
THE REVERSAL OF POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN EGYPT

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı Mısır'daki siyasi liberalleşme sürecinin gerilemesinin ardındaki kavramsal ve analitik konuları incelemektir. Bunu yapabilmek için, öncelikle Arap ülkelerindeki siyasi liberalleşme sürecini şekillendiren önemli yaklaşımlardan; uluslararası konjonktür, sivil toplum, siyasi kültür ve siyasi ekonomi yaklaşımları incelenecektir. Bu yaklaşımların analizinde, Mısır'ın iç siyasi yapısının önemli bir parçası olan "siyasi İslam'ın yükselişi," diğer bir deyişle Mısır siyasi yapısında etkisi artan İslami politik yapılanma üzerinde yoğunlaşacaktır. Çalışma, "siyasi İslam'ın yükselişi," faktörünün Mısır'daki siyasi liberalleşme ve siyasi liberalleşmenin gerilemesi süreçlerini açıklamaya çalışan her bir yaklaşımı ne şekilde etkilediğini inceleyecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mısır, Siyasi Liberalleşme

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine conceptual and analytical issues behind the political deliberalization process in Egypt. In order to do that, the article will first study the approaches such as international context, civil society, political culture, and political economy, which are considered as significant factors that shape Arab countries' political liberalization process. In this analysis, the article will concentrate on the most important component of the Egyptian domestic context, "rise of political Islam," in other words, increasing role of Islamic fundamentalists in Egyptian politics. The article will examine how the "rise of political Islam" shapes each approach, which is effective in the processes of political liberalization and deliberalization in Egyptian political life.

Key Words: Egypt, Political Liberalization

1. INTRODUCTION

Liberal democracy has been the exception rather than a rule in the contemporary Middle East. The principal exceptions with varying degrees have been Turkey, Israel and Lebanon until the breakdown of its state institutions through civil strife in 1970s. Starting in 1980s and 1990s, some steps towards political liberalization started taking place in numerous Arab states including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Yemen.

Among these countries, Egypt seems to grant many of the civil and political rights to its citizens which many other Arab states do not. Compared to other Arab states, Egypt represents the strongest continuity of democratizing measures. However, at the same time, political liberalization in Egypt fluctuates between genuine progress and setbacks which leaves central authority solidly in control. While a process of controlled political liberalization had started taking place in mid-1970s, with the creation of multiple parties, a relatively free press and the regular holding of elections, since the early 1990s, the country has been experiencing a substantial degree of deliberalization. Repressive amendments to the penal code and enactment of the anti-terrorist law, continuation of the emergence law, the intervention of the government in the affairs of the professional syndicates and trade unions, and unprecedented electoral fraud have all been the components of the reversal of political liberalization.

The purpose of this article is to examine conceptual and analytical issues behind the political deliberalization process in Egypt. In order to do that, the article will first study the approaches such as international context, civil society, political culture, and political economy, which are considered as significant factors that shape Arab countries' political liberalization process. (1) (Brynen, Korany, and Noble, 1995: 3-21) In the analysis of these approaches, the study will concentrate on the most important component of the Egyptian domestic context which is the "rise of political Islam," in other words increasing role of both radical and moderate Islamists in Egyptian politics. Islamic movement includes all individuals and groups looking for ways to change their societies by deriving their ideology from Islam. These individuals may differ in their methods, approaches and styles. While the radical Islamists plans to overthrow the existing regimes completely and bring their own system, moderate Islamists want to bring Islamic reform gradually to the society and state. (2) The article will examine how the "rise of political Islam" shapes each approach which is effective in the processes of political liberalization and deliberalization in Egyptian political life.

The first section of this study will examine the Egyptian political liberalization movement that had been taking place since mid-1970s with President Anwar Sadat's initiative to start a multi-party system. The second section will concentrate on the reversal of political liberalization and the last sections, in an attempt to search the reasons for this deliberalization movement will explore the

above mentioned approaches by concentrating on “rise of political Islam.” The article will be concluded by analyzing the problems and prospects for political liberalization in Egypt.

2. POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN EGYPT

Once Gamal Abdul Nasser came to power in the aftermath of Free Officers’ Revolution in 1952, his single-party (Arab Socialist Union-ASU) system had already been relatively pluralist for a regime of its kind. However, the introduction of multi-party elections and some measures of economic liberalization under President Anwar Sadat in late 1970s appeared to have further liberalized Egyptian politics. Since Sadat lacked the mass legitimacy Nasser had enjoyed, he had to address the desires for political liberalization. Moreover, Sadat’s “rightward” policy gave rise to the emergence of leftist Nasserite opposition. At the same time, violent clashes over the increased prices of basic commodities in January 1977 had started. Consequently, Sadat sought to balance these oppositions by permitting the formation of opposition parties. He dismantled the ruling party ASU and created the National Democratic Party (NDP) and he allowed the opposition parties to coalesce around the fragments of ASU. By doing so, Sadat actually attempted to control the opposition parties, forcing them to be loyal to the regime. However, once the new parties pushed their cases too far and refused to play by his rules, Sadat banned such groups as the New Wafd Party and National Progressive Unionists Party. (Ghadbian, 1997: 88-89)

