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Egypt in Transition: Challenges of State and Societal Resilience

by Eman Ragab

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ABSTRACT

Resilience in the Egyptian context can be defined as a process of reform through which the state and society are more capable of overcoming political, social, economic and security crises without threatening social stability or weakening political legitimacy. Three main challenges are slowing the process of achieving state and societal resilience in Egypt. These include deteriorating living conditions, radicalism and terrorism, and the difficulty in working out a sound balance between security needs and political freedoms. A number of actors are nonetheless working to strengthen state and societal resilience in Egypt.

Egypt | Economy | Domestic policy | Security | Terrorism | Civil society | Resilience

keywords

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by Eman Ragab*

Introduction

Egypt has been experiencing a prolonged transition since the January 2011 revolution, which uncovered a number of challenges affecting state–society relations. State institutions have largely resisted these challenges, remaining the central organizing force in the country, thereby demonstrating their ability to respond to societal pressures and calls for reform, while recovering from internal crises. The state remains strong in Egypt and is working to meet the demands for change expressed by citizens who took to the streets on 25 January 2011 and 30 June 2013.¹ Moreover, Egypt is not sliding towards partition as is the case in Libya, and the society is homogenous enough not to be torn apart by civil war or armed conflict as in the cases of Yemen and Syria.

The process of transition unleashed by the 2011 revolution has however created a deep political rift in the society that reached its peak after the December 2012 constitutional amendments adopted by former President Mohamed Morsi and meant to expand his power as president.² The main fault line in society remains that which divides those who supported these changes, namely supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the political Islamic groups that allied with them, and the revolutionary and civilian groups that created a unified front known as

¹ For 2011 revolution see: Amir Ahmed, "Thousands Protest in Egypt", in *CNN News*, 26 January 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/01/25/egypt.protests>. For 2013 revolution see: Patrick Kingsley, "Protesters across Egypt Call for Mohamed Morsi to Go", in *The Guardian*, 30 June 2013, <https://gu.com/p/3hxd3>.

² Mara Revkin, "Egypt's Untouchable President", in "The Battle for Egypt's Constitution", in *POMEPS Briefings*, No. 17 (11 January 2013), p. 13-15, <https://pomeps.org/?p=3064>.

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· Paper produced in the framework of a project entitled "The EU's New Resilience Agenda in the MENA Region", November 2017. Copyright © Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS).

the National Salvation Front.³ This rift created the momentum for the protests of 30 June 2013 that led to the overthrow of President Morsi with the aid of the army.

Another rift developed after the fall of the MB-linked government led by Morsi: the society became polarized between the “coalition of 2013”, which spearheaded the overthrow of the MB, and the “coalition of legitimacy”, which believes in the legitimacy of the MB and their right to return to power. This polarization is echoed in public opinion polls. According to the Baseera poll of October 2013, 46 percent of Egyptians objected to any negotiations with the MB, 46 percent called for negotiations and 8 percent were unsure.⁴

Following the election of President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in 2014, this rift has become multidimensional. One manifestation of these multiple dimensions relates to the debate on whether to create more space for political freedom or to maintain “order and the consolidation of the ‘State’”.⁵ Another debate is focused on economic policy and the best means to encourage growth and development. These dimensions foster divisions between those actors that support the implementation of mega economic projects (such as the Suez Canal development project),⁶ those that call for the adoption of International Monetary Fund (IMF) inspired economic reforms⁷ and those that prioritize the provision of social protection to the most vulnerable sections of society.⁸

1. Resilience against what?

Based on this background, the analysis will apply the EU’s resilience approach, as outlined in the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) for Foreign and Security Policy, to the case of Egypt. Using the general definition of resilience contained in the EUGS, which sees resilience as the opposite to “fragility”,⁹ Egypt is less fragile than other countries in the Arab region. For instance, the 2017 Fragile States Index that measures a state’s fragility over ten years (2007–2017) designates Egypt in the

³ “Profile: Egypt’s National Salvation Front”, in *BBC News*, 10 December 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20667661>.

⁴ Baseera, *Poll on the Muslim Brotherhood Return to the Political Scene* (in Arabic), 31 October 2013.

⁵ Hanaa Ebeid, “Eluding Normalcy: Egypt’s Political Situation”, in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2015*, Barcelona, IEMed, 2015, p. 192, http://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/anyari/med.2015/IEMed%20Yearbook%202015_Panorama_Egypt_HanaaEbeid.pdf.

⁶ Stephen Kalin, “Egypt’s Sisi Delivers Economic Reforms but Hurdles Remain”, in *Reuters*, 30 September 2014, <http://reut.rs/1DVrxqj>.

⁷ These include a VAT tax, reduction in subsidies, and free floating the currency. See Steven A. Cook, “Egypt’s Economic Reform: The Good and the Bad”, in *From the Potomac to the Euphrates Blog*, 14 November 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/blog-post/egypts-economic-reform-good-and-bad>.

⁸ Gamal Essam El-Din, “Parliament Divided on Economic Reforms”, in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 1319 (10-16 November 2016), <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/17829.aspx>.

