chose to vote. The only credible opposition party in parliament, the PJD focused its campaign on an impressive anti-corruption platform with concrete policy proposals. The constitutional reforms require the prime minister to come from the largest party in parliament, meaning the PJD will hold this post. Yet the PJD’s ability to bring about a radical transformation is constrained by two factors. First, given the aforementioned proportional representation system that results in a fractured parliament, the PJD with 27 percent of seats will now need to form a coalition with other parties — most likely those of the “Democratic Bloc” alliance — who are co-opted by the palace. Second, despite the fact that it shed its radical leanings decades ago, the party is viewed suspiciously by the regime and its allies, and has had to take a cautious approach to demonstrate that it is willing to work within the system. The change in party leadership in 2008 from Saad al-Din al-Uthmani, who wants a parliamentary monarchy, to Abdelilah Benkirane, who prefers to maintain a strong monarchy, reflects this calculation.

Both the low turnout and the PJD’s success show that Moroccans want genuine change, and won’t be fooled by superficial attempts to win them over. But it is clear that

such meaningful change will not come from the king. With endemic corruption, decreasing quality of health care and housing, and increasing levels of unemployment, Moroccans suffer from the same issues that ail the rest of the Arab world. While they probably don't want to go down the path of revolution, unless political parties take more ownership of the political process and stand up to the king, disaffected Moroccans may find they have nowhere to go but the streets.

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Election dilemmas for Morocco's protest movement

By Adria Lawrence, November 16, 2011

Moroccans head to the polls in just under two weeks to elect a new parliament. The elections have been touted as a test of the King's constitutional reforms, passed by referendum in July, and are ostensibly shrouded in uncertainty. Will the elections produce gradual movement toward democracy, as the regime has promised? Will the winning political parties take advantage of their somewhat increased powers and enact better policies? Will Moroccans even show up to vote? Will Morocco be the Arab Spring's great success or great failure, as the *Atlantic* provocatively asked?

In all likelihood, the elections will neither produce clear answers about Morocco's future, nor will they reveal just what it is that Moroccans want. They certainly seek change — their country has one of the highest levels of inequality in the Arab world, and one of the lowest incomes with GDP per capita under \$3,000. Political parties are widely viewed as corrupt and inept, and unemployment and underemployment continue to pose problems, particularly for the younger generation. Yet Moroccans are divided as to how best to rectify these problems, and whom to hold responsible.

The February 20th movement, whose protests earlier this year led the King to initiate constitutional reforms, has been thus far, unable to assign blame or propose a concrete agenda. Its uneasy alliance with the banned Islamist group, Justice and Charity, cost it some of its supporters and created internal fissures. It has not yet managed to forge the linkages to other segments of society that were so crucial in Tunisia and Egypt. In the wake of the King's constitutional reforms, the movement lost momentum.

Yet although the February 20th group has been faulted for failing to provide a platform for change, they have articulated a clear, simple message, despite critics' claims to the contrary. Movement activists, like many Moroccans, want an end to elite privilege and corruption — they want elites to share political power and wealth with the rest of the country and they want increased political liberties.

What they haven't asked for is regime change. In this respect the Moroccan protests more closely resemble the Occupy protests in the United States than those that swept Mubarak and Ben Ali from power. They are anti-privilege, but not anti-monarchy. Moroccans blame a number of

actors for the current state of affairs — bickering political parties that fail to deliver on campaign promises, corrupt ministers, post-colonial legacies, and a disengaged public. But they do not lay the blame at the foot of the King. And neither does the February 20th movement — for blaming the King is a sure way to lose support.

Why don't Moroccans blame the King? He is, after all, the logical person to hold responsible — the country's chief power-holder. The answer lies, in part, in the person of King Mohammed VI himself. Since his reign began in 1999, the King has presented himself as a newer, friendlier version of the monarchy. He has distanced himself from his father's more brutal practices, modernized the monarchy, and promised slow, sure change. He has been dubbed, "The King of the Poor," reflecting the view that he sincerely seeks to fight poverty in the kingdom.