Anwar Sadat’s measures for political liberalization were followed by his economic openings. His *infitah* (Open Door) policy emphasized reconstruction, encouraging foreign investment, and introducing a private enterprise sector. Sadat wanted to find a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict by making peace with Israel at Camp David. He moved his country closer to the United States and the West, turning away from dependence on the Soviet Union for weapons and political support. While attempting to liberalize the country politically and economically, Sadat also made sure to strengthen his authority, by passing a new constitution vesting executive power in the president, who was to be nominated by the people’s assembly and elected for a six-year term by popular referendum. Sadat was not planning to tolerate the loss of political control that would occur if those parties would turn into vehicles for mass participation. Despite his political and economic openings, Sadat’s regime faced growing opposition, due to economic hardship and misgovernment. Moreover, his *infitah* policy and his peace agreement with Israel increased the number of unhappy people. In 1981, in the aftermath of a sectarian strife between Muslims and Coptic Christians, Sadat’s security forces arrested more than 1000 rebels. He placed 40,000 privately operated mosques under government control. Actually Sadat was paying the price of his political liberalization movement. (Ghadbian, 1997: 89-90 and Baynard, 1995: 314-5.)

Anwar Sadat was assassinated in October 1981 by Islamic fundamentalists who opposed to his peacemaking with Israel. His follower, current Egyptian President Husni Mubarak continued his political openings. Mubarak pursued political liberalization with two parliamentary elections in 1984 and 1987. He allowed the liberal New Wafd Party to participate in the 1984 parliamentary elections, but Mubarak's National Democratic Party won handily. In the 1987 elections, although National Democratic Party maintained its dominance in the assembly, a new coalition of the Socialist Labor Party and the Liberal Party which represented the Muslim Brotherhood, (called Islamic Alliance) emerged as the largest opposition bloc. By permitting the multi-party elections and attempting to please the opposition, Mubarak managed to secure a second term as president. However, in 1987 the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood as the largest opposition group startled the ruling elite and accelerated its decision to slow down the democratic experiment and revert to more authoritarian practices. Higher Constitutional Court declared the electoral law -under which the People's Assembly had been elected in 1987- as unconstitutional. As a result, Mubarak dissolved the Assembly two years before its term expired and permitted new elections in 1990. In 1990, the opposition parties who ran in the elections for the Shura Council (the upper house) and did not win any seats accused the government of widespread fraud and intimidation. Having lost faith in the government's honesty, and to protest the government's refusal to allow judicial monitoring of the election, the major opposition parties, including the liberal New Wafd Party and the Islamic Alliance decided to boycott the 1990 elections for the People's Assembly. (Ghadbian, 1997: 90 and Baynard, 1995: 315)

As it can be observed from the 1984, 1987 and 1990 elections, President Mubarak while attempting to follow a path of political liberalization, at the same time responded firmly to those who challenged the authority of his government. He reverted more and more to authoritarian tactics toward the end of his first decade in power as the economic conditions have not improved, and the Islamist challenge has not eroded. Under Mubarak, the regime never discarded the use of coercive measures, even when some liberalizing steps were introduced.

Majority of the political openings Mubarak regime has introduced were superficial since he initiated them in order to preserve its hold on power. As a symbolic gesture, in 1994 President Mubarak initiated a dialogue with opposition groups, but he prohibited Muslim Brotherhood and professional syndicates from taking part in this dialogue. In October 1995, Independent Commission for Election Review (ICER) was established with the support of opposition parties to control functioning of each and every electoral process from beginning to the end. However, besides these two political liberalization acts, 1990s was full of violent Islamist attacks that resulted in significant human loss and serious damage to tourism. In order to cope with Islamist attacks, Mubarak regime slowed down liberalization program in the political field and as

the first step he limited the activities of civil society organizations to a large extent. (Fandy and Hearn, 1999: 112)

In 2000s, when people started to lose their satisfaction with Mubarak's National Democratic Party-led governments, their domestic demands for political accountability started rising. Moreover, the government was forced by the United States and European Union to start economic reforms as a result of worsening socio-economic conditions. Consequently, Mubarak government started to project a new, reformist image by replacing National Democratic Party's older figures with a cadre of younger technocrats—mainly mid-career professionals, businessmen, and university professors—who supported more attempts of political liberalization such as the political rights of the citizens and their participation. Moreover, as another superficial political liberalization precaution to calm down the pressures in the public, President Mubarak's allowed more than one candidate to run in the presidential election of September 2005 by amending the article 76 of the constitution. Not surprisingly, Mubarak won 88 percent of the votes and extended his term in office to 2011. The voting process resembled a regular referendum on Mubarak since the opposition parties were weak and disorganized to have a presentable candidate. (Darwish, 2005: 12)

3. POLITICAL DELIBERALIZATION IN EGYPT

Whenever Anwar Sadat and Husni Mubarak found out that their power was challenged by opposition powers after initiating some democratic openings, they both reversed their political liberalization policies. Their political liberalization moves were followed by political deliberalization precautions. Among the deliberalization policies Mubarak administrations took were: Repressive amendments to the penal code and enactment of the anti-terrorist law, continuation of the emergency law, and interference of the government into the affairs of the professional syndicates and trade unions, and electoral fraud.