⁹ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, p. 23, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/node/339>.

category of countries that are “marginally worsening”.¹⁰ This rank makes Egypt less fragile than Tunisia, Jordan, Turkey, Iran and Oman during that decade.

Also, following the public debate in Egypt after the 2011 revolution, and even more so after the election of Sisi in 2014, the concept of state fragility in Egypt remains contentious. On the one hand, there are many experts who are convinced that Egypt is going through a transition, but cannot be considered fragile.¹¹ Ali Hillal has argued in his book *The Return of the State* that the 2013 revolution and overthrow of the MB actually brought state institutions back to business, strengthening the state’s legitimacy as it sought to maintain order and meet the demands of the people.¹²

On the other hand, Egyptian president Sisi, in commenting on the ineffectiveness of state institutions in meeting the needs of the people, went so far as to use the term “semi state”.¹³ Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, columnist with the newspaper *Al-Masry al-Youm*, responded to Sisi’s statement by arguing that Egypt is a strong state in terms of international legitimacy, but is still a semi state because of the power struggle among the ruling elite that prevents the birth of genuine opposition movements, the deteriorating economy and continued corruption in municipalities.¹⁴

Others are convinced that the political and economic situation in Egypt is worse today than under former President Hosni Mubarak. Amr Khalifa has argued that since 2011 a “counter-revolution [has] strangled the uprising”, adding however that “the arrogance of the military, shepherded by Sisi, will ultimately cause the pendulum to swing back”.¹⁵

¹⁰ J.J. Messner (ed.), *Fragile States Index 2017*, Washington, The Fund for Peace, 2017, p. 41, <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/?p=485>. Fragile States Index uses six primary social and economic indicators (demographic pressures; refugees; uneven economic development; group grievance; human flight and brain drain; poverty and economic decline) and six political and military indicators (state legitimacy; public services; human rights and rule of law; security apparatus; factionalized elites; external intervention). Total scores for Egypt in 2006 was 89.5, in 2017 it was 89.8, while in 2016 it stood at 90.2. A peak of 91 was reached in 2014. See the Fragile States Index website: *Country Dashboard: Egypt*, https://public.tableau.com/shared/DWQG747QZ?:display_count=yes.

¹¹ Khaled Elgindy, “Egypt’s Troubled Transition: Elections without Democracy”, in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (March 2012), p. 89-104; Dina Guirguis, “Egypt’s Fragile Stability”, in *Democracy and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2011), p. 11-15, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egypts-fragile-stability>; Pauline H. Baker, *Fragility and Resilience in Revolutionary Egypt*, Washington, Creative Associates International, February 2017, <http://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Fragility-and-Resilience-in-Revolutionary-EgyptFINAL.pdf>.

¹² Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, May Mujib and Mazen Hassan, *The Return of the State. The Evolution of the Political System in Egypt after the 30th of June* (in Arabic), Cairo, Egyptian-Lebanese Press, 2015, p. 11-16.

¹³ Sisi’s speech at the inauguration of the Farafra mega project (in Arabic), 5 May 2016, <https://youtu.be/6byISChIW28>.

¹⁴ Mohamed Ali Ibrahim, “Mr President: Who Turned Us a Quasi State?” (in Arabic), in *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 8 May 2016; Abdullah Elsenawy, “State Cracks” (in Arabic), in *Al-Shorouk*, 7 August 2017.

¹⁵ Amr Khalifa, “In Cairo, the Pot Boils”, in *Middle East Eye*, 30 June 2017, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/node/64401>.

The EU Global Strategy also provides another, more articulated, definition of resilience, describing it as, “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises”.¹⁶ Applying this concept to the case of Egypt leads to a number of findings.

First, the dividing line between state and society is blurred. There are interconnections and linkages between the state, understood in terms of formal state institutions, the bureaucracy, the armed forces and municipalities, and the broader society, in its various groupings and sub-groupings. Safi Kharboush, professor of comparative politics in Cairo University, considers the state as “a system containing two sub-systems, the political and the social”. According to him, “historically in Egypt the political system has dominated the social system and accordingly used the state institutions to strengthen its legitimacy”.¹⁷

Thus, state institutions in Egypt (including the bureaucracy, the army, the educational system, the health system, the ministries, etc.) have not been alienated from the society and are indeed an integral part of it. The state remains the major employer in the country, ensuring a degree of legitimacy and support for these institutions. For instance, the adoption of mandatory military service provides employment for about 1.8 million young citizens annually. The number of civil servants in the state bureaucracy had reached, by the end of 2016, around 6 million, which represents 25 percent of the workforce in Egypt.¹⁸ Moreover, 71 million people are benefiting from government-provided ration cards. This number reveals that two thirds of the population are dependent on the state for basic goods.

Second, the political regime tends to use state institutions to strengthen its legitimacy, thus furthering the linkages between “state”, “regime/elites” and society. This overlap means that a “weakening of the legitimacy of the regime has its impact on the legitimacy of the state”.¹⁹

With these points in mind and against the general backdrop of significant linkages between the state, the regime and broader society in Egypt, the analysis defines state resilience in the Egyptian context as a process through which the state maintains a capacity to meet social, political, economic and security demands of the people and to do so without weakening the legitimacy of its institutions. Societal resilience can by contrast be defined as a process through which individual citizens or groups of citizens can create and express demands for change and reform. The ultimate goal of the process of building state and societal resilience according to the EUGS is

¹⁶ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit., p. 23.

