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***No Bread, No Freedom, No Social Justice: How EU–
Egyptian Human Rights Discourse Undermines Democracy***

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Conventional approaches to democratization in the Middle East take for granted the priority of some civil–political rights (e.g., voting) over others (e.g., rights of association or protest, socioeconomic rights). The discursive structure of these approaches has framed both the promotion of democracy by the European Union and regional governments’ counter-conductive reframing against that effort. But this pas de deux is part of a broader dynamic in which the common ground shared by these two efforts frames democracy so as to deny and delegitimize both the conception of democracy held by Middle Eastern and North African populations themselves and the political and socioeconomic demands of those same populations. Governments, in short, are engaged in “counter-conducting” their own populations. Drawing on critical discourse analysis of key documents, public opinion survey data, and activist interviews, an analysis of the Egyptian case shows that the discursive competition between governments is (also) a dance around democracy which seeks to avoid the more radical, egalitarian demands by populations

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