VIOLENCE AGAINST COPTS IN EGYPT

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Contents

About the Author

Jason Brownlee, an associate professor of government and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Texas at Austin, is the author of two books and dozens of articles on comparative politics, Middle Eastern politics, and U.S. foreign policy. In 2010–2011 he was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, where he completed research for his second book, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2012. For 2012–2013 he received a grant from the United States Institute of Peace to examine the sources of violence against Copts in Egypt. He is currently studying how ideas of economic insecurity have historically shaped U.S. foreign policy.

Summary

The Egyptian Orthodox Christian community—the Copts—has been the target of violence and discrimination since the 1970s and especially following the revolution that overthrew Hosni Mubarak. The Egyptian state has done little to remedy the situation and has at times enabled the conflict between Muslims and Christians. Achieving religious freedom and equality depends on building state institutions that can guarantee all citizens' constitutional rights.

The Conflict

- Regime-church relations deteriorated in the 1970s under President Anwar Sadat, who embraced Islam and Islamists as a counterweight to the left.

- Churches are flash points for anti-Coptic attacks. The construction and renovation of churches is a highly political process in Egypt that has historically required presidential approval to proceed.

- When Copts are physically attacked, the army and police frequently do not intervene to ensure public safety, enabling the spread of assaults. On occasion, such as an incident at the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (Maspero) in October 2011, security personnel have even used lethal violence against unarmed Copts.

- While attacks by Muslims on Copts have a sectarian element, confessional differences are not the primary source of tension. Egypt's outdated laws and authoritarian institutions have made Copts a target of social conflict.

Recommendations for the Egyptian Government

Broaden the political transition process to include a wider range of participants. Appointment of Coptic elites to ministerial posts or to the subset of unelected parliamentary seats may strengthen the voice of Christians in government and remedy institutional shortcomings. But this does not do away with the need to address inequality in the rest of the country.

Undertake security reforms that put police in the service of local communities. A relic of authoritarian rule, the police currently serve the Egyptian state instead of the Egyptian people. Police should protect all Egyptian citizens, including the Copts, not just the interests of the state.

Investigate the failure of security forces to defend churches and other sites targeted because of their connection to Coptic communities. Prosecution

of assailants and broader policy changes must be informed by a careful evaluation of recent events, including the negligence of security officials at all levels to provide basic security for Egyptian citizens of all faiths.

Revisit the recommendations of the al-Utayfi Committee's report. Released after a wave of sectarian clashes in 1971–1972, the report recommended that the government clarify procedures for church construction. Passing a unified law on construction of houses of worship and enforcing it can help alleviate a recurrent source of conflict.

Introduction

The demise of Egypt's elected Islamist government in July has not delivered a hopeful beginning for interfaith relations. Violence was rising in Egypt even before the military deposed President Mohamed Morsi in a coup embraced by millions, but social and political turmoil has only escalated since then. The killings by Egyptian security forces of upwards of 1,000 Morsi supporters in separate mass shootings in July and August have been the most notorious incidents. Lethal attacks on Egyptian Christians, Copts, are also cause for alarm. Assailants from the northern Sinai to southern Egypt have besieged churches and slain Coptic clergy and laypersons. This trend escalated after police violently cleared the main pro-Morsi protests in Cairo on August 14.[1]

A rash of hate crimes seldom bodes well. Now, during Egypt's second military-led transitional government in as many years, sectarian tension harkens back to the state indifference and social angst that fueled the original Egyptian Revolution of January 25, 2011. Human rights organizations have linked some attacks against Copts to partisans of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist organizations. They have also reported that the military and police have often made a bad situation worse, by ignoring calls for help and letting the perpetrators rampage freely. Their criticism reveals how Coptic security is tied to the broader effort to establish a government that treats Egyptians as citizens with rights rather than a problem to be managed.

The question of citizenship—full membership in the national political community—has bedeviled all Egyptians, whether they practice Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or another faith. The country officially became a republic in 1953, but state officials never became truly accountable to the public they ostensibly served. To take one particularly egregious example, the police have been as likely to prey upon Egyptians as to protect them. Hosni Mubarak's longest-serving minister of the interior went so far as to replace his department's slogan, "the police in the service of the people," with "the police and the people in the service of the nation."[2] In practice, the ministry's extortion schemes effectively put the people in the service of the police. In June 2010, when young entrepreneur Khaled Said threatened to expose police involvement in trafficking, two police officers in Alexandria hauled the young man from an Alexandria cybercafé and beat him to death. Said's killing, immortalized in the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook group, became a cause célèbre. Notably, the

> **Coptic security is tied to the broader effort to establish a government that treats Egyptians as citizens with rights rather than a problem to be managed.**

Ministry of the Interior from which Said's killers hailed has been one of the most criticized and least changed institutions of the ongoing transition.

For sixty years Egyptian leaders have defended a rigid hierarchy instead of instituting political equality. The country's military rulers shared power with only a few civilians. The rest of the population, numbering in the tens of millions, got by on whatever rights and opportunities the regime bestowed. Under such an authoritarian system, religious identity mattered less than wealth and personal connections to the army. It follows that most Egyptians, Muslims and Copts alike, have experienced a kind of second-class citizenship when interacting with their government.

What, then, has religion got to do with it? In a country that played an integral role in the global spread of Christianity and Islam, religion has served to fragment a society that is already sharply split between rulers and ruled. The regime of President Anwar Sadat grew more overtly pious in the 1970s, inserting the call to prayer into national television programs and banning the sale of alcohol in much of the country.[3] Copts found Egypt being defined in terms that excluded them from belonging in equal measure alongside Muslim Egyptians.

The problem of sectarianism persisted. Aside from a moment of intercommunal harmony during the eighteen-day uprising against Hosni Mubarak, Copts have faced discrimination and oppression under the former authoritarian regime and the transitional governments that followed it: the army's massacre of civilians at Maspero in October 2011; the siege on St. Mark's Cathedral in April 2013 near the end of Mohamed Morsi's presidency; the shootings, beheadings, and church burnings that General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's forces did little prevent after el-Sisi took power in July. In sum, Copts remain one of Egyptian society's most vulnerable communities.