The goodwill toward the King is not just the result of effective public relations. Though observers note that the King retains nearly absolute political power, even after the constitutional changes, Moroccans have seen tangible improvements over the last decade. Women gained rights when the King sponsored changes to the system of family law in 2003. Today, they are present in places traditionally dominated by men, from the cafes to universities to the parliament. The King has also invested in infrastructure, such as the new high-speed train linking Casablanca and Tangier or the modern tramway in the capital city of Rabat. Economic growth has been decent in the past few years. "Things are getting better here," said one Moroccan youth, "they are not getting worse, as they were in Tunisia and Egypt." This sense of progress contributes to a willingness to follow the King's lead, and seek evolutionary, not revolutionary, change.

But part of the reason that the King is blame-free has little to do with the actions and attributes of this particular king, but of the institution of monarchy itself. The monarchies that survived the early post-colonial years have proven resilient. In the new context brought on by the Arab Spring, it is indeed good to be a king. Some have suggested that the monarchies are shielded by their legitimacy, an

explanation however, that if not tautological (in the sense that the proof of a leader's legitimacy is that he stays in power), is unverifiable since it is unacceptable and illegal to question the king's legitimacy. Mohammad VI's father was nearly overthrown by a coup early in his reign. Had those coup attempts succeeded, no one would be asserting the dynasty's legitimacy today.

It is the longevity of monarchical rule and the absence of viable alternatives that shield the monarchy today. Having survived the early years, when kings in other parts of the Arab world fell, the monarchy became a symbol of stability, its endurance proof of its ability to provide security, if not democracy. A poll carried out by *Le Monde* and the Moroccan journal *TelQuel* in 2009 (banned in Morocco) found that the vast majority of Moroccans supported the king, which is unsurprising given the constraints on criticizing the monarchy. A more astonishing finding was that the majority of Moroccans who described the monarchy as authoritarian approved of its authoritarian bent declaring, "Better that power should rest in the hands of the king than in those of corrupt politicians out for their own interests."

For Moroccans seeking change, there are few good models to imitate. Revolution has little to recommend itself, if it is followed by the kinds of authoritarian republics that replaced the monarchies elsewhere in the Arab world, by the instability that occurred in neighboring Algeria, or by an Islamist takeover. Spokesmen for the regime have not been shy about pointing to these dismal alternatives to the status quo.

Without viable alternatives, it's no wonder that some are asking whether it is worth it to vote in the upcoming elections. The February 20th movement and the banned Justice and Charity Group have called for a boycott, but if there is low turnout, it will not necessarily signal support for these groups, given the myriad of reasons why potential voters may stay home. One shopkeeper spoke of a general disenchantment with politics — he's not voting because the "solutions don't lie in politics at all, but in each one of us. We must find the answers ourselves, not look to

politicians to find them for us.” Others echo his sentiments, expressing doubt that real progress will come out of the parliament.

Even if turnout is respectable, it is hard to see what the elections are capable of accomplishing. The moderate Islamist Party of Justice and Development is favored to gain seats, but is unlikely to push for radical change and will need to form a coalition with parties that have diverse interests.

A result that favors the status quo may renew protest activity and push the King to make further changes, but activists, whether from the February 20th movement or the Islamists organizations, must develop long-term strategies. Articulating a positive agenda and fielding candidates of their own is the route to democratic progress in Morocco. By keeping up the pressure and expanding their organizations, they may yet offer a viable alternative to the status quo, even if it is not a revolutionary one.

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Other

Jordan's Fictional Reforms

By Sean Yom, November 9, 2011

Compared to recent dramatic events — Qaddafi's demise in Libya, Tunisia's groundbreaking elections, the Coptic killings in Egypt — Jordan's latest cabinet shuffle barely registered as a news blip. Indeed, King Abdullah's dismissal of wildly unpopular Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit had been expected as early as this summer. Still, many analysts greeted new Premier Awn Khasawneh with hope and anticipation. In a country that has simmered with growing unrest, the appointment of a new government explicitly charged with rejuvenating a moribund political reform process may represent a decisive royal concession. As opposition protests enter their eleventh month, perhaps the monarchy has realized that democratization can wait no longer.

Such an appraisal is admirably optimistic, but it is a convenient fiction produced for Western consumption. Scryers of Jordan must look beyond any given cabinet to understand that although the Hashemite palace trumpets the cause of democracy, its goal during the Arab Spring has been to preserve autocratic supremacy. A transition to constitutional monarchy exists more as fantasy in the minds of liberals than a goal supported by the palace. Yet that is the logical endgame of Jordanian democratization: a near-absolute monarchy devolving power to a fairly elected parliament, alongside a General Intelligence Directorate that no longer interferes in public life.

