Political Analysis

Volume 21 *Political Analysis*   Article 4

2020

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Devin Smith
Seton Hall University

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Understanding How Foreign Influence and Strongman Policies Prevent Democracy in Egypt

Devin Smith

Devin Smith is a Diplomacy and International Relations major at Seton Hall University with a Middle Eastern Studies minor planning to graduate in May 2021. The objective of his thesis was to investigate the factors that prevent the spread of democracy in Egypt. Upon graduation, Devin hopes to find a job in the nonprofit sector.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the early 1990s, it appeared that global democracy was on the rise in what scholars have called "Democracy's Third Wave". Countries previously thought extremely unlikely to become susceptible to democratic movements, such as Poland in 1989, had finally overthrown the shackles of autocratic communism and transitioned towards democratic rule. However, as more countries than ever before began the tumultuous journey towards democracy, the Arab world largely remained stagnant behind the curtain of authoritarianism.

Egypt in particular remained strongly behind the fulcrum of autocracy even as it seemed that the world was largely leaving autocratic leaders such as Egypt's Hosni Mubarak behind. "During the 1980s and 1990s, as dictatorships in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia collapsed, Egypt's autocracy stood firm. Although opposition movements across the developing world vaulted into power through dramatic election victories, President Mubarak thwarted kindred campaigns against his rule. (Mubarak) seemed to exercise almost unparalleled domination and to have an extraordinary ability to preserve (his) own incumbency while preparing the way for their chosen successors"[1].

While Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's longest-serving self-styled 'president', seemed entrenched against any sort of opposition that sought to even remotely stymie his wide-reaching power, the 2011 Arab Spring protests proved that even modern Egypt's longest serving president was not immune to a mass popular uprising.

In the case of Egypt's centralized executive arena, unanticipated but relentless popular protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square as well as other major squares across every major city overwhelmed the Interior Ministry's security apparatus. By physically defeating the security forces in pitched street battles over four days, protesters effectively shut down the country. This caused the military to intervene and deploy personnel and armored vehicles into the streets on January 28. During the tense days after the military deployed and before Mubarak stepped down on February 11, the NDP faded from existence. The party's paralyzed state was complemented by the disappearance of the police and security forces. As the standoff continued, Egyptians and the world watched anxiously whether the military would open fire on the protesters. The military, which has extensive economic interests and has served as a regime's core since 1952, reiterated the promise that it

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[1] Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 122.

would not. Time eventually ran out for Mubarak and his executive elites as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) nudged them out the door.[2]

The removal of Hosni Mubarak from power served as a powerful, inspirational message to the Egyptian people that real change, however unlikely it may have seemed, was possible.

The first round of presidential elections occurred on May 23–24, 2012. Muhammad Morsi, a senior Muslim Brotherhood leader and president of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), came in first with 24.8 percent of the vote. Ahmad Shafiq, a former military officer and Mubarak protégé who briefly served as prime minister in early 2011, won 23.7 percent… (Morsi) campaigned as the "candidate of the revolution" who would fight against the counter-revolutionary forces in the military, the judiciary, and the security services. Morsi's efforts were successful. He won 52 percent of the vote to Shafiq's 48 percent. The military accepted Shafiq's defeat and allowed Morsi to assume office. For the first time in Egypt's 5,000-year history, the country had an elected national leader. In his inaugural address, Morsi promised to be the president of all Egyptians and to build a new Egypt that is "civil, national, constitutional, and modern.[3]

Unfortunately, Egypt's experiment with democracy did not prove to be a lasting one. On July 3, 2013 the Egyptian Armed Forces removed Morsi from power barely a year after had been sworn in. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, a former general in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of Egypt and former Director of Military Intelligence, assumed the presidency with a dubious 96% of the vote in 2014.[4] He has remained in power ever since.

Egypt, with the exception of the brief presidency of Mohamed Morsi, has remained mostly thoroughly autocratic since Gamal Nasser's ascension to the presidency in 1954. But why is that the case? In this thesis, I will argue that a combination of foreign influence from Western and other Arab states, religious extremism and sectarianism, and entrenched political interests within Egypt all play a hand in undermining democracy in Egypt. It is my opinion that lasting, free democracy in Egypt, however unlikely, will always be possible if these hurdles can somehow be overcame.

