

EGYPT'S RESILIENT AND EVOLVING SOCIAL ACTIVISM

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With the decline of party politics in Egypt, social activism is becoming increasingly relevant in the fight against the government's new authoritarian policies and tactics. While Egypt's ruling generals have developed a tight grip on power in virtually every sector of society, various activist groups have had at least some success in holding the government accountable for human rights abuses. It will take many more victories to counteract the entrenched repression, but these groups offer the best hope for changing Egypt's current reality.

The Struggle

- Since 2013, four anti-authoritarian platforms—led by young activists, professional associations, student groups, and workers and civil servants—have shaped social activism in Egypt.
- Spontaneous eruptions of popular anger have also become politically significant.
- In contrast, opposition parties have become less significant. Unable to carve out a stable, independent role in Egyptian politics, they are gradually turning to activist initiatives to exert some influence.
- Young activists remain committed to single human rights causes, primarily focused on extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, or torture in places of custody.
- Certain professional associations—particularly the Syndicate of Doctors and Syndicate of Journalists—have ramped up their demands for autonomy and freedoms of expression and association.
- Students are challenging the security services' interference in their affairs and the presence of government and private security forces on campuses.
- Workers and civil servants remain highly engaged, continuing to voice the economic and social demands of organized labor.
- Citizens have frequently taken to the streets to protest specific government policies and practices, as well as accumulating human rights abuses.

The Impact

- The government is using repression, undemocratic legal frameworks, and aggressive judicial tools to try to extinguish social activism. A large number of activists have been detained and arrested.
- Yet, the activism has restored pluralist politics to professional associations and increased popular awareness of the daily instances of repression.
- Labor activism has not been quashed, despite the banning of independent unions and the frequent referral of protesters to military courts; nor has the government's renewed co-optation of the General Union of Egyptian Workers silenced the protesting of deteriorating economic and social conditions.
- The government's tactics have also failed to vanquish student activism. Students continue to hold protests and have successfully mobilized against pro-government candidates in student union elections.
- The frequency of popular protests has resulted in a relatively effective push back against the impunity of police personnel implicated in human rights abuses.

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