Despite the heroic assumptions of reformists expecting progress toward such transformation, Khasawneh's new government is designed to fail. Why? It is not simply that Khasawneh's task is Herculean. (Starting off by promising no more rigged elections, given that every past election was declared free and fair, does not inspire much confidence.) Rather, in Jordan cabinet changes are *signals* rather than causes of major policy shifts. While prime ministers have always been executors of royal imperatives, since the political opening of 1989 they have become part of a new system of cyclical management. Premiers are appointed with impossible jobs because they are expected to stumble — and

popular cabinets do not get sacked. When their inability to deliver generates an inevitable crisis of public confidence, the king ritualistically intervenes.

Such essential reboots allow the palace to maintain its fictive distance from the political fray by sympathizing with (and, in theory, defusing) popular frustration, while promoting another loyal retainer into the top spot. Parliament ironically lubricates this cycle because the imbalanced electoral system favors independent MP's who, bound by no party, raucously echo their constituents' displeasure because it wins votes. The historical record exposes the dispensability of cabinets: this is the 61st premiership since the 1950s, and the ninth government since Abdullah's 1999 ascension. Either Jordanian prime ministers are all incompetent, or else cabinet stability — the institutional foundation for any sustained policy change — is not the goal.

Analysts should thus use the latest session of the musical chairs game to consider the direction of royal strategy. It starts with the logic of selection. During his half-century of rule, King Hussein placed trust in a small coterie of East Bank advisors and loyalists. They often rotated between the official cabinet and royal court (a parallel government of sorts), and many served as prime minister multiple times given the King's confidence in their skill. By contrast, King Abdullah's strategy has been to experiment more diversely, plucking out new political talent from a broader network of clients. At times this backfired. For instance, conservative tribal supporters still bitterly recall the King's early endorsement of Bassem Awadallah, a Palestinian technocrat who gained unparalleled authority and prominence — it was their ferocious criticism that eventually forced his resignation from the royal court in 2008.

However, such eclecticism now makes sense now in a context of weekly protests and social tension. With his quiet credentials as an international jurist, Khasawneh

lacks domestic experience and political baggage — the former would have kept him unknown under Hussein, but the latter makes him Abdullah's newest superstar. He will pursue whatever limited reforms the palace suggests, such as the recently ratified constitutional amendments and tepid changes to the elections and political parties laws. Thus, he is the ideal successor to Bakhit, who was the only prime minister to serve twice under Abdullah but whose reputation had been irrevocably decimated by scandals — e.g., the Casino-Gate corruption hearings, tribal agitations that forced the postponement of municipal elections, and violent attacks against opposition demonstrations.

Given the inevitable collapse of this government, the changeover's real benefit has been to give the palace time to regroup. The sheer volume of public discontent flooded royal insiders this year, and they will use the next several months to rebuild relations with opposition forces. For example, the Islamists were offered several posts in the new government, and have been encouraged to reenter the political scene after they boycotted the last general elections. Khasawneh met with the professional syndicates and to their approval pledged to improve relations with Hamas. Urban youth activists disgusted with their brutal treatment by riot police and anonymous thugs received invitations to royal summits and other high-level gestures.

Notably, what surprised the regime was that many of those youth activists, such as the March 24 Shabab, were not Palestinian but rather hailed from tribal backgrounds. That hostility from East Bankers has grown immensely significant. After all, the Jordanian "street" does not threaten the monarchy when it encompasses the Muslim Brotherhood, professional associations, and leftist parties — predictable actors easily contained through targeted repression and legal constriction. Existential danger instead emerges when dissent emanates from the very social forces that staff the state, man the army, and operate the mukhabarat (GID).

That danger has become tangible in recent years, as prominent regime veterans and disaffected tribal communities have loudly complained about the status

quo. They are neither traditional opposition nor lockstep liberals. They occasionally march with Islamists, manipulate the Palestinian issue to benefit their cause, and often focus on material demands like halting economic privatization. Yet like other Jordanians, they are furious about corruption, frustrated with economic stagnation, and disappointed with Abdullah's reign. Towns like Tafleeh have witnessed repeated protests, and East Bank activists have spearheaded the creation of new opposition fronts. Most of all, public disparagement of the monarchy has become startlingly brazen, far more so than in 1989. Much as condemnation of Queen Rania broke a major taboo last year, reports of tribal gatherings openly criticizing both king and crown have become common.

