# Fear in times of uncertainty: How fear led to the failure of Egypt's democratic transition

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**Abstract**

Fear among other emotions plays an important role in shaping political outcomes, especially during periods of uncertainty. In this paper, 'the politics of fear' is taken as the theoretical basis and is explored through a case study of the democratic transition period in Egypt from 2011 to 2013. The aim is to investigate how fear led to the ultimate failure of this transition. This paper demonstrates that fear was experienced, instrumentalized and exacerbated by three main groups in Egypt during this period, the elite, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the leftists and seculars. Looking beyond Egypt, 'the politics of fear' can be used to explain other periods of political uncertainty in different contexts.

*Keywords:* fear, democratic transition, democratization, political uncertainty, Egypt, MENA region, Muslim Brotherhood, Arab Spring

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**Introduction**

The prevalence of hybrid or authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has stimulated discussions of 'Arab exceptionalism' concerning democratization, as the waves of democratization seemed to skip Arab countries. The Arab uprisings came as a break with this phenomenon as protests broke out and leaders in some countries were ousted from power, triggering democratic transitions or reforms. This resulted in the electoral success of Islamist movements in different countries namely Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco. In Egypt and Tunisia, their respective Islamist movements-turned-political parties spearheaded the democratic transition process.

Generally, democratic transition periods are defined by institutional uncertainty and do not necessarily lead to democratic consolidation, as there is the possibility of falling back into authoritarianism (Lynch et al., 2017, pp. 1160-1161; Nugent, 2020, p. 7). In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and their presidential candidate Mohamed Mursi won the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012. However, the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) subsequent time in office was short-lived. In July 2013, a widely supported military coup led by General Abdel-Fatah el-Sisi overthrew Egypt's first civilian president and reinstalled the old authoritarian military regime which has ruled Egypt since 1952 (Asad, 2012, p. 275).

Scholars have attempted to explain why the democratic transition process failed in Egypt. Brown (2013) deliberates that the "transition process [in Egypt] was not badly designed; it was simply not designed at all" (p. 53). Lynch et al. (2017, p. 1164) argue that institutional uncertainty in Egypt was "exceptionally high" even compared to other democratic transitions. Nugent (2020, pp. 7-10) argues that higher levels of political polarization, specifically party polarization, will make democratic consolidation less likely and ultimately led to the failure of the transition in Egypt. Some claim that the democratic transition failed in Egypt because of Islam's incompatibility with democracy, as theorized by Huntington (1996, as cited in Stepan & Linz, 2013, p. 17). However, Egypt's rejection of the MB as an Islamist movement did not translate into the rejection of Islam (Khan, 2014, p. 80). Therefore, Islam cannot be used to explain the failure of the democratic transition in Egypt or in another context. This is supported by the existence of successful models of democracy in other Muslim-majority countries (Khan, 2014, p. 80; Stepan & Linz, 2013, p. 17).

A prevailing question discussed in the literature is why the democratic transition failed in Egypt while it succeeded in Tunisia. Hinnebusch (2017, pp. 172-173) identifies the importance of party institutionalization in democratic transitions. He highlights that Tunisia's emerging two-party system in the first post-Ben Ali elections and its ability to form a coalition enabled it to have a successful democratic transition. In contrast, Egypt had a weak party system and the inability of other parties to compete against the Islamists increased dissent. Stepan and Linz (2013, pp. 22-23) argue that the difference between both countries lies in three points. First, the Ennahda party in Tunisia saw democracy as necessary in contrast to the MB who merely adapted to public demands to gain power. Second, the agreements formed between the Islamists and seculars in Tunisia helped reduce fear of uncertainty during the democratic transition. Lastly, civil and political society began to develop in Tunisia which acted as a resistor to authoritarianism, helped in surpassing fears, and building a democratic society. This literature predominantly draws comparisons between Tunisia and Egypt before the freezing of parliament and subsequent democratic backsliding in Tunisia (Marzouki, 2022). Even then, it remains relevant to understand how Tunisia initially consolidated democracy and how the core issues in Egypt could have been surpassed.

Building on an element mentioned by Stepan and Linz (2013), fear and other emotions have played a significant role in the failure of the democratic transition in Egypt. For one, Lynch et al. (2017, p. 1161) discuss how the existential insecurity experienced by groups motivates their behavior in periods of political uncertainty. Their research focuses specifically on how the isolation of clusters on Egyptian twitter increased fear between groups. Accordingly, Pearlman (2013) focuses on the role of emotions during the Egyptian revolution. Furthermore, Lust et al. (2016) tackle the role of fear both during and after the democratic transition period, but only in a short article. Therefore, while the role of fear among other emotions is mentioned in the literature, its effect on democratic transitions is only briefly explored. For this reason, this paper will explore how fear shaped the behavior of different groups in Egypt which ultimately led to the failure of the democratic transition.

