

## Egyptians Wary about Future

Difficulty:

**DIFFICULT**

Date of release:

Monday 5th December 2011

### *Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson*

Today's report looked at the situation in Egypt at the time of the elections to the Lower House of the Egyptian parliament. Which people are interviewed in the report? What do they say? Are they optimistic? What problems do they mention?

### *Extension discussion topics*

#### **A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text**

*Introduction = Political and social climate in Egypt at the time of the parliamentary elections.*

1. Who was interviewed in the report? What do you know about their current role in society?
  - Habiba (el) Hussein: student, member of Professor Said Sadek's political science class.
  - Said Sadek: political sociologist, professor at The American University in Cairo.
  - Salah Hassa'an: salesman in Cairo, member of the working class. He feels resentment that few of the political parties are interested in the opinions of the working class - the "silent majority".
2. What did the interviewees say?
  - Habiba Hussein thinks elections are necessary, but that the country is not ready for them yet. She does not support the anti-military protesters in Tahrir Square (she feels that such things as the state of the economy and tourism are greater priorities), but neither is she happy with the government crackdown on those protesters. She is planning to go to Tahrir Square to voice her opinions.
  - Professor Sadek feels that the army can give a sense of stability during the unrest. He acknowledges that the military are basically middle class, with economic interests. He is concerned that some politicians with religious interests may be increasing social division. He wants to know how involved the students in his political science class are in the demonstrations, and challenges them to analyze their position and opinions.
  - Salah Hassa'an feels resentment that few of the political parties are interested in the opinions of the working class - the "silent majority".
3. What details of other social or political concerns can you remember?
  - there could be a growing division between opinions in the village and the city, and between traditional Bedouin and modern ways of life.
  - these are unstable times, the economy is in very poor shape ("a disaster").
  - there seems to be a mood of pessimism amongst Egyptians from different social classes.

## B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

*Topic = The unrest in Egypt, and the position of the military.*

1. Do you remember how and when the current unrest in Egypt began? What details do you remember of the early revolution? [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011\\_Egyptian\\_revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Egyptian_revolution)
2. At first the military were welcomed by the protesters as less violent and repressive than the Central Security Forces, the police force loyal to ex-President Hosni Mubarak. What may have made opinions change? Have you watched the events in Egypt with interest? (Why / why not?) Describe details of the changing situation that you remember over the last few months.
3. Why do you think the protesters might be unhappy with the idea of continued military power, or even a future military regime? What do you think of this?

*OR, Topic = Tahrir Square.*

Tahrir Square is one of the main public squares in central Cairo, and in happier times, has been a gathering place both for locals and for tourists. Find out all you can about it and give an oral presentation to a partner or to your teacher. The many relevant websites include <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12332601>  
<http://www.dwell.com/articles/design-and-history-of-tahrir-square.html>  
[http://wikitravel.org/en/Cairo/Midan\\_Tahrir](http://wikitravel.org/en/Cairo/Midan_Tahrir)

## C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

*Topic = Elections and political power.*

1. The parliamentary elections in Egypt were originally expected to take place in September 2011, but were postponed as it was felt that this date gave an advantage to established parties. And yet one interviewee in the report felt that it is still too early to hold the elections. What do you think of this opinion? What could be the advantages or disadvantages of delaying elections? (Not just in Egypt, but in other countries too.)
2. Do you think the protesters represent the "silent majority"? Do you think that in general, the silent majority should take a more active interest in politics? Do you think the large majority of the electorate should be involved in day-to-day politics? How?
3. Should large protests influence governments' decisions? In your country, can you think of examples where mass protest has brought about change, or has been ignored? Has there ever been a referendum in your country? What do you think about this?
4. What is the minimum voting age in your country? Are there other restrictions on voting? Do you vote? Why / why not?

## *Audioscript*

It's the moment Egypt's protesters have fought for - an election in which the results might be a surprise. But with the violence-wracked run-up to the vote, it's not been easy getting to this point.

University student Habiba el Hussein is not hopeful. "I honestly don't want to be a pessimist. I want a better future for us. But now I don't think it's the right time for them to take place, but they have to take place."

It's a dilemma discussed in Hussein's political science class at The American University in Cairo. Political sociologist Said Sadek asked students about their involvement in the protests. "Anybody went to Tahrir? Very good. So two? Only two this time?"

Habiba Hussein says she plans to visit Tahrir Square to oppose the government crackdown on demonstrators, not to support the protesters' anti-military cause.

"We're in very unstable times, and the economy is a disaster. So this is not what they should be focusing on now. They should be focusing on our economy, our tourism, everything else except that."

"As you see, there was division of labor." Said Sadek says the military gives some Egyptians a sense of stability after the tumultuous events of the Arab Spring.

"The military is basically middle class, urban middle class, and they have many economic interests."

But the civil-military conflict in Tahrir Square is not the only source of tension. Sadek blames Islamist politicians for inspiring further resentment and unrest.

"Political Islam is not Islam. These are politicians who are using religion to reach power. And they are building that on class struggle -- division between the village and the city, Bedouin life and modern life. And they build on that."

These different voices have left some Egyptians even more alienated. Cairo salesman Salah Hassa'an: "We are entering a dark thing, a dark stage, because the majority of the parties have political and personal interests and they do not express the public opinion (of) the working class, because as they say, we represent the 'silent majority'."

At The American University in Cairo, Professor Sadek is challenging his students to understand where they fit in Egypt at this historic crossroads. "Are you the majority or the minority?"

No matter how uncertain these days might be for many Egyptians, experts say the results of the elections might make that question a little easier to answer.

Elizabeth Arrott, VOA News, Cairo.