¹⁷ Author interview with Mohamed Safi Kharboush, professor of comparative politics, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Cairo, 25 May 2017.

¹⁸ Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), “Labor Force”, in *Statistical Yearbook 2017*, Cairo, CAPMAS, September 2017, p. 28, http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/StaticPages.aspx?page_id=5034.

¹⁹ Author interview with Mohamed Safi El-Din Kharboush, cit.

that of paving the way for “sustainable growth and vibrant societies” as well as for the ultimate attainment of democracy.²⁰

The aforementioned polarization and the prolonged transition the country has gone through since 2011 have generated many challenges to state resilience. At the same time, however, many of these same processes reflect the capabilities of citizens to take political positions, demanding change and reform. The analysis below will examine three significant challenges to resilience in Egypt: deteriorating living conditions; radicalism and terrorism; and the difficulty in working out a sound balance between security needs and political freedoms.

For each of these challenges, the analysis will examine its effects on state and societal resilience independently or in synergy, what type of responses these challenges have generated from the society and the institutions of the state, and how these responses can contribute to the goal of strengthening state and societal resilience in the country.

2. Deteriorating living conditions

Since the election of President Sisi in June 2014, economic recovery has emerged as a key priority for the government. Given Egypt's lack of financial liquidity and mounting budgetary deficits, receiving a loan from the IMF has become a priority. The government has adopted many economic reforms in order to meet the loan conditions.²¹ Reforms include the devaluation of the national currency by 50 percent, the cutting of fuel subsidies and the introduction of a value added tax (VAT). These reforms are meant to redress a situation in which the unemployment rate has reached 13 percent,²² with inflation reaching 34.2 percent in July 2017.²³

The short-term outcome of these reforms is leading to further deterioration of the living standards of regular citizens as well as of the poor, who used to rely on subsidized commodities to survive the rising inflation rates. According to the UN Human Development Index of 2016, the ranking of Egypt declined from 101 in 2010 to 111 in 2016,²⁴ and the average Annual Human Development Index (HDI) growth

²⁰ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit., p. 23.

²¹ The loan is for 12 billion dollars, to be paid by IMF over three years. The loan repayment will be over a 10-year period with an interest rate of 1–1.5 percent. See Mohamed Samir, “IMF Approves \$12bn Loan: What's Next for Egypt's Economic Reform Programme?”, in *Daily News Egypt*, 12 November 2016, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2016/11/12/imf-approves-12bn-loan-whats-next-for-egypts-economic-reform-programme>.

²² CAPMAS, “Labor Force”, in *Statistical Yearbook 2017*, cit., p. 4.

²³ CAPMAS, *Change percentage from the same month of the previous year - Inflation rate*, http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/IndicatorsPage.aspx?page_id=6130&ind_id=2542.

²⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2010. The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan,

is decreasing over time.²⁵ Poverty is also increasing. According to Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the poverty percentage in 2000 was 16.7. With a 2015 rate of 27.8 percent,²⁶ nearly one third of the population is poor.

It is worth noting that the deterioration of living conditions in Egypt is part of a regional phenomenon. However, in the case of Egypt, it is becoming worse due to slow economic growth caused by the prolonged transition since January 2011.²⁷ In 2010, one year before the revolution, the annual GDP growth rate was 5.1 percent. Following the 2011 revolution, the annual growth rate of the GDP was 1.7 percent in 2011, 2.2 percent in 2012-2013 and 2.9 percent in 2014.²⁸ Since the election of Sisi in June 2014, tourism, which represents one third of the GDP, is slowly recovering, foreign aid from the Gulf states and European countries is fluctuating, remittances are decreasing and the GDP growth rate is 4.3 percent,²⁹ which is below the target of 5 percent.³⁰ This is coinciding with uneven economic development. For instance, according to CAPMAS, the percentage of poor people in the upper rural governorates is 49.9 percent, the highest among the regions. The percentage in the upper urban is 26.7 percent, in the boundary governorates 24.2 percent, in the lower rural 17.4 percent, in the lower urban 11.7 percent and in the urban governorates 15.7 percent.³¹

This dire economic situation impacts on the legitimacy of the state and of the regime, even though President Sisi was elected with 96.1 percent of the vote.³² Three years after he took office, there is little doubt that the economic situation in Egypt represents the primary challenge to the political legitimacy of the regime. According to the Baseera opinion poll of October 2016, 68 percent of the sample approved of Sisi's performance.³³ This number was 82 percent in the August 2015

2010, p. 149, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/node/270>; UNDP, *Human Development Report 2016. Human Development for Everyone*, New York, UNDP, 2016, p. 203, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2016-report>.

²⁵ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2016*, cit., p. 203.

²⁶ "CAPMAS: Poverty is the Highest since 2000" (in Arabic), in *Youm7*, 26 July 2016, <http://www.youm7.com//2816823>.