> **Anti-Coptic violence during the past forty years emerged from the intersection of religious discourse and authoritarian control.**

Anti-Coptic violence during the past forty years emerged from the intersection of religious discourse and authoritarian control. Sadat promoted Islam in public life and rebuilt the Nasserist police state as a means of shoring up his political position. Coptic complaints about Morsi, which grew during his twelve-month tenure, are rightly seen in this light: the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and allied conservative Islamists exposed the Copts' political predicament, a predicament that had been produced by the old regime. Thus, the end of Egypt's first Islamist presidency does not presage a golden age for Muslim-Coptic relations, but merely a return to the subtler, pernicious problems of the Sadat-Mubarak era.

Violence against Egypt's Coptic community, the largest population of Christians in the Middle East, must be viewed in its historical and institutional context. Any attack by Muslims on Copts carries a sectarian element, but it is Egypt's outdated laws and authoritarian institutions, not confessional differences, that have made Copts a target of social conflict.

Aside from physical assaults, Copts face numerous forms of quotidian discrimination. Copts have been customarily barred from positions of leadership (including university presidencies and governorships, with a few exceptions discussed below) as well as positions deemed sensitive to national security, from the upper echelons of the security apparatus to the pedagogical front lines where Copts are prevented from teaching Arabic. Everyday forms of prejudice no doubt contribute to a climate of insecurity. Institutional changes will not be sufficient to bring about a shift in social attitudes, but state officials can build an environment where such shifts are much more likely to take place.

Today, a lack of political will and institutional reform helps explain why President Morsi's downfall has not made Copts feel safer. With respect to the law, when Copts want to construct or renovate their places of worship, an essential practice for freedom of belief and religious equality, they face a political minefield rather than a simple administrative process. Next, in terms of public safety, the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, Egypt's chief security institutions, have not altered the modus operandi they acquired under the Free Officers regime more than a half century ago. In the main, police and soldiers behave as if their first duty was to Egypt's political leaders, not its people, and when violence has erupted they have been absent or complicit. These flaws—as well as the broader phenomenon of anti-Coptic discrimination in everyday affairs—weigh heavily on current discussions of a "road map" to a stronger and more egalitarian Egypt. If the current cohort of leaders—officers and civilians—wishes to protect and include all Egyptians, it will need to enact the legal and security reforms that Sadat, Mubarak, Mohamed Hussein Tantawi (the armed forces commander who was de facto head of state after Mubarak's ouster), and Morsi failed to undertake. Such efforts could help rebuild a national sense of "Egyptianness" that has waned under secular and Islamist rulers alike.

From "Egyptianness" to Islamic Identity

The latest census (whose figures the Coptic Orthodox Church contests) estimates that Copts make up 7 percent of Egypt's population, thus numbering about 6 million.[4] No matter their demographic size, Copts have been prominently represented in parliament and Egyptian political life, notably during the Liberal Age of the 1920s. One of the reasons that today's rise in attacks on Copts has shocked Egyptians and outside observers is that this kind of anti-Coptic violence is relatively new: during the past four decades, sectarianism rose and Muslim-Coptic relations dramatically declined.

Copts have long been central to the struggle for national independence and popular sovereignty in Egypt. The height of Coptic political participation came in the 1920s. During the 1919 Revolution, a national identity transcended confessional cleavages as both Muslims and Copts protested British rule, not as members of their respective faiths but as fellow Egyptians. Saad Zaghloul

spearheaded this movement, and his party, the Wafd, provided an institutional aegis for Copts to seek office during the succeeding decades. The 1930s and 1940s, however, gave rise to religiously based organizations, chief among them the Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded in 1928, as well as an economic downturn that exacerbated social anxiety and worsened Muslim-Christian relations. Ironically, at that time foreign advocates of Christian rights, such as Anglican missionaries and British imperialists, weakened the Egyptian national identity by putting Islamist movements on the defensive and deepening confessional rifts. Great Britain used religion as part of a divide-and-rule strategy that maintained de facto British control, despite Egypt's formal independence after 1922. As confessional identities became more salient, Coptic politicians had an increasingly difficult time winning election to parliament. Even the Wafd tempered its support for Copts.[5]

After the 1952 coup that Gamal Abdel Nasser led and which brought him to power, Egyptians again came together under the umbrella of a national project. While Nasser banned and repressed the Muslim Brotherhood, he sought to build an Arab nation. Although this broad regional identity included Christians and Muslims, it lacked the distinctive Egyptianness that had tied the country together in the 1920s. Further, while Nasser's foreign policy did not discriminate based on religion, his domestic economic approach, which included sweeping land reform and expropriations as well as strictures on political speech and association, sent many wealthy Egyptians, numerous Copts among them, packing.

For Copts who did not emigrate, Nasser offered a patrimonial form of protection that bolstered social stability while enshrining political inequality. The Egyptian leader struck a partnership with the pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Kyrillos VI, in which Nasser would "ensure . . . the security of the community" and Kyrillos's status as the community's spokesperson. One legacy of this arrangement was the construction of churches that had previously been frozen but were licensed by Nasser.[6] This pact did not yield durable interfaith harmony. After Egypt's devastating loss of territory to Israel in June 1967, many Egyptians, Muslim and Christian, sought answers and a way forward in their faiths. Thus when Nasser's tenure ended, confessionalism was on the rise.

Regime-church relations deteriorated in the 1970s under the presidency of Anwar Sadat. Turning upon the remnants of Nasser's socialist entourage, Sadat embraced Islam and Islamists as a counterweight to the left. The 1971 constitution made the principles of Islamic sharia a principal source of legislation. The president also let Muslim Brotherhood leaders leave prison or return from exile abroad. After nearly two decades underground, the organization once more operated publicly.

