

# 1 Introduction

One should never fear there being too many subjects or too many citizens . . . being that there is no wealth nor strength but in men.

Jean Bodin, *Les Six Livres de la République* (1583)

‘We will continue to meet the manpower requirements of Arab countries.’ Anwar Sadat, Egypt’s third president, showed no sign of distress when asked, in early January 1977, how he would address the country’s extensive technical staff shortages and grave inflationary pressures that followed the deregulation of Egypt’s labour emigration policy. Voices urging for a review of Egypt’s emigration policy in light of its grave economic effects were ignored. In fact, little has changed in the decades following the 1971 decision to lift any obstacles to citizens’ emigration abroad. Existing political economy approaches cannot explain his nonchalant response to the economic repercussions of Egyptian labour emigration: why would the Egyptian regime not attempt to fine-tune a policy that adversely affected the national economy? If labour emigration is solely a tool for economic development, policy-makers would normally be expected to anticipate inflationary pressures or labour market imbalances, and to adjust accordingly. A closer examination of the politics of Egyptian migration reveals why Sadat refused to debate any policy shifts, and why he appeared to prioritise the labour needs of the oil-producing Arab states at Egypt’s expense: political survival would not be jeopardised for the sake of economics. The Egyptian regime understood how, as Jean Bodin shrewdly wrote, power lay in citizens’ numbers.

This book provides the first attempt to examine how autocracies employ labour emigration policy in order to enhance regime durability. It focuses on modern Egypt, a state that has played a predominant role in Arab politics, continues to be a strategic actor across the Middle

East, and serves as the region's main supplier of migrant labour. *Masr Umm al-Dunya* – 'Egypt is the mother of the world', as the Arabic saying goes – alludes to the country's crucial role in the rise of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism, as well as to its status as the birthplace of political Islam and the cultural heart of the Middle East. Despite the fact that millions of Egyptians have left the homeland in search of employment abroad since Egypt gained its independence from the British in 1952, labour migration rarely features in the voluminous literature on Egyptian politics. This book demonstrates how cross-border mobility constituted a salient component of the Egyptian ruling regime's survival strategy for more than half a century. From 1952 until the 2011 Arab Uprisings, Egyptian autocrats incorporated labour emigration in their legitimisation tactics, their use of repression, and their co-optation of domestic business actors. Labour emigration policy, in other words, sustained a ruling authoritarian regime in multiple ways that have yet to be analysed.

The book examines the importance of labour emigration policy for the Egyptian regime's strategies of legitimisation, repression, and co-optation via two case studies: firstly, it analyses the constraining and highly regulated regional emigration policy framework that the Egyptian state developed and implemented under President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1952–70); secondly, it focuses on the deregulated, liberalised regional emigration policy framework that came in place under Presidents Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak (1970–2011).<sup>1</sup> The study will employ qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on unexamined archival data from British and Egyptian sources, semi-structured interviews with key Egyptian elites, including a former prime minister and former ministers, and statistical data on macroeconomic indicators, remittances inflows, and cross-state migration stocks and flows. It will inductively demonstrate how the ruling Egyptian regime, from 1952 to 2011, employed labour emigration to enhance its durability and withstand pressures for reform. In sketching the different ways through which Egyptian elites benefitted from citizens' cross-border mobility, the book also sheds light on the importance of labour emigration policy for authoritarian regimes on a global scale. But, before outlining the exact nature of the Egyptian ruling regime's strategies, an initial overview of academic research into the politics of migration and a discussion of cross-border mobility within the broader Middle East is required in order to better contextualise the reader.

## Researching Population Mobility and Authoritarian Politics

The promotion of democracy and human rights in Cuba is in the national interest of the United States [and, thus,] measures that decrease dependency of the Cuban people on the Castro regime and that promote contacts between Cuban-Americans and their relatives in Cuba are means to encourage positive change in Cuba. The United States can pursue these goals by ... increasing the flow of remittances and information to the Cuban people.

