

Chapter 4

The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square

EMADEL-DIN SHAHIN

EMAD EL-DIN SHAHIN is Professor of Public Policy and Administration at the American University in Cairo. He is also the editor-in-chief of The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics and co-editor (with John L. Esposito) of The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics (both forthcoming from Oxford University Press).

The fall of Mubarak's three-decade-long regime in just eighteen days revealed the fragility of authoritarianism and the power of mass movements. Despite early warnings from neighboring Tunisia, Mubarak and his top associates thought that Egypt was different, and that the regime was strong enough to survive popular pressures for change. Even Mubarak's external allies initially believed that "the Egyptian government [was] stable and [was] looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people."¹ This apparent stability concealed deep-rooted crises and structural problems that had piled up for decades. Mubarak's long period of rule had generated profound feelings among Egyptians concerning their repression, poverty, and lack of social justice.

The January 25 revolution was not a spontaneous act, but rather a cumulative process that involved numerous figures, groups, and movements over the years. Likewise, it was not merely a youth or Facebook revolution, but a people's revolution that skillfully used traditional as well as modern means of mobilization. The youth ignited this revolution, the people supported and defended it, and the military managed it. Several key factors ensured the success of the January 25 revolution, but the most fundamental factor was mass mobilization, expressed as the outpouring of millions of Egyptians who battled security forces and articulated clear demands for change. One protester summarized the impact of mass force: "From the very first day we felt we could win because of the huge numbers of people involved, the masses. When you're at a protest and you see small numbers, you panic and you are afraid. This was different. We could see right away that we might win. We felt more confident."²

The predominantly nonviolent strategy that the protesters adopted accentuated the regime's brutal repressive measures and fostered domestic and international support for the revolution. This chapter analyzes the particular features of the Egyptian revolution and examines the deep-rooted crises that lie behind it. It discusses the role of different forces: the youth, political parties, the Muslim Brothers, and the military. Finally, it attempts to answer the question of why this revolution was successful and explains the traditional and modern means of mobilization that benefited the organizers.

"A UNIQUE REVOLUTION!"

Egyptians have revolted several times in recent history—in 1882, 1919, 1952, 1977, and 2011. Several characteristics, however, distinguish the January 25 revolution from the rest. The most distinct feature was the incredibly large number of protesters who participated throughout the eighteen days of this

¹Reuters, "US urges restraint in Egypt, says government stable," January 25, 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJJOE70O0KF20110125>.

²Youth leader, interview with the author and David Cortright, June 8, 2011.

revolution. According to a member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the number of demonstrators who participated in the revolution throughout the country reached 15 million. David Cortright, a renowned expert on nonviolent social movements, considers this revolution to be “one of the largest outpourings of mass civil resistance in human history.”³ On February 11, the day that Mubarak resigned, Tahrir Square and its surrounding areas hosted over four million protesters. The next closest revolution in terms of size was the 1989 Polish revolution, in which 10 million people participated.

The second significant feature of the January 25 revolution was its predominantly peaceful nature. The organizers of the January 25 protests expected a harsh and repressive response from the regime. They avoided clashes with the security forces in order to not alienate potential participants and to raise sympathy for their cause. Their main slogan, particularly when confronting the brutal crackdowns of the security police, was “Peaceful . . . Peaceful.”

A third feature of the revolution was its classless nature. In other words, this uprising was a true people’s revolution that was not limited to or instigated by only one class, but rather drew support from various social classes. The youth of the middle and upper-middle class called for and led the revolution and were then joined by the poor and marginalized, the upper classes, workers, peasants, women, Copts, Muslims, young people, old people, urban residents, and rural residents.

A fourth remarkable feature was the “leaderless” nature of the revolution. The revolution had no leading figure, group, vanguard, or movement. It did not follow the traditional pattern of leadership that relies on hierarchical structures. Instead, it was the work of various groups and organizations, with no one claiming a principal role. Nevertheless, the revolution was highly organized, remaining united on one main demand: “The people want to change the regime.” This demands-oriented nature of the revolution kept the movement together and helped it to progress.

Organization was the fifth unique characteristic of the Egyptian revolution. Different actors coordinated and interacted throughout the revolution. They organized protests, articulated demands, and turned Tahrir Square into a “mini-state” that provided food and supplies, health services, defense and security, media and communications, and entertainment for the millions of participating protestors. Modern technologies such as the Internet and social media were key factors in the mobilization and organization of this revolution. Explaining the particular nature of the revolution, David Rothkopf writes, “We are accustomed to political movements requiring charismatic leaders and political infrastructure. But what happened in Egypt was, thanks to

³David Cortright, “Glimpses of the Revolution in Egypt,” Peace Policy, July 6, 2011, <http://peacepolicy.nd.edu/2011/07/06/glimpses-of-the-revolution/>.

social networks and a new information culture, a revolution led by networked clusters of individuals in which all the grassroots capabilities of old infrastructures were instantly available via the application of new technologies.”⁴

Finally, the January 25 revolution engendered an extraordinary aura of tolerance, acceptance, and pluralism, values that were absent for long periods of Mubarak’s rule. The protesters came from different ideological backgrounds, religions, political orientations, and geographical areas, but they were tolerant and accepting of each other and were able to transcend their differences. Faith and religion played a remarkable role in the revolution. The importance of these factors could be seen in the repeated incidences of collective prayers, Friday and Sunday sermons, and men and women praying and bowing on the ground to confront police brutality. Prayer was used to break fear and promote a feeling of security and mutual support. Scenes of thousands of protesters kneeling on the ground while forces besieged and fired at them generated immense sympathy for the demonstrators. Photos of Copts protecting Muslims during their Friday prayers and then being protected by Muslims during their own Sunday services became iconic. An extraordinary atmosphere of civility quickly emerged and was clearly noticeable to any observer.⁵ Throughout the eighteen days, not a single incident of theft or sexual harassment was reported.⁶ It is this atmosphere of tolerance and civility that Egyptians later called the “Spirit of Tahrir.” Activists are now trying to infuse this new spirit into the entire Egyptian society.

STRUCTURAL CRISES

Despite its sudden outburst, the January 25 revolution was neither spontaneous nor planned. Rather, it was a cumulative process that evolved over the decade between 2000 and 2011, emerging from structural failure, growing political discontent, sporadic protests, and a strong desire for reform. The January 25 revolution revealed deep structural problems that affected the majority of Egyptians, particularly the educated middle classes, the youth, and the poor.

