POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT: SOCIAL MOBILIZATION, POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND MODERNIZATION AFTER THE 1952 REVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

While Egypt could by no means be called a democratic country, some steps have been taken in that direction. In this article, I will look at those changes, which occurred immediately following the Revolution of 1952.

Political participation among the Egyptian rural population increased significantly in the years following the July 26, 1952 Revolution led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, and political participation has become a key factor in Egyptian politics. There are several reasons for the growing interest in politics in Egypt, including changes in government institutions for participation, growing feelings of nationalism, significant educational reforms, and communications improvements. The theory of social mobilization, defined by Karl Deutsch as "an overall process of change, which happens to substantial parts of the population in countries, which are moving from traditional to modern ways of life,"(1) offers many insights into the steps toward democratization took place in Egypt after the Revolution According to Deutsch:

The process of social mobilization generates strong pressures towards increasing the capabilities of government, by increasing the volume and range of demands made upon the government and administration, and by widening the scope of politics and the membership of the politically relevant strata. The same process increases the frequency and the critical

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importance of direct communication between government and governed. It thus necessarily increases the importance of language, the media, and the channels through which these communications are carried on. (2)

In order to determine whether social mobilization took place in Egypt under Nasser, it is necessary to look for signs of change in each of the areas mentioned by Deutsch. Are there more people showing interest in the political aspects of life? Have institutions of participation expanded in membership and activity? Have other trends caused the population to become more interested in their government, resulting a shift from traditional to modern society? The answers to these questions might also show what degree of progress was made to establish a democratic government.

By examining these factors throughout modern Egyptian history, a process of social mobilization can be clearly discerned. Three questions would provide a framework for this analysis: What system had been existed before the process of mobilization began? How was the need for change recognized? Finally, what changes were attempted that indicate social mobilization? In the conclusion I will briefly examine whether these changes led to a degree of democratization in Egypt, and if so, how significant were they?

BEFORE THE REVOLUTION: DOMINATION AND DETACHMENT

What sort of government and political participation existed in Egypt prior to the Revolution of 1952? For over 2000 years Egypt had been subjected to foreign rule by the Greeks, Romans, Mamluks, Ottomans, and finally, the British. The people of Egypt had long been detached from the government that ruled and exploited them.

The period of British colonization in Egypt most dramatically illustrates the position of Egyptians relative to their government. Britain had no interest in the welfare of the Egyptian people, and British policies clearly illustrated this fact. Under the British administration most of the cultivable land was converted into cotton production plantations, leaving Egypt without adequate food supply. Egyptians had no role in the governing of the country and Britain did not seem anxious to give them the experience which would

allow them gaining independence gradually. Despite numerous promises to leave Egypt on her feet, Britain remained in control for forty years and the military occupation continued until 1954.

After the Revolution of 1919, upper class landowners of the Wafd party had established a firm control in the ruling of "independent" Egypt, yet the British interests were still actively met. This ruling class elite's main concern was its own account and it had relatively no interest in the state of peasants. The exploitation by the Wafdist government manifested itself in various forms, including rigid press censorship, a strong spy network, and brutal punishment of those who dare to criticize the government. (3) There was little opportunity for the masses to express their ideas. Unsatisfied with the existing institutions of political participation, a feeling of restlessness was natural as people grew more aware of their ability to change their situation.

The above-mentioned forms of government would have been considered by Deutsch to be traditional ones. Nevertheless, societies do not remain static-- they undergo constant gradual changes, and at the present all societies are either modern or in the process of modernization. (4)

NASSER: RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Another definition of social mobilization offered by Deutsch is as follows: "The process in which major clusters of old social, economic, and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patters of socialization and behavior." (5) The period during which Egypt ruled by the British can be taken as an example to this. Whereas the old regime catered to the aims of the British policies for the most part, beginning with Nasser's time there was a shift toward a desire to rule for the good of the Egyptians. The Revolution of 1919 had merely been a first tentative step in the direction toward genuine independence. The beginnings of social mobilization and modernization become evident with increasing anti-government demonstrations and the activities of the so-called Free Officers.