²⁷ Xavier Aragall, Jordi Padilla and Aleksandra Chmielewska, "Descriptive Report: Domestic and Geopolitical Changes in the Euromed Region", in IEMed, *The European Union in a Transformed Mediterranean: Strategies and Policies. Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors*, Barcelona, IEMed, 2014, p. 81, 86, 87-89, <http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/historic-de-publicacions/enquesta-euromed/euromed-survey-2013/euromed-survey-2013>.

²⁸ World Bank, *GDP growth (annual %) - Egypt*, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=EG>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Brendan Meighan, "IMF Loan a Way Forward for Egypt", in *Sada*, 15 November 2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=66147>.

³¹ CAPMAS, *Statistical Yearbook 2017*, cit.

³² Patrick Kingsley, "Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi Won 96.1% of Vote in Egypt Presidential Election, Say Officials", in *The Guardian*, 3 June 2014, <https://gu.com/p/3pnec>.

³³ Baseera, *The Performance of President Al-Sisi after 28 Months in Office*, 22 October 2016, <http://baseera.com.eg/EN/RecentPolls2.aspx?ID=125>.

poll³⁴ and 90 percent according to the June 2015 poll.³⁵

Societal resilience is affected by this situation in two ways. First, economic hardship is making living conditions the main priority for the people rather than political reform. According to the World Values Survey, most surveyed Egyptians believe that fighting rising prices is the second most important issue after maintaining order.³⁶ Also, the negative impact of this situation is not confined to the poor but extends to the middle classes, who were less affected by the economic instability following the 2011 revolution. According to the World Bank, individuals belonging to the middle class earn 4.9 dollars per day. The Global Wealth Report issued by the Credit Suisse Research Institute shows a decrease over time in the number of individuals qualified financially as belonging to the middle class in Egypt. The total number according to the report dropped from 5.7 million in 2000 to 2.9 million in 2016.³⁷

Second, the deteriorating socio-economic situation is driving an increasing number of young Egyptians to illegally migrate directly to Europe, often through Libya. According to the Minister of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriate Affairs, Nabila Makram, "Kafr el-Sheikh, Gharbiya and Fayoum governorates rank first domestically in the number of youth who illegally migrate to Europe, most notably to France and Italy".³⁸ These three governorates are the highest in terms of the poverty level and unemployment. For legal migrants, Egypt in comparison to other Arab countries is also ranked first. The number according to the Arab Human Development Report was more than 5 million in 2010–2014.³⁹

Positive contributions to resilience

The state's response to the economic difficulties has been twofold. First, the state has focused on reviving the economy in an attempt to enhance the legitimacy of the regime. It has launched a number of mega economic projects such as the expansion of the Suez Canal and a state-planned agricultural project to reclaim 1.5 million *feddan* of desert land in Farafra.⁴⁰ The state has also sought to directly strengthen the resilience of those sectors of society that are most exposed to these

³⁴ Baseera, *The Performance of President Al-Sisi after 26 Months in Office*, 15 August 2015, <http://baseera.com/EN/RecentPolls2.aspx?ID=116>.

³⁵ Magued Othman, *Press Release: The poll conducted by the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research (Baseera) on Egyptian President's approval rate at the end of his first year in office*, June 2015, http://baseera.com/EN/PressPoll-Ar/82_En.pdf.

³⁶ World Values Survey (WVS), "V62.- Aims of respondent: first choice", in *World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014*, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

³⁷ Salma Shukrallah, "High Inflation Takes Its Toll on Egypt's Shrinking Middle Class", in *Ahram Online*, 23 October 2016, <http://english.ahram.org/News/246377.aspx>.

³⁸ "Egypt Ranks First in Illegal Migration Worldwide: Minister", in *Egypt Independent*, 25 November 2016, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/?p=2474477>.

³⁹ UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016. Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*, New York, UNDP, 2016, p. 152, 268, <http://www.arab-hdr.org/Reports/2016/2016.aspx>.

⁴⁰ "Sisi Inaugurates 1st Phase of 1.5 Million Feddan Reclamation Project", in *Mada Masr*, 31 December 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/?p=30291>.

socio-economic challenges. In this domain, state authorities are adopting gradual reform policies in order to direct subsidies to the most disadvantaged sectors of society.⁴¹ Part of these subsidies is provided through the governmental ration cards that benefit 71 million citizens, but not all of these individuals are disadvantaged.⁴² For instance, according to CAPMAS, more than 90 percent of people in the lower rural governorates hold these cards,⁴³ while the percentage of poor people in these governorates is 17.4 percent. The state is also implementing the Takaful and Karama programme which aims to protect the poor by providing direct cash transfers.⁴⁴ The programme is designed to target three million poor families over four years, in seven governorates.⁴⁵

Second, the authorities are supporting the army and developmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the provision of subsidized commodities to citizens. The army is widening the provision of low-price foodstuffs and supply commodities. These are dispatched daily through its National Services Project Organization⁴⁶ and the *Tahia Masr* fund's 1,100 distributing units, with total capacity of 1.1 tons daily, providing the basic commodities via 341 outlets spread across most of the governorates.⁴⁷

