Repression Reconsidered:

Bystander Effects and Legitimation in Authoritarian Regimes

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Scholarship on repression has shown the myriad ways in which autocrats can use violence to stay in power, from harassment of dissidents, to targeted assassinations, show trials, and disappearances.[1] The sources and consequences of such violence are the object of a broad research agenda, but one idea remains constant: that violence's primary function is to destroy. Most research on authoritarian rule focuses on so-called "threat elimination" strategies that center on the suppression of opposition.

Yet, eliminating threats is not the only purpose of repression in authoritarian regimes. This article argues that autocrats can also repress to build popular support for their rule. By repressing groups perceived as dangerous, autocrats can cultivate a following of citizen "bystanders" (i.e., civilian groups that are not the explicit targets of violence) who are otherwise wary of the threat that the repressed groups pose to them. Existing studies tend to overlook how bystanders affect state repression. However, bystanders can play crucial roles because they can support, acquiesce, or revolt against the regime after witnessing or learning about state violence, and their reactions shape the costs and benefits of political violence. When bystanders support violence against rival groups, an autocrat can exploit these sentiments to consolidate power. I call this a legitimation strategy of repression that serves not only to eliminate threats to power, but also to boost regime legitimacy by stamping out the bystanders' adversaries. Repression captures bystander support because it signals the regime's capacity and willingness to protect them against a perceived enemy.

In this article, I present a theory of authoritarian legitimation through repression and delineate its scope conditions. I highlight two factors that increase the probability that an autocrat will employ a legitimation strategy. The first factor is polarization, which captures the extent to which groups in society distrust each other and have incompatible policy objectives. Politics in highly polarized societies becomes a zero-sum game

dominated by perceptions of existential threats. In such a context, an autocrat can step in and solidify the support of one group by repressing this group's rival. The second factor is regime type. Not all authoritarian regimes have the same propensity to use violence to build popular support. For example, party-based authoritarian regimes possess institutions to distribute benefits among supporters and coopt opposition without repressing.[2] In contrast, military regimes after a coup often lack institutions such as parties and legislatures to recruit and mobilize supporters. Given that military regimes already control the institutions of coercion, violence can be a powerful tool to build a support base, signaling the regime's commitment to protecting certain groups from threats.

This article makes several contributions to the literature on state repression and authoritarianism. For one, I propose reconsidering key assumptions of current research on repression. Existing scholarship often frames repression as a dyadic interaction between the regime and the main target of repression.[3] In this adversarial relationship, the decision to repress involves a calculus that balances the costs, including backlash against the regime, international sanctions, and so on, against the benefits, eliminated threats. However, as addressed below, this dyadic model tends to overlook the constellation of forces in society that a regime often contends with: not just the target of repression, but also the bystanders who witness violence against others.[4] This analytical oversight has hindered scholars' ability to theorize the variegated effects of repression and the full range of authoritarian strategies of violence. In particular, such thinking downplays the possibility that violence might be popular and that autocrats may repress expressly to cultivate mass support. In moving beyond a dyadic model, I build on the work of Ellen Lust and Holger Albrecht, who have theorized the divide-and-conquer strategies of Arab autocracies.[5] However, I highlight a novel mechanism whereby autocrats foment and exploit already existing divides to build a political following through violence.

To demonstrate this logic, I present a case study of repression in Egypt after the military coup of July 3, 2013. The coup heralded a period of unprecedented repression in Egypt. The new military regime detained tens of thousands, sentenced hundreds to death, and killed several hundred in street clashes across the country. The bulk of these casualties occurred during the Rabaa massacre of August 14, 2013, during which security forces killed approximately one thousand protesters in a single street intersection in less than twelve hours in a densely populated area of Cairo. Drawing on original interviews and a variety of secondary sources, I show how repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in the months that followed the 2013 coup responded in part to a logic of legitimation. Severe repression against the Muslim Brotherhood not only served to eliminate a significant threat to the new regime, but also helped legitimize the new post-coup government and Defense Minister ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī as indispensable for preventing the country's descent into chaos. I argue that repression partly aimed to increase the regime's legitimacy among secularist groups wary of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian case demonstrates how large-scale violence against civilians does not necessarily hurt a ruler's legitimacy. On the contrary, in a deeply polarized context such as Egypt in 2013, repression can legitimize a regime by signaling to supporters a commitment to hold a hard line against their political rivals.

Existing Approaches to Authoritarian Repression

Understanding how repression can build popular support requires rethinking repression in authoritarian contexts. Repression is most often depicted as a dyadic conflict between two adversaries: the ruler and the repressed group.[6] Faced with a dissident group, an autocrat must decide how to respond: concession or repression.[7] The literature suggests that when given a choice to concede or repress, the regime opts for whichever strategy is "cheapest." That is, coopt when cooptation is cheap, such as when the regime has access to rents to distribute in the form of patronage,[8] and repress when repression is cheap, such as when the autocrat possesses a powerful and loyal coercive apparatus.[9]

The dyadic model has important consequences for how scholars think about the effects of repression. To understand why, it is helpful to distinguish between the effects of repression on behaviors versus attitudes. The effect of repression on behaviors is varied and complex. Repression has been found to either increase or decrease overt dissent depending on the context.[10] Some have argued that an increase in repression decreases future mobilization.[11] Others conclude that an increase in repression encourages more mobilization,[12] while some posit a non-linear relationship between repression and mobilization.[13] Christian Davenport refers to these contradictory findings and as the "punishment puzzle": whereas threats always increase repression, repression's effects on threats are complicated and context-dependent.[14]

Whereas repression's effects on behavior are varied, the effects on attitudes are believed to be much more straightforward. In dyadic models, civilian actors are always the direct targets of repression. Because civilians are the only actors experiencing violence, repression can only decrease the regime's popularity. As recent studies have shown, being targeted by violence often provokes emotions of resentment and anger against the perpetrators of violence and encourages victims to turn towards their ingroup. Victims of repression deepen their animosity against the regime and develop powerful and long-lasting narratives of oppression and survival.[15] As a result, repression is largely understood to have negative consequences for a regime: it tends to "lower the government's legitimacy."[16]

Given that repression is assumed to damage regime legitimacy, only a limited range of coercive strategies is imaginable in a dyadic model. The goal of repression here is to eliminate threats,[17] either by destroying the organizational capacity to mobilize against the regime,[18] or by physically eliminating members of opposition groups.[19] Repression in this form results in acquiescence, but not legitimacy. Submission to authority is the product of fear and an assessment that the costs of opposing the regime are too high.[20] Although repression can force citizens to comply, it cannot shift popular attitudes (i.e., support) in favor of the autocrat. In other words, repression in a dyadic theory generates divergent effects on attitudes and behaviors by diminishing overt opposition but increasing anti-regime sentiment. These divergent effects generate a fundamental trade-off: repression can make citizens comply, but compliance comes at the cost of a loss of popularity.

Repression as Legitimation

Dyadic approaches to repression, which tend to focus on the regime and the opposition, overlook the diversity of groups in society and their interactions. The reality is that autocrats do not simply manage their relationship with a single societal group. Rather, they must confront multiple groups that may have conflicting views towards the regime and one another. A triadic model—involving autocrats, targets, and bystanders—opens up the possibility that repression might serve purposes beyond eliminating threats, specifically, building support. I refer to this as a legitimation strategy of repression.