Based on this, the following research question will be investigated: What has led to the failure of the democratic transition in Egypt?

This thesis will unfold as follows: First, the theoretical framework will define 'the politics of fear', the theory that will be used to analyze the failure of the democratic transition. The methodology section will explain the research design. Then, the analysis, which is divided into

three sections, will analyze the three main groups which played a part in the failure of the democratic transition: the elite, the Muslim Brotherhood, and leftist and secular groups. This will be followed by a discussion on the interaction between these groups and how this resulted in the failure of the democratic transition. The conclusion will discuss the wider implications of this research for democratic transitions and the role of emotions in shaping behavior and ultimately determining outcomes.

### The Politics of Fear

Emotions play an important role in determining the behavior of individuals. Emotions such as anger and fear can motivate risk-averse behavior, higher threat perception, and a prioritization of security (Pearlman, 2013, p. 388). Those in positions of power can influence and instrumentalize the emotions of citizens. This has been a key tactic for authoritarian regimes in the MENA region.

Fear as an emotional state can be triggered by different forms of stimuli and can be experienced in different ways (Hatemi et al., 2013, p. 279). In the political sense, this can be a general fear of the regime, fear between groups, fear of alternatives, or fear of revolution (Lust et al., 2016; Asad, 2012). These various fears are experienced by different groups in society ranging from political parties, ruling authority, the military, civilians with diverging political ideologies, and external actors. Although fear is a genuine emotional state, it can also be activated and exploited by political actors to achieve certain outcomes. This two-sided explanation will be theorized as 'the politics of fear' and will be taken as the theoretical basis for this research. In the current literature, this theory is not widely discussed, although emotions can help explain the failure of the democratic transition both in Egypt and in other politically uncertain contexts.

In the pre-2011 context, the Egyptian regime employed "co-optation, monitoring, and physical coercion" (Pearlman, 2013, p. 393) to control its population. This system made those who gained privileges from the regime afraid to lose them while the powerless remained silent out of fear of losing their livelihoods. Simultaneously, others experienced self-enforced fear and hopelessness based on the impression that the status quo was unchangeable. This shows how, before 2011, those in power used fear as a tool to remain in power which was imposed through the security apparatuses and propaganda. This was used to convince the public that the only alternatives to the regime were either chaos or radical Islamism (p. 393). Sparked by Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, the Egyptians, among other Arabs, were 'liberated' from their fear which was replaced by anger driven by years of repression, a poor economic situation, and corruption, among other factors. Pearlman (2013, p. 397) argues that this 'liberation' from fear was merely momentary, as the democratic transition period led to a dramatic escalation in fear. A better explanation for this would be that, during the revolution, the fear remained present but was overpowered by other emotions, such as anger, joy, and pride. These emotions encourage risk-taking behavior, prioritizing dignity, optimism, and engaging in resistance in contrast to the behavior that fear brings out (p. 388).

The politics of fear can be explained through political repression and political polarization, in which repression can cause and reaffirm fear, while polarization is a consequence of it. Due to repression and the lack of political freedom, there was an absence of conflictual interaction between groups in Egypt. This meant that citizens did not have a public setting where they could exchange political opinions. Even in cases of civilian interaction, citizens possessed little power and initiative to change the status quo, which made it easier for the regime to influence the perceptions of groups. The regime also deliberately kept different groups separated. Within the prison system, people with different ideologies were separated and placed with other ideologically similar prisoners. The overarching goal of this repression and separation was to reaffirm the fears and suspicions of the 'other' (Nugent, 2020, p. 165). Therefore, the regime used ideological differences as a tool to maintain a tense political climate and emphasize divisions. This trend persisted during the democratic transition period.

Regarding political polarization, Nugent (2020, pp. 7-10) argues that the reason polarization levels were high in Egypt was because of party polarization in which political parties had negative feelings toward each other and had very different goals. While political polarization implies two ideological extremes, the political landscape in Egypt is a multifaceted one that does not have two distinct and opposing sides. Evidently, the identifiable groups are also composed of sub-groups (Lust et al., 2016).

Despite this, a division between the Islamist and 'non-Islamist' camps was constructed by the elite first and the groups themselves later. This was done to strengthen the polarization narrative and further draw a wedge between people, and this dividing line was the clearest one seeing the long history of Islamism and leftist ideologies in Egypt. This division emphasized the out-group differences by constructing a narrative of fear and suspicion of the other (Asad, 2012, p. 272). This did not necessarily reduce within-group differences contrary to McCoy et al.'s (2018) argument. This is because there was still an internal division within the groups leading up to elections in Egypt. However, during Mursi's presidency, the differences among the non-Islamists were reduced as they pinpointed the MB as a common enemy (Hatab, 2020, p. 75). Fear, whether genuine or constructed, drove this increase in polarization. This fear was rooted in pre-2011 Egypt but was exacerbated in the actions of groups during the democratic transition. It is not that polarization did not exist, but that fear is identified as a cause of it and that polarization was exaggerated. This can be generalized based on the following premise: political repression increases

fear and suspicion while political polarization is both a consequence of fear and is strengthened by it.