Developmental NGOs are also launching many projects in order to provide basic commodities, health services and housing, especially in the poorest villages. For instance the *Misr El Kheir* institution has provided nearly 29 million services since its founding in 2007. It runs a wide range of programmes covering Debtors Redemption, *Ibn el-Sabeel* (The Wayfarer), Direct Aid and Income Generating projects, as well as programmes for Pre-University Education, Vocational and Higher Education, Prevention of Hepatitis C, Medical Treatment and Social Inclusion for People with Disabilities.⁴⁸

Assessing the extent to which these policies are meeting the socio-economic needs of the people is no easy task. State institutions have limited capabilities whereby their legitimacy as providers of basic services is diminished. For instance, the target number of beneficiaries for the Takaful and Karama programmes represents

⁴¹ Adopted since 2012, but not implemented until the election of Sisi. See: Julie Herrick, Maya Moseley and Laura Raus, "Egypt's Impending Subsidy Crisis", in *Egypt Oil and Gas*, 29 December 2014, <http://egyptoil-gas.com/?p=10075>.

⁴² "Supply Ministry to Start Revising Ration Cards in January", in *Egypt Independent*, 18 December 2016, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/?p=2474969>.

⁴³ CAPMAS, *Statistical Yearbook 2017*, cit.

⁴⁴ "El-Sisi Wins Egypt's Presidential Race with 96.91%", in *Ahram Online*, 3 June 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/102841.aspx>.

⁴⁵ Afrah Alawi Al-Ahmadi, *Egypt, Arab Republic of - Strengthening Social Safety Net Project. P145699 - Implementation Status Results Report. Sequence 03*, Washington, World Bank, 17 October 2016, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/664211476725796183>.

⁴⁶ For more see the official website: <http://www.nspo.com.eg>.

⁴⁷ Statement by army spokesperson on Facebook, 19 July 2014 (in Arabic), <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/509906759140311>.

⁴⁸ See the Misr El Kheir official website: <http://misrelkheir.org/en>.

12 percent of the people living below the poverty line,⁴⁹ leaving the remaining 88 percent of the poor not covered by this programme.

In addition, the mega projects are not enhancing the living conditions of citizens in the short term, or alleviating the negative impact of rising inflation.⁵⁰ According to many economic experts, such projects will only yield positive impacts in the medium and long term.⁵¹ For instance, the Suez Canal project is expected to contribute to state and societal resilience in 2023 by creating one million new jobs, expanding industrial production and increasing revenue.

The outcome of the expanding role of the army and the developmental NGOs is strengthening both the resilience of the state, as the army is one of its institutions, and that of society, as the societal sectors receiving help are becoming more socially secure. Yet, these two actors are also replacing other governmental institutions that have traditionally been responsible for these services, namely the ministries of Social Solidarity, Health, Education, Higher Education and Supply. This means that that these formal institutions of the state are losing some degree of legitimacy, as their functions are increasingly replaced by NGOs and the army.

3. Radicalism and terrorism

The state's ability to maintain security and order, which is another aspect of resilience, has been challenged since the dispersal of the Muslim Brotherhood's sit-ins in Rabaa and in Al-Nahda squares on 14 August 2013, and the subsequent waves of tensions and terrorist attacks that have impacted Egypt since. This wave is not confined to Northern Sinai and has been spreading to many cities on the mainland, targeting civilians, infrastructure, police and army officers, as well as foreign embassies and religious institutions.⁵² Not all of these events are directly related to the MB, yet instances of violence and attacks have increased since the 2013 events.

Radicalism and terrorism challenge state and societal resilience in three ways. First, the continuation of "a ferocious war" on terrorism (as labelled by President Sisi) is

⁴⁹ According to CAPMAS, the Egyptian poverty line was 482 Egyptian pounds monthly in 2015. It was 326 Egyptian pounds monthly in 2012/2013. Adel M. Fakhry, "EGP 482 per Month Becomes New Poverty Line", in *Daily News Egypt*, 27 July 2016, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2016/07/27/egp-482-per-month-becomes-new-poverty-line>.

⁵⁰ Baseera, *The Performance of President Al-Sisi after 28 Months in Office*, cit.

⁵¹ Henry Harding, "Egypt's Economy Five Years after the Revolution", in *Middle East Eye*, 23 January 2016 (last update 3 December 2016), <http://www.middleeasteye.net/node/50337>.

⁵² Eman Ragab, "Counter-Terrorism Policies in Egypt: Effectiveness and Challenges", in *Papers IEMed/EuroMeSCo*, No. 30 (October 2016), <http://www.iemed.org/publicacions-en/historic-de-publicacions/papersiemed-euromesco/30.-counter-terrorism-policies-in-egypt-effectiveness-and-challenges>; Jeremy M. Sharp, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations", in *CRS Reports*, No. RL33003 (24 March 2017), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>.

challenging the perceived legitimacy of the state and security services among the public.⁵³ This is particularly important given that the main priority for the Egyptian people according to the World Values Survey is achieving security and maintaining order.⁵⁴ Second, terrorism and radicalism contributes to the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions in the country. It hinders the implementation of development projects, especially in Northern Sinai. Third, the prolonged asymmetric war with the terrorists is negatively affecting Egypt's tourism industry. According to the Global Terrorism Index developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace, the global rank of Egypt jumped from 27 during the period 2002–2011 to 13 in the years 2013 and 2014.⁵⁵

Positive contributions to resilience

The state is adopting three sets of policies to maintain its legitimacy as the sole provider of security. The first set targets the terrorists both in Northern Sinai and on the mainland by arresting leaders responsible for planning and carrying out terrorist attacks, tracking their financial transactions and dedicating hotline numbers for regular citizens to report suspicious activities that could escalate into terrorism. The state has also recently focused on tightening the security procedures in all ports in order to prevent the smuggling of terrorists, while visibly increasing the physical presence of security forces on the streets.

