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Student political activism in democratizing Egypt[1]

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INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian university throughout the nation's modern history has been a fulcrum for generating political and civic activism. Indeed, it is not altogether surprising that the current regime is so intent on cracking down on student activism, precisely because it so astutely recognizes the potential of the university as a site of civic debate and protest.[3] Presently, there are nearly two million university students enrolled in twenty-four state universities and twenty private universities throughout Egypt.[4] Owing to a student body that has grown tremendously since the early twentieth century – the national education budget doubled between 1930 and 1953, and the student body accordingly doubled

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[3] Louisa Loveluck, "Egypt's universities, centers of dissent, reopen under strict new controls," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 10, 2014, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2014/1010/Egypt-s-universities-centers-of-dissent-reopen-under-strict-new-controls

[4] "Supreme Council of Universities," April 18, 2015, http://www.scu.eun.eg/

from 1945 to 1951 alone[5] – the university will continue to serve as a deeply conducive site to political organizing. Accordingly, to explicate the full implications of university political organizing on the Egyptian body politic, this chapter will address the history of student activism in Egypt. By examining the role and impact of Egyptian university student activism on the promulgation of political activism and democratization, we will ultimately be able to offer a meaningful prognosis on its future role in contributing to Egyptian civic and democratic life.

Sketching the landscape of university activism across its longitudinal history in modern Egypt will prove pivotal in addressing its role and impact in Egyptian civic life, past, present, and future. I will proceed with this investigation with several key metrics in mind. How effective has student activism been in generating positive political change? What role has political affiliation of the student body – be it of leftist, liberal, or Islamist disposition – had on the direction of activist initiatives on campuses? What is the relationship between student activism and broader movements in Egyptian political and civil society? How did student activism respond to or evolve in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution culminating in the overthrow of Mubarak, or the subsequent 2013 revolution that culminated in the overthrow of Mohammad Morsi? And finally, what are the implications for future activism in the aftermath of the return of authoritarian rule under Sisi? Or more specifically, what future role does student activism stand to play in democratizing Egypt and cultivating a vibrant civil society?

Indeed, even in the context of the authoritarianism of post-coup Egypt, the university remains a pillar of Egyptian civic life – lionized as such even by figures otherwise wholly supportive of the Sisi regime's crackdown on civil society. For example, the paradoxical career of Dr. Mohammad Abol Ghar is a case in point. From a vibrant career prior to the January 2011 uprisings in support of substantive democratic reform, to his role as cofounder and interim leader of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, the Cairo University gynecology professor has since thrown his firm support behind the July 3 overthrow of Mohammad Morsi and the concomitant crackdown on Egyptian civil society. Going so far as to argue explicitly that national security interests trump individual freedoms, most recently Abol

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[5] Ahmed Abdalla, *Alttalaba wa Al-siyaasa fi Misr* (*The Students and Politics in Egypt*), trans. Ekram Youssef (Cairo: Sina Publishers, 1991), 41.

Ghar has given his imprimatur for the democratic process to precisely limit rights and freedoms to fit the current security needs of the state.[6]

Yet for all his proclivities to support the new authoritarianism in Egypt, there is one arena in Egyptian civil society he is not willing to circumscribe in the name of national interest: the Egyptian university system. Fully faithful to the project he helped inaugurate in the March 9th Movement for University Independence, Abol Ghar in one of his regular columns for *Al-Masry al-Youm* offers significant pushback to the military regime he now so strongly supports. Addressed as an open letter offering advice (*nasihah*) to Sisi, Abol Ghar firmly yet politely and respectfully chastises the Egyptian leader for attempting to politically manipulate the system of selection of university leadership. Declaring such a decree unconstitutional, Abol Ghar exhorts Sisi to reconsider the consequences of this hasty measure, arguing, "Mr. President, without an independent and free university, nations do not progress. The legislation of this law in this hasty manner is flawed and harmful, and you will go down in history for this huge mistake."[7]

Suffice to say, despite Abol Ghar's lukewarm commitments to "social justice and democratic change"[8] under the current regime, he nonetheless firmly maintains them in the context of the university system. Thus, even in tenuous times in which Egyptian civic life is otherwise under attack, it seems that leftist and liberal activists in this vein continue to covet the free and independent Egyptian university as a site for the promulgation of liberal values. The student movement within the university context, moreover, is a fundamental component of the university's role in the cultivation and preservation of Egyptian civic life. It is thus imperative

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[6] Karima 'Abd al-Ghani, "Abol Ghar li'al-Ahram': Qalb al masriyiin jami'an ma' al-dawla," *Al-Ahram Online*, November 13, 2015, http://www.ahram.org.eg/News/131723/145/453551/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8/%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%80-%C2%AB%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%85%C2%BB-%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9.aspx

[7] Mohammad Abol Ghar, "Min Mandela ila-l Sisi: al-Jami'ah," *Al-Masry al-Youm*, June 30, 2014, http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/473745

[8] "Mohamed Abul-Ghar," *Jadaliyya*, November 18, 2011, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3173/mohamed-abul-ghar

to better situate the student movement across its historical trajectory, to do full justice to its potential as a fulcrum of civil society.

To properly address these concerns, I will proceed in a linear chronological fashion. First, I will offer a brief history of the emergence of student movements during the colonial period. Then I will move on in the second section to analyze student activism under Nasser, with a particular focus on the 1954 crisis and the 1968 student uprisings. In the third and fourth sections, I will investigate, respectively, the uprisings of 1972–3 and 1977 under Sadat, and student activism more broadly under Mubarak. I will end by exploring student activism in the contemporary context, from the 2011 uprising to its current status in the aftermath of the crackdown on the university scene under Sisi since 2013, and the implications for future activism in this milieu.

EMERGENCE OF EGYPT'S STUDENT MOVEMENT

Nascent beginnings of the student movement in Egypt began as early as the eighteenth century, during which seminary students from al-Azhar University played a palpable role in protesting at the oppressive policies of the Ottoman rulers and their Mamluk soldiers. Azhar students continued in this tradition of protest against the French invasion of Egypt (1798–1801).[9] By the early nineteenth century, the modern state infrastructure and educational system established by Mohammed Ali Pasha (d. 1849) began to supplant the role of the Azhar system, such that students from the higher education schools established under Ali's leadership increasingly emerged in the public sphere.[10] And most Azhari sheikhs and students as well as higher education students supported Ahmed 'Urabi's revolution in 1881–2.[11]

However, it would be premature to label student political activism during this early period as a bona fide *haraka tullabiyya* (student movement), for student demands here were actually an extension of demands

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[9] See Muhammad Afifi, *Alharaka Altollabiya wa Alwataniya Almasriya* (*Student Movement and Egyptian Nationalism*), The Arab Center for Research and Studies, April 8, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015, http://www.acrseg.org/3719

[10] Abd al-Rahman al-Rafai, *Asr Muhammad Ali's* (*Muhammad Ali's Era*), 5th ed. (Cairo: Al-Mareef Publishers, 1989), 397.

[11] Abd al-Rahman al-Rafai, *Ahmad Urabi: Al-Zaeem Al-Moftara Alei* (*Ahmed 'Urabi: The Leader Maligned*), 242.

articulated by Egyptian society more broadly during this period. With the rise of Mustafa Kamil (d. 1908) and the establishment of the Club of Higher Education schools, students played a vital role in Kamil's National Party.[12] They protested for two primary national goals: formal independence, and a modern, democratic constitution.

Students of higher education schools, particularly law school students, ignited the first flame of the 1919 revolution.[13] One of the revolution's outcomes was the rise of an inclusive, broad, national movement in which Muslims and Christians took part, demanding Egypt's independence and a democratic constitution. Students formed the backbone of this national movement, and as their number increased thanks to the development of the educational system in the mid-1930s, so did students' political power. As the political scientist and former student leader Ahmed Abdalla (d. 2006)[14] writes, during this period students were galvanized by the deteriorating economic situation and the concomitant lack of job opportunities for university graduates, as well as political instability and the constitutional relapse resulting from the abolition of the 1923 constitution – which had otherwise guaranteed a reasonable extension of parliamentary representative democracy, liberties, and political pluralism.[15]

In light of those concerns, student activists in the early twentieth century communicated two specific goals to political parties, particularly the Wafd Party. The first was specifically educational, and dealt with the paucity of meaningful post-graduation employment opportunities; in particular, students held the state responsible for low wages and for limited access to government jobs, despite its willfully employing non-Egyptians

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[12] For more details, see Haggai Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989), 18–22.