During the transition period, groups also emphasized the differences between them in order to push their agenda. Seeing that it may be argued that this behavior was driven by interest rather than fear, it is important to differentiate between an interest-based and a fear-based approach. The incentive of a group to act on their fear can be based on what they can gain from this, which is where the interest aspect comes into play (Lynch et al., 2017, p. 1162). For example, while an interest-based argument can be used to explain the motivation of the MB to take steps that would secure their power, it is the fear of being marginalized that drove their interest to begin with.

The politics of fear will be taken as the larger theory while political polarization and repression will be explained in relation to fear. This thesis will argue that the politics of fear has shaped the behavior and response of different groups during the democratic transition period in Egypt, which ultimately led to the failure of this transition. The wider theoretical relevance of a fear-based argument is that it helps explain how emotions affect the behavior and decisions taken by groups and thus, how this shaped certain outcomes.

**Methodology**

  This research will be carried out through a single case study. This method will allow for an intensive examination of a single case while simultaneously demonstrating what this implies for other states undergoing democratization processes or periods of uncertainty (Halperin & Heath, 2020, pp. 234-237). The politics of fear, the theoretical basis for this paper, and how it has translated into the failure of the democratic transition in Egypt will be explained through the following three groups: the elite, the MB, and the leftists and seculars. These groups were chosen because they were "the three players left standing" (Stepan & Linz, 2013, p. 21) after the resignation of Mubarak. As the most influential groups, each group has played a significant role during the democratic transition period and contributed to its ultimate failure. Driven by their fear, they each took advantage of the fragility of the political situation to act in a way that further undermined it (Brown, 2013, p. 53).

  Using within-case analysis will allow for comparing across these different groups within the Egyptian case. This makes it possible to gain an in-depth understanding of each group's behavior and the interactions between the groups. The effect that each corresponding group had on public opinion will also be demonstrated in each section.

  The period that will be analyzed is from 2011 until 2013 which is defined as the democratic transition period. This period begins with the 'January 25' revolution, followed by the removal of the longstanding Mubarak government, the interim government, and the Mursi presidency, and ends at the removal of the MB from power.

*Conceptualization*

  In this research, 'the elite' is defined as those who hold "more political power than others" (Putnam, 1976, p. 5). Those who held political power during the democratic transition were the military and the business elite from the Mubarak regime. Regarding the military, the focus is mainly on the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), a military body that usually meets during times of national emergency. The SCAF assumed power following the fall of Mubarak and was responsible for overseeing the democratic transition process (Roll, 2013, p. 10). As for the Egyptian business elite, they had significant influence over the media. As for the MB, this will specifically focus on the MB in Egypt, both as a movement and through its political party, the 'Freedom and Justice Party' (FJP), which was founded in June 2011 to represent the MB in the political arena (Jaraba, 2014, p. 71). Lastly, the leftists and seculars are defined as parties that are

non-Islamist and did not support the old regime. The term non-Islamist will be used interchangeably with leftists and seculars.

Regarding more general terms within this research, democracy is defined based on the maximalist definition of democracy which implies that it is not sufficient for a state to hold elections to be considered democratic (Kendall-Taylor et al., 2019, p. 22). Therefore, the period of 2011 to 2013 is referred to as a democratic transition period, as although Egypt had free and fair elections in principle, it has not necessarily fulfilled the criteria based on the maximalist definition of democracy. Another key term for this research is Islamism which is defined as a "political movement that instrumentalized Islam as a doctrine of political action" (Akbarzadeh & Baxter, 2018, p. 88).

*Data collection*

Secondary sources are used in this research due to safety concerns and financial and time constraints. Furthermore, secondary sources are well-suited for studying this large-scale topic. A combination of Arabic and English sources is used to gain better insight on the topic and increase the resource pool available.

The selection of sources is tailored toward the group being analyzed. For the section on the elite, the analysis will depend on academic articles, newspaper articles, reports, and interviews. As for the MB section, academic articles are analyzed in combination with interviews and newspaper articles that reveal the MB's opinions and actions. As for the analysis of leftist and secular groups, this will depend on academic articles, *The Square* documentary, and newspaper articles. These sources feature statements made by leftist and secular groups in Egypt. There is a limitation in studying the behavior of elites and untransparent groups, as they do not disclose their true intentions. While interviews are a strategic instant of communication for these groups, they can help explain their behavior by exemplifying how the groups wished to be perceived by the public.

