Perceptions of Egyptian Youth:

A Look at Post-Arab Spring Leadership and the Post-Revolution Life of a Revolutionary

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Abstract
Nearly a decade ago, the Arab Spring swept through Egypt causing a massive political shift and removing the entrenched regime from power. Those who subsequently rose to power, however, were not revolutionaries. This paper aims to determine why Egyptian protest leaders did not rise to fill the power void left by Mubarak, as well as what avenues to power remain open for reform-minded individuals in Egypt. Aided by regime theory, transition and consolidation theory, and pendulum theory, this paper looks closely at the events that followed the uprising, highlighting community action and growth. It argues that as politicians began to come forward to fill parliament seats and an empty presidential administration, the revolutionaries were inexperienced youths with no leverage to gain national leadership positions. As the communities helped to right themselves, however, these same revolutionaries that were locked out of formal governmental positions found themselves gaining valuable leadership experience. Now, as the economic and social conditions in Egypt begin to mirror pre-2011 conditions, those same reform-minded protestors are a little older and a lot more experienced.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Youth Movements, Regime Transition, Regime Consolidation, Protests, Egypt, Uprising

Introduction

When the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings swept through the Middle East, they seemed to leave promises of change and opportunity in their wake, especially in Egypt. In the near decade since, however, citizens have found themselves back in the streets with the same complaints as before. This makes sense when considering the leaders who rose to replace the outgoing regime were unaffiliated with the revolution and in some cases were even peripherally related to the now-deposed leader. This leaves the question: *why didn't Egyptian protest leaders rise to fill the power void left by Mubarak? And, what avenues to power remain open for reform-minded individuals in Egypt?*

Cognitivist approach to regime theory suggests that while interests and power[1] do play an important role, so do the oft ignored perception and environment.[2] Furthermore, transition and consolidation theory states that regime change happens in two (self-explanatory) steps: regime transition, or the "period between when one regime is dissolved and a new one installed," and regime consolidation, or the period when infant laws and institutions introduced during transition are improved and made permanent.[3] Finally, pendulum theory submits that Egypt will oscillate between the stability-based authoritarianism it is used to and

[1] Realist theory believes that power-based approaches explain regime theory while neoliberals believe that interest-based approaches explain regime theory.
[2] Edythe Weeks, "The Politics of Space Law in a PostCold War Era: Understanding Regime Change" (Doctoral Thesis, Northern Arizona University, 2006), 7-16.
[3] Jorunn Brandvoll, "From Apparatchik to President—From Businessman to Khan: Regime Transition and Consolidation in the Russian Republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia," Report for *Norwegian Institute for International Affairs* (2002): 14.

increasingly greater attempts at a free and open democracy.[4] This implies that *power lies in perception of power, and the perception was that the revolutionaries were inexperienced youths, leaving them no leverage to gain national leadership positions as the regime consolidated. However, not all leaders operate at a federal level or exist in government jobs, and as the pendulum swings back those "youths" will be prepared for more central roles.*

Fury, Rage, and Idleness

As the world spun into 2011, Egypt marked over four decades of being in a near-constant state of emergency under a president who remained in power due to systematic election fraud, all while maintaining "one of the worst human rights records in the world."[5] Furthermore, "unemployment and underemployment, especially among young people, were [skyrocketing. Unsurprisingly,] the situation was exacerbated by the global recession that began in 2008 and unemployment became clearly much higher [than 8.9%] by 2011."[6] In fact, all over the Arab world "young people [were suffering this] economic exclusion, and most blamed their countries' leadership for that state of affairs."[7]

It was not just the widespread malcontent that explained how this movement gained the necessary momentum to topple a regime that had a reputation for managing dissent instead of suppressing it: the movement was perfectly timed to hit with a trifecta of tribulation, technology, and Tunisia.[8]

Unlike previous protests, this revolution was built on the back of Twitter. Previous generations used flyers, rocks, and word of mouth, but "in the hands of the young Egyptians who stimulated the Tahrir Revolution, technology and social media" replaced the methods Mubarak's regime was familiar with, offering a new way to organize.[9] Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube provided untouchable forums for people to express their anger over the President, though perhaps that rage would have stayed online, if not for Tunisia.