Egypt, with a population of 95 million people, has the largest population in the Middle East and plays an important role as a regional power and key US ally in a constantly volatile region of the world. While it may seem counterintuitive for the United States, which is often seen as a key liberalizing global force, to continuously ally itself with and support an autocratic state such as Egypt, it is largely within the United States' interest to support and reinforce the status quo. "Rather than fostering democracy in an incremental fashion, U.S. and Egyptian officials have promoted an autocratic security state that supports a U.S.-led regional order built around Israeli security and the projection of U.S. influence over the Persian Gulf. By contrast, public opinion in Egypt favors a regional security order less dominated by the United States and Israel, and a government that respects political competition and civil liberties"[5]. However, as the successive military regimes in Egypt show, it is not

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[2] Joshua Stacher, *Adaptable Autocrats : Regime Power in Egypt and Syria* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 158.

[3] Bruce Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World* (New York, NY: Princeton University Press, 2008), XII-XIII.

[4] "Egypt election: Sisi secures landslide win," BBC News, 29 May 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27614776.

[5] Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention : The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

Egyptian public opinion that drives the government to action.

Further working against the will of the Egyptian people is how strongly the United States supports autocratic regimes in Egypt when deemed to be beneficial for Washington. "The problem for Washington was not that pro-U.S. authoritarianism would be followed by more authoritarianism, but that the successor government, democratic or not, could turn Egyptian policies away from U.S. preferences. Hence, U.S. officials worked to check Islamic political activity, either by cultivating a liberal option between the NDP (Mubarak's National Democratic Party) and the Muslim Brotherhood or by squarely backing Mubarak"[6].

EARLY AMERICAN- EGYPTIAN RELATIONS

In order to best understand the relationship between Cairo and Washington, and later Cairo and other Gulf States, it is important to consider the history of relations between the two, dating back to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's split with Moscow. While there were relations between Cairo and Washington dating back to the 1952 coup d'état, Cairo had severed relations with Washington completely following the devastation that Egypt faced in 1967's Six Day War against Israel[7]. Israel, the United States' key Middle Eastern partner, preemptively struck Egyptian airfields, effectively crippling the Egyptian air force and paving the way for the relatively easy Israeli occupation of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, as well as the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria.

Following the severance of U.S.-Egyptian relations, Egypt was a firmly under the influence of the Soviet Union. Faced with the embarrassment of Israel's occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt had closely aligned

itself with Soviet influence; further, Gamal Nasser's Arab socialist and anti-imperialist policy paid off as it earned Egypt critical economic and military support from the Soviet Union. Nasser's regime remained vehemently opposed to the pro-western Baghdad Pact, further demonstrating the general disdain for the United States that Nasser's regime had felt[8].

DÉTENTE WITH THE UNITED STATES

Following Gamal Nasser's death in 1970, however, his successor Anwar Sadat began reorienting Egyptian foreign policy towards a more pro-western approach. Facing a stagnant economy and the continued occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, Sadat grew tired of the status quo and began making overtures to the west.

"In mid-1973, he seemed to most Egyptians and Arabs a pathetic leader, worthy of sympathy rather than anger. But the October (1973 Yom Kippur) War later that year transformed his image to that of an instant national hero… What mattered was that Sadat had led the Arabs (with Assad of Syria) into a fighting battle with an opportunity to defy the enemy and vindicate Arab dignity. The October War for Sadat could have been what the 1956 Suez War was for Nasser, baptizing him as a pan-Arab leader. However, in the following months it gradually emerged that the man fought not so much in defiance of the West or against what is perceived to be the West's local surrogate (Israel), but rather to be accepted in the West. He was even suspected of being eager to serve, along with Israel and the Shah of Iran, as another American surrogate in the area"[9].

While it may be disingenuous to refer to Sadat as an American surrogate, his relations

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[6] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 10.

[7] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 15.

