

EGYPT'S POST-MUBARAK PREDICAMENT

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Three years after the uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak from power, Egypt continues to grapple with an authoritarian state. Throughout the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, authoritarian forces remained the key political players. Democratic alternatives have not capitalized on cracks in the system. Prospects for the Brotherhood's political reintegration and a democratization of political Islam are bleak. As long as credible alternatives fail to gain traction, the old state will persist and Egypt's central challenges will remain unresolved.

Key Themes

- Egypt is where it was before the 2011 uprising—revolutionary battle lines are being drawn over support for an old state characterized by a series of institutional fiefdoms that act in their own interests rather than in the national interest.
- The Muslim Brotherhood's rule constituted an undemocratic interlude in Egyptian politics, and its downfall was a product of its inability to deal effectively with the old state.
- It can only be politically reintegrated after a complete political surrender on its part, which is unlikely.
- Egypt is becoming increasingly ungovernable. The state cannot convert its reasserted dominance into legitimacy, and as intrastate competition and unruly protest politics engulf the political arena, the country faces a political vacuum with no clear resolution.

Findings

The old state, with its competing institutional power centers, persists. The new constitution has the potential to exacerbate the problem, preserving the privileges of old state institutions and providing them the capacity to act as power brokers within a fragmented system.

Egypt needs a complete reinvention of its political sphere. Despite the development of a contentious public space since 2011, Egypt still lacks a capable political class, without which it will be unable to confront entrenched institutional obstacles to democracy.

The coalition that supported the July 2013 coup that overthrew then president Mohamed Morsi is fragmenting. A split is developing between groups that want to reproduce Mubarak's authoritarianism and those that support a more democratic future for Egypt. No one group has monopolized the debate.

The possibility of reconciliation between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood remains elusive. So far, the Brotherhood has chosen a path of political intransigence. Given the regime's crackdown and the Brothers' political incentives against moderation, they face an increasingly limited set of options.

Democratic forces must overcome leadership and capacity deficiencies. They need to move beyond hollow slogans and develop tactics that support their goals. The development of a successful democratic movement is crucial for Egypt's future.

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