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[4] Sonia Alianak, *The Transition Towards Revolution and Reform: The Arab Spring Realized? (*Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 96.

[5] Esam Al-Amin, *The Arab Awakening Unveiled: Understanding Transformations and Revolutions in the Middle East* (Washington DC: American National Trust, 2013), 37.

[6] Earl Sullivan, "Youth Power and the Revolution," in *Egypt's Tahrir Revolution*, ed. Dan Tschirgi, Walid Kazziha, and Sean F. McMahon (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), 69.

[7] Hafez Ghanem, *The Arab Spring Five Years Later: Toward Greater Inclusiveness* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 58.

[8] Mona El-Ghobashy, " The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution," in *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Changes in Egypt*, ed. Jeannie Sowers and Chris Toensing (New York: Verso, 2012), 21.

[9] Earl Sullivan, "Youth Power", 73.

A month prior to the Lotus Revolution,[10] a fruit vendor in Tunisia self-immolated at the capital building in response to the country's rampant and unavoidable corruption. Within two weeks, extensive protests had deposed the Tunisian president and lit a spark in the region, inspiring Egyptians "beyond the activists or elites."[11] In fact, Tunisia's problems and response brought to light how deep the tribulations of the people of Egypt went. As that desperation flooded the country, people took to social media, using Facebook and Twitter to reach over 60 percent of Egypt's 80 million under-25 population. Additionally, they used YouTube (and other video sharing sites) to spread anti-Mubarak propaganda worldwide, including a video plea from the mother of Khaled Said (a man who had been wrongfully killed by police in Alexandria six months earlier), giving the revolution a martyr and invocation.[12] Egyptians saw Tunisia's success as domestic commodity prices soared, and decided to take a walk.

Demanding Dissolution

On January 25th, 2011, thousands of people (primarily young and working class) peacefully descended on Tahrir Square with five demands and plenty of time to wait.[13] The first demand was for government-sponsored programs to "address poverty and unemployment."[14] Second was a call for an end of the 31-year state of emergency and a promise to uphold judicial independence. Next, the masses demanded the "resignation of the interior minister whose ministry was notorious for torture and abuse of human rights."[15] Fourth, they called for political reforms including (though not limited to) a cap of two presidential terms, "the dissolution of parliament, and for new elections to be held."[16] Finally, they called for the immediate resignation of President Mubarak.

Mubarak fired the interior minister and made vague promises of reform, but announced his intention was to remain in power until the next scheduled election.[17] In response, hundreds of thousands marched, bringing a wide swath of people of different ages, genders, religions, and even education levels together. Eighteen days after the initial assembly, Mubarak stepped down.

[10] *A name given to the Arab Spring Revolution in Egypt.*
[11] Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Praxis," 22.
[12] Earl Sullivan, "Youth Power", 73.
[13] Paul Amar, "Egypt," in *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East*, eds. Paul Amar and Vijay Prashad (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 43.
[14] Esam Al-Amin, *Arab Awakening*, 34
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] A popular joke at the time was 'a speech writer rushed into the president's office, exclaiming 'Mr. President, this is your farewell speech to the nation!' and Mubarak responded 'Why? Are all the people leaving the country?''

Regime Transition

Though the revolution was successful (or, 2/5ths successful and counting), there was still a lot of work to be done. The ideal choice for this transition period would be a committee organized and run by protest leadership, featuring input from various demographics across the country. This committee, or anything even remotely similar, could never be realized because "there was no mass-defined leadership, nor was there a single identity dominating and ruling the flow of the Egyptian revolution."[18]

Though new to the Middle East, this "horizontal network [with] no single, central leader"[19] resembled the revolts that had been appearing in Latin America for the decade prior, allowing "traditional opposition bodies" to participate, but refusing them directorial roles.[20] Despite a "lack of clear leadership", this structure works by coordination that comes "during the movement itself[, using] its own system in diversity, expansion, multiplication, and multiplicity, which enables spontaneous control over the revolution."[21] Though Egypt did suffer incidents of confusion, violence, and demagoguery during the initial uprising, none of them erupted into riots or panics, and all blame has fallen at the feet of "the remnants of the former regime, the police in particular."[22]

While this upheaval mechanism is a powerful way to gain diverse support in large quantities, it fails to empower any individual revolutionaries to step into the power void left behind. In this case, the majority of protesters were under thirty, with little employment history or education, much less relevant experience. Even so, these young people began to take on greater community roles.