Breaking society up into multiple actors—the direct targets of repression and the bystanders of repression—generates new insights into autocratic regimes' repression strategies. Consider how most of the population is composed of bystanders, ordinary citizens who are not directly targeted by repression but observe its effects on others. Although repression does not directly harm these bystanders, it nonetheless influences their attitudes. To see how, it is useful to think of violence as carrying new information about the autocrat. Repression communicates to the bystander that the autocrat is "tough" and willing to employ violence to eliminate threats. Such toughness can be appealing to bystanders if they themselves feel threatened by the repressed group. Repression signals that the autocrat will not compromise with the threat. Witnessing such repression may thus lead the bystander to positively update their support for the autocrat if they fear the repressed group and perceive repression as necessary to address the threat they pose. Repression changes bystanders' attitudes by revealing new information about the regime, such as its commitment to protect.

By looking beyond the dyadic relationship between the regime and targets of repression, I illustrate that repression can have a much broader role than in a dyadic model. In particular, bystander groups complicate the decision calculus of repression for the autocrat by forcing the autocrat to consider not only the direct effects of repression, but also the indirect effects on individuals who are not repressed. Indeed, considering all actors involved in repression opens up the possibility that repression may have a role in addition to eliminating threats. Repression allows the regime to both eliminate threats and solidify bystander support.

My signaling argument builds on and helps advance the literature on authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa, which theorizes differentiated repression against Islamists and secularists, and its effects on autocratic survival.[21] Compared with existing studies, I place more emphasis on how repression affects not only the behaviors of secularist opposition groups, but also their attitudes. My argument is therefore closer to the recent works by Dana El-Kurd and Elizabeth Nugent, who have shown how repression and authoritarianism reduce inter-group trust, while proposing two important innovations.[22] First, the theory of authoritarian legitimation I offer expands on how repression shapes citizen attitudes towards the ruler, beyond its effects on attitudes towards other citizens. Second, this novel emphasis on the public's perceptions towards the leader generates new insights on authoritarian leaders' strategic environment. Specifically, it suggests that the autocrat's decision-calculus is conditioned by expectations about how

the public will react. If the autocrat expects the public to react approvingly to repression, they can use repression to cultivate a mass following.

Scope Conditions

This section specifies the conditions that make autocrats most likely to use a legitimation strategy of repression. I argue that two conditions make it especially likely that a ruler will employ a legitimation strategy of repression: polarization and a military coup. Polarization activates cleavages between societal groups, making violence easy to justify; a military coup creates a legitimacy gap for the new rulers, one that can potentially be filled by violence.

Polarization   The first condition that enables a legitimation strategy of repression is a high level of polarization in society. I argue that polarization predisposes citizens to support the repression of a perceived adversary. In line with prior work, I conceptualize polarization as having "two components":[23] (1) affective polarization and (2) distance in policy preferences. Both components contribute, independently and jointly, to reducing the costs of repression. First, affective polarization "occurs when group members hold negative views of and distrust members of the outgroup and perceive a high level of social distance between their group and the outgroup."[24] Affective polarization reduces identification with and empathy towards members of the outgroup. It increases tolerance towards repression of the outgroup and can even generate desires for revenge. When affective polarization is high, individuals can derive satisfaction from the outgroup's repression. Such revenge motives have been widely documented in accounts of civil war and ethnic conflicts.[25] For example, in his account of the ethnic cleansing by ethnic Albanians of 8,000 Roma people in Mitrovica in Kosovo after the withdrawal of Serbian troops in 1999, Petersen recounts that "[t]he action was apparently highly popular throughout the Albanian community,"[26] even though the Roma posed no obvious threat to Albanians. Instead, Albanians believed the Roma deserved to be punished for having collaborated with Serbs in killing Albanians.

　　The second component of polarization is the distance in policy preferences: this is the extent to which groups disagree "on political issues of central importance."[27] Distance in policy preferences generates a distinct rationale for supporting the repression of members of an outgroup; repression weakens the outgroup and diminishes its ability to influence policy. Weakening the outgroup can be important if it has policy goals that threaten the ingroup's interests: to cancel private property, eliminate entire social classes, or impose religiously-sanctioned rules of social behavior. Such "social revolutionary" goals often create fear and demand for protection by the state.[28] For this reason, repression against outgroups suspected of harboring a radical agenda can enjoy broad popular support.[29] In Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, the middle classes lived in a "continued terror of 'communism'" and often supported the state's repression of leftist movements.[30]

Combined, the two components of polarization create an environment that is ripe for repression. The deep distrust that is constitutive of affective polarization generates perceptions that groups are embroiled in an existential conflict for survival. In such a highly polarized context, the autocrat can signal to one group that they are fighting on their side by repressing the other side. Repression in polarized settings then changes the attitudes of bystanding (i.e., non-repressed) groups by revealing new information about the regime and its commitment to protect.

This focus on how groups in society perceive of each other helps explain autocrats' uneven success in justifying repression. Virtually all regimes provide some rationale for why they repress, almost invariably describing repression targets as outlaws, terrorists, or traitors.[31] Although regimes often use a similar language, these justifications do not always succeed at persuading their target audiences. As shown below, justifications for violence are much more persuasive when society is polarized (i.e., when some groups are predisposed to hearing these justifications).

Military Coups   The second condition is autocratic regime-type. Specifically, I argue that a regime that recently came to power through a coup is more likely to adopt a legitimation strategy of repression. Eradicating threats to society is an expedient way for a new military regime to build a support base, provided that society is polarized enough that such a strategy is available.

Military officers who come to power through a coup often face challenges in justifying their power grab. Indeed, the military invariably faces a "legitimacy deficit" after a coup, given that it seized power extra-legally.[32] To overcome these problems, military rulers can adopt several strategies. First, they can erect a ruling party to garner civilian support. Between 1945 and 2010, "[d]ictators who seized power through armed force (most often by coup) later created a civilian support party or allied themselves with a pre-existing party about 60% of the time."[33] Prominent examples of such institution-building include Egypt's Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's creation of the Liberation Rally, which would later become the Arab Socialist Union, the ancestor of the ruling National Democratic Party under Mubārak,[34] and Suharto's repurposing of Golkar into a ruling party in Indonesia.[35] Building strong parties enhances autocratic survival; however, building parties typically takes time and may not be implementable in the crucial weeks or months after a coup when the regime is most vulnerable. A second strategy would be to hold elections soon after ousting a non-democratic regime. This measure can lend immediate credibility to a new military junta by giving citizens the impression that power has been handed back to them.[36]

I argue that military officers have other options at their disposal for building a support base. For example, they can wage violence against society's alleged enemies. Repression here communicates in a highly visible fashion to civilian audiences that the new regime is willing and capable of protecting them against threats. If the ousted incumbent is a polarizing figure, the military can win over opponents of the disgraced ruler by repressing his supporters.[37] This strategy is especially valuable for military officers about

whom the general public often knows little. To be sure, officers often prefer to return to the barracks and avoid politics. But in a highly polarized environment, the option of consolidating power through repression becomes available.