⁴David Rothkopf, “Foreign Policy: Overthrowing the Old Egypt Experts,” National Public Radio, February 15, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/15/133771699/foreign-policy-handling-egypt-with-little-experience>.

⁵In my own experience, the minute that I stepped into the square, I was always greeted with breadsticks and cheese and tomato sandwiches. I was also a witness to this encounter: Shortly before the Friday prayers of February 10, an organizer tried to persuade some women to move in a certain direction to avoid crowds of men. The women refused to change their path, asserting that the men in the square always lowered their gaze and never bothered them.

⁶On the day of the celebrations of Mubarak’s ouster, an incident of sexual assault against an American journalist was reported. The perpetrators were unidentified mobs, allegedly pro-Mubarak thugs that tried to intimidate American journalists to prevent them from covering the events in Tahrir Square. For the civilized aspects of the revolution, see Nadia Mostafa, *Al-Thawra al-Masriya: A Civilizational Model* (Cairo: Civilization Center for Political Studies, 2011).

The most important of these problems were the economic crisis, political stagnation, and the regime's astonishing disregard for rising popular discontent.

Economic Grievances

Since the early 1990s, Mubarak's regime had adopted neoliberal economic policies and embarked on a major structural adjustment process. While this program produced some success, it also hurt large numbers of the population. After long years of economic stagnation, however, the country's economic performance improved. Egypt's gross domestic product grew an average of 6 percent annually between 2007 and 2011. In 2007, foreign direct investment (FDI) increased to \$11 billion (a remarkable jump from \$400 million in 2004), and Egypt's exports increased by 20 percent. At that time, the Egyptian economy ranked as the fourth largest among the Arab countries (\$128 billion in 2007), exceeded only by oil-rich Saudi Arabia (\$381 billion), Algeria (\$135.2 billion), and the United Arab Emirates (\$129.7 billion).⁷ The economy seemed to be doing well, but the majority of Egyptians were not. Only a few state cronies benefited from this growth.

Mismanagement, cronyism, mal-distribution, massive corruption, a substandard educational system, and rising unemployment undermined these achievements and inflamed the anger of the majority of the population. Most of this growth was achieved by rent-seeking operations—increases in the sale of natural gas, workers' remittances, revenues from the Suez Canal, sale of public enterprises, and real estate—and not through the creation of a competitive industrial base or other productive economic sectors. The economy suffered from soaring inflation (17.1 percent in 2008), high unemployment (20 percent at the end of 2006), a large public debt that reached 100 percent of GDP in 2007, and a trade deficit that amounted to \$60.8 billion in imports, compared to \$34.5 billion in exports, in 2008.⁸ During the last years of Mubarak's rule, corruption became massive and institutionalized, with Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index ranking Egypt seventieth out of 163 countries. The regime failed to provide the 600,000 new jobs that were needed annually to absorb the country's new entrants to the job market. The deteriorating educational system failed to meet the expectations of university graduates who lacked the necessary competitive skills and were forced to join an army of unemployed youth. Unemployment among university graduates averaged 40 percent for men and 50 percent for women.⁹

⁷Nathan Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin, "Egypt," in *Politics and Society in the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Michele Penner Angrist (New York: Rienner, 2010), 213.

⁸Economist Intelligence Unit, *Egypt Country Report* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008), 8.

⁹*Ibid.*, 32.

The government's neoliberal policies produced many losers and few winners. Chief among the losers were the poor, workers, the middle class, and people from rural areas. All of these groups struggled to survive on a fixed income that could not keep up with the rising prices of food and basic necessities. Poverty levels became phenomenal, engulfing about 40 percent of the population. Disparities in lifestyle and incomes became increasingly alarming. Whole gated communities mushroomed on the outskirts of Cairo and other major urban areas, provoking the anger of the deprived. The number of shantytowns increased exponentially. According to the Cabinet's Information and Decision-making Support Centre and other government-sponsored institutes, there are over one thousand shantytowns in Egypt spread among twenty governorates, with a population of 17.7 million.¹⁰

Starting in 2002, the state-business nexus grew particularly strong with the grooming of Mubarak's son Gamal as a possible heir. Gamal relied on the state party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), and business and state cronies to build his own power base and in return helped them infiltrate the government and the party. These partners in economic crimes accumulated wealth through the privatization of state-owned enterprises, real estate, doubtful business dealings, and financial breaks (e.g., tax exemptions, bank loans, and price incentives). As these newly rising businessmen became richer, the poor, middle, and working classes were increasingly crushed by inflation, job shortages, and hopelessness. It is important to note that these segments of the population have historically constituted the backbone of Egyptian society. They were now marginalized, unable to satisfy their basic needs, and exposed to the pressures of social disintegration. Statistics demonstrating economic improvement and the many economic and political opportunities that were available to elites blinded the regime to the mounting wrath of large segments of the population.

Political Stagnation

Egyptians associate Mubarak's reign with political stagnation. Astonishingly stubborn and unyielding when faced with pressures for change, Mubarak kept the political life of the country under tight control and prevented both true political contestation for power and any change to the basic structures of the political system. The state party, the NDP, wielded complete hegemony over the state institutions and parliament and monopolized the political process. With the potential ascendance of Gamal Mubarak in 2002 as an heir, the NDP became even more dominant and vicious in suppressing opposition to this plan for Egypt's political future.

¹⁰Alastair Sharp, "Cairo's poorest live life on the edge," Reuters, September 27, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/09/28/us-egypt-shanty-idUSTRE48R00320080928>. See also Egypt.com News, "Shanty towns are ideal places for criminals," Egypt.com News, October 22, 2007, <http://news.egypt.com/en/20071022649/news/-egypt-news/shanty-towns-are-ideal-places-for-criminals.html>.

Mubarak tolerated political parties as long as they did not pose a serious threat to his authority. Weak, fragmented, and divided, the legalized opposition was resigned to its subsidiary role and was seemingly incapable of posing a serious challenge to the regime. Effective movements and parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Nasserite Karama (Dignity) Party, the Islamic centrist al-Wasat (Center) Party, and al-Ghad (Tomorrow) Party, were either banned or harassed. The legalized political parties were constrained by regime-imposed legal restrictions, and their aging leadership, lack of innovation, and lack of internal democratic practices added to their ineffectiveness. Many of these parties were easily co-opted into the service of the regime, creating the illusion of pluralism and political dynamism. Because they always failed to gain people's trust and mobilize an adequate following, this legal opposition performed poorly in elections and became discredited. By 2004, activists, including the youth, were looking for other channels to articulate their protest and aggregate their demands. Alternative protest movements such as the Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya) emerged as a response to activists' need to transcend the obsolete style of political parties and their ineffectiveness.