However, the regime's old method of preserving East Banker support — sacrificing its fiscal health to maintain the institutions that employ them and the welfare that assists them — is invoking untenable costs. The absurd sacking of Central Bank Governor Faris Sharaf is a case in point. Among other reasons, his insistence on fiscal austerity threatened the price subsidies, public salary increases, and other grant programs promised this past year. Only Saudi aid grants have prevented the budget deficit from swelling further, but such expectations are unsustainable given the king's acknowledgement that living conditions precede democracy. Simply put, the regime lacks the financial resources to continue its lavish public spending spree.

Politically, the new opposition is using the Sharaf controversy to decry the overreach of the regime's security apparatus. In doing so, they have highlighted an uncomfortable fact: that the monarchy is either unwilling or unable to downsize the mukhabarat's interference in political affairs. Western analysts often assume the palace and mukhabarat are inseparable, but this is not always true. Both institutions seek to preserve authoritarian order, but over the past year the latter has exhibited an independent resistance to even half-hearted reforms that surprised the King himself. Not coincidentally, Khasawneh's installment as prime minister coincided with the appointment of a new GID director,

General Feisal Shobaki, alongside a royal promise to review the agency's role.

For the Jordanian monarchy, maintaining stability depends on whether it can demobilize East Bank dissent while checking traditional opposition forces. It must accomplish these goals by foreclosing genuine democratic reforms,

which would endanger its capacity to command the social policies central to its survival. Herein lays the current paradox of Jordanian politics: the monarchy shall succeed when its government fails.

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Oman, kind of not quiet

By Ra'id Zuhair al-Jamali, November 7, 2011

Oman held parliamentary elections on October 15 — two weeks before the Tunisian elections that captured the world's attention. But nobody paid them much mind. And why should they? There is not much more to be said beyond the high "participation" rate (76 percent of those who *bothered* to register), the solitude that the one elected woman may feel among her 83 male colleagues, or the election of three protesters. Tribal alliances still drove results in a country where political parties are not allowed and where, for most seats, 1,500 votes is enough to get elected.

But this might be deceiving. This has been Oman's least quiet year in a generation. The Economist scored Oman sixth highest within its (unsophisticated) Arab instability index in early February, a forecast met with wide incredulity at the time. A few weeks later, the country was shaken with memorable scenes of unrest: protests — some violent, most peaceful, loyalty marches, regime concessions, a GCC "Marshall Plan," labor strikes and opportunistic demands, and regime crackdowns. The ground has significantly shifted beneath the feet of a regime that has overseen the rapid transformation of society over the last 40 years, underwritten by absolute power and facilitated by oil income.

Muscat witnessed its first significant demonstration only three days after Ben Ali fled Tunisia. By the second "Green March" — on that first Friday sans Mubarak - it was undeniable that a new wind was blowing. Vibrancy of Bahrain's early Lulu scenes and the intensifying youth-led protests in Yemen only sharpened the palpable mood for change. Secure in its own rhetoric of Omani exceptionalism, the government chose not to confront crowds numbering in the low hundreds rallying mainly against corruption.

One week later, though, massive protests struck in the rapidly industrializing city of Sohar, setting in motion a month of unprecedented countrywide unrest, government concessions, labor opportunism, and even promises of GCC economic support. By mid March, however, specters of a bloody crackdown in Bahrain and Yemen fed fears of deterioration. On March 29, the army finally moved to clear the protests in Sohar, restoring safe passage for the industrial port area. Over the next month, order was gradually enforced through security and legal channels, culminating in the May 12 breakup of the last major protest site in Salalah. Whatever residual will for public manifestation there remained, summer heat soon dissolved.

Yet roots of the Omani protests extend deeper than a simple imitation of the prevailing Arab mood. Throughout the past decade, new and unregulated channels for disseminating information and expressing opinion proliferated. Internet forums dynamically altered the hitherto rigid political mood. With over 100,000 members and 200,000 daily visitors, thorny samizdat Al-Sablah endured episodes of closure and litigation until Oman's own "Spring" forced a major concession — the royal court now operates an official account. This and other examples of compelled accommodation illustrate how much the regime's capacity for containment was challenged — most dramatically since the defeat of the 1970's Marxist insurgency led by the Popular Front for Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG). Yet this year's confrontation was less ideological, more pragmatic. It's about a youthful, worldly, more connected population who basically want a voice — publicly accountable ministers, free and independent press, even separation of state powers. It's also about an economy in which during 2009, nearly 75 percent of private sector jobs drew monthly wages of OMR 200 or less (USD \$520), and in which non-nationals in the active workforce outnumbered nationals by more than two-to-one. Oil income may be near historic highs, but with the inequitable distribution of revenue, it's far from enough to pamper the entire population. Even narrowing it to "jobs and economy" entails a political undercurrent: a limit of rentier social contract is fast approaching.