My theory suggests a new mechanism for how autocrats consolidate power that complements extant theories in comparative politics. One influential argument is the protection pact, wherein elites who face common threats become motivated to form partnerships that defeat their shared enemy.[38] Indeed, Bruce Rutherford argues that Egypt's current regime represents such a pact (albeit an incomplete one), where the Muslim Brotherhood poses a shared threat to elites, such that the latter can coordinate against the former.[39] My theory of legitimization through repression differs from protection pacts in several aspects. For one, domestic support never arises from repression in a protection pact. On the contrary, one central feature of a successful protection pact is that it helps avert widespread and unpopular repression. The shared threat to elites prompts them to invest massively in strengthening the state's coercive capacity, ensuring repression remains selective and unnoticeable rather than heavy-handed and indiscriminate.[40] In other words, a protection pact helps tame and channel state violence rather than catalyzing it, and therefore the mechanisms through which it generates popular support are different from the theory proposed here.

Case Study: Repression in Egypt

On August 14, 2013, Egyptian security forces violently dispersed a sit-in of thousands of protesters who demanded the reinstatement of ex-president Muḥammad Mursī, a conservative member of the Muslim Brotherhood who had been overthrown in a military coup a few weeks prior. The Rabaa massacre, as it became known, occurred in a densely populated Cairo neighborhood and involved the killing of approximately one thousand protesters, placing it among the bloodiest massacres of unarmed protesters in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[41] In the months after the massacre, the government imposed a draconian anti-protest law, detained tens of thousands of political opponents, sentenced hundreds to death, outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood, and labeled it a terrorist organization. While initially focused on Islamists, repression broadened to target any group or individual who criticized the regime. Despite its repressive nature, the new regime maintained a puzzlingly high level of support among activists, including liberals, Nasserists, and Leftists, who had previously opposed the repressive dictatorship of Mubārak. Long after the coup, these activists continued supporting the regime's repression. In my interviews with many of them, I was surprised to hear little condemnation of the violence perpetrated during the Rabaa massacre. Instead, I heard passionate and lengthy denunciations of the Muslim Brotherhood and the ongoing threat it posed to Egypt, a threat which arguably justified their repression.

These developments are not well accounted for by existing theories of repression, which stress how large-scale repression of protesters tends to delegitimize regimes. To be sure, repression in Egypt did cause some secularists to withdraw their support.

For instance, the April 6th Movement, which I discuss below, actively denounced the regime's violence, and interim Vice President Muḥammad al-Barādaʿī resigned from his post (he was the only cabinet member to resign). However, a critical mass of secularists supported the political rise of Defense Minister Sīsī, whose popularity sky-rocketed among the general public. To be clear, it is difficult to capture public attitudes during this period, not least due to well-known conceptual, methodological, and data collection challenges when studying legitimacy in authoritarian regimes.[42] However, survey data collected by local firms and Western scholars, as well as media coverage, portray a consistent picture of the regime's high popularity during its early days, a phenomenon referred to as "Sisi-mania" in reference to the effusive displays of support for Sīsī that characterized this period.[43] In addition, qualitative assessments based on interviews, by the author and Egypt experts, consistently point to Sīsī's popularity in this early period, a popularity rooted in the belief that he was uniquely qualified to protect Egypt from the Muslim Brotherhood's threat.[44] Sīsī's popularity did not rise despite the regime's repression; but to some extent because of it. It was rooted in some people's perception that the Muslim Brotherhood's threat necessitated a forceful government response and firm-hand leadership.

This section examines these developments in greater depth. It employs extensive interview material from original fieldwork conducted in Egypt in 2013–2015 and Turkey in 2018, as well as corroborative secondary sources to make two central claims about repression in Egypt after the coup of 2013. First, many secular political groups supported the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood because they saw the Islamist organization as an existential threat that required immediate and forceful response. Through my interviews with opposition party leaders, intellectuals, and prominent civil society actors, I heard frequent justification for the government's repression. Importantly, the activists I interviewed were not pawns of the regime, but had a demonstrated record of advocating for democracy and human rights during the Mubārak era, often at great costs to themselves. During Mursī's presidency, they became convinced that the threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood was so severe that it required giving security forces and Sīsī extensive powers to protect the country. Many of these intellectuals did not withdraw support from the regime until several years into the Sīsī presidency when they themselves became the regime's targets. Their presence in the Egyptian media and their vocal support for the regime's repressive policies helped the government justify its repressive actions to the broader population.

Second, I argue that the backing of these secularist activists played a key role in the regime's decision to repress. Their vocal support for the hardline lowered the political costs of using repression. That is, my claim is that the regime factored in the expectation that repression would be popular in its decision to repress. I provide suggestive evidence that the post-coup government was attentive to how the public would react to a large-scale crackdown. The regime saw in popular anger directed towards the Muslim Brotherhood an "opportunity," in the words of a former high-ranking official, to get rid of the Muslim Brotherhood and seize power with the people's support.[45] While the secretive nature of elite deliberations in authoritarian regimes creates substantial challenges for

ascertaining an authoritarian regime's motivations, I triangulate this interview evidence with NGO reports and public declarations by activists and regime officials to demonstrate my argument.

In short, I argue that after the 2013 coup, a legitimation logic was at play, which coexisted with the logic of eliminating direct threats to the regime. Not only did repression aim to destroy the Brotherhood, but it also served to consolidate the initial support of secularist opposition groups wary about Islamists. These groups include party leaders, prominent intellectuals, and civil society actors who actively mobilized in support of democracy during the Mubārak presidency and would later mobilize in 2013 in support of the coup and Sīsī's regime. Repression demonstrated to these actors that the regime was serious about dealing with the perceived threat of the Muslim Brotherhood and increased its legitimacy in the eyes of these constituencies.

Background   After mass mobilization ended the three-decades-long presidency of Ḥusnī Mubārak (1981–2011), Egypt held its first free parliamentary elections in more than half a century.[46] An Islamist-dominated parliament was elected, with the largest block of seats going to the Freedom and Justice Party, the political party of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest Islamist organization, which had been banned from forming a political party under the Mubārak regime. The presidential election took place in the spring of 2012 and resulted in the election of Muḥammad Mursī in a runoff against Aḥmad Shafīq, former Air Force Chief-of-staff and a Mubārak regime figure.

During late 2012 and early 2013, non-Islamists began opposing Mursī and his government with increasing virulence. In the fall of 2012, a rushed constitutional process dominated by Islamists and a controversial presidential decree in November 2012 that placed executive decisions above judicial review, sparked broad opposition against the Muslim Brotherhood and the president (the decree was rescinded shortly thereafter). Mursī defended the decision to grant himself these powers as necessary to protect the gains of the 2011 revolution from a judiciary dominated by former Mubārak appointees. Yet, these justifications did little to convince his detractors. Mursī's opponents believed that he had autocratic ambitions and was laying the ground for the capture of the Egyptian state by the Muslim Brotherhood. A political coalition of anti-Mursī forces called the National Salvation Front formed to oppose the president. By the spring of 2013, a movement calling itself Tamarrud, meaning Rebellion in Arabic, began collecting signatures demanding early presidential elections. The movement, which received support from elements in the security services hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed it had collected over twenty-two million signatures and called for protests on June 30, 2013, to demand an early presidential election.[47] When Mursī did not budge, the military ousted him on July 3, 2013, amidst massive protests that dwarfed the protests that had mobilized against Ḥusnī Mubārak in 2011.

Importantly for the repression which followed, polarization between the Muslim Brotherhood's supporters and opponents was at an all-time high on the eve of the coup.