The emergence of a large number of protest and pro-change movements greatly altered Egypt's political landscape. These movements energized the political arena and ended the decades-long stagnation that Mubarak's regime had forced on Egyptian politics. Reform movements, advocacy groups, public figures, critical journalists, independent judges, and activists mushroomed in a relatively short time. In 2004 and 2005, over a dozen groups surfaced in opposition to the renewal of Mubarak's presidency for a fifth term and his attempts to groom his son Gamal as a successor. "Change" became the buzzword and driving force behind all these movements, which adopted such names as Kifaya, the National Rally for Democratic Change, Journalists for Change, Doctors for Change, Intellectuals for Change, Writers for Change, and Youth for Change. All of these movements took to the streets to protest against government policies, breaking the barriers of fear, laying the foundations of grassroots activism, and challenging the regime's security measures. The growth of the pro-change movements reflected a wide dissatisfaction with the existing political parties and the need to come up with alternative structures and tactics to pressure the regime for reforms.

Obviously, some of these movements were more influential than others. Kifaya was the most well known and one of the most popular. This group formed in August 2004 and included members of different political parties and activists. To build a broad base of support, Kifaya embraced basic reform demands that called for an end to the state of emergency, an end of the regime's monopoly over power, the amendment of the constitution, and the creation of a system that would allow for the transfer of power. Its slogan, "No extension for Mubarak, no hereditary succession," became a mantra for the change movement. Gradually, the movement began to take to the streets to express its demands and, more significantly,

to achieve mobilization and end the culture of fear that was so prevalent among Egyptians. Indeed, Kifaya succeeded in organizing dozens of demonstrations in a few years and gradually managed to articulate a list of reform demands that many began to share and advocate. However, the group was never able to mobilize large numbers of the population. Kifaya's narrow ideological platform, sporadic activities, and internal disputes limited its ability to achieve mass mobilization, and by 2008, the movement had lost some of its appeal, prompting many youth to look for alternative avenues for protest.

The November 2010 Parliamentary Elections

Fraudulent elections have been a common trigger factor in many prodemocracy revolutions, and Egypt was no exception. The regime was blind to all mounting domestic pressures. Its political and economic elites had grown completely isolated from society and were even more determined to push for the succession of Gamal Mubarak, despite growing popular opposition to this plan. Ahmad Ezz, a business tycoon, top NDP official, and close associate of Gamal, wanted to make sure that his friend's path to the presidency was secure and smooth, and as a result, he oversaw one of the most tainted parliamentary elections in the country's recent history.

The parliamentary election of November 2010 was another major turning point that contributed to the downfall of Mubarak's regime. The NDP used massive vote rigging, intimidation, and repression to secure an overwhelming 97 percent majority in the parliament. Fraud was widespread, obvious, and provocative. Activists captured numerous incidents of ballot stuffing in photographs and videos and posted them on the web. Because opposition parties were almost completely excluded from the parliament, the regime alienated and delegitimized itself even further. Thomas Demmelhuber concluded already in December 2010 that "[s]uch obvious election manipulation should not be seen as reflecting the strength of the regime or as a sign of efficient government action. On the contrary, it is an expression of weakness, as stable authoritarian regimes can nowadays put up with a numerically strong opposition."¹¹ The fraudulent November elections also confirmed the belief that the next presidential election, scheduled for September 2011, would certainly be rigged. Mubarak added insult to injury when he publicly mocked the opposition, which had formed a parallel parliament in protest of the sham elections, during the joint session of the newly "elected" parliament. He insulted and antagonized the Egyptians, blocked any possibility for reform, and highlighted the urgency for rapid change.

¹¹Thomas Demmelhuber, "Parliamentary Elections and the Mubarak Regime: Long Live the Pharaoh!" Qantara.de, December 15, 2010, <http://en.qantara.de/Long-live-the-Pharaoh/7116c154/index.html>.

MAIN ACTORS

The Youth Factor

The Egyptian youth led the January 25 revolution, the people embraced it, and the military managed it. Various youth movements played a central role in calling for protests and organizing the mass mobilization that turned the January 25 protests into a people's revolution. Many of these new movements benefited from the political and organizational experience that they had gained from their past involvement with protest groups that had emerged a few years previously, as well as from the adoption of new strategies and tactics of confrontation with the regime.

While these groups drew on past experiences, they also improvised new techniques for challenging Mubarak's regime. As we will see later, they were also successful at moving with ease between the virtual reality of social media, such as SMS, blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and the real world on the ground. This new dynamism produced a critical mass that was necessary for making this revolution successful. Ahmad Eid, a young activist, shared his experience: "I consider myself and the main groups that participated in the January 25 Revolution, the children of the context created by the emergence of Kifaya. I, therefore, see January 25 as a coronation of the state of political and social activism that began in 2004 with the establishment of Kifaya."¹²

The youth groups that called for and participated in the revolution shared certain common features that helped in their success. Many of these movements had been recently formed. The oldest was the April 6 Movement, which was formed in 2008, only three years before the revolution. Other newly formed groups included the Campaign for the Support of ElBaradei, the We Are All Khalid Said group, Youth for Justice and Freedom, the Youth of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Youth of Kifaya, young people of the Tomorrow Party, and young people of the Democratic Front Party. These groups were later joined by young people from the Leftist Tagamu Party, the Nasserite Party, the Popular Movement for Democratic Change (HASHD), young people of the Labor Party, young people of the WafdParty, and the Front of Coptic Youth. The recent formation of these groups ensured that many of their members were unknown to the regime and its security forces. As a result, the regime underestimated the ability of these groups to pose a threat to the stability of the regime, exercise influence, and have the capacity to move large masses. In a YouTube clip that was widely circulated a few months before the revolution, Gamal Mubarak publicly made fun of the April

¹²AmrHashim Rabi', *Thawrat 25 Yanayr: Qira'a Auwaliya wa Ru'ya Mustaqbaliya* [The January 25 Revolution: Preliminary Reading and Futuristic Vision] (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Siyasiyawa al-Istratijiya, 2011), 437.