[13] Abd al-Rahman al-Rafai, *Thwarat 1919: Tariekh Masr Alqawmi: 1914–1921* (*The 1919 Revolution: Egypt's National History from 1914 to 1921*) (Cairo: Al-Mareef Publishers, 1987), 193.

[14] Ahmed Abdalla was a student leader in the 1960s and 70s and an independent political scientist and political activist in the 1980s and 90s. He wrote considerably about student activism, and about Egyptian politics and sociology. His doctoral dissertation at Cambridge University, focusing on the Egyptian student movement, was ultimately published as his first book. See Ahmed Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt: 1923–1973* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008). For more on Abdalla more broadly, see this obituary: Marsha Pripstein Posusney, Michaelle Browers, "Ahmed Abdalla Rozza," *Middle East Report* 36, no. 240 (Fall 2006).

[15] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 48–9.

in industrial and commercial institutions.[16] The second goal, broader in scope, was in alignment with the national cause, seeking restoration of the 1923 constitution and formal Egyptian independence. Given its broader ambitions, the student movement in this respect gained the support of several other sectors of society, including trade syndicates, unions, teachers, judges, and journalists.[17]

And in so doing, the student movement gave rise to the 1935 uprising, which achieved several goals. All main national political parties and student groups formed a united national bloc,[18] and, in December 1935, the government restored the 1923 constitution.[19] Moreover, established political parties (such as the Wafd Party) and other political movements (like the Young Egypt Party (Misr El-Fatah) and the Muslim Brotherhood) included many students who played prominent roles, especially during elections, mobilization, and protests.[20] New communist political groups also formed student wings, and some students engaged in secret communist groups. Communists played an influential role in the 1946 uprising, yet ultimately became feeble inside the student movement after refusing to participate in the Palestine War.[21] All this is to say, the student movement officially became a political actor in the Egyptian public sphere following the 1935 uprising. Yet, at the same time, the nascent movement suffered from political fissures that eventually led to violent clashes among Wafd Party supporters and opponents in 1937. By the end of World War II, the student movement had become a subject of dispute among several political streams: Wafd Party; left-wing currents; Misr El-Fatah; and the Muslim Brotherhood. Nonetheless, despite such political divisions, common national goals (formal independence, the constitution, and the

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[16] Ibid., 50.

[17] Ibid., 51. During this period, the student movement was supported and encouraged by several members of the Egyptian state and civil society, namely judges. Some courts went as far as issuing extenuating decrees on behalf of students after the 1935–6 uprising. Moreover, the vast majority of faculty members also supported the student movement during this phase – in contradistinction to the Republic era, at which point the government wholly dominated the university faculty.

[18] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 57.

[19] Abd al-Rahman al-Rafai, *Fi Aqab althawra almasiriya 1919* (*After the 1919 Egyptian Revolution*) (Cairo: Al-Mareef Publishers, 1988), 224.

[20] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 59–61; and Abd al-Rahman al-Rafai, *After the 1919 Egyptian Revolution*, Vol. 3, 56.

[21] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 65.

annulment of the 1936 treaty) united these factions, as they all joined protests against the British and the king.

That said, despite student protests being overwhelmingly peaceful, the response by the palace and the British to student demands were outright brutal, relying on repression, spreading misinformation about the student movement in the press, university shutdowns, and other similar repressive measures.[22] The British and Egyptian administrations alike also resorted to infiltrating the student movement to sow division and dissent among student activists, going so far as establishing pro-government organizations inside the universities to confront Wafd Party governments. Muhammad Mahmoud, prime minister of Egypt 1928–9 and 1937–9, even recommended the founding of a group of "Patriot Students" to monitor subversive student activist groups on campus – a proposition resurrected nearly a century later by regime loyalists in the aftermath of the coup of July 2013, as we shall see later in the chapter.[23]

Nonetheless, student protests and political divisions continued until a new uprising, led both by high school students and by students at Cairo University, commenced on February 9, 1946. This demonstration was an immediate response to British forces having infamously opened Abbas Bridge, during which tens of students fell into the Nile.[24] Students issued three demands: the evacuation of the British troops and raising the cause for Egyptian independence in the UN Security Council; liberation of Egypt from economic slavery; and the formation of a student general union. And despite suffering from political fissures, mismanagement, and a lack of unified leadership, the student uprising nonetheless made considerable gains here, as Britain declared it would withdraw from Egyptian cities, and settle only in the Suez Canal region. Still, facing continuing and enduring repression, both from the British and from the Egyptian monarchy, the student movement resumed its protests at the beginning of the 1946–7 academic year. In 1951, it issued a National Covenant, which called for armed resistance to obtain national independence. In effect, then, universities were being converted into military training camps, and brigades of the Muslim Brotherhood, among others, volunteered to fight the British in the Canal region. As such, alongside peasants, laborers,

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[22] Abd al-Rahman al-Rafai, *After the 1919 Egyptian Revolution*, Vol. 2, 216.

[23] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 108.

[24] Abd al-Rahman al-Rafai, *After the 1919 Egyptian Revolution*, Vol. 3, 187.

educated citizens, and some police and army officers, students engaged in the fight for national independence.

Having sketched this landscape of the emergence of the student movement in its early years, we can more seamlessly make sense of how it came to maturity. This ultimately takes place beyond the colonial period, particularly during the reign of Nasser.

STUDENT ACTIVISM UNDER NASSER

This phase of student involvement in politics under Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952–70) began under a political context utterly distinct from the colonial period. The emerging representative democratic system was demolished, and the military became directly engaged in politics. In addition, the ruling elites changed, as the military and a single-party regime came to dominate political life. The new regime, repressing both communists and Islamists alike, also adopted a centralized, socialist economic approach. Despite having achieved formal independence, Egypt was still far from its original democratic aspirations, having regressed instead into a totalitarian police state, which invariably came to have a deleterious impact on education and on student movements.

To be fair, Egyptian education had developed decidedly during this period, as budgets doubled; indeed, the expenditure in the first thirteen years of Nasser's regime was three times that of the educational system during the seventy-year British occupation.[25] Nasser presided over a vast expansion of primary and girls' education, and in technical education, while tuition fees were completely abolished. As for religious education, under Nasser the Azhar curriculum was augmented to include non-religious subjects in 1961. Moreover, this period also saw the establishment of regional universities, as well as the expansion of Faculties of Commerce, Law, and Arts. Nonetheless, there remained a serious concern that the *quantitative* investment made in education during the Nasser period could not be accompanied easily by a similar commitment to a *qualitative* improvement in education more broadly. It is in this uneasy context that student activists proceed.

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[25] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 127.

Students and the 1954 crisis

Immediately upon coming to power, the new regime attempted to court student groups and gain their loyalty. Yet, just as quickly, the military regime faced resistance from intellectuals and students, as well as from laborers. With respect to the latter, it faced some immediate credibility concerns with students due to the Kafr El-Dawwar incident, in which two laborers under the age of twenty were executed twenty days after the July 1952 coup.[26] Still, despite this rocky beginning, the nascent regime eventually gained student support during its early years. However, when the Revolutionary Command Council broke off into two separate wings, in which Mohammed Naguib – who sought military withdrawal and a return to democratic civilian rule – was ultimately bested by Nasser and his plans to implement one-party military rule, the students' front responded by abandoning the regime and demanding the ousting of the military dictatorship.

As for the Muslim Brotherhood, while it first supported the Free Officers Movement, following this rift in the Revolutionary Command Council, it turned its support to Mohammed Naguib's group, demanding that the military return to its barracks, as a prerequisite for the development of a properly democratic order. On the other hand, the Brotherhood engaged in a struggle for power with Nasser and his group, to the point that Brotherhood-affiliated students directly clashed with the state-led Liberation Rally organization. In March 1954, students from Cairo University formed a national front in opposition to military rule, which the Brotherhood had ultimately joined. The regime dealt with the protests using the same methods as its predecessors in the colonial period: with brute force, with duplicitous media campaigns maligning the student movement, and by ultimately closing the university. Through such tactics, the regime managed to simultaneously repress the democratic wing within the Revolutionary Command Council, the Brotherhood, and the broader student movement.[27]

During the 1954 crisis, the Alexandria University Faculty Members Club was at the forefront of the protesters who demanded the suspension

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[26] Ahmad Hammrough, *Thawrat Thalatha wa Eshroun Yolou* (*The July 23rd Revolution*), Vol. 1 (Cairo: Egyptian General Association of Book, 1992), 291–2.

