

Authoritarian Elections and Elite Management: Theory and Evidence from Egypt

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Prepared for delivery at the Princeton University
Conference on Dictatorships, April 2008

Abstract

This paper considers how authoritarian regimes use competitive parliamentary elections as a tool for elite management. In particular, I argue that parliamentary elections in Egypt serve as the regime's most important device for the distribution of rents and promotions to important groups within Egypt's politically influential classes including family heads, businessmen, and party apparatchik. For party professionals, ability to limit opposition voteshare serves as a signal of competence and loyalty to the regime leadership and party officials maintain positions of influence on this basis. For members of Egypt's politically-influential upper class, parliamentary elections work as a kind of market mechanism for the selection of those individuals who will be allowed to extract state rents via both legitimate and illegitimate channels.

1 Introduction

The longstanding conventional wisdom regarding why authoritarian regimes establish parties, hold elections, and convene legislatures is that these institutions convey an aura of legitimacy, both domestically and to the outside world. From a domestic perspective, most autocrats enjoy the power and institutional capacity to impose their policy preferences in an autonomous manner. Nevertheless, it is often preferable to make changes under the cover of formal legislative institutions with ruling parties composing a parliamentary majority. In fact, in many authoritarian regimes there is surprising attention paid to issues of procedural integrity, even when passing the most draconian and undemocratic of laws. The existence of elections and parliaments also conveys a certain degree of legitimacy to the outside world. Levitsky and Way argue that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a period of Western liberal hegemony began and that the costs associated with the “maintenance of full-scale authoritarian institutions” rose considerably (2003). Authoritarians, it seems, would benefit from the establishment of institutions that appeared to be democratic to reap the benefits associated with liberalization. These benefits might come from the US or Europe offering aid or preferential trading arrangements in exchange for liberalization, or from international financial institutions offering cut-rate loans. A number of scholarly works rest on the assumption or actively promote the idea that elections have the potential to confer legitimacy to authoritarian and “transitioning” regimes in Africa (Moehler 2005, Mozaffar 2002), Central Asia (Schatz 2006), China (Heberer 2006), and more generally (Schedler 2002).

My contention is that the desire to be seen as legitimate matters in authoritarian regimes but that this relatively well-documented reason for convoking elections is not the only incentive facing authoritarian rulers. In other words, the quest for legitimacy is only half the story. The perhaps more compelling explanation involves the role of elections in managing the domestic political elite upon whom the authoritarian relies for regime stability. I argue that competitive parliamentary elections in Egypt serve as the regime’s most important device for the distribution of rents and promotions to important groups within Egypt’s politically influential classes including family heads, businessmen, and party apparatchik. For party cohort, ability to limit opposition voteshare serves as a signal of competence and loyalty to regime leadership and party officials are promoted and demoted on this basis. For members of Egypt’s politically-influential upper class parliamentary elections work as a kind of market mechanism for the selection of those individuals who will be allowed to extract state rents in the future. In addition to the quasi-legitimate benefits of holding office, elections also serve as a type of auction for the right to parliamentary immunity for members of this elite class. Under the cover of parliamentary immunity, individuals who are able to win office have the ability to engage in corruption with little fear of prosecution. I argue that economic liberalization has increased the perceived or real value of holding a parliamentary seat over time and I find that parliamentary incumbency rates reflect this trend.

2 Theoretical Considerations

This paper builds on the important work of Geddes who has argued that dictators spend scarce resources on parties and elections — despite the risks — because these institutions help to solve intra-regime conflict that would otherwise destabilize the country (2005). As a result, parties and elections are a central part of a survival strategy (Geddes 2005; Magaloni 2006). Geddes primarily emphasizes the use of parties and elections as a counterbalance to the military or factions within the military. While I concur with her general conclusion about the use of elections for solving intra-regime conflict, my research focuses on the importance of elections as a mechanism for distributing rents, access to rents, and promotions among members of the elite and the party cadre rather than the use of parties and elections as a balance to the military. In addition, my argument is distinct from that of Brownlee (2007) who finds that it is effective *parties*, not elections, that matter for solving intra-elite conflict.¹ While parties may be important venues for negotiating the role of elites, it is the contention of this paper that the electoral process *itself* serves as the key mechanism for containing intra-elite competition via the ability of elections to aid in the distribution of both rents and coveted positions within the regime.

