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Authoritarianism and Regime Change: The Case of Egypt (2011-2018)

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Abstract

To assert that Egypt, prior to the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, was deeply entrenched in authoritarianism, would amount to stating the obvious. Indeed, scholars had arrived at a consensus that authoritarianism was compatible with the Egyptian society. However, the outbreak of the 2011 uprising in Egypt and the resultant ouster of Mubarak appeared to open a new vista for the prospect of regime changes in authoritarian societies. It is debatable to state that authoritarian rule in Egypt ended with the exit of Mubarak. The finding in this study is negative. Egypt is unlike authoritarian states such as China and Singapore, whose credentials in governance have yielded stupendous socio-economic transformations. To ascertain whether the authoritarian accusations levelled against Mubarak in 2011 continued till 2018, the qualitative research method was used. This method helped to examine and synthesize the extant literature on authoritarianism and regime changes in contemporary African international studies. The paper argues that beyond the negative connotations of authoritarianism, the need for a strong leader and a strong state is the only alternative between the Egyptians and anarchy. Again since the post-Mubarak era is also authoritarian, this study recommends a re-examination of the thesis, which postulates that authoritarianism is a necessary precursor of regime changes.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, Regime Change, Egypt, Democratization, Deep State

Introduction

The contemporary debate about how Egypt has evolved over time has placed great premium on the structure of the state and the place of the authoritarian agent in that structure. To assert that modern Egypt prior to the fall of President Mubarak in 2011 was deeply authoritarianism, would amount to stating the obvious. Indeed, scholars had arrived at a consensus as regards the prevalence of authoritarianism not only in Egypt, but also in the Arab world as a whole. While democracy had become a desired currency in global political marketplace, it was not so in the Arab world before 2011 uprising. Egypt was no less among its Arab neighbours in

disgusting democracy as the country for a number of years was yoked under authoritarian regimes.

Egypt, officially known as the Arab Republic of Egypt, is a central country in the Arab world, both for its demographic and geopolitical importance¹ as well as its reputation as one of the earliest civilizations of the world. The country's modern era could be traced to the 19th century when it passed from being a province in the Ottoman Empire to become a British overseas territory. In 1922, Egypt gained her independence and became a constitutional monarchy. The monarchy was however overthrown in 1952 when a secret society in the Egyptian army called the Free Officers, led by General Gamal Abdel Nasser, took control of the government in an almost bloodless coup².

Egypt has ever since passed through three authoritarian regimes, starting from Nasser's which ended in 1970. Nasser was succeeded by Mohammad Anwar al-Sadat who ruled till 1981 when he was assassinated by Islamist extremists. After the assassination of al-Sadat, Hosni Mubarak took over governance. During the three regimes, Egypt was largely governed under Emergency Law (Law No. 162 of 1958) which extended the powers of the police, suspended certain constitutional rights and as well legalized censorship³. While other peoples in the global community had embraced democracy to reasonable extents, Egypt, like its Sister-Arab-states was rather glued to the authoritarian machine. Egyptians yearned for democracy and political liberalization but were silenced by the coercive apparatus of the Egyptian state.

In 2011 however, a watershed was recorded in Arab history, as the seemingly invincible authoritarian edifice of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia had bowed to days of popular protests. To the Egyptians, this was not just a news story but a call for action. Inspired by events in neighbouring Tunisia, Egyptians took to the streets in protest against the prevalence and resilience of authoritarianism in Egypt under President Mubarak. With the instrumentality of online social media, protests were organised and co-ordinated so that within 18 days of an unprecedented spontaneous public uprising, the 30-year authoritarian leadership of Mubarak came to a close⁴. The anti-authoritarian regime protests that

came to be known as the ‘Arab Spring’ gained more popularity and spread to other Middle East countries.