**Fear in Egypt's democratic transition (2011-2013)**

From 2011 to 2013, the was a shift in public opinion in terms of confidence in democracy and the MB. When respondents were asked how much trust they have in the MB, in 2011, 34% responded with 'absolutely do not trust the Muslim Brotherhood' compared to 2013 in which 71% responded as such (as cited in Hatab, 2020, p. 80). This shows how trust in the MB-led government quickly declined in a short period of time. In 2013, 54% of Egyptians answered that they would rather have a stable country while 44% would rather have a democratic country (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 1). In this analysis, the actions that shaped this declining public opinion and ultimately, the failure of the democratic transition will be explained.

The analysis has been structured as follows: it begins with analyzing the elite group followed by the MB, and lastly the leftist and secular groups. This sequence was chosen based on the power hierarchy during the democratic transition period and the effect that the groups had on each other.

The following sections will demonstrate how the politics of fear shaped the response of different groups during the democratic transition period in Egypt, which ultimately led to the failure of this transition. The politics of fear is different for each group. For the elite, the argument is that they feared losing their power which motivated their behavior to manufacture feelings of fear in other groups and the public to maintain their power. As for the MB, their actions were motivated by their fear of being marginalized again following their long history of repression but also based on the SCAF's attempts to limit their power. The steps that they took to increase their power caused fear in the two other groups and the public. As for the leftists and seculars, they feared losing their rights and freedoms and the consequences that Islamism could entail. Based on the political decisions taken by the MB, the leftists and seculars took advantage of the fear instigated by the elite to remove the MB from power. This shows how the politics of fear played out differently for each group and demonstrates the important role that fear played toward the failure of the democratic transition.

I. *The Elite*

This section will argue that the elite, meaning the military and the business elite, was driven by their fear of losing power to instigate and reaffirm fear among the public. This was done by using the MB's Islamist ideology as a deterring factor and highlighting the security threats that could consequently emerge.

The military has been a powerful institution in Egypt since the 1952 military coup, and all presidents prior to Mursi were military men (Cole, 2012, p. 487). After the fall of Mubarak, this institution maintained its power rather than losing it. First off, the army stepped into the power vacuum through the SCAF which acted as a transitional government and made plans to organize elections. Despite this, the SCAF did not maintain its promise of delivering elections in six months. The public also perceived it to be protecting Mubarak and the old regime, who remained in Egypt even six months after the revolution. Other groups in Egypt argued that the presence of the SCAF was merely a shift in the elite and does not intend to oversee a democratic transition. These actions sparked protests in July 2011, which put pressure on the SCAF to organize parliamentary elections in the fall and to put Mubarak on trial. During its rule, the SCAF generally responded to protests by instigating fear in the public by telling them that this would spread chaos and cause economic problems (Cole, 2012, p. 499). This marked the first steps taken- during the transition period, by the SCAF to instigate fear to maintain power.

After the parliamentary elections took place, the MB emerged with the largest number of seats in parliament in January 2012. Following this, the SCAF noted that the MB, as the only organized group, could potentially win presidential elections. Fearing the prospect of losing power, the military entered in a "marriage of convenience" (Abul-Magd, 2012) with the MB. Following the drafting of the new constitution, the new government led by Mursi did not alter the military budget and did not remove military officials in high-ranking civilian positions, which served as further evidence of the collusion between both groups (Abul-Magd, 2012). Mursi made it a point to dismiss Field Marshall Tantawi, the head of the SCAF during the interim government, which may have seemed like a major move at face value. However, this did not seriously undermine the security sector but rather allowed for lower-ranking officers to take charge, including El-Sisi at the time (Tabaar, 2013, p. 732). This shows how fear drove the SCAF's decision to come to an agreement with the MB, and it was able to maintain its power structure during the presidency and made it easier to overthrow the regime later.

Despite their alliance with the MB, the SCAF still took measures to increase their power, which made the MB retaliate by also increasing their power. This contributed to the growing unpopularity of the Mursi government. Having realized this, the elite's fear of losing power took over again as they realized that they could not rely on the MB to stay in power. Therefore, they acted by instigating fear of the MB in the public and switched their alliance to the leftists and

seculars. This was done through backing the *Tamarrod* movement which aimed to put pressure on Mursi. There was evidence from the Ministry of Interior at the time, whose minister was from the military, that it was facilitating the *Tamarrod* protests and pressuring media outlets to report unrealistic numbers of protestors present to encourage people to join protests (Ketchley, 2017, pp. 106, 111).