Samuel Huntington's definitions of traditional and modern men are helpful in illustrating the changes took place in the Egyptian society:

> *Traditional man is passive and acquiescent, he expects*
> *continuity and society and does not believe in the capacity of*

man to change or control either. Modern man, in contrast,
believes in both possibility and the desirability of change,
and has confidence in the ability of man to control change so
as to accomplish his purposes.. (6)

Egyptians as a result of foreign domination and autocratic rule, had played the role of the traditional man for many years. An overwhelming majority of them had lived in a world of unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy and had seen little hope on the horizon for any change.(7) However, reflecting the worldwide trend toward modernization and democratization, Egyptians began to feel that change was necessary and possible. Epitomizing the modern man in Egyptian history, Gamal Abdel Nasser began to feel the need for change at a young age.

When only seventeen years old, Nasser was elected president of the Nationalist Secondary Students' Executive Committee at the secondary school which he attended in Cairo. As the leader of the group, Nasser took the initiative to organize protests and demonstrations against the Wafdist government.(8) These activities helped him to form impressions that would greatly affect his policies later as the president of Egypt. In his *Philosophy of the Revolution* Nasser states:

Ever since I was at the head of the demonstrations in Al Nahda
School, I have clamoured for complete independence; others
repeated my cries; but these were in vain. They were blown
away by the winds and became faint echoes that do not move
mountains or smash rocks. (9)

Although the above-mentioned demonstrations showed increasing demands upon the government for political and administrative reforms, Nasser concluded that more would need to be done to change the traditional structure and political culture of the Egyptian society. He realized that violent demonstrations were ineffective in the effort to initiate change. From this realization there arose a strong desire for operative political institutions that would express the will of the people.

When the army opened its officer corps to lower and middle classes in 1936, Nasser seized the opportunity to promote his nationalist and modernist ideas within the Egyptian society as a respected officer. (10)

Through his activities with the Free Officers, Nasser was able to place himself in a position to begin the process of reform that would lead to a mobilized society. The Free Officers were able to speak on the level of the peasants and lower middle classes and to present themselves as true representatives of the people. They were very successful in their attempt to "Egyptianize the people of Egypt and instill in them a feeling of nationalism."(11) In a speech delivered a decade after the revolution, Nasser once again underscored his objectives:

> *The whole people was driving force behind the fighting vanguard for the extermination of imperialism. The solidarity of the army and a people armed with patience, faith, and determination has enabled us to see the British flags being pulled down and our own flown instead.* (12)

This bond is undoubtedly a prerequisite to social mobilization.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE:
ORGANIZED PARTICIPATION

An important aspect of change, associated with social mobilization, is the appearance of new institutions for political participation allowing an increasing percentage of the population to play active roles. Nasser expressed the sentiment that "political revolution demands, for its success, the unity of all national elements, their fusion and mutual support, as well as self denial for the sake of the country as a whole."(13) To create unity and to build a system based on this philosophy it was first necessary to eliminate the power of the opposition.

Opposition coming from old regime officials and the political immaturity of the Egyptian masses were the two major factors that led to the authoritarian rule under Nasser.(14) He assumed that if parties were permitted that Egypt's first tentative steps toward democracy would be lost in a relapse to old ways with the former leaders regaining control. In order to prevent this, Nasser created a single-party system which passed through three phases during his term in office as president. Despite the authoritarian nature of the system, the population was given increasingly significant roles in the operation of the new political organizations. This was a salient change, for it is the first visible shift toward participatory politics and democracy in Egypt.

The Liberation Rally (1953-1958) was created to serve as a source of popular demonstrations in favor of Nasser's regime.(15) All adult citizens were members and this is certainly a definite change from the old regime in which only the elite landowning class had participated in politics. The Constitution of 1956 showed efforts toward modernization with its emphasis on civil liberties, especially in its provision for citizens to be able to petition against any inappropriate behavior of the authorities. In this way, a means of direct communication between the government and the population was established. These initial reforms did not establish a totally mobilized society, however, they should be considered as definite signs of progress.

The National Union (1958-1961) was very similar to the Liberation Rally, but its goals were more clearly defined: to realize the goals of the 1952 Revolution and to build a socialist democratic cooperative society, free from political, social, and economic exploitation.(16) In an effort to mobilize Egyptian society we should point out that increasing the base of the politically active sector of the population was extremely important. The Liberation Rally and the National Union achieved this goal by requiring all adults to become members. This was not an ideal solution, however, since making membership compulsory did not allow any feeling of pride or belonging to develop among the masses,(17) and was certainly not democratic.