American President Barack Obama (quoted in Badella 2014, 158)

This study theorises the interaction between labour emigration policy, broadly defined as a state's institutional framework regulating citizens' cross-border movement for purposes of employment outside their country of origin, and the durability of a non-democratic regime. Emigration politics cannot be separated from actions taken by political forces within the sending state. Although each citizen has a degree of agency in choosing to emigrate or to remain within a country, this decision is also necessarily filtered through governmental policies that enable or hinder mobility – particularly within non-democratic contexts. At one end of the spectrum, Morocco constitutes a clear example of a state that has developed a policy that includes benefits, pre-migration training, medical insurance, and emergency loans for its migrant population. At the other end, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea considers migration a form of defection and pursues a “shoot to kill” policy for citizens attempting to cross its borders. Surviving would-be migrants face torture and forced labour in “re-education camps”. Until 2013, even talk of unauthorised travel abroad carried a six-month prison sentence for Cuban citizens. Ultimately, how do authoritarian regimes regulate cross-border mobility, and how important is labour emigration policy in sustaining non-democratic structures of power?

Historically, scholars of the politics of migration have paid scant attention to the effects of population mobility on political processes within sending states, particularly in non-democratic contexts. Initially, the political science literature on migration suffered from a tendency to marginalise the role of the state altogether. ‘The most striking weakness in migration theories drawn from the social sciences’, wrote Teitelbaum, ‘is their failure to deal in a serious way with government action in initiating, selecting, restraining, and ending

international migration movements' (2001, 26). Two notable exceptions – Aristide Zolberg and Myron Weiner – led an early debate within political science that highlighted the role of states in managing migratory processes (cf. Talani and McMahon 2015, 19; Hollifield 2012). This early work initiated a tradition of focusing on liberal democracies, rather than authoritarian regimes, by espousing the long-standing claim that non-democracies tend to restrict population mobility (Hirschman 1993, 179). This was a perspective informed by the Cold War, when 'communist countries rightly feared a mass exodus of dissatisfied citizens, while many people living under communist rule secretly hoped for an opportunity to leave' (Munz and Weiner 1997, vii; cf. Dowty 1989). Such an approach obscured the intricacies of communist regimes' emigration practices, including cross-border population management and, in particular, exchanges of elites between states of the Warsaw Pact (cf. Babiracki 2015). The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, for instance, was a prime example of a communist regime that had adopted a permissive emigration policy since the 1960s (Kosinski 1978). More importantly, this Cold War perspective paid less attention to non-communist authoritarian regimes, such as Turkey or Morocco, which had already developed intricate emigration policies (Adamson 2018; Collyer 2004). To this day, non-democracies are seen as more likely to restrict citizens' emigration than either established liberal states (Messina and Lahav 2006, 24–30) or emerging democracies (Massey 1999).

At the same time, even as the scholarship grew to theorise the importance of state practices in regulating cross-border mobility (Hollifield and Brettell 2015; Hollifield 2004; Messina and Lahav 2006; Adamson and Demetriou 2007), it has largely focused on the politics of immigration. In other words, the sizeable body of research on the politics of migration suffers from a tendency 'to focus on the consequences of immigration in wealthy, migrant-receiving societies, and to ignore the causes and consequences of migration in origin countries' (Castles, Miller, and De Haas 2014, 26). As Boucher and Gest argue, 'the most glaring shortcoming of contemporary migration policy regime typologies is a general reluctance to include non-OECD countries' (Boucher and Gest 2014, 7). The small group of scholars examining the politics of emigration tend to focus on liberal democratic states (Rodriguez 2010; Kapur 2010; Fitzgerald 2009; Naujoks 2013), at the expense of non-democracies (notable early exceptions include

Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Brand 2006). Although scholars are gradually shifting focus to how authoritarian regimes engage with population groups abroad (Moss 2016; Glasius 2018; Koinova and Tsourapas 2018), the political importance of such policies for sending states remains under-theorised.