Both Wave II (June–July 2011) and Wave III (March–April 2013) of the Arab Barometer asked respondents the extent to which they trusted the Muslim Brotherhood. The choices were: "to a great extent," "to a medium extent," to "a limited extent," or "absolutely do not trust it." Whereas in 2011, the proportion of respondents who answered that they "absolutely do not trust" the Muslim Brotherhood was 32 percent, this proportion had risen to 68 percent by 2013 shortly before the coup. Interestingly, the increase in distrust was substantial even among people who did not identify as very religious. In 2011, 44 percent of respondents who answered "rarely" to the question "do you pray daily?" reported "absolutely not" trusting the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2013, this number was 83 percent. Growing distrust of the Muslim Brotherhood was due to deteriorating public services, increasing feelings of physical insecurity during the Mursī period, and perceptions that the Muslim Brotherhood aimed to impose a theocracy.[48] These concerns were further exacerbated by the barrage of alarming news in non-Islamist media sources about the Muslim Brotherhood and the dangers they posed. These fears created political opportunities for repression.

Repression as Legitimation   In the summer of 2013, Egypt found itself meeting the two conditions for a legitimation strategy of repression. First, polarization was extremely high between opponents and supporters of Mursī. Second, the new regime was highly dependent on popular support. The military's main claim to legitimacy that it represented the will of the Egyptian people was technically in tension with the fact that it had ousted Egypt's first democratically elected president. Extreme levels of animosity towards the Muslim Brotherhood among secularists who had supported the coup created an opportunity for the military to further solidify the support of this important constituency.[49]

The new regime moved aggressively to promote the notion that it was serving the will of the Egyptian people. The defense minister and head of the Armed forces ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī announced on television on July 3, 2013, a new roadmap that included a broad range of civilian actors representing a wide political spectrum. The designated interim president was former chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, ʿAdlī Manṣūr. Respected economist Ḥāzim Biblāwī became interim prime minister. Other cabinet members included the popular labor activist Kamāl Abū ʿAiṭa, who had spearheaded a movement for trade union independence in the late 2000s.[50] Law professor Ḥusām ʿAisā who had mobilized street demonstrations against the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) in the summer of 2011 alongside prominent activist groups such as the April 6th Movement was appointed deputy prime minister and minister of higher education.[51] This "civilian-led" transition left a deep impression on one of my interviewees. Referring to the 2011 military-led transition, he reminded me: "The real power after January 25 was with the Supreme Council of Armed Forces. But the power after the June 30 coup was in the hands of a civilian government."[52]

The main challenge that the government faced was the sustained street mobilization by supporters of deposed president Mursī. The epicenter of pro-Mursī mobilization was an intersection in the Cairo suburb of Naṣr City in front of the Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiya Mosque, where a sit-in had been ongoing since June 28, 2013, in support of the embattled ex-president. After the military ousted Mursī on July 3, the protesters had remained on the site of the sit-in, demanding Mursī's reinstatement. The National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy was a coalition of Islamist forces that opposed the coup and proclaimed the democratic legitimacy of Mursī as Egypt's first freely elected president. They had set up a stage at the Rabaa sit-in where Muslim Brotherhood leaders and other Islamists made fiery speeches denouncing the coup. In parallel to the Rabaa sit-in in Naṣr City, another sit-in was ongoing in Gīza's Nahḍa Square, in proximity to Cairo University, where many protestors hailed from ultra-conservative Salafist movements. The National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy organized protests from the sit-ins that soon escalated into violent clashes with security forces. On July 8, over fifty protesters were killed in front of the Republican Guard Headquarters.[53]

The sit-in increased public anxieties. Media outlets reported on passersby allegedly being tortured at the Rabaa sit-in.[54] Residents of the neighborhood complained that they did not have safe access to their homes and suffered harassment by Islamists. Television programs "were keen to insist that the sit-ins were essentially Tora Bora in the middle of Cairo, denouncing MB supporters as terrorists who deserved no mercy."[55] Newspapers claimed that the Muslim Brotherhood was enlisting children and teaching them how to be martyrs. To make matters worse, speakers who took the stage at the Rabaa sit-in made declarations that raised concerns about the Muslim Brotherhood's commitment to non-violence. Mursī supporter and preacher Ṣafwat Ḥigāzī declared that "if anyone splashes water over M[u]rs[ī], we splash him with blood."[56] Likewise, Brotherhood leader Muḥammad al-Baltāgī warned that the unstable Sinai region, where an Islamist insurgency was building, would not become peaceful until Mursī was reinstated.[57] Although the Brotherhood denied that it was responsible for the violence, many interpreted such declarations as confirmation that the Islamist organization was behind the Sinai insurgency.

Secular political forces were deeply concerned by these developments, and many began publicly advocating for the hardline. Newspapers, once known for their criticism of police brutality under Mubārak, were publishing opinion pieces calling for intransigence. One piece in *Al-Masry al-Yawm*, Egypt's largest privately-owned newspaper, described the Rabaa sit-in as "an illegal gathering that clearly threatens national security and the safety of citizens" and emphasized that it was the "national duty of the organs entrusted with maintaining the security of the country" to disperse the sit-in.[58] The same author wrote in another op-ed that "the police must deal with [the sit-in] as it deals with criminals and murderers. Such banditry is a violation of the law. It should not be tolerated," adding that "the police's responsibility is to protect the people from advocates of violence and bandits."[59] Another journalist similarly urged security forces to disperse the encampment:

> We are waiting to receive our ʿaidiya [gift offered as part of the celebrations of ʿAid] from the armed forces. Nothing would be more beautiful than erasing the "Republic of Rabaa" off the map. There would be nothing more beautiful than getting rid of the Muslim Brotherhood. There is no alternative to ensuring stability. Enough with chaos already! Enough with dishonoring the name of Egypt in Rabaa and Nahda! Enough with the visits of foreigners in the name of negotiations and intercessions! Egypt is greater than all. The beauty of the current Eid celebrations is that they take place without Mursī. But we want them to happen without the Muslim Brotherhood, without chaos.[60]

The relentless demonization of the Muslim Brotherhood in the media deepened public insecurities. In late July, it became increasingly clear that repressive measures would garner public support. In a speech pronounced in late July, Sīsī, in his capacity as defense minister, asked citizens to fill the streets to give the military a "mandate" to confront terrorism, a thinly veiled call for supporting a violent crackdown upon the Rabaa protesters. Pro-military protesters gathered in large numbers on July 26 in Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said, and Suez in a show of support for the military that received wide media coverage. The atmosphere of the pro-military demonstrations in Taḥrīr Square in Cairo was "jovial," and street vendors sold Sīsī-themed paraphernalia, including masks of Sīsī.[61] *Al-Masry al-Yawm* published a front-page article on the protest and reported chants of "Oh army, oh army, eliminate the terrorism of the Muslim Brotherhood. And Happy Eid without the Brotherhood terrorists. Oh Sīsī we authorize you, and may God help you against terrorism."[62]