Despite this fact, the rural population proved itself to be even more politically active than the urban sectors who had, in the past, dominated Egyptian political life. In a national election in 1959, one person voted for each 700 living in the rural areas, while in Cairo only one in 4,611 persons voted.(18) These figures point out that the rural classes took their new role seriously and were willing to do all they could to assure that their voices would be heard.

With the creation of the Arab Socialist Union in 1962 greater strides toward social mobilization were made. Membership was on a voluntary basis so the organization included only the most politically active and aware Egyptians. Over four million Egyptian citizens applied within the first twenty days following the Union's formation, and very few were denied membership.(19)The National Charter of 1962 stated that at least 50% of all elected seats in political, trade-unions, or cooperative activity were reserved for workers and peasants,(20) further indicating Nasser's desire to mobilize those who had previously been alienated from politics.

Being a member had several benefits, including redress of grievances, protection of existing rights, retention of social prestige, and a means of acquiring the experience needed to advance within the party.(21) Instead of having only ineffective demonstrations as a means of expressing political opinion, the rural classes now played a significant, if not a dominant, role in Egyptian politics. Evidence of this fact can be found in the statistics on the proportions of committees in the rural, urban, public, and private sectors. Out of a total of 6,888 committees under the Arab Socialist Union 59% were rural, only 4.6 % were urban, and 33% were from the public and private sectors combined.(22)

FACTORS LEADING TO INCREASED PARTICIPATION: EDUCATION AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

It is apparent that the masses had begun to participate more extensively in politics due to the reforms carried out by the new regime in Egypt. This change did not simply materialize upon the formations of the Liberation Rally, the National Union, and the Arab Socialist Union, however. Many other changes occurred alongside the growth of these organizations, which stimulated awareness and interest in politics. Huntington writes that an indicator of a modern society is its concern with the diffusion of knowledge through society by means of education and mass communications.(23) Egypt demonstrated signs of improvement in each of these areas under Nasser.

Under the British very few reforms had been made in education. Egyptian nationalists in Nasser's time were quite certain that the British thought that more education would lead to an increase in nationalist activity, causing instability.(24) Statistics prove that Nasser made a significant effort to reverse this trend. Between 1951 and 1958 the numbers of students in primary and secondary schools doubled, and the number of students, enrolled in universities, almost tripled.(25) In 1962 Nasser announced that university education would be free to all who enrolled, a fact that led to even further increases in the student population.

More important was the curriculum used in schools during Nasser's regime. Students were taught the principles of socialism, Arabism and national consciousness and textbooks were used to stress the government policies,(26) which made a positive impact on the acceptance of the new regime. With more people being exposed to the mechanics of the

governmental structure, growing participation was inevitable. This increased awareness caused universities to become centers for demonstrations of political discontent by the late 1960s.(27) Through education a significant movement toward social mobilization was evident.

Mass communications are a vital resource for spreading nationalist propaganda and educating people along state lines, as well as keeping them informed of government politics.(28) In Egypt, radio, newspapers, and later television were utilized to publicize and broadcast political speeches, thus, increasing the audiences of these events and assuring the majority of the population would be aware of important events. Corresponding to Nasser's desire to incorporate more of the population into the political fabric of Egypt, here was a significant increase in the amount of radio broadcasts. The total hours per day of radio broadcasting in 1952 had been only 33, and by 1964 this figure was increased to 394.(29) Licensing to receive radio broadcasts also increased steadily. In 1951 only 23.4 % of the population owned such licences, while by 1957 over 79% of all Egyptians were licensed to receive radio broadcasts. Furthermore, newspaper consumption doubled between 1950 and 1956, showing that a larger portion of the population was reading the political information provided by fifty dailies being published after 1952.(30) Thus, Egypt demonstrates yet another of Deutsch's indicators for social mobilization, that the government "direct a greater part of their communications output at the new political strata."(31)

CONCLUSION

Social mobilization in Egypt took place on many levels under Nasser. Before the military takeover, Egypt had been caught in a seemingly endless cycle of domination, whether by a foreign imperialist power like Britain or a landowning elite class, members of which played a significant role in the formation of the Wafd. The coup of 1952 was announced "on behalf of the whole of Egypt, not a party, a revolutionary mass movement, or an ideology,"(32) and the resulting changes had a great impact on the entire population.