[27] For more details about the 1954 crisis, see ibid., 331–66.

of martial law and the dissolution of the Revolutionary Command Council. The regime again responded with an iron fist, compromising the academic integrity of the institution by arresting a number of professors, and outright dismissing others from their posts.[28] Thus, by the end of this crisis, the regime had managed to dominate not only politics and the university, but also civil society as a whole – of which the university was a central part, per the visions for higher education articulated by early Egyptian reformers. Jettisoning those lofty ideals of the nation's early intellectual leaders, the new military regime in Egypt had instead adopted totalitarian rule, based on a single-party system. Eventually, members of the student movement, like leftist and liberal activists in general, either supported the regime or withdrew from the public sphere altogether. Others instead chose to emigrate. This emasculated state became the status quo in Egyptian protest movements for decades, only to be resuscitated after the regime's military defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Thereafter, the student movement formatively reemerged in Egyptian political life via two uprisings in the same year.[29]

The uprisings of February and March 1968

The 1967 military defeat was the first flame that motivated many Egyptians to emerge from their political passivity. Coupled with that defeat, expansion in education yielded a new educated middle class, which gradually opposed the regime's policies more and more intensely. Demonstrations

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[28] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 144.

[29] It is important to briefly outline Nasser's repressive policy against university students and faculty members, which prompted student revolts in 1968. According to Ahmed Abdalla, the regime dominated the university context by several methods, including: politicizing class syllabi for the sake of garnering support for the regime; imposing a mandatory "national education" class in order to glorify the regime and instill loyalty; enacting a university bylaw in 1966 that banned any student political activism, and further restricting student activities to those practiced by regime-led organizations; appointment of a university police guard under the authority of the Interior Ministry; taking state stewardship of the university establishment by founding the Supreme Council of Universities, headed by the Ministry of Education, in 1961; selecting faculty deans by political appointment rather than by election; and creating a new class of loyalists by appointing university faculty to administrative and ministerial posts, among other repressive measures. For more details, see Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 147–57; and Hisham al-Salamuni, *al-Jil alladhi wajaha Abd al-Nasir wa-al-Sadat* (*The Generation that faces Abdel Nasser and Sadat*) (Cairo: Dar Qiba', 1999), 213–16.

erupted first among the laborers in Helwan on February 21, 1968 in protest against the lenient sentences issued to Air Force officers accused of carelessness during the war.[30] Mass demonstrations soon gave way to a bona fide mass uprising, spearheaded in large part by students. The regime responded with its typical repression, and in the process killed many protesters. Regime escalation then gave rise to an escalation in the protesters' demands, which came to include releasing political detainees and prosecuting those accused of killing protesters.[31]

As the regime-controlled media subsequently reported that the protestors' demands were concerned only with sentencing, students at Cairo and Alexandria Universities released a series of more explicitly political demands. These demands included, among others: the discharge of political detainees, achieving a democratically elected representative government, instituting the freedom of speech and of the press, annulment of anti-freedom laws, the removal of Nasser's brother from his nepotistic post in the Socialist Union in Alexandria, investigating the murder of protesters killed in Helwan, investigating the Air Force incident, removing the Intelligence Directorate and the Investigation Service from the universities, and investigating violations of the university's independence and police brutality against students.[32]

As the demonstrations became wider, and with the police unable to continue to contain them, the regime attempted to coddle the students' rage by arranging meetings between student representatives and state officials – including with Nasser himself. The regime had also utilized members of the university administration and faculty in persuading the students to limit their protests to within the confines of university facilities. State officials and journalists constantly slandered and accused the students of betrayal, claiming that elements of the old feudal regime were the hidden hand behind student demands for democracy and freedom. State-run media even went as far as to announce that the protests were penetrated by some elements that worked for imperialist and Zionist forces in order to defeat the Arab nation.[33]

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[30] *Mothakarat Mohamed Najib: Konto Raeesan Li Misr* (*Mohammad Najib Memoir: I was Egypt's President*) (Cairo: Modern Egyptian Bureau, 1984); and Al-Salamuni, *al-Jil alladhi wajaha Abd al-Nasir wa-al-Sadat*, 274–82.

[31] For more details, see Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink from Nasser to Mubarak* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011), 64–5.

[32] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 186.

[33] For more details, see Al-Salamuni, *al-Jil alladhi wajaha Abd al-Nasir wa-al-Sadat*, 174–6.

Nonetheless, despite the desperate attempts by the state to suppress it, this uprising generated positive outcomes: above all else, both students and the Egyptian public more broadly found a renewed interest in the public sphere. Moreover, Nasser issued a decree to appeal for the prosecution of the Air Force officers and formed a new government with mostly civilian officials. He also issued the March 30 statement that included a promise to introduce liberal reforms.[34] At the university level, the uprising paved the way for eliminating some restrictions then being placed on student activism. With active student participation, a new students' bylaw was drafted in 1968, invalidating the stewardship by faculty over student activism, and inaugurating the General Union of Egyptian Students. Though, to be clear, the bylaw also maintained the presence of university security, provided that they did not intervene in direct activities of student activists.

The November 1968 uprising

Against this backdrop earlier in the year, a new uprising erupted in the city of al-Mansoura as high school students protested against a new law regarding secondary education. The demonstrations later expanded, exacerbated by the rampant repression by the state of al-Mansoura's students, and ultimately specific demands were made regarding the universities and the political regime. The largest clashes were among the Faculty of Engineering at Alexandria University, where unrest and sit-ins dramatically increased. Subsequently, mass demonstrations extended throughout the city, resulting in the deaths of dozens and the considerable vandalizing of private property. Student activist demands, though deeply influenced by their own educational and social difficulties, were articulated in largely political terms: prosecuting the officials responsible for the al-Mansoura incidents, the resignation of the minister of interior, releasing all political detainees, enforcing the freedom of the press, reinstatement of the rule of law, and a systematic improvement in the state of the Egyptian university system.

Predictably, the government responded through force, repression, accusations of betrayal and disloyalty to the state, by attacking the reactionary

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[34] See Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics*, 190–4; and Al-Salamuni, *al-Jil alladhi wajaha Abd al-Nasir wa-al-Sadat*, 213–16.

forces, and by encouraging political divisions among student activist groups. At this point, the university administration – and even some university faculty – were openly advocating on behalf of the regime, and thus taking great pride in undermining student activism and serving as whistleblowers against students and faculty who protested about regime policies.[35] Needless to say, the odds were stacked against the student movement at this juncture. And even worse, the uprising ultimately had highly deleterious consequences for student activism more broadly, as it led to the regime reneging on its prior commitments to university independence, and to again dominating campus life – going so far as reinstating faculty supervision over student activism in 1969.[36] This climate of fear and massive surveillance came to define student activism for the rest of the Nasser period, only for the student movement to transform again during the Sadat era.

STUDENT ACTIVISM DURING SADAT'S ERA

The first years of Sadat's reign saw remarkable renewal of student activity. Regenerated after the setbacks dealt to the movement under the Nasser era, student groups reemerged to focus on two broad political goals: Sinai's liberation from Israel, and establishing genuinely democratic governance. Students thus formed activist groups, actively published wall magazines critical of the regime, and held public conferences and seminars. Moreover, university campuses witnessed a return of sit-ins and political unrest.[37]

On the heels of student elections of the 1971–2 academic year, Sadat capitulated to popular demands and expelled security forces from university campuses. Nevertheless, this proved insufficient to tame fully student upheaval: his speech on January 13, 1972, wherein he provided lukewarm justifications for failing to fulfill his promise that 1971 would be a year of decisiveness in liberating Sinai, prompted enraged students to stage protests, unrest, and sit-ins, starting from the Faculty of Engineering in Cairo University and spreading throughout most of the universities.

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[35] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 201.

[36] For more details, see Al-Salamuni, *al-Jil alladhi wajaha Abd al-Nasir wa-al-Sadat*, 176.

[37] See Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 51–2, 243–4; and Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics*, 207.