These mass displays of support for the hardline almost certainly emboldened the regime.[63] In an interview, one former high-ranking official stated that the government got "encouraged" by the July 26 demonstrations.[64] Indeed, planning for the dispersal picked up after the demonstrations. The National Defense Council headed by interim president ʿAdlī Manṣūr convened two days after the July 26 protests to begin working on a plan to disperse the Rabaa sit-in.[65] On July 31, the government announced it had ordered the police to end the demonstration, and on August 4, the National Defense Council approved the proposed plan.[66] These rapid developments suggest a shift in government strategies around the time that public support for coercive measures became manifest. Although it is impossible to know for certain what motivated the violence, available evidence casts doubt on explanations that solely focus on the Muslim Brotherhood's direct threat to the regime. Indeed, threat-based explanations fail to account for the timing of repression. Regime officials' hostility—and threat perceptions—towards the Muslim Brotherhood were deeply engrained, and their origins lay in events that long preceded the coup. Domestic security officials, for instance, were long convinced that the only way of dealing with the Islamist organization's threat was to destroy it.[67] Given these entrenched perceptions of threat, it is telling that the military waited almost two months after seizing power before unleashing its full force onto the Rabaa protesters.[68] What changed during the summer was not the perception of the Muslim Brotherhood's threat, but the regime's "opportunity structure."[69] Rising public demand for the government to put an end to the Muslim Brotherhood's mobilization, which was in part the product of the regime's own fear-instigating campaigns, created opportunities for the regime to crush the organization at little political cost.

On August 14, 2013, police and military personnel surrounded the Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins; Egyptian Special Forces and the Ministry of Interior's Central Security Forces advanced on the protesters alongside Armed Personnel Carriers and bulldozers that were operated by police and army personnel, while military soldiers secured the exits.[70] Security forces opened fire almost immediately. According to a detailed report by Human Rights Watch, protesters were trapped inside and not allowed safe exit for several hours.[71] The human rights organization confirmed the deaths of "817 from Rab'a [sic] and 87 from al-Nahda [sic]" but stresses that "likely well over 1,000 people were killed" in the dispersal of the Rabaa sit-in alone on August 14. This number was later confirmed by Prime Minister Biblāwī. In September 2013, he declared that "close to 1,000" had been killed at Rabaa and Nahda on August 14. The collective Wikithawra compiled information data on arrests, injuries, and deaths from newspapers and social media and counted 932 people killed during the Rabaa massacre.[72]

This massacre has been described as the largest killing of unarmed protesters in Egypt's modern history.[73] Yet many segments of the Egyptian public reacted with approval of the government's actions. Political scientist Kira Jumet noted how "significant portions of the Egyptian public had been whipped into a frenzy and were out for blood, emphatically supporting any actions that the military took against the Islamist group, no matter how violent."[74] A Western journalist who had been at the location of the massacre recalls witnessing a "scene of jubilation," adding that "[s]oldiers and riot police stuck their chests out like heroes. Civilians stopped to congratulate them."[75]

Compare these reactions to those following other acts of repression against civilians in Egypt in the past. When in January of 1977, the military violently repressed anti-austerity protesters, it caused generalized anger and massive protests that spiralled out of control, forcing President Sādāt to walk back his economic reforms and rescind the austerity measures in the face of popular pressure.[76] Likewise, during the uprising of January and February 2011, the military never attempted to dislodge the anti-Mubārak protesters ensconced in Tahrir Square.[77] The killing of protesters would have almost certainly cost the military its prestige and severely undermined morale within its ranks.[78] Unable to order the military to crush the protests, the flailing Mubārak regime engaged in desperate attempts at clearing the square by outsourcing violence to hired thugs. When the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) sent its thugs onto the Taḥrīr Square protesters on February 2, 2011, these attacks not only failed to remove the protesters, but they further swayed popular opinion in favor of the anti-Mubārak mobilization. They "instigated a great deal of sympathy for the protesters among Egyptians who initially had little interest in revolution."[79]

The situation could not be more different in 2013. In 2013, there was little sympathy among secularists towards the protesters. In stark contrast with 2011, several highly prominent and influential figures overtly supported the repression and praised the regime for not backing down. World-renowned novelist ʿAlāʾ el-Aswānī, who had been a staunch opponent to the Mubārak regime and a celebrated liberal voice, declared that Sīsī was a "national hero" for protecting the Egyptian people. He praised Sīsī, stressing how the defense minister's decision to personally get involved and end the

crisis signaled great leadership. "The Muslim Brotherhood took to the streets to kill you? Just let the police and the public prosecutor deal with the situation. He [Sīsī] could have just done that!"[80] In the weeks before this declaration, Al-Aswānī had supported the use of force against the Rabaa protesters. On the day of the massacre, he tweeted to his two million followers: "In Egypt now there is a people, a government, a police force and an army in the confrontation with an armed terrorist group that is committing the most heinous of crimes for power. There is no middle ground. Either with Egypt or with terrorism."[81]

Many other prominent liberal figures publicly supported Sīsī after the massacre. Ibrāhīm ʿAyssā, the co-founder of *al-Dustūr* newspaper, who was often referred to as a "thorn" in the side of the Mubārak regime for his relentless criticism of corruption and police abuse, publicly and enthusiastically supported repression, declaring that "[t]here is no such things as rights for terrorists."[82] ʿAyssā later supported Sīsī's candidacy to the presidency, referring to Sīsī's political rise as "a day of joy, a day of victory, a day of dignity, a day of pride, the day Egypt and its people were victorious."[83] Another prominent secularist activist, Muḥammad Abū al-Ghār, a university professor who founded the March 9th Movement for university autonomy and an active voice opposing the Mubārak regime, likewise endorsed repression. In an interview with a Western journalist in the days following the massacre, he said "The loss of life is tragic. But I'm sorry to say that the Muslim Brotherhood invited this. They wanted all of the time for this to happen [...] I don't accept that there are non-extremist elements to the Muslim Brotherhood."[84] Respected sociologist Saʿd al-Dīn Ibrāhīm, famous for his pathbreaking academic studies of Islamist activism and for being imprisoned for his pro-democracy activism under Mubārak, suggested schools and mosques be turned into temporary detention centers to accommodate the estimated 700,000 Muslim Brotherhood members.[85] Co-founder of the Egyptian Movement for Change, the Kifāya Movement, which pushed for political liberalization in the mid-2000s, and Secretary General of the Egyptian Socialist Party, Aḥmad Bahā' Al-Dīn Shaʿbān, supported repression and even criticized the interim government for not doing enough in its battle against terrorism. In early 2014 he called on the regime to "purge state institutions from members of the Brotherhood and their allies," adding: "We are fighting a bloody battle against terrorism."[86] Concerned about the ongoing Muslim Brotherhood protests on university campuses, he called on the government to suspend classes for two weeks and "arrest terrorist elements" on university campuses.[87]

The secularist activists I spoke to held to a similar discourse. For instance, leftist activist Muḥammad explained to me at great length how the Muslim Brotherhood was a highly ideological movement that had become expert at dissimulating its true objectives and could not be trusted.[88] The Muslim Brotherhood's patriotism was suspect, according to Tawfīq, another leftist activist. The Muslim Brotherhood's goal was no less than to wipe Egypt off the map: "They don't believe in the concept of nation. They want to erase borders."[89] Had the military failed to stop the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt would have disappeared and been dissolved into a transnational Islamic Caliphate, and the organization would have expanded its influence beyond Egypt's

borders. For these activists, the Muslim Brotherhood posed a threat not only to Egypt, but to the entire world. As Muḥammad noted, "humanity will one day remember that the Egyptian people put a stop to the expansion of religious extremism in the world," adding "no one can come to us and tell us, like the Americans did, that this was a military coup. We are the ones who decided and we demanded that the military move. If the military lost the support of the people, Sīsī wouldn't last one minute."[90] He further added, referring the so-called "June 30 Revolution" against Muḥammad Mursī: "the West, I think, made a huge mistake in its appraisal of June 30. June 30 saved humanity from a terrible wave of barbarism."[91] For Egyptian secularist forces, it was only natural to turn to the powerful Egyptian military for protection once they understood the Muslim Brotherhood's true nature.[92]