[8] Saadeddin Ibrahim, "A Socio-cultural Paradigm of Pan Arab Leadership: the Case of Nasser," in

Leadership and Development in Arab Society, ed. Faud Khuri (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1981), 49.

[9] Ibrahim, "The Case of Nasser," 56.

with the United States was certainly unprecedented in Egyptian history. The 1973 Yom Kippur War, while ultimately an Israeli victory, saw Egyptian troops on the offensive for the first time since before Egypt's humiliating defeat in the 1967 Six Day War in an initially successful surprise attack against Israeli forces. Following the war, a newly reinvigorated Sadat had reestablished relations with Washington, eventually shirking Moscow altogether. "While Anwar Sadat sought territory and foreign investment, the White House wanted a strategic advantage over the Soviet Union. The mutual benefits of a U.S.-Egyptian alliance only became clear to both sides, though, after Sadat took Egypt to war"[10].

Sadat's shift from a Soviet client state to a vital American partner in the region was relatively quick, happening within the span of only several years. Though a friendship treaty had been signed between Cairo and Moscow in 1971, Soviet military advisors were expelled from Egypt the following year, and the friendship treaty itself was abrogated in 1976, only two years after relations with Washington were reestablished. "In March 1976, in a fresh bid for U.S. military assistance, Sadat told Parliament to cancel Egypt's friendship treaty with the USSR. In April, he denied Soviet ships access to Egyptian ports (although the Soviet Union remained, for the time being, Egypt's largest trading partner). After Sadat snubbed Egypt's former patrons in Moscow, Washington began selling C-130 military transport aircraft to Egypt. Six C-130s were delivered in 1976, but only after Kissinger promised Congress that the sales would not constitute a precedent and that there would be no further Egyptian requests for materiel that calendar year. For the next fiscal year, bilateral economic aid and food subsidies to Egypt would top $1 billion"[11].

SADAT'S INCREASINGLY AUTHORITARIAN TENDENCIES

While Sadat's regime was becoming increasingly cozy with Washington, Sadat began the dual tasks of tightening his grip on Egyptian society and securing increasing amounts of American weapons and military equipment. Somewhat ironically, Cairo's increasing detente with Washington occurred simultaneously with Sadat rolling back freedoms for the Egyptian people. Washington, solely interested in a strong military partner in the region to counter Soviet influence and eliminating a military threat to Israel, generally reacted to Sadat's growing strongman tendencies with apathy.

In an attempt to balance Egypt's budget deficit, Sadat cut government subsidies on cooking gas, rice, and sugar in 1976, increasing the average Egyptian's cost of living by 15%. These subsidy cuts resulted in the greatest social unrest seen in Egypt in decades, with 30,000 protestors facing off with police in Cairo.

"An estimated eighty people were killed, hundreds were wounded, and 1,200 to 2,000 were arrested. The price revolt traumatized Sadat, some say permanently. He 'was 100 percent changed by the experience' and 'became aggressive,' recalled then minister of defense Abd al-Ghani Gamassy, who had led the military's intervention. Sadat, who fancied himself to be liberalizing Egypt, warned that democracy had 'fangs one hundred times sharper than the extraordinary measures' of dictatorship. During a two-hour television broadcast on February 3, he pinned the riots on Soviet agents and communist remnants from Nasser's administration. Egypt's enemies had exploited the November 1976 elections to sow doubt and propaganda. In order to preserve national unity and prevent another "uprising of thieves," Sadat would rollback his earlier reforms, criminalize

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[10] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 15.

[11] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 24.

strikes and demonstrations (on penalty of life imprisonment with hard labor), and confine electoral competition to government-sanctioned parties. 'We hereby end one period,' Sadat proclaimed, 'and we begin a new one.' A February 10 plebiscite approved the measures with a suspicious 99.4 percent[12]".

