

If I Were in Charge of Egypt

by [Eric Trager \(/experts/eric-trager\)](/experts/eric-trager)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Eric Trager was the Esther K. Wagner Fellow at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

The Guardian website recently launched a new feature asking readers to weigh in on current affairs, then having an expert respond to them. In this edition, the editors asked Washington Institute fellow Eric Trager to assess the viability of a detailed plan (submitted by reader "2cents") for putting Egypt on a path to prosperity and stability. The following is his response; [view the original reader submission \(http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/02/egypt-if-i-were-in-charge\)](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/02/egypt-if-i-were-in-charge).

There is much that [2cents'] proposal gets right, conceptually speaking. The writer is correct in arguing that resuscitating Egypt's economy will require significant reforms to the Egyptian government's very costly subsidy program. The writer is also correct that long-term growth will require substantial investments in improving education and infrastructure, and the list of industries that the writer views as potential areas of growth is also useful.

Perhaps most importantly, the writer correctly recognizes that broad political inclusiveness will help advance these reforms. After all, cutting subsidies would be particularly painful for many Egyptians, which is why few governments will be willing to undertake such unpopular policies unless they can insulate themselves politically with a broad coalition of allies.

But what if political inclusiveness cannot happen anytime soon, as appears to be the case? Egypt, after all, has just experienced significant political upheaval, in which the military responded to impending state failure and unprecedented protests against the Muslim Brotherhood's rule by removing from power the only elected president in Egyptian history. The consequences of this action make sustained civil strife far more likely than consensus, at least in the short term. The Brotherhood, after all, believes that something has been stolen from it, and thus intends to fight rather than join any political process that would legitimize Mohamed Morsi's ouster. Meanwhile, many of those supporting Morsi's removal decry the Brotherhood as "a terrorist organization," and the nature of coups is such that the military is unlikely to permit the Brotherhood to participate politically anytime soon.

A stronger proposal would have thus acknowledged the unlikelihood of a politically inclusive transition process, and asked how Egypt's economy could be resuscitated in light of this reality. Here's one suggestion: rather than focusing on political inclusiveness, the new government could foster a more hospitable environment for investment through security sector reform. After all, improving Egypt's policing policies is one thing that a military-backed government

should be better at doing than a civilian government.

To be sure, Egypt's military is unlikely to undertake security sector reform on its own, which is why international encouragement is vital. But given how unlikely political consensus in Egypt is at the moment, focusing on security sector reform might be a more worthwhile endeavor for those looking to help Egypt move forward after Morsi. ❖

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