The ‘Arab Spring’ has been linked to several intended and unintended consequences including the ongoing migrant crisis in Europe and the United States⁵. But how has authoritarianism aided regime changes particularly in Egypt post 2011? It is a known fact that the removal of President Mubarak has not ended authoritarian regimes in Egypt. Mubarak’s regime ended by a popular uprising and the ascendancy of Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood actually signalled the success of liberal democracy. However, Morsi’s overthrow and imprisonment, has questioned the authoritarianism-regime change paradigm. The consequent ascension to power of another military officer, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has demonstrated a challenge to all the assurances of the Arab and more especially the Egyptian revolution. It is against this background that this paper reconsiders the view of many analysts that authoritarianism is the necessary precursor of regime change.

In order to achieve its objectives, the paper is essentially divided into four main segments: the first gives a conceptualization of authoritarianism; the second segment looks at how the authoritarian tendencies of President Mubarak triggered the Egyptian revolt in 2011; the third examines post Mubarak administrations – Morsi and Sisi and their indulgences towards authoritarianism; the fourth is the lesson and conclusion. This paper is guided by the following research questions. What is authoritarianism? How authoritarian was the Egyptian government and why has the authoritarian system of governance lasted for so long in that country? How were regime changes effected in Egypt from 2011 to 2018? What lessons, if any, does regime change in Egypt hold for the study of international studies?

Conceptualizing Authoritarianism

A glance at the dailies, displays the gloomy side of democracy in the world. In Africa and Middle East, Russia and China, Turkey, Singapore and North Korea, authoritarian states are getting more authoritarian, and some democratic states are shaky. This attests to the idea that Western liberal values have their limits of relevance⁶. This is particularly shown with the

stupendous successes of authoritarian states like Singapore and China. Just seventy years ago, Singapore was a war-battered British port with a poor and uneducated population residing mainly in slums. It was under that muddled condition that it struggled to be independent in 1965. But today, the life expectancy of Singaporeans in 2018 is 83years⁷. None is homeless; while the unemployment rate is as low as 2.01 percent as at June 2018. All these were achieved through three decades of an authoritarian regime of Lee Kuan Yew, the country's founding father. The successes of Singapore can never be compared to that of China, that through an authoritarian communist party, the leadership has made China the second largest economy in the world with the hope of displacing the United States. These and other states have actually displayed authoritarian tendencies and an increasing attrition of civil liberties. The Chinese President Xi Jinping that assumed the leadership of his country in 2012 had to silence his critics and reminded his country's journalists that their job is to "serve and promote the Communist Party". Does it mean that authoritarianism should be encouraged?

In 2011, authoritarianism was one of the easily mentioned factors that analysts used in explaining the outbreak of the Arab Spring that took its tolls in Egypt. Authoritarianism in this sense is taken to mean any system of government where the governing body exercises absolute authority without being constitutionally responsible to the people. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, it is conceived as a principle or system that demands blind submission to authority, while power is exercised arbitrarily¹⁰.

However, Garret Norris¹¹ observed that despite half a century of dedicated scholarly attention, still no adequate or universal agreement has been reached, since many analysts have viewed the concept of authoritarianism differently. Before Norris, analysts like Lewis¹², Martin¹³, Rosier and Willig¹⁴, have written passionately about authoritarian personality. Thus, in a bid to provide a framework upon which authoritarianism could be adequately assessed, Randall Baker offered a 13-point attribute of the concept which includes:

1. Centralized authority and decision-making structures.
2. Presence of a control structure to stifle dissent and maintain order.

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3. Top-down rule from leader to citizens through a bureaucratic structure.
4. A powerful bureaucracy charged with making and distributing tangible goods.
5. A civil service that represents the centre down to the local level.
6. Prevalence of nepotism over merit as basis for hiring decisions in civil service.
7. Opportunities created by bureaucracy for corruption or “unofficial income.
8. Preference for official cover-up of system shortfalls over correction.
9. Presence of a civil service of unquestioned loyalty.
10. Regime enhancement of elite power and privilege.
11. Poor horizontal state coordination.
12. General public distrust of civil service.
13. Bureaucratic secrecy that builds regime cohesion through mutual suspicion¹⁵.