With a limited central government stumbling along under the control of an unpopular military council (a remnant of the newly-deposed regime), and a brutal police force operating without oversight, the people who had flocked to the streets to overthrow their government, stayed in the streets, launching "new experiments in self-policing, societal security, conflict resolution, and self-government."[23] Surprisingly similar security committees independently appeared across cities and smaller towns to keep the police out and protect their neighborhoods from looters, traffickers, and "wealthy businessmen wreaking havoc on the insurgent neighborhoods."[24] Though some of these committees were dangerous to the communities they had been formed to "protect", many had great success, even innovating new models and concepts of security including "informal dispute resolution mechanisms, women-run mutual finance associations that offered

[18] Aly El Raggal and Heba Raouf Ezzat, "Can a Revolution be Negotiated?" *in Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat*, ed. I. William Zartman (Atlanta, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 85.
[19] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Arabs Are Democracy's New Pioneers: The Leaderless Middle East Uprisings Can Inspire Freedom Movements as Latin America Did Before," *Guardian* (London, UK), 24 February 2011.
[20] El Raggal and Ezzat, "Can a Revolution be Negotiated?" 85.
[21] Ibid., 89.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Amar, "Egypt," 43.
[24] Ibid.

collective economic [means over] coercive means, and participatory forms of urban problem-solving" that acted as local administration in place of a more traditional structure.[25]

Then something beautiful began to happen: these committees evolved and began to work together across neighborhoods and towns, building local government from the ground-up. Crime began to fall, new public spaces were built, and public services and transportation began to restart.[26] Then labor unions stepped up and began to provide security on a larger scale, followed shortly by women-led financing collectives, who stepped into the void left by Mubarak-loyal investors and began to "provide employment supplements and spread community resources to those most traumatized by unemployment."[27] These social and financial operations led to a stabilization of working- and lower-middle- class neighborhoods. As everyday life became more recognizable, people started to look to the burgeoning central government, and their expectations were high after the success of neighborhood control.

On the eve of the Egypt's first open presidential elections, it appeared the revolution was a success. After all, revolutions are "fundamental transformations to the political structure and power relationships in the country as well as the redistribution of resources within society, not a change in personalities or modalities."[28] Young, uneducated members of the working class had marched with nothing but desperation, and 16 months after that first spontaneous action, many were active community leaders with experience in domestic security, welfare programs, and infrastructure development, among other things.

Regime Consolidation (Attempt #1)

May 23rd, 2012 felt like a special day. The first open presidential elections revealed "the exciting pluralism, dynamism, and productivity of a long-latent democratic political culture [that the uprisings] and violence of 2011 had brought to the surface."[29] Though the Muslim Brotherhood held the most seats of any party in the hastily elected parliament, and was therefore the favorite, the new People's Assembly had already "disappointed or offended huge swaths of the Egyptian electorate" under their leadership.[30]

After two days of elections, Hamdeen Sabahy emerged with the largest popular vote count in the country. Sabahy was a "young-spirited, charismatic and articulate leader [who had] polled incredibly well."[31] He had become politically active during his university days and the 1970s "Bread Riots", and had

[25] Ibid.
[26] Paul Amar and Noha Roushdy, "Concept Paper: Societal Violence and Alternative Security Practices," *Nazra for Feminist Studies* (22 October 2012), 5-6, https://nazra.org/en/2012/10/concept-paper-societal-violence-and-alternative-security-practices.
[27] Amar, "Egypt," 44.
[28] Esam Al-Amin, *Arab Awakening*, 136.
[29] Amar, "Egypt," 45.
[30] Ibid., 46.
[31] Ibid., 47.

stood with the protesters in Tahrir Square all those months ago.[32] In the simplest terms, he was a leader molded in revolution and ready to step into the remaining power void, boldly declaring "I am the president of the poor."[33]

But as the cities "shifted wholesale against the Brotherhood," rural areas existed outside the influence of the growing progressive movement and the Brotherhood's political machine did its job.[34] While Sabahy might have had the highest raw vote count, the party system limited his opportunities, and he was subsequently locked out of the second run-off election, with the Brotherhood candidate (Mohamed Morsi) and a military man left behind by the former regime (Ahmed Shafiq) remaining on the ballot.[35] Though neither candidate was popular with the former protesters, Morsi capitalized on the optimism of youth and his superior ability to work the levers of bureaucracy, promising to be the "president for all Egypt" rather than just the Brotherhood.