In an effort to amend this, I draw on work by Hollifield and Gamlen (Hollifield 2004; Gamlen 2008), and argue for the need to examine the workings of ‘authoritarian emigration states’, namely ‘the set of institutions, practices, and mechanisms regulating cross-border mobility developed within non-democratic contexts’ (Tsourapas 2018a, 403). This study’s approach to authoritarianism embraces Linz’s classic macro-definition of ‘political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones’ (Linz 1964, 255).

How may emigration feature in discussions of authoritarian durability? In terms of the determinants of authoritarian power, Wedeen’s argument holds true that ‘there are, oddly, few recent writings on authoritarianism in comparative politics and they tend to be concerned primarily with the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule’ (Wedeen 1999, 26). For the purposes of this analysis, comparative politics scholarship on the determinants of authoritarianism can be divided into two broad categories, neither of which has yet accounted for the importance of labour emigration. One large group of scholars explains authoritarianism via domestic factors (Schlumberger 2007; Posusney and Angrist 2005). Non-democratic regimes maintain power by developing a strong middle class (Bellin 2004, 2012), ensuring the presence of technocrats (O’Donnell 1973), or a functioning party system (Huntington 2006). Similarly, other scholars highlight the importance of a single-party apparatus (Brownlee 2004, 5), electoral processes (Levitsky and Way 2011), the organisation of political propaganda and the development of “personality cults” (Wedeen 1999; Tripp 2007), or “coup-proofing” strategies across domestic institutions (Quinlivan 1999; Byman and Lind 2010).<sup>2</sup> As will be detailed in the section below, scholars also identify the importance of legitimation, repression, and co-optation in supporting an authoritarian regime’s stay in power.

More recently, a second group of scholars has attempted to go beyond the domestic determinants of authoritarian power and theorise the role of international actors in shaping non-democratic politics (Tansey 2016). Ambrosio's work built on Elkins and Simmons in conceptualising the process of 'authoritarian diffusion' as an unintentional process that does not involve 'any collaboration, imposition, or otherwise programmed effort on the part of any of the actors' (cf. Simmons and Elkins 2005, quoted in Ambrosio 2010, 378). For some, this constitutes a process of 'authoritarian learning', as in Heydemann and Leenders' work (2011), which examined such processes of policy adaptation among non-democratic regimes following the post-2011 Arab Uprisings. Empirical evidence supports this research agenda, given that authoritarian regimes also rely on each other for economic, military, and diplomatic support. They provide vetoes in the United Nations Security Council, offer bilateral and multilateral aid in military and security issues, exchange ideas on developmental strategies, or engage in ideational and material support (Erdmann et al. 2013, 5). This literature continues to be 'highly fragmented' and its empirical and conceptual bases are found lacking (Erdmann et al. 2013, 27), as the international dimension of authoritarian regimes 'remains an under-theorised field of study' (von Soest 2015, 628). At the same time, similar to the comparative politics literature on the domestic context of authoritarian rule, labour emigration does not feature as an instrument of cross-regime interaction (Alemán and Woods 2014).

Going beyond comparative politics research on authoritarianism and the literature on the politics of migration, three strands of research are relevant in theorising the importance of labour emigration in autocratic contexts, namely the literature on "rentier states", on developmentalism, and on mobility as a "safety valve". In terms of the first, research on economic remittances has engaged most fruitfully (albeit indirectly) with the importance of labour migration in sustaining non-democratic regimes. Theorists have argued that economic remittances constitute a form of unearned income for the sending states' governments – or, a form of 'rent' (cf. Mahdavy 1970). According to Beblawi and Luciani's political economy analysis, 'with virtually no taxes, citizens are far less demanding in terms of political participation', as per the 'no taxation without representation' demand that contributed to the modern European nation-state system (Beblawi and Luciani

1987, 53–54; cf. Tilly 1992). In examining migrants' remittances as a source of unearned income for sending states, or rent, scholars have argued that emigration ultimately supports incumbent regimes' stay in power. Ahmed argued that unearned foreign income, such as remittances, 'reduces the likelihood of government turnover, regime collapse, and outbreaks of major political discontent', because governments are able to divert expenditure from the provision of welfare goods to 'patronage goods' (Ahmed 2012, 146, 148). In fact, certain non-democracies, such as Cuba or Eritrea, appear to be sustained to a significant extent by workers' remittances (Byman and Lind 2010).