Furthermore, Sarah Rennick offers a six-dimensional approach to understanding what the concept of authoritarianism entails. These include:

1. The lack of popular confidence in the performance of public institutions.
2. The quasi-unanimous spread of favouritism in public employment.
3. Increase of corruption in public institutions.
4. The maltreatment of the political opposition, arbitrary arrests, and abuse of detainees.
5. The inability to organize public meetings and demonstrations, and
6. The increase in public expenditure on security rather than education and health care.¹⁶

In this sense, therefore, an authoritarian regime may be described as political system with limited but not responsible political pluralism, without intensive or extensive political mobilization, and a system where a leader or a small group usually exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones.¹⁷ Such a regime usually begins with the ‘theft’ of public office and powers,¹⁸ where instead of representing the entire citizenry, authoritarian regimes rather focus on representing the interest of a sub-group of the population, usually the elite and the privileged.¹⁹

Different typologies of authoritarianism are identified by Ezrow and Frantz.²⁰ These include grey zone regimes where formal democratic

institutions are used to cover up for the reality of authoritarian domination. According to Diamond²¹, this variant of authoritarianism usually involves elections which are however usually fraught with electoral malpractices. He further stresses that in such systems, winners are usually determined before polls are conducted.²² The Gambia [1996 and 2006 election], Nigeria [2003 and 2007 elections] and Zimbabwe elections during President Mugabe tenure, particularly from 1985, are useful examples. Another variant of authoritarianism is identified as competitive authoritarianism. In this kind of political system, formal democratic institutions are established while leaders are duly elected through reasonably free and fair elections. However, upon assumption of office, incumbents begin to violate the rules of democracy, so much so that the regime falls short of the minimum standards of democracy.²³ Similar to competitive authoritarianism is electoral authoritarianism, in which case there are the legislative and executive arms while periodic elections are conducted to choose leaders.²⁴ However, while democratic practices are imbibed in such societies, human rights and civil liberties are usually restricted, while discriminatory policies are widespread.

Certain factors have over the years been observed to offer a favourable breeding ground for authoritarian regimes. Notable among such factors is the role of natural resources like oil; it is ascertained that countries with abundant natural resources usually experience deficit in democracy and human rights.²⁵ Huntington offers useful explanation when he stressed that oil-rich states do not rely on taxation for income generation.²⁶ Huntington understands that resource rich states do not solicit the acquiescence of their citizenry in income generation, a scenario that has the propensity towards authoritarianism. People in such regions will demand representation only when there is taxation.²⁷ Diamond also sees rich resource states as more inclined to spending heavily on state-security apparatuses — used to stifle opposition.²⁸

Islam has been adduced to play an important role in authoritarianism both in Egypt and other Islamic states. Islam is not only a religion. It is also a political ideology. An ideology is the safest guarantor of authoritarianism world over.²⁹ For instance, it is recorded that in the 47 countries with Islamic majority, only 11 have democratically elected governments, while

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110 of the 145 non-Islamic States are electoral democracies.³⁰ It is based on this statistical data that Fish concludes that countries with Islamic majority are remarkably more authoritarian than non-Muslim societies.³¹ It must however be noted that while some countries with majority Muslim population had at least made attempts at shifting towards electoral democracy, the Arab world had simply shrugged in indifference, preferring instead to remain entrenched in authoritarianism up until the outbreak of the recent Arab Spring.

Widespread illiteracy and poverty is another useful explanation for the prevalence of authoritarianism in some countries of the world. This is because with illiteracy, individuals are mostly unaware of their constitutional as well as fundamental rights and as such cannot demand such rights. On the other hand, poverty is linked to authoritarianism where an improved socio-economic condition of the people is considered as a danger to regime stability.³² This point is adequately explained by Magaloni³³ who notes that the authoritarian regime in Mexico in its bid to sustain itself, introduced a range of policies targeted at preventing rural peasants from escaping poverty. She stresses, that with such policies, the PRI authoritarian regime in Mexico was able to secure the loyalty of the rural dwellers through state patronage and clientelist practices.³⁴

