Are Women Better Off After 'Arab Spring' Uprisings?
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The push for women’s rights, a welcomed by-product of the Arab Spring uprisings throughout North Africa and the Middle East, has arrived in ultra-conservative and Islam-dominated Egypt.

Egypt’s Arab Spring uprisings have been the civilians’ push for democracy, so women’s rights would naturally be a part of the agenda, as democracy, in its purest sense, is government’s equal representation of all members of society.

But Egypt and other Arab Spring countries, such as Syria and Tunisia, hold Islam as a major backbone to their society. In early 2011, 85 percent of Egyptians said Islam played a positive role in the country’s politics, according to the Pew Research Center.

The progressive rights of women in Islam-dominated countries have long been stifled by traditional Islamic culture, which, according to passages of the Quran, believes men should be “in charge of” women.

The intent of Egyptians in the Arab Spring uprising was to see the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak and an autocratic regime. Over the past few months, Egypt has seen a ban on military virginity testing as well as a turnout of women in a recent rally condemning soldiers’ treatment of women, perhaps revealing the country’s progress toward women’s rights.

In late December, the courts banned the practice of virginity tests on detainees after Samira Ibrahim filed a lawsuit against the military. Ibrahim was one of seven women subjected to the invasive virginity test after she was detained for protesting.

“I will not give up my rights as a woman or a human being,” Ibrahim stated.

Women’s rights activists spoke up again when a YouTube video surfaced in mid-December, showing soldiers shedding the black veil of a female protester, exposing her torso as they brutally beat her to the ground.

Thousands of women then took to the streets of Cairo on Dec. 20, demanding the military step down from power.

The roughly 10,000 protesters chanted “the women of Egypt are a red line,” while they carried photos of the protester who was brutally beaten.

The Islamic-led political party, the Muslim Brotherhood, is expected to dominate Egypt’s Parliament as the third round of elections wrap up Wednesday.
Although it is yet to be determined how much conservative Islam will influence parliamentary decisions, the events over the past few months seem to show that the push for women’s rights has made its way into the spotlight of Egyptians’ democratic agenda.

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