Regarding the instrumentalization of fear by the military, one of the ways this was done was by blaming unknown groups or 'thugs' for the outbreak of violence against protestors. Following the electoral victory of Mursi, two members of the SCAF, General Mohamed al-Assar and General Mahmood Hegazy were interviewed on the TV show *Bihudou'* on CBC hosted by Emad El-Din Adeeb. When questioned about whether judiciary measures would be taken regarding 'certain actions' of the army under the command of the SCAF, the generals dismissed this question. In this, Adeeb was referring to the violent response of the security forces to the protests near the end of 2011, but also the failure of security forces to protect protestors from attacks by unidentified actors (Pratt, 2015, p. 45; Cole, 2012, pp 492-493). Al-Assar and Hegazy deflected the question by saying that "*alayna an natakalam kayf tatakaram hadi almu'asasa ala ada'ha khilal alfatra di"* [we should discuss how the SCAF should be rewarded instead] and claimed that people should think about what could have happened if the SCAF acted differently. They did not take responsibility for the deaths of protesters, but instead, removed themselves from the situation by creating the impression that they stood with the people. They claimed that the reason they were being blamed was that many sides wanted to provoke the SCAF (CBC Egypt, 2012, min 51.00-58.00). This deflection by the SCAF revealed the army's attempt to reinforce tensions and suspicion and subsequently fear, between different groups in Egypt.

As for the business elite, their principal fear was to be held accountable for earlier transgressions that they committed and hence, lose their power. This fear was instigated by Mursi who pointed to certain private companies and claimed that they would be investigated, which led the business elite to be more hesitant in cooperating with the MB. This eventually led them to opt for supporting the opposition (Roll, 2013, p. 18). The business elite played an important role in the failure of the democratic transition as many of the big businessmen of the Mubarak regime owned and controlled media organizations in Egypt. In fear of losing their power, the military and the business elite launched a 'campaign of fear', in which there were comparisons drawn between Egypt and other countries in the region such as Syria and Libya to show how the unstable situation

in Egypt could deteriorate. The media also linked conflict to religion as seen in other countries in the past such as Algeria and Iran (Hatab, 2020, pp. 76-77). This created a "climate of insecurity" (Naguib, 2016) among the public about the MB. The elite also instigated fears of potential civil war which increased feelings of insecurity. This made democracy look less appealing in comparison to security if it meant ruling out the risk of war. This was especially the case considering how the media exaggerated the differences between the political groups, namely between the Islamists and the leftists and seculars to increase divisions and suspicion of the other (Hatab, 2020, p. 70).

Therefore, the business and military elite both feared losing power in the democratic transition which led them to instigate fear in the public as a strategy to maintain their power. The coup gave the military more power and the institution continued to plant fear of insecurity in Egyptian citizens. Fear was used as a justification to implement repressive measures and eventually lead to the return of a military dictatorship under General El-Sisi (Tabaar, 2013, p. 733; Bolliger et al., 2016, p. 9).

II. *The Muslim Brotherhood (MB)*

This section will explore the ways that fear motivated the MB's behavior during the revolution in Egypt and during Mursi's presidency. It will also analyze how the MB's behavior triggered fear in other groups. The argument is that the history of repression shaped the MB's fear of being marginalized or sidelined again, and the actions taken on this basis led to instigating fear among other groups.

The MB's experience with authoritarian repression increased its feeling of dissent towards other groups and its fear of being repressed in the future. The MB has experienced repression at the hands of the Egyptian regime since Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in 1954. As one of the first Islamist movements that gained popularity in an era of Arab nationalism and 'secularism', the MB was systematically repressed but was able to maintain its support base during all those years (Jaraba, 2014, p. 61). Particularly under Mubarak, the MB was regularly targeted. For this reason, the MB held hostile feelings toward the non-Islamists, who admitted that the MB were repressed but remained silent, which led the MB to accuse them of supporting their repression. The MB channeled these feelings and their experience with repression by adopting a profile of 'victimhood', in which repression became a shared experience among members of the MB (Nugent, 2020, pp. 170, 177). Their experience of repression and history of distrustful feelings

toward the non-Islamists helps explain their behavior during the 2011 revolution and the Mursi presidency.

The MB's history of repression shaped its first cautious and then advantageous response to the revolution. Upon the outbreak of the 'January 25' protests, the MB were initially hesitant to join the protests in Tahrir Square until it became costly for them not to join (Lust et al., 2016). At the time, the MB did not have influence over power networks. Based on the nature of the protests and the lack of religious slogans, the MB had to reorient itself to remain relevant, which led to it exhibiting a more democratically oriented front and a willingness to compromise and cooperate with other groups (Jaraba, 2014, p. 69). The MB took advantage of the fact that I was the only organized group, which is something that the leftists and seculars feared (Jaraba, 2014, p. 69). When it became more evident that a deal was made between the MB and the military, this marked the first instant after the revolution in which an action by the MB instigated fear in the public and the leftists and seculars (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Lust et al., 2016).