Cognizant of the situation's unfolding gravity, the Omani authorities responded by bombarding the population with far-reaching decisions. One third of the Cabinet of Ministers was replaced. Some top officials, previously thought as immovable, were dismissed. There was an immediate creation of 50,000 jobs — in a country where the total active national workforce, public and private, was probably 300,000. Minimum wage was raised by a one third (OMR 150 to 200). It did look quite ad hoc, even if the careful sequence of changes — individually or in aggregate — indicates that Oman had intellectually digested the risks and opportunities presented by its own youth bulge phenomenon.

But the treatment did not just stop at analgesics. Public prosecution gained independence from the police force and there was an expanded remit for State Audit committee. Constitutional changes were announced, with the bicameral house eventually gaining legislative and regulatory powers. These are actually deep institutional changes which are remodeling the scope of possibilities. Power is becoming more inclusive, with the elected Shura Council being granted extra voice and, while in the appointed State Council, civil society being recognized as the emergent social force.

The thing that is less clear is whether the Omani system can manage this adaptation. The regime is quite set in its ways. Many of the key figures are septuagenarians (or were, until March, when the average age of ministers significantly decreased). Since the resignation of his uncle nearly 40 years ago, Sultan Qaboos has not warmed up to the idea of a prime minister. The Sultan retains nominal ministership of defense, foreign affairs, finance, plus command of various military and security apparatuses. (With March's cabinet sackings, the lightning rods had vanished and it was expected that a PM was needed more than ever. Yet that still hasn't happened.) Considering the widely acknowledged need for a more reactive, flexible form of governance, what type of power transfer can thus be expected? Moreover, as placements of individuals to public positions often proceed without their foreknowledge, this unpredictable all-powerful agency maintains a sense of public passivity. And of course: whenever a singular, i.e. extra-ordinary, power becomes the defining factor for an entire system, perennial uncertainty breeds.

Many Omanis worry as well about the regime's efforts to re-impose control over the public sphere by drawing new "red lines." For example, the amended penal code article headed "on undermining the state's position" outlines punishment for those who undermine "prestige of the state" or weaken confidence in its financial reputation. Or another article in the press and publications law that prohibits "disseminating all that would compromise state security, internal or external." Not to mention the ongoing appeal by Azzaman newspaper, slapped with prison sentences and one month closure.

Previous Omani reforms have typically responded to major external challenges. The Shura council was founded at the end of a year of intense world scrutiny bearing upon Saudi Arabia and the GCC consequent to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Female inclusion could be seen as another proactive move, partially to stem the spread of Islamist currents of the 1990s. Post 9/11, a different set of acute outside pressures resulted in further overtures, proactive and reactive: non-opposition of benign Western reform agendas, symbolism of a 100-fold increase in base of possible voters in 2003 versus 1991, acquiescence to a regionally assertive United States on free trade. As these external pressures subsided, so did the reforms. The

events of 2011 are a departure from the past as the first sustained, significant pressure from within. It remains unclear whether genuine pluralism can evolve within a domineering power structure, and more critically whether a democratic transition can be managed whilst preparing society for the post-oil terra incognita. At least if the exceptional number of Royal Decrees is any indicator, clearly some kind of shift *is* taking place.

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Kuwait's Constitutional Showdown

By Kristin Diwan, November 17, 2011

The world awoke to a new front in the Arab Spring as thousands of protestors fought through guards to occupy Kuwait's Parliament on Wednesday night. Chanting "this is our house" and "the people want the removal of the Prime Minister" the youthful crowd, accompanied by opposition parliamentarians, certainly looked the part of Arab revolutionaries. Yet Kuwait has been working toward this climax since before Tunisians took to the streets of Sidi Bouzeid. And while drawing momentum from Arab brethren in Egypt and elsewhere, Kuwait activists are not seeking regime overthrow but rather something even more rare — a genuine constitutional monarchy in the Gulf.

