

# Political Parties and Democracy

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General Editor, Kay Lawson

*Volume V: The Arab World*

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Political Parties in Context  
Kay Lawson, Series Editor



AN IMPRINT OF ABC-CLIO, LLC  
Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Political parties and democracy / Kay Lawson, set editor.

p. cm.—(Political parties in context series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-275-98706-0 (hard copy : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-0-313-08349-5 (ebook)—ISBN 978-0-313-38314-4 (vol. 1 hard copy)—ISBN 978-0-313-38315-1 (vol. 1 ebook)—ISBN 978-0-313-38316-8 (vol. 2 hard copy)—ISBN 978-0-313-38317-5 (vol. 2 ebook)—ISBN 978-0-313-38060-0 (vol. 3 hard copy)—ISBN 978-0-313-38061-7 (vol. 3 ebook)—ISBN 978-0-313-35302-4 (vol. 4 hard copy)—ISBN 978-0-313-35303-1 (vol. 4 ebook)—ISBN 978-0-275-97082-6 (vol. 5 hard copy)—ISBN 978-0-313-08295-5 (vol. 5 ebook) 1. Political parties. 2. Democracy. I. Lawson, Kay.

JF2051.P5678 2010

324.2—dc22 2009047965

ISBN: 978-0-275-98706-0 (set)

EISBN: 978-0-313-08349-5 (set)

14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available on the World Wide Web as an eBook.  
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Praeger

An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

ABC-CLIO, LLC

130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911

Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

This book is printed on acid-free paper 

Manufactured in the United States of America

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Political Parties in Egypt: Alive, but Not Kicking

*Emad El-Din Shahin*

### INTRODUCTION

The results of the 2005 parliamentary elections clearly revealed the weakness of party life in Egypt. The ruling party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), proved to be a hollow structure whose survival is predicated primarily on the state's strong backing and electoral irregularities. NDP candidates lost two-thirds of the contested 444 seats, and several of its leading members failed to get re-elected. The results of the elections were similarly discouraging for the legal opposition. The 20 legal opposition parties, which collectively fielded 395 candidates, were able to win only 12 seats (2.5%). A more serious problem was that the elections that followed a period of relative political mobility and mounting expectations for reform and change failed to attract the majority of the Egyptian voters. Only 23% of the registered voters turned out to participate in this presumably momentous national event. The two major winners in the elections were not the legal political parties but the banned Muslim Brothers (MB) and the independent candidates (most of whom later rejoined the NDP, thus giving it the majority it needed in the parliament). The former won 20% of the seats, and the latter captured more than 40%.

The leaders of the legal opposition parties attributed their weak performance to the excessive use of money and intimidation by the government and the use of religion by the MB. In fact, the problems of the legal opposition are much deeper than can be blamed solely on irregularities. These and similar poor results for opposition parties have been

a recurring outcome of almost all past parliamentary elections since the adoption of the multiparty system in 1976. They have become a systemic pattern, not an exception, which relates to the wider political dynamics of authoritarianism and the role and functions that are invariably assigned to weak political parties in semiauthoritarian polities.

In democratic systems, the existence of effective political parties is essential for democracy to function properly. Beyond their basic functions of structuring votes and governing, political parties are expected to exercise oversight, provide channels for participation and representation, and aggregate and reconcile competing interests. This process guarantees the strength and vitality of political parties and the overall state of democracy in general. Unfortunately, such dynamics do not exist and hence do not apply to the case of Egypt. Egypt has neither a functioning democracy nor a ruling regime willing to contemplate the possibility of a peaceful transfer of power. The state party has been in power since its establishment in 1978. It was in control for even a longer time but under different names (Egypt Arab Socialist Party, 1976, and the Arab Socialist Union, 1961). Further, the regime does not allow for the full participation of rival, autonomous powers that can effectively offer alternative platforms that might aggregate the interests of society and shake the regime's monopoly over power.

One should therefore go beyond an academic discussion of these party functions and address the specific context at hand. Political parties in Egypt were allowed to emerge only as nonautonomous, controlled actors and were designed to perform certain functions that differ from those in working democracies. They are part of the authoritarian power structures and are tolerated as long as they do not pose a threat to the regime's control. In return for the regime's recognition, financial incentives, and sometimes recruitment into some state structures, opposition parties are expected to help legitimize and maintain the existing structures of authoritarianism. They legitimize the facade of a superficial pluralism by regularly participating in a manipulated electoral system. This relationship has not always been a smooth one, as the regime deliberately keeps the margins of toleration and the windows for dissent in a constant state of flux. These margins are defined by the president, whose role as a final arbitrator, reserving for himself the right to allow the exercise of freedoms supposedly protected under the law, is constantly accentuated and has indeed become indispensable. The regime—parties relationship is sustained through a combination of toleration of dissent, cooptation, legal restrictions, and coercion. It is not surprising that Egypt has 24 legal political parties, yet all are largely ineffective, unpopular, and marginal. None could be considered a serious contender for political power. Meanwhile, the regime has systematically restricted the legalization and even movement of popular

actors (organized groups, movements, or individuals) that exhibit a degree of autonomy and can potentially pose a threat to its continued control. Hence, the famous paradox or cliché: "In the Egyptian political arena, the popular parties are illegal, and the legal parties are unpopular." This chapter considers the problem of political parties as a reflection of the wider crisis of the Egyptian political system and its dominant authoritarian dynamics. It will also examine other causes of that crisis that relate to the parties.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: A WEAK LEGACY OF PARTY LIFE

A society's historical legacy of a democratic experience (or lack thereof) is important as it positively or negatively affects its political culture. Egypt has a relatively long history of party life, a century old, but this legacy has not always been inspiring. Many of its shortcomings—a weak party life and low levels of political participation (or popular apathy)—have persisted and still characterize today's party dynamics.

Several elements have contributed to the weakness of the party system: the persistent imbalance between the excessive authority of the executive branch and the weak legislature; a high state of polarization and fragmentation between the political parties; their low level of institutionalization; and their lack of clear social and economic programs that address the needs and expectations of the majority of the population. Despite its significant weaknesses, the pre-1952 revolution parliamentary experience had its positive sides. Egyptian political life at that time was relatively vivid and characterized by repeated transfers of power (often due to irregular procedures), the formation of political alliances, and a relative respect for individual and public freedoms. It became evident, however, that toward the end of the first half of the 20th century, Egypt's party life was suffering severe strains.