6 Movement and its members and refused even to consider the possibility of talking to the Egyptian youth.

Unlike the preceding generation of protest movements and political parties that cohabitated with Mubarak's regime for long decades, these youth movements had a strong desire for change and were eventually successful in ridding the country of Mubarak's regime.¹³ For them, the possibility of Gamal ascending to power after his father was entirely unacceptable. Unlike the political parties, the youth movements were also characterized by their resourcefulness, practicality, and ability to coordinate with other political forces and among themselves, despite their different ideological orientations and intellectual backgrounds. This flexibility was a great asset that helped these movements enlist various political and social forces, form a loose yet coordinated front, and push the revolution forward. The movements were able to maintain this high level of flexibility and move across parties and organizations, which increased their network of activities, organizational skills, and mobilization capacity. Both the leaders of these movements and a large part of their constituencies were drawn from the educated youth of the middle and upper-middle classes. In addition to advocating for better socioeconomic conditions, they also aspired to institutionalize the democratic values of rule of law, transfer of power, and popular sovereignty. Finally, these movements used social media extensively and skillfully for several years to raise public awareness, expose the repressive policies of the regime, and build and organize a wide virtual constituency of people from different sectors of society.

The April 6 Movement

Five groups—the April 6 Movement, the Campaign for the Support of ElBaradei, the young people of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Youth of the Tomorrow Party, and the youth of Justice and Freedom—were key players in calling for and organizing protests during the first days of the revolution. The April 6 Movement represented the first cyber protest movement in Egypt. This group was formed in 2008 in support of the workers' strike in al-Mahala al-Kubra, a major industrial city in the Nile Delta, and against the harsh measures adopted by the regime to suppress the striking workers. The movement used its Facebook page, which then had 70,000 members, to call for the organization of a general strike. Activists picked April 6 both as the starting day of the strike and as a name for the group, to commemorate the date on which Mahatma Gandhi ended his peaceful Salt March of 1930. The symbolic messages that lay behind the choice of name cannot be ignored. One clear message is that this strike was intended to mark the beginning of a long struggle against

¹³For in-depth analysis of the role of political parties and alternative political forces under Mubarak's regime, see Emad El-Din Shahin, "Political Parties in Egypt: Alive, but Not Kicking," in *Political Parties and Democracy*, ed. Kay Lawson et al., 3–26 (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

Mubarak's regime in emulation of Ghandi's practices. The second was the movement's intention to draw a clear inspiration from Gandhi in adopting a peaceful and nonviolent strategy of resistance. Some members of the movement reportedly received training in Serbia on nonviolent protest techniques.¹⁴

The April 6 Movement did not create a tight organizational structure. Describing itself on its webpage as "a group of Egyptian youth that do not belong to a specific political orientation and seek political change," the movement included youth from different political parties, movements, and organizations, as well as independent individuals. The movement was active on the Internet and among the youth in different circles. It worked to improve its protest techniques in preparation for a major mass mobilization. However, its second general strike of 2009 was not successful, and its ability to mobilize a large segment of the population remained limited. According to Ahmad Salah, a cofounder of the movement, "We have been trying for a long time to build up sentiment, to choose the right moments, and come out for demonstrations, but the maximum number of people that would attend was only a few thousand."¹⁵ The movement played a crucial role in amassing people for the January 25 protests: distributing over 50,000 leaflets, explaining to people why they should join the protests, and organizing awareness campaigns in poor areas to educate people about their social and legal rights.¹⁶

The Popular Campaign for the Support of Elbaradei

In 2010, a new development energized Egyptian politics and indirectly but significantly contributed to the January 25 revolution. A group of young Egyptians wanted to create popular support for a consensual presidential candidate who could challenge Mubarak in the 2011 elections and end the chances of Gamal's succession. They wanted to raise awareness of the need for change and provide a new avenue for popular democratic change. Consequently, they rallied

¹⁴Esam Al-Amin reports that Muhammad Adel, a leader of the April 6 Youth Movement, "was dispatched to Serbia to meet with Srdja Popovic, a proponent of non-violent resistance and leader of Otpor (Resistance) Movement, a group of young activists who helped depose Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. He came back to Cairo with DVDs and other educational and training materials that demonstrated in detail some of the non-violent means and civil disobedience techniques used to induce political change." See Esam Al-Amin, "Conditions and Consequences: Anatomy of Egypt's Revolution," CounterPunch, February 17, 2011, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2011/02/17/anatomy-of-egypt-s-revolution/>.

¹⁵Ahmad Salah, "Co-Founder of April 6 Movement," International Center on Non-Violent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/learning-and-resources/on-the-ground/1547-ahmed-salah>.

¹⁶Ahmad Tuhami Abd al-Hay, "Kharitat al-Harakat al-Shababiya al-Tahawriya fi Misr," Markazal-Jazeera li al-Dirasat [The Youth of January 25], February 10, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/5898A077-3AAE-4319-BE5D-E89972395162.htm>. Iman Abd al-Munim, "Shabab January 25th," OnIslam.com, February 6, 2011, <http://www.asharqala.rabi.org.u?k/ruiah/b-?taqarir-53?2.htm>.

behind Mohamed ElBaradei as a possible candidate and formed the Popular Campaign for the Support of ElBaradei as President in 2011. Seeking to build a large constituency, this group became active in several provinces and mobilized the public in support of their campaign. These young activists were able to collect over one million signatures; raise hopes of the possibility of a bottom-up, peaceful democratic change; and more important, learn valuable skills in outmaneuvering the regime's repressive measures. These achievements became great assets in the January 25 revolution. The Popular Campaign urged people through its webpage to join the protests on January 25, and its members were among the youth leaders of the revolution.

The youth of other movements and parties also took part in the early days of the protests. The youth of the Muslim Brotherhood group have had a long history of activism on university campuses, as well as confrontation with the regime. This group was particularly well known for its great discipline and organizational ability. According to many accounts, the role that the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood played during the first days of the revolution and the early confrontations with the regime's security forces was crucial in saving the revolution. These individuals courageously battled the security forces and the state-sponsored thugs. The youth of the Tomorrow Party, the youth of Justice and Freedom, and the youth of the Democratic Front Party were also all instrumental in calling for protests and mobilizing thousands of people from various neighborhoods.