Thus, from Magaloni's arguments, the point to stress is that since poor people are more likely to depend on the regime for the provision of basic needs, widespread poverty is therefore favourable for the survival of authoritarian regimes as it creates regime-dependent loyal citizens. This view is equally shared by Helle and Rakner who explained the resilience of Uganda's authoritarian regime with the prevalence of rural poverty in the country. These scholars however added that in Uganda, prevailing rural poverty has helped to sustain the country's authoritarian regime since rural dwellers often do not care so much about their political leadership, especially at the national level.³⁶

Thus, it was in view of the above understanding of authoritarianism that the Arab world was singled out as the unchallenged bastion of durable authoritarianism across the globe.³⁷ For instance, during the 23-year old dictatorship of Ben Ali in Tunisia, government stifled all forms of political opposition and defiance with the instrumentality of a 130,000-strong

security force, while the country functioned in reality as a single party state under the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD).³⁸ In the same manner, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt orchestrated state brutality through a coercive security apparatus and the Emergency Law³⁹, while Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya was marked by a lack of political pluralism due to strong prohibition of opposition and the presence of a robust and coercive security apparatus. The regime expected unquestioned loyalty from the citizenry while governing the country through a constitution single-handedly authored by Gaddafi. Other Middle Eastern states had authoritarian regimes, a phenomenon that appropriately gave rise to the outbreak of the Arab Spring.

Added to the above listed factors is how relative deprivation exacerbated by a clash between expectations and reality offers an insightful explanation for authoritarianism that led to the outbreak of the Arab Spring.⁴⁰ In this case, the ever-increasing population of educated youth had moved to the urban areas seeking "to do not only as well, but better than their parents had before them."⁴¹ The people's expectations were however hindered by widespread unemployment⁴², as well as their inability to afford what to eat as a result of rising food prices.⁴³ In a study conducted on the eve of the uprising, it was reported that on an overall basis, over 120 million persons out of a total of 250 million persons in the entire Middle East region were dissatisfied with their living condition.⁴⁴

The place of the social media in the outbreak of the Egypt Spring cannot be ignored. Daniel Byman⁴⁵ highlights the role of the internet, particularly Face book, Twitter and YouTube for mass mobilization during the conflict. In Egypt, in particular, it was usual for the government to arrest leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the El Ghad party whenever there was a manifestation of civil disobedience. However, with the rise of online social media as a new political actor, it had become absolutely unnecessary to round up on the usual suspects, as they (members of the opposition groups) knew little or nothing about the events.⁴⁶ Other factors that equally explain the outbreak of the Arab Spring include: freedom and good governance deficit,⁴⁷ democracy promotion agenda of Western powers,⁴⁸ as well as neo-liberal reforms which weakened

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the capacity of the authoritarian regimes to maintain a firm grip over their respective States.⁴⁹

As was the case in the Middle East, Egypt was indeed no exception. The regimes of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak had clearly exemplified the authoritarian tendencies and it is on this basis that this discourse would focus on authoritarianism in Egypt during the regime of Hosni Mubarak vis-à-vis regime change in the state.

Authoritarianism and Mubarak's Egypt

Prior to Mubarak's accession to power in 1981, a constitutional amendment in 1980 had practically extended the tenure of the President to lifetime as it stipulated that the President could seek re-election for as many times and he kept his country under emergency law.⁵⁰ It was therefore upon this constitutional framework that Hosni Mubarak became Egypt's President, serving in that capacity for about three decades. Nonetheless, in examining Egypt's socio-political climate during the Mubarak regime, the four-way analysis presented by the Egyptian sociologist Galal Amin becomes pertinent. These include the 'Soft State' theory, the nature of the ruling elite, and wealth distribution as well as widespread corruption.