Shortly after the July 1952 revolution, the Revolutionary Command Council dissolved all political parties, thus bringing to an end all pluralist political life. President Gamal Abdel Nasser was distrustful of the liberal experience and its party dynamics. He always considered political parties to be divisive and to have frustrated popular expectations. He also believed that the Egyptians were not ready for democracy and needed to be resocialized regarding democratic practices. Nasser's understanding of democracy linked public freedoms to the provision of the basic economic and social needs of the people. In practice, he wanted to consolidate power by undermining the sociopolitical forces and building a new support base to ensure the mobilization and full support of the masses behind the new regime. To achieve these goals, he suspended political pluralism, centralized power in the executive and its head, and restricted political participation. The state experimented with different

forms of single/state party systems, each lasting only a few years (the Liberation Rally 1953; the National Union 1957; and the Arab Socialist Union, 1961, which ended in 1976).

The single party structures, and particularly Nasser's charisma and overwhelming popularity, mobilized the population in support of the regime's policies but otherwise did not necessarily provide for their participation in the system or their involvement in the decision-making process. The state party was a bureaucratic top-down structure, an instrument of control, and an integral part of the executive that dominated entirely the other branches of the government. Party members dominated the parliament entirely and always rubber stamped the policies and decisions of the regime, and thus the parliament lost its *raison d'être*. The regime also exercised full control of the associations of the civil society and over the professional unions, subordinating them to the governing party structures.

The policies of the 1952 revolutionary regime had a deep impact on the political culture of the Egyptians and their perceptions of the political system and party life. Nasser's regime institutionalized authoritarianism, the use of extra-legal repressive measures, and the overwhelming power of the state vis-à-vis society. All this shaped the Egyptians' attitudes toward authority and the validity of participation. Many felt the marginalization of their role as citizens and members of the political community. Their participation did not count, as it neither changed policies nor affected the results of the state-manipulated elections. And since dissent was not tolerated, individual or collective organized action against an overpowering state was not only futile but also extremely risky. Many also became deeply skeptical about the potential of the parliament to function as an agent for true representation, policy making, and oversight. In such an atmosphere, eschewing politics and politicians and securing daily socioeconomic survival became more rational choices. Many of these attitudes still shape the political culture of most, if not all, Egyptians.

A multiparty system was restored in the mid-1970s. It was a decision from above, not a product of a thriving civil society or popular pressures. It was simply a grant from President Anwar Sadat who, by introducing major changes to Nasser's political structures, hoped to create his own political system and build a new basis of legitimacy. The decision was also not an outcome of Sadat's deep belief in democracy and democratic values; indeed, he always referred to democracy as capable of having fierce "fangs and claws." Exactly like authoritarianism, it too can "grind" the opposition. He thought that through a controlled pluralism, he could still maintain a strong grip over his opponents; or, as he always liked to call them, "my opposition." The move to a pluralistic system was also necessary in order to give a strong signal to the external actors, particularly the United States, that he was seriously

moving away from Nasser's socialist model and embracing a liberal economic and political system.

Sadat laid the foundation for a weak multiparty system, which he could easily manipulate to prevent the emergence of strong contenders to the state party. He orchestrated the process from above and designed the political and legal frameworks within which the parties were permitted to operate. In 1976, he approved the formation of three platforms, centrist, right, and left, within the Arab Socialist Union. Sadat personally picked the heads of this legal opposition. A year later, he granted these platforms the right to evolve into political parties. They became known as the Egypt Arab Socialist Party (the state's party), the Liberal Party, and the leftist Tagamou. In 1978, the New Wafd, the successor of the popular prerevolutionary Wafd Party, was approved. When Sadat felt that the multiparty system was beginning to pose some pressure, particularly after the massive food riots of 1977 and his initiative to engage in peace negotiations with Israel, he decided to restructure the party system and place more restraints on it. He established a "new" state party, the National Democratic Party, to replace the Egypt Arab Socialist Party, and created an alternative opposition party, the Labor Socialist Party, hoping that it would act as a loyal opposition and replace the increasingly critical Wafd and Tagamou parties. To facilitate the creation of the Labor Party, he himself helped found the party and ordered 20 members of his own party to resign and join the newly formed opposition party. Sadat picked Ibrahim Shukri as the leader of the Labor Party. The blatant engineering process and the manipulation of this crucial restorative phase of the multiparty experience stigmatized the legal parties and weakened their credibility as a serious and autonomous opposition. They appeared not to have evolved by popular will or independent socioeconomic forces, but by a top-down decision of the regime.

Sadat also identified the parameters for admission to and exclusion from the political process. He set the conditions and devised the necessary legal constraints to ensure continued state control over the parties. He required the platforms of all political parties not to undermine three issues: national unity, commitment to the socialist achievements of the revolutionary system (July 1952 revolution and his own May 1970 rectification revolution), and social peace. In addition, he denied recognition to parties based on religion, class, region, or profession. He also banned the formation of parties that had existed before the July 1952 revolution. After signing the peace treaty with Israel, Sadat added new conditions: not to oppose the peace treaty with Israel (the Supreme Court later nullified this condition) or the principles of the Islamic Shar'ia [commonly defined as Islamic laws]. Too broad and deliberately vague, these conditions were designed in a way that would enable the regime to easily and arbitrarily interpret and apply them at its convenience.

Their immediate intent was to restrict freedom of expression, which the Egyptian constitution guarantees, and undermine the very idea of a plurality of programs and political stands. These paralyzing restrictions led the New Wafd in 1978 to "freeze" itself and suspend all of its activities. The Leftist Tagamou Party decided to confine its activities within its headquarters, only holding meetings.

To further muzzle the opposition, Sadat designed several "innovative" laws that curtailed the activities of political parties and limited their ability to function effectively. The new laws included the Law of Shame, ostensibly to protect the values of society, and the Law for the Protection of Social Peace. He also manipulated the electoral laws in ways that contradicted regular democratic practices and norms. For example, the elections of the members of the Shura Council and the local structures (municipal and provincial councils) followed a "modified" system of proportional representation that allowed the state party to monopolize all the seats in the local councils, where much of the patronage takes place. In addition, Sadat frequently side-stepped the legislature and resorted to popular referendums whose announced results were clearly the result of fraud.