3.1. Anti-terror Law, Emergency Law, Restrictions on Professional Syndicates and Journalists Syndicate Law, and Press Law:

Once the political violence of the Islamist militants increased in the early 1990s, the NDP dominated parliament passed an "antiterrorist law" and amended the penal code and the law concerning the Supreme State Security Courts in July 1992. According to the new "antiterrorist law," any kind of action that would disrupt public order, harm individuals, or damage the environment, financial assets, transport or communications or involve physical occupation of sites and places, or obstruct the application of law could now be considered as a terrorist act. (Kienle, 1998: 222) This law made membership in any organization defined as "terrorist" a crime punishable by death and it also gave the security forces the power to detain suspects without notifying the prosecutor's office. All crimes against the security of the state and the public were put under the sole of

jurisdiction of the Supreme State Security Courts (military courts), the verdicts of which could not be appealed. (3) (Ghadbian, 1997: 100, Kienle, 1998: 221-2)

Emergency law, which was first imposed in 1981 following the assassination of President Mubarak's predecessor Anwar Sadat, has not been abolished yet. Since then it has been extended almost every three years. The last extension took place in early 2006. This time, President Mubarak asked the parliament for a two years extension. This extension has been widely criticized by human rights groups, political opposition groups and people on the street. (International Herald Tribune, May 2, 2006) As a result of this emergency law, tens of thousands of prisoners including journalists have been held in jails without trial. Majority of the human rights violations were related to the armed confrontation between the state police and Islamic militants, torture and ill treatment of prisoners and excessive use of force by security during rallies or demonstrations, which are banned under the emergency law. (Cassandra, 1995:15, Ghadbian, 1997: 99.)

Since 1990s, military courts have been used by the government to ensure the speedy trial and conviction of militant Islamists. These military trials lack the minimum guarantees for fair trial in line with international conventions. Moreover, the judges in the military courts are military officers, and therefore, they are subject to orders from their superiors. Sentences issued by both state security and military courts cannot be appealed and are only subject to approval by the president. Since 1990s, the number of civilians tried in the military courts increased significantly. Furthermore, military tribunals handed down an increasing number of death sentences. (Ghadbian, 1997: 100 and Kienle, 1998: 222)

Professional syndicates (*niqabat mihniyya*), which organize certain professions, including engineers, physicians and lawyers, represent their members interests and cater to their material needs became an ideal battle ground for forces that are seeking to demonstrate their strength in politics. The regime did not permit some of the groups such as Muslim Brotherhood to participate in a free, fair political competition. Consequently, such groups concentrated on winning control of professional associations, unions, and charitable association. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood had been able to dominate the elected boards of the unions of doctors, pharmacists, engineers, and teachers, the association of university professors, student unions at Egypt's universities. The government's inability to fulfill some of its social and economic functions, have left spaces which have been filled for the most part by members of Muslim Brotherhood. (4) (Cassandra, 1995: 15, Ghadbian, 1997: 101-2)

In 1993, the government, alarmed by the influence of the Islamist movement within professional syndicates, enacted the "Law to Guarantee Democracy within the Professional Syndicates." This law requires a minimum voter turnout of 50 percent of the members in professional syndicate elections, or, failing this, 33 percent in a second round. If these electoral thresholds are not met, voting

results are voided and syndicates fell under the supervision of a group of judges appointed by the government. This law gave the regime greater powers to invalidate elections in the professional syndicates. (Cassandra, 1995: 15 and Kienle, 1998: 228.)

Furthermore, in 1993, the government amended the “Journalist Syndicate Law” to monitor the journalists. According to new law government dominated Journalist Syndicate started to control the promotion of the journalist to a higher category or transfer to another post in the same organization. The law also made employees of the Ministry of Information, who far outnumber professional journalists, members of the Journalists Syndicate. Consequently the purpose of the law was to prevent syndicates from falling under the control of the Islamists. (Cassandra, 1995: 15-16.)

In 1995, Egyptian government passed a so-called “press law,” which imposed heavy sentences on “publication crimes” such as printing of “misleading information,” “false rumors,” or “defamations,” in particular if these were directed against state, its representatives and its economic interests, or endangered public order. While such acts were largely punishable with modest fines in the past, they now carried sentences up to five years of imprisonment and payment of exceedingly high fines. Although with the efforts of the Press Syndicate General Assembly, the law was abrogated in June 1996; in reality the journalists’ resistance was not that successful. Many journalists and editors had been interrogated, charged and sometimes sentenced by lower courts. (Kienle, 1998: 223 and MENA, 10 June 1995: FBIS-NES-95-112)

3.2. Election of Deans, Election of Village Chiefs, and Amendments to Party Law

According to a law passed in May 1995, the right of the professors in a university to elect their own deans for their faculties was taken away. Currently, the deans are appointed by the president of their university, who is himself appointed by the president of the republic. (Cassandra, 1995: 16 and Kienle, 1998: 228) By passing this law, the government guaranteed the election of deans for different faculties of the universities who are not opposing to the NDP-led government.

In 1994, Egyptian government terminated the century-old practice of villages electing their *umdas*, who are village chiefs rather than real mayors. Under a new law passed in April 1994, *umdas* were to be appointed by the Minister of the Interior. Again by organizing the appointment of the village chiefs by the Minister of Interior, the Egyptian government secured the election of *umdas* who are supporting government policies. (Cassandra, 1995: 16 and Kienle, 1998: 228)

According to the amendments made to the party law in 1992, the founders of the new parties are prohibited from accepting foreign funds and from conducting

any political activity in the name of their party before it is officially recognized. Since the legalization of political parties is a lengthy process, and depends on a government commission, this new law impeded the establishment of many new parties.