The theory of the Soft state was first introduced by Gunnar Myrdal to describe a state of general societal indiscipline which manifests itself by "deficiencies in legislation and in particular law observance and enforcement."⁵¹ Galal Amin however applies this theory to Egypt where in his observation, "the elites can afford to ignore the law because their power protects them from it, while others pay bribes to work around it." The situation is such that laws only apply to the poor populace that may not afford to bribe law enforcement agents, while licences and permits are granted on pay rather than on merit.⁵²

Having enriched themselves with bribes and unofficial income, government officials including law enforcement agents are known to turn blind eyes to societal ills. For instance, it is on record that in 1992 when an earthquake struck Cairo, the government had been contemplating on what strategies to adopt in solving the ensuing housing problem. Lack of prompt attention to the needy gave the Muslim Brotherhood an opportunity to

provide disaster reliefs to the persons directly affected by the earthquake. Indeed, Brotherhood members were said to have rapidly set up shelters and medical tents, provided food, clothing and blankets to residents of the city, and donated US\$1 000 to every family whose home had been destroyed.⁵³

Also, to understand the nature of authoritarianism in Mubarak's Egypt, it is pertinent to understand the nature of the ruling elite. First, President Mubarak had prevented the emergence of competition among elite factions through steady, large-scale patronage of the political elite. This is given the belief that competition among the elite would weaken the regime and could even lead to an eventual breakdown of the regime.⁵⁴ Hamdy Hassan argues that the ruling elite under Mubarak like their predecessors, are loyal to the President but however lack interest in politics and public affairs thereby making the President the sole administrator of the entire country.⁵⁵

An examination into the privileges and activities of the National Democratic Party (NDP) is also necessary in understanding the nature of authoritarianism during the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Established by President Anwar Sadat in 1978, the NDP existed as a de facto single party in Egypt as it wielded an uncontested power irrespective of the fact that the country was officially designated as a multiparty state.⁵⁶ In fact, it is the party that determines what other political parties are qualified to be registered. The party as well enjoys the privilege to make recommendations for the dissolution of a political party whenever such a party poses a threat to NDP's continued dominance. It is only from the NDP of all political parties in the world that one party, in a sham of democracy, fields multiple candidates in a parliamentary election.⁵⁷

Moreover, the NDP, with its control of over 70% of the parliament as well as its status as the party of the President of the Republic, there is hardly any differentiation between the government and the party so that legislations are made often to keep opposition in check. For instance, membership in opposition parties is not allowed above a total of 400 persons so that it becomes roundly impossible for an opposition of 400 members to oust a regime in power in a country of 80 million.⁵⁸

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The role of Egypt's security system in the sustenance of authoritarianism during the regime of President Hosni Mubarak cannot be undermined. Mubarak maintained a pervasive and fiercely loyal security apparatus that disrupted any internal opposition activity before it could fully mobilize a call for change.⁵⁹ In effect, Mubarak security apparatus had always rounded up on members of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the El Ghad Party of Dr Ayman Nour whenever these groups revealed signs of championing a course for regime change.

The security apparatus was an integral part of the regime. This consisted of paramilitary, riot police, the secret service, and many other sections whose job it was to efficiently repress the population.⁶⁰ It is on record that while in power, Mubarak created one of the world's largest state security forces, equalling in size that of China.⁶¹ Detention facilities were built in isolated deserts and in a number of instances, many Egyptians were thrown into jail without trial, especially when they exhibited anti-regime feelings. It was all of these that had characterised the Mubarak regime thus earning the description of authoritarianism.

Also, distribution of wealth during the Mubarak regime in Egypt was largely unequal. The introduction of a set of neo-liberal economic reforms had created a new class of wealthy citizens who amounted to a meagre 9% of the population. As a consequence, a large proportion of the populace wallowed in want and scarcity. Unemployment soared while over-population had begun to bring an increasing crime rate in the country. In the face of this situation, corruption had assumed a monstrous role as bribes were not uncommon in the Egyptian society.⁶²

