

EGYPT'S REVOLUTION ONE YEAR LATER

Introduction

Focus

This *News in Review* story focuses on the first anniversary of the Egyptian revolution that toppled a dictator. It also assesses the country's difficult progress toward democracy since that time.

Further Information

The March 2011 *News in Review* story "Egypt and the Days of Anger" covers the events of the Egyptian revolution up to the fall of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

On January 25, 2012, thousands of Egyptians flocked to Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo to mark a significant anniversary in their country's history. On that very spot exactly a year before, the first protests had broken out against the 30-year dictatorial regime of President Hosni Mubarak, which eventually led to the hated ruler resigning from office. The Egyptian army stepped in as a transitional authority but vowed to hand over power to a civilian government as soon as elections could be held and a new, democratic constitution written.

But a year later the mood was far less buoyant. Egypt had been through a number of upheavals since Mubarak's overthrow, and it was far from clear that the country's progress toward a democratic future was assured. Many of those who had taken part in the initial protests were frustrated at the army's reluctance to hand over power quickly, and some even suspected that Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, the head of the ruling military council, was trying to thwart the democratic process. Protests against continuing military rule and suppression of human rights had turned violent, resulting in loss of life and many injuries. To some, it seemed that the Egyptian revolution would not be over until the military was no longer in power. But who would replace them was anyone's guess.

In the meantime, Egypt had held its first free elections, a significant step on the bumpy road to democracy. But the results had come as a disappointment to those who hoped that Egypt's future government would be liberal and non-religious. Pro-Islamist parties, whose base of support was largely in the rural, more conservative regions of the country, won an overwhelming victory and seemed poised to influence the framing of the new constitution, which could strengthen the role of Islam in the country's society and legal system. To non-religious liberals and Egypt's small but significant Coptic Christian minority, this was a cause for great concern.

In August, Egyptians of all political persuasions were united by a sight that many of them had not even dared to hope for. The former dictator, Hosni Mubarak, was brought to trial on charges of corruption and ordering the killings of protesters during the demonstrations in Tahrir Square. It was the first time any Arab leader had been tried by his people—and the country was transfixed by the spectacle. For whatever the future might hold for Egypt, Mubarak's trial made it clear that there would be no return to his hated regime. But as of early 2012, the path to democracy looked long and difficult, with many roadblocks on the way before the dreams born in Tahrir Square might come to fruition.

To Consider

1. How many years do you think it will likely take before Egyptians know if the revolution of 2011 achieved its goals?
2. Is it unreasonable to expect that the country should be stable on its first anniversary, or not?
3. Despite the fact that Canada became a united country in 1867, it is referred to as a young country, and one that is still establishing itself. What challenges does Canada still face, and how might that help us understand the challenges facing Egypt?

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Video Review

Pre-viewing Questions

With a partner or in a small group discuss and respond to the following.

1. What do you know about events in Egypt since the revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011?

2. Why do you think some Egyptians might be unhappy with what has happened in their country since Mubarak was overthrown?

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. Who was the president of Egypt who was overthrown in February 2011? For how long had he been in power?

2. What was the main location for the anti-government protests?

3. How many days did it take for the protesters to achieve their goal? How many protesters were killed or injured during the demonstrations?

4. Who took power after the revolution succeeded? What promise did this group make?

5. Why are some Egyptians frustrated and angry about what has occurred since the revolution began a year ago?

6. What political groups won the most seats in the parliamentary elections? Why does this worry some Egyptians?

7. How does the Giza apartment that Nahlah Ayed and her CBC crew visited represent a miniature version of Egyptian society?

8. What is the name of the Islamist political group that has set up its headquarters in the building?

9. How are the residents reacting to the presence of this group in their building?

10. What is the name of the Islamist group that won the most seats in the election?

11. Why is the doorman of the building optimistic that residents will be able to work out their differences?

12. When are the first presidential elections since the revolution scheduled to take place?

Post-viewing Questions

1. After watching the video, revisit your responses to the Pre-viewing Questions. Did watching the video help you respond to the questions in greater depth? In what way?

2. If you were a young Egyptian looking for work, how would you feel about the revolution that began in early 2011 and its progress since then?

3. If you were a woman living in the Giza apartment building featured in the video, how would you feel about the presence of a radical Islamist party's office in it?

4. How would you characterize the views of the Egyptians living in the apartment building who are interviewed in the video?

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Overview of a Tumultuous Year

Further Research

For in-depth coverage of the unfolding events in Egypt, view the CBC News Special Report, "Egypt's road to democracy," www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/01/29/f-egypt-uprising.html.