3.3. Electoral Fraud

Electoral fraud had been a common practice in Egyptian general elections since late 1980s. For example, when the Egypt's Higher Constitutional Court declared the electoral law (under which the People's Assembly had been elected) unconstitutional in 1987, early elections were called in 1990. Although the Supreme Constitutional Court had issued its ruling on 19 May 1990, the ruling was not promulgated until 29 September, only two months before the vote was to take place. The regime did not even consult the opposition parties. The party lists were now entirely replaced with a two-round majority-poll in which, technically, votes were cast for candidates, not for parties. In 1990 elections many NDP candidates ran as independents against the candidates officially supported by their own party, taking advantage of the new electoral arrangements. As soon as they were declared elected they rapidly joined the NDP parliamentary group. Consequently, in 1990 elections NDP gained a larger majority than it did in 1987 elections. (See Table 1 for the results of elections between 1984 and 2005; Kienle, 1998: 224)

Most opposition parties protested against gerrymandering and insufficient guarantees of fairness at the poll. They also boycotted the 1990 elections. Even though Hizb al-Tajammu (the Tajammu Party) and Hizb'al Umma (the Umma Party) were the only parties to participate the elections, numerous members of Hizb-al Wafd (the Wafd Party), Hizb-al Amal (the Labor Party), Hizb al-Ahrar (The Liberal's Party), and the members of the Ikhwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood) did not respect the boycott and ran as independent candidates. During the election campaign, NDP attracted financially resourceful candidates who considered a seat in the parliament an investment for the future. NDP candidates could rely on official support, ranging from the use of public sector vehicles to the collaboration of the state officials appointed to run the polling stations. (5) (Kienle, 1998: 225-226)

When the opposition parties were convinced that boycotting elections in 1990 worked for the benefit of NDP, increasing NDP's seats in the parliament, they took part in 1995 elections. However, in 1995 elections, the regime developed and used interferences and fraud to an unprecedented degree. Two months before the elections, government issued a presidential decree referring 45 defendants belonging to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood to trial by military court. Later the government arrested 37 more members of Muslim Brotherhood. First military trials ended six days before the Election Day with 54 convictions and the closure of the organization's headquarters in Cairo. Approximately 16 of the defendants were actually planning to run for parliament and 14 of them had been members of the 1987 Assembly. (6) (Makram-Ebeid, 1996: 128)

Wide scale fraud in numerous electoral districts favored the candidates of the ruling party. Favoritism of the NDP in the treatment of candidates and parties was obvious when the choice for electoral symbols were made. While NDP gave itself the symbols of the crescent and the camel, the Muslim Brotherhood candidates were deliberately given the symbol pistol and sword which could be identified with terrorism. All through the campaign there was a pattern of persistence violence, as in many areas the contest was between powerful families and clans, reviving the old spirit traditional rural politics. (6) (Al-Arabi, 4 December 1995: FBIS-NES) As a result of this wide-spread fraud, the NDP won an overwhelming victory by getting more than 96 percent of the seats. (See Table 1 for 1995 Elections)

Electoral fraud came to a halt in 2000 elections. Prior to 2000 elections, by a court decree the polling places were put under judicial supervision to guarantee the fair functioning of the electoral process. The 2000 elections were held on three separate days with different regions voting each time to enable judges to supervise the process effectively. Although NDP won the overwhelming majority of the seats, the opposition parties and independents managed to secure more seats than 1995 elections. Rather than formal political parties, the opposition in the assembly was consisted of independent Islamists, who were “unofficially affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.” (Feldman, 2003: 169) Finally in 2005 elections, with a relatively less government manipulation, independent candidates from Muslim Brotherhood secured 76 seats while NDP as usual won the majority. (Middle East Times, 4 December 2005)

Throughout 1990s, electoral fraud directed by the government shaped the Egyptian elections. Sadat’s transition to multi-party system and Mubarak’s support for that system as part of their political liberalization process was completely reversed by the government led fraud on elections.

4. APPROACHES EXPLAINING POLITICAL DELIBERALIZATION

The political liberalization process in Egypt fluctuated between a process of controlled political openings and serious setbacks to these openings. Actually the conceptual and analytical issues such as international context, civil society, political culture, and political economy that lead Egypt to political liberalization also at the same time help it to reverse this liberalization. However, the effect of each approach to political deliberalization was enhanced with the “rise of political Islam.” These approaches, without being affected from political Islam, on their own actually do not show a very substantial strength to force Egyptian politics for deliberalization.

4.1. Impact of Civil Society

An active civil society, which includes self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals, relatively autonomous from the state, is essential for the process of political liberalization. These groups 'attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests.' (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 7) Given that the civil society organizations can be formed outside of the patronage of the state, they counterweigh the power of the state and weaken the state's control over society. (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986: 48-56)

However, in the Egyptian context, since the government controls the civil society groups, these organizations do not play a significant role in the political liberalization or deliberalization process in the country. While the state permits a degree of autonomy for societal actors, it regularly checks out, whether its interests are being challenged by these actors or not. Once the government is faced with any criticism, it limits the public space by restricting the freedom of expression and association. Moreover, it justifies this suppression as a precaution for national security concerns. (8) (Fandy and Hearn, 1999: 111)

As Saad Eddin Ibrahim points out the state put up with the civil society organizations when it needed their backing for international events like the September 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. However, once the conference was over, the state got back to reasserting its control over the civil society organizations. (Ibrahim, 1996: 131) Similarly, the state requested help from major civil society organizations to fight against Islamist activism. Civil society organizations contributed to the fight against Islamist radicalism through television programs, films, conferences, seminars and books. However, Egyptian government instead of reciprocating the civil society organizations' support by giving them more rights, it cut back on liberalization by canceling the *umda* elections in the villages and dean of faculties in the universities and limiting press freedoms. (Ibrahim, 1996: 131)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights organizations have also been important components of the Egyptian civil society. For example, a feminist NGO managed influence the political agenda of the government concerning a change in the family status. However, the government accused many independent organizations for receiving foreign financial aid. When these organizations received aid from the government, then the government expected them to obey its rules rather than to represent the civil society. (Abdelnasser, 2004: 122-23 and Ottoway, 2003: 50)

Although the aim of civil society organizations is to form a buffer zone between society and state, in Egypt they are usually under the subordination of the state. Under the state control, civil society organizations of Egypt do not usually have the chance to contribute much to the political liberalization in Egyptian political life. However, once the Islamists started dominating the Egyptian civil society

organizations, they became the *raison d'être* of the government to impose their political deliberalization measures.