While Sadat was unraveling Nasserism and empowering Islamists, sectarian violence rose. During 1971–1972 there were eleven confessional incidents, the majority of which originated in disputes over church construction or

renovation. These initial clashes did not garner serious government attention. Then, in November 1972, arsonists in al-Khanka, Qalyubia, torched the local headquarters of a Coptic organization, the Holy Bible Society, part of which was being used, illegally, as a church. Kyrillos's successor, Pope Shenouda III, ordered an entourage of priests to visit the site and celebrate mass. His instructions, which the priests carried out, incensed Sadat—who perceived Shenouda as challenging his authority—and also aggravated some Muslims in the area. After the priests left al-Khanka, attackers burned half a dozen nearby apartments belonging to Copts. The incident marked a new nadir for Muslim-Coptic relations since 1952.

In the aftermath, Sadat initiated a parliamentary investigation, led by Jamal al-Utayfi, one of the deputy speakers of the Egyptian House of Representatives (at that time the country's sole legislative body). The al-Utayfi Committee's final report recommended that the government clarify procedures for church construction to ease that flash point of communal conflict. By his own account, Mohammed Heikal, a close adviser of Sadat's at the time, encouraged the president to resume Nasser's practice of issuing the church twenty-five building permits a year. Sadat balked. After meeting with Shenouda and ranking leaders in the Coptic Orthodox Church, he grandly pledged to give twice the number of permits Nasser had granted. But he never followed through.[7] (His successor, Mubarak, did not fare much better; he is said to have given but ten during his first decade in office in the 1980s.)

As the years passed, Sadat's popularity declined and so did Muslim-Coptic relations. Rather than using his vast powers to defend Egypt's Coptic communities, the president reinforced Islamism in the public sphere. On Fridays, Egyptians could watch broadcasts of Sadat, the "believer president," attending weekly prayers, each time at a different mosque. Television programs of all kinds were interrupted five times a day for the call to prayer.[8] In 1980, embroiled in domestic controversy over Egypt's recent treaty with Israel and soaring inflation, Sadat used one of his signature plebiscites to alter the second article of the Egyptian constitution and make Islamic jurisprudence (sharia) the principal source of legislation. Shenouda bristled at Sadat's sectarianism, convening a series of conferences that:

> demanded government protection of Christians and their property, freedom of belief and worship, an end to the seizure of Church property by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, the abandonment of efforts to apply Islamic law to non-Muslims, as well as greater Coptic representation in labor unions, professional associations, local and regional councils, and parliament.[9]

As the pope resisted what he saw as creeping Islamization, Sadat charged that the Coptic Orthodox Church was acting as a fifth column, in league with the communists. He accused Shenouda of separatism, saying the Coptic pope wanted to carve off a piece of upper Egypt to form a Christian state.[10]

Elite discord soon reverberated in social conflict. In June 1981 firefights broke out between Copts and Muslims in the Cairo neighborhood of El Zawya el Hamra. Once more, the precipitant was a controversy over church construction. When a group of Muslims began erecting a mosque on private property slated for a Coptic Church, Copts shot at them. Muslims retaliated, and the Ministry of Interior let the battle rage for three days before intervening. The crisis in El Zawya el Hamra left seventeen people dead (nine of them Copts) and 112 injured. Critics faulted Sadat for cultivating an environment of intercommunal suspicion and not curtailing the violence when it began. The increasingly isolated Sadat thought the social turmoil justified further repression. That September, he swept up more than 1,500 critics, Muslims and Copts, and placed Shenouda under house arrest. This "Autumn of Fury" climaxed when Islamist militants shot and killed the president at a military parade commemorating the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.[11]

The Unlearned Lessons of al-Khanka

Under Sadat, the policy issue that most often troubled Coptic communities was the renovation and construction of churches, a seemingly straightforward issue that successive Egyptian governments have failed to address.[12]

For much of the Ottoman period, local leaders decided who could build houses of worship. In 1856, though, a decree known as the Hamayouni Edict shifted authority over places of non-Islamic worship from the local authorities to the central government of the Ottoman Empire. While this move still left decisions about building houses of non-Islamic worship subject to the discretion of the sultan, Egyptian Christians considered it an advance because local leaders were often biased against them. All the same, after Egypt gained partial independence from Great Britain in 1922, it moved toward modern statehood without a formal legal framework governing church construction. In 1934 Deputy Interior Minister El-Ezaby Pasha laid out a list of ten questions that became a loose set of guidelines for when Christians could receive a permit to build churches (see box 1). The questions implied, among other issues, that new churches should be a reasonable distance from existing mosques, they should enjoy the consent of the neighboring Muslim population, and they should not be too close to any existing churches.

After the July 23 Revolution of 1952, the president of Egypt became the authorizing figure for church construction, renovations, and repairs. However, even as Copts periodically enjoyed favorable attention from the president, the El-Ezaby "conditions" had the pernicious effect of shifting authority back to the local level and even to Muslims in the vicinity of potential construction sites. Therefore, even as the Free Officers regime guaranteed freedom of religious belief in principle, in practice Copts struggled to obtain the necessary

Box 1: The El-Ezaby "Conditions" on Church Construction

1. Is the land on which the church is to be built empty or agricultural land, and does it belong to the person presenting the request? Land ownership papers have to be appended to the presented request.

2. What is the distance between the proposed church and surrounding mosques?

3. If the land is vacant, is it amid Christian or Muslim settlements?

4. If it is amid Muslims, do they have any objections to it?

5. Is there another church belonging to this denomination in the same town or village?

6. What is the distance between the nearest church belonging to this denomination and to the town in which the requested church is to be built?

7. What is the number of Christians in the area?

8. If the land on which the church is to be built is close to Nile bridges or public utilities belonging to the Ministry of Irrigation, approval should be sought from the Ministry itself. Also, if it is near to railway lines, the railway authorities should also give their approval.