From the inception of these protests, students focused intently on the broader political agenda of liberation of Sinai from Israeli occupation, and progress toward democratic governance. Dovetailing on those political demands, they included a distinctly economic critique, demanding progress in socio-economic development more broadly, the establishment of a minimum wage, de-linking the Egyptian economy from Western interests, decrying the economic stratification of Egyptian society and lavish lifestyle of the upper classes, and demanding the release of the detained Helwan laborers.[38]

To be clear, the most active stream during this uprising was the left-wing elements of the student movement. Building on that spark ignited by student leftist activists, and despite the antagonistic attitude of the official unions, the uprising then gained support by a number of student union leaders, in addition to the support of the masses and the professional syndicates. This stood to be an uprising of truly national proportions.

On the one hand, the government's reaction was consistent with its tactics since the days of British colonialism: brute repression and silencing of the student movement. But on the other, going even beyond the metrics of brutality employed during Nasser's reign, Sadat's regime went as far as employing national security forces to storm Cairo University campus on January 24, 1972. Moreover, the regime tried to contain the uprising by sending ministers and state officials to meet and pacify student activists. Meanwhile, echoing national media condemnations of the student movement, Sadat attacked student activists by accusing them of treason – all while continuing to maintain his resilience to fight to liberate Sinai, without being willing to declare the specifics of his plan to do so in public. Attempting to dismiss the credibility of the student movement, Sadat accused a small number of "lurking elements" (*qilla mundassa*) of being behind the protests, adding that some students had gone on suspicious trips abroad, and insinuating that student activists attacked each other only to falsely accuse the police of brutality and repression.[39]

In general, under Sadat, the student activist movement had become more politically mature than its predecessors, and was able to mobilize the masses more successfully in protest at the regime and its policies. In fact, in this latest spate student movements were able to make their way as far as Cairo's Tahrir Square before the police forces could finally disperse

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[38] For more details, see Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 224.
[39] Ibid., 222.

them. Following this uprising in January 1972, Sadat's government issued a decree formally banning demonstrations. At the same time, it instituted specific measures in preparation for a war economy, and allowed students to volunteer and join the war effort.[40] This climate came to inform the rest of the Sadat period. In particular, Sadat recognized the allure of leftist movements on university campuses, and made it a point to actively undermine them moving forward.

The uprisings of the 1970s: 1972–3

During the summer of 1972, three ideological blocs formed in the university sphere; the left-wing bloc that led the January 1972 uprising; the Nasserist bloc; and the Islamist bloc emerging from the Youth of Islam Group in the Faculty of Engineering of Cairo University. Recognizing a potential counterweight to the pernicious influence of leftist campus politics, Sadat's government welcomed the emerging Islamist stream as a bulwark against the left-wing bloc.[41] Consequently, university campuses at that time came to experience clashes among the leftists and the Islamists, with each offering competing political platforms via wall newspapers and conferences on campus.

That said, even as it propped up Islamist student groups to counter leftist ones, in response to the continuation of demonstrations from earlier in the academic year – despite Sadat's decree formally banning demonstrations following the January 1972 uprising – the government ultimately shifted gears and increasingly began to repress both leftist and Islamist student leaders alike. In response, student activists flared with anger and resorted to strikes and sit-ins. As a caveat, this spate of uprisings did not have complete uniformity in political platform or demands: whereas the Islamists focused narrowly on student demands (among them a revised student bylaw, and integrity in the student election process), the leftist bloc focused on broader national goals (namely democratic and economic

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[40] For more details, see Erlich, *Students and University in 20th Century Egyptian Politics*, 211–12.

[41] For more details on the rise of Islamists in the 1970s, see John R. Bradley, *Inside Egypt: The Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan Trade, 2008), 56–7; Abdel Moneim Abul Fotouh, *Shahid 'ala tarikh al-harakah al-Islamiyah fi Misr, 1970–1984* (*A witness on the Student Movement in Egypt 1970–1984*), ed. Hossam Tammam (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 2010).

reforms). Nonetheless, these latest protests did manage to strike a nerve by capitalizing on the national rage resulting from Egypt's humiliating defeat by Israel in June 1967, and in so doing all parties involved – including intellectuals, university faculty, and members of professional guilds – renewed broader calls for democracy, and for university reform and independence. This incident is particularly remarkable in that several faculty members broke their silence for the first time since 1954 by publicly supporting students in their political struggles – though others opposed them, some of whom were later granted ministerial posts as a reward for their loyalty to the regime.[42]

Sadat's government responded in the typical fashion, by confronting student protesters with excessive force, mass arrests, through the establishment of fact-finding committees, as well as by outright closing the universities. Sadat agitated the situation further by claiming that the left and right wings had a plan to confront "The Alliance of Popular Working Forces," the main ideology of the state. Moreover, the government also expelled dozens of professionals in the aftermath of this latest crackdown, and censored several authors and writers. Some judges responded sympathetically to the student protesters, by issuing lenient sentences and discharging them on bail; rejecting these overtures, Sadat went as far as to use his constitutional authority as president to appeal against some of these judicial orders.[43]

However, the tumultuous political climate that culminated in the October War in 1973 with Israel led Sadat to shift gears, retreating from his heavy-handedness with student activists by halting pending trials, and by reinstating hitherto alienated activists and journalists. Consequently, when the war broke out, students engaged in wartime civil defense of the state, both inside and outside the universities. In the aftermath of the war, Sadat inaugurated a policy of economic opening to private investment and political pluralism, a period known as the Opening, or *al-Infitah*. Many student movement leaders willingly followed Sadat in his posturing of openness, and joined newly established political parties. Still, others firmly opposed Sadat's new initiative, thus paving the way for renewed confrontation with the regime.[44]

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[42] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 240–1.

[43] Ibid., 241.

[44] Ibid., 242.

That propensity for renewed conflict escalated further in 1976, when a new student bylaw was enacted that many students considered one of the most charitable in the history of the Egyptian university system. Although this bylaw banned any political activity outside the framework of student unions, it nonetheless considered political activism a form of bona fide student activity, thereby protecting it. The bylaw also endorsed the activity of the General Union of Egyptian Students, and ended the practice of faculty supervision over student union committees.[45] Thus, students were now free to pursue political activity unhindered, and accordingly they continued to engage in civil discourse with renewed passion and zeal. This all came full circle in 1977.

The 1977 uprising

For all the reasons mentioned above, clashes between students and the regime continued after the 1973 war. In particular, Sadat's decision to raise the price of basic commodities in the context of his economic liberalization of the country caused great unrest, leading to an uprising in 1977 spearheaded by factory laborers. Led by leftists, the movement came to attract students and other ordinary peoples in multiple Egyptian cities, to the extent that police stations and presidential headquarters were burned. The government's reaction was particularly repressive, to the extent that Sadat and state-run media described the protest as the "uprising of thieves" and a "communist conspiracy," and thousands of activists, writers, and intellectuals were arrested in the aftermath.[46]

Nonetheless, the uprising did force Sadat to rescind his plans to raise the price of basic commodities. In response to the renewed threat posed by the student movement, Sadat replaced the politically lenient student bylaw of 1976 with a far more restrictive one in 1979 – one that dissolved the political committee, and banned the hosting of seminars or distribution of pamphlets and publications by student activists without explicit permission by the university president or the faculty dean. This

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[45] For more detail on the student bylaw, see *Al-hoquq wa alhuriyat al-tullabiyia* (*Student Rights and Freedoms*) (Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, 2008), 11–14, accessed January 12, 2015, http://afteegypt.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/11/sfrstudy.pdf
[46] See Anthony Mcdermott, *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak: A Flawed Revolution* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 109–10; and Judith Tucker, "While Sadat shuffles: Economic decay, political ferment in Egypt," *MERIP*, no. 65 (March 1978), 3–5.

restrictive new bylaw also included the establishment of a new system of supervision and surveillance of student activists, comprised of professors on the student union's committees, as well as hiring security forces within university campuses as added surveillance. Moreover, this new bylaw undermined or erased some of the union goals as articulated in the 1976 bylaw, such as "providing students with the basic talents that shall support the growth of their characters and intellect," and "reinforcement of their connection with student organizations and unions throughout the Arab world." Moreover, this restrictive new bylaw also compromised student unions' financial independence.[47]

To conclude this section, it is worth reiterating that the Sadat years greatly contributed to the emergence and development of the Islamist movement in student activism, and the concomitant retreat of the leftist bloc. Sadat's administration deliberately encouraged this dissention between the two, supporting the Islamists specifically to undermine the putative threat of leftist activism – only to ultimately turn its guns on the Islamist student bloc as well, upon learning that he could not wholly contain it and make it docile to his political agenda.[48] Ultimately, though, Sadat's intransigence wound up emboldening the Islamist bloc of the student movement, beginning with his 1977 visit to Israel. Capitalizing on the anger this posturing to Israel produced among Egypt's Islamists, Islamist student blocs went on to win a landslide in 1978–9 elections. Meanwhile, Sadat's government continued with its policy of repressing dissident students, even augmenting the role of university security and surveillance in the process. Tensions increased further in 1979, when Sadat granted political sanctuary and asylum to the deposed Shah of Iran – a figure deeply reviled by Islamists. In the aftermath of that episode, Sadat conducted a now infamous raid encompassing all those who opposed the peace treaty with Israel – including writers, journalists, political party leaders, and university professors. In the process, Sadat's regime arrested nearly six hundred students, mostly Islamists, and unceremoniously closed down opposition newspapers.[49]

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[47] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 276–7.

