

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold

Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: Egypt

Introduction to Egypt Cases

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CIVIL SOCIETY'S NATURE AND TYPE

The present study focuses on civil society in Egypt, which includes everything between the state and the family except for political parties. It also tackles the civil and human rights movement that led to economic and social issues such as the right to health, the law on health insurance and social security, the civil society law, the labor law, and the process of adopting minimum and maximum wages, as its role sheds light on organizing initiatives and campaigns, presenting alternative draft laws and using various mobilization tools.

The development of the Egyptian civil society was closely related to the general political context in the country; During the monarchy period, endowment and charitable, civil institutions emerged, and during the Nasserite period, civil society was nationalized in favor of the state project that provides services and establishes social security networks at the expense of the political spaces. This situation remained despite the decline of the state's role in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the policies of economic openness brought the role of charitable, civil society back to light. By the mid-eighties during the reign of former President Hosni Mubarak, development and human rights societies began, and by the beginning of the second millennium, the human rights approach to work had spread in various types of civil institutions that generate protest movements such as the Popular Committee to Support the Palestinian Intifada, including "Kefaya" (i.e., Enough), then the National Association for Change.

In fact, the state's withdrawal from some of its fundamental roles opened the way for charitable, civil society to expand, particularly in the sectors of health, education and religious solidarity activities. At the beginning of the first decade of the second millennium, many human rights and development institutions were established, and companies' social role increased (Civil Society in The Arab World, Development, Legal Framework, Roles, 2013, <https://is.gd/mjs4d0>).

After the Egyptian revolution, civil society's human rights role developed and became more capable of influencing the processes of writing constitutions and drafting laws, specifically in areas of its interests, by organizing awareness campaigns, tables, public discussions or submitting texts of alternative draft laws. The tools of civil society, in all its divisions, also evolved due to technological development and the ability to mobilize individuals and resources through social media platforms or through the development of mechanisms to receive support and donations, which contributed to the launch of many initiatives that had a stronger impact than some political institutions such as parties and unions in periods of political tightening, strengthening the idea of citizenship, ideas of corporate social responsibility, mechanisms of civil society governance and popular surveillance of its work, its financing, its expenditures and its control over public policies (Mohamed Al-Agati, On Civil Society and the Public Sphere, The Egyptian Case, 2011, <https://is.gd/siwwf2L>)

Despite the development of the capabilities of the Egyptian civil society in influencing public policies in certain fields such as health and education, by working on laws and constitutional texts related to these two sectors as basic economic and social rights, the civil society succeeded in a large extent in shifting attention towards these issues due to the ability to enhance them in light of the prevailing trends and thus achieving profits in all political contexts. (Mina Samir, *The Role of Social Movements, Civil Society and Challenges to Achieve Social Justice*, 2017, <https://is.gd/X7qCNB>)

MEDIA AND THE PRESS'S STATUS AND ROLE AS AN INFLUENCING FACTOR IN THE COURSE OF CIVIL SOCIETY WORK: ACCESSIBILITY

Media channels have focused on the youth of the revolution and civil society associations since the first months of the Egyptian revolution by using the term civil society activists or talking about civil society's role in the revolution. Simultaneously, it was easy for the ruling political authority to raise suspicions about these activists and the several civil society groups. Hence, the pro-government media campaign prepared civil society early. In July 2011, Major General Hassan Al-Ruwaini, a member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, confirmed that the "April 6" movement receives foreign funding. Its members are trained in Serbia, linking the movement with civil society associations and holding civil society responsible for tensions and instability in Egypt in the aftermath of the January revolution. Al-Ruwaini revealed in a telephone interview with the "Al-Jazeera Mubasher Misr" channel that 600 NGOs requested funding from the American embassy in Egypt, and confirmed that the responsible authorities would soon announce the details of the documents, especially that the security forces have been monitoring the "April 6" movement since 2009. They have information about them, including the names, places of training, and the amounts they obtained, noting that no documents or evidence were presented to confirm it. (Declaration of Major General Al-Ruwaini, April 6, funded from abroad, and its members are trained in Serbia, July 2011, <https://is.gd/luhKIN>)

As for the current political situation, we are witnessing a complete closure of the public sphere, starting with the restriction on the activities of the parties and public figures, severe restrictions on the work of civil society and the recurrent accusations of being a proxy, which is accompanied by massive media campaigns against its activities.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE OF GOVERNANCE AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE COUNTRY

Since the third of July 2013, Egypt has been under a regime that derives its legitimacy from the war on terror that transcended the borders of traditional areas in Sinai and spread in all of Egypt, as the society is supposed to unite behind its official leadership to stem this expansion. The regime is also engaged in a zero-conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood movement and all political forces and actors affiliated with the January revolution and civilian activities that it deems to hinder its war on terror.