The rentier state argument has been widely discredited from a number of different perspectives (Waterbury 1997; Dunning 2008; Haber and Menaldo 2011). The underlying theory has been rightly accused of being rather ahistorical, given that non-democratic practices in numerous cases existed well before the emergence of rentier resources. The theory also suffers from reducing regimes' strategies to a purely economic rationale (see Birks and Sinclair 1979, for an example of such an account), while bypassing the fact that many rentier states in Northern Europe and Latin America are, in fact, liberal democracies. Importantly, remittances cannot be considered a form of rent, given that they are not transmitted directly into governmental or state coffers, but to households. In many cases, remittances are poorly tracked, or even untaxed, by sending-state governments (de Luna-Martinez 2005; Chami et al. 2008). Boix and Stokes argue that remittances, as they are received by households, create greater financial security that is expected to produce conditions necessary for liberalisation, rather than authoritarianism (Boix and Stokes 2003; cf. Lipset 1959). In Mexico, remittances are used for infrastructure projects that allow for individual political mobilisation (de la Garza and Hazan 2003). Such findings are corroborated by more recent research on the impact of remittances on processes of democratic transitions (Escribà-Folch, Meseguer, and Wright 2015). At the same time, an influx of remittances can have secondary macroeconomic repercussions, from heightened inflation to altered consumption patterns that might increase, rather than decrease, social inequality and political tensions within the sending state (Castles and Wise 2008).

A second, historically dominant paradigm has been the developmentalist approach, in which emigration policy is shaped by a state's

developmental needs (see debate in De Haas 2010; Faist 2008). This has been a debate that has adopted various phases over the decades: an initially positive take on labour migration as allowing developing countries to take-off built on neoclassical approaches and modernisation theory, approaching migration as mobility from capital-poor, labour-abundant areas to capital-rich, labour-scarce ones (Todaro 1969; cf. Rostow 1960). Wage differentials drive migration processes that will, ultimately, result in wage convergence and equilibrium. Once economic conditions in sending and host states become similar, the incentive for migration is expected to decrease. This view was challenged by a number of critical scholars working through dependency theory, world systems theory, or globalisation theory frameworks. These scholars argued that individuals are fundamentally constrained by structural forces; they highlighted issues of “brain drain”, and focused on migration’s importance for the ‘development of underdevelopment’ (Frank 1966; cf. Bhagwati 1976), by examining the contribution of cross-border mobility to uneven trade relations between ‘developed (migration receiving) and less-developed (migration sending) countries’ (Hollifield 2012, 366; cf. Sassen 1988). In recent years, the pendulum has swung back to a renewed faith in the importance of remittances for the development of sending states, particularly in the Global South; remittances and, by extension, migration constitute ‘mother’s milk for poor nations’ (Kapur and McHale 2003, 49).

There is little doubt that the developmental paradigm has influenced states’ migration policies, in both democratic and autocratic contexts. Furthermore, it has been instrumental in highlighting how migration features in the broader patterns of inequality across world politics, as well as the importance of “push” and “pull” factors in understanding economically driven, cross-border mobility flows. While an elaborate macroeconomic analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of this paradigm is beyond the scope of this study, developmentalism nevertheless allows us to identify how these debates have affected autocratic regimes’ policies. On the one hand, some regimes have discursively linked a restrictive emigration policy with their broader developmental strategy, which includes preventing brain drain: most notably, the German Democratic Republic’s construction of the Berlin Wall functioned as a symbol of the regime’s wish for economic development that specifically prevented the emigration of their most able citizens. On the other hand, there have also



been attempts by autocracies to discursively link a permissive emigration policy to ‘brain gain’, as part of popularising a broader developmental strategy: the post-1978 shift in Chinese emigration policy, for instance, framed labour migration as a positive phenomenon, and was employed to popularise the developmental shift towards the market by Deng Xiaoping. Yet, the extent to which emigration policy (in particular, arguments on brain drain or brain gain) may feature in such strategies of autocratic regimes has not been fully explored as a separate field of inquiry.