Focus for Reading

In your notebooks, create an organizer like the one below. As you read the following information on the main events that have occurred in Egypt since the fall of Mubarak, record key points in your organizer. You should be able to enter at least two or three points in each section. You will be using this information in the activities that follow the text material.

<p>A Triumphant Aftermath (February – March 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egyptians celebrated the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's regime and hoped for a swift transition to democracy. • The military leaders appealed to Egyptians to stop demonstrating, obey the law, and return to work.
<p>Months of Protest (April – July 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
<p>The Trial of Hosni Mubarak (August 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
<p>Demonstrations and Elections (September 2011 – January 2012)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
<p>A Clouded Anniversary (January – February 2012)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •

A Triumphant Aftermath (February – March, 2011)

Egyptians were in a state of collective euphoria following the toppling of Hosni Mubarak's hated dictatorship on February 11, 2011. The thousands who had taken up residence in Cairo's Tahrir Square over the 18-day uprising packed their belongings and returned home, but not before voluntarily cleaning up the entire area. For its part, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which had assumed a leadership role in the transition to democracy, promised it would swiftly hand over power to a civilian government after elections were held and a new constitution drawn up. But many Egyptians, emboldened by their dramatic success, were pressing for more radical and rapid change in almost every aspect of society. Workers went

on strike, demanding higher wages and improved conditions, and anti-Mubarak protesters insisted on a thorough house-cleaning of remnants of the old regime. But the leaders of the SCAF were anxious to restore stability and appealed to Egyptians to stop protesting and return to work. Even in the early weeks of Egypt's newfound freedom, some cracks in the alliance between the army and the protesters were beginning to emerge.

Months of Protest (April – July 2011)

On March 19, the vast majority of Egyptians voted in favour of a package of proposed constitutional amendments put to them in a national referendum approved by the SCAF. But critics of the proposals warned that a "yes" vote would hand a blank cheque to the army

to proceed without significant civilian input into the process. On April 1, a large crowd gathered in Tahrir Square for a Save the Revolution protest, calling on the army to move faster to introduce democracy and purge the government of remnants of the old Mubarak regime. In the weeks that followed, the square was the scene of a number of huge rallies organized by rival political factions, including a weekly Million Man march of the Muslim Brotherhood, beginning on April 8.

The Brotherhood, a pro-Islamist group once banned under Mubarak, was quickly becoming a force to be reckoned with in Egypt's new political configuration. Well-organized and with deep roots in many sectors of Egyptian society, its calls for a more Islamic social and legal system were gaining widespread approval.

But liberal and secular Egyptians, who had been at the forefront of the anti-Mubarak protests, were deeply concerned about the rise in Islamist sentiment. Despite their serious differences, both groups agreed that the military was moving far too slowly in implementing democratic reforms, and protests against the SCAF reached a violent crescendo by late June and July, when demonstrations in Tahrir Square and other locations in Egypt led to bloodshed. At this point, some protesters were even calling for a second revolution, this time against the SCAF and its leader, Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi.

The Trial of Hosni Mubarak (August 2011)

Whatever their views regarding Egypt's future, most people were united in taking grim satisfaction about the drama they witnessed on television on August 3, when the ailing former president, Hosni Mubarak, was brought to court to face charges against him. It was an event

unprecedented not only in Egypt, but also in the entire Arab world. A once-powerful despot was being placed on trial by his own people for crimes including massive corruption and ordering the shooting of unarmed demonstrators during the protests leading up to his overthrow. Brought into the packed courtroom on a hospital gurney, Mubarak pleaded "not guilty" to all the charges leveled against him. Others appearing in court that day included Mubarak's two sons, Ala'a and Gamal, former interior minister Habib el-Adly, and six senior police officers. Although the trial was quickly postponed because of Mubarak's seriously declining health, the very fact that he had been brought to court was a highly significant event. It demonstrated to all Egyptians that there would be no return to his hated 30-year dictatorship, and that even the most powerful figure in the country, a man who had once compared himself to the pharaohs of ancient times, was not above the law. In late February 2012, the presiding judge in the trial announced that Mubarak's verdict would be handed down on June 2.