The Role of the Muslim Brothers

Mubarak's regime viewed and treated the Muslim Brotherhood group as the main challenger to its stability and systematically cracked down on its members. Unlike the legalized political parties, the Muslim Brotherhood challenged the regime's harassment, continued their activities, and periodically paid the price for their defiance. The period from 1995 to 2000 became known as the "bone-crushing" phase of repression, during which the regime intensified its crackdown and sent several leaders and members of the movement before six military tribunals, which awarded them harsh jail sentences. The Muslim Brothers adopted an assertive strategy in challenging the regime and a pragmatic orientation in the reform agenda they proposed. This approach became quite noticeable in early 2005, when the movement reasserted its presence in the political process, defied the regime's ban on its demonstrations, and even threatened to adopt a program of civil disobedience. The Brotherhood also cooperated with other political forces that did not share its ideological perspectives and jointly launched reform-oriented fronts. Subsequent arrests and crackdowns continued to prevent the movement from growing into an uncontrollable threat to the regime's hegemony. During Mubarak's last years, the confrontations with and repression of the group became even harsher.

The Muslim Brotherhood did not directly instigate the January 25 revolution, but it did actively participate in it. The group received strong warnings from state security to not support or join the planned protests. Concerned that the regime might use the group's participation to portray the protests as Islamist-led and thus provide an excuse for further crackdowns, the leadership of the Brotherhood announced that the group would not formally participate in the demonstrations, although its members would be free to take part on an individual basis. To defuse the situation, the group presented specific demands to the regime and urged it to introduce immediate reforms. The proposed reforms included ending the state of emergency, dissolving the fraudulent parliament, conducting new elections, and introducing constitutional amendments. The youth branch of the Muslim Brotherhood took a different position from the main group and participated fully in the revolution from its beginnings. Some prominent members of the Muslim Brotherhood also joined the protests early on and even played leading roles. Full involvement of the Brotherhood occurred on January 28, known as the Friday of Rage. Being both highly organized and popular, the Muslim Brotherhood managed to mobilize large numbers of their followers and were instrumental in confronting the brutality of security forces and the state-sponsored thugs. According to many accounts, members of the Muslim Brotherhood were at the frontlines during the violent clashes between antiriot police and the protesters. Throughout the revolution, the Brotherhood adopted a conciliatory and pragmatic position. It agreed to not raise any of its religious slogans and gave assurances that after Mubarak's ouster, it would not field a candidate nor would it run for more than 35 percent of the seats of the parliament.

The Role of Labor Unions

The last few years of Mubarak's reign witnessed an increase in the number of workers' strikes. The working class had been one of the main losers of the neo-liberal economic policies that the government had adopted since the mid-1990s. These people were disproportionately affected by the process of privatization, repeated layoffs, depreciating wages, and job insecurity. Businessmen hired workers on temporary contracts and refused to offer them permanent appointments. Workers were also crushed by high inflation rates and increased costs of living. Starting in 2007, workers' protests and strikes began to spread throughout Egypt. In that year, workers organized close to one thousand strikes and sit-ins in both the public and the private sectors. In 2008, the April 6 Movement was founded in support of workers' demands and strikes. In 2009, the number of workers' strikes and protests reached 800.¹⁷

¹⁷Ikhwanweb.net, "Escalating Strikes: A New Fad in Egypt," April 23, 2010, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=24439>. See also Abd al-Latif, Omayma, "Al-Thawra al-Sha'biya fi Misr" ["The People's Revolution in Egypt"], Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, February 2011.

The role of the workers was important throughout the revolution, particularly during the last days of Mubarak's reign. The leadership of the workers' unions had for a long time been intimidated by the regime and was opposed to taking part in the protests. The labor unions sometimes even forced workers to protest in support of Mubarak. However, thousands of workers joined the protesters in Tahrir Square and organized demonstrations to protest their deteriorating conditions and demand improvement of their wages and work conditions. On February 9, one day before Mubarak abdicated, workers intensified their protests and strikes in several provinces, which threatened to shut down the country. Protests were reported in major industrial cities, hospitals, steel factories, telecommunication centers, the Cairo airport, and two companies at the strategically important Suez Canal. For many Egyptians, the workers' involvement in the revolution sent a strong signal that the downfall of the regime was imminent.

The Role of the Military

The Egyptian military has been the main power base of all regimes in power since 1952. Since the military coup of the Free Officers in July 1952, the military, as an institution, has fostered a strong sense of ownership of the country. This feeling of ownership is based on a legacy of revolutionary legitimacy and the people's view that the military is a patriotic institution. For the past sixty years, all Egyptian presidents have come from the military establishment. Therefore, the military's approval of the succession of Gamal Mubarak, a civilian, to power was questionable, although it never publicly articulated its stance on that issue. In fact, Mubarak's grooming of Gamal and his increasing reliance on the Ministry of the Interior and a small circle of associates (Omar Sulaiman and Safwat al-Sharif, among others) to advance this scenario created factionalism within the state institutions. One significant civilian faction was headed by Gamal and comprised the state NDP Party, the Minister of the Interior Habib al-Adli, certain business cronies, several cabinet members, and other civilians (newspapers editors, directors of state-owned media, and many intellectuals and university professors in the NDP Policies Committee). Gamal enlisted these elements to build an alternative power base, amplify his role, and promote his possible accession to power. Since 2002, this civilian faction started to exercise influence and assume control over the country's institutions, policies, and economy. In some instances, some of these policies, particularly the continued privatization of the economy and the spread of corruption, clashed with the military establishment's interests. The army, of course, represented another faction within the state and apparently disapproved of both this succession scenario and the direction the country was taking. The underlying conflict between these two factions may explain the role that the military adopted during the revolution.

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE JANUARY 25 REVOLUTION

Mass Mobilization

As discussed previously, several factors contributed to the success of the massive uprising of January 25. The key factor behind this success, however, was the ability of the protest organizers to achieve mass mobilization and adopt a nonviolent strategy that generated wide support for the protesters and defeated the regime's violent strategies. To be clear, this revolution could not have succeeded had it not been for the support of regular people and the role that various actors played in it. The number of Egyptians who actively took part in the eighteen-day protests has been estimated at around 15 million. To mobilize such a large number, regime opponents used both traditional and modern techniques of mass mobilization.

Not by Facebook Alone!

Social media, particularly Facebook, has been considered the main tool behind the mass mobilizations of the revolution. However, traditional means of resistance have also been instrumental over the years in increasing people's awareness, underscoring the regime's weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and breaking the fear barrier. The Arab and Egyptian satellite stations that started to mushroom in the 1990s broke the regime's monopoly over the media and exposed its inefficiencies, corruption, and incompetence to millions of viewers. In the last few years before the revolution, talk shows provided space for critics of the regime and members of opposition parties and movements to air their opinions. These shows also raised issues that the regime considered untouchable and mounted harsh criticisms to specific policies and public figures. To project some sense of credibility and attract viewers, the state-run television stations had to emulate other talk shows and allow some criticism of state officials on its programs.