After a month a campaigning, Morsi won the presidential election, consolidating a declining Brotherhood's power. From there, he began the less-then-glamorous task of fixing the economy. More fiscally conservative than his autocratic-leaning predecessor, Morsi recognized the immediacy of the problem and began implementing policies that often-leaned anti-labor, intending to promote growth.[36]

Since the spring of 2011, there had been waves of labor strikes all over the country, across a variety of sectors. By late 2012, a new round of strikes had begun to gain momentum, affecting cigarette factories, weaving mills, and port facilities.[37] Trade unions began to work together, rallying around pro-labor policies and a shared dislike of Morsi's rule.[38] As strikes became larger and harder to ignore, Morsi quietly introduced a new law forcing union leadership over the age of 60 to retire, subsequently replacing them with Brotherhood members.[39]

When workers expressed outrage over the loss of their hard-won rights, Morsi decreed a "Revolution Protection Law" that made inciting strikes illegal.[40] Next, "the government drafted a law banning any public protests that 'insult' the state or president or at which protestors 'rudely shout'."[41] Finally, Morsi "claimed full powers and promulgated a hastily written constitution, imposing [the Muslim Brotherhood's] own

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[32] Joe Sterling, "Hamdeen Sabahy, A Champion for Egypt's Dispossessed," *CNN World, Africa Edition,* last updated 23 May 2012, https://edition.cnn.com/2012/05/22/world/africa/egypt-election-sabahy/index.html.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Amar, "Egypt," 47.
[35] El Raggal and Ezzat, "Can a Revolution be Negotiated?" 99-100.
[36] Joel Beinin, "Workers, Trade Unions, and Egypt's Future," *Middle East Research and Information Project,* 18 January 2013, http://merip.org/mero/mero011813.
[37] Amar, "Egypt," 50.
[38] Beinin, "Workers, Trade Unions, and Egypt's Future."
[39] Ibid.
[40] Heba Fahmy, "The Pitfalls and Limitations of the Revolution Protection Plan," *Egypt Independent* (Cairo, EG) 27 November 2012, http://www.egyptindependent.com.
[41] Amar, "Egypt," 35.

notion of legitimacy and exploiting it."[42] This led to the "blackest day on record", when on December 2nd the Constitutional Court was forced to closed (rather than rule on the legitimacy of the constitution writing process) under pressure from "sword wielding thugs from the Muslim Brotherhood."[43]

In response to the court closure, demonstrators planned to protest peacefully at Ittihadiya, which was the palace President Morsi worked out of. Instead they met with a horrifying spectacle:

> armed Muslim Brotherhood militias [brandishing] swords and rifles, attacking the crowds, lynching protesters, capturing progressive women and dragging them through the streets into tents for interrogation and [molestation]. And these attackers were not just nameless thugs[, but] included prominent Brotherhood leaders including some in Morsi's inner circle as well as the editor in chief of the Brotherhood's moderate and modern media [presence.] The nation watched the attacks live on television and on the Internet in horror.[44]

Over 100,000 people descended on the palace in response to these atrocities, violently clashing with the police until December 9th when Morsi rescinded his constitution declaration.[45]

The next seven months of Morsi's presidential term were fraught with protests and violent clashes with the police (though none as bad as December), and he was never able to move past them. The Brotherhood had watched as Mubarak managed dissent through fear and believed his methods could be replicated for their new regime. Given the lack of enthusiasm around his election, it is unlikely Morsi would have held power for long in any version of this story, but the second he attacked the protests, he became irreparably weak. After all, Morsi and the Brotherhood gained their power through a perception of good works and Islamic piety, and violent action against citizens is counteractive to that image. Furthermore, what they failed to comprehend was the Arab Spring protests (and subsequent interim period) were not a fluke or luck and had in fact brought communities together and empowered the people to be navigators of their own futures. Now, when the government pushed the people, they knew how to push back.