[48] See, for instance, Abdullah Al-Arian, *Answering the Call: Popular Islamic Activism in Sadat's Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 172–3.

[49] For more details, see Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 275; Fawaz A. Gerges, "The end of the Islamist insurgency in Egypt?: Costs and prospects," *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 4 (Autumn, 2000): 592–612. For more on Islamist activism under Sadat more broadly, see Al-Arian, *Answering the Call*.

This raid occurred on September 3, 1981, mere weeks before his assassination by extremist Islamists. Ultimately, then, Sadat's attempt to temporarily shore up the Islamist student movement to undermine the leftist one, only to betray his erstwhile Islamist student allies in the end, proved to be a Faustian bargain. Consequently, Islamism proved to gain a formative influence in the university activist scene under the Mubarak era, as we shall see in the next section.

STUDENT ACTIVISM DURING MUBARAK'S ERA

The mid-1980s witnessed a significant increase in the development of higher education: the total number of enrolled university students doubled, with more than 500,000 students now enrolled after the foundation of many regional universities. The higher education budget during this period, moreover, had reached nearly 370 million Egyptian pounds.[50] However, this quantitative development did not give rise to qualitative development in the Egyptian education system. Moreover, feeble social and economic policies, the adoption of unregulated free market economics, and the spread of corruption and patronage throughout the Egyptian public and private sectors all contributed to a growing disillusionment by students and university graduates in the possibility of a better future through the improvement of higher education. Ultimately, this malaise among the student body gave rise to political alienation among Egyptians more broadly.[51]

That said, this environment of disillusionment and alienation did not immediately translate into insurrection student activist groups as such. During Hosni Mubarak's repressive reign, Egypt did not witness large-scale student uprisings similar to those of the 1960s and 70s. Nevertheless, Mubarak's harsh administrative and security policies did not preclude some more modest direct action against the status quo by student activists. Student protests started in Al-Mansoura University in the academic year 1983–4, and then expanded to other universities. Student demands during this period focused on the reinstatement of the 1976 bylaw, lifting the restrictions imposed on their activities and unions, the restoration of the General Union of Egyptian Students, the expulsion

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[50] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 267.

[51] See Abdel-Fattah Mady, "Popular discontent, revolution, and democratization in Egypt in a globalizing world," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 20, no. 1 (2013): 315–25.

of the security forces from university campuses, and the elimination of the broader milieu of invasive state supervision imposed on universities.[52]

More broadly, student activism was motivated in this period by a yearning for genuine democracy and the liberal rule of law, by a refusal and rejection of Egypt's normalizing ties with Israel, and by solidarity with various regional causes. With respect to the latter, political developments elsewhere in the Arab world and beyond triggered protests by Egyptian students, including: uprisings following the first Palestinian Intifada (Uprising) in 1987, protests in the early 1990s decrying Egypt's involvement in the 1991 Iraq War, protests in solidarity with Bosnia in 1995, and protests against the United States' bombardment of Iraq in 1998. Moreover, university and secondary-school students began large-scale demonstrations on September 29, 2000 against the visit of former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem – a visit that helped trigger the Second Intifada. And in March 2003, a large-scale student protest marched to Tahrir Square in Cairo to condemn the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.[53]

These commitments to democracy and to solidarity with regional causes did not generate mass uprisings, though, because students found themselves constrained from several perspectives. Although the General Union of Egyptian Students had been restored, it had no legal grounds for handling student regulations or funding, particularly following the severe tension caused by governmental interference in student elections in 1984–5.[54] In this context, Mubarak's regime utilized hitherto unavailable tools to limit the role of the student unions in arts and sports. It further amended the 1979 bylaw in 1984 in order to tighten the invasive influence of security forces on university campuses. More specifically, it amended the relevant article in the bylaw as follows: "In every university, a security unit shall be founded, as it will be tasked to protect the university facilities and its safety, which will be directly supervised by the university president." The inserted clause, "and its safety," despite seeming innocuous at face value, in practice gave the regime full license to ratchet up repression of students under the nebulous auspices of protecting the university's safety. Consequently, student activism was largely hindered,

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[52] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 278.

[53] "Mathahirat Masriya did darb al-Iraq," *BBC News*, February 23, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/news/newsid_2791000/2791457.stm

[54] Abdalla, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, 280.

and student unions became submissive and beholden to the will of university administrators – themselves appointed upon the approval of the State Security Investigation Service. Accordingly, the 1979 bylaw was referred to during the Mubarak years as the "State Security bylaw."[55]

Despite this hostile environment to campus activism under Mubarak, though, the same period proved one of increasing political influence for the Muslim Brotherhood in campus life. As discussed in the previous section, despite Sadat's initial embrace of Islamist student groups, his later years witnessed significant repression of his erstwhile allies, both inside and outside the university context. Nonetheless, the Islamists were ultimately empowered in the very same context of Sadat's intransigence, as evidenced by the results of the parliamentary, syndicate, and student elections.[56] The Islamist current also included politically quietist Salafis, as well as Jihadists like the Islamic Group (al-Gama'aa al-Islamiyya), but the Muslim Brotherhood was by far the largest faction within the broader Islamist bloc. The Brotherhood utilized this leverage within the broader Islamist political bloc to solidify its influence in the university activist scene during this period.

Between 1948 and 1989, Brotherhood-affiliated professors successfully managed to join faculty members' clubs at their institutions, while Brotherhood-affiliated students won landslide victories in student elections in most universities.[57] In fact, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated student groups in the 1980s had comparably more freedom than then deeply constrained Egyptian political parties and civil society outside the university milieu on the one hand, and than the broader student movement in the context of increased governmental restrictions later during the 1990s on the other.[58] In addition to protesting in solidarity with Arab and Muslim causes and on behalf of broader demands articulated by the student movement, such as the bylaw modification and expulsion of security forces from campuses, Brotherhood-affiliated student activists entrenched themselves more deeply in campus life through other educational, social, cultural, and religious activities, and through solidarity campaigns with Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kosovo, among others.

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[55] See *Student Rights and Freedoms*, 14–15.

[56] For more details on the rise of Islamists in the 1980s, see Hesham Al-Awadi, *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Legitimacy: Power and Political Islam in Egypt under Mubarak* (I.B. Tauris; Reprint edition, 2014), 92–5; and Bradley, *Inside Egypt*, 58–9.

[57] Al-Awadi, *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Legitimacy*, 122–3.

[58] See Mady, "Popular discontent, revolution, and democratization in Egypt," 313–37.