PEACE WITH ISRAEL AND WARMER RELATIONS WITH WASHINGTON

Further compounding the situation of the Egyptian public's rights were Sadat's attempts at a lasting, permanent peace with Israel. This put Sadat in a tough position as Israel was deeply unpopular with not only the Egyptian public, but also the Arab world writ large. Jordanian and Syrian territory was still under Israeli occupation as well as the Sinai Peninsula, inviting even more malice directed at Israel from nearby Arab states. Despite the fierce opposition to peace with Israel, Sadat pressed on. Egyptian newspapers critical of Israel were shuttered, opposition parties suspended operations, and dissident members of parliament were expelled in a plebiscite with 98.29% of voters approving[13]. While Jimmy Carter's human rights-focused administration "regretted" Sadat's de-liberalizing policies, Carter nonetheless pushed forward in promoting Israeli-Egyptian peace talks. Sadat was at a particular disadvantage, with the only concession Israel agreeing to being a full Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. The West Bank and Golan heights would remain under Israeli occupation, Israeli settlement activity would resume, and Israel would not agree to any form of Palestinian self-rule. However, with Sadat's primary goal being an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and his secondary goal being to secure American military aid, the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty was still signed in the White House in 1979.

"On March 17 and 19 (1978), (American Secretary of State) Brown concluded the details of U.S. military assistance, the linchpin of peace… Egypt would get $1.5billion "in loans to finance procurement through fiscal year 1982 of defense articles and defense services," as well as $300,000 in economic assistance. The arrangement created an informal norm that aid to Israel and Egypt would follow a 3:2 ratio. On March 26 in Washington, Sadat and (Israeli Prime Minister) Begin signed the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, along with texts covering West Bank autonomy talks, normalization of Egyptian-Israeli relations, and Egyptian oil sales to Israel. The treaty also capped Sadat's long quest for U.S. weaponry. That summer, the United States sold Egypt "several hundred air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles," 550 armored personnel carriers, "twelve batteries of Improved Hawk air-defense missiles," and 35F-4E Phantom fighter-bombers[14]".

In the same year that the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty was signed, Iran, at the time one of the United States' primary partners in the region, underwent their 1979 Islamic Revolution, ousting the Shah and severing diplomatic ties with the United States. With one of the primary pillars of American foreign policy on the Middle East destroyed, the United States became increasingly reliant on Egypt as one of its primary partners; Egypt was more than willing to fulfill this role in exchange for military and economic aid. While Egypt became increasingly integrated into American foreign policy in the region, Sadat continued to become more despotic. While the economy was in shambles with inflation hovering around an astounding 30 percent, Sadat changed the Egyptian constitution through rigged plebiscite to establish Islamic law as the primary source of legislation, remove the

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[12] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 25.
[13] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 30.

[14] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 37.

presidential term limits that would have removed him from power, and criminalize transgressive speech[15]. "Although Carter prided himself on being a human rights advocate, he refrained from criticizing Sadat about his plebiscites, censorship, and police repression. In fact, he depended on Sadat's autocratic prerogatives to conclude the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty[16]".

SADAT'S ASSASSINATION AND MUBARAK'S RISE TO POWER

While Israel slowly withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula over the three-year period stipulated in the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, Sadat increasingly turned Egypt into a surveillance state. Concerned about critics of the treaty sabotaging peace efforts, Sadat significantly increased audio and video surveillance while also tripling the amount of riot police to 300,000. "In September 1981, the Ministry of the Interior arrested or detained more than 1,500 party activists and leading cultural figures, including the Coptic pope and the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood. The dragnet swept up secularists, leftists, liberals, and Islamists. One victim was a young man in southern Egypt named Mohamed Islambouli. On October 6, Mohamed's brother Khaled and three fellow Islamic militants assassinated Sadat during a military parade commemorating the war in 1973. Vice President Hosni Mubarak survived the shooting and assumed the presidency"[17].

With the assassination of Anwar Sadat, Hosni Mubarak went on to become the longest-serving and perhaps most autocratic president in Egypt's history. In office from Sadat's assassination in 1981 leading up to the 2011 Arab Spring protests that removed him from power, Mubarak ruled for nearly thirty years by continuing and expanding Sadat's oppressive policies and by further cozying up to the United States.

