

Six years after the Arab Spring and Egyptians still do not have freedom

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Huria, huria, huria! The Arabic call for freedom resounded through Cairo's Tahrir Square in February 2011. At the heart of the protests were a desire for freedom of expression and the protection of human rights in Egypt. Reflecting on the last six years in Northern Africa, it is clear that in some ways, the Arab Spring significantly changed the political landscape of the region.

In Tunisia, a dictator was replaced with a democratically elected President. In Libya, protests led to the downfall of Gaddafi but at the cost of a civil war, the effects of which are still felt in the country today. In Egypt, an authoritarian dictator was toppled only to be replaced by a democratically elected yet authoritarian president.

After the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, many Egyptians were hopeful, as the country would see its first freely held election. Mohammed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood had opposed Mubarak for years, promising reforms and in 2012, Morsi won what was a tight election securing 51.6 percent of the vote (Guardian 2016). However in the aftermath the country experienced a reversion to the same authoritarian style of rule, as Morsi proposed constitutional changes that would secure his uncontested position.(Kingsley 2015).

A series of popular protests ensued: noting the large opposition towards Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian military intervened and ousted Morsi in 2013 (Kingsley 2013). In the next election, the army proposed a candidate of their own to run for office, Abdel el-Sisi. Three years later into his Presidency, have Egyptians achieved the freedom they were striving for?

Under Sisi, the answer is clearly no. During his time in power Egypt has sustained a less-than-humane human rights record. In recent years journalists have been forcibly detained, such as Al Jazeera's Mahmoud Hussein (Al Jazeera 2017). In addition, the government has also jailed thousands of political opponents especially supporters of former president Mohamed Morsi (Human Rights Watch 2017).

The government seems to go beyond restricting its opposition, by actively undermining the idea of human rights (Human Rights Watch 2017). Sisi's government has recently frozen the assets of various human rights groups, and the Egyptian parliament has proposed a draft law that allows the government to monitor the funding of independent groups, in a perceived attempt to assert control. (Human Rights Watch 2017). These are worrying signs and are clearly not what the protesters in Tahrir square were calling for in 2011.

The continued authoritarian style of rule has sparked resentment among many Egyptians, yet any protests are quickly crushed. In 2018 Egypt is due to hold its next election. Perhaps it will give Egyptians another chance to choose a president who respects democratic ideals, freedoms and human rights. However, political indicators suggest that the next election will not be a fair and free one.

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