When the Egyptian government prevented Muslim Brotherhood to act as a legal party, the group started to reach the public by providing various social services such as free health care, financial support, and shelter in times of crisis. Its organizations offered services to the people which the state was not able to provide. Moreover, Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in taking control of many professional associations and trade unions which are both important components of civil society. Once the Muslim Brotherhood started to dominate these professional associations, (the elected boards of the unions of doctors, pharmacists, engineers, and teachers, the association of university professors, student unions at Egypt's universities), they also began to face a number of serious problems. Consequently, as already noted on the section political deliberalization, the government was scared by the influence of the Islamist movement within professional syndicates and enacted a law to avoid Islamists in these organizations. Similarly, the government amended the "Journalist Syndicate Law" to prevent the syndicate from falling under the control of the Islamists. Consequently, professional associations faced serious problems when the government used coercion against them in order to control them. (Feldman, 2003: 169, Ibrahim, 1996:131-2)

As long as the civil society organizations did not challenge the Egyptian government's power, they did not play an important role in the liberalization or deliberalization of Egyptian politics. Nevertheless, majority of the time civil society organizations were controlled by the state. However, once the Islamists started to control the civil society organizations, then the deliberalization policies of the government started.

4.2. Impact of Political Culture

Political culture approach mainly concentrates on the role played by Arab and Islamic political cultures in the process of political liberalization in Egypt. It includes characteristics of Arab social culture (primordialism: strong clan, tribal, and sectarian loyalties) and history (migrations and wars) In this context, the question is whether the Egyptian political culture, which is fed by Arab and Islamic political cultures, is compatible with the main principles of political liberalization or not. Coming from traditional patrimonial life style and following rule of Islamic Law-Sharia, could Arab nations support political liberalization—are difficult questions that need answers. As the most important component of political culture in the Arab world and Egypt, the main concentration area should be Islam and whether Islam is compatible with democracy or not. The discussion of this subject is beyond the scope of this article. Another important issue which is discussed in secular Muslim countries is the "impact of secularity on democracy." However, in the Egyptian context, since even the Civil Law is still followed according to rules of Sharia, the discussion of "secularity and democracy" is not relevant. In other words, Egyptians are not concerned about

“secularity” as much as some other countries that are following Islam. In this study, the main concentration will be on the Islamic movements and political liberalization. The Islamic movements in Egypt are heterogonous. They range from modernists looking for new ways of reconciling faith and modern society to the most intolerant militants opting for a complete break with society, radical treat and armed *jihad*.

4.2.1. Radical Islamic Groups

Origins of radical Islamist groups go back to last years of Nasserist rule, where the Islamists experienced brutal tortures by government forces. They follow Sayed Qutb's ideas written in his book *Ma'alim fil Tariq* (Milestones). In his book Qutb makes a distinction between Islamic rule deriving its authority from God and *jahilliya* (ignorance). *Jahilliya* includes other rules concerning nationalists, capitalists, communists and others. However, the radicals of Egypt who carried Qutb's argument one step further and included regimes which control most of Arab and Muslim nations. For them these were all illegitimate regimes. They assigned themselves the task of overthrowing these corrupt and illegitimate regimes including the Egyptian government. They consider their fight as a struggle between right and wrong, good and evil, and faith and unbelief. Extreme poverty, high unemployment, widening gap between rich and poor and lack of opportunities for political participation all constituted the suitable environment for these groups. *Gama'at al-Tahrir al-Islami* (Islamic Liberation group), *Gama'at al-Muslimin* (Group of Muslims), *al-Jihad* are all included in the radical Islamists groups of Egypt. In order to overthrow the Egyptian government, they all have resorted to violence throughout 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. (Ghadbian, 1997: 69, 96-7)

4.2.2. Moderate Islamic Groups

Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) can be considered as the best example of the moderate Islamic groups in Egypt. Muslim Brotherhood which was founded in 1927 in Egypt, has not only been the oldest, and best organized moderate Islamist movement, but also has had the widest impact in the Arab world. It has branches in Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and even Sudan. Muslim Brotherhood believes in the gradual Islamic reform of the society and state. Moderate Muslims, similar to radical Muslims want to make Islam the center of Muslim people's sense of self and shift their frame of reference toward Islam. However, unlike radical groups, moderate Islamists want to do this gradually and peacefully. They try to take advantage of democratic openings in order to realize their reforms. Consequently, Muslim Brotherhood's groups exists as Islamic charities, self-help organizations, Islamic banks, investment and computer companies, Islamic associations that are active among students, and artisans. (Kramer, 1996: 210, Ghadbian, 1997:80-1.)