The Party Formation Law (40/1977) that was promulgated 30 years ago still stands and continues to stifle party life. It predicates the legal approval of a party on the decision of the Parties Committee. This committee also has the authority to end a party. According to the latest 2005 amendment of the Party Formation Law, the committee consists of nine members: the speaker of the Shura Council, the minister of the interior, the minister of state for parliamentary affairs, three former members of judiciary bodies, and three "public figures." The first three are, by position, members of the ruling party; and the other six are appointed by the president, who himself is the head of the ruling party. Thus, the formation of the committee grants the NDP the authority to legalize political parties. Far from being neutral, the opposition and civil society organizations have consistently called for its abolition. Article 6 of the 1977 law gives the Parties Committee the right to turn down any political party if it concludes that the party's program is not distinct from that of already existing parties. Like the committee itself, this is one of the most problematic aspects of the law. While the law, in part, requires the parties to conform, in their policies and platforms, to vague and broad principles, it expects them at the same time to present distinguishable programs. It also gives the right to decide on the nature of a party's program, not to the people, but to a regime-controlled committee. Unsurprisingly, the Parties Committee has continuously used this article to suppress any serious rival to the ruling NDP. Since its formation in 1977 and until 2008, the committee has rejected about 90 parties. So far, it has legalized only five new parties and all except the Ghad Party, described further below, are scarcely known.

In sum, while Nasser disbanded political parties and suppressed political pluralism outright, Sadat maintained a different approach. He allowed the formation of political parties, while expecting them to operate within narrow limits and observe parameters that he had devised. He also expected the opposition parties to be loyal and show him gratitude for allowing them to exist in the first place. When they did not fully comply and expressed harsh criticism of some of his policies, particularly the open door economic policy and the peace process with Israel, Sadat grew impatient, and in 1981 he suspended opposition papers and arrested party leaders. Such repressive measures exacerbated an already charged political situation and contributed to his assassination in October 1981.

Most of the restrictions that impede an effective party life still persist. The opposition parties have been fully aware of these limitations, yet have agreed to participate on the regime's terms, as they were not strong or popular enough to take part in making the rules. They henceforth subjected themselves to an arbitrary process that lacked proper institutionalization and that the regime and its ruling party manipulated. Their propensity to resist and challenge regime manipulations has proven to be very low. They have complied with the regime's restrictions and confined their activities to their headquarters. They wait for the approval of the state security forces before undertaking any activity or publicly engaging their constituency. When the approval has been denied, as is usually the case, they have never defied these arbitrary decisions. On the rare occasions when the legal opposition threatened not to participate or boycott elections, the regime has been able to lure them to rejoin the process and prevent them from keeping their threats. All this cost the political parties, particularly in this formative phase, dearly in terms of credibility and popularity.

#### **POLITICAL PARTIES UNDER MUBARAK: KEEPING THEM ALIVE, BUT NOT KICKING**

A characteristic of party life under Hosni Mubarak is the large number of parties that have come into existence since he took power in 1981 and the relative freedom of expression that the opposition or independent newspapers now enjoy. Egypt currently has 24 legal political parties, which are difficult to classify on an ideological basis. With the exception of one or two leftist or socialist parties, most share similar programs and orientations that are not substantively different from that of the state's NDP. As this chapter focuses more on the structural crises of the parties, it classifies them into two groups: the controlled legal parties and the alternative illegal political forces. The legal political parties comprise the five old, and now atrophying, parties that Sadat allowed to exist in 1976-1978: the NDP, the Liberal Party, the Tagamou, the New Wafd,

and the Labor Party. Only the NDP and the Tagamou remain functional, while the rest have been either frozen by the state or have become practically dysfunctional because of severe internal disputes or direct state interventions. The other legal parties are marginal, lack popular support, and perhaps with the exception of the Nasserite Party, are not even recognizable by average Egyptians. Their poor electoral performance reflects the limited impact they have on public life. For example, of the 24 legal political parties, 12 have never been represented in the parliament; and in the 2005 parliamentary elections, 17 failed to win a single seat out of the parliament's contested 444 seats. In the last presidential "competitive" elections that 10 candidates contested, 7 of those candidates combined won only 2% of the votes.

Unlike the legal political parties, the alternative political forces enjoy some level of representation and popularity among the various social segments of society and could effectively challenge the policies and control of the regime by mobilizing public protest and mounting a sustained opposition. Within this category are the MB, the Wasat, the Ghad, and the Karama parties. All of these parties, with the exception of the Ghad, have not been legally recognized by the regime. Though varying in influence and effectiveness, they have some social representation and a strong potential as credible opposition to jump start an effective party life. In fact, these could be viewed as original images of the shadow parties that are currently occupying the political arena.

Mubarak has thus managed to keep the multiparty system alive, but ineffective. While keeping the legal opposition weak and discredited, he does not allow the party system to collapse altogether. To do that, he applies several tactics that might seem contradictory but are selected to address specific challenges. Such tactics include the use of carefully designed legal constraints to stifle the existing political parties. He leaves room for the full and legal integration of weak parties, while allowing only partial and not legal integration of the effective political forces in order to keep them engaged and within the system. When a party seems too critical or capable of mounting a threat, the state intervenes to freeze, split, or repress it. To Mubarak's credit, he applies out-right repression only after the other means prove unsuccessful.

Mubarak is keen on maintaining the hegemony of the state over party life. He heads the NDP and refuses to heed the demands of the opposition parties, which have called on him to relinquish his chairmanship of the NDP in order to address the imbalance between the state and opposition parties. On several occasions, he admitted that if he did step down, the NDP would become weak, thus implicitly recognizing that what keeps the NDP afloat is the support it receives from the state. Furthermore, the Parties Committee has been reluctant to legalize new parties. With the exception of the old parties that were formed under Sadat, almost all of the legal parties under Mubarak came into existence by

order of the Administrative Court, after the Parties Committee had rejected them. The increase in the number of legalized parties has not reflected a similar increase in the vitality and effectiveness of party life. Instead, most of these parties are marginal, with a limited following, and are no match for the hegemonic state party.

On several occasions, when the relationship between the regime and the legalized opposition parties reached an impasse, Mubarak would either introduce new items to revive party life or engage the leaders of the legal opposition in dialogue to keep them busy. For example, following the embarrassing results of the NDP in the 2000 parliamentary elections, Mubarak urged all the political parties to reform themselves, knowing full well that this would be impossible under the existing legal and structural constraints. In 2004, the NDP engaged a number of opposition parties in lengthy dialogue, in which it rejected any discussion of a possible amendment of the constitution. After the opposition conceded to this condition, Mubarak surprisingly decided to amend Article 76 of the constitution to allow for competitive presidential elections. This move further discredited and marginalized the legal opposition. Although it was expected that after years of adjusting to the system the political parties under Mubarak would grow stronger and gain more public support, they in fact grew weaker. Some even argue that the political life in Egypt was much more vivid when there were only six parties, as was true at the end of the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

## STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES TO PARTY BUILDING

We turn now to a closer look at the serious structural challenges Egyptian political parties must face, given the current legal and administrative constraints and the weakness of social and political pluralism in the nation at large.