By the late 1990s and the early 2000s, to counter the increasing influence of the Brotherhood in campus politics, Mubarak's regime exerted considerable effort to establish pro-regime student groups under the aegis of the ruling National Democratic Party and the governmental Youth and Sports Agencies. The regime thus created and generously funded entities known as "Horus" student groups on university campuses, and encouraged them to intimidate the student body by silencing activists and deterring others from joining activist campaigns. However, these groups proved unsuccessful, as only reckless students joined them. In addition, the Mubarak regime intensively exploited university administrations and security apparatuses to undermine student political activities, and blatantly intervened in elections and nominations to political posts. To this end, the regime eventually deployed hired thugs (*baltajiyya*) to attack purportedly seditious students on campuses.[59]

On December 10, 2006, Brotherhood-affiliated students at al-Azhar University protested at the regime's violence with a mock military-style parade, replete with students dressed in military uniforms – a move that agitated both the government and political opposition alike, including leftists and liberals. This incident was known as having been spearheaded by "Azhar militias."[60] Although the Brotherhood attempted to alleviate the discord it created through this incident, to the point that the students involved apologized, the government used the incident as justification to mount a fierce propaganda campaign against Brotherhood campus activism. Swiftly, the Mubarak regime launched harsh raids in which hundreds of Brotherhood-affiliated students and dozens of Brotherhood-affiliated leaders and university professors were arrested, and prosecuted under the auspices of inciting violence and attempting to overthrow the political regime.[61]

After al-Azhar University's event, the security agencies disqualified Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated candidates from elections in 2007, leading to landslide victories by pro-regime student leaders. Protests erupted in al-Azhar University and then expanded to other universities. Brotherhood-aligned students, alongside faculty associated with the

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[59] Personal observation by author, while serving as a faculty member at Alexandria University.

[60] Ahmad al-Bahiri, "'Militiayat Ikhwaniya' tasta'rada maharat al-qital dakhil jami'at al-Azhar," *Al-Masry al-Youm*, December 11, 2006, http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=40525

[61] Al-Awadi, *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Legitimacy*, 209–10.

March 9th Movement for University Independence – the very movement founded in 2003 by Dr. Mohammad Abol Ghar and others, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter – suggested establishing alternative student unions in protest at the blackballing of Brotherhood and other opposition students from elections.[62] Informal elections were held across several universities in 2007, resulting in the election of alternative non-government-aligned unions. Nonetheless, the government dealt with the elections in Cairo University in 2007 using a new weapon, the *baltajiyya*, who would physically attack students and sabotage the elections, in addition to expelling students from universities and dormitories.[63]

As campus activism independent of the official pro-government student unions increased, the regime responded by issuing a new bylaw in 2007 that confirmed that official student unions were the only legitimate political entities on campus – thus invalidating the alternative informal unions discussed earlier. It also banned any factional, religious, or partisan gatherings, in addition to expanding professorial authority over student political activities.[64] On the other hand, despite these setbacks, during this same period, some professors resumed their political activities via faculty clubs that struggled against the regime's violations of academic freedoms, and actively opposed government attempts to rig faculty club elections in favor of pro-government electoral candidates. In 2003, professors affiliated with the March 9th Movement for University Independence were able to elevate several higher education challenges for public discussion, and in so doing objected to some suspicious projects advocated by Mubarak's regime, including its attempts to sell the historical facilities of Alexandria University and its public hospital, and the government's call for the privatization of education.

The university faculty further reasserted itself against threats by the Mubarak regime in 2006, when the Alexandria University Faculty

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[62] Here it is interesting to note that, in this context, despite Dr. Abol Ghar's outright hostility to the Muslim Brotherhood in its totality in the aftermath of the 2013 coup, the March 9th Movement for University Independence proved willing here to ally with student activists aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood. For more on the complexities of the March 9th Movement's relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, see Benjamin Geer, "Autonomy and symbolic capital in an academic social movement: The March 9 Group in Egypt," *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 17 (December 19, 2013), https://ejts.revues.org/4780

[63] See "Observatory state of democracy," October 22, 2007, accessed December 20, 2015, http://www.mosharka.org/index.php?newsid=116

[64] For more details, see *Student Rights and Freedoms*, 15, 24–41.

Club insisted on conducting impromptu Club elections on the sidewalk opposite the club facilities, as the government had cancelled the official elections. This election, called "the sidewalk election," formed a board of directors composed of professors who belonged to various different political currents: the Muslim Brotherhood, leftists, and independents were all represented in this coalition. Moreover, the March 9th Movement for University Independence also mobilized faculty members in cooperation with students for a large-scale protest on April 6, 2009 – under the auspices of the April 6th Youth Movement – aimed at expelling university security forces, culminating in a lawsuit against the regime demanding an end to security force presence on university campuses.[65] However, the regime did not implement the ruling, interestingly enough, until the January 2011 revolution erupted.[66] Ultimately, security forces were expelled from the university in March 2011.[67]

In brief, since 2004, student activism during the Mubarak years had become an integral part of a broader trend in political opposition activism, initiated in particular by a cross-ideological populist movement known as Kifaya, Egyptian Movement for Change. Kifaya opposed Mubarak's attempts to extend his reign to a fourth term, and similarly opposed both his plan to bequeath the presidency to his son Gamal, and the constitutional amendments of 2005 and 2007 that in fact strengthened the absolute power of ruling party.[68] Kifaya's goals were broad, nationally driven concerns that gained appeal with all different political persuasions in the student activist movement. However, Mubarak ignored this movement and its populist demands, despite all indicators suggesting that protest against his regime would prove increasingly difficult to put down – including hundreds of yearly strikes; the emergence of the populist and non-ideological April 6th Youth Movement; in addition to other protest movements within different professional sectors including

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[65] See, for instance, this statement from the April 6th Youth Movement's blog, detailing its partnership with March 9th: https://shabab6april.wordpress.com/2009/04/04/

[66] See on Academic Freedoms Abdel-Fattah Mady, *Kayf yomkn hemaya al-huriyat al-akademiyia* (How to protect academic freedoms), Aljazeera.net, August 27, 2012, accessed April 24, 2015, http://www.abdelfattahmady.net/opinion-articles/aljzeera/373-27-8-2012.html

[67] For more details, see Menna Omar, "Policing Egypt's universities: From campus to courts," *The Legal Agenda*, March 27, 2014, http://www.english.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=600&folder=articles&lang=en#.UzQ9RqiSyyZ

[68] Al-Awadi, *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Legitimacy*, 211

judges, laborers, lawyers, intellectuals, and university professors. In 2010, a cross-ideological alliance was also introduced via the formation of the "National Association for Change," comprised of all major political currents – including the Muslim Brotherhood.[69] Ultimately, these populist currents brewing in Egypt civil society – of which the student movement was a major catalyst – proved so overwhelming to the Mubarak regime that in 2011 they culminated in bona fide revolutionary upheaval. It is to this period and beyond that we shall now turn.

POST-JANUARY 25, 2011 REVOLUTION

As a preface, statistics regarding higher education during the period immediately preceding the eruption of the revolution indicated a steady increase in university student enrollment – but at the same time a remarkable decrease in the higher education budget. For instance, student enrollment in state- and privately owned higher educational institutions during the 2011–12 academic year totaled nearly 2.1 million, and in 2010–11 yielded around half a million graduates.[70] But, by contrast, budgets were limited, as expenditure on higher education (excluding al-Azhar) was nearly 13.5 billion Egyptian pounds in 2011–12. This figure represented nearly 25.1% of the nation's total expenditure on education and 0.9% of Egypt gross domestic product (GDP) – a marked decline from the 29.6% of total education expenditure and 1.2% of GDP spent on higher education in 2006–7.[71] This environment, then, characterized by increasingly bloated student enrollment coupled with an outright cutback in available resources, came to characterize the student activist milieu immediately preceding the 2011 revolution.

The developments of the student movement after the revolution can be examined in two phases: the first transitional phase, from the announcement of Hosni Mubarak's resignation as president on February 11, 2011 to the June 30, 2013 uprising against the presidency of Mohammad Morsi;

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[69] See Mady, "Popular discontent, revolution, and democratization in Egypt," 329.

[70] Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education, *Statistical Yearbook*, 2011, accessed May 8, 2015, http://www.higheducation.idsc.gov.eg/front/ar/stat_popup_last.aspx?statistics_id=61

[71] Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, *Education Statistics*, 2014, accessed May 8, 2015, http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pdf/EgyptinFigures2015/EgyptinFigures/pages/arabic%20link.htm

and the second phase, from the events of June 30, 2013, culminating in the overthrow of Morsi, until the time of this writing.