Regime Change in Egypt

The Arab Spring ushered in renewed scholarly interests as to why some regimes fail while others succeed. The 2011 social upheaval brought the downfall of Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya as the rioting citizens demanded their replacements. Protests in Syria and Yemen resulted in long drawn wars. The Arab Spring found expression in societal dissatisfaction, which the relative deprivation theorists propagate. Though criticized for lacking the ability to measure the perception of the discrepancy between the actual

needs of the people from their perceived needs, yet this school of thought has been fundamental in explaining the societal dissatisfactions that gave rise to regime changes in the region. The proponents of this theory are Ted Gurr (1968, 1970) and lately Francis Stewart (2000). Another theory that gives credence to regime change in Egypt is the elite theory. To elite theorists, in every society there exists a small group of people whether in the military, political party or even in the corporate world with specified interests to protect at any point in time. The interest of the state is most of the time defined by the ruling elites. The scholars that have long argued for elite unity as an important determinant to regime changes are Pareto 1935; Aron 1950; Putnam 1976; Huntington 1984. Higley and Burton (1989) attempted to form a new elite paradigm that explains regime change similarly. They contend that a divided national elite, produces unstable regimes that oscillate between authoritarian and democratic systems of government.

Mubarak governed Egypt for three decades. To ensure survival, he instituted coercive security apparatus, weakened the civil society groups, and ran a rentier economy. However, the success of a popular uprising against an identical regime in neighbouring Tunisia had inspired Egyptians on the need to effect a regime change in their own country via mass protests. Thus, as it happened in Tunisia, millions of Egyptians marched through the streets demanding an end to the Mubarak regime. The uprising in Egypt was triggered by many causes, principal among which were the need to put an end to the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak as well as the enthronement of democracy.⁶³ The Egyptians loathed the Mubarak regime for authoritarian features including widespread corruption and a soaring of food prices; the cost of food prices for the urban poor dwellers appreciated by 40 percent.⁶⁴ The other reasons were the increasing rate of youth unemployment, state brutality as orchestrated by the security forces, as well as the Emergency Law, a piece of legislation which negated the principle of democracy, under which the state had been governed for quite a number of decades.⁶⁵ The Egyptian protesters wanted democracy; they wanted liberty; they wanted freedom of expression as well as the enthronement of the rule of law under which they hoped to have a limitless economic opportunity opened to them.

Among the immediate sparks of the uprising was the torture and consequent murder of Khaled Said, a 28 year-old Egyptian who was allegedly beaten to death by the police on June 6, 2010. Said was a United States' trained computer programmer who was arrested from a cyber cafe in Sidi Gaber area of Alexandria and was thereafter tortured to death before a crowd.⁶⁶ In protest against police brutality, many Egyptians took to the streets but were brutally suppressed by the state's security forces; many protesters were arrested. Meanwhile, with the instrumentality of the online media, the Khaled Said affair had attracted international attention as his picture began to feature in international concerts of Said including a Pink Floyd concert in Florida.⁶⁷

As the Khaled Said affair gained publicity, inspired by protests in Tunisia, Wael Ghonim, a Google executive, via online social media particularly Face book, YouTube and Twitter, encouraged Egyptian youths to march out for protests on January 25, 2011.⁶⁸ That day, over half-million people heeded to the call,⁶⁹ and for 18 days, Tahrir Square in Cairo and the streets of Alexandria were filled with thousands of frustrated but dynamic youths who were growingly interested in talking about citizenship and democracy in their country.⁷⁰

In response to popular uprisings, Mubarak offered concessions to protesters in a bid to secure his office. Among such concessions was a declaration on February 1, 2011, not to seek re-election at the expiration of his tenure. Nine days later, he re-iterated his decision not to run for the next presidential election but asked the protesters to allow him 'shoulder' the responsibility of organizing a 'peaceful transition.'⁷¹ All of these had however fallen on deaf ears as the protesters strengthened their stance.