The second set of policies aims at countering religious Islamic radical ideas to prevent recruitment of new terrorists.⁵⁶ The third set of policies aims to help the victims of terrorism, among both civilians and the security services. Those who have suffered due to the counter-terrorism measures adopted by the state are also included under these policies. Here, the state provides compensation to the victims on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, on 3 June 2016 the authorities announced the launch of a national project to develop Sinai, an attempt to bring socio-economic development to the area as a measure against extremism and radicalization. The total budget for this project is 150 billion Egyptian pounds (about 8.5 billion dollars) dedicated to implementing development programmes covering fishing, housing, water treatment and agricultural sectors. These projects are expected to indirectly enhance the living conditions in Northern Sinai in the long term, thus helping to deal with the grievances among the people created by the counter-terrorism measures.

⁵³ Edith Lederer and John Daniszewski, "AP Interview: Egypt's Leader Says Country in 'Ferocious War'", in *AP News*, 27 September 2015, <https://apnews.com/c7899e61dbf94c9db60d359c4b018d44>.

⁵⁴ WVS, "V62.- Aims of respondent: first choice", in *World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014*, cit.

⁵⁵ Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *2012 Global Terrorism Index*, December 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/node/541719>; IEP, *Global Terrorism Index Report 2014*, November 2014, <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>; IEP, *Global Terrorism Index Report 2015*, November 2015, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2017/04/2015-Global-Terrorism-Index-Report.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Eman Ragab, "Counter-Terrorism Policies in Egypt", cit., p. 16-26.

The combination of these policies led to a decline in the total number of terrorist attacks in 2016,⁵⁷ with much of the threat becoming confined to Northern Sinai. However, the state's ability to confront terrorism and radicalism is still being challenged. The terrorists are still capable of attacking significant targets unilaterally or through coordination with other groups. For instance, on 8 May 2016 four men carried out a mass shooting in Hilwan, killing eight policemen. Two terrorist organizations, *Welayat Sinai* and the Popular Resistance, claimed responsibility. The former organization also recently unleashed a new wave of attacks targeting Egyptian Copts in the country. In April 2017, it claimed responsibility for the double bombing of churches in Alexandria and Tanta.⁵⁸

Moreover, there are many sectors of society that are still vulnerable, or less resilient, in their ability to withstand or counter radicalism. This is particularly true with regard to the victims of terrorism, for two reasons. First, the absence of a well-defined compensation scheme (along with clear criteria for compensation) risks further alienating these people from the state. Second, the state is primarily tackling religious radical ideas, which it perceives as the main driver for terrorism, ignoring other trigger factors and motivations leading to such actions. Members of active terrorist groups on the mainland, namely the Revolutionary Punishment, *Liwaa al-Thawra* and *Hasm*, are in fact driven by a set of intertwined drivers that combine individual grievances, political and religious reasons, as well as economic and social motivations.⁵⁹

4. Security vs. political freedoms

State and societal resilience in Egypt is also challenged depending on how the state chooses to balance the protection of liberties and freedoms, as stated in the 2014 constitution, and the goal of ensuring order and countering radicalism and terrorism.

Egypt is witnessing intertwined developments in this regard. On the one hand, the government has adopted the protest law of 2013, the terrorist entities law of 2014 and the counter-terrorism law of 2015, which according to many analysts are violating the right of citizens to protest and express their opinions.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ By the end of 2016, the total number of terrorist incidents had reached 861 attacks, with an average of four per week. The average number of attacks in 2015 was six per week. Ahmed Kamel El-Beheiry, *Count of Terrorist Attacks in Egypt in 2016* (in Arabic), Cairo, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 4 January 2017, <http://acpss.ahram.org.eg/News/5619.aspx>.

⁵⁸ Ruth Michaelson, "Egypt: ISIS Claims Responsibility for Coptic Church Bombings", in *The Guardian*, 9 April 2017, <https://gu.com/p/695ah>.

⁵⁹ Eman Ragab, "Counter-Terrorism Policies in Egypt", cit.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Egypt: Draft Law Bans Independent Civil Society Groups*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/node/296958>.

