Is Egypt Ready for Democracy?
By: Nivin Abdel Meguid

According to Linz & Stepan (1996), “democratization requires open contestation over the right to win the control of the government, which in turn requires free competitive elections whom results determine who governs”.

In this paper, I put at hands, with regard to Linz and Stepan’s book, my synthesized review of the literature on Egypt transition to democratization. I presented the conditions required before that transition can be considered complete, in an attempt to figure out where Egypt is on the way towards a complete democracy after the January 25 revolution.

In the early phases, revolutions are expected to be intensely focused on achieving political goals. Over the long term, however, “revolutions cannot be described as such unless they are able to produce deep permanent political transformations” (Bahaa Eldin, 2011). These political conversions can be counted complete according to their ability to go beyond direct political and social gains. I believe that it is time for the January 25 revolution, which has already realized a great part of its political targets, to leverage its grassroots popularity to get the best use of Egypt’s social capital in passing the critical period of transition to democratization. In my opinion, realizing successful democratic transition is the most challenging collective action could be considered over the past thirty years of Mubarak’s era.

According to Dunne (2011), although Egypt is a lower middle income country by international standards, but by no means, is among the poorest of the poor. “Income per capita and the equality of income distribution are similar to or better than those in India and Indonesia, two countries that made successful transition to democracy”, she stated.

Thus, is Egypt ready for democracy despite the fact that about 20% of Egyptian population lives on $2 per day and more than 30% of the public suffers from illiteracy? Is it possible with no middle class to speak of, after a thirty years of silence, to become a democratic state where wealth is equally distributed? In addition to a vanishing middle class, a global economic downturn hit, enormous cases of corruption, and overall, a fragile public education system that failed to prepare children for the private sector jobs generated by previous reforms.

“Egypt has a large civil society, well-developed state institutions, and average socioeconomic indicators”, (Dunne, 2011). Yet, could they be enough for a complete democratic transition? I think that it might transmit Egypt to democratization; however, it is different story when completeness of transition is what we are discussing.

In this regard, Linz & Stepan (1996) has identified when a transition to be “complete” according to four imperatives; when sufficient agreement about political procedures has been reached to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power is a direct result to a free and popular vote, when this government effectively has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative, and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies.
In my point of view, Egypt has little chances in realizing complete democratic transition, at best case, not within the six-month period assigned for the transition to be completed. This is because of two reasons; first, is “electoral fallacy” (Linz & Stepan, 1996) that might be caused by the ruling military that might retain extensive sanctions even after handing over direct control of government to the new democratic government. Second, is the “continuous confrontation and disagreement about democratic institutions among the political elite or democrats, which may create questions about the legitimacy of the emerging democratic government, the decision-making process, and the future of the political system, in a way not conducive to democratic consolidation” (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

Despite these two factors, transition to democracy in Egypt might be completed, however, it will also be subject to other three variables that may affect transition unless treated carefully; “prior regime type and stateness, leadership base of the prior regime and the actors who initiate and control the transition, and international influence; political economy of legitimacy and coercion, and constitution making environment” (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

In conclusion, Egypt still at the start point on the way to a complete democratic transition; military is running the country “pledging” to hand power to an elected civilian government, while genuine contested presidential elections are supposed to be conducted properly in September. Furthermore, National Democratic Party, Shaab and Shura councils are dissolved due to corruption and elections proven fallacy, while there is a question mark about the last referendum on constitution.

On the other hand, based on recommendations by the International Crisis Group, Egyptian government must take necessary measures to ensure that the coming legislative and presidential elections are free and fair. Also laws on political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs.) should be revised; therefore, they are able to participate collectively in politics. Finally, judiciary should be independent by acting as a counterweight to the executive, and hence, supervises the election process across the country at all levels.

Although international and domestic hopes in Egypt are far above the ground that a democratic transition hopefully might take place in an effective and complete manner, facts are not reflecting the same impression for that wish to be true in the near future.

Sources;