In the early 1990s, some newspapers managed to get licenses through court orders and begin publishing independently. These papers were able to attract fine journalists who had been critical of the government for years and who began to open wide cracks in the system. Many of their investigative reports revealed wide-ranging corruption in the country and provoked antiregime sentiments. They also broadened the net of criticism to include Mubarak and his family and went as far as to publicly call for his removal from power. Mubarak's attempts to muffle these papers through a restrictive new press law did not dissuade these independent journalists from continuing their scathing criticism of the regime. Accordingly, some engaged in legal battles with the government and were sentenced to prison, particularly in the last years of Mubarak's regime. The independent papers played a remarkable

role in raising the level of awareness and, more importantly, emboldening the people against the regime. Prior to January 25, young protesters also used other traditional means for mobilization such as SMS, sit-ins, night vigils, silent stands, demonstrations, strikes, leaflets, and word of mouth.

Social Media

The spark behind the January 25 revolution came from the virtual world. Social networking played a critical role in Mubarak's downfall.¹⁸ The first calls for the protests came through the Facebook page of the I Am Khalid Said group, which had 400,000 members and had participated in the organization of several protest activities in 2010. The April 6 Movement, another major organizer, had 70,000 members, and the ElBaradie Group had 300,000 members. A few years before Mubarak's overthrow, tens of thousands of blogs reporting on the corruption and atrocities of the regime mushroomed.¹⁹ These sites covered the efforts and protests that the different movements organized to challenge the regime, and they extensively used YouTube to document police brutality, acts of torture, and human rights violations. Video clips of police violations against ordinary citizens inside police stations and photos of Khalid Said, who was tortured to death by police, had a profound impact, provoking people's hatred against the security police and the regime as a whole. Until the regime cut off the Internet on January 26, social media groups were instrumental in calling for protests and mobilizing the population on their pages. Full guidelines and detailed information for the January 25 protests were made public on the Internet a few days before the revolution, and direct instructions were given to potential participants. Esam Al-Amin has noted that the January 25 revolution "was probably the only revolution in history that determined its commencement and announced its date to the world online."²⁰ In brief, virtual media and social networking leveraged mounting socioeconomic and political discontent through the skillful use of the Internet, blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter and succeeded in mobilizing thousands of protests on January 25. These protesters were immediately joined by hundreds of thousands of angry Egyptians, who spontaneously embraced the young organizers and their calls for economic and social justice, freedom, and dignity.

¹⁸For more information on the role of digital media in Egypt and Tunisia, see Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, "The Role of Digital Media." *Journal of Democracy* 22 (2011): 35–48. See also Sallie Pisch, "Social Networking, Political Action and Its Real Impact in Egypt," *Bikyamasr*, March 21, 2010, <http://bikyamasr.com/10218/social-networking-political-action-and-its-real-impact-in-egypt/>.

¹⁹For more information on the impact of blogs on Egyptian politics before the January 25 revolution, see Ikhwanweb, "Effect of Egyptian Blogs on Politics, Society," July 7, 2007, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=1221>.

²⁰Al-Amin, "Conditions and Consequences."

The organizers framed their demands in a way that ensured wide support for their uprising. Initially, they outlined four main economic and political demands: (1) address the problem of poverty by increasing minimum wages, improving education and health services, and providing unemployment benefits to the youth; (2) end the state of emergency, put an end to torture, and respect court sentences; (3) dismiss the Minister of the Interior; and (4) limit the president to only two terms. Taking these demands from cyberspace to the streets, the revolution began to unfold.

Protesters' Strategy and Tactics

Protests and demonstrations alone were not enough to change a regime. The movement needed a vision and a strategy. Organizers adopted a strategy of linking political and socioeconomic demands, achieving mass mobilization, and adopting nonviolence resistance. They also used clear tactics that aimed at wearing down the security forces and causing their collapse.

The instruction guidelines for the protests that the organizers posted online a few days before January 25 stressed the peaceful nature of the demonstrations. The protesters described themselves as peace advocates and did not call for any violence. They urged the participants to protect the rights of others while demanding their own. They warned participants not to respond to any provocation from the security forces or provide the state police with the opportunity to portray the protesters as saboteurs aiming to destroy the country. The instructions asked that participants exercise self-restraint and refrain from any illegal action that might jeopardize the safety of other participants, cause damage to private or public property, or unnecessarily disrupt the traffic. Protestors called for the extensive use of the Egyptian flag, requested that no particular banners be raised, and urged parties and movements not to use any ideological or religious slogans. The instructions described January 25 as a day for all Egyptians to call for basic rights of equality, social justice, and unity. Therefore, the unified slogans focused on common and popular demands such as employment, higher income, freedom, dignity, and social justice.

The adoption of a nonviolent strategy and the combination of political and socioeconomic demands secured a wide base of support from millions of Egyptians who joined the young and unarmed protesters and embraced the revolution. One protestor explained the rationale behind the adoption of a nonviolent approach: "We wanted to project a positive image to the people at home, to maintain a positive spirit. If the people saw us clashing with the police they would be scared. But when we did not attack the police, we conveyed a sense of calm, and sent a message that we were not afraid."²¹

Past experiences with strikes and demonstrations helped the organizers devise new tactics that proved decisive in confronting the security forces and

²¹Youth leader, interview with the author and David Cortright, Cairo, June 8, 2011.

ultimately bringing down the regime. The main objective was to wear down these forces and outlast them. In the past, protesters had gathered in main streets, grouped together in one location, and allowed themselves to be cordoned off by the security forces, who eventually forced them to disperse, usually after harsh confrontations and brutal crackdowns. This time, the protesters adopted different tactics. In response to calls for mass demonstrations on January 25, the Ministry of the Interior placed its antiriot forces on full alert forty-eight hours prior to that day. Taking no chances, it also deployed all its forces to control and decisively crack down on the demonstrations, leaving no back-ups available. Aware of this tactical error, the protesters managed to keep the antiriot police engaged and deployed for relatively long periods of time. Demonstrators started from mosques and side streets in poor neighborhoods. They also sought the help of major soccer fan groups, known as the “Ultras,” that have hundreds of thousands of followers and long experience in dealing with security forces. These usually apolitical groups helped increase the number of protesters and instructed protesters in self-protection techniques and ways to avoid direct clashes with the antiriot police.²² Finally, protesters also organized demonstrations in other major cities such as Alexandria, Suez, and Ismailiya, using almost the same tactics: starting from poor areas, inviting people to join, and then pouring into main squares in massive numbers through various channels. This approach made it difficult for the antiriot police to contain the demonstrators. By the time the protesters reached the main squares, their numbers had soared to hundreds of thousands and, in some cases, millions. As a result, the protesters were able to outnumber the antiriot police, and this huge number eventually defeated the regime’s violent and repressive measures. Completely unarmed, the peaceful demonstrators braved the security forces for days, and on January 28—the third day of the demonstrations—the security forces ran out of ammunition, succumbed to exhaustion, and collapsed. They withdrew in a disorderly fashion, and, according to many participants, it was clear that the revolution had been won.