### Legal and Administrative Constraints

Forming a political party is technically allowed, but the legalization of strong, effective parties is practically difficult. Since Mubarak assumed power, party life has functioned under emergency law and other restrictive laws. The emergency law, which gave President Sadat the power to detain all his political opponents in September 1981, gives the regime the power to arrest and detain citizens for long periods of time and to ban demonstrations and meetings. These restrictions confine the activities of the parties to their headquarters and limit the parties' ability to reach out to constituents, communicate their programs, and mobilize public support. Parties are required to obtain the approval of the state security before holding public meetings, distributing party materials, or organizing peaceful demonstrations. Traditionally,

granting such approval has been the exception, not the rule. The regime has used the emergency law to detain and try journalists as well as members of unrecognized movements and professional associations, including the Egyptian Human Rights Association. The absence of free association, fear of detention, and high risk associated with political participation have forced people out of the political arena.<sup>2</sup>

The Party Formation Law further curtails the formation of political parties by giving the Parties Committee extensive powers. In addition to legalizing and eliminating parties, the committee has the power to freeze an existing party, ban a party's publication, or veto a party's internal decision. The committee used its authority to freeze several parties that were critical of the regime, such as the cases of the Labor Party and the Ghad, as well as those that have experienced internal leadership rivalry. So far, the committee has frozen seven opposition parties.

Other articles of the Parties Formation Law place strong conditions on the capacity of the parties to mobilize resources. Article 11, for example, prohibits parties from practicing any commercial activity and from investing their money in any project, which further deteriorates the financial capabilities of political parties. Under the current regulations, political parties find it extremely difficult to finance their activities. Additionally, various problems confront the political parties even before they come to exist legally. According to the law, the party must publish its list of founders in two daily newspapers before applying to the Parties Committee. This means that, despite being prohibited from organizing any activity before its legalization, the party has to spend a small fortune on advertisement. Further, the law requires the party to announce in two daily newspapers any donation exceeding £500. Taking into consideration that such announcements would cost up to hundreds of thousands of pounds, parties tend to turn down donations, as the cost of accepting them would exceed their value. Political parties therefore depend solely on the subscriptions of their members (who are limited and dramatically decreasing in number) and the subsidies they receive annually from the regime. For the first 10 years, a legal opposition party receives the amount of £100,000 as a direct subsidy from the regime. The opposition parties also receive a £5,000 grant for each of their elected members in the parliament.

The financial limitations of the parties have obvious effects on the vitality and independence of party life in Egypt. Due to their limited resources, parties cannot exercise patronage, nor are they able to build offices, provide services, or organize events to disseminate their ideas and recruit members. Because many are dependent on the regime's subsidies, they have to moderate their opposition in order to avoid falling out of its financial favor.<sup>3</sup>

### Weak Social and Political Pluralism

The existence of political and social pluralism is necessary for political parties to be effective and represent and reconcile the different interests in society. The existence of different political parties, no matter how numerous they are, becomes meaningless if these parties are not a product of autonomous, grassroots social and political organizations.<sup>4</sup> The formation of legal political parties in Egypt does not reflect this dynamic, given that the legal parties are based solely on the consent of the regime. Unlike traditional grassroots political parties, the Egyptian version of a "legal" political party is a top-down structure that starts with a leadership, which then searches for a structure and supporters. Therefore, the parties that claim legality in such a manipulated process often lack public support and legitimacy. Most of them cannot compete with the autonomous "illegal" parties and groups that depend on grassroots support as their source of legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> These outlawed movements increased dramatically in number in 2004 and 2005<sup>6</sup> and represent an added challenge to the popularity and credibility of the legal political parties.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, they reveal the inadequacy of controlled political parties as effective avenues for articulation and political participation. The current laws of associations and political practices further prevent the development of a healthy pluralism by restricting civil society organizations from establishing links with political parties and party activities and prohibiting any political activities on university campuses or factories. Under these circumstances, political parties cannot maintain a presence or organize political activities. Thus, these governmental restrictions dry up the potential of civil society by regulating the behavior of grassroots organizations and depriving legal parties of natural access to a broad constituency in society.<sup>8</sup>

### CRISES WITHIN THE PARTIES

Structural problems are not the only challenge facing the Egyptian political parties and hindering their ability to play an effective role in the political process. The parties themselves suffer from clear internal deficits, such as ideological stagnation, lack of internal democracy, and the fragmentation of the party system.

#### Ideological Stagnation

The ideological orientations of the existing political parties act as a barrier between the party and the average populace in at least two obvious ways. First, the ideologies of most of the legal opposition are outdated and as a result no longer seem appealing. The legal parties have not adjusted their orientations to the rapid changes taking place



in society, and continue to present an irrelevant and rigid ideological discourse that fails to relate to the majority of the Egyptian people. Most of the programs of the legal parties tend to be too general, unrealistic, and almost impossible to implement, focusing as they do on "grand" ideological objectives or demands, with inadequate attention to the process, mechanisms, or vehicles needed to achieve them. This tendency almost surely helps explain the low membership of the legal parties, estimated at 2 million members.<sup>9</sup> According to al-Ahram newspaper, 10 political parties have a combined total membership of less than 1,000 members.<sup>10</sup> Recently, the constituency of some parties witnessed a sharp drop. For example, the membership of the left-wing Tagamou Party decreased from over 150,000 in 1976 to around 13,000 in 1998, and the situation is similar in other political parties.<sup>11</sup>

Another ideological reason for the weakness of political parties is the lack of intellectual innovation and syntheses. Most of the existing political parties duplicate ideologies of parties already existing elsewhere in the world, using similar rhetoric and discourse and proposing similar programs and agendas. Therefore, they cannot connect to the average Egyptian who needs an indigenous framework to relate to. For example, the Egyptian left has always followed the "ideology and vision of the international leftists, without being able to present an original Egyptian vision of the core value of the leftist movement, namely social justice."<sup>12</sup> The same problem applies to the liberal parties, which have not yet produced an indigenous liberal model. Many Egyptian liberals are elitist, with an unoriginal and alienating discourse that condones ambiguous and sometimes contradictory stances. They are not autonomous from the regime, and some are even entrenched within the state apparatus, which raises serious questions about their commitment to democratic values. One can easily refer to the case of the "democrats," "liberal-minded intellectuals," and university professors who readily joined the Policies Committee of the NDP in 2000. The liberals have yet to make democracy a primary or relevant value for the Egyptians and effectively mobilize large segments of the population to attain it.