ANTIDEMOCRATIC COUP IN ALGERIA

In 1991 Algeria, another despotic state in North Africa, underwent multiparty democratic elections for the first time after decades of military rule; candidates from a conservative Islamic party, the Fronte Islamique du Salat won more than 80% of the open seats in Algeria's parliament. In a move that sent a chilling message to Egyptian democracy advocates the Algerian military froze elections, effectively ensuring that they held onto power. The United States, doubtless concerned about the geopolitical implications of an Islamist party taking power, stood by the Algerian military's antidemocratic coup. As then US Secretary of State Jim Baker put it, "Generally speaking, when you support democracy, you take what democracy gives you... If it gives you a radical Islamic fundamentalist, you're supposed to live with it. We didn't live with it in Algeria because we felt that the radical fundamentalists' views were so adverse to what we believe in and what we support, and to what we under-stood the national interests of the United States to be"[18].

To observers in Algeria and Egypt alike, the United States' continued support for the Algerian military over the democratically elected FIS sent the unfortunate message that the United States would continue to support entrenched autocrats in order to secure their own interests, leaving fledgling democratic movements to falter if their interests don't coincide with those of the United States.

EGYPT AND THE WAR ON TERROR

However, Mubarak never allowed elections as free as those in Algeria that nearly brought the FIS to power during his reign. Egypt's 1990 elections were boycotted by opposition parties due to blatantly unfair election rules and a lack of independent

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[15] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*,.40.
[16] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 42.

[17] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 41.
[18] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 59.

supervision, leading to an extension of Mubarak's grip on power. Further providing Mubarak's regime with a casus belli against opposition to the regime, a group of Egyptian radicals with military experience from fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan called the Islamic Group attempted to assassinate Interior Minister Zaki Badr. This assassination attempt, followed by another that mistakenly killed Speaker of the Parliament Rifaat Mahjub instead, brought Islamist movements firmly into the crosshairs of the Egyptian security apparatus, triggering increasingly bloody crackdowns. Badr defended this newfound brutality by claiming "I only want to kill one percent of the population"[19].

Further accentuating the dire situation of Islamists in Egypt was the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York City, carried out by a Kuwaiti national mentored by Omar Abdel Rahman, a radical Egyptian-born cleric living in New York. Abdel Rahman was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the bombing, leaving American officials with the impression that supporting Mubarak's fight with Egyptian Islamists could end up leaving America safer. Following the bombing, the Clinton administration gave Mubarak's security apparatus a key role in the United States' War on Terror against Islamic extremists[20]. An uptick in terror attacks carried out by Islamists, such as the United States Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, led to increasingly draconian measures carried out by both the United States and Egypt.

In 1999, Mubarak addressed Egypt's trajectory while receiving an honorary degree from Georgetown University: "The road to democracy is a long one, and we travel it with confidence. We have not turned back under the most difficult conditions, economic hardships, social pressures, malicious

terrorism and narrow-minded intolerance. And we will not turn back, nor will our belief in the rule of law be shaken. We will work towards consolidating our democracy gradually, steadily, and in the spirit of tolerance and cooperation that is known about the Egyptian people". That year, Mubarak was elected to a fourth term, and had ruled longer than Nasser had[21]. Mubarak had also exceeded Sadat in the number of arrests (25,000 to 19,000), casualties from political violence (2,386 to 250), and accounted for 41% of all Egyptians killed or wounded in political violence since the 1952 Coup d'état. He was reelected president in 1999 by 93.79 percent of the vote[22].

FREEDOM AGENDA AND MULTICANDIDATE ELECTIONS

With the election of George W. Bush to President of the United States in 2000, his trademark Freedom Agenda resulted in a continued status quo for democracy and opposition activists in Egypt. "Even as Bush called on Mubarak to lead the Middle East toward democracy, the United States depended on the Egyptian president to interrogate al-Qaeda suspects, ease U.S. craft through Egyptian waters and airspace, and keep tabs on Gaza after Israel withdrew. Political reform was pushed only so far as it helped ensure the post-Mubarak regime would be pro-American. Hence, the Freedom Agenda was not a turning point for U.S. foreign policy, but a variant of the existing approach"[23].