In fact, the Egyptian regime is considered a regime that does not believe in political institutions and is suspicious of society's ability to solve its problems. It also deals with skepticism and suspicion with civil activities organized by the parties or civil society without exposing them to a series of security approvals. Therefore, it becomes easy for it, in a similar system, to rely on the media and the judiciary to accuse a civil society of working to destroy the state; it also accused the civil society sometimes of cooperating with terrorist groups; hence, civil society activities suffer from severe polarization and zero-conflict between the two parties.



In this political context, we find that the Egyptian civil society faces challenges related to public skepticism about its role and orientations, reinforced by the context of the war on terror and its accompanying systematic media campaigns against civil society. That was reflected by laws related to civil society's work, which limited its ability to access funding and its activities to what the state decides, specifically in charitable work run by institutions close to the ruling authority. The work of civil society also faces challenges related to restricting its right to organize, which are stipulated by many laws and developed in the law that was approved in May 2017 and considered an attack on civil society, before it was reviewed in November 2018 by order of the President, and was amended to be released in 2019 without actual changes. Practically, this confusion has led to the emergence of organizational problems and issuing approvals to different institutions. Furthermore, the Egyptian civil society faces challenges related to registration and access the legal right to establish, in addition to its suffering from legal crises to obtain funding and converting the violations related to its work into criminal offenses that lead to the prosecution of its leaders and its affiliates, whether through travel bans or imprisonment in cases that remain open for years. These challenges have become more serious and threaten the sustainability of civil society's work and limit its ability to develop itself, its issues, and its fields of work (Omar Samir, *Civil Society Development in Egypt Since The Revolution Between Legal Restrictions and Attempts to Survive*, 2019).

Economic, Political, Security and Social Situation in The Country and Its Relationship to The Emergence and Development of Civil Society

Egypt suffers from poor economic conditions, as it largely finances government expenditures from taxes and debts. In contrast, the country suffers from high inflation rates that reached almost 14.4% in 2018, after reaching 29.5% in 2017 (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, <http://bit.ly/2OYKXJS>). In addition, external and internal debt amounts to almost \$ 311.5 billion (Monte Carlo International, according to Statistics Authority, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2OWOU1B>). This means that the economy is working to service debts, leaving little financial margins for spending on public services. In a similar situation, civil society's need becomes more urgent to bridge the development gaps that the state is unable to fulfill. However, the high rates of unemployment (9.9%) and poverty (32%), in parallel with the high rate of inflation and the

austerity policies imposed in accordance with the economic reform program with the International Monetary Fund, make engaging in civil society and voluntary work difficult, if not impossible, for the youth who are supposed to enrich these organizations.

This severe economic and social situation is not a fate but rather the result of accumulated politics and the ruling class's prejudices. However, the general political context remains one of the most significant factors affecting Egyptian civil society's work. The main determinant of its permitted scope of work, its mechanisms, financing and laws regulating it, as it is directly affected by the political context. It is open, that would ease the restrictions on its work; if it is strict, the margins of the movement will narrow in a way that limits its developmental and awareness-raising impact in favor of the charitable impact that facilitates its attribute to the authority that imposes its political and economic orientations as well.

SHEDDING LIGHT ON ASPECTS OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND MOVEMENT

Although the Egyptian Constitution stipulates freedom of thought and speech and the right to expression (2014 Constitution Article 65) and guarantees freedom of artistic and literary creativity (Article 67) and the right to peaceful assembly and association (the 2012 Constitution and the 2014 Constitution), public policy has established laws that restrict these rights, such as the Protest Law, Civil Society Law, and laws that regulate the press and the media, which makes it difficult to expand the scope of civil society work or even to maintain its roles and activities.

CONTEXT, REGIONAL DIMENSIONS AND PROBLEMS SURROUNDING THE COUNTRY

The Egyptian case's regional context is no more supportive of civil society action than the local context. On the western borders of Egypt is Libya, which is considered a collapsed country suffering from civil strife and a legal crisis resulting from two governments, parliamentarians and armed groups that control its cities and fight with any federal force that tries to impose its control. From the south, there is Sudan, which has been suffering from war, fighting, asylum and displacement, and is currently going through a transitional phase dominated by a great deal of liquidity. From the east, there is Saudi Arabia, where the regime is the most conservative in the Arab region and the most hostile to the work of political parties, organizations and civil society. Meanwhile, the burst of the Syrian and Iraqi cases and their transformation into a bad example of the collapse of state authority and the fall of large areas of them under the control of terrorist organizations granted legitimacy to all local restrictions on the work of civil society and the various political organizations from unions and parties and provided the security services with the justification to impose their measures on civil society based on its skeptical vision of its role, goals and organizations.



BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the "Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World" program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project "Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making". This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project's goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM


at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media's expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.


THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT


The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB Policy Institute) is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. Inaugurated in 2006, the Institute aims to harness, develop, and initiate policy relevant research in the Arab region. We are committed to expanding and deepening policy-relevant knowledge production in and about the Arab region; and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society and policy-makers.


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