### Lack of Internal Democracy

Another major problem hindering the growth and reducing the credibility of most legal opposition parties is their lack of internal democracy. While criticizing the regime for its undemocratic practices and unwillingness to transfer power, most of the parties do not follow acceptable democratic rules and procedures that could provide for their proper institutionalization. The symptoms of the absence of democratic norms are visible in the opposition parties, especially the smaller ones, which have become nepotistic "family parties." The big parties follow

similar rules and procedures. All the legal parties are centered on the party *zaim* (chief), who stays for life at the top, appoints his loyal followers to high party positions, and swiftly dismisses intraparty opposition. Similar to the regime's style, all procedures are conducted through a "ceremonial collective" process that gives such arbitrary procedures a democratic face. Mirroring the regime, the legal parties equally suffer from lack of accountability and transparency. Not a single opposition party leader has been held accountable for his party's poor performance, whether dismal election results, failure to recruit members, or inability to resolve internal conflicts. The legal parties do not disclose the exact number of their members or their financial budgets. In brief, the legal parties have not been willing to function as modern, institutionalized structures or exhibit an acceptable level of transparency and accountability.

The continuity of a political party and the growth of its political influence depend heavily on its ability to recruit and prepare new leaders to sustain an effective presence. The party leaders should always be on the lookout for promising young leaders who can maintain the party as a dynamic and appealing force. Clearly, that is not the case with almost all opposition parties. With the exception of the newly established Ghad Party and the unrecognized Wasat and Karama parties, Egyptian political parties are headed by conspicuously old leaders. Some have been at the head of their party for more than 25 years.<sup>13</sup> Many have exceeded the age of 70, and some are in their 80s. These leaders continue to run their respective political parties by using techniques that are similar to those the regime employs to sustain itself at the top: patronage (mainly appointing loyalists to senior party positions), undemocratic procedures, and even intimidation. However, the leaders of the opposition parties often use the restrictive measures of the regime as an excuse for their inability to recruit young leadership. In fact, the authoritarian practices within the legal opposition force out many qualified young members and engender major rifts within the party's ranks. This has been the case with old and new parties, such as the Wafd, the Labor, the Liberals, the Nasserite, the Ghad, al-Wifaq, and Egypt 2000. The MB experienced a similar rift in 1996.

The lack of "fresh," publicly accepted young personalities that could attract people and present innovative ideas has contributed to the stagnation of political parties. This gives the NDP an apparent advantage as Gamal Mubarak, the president's son, young and well educated, is practically running the state party. Another, and perhaps only other, young head of a legal party is Ayman Nour, who has been eliminated as a potentially strong rival to Gamal and is now in prison. The parties of other young and charismatic heads, namely Hamdeen Sabbahi of the Karama and Abul-Ula Madi of the Wasat, have been denied legal status by the regime-controlled Parties Committee.

### Fragmentation and Lack of Interparty Cooperation

An eventual consequence of the absence of internal democracy is the frequent splits and fragmentation of opposition parties. These parties are not properly institutionalized structures, as almost all lack effective mechanisms for the resolution of their internal disputes. Typically, problems arise, accumulate, and remain unresolved, leading to major infighting and splits within the party ranks. Moreover, since it is almost impossible to get legalization for a new party, the escalation of the internal disputes often lead to freezing of the entire party by the Parties Committee or to the party's practical death. So far, seven political parties have been frozen by the Parties Committee because of disputes over the party's leadership. These include the Labor, Liberal, Young Egypt, People Democratic, National Reconciliation, Arab Socialist, and Social Justice parties.

With their weak structures and highly personalized decision-making processes, the legal opposition parties cannot adopt effective strategies to advance their goals. The leaders of the opposition have been unable or unwilling to work collectively and challenge the regime's manipulative agenda. Distrustful of one another, they keep intraparty cooperation and coordination at a minimal level. However, some opposition parties have been able to form electoral coalitions that in some cases produced relatively positive results. In the 1984 parliamentary elections, the two historical rivals, the Wafd and the MB, contested the elections on a unified list; and in 1987, the MB entered the elections on the lists of the Liberal and Labor parties. The 2005 electoral coordination of the opposition parties was not successful. In general, the attempts to build coalitions or opposition blocs have been short lived and ineffective.

Several factors have contributed to these failures, such as the historical rivalry between some opposition forces, personal rivalries between their leaders, deep ideological differences, lack of commitment, and internal instability within participating parties. Some members of these coalitions or fronts insisted on the exclusion of the MB, a key opposition force. Following the 2005 elections and the relatively strong performance of the MB, the leftist forces called for forming a coalition, not against the regime that had rigged the elections, but against the MB. The top leaders of different political parties make the important decisions and seem to be focused on the benefits they could secure through collaboration with the regime instead of other parties.<sup>14</sup> On several occasions, they agreed to engage in "national" dialogue with the regime and conceded to its conditions to exclude groups that have popular support, particularly the MB. The limited level of collaboration and coordination between the existing political parties plays into the hands of the ruling NDP. It can also explain the reasons for the recent emergence and growth of alternative movements, such as Kifaya and the other pro-reform groups.

### ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL FORCES

Despite the difficulties facing parties in Egypt, certain movements do have some level of social and political representation or some potential to become an effective political force. These include the MB movement, the Ghad Party, the Wasat Party, and the Karama Party.<sup>15</sup> With the exception of the Ghad, the regime has consistently deprived these forces from acquiring legal recognition. Unlike the controlled legal parties, the autonomous political forces are not the clients of the regime, which offer them no patronage. They represent the main ideological or political streams within society: Islamism, liberal nationalism, and Arab nationalism and socialism, and are thereby able to build wide grassroots support.

With the exception of the MB, these are all splinter movements from a larger party or group. For example, the Ghad, the Wasat, and the Karama are offshoots of the Wafd, the MB, and the Nasserite Party, respectively. Each is led by young, charismatic leaders who, given certain arrangements, could revive party life and even challenge the candidacy of Mubarak. Not only are they products of the generational gap within the legal parties, but they have also emerged in protest against the organizational inflexibility or weakness of their mother movements. Some have mainstream orientations that attempt to appeal to larger segments in society and a proactive or defiant attitude that could augment their popularity and potential to challenge the regime. Further, most of these forces have relatively good relations with one another, surprisingly with the exception of the MB and the Wasat, and with newly emerging protest movements. They all support legal integration of the MB in the political process. The Karama Party joined the MB-led coalition, the National Coalition for Reform. Members from the MB, the Wasat, and the Karama helped found the Kifaya movement, which succeeded in articulating a popular protest to the extension of Mubarak to a fifth term. It is also believed that a large number of young MB votes went to Ayman Nour during his contest for the presidency.

