Unending War of Egyptians

Introduction

Egypt once an inspiration for serenity, the society that very well illustrated peace and forbearance, has today, turned into one amongst the Middle East’s most turbulent states. In recent history, Egypt has been witnessing a continued internal struggle aiming not only to overthrow the regime but to renovate its complete society. In this process, Egypt has unfolded many substantial ideas and patterns. The struggle for the idea of democracy is still, far from won.

An Escape from Autocracy

The revolution began on January 25, 2011 in retaliation to one of the world’s longest serving presidents, Hosni Mubarak, and his autocratic rule. Fifteen months down the line, patience and consistency brought the Egyptians to the long awaited presidential elections, May 2012, as promised by the military. Two candidates ran for Presidential Election, Mohammad Morsi and Ahmed Shafiq. On June 24, President Mohammad Morsi, representative of Muslim Brotherhood, was declared President of Egypt with voter turnout 51.7% and Ahmed Shafiq voter turnout was 48.3%.¹

Drafting of Constitution

Mohammad Morsi was elected at the point of time when Egypt was being ruled under provisional constitution adopted by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces of Egypt. President Morsi inherited the challenge of drafting a constitution. Egypt’s Constitutional Referendum happened in two phases on December 15, 2012 and December 22, 2012. Figuratively, out of 52 million Egyptians, 17 million Egyptians are eligible of voting. During constitutional referendum, 10 million (64%) people voted in favor of the constitution and 7 million (36%) voted against the constitution. Breaking the average voter percentage, it makes, every 20 Egyptian voted in favor of constitution, 12 voted against the constitution and remaining 68 did not vote². Below illustrated table shows statistical data of the voters who voted against and in favor of constitution. Furthermore, a brief history of 2011 parliamentary elections is also briefed in order to identify the ideological pattern of the cities. The facts also

¹http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/06/24/egypt-braces-for-announcement-president/
²http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/52259
demonstrate that all the geographical zones of the state did not experience a similar voting ratio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Against Constitution</th>
<th>In Favor of Constitution</th>
<th>Population percentage which didn’t vote</th>
<th>Type of Population</th>
<th>Parliamentary Elections 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>57% Reject Islamic Camp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban, Elites (Social and Intellectual), Poor</td>
<td>No Data Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Primary support base of Salafist parties.</td>
<td>66% voted for Freedom and Justice Party or the Al-Nour Party</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower Egypt (North)</td>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Poor regions, high illiteracy rates</td>
<td>84% voted for Islamist Parties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Egypt (South)</td>
<td></td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>Poor region, high illiteracy rates</td>
<td>No Data Available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>Radical Salafis, Poor. Reason for not voting, lack of interest and only recognize “Law of God”</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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**How ‘New’ is the New Constitution?**

A brief comparison between 1971 constitution and present constitution is stated below:

I. 1971 constitution declared identity of Egypt as a democratic state, based on citizenship. Present constitution has changed language a bit and has declared Egypt’s identity as a nation part of Arab, and Islamic nations.
II. The 1971 constitution declared Islam as religion of state and mentioned Sharia as the basis for jurisprudence; however, the new constitution explicitly adopts principles of Sharia including general evidence and foundations. Furthermore, latest constitution has given exceptional powers to Al-Azhar, the most prestigious religious school, the constitution directs that the scholars of Al-Azhar need to be consulted on matters of Sharia.

III. Present constitution only guarantee rights and freedom of faith for monotheistic religions, whereas, 1971 constitution guaranteed rights and freedom of practice religious rights of all communities. So, strict monotheism needs to be practiced in Egypt and polytheism or lack of belief in God in Egypt can lead to persecution. Article 43 of the constitution states “the state shall guarantee freedom of faith and freedom of practice of religious rights and the right to establish worshipping places for monotheist religions based on law”

IV. The constitution under former President Hosni Mubarak promoted political system based on principles of pluralism whereas; under President Morsi political system is based on democracy and Shura (consultative council).

V. To strengthen the process of democracy present constitution has reduced President’s tenure length from six years to four years, and has also limited president’s re-election once. However, President still remains the supreme commander of the military and the head of the National Defence Council.

The Revolution Continues

Constitutional Dissatisfaction

The constitutional victory has unfortunately, failed to satisfy the masses of Egypt. The constitution is termed as “illegitimate” by the opposition. They accused Morsi of using the banner of religion, Islam, to manipulate the minds of Egyptians. The country is divided into Secularists and Muslims, Extremist and Liberals, Rural and Urban and Rich and Poor.
“Egypt’s Constitutional Assembly is dominated by Muslim Brotherhood and Justice Party.”