Kuwait is a natural candidate for such a distinction. Its proud tradition of civic activism goes back to the 1930s when prominent merchant families formed their own municipal council and then forced upon the governing sheikh the first elected Majlis in the Gulf. With its independence in 1961, Kuwait's elite gathered in a

constitutive assembly, which established Kuwait's ruling order: an emir who stands above the fray appointing a government headed by the ruling al-Sabah family, but with significant powers of legislation and oversight held by an elected parliament. Twice the ruling family has done away with the nuisance of parliament through its unconstitutional dissolution. But since its reinstatement following Kuwait's liberation from Iraq, the Parliament has assumed a central position in Kuwaiti life. It is fair to say that the National Assembly is essential to Kuwait's very identity.

Yet there remains a key distinction between Kuwait's order and a genuine constitutional monarchy — a distinction that maintains the primacy of the ruling al-Sabah, and generates endless friction with elected representatives. The elected political factions (Kuwait has no legal parties) do not select the cabinet, whose members stand as ex-officio members of parliament (MPs), providing the

government with a key voting bloc. Elected MPs are thus unable to set pro-actively the policy of government, having only the power to call the ministers to account through parliamentary grillings, and to dismiss them if they can summon the majority in a vote of no confidence — a vote to which ex-officio members are excluded.

This “negative” power has been used increasingly in the post-liberation order. During the tumultuous five-year reign of the current Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah, parliamentary grillings and the threat to withdraw support for ministers have resulted in the shuffling of seven cabinets, and on three occasions have compelled the Emir to dismiss the Parliament and call for new elections. This dizzying return to the ballot box eased only after the 2009 elections decimated the organized Islamist political blocs, and returned a Parliament with more independents and a less coherent opposition. The augmented support for the government allowed the Nasser al-Mohammed government to shift tactics: confident of success, the Premier for the first time stood for a vote of no confidence in December 2009, and won.

However the election of Kuwait’s most pro-government Parliament since liberation did not end the political intrigue. For the conflict between Kuwait’s executive and legislative branches has been matched by the in-fighting within the ruling family itself. Since the contentious succession of 2006, rival princes have been fighting a proxy battle for influence through Kuwait’s expanded private media and through the Parliament itself. This leadership struggle has stymied government-led economic diversification plans, further eroded the effectiveness of public services, and sown corruption throughout Kuwait’s governing institutions.

New evidence of the growth in corruption has been mounting for months. In August reports leaked to the media indicated that Kuwait’s two largest banks were looking into the transfer of \$92 million dollars into the accounts of two members of Parliament. By September, Kuwait’s Public Prosecutor took the unprecedented move of opening an investigation into an ever-broadening number of politically suspicious transactions, resulting

in allegations that around 16 MPs received about \$350 million in bribes to vote in support of the government earlier this year. In October, the scandal spread to the Foreign Ministry on accusations by the parliamentary opposition members that the Prime Minister had diverted public funds to personal accounts abroad. This prompted the resignation of Foreign Minister Mohammed al-Salem al-Sabah, the lone minister from a rival branch of the ruling al-Sabah, who cited his unwillingness to serve in “a government that does not carry out true reforms regarding the multi-million bank deposits.”

The scandal eroded the Premier’s already declining support with the public, and (ironically) hindered his ability to mount an effective defense in Parliament. Opposition MPs returning to a new parliamentary session in October boycotted committee meetings, refusing to sit with colleagues rumored to be corrupt. In November, the defection of the nominally supportive secular and pro-business National Action Bloc marked a turning point: the opposition now had the votes it needed to put through a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister. This left the Emir with poor options. He would have to yield to the demands to replace his nephew — implicitly conceding greater parliamentary control over government leadership — or dissolve the Parliament, and face new elections in a very anti-government environment.

Returning from the Eid recess on Tuesday, the al-Sabah-led government played a final card. A controversial ruling returned by the constitutional court in October stated that the Prime Minister could not be grilled for violations committed by his ministers, only for issues under his direct authority. Using the ex-officio cabinet members as a voting bloc, government supporters scrapped a proposed grilling of the Prime Minister, signaling a new strategy to sidestep any future moves toward a vote of no confidence over the graft scandal. Opposition lawmakers decried this as “a clear attempt to prevent the lawmakers from exercising their constitutional right to question the Prime Minister,” and a dubious means of escaping popular accountability.