Although Nasser received support from the Muslim Brotherhood for his revolution, he suppressed the Islamic movements. Sadat used Islam to diminish the power of Nasserites and leftists in order to enhance his legitimacy. He utilized the state-sponsored religious establishments and fostered the reemergence of the Islamic movements. By doing so he actually unleashed forces that came to pose a major challenge to his regime. Mubarak while attempting to pursue a path of political liberalization and toleration, at the same time responded quickly and firmly to those who resorted to violence to challenge the authority of his governments. Although Mubarak government made significant concessions to Islamists in the field of information and education,(8) he blocked all attempts made by Islamist deputies to codify *sharia* as the law of the land. (Kramer, 1996: 210) Mubarak regime tried to integrate the moderate Islamists, but tried to marginalize the militant Islamists. Despite the ruthless repression of the government, the militant Islamists have not been eliminated. The breathing space of the early Mubarak years had enabled Islamic political and social activism to grow more rapidly, to expand its institutions and to become part of mainstream society. (Esposito and Voll, 1996: 173-180)

The biggest dilemma Mubarak regime faced was the difficulty of making a distinction between moderate peaceful Islamists and the fundamentalist violent Islamists. Therefore, Mubarak government tried to exclude Islamists in general from political participation. The government refused to widen its scope of participation. It was afraid of an Islamist take over. Furthermore, the government tried to prevent the Islamists from gaining too much economic strength, leverage in professional institutions and unions, and influence in the media. (Ghadbian, 1995: 88)

During the period of 1987 and 1988, for a brief period of time, the government tried to contain and co-opt the rise of moderate wing of the Muslim Brotherhood by allowing them to ally with two other parties and form the Islamic Alliance in the 1987 election. In appreciation to this, members of the Muslim Brotherhood reelected Mubarak for a second term. However, in a short time Mubarak regime viewed the group's participation in civil and political life as an alarming threat to its own declining legitimacy and started its campaign of arrest and intimidation. (Campagna, 1996: 280) During 1990s, Mubarak regime decided to exclude the Muslim Brotherhood completely from the political process. This was the beginning of the deliberalization process of the regime. The first strategy the state directed at radical Islamists was a harsh suppression. The government used the emergency laws, giving the security forces wide-ranging powers of arrest and detention. The campaign of detention had increased dramatically in response to the violent waves of attack by militant Islamists against government figures and security forces beginning in 1991. (10) (Ghadbian, 1995: 99)

As a result of the drastic increase in political violence, including attacks to government officials, Copts, anti-Islamist intellectuals and tourists, the penal code was amended in 1992. According to the new "antiterrorist law" any kind of action that would disrupt public order, harm individuals would be considered as

a 'terrorist act.' The arrests were followed by rigorous legislative initiatives in 1993 aimed at curtailing Brotherhood influence in professional syndicates. At the same time, an increasingly fervent media campaign was started by state officials and semi-official press, seeking to discredit the group by labeling it a "terrorist" organization, coordinating with the radical and militant segment of the group. (Campagna, 1996: 280; Kienle, 1998: 228-9 and Ghadbian, 1995: 100)

Throughout the 1990s, Egyptian regime faced serious domestic security challenges from radical Islamist groups, which certainly led the government to implement more repressive policies at levels of both legislation and political practice. The rising level of political detainees, of civilians referred to military courts, of death sentences and other human rights abuses all led to the reversal of political liberalization. Consequently "rise of political Islam" which reflected itself as the violent militant Islamists' attacks as an important component of political culture accelerated the political deliberalization process of Egypt.

4.3. Impact of Political Economy

Political economy approach assumes that when the ability of the ruling regime to provide its citizens with economic welfare decreases, then the regime has to implement political reforms in order to maintain its legitimacy. Process of controlled political liberalization in Egypt has been closely intertwined with economic reforms. Whenever the regime found itself in the need of implementing painful economic measures that create a greater inflation and unemployment in the short term, they have offered their citizens a measure of political participation through elections with multiple parties.

After the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Sadat inaugurated his open-door policy, *infitah*, which emphasized reconstruction and encouraged foreign investment and introduced privatization. However, this policy only benefited very small business elite and widened the gap between rich and poor classes. As a result, Islamists started providing economic assistance to the masses left outside the "open-door." In 1977, when food prices went up after the removal of the price subsidies, intense riots broke out all over the country. The government had to revoke the price increases and introduce a variety of legal measures to prevent the recurrence of such riots. President Sadat, then introduced some democratic openings by allowing the formation of opposition parties. (Ghadbian, 1995: 88)

Upon taking office in 1981, Mubarak encountered chronic economic difficulties. There was a rising inflation, expensive government welfare system, foreign exchange shortages, balance of payment problems, and a foreign debt estimated at about \$ 21 billion, which went up to \$ 46 billion in five years making Egypt the region's greatest debtor nation. The decline in oil prices and in workers' remittances prompted the crisis of mid-1980s. (11) (Baynard, 1995: 312 and Kienle 1998: 231) In the 1980s, in order to calm the tension, the

government decided to expand the process of political liberalization, by extending civil liberties and expanding freedoms of expression and associations. Consequently, similar to Sadat, Mubarak also used political reforms to build up support for himself and to neutralize some of the tensions caused by economic reforms. (Owen, 1994: 191)

However, economic reforms caused by economic crises did not always speed up the political liberalization process. Quite often economic reform attempts in the aftermath of crises affected the political liberalization process negatively. The foreign aids Egypt received from the Arab States, US, European countries and the international financial organizations, quite often caused policies of political deliberalization. In 1990s, Egyptian economy recovered slightly, first with the flow of aid and investment by the wealthy Arab states (once Egypt turned its back on Israel), second, with the huge cash and debt cancellations (12) Egypt received from Saudi-US coalition in the 1990-91 Gulf Crisis as a result of its support and third, with the help of the structural adjustment program which Egyptian government initiated in cooperation with the IMF and the World Bank in 1991. (13) (Galal, 1995, Baynard, 1995: 312, Kienle, 1998: 232-3)