Regime Consolidation (#2)

After seven months of near-constant civil unrest, the Egyptian Army, led by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, staged a coup. Efficient and brutal, Morsi was removed from power quickly and the Army took control, cracking down on Brotherhood members and protesters simultaneously, leaving "hundreds of people [injured], killed and imprisoned."[46] In spite of this, the dislike of Morsi transformed into a cult-de-personality around Sisi,

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[42] I. William Zartman, "Lessons for Theory: Negotiating for Order and Legitimacy," in *Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat*, ed. I. William Zartman (Atlanta, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 425.

[43] Amar, "Egypt," 36.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Morsi rescinded the constitution on December 8th, but the clashes continued as the news spread.

[46] Khaled Abou El Fadl, "Egypt: Is Political Islam Dead?" Aljazeera, 8 July 2013, 2, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/201378985916781.html.

with people rallying around him even as unrest continued throughout the country. Rather than rely on political influence or bureaucratic machinations to rise to power, Sisi used the power of the military to consolidate his strength. Moreover, by cracking down on both sides of the political struggle, he was able to effectively squash any resistance to his new regime and leverage his charisma to show the country his effortless power and control.

After the previous military control and the year under Morsi, people had lost hope for "realizing the Arab Spring", with only 36 percent remaining optimistic in 2013.[47] It seemed that Sisi offered a "re-establishment of the Mubarak-era hierarchies of emphasizing stability," but that was no longer inherently a bad thing.[48] This is not to imply that the remaining 64 percent missed the pre-2011 era (in fact, 41 percent were 'extremely disappointed'), but rather that this 64 percent wanted to focus on the issues that affect them daily (i.e. food, employment, shelter). This desire for normalcy as a consolation prize permitted Sisi to reprioritize "stability, and those elements of the authoritarian state [that Mubarak relied upon, such as the plutocrats, the security and the military, have] worked hard to shield Egypt's status quo from the full brunt of [the remaining] revolutionary unrest."[49] In fact, despite consistent (though not constant) civil unrest since his confirmation, Sisi brags that Egypt has "become 'an oasis of security and stability' under his rule."[50]

This brings us to the fall of 2019. Under Sisi's leadership, the "GDP has risen by 5.5 percent, with inflation declining to 11.3 percent [yet] the Egyptian people have not benefited from this positive trend and have grown increasingly frustrated."[51] Then Mohamed Ali, a former Egyptian Ministry of Defense contractor, publicly accused Sisi and "his inner circle of widespread use of public funds for luxury investments and illicit business."[52] These accusations brought a month of protests and resulted in the arrests of thousands, "including prominent academics, journalists and politicians."[53] International media covered the protests widely, wondering at what could cause people to come forward in such a "rare" demonstration.

Unlike Morsi before him, Sisi seems to understand the power a dissenting population has. Regimes throughout the Middle East are "acutely concerned for their own survival" as protests reminiscent of 2011

[47] Alianak, *The Transition Towards Revolution and Reform*, 95.
[48] Ibid., 96.
[49] Ibid., 96.
[50] Associated Press Reporters, "Egypt Now 'an Oasis of Security and Stability', claims Sisi amid Clampdown on Protesters," *Independent (*London, UK) 24 January 2020. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/egypt-el-sisi-protest-arab-spring-anniversary-a9299861.html.
[51] Alessia Melcangi and Giueseppe Dentice, "Egypt's Latest Protests are an Alarm Bell for Sisi," *MENAsource* (Atlantic Council) 21 October 2019, https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypts-latest-protests-are-an-alarm-bell-for-sisi/.
[52] Ibid.
[53] AP Reporters, "Egypt Now 'an Oasis of Security'."

begin to appear.[54] Leaders in affected countries seem to vacillate between promoting reforms to appease protesters and violent suppression methods, but there has been little success in subduing the unrest, except in Egypt.[55] The heavy-handed response of zero-tolerance and curfew (among others) last fall very publicly stopped the protests, but that does not mean the underlying issues have been resolved.[56] It does not seem to matter, however, as Sisi has introduced a new policy to his control mechanism: fake news.