Demonstrations and Elections (September 2011 – January 2012)

A series of often-violent protests continued to sweep through Cairo and other Egyptian cities in the fall of 2011. Some of the violence was directed against the country's small but influential Coptic Christian minority, whose members had largely supported the popular movement against Mubarak. Many observers had been struck by the obvious harmony between Christians and Muslims, united in a common cause, during the occupation of Tahrir Square. But after an attack on a Coptic church in late September, the army used force to suppress the demonstrations that followed, accusing the Copts of acting outside the law. Some feared that the army's action was a deliberate ploy to

divide the revolutionaries by appealing to Islamist sentiment that was suspicious of secular Egyptians' demands for a non-religious society where the Copts would not feel threatened.

At the end of November, Egyptians began voting for an elected People's Assembly, whose main task would be to draw up a new constitution for the country. Despite a wave of violent protests in the run-up to the vote, and demands that it be postponed, the SCAF ordered the election to proceed. Voting began in Cairo and proceeded in stages throughout the country, with final tallies not officially announced until early January 2012. The results were a shock to liberal and secular Egyptians, but a cause for celebration among their more religious fellow-citizens. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party took almost half of the seats, followed by the Salafi al-Nour Party, an even more extreme Islamist group, which won about one-quarter. For their part, liberal groupings like the United Egyptians Bloc were able to win only a quarter of the seats in an assembly that would clearly be overwhelmingly dominated by groups dedicated to enhancing the role of Islam in Egyptian society and underwriting this in the country's new constitution.

A Clouded Anniversary (January – February 2012)

On February 1, over 70 people were killed in a stadium in the city of Port Said after a soccer game when supporters of two rival teams clashed on the field. While sports-related violence is not unknown in Egypt, this particular episode was particularly bloody, and many believed it reflected the growing political divisions and chaos in the country. Some accused the army of being behind the violence in order to discredit soccer fan organizations that had been

involved in the anti-Mubarak protests almost a year before. The public outcry and suspicions surrounding this tragic event were clear evidence that for many Egyptians, their country was entering a troubling and uncertain period in its history. The economy was reeling, with many workers on strike for higher wages and production at a standstill. In addition, the tourism industry, a major earner of foreign currency and provider of employment, was suffering because the continuing unrest was keeping foreign visitors away. As a gesture of goodwill to those calling on the army to move faster toward democratic reform, Tantawi announced the lifting of the decades-old State of Emergency, used to ban protests and jail political dissidents without cause, just one day before the anniversary of the beginning of the anti-Mubarak revolution on January 25.

Egyptians had much to celebrate one year after the fall of Hosni Mubarak. They had voted for the first time in a free election and were moving, albeit slowly and painfully, toward a more democratic future. But to many, the changes, however dramatic, were too little, too late. Some called for the immediate removal of the SCAF and for presidential elections by June 2012. Others believed that much more needed to be done to improve the lives and working conditions of Egypt's impoverished majority, who had enjoyed few if any benefits since the revolution began. And the split between liberal, secular-minded Egyptians, who feared the rise of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis, and their more religious counterparts who backed them, was growing wider by the day. As the nation looked back over a tumultuous year in its history, few could predict what the future might hold for Egypt, one year after the hopeful blossoming of the Arab Spring.

Follow-up

1. With a partner, compare the information in your summary chart. Help each other complete any missing information.
2. Which of the events in this section represent examples of unity among Egyptians and which of them could be considered examples of disunity? Give reasons for your choices.
3. What are the main differences between secular and Islamist Egyptians regarding the country's political, social, religious, and legal systems?
4. Do you think the anniversary of the overthrow of the Mubarak regime is a cause for celebration among Egyptians? Why or why not?

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Three Children of the Egyptian Revolution

Focus for Reading

The documentary *Children of the Revolution* focuses on the involvement of three young Egyptians in the events taking place over the year following the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's regime in February 2011. While all of them supported the revolution that toppled the dictatorship, they have very different views regarding what kind of society and government should replace it.

As you read the following profiles, note how the social, economic, and religious backgrounds of these three young Egyptians have influenced their views about what kind of future they want for themselves and their country.

Gigi Ibrahim

Twenty-four-year-old Gigi Ibrahim became the poster girl of the Egyptian revolution when her picture appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. Attractive, personable, and completely fluent in English, Ibrahim comes from a wealthy family that lives in a large house in a well-to-do suburb of Cairo. Her father, a successful businessman, originally profited from his ties to the Mubarak regime but later became disillusioned with its corruption and heavy-handedness. Ibrahim, who recently graduated from the American University of Cairo, wants Egypt to become a democratic, secular, and socialist society following the revolution in which she played a key role.