There are two factors that initially pushed the MB to increase its power. First was the MB's fear of being marginalized again. Second was its fear of being sidelined by the SCAF. In turn, their actions triggered fear in other groups. Based on their previous experience of repression, the MB "was certain that 'their necks will be put at stake if their attempt at power fails'" (as cited in Lust et al., 2016). This fear arguably motivated the MB to collaborate with the military to ensure that it is not marginalized again. After attaining a majority in parliamentary elections, the MB isolated itself by detaching from the other. They also miscalculated that, in their position of power, they did not need the support of other groups (Jaraba, 2014, p. 71). This was partially driven by their distrust of the non-Islamists and their fear of being sidelined by others. This also pushed them to exclude other pro-democracy groups from decision-making processes and from forming alliances with them (Asad, 2012, p. 272). Despite initial collaboration between the MB and the SCAF, tension later emerged, in which the latter took measures that noticeably aimed to limit the power of executive bodies such as the dissolution of parliament and the threatened dissolution of the constituent assembly. This caused the MB to fear that they were being sidelined which pushed them to make more moves to seize power.

Based on these two motivating factors, the MB took steps to increase its power. This included Mursi increasing his executive powers, placing himself above judicial law, and limiting freedom of speech by restricting media and NGOs (Tabaar, 2013, pp. 730-731). There are two

occurrences that demonstrate how the MB's actions directly affected their image and increased threat perception in others. In an interview, Mursi expressed his "happiness" that Egypt is moving towards total freedom of expression but that this excludes speaking in a way that may threaten the safety of society. He emphasized that the president is a core and representative part of the state, which means that speaking badly of this figure damages the image of Egypt to the world which should be "*thawban abyadan lasi'an da'iman*" [always like a bright white dress], a comparison entailing that Egypt should not reveal its internal issues to other countries (Al Jazeera Mubasher, 2013). This statement implies that Mursi wanted freedom of speech with exceptions rather than total freedom of speech. This shows why other groups interpreted this as limiting freedoms as it made it seem like the MB did not want to be criticized but still wanted to be viewed as a legitimate democratically elected government. This instigated fear in the other groups and the public, who saw these actions as a possibility that Egypt is returning to autocracy (Friedman, 2012). The MB also issued a list of objections to a UN statement that condemned violence against women, through which they voiced their controversial opinion regarding this topic for the first time since they gained power. This induced fear in the liberals and seculars and the public who feared that the situation for women will deteriorate under the MB (Kirkpatrick & El-Sheikh, 2013).

The protests that broke out during the year in which the MB was in power were driven by fear of what the MB's actions will imply to public life and democracy in Egypt. The leftists and the seculars (among other groups) were equally as suspicious and fearful of the MB as the MB was of them. Furthermore, the MB justified the use of repression against the protestors under the banner of 'saving the revolution'. This was based on the logic that the MB was elected to office which makes them a representation of the "democratic will of the people" (Pratt, 2015, p. 44). Following the removal of the MB from power, their fears of being marginalized proved to be warranted, as they became more alienated than they previously were. The strong opposition to their rule and their alienation was demonstrated by a photo taken of General el-Sisi and other factions sitting together upon announcing the overthrow of the MB (Halawa, 2015).

Therefore, this section first demonstrated how the MB's fears stemmed from its experience with repression and how this shaped its behavior during the democratic transition period. In turn, this instigated fear in the public and in other groups.

## III. *Leftists and seculars*

In this section, the group that will be analyzed consists of those that identify as leftists or seculars in their ideological orientation. There are many parties that fit into this category as, unlike the Islamists, the leftists and seculars are more divided, which is one of the reasons why they were unable to form a coherent program and succeed in the elections after the 2011 protests. This group is primarily driven by the fear of losing rights and freedoms. The MB's Islamist ideology became framed as a threat to their right and freedoms (Friedman, 2012). Furthermore, the fears that the elite aimed to instigate in the public played out in this group in two ways. First, it increased their own (genuine) fears, and second, they used this as an opportunity to freeride on the elites' tactic in order to push their own agenda.

Under the Mubarak regime, all parties in opposition to the regime at the time were repressed and punished for their actions. However, the leftists and seculars were less repressed than the MB, which they had admitted. The leftists usually follow up this statement by claiming that they were more targeted than the MB under Sadat in an attempt to also make their repression visible (Nugent, 2020, pp. 167-169). This shows how repression was used as a divide-and-rule strategy and how groups competed on repression to legitimize and somehow give value to their struggle. In some instances, shared experiences of repression also brought more understanding between groups. For example, Ayman Nour, the leader of *El-Ghad* party, recognized that it is important to acknowledge the right of other political parties and ideologies to exist, including the MB, even if one does not agree with their views (Nugent, 2020, p. 180).

Fear between different groups was not always the dominant emotion and driver of behavior. For example, during the 2000s, there was less fear between the Islamists and non-Islamists as there were attempts at cooperation between the two groups, lobbying for certain economic and humanitarian demands from the regime (Lust et al., 2016). There was more cooperation on an individual scale rather than on an organizational level, and it was mostly initiated by the Left, the weaker party in this situation (Abdelrahman, 2009, p. 53). Another instance in which fear was low was during the January 25 revolution against Mubarak's regime which brought about the "Islamists-Secularists revolutionary" (Lust et al., 2016). These periods are significant as they show that fear does not necessarily need to dictate the relationship between the two groups. Rather, fear is exaggerated by the elite to maintain power, but also the two groups use the narrative of fear when it is beneficial to them.