January 2011–June 2013

Student activism had no independent role during the January 25 revolution for one main reason: this revolution was deeply populist, and relied on Egyptian youth both inside and outside the university context. That said, students were nonetheless a crucial part of the youth protest movements, as universities and mosques were the starting point of many demonstrations that marched to public squares. In addition, January 25 coincided with the first term exams, followed by the mid-year holidays. Following the fall of Mubarak on February 11, 2011, revolutionary optimism permeated the university system as well, such that, a mere six days later, several thousand university faculty members organized a major conference dedicated to how the university could support the ongoing revolution. Jointly organized by the March 9th Movement for University Independence and the Islamist Academics for Reform (*gamaaʿun men agl el-islah*)[72] – this conference set at Cairo University cultivated high expectations in university reform.[73]

Students thus responded accordingly, entrenching themselves in the post-revolutionary milieu to protest for deeply desired reforms, both in the university system and for the student movement. Rallying against the further dwindling resources allocated to higher education in light of escalating enrollments, and against the remaining specter of Mubarak loyalists in senior administrative posts, several student demonstrations erupted demanding the full ouster of the *ancien régime* from university life, and for tangible improvements in higher education. And on some metrics they proved successful: police security guards were removed from campuses, free elections for student unions were held for the first time in decades, as well as for administrative posts – which were previously

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[72] It is worth noting that this conference on February 17, 2011 is yet another example of the March 9th Movement for University Independence partnering with Islamist-oriented forces, in contradistinction to its leader Dr. Abol Ghar's vehement opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood tout court in the aftermath of the 2013 coup.

[73] For more details, see Ursula Lindsey, "Freedom and reform at Egypt's universities," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 4, 2012, accessed April 28, 2015, http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/04/freedom-and-reform-at-egypt-s-universities

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granted by appointment. But protesters faced significant obstacles from achieving the totality of their desired reforms, namely the military junta under the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) summarily refusing such demands, but also the heavily consolidated bureaucratic state apparatus, and the recalcitrant attitude of extant university faculty and administration, who often wound up reelecting Mubarak-era incumbents into their posts.[74]

Students faced similar difficulties in achieving the passage of a new student bylaw. Under the stewardship of SCAF, the minister of higher education drafted a new students' bylaw in February 2012 without student consultation as such. To be fair, this draft contained many positive developments, such as: the restoration of the political committee inside student unions; guaranteeing the students' right to elect their unions; depriving university administrators of authority in the formation of unions in instances in which runoff elections do not achieve at least twenty percent; the restoration of the General Union of Egyptian Students; and the addition of new procedures for transparency in elections and financial affairs. Nonetheless, students of all political persuasions were largely united in opposition to this draft bylaw, insofar as it was enacted without their consultation and contained other restraining articles.[75]

But this incident notwithstanding, unity among student activist blocs became elusive in the transitional period, with conflicts between the Islamist bloc and its secular opponents creating an increasingly polarized campus environment.[76] This became especially apparent during the reign of Mohammad Morsi, at which point the student movement was acutely divided between the Muslim Brotherhood and their opponents – which included leftists, liberals, and independents. Consequently, during the student elections of 2013, this political polarization permeating Egyptian campuses enabled oppositional political blocs to win in landslides in most universities. Moreover, this division in the student movement exacerbated major disputes over a new draft of the student bylaw issued by Morsi's government. While the new draft did ease many restrictions then being imposed on student political activity – such as the formation of a general student union, restoration of political and cultural committees,

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[74] Ibid., 9–14.

[75] "Waraqa mawqif hawla iqrar al-lai'ha al-tulabiya al-jadida bayna shari'ya iqrariha wa ashkaliyatiha al-qanuniya," Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, February 26, 2012, http://afteegypt.org/academic_freedom/2012/02/26/525-afteegypt.html

[76] Lindsey, "Freedom and reform at Egypt's universities," 11–14.

and other new procedures for transparent elections – many students remained apprehensive because, as was the case under SCAF, this draft bylaw was issued without their consultation.[77] Moreover, many criticized this iteration for containing several nebulous articles that could ostensibly be interpreted in a way that would embolden repressive measures – for instance, insisting that unions commit to "the university laws and customs," and that student interaction with civil associations and institutions outside the university be "upon the permission of the specialized entities," without specifying those laws and customs or specialized entities as such.[78]

These disputes over the draft bylaw under Morsi were deeply motivated by divisions then extant in the student movement. But as we shall see in the next section, those divisions following the overthrow of Morsi and the new order under Sisi escalate to hitherto unforeseen levels.

Since June 30, 2013

Since June 30, 2013, divisions within the student movement have transcended the quotidian aspects of this or that particular political campaign, be it student bylaws or representation in elections. Rather, it has metastasized into systemic political polarization; drawing on the deepening divisions in Egyptian political society more broadly between supporters of the new regime and its opponents, student activism has been similarly divided across several lines, with student supporters of the regime – having been largely created and encouraged by the security agencies, as had been the case under Mubarak, Sadat, and Nasser previously – pitted aggressively against regime opponents. This increasing division even applies to the broader coalition of student groups that oppose the current regime: while the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated entity known as "Students Against the Coup" is no doubt a key contingent of this coalition, it is joined by students of the Movement of Revolutionary Socialists, the Misr

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[77] Abu al-Sa'id Muhammad, "al-Hakuma taqar al-lai'ha al-tulabiya al-jadida budalan min rais al-jamhuriya," *Al-Masry al-Youm*, January 11, 2013, http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=366969

[78] Muhammad Najy and Muhammad Abdel Salam, "Al-Lai'ha al-Tulabiya min al-'idad ila al-iqrar mazid min al-iqsa 'wa-l tahmish wa ghiyab al-shafafiya," Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, January 20, 2013, http://afteegypt.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/afte001-20-01-2013.pdf

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al-Qawiyya party, and the April 6th Youth Movement, among others.[79] All are deeply divided in their ideological orientation – the Socialist and April 6th Youth Movement blocs in particular have very little ideological affinities to the Brotherhood or Islamism – and thus in their proposed response in opposition to the coup.

That said, while these student blocs are all divided on how they envision a political solution to the disruption caused by the coup – for instance, on the possibility of the return of Morsi as president – they are united on the broader political goals of ending political repression against students in all its forms, and the reinstatement of academic freedom and the withdrawal of security forces on campuses. Undergirding this student coalition's political platform was the broader aim of opposing the new regime's incursion against the values of the January 25 revolution, the return of the Egyptian police state, and the concomitant crackdown on freedom and individual liberties. Campus activism under these auspices has been predominantly peaceful protest, including marches, human chains, and strikes.[80] The Muslim Brotherhood initiated many protests on campuses during this period, but was ultimately joined by other factions unaffiliated with the Brotherhood as such. The reason being, in the face of police brutality toward student activists on the one hand, and of a broader campaign of regime repression against any and all of its putative opponents on the other, even student activists with no ideological sympathies to the Brotherhood can and have come in the regime's crosshairs. In fact, it would be accurate to posit that the Sisi regime has exploited its war against the Muslim Brotherhood in order to dismantle student activism more broadly, and to eradicate whatever remained of academic independence and freedom.

Regime brutality against students cannot be overstated. Utilizing the full array of military power, including the use of tanks and live ammunition to storm into campuses and dormitories, the present regime's campaign against the student movement ostensibly exceeds all previous administrations in modern Egyptian history.[81] For instance, from November 2013

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[79] Shahata Awad, "*Alharak Altollabi fi Masr* (Student Movement in Egypt)," *Aljazeera Center for Studies*, June 19, 2014, accessed April 25, 2015, http://studies.aljazeera.net/reports/2014/06/2014617121923939384.htm

[80] For more details, see Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, "The Annual Report: Strangling of the Public Sphere," April 2014, accessed March 27, 2015, http://afteegypt.org/publications_org/2015/04/09/10013-afteegypt.html

[81] Shahata, Student Movement in Egypt.

to May 16, 2014 alone, twenty students were killed inside universities.[82] The Egyptian Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, in its annual report for the year 2014, titled "Strangling of the Public Sphere," revealed an even starker picture: 2014 witnessed 88 incidents of breaking into governmental campuses and al-Azhar University by security forces, killing 12 students; 760 students were arrested; 673 were expelled, 400 of whom permanently; 23 were referred to military courts, and 31 were evacuated from dormitories, to name only a few such infractions.[83]

Regime repression against students also extends to abusive legislation. Following the ratification of a constitution that consolidated the sovereignty of the military over parliament, Sisi issued two presidential decrees, as well as a series of legal amendments, specifically designed to undermine student activism, including: a new student bylaw that wholly bans partisan political activism and grants the executive authority expansive regulatory powers; a return to the appointment system of university administrators (as of June 2014); amending university regulations at al-Azhar to allow for the expulsion of faculty who join political protests (as of September 2014); and a September 2014 presidential decree announcing that all public establishments – including university campuses – are heretofore subject to the authority of the military court.[84] Moreover, the regime annulled student union elections in both the 2013–14 and 2014–15 academic years, and the Court of Urgent Affairs issued a ruling in March 2014 stipulating that university security forces shall be reinstated.