Mubarak emerged from the Gulf War of 1990-1991 with an unchallenged supremacy on the home front. Gulf War opened the way for the Egyptian leadership to establish any kind of political liberalization very slowly and not to take any political risks. Egyptian government managed to limit political liberties and even used coercion as a means to repress the tension in the country. In 1995, Egypt received \$ 2.4 billion from the US government and became the second largest recipient of American assistance after Israel. This aid has contributed to the capacity of the Mubarak regime to postpone the political reforms he has promised earlier. Consequently, in the Egyptian context, it is not always possible to argue that economic liberalization would inevitably lead to political liberalization. Sometimes, it may lead to political deliberalization.

Besides Egypt's support of the Saudi-US coalition in the 1990-91 Gulf War, one of the main reasons for US financial aid and debt cancellations to Egypt was to keep the Mubarak government in power and to force it to control Islamic fundamentalism. Despite its authoritarian tendencies, Mubarak government was a much better choice than Islamists for these powers. Therefore, Mubarak regime feeling secure with the financial aid it received from US and international financial institutions stopped pursuing any kind of political openings. Moreover, both the US and the international financial institutions have been interested in the economic liberalization of Egypt rather than the political liberalization (which could lead to an Islamist government) to protect their strategic and economic interests. Consequently, the rise of "political Islam" component with its impact on the political economy approach again enhanced the political deliberalization in Egypt.

4.4. Impact of International Context

Due to its strategic location, proximity to important oil regions, its leading “big brother” role on other Arab states and its involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process, Egypt has always kept its significance to the Western world and particularly to the United States. Consequently, recognizing Egypt’s importance and vulnerability, US administrations have taken special precautions to maintain Egypt’s stability. (Chase, Hill and Kennedy, 1996: 41) In fact, for the United States and the Western World, Egypt’s political liberalization and deliberalization did not matter as long as Egypt remained stable in order to serve their interests. Throughout 1980s-2000s, while the United States on one hand seemed to support political openings in Egypt, once these openings put its interests in danger in the region, it did not interfere into any repressive policies followed by Mubarak regime.

United States government supported the Mubarak regime economically, militarily and diplomatically. The most important objective of this support was to engineer a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. This objective was accomplished when Egypt signed the Camp David Accords in 1978 and isolated itself from the rest of the Arab world. Egypt’s contribution to regional stability was important for the US. Another objective of the US support to Egypt was –as noted in the previous section– to force Mubarak government to control the Islamic fundamentalism. In this context, for the US government restraining Islamic fundamentalism was more important than supporting an authoritarian regime. In fact, the US has adopted what it believed to be lesser of two evils. It was much better to aid a pro-Western military or an authoritarian government than an Islamic state like Iran. (Karabell, 1995: 47) Consequently, repressive policies followed by Mubarak government towards Islamic fundamentalists did not bother the US administrations. When various human rights groups and the US Congressional report on human rights criticized Egypt’s record, Mubarak defended his repressive policies on the grounds that unless such measures were taken, Egypt would fall to the hands of Muslim Brotherhood or Islamic Jihad. (Karabell, 1995: 44) For Americans Mubarak was ‘a much safer gamble than mainstream Islamists.’ (Fawaz, 2000: 603) Therefore, Mubarak found himself empowered to weaken all opposition including the Islamists and the seculars.

Even the 1990-1991 Gulf War which was supposed to encourage political liberalization in the Arab world, due to the legitimacy crises of various ruling regimes, in fact rewarded Mubarak with a continuation of his ‘state of emergency.’ He became increasingly less tolerant about allowing free public expression and political organization. With the economic rewards, he received as a result of joining the US-led coalition, Mubarak managed to control the opposition. (Hudson, 1991: 410-11 and 425) Particularly in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, US government could not make its mind whether to help Mubarak to suppress Islamist groups or to initiate ‘a long-term and potentially destabilizing project of democracy promotion.’ (Ottoway, 2003: 50)

Consequently, Egyptian political liberalization or deliberalization only mattered to the US and the European powers as long the Egyptian regime followed pro-Western policies. For them rather than dealing with Islamists, allying and aiding an authoritarian Mubarak regime and supporting his repressive policies was a better choice. Consequently, impact of the “rise of political Islam” on international context approach also accelerated Egypt’s political deliberalization policies.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT

Although Egypt seems to be far ahead of some of its Arab neighbors in the process of political liberalization, it is still a strong presidential system with a façade of elections and party rule. The judiciary is independent, but the government can, and has, used military courts or the “state of emergency” regulations to ignore judicial decisions it does not favor. There is a multiparty system which does not operate. There are numerous parties in addition to NDP, the government party, which can not compete with NDP fairly and freely through fraud conducted by the government.