The fear of the leftists and seculars towards the MB first appeared prior to them holding executive power, but when the MB had demonstrated its potential to gain power. After a date for the parliamentary elections was set by the SCAF, leftists and seculars preferred to delay elections as they feared that the more organized Islamists would succeed in the elections, which had turned out to be the case (Jaraba, 2014, p. 69). Despite this, the fear among the leftists and seculars following parliamentary elections was mainly targeted at the SCAF rather than the MB, which shows that fear was also based on the power structure rather than only on ideological differences. This was evident on the one-year anniversary of the revolution in which protesters from the leftist youth mobilized to demand that the military transfer its power to the parliament, rather than protest against the success of the Islamists. This demonstrates that the issue at the time was less about competing ideologies and more oriented towards dismantling old power structures. This meant removing the military from its position of power was viewed as the first step toward democratization (Cole, 2012, p. 497).

The deal made between the MB and the SCAF and the undemocratic steps taken by the MB had marked the end of the cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists as the MB was viewed as having betrayed the revolution (Noujaim, 2013). These actions triggered fears and increased threat perception of what the behavior of the MB could entail for their rights in the future, also due to the differing ideology. Following Mursi's steps to increase his power, restrict freedom of speech, and monopolize the constitution-drafting process, the National Salvation Front (NSF) was formed by the previously divided leftists and seculars, in response to the extra-judicial powers that Mursi had granted himself which was viewed as hindering the democratic transition process (Tabaar, 2013, p. 731; Pratt, 2015, p. 51). The different parties within the NSF had little in common besides their shared fear of the MB (Hatab, 2020, p. 75).

The leftists and seculars had also used the undemocratic behavior of the MB to their advantage. They instrumentalized the increasing threat perception towards the MB and their Islamist ideology as the basis for their opposition to the Mursi government, highlighting the consequences that Islamism could pose to their freedoms in Egypt and the possible 'Ikhwanization', meaning the MB's imposition of its ideology, of the state (Tabaar, 2013, pp. 730-31). The general reaction and the language used by leftists and seculars indicated strong opposition to the MB and Islamism. For example, the president of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party and spokesperson of the National Association for Change asserted that "People elected the

Brotherhood's president who saved them from Mubarak dictatorship but introduced them to Islamic Fascism" (as cited in Hatab, 2020, p. 75).

The leftists and seculars channeled the narrative of insecurity and war created by the elite in order to use fear as a justification to remove the MB. Ironically, although the leftists and seculars, as well as the public, had described the MB as traitors for allying with the military, they then allied with the military to overthrow Mursi and the MB's democratically elected government (Tabaar, 2013, p. 732). This alliance justified its actions through the fear and insecurity narrative, specifically based on the threat of Islamism (Cole, 2012). After the removal of the MB from office, Khaled Dawoud, the spokesperson of the Constitution Party and a spokesperson of the NSF, said that "*alikhwan mas'ouloun a'n al-onf fee masr wa kunna ala shifa harb ahliyya*" [the Muslim Brotherhood is responsible for the violence in Egypt and we were at the brink of civil war] (Al-Muzan, 2013). Dawoud explains that this was because the MB continued in its collaboration with the security forces and increased problems in Egypt. This justification is hypocritical considering that the leftists and seculars also allied with the military to overthrow the MB.

This section has demonstrated that the fears of the leftists and seculars are rooted in the threat that those in power pose, and that ideology had overlapped with the power dynamics. The actions that the MB took following its electoral success increased and reinforced the fears of the leftists and seculars. However, the leftists and seculars also took advantage of the growing fear among the public to remove the MB from power.

## IV. Discussion

After focusing on each of the three groups individually, this discussion will look at the overlap and interactions between them. The way that the fear experienced by one group was related to other groups' fears and behaviors shows how the different groups are interconnected and influenced by each other. This demonstrates that the failure of the democratic transition was an accumulative result of group's behaviors rather than a result of the actions of one group.

To begin with the elite, this group can be seen as the only winner following the failure of the democratic transition. Their use of fear as a tool to manipulate other groups, due to their own fear, made them emerge successful from this period. First, the elite postponed elections and did not keep their promises during the time where the SCAF was acting as a transitional government. Then, they undermined the new democratically elected government by attempting to limit its control and influencing public opinion against it, which is where the role of the business elite came

into play. Seeing that the MB had begun taking steps which the public and opposition groups disapproved of, the military, in turn, recognized that their alliance with the MB could not survive and began to back the *Tamarrod* movement, which removed the MB from power and further alienated them (Ketchley, 2017). In this, the military posed as the savior of the people in defense of democracy and the perceived threat of Islamism. The elite is the group that would have benefited least from having a functioning democratic system as it would have eventually lost its benefits if the system functioned correctly. Since the elite were the ones with the most power, they had the upper hand following the revolution. Their readiness to use their power to maintain the old system that worked in their favor shows that they were not interested in having a democracy from the start.