The blockage in the National Assembly presaged a return to the extra-parliamentary strategy of popular

mobilization. Declaring that “no medium of escalation would be spared” the opposition led by the tribal populist Popular Action Bloc had for weeks been holding seminars across electoral constituencies pushing for the trial of those involved in the bribery scandal, new elections, and the ouster of the government and its leaders. Youth movements, emboldened by the success of popular movements across the Arab world, set up an encampment in the public park outside the Parliament. On Wednesday one youth leader tweeted that “no solution will come from within the parliamentary halls of Abdullah al-Salem, but instead must come to it.” On Wednesday night, in the course of a raucous protest, they did just that.

While it is clear that the storming of the Parliament crosses a threshold, it is unclear what is on the other side for Kuwait. The youthful protestors broke other red lines in directly taunting the Emir: a constitutional offense for which a number of Kuwaiti cyber activists were recently jailed. Will the public see this as going too far? Most Kuwaitis want reform but there is no appetite for revolution in this wealthy oil monarchy. A sign of such wariness can be seen in the statement issued by the liberal National Action Bloc that “the storming of the parliament is no less dangerous than what the government is doing.” There exist deep social cleavages in Kuwait — sectarian and also urban elite fears of the empowerment of the largely tribal classes which have been at the forefront of the protests — which the ruling family can accentuate in drawing the public to the side of a law and order government. Yet too strong a crackdown will likely backfire against the government, just as it did in December of last year after the police attacked a political gathering of oppositionists, beating academics and parliamentarians.

The Kuwait opposition also faces difficult decisions about how to position itself on Kuwait’s constitutional order.

Thus far popular action has been framed as a defense of Kuwait’s constitution in the face of official corruption and political subterfuge. Yet, the recent government maneuvers in the Parliament reveal more than ever the weaknesses in Kuwait’s constitutional system. Already one of Kuwait’s opposition parties, the Islamist Reform and Development Bloc, has called for amending the constitution to deny the voting rights of the ex-officio members. Yet opening the constitution to change carries substantial risks as well, especially as the constitution forms a bedrock for national unity — a point made repeatedly this past week as Kuwait celebrated 49 years since its enactment.

It is equally unclear what Kuwait’s dalliance with the Arab Spring may mean for the broader Gulf. Watching Wednesday’s events is the Qatar government happy that they pro-actively announced parliamentary elections for Spring 2013, or are they regretting opening the Pandora’s box of an elected legislative body? Is Saudi Arabia, with troops in Bahrain, anxiously eyeing another popular rebellion on the Gulf littoral, or are they privately enjoying “democratic” Kuwait’s troubles?

All turns on the outcome of Kuwait’s constitutional struggle. The Kuwaiti youth who took the seats of lawmakers and cabinet members in Abdullah al-Salem hall may have basked in their capture of the people’s house. But occupying the Parliament is not the same as assembling an effective opposition within it, an opposition able to appoint its own government and form a majority coalition that works for the betterment of all Kuwaitis. For that, a long political struggle remains, and the jury is still out.

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Qatar's Ambivalent Democratization

By Justin Gengler, November 1, 2011

In an unexpected move, Qatar will hold its first-ever parliamentary elections in the second half of 2013. According to the plan announced Tuesday by Qatar's Emir Hamid bin Khalifah Al Thani, two-thirds of the country's advisory Shura Council will be up for vote, while the rest will remain appointed. But in contrast to similar reform initiatives undertaken by Arab governments made nervous — or challenged directly — over the course of the previous ten months, Qatar's decision is an entirely proactive one. Indeed, as indicated by the results of several recent, scientific public opinion surveys, its citizens are quite pleased with their current political system — and have little interest in changing it any time soon.

Qatar may be one of the only Arab countries that wouldn't mind reliving 2011. It has taken an ever more leading role in regional politics, while avoiding even a hint of the political discontent that spread to some degree to each of its Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) neighbors. Qatar has long been best known for its state-owned Al Jazeera satellite television network, which broadcasts from Doha and has played a central role in shaping the course of the Arab Spring. More generally, Qatar has used the impetus of the Arab Spring to put its trademark international activism into overdrive, attempting to mediate peaceful transitions in Syria and Yemen, sending \$500 million in foreign aid to Egypt alone, and playing a significant role in joint military action in Libya and, to a much lesser extent, in Bahrain. Despite the hopes of its rivals, however, Qatar has seen no signs of the popular political mobilization witnessed elsewhere in the region.