Ibrahim was actively involved in the protests in Tahrir Square that resulted in the overthrow of Mubarak and recorded her on-the-spot impressions of the events through Tweets, text messages, and photographs. In the course of her political activism, she often clashed with fellow protesters whose vision of Egypt's future is very different from hers. On one occasion, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood challenged her right as a woman to be taking pictures of their activities and threatened to take her camera away by force. Ibrahim is confident that the Egypt she is fighting for will be free of any overtly religious

influence, but fears that her views may not be shared by a majority of her fellow-citizens. As for her father, although he is very proud of the role his daughter is playing in the revolution, he worries about her safety as the ongoing clashes between liberal and Islamist groups sporadically erupt in violence.

Ahmed Hassan

Ahmed Hassan is about the same age as Ibrahim, but the world he inhabits is totally different from hers. Hassan lives with his widowed mother and younger brother in a run-down apartment in Shubra, one of Cairo's poorest neighbourhoods. Unemployed and looking for work when the revolution broke out, he immediately joined the protests in Tahrir Square. He and most of his friends were strongly opposed to the Mubarak regime because they believed it had done nothing to help them find employment and improve their living conditions. An intense, ambitious young man, Hassan wants to rise in society and be able to provide for himself and his mother through honest and fulfilling work.

Hassan played a key role in the protests and at one point was arrested and held by the police for 15 hours. Initially, he was hopeful that his involvement in the revolution that overthrew Mubarak would gain him

favour with prospective employers. But in the months that followed, he became increasingly frustrated and disillusioned after finding out that his record as an activist was being held against him. He finds it grimly ironic that the SCAF has plastered his neighbourhood with slogans proclaiming, “Work is our only solution,” when he is having such difficulties finding a job. Hassan is proud of his role in the events of Tahrir Square and is still hopeful that Egypt will become a fairer and more equitable society for the millions of young people who, like him, remain unemployed and restless. But with each passing day, he is becoming increasingly doubtful that the new Egypt he fought for will be any better than the old one that offered him, his family, and his friends so little.

Tahir Yasin

Tahir Yasin is a young activist in the Salafi al-Nour party, which promotes a vision of Egypt as an Islamic society ruled by Sharia religious law. During the Mubarak regime, Yasin was in and out of jail because of his Islamist activities, at one time arrested for teaching the Qu’ran to his students at an illegal madrassa, or religious school. Yasin was originally a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood but broke with that organization because he

believed it was becoming too moderate. He wants to see Egypt become a strict Islamic state similar to Saudi Arabia, and strongly opposes those like Ibrahim who call for a more liberal, secular society. In particular, Yasin believes that women should play a minimal role in public affairs and dedicate themselves to their traditional functions of raising children and looking after the household.

In the days before the November 2011 elections, Yasin paid a visit to a small town in rural Egypt and met with a close friend, the local mayor. There he was happy to experience an example of the country he and his party are fighting for—a place where fathers are the head of the house, where religion is incorporated into almost every aspect of life, and where unsettling Western influences and media are kept under strict control. The election itself, which resulted in a great triumph for his al-Nour Party, was cause for a double celebration for Yasin, whose wedding coincided with the vote. Dressed in a smart Western suit beside his heavily veiled bride, Yasin looked forward to an Egypt where he could marry more than one wife and where his strict Islamic beliefs would form the foundation for the country’s political, legal, and social systems.

Follow-up

1. With a partner, discuss your responses to the Focus for Reading task. How have the backgrounds of these three young Egyptians influenced the way they feel about the revolution and the future of Egypt?
2. With which of these three children of the revolution do you feel the most in common? With which do you feel the least in common? Why?
3. As a class viewing activity, watch the documentary *Children of the Revolution*, available online at www.cbc.ca/passionateeye/episode/egypt-children-of-the-revolution.html and follow the involvement of Ibrahim, Hassan, and Yasin over the course of the events taking place from the fall of the Mubarak regime to the elections held in late 2011 and early 2012. Note their responses to these events and how they have influenced their views about what is likely to happen in Egypt in the future.

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Nahlah Ayed's The House that Tahrir Built

CBC reporter Nahlah Ayed has covered the dramatic events of the Arab Spring in Egypt and other countries in the region for CBC viewers over the course of 2011. Born into a Palestinian-Canadian family in Winnipeg, she is fluent in Arabic and English and joined the CBC in 2002. She is a graduate of Carleton University's school of journalism and also holds a science degree from the University of Manitoba, specializing in genetics. In 2007 she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Manitoba for her coverage of events in the Middle East. Based in Amman, Jordan, in 2003, she spent time in Baghdad prior to the Iraq War and later returned to the city to report on how it had changed following the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Her coverage of these events won her a Gemini Award nomination.