Bush even went as far as to say in 2002 that "There are some in the world who don't like President Mubarak because of what he stands for, a more open society. He's been a great leader of Egypt, and there are extremists who don't like him. And to the extent that we can help round up those extremists that would

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[19] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 59-60.
[20] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 60.
[21] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 67-68.

[22] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 61.
[23] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 70.

do harm to the President or his government or the people of Egypt, we will do so"[24].

The military alliance between Cairo and Washington proved to be useful to both nations during the 2003 Iraq War, where Egypt was more than happy to provide free access to the Suez Canal for American military personnel en route to the Persian Gulf. Following Saddam Hussein's overthrow and the discovery that Iraq was not in fact harboring weapons of mass destruction, Bush framed the invasion as part of his Freedom Agenda; a free, democratic Iraq would make the Middle East more *free*. But while the Bush Administration was promoting democracy in Iraq, it was doing the opposite in Egypt. Mubarak was now in his seventies, and without a vice president or a clear successor. With the American-led Iraq War, and by extension American foreign policy in the Middle East shown to be extremely unpopular with the Egyptian public in opinion polls, a shift towards democracy or Mubarak's death or overthrow could very easily lead to a new Egyptian government overtly hostile to American interests. Indeed, 98 percent of Egyptians polled held an unfavorable view of the United States. Despite the optics and rhetoric, Bush's Freedom Agenda would in no way challenge the status quo in Egypt, and the two countries would continue to work together militarily[25].

Following the Iraq War, Egyptian police, diplomats, and soldiers continued to receive training from the United States in the name of counterterrorism, with millions of dollars from the US State Department's Antiterrorism Assistance Program being sent to Egyptian security forces. These same 'counterterror' trainees were found in the State Department's 2004 human rights report to be responsible for "torture, extralegal detention, mass arrest, and unlawful killing"[26]. Had the United States been truly bothered by this flagrant abuse of

resources that may leave American aid culpable for Mubarak's strong-arm tactics, the aid and training could have been cut or withdrawn. It never was.

Up until 2005, Egyptian elections saw the Egyptian public voting either yes or no on a single candidate nominated by the Egyptian parliament, with the candidate always being either Mubarak or his predecessors. Worried that parliament could be swayed to nominate either his increasingly popular son or another charismatic leader, Mubarak asked parliament to amend the constitution to allow multicandidate presidential elections. Though lauded by American officials such as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the election process itself remained as corrupt as ever. Opposition leaders were forbidden from campaigning, election observation teams were prevented from monitoring election sites, members of Mubarak's NDP Party blatantly intervened, and government-backed thugs and security forces blocked opposition supporters from voting. Ayman Nour, leader of the opposition el-Ghad Party and the leading opposition candidate, was arrested on fabricated charges. Mubarak won by a margin of 88.6% of the vote, only 5% less than the last plebiscite. A US embassy cable cautioned that while the elections "undermined Mubarak's credibility as a leader of democratic reforms and… strained our ties with Egypt… The bedrock of our strategic interests with Egypt remains as important as ever"[27].

ENTRENCHED, GRIDLOCKED POWER

Egypt's failure to democratize along with its continual trudge on an authoritarian path despite growing democratic movements in other countries once seemingly inhospitable to democracy such as Poland, Mali, Ghana, and Argentina is due to issues largely local to Egypt rather than any overarching cultural or

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[24] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 73.
[25] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 85-86.

[26] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 86.
[27] Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention*, 92-96.

demographic reasons. Mubarak's National Democratic Party, and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's military junta following his election in 2014, completely refuse to allow any sort of opposition movement to freely and fully participate in politics[28], leaving whichever strongman is in power with complete authority to run the country as he wishes. Egypt's formidable security forces, backed by American training, weapons, and funding, have been effectively used to protect the interests of Mubarak, and eventually el-Sisi, to destroy organized opposition and ensure the regime's power remains unchecked.