Certainly, the economic affluence of its citizens may be expected to have some dampening effect on aspirations for change. Qatar has benefited from the successful culmination of a two-decade long program of oil and natural gas investment that is projected to boost GDP this year alone by some 15 percent. Yet even the similarly wealthy United Arab Emirates witnessed a call for

increased accountability in the form of a petition for an elected parliament signed by 133 intellectuals and activists in March. Could ordinary Qataris really have occupied such a front-row seat to the Arab Spring, as it were, without being at all inspired themselves?

The answer, when one asks them, appears to be that yes, yes they could. Separate, nationally-representative public opinion polls conducted by Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) reveal that, in the six tumultuous months spanning December 2010 and June 2011, support for democracy and interest in political participation has dropped markedly among Qatari citizens. The proportion of survey respondents who report being "interested" or "very interested" in politics decreased by almost 20 percent over this period, while the proportion of Qataris who say that living in a democratic country is "very important" to them dropped from 74 percent to 65 percent, a relative decrease of 12 percent.

At the same time, confidence in existing government institutions — the judiciary, the Shura Council, and the government itself, among others — all saw jumps ranging from 8 to 18 percent. In other words, not only has support for and interest in democratic governance in Qatar not *increased* since the onset of the Arab Spring, but in fact Qataris seem to have drawn the opposite lesson from the upheavals witnessed from afar — namely, a renewed appreciation for the relative security and prosperity afforded by their own political system, democracy or no democracy.

Yet this is only half the story. Conspicuous in the backdrop of the internal Arab conflicts of 2011 has been the larger geopolitical struggle for influence involving Iran, Saudi Arabia, and their respective client states, a so-called "New Middle East Cold War" being fought nowhere more fiercely than in the Gulf region. Bahrain's failed uprising in particular has served as a volatile flashpoint, with Iran

decrying the GCC's crushing military intervention in March as a sectarian-motivated massacre and the latter dismissing the entire episode as an elaborate Iranian conspiracy to overthrow the Gulf monarchies.

As with other Gulf Arabs, this sustained media focus on the regional threat posed by Iran has not been lost on ordinary Qataris. In a SESRI survey administered in the summer of 2010, Qataris were asked to name the country most threatening to the Gulf region as well as to Qatar itself. At the time, less than a third of respondents identified Iran — a country with which Qatar has long maintained good relations — as the biggest threat to the GCC, and just 17 percent said it was the greatest threat to Qatar. Indeed, a near-majority (44 percent) of Qataris answered that no state threatened them.

By June, however, these perceptions had shifted dramatically. Now, 57 percent of Qataris believed that Iran posed the greatest threat to the GCC — a relative increase of 84 percent — with the second most frequent answer, Israel, receiving just 14 percent of responses. Even more marked was the change in opinion regarding the threat to Qatar itself. No longer were most Qataris confident in their external security: now only a quarter replied that no country posed a threat to the nation, while the proportion identifying Iran as the greatest threat increased by almost 125 percent to more than one in three citizens. No other nation accounted for more than 8 percent of responses.

Hence, for many Qataris, and perhaps for other Gulf Arabs in similar socio-economic and political circumstances, the primary message of the Arab Spring seems to comprise of

two reinforcing elements, neither of which is the intrinsic importance of popular government. It is a message that Gulf governments have done their best to drive home, not least via up-to-the-minute coverage of the chaos and bloodshed experienced by those who chose to ignore it. The lesson: don't try to fix what isn't broken, for others will see to it that you wind up with something much worse.

Sure, some two-thirds of Qataris still consider it "very important" to live in a country that is governed democratically, at least as of June. But when asked to decide Qatar's most pressing national priority over the next 10 years, a mere 13 percent of these same respondents replied that it was "giving people more say over important government decisions." By contrast, a combined 82 percent of Qataris identified either "maintaining order in the nation" or "fighting inflation." In a society in which citizens are guaranteed many luxuries, democracy, it seems, is one they can do without.

Far from an attempt to deflate domestic political pressure, therefore, Qatar's surprise election announcement is almost certainly aimed to help counter the growing observation that it has supported democratic movements abroad while avoiding political reform at home. Perhaps for the first time in history, a Middle East regime may need to convince its own citizens of the merits of increased political participation.

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