

LEGISLATING AUTHORITARIANISM: EGYPT'S NEW ERA OF REPRESSION

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Egypt's new authoritarian regime is rapidly closing the public space—cracking down on autonomous civil society and independent political parties, asphyxiating the practice of pluralist politics, and thwarting citizens' peaceful and active engagement in public affairs. The government's primary strategy is to institute wide-scale repression through lawmaking and justify its behavior through conspiratorial and populist narratives. With unprecedented resolve, it has passed new protest and terrorism laws, introduced legal amendments targeting nongovernmental organizations, and extended the military court's jurisdiction. Essentially, the regime is adapting lawmaking for its own purposes. To fight against the tide, those challenging the system need to fully understand how.

The Strategy

- Egypt's government is institutionalizing its new authoritarian doctrine as part of the state apparatus, thereby empowering the military and intelligence and security services to control civil society with little oversight.
- Undemocratic laws are being used to rescind established notions of the rule of law and denigrate trust in the impartiality of public institutions.
- Vague, broad language in new and amended laws—such as the Protest Law, NGO Law, Penal Code, Terrorism Law, and Military Court Law—is enabling the regime to arbitrarily prohibit or criminalize activities without definition, make accusations of terrorism without legal restraint, and transfer civilians to military courts.
- With legal backing, scare tactics and police brutality are being used regularly to deprive citizens of their freedoms of expression and association.
- To justify its policies, the regime is propagating conspiracy theories, the defamation of opponents, and hate speech directed at voices of dissent.
- The government is also using religious and nationalistic narratives to elevate its ruler to the level of a moral paragon and savior and to counteract dissatisfaction with Egypt's deteriorating conditions.
- This approach allows Egypt's generals to claim that their policies are aligned with national interests and national security.

The Effects

- Debates about public affairs and politics have become permeated with incorrect information, fake news, and outright lies.
- Liberal and leftist parties have been once again either domesticated or marginalized in a formal political arena controlled by the security services.
- Viable opposition movements and civic activism have been severely hindered. Islamist movements, in particular, have been weakened.
- Human rights defenders and nongovernmental organizations have been pushed to the edge of extinction, in constant fear of government sanctions.
- Tens of thousands of people have been detained, imprisoned, tortured, or killed by the security and intelligence services in the name of protecting the country's stability.

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