Mubarak, el-Sisi, and their forebearers prevented opposition advocates, be it liberal, Islamic, or anything else, from converting their popular bases among the Egyptian people into political gains. Mubarak's now-shuttered National Democratic Party effectively provided the only source of political advancement available to any Egyptian for decades, allowing the party to survive any sort of dissent from either the Egyptian public or the very few dissident party members[29]. The National Democratic Party, or the Egyptian military following el-Sisi's rise to power in 2014, also provided a mechanism for mediation between Egypt's political elites, preventing defections from the party and eliminating any outside political movements as opportunities for elites to oppose the government.[30]

Egypt's continued alliance with the United States despite the massive humanitarian shortcomings of authoritarian regimes since Anwar Sadat demonstrates a failure on America's part to effectively promote democracy. While American officials

have not always remained quiet on their desire for Egypt and other Arab states to democratize, especially under Bush's Freedom Agenda, Egyptian responses have remained cosmetic without making the country any more free[31]. Mubarak's decision to implement multicandidate elections in 2005, for instance, was greeted with commendation by American officials but ultimately failed to bring about any lasting change to Egyptian politics. Even after opposition leader Ayman Nour was arrested and tortured following these supposedly multicandidate elections, Washington's only response was to release a press statement calling for Nour's release based on 'humanitarian concern'[32]. A visit by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Egypt the following year saw no mention of Nour, who remained a prisoner until 2009 and eventually had to flee the country.

Egypt's development of a neopatriarchal society, defined by Hisham Sharabi as a process where a state blends patrimonial culture into its institutions[33], further limits Egypt's ability to democratize. Dependency on the state for economic wellbeing, underdevelopment of social and economic factors, the ruling regime's authoritarian relationship with the Egyptian public, the fragmentation of organized opposition and successive defeats of both organized opposition and protest movements leave the Egyptian people apathetic, depoliticized, and demoralized[34]. In effect, the regime has made itself inevitable.

INTERFERENCE FROM OTHER ARAB STATES
Egypt is far from the only autocracy in the region, with other conservative monarchies,

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[28] Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization,* 151.
[29] Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization,* 156.

[30] Stacher, *Adaptable Autocrats*, 29.
[31] Stacher, *Adaptable Autocrats*, 29-30.

[32] Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement on Conviction of Egyptian Politician Ayman Nour," The White House, December 2005, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/12/200512 24-1.html.
[33] Stacher, *Adaptable Autocrats*, 31-32.

[34] Stacher, *Adaptable Autocrats,* 33.

military dictatorships, and other forms of totalitarian governments all tangled in a political web, especially following the events of the 2011 Arab Spring revolts. Demonstrating just how interconnected the Arab world is, the UAE was accused by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood elements of granting refuge to criminals from Mubarak's regime, including former prime minister Ahmad Shafiq after losing the 2012 presidential election. Shafiq faced charges of corruption for his role in Mubarak's regime[35].

"With mass protests in Bahrain in spring 2011, and smaller protest movements in Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait, the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) states decided on a common strategy toward the Arab Spring abroad and the protests at home: protests in other Arab states could be supported if this served geopolitical interests, but there was zero tolerance for protests or demands for reform at home, where security and stability remained priority number one"[36]. The various Gulf States drew from different types of support; Saudi Arabia opposed the Muslim Brotherhood, which is banned in Saudi Arabia, in favor of Wahabi elements more in line with the Saudi's interests; the UAE remained opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood and welcomed important officials from Mubarak's regime after its downfall; sensing an opportunity to increase its influence at the expense of other Gulf states, Qatar largely backed the Muslim Brotherhood[37]

REIGION AND AUTOCRACY

The reason for sustained popular support for Islamic movements in Egypt is primarily derived from political and economic circumstances, rather than that of religious and cultural traditions. In the words of a young Algerian that supported the soon-to-be overthrown FIS, "In this country, if you are a young man… you only have four choices: you can remain unemployed and celibate because there are no jobs and no apartments to live in; you can work in the black market and risk being arrested; you can try to emigrate to France to sweep the streets of Paris or Marseilles; or you can join the FIS and vote for Islam"[38]. Faced with a dauntingly stubborn status quo that leaves the majority of Egyptians in relative poverty while the elites continue to thrive, Egyptians turn to Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

'Rais', the Arabic translation of 'president', more directly translates to a person in a leadership position as the head of a group, leaving the term 'president-for-life' not as alien to an Egyptian or a Tunisian as it may be for an American[39]. Rachid al-Ghannouchi, a Tunisian politician, argued that since North African elite "speak a different political language from the masses, there will inevitably be an authoritarian dictator. In other words, the processes of Westernization as experienced in North Africa in the past century lead not to democracy but to authoritarianism. What is needed in order to transcend that situation is a program that can bridge the gap between the elite and the masses- and this can be provided by Islam"[40].