9. An official report should be made on all of the above points, and it should indicate the surrounding buildings to the requested spot on which the church is to be built, including the nearest utilities of a public nature, and the distances between these utilities and the church. This report is to be sent to the Ministry.

10. The applicant must present with his request architectural drawings in the ratio of 1/1000 that are signed by the head of the religious denomination and the engineer who has expertise of the area on which the church is to be built. The competent administration should investigate the truthfulness of the papers, should sign it, and present it with the investigation papers.

Source: Christian Fastenrath and Corin Kazanjian, "Important Factors for Church Building in Egypt," *Arab-West Report* Paper 4, April 2008, 32–33.

permits to erect new churches or even maintain existing ones. Meanwhile, legal and illicit mosque construction was pervasive.[13]

This predicament persisted through the al-Khanka attacks and the ensuing investigation. In its report the Utayfi Committee found that

> One of the most important reasons leading to friction and the arousal of divisions is the nonformulation of any easy process for the regulation of such licensing without there being a need for the issuing of a presidential decree in each case. This is because acquiring such a decree requires much time during which it often happens that the features of the site slated for the establishment of the church have changed, such as the establishment of a mosque nearby, which would prevent compliance with the ten conditions. Owing to the slowness of the procedures, many Coptic societies often resort to establishing such churches without a license. In some cases the administrative party tolerates that, and in other cases an investigation is held with the person responsible in the society. *This is a situation that appears to create a contradiction between respect for the rule of law on the one hand, and respect for the freedom of practicing religious rites on the other, a principle guaranteed in the constitution in its forty sixth article* [emphasis added]...[14]

Because the committee observed that most incidents of intercommunal conflict during the preceding two years, as well as in al-Khanka, were "associated with the establishment of unlicensed churches, and confrontations between the administration or certain residents and those in charge" of the churches, the members recommended developing a clear and simple legal procedure for Copts to petition for the creation of new churches. Sadat ignored the recommendation. Consequently, the growing population of Egyptian Christians practiced their faith in a legal limbo, under threat that Muslims in surrounding areas would object to, and block, church construction.

Mubarak and the Copts

Intercommunal conflict during Sadat's presidency prefigured the problems Copts would face under Mubarak, the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which took power upon Mubarak's ouster in 2011), and Morsi. The national political climate was changing dramatically, as the spirit of "Egyptianness" from the interwar period gave way to a narrower Islamic identity. At the same time, the formal legal structure of the country was not being updated to ensure that Copts could pursue their livelihoods and practice their faith freely. With religion replacing nationalism, matters that should have been governed by law became flash points for identity politics.

After he assumed the presidency in 1981, Mubarak preserved Sadat's general domestic and foreign policies while easing the repression that had alienated Egyptians. Regime-church relations also benefited from a fresh start. Shenouda was released from house arrest in 1985 with the modus vivendi that he would support Mubarak politically while the president privileged the

Coptic Orthodox Church as the principal channel for handling Copts' concerns. This arrangement, a kind of religious corporatism, amplified Shenouda's authority and let Mubarak address millions of Egyptian Christians through a single proxy. Copts with political grievances were impelled to seek redress as clients of the Church, via the Coptic pope, rather than as citizens of the state. Over the decades, Shenouda would prove as steadfast in backing Mubarak as he had been in opposing Sadat, supporting the regime even when lay Copts fought to topple it.[15]

The Mubarak-Shenouda pact concealed rather than solved the institutional disadvantages suffered by Coptic communities. Copts seeking to build or renovate churches still had to work through a bureaucratic and political morass to obtain permits. Ultimate authority for church construction lay with the president, although Mubarak eventually delegated to the governorate level any licensing decisions to renovate, demolish, or rebuild existing churches. Further, when attacks against Copts intensified, Mubarak exploited Coptic insecurity to his own political benefit. Meaningful citizenship and rule of law held the potential to upend Mubarak's top-heavy brand of authoritarianism. So rather than putting the state in the service of Christians and Muslims equally, he positioned his regime as the firewall against sectarianism. For decades he and his coterie propagated the narrative that without Mubarak's protection the Copts would fall into the shadow of a zealously Islamist and anti-Christian regime.[16]

During the 1990s, Mubarak's intelligence and police forces fought an internal war on Islamic militants, who targeted regime officials, foreign tourists, and Copts. By 1999 his security apparatus had succeeded in pacifying the leading perpetrator of attacks, Al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group). The autocrat could claim to have rescued Copts from the "Islamist threat," except the same police agencies that had crushed Islamic radicals posed their own menace to Egyptian civilians.[17] In August 1998, security officials in the southern Egyptian town of Kosheh, Sohag governorate, had tortured hundreds of Copts while ostensibly investigating the murder of two other Copts.[18] It was a grim harbinger of the decade that followed, the last one of Mubarak's rule.

The regime's security agents were at least partly responsible in incidents that killed more Copts than the El Zawya el Hamra battles or any previous anti-Christian violence in the modern history of Egypt.[19] On January 1–2, 2000, Muslims from nearby towns and villages flocked to Kosheh in response to a scuffle between two merchants, one Copt, the other Muslim, the evening of December 31. Kosheh had a population of 35,000 at that time, the majority of them Copts. The assailants vandalized Coptic stores and homes and attacked the locals. Twenty people, all Copts, were killed before the Ministry of Interior intervened. Rather than bridging confessional cleavages, area police exacerbated them, conspicuously leaving the scene while the conflict escalated.[20]

In the decade that followed the Kosheh massacre, the economy, infrastructure, and security climate of Egypt all deteriorated. As in other periods, the

sinking tide dragged Copts down along with all other Egyptians. Copts who suffered assaults or discrimination found little justice in the courts. None of the perpetrators of the Kosheh killings were convicted, an outcome that proved typical on the rare occasions that Muslim suspects were formally charged with attacking Copts. While the state was in decline, activism was rising. By 2009 a host of new movements—calling for workers' rights, full judicial independence, and political reform—challenged the regime. One of them was the Egyptian Movement for Change, which some Coptic activists had helped establish in December 2004 and was known by its slogan *Kefaya* (Enough). Kefaya's street demonstrations had broken the taboo on organized public dissent. The group also provided prominent avenues through which Copts who opposed Mubarak's policies could act politically and, implicitly, challenge the president's partnership with Shenouda.