Side by side the offer of political concessions, Mubarak employed certain coercive measures with which he hoped to get the protesters into quiescence. For instance, on January 28, the Google executive who created the "We are all Khaled Said" fan page was arrested while access to the internet across the country was limited.⁷² By February 5, about 300 protesters had lost their lives while another 500 had died within the next six days following police brutality. Finally, on February 11 2011, with mounting pressure both at home and abroad, Mubarak reluctantly resigned after thirty years in office. Power was handed over power to the Supreme

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Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which was therefore to conduct general elections for the country.

Thus, after many twists and turns, on November 28, 2011, the first post Mubarak parliamentary elections were held with Islamist parties recording an overwhelming majority.⁷³ Then, by June 16 and 17, Presidential elections were held with Mohammed Morsi and Ahmed Shafiq as the two candidates for the election. On June 24, 2012, the Supreme Presidential Elections Commission (SPEC) announced Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood as the winner of the election, having secured 51.7% votes as against Shafiq's 48%.⁷⁴ On Saturday, June 30, Mohammed Morsi was sworn in as Egypt's new President as he promised a new era for Egypt while resigning his membership from the Muslim Brotherhood, in keeping his pledge to represent all Egyptians during his years in office.⁷⁵ Thus, the Mubarak authoritarian regime had come to an end as members of the regime had been put on trial with Mubarak imprisoned for life. Has authoritarianism ended in Egypt with the exit of President Mubarak?

President Mohamed Morsi and Warped Authoritarianism

Mohamed Morsi was elected the President of Egypt after the 2011 social uprising. His presidency spanned from June 2012 to July 2013. Though he was desirous to introduce some reforms, many analysts accused him of "incompetence" possibly for policy reversals and mismanagement of the economy⁷⁶ and was unable to understand the political intrigues needed in democratizing a richly divided Egyptian society.⁷⁷ Though democratically elected, Morsi in November 2012, edged towards authoritarianism as he retired some top military officers and went ahead to issue decrees that were exempted from review; as a consequence widespread demonstrations coerced him to backtrack.⁷⁹ The protests left seven people dead.⁸⁰ Morsi was accused of favouring his Islamists groups; he buttressed the allegation by appointing his Islamist brothers as state governors.⁸¹ He harassed and threatened opposing voices, and worsened the situation by detaining some secular activists, like Ahmed Maher⁸² that brought him to power. As months of distrust rolled by, Egypt under Morsi became what Nathan Brown termed a wide state.⁸³

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Morsi lost favour from the powerful elites that kept the Egyptian polity, even under Mubarak. His earlier pledge to achieve the “revolution's goals”⁸⁴ started waning the moment he failed to recognize the need for inclusive democracy and government; the constitution-drafting committee was dominated by the Islamists that ultimately brought out a totally flawed and parochial framework for the country. The draft constitution was criticized as designed to achieve the Muslim interpretation of Egyptian laws.⁸⁵

The Amendments to Egypt's Constitutional Declaration, announced by President Morsi on November 22, 2012 was criticized by Amnesty International as designed to trample Egypt's resolve on rule of law and to herald governmental repression. Morsi's decree also robbed the judiciary of its power to dissolve the Constituent Assembly and the upper house of parliament (Shura Council).⁸⁶ The judiciary rejected Morsi meddling into its domain; as protests continued, the military gave its warning.⁸⁷ Morsi's authoritarian credentials was warped or to say the least thin; but as he presided over an economy that was sputtered with a high rate of unemployed youths, the very reasons for the 2011 uprising, his tenure can best be described as a Frankenstein's monster. Morsi's monstrous government was shown the exit door by the military before a protesting and cheering crowd.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi Authoritarian Abuses

Analysts like Hamdy Hassan appreciate that Egypt is historically authoritarian.⁸⁸ Hassan traced the present authoritarian tendencies of modern Egypt to antiquity, a phenomenon that can be linked to the pharaonic tradition. Thus, any democratization process by any contemporary Egyptian regime is stymied and inevitably degenerates to authoritarianism.⁸⁹ This authoritarian affirmation is descriptive of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who, as a military autocrat ousted an elected President Morsi in July 2013, and has been ruling Egypt autocratically till date. Sisi has administered Egypt as a deep state, running the country with the support of top military officers, intelligence agencies, security forces, senior bureaucrats and occasionally judges. For the last five years, Sisi has

governed Egypt by establishing institutions to control the state and maintain some form of legitimacy.

