



Article Type: Research paper

Pathology of Transition to Democracy in Egypt, 1950-2020

*Vahid Zolfaghari¹

1. Ph.D in comparative politics, postdoctoral researcher in politics Comparative University of Munich, Germany

Article Info.

Received: 12/04/2022

Accepted: 01/04/2023

Available Online: 11/09/2023

Abstract

Non-democratic politics, brutality of politics, stable presence of military forces in the eco-political life, institutionalization of authoritarianism, detachment of ideological and strategic thoughts, and the descriptive function of democracy in Egyptian political history have turned politics into the exclusive prerogative of political sovereignty and military forces.

By the discourse of anti-otherness, attempting to monopolize politics, and considering democratizing movements as actions vacating the spoiled fervors of collective action, this kind of governance prevented the transition to democracy. Influenced by the power structure and the behaviors of the main policymakers on the one hand, and the ceaseless cycle of populist authoritarianism, pseudo-democracy, and neo-authoritarianism on the other hand, the failed democratic experience and fluctuation of

Vahid Zolfaghari, Ph.D.

Address: Ph.D in comparative politics, postdoctoral researcher in politics Comparative University of Munich, Germany

E-mail: zolfaghari.vahid282@gmail.com

How to Site:

Zolfaghari, Vahid. (2023). Investigating and explaining the effective identity factors in the formation of recent developments in the Arab Middle East (case study: Kurds, Shiites and fundamentalists). *Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World*, 5(2), pp. 9-12.

transition to democracy in Egypt are regarded as the triumph of the structure against agency. Thus, the main question of the current paper is to study why the process of transition to democracy was unsuccessful in Egypt.

According to the main hypothesis, policymaking and governance in Egypt are based on undemocratic liberalism. In other words, despite the rise of pseudo-liberal creeds in different periods, Egypt has never experienced an institutionalized democratic political life. Therefore, by using the logic of historical sociology and the theory of transition to democracy, this paper will analytically test the mentioned hypothesis. By highlighting the cycle of populist authoritarianism, quasi-authoritarianism, pseudo-democracy, and neo-authoritarianism in Egypt, the findings show that alienation from democratic values, institutionalized authoritarian values, and a lack of democratic culture in Egypt's political life have led to the failure of democratization movements.

As the most populous country in the Middle East and the third most populous country on the African continent, Egypt is one of the main candidates for a transition to democracy. Despite the suspension of political development and the geopolitical and geostrategic instability in the region, the desire for democracy and the effort to transition to a democratic political life are social and sustainable demands in Egypt. From a historical perspective, despite previous experiences with democracy in Egypt, the lack of political participation by the people caused fragility and instability of these movements until the 1980s. However, with the transition to the third wave of democracy, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the gradual transition of countries in Latin America and Eastern Europe to democracy, pro-democracy actions in Egypt have been pursued more seriously.

Studying the history of political and social developments in Egypt as a vanguard of the transition to native democracy reveals the emergence of an authoritarian structure and society. This structure aims to establish the foundation for the rise of political pluralism and democracy by consistently attempting to marginalize the hierarchical power structure. In fact, the growth of social demands, political developments, the emergence of technological and cognitive processes, and the increasing waves of globalization have made democracy one of the primary demands of Egyptian society. However, this demand is not a recent phenomenon but has a political history spanning over a century.

The first phase of the transition to democracy in Egypt began with the country's independence in 1922 and continued until 1949, despite its fragility and instability. Colonialism, as the dominant force on the African continent, hindered any country's ability to transition to democracy. However, during the

constitutional monarchy of King Farouk from 1922 to 1949, Egypt was able to experience a quasi-democratic political system for the first time. Egypt underwent a second period of transition to democracy during the rule of Anwar Sadat. The emergence of various political forces, the support of Islamist organizations and forces, and the application of open-door liberal policies were considered as signs of Egypt's desire for democracy, which leads it to political development and social reforms. But the third period of the transition to democracy in Egypt can be seen as the result of the political and social developments of 2011, when the revolutionaries were trying to establish a new political plan for governance and politics. It is worth noting that neglecting the differences between different periods of transition to democracy in Egypt is a kind of cognitive reductionism.

One of the main differences between the third transition period and the previous two periods is the type of democratic and reformist social actors. In the sense that, in the first and second periods, the main reformists and democrats were the political rulers and the primary actors in the national power scene, whereas in the third period, the main pro-democracy activists were the society and the people. Democracy and political reformism in the first and second periods were hierarchical and top-down, while in the third period, it emerged from the bottom up. Unlike the first and second periods, democratization and reformism in the third period were driven by the societal cognitive empowerment and the emergence of the third wave of knowledge due to the existence of social networks.

Democracy in the first and second periods did not necessarily change the structure of political power, while the rotation of political actors and the relative change in the ruling attitudes towards society have been the reasons for the third period of transition. Despite these differences, fragility and instability are common features of different transition periods in Egypt. In such a way that after a short period of time, the movement for democracy and reformism was stopped. In this article, we want to pathologically examine the pro-democracy movements in Egypt from 1950 to 2020. This question is raised: why has the transition to democracy in Egypt failed? In response to this hypothesis, politics and governance in Egypt are based on undemocratic liberalism. Despite the emergence of pseudo-liberal teachings in different periods, democratic political life was never institutionalized in Egypt.

According to the research hypothesis, institutional cultural and traditional practices, unfamiliarity with democratic principles, and the institutionalization of authoritarian norms in Egypt have led to the adoption of some pseudo-liberal behaviors. These conditions, coupled with the absence of democratic bio politi-

cal institutions, have hindered the transition to democracy.

In summary, it can be said that the political and social developments in Egypt during the post-Mubarak era, especially after the inauguration of Muhammad Morsi, promised democracy in the new era with the relative increase in economic activity and the emergence of various political and social parties. However, there were several factors that hindered the transition to democracy.

The lack of strategic vision among the revolutionary coalition forces, the insufficient commitment of Islamist, liberal, secular, and leftist forces to democratic principles, the main focus on seeking power by the Islamists in the 2012 elections, and their tactical alliance with the military to secure victory in the election all contributed to the challenges.

Furthermore, the ruling Islamists' increase in political and economic privileges for the military after their election victory, the cooperation between liberal and secular forces with the military in 2013 to criticize the Islamists, the failure of ruling political forces to connect strategic thoughts and ideological stances, the deviation from democratic principles and cultural norms in Egypt, and the support of transnational forces for the military's role in Egyptian politics and economy have all played a role in hindering the transition to democracy.

In other words, Egypt's failure to transition to democracy and the continuation of authoritarianism and quasi-democracy can be seen as a strategy to control power and stabilize the political positions of those in power.

Key words: Democratization, Authoritarianism, Transition to Democracy, Middle East, Egypt.