Two lethal attacks on Christians in 2010 galvanized a younger cohort of Copts to distance themselves from the Church's support for the regime. The first took place in the southern governorate of Qena, and the second occurred in Giza, the governorate adjoining Cairo. On January 6 in Nag Hammadi a drive-by shooter slew six Copts coming from a Christmas Eve mass and one Muslim off-duty police officer. In the Omraniya neighborhood of Giza in November, police lethally shot a Coptic man during a dispute over the construction of a church originally licensed to be a community center. Dozens more were injured in connected Coptic demonstrations against the police. Throughout the year, Mubarak and top regime officials were indifferent, seemingly more interested in perpetuating their own power than in protecting Egyptians, whether Copts or Muslims, like Khaled Said.[21] Their apathy soon pushed Christians and Muslims toward revolt.

Barely thirty minutes into 2011, a massive explosion tore through a midnight mass at the Coptic Church of Saint Mark and Pope Peter (also known as the Church of the Two Saints) in Alexandria. The car bomb killed 23 parishioners, injured dozens, and shattered the regime's pretense of keeping Christians safe. The New Year's attack exposed Copts' continuing vulnerability, despite living in a security state with a powerful chief executive and a sprawling Ministry of Interior. Egyptians were horrified and outraged. Security officers had not only failed to intercept the bomber, but they also stood by afterward as Christians and Muslims scuffled in the surrounding area. One Coptic lawyer even accused the Minister of Interior of orchestrating the bombing to scare Copts into backing Mubarak out of fear of further sectarian strife.[22] Instead of stemming the flow of Copts into the ranks of the opposition, the Two Saints Church bombing drove young Copts into the streets.[23]

Confessionalism After the
January 25 Revolution

When Egyptians launched a "Day of Wrath" on January 25, 2011, they rekindled the shared Egyptianness from the 1919 Revolution and the 1920s. Three days later, Copts and Muslims pushed side by side against Mubarak's police and thugs, shattering the Ministry of Interior's control over public space and gaining control of Tahrir (Liberation) Square. A tent city soon formed and bore witness to interconfessional unity. In a space besieged by thugs of the embattled regime, Christians encircled and defended praying Muslims. Muslims reciprocated when the Copts worshipped on Sunday. The model of Tahrir showed once more how national solidarity trumped cynical attempts to stir discord along religious lines.[24]

In an earlier time, when the Wafd had opposed the British after the 1919 Revolution, the bonds of nationalism stretched for more than a decade. By contrast, after the 2011 Revolution, the camaraderie that joined Copts and members of the Muslim Brotherhood lasted only a few weeks. On February 18, seven days after Mubarak stepped down, the renowned Muslim preacher and religious scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi returned from decades in exile and led Friday prayers in Tahrir. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and tens of millions of Sunnis worldwide had long followed his teachings and interpretations. Although al-Qaradawi's sermon addressed and praised Copts as well as Muslims, his historic appearance—redolent of the Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran in February 1979—gave an Islamist inflection to the first week of the post-Mubarak transition.[25]

Al-Qaradawi's presence posed a symbolic challenge to interfaith unity, but Egyptian Islamists soon displayed a political influence that was much more worrisome for Copts and non-Islamist Muslims. On March 19, 2011, Egyptians went to the polls in the first democratic vote of the post-1952 period. They were deciding a referendum put forth by the SCAF that made small changes in the 1971 constitution and stipulated that elections for parliament would precede the writing of a permanent constitution. The Muslim Brotherhood and the ultra-traditional Salafists endorsed the measure, which preserved Article 2. Liberals, leftists, and Copts generally opposed the measure, arguing that the constitution should be written and adopted before elections. The SCAF's plan gained a thunderous 77 percent approval from voters and foreshadowed the electoral weakness of non-Islamist forces.[26]

While the wake of the 1919 Revolution was marked by interconfessional harmony, in the political landscape of 2011 there was no broad pan-religious nationalist party to empower—and protect—either Muslims or Copts. The Wafd, for example, had long since lost its political magnetism, and younger parties whose members included members of both faiths were not nationally known. Religious appeals in a democratizing context delivered unprecedented

power to Islamists. After the referendum results were in, one Salafist preacher gloated that Muslims had "conquered" the ballot box and suggested that Egyptians who opposed an Islamic state should get visas to America and Canada.[27] Meanwhile, in southern Egypt, other traditionalists read the results as a mandate to mete out their own kind of religious justice. In Qena, they accused a Coptic man, Ayman Mitri, of "running a prostitution ring" and severed one of his ears as punishment. Mitri tried to take the vigilantes to court but was instead pressured by local notables and representatives of the military to accept informal reconciliation—and leave the attackers unprosecuted.[28]

The first months after Mubarak was deposed revealed that Copts were isolated if not overwhelmed. On one side stood the Islamist forces gloating about the referendum results. On the other flank were the country's military overlords, who proved weak-willed and mendacious.