Sisi started by neutralizing the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups through significant repressions. Ousted President Morsi was detained.⁹⁰ Tough security measures were inflicted on the university campuses. The activities and funding of nongovernmental institutions and civil society groups were curtailed.⁹¹ On November 29, 2016, the parliament passed hastily, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) law that hamstring the activities of the civic groups. The draft criminalises any research or work that injures public morals or order, national unity or security. No legislative clarifications were made of these terms, thus giving the authorities the latitude to frame any charges against any group. Such ambiguities allow the authorities to file charges against almost any group. The prohibitions against the right to associate and assemble without governmental interference definitely violates the people's rights as enshrined in the constitution and international statutes ratified by Egypt. Elaborately, all non-governmental activities must conform to the state's plan and developmental priorities.⁹²

Protests by the public as well strikes from the organized labour unions were outlawed. The media houses were compelled to present pro-government programmes and to indulge in self-censorship. Government restrictions were also placed on the social media that brought Mubarak to his heels. From 2013, when Sisi took over the reins of government, suppression of dissenting voices had been persistent.⁹³ Sisi's repressive measures raised an international outcry.⁹⁴ Sisi has never been known for the establishment of a ruling party as his predecessors did. Rather, what was put in place was an amorphous political structure that is till date, pro-regime.⁹⁵

Conclusion

It has been shown in this study that Egypt is actually steeped in authoritarianism, going from antiquity. Regime change has been a recurring decimal that started with the orchestrated overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy in 1952. The coup d'état was stage-managed by a group of soldiers led by Nasser. Ever since, the country has been governed

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by soldiers who in Mubarak's era gave an artful nod to the Third Wave of democratization by introducing elections which were albeit manipulated. Attempts at regime change through the ballot had failed [except for Morsi], while plots for military coup d'état have been nipped in the bud, thanks to Egypt's well-funded intelligence service.

Thus, learning from the Egyptian experience, it could be stated that the contemporary society is presented with a wide range of opportunities for regime change in authoritarian societies as the people could easily gather themselves through the internet and arrange for popular protests, when the need arises. More so, whereas authoritarian governments do censor print and broadcast media, censorship of the internet is a harder task given the international nature of cyber space. As such, given the 2011 Egyptian upheaval, it could then be said that the internet has opened up opportunities to the possibility of regime change in closed societies with authoritarian regimes.

This study offers valuable ideas in the field of international studies (IS) literature that is interested in how domestic political structures are linked to foreign policy through regime studies (democracy or autocracy). Over the years, students of international studies have explored foreign policy-regime type nexus. It is hoped that this study has brought some literary insights in the lexicon of IS theory. This informs the examination of the role of political elites in sustaining authoritarian rule in Egypt. Thus, the IS literature is further enriched by exploring the strategies used in quelling the political crises in Egypt from 2011 when the uprising started to 2018 when another authoritarian leader in the person of President Sisi was elected for a second term.

It must however be noted that this paper does not argue that regime change in Egypt has brought about democratization of the country given the continuance of popular demonstration in protest of some of the policies of Morsi's administration. The study acknowledges that the post 2011 Egyptian polity has been profoundly authoritarian, though Morsi's style was warped. Mubarak and Sisi are two sides of the same authoritarian coin. Sisi has been elected for his second tenure in March 2018, after he had used draconian measures against his opponents. He silenced them after

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projecting Egypt's image as one under deadly threats from terrorists operating within the country and in particular the Sinai region.

Sisi has not taken the draconian steps without the support of the military, bureaucracy, the parliament and the judiciary, thus making Egypt a deep state. This authoritarian order allows for the continued emergency laws, all to the disdain of the civil society groups and the international community. But many Egyptians believe that a strong leader and state is the only alternative between them and chaotic situations.

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