Bringing this into reality were the organizations created by Nasser. The Liberation Rally, the National Union, and the Arab Socialist Union represented modest steps toward a mobilized political system. It has been illustrated that these organizations increased the breadth of the politically aware population by allowing greater participation. These improvements

most drastically effected the lives of the rural population, who had played no significant political role until the 1952 Revolution. Following this revolution, they have become the most politically active sector of the population.

Through reforms in education, political awareness was diffused to an increasing number of students. Although improvement in the literacy rate was modest, a groundwork had been laid in the building of new schools at all levels of education. With a population becoming more knowledgeable, a higher amount of political participation is likely to occur.

To satisfy the growing demand for information, mass communication systems such as radio and newspapers were augmented and were accessed by a larger portion of the population. Since more people were in tune with local and national events, they were more likely to react to them either through channels set up by the government or through mass demonstrations.

Karl Deutsch's theory of social mobilization states:

The increasing numbers of the mobilized population, and the greater scope and urgency of their needs for political decisions and government services, tend to translate themselves, albeit with a time of lag, into increased political participation. This may express itself informally through greater number of people taking part in crowds and riots, in meetings and demonstrations, in strikes and uprisings, or less dramatically, as members of a growing audience for political communications, written or by radio, or finally as members of a growing host of organizations.(33)

Following the Revolution of 1952, Egypt did indeed manifest signs of progress along these lines. Although Nasser's regime didn't set out to increase participation per se, many Egyptians considered the new government to be the most Egyptian one they had ever known.(34) This sentiment is what led a greater number of people to get involved in politics, to the extent that the authoritarian system under Nasser would allow. Granted, the reforms made under Nasser did not result in a totally mobilized society, and a great deal of further change is necessary for Egypt to become a real democratic nation. But change cannot be implemented effectively if it is too fast for the traditional aspects of society to adjust to. Although he couldn't

complete it, Nasser was successful in speeding up the process of social mobilization and democratization, which without his direction would never have occurred as early as 1952.

ENDNOTES

(1) Karl W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," **The American Political Science Review** 55, no. 3 (September,1961), p. 493.

(2)Ibid., p. 501.

(3) Don Peretz, "Democracy and the Revolution in Egypt," **The Middle East Journal** 13, no. 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 26.

(4) Samuel P. Huntington, "The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics," **Comparative Politics** 3, no. 6 (April, 1971), p. 290.

(5) Deutsch, op.cit., p. 494.

(6) Huntington, op.cit., p. 287.

(7) Raymond William Baker, **Egypt's Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat** (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 7.

(8) Ibid., p. 21.

(9) Gamal Abdel Nasser, **The Philosophy of the Revolution** (Buffalo: Economica Books, 1959), p. 43.

(10) Baker, op.cit., p. 22.

(11) P.J. Vatikiotis," Dilemmas of Political Leadership in the Arab Middle East: The Case of the U.A.R.," **International Affairs** 37, no. 1 (January , 1961), p. 202.

(12) Gamal Abdel Nasser, **Speech Delivered by President Gamal Abdel Nasser on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Revolution** (Alexandria, July 26, 1962). (Information Department of Egypt.)

(13) Gamal Abdel Nasser, **The Philosophy of Revolution,** pp. 36-37.

(14) P. J. Vatikiotis, ed., **Egypt since the Revolution** (New York: Freidrick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968), pp. 94-95, 102.

(15) John Waterbury, **The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 312.

(16) Peretz, op.cit., p. 33.

(17) Waterbury, op.cit., p. 314.

(18) Leonard Binder, **In a Moment of Enthusiasm** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 45.

(19) Binder, op. cit., p. 310.

(20) Waterbury, op.cit., p. 315.

(21) Binder, op. cit., p. 42.

(22) Ibid., p. 313.

(23) Huntington, op.cit., p. 287.

(24) Peter Mansfield, **Nasser's Egypt** (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 120.

(25) **UN Statistical Yearbooks**, 1954-1960.

(26) Derek Hopwood, **Egypt: Politics and Society 1945-1981** (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1982), pp. 136-37.

(27) Hopwood, op.cit., p. 141.

(28) Ibid., p.156.

(29) Mansfield, op.cit., p. 124.

(30) **UN Statistical Yearbooks**, 1954-1960.

(31) Deutsch, op.cit., p. 499.

(32) Hopwood, op.cit., p. 38.

(33) Deutsch, op. cit., p. 499.

(34) Binder, op.cit., p. 41.