The response of the regime to these forces has not been uniform. In general, the regime has been reluctant to integrate fully the forces that have actual popular presence. At the same time, however, it is difficult to crush these groups and movements without endangering stability. Therefore, its response has varied from some form of partial integration that tolerates some of their activities to periodic repression that prevents them from evolving into a full-fledged force. It is clear that their ideological orientation, Islamic, liberal, or pan-Arab, has not been a key factor in determining which approach to apply. The regime certainly views them all as a threat because of their potential for gaining popular support. The regime's margin of toleration starts to narrow when these forces challenge the demarcated boundaries of a tolerable opposition,

come close to posing a threat to its control, or shake its grip over power. The next section focuses on two of these forces, the MB and the Ghad, which maintained an assertive approach toward the regime. It also deals briefly with the Wasat and Karama parties that have not been willing to defy the regime's restrictions and opted to fight their battles through the courts.

### The Muslim Brothers

The Society of the Muslim Brothers is one of the oldest and most highly institutionalized political forces in Egypt. Despite a ban on the movement since 1954, it fulfills the description of a real political party: a nationwide organizational structure that survived the founder's lifetime and has a vision, an ideology, and grassroots support. The last parliamentary elections of 2005 revealed the MB to be the main opposition force and a key player in Egyptian political life. Its members captured 20% of the seats, an unprecedented performance for an opposition force since Egypt became a republic in 1952. However, at the same time it is difficult to determine accurately the ability or willingness of the MB to dislodge the regime or the exact levels of its popularity among the overall population.<sup>16</sup> Concerns about the MB revolve around its high organizational and mobilization skills, its influence in comparison to the other opposition, and the lack of clarity regarding its future plans.

The regime has always combined toleration with repression in its relationship with the MB. This approach has served several purposes. Under Sadat, the MB was tolerated as part of his de-Nasserization process and later to perform a moderating effect of the emerging radical Islamic groups. The latter objective continued under Mubarak until the mid-1990s, when the state appeared to be winning its battle against the violent Islamic groups. Mubarak then cracked down on the movement to trim its growing influence. The period from 1995 to 2000 became known as the "bone-crushing" phase, during which several leaders and members of the movement stood before six military tribunals and 79 of its leading members received jail sentences. Subsequent periodic arrests and crack-downs continued in order to prevent the movement from growing into an uncontrollable threat to the regime's hegemony. However, the regime has so far stopped short of completely crushing the movement, tolerating its presence in the parliament and in society. This presence allows the regime to showcase its toleration of opposition, while at the same time maintaining absolute political power. The regime also realizes that the elimination of this moderate movement will not necessarily guarantee political stability, as radical, violent groups are likely to emerge to fill the vacuum. Further, the presence of this active Islamic movement in society pushes the secular opposition and intellectuals to stay loyal to the regime

that shares their secular orientation. The same relationship provides a pretext for the regime to maintain the extralegal processes and suppressive measures to impede the "Islamic threat." Finally, the regime uses the increasing influence of the MB and its potential "threat" to fend off the external pressures for democratic changes and present itself as the West's plausible ally.

The MB 2005 electoral successes did not come easily. In comparison to the legal opposition, the MB has been much more exposed to the regime's repression and restrictions. Unlike the legal opposition, however, it is willing to challenge the regime's harassment, reassert its presence in society, and consequently pay the price for its defiance. The MB fully realizes the comprehensive nature of its movement and the general objectives it seeks to accomplish. It is an activist movement with a comprehensive reform message, combining multidimensional spheres that give the movement a reasonable space to maneuver within even when its activities are severely constrained at one dimension. It has adopted a gradualist bottom-up approach for change that seeks to resocialize society along Islamic lines (the individual, family, society, and then the state). The brotherhood had sustained repeated phases of brutal regime repression. All this has generated a particular political orientation for the movement that is characterized by caution, gradualism, slow adaptation, and fear of experimentation and failure. In the movement's view, failure will reflect not simply on the leadership of the group at a particular moment, but on the entire movement as a precursor and exemplar for others. It can even affect the fortunes of political Islam as an alternative to the postindependence foreign-inspired secular models. Therefore, preserving the survival and structural coherence of the movement has always been a top priority. It is an objective that for long has dominated the brotherhood's political calculations and levels of interaction in the political process and enabled the movement to exhibit a pragmatic attitude whenever the circumstances warrant.

Over the past few years the MB undertook major transformations at the level of orientation and strategy. Its recent documents and the statements of some of its leaders began to reflect commitment to the civic nature of political authority, notwithstanding its adherence to the principles of the Shari'a: respect for the basic values and instruments of democracy; respect for public freedoms; acceptance of pluralism; transfer of power through clean and free elections; sovereignty of the people; separation of powers; rejecting the use of violence and adopting gradual and legal means to achieve reform; acceptance of citizenship as the basis for rights and responsibilities for Muslims and non-Muslims; and support of human rights, including those of women and Copts.<sup>17</sup> The MB adopted an assertive strategy in its relationship with the regime and a pragmatic orientation in the reform agenda it proposed. This change became quite noticeable in early 2005, when the movement

insisted on reasserting its presence in the political process, defied the regime's bans on its demonstrations, and even threatened acts of "civil disobedience." It also cooperated with other political forces that did not share its ideological perspectives and jointly formed reform-oriented fronts.

A real challenge facing the MB is generating a societal consensus over its integration into the system and articulating its future plans. The two seem to be closely intertwined. At the moment, the MB is not seriously pushing to be legalized as a political party, particularly under the current legal constraints that stifle political parties. Its existence as a comprehensive movement, not a party regulated by the state laws, gives it more maneuverability and appeal, despite the regime's periodic repression. So far the MB has been able to survive that repression and eventually increase its credibility and legitimacy as a serious and effective opposition. Meanwhile, the movement has expressed willingness to be part of a pluralistic political system and has linked its reform demands to the wider demands of the pro-change movements.

The MB has also revisited some of its positions vis-à-vis the West. It has recently begun sending messages to the West in an attempt to improve its image. The Second Deputy of the General Guide Khayrat Al-Shater addressed the West in an article in the *Guardian* titled, "No Need to Fear Us," in which he reconfirmed his movement's respect for "the rights of all religious and political groups."<sup>18</sup> In a later interview with the MB official Web site, he asserted that the movement is not promoting an anti-Western agenda.<sup>19</sup> These messages have been harshly criticized by the Egyptian regime, which considers the MB's move toward a centrist position a serious threat.