Ongoing protest on constitution in Egypt is also due to the fact that Islamic clerics are made part of the legal process and custodians of civil rights, which is capable of initiating process of “religious policing”.

Referring to the constitutional opposition, National Salvation Front (Egypt), an alliance of Egyptian political parties, advocated strong opposition against Muslim Brotherhood during Constitutional Referendum and President Morsi. The clashes are still going in Egypt amongst Secularist and Islamist and thus, further deteriorating situation in Egypt. Mahmoud Hussein, Leader of Muslim Brotherhood, has threatened legal action against National Salvation Front due to their continued questioning on the constitution. There is a rift between Secular and Islamist parties; the society is divided between two blocks. The secular liberal parties are gaining momentum which is getting in competition with Islamists. Both the blocks are trapped in zero-sum game. This will be a turning point for Egypt. Whichever party governs, both of the blocks affect identity and ideology of Egypt.

Furthermore, Military still remains an untouched institution in the constitution. Armed forces are the foundation of Egypt’s political system and main obstacle in revolutions.

**Foreign Policy Concerns**

President Morsi with coming into power also gave an impression of Islamizing foreign policy by escalating ties with Hamas. Furthermore, Egyptian President paid less heed to already established relations with Europe and U.S and rather switched towards Ethiopia, KSA, China and Iran. This raises concerns amongst the Egyptians of Morsi facilitating the interests of Muslim Brotherhood and overlooking the State’s interests.

**Economic Deprivation**

The deprivation of economic rights of the Egyptians continues even after the change of leader. The new budget plan put forward by Morsi’s government allocates 80% of the budget amount to fixed items as “interest on loans is 22%, public salaries is 26%, food and fuel subsidies is 32 % whereas, remaining 20% of the budget is set for new programmes and investment projects.” To revive economy of Egypt, President Morsi government has

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approved draft law “Sukuk Law” which allows sovereign Islamic Bonds. The law is intended to organize financing of government, state budget, national projects and public institutions. The government of Egypt, in order to overcome its economic crisis and to meet ends, is depending on IMF $4.8 billion loan. However, economists have raised their inhibitions regarding ‘law’ and ‘loan’ from IMF, claiming that ongoing economic crisis in the country is directly linked to political turmoil. Furthermore, the economists claim that the same law was put forward by former Investment Minister Mahmoud Mohey Edin which turned out to be hoax and allowed the foreign ownership of public utilities. Thus, there’s an environment of mistrust on President Morsi government that whether “Sukuk Law” is a tool asked by the IMF.

Appraisal

The aim of breaking top tier political system and bringing about economic change has been half achieved i.e. removal of former President Hosni Mubarak from office and sacking his administration. However, real challenge of bringing actual economic change in country is still hanging in the balance. Poverty in Egypt has risen from 20% to 25%. Since revolution, Egypt’s foreign reserves have also fallen from $36 billion to $15 billion. Devaluation of Egyptian pound and country’s reliance on IMF loans has further deteriorated the situation in the country. Furthermore, the fight between Islamist and Seculars is only creating terrible conditions for the lower strata of the society. Leaving the people of Egypt into a much frustrated situation to bring changes to their socio-economic conditions, for which they thought democracy, would serve best. Thus, none of the objectives of revolution have been achieved.

If revolution continues in Egypt, which will, as evident from the prevailing conditions, would further increase chaos in the country. The continued rift between secularists and Islamists will further deteriorate the political situation. The society is already divided between rich and poor, urban and rural, Liberals Freedom advocates and Sharia

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9 An Islamic financial certificate, similar to a bond in Western finance, that complies with Sharia, Islamic religious law. Because the traditional Western interest paying bond structure is not permissible, the issuer of a sukuk sells an investor group the certificate, who then rents it back to the issuer for a predetermined rental fee.
advocates. Tourism, previously one of the drivers of economic generation, is also declining day by day because of turbulent events. Foreign investment is also ending, as investors do not want to invest their money in a land of uncertainties and instabilities.

The revolution, as viewed by many is a revolution for democracy. Whereas, the need is to understand the real or ultimate aim of calling for democracy; granting of socio-economic rights the Egyptians. To achieve which, the state and non-state actors of Egypt need to keep aside their personal and selfish interests and join hands together to work for the basic needs and demands of the people of Egypt.