January 2020 brought a fear of renewed protests as the Arab Spring anniversary passed. In order to ensure an orderly population, the "interior ministry issued a statement alleging that the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood was plotting to 'spread chaos' and 'undermine the country's stability' by using the cyberspace to call for protests and rioting."[57] It is (of course) possible that this conspiracy is real, but that it is far more likely that this accusation provides political cover for the regime to crush any opposition that appears around the anniversary. Since Sisi's rise to power, "state officials and state-controlled media have spread the narrative that the 2011 uprising was the outcome of a conspiracy by the Brotherhood and its regional allies," going so far as to name January 25th "Police Day".[58]

As regional unrest spreads, Sisi faces a higher chance of losing his tight grip on control. Currently, his softer totalitarian measures and expansive secret police force seem to be holding the regime in place, but Sisi knows that while the 2011 revolutionaries may have been young and inexperienced, they managed to overthrow an entrenched ruler, and now they are older and more experienced.

Prospects

"Fluidity, decentralization, leaderlessness, and apparently spontaneity have [become] the main characteristics of the Egyptian revolution.[59]" As protests have continued over the years, the horizontal structure has remained, yet leaders have begun to emerge by virtue of time and necessity. This is not always a good thing.

Following Sisi's 'unfree and unfair' re-election in March 2019, Human Rights Watch accused security forces of having "escalated a campaign of intimidation, violence, and arrests against political opponents, civil society activists, and many others."[60] Reportedly, "tens of thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested[, with hundreds sentenced] to death in mass trials."[61] This implies that, unsurprisingly, Sisi has

[54] Sarah Feuer and Carmit Valensi, "Arab Spring 2.0? Making Sense of the Protests Sweeping the Region," *Institute for National Security Studies* (2019), 3.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Melcangi and Dentice, "Egypt's Latest Protests."
[57] AP Reporters, "Egypt Now 'an Oasis of Security'."
[58] Ibid.
[59] El Raggal and Ezzat, "Can a Revolution be Negotiated?" 86.
[60] MEE Staff, "Jailed, Exiled, Missing: The Faces of Egypt's Opposition to Sisi," *Middle East Eye*, 21 June 2019, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/what-happened-egypts-opposition-home-and-abroad-profiles
[61] Ibid.

more opposition than should be possible. Many of his opponents became politically active in 2011, gaining experience and drive as the years went on, though to this day few hold (or ever held) conventional leadership roles. In fact, for some, perhaps ironically, the claim they have to a future leadership position is that Sisi jailed them for dissent, meaning if Sisi had left them alone, he would have nothing to worry about

Conclusion

Why didn't Egyptian protest leaders rise to fill the power void left by Mubarak? It is a complicated question, as most things are. The regime transition and consolidation periods offer a structure for implementing power, with power not necessarily coming through overt force.

Initially, there were not any roles that needed to be filled nor any leaders, due to the horizontal structure of the protests. As time went on, however, that changed. The regime transition period allowed communities to build themselves up, offering experience to those who wanted it, and a chance to cause real, visible change. When Morsi came to power, he made room for a few young leaders, but he wanted young leaders from his own coalition, locking out women and a majority of men. As he began to alienate the population, he resorted to violent security enforcements, drawing more public dissent, and ultimately leading to his downfall (and that of the Muslim Brotherhood's). By the time Sisi had clawed his way to the presidency, it was becoming clear that he would use the military, police, or social pressures to maintain order to his liking.

It is more than that, though. Power lies in the perception of power, and the perception was that these young revolutionaries were inexperienced youths. They had no leverage with which to gain a national leadership position, nor a reason to attempt to try. However, as most of the people who make up Sisi's opponents can explain, not all leaders exist in government roles or work at a federal level, because there is a lot of work to be done, and plenty of ways to do it.

And, what avenues to power remain open for reform-minded individuals in Egypt? The most fascinating thing is happening. As Sisi becomes more afraid of his own people, the people he arrests or disappears become more visible internationally, giving further credibility to the opposition. After all, power lies in the perception of power, and the perception now is that the revolutionaries must be experienced, reform-minded political animals being pulled out of population to keep them from leadership positions. Sisi can continue to jail his opponents, but not all leaders operate within the constraints of government or at a national level, and as the pendulum swings back towards 2011 conditions (economic instability, food crisis, autocratic leader), those 'inexperienced youths' have more tools in their belt than social media and optimism.

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