This paper deals with the general question of how to allocate resources across the set of individuals who, collectively, may be considered the “selectorate” for the existing regime in Egypt;² this class of individuals includes influential family heads, businessmen elite, and senior bureaucratic appointees.³ There are a number of strategies by which an authoritarian regime might distribute resources to its broad coalition of supporters. For example, Stone (2007) argues that properly-constituted lotteries are a uniquely just way to allocate certain benefits and burdens. While distribution of rents by lottery seems like an unlikely strategy for an authoritarian ruler, the question of how to distribute scarce goods across a relatively large set of individuals who each has a quasi-legitimate claim on the regime requires careful consideration. At first blush it may seem odd to discuss distributive or allocative “justice” in the context of dividing the spoils of an authoritarian regime; yet from the perspective of political entrepreneurs operating in this environment, maintaining norms of fairness are of surprising importance. As members of the elite pursue their political careers, conflict over access to state resources has the potential to destroy the incumbent’s coalition of support.⁴

¹One source of evidence for Brownlee’s theory is a statistical finding that suggests it is parties, not elections that contributes to the longevity of authoritarian regimes. The number of authoritarian regimes that have parties without elections is relatively small, however, opening up some question about one’s ability to make statistical inferences about the influence of elections independent of parties.

²The term selectorate refers to the subset of individuals within the population that in principle has control over the choice of leadership (Buono de Mesquita et al. 2003). It is possible to argue that in Egypt, the “winning coalition” represents a fairly large proportion of the selectorate.

³An additional group with considerable influence is the leadership of the Egyptian military. I discuss this group more explicitly in section 5.2 of this paper.

⁴Previous research has stressed the extent to which authoritarian regimes are only as strong as the

As such, dictators establish credible powersharing arrangements with their “loyal friends” and parties and elections help serve this role (Boix and Svulik 2007; Magaloni 2008). Magaloni (2008) takes a functionalist view of authoritarian parties and argues that both parties and elections mitigate the commitment problem that exists between the dictator and his ruling coalition; autocracies with parties and elections, then, are more stable because of their superior ability to establish credible powersharing deals where these institutions serve as a kind of contract between the dictator and his coalition.⁵ This is consistent with Weingast’s argument that “appropriately specified political institutions are the principal way in which states create credible limits on their own authority” (1993, 288) as well as Haber’s argument that the creation of a property rights system is key for stability in an autocratic regime (2006). Can a system of property rights be so broadly construed as to include the right to patronage distributed via competitive elections to parliament? While a strict definition of property rights may not be applicable, a more broad conceptualization of the concept to include intangibles like the right to a monopoly in a particular area may be relevant. Haber (2006) writes that authoritarians often protect the right to “jobs, loans from government-run banks, the opportunity to receive bribes and kickbacks, selective allocation of trade protection, and tax preferences” all under the broad rubric of property rights (Haber 2006). Crony capitalism — a system in which those close to the political authorities receive favors that have large economic value — becomes a solution to a political problem by allowing the government to “guarantee a subset of asset holders that their property rights will be protected” (Haber 2002, xii-xiv). Haber describes this as an “implicit contract between government and the privileged asset holders” (Haber 2002, xv).⁶

Parties and elections, then, can serve as a contract between an autocrat and his coalition of elite supporters via credible powersharing arrangements, or other institutions, that are negotiated over rights to intangible, often economic, forms of property. In addition to the importance of elections as an institution, this paper also builds on an emerging literature which argues that elections are important sources of information. Magaloni (2006) makes two important contributions to this literature. Referring to the PRI’s overwhelming

elite coalition that supports them. O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986) write that important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself set off the transition process. In this paper, I focus primarily on the elite coalitions though in other work I make the explicit connection between these elite political entrepreneurs and the general populace. See Blaydes 2006c for details on the way political entrepreneurs induce voter turnout.

⁵Boix and Svulik (2007) make a slightly different point; they argue that legislatures provide the forum within which notables exchange information and elections serve as a signal of the influence of individual notables. There is some question regarding the extent to which notables a) need a separate forum within which to share information as they may already have overlapping social networks and b) why a public forum, like a legislature, would be preferable to private fora for communication between notables.

⁶Haber, Razo, and Maurer (2003) describe how a dictator and political entrepreneurs can maintain a stable authoritarian regime by creating a property rights system that is based on the generation and distribution of economic rents; third-party enforcement is critical to maintaining this equilibrium. In the Egyptian case, both the domestic coalitional and international reputation costs associated with shutting down or heavily-rigging elections are high and becoming higher as the benefits from parliamentary membership increase.

electoral victories in Mexico, Magaloni argues that elections disseminate information about the regime's strength which discourages defections from the hegemonic party. In order