THE REGIME’S STRATEGY: FIVE MISTAKES THAT MADE A REVOLUTION

Mubarak’s regime rested on three main pillars: the security forces, the NDP and its business cronies, and the military. All of these groups were defeated or neutralized in the first days of the revolution. The security forces were defeated on January 28, the NDP was defeated on February 2, and the military

²²On the role of the Ultras, see Muhammad Yahya and Amr Izzat, “Al-Ultras: Sira’ fi Mudarrajat al-Kura waWihda fi Midan al-Tahrir” [“The Ultras: The Biography of the Football Clubs and Their Unity in Tahrir Square”], *Al-Masry al-Youm*, February 28, 2011, <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/printerfriendly.aspx?ArticleID=289158>.

was neutralized on February 9. January 25 could have passed as a regular day had it not been for five major mistakes that Mubarak's regime made that contributed to the success of the revolution.²³

Slow Response

Mubarak did not want to repeat Tunisian President Ben Ali's "mistake" of cutting short and fleeing. A former fighter pilot, he thought he could dodge, outmaneuver, and land his plane safely. His advisors, led by his son and the Minister of the Interior, convinced him that the protesters were just a bunch of Internet kids, and that the situation was completely under control. The regime was confident that these protests would be suppressed and dispersed in a few days. The key was to buy as much time as possible and use repressive force to crush the demonstrators. It took Mubarak four days, from January 25 to after midnight on January 28, to appear in public to address the nation and discuss the political measures he proposed to handle the situation. In the meantime, everyone who had access to a television screen—senior U.S. and EU officials, human rights organizations, pundits, and many others—appealed to the Egyptian regime to make the right decision and respond meaningfully and quickly to the crisis. The slow political response enraged the protesters and made them more determined to continue challenging the regime and adding more pressure. The protests started by articulating limited socioeconomic and political demands that included dismissing the interior minister, ending torture and the state of emergency, and increasing minimum wages. Many protesters asserted that Mubarak missed several opportunities to defuse the situation by refusing to give concessions early and respond positively to some of the demands. For example, had Mubarak dismissed the interior minister or changed the government, he might still be in power today.

Excessive Violence

From January 25 through February 2, Egyptians were able to see a clash between entirely two opposite sides: peaceful and unarmed protesters and vicious antiriot police who used excessive and lethal force. Adopting a strategy of massive repression, the regime applied diverse violent techniques ranging from the use of "expired" tear gas and rubber and live bullets to mowing down demonstrators with police trucks and unleashing thousands of thugs armed with swords, knives, and machetes against the peaceful, unarmed protesters. The protesters were able in the end to defeat the security forces

²³The following discussion has been adapted from an article by the author that was published in *The Atlantic*. See Emad Shahin, "Mubarak's 5 Fatal Mistakes," *The Atlantic*, February 24, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/02/mubaraks-5-fatal-mistakes/71661/>.

on January 28 and the thugs on February 2 in what became known as the Battle of the Camel, thus scoring a major victory over the second pillar of the state, the NDP. As was revealed later, the Battle of the Camel was masterminded by some top NDP officials and NDP-affiliated businessmen.²⁴ The excessive use of force and the medieval scenes of thugs attacking protestors on camels and horses sealed the fate of Mubarak's regime and any chance for him to continue in power. With every death of a demonstrator, popular sympathy mounted and more people rushed to support the protestors. Some participants even informed me that "good thugs" from surrounding neighborhoods came to their rescue and helped overpower the "bad thugs." All in all, the regime's strategy of continued and excessive violence backfired, leaving its repressive machine completely broken by February 2. As a result, what started as a popular uprising with limited reform demands ended as a mass revolution that overthrew the regime.

Digital Iron Curtain

In preparation for a major crackdown against the demonstrators, Mubarak's regime cut off the Internet and cell phone services in Egypt on January 27 for several days. This measure was another fatal mistake that benefited the demonstrators because it affected the flow of communication between the security forces on the ground and their commanding officers in the headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior. According to security officers, many lost their walkie-talkies in the violent clashes and were unable to use their disconnected cell phones, which forced them into full withdrawal and eventually led to their retreat on the afternoon of Friday, January 28. Unable to use cell phones to check on demonstrating relatives in Tahrir Square, families flocked in thousands to the square and stayed by their kin throughout the clashes with the security forces. Finally, the lack of cell phone and Internet communication forced protest organizers to plan events ahead of time and devise an advance schedule. All Egypt took notice of the early invitation to participate in the planned massive demonstrations on Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday.

Targeting Foreign Media

The systematic targeting of foreign correspondents and some TV stations exposed the regime's ugly face and turned Western public opinion against Mubarak. The regime's strategy started with shutting down al-Jazeera and arresting its correspondents in Cairo. Because it is almost impossible to block

²⁴Sherif Tarek, "Bosses, Enforcers and Thugs in Egypt's Battle of the Camel to See Harsh Retribution," Ahronline, April 19, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/10293/Egypt/Politics-/Bosses,-enforcers-and-thugs-in-Egypt-Battle-of-th.aspx>).

out the media, al-Jazeera continued its direct and live coverage of the events and aired news through other satellite stations. Its coverage was broadcast live on big screens in the square, and the protesters gave al-Jazeera the name of "The Voice of the Revolution." Scenes of well-known correspondents being harassed and hit in the square by Mubarak's thugs were incredibly repulsive and were widely viewed as unprecedented cruelty against professional media crews who were simply trying to report the facts to the rest of the world. These scenes highlighted the true nature of Mubarak's regime and stressed the need for his departure.