From 2006 to 2009 Ayed was the CBC's correspondent in Beirut, Lebanon, and reported on events such as the 2006

Lebanon War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza in 2007. In 2009 she was again nominated for a Gemini Award and a year later went to Iran to cover the disputed presidential election in that country. On more than one occasion, Ayed has risked personal injury as a result of her reporting on potentially dangerous and violent situations in the Middle East.

In 2011, she and her CBC production crew based themselves in an apartment building in the Egyptian city of Giza, taking time to become acquainted with its residents and discuss with them their views of the revolution that was transforming their country. Her documentary, *The House that Tahrir Built*, which aired on *The National* in January 2012, offers an eyewitness account of how ordinary Egyptians with different backgrounds and beliefs are responding to the dramatic events that are transforming their country and what their hopes for its future might be.

Activity

Use the following link to watch interviews with and learn about the residents of *The House that Tahrir Built* and their views of the Egyptian revolution: www.cbc.ca/news/interactives/egypt-apartment/.

Working in pairs or small groups, make notes on the people who are featured in this documentary:

1. Abd al-Atee Abd al-Hameed, the doorman of the building
2. Emad Abou Basha, a businessman and political commentator
3. Dr. Hisham Abu al-Nasr, a medical doctor and official with the Salafi al-Nour Party
4. Islam Hindy, the owner of the building and a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood
5. Nisreen and Ahmed Gabr, a married couple; Nisreen is an accountant and Ahmed works in the struggling tourism industry
6. Nour Abou Basha, the daughter of Emad Abou Basha, a university student, political activist, and devout Muslim

Follow-up

1. When you have finished watching the video clips, report to the class on what you learned about these individuals, their lives, backgrounds, and views of the events taking place in Egypt.
2. As a class, summarize the similarities and differences you noticed in the backgrounds and beliefs of the residents in *The House that Tahrir Built*. Which do you think are greater: the similarities or the differences? Why?
3. As a class, discuss the kind of Egypt the people in *The House that Tahrir Built* would like to see emerge from the revolution. Do you think there are any areas where they might be able to agree? Why or why not?
4. After viewing *The House that Tahrir Built* you may wish to send your comments on it using the Twitter or Facebook icons featured on the link above.

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Activity: Forecasting Egypt's Future

Just over one year after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian revolution appeared to be a work in progress with no clear resolution in sight. The military remained in power, a new constitution had still to be written, and a date for presidential elections had not yet been determined. Meanwhile, various factions, including moderate and hard-line Islamists, supporters of the military, and liberal, secular Egyptians jockey for power, trying to position themselves favourably for the return to civilian authority over the country.

At the same time, Egypt's economy was struggling with rising unemployment, while revenues from the once-lucrative tourism industry were declining dramatically due to the unrest. A growing number of people, especially among the poorest groups in Egyptian society, were becoming disenchanted with the promises of a revolution that so far appeared to be failing to deliver any tangible benefits for them. But whether this groundswell of discontent would result in continuing violence, or even a possible second revolution, remained to be seen.

Your Task

Form groups to prepare and present a scenario for one of the following possible outcomes of the Egyptian revolution. Using the material contained in this *News in Review* story, along with the Web-based sources listed below, gather information on the events and developments of the Egyptian revolution to date and make a forecast for how you think it might be likely to play out, based on the scenario you have chosen to present. In your report, be sure to explain why you think your scenario for the future of Egypt is likely to occur.

Scenario 1: Egypt becomes a moderate Islamic state with the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) playing a major role.

Scenario 2: Egypt becomes a strictly conservative Islamic state, influenced by the beliefs of the hard-line Salafi al-Nour Party.

Scenario 3: Egypt becomes a Western-style secular democracy with liberal political factions such as the United Egyptians Bloc in power.

Scenario 4: The SCAF decides to delay the transfer to civilian democratic rule due to continuing instability in the country and extends military rule over Egypt indefinitely.

You may wish to consult the following sources of information to complete this activity:

- CBC: "Egypt's road to democracy," www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/01/29/f-egypt-uprising.html
- BBC: "Egypt's revolution," www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12315833
- Al-Jazeera: "Egypt's revolution one year on," www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/egypt-one-year-on/
- CNN: "Egypt," <http://topics.cnn.com/topics/egypt>