During their year in power, the MB had progressively 'radicalized' and become more authoritarian rather than democratic seeing the decisions that they took. This was mainly due to their already-untrusting nature which exacerbated their fears of being marginalized again. This fear was reaffirmed by the military's efforts to undermine their position. Another reason why the MB did not follow through with certain promises was due to fears stemming from the unstable political situation, the continued outbreak of protests, and its growing unpopularity. This discouraged them to reforming the security sector which later worked against them (Tabaar, 2013, p. 732).

Consequently, this led them to take more unilateral moves. Both the elites and the leftists and seculars took advantage of the situation by orienting public opinion against the MB, which ultimately led to the military coup that restored the old regime. To add to that, the period in which the MB were in power did not help their case. After the Arab uprisings, there was an increase in radical Islamism in the region most notably with the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. This played into the hands of the elite who had used the media to posit the MB within the radical Islamist narrative, which did not help their image and contributed to a growing fear of the MB among the public and other leftist and secular groups, and what this could mean for the future of Egypt (Hatab, 2020, p. 76).

On the leftists and seculars' end, different fears drove many of them into an alliance with the military against the MB. First, the actions of the MB were perceived as a fall back into the old system. Second, avoiding an Islamist takeover in Egypt was perceived as more important than sticking to democratic guidelines (Cole, 2012). However, the undemocratic behavior of the MB and the elite legitimized the actions of the leftist and seculars to also resort to undemocratic means

to overthrow the MB. The main issue with the leftists and seculars is that they did not have a proposed alternative for the system in Egypt, but rather were fighting against what they knew they did not want and what they feared (Pratt, 2015, p. 47). First, this was the Mubarak authoritarian regime, and then it was the Mursi-led Islamist-majority government. Although they wanted reform and to put an end to dictatorship, groups were unable to come to an agreement with each other or come up with a coherent program that would enable them to contribute to the democratization process or drive it in the desired direction.

This discussion demonstrates that the MB and the leftists and seculars played a part in their own loss, as the failure to put differences aside and collaborate, due to fear and suspicion, made the democratic transition process more difficult. The lack of institutional foundations also exacerbated the situation as it gave more room for groups to act in the way that benefitted them most. Furthermore, the fact that the elite, who possessed the most power, did not seem to be interested in following through with the democratic transition made it more imperative for the other two groups to take initiative. This shows how fear overpowered rationality leading to groups acting unilaterally which ultimately led to the restoration of the old system. The alienation and repression of Islamists following the 2013 coup can only exacerbate fear between groups in Egypt and will make it more difficult to find a democratic solution in the future. Seeing that one of the problems under the MB government was the lack of openness to collaboration, it will also be difficult for leftists and seculars to find a solution without the Islamists. However, the feeling of security that the authoritarian regime is currently providing for Egyptians will keep the pursuit of dignity and democracy on pause as it means that the 'threat of Islamism and civil war' is kept at bay.

**Looking beyond Egypt**

        This paper has argued that the politics of fear shaped the behavior and response of different groups during the democratic transition period in Egypt, which ultimately led to the failure of this transition. It was demonstrated that each of the three groups: the elite, the MB, and the leftists and seculars experienced their own fears. When it comes to the response to actions, the elite as the group with the most power was able to drive the fear narrative which was instrumentalized by the leftists and seculars whose fear drove their interest in removing the MB from power. Simultaneously, the MB exacerbated fears in other groups through their undemocratic and conservative actions.

        A more comprehensive study of this topic would have also considered foreign actors as a group that played a role in the Egyptian political landscape during the democratic transition period. The reason this was excluded is for time and word count constraints. Domestic groups who played a role during the democratic transition were prioritized in this in-depth case analysis as they played a more significant role in the case of Egypt.

        This research has shown that, in order to surpass fear and suspicion of the other, cooperation and a genuine desire for democracy by all groups is also a prerequisite for a democratic transition period to succeed. 'The politics of fear' has shown that while it is important to study how power dynamics and economic and political factors lead to certain outcomes, it is also valuable to understand the role that emotions play in shaping the behavior of individuals and groups, and how this can shape outcomes. Also, political scientists both within the discipline of political psychology and other disciplines should account for the role of fear and other emotions beyond their effect on voting patterns in established democracies. Instead, the effect of emotions on political preferences and behavior in hybrid and authoritarian countries should also be considered.

        This paper is beneficial for future research on democratic transitions, politically unstable settings, or the effect of emotions on decision-making and shaping larger outcomes. The theory and results of this research can be tested in other contexts such as the democratic collapse in Thailand and the democratic backsliding in Tunisia.

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