By the time I did these interviews, the regime's willingness to inflict violence on its opponents, including non-Islamists, was abundantly clear. Nevertheless, many secularists still maintained their support for the regime, and the groups that did critique the regime's increasing repressiveness became marginalized. Consider the April 6th Movement, a youth political organization that became famous in 2008 for coordinating a nation-wide strike in solidarity with workers and played a central role in the protest movements that ousted Mubārak in 2011. Although the April 6th Movement participated in the June 30, 2013 demonstrations that ended Mursī's presidency, it vocally denounced repression after the Rabaa massacre. In the fall of 2013, it mobilized against a highly restrictive anti-protest law, and the regime responded by arresting the April 6th leadership, including prominent leader Aḥmad Māhir. Remarkably, Ibrāhīm ʿAissā, mentioned above, "applauded" the regime's actions.[93] Reflecting on these events, one member of April 6th's political office explained to me how the prevailing polarization at the time made it impossible for their movement to gain traction:

> At the time, people had been told that anyone who talks about reconciliation serves the interests of the Muslim Brotherhood. Even the other civilian movements were attacking April 6. Civilian movements like the Free Egyptians and all the political parties. This included opposition political parties that had been founded on social movements: like the Nasserists and the Karama Party. They were all attacking us.[94]

He added:

> In those days the general opinion was that the Muslim Brotherhood are terrorists. There were terrorist attacks and the Muslim Brotherhood was blamed for them. There was violence, and they would say the Muslim Brotherhood were terrorists. So anyone talking about a reconciliation would be accused of serving the objectives of the "terrorist organization" [the Muslim Brotherhood]. Even though we [April 6th] had been among the biggest opponents of the Brotherhood and had participated in Tamarrud and the June 30 [protests] against Mursī.[95]

There were major obstacles to successful organizing: "There was intense polarization. Are you with us or against us? There was no such thing as someone is in the

middle who wants what's best for the country. Are you with us? No? Then you are against us."[96]

In short, repression in Egypt after the coup of 2013 did not delegitimize the regime, contrary to expectations of recent scholarship on repression. My theory explains this apparent anomaly by pointing to prevailing polarization and secularists' animosity towards the Muslim Brotherhood. In the summer of 2013, many had come to believe the Muslim Brotherhood posed an existential threat to themselves and to the country and wanted the government to address the threat. This polarization dramatically reduced the political costs of repression for the regime. It ensured that repression would not provoke indignation, it could even be used for political gain. By repressing the Muslim Brotherhood, the new regime could increase its legitimacy by signaling a willingness to protect its supporters from their political rivals.

Conclusion

This article has argued that repression can serve more than one purpose. It can serve to eliminate threats as well as build support for authoritarian rule. Although the former function of repression has been well studied in the existing scholarship, the latter has received much less attention. The argument that repression can rally support for autocrats helps explain recent developments in Egypt. Secularists not only disapproved of the pro-Mursī mobilization in the summer of 2013 but also hoped that the regime would suppress it. This expectation that violence against protesters would not provoke outrage helped convince the new regime to go ahead with a plan to disperse the sit-in violently. Rather than delegitimize the government, the massacre improved its image by presenting itself as uniquely capable of protecting Egypt against threats.

The theory presented has many implications for how we think about repression. First, it unsettles the strict divide between cooptation and repression in the current literature. This article shows how repression can serve not only to eliminate threats but also to generate support for authoritarian rule. This strategy complements conventional forms of cooptation that rely on the provision of material goods to supporters.[97] Repression may also provide a form of "good," in the form of protection and revenge against a perceived enemy. Yet more work must be done to explain whether these exchanges can be institutionalized and sustained over the long-term, especially after the threat recedes.[98]

Second, the theory helps explain why repression increases dissent in some cases and decreases it in others. Scholars have long struggled with the question of whether and when repression "works" (i.e., whether it reduces future mobilization). I suggest that repression is more likely to work in polarized contexts. When polarization is high, repression provokes less outrage, even when directed at largely non-violent protesters.[99] Repression in polarized settings allows the regime to simultaneously eliminate a threat and legitimize itself.

Third, the article highlights the critical role of civilian publics for state repression. I contribute to a large body of evidence that demonstrates how unarmed actors during a

conflict are not passive observers but instead have agency in shaping violence. During civil wars, unarmed civilians shape the production of violence through their provision of information or logistical support to armed groups.[100] Building on these works, I find that the responses of everyday citizens toward acts of violence perpetrated by security forces condition how authoritarian regimes decide to repress.

NOTES

1. Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics,* 44 (January 2013), 127–49; Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Courtenay Conrad and Jacqueline DeMeritt, "Constrained by the Bank and the Ballot: Unearned Revenue, Democracy, and State Incentives to Repress," *Journal of Peace Research,* 50 (January 2013), 105–19; Ronald Francisco, "After the Massacre: Mobilization in the Wake of Harsh Repression," *Mobilization,* 9 (June 2004), 107–26; Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Mai Hassan, "The Strategic Shuffle: Ethnic Geography, the Internal Security Apparatus, and Elections in Kenya," *American Journal of Political Science,* 61 (April 2017), 382–95; Lynette H. Ong, "Thugs-for-Hire: Subcontracting of State Coercion and State Capacity in China," *Perspectives on Politics,* 16 (September 2018), 680–95; Pablo Policzer, *The Rise and Fall of Repression in Chile* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Emily Ritter and Courtenay Conrad, "Preventing and Responding to Dissent: The Observational Challenges of Explaining Strategic Repression," *American Political Science Review,* 110 (February 2016), 85–99; Fiona Shen-Bayh, "Strategies of Repression: Judicial and Extrajudicial Methods of Autocratic Survival," *World Politics,* 70 (July 2018), 321–57; Christopher M. Sullivan, "Political Repression and the Destruction of Dissident Organizations," *World Politics,* 68 (October 2016), 645–76; Milan Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

2. Christian Davenport, "State Repression and the Tyrannical Peace," *Journal of Peace Research*, 44 (March 2007), 485–504; Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

3. Mark Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation?: The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 31 (June 1987), 266–97; Will Moore, "The Repression of Dissent: A Substitution Model of Government Coercion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44 (February 2000), 107–27; Jan Henryk Pierskalla, "Protest, Deterrence, and Escalation: The Strategic Calculus of Government Repression," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* 54 (December 2010), 117–45.

4. The term "bystander" here strictly refers to civilians who are not the direct target of violence.

5. Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents and Institutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Holger Albrecht, "How Can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt," *Democratization*, 12 (2005), 378–97.