Beyond legislative repression, the regime has embarked on a systematic campaign to vilify student activists in the media, through broadcasters demanding that security forces kill and oppress students and protesters, as justified in the name of stability and security.[85] In this same vein, Bahaa Taher, a prominent intellectual figure, called for the closure of campuses for two years.[86] Meanwhile, the regime has dissolved most of the board

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[82] See "Awlaham Abdel Ghani wa-Akhiruhum Anas al-Mahdi 'huriya al-fikr' tanshir hasran bahalat wafat al-tulab khilal 'amayn dirasiyayn," Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, May 17, 2015, http://afteegypt.org/academic_freedom/2015/05/18/10239-afteegypt.html

[83] Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, "The Annual Report."

[84] Ibid.

[85] Many episodes of Egyptian television broadcasters in this vein are available on YouTube, such as: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A61AEydFYo/, May 12, 2015.

[86] Muni Nur, "Usatidhat al-Jami'at radan 'ala fikra baha 'Tahir: al-Ghalaq laysa al-hal innama al-islah," *Akhbar Aladab*, May 3, 2013, http://www.dar.akhbarelyom.com/issuse/detailze.asp?mag=a&field=news&id=7920

of directors of faculty members' clubs and professional syndicates, following several humiliating incidents of security intervention in their internal affairs – in some cases outright threatening elected professors and professionals.[87] Some professors and intellectuals have consequently called for the formation of watchdog "patriot students" groups tasked with reporting their colleagues; some university presidents have taken pride in recruiting students as whistleblowers in this vein, as has the president of al-Azhar in the early 2014–15 academic year.[88] Universities have also spent millions of pounds on contracts with private security companies and on building laminated gates – all to the detriment of education, as evidenced by frequent campus closings and postponements of the academic term, and a palpable decline in research work.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates that student activism has played a palpable role in supporting liberties and democracy in Egypt since the early twentieth century until the 2011 revolution. This revolution was a remarkable opportunity for students to achieve a series of key demands: the amendment of the student bylaw to guarantee student political autonomy without security interference, alongside radical and qualitative reforms in the education system – both of which would have paved a way for the truly democratic society the 2011 revolution sought to attain more broadly. Regrettably, that noble ideal was shortchanged by the events of July 2013, wherein student activists faced harsh reprisals characteristic of regime violence against Egyptian civil society more broadly – including public institutions and nonviolent protesters.[89] In this return of the Egyptian

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[87] In one case in Alexandria, the pro-government media accused Dr. Kamal Naguib, a well-known professor and board member of the Alexandria University Faculty Club, of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood – despite his being a Christian. Based on correspondence with the author, while serving as General Secretary of the Alexandria University Faculty Club from March 2012 to September 2014.

[88] Ahmad al-Dasouqi, "Rai's Nadi Tadris 'al-Azhar' ya'taraf bil-tajassus 'ala talaba al-jam'iah," *Almalnews*, October 11, 2014, http://www.almalnews.com/Pages/StoryDetails.aspx?ID=184920#.VVZtnCFVhBc

[89] For more details, see Abdel-Fattah Mady, *Violence and Democratization in Egypt* (Dar Albashier, Cairo: Egypt, 2015), 8–13.

police state, there are several key implications for student activism, and its future role in cultivating democratization in Egypt.

First, it is imperative that we begin to view student activism as inextricably linked to broader political demands emanating from Egyptian civil society in general. Student demands for educational reform and academic freedom will simply not carry weight without a concomitant democratic bloc in Egyptian political life that can successfully transcend the partisan concerns of its constituent parties to articulate the aims of the January 2011 revolution. Political change in the student activist context must be accompanied by bona fide democratic change in Egypt to gain any meaningful traction.

Accomplishing as much, though, would necessitate that "liberal" as well as leftist forces in Egypt critically reevaluate their alleged commitments to bona fide democratic change. As we saw earlier with the example of Dr. Mohammad Abol Ghar, such forces have proven guilty of glaring double standards post-2013 in their handling of issues of human rights and democracy. If anything, the events of June 30, 2013 portend the lack of a truly "liberal" current in the Egyptian political landscape in the first place. Both before and after Morsi's election in June 2012, allegedly liberal and leftist figures expressed antagonism towards Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, having demanded a recall presidential election following Morsi's constitutional declaration in November 2012, rather than properly offering a political alternative to the Brotherhood in the parliamentary elections that were set to take place in late 2012 or 2013. Similarly, such a front collaborated with the Tamarod (Rebel) campaign that ignited the drive to topple Morsi – and which was later demonstrated to have links with deep state institutions.[90]

Yet these same "liberal" and leftist figures – alongside other political forces like nationalists and Salafis – for all their indignation against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood during their time in power, have

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[90] See "Leaks from Sisi's office allege far-reaching UAE 'interference' in Egypt," *Middle East Eye*, March 1, 2015, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/fresh-leaks-462283720#sthash. rTNVh6Wi.dpuf; and "tasribat jadida li-mudir maktab-l Sisi," *Aljazeera.net*, March 2, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2015/3/1/%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A %D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%85%D8 %AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8-%D8%A7 %D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84- %D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1 %D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9

proven oddly silent in the face of egregious abuses and political repression committed by the military order under Sisi since Morsi's overthrow. Many have actively supported the repressive measures of the current regime, including security repression of student and political activists, but extending beyond that to include the politicization of the judiciary, media campaigns against the opposition, and the repressive legislation mentioned earlier. Many have endorsed the regime's campaign of open season on Islamists, some having gone as far as advocating an exclusionist democracy without the Muslim Brotherhood, on the basis of Brotherhood members being unpatriotic, thus endorsing the present regime's campaign of "Debrotherhoodization."[91] Even a figure like Dr. Abol Ghar, for all his purported commitments to academic freedom, has otherwise given the Sisi regime a blank check for repression in all other arenas of Egyptian political and civic life. Suffice to say, for the university scene to be a true contributor to Egyptian civic life more broadly, such contradictions would need to be formatively addressed.

Substantive political change in Egypt more broadly, then, requires a democratic alliance or bloc, which could transcend the ideological affiliations of its component parties and thus truly express the interests of the January 25 revolution. To that end, democratizing Egypt necessitates that "liberal" and leftist forces address the double standards they have increasingly adopted with respect to individual liberties, democracy, and the rule of law. Such factions cannot achieve political success in the long term through the outright destruction of Islamist factions; instead, for liberal and leftist actors to gain purchase in Egyptian political life, they would need to work with the masses to offer a viable political alternative, and thus cultivate proper political platforms and credible party leaders. Moreover, Islamists would similarly need to recognize the need to fully engage collaborative partners, and recognize that freedom and democracy must take precedence over any ideological agenda, Islamist or otherwise.

As for the generals, they should realize that what happened in 2011 was a truly popular uprising that will never come to an end unless it leads to a modern state governed by a democratically elected government and accompanying institutions, in which neither the army nor any other unelected institutions have the upper hand. Change shall occur when the

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[91] For instance, Moataz Abdel Fattah, *Risala ila al-safir al-almani bil-Qahira* (*Letter to the German Ambassador in Cairo*), *Alwatannews*, May 22, 2015, http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/734230

generals understand that establishing civil control of the armed forces will eventually strengthen the state, the army, and democracy.

Moreover, the regional and international powers that support the current government should understand that times have changed and that the power of the masses and students, and their demand for freedom and dignity, can no longer be permanently halted by brute force, particularly when students and young people have access to technology and social networks. One cannot escape the negative repercussions that have been accumulating for decades due in large part to long-term Western support for despotic governments in Arab countries and double-standards toward democracy and human rights violations. Finally, student activists have to reunite behind a shared agenda that promotes democracy and human rights. There will be no freedoms and liberty in the university context if they are not accompanied in Egyptian civil society more broadly. Education reforms will never be actualized without elected and responsible political institutions.