On April 15, the SCAF appointed 20 new governors, out of a total of 27, most of them hailing from the military or the police. Among them was Emad Shehata Mikhail, a Coptic police officer who had previously fought tax cheats. He was tapped to administer Qena, where five years earlier Mubarak had appointed another Coptic governor, Magdy Ayoub. Ayoub was the second Christian governor in Egyptian history, but the people of Qena, Copts and Muslims alike, generally regarded him as weak and unqualified.[29] It was on Ayoub's watch that the drive-by shooting in Nag Hammadi had occurred in January 2010. When Prime Minister Essam Sharaf's government announced Mikhail's appointment, Salafists in Qena organized massive rallies and shut down the train line running through the province. For more than a week, demonstrators froze rail transport through the main north-south artery traversing Qena. They argued that their governorate had been singled out to be the token area with a Coptic administrator. Some even threatened to kill Mikhail if he tried to take office. Unable to break the rail line blockade through negotiations, Sharaf capitulated and suspended Mikhail's appointment. Eventually, Adel Labib, a Muslim officer in state security who had served successfully as governor of Qena immediately before Ayoub, was installed in the position in 2006.[30]

During this period of general insecurity for all Egyptians, a wave of kidnappings evinced the acute vulnerability of Copts. Public security had collapsed across the country, partly because Mubarak's officials had deliberately released incarcerated prisoners in a futile bid to foil the uprising. Hardened criminals and young petty thieves sought fast cash in Egypt's languid economy. Affluent Copts in Qena and the nearby governorates of Sohag, Minya, and Asyut, which are home to the country's largest concentration of Copts, proved an attractive target. Beginning in 2011, Copts in these regions of Upper Egypt were frequently abducted and held until their families paid a ransom. The state left Copts vulnerable by encouraging Christian victims to reconcile with perpetrators rather than prosecute them. One official from the Ministry of

Interior admitted: "Kidnapping Christians is an easy way to make money. . . . [They] don't have the tribal or clan backup that will deter kidnappers and they are happy to pay the ransom to gain the freedom of their loved ones." Indeed, kidnappings in Minya, where Christians are estimated to make up more than a third of the population, have been a weekly occurrence since Mubarak's ouster. In late 2011, Copts in Qena paid a 600,000 L.E. (approximately $100,000) ransom for the return of two white-collar Coptic males. Dozens more Copts were held hostage in subsequent months.[31] In Qena, writer Hana Haseeb explained, "We don't believe in vengeance, and we don't have weapons. So how can they [the bandits] make money? From the weakest class, the Christians, who are not protected by the state."[32]

The railway blockage in Qena and rise of kidnappings across Upper Egypt signaled the impotence of the postrevolutionary state. Rather than defending citizenship, the SCAF allowed rogue Islamists and common criminals to run amok. While protecting their own resource streams and perks in the Egyptian economy, the generals stood by while Copts braced themselves against further attacks. In March 2011, a church had been torched during Muslim-Coptic fighting in the Cairo suburb of Atfeeh, Helwan, and thirteen people had died during a protest over the arson. In May, 2,000 Copts and Muslims converged in Cairo's lower-income Imbaba neighborhood to take opposing sides over the rumor of an interfaith marriage. There ensued clashes in which at least four Copts and nine Muslims lost their lives and two churches were left aflame. In response, thousands of Copts from all over the country, and many Muslim supporters, camped out in front of the Egyptian Television and Radio Union, known as Maspero, for more than a week to demand that the SCAF ensure the safety of Coptic churches and communities.[33]

The most infamous attack on Copts occurred that fall. On Sunday, October 9, after the recent arson of a church in Aswan, a large group of Copts and their Muslim supporters congregated once again before Maspero to denounce the SCAF's complicity in anti-Christian violence. Before the protesters could reach the building, army vehicles plowed through the crowd. State television claimed the protesters were initiating violence and incited viewers to reinforce the army. While the Copts and their Muslim supporters tried to regroup, thugs on nearby rooftops began barraging them with projectiles. Twenty-seven civilians, most of them Copts, were killed. The SCAF defended itself by claiming that some soldiers had panicked. Rather than punishing the purportedly derelict troops, the junta incarcerated 31 of the demonstrators and slated them for military trials.[34]

The Maspero massacre demonstrated that Copts were as vulnerable as they had been before the revolution. As in the Mubarak era, most attacks reflected a combination of official contempt and local prejudice. Lacking a national party to amplify their voice, Copts looked on as elections carried Islamists to the helm of the transition. In winter 2011–2012, candidates from the Muslim

Brotherhood and the leading Salafist Party (Al-Nour) took control of parliament with more than two-thirds of the seats in the People's Assembly and the then-titular Upper House (Shura Council).

Christians Under an Islamist Government

Although the SCAF's rule formally ended in summer 2012, Copts, and non-Islamists in general, cringed as military rule gave way to inflexible and exclusionary Islamism—with the Muslim Brotherhood at the helm.

In April 2011 the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohamed Badie, pledged that his organization sought "to participate in, not dominate elections."[35] A year later the group's actions were overshadowing its rhetoric. After initially reassuring skeptics that they would seek only a third of the seats in parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood contested the legislative elections in full force and squeezed out the liberal and leftist movements connected to the original January 25 protests.[36] The Brotherhood then flipped on another one of its positions on elections—that it would not seek the presidency—by fielding a senior member of the organization, Khairat al-Shater, for that post.[37] When al-Shater was disqualified because of a criminal conviction under Mubarak, Mohamed Morsi became the group's standard-bearer. In his campaign Morsi vowed that if elected he would represent all Egyptians, not only Muslim Brotherhood supporters. He took a quarter of the votes in the first round and then entered a runoff against Mubarak's last prime minister, Ahmed Shafiq. Because of Shafiq's association with the old regime, a substantial number of non-Islamist voters cast their ballots for Morsi. Morsi did not, however, get the support of Copts, who overwhelmingly favored an ex-military man and stalking horse for the defunct ruling National Democratic Party over the Brotherhood's candidate. Ultimately the mix of Islamism and anti-Mubarakism carried the day. When voters went to the polls, Morsi edged out Shafiq, 51.7 percent to 48.3 percent.[38]

Morsi took office on June 30. Six weeks later he sidelined the top generals who until then had been steering the transition. What could have been a step toward civilian democracy, though, soon came to be seen by the opposition as the first phase of a partisan power grab by Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood leaders—namely al-Shater and Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie. In the months that followed, Morsi did nothing to assuage his skeptics. After the Coptic Church chose Tawadros II as permanent successor to Shenouda, who died in March 2012, Morsi passed up a golden opportunity for interfaith accord by not attending the installation ceremony.[39]