6. Bellin, 2012; Blaydes, 2018; Christian Davenport, "State Repression and Political Order," *Annual Review of Political Science,* 10 (2007), 1–23; See also Lichbach; Moore; Pierskalla; Shen-Bayh. In a highly influential article, Mark Lichbach presents his theory's main assumption as follows: "We divide the political world into a single regime faced by a single opposition group" (Lichbach, 273). More recent studies have relaxed the assumption that the regime is a unitary actor and focused on the principal-agent problem that the autocrat faces in empowering the coercive apparatus. Yet these studies tend to focus on the state's direct interaction with regime challengers. See Greitens and Svolik. One body of work that theorizes the role of bystanders focuses on how their perceptions towards repressed groups depend on the latter's use of violent versus non-violent mobilizing tactics. Scholars have found that non-violent protests are more successful at extracting concessions

than violent protests because the former are less likely to antagonize public opinion than the latter. See Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Omar Wasow, "Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting," *American Political Science Review,* 114 (February 2020), 638–59. For recent work theorizing bystanders' role in repression, see Jane Esberg, "The Audience of Repression: Killings and Disappearances in Pinochet's Chile," Working Paper (2020).

7. Courtenay R. Conrad, "Constrained Concessions: Beneficent Dictatorial Responses to the Domestic Political Opposition," *International Studies Quarterly,* 55 (September 2011), 1167–87; Erica Frantz and A. Kendall-Taylor, "A Dictator's Toolkit: Understanding how Co-Optation Affects Repression in Autocracies," *Journal of Peace Research*, 51 (March 2014), 332–46.

8. Conrad and DeMeritt, 2012; Michael L. Ross, "Does Oil Hinder Democracy?," *World Politics,* 53 (April 2001), 325–61.

9. Bellin, 2012; Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics,* 36 (January 2004), 139–57; Aurel Croissant, David Kuehn, and Tanja Eschenauer, "Mass Protests and the Military," *Journal of Democracy,* 29 (July 2018), 141–55; Terrence Lee, *Defect or Defend? Military Responses to Popular Protests in Authoritarian Asia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

10. Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State: A Tidal Approach to the Study of Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Davenport, 2007; Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Elizabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

11. Douglas Hibbs, *Mass Political Violence* (New York: John Wiley, 1973).

12. Ronald A. Francisco, "Coercion and Protest: An empirical Test in Two Democratic States," *American Journal of Political Science,* 40 (November 1996), 1179–204.

13. Edward Muller, "Income Inequality, Regime Repressiveness, and Political Violence," *American Sociological Review,* 50 (February 1985), 47–61.

14. Davenport, 2007, 8.

15. Blaydes, 2018; Elizabeth Nugent, "The Psychology of Repression and Polarization," *World Politics,* 72 (April 2020), 291–334. On backlash, see S. Erdem Aytaç, Luis Schiumerini, and Susan Stokes, "Why Do People Join Backlash Protests? Lessons from Turkey," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* 62 (July 2018), 1205–28; Francisco, 2004; Christopher M. Sullivan and Christian Davenport, "The Rebel Alliance Strikes Back: Understanding the Politics of Backlash Mobilization," *Mobilization,* 22 (March 2017), 39–56.

16. T. H. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements* (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1974), 112; cited in Lichbach, 269; see also Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Scholarship theorizing bystander perceptions towards violent and non-violent protests shows that violence against unarmed protesters tends to legitimize the latter's claims. However, this effect is annulled when protesters employ violence. See Chenoweth and Stephan*;* Wasow.

17. Lichbach; Pierskalla.

18. Sullivan.

19. Blaydes, 2018; Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

20. Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise of 1989 European Revolution," *World Politics*, 44 (October 1991), 7–48; Lauren Young, "The Psychology of State Repression: Fear and Dissent Decisions in Zimbabwe," *American Political Science Review,* 113 (February 2019), 140–55.

21. Albrecht; Dana S. El Kurd, "The Legacy of Authoritarian Strategies: Repression and Polarization in the Palestinian Territories," *Middle East Law and Governance,* 10 (October 2018), 375–401; Matt Buehler, *Why Alliances Fail: Islamist and Leftist Coalitions in North Africa* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2018); Ellen Lust, "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East," *Studies in Comparative International Development,* 46 (June 2011), 163–90; Nugent; Dina Shehata, *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt: Opposition, Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Routledge, 2010).

22. El Kurd; Nugent.

23. Nugent, 292; see also Shanto Iyengar, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood, "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science,* 22 (2019), 129–46.

24. Nugent, 293.

25. Laia Balcells, *Rivalry and Revenge: The Politics of Violence during Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

26. Roger Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans: The Strategic Use of Emotion in Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 132.

27. Nugent, 293.

28. C.f. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); See also Jean Lachapelle, Steven Levitsky, Lucan A. Way, and Adam E. Casey, "Social Revolution and Authoritarian Durability," *World Politics,* 72 (October 2020), 557–600; Killian Clarke, "Social Forces and Regime Change," *World Politics*, 69 (July 2017), 569–602.

29. Whether these outgroups truly have radical goals is often unclear *ex-ante*. On the conceptual and empirical difficulties involved in categorizing Islamist parties as radical or moderate, see Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Carrie Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

30. Guillermo O'Donnell, "Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State," *Latin American Research Review,* 13 (1978), 24; Cathy L. Schneider, "Violence, Identity and Spaces of Contention in Chile, Argentina and Colombia," *Social Research,* 67 (Fall 2000), 773–802.

31. See Mirjam Edel and Maria Josua, "How Authoritarian Rulers Seek to Legitimize Repression: Framing Mass Killings in Egypt and Uzbekistan," *Democratization,* 25 (2018), 882–900.

32. Sharan Grewal and Yasser Kureshi, "How to Sell a Coup," *Journal of Conflict Resolution,* 63 (April 2019), 1001–31; Nikolay Marinov and Hein Goemans, "Coups and Democracy," *British Journal of Political Science*, 44 (October 2014), 799–825.

33. Barbara Geddes, Erica Frantz, and Joseph Wright, "Military Rule," *Annual Review of Political Science,* 17 (2014), 151.

34. Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51.

35. Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 186–87.

36. Grewal and Kureshi.

37. On polarizing figures, see Dan Slater and Aries Arugay, "Polarizing Figures: Executive Power and Institutional Conflict in Asian Democracies," *American Behavioral Scientist,* 62 (January 2018), 92–106.

38. Slater.

39. Bruce Rutherford, "Egypt's New Authoritarianism under Sisi," *Middle East Journal,* 72 (Spring 2018), 185–208.

40. Slater, 2010, 17; Dan Slater and Sofia Fenner, "State Power and Staying Power Infrastructural Mechanisms and Authoritarian Durability," *Journal of International Affairs,* 65 (Fall/Winter 2011), 22.

41. The 2005 Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan caused "hundreds" of deaths according to Human Rights Watch. See "Bullets Were Falling Like Rain: The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005," *Human Rights Watch*, 17 (June 2005), 3, at https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/uzbekistan0605/uzbekistan0605.pdf, accessed on 03/30/2021. Some estimates place the death toll of the Kwangju massacre in South Korea in 1980 at "between one and two thousand." See "Flashback: The Kwangju massacre," *BBC*, May 17, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/752055.stm, accessed on 03/30/2021. And whereas the true death toll of the Tiananmen Square massacre in China is unknown, estimates have ranged from the hundreds to the thousands: "Tiananmen Square Protest Death Toll 'was 10,000'," *BBC*, Dec. 23 2017, at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-42465516, accessed on 03/30/2021.

