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## Egyptians have lost faith in Morsi

Most feel that the authoritarian Mubarak government has been replaced by another oppressive regime.

By Dalibor Rohac – June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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As Mohamed Morsi prepares to mark his first anniversary as president Sunday, Egypt is bracing for a fresh wave of protests.

The Tamarod (or Rebel) campaign has reportedly collected more than 15 million signatures demanding Morsi's resignation and an early presidential election. In response, the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated ruling Freedom and Justice Party is organizing rallies in support of the government. Last week, tens of thousands of FJP supporters were brought in on buses from rural areas to Cairo's Nasr City neighborhood, where they chanted slogans such as "Islam is the solution" and "The Koran is the constitution."

Things could take a nasty turn; after all, the Rebel campaign headquarters were burned down on June 7, and attacks on local FJP offices have been reported. The government is talking of a conspiracy aimed at bringing it down. "There is information about an arrangement among certain former MPs and Mubarak's National Democratic Party thugs to cause violence and mayhem in the June 30 demonstrations," said an FJP media advisor.

But that's just fear-mongering, Magdy Samaan, a Cairo-based journalist for London's Daily Telegraph, told me in an interview. "The constant talk about violence is aimed at keeping people at home on June 30.... Egyptians have never been more upset with their government than now, and the Muslim Brotherhood is afraid that more people will come to the streets than during the Arab Spring."

The popular discontent with Morsi is understandable. There has been crisis after crisis — economic and political — with many of the goals of the Arab Spring seemingly forgotten.

Over the last year, the government has done little to address the country's economic problems. The economy is expected to grow at 2.5% in the current fiscal year — barely half of pre-2011 growth rates — and the budget deficit is now at 11.5% of GDP.

The deficit is overwhelmingly driven by wasteful subsidies to fuels and food, accruing mostly to wealthy households and big businesses, while the poor face shortages. The imports of subsidized commodities are draining the country's foreign reserves — now at one-third their 2010 levels. Instead of proceeding with systemic reform of the subsidy system, Morsi's government has a pattern of announcing partial reform initiatives but with very little, or no, follow-through.

The unemployment rate has been rising steadily since 2010. The current rate is 13.2%, with 77% of the unemployed between the ages of 15 and 29. The lack of private-sector-led job creation can be blamed on the complicated system of taxation, lax enforcement of contracts and a byzantine system of construction permits.

"The government has no specific vision for the economy and is reluctant to pursue any reforms before the parliamentary election," Samaan said.

Morsi's political record is even worse. In early June, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that the elections in 2011 and 2012 to the FJP-dominated upper house of Egypt's parliament, the Shura Council, as well as to the country's constitutional committee were unconstitutional. Political parties had been allowed to compete for the one-third of seats reserved for independents, while independent candidates were prevented from competing for the remaining seats reserved for party candidates.

This, in effect, discriminated against the independents. Instead of rectifying the problem, it is business as usual for the FJP, with the Shura Council legislating as before.

Then there was the unprecedented 2011 crackdown by the transitional military government on nongovernmental organizations operating in the country, including Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute. The prosecution continued under Morsi's presidency, and the 43 defendants in the case — including 16 Americans — were convicted and sentenced to prison this month, most in absentia. Their crime? The organizations were working "without proper licenses" and had received foreign funding.

Uglier still, documents leaked in April show that the Egyptian military took part in torture and killings during the early months of 2011. More than 1,000 people are reported to have disappeared during the 18 days of protests.

The report that the leaked documents came from was submitted to Morsi in January, but he has not made the findings public or asked for a public investigation as a result of the revelations. Instead, Egypt's defense minister, Gen. Abdel Fattah Sisi, warned the public against slandering the military.

In short, Egyptians increasingly feel that Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian government has never gone away but was simply replaced by another oppressive regime and kept in check only by a powerful military. "And that would have been OK with most of them, if the government had improved the economy or opened space for personal self-expression," Samaan said.

Because none of these things has materialized, Morsi is now treading on thin ice. We shall soon see how strong his hold on power really is.