The so-called political liberalization wave, Egypt went through beginning in mid-1970 until 1990's, did not last long. When the Egyptian regime found its authority in danger as a result of pluralism, a reversal wave of political liberalization started. The limited freedoms that were given before were taken back in some tricky and indirect ways. There are four approaches that explain the political liberalization and deliberalization process in Egypt, i.e. political culture, civil society, political economy and regional and international context. They all present the obstacles and advantages before the political liberalization process in Egypt. However, they do not have a strong explanatory power without taking “rise of political Islam” into consideration. For example, since civil society is controlled by the government, its contribution to political liberalization is questionable. Yet, whenever civil society organizations such as professional syndicates are dominated by the Islamists, the government starts its political deliberalization process. Similarly, political culture in the sense of “rise of political Islamist groups” either peaceful or violent all alarm the government to start limiting the civil liberties. Along the same line, while economic reforms or crises in some circumstances force the government for political openings, in other situations when the country receives aid from Western powers, the US and the international organizations, the Egyptian government refrains from giving any concessions. Under the regional and international context approach, once the danger of Islamists shows up, Western powers, the US and the international organizations prefer to support the authoritarian government in power and turn a blind eye to its repressive policies. In other words, all these so called democratic countries support the reversal of political liberalization in Egypt.

Egypt still has a chance for further political liberalization if certain conditions can be accomplished. The debt reliefs and financial aid Egypt had received from the US and the international financial organizations have not necessarily helped its people. Therefore, there must be a substantial socioeconomic and political reform in order to stop corruption and violence. The structural reforms have not improved the living conditions of most Egyptians. The gap between the tiny wealthy strata composed of current and former officials, military people and private business tycoons and the majority who has middle income and are at the poverty level must be narrowed. Otherwise, the extent of corruption and mismanagement within the government will get worse.

The reluctance of the Egyptian elite to give the power away is a significant problem. Monopolization of the power must be ended. The regime must distinguish the moderate Islamists from the militant ones and include Muslim Brotherhood to the system. Human rights records must be improved. If Egypt can accomplish some of these conditions, then it may have a chance to go through a real political liberalization process.

Table 1: The Results of the 1984, 1987, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005 People's Assembly Election

POLITICAL PARTIES	1984 PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (SEATS)	1987 PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (SEATS)	1990 PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (SEATS)	1995 PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (SEATS)	2000 PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (SEATS)	2005 PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (SEATS)
National Democratic Party	384	346	348	416	388	311
New Wafd Party	58	35	did not participate	6	7	6
National Progressive Unionist	----	----	6	5	6	2
Islamic Alliance	did not exist	60	did not participate	did not exist	did not exist	did not exist
Socialist Labor Party	----	did not exist				
Liberal Socialist Party	----	did not exist				
Liberal	did not exist	did not exist	did not exist	1	1	----
UMMA	did not exist	----		did not exist	did not exist	did not exist
Nasserite Arab Democratic	did not exist	did not exist	did not exist	1	3	----
Independent	did not exist	7	83	15	37	88- Muslim Brotherhood 24- Others
TOTAL	448	448	437	444	442	454

Source: Democratization and Islamist Challenge in the Arab World, (Ghadbian; 1997) and Estimate, (<http://www.theestimate.com/>)

ENDNOTES

(1) Actually, Brynen, Korany and Noble brought out these dynamics as factors advancing political liberalization in the Arab World. However, in this study these issues will be taken into consideration as factors causing reversal of political liberalization.

(2) For the distinction of radical and moderate Islamists, see the section on the "Impact of Political Culture."

(3) According to this new law, belonging to an organization which is considered as undermining social peace or rule of law, or preventing law enforcement officers from performing their duties would be punished with severe penalties. Prison terms were placed with forced labor, temporary sentences with life sentences, and life sentences with death penalty.

(4) The Muslim Brotherhood provides members of the professional associations under its leadership with affordable services. For example, the 80,000 member physicians' union led by the Brotherhood gives physicians and their families the best quality healthcare at a minimum price. They have reputation for being honest and careful with union funds.

(5) NDP candidates could put up posters and banderols before the beginning of the official election campaign, unlike the opposition. News bulletins on state-controlled television left Egyptians with the impression that the NDP was the only party running. Opposition parties were granted a few short slots of campaign statements, which were also granted to the NDP.

(6) The number of Muslim Brotherhood candidates arrested reached over one thousand. Most of them were campaign workers or representatives of candidates, who by law were entitled to observe the voting in polling stations, as well as the counting of the vote.

(7) Report on the National Egyptian Committee for monitoring the parliamentary elections, 1995. Released on December 17, 1995; For the details of the violence before the 1995 elections see Rose Al-Yusuf, 11 December 1993 (FBIS-NES-95-243)

(8) For example as Saad Eddin Ibrahim points out the state tolerates the civil society organizations, especially when it needs their support for international events like the September 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

(9) Religious instruction at school has been intensified. Religious programs on TV and radio have been greatly expanded, religious papers licensed or religious papers are added to the national press. Alcohol has been banned in individual

provinces and on flights of Air Egypt. Anti-Islamic books are confiscated and their authors were prosecuted.

(10)The number of detention orders between January 1991 and 1993 reached 24,568 detainees whose detention time lasted forty-five days to three years. The number of detainees under Sadat and Nasser were 14,000 and 19,000 respectively.

(11)Also see Roger Owen, "Socioeconomic Change and Political Mobilization," in *Democracy without Democrats*, ed. Ghassan Salame (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 183-198.

(12)\$ 2 billion cash and \$ 7 billion in debt were cancelled in 1990-91. 90 percent of Egypt's military debt to the US was cancelled. Moreover, Gulf States donated \$ 6 billion and the Paris club countries waived 50 percent of the total debt up to \$ 10 billion.

(13)Structural adjustment program tried to consolidate the Egyptian economy in the longer run, by liberalizing the prices and foreign trade and privatizing several hundred of the public sector companies. This program was designed to move Egypt toward a market economy and it introduced tight fiscal and monetary measures to reduce Egypt's budgetary and external imbalances, and its large external debt.

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