

Introduction:

Part of Egypt's June 30th uprisings challenges the traditional absence of religious pluralism in the predominantly Muslim country. During the demonstrations, millions of protestors advocated for the ousting of Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, and the instatement of a secular government. While the protestors of Egypt's 2011 protests made similar demands just a couple years earlier, Morsi's regime and unconstitutional expansion of presidential powers produced a strong aversion to religious rule.

The apparent desire for a secular government holds great promise for one particular community: Coptic Christians. The rights of Coptic Christians are an important topic among both Muslim and Christian revolutionaries. This community has been persecuted and marginalized for millennia, due to unequal recognition before the government to their Muslim counterparts. The 2013 demonstrations, however, resulted in their sudden inclusion in politics, policies, and constitutional matters. The Copts new status was dramatically marked by Pope Tawadros II's (Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, 2011-) appearance next to army leader General Sisi as he announced the arrest of President Morsi; an unprecedented display of Coptic and state unity. Though Egypt has never fully accepted non-Muslims in the Egyptian state, anti-Morsi supporters—many of the protestors—reject both Morsi as well as religion in politics, potentially liberating Copts from their second-class status. This new societal trend poses the question; is this just a short term of inclusivity in the evolving status of Coptic Christians, or does it anticipate a fundamental shift in the community's struggle for equality?

Background:

This project builds off the work of three scholars whom study religion and the state in modern-day Egypt. Dr. Rachel Scott describes the history of Christianity and Islam in Egypt from the eighth century, Ottoman invasion to 2010. She provides a detailed argument that suggests one particular school of Islam, the Wattsiya (Moderate) approach, could provide the foundation for an Islamic theocracy that would support the rights of non-Muslims (2010). She goes on to comment, however, at the difficulty of having the support for a system from secularists and hard-lined Islamists. S.S. Hassan's work accounts for the sectarian violence between Copts and Muslims since the coup d'état of 1952, and the government's response, or lack thereof, to the violence. She argues that Egypt's political and societal conditions prevent Christians from being fully protected and integrated into the nation dubbing Copts "the ugly

step-child of Egypt" (1999, 175). Together these works provide an important basis that contextualizes my own research.

Research to date:

My research so far reveals an overall trend that anti-Morsi revolutionaries support secularism. From May to date, I have conducted several interviews with revolutionaries (Muslim and Christian), NGO heads, Coptic clergy, and prominent Coptic figures. These interviews reveal a society that has changed drastically from the times of S.S. Hassan. Although violence against Christians persists and has worsened in the aftermath of Morsi's overthrow, moderate Muslims are no longer indifferent onlookers as Copts are targeted. Instead, both Muslims and Christians are advocating for Coptic rights. Nearly all Copts interviewed (N=30), claim that for the first time they feel Egypt can fully accept Christianity. I plan to continue my research with more interviews, including one with the Coptic pope in December of this year. I also am using web-scraping techniques to remain current on the political and societal conditions in Egypt

Other Questions:

This topic encompasses a variety of other questions for research, including more generalizable relating to religion and conflict. Some include: Is Egyptian nationalism inherently tied with Islam? Can Egypt's revolution produce elements of, if not complete, democracy? Can non-Muslims gain full citizenship in a Political-Islamic state? Could non-Muslims support an Islamic theocracy with guaranteed and protected rights? Is Egypt ready for democracy? Why was their public support for the coup d'état of 2013?

Qualifications:

My qualifications include SURF, experienced mentors, accessibility to Egyptian resources and relevant coursework. As a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellow, I have had the opportunity to have great mentors support my research efforts. This includes Professor David Collier, who has agreed to mentor me on this project as well as reviewed this proposal. SURF staff has also supported and reviewed my research to date. In addition, as an Egyptian with the majority of family living in Egypt, I have numerous resources to important figureheads, and archived texts unavailable in the US. I also have taken relevant coursework, such as, Professor Gurowitz's Introduction to International Relations, Professor Gailmard's PS3, and Professor Hassner's Religion and Conflict. All three have taught me valuable skills that will allow me to produce quality work.