Whatever chance Morsi had to win over the 48.3 percent of the electorate, Christians and Muslims, who had supported Shafiq, he squandered it with the new constitution his partisans pushed through at the end of 2012. The Constituent Assembly charged with writing Egypt's constitution reflected the Islamists' dominance in the People's Assembly and Shura Council, although the former body had been dissolved by a court order. Rather than striking a

compromise with the minority bloc comprising non-Islamist trends, including the Coptic Church, constitutional delegates from the Brotherhood, Al-Nour, and other Islamist movements insisted on crafting a document that amplified the religious language of Sadat's 1971 constitution and omitted mechanisms for protecting politically vulnerable constituencies such as Christians, women, and journalists. In mid-November, before the finished draft was published, representatives from the Coptic Church became the latest in a series of dissenters to withdraw from the assembly in protest.[40]

The Constituent Assembly was rapidly losing legitimacy and on the verge of being dissolved by Egypt's highest court. In this context, Morsi decreed on November 22, 2012, that his prior presidential decrees, as well as the drafters of the permanent constitution, were temporarily immune from judicial review.[41] The assembly soon published the final draft, which included overtly sectarian language that threatened to marginalize not only Christians but non-Sunni Muslims as well. Article 2 set the "principles of sharia as the principal source of legislation," and Article 4 codified a role for al-Azhar, the premier Islamic religious institution, to ensure that laws comply with sharia. With respect to Christians and Jews, the constitution made faith the touchstone for dispute resolution: "The canon principles of Egyptian Christians and Jews are the main source of legislation for their personal status laws, religious affairs, and the selection of their religious leaders." For Copts, such language codified the corporatist structure that had inserted the pope as an intermediary between them and the state.[42] In addition, the constitution tossed the unresolved issue of church construction back to the legislature, stipulating, "The State shall guarantee the freedom to practice religious rites *and to establish places of worship for the divine religions, as regulated by law*" [emphasis added]. The next article forbade blasphemy against "all religious messengers and prophets."[43] Coptic activists joined with Muslim dissidents to denounce the constitution before it was put before the public. They campaigned for a no vote and exceeded their performance in March 2011. In two rounds of voting (December 15 and 22), a relatively small majority of voters, 64 percent, ratified the foundational document.

When the second anniversary of the January 25 Revolution passed, Copts, the broader non-Islamist opposition, and many ordinary Egyptians saw their country in a political and economic tailspin. Far from upholding the idea of "participation, not domination," the Muslim Brotherhood appeared to be going from electoral dominance to institutional hegemony, with gubernatorial appointments one of the strongest symptoms of a creeping takeover of the state. Morsi and Brotherhood spokesmen gestured toward reaching out to their critics and modifying the Constitution, but they were slow to act. Political discontent merged with the economic grievances of previous Morsi voters. A survey done by the Egyptian polling organization Baseera found popular approval for the president dropped from 76 percent when he took office to 49 percent eight months later.

Anti-Christian violence brought chilling validation to the concerns Copts harbored. Kidnappings in Upper Egypt continued, and anti-Christian attacks rocked the heart of the country as well (see box 2). On Friday, April 5, in

Greater Cairo, five Copts, as well as a Muslim man, were shot and killed. The attacks in al-Khusus continued over the weekend and spread to St. Mark's Cathedral in central Cairo on April 7. There the police joined with a mob of thugs in laying siege to parishioners mourning the victims of al-Khusus.[44] Morsi's office defended the Ministry of Interior from criticism, stating the police had worked to quell the clashes around the cathedral, despite eyewitness accounts to the contrary.[45] Like Sadat after the al-Khanka incident, Morsi reached out to the Coptic pope and called for an immediate investigation. But given his track record to date, it was easy to question—as Tawadros immediately did—whether deeds would follow words.[46] As the grassroots anti-Morsi Tamarod (Rebellion) movement gained steam, Copts were among the millions calling for Morsi's early removal from office and new elections—pleas that the military answered by deposing the president on July 3.

Box 2: Major Incidents of Anti-Coptic Violence Surrounding the January 25 Revolution

January 6, 2010	Gunman kills six Coptic parishioners and one off-duty Muslim police officer in Nag Hammadi, Qena.
November 24, 2010	Police kill a Coptic man while trying to stop church construction in Omraniya, Giza, prompting hundreds of Copts to march on the governor's office.
January 1, 2011	Car bombing of the Church of the Two Saints in Alexandria takes the lives of 23 worshippers.
March 4, 2011	Two Martyrs Church in Atfeeh, Helwan, is torched. Four days later, thirteen people, Copts and Muslims, are killed during a protest over the arson.
May 7, 2011	Fifteen people, including at least four Copts, are killed, more than 200 other Egyptians wounded, and two churches set ablaze in the Imbaba neighborhood of Cairo.
October 9, 2011	Twenty-seven civilians, most of them Copts, are killed by soldiers and thugs while demonstrating in front of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (Maspero).
April 5, 2013	Five Copts and one Muslim man are shot and killed in al-Khusus, Greater Cairo. Two days later, mourners are besieged at St. Mark's Cathedral in Abbasiya, Cairo.

New Leader, Old Problems

General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was flanked by notables from the country's major religious communities, including Pope Tawadros, when he announced a new interim government. El-Sisi spoke in reconciliatory tones of moving the country forward, and many Egyptians expressed relief at the military's reentry into politics. "Now that the army is on our side, we feel safer," said one female Coptic student. "We feel that Egypt has been returned to us."[47] The new cabinet included three Coptic ministers, one of them assigned to handle the influential trade portfolio.[48] But displays of national unity at the upper echelons of Egyptians politics did not establish interfaith comity among the population. Further violence, not stability, followed the coup.

