

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

July 5, 2013 at 10:11am

Egypt's Second Revolution: The View From Twitter

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Regular readers may remember an article I did in May, based on interviews with Professor Jim Youniss, and two of his assistants, Trevor Falk and Catherine Noga. Professor Youniss was working on interviews and a poll of Egyptian young people to ascertain their views on civic engagement and politics. Falk and Noga had helped monitor the Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said" for Professor Youniss, as well as following Twitter accounts during and after the first revolution and throughout the transition to democracy and the election of President Morsi last year.

I spoke with Falk this morning. He told me that he has been following both the Facebook page, which really galvanized support for the first revolution, and Twitter the past few weeks. "On the Facebook page itself, it's taken an interesting turn," he explained. "The administrator of the page said a few weeks ago, before the heavy protests, that he would remain neutral in the struggle between President Morsi and his opponents." Falk said that this stance provoked hundreds of responses from people condemning the administrator for not supporting their street protests against Morsi and, also, hundreds of responses from those who thought he should support the president whose election was the result of the first revolution.

Falk said that this division reminds him of the views of those on Facebook and Twitter during the first revolution. "You were either pro-Mubarak or anti-Mubarak," Falk said. "Then, once Mubarak fell, the views points diverged into dozens of distinct groups with different views and objectives. Now, it is all pro-Morsi or anti-Morsi." The phenomenon points to one of the most difficult political transitions a country faces during a revolutionary period: People will unite around a common enemy, but they entertain vastly different objectives once that common enemy is removed.

The changes in attitudes towards Morsi mirrors a change in attitudes towards the military, but with a significant difference. Egypt has conscription, so most people have an experience of the military first

hand, it is part of their growing up process, it really is seen as a part of the people because the people have been a part of it. "In the first revolution," Falk said, "the military was trusted at the beginning, but over time, that trust began to wane." Some people wanted the military to move to democratic elections more quickly, others worried that the country was not ready for elections. "The coup has renewed trust in the military," Falk said. "This is mind blowing for an American. We love the military and respect them, but if they attempted a coup, all hell would break loose. There they trust the military because everyone has been a part of it."

Stay tuned as events unfold. We will be in touch with Professor Youniss, Mr. Falk and Ms. Noga as events develop.

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