42. On challenges of studying popular legitimacy in authoritarian regimes, see Johannes Gerschewski, "Legitimacy in Autocracies: Oxymoron or Essential Feature?," *Perspectives on Politics*, 16 (September 2018), 652–65; Andrew J. Nathan, "The Puzzle of Authoritarian Legitimacy," *Journal of Democracy,* 31 (January 2020), 158–68; Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Susan H. Whiting, "Authoritarian 'Rule of Law' and Regime Legitimacy," *Comparative Political Studies,* 50 (December 2017), 1907–40.

43. See Patrick Kingsley and Marwa Awad, "Egypt's Army Chief Rides Wave of Popularity towards Presidency," *The Guardian*, Oct. 20, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/20/egypt-general-sisi-mania, accessed on 03/30/2021. The Egyptian firm Baseera conducted a survey in February and March 2014 showing that 51 percent of respondents declared they would vote for Sīsī in the 2014 presidential election. See Tarek Masoud, "Egyptian Democracy: Smothered in the Cradle, or Stillborn?," *Brown Journal of World*

Affairs, 20 (Spring/Summer 2014), 4. These high levels of outward support do not appear to be the product of fear or social desirability bias. Employing an Implicit Association Test to measure unexpressed implicit support for or against Sīsī in an online survey conducted more than three years after the Rabaa massacre in October 2016, Rory Truex and Daniel Tavana find that "the Egyptian population in general has positive associations with the new dictator." Rory Truex and Daniel Tavana, "Implicit Attitudes Toward an Authoritarian Regime," *Journal of Politics,* 81 (July 2019), 1015.

44. The interviews were conducted during the author's field research in Egypt from November 2013 to June 2014 and from July 2015 to August 2015, as well as in Turkey in November 2018. Most interviews were conducted in Arabic and audio-recorded with the participants' permission. The names of the interviewees were changed to preserve their anonymity and safety. Interviewees were recruited using snowball sampling and belong to youth movements, political parties, or government, and hailed from leftist, Nasserist, liberal, or Islamist political backgrounds.

45. Author interview with former high-ranking official, 2014.

46. Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

47. Killian Clarke, *Overthrowing Revolution: The Emergence and Success of Counterrevolution, 1900–2015*, Ph.D. dissertation (Princeton University, 2020); Kira D. Jumet, *Contesting the Repressive State: Why Ordinary Egyptians Protested during the Arab Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 181–88; Neil Ketchley, *Egypt in a Time of Revolution: Contentious Politics and the Arab Spring* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 111–13.

48. See Masoud, 2014.

49. On secularists' role in creating the conditions for the coup, see Clarke, 2020.

50. Dina Bishara, *Contesting Authoritarianism: Labor Challenges to the State in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 87–107; Jean Lachapelle, "Lessons from Egypt's Tax Collectors," *Middle East Report,* 264 (Fall 2012).

51. Author's interview with a member of the political office of the April 6th Movement, November 28, 2018, Istanbul, Turkey.

52. Author's interview with Tawfīq, a leftist activist, Cairo, Egypt, August 27, 2015. The interviewee's name was changed to preserve their anonymity.

53. "All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt*," Human Rights Watch* (August 2014), 112, https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt [accessed on 03/30/2021].

54. Ali Abdel Mohsen, "An Account of Abuse in Rabea," *Madamasr,* Jul. 28, 2013, https://www.madamasr.com/en/2013/07/28/feature/politics/an-account-of-abuse-in-rabea/ [accessed on 03/30/2021].

55. H. A. Hellyer, *A Revolution Undone: Egypt's Road Beyond Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 162.

56. Quoted in Human Rights Watch, 2014, 105.

57. Hugh Miles, "Egypt Army in Major Push to Eradicate Sinai Militants," *BBC News*, Sep. 13, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24069130 [accessed on 03/30/2021].

58. Muḥammad Salmāwī, "متى تتحرك الأجهزة؟," *Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm,* Aug. 6, 2013, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/199073 [accessed on 03/30/2021].

59. Muḥammad Salmāwī, "بؤرة رابعة!," *Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm*, Jul. 23, 2013, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/198615 [accessed on 03/30/2021].

60. Muḥammad Amīn, "«العبيدية» التى نريدها!," *Al-Miṣrī al-Yawm*, Aug. 7, 2013, https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/199163 [accessed on 03/30/2021].

61. Jumet, 2018, 202.

62. "The masses answer the call … and issue an order to the army" [Al-gamāhīr tulabbā al-nidā' wa tuṣaddir amraha lil-gaysh], *Al Miṣrī al-Yawm,* Jul. 27, 2013, https://to.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=391302 [accessed on 03/30/2021].

63. On pro-government demonstrations in authoritarian regimes, see Sebastian Hellmeier and Nils B. Weidmann, "Pulling the Strings? The Strategic Use of Pro-Government Mobilization in Authoritarian Regimes," *Comparative Political Studies*, 53 (2020), 71–108.

64. Author's interview with former high-ranking official, November 2014.

65. Human Rights Watch, 2014, 14. See also Amy Austin Holmes, *Coups and Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 159.

66. "Crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood intensifies in Egypt," *CBS News*, Jul 31, 2013, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/crackdown-on-muslim-brotherhood-intensifies-in-egypt/ [accessed on 03/30/2021].

67. Author's interview with former high-ranking official, 2014. Asma Alsharif and Yasmine Saleh, "Special Report: The real force behind Egypt's 'revolution of the state'," *Reuters*, Oct. 10, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-interior-specialreport-idUSBRE99908D20131010 [accessed on March 30, 2021]. See also Omar Ashour, "Collusion to Crackdown: Islamist-Military Relations in Egypt," *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper,* 14 (March 2015), 19. For an account of the Egyptian military's history of violent confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood, see Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt*, Second Edition (New York: Verso, 2014).

68. Although security forces opened fire on pro-Mursī protesters on several occasions during the weeks after the coup, the regime made no significant move against the Rabaa sit-in and refrained from the kinds of mass incarceration that would characterize later periods. Only about 20 pro-Mursī political figures were in jail during the crucial weeks from July 3 to August 14, according to a leading member of the pro-Mursī National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy. Author's interview, Nov. 27, 2018, Istanbul, Turkey.

69. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly.

70. Human Rights Watch, 2014, 14.

71. Ibid., 33–34.

72. Data accessed from https://wikithawra.wordpress.com/ on March 4, 2020.

73. Hellyer, 164.

74. Jumet, 206.

75. David D. Kirpatrick, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East* (New York: Viking, 2018), 278.

76. MERIP Reports, "The Reaction of Bricks : 'Jihan, Jihan! We are Hungry!!,'" *Middle East Report*, 56 (April 1977), 6–7.

77. Neil Ketchley, "'The Army and the People are One Hand!' Fraternization and the 25th January Egyptian Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 56 (January 2014), 155–86.

78. Bellin, 2012, 132.

79. Hellyer, 18.

80. "فيديو.. علاء الأسواني: السيسي بطل قومي," *Miṣr al-ʿArabiya*, Sep. 27, 2013, https://masralarabia.net/%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1/105585-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%84-%D9%82%D9%88%D9%85%D9%8A [accessed on 03/30/2021]. The video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6Vhxjl2Z7E [accessed on 03/30/2021].

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