Initial reports indicate the attacks were fueled in equal measure by Islamist grievances and state indifference. On July 3, arsonists burned a church in Minya in the south while vandals struck at a church in Marsa Matruh on the northwestern coast. Two days later in the village of Nag Hassan, near Luxor, a mob beat four Copts to death and razed twenty-four Coptic-owned properties. Some human rights advocates said the surge in attacks was coming from disgruntled Morsi supporters. Ishak Ibrahim of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights accused Muslim Brotherhood members of "spreading . . . rumors [after Morsi was deposed] saying [the coup] is a Coptic conspiracy to exclude them from power."[49] While Islamists were sometimes the aggressors, law enforcement officials often enabled the attacks. After the Nag Hassan killings, the director of security for Luxor governorate told Human Rights Watch that the job of the police was not to intervene and "stop killings" but to "investigate afterward." (In nearby Qena city, local police demonstrated how to stop perpetrators in the act. Using tear gas canisters, they dispersed a crowd besieging the main cathedral.) Two Copts kidnapped in Northern Sinai on July 5–6 were decapitated, in one case because a ransom had not been paid.[50]

In the middle of August arsonists damaged or destroyed more than 40 churches in Upper Egypt, Beni Suef, and Fayyoum. The proximate catalyst for the wave of church burnings was the military's August 14 killing of more than 800 civilians who were protesting the coup. While el-Sisi's forces succeeded in dispersing the hub of pro-Morsi demonstrators near the Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque in the Nasser City district of Cairo, the loss of life they inflicted appeared to enrage thousands of other Egyptians elsewhere in the country. When the arsons began, police were once more conspicuous in their absence.[51] In summary, the end of an Islamist government brought an immediate sense of relief to Coptic communities. It remains to be seen, though, whether the transition will deliver lasting rights and security or

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Conclusion

The Egyptian state has failed to ensure the physical security and the political rights of citizens, irrespective of religious denomination. Copts have been among the communities most harmed by the Egyptian security state and its religious discourse since the 1970s. Although successive leaders have run the gamut from an anti-Islamist autocrat (Mubarak) to an elected Islamist standard-bearer (Morsi), all have contributed to a divisive political system—defended by security forces that have treated citizens with contempt. Under Sadat and his successors, state security agents have been active participants in the violence rather than inept bystanders. The al-Khanka investigation and witnesses at the siege of St. Mark's Cathedral attest that police and central security forces stood aside or joined with anti-Coptic assailants instead of arresting or detaining them. This collaboration—between the state's formal coercive apparatus and its unofficial proxies—has thrived under the aegis of rhetorically concerned but politically detached leaders.

The absence of institutional guarantees for rights that all Egyptians are granted in the constitution helps explain why outbreaks of violence against Copts continue to shake the country. For the current transition to produce a more inclusive and more stable government than that in 2011–2012, Egyptian leaders will need to go beyond scapegoating Islamists and actually promote citizenship. This work will entail crafting an inclusive constitution that draws as much popular support as the document passed in December 2012, as well as pursuing legal and security reforms that address the problems of church construction and anti-Coptic violence.

With respect to the wave of kidnappings and church burnings, the absence of an effective legal framework has become an acute problem. After Mubarak fell, economic decline stirred material predation. After Morsi's removal, political frustration contributed to hate crimes. Rather than aggressively defending the rule of law, Egyptian officials at the national and local levels have favored informal dispute resolution over court proceedings, a bias that advantages Muslim perpetrators over their Christian victims. As a result, criminals have kidnapped members of affluent Coptic families—not because of religion differences but because of official indifference and perceived monetary opportunity. A similar sense of impunity emboldens mobs committing acts of aggression against Coptic churches. The frequency of anti-Coptic assaults could be reduced, if not eliminated, by prosecuting assailants and adopting a unified law on construction of houses of worship. Such laws and their enforcement would be one element in a broader effort to guarantee citizenship rights for all Egyptians.

With respect to constitutional and political developments, for the current transition to succeed it must be more inclusive than the process of the past two and a half years. Meaningful inclusion will be marked by deep and difficult negotiations, rather than cosmetic gestures of interfaith unity such as General el-Sisi's appearance with Coptic and Muslim clergy at the time of the coup. The appointment of Coptic elites to ministerial posts or a subset of unelected parliamentary seats may help ensure Christian voices in government. It will mean little, however, if the resulting government does not begin to establish equality for the tens of millions of Egyptians who will never hold such offices. Similarly, reversion to earlier constitutional language will have no more than a symbolic effect if it is not combined with establishing a police force and judiciary that rigorously apply the law, regardless of the plaintiffs' denominations. It follows that renegotiating the 2012 constitutional language that amplified the role of Islam in lawmaking will address only one facet of the problem. Similarly, although outside observers may understandably focus heavily on the next set of elections, the past year has demonstrated that voting is necessary but woefully insufficient to guarantee a representative government. The problem is not that Egyptians elected the "wrong people" (Islamists) but that their elected leaders did not address the structural flaws of the political and legal system. Foreign officials should also be aware of the suspicion that outside efforts to promote Coptic rights have generated, thanks in part to the history of the British using sectarian differences as a wedge.

The problem is not that Egyptians elected the "wrong people" (Islamists) but that their elected leaders did not address the structural flaws of the political and legal system.

Egyptian rulers have been equally adept at practicing their own form of divide and rule. As the Mubarak era demonstrated, state repression of Islamists does not necessarily protect Copts. To the contrary, officials are just as likely to pit the country's faith communities against one another and operate through a religious corporatism that treats Copts as members of the Church but not the nation. Achieving a democratic Egypt thus requires political equality for Copts and Muslims, which in turn depends on remedying the institutional biases that began and continue under Egypt's military leaders. It was not always like this. The interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s was marked by powerful manifestations of national unity across confessional lines. The Free Officers regime, however, failed to sustain that national harmony or, for the most part, give Coptic concerns more than rhetorical attention. Before the 2011 Revolution and since then, Egyptian officials have lacked the political will to defend citizens' constitutional rights. Hence interconfessional unity at the regime's upper echelons must be matched by political efforts that deliver Coptic security and freedom on the ground.

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