Moreover, the political discourse in Egypt does not welcome any genuine form of political opposition. The suspension of Amr El-Leithy's show in October 2016 after it broadcast a video in which a *tuk-tuk* driver harshly criticized the living conditions in Egypt is an indicative example.⁶¹ In parliament, the "25–30 group" that is formally part of the opposition is not providing genuine counter-narratives as an alternative to the policies of the government. Its role is confined to criticizing the government's economic policies,⁶² while never providing concrete alternatives or calling for questioning of the ministers involved.⁶³

On the other hand, many columnists have called on the regime to provide more space for political dialogue and opposition. One such example is given by Emad El-Din Hussein, who has eloquently argued, "security can disperse demonstrations, but politics can convince people not to organize them".⁶⁴

Also, many individuals and social groups are convinced that practicing their right to protest government decisions does not constitute a national security threat. The April 2016 protest against the agreement with Saudi Arabia on Tiran and Sanafir Islands was organized in violation of the protest law and is considered the largest demonstration since the election of Sisi.⁶⁵ Also, police brutality remains a driver for spontaneous protests. For instance, the death of an Egyptian citizen, Tala'at Shabib al-Rashidi, a few hours after being arrested by the police in Luxor on 1 December 2015 drove a march against police brutality.⁶⁶

Besides, workers' protests are still remarkable. Between January and April 2016, the number reached 493. During 2015 it was 933, while the previous year there were 1,655 protests recorded.⁶⁷ The dominant feature of these protests is that they are short, focused on a single cause and in many cases spontaneous.

It is worth noting that social media platforms are becoming important venues for expression of criticisms and protests, even though the government has significantly increased its monitoring of the web. For instance, the "internet revolution campaign"

⁶¹ Toqa Ezzidin, "Renowned TV Presenter Ibrahim Eissa Suspends His Talk Show Due to Ambiguous 'Pressures'", in *Daily News Egypt*, 1 January 2017, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2017/01/01/renowned-tv-presenter-ibrahim-eissa-suspends-talk-show-due-ambiguous-pressures>.

⁶² Gamal Essam El-Din, "Parliament Divided on Economic Reforms", cit.

⁶³ Samir Ramzy, *Party Coalitions in the Parliament* (in Arabic), Badil Center for Planning and Strategic Studies, 3 October 2016.

⁶⁴ Emad El-Din Hussein, "Less Security... More Politics" (in Arabic), in *Al-Shorouk*, 28 March 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=28032017&id=a49cd85e-90cf-44c4-91e3-b268936eaf7d>.

⁶⁵ "Final Court Ruling Declares Egyptian Sovereignty over Tiran and Sanafir Islands", in *Mada Masr*, 16 January 2017, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/?p=231458>.

⁶⁶ "Protest in Egypt after Death of Man in Police Custody", in *Al Jazeera*, 1 December 2015, <http://aje.io/f2y6>.

⁶⁷ Amr Hamzawy, "Workers Protests 2013-2016" (in Arabic), in *Al-Shorouk*, 4 November 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=04112016&id=cb9f37f4-53cf-4aef-a4ac-2ea1f257325f>.

launched in 2014 remains very active on Facebook to mobilize users to protest against the low quality and speed of Internet services, creating financial losses for the main service providers.⁶⁸ Also, in response to the rising inflation rate, many Facebook users called on 1 December 2016 for a boycott of all commodity items for one day. According to a Baseera poll, 77 percent of Egyptians supported the call and considered it a means to pressure tradesmen and sellers to reduce prices.⁶⁹

The existence of these contradictory dynamics reveals how society is still capable of creating demands for change using tools that are not under the full control of the state, like the social media platforms. Yet, many observers believe that what the regular citizen in Egypt is most keen on is “enhancing his/her living conditions and not to participate in politics”.⁷⁰ The Arab Human Development Report of 2016 has shown how ordinary Egyptians, similarly to what is the case in many other Arab countries, are concerned with two main issues: the economy and their security.⁷¹

However, the World Values Survey found that most surveyed Egyptians believe maintaining order to be priority number one, followed by fighting rising prices, protecting freedom of speech and then giving people more say in important government decisions.⁷² Politics therefore is one of the issues of concern to citizens. Seventy-five percent of Egyptians surveyed consider politics as very important or rather important, especially those in the 30–49 age range.⁷³ The percentage was lower (48 percent) during the 2000–2004 survey, especially among those above 50.⁷⁴

These dynamics are creating pressures on state institutions and consequently on the regime to weaken or revise its securitization approach to politics and to be more responsive to the political demands of the people.

Positive contributions to resilience

The continuation of the conflict between a dynamic society and state institutions is revealing different aspects of the political resilience of state and society.

⁶⁸ Mohamed Alaa El-Din, “‘Internet Revolution’ Targets Communications Companies over Low-Quality Services”, in *Daily News Egypt*, 28 June 2015, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/06/28/internet-revolution-targets-communications-companies-over-low-quality-services>.

⁶⁹ Baseera, *Ration Cards and the Boycott Campaign on December 1st*, 26 November 2016, <http://baseera.com.eg/EN/RecentPolls2.aspx?ID=126>.

⁷⁰ Author interview with Ali El-Din Hillal, professor of comparative politics, Faculty of Economic and Political Sciences, Cairo University, Cairo, 25 June 2017; Author interview with Mohamed Safi Kharboush, cit.

⁷¹ UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016*, cit., p. 32.

⁷² WVS, “V62.- Aims of respondent: first choice”, in *World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014*, cit.

⁷³ WVS, “V7.- Important in life: Politics”, in *World Values Survey Wave 6: 2010-2014*, cit.

⁷⁴ WVS, “V7.- Politics important”, in *World Values Survey Wave 4: 2000-2004*, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

Seeking to respond to the political demands of the people without compromising the fight against terrorism and radicalism has led the state to adopt a mix of policies, some of which have tended to create more space for political discussion, while others have further restricted such space. Speaking of the former, the parliament has for instance reviewed the protest law, following the constitutional court ruling that the article granting the ministry of interior the authority to deny protest requests is unconstitutional.⁷⁵ Also, the presidency is sponsoring the organization of a national youth conference to create a new platform for discussing youth issues with government officials as well as with the president. One of the main outcomes of the first youth conference, held in October 2016, was the formation of a committee to free young people imprisoned without conviction or for offenses related to unauthorized political gatherings and protests.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the president freed 82 people on 18 November 2016⁷⁷ and decided to pardon a further 203 in March 2017.⁷⁸

There is also a developing tendency of holding police officers accountable for their brutality against citizens, in order to strengthen the rule of law. Cases include Shaima al-Sabbagh, who died after being shot by the security services during a protest in Cairo in 2015,⁷⁹ and Magdy Makeen, an Egyptian fish seller who died after being arrested and tortured in a Cairo police station in 2016, for example.⁸⁰ However, the extent to which this practice will continue is questionable, especially given that the list of alleged instances of police brutality cited by many human right organizations is very long.⁸¹

Turning to policies that are restricting freedoms in Egypt, the government adopted in May 2017 a new law that regulates NGOs in the country. This law restricts the activities of NGOs and their capabilities to raise funds, as well as creating a new agency to direct the operations of these non-governmental organizations. According to Nasser Amin, a prominent human rights lawyer, the law “failed to

⁷⁵ “Protest Law to Be Amended, Poultry Customs Exemption to Be Reviewed: Egypt PM”, in *Ahram Online*, 4 December 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/251277.aspx>; El-Sayed Gamal El-Din, “Egypt Cabinet Formulates Amendment of Unconstitutional Article 10 in Protest Law”, in *Ahram Online*, 7 December 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/251566.aspx>.

⁷⁶ “Egypt’s Sisi pledges reviews of protest law, detentions”, in *Reuters*, 27 October 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-sisi-politics-idUSKCN12R2MX>.

⁷⁷ “Egypt’s Committee to Pardon Youth Prisoners Submits New Names for Presidential Review”, in *Ahram Online*, 19 January 2017, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/256400.aspx>.

⁷⁸ Hadeer El-Mahdawy, “Egypt’s Sisi Pardons 203 Prisoners in Protest-Related Cases”, in *Ahram Online*, 13 March 2017, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/260840.aspx>.

⁷⁹ Amira El-Fekki, “Retrial of Police Officer in Shaimaa Al-Sabbagh’s Case Postponed”, in *Daily News Egypt*, 22 December 2016, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2016/12/22/re-trial-police-officer-shaimaa-al-sabbaghs-case-resumes>.

⁸⁰ Taha Sakr, “Magdy Makeen’s Autopsy Report Proves His Death Was Result of Torture: Lawyer”, in *Daily News Egypt*, 7 December 2016, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2016/12/07/magdy-makeens-autopsy-report-proves-death-result-torture-lawyer>.

⁸¹ See for instance: Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Egypt. Events of 2016”, in *World Report 2017*, New York, Seven Stories Press, January 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/node/297810>.

take into account the rulings of the Egyptian Constitutional Court, which has consistently chosen not to intervene in the affairs of NGOs, whether related to dissolving the organization, selecting activities, or even determining fields of administrations”.⁸²

These developments reveal the capacity of society to exert pressures for change, and the state and regime’s capacity to respond to them. However, the final outcome of this dynamism is yet not defined.

Conclusion

The analysis has examined state and societal resilience in Egypt within the framework of the EU Global Strategy. Egypt can be considered something of a unique case in the region due to the interconnectedness between the institutions of the state, the ruling elite and society. These linkages create their own dynamics that affect the resilience of the state and society and how they manage to confront the three challenges examined in this paper.

Each of these challenges reveals the limited capability of state institutions to meet the economic and security needs of the people, which in turn prevents a greater attainment of state and societal resilience in the case of Egypt. For instance, radicalism and terrorism hinder the implementation of developmental projects and affect the economic outlook of the state, which again challenges its ability to provide the basic social services to those in need.

In other words, the state and society’s responses to these challenges reveal, on one hand, that the state remains capable of carrying out its functions in the political, economic and security fields to address the three challenges. On the other hand, society is still capable of expressing dissatisfaction and anger caused by the state’s securitization approach to politics in order to be more capable to counter radicalism and terrorism, which affects the socio-economic situation and political development in the society.

Nonetheless, resilience in Egypt remains subject to how the state–society relationship will develop in the context of the prolonged transition the country has been going through since 2011.

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⁸² Maged Atef, “NGO Law in Egypt”, in *Fikra Forum*, 12 January 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/ngo-law-in-egypt>.

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