As demonstrated by the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 2012 Egyptian elections, Islamic populist opposition to authoritarian regimes in the Arab world are demonstrated to be willing to work within flawed, existing political structures in order to

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[35] Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Briefs, 2013), 116.

[36] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 118.

[37] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 119.

[38] Mark Tessler, "The Origins of Popular Support for Islamist Movements: A Political Economy Analysis" in *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa*, ed.

John Entelis (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 93.

[39] John Voll, "Sultans, Saints, and Presidents: The Islamic Community and the State in North Africa," in *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa*, ed. John Entelis (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 12.

[40] Voll, "Sultans, Saints, and Presidents," 14.

promote democratic processes[41]. Despite western support for 'risk-free democracies' where, according to John L. Esposito, "opposition parties and groups are tolerated as long as they remain relatively weak or under government control and do not threaten the ruling group"[42], Mohamed Morsi demonstrated that truly free elections can bring Islamic leaders opposed to Western influences into power.

While political parties with doctrine based in Islamic ideology have problems of their own that are best addressed in a different paper, they often provide the best, if not the only legitimate opposition to Middle Eastern autocracies, with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt serving as no exception. Michael Hudson, a political scientist focused with the Middle East, wrote that democracy is not an "ideal condition but… a process through which the exercise of political power by regime and state becomes less arbitrary, exclusive, and authoritarian"[43]. Despite the staggeringly broad array of values and politics that various Islamic factions prescribe to, Islamic parties in Egypt represent a chance at achieving Hudson's view of democracy. While Morsi's brief presidency was certainly flawed and not without its own autocratic tinges, it was not was not anymore antidemocratic than other regimes in transition from autocratic rule[44]. "Ideas of just rule, religious or otherwise, are not fixed, even if some radicals claim that they are. Such notions are debated, argued, often fought about, and re-formed in practice. The issue is not whether such debates are occurring but how to recognize their contours, as well as the obstacles and the false starts, both internal and external, to making governance less arbitrary and authoritarian"[45].

CONCLUSION

The threads leading to the prevention of democracy in Egypt are incredibly complex and deeply entangled with one another. Foreign support for oppressive Egyptian regimes, frequently originating from the United States or other Arab states, prop up "stable" dictatorships while leaving democratic activists to their own devices. Ironically, Egypt's key position as an American ally in the War on Terror in the regime has been used by Egyptian officials as an opportunity to promote increasingly draconian and authoritarian measures, with government officials free to act without interference from either their American or Gulf allies or the Egyptian public.

However, as suggested by the Arab Spring revolt in 2011 and other instances of autocracies collapsing in similar countries in the region, democracy remains a possibility for the nation. Mubarak's thirty one-year reign was ended by mass protests in the streets, as was Morsi's presidency. The Egyptian people, oppressed for decades, demonstrated once that they were tired of inefficient, autocratic rule. It remains to be seen if the same level of protests can be seen under the increasingly despotic rule of General el-Sisi.

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[41] Voll, "Sultans, Saints, and Presidents," 8.
[42] Voll, "Sultans, Saints, and Presidents," 9.
[43] Dale Eickleman, "Muslim Politics: The Prospects for Democracy in North Africa and the Middle East," in *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa,* ed. John Entelis (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 19.

[44] Shadi Hamid, Meredith Wheeler, "Was Mohamed Morsi Really an Autocrat?" The Atlantic, 31 March, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/03/was-mohamed-morsi-really-an-autocrat/359797/.
[45] Eickleman, "Muslim Politics: The Prospects for Democracy in North Africa and the Middle East," 38.

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