

Egypt Has Post-Election Blues.  
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A few weeks ago, I attended a lecture on Egypt\222s \223Arab Spring\224 and their recent round of elections. The speaker was optimistic about this process, and noted a number of \223accomplishments\224 that Egyptians should regard with pride:

- \225 A tyrannical dictator removed
- \225 A relatively free and fair election held
- \225 A member of the Muslim Brotherhood elected (Accomplishment?)
- \225 The military promise to yield to civilian rule
- \225 Treaty agreements with Israel still in force (for now)
- \225 A new constitution in the works
- \225 The new government has increased retirement pensions and government salaries.

This optimistic view is widely shared by journalists, and those who are skeptical of the benefits of these accomplishments are reminded: \223Look how long it took us to have a democracy! Give them a break.\224

I wish that Egypt had given itself a break, but these \223accomplishments\224 run counter to the most important issue of all: how to fix a disastrous economy. For Egypt, the economy not only matters, it is more essential than any other issue. The downsides of each of the accomplishments listed above are:

\225 Dictators are the bridge between feudalism and modernity. In holding the reins of power, they suppress tribal and religious conflicts----hopefully long enough to bring some sense of national identity to the public. Removing the dictator may not prove a blessing and bodes ill for minorities.

\225 An election was indeed held, but a vast majority of voters were illiterate and clueless. The institutions that must precede an election are not in place. Where are independent courts, press, literacy, and experience in self-governance even at village level?

\225 That a member of the Muslim Brotherhood was elected bodes ill for the economy. The MB has no interest in business or industrial development. They are not champions of the emancipation of women, modern education (critical thinking), or family planning. With tourism the main revenue source for Egypt, who will want to go there with an Islamist government and increasingly religious population?

\225 The military is not yielding to civilian rule. They are obstructing and waiting for the inevitable chaos that will welcome them back. And Egypt needs them now: in the Sinai where terrorists are massing.

\225 The treaties with Israel are fiercely unpopular, but without them, they will not only lose generous American money, but run the risk of renewed military conflicts with Israel (which Egypt will lose again).

\225 A new constitution is in the works that has two important clauses: no one may insult Islam or the Prophet Mohammad. That does not bode well for freedom of speech, thought, or minority beliefs (Christians are packing their bags).

\225 Where is the money coming from for these pension and salary increases? Government is the major employer in Egypt.

There are other problems in modernization that face Egypt today not addressed by the Arab Spring or the Egyptian election. Egyptian cities look modern, but in the vast village hinterland, neither modernization nor westernization exists.

Modernization, to be successful, depends upon having an education system that supports science, medicine, law, and most of all, ability to think critically. According to analysts, Egyptians educated in Egyptian universities are ill-educated. These universities are largely degree mills, turning out graduates who cannot compete in the world. They are only employable by the Egyptian government itself.

The Western-educated stratum of Egypt is very small, most of them living in Cairo, and as secular Egyptians, they were vastly outnumbered at the polls. Women, particularly educated women, have been losers in this election. Egypt has been the biggest loser in this election.

Today, Egypt makes nothing that anybody wants to buy. Electing an Islamist makes it worse. Tourism is flagging, and the choices made by the Egyptian electorate will harm that industry more.

The food supply is in danger. Egyptian villagers are fleeing to city slums, leaving Egyptian agriculture in collapse. There were bread riots in Cairo last year, which bodes ill for Egypt's future and for the future of the region.

And what makes optimist think that the new president is benign? He talks the talk, but will not walk the walk.

675 words

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