Stubbornness

The regime's slow political response to the crisis and its excessive violence were exacerbated by its offer of too few concessions to the protesters. This refusal to take the protestors seriously created an incentive for the protesters to keep raising their ceiling of demands. Recall that the demonstrators started on 25 January by demanding freedom and ending police brutality. As days passed, the ceiling of demands started to gradually rise as the regime's disappointing responses continued to fall short of the protesters' expectations. The list of demands began to escalate from "Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice" to "The People Want to Change the Regime," to "The People Want to Try the Butcher," to "The People Want to Clean up the State Institutions."

Mubarak had at least three opportunities to offer an adequate political solution to the crisis and defuse the situation. He could have expressed understanding of the people's demands early on and shuffled the entire cabinet to bring new, more credible faces to the government. Instead, he changed the cabinet while retaining fifteen of his old, corrupt ministers. He also could have assured the people that he was not running for a sixth term of office or planning to transfer power to his son. Instead, he was ambiguous on both points, which led many Egyptians to question his credibility. And when he finally did admit that he understood the demonstrators' grievances and was willing to change, the very next day he unleashed his thugs to attack and brutalize peaceful protesters. His intransigence shattered any hope that could cling to power.

On February 11, 2011, Mubarak abdicated and transferred his authority to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). The SCAF moved quickly to dismiss the parliament, suspend the constitution, and promise elections within six months, but its position throughout the revolution quickly raised questions. In a few days, the SCAF moved from a pivotal supporter of Mubarak's regime to a self-proclaimed "defender of the revolution." The military waited for some time before it finally decided which side to take. Many Egyptians believe that the SCAF took the side of the people in this confrontation and sided with the revolution, while others believe that it simply took a position that served its own interests as a military establishment. In

choosing not to fire at the unarmed protesters and instead letting Mubarak go, the military took control of the revolution and managed the transition process, thus ensuring its continued influence over the country's politics.

As the security forces broke down and withdrew on January 28, Mubarak called in the military to suppress the protesters and maintain order. Reportedly, instructions were already given to suppress the demonstrators, but the military officers refused to shoot and remained neutral. In fact, because the protesters had faced the brutality of the security police for several days, they cheered at the sight of military forces stepping into Tahrir Square and other parts of the country to fill the vacuum left by the disappearance of the police. Protestors greeted the military with flowers, hugs, and slogans, chanting with enthusiasm: "The army and the people are one hand!" Some protesters even slept between the tracks of the tanks to prevent the army from leaving the square. A few days later, on January 31, the army issued several statements and communiqués in which it asserted its support for the legitimate demands of the people, assured the nation that it would not use violence against the peaceful protesters, and gave guarantees to protect the freedom of expression through peaceful means.

The army's position during the Battle of the Camel raises serious questions, however. On February 2, thousands of Mubarak's supporters charged into Tahrir Square. On the backs of camels and horses and carrying swords, clubs, and machetes, these supporters began attacking the unarmed protesters in an attempt to intimidate and disperse them. For eighteen hours, the unarmed protesters were subject to these attacks, which quickly escalated with the use of rocks and Molotov cocktail bombs. Snipers equipped with laser-guided rifles (only available to state security forces) shot at the demonstrators, killing dozens and injuring hundreds. Throughout these violent clashes, the army refrained from intervening and refused to protect the unarmed protesters, despite their repeated pleas for intervention. Additionally, the day after Mubarak's departure, the SCAF gave firm instructions to the protesters to disperse from Tahrir Square and go home. Military police removed the tents and blankets from the square and engaged in scuffles with the protesters, beating them with sticks. Scores of protesters were detained and allegedly tortured in the area around the Egyptian museum where army units were stationed. Despite the protestors' success in removing Mubarak, the SCAF announced that it would keep and work with the cabinet that Mubarak had appointed on January 31 to run the country until the transition process was completed. However, massive demonstrations forced the SCAF to dismiss this cabinet on February 24.

After the removal of Mubarak, tension grew between the SCAF and the protesters, who were dismayed by the slow pace of change and who felt that they may have overthrown Mubarak, but not his regime. There are serious doubts that the military will introduce true democratic reform by withdrawing from politics and handing over power to civilians.

CONCLUSION

The success of the January 25 revolution in overthrowing a strongly entrenched and sclerotic regime surprised many, including the organizers of the protests themselves. This revolution had built up over several years of political repression, economic mismanagement, social injustice, police brutality, and mounting political activism. The movement ultimately toppled a regime that had monopolized power for three decades, controlled the political process, and suppressed individual and collective initiatives. Despite years of government-imposed political stagnation, grassroots protest movements, public figures, and independent journals articulated a well-defined reform agenda and gradually mobilized support for it. These movements succeeded in raising the level of opposition to and criticism of the regime, breaking the fear barrier, and inciting people to take their dissent to the streets, thus defying the regime's repressive machine.

The January 25 revolution was a true people's revolution that developed some unique features. It was inclusive of various social classes, groups, and movements. It transcended ideological differences and focused on a shared list of demands that united the protesters during the eighteen days of the revolution and kept the protest momentum alive and strong. The revolution exhibited remarkable levels of pluralism and tolerance that had been missing in Egyptian society for decades. These values were reified in a new national spirit, which Egyptians called the "Spirit of Tahrir."

The youth played a key role in setting the stage for this popular revolution. From 2004 onwards, they were major participants in many of the protest movements, which provided them with important political and organizational experience. The youth then built on those experiences and combined them with modern organizational skills to achieve a mobilization of the masses that led to a successful revolution. During this decade, many of the youth grew dissatisfied with the traditional style of the old political parties and the inability of many of the emerging pro-change movements to achieve any real breakthroughs.

The revolution succeeded in highlighting and aggregating the political, economic, and social grievances of the Egyptian people. The combination of the political and socioeconomic dimensions was instrumental to the formation of this mass uprising. In this regard, the revolution in Tunisia was extremely important in raising hopes and showing the way to successfully overthrow an autocratic regime through nonviolent means. The peaceful strategy that the organizers of the protests used certainly contributed to the success of the revolution. Generally committed to nonviolence, the peaceful protests generated the support of millions of Egyptians, as well as the respect of the outside world. The unarmed and peaceful response of the demonstrators accentuated the repressive measures of a desperate regime and exposed

its brutality, thus delegitimizing Mubarak and generating domestic and international pressures for his departure.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author thanks Christina Buchhold for her invaluable assistance with this article.