Beyond economic remittances as rent and developmentalist approaches, social scientists have also approached labour migration as a ‘safety valve’ that allows sending states to artificially reduce their unemployment rates, or to tackle demographic problems by allowing citizens to migrate abroad (Castles and Wise 2008; Weiner and Teitlebaum 2001). This line of thought builds on Albert Hirschman’s key work on “voice”, “exit”, and “loyalty”. The German economist noted that customers may respond to a firm’s deteriorating performance in two ways: they can either exit by choosing a different product or voice their complaints to the management about the product’s decline in quality, with loyalty constituting an additional barrier to exit. Beyond economics, he identified in passing how this would be relevant in authoritarian contexts: ‘Competition does not restrain monopoly but comforts and bolsters it by unburdening it of some of its more troublesome customers ... those who hold power in the lazy monopoly may actually have an interest in creating some opportunities for exit on the part of those whose voice might be uncomfortable’ (Hirschman 1970, 59–60). By importing this framework into authoritarian contexts, scholars have argued that migration can serve as a safety valve against unemployment, overpopulation, or other socio-economic problems. It may even promote a wish among return migrants to maintain the illiberal status quo, as in the case of 1970s Portugal (Brettell 1979). Scholars have identified notable cases of authoritarian emigration states where citizens were encouraged to emigrate in order to minimise grievances against a non-democratic regime, such as Haiti, Morocco, and Zimbabwe (De Haas 2005). Hirschman (1993) applied his model into the demise of the German Democratic Republic. Already in 1978, he had been arguing that exit, more broadly, enabled the silencing of voice across nineteenth-century Europe: ‘the ships carrying the migrants contained actual or potential anarchists and socialists, reformers and revolutionaries. [That] Emigration of dissenters will

strengthen an authoritarian regime in the short run is obvious; not content with allowing emigration, many such regimes have taken it upon themselves to deport or ban their political enemies' (Hirschman 1978, 102–3).

Discussions of socio-economic and political safety valves are problematic. Despite its attractiveness, Hirschman's framework is rather abstract and, at times, self-contradictory: for example, travel restrictions have been shown to decrease regimes' repression costs and, thus, add to their stability (Alemán and Woods 2014). At the same time, the exit of a country's citizens can also produce destabilising effects for an authoritarian regime when done en masse. In cases when citizens are able to 'vote with their feet', to use Lenin's famous phrase, the regime is threatened with breakdown, as in East Germany: the German Democratic Republic collapsed after more than 13,000 citizens left for Hungary in August 1989, or crossed into West Berlin three months later (Brubaker 1990; Pfaff 2006). In other instances, however, even mass migration did not destabilise the regime – such was the case, for instance, in French West African colonies, which underwent massive waves of 'protest migration' (Herbst 1990, 186). Thus, the breaking point between migration as a stabilising and as a disruptive force remains unspecified. Furthermore, exit does not necessarily imply the absence of voice. Migrants can also seek to influence their sending states' domestic politics from abroad (Glasius 2016). In fact, 'since emigrants often have greater access to important resources, ranging from remittances, skills-transfer through returns, and networks, as well as symbolic and cultural capital, they may well enhance their voice in the country of origin' (Kapur 2010, 42). Finally, if migration occurs as a response to "quality decline" (in this case, increased authoritarianism), then are we assuming that citizens prefer a democratic polity versus a non-democratic one, and that this preference forms the reason for their emigration?

### **The Politics of Authoritarian Emigration States: A Framework of Repression, Co-Optation and Legitimacy**

In order to comprehend the interplay between labour emigration policy and authoritarianism, this study proposes a framework that builds on aforementioned debates on population mobility within social sciences. Its framework rests on two key assumptions. First, labour emigration policy operates within a continuum between two