With regard to its future plans, the MB seems to be ambiguous and needs to be clearer on some issues. A major issue that needs clarification is the relationship between the Islamic state it intends to establish and the civic nature of authority to which it has declared commitment. A challenging question immediately arises: Is the implementation of the Shari'a as a way of life and a frame of reference reversible? In other words, how would the MB respond to a situation where it came to power through democratic means and established a state with Islamic foundations, but was then voted out of power by a secular party that implements a secular program that gives only lip service to Islam? Is it not the duty of a Muslim to uphold and defend the Shari'a? The MB also needs to be clear on issues such as the status of secular parties in an Islamic state (freedom of expression and advocacy) and the extent of respect and protection of the individual's private sphere in this Islamic state. It is also noteworthy that despite the moderate statements of the movement's leaders regarding citizenship, the Copts, and women, these viewpoints need to be adequately developed and embedded in the movement's official documents.

### The Ghad Party

The swift rise and fall of the Ghad Party is a sad testimony to the regime's perception of pluralism and its tactics in dealing with a promising legal opposition. Thanks to its charismatic young leader Ayman Nour and its liberal orientation, the Ghad appeared to represent a new generation of political opposition that could replace the aging Wafd Party and attract a considerable following. To many, it was expected to present a middle way between the ruling NDP and the MB. Perhaps for that reason, the regime brought the career of the new party to a sudden and brutal end.

The legalization of the Ghad in October 2004 came at a time of remarkable political vitality in the country and amid popular pressures for political reform and reviving political life. Nour was able to attract six members of the parliament and a few independent representatives as founding members of his new party, enabling the Ghad to lead the opposition in the parliament. In his rush to establish the party, Nour did not apply rigorous recruitment criteria. Thus, the party founders also included several prominent public figures, in addition to people of differing political backgrounds. At one point, the number of the party's founders exceeded that of its members (over five thousand founders to four thousand members!). This oversight later created serious rifts within the party.

Following the official recognition of the Ghad, Nour was elected as party head in a democratic process; and, for the first time in Egypt's party practices, his tenure was limited to two terms. Nour announced his party's plan to vigorously contest the upcoming parliamentary elections and end the hegemony of the ruling NDP. The party that he said would provide a platform for liberal youth attracted segments of the young generation—young and medium-size businessmen—and some former members of the liberal Wafd Party. The dynamic and articulate Nour worked tirelessly to build the party structures in several provinces. He also defied the regime's constraints that restricted the political activities of parties and their ability to engage the population. The Ghad also linked its program to the demands of the emerging pro-reform movements that called for amending the constitution and introducing fundamental changes to the power structures. The speedy emergence of the Ghad and Nour stirred up and revitalized the country's stagnant party life.

However, in January 2005, only three months after the party became legal and active, the regime arrested Nour on charges of forging powers of attorney to help found his party. Many believe the charges were politically motivated, aimed at ending Nour's career and putting checks on the growth of his party. A month later Mubarak announced his approval of amending Article 76 of the constitution so as to allow

the country to have multicandidate presidential elections for the first time. Nour continued with his defiance and declared from prison his intention to run for the presidency. The regime seemingly bowed to internal and external pressures and released Nour on bail in March. Still not convicted, Nour was able to run against the president. Throughout his campaign, he focused on his bitter tragedy and intensified his criticism of the regime. He challenged Mubarak to an hour-long televised debate to expose the regime's corruption and present his program. Nour's strongest point in his presidential campaign was his plan. If he won, he promised to act as an interim president for two years, during which major institutional reforms would take place, a new constitution would be written to establish a new democratic system, and new free parliamentary and presidential elections would be held. Out of 10 presidential hopefuls, Nour came second after Mubarak, capturing almost 8% of the votes. Three months later, Nour was arrested again, tried, and sentenced to five years in jail. If Nour's pending appeal is rejected by the Cassation Court, his political career will be adversely affected as he will become politically disenfranchised. Following Nour's incarceration, the party experienced a devastating split that has affected its momentum and the promise it had generated.

The case of the Ghad Party reveals the regime's low level of toleration of serious challengers to its stranglehold on power, regardless of whether its political rivals adhere to an Islamic ideology or a liberal one. It also exposes the various repressive tactics that the regime uses to undermine the status of legal parties. With his dynamic personality, ambitions to institutionalize his party, willingness to defy the set limits for political action, and ability to reach to the public, Nour presented a threat not necessarily to Mubarak, but more seriously to his son Gamal, who is practically leading the state party and is being groomed to become the next president. The Ghad proposed a liberal program similar to that of the governing NDP. The youthful Nour was of the same generation as Gamal and the group associated with him, but he was by far more charismatic and resourceful. Had the Ghad been allowed to fulfill its promising growth, Nour could probably have become a serious contender for power in the 2011 presidential elections. The regime used all the means at hand to preempt this possibility. When the usual legal constraints did not seem to work, it removed Nour from the scene and directly intervened to break up his party. The Ghad and Nour have raised the ceiling for opposition, escalated the confrontation with the regime, and invited the regime's wrath.

#### **The Wasat Party: A Civic Party with an Islamic Framework**

The origins of the Wasat date to the mid-1990s, when a group of young members of the MB split because of differences in orientations

and in protest to internal organizational rigidity within the movement. They formed a party and applied three times, in 1996, 1998, and 2004, to the regime-dominated Party Formation Committee. Each time, the party's request was denied. The founders pursued their case through the judicial channels, which have also repeatedly denied them recognition. The standard reason was that the party's program is not distinguished from those of already existing political parties. The significance of the Wasat Party lies in its attempt to form a civic party with a mainstream Islamic orientation. It is distinguished from the MB as it separates political functions and religious proselytizing (*da'wa*).

In fact, the Wasat's program does present a new orientation. It is a civic political party with an Islamic reference that attempts to appeal to broad segments of the Egyptian population. It presents Islam as a cultural framework that can assimilate the religious aspirations of Muslim Egyptians and the natural cultural affiliations of the country's Copts. (In fact, several founding members of the party were Copts.) According to its program, the party's vision of Islam is based on three fundamental pillars: citizenship that provides equal rights for Muslims and non-Muslims; the right of all citizens to assume all positions; and coexistence with other cultures on the basis of respect of cultural specificities—justice and equality, interdependence, and mutual interests. The Wasat has reconfirmed its unequivocal commitment to peaceful and legal change and to the fundamental democratic principles: the sovereignty of the people; separation of powers; transfer of power; citizenship; freedom of belief; political and intellectual pluralism; full equality between men and women; freedom of expression; and respect of human rights. The Wasat also seeks through democratic means to implement the principles of the Shari'a, through a selective and modernist process that while achieving the objective of the Shari'a would lead to the development and progress of society.<sup>20</sup> In terms of organizational structures and popularity, the Wasat is not a match for the MB. It is still a nascent and evolving entity, but with a strong potential. The Wasat leadership is young, active, and articulate. It has established good ties with the existing political forces and managed to present a moderate and programmatic Islamic orientation.

#### **The Al-Karama Party**

The Karama (Dignity) Party is an offshoot of the officially recognized Nasserite Party. As in the case of the Wasat, a younger generation under the leadership of Hamdeen Sabbahy split from the Nasserite Party in protest to the management style and orientation of the party's older leaders. They established al-Karama Party and sought official recognition in 2004. The regime has repeatedly denied the party official approval. The party publishes a weekly newspaper and its leader, Sabbahy, managed to win

a seat in the 2005 parliamentary elections. Although the extent of the popularity of al-Karama is not exactly known, the party represents a trend—Nasserite, socialist, and Arab nationalist—that has some appeal in society. Its emphasis on social justice, independent development, and the rights of the workers and poorer classes would certainly attract segments in society that have been adversely affected by the structural adjustment that has been taking place in Egypt.

## CONCLUSIONS

At transitional junctures in the move from authoritarianism, political parties are essential agents for democratic change. Civil society organizations and spontaneous protest movements are quite significant in this process but are not enough to single handedly challenge a regime's power. Parties are more equipped for aggregating demands, structuring votes, and coming to power. However, in Egypt the legal political parties are weak, divided, and ineffective. The weakness of party life is a reflection of a wider structural problem and of the authoritarian dynamics that control the political process. Initially, the country had a weak legacy of party life, characterized by the continued dominance of the executive branch, polarization between dominant parties and weak ones (the Wafd versus the minority parties and currently the NDP versus the weak parties), and a low level of institutionalized party structures. Party life deteriorated even further under the single-party regime that forced people's conformity and mobilization at the expense of their effective political participation in the political process. The single-party system marginalized the role of the parliament, suppressed pluralism and dissent, and eroded people's confidence in party life.

Sadat allowed a multiparty system to emerge in the mid-1970s. He adopted political pluralism as part of the process of de-Nasserization, building a new support base and legitimacy and ensuring the support of the West. Sadat envisioned a loyal, marginal, and controlled opposition that would showcase Egypt's new "democratic" system. He therefore developed restrictive legal frameworks to ensure that the opposition would not get out of line. When the opposition became critical of some of his policies, he applied the "claws" of democracy, as he used to say, to the feeble bodies of the newly emerging political parties. Sadat's formative phase of political pluralism was in fact a "deforming" one that stifled party life and limited the growth and effectiveness of the legal opposition. It has had far reaching consequences on Egypt's party dynamics.

The same legal constraints are still in place and continue to stifle party life under Mubarak, who has added restrictions for civil society organizations, syndicates, and the press. A quick look at the distribution of power within the state structures reveals the limited avenues available

for the legal opposition. Mubarak heads the executive and at the same time he is the head of the ruling party, the NDP. His son Gamal practically controls the NDP. The current cabinet is dominated by the NDP. Also, the NDP is in control of the parliament. Despite all the talk about pluralism and the increase in the number of parties, Mubarak has maintained the hegemony of the ruling NDP over party life. This is expected to continue as the NDP is the only vehicle through which his son can come to power, provided that he secures the approval of the military, which has been traditionally the only vehicle for coming to power and continues to safeguard the post-1952 regimes. While keeping the opposition parties weak and marginal, Mubarak is also keen on keeping the multiparty system alive. Its existence legalizes the authoritarian nature of his regime and is equally necessary to legalize the succession process.

The political parties themselves are also to be blamed for their weak state. The legal opposition has consented to take part in a pluralistic experience that has not been properly institutionalized and has been subject to clear manipulations. They perform the roles the regime expects from them in return for securing its patronage or avoiding its wrath. They have also failed to institutionalize their party structures, follow internal democratic procedures, attract and train young leadership, and cooperate with one another. Their moment of truth came in 2004 and 2005, when spontaneous pro-reform movements emerged as alternative avenues for articulation and protest.

The alternative political forces, officially unrecognized, reveal further indications of the weakness of the legal opposition. They have an actual presence in society, some level of support, and enjoy credibility, as they have not been the product of regime patronage. They include actors with different ideological orientations: the MB, the liberal Ghad, centrist Wasat, and the pan-Arab Karama. Because these groups represent genuine political orientations in society and are consequently equipped to jump start serious multiparty politics, the regime has consistently denied them legal recognition. The only one that escaped the legal constraints, the Ghad, became an exemplar of the regime's ability to bring a serious contender to a quick demise and still maintain a superficial pluralism.

At present, the status of party life in Egypt is not conducive to promoting a genuine democracy. True democracy requires effective pluralism, which can only thrive in a free environment. Both are clearly lacking. The legalized political parties have accepted the regime's cooptation and have given up their basic roles as a serious opposition to an authoritarian regime and as vehicles for popular participation, recruitment of new cadres, structuring votes, and promoting change. The regime has succeeded in marginalizing and when necessary crushing the alternative political forces. This apparent failure of the political parties prolongs the life of authoritarianism and sheds serious doubts on the future of democracy in Egypt.

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## CHAPTER 2

# The Lebanese Partisan Experience and Its Impact on Democracy

*Antoine Nasri Messarra*

## INTRODUCTION

To many Arabs, the Lebanese partisan experience is synonymous with war, disintegration, and disunity. In fact, however, since as far back as the 1920s, political parties in Lebanon have promoted the concepts of democracy, liberation, human rights, nationalism, socialism, and pan-Arabism. It is not the parties that caused the multinational and regional wars that were waged on Lebanese soil between 1975 and 1990 and in July 2006, but rather the fact that the Lebanese army had been effectively paralyzed by regional pressures. When the army breaks down, society as a whole becomes vulnerable. The result in Lebanon was that the political parties became the executors and victims of war simultaneously. Lebanon epitomizes all issues of concern to the Arab world, issues that have been a source of calamity for Lebanon. Maintaining and developing a functioning party system capable of managing diversity democratically has been all but impossible in recent years. Despite the fact that the years of warfare have generated a new readiness on the part of many to establish the rule of law and rationality, there are still confession-based forces affiliated with external powers that are at the same time dependent and domineering. These forces have detached themselves from whatever remains of their grass-roots base, becoming increasingly dependent on support from external actors. This chapter will explore the institutional structures that govern the development and operation of political parties, discuss the historical events that have shaped that development, and then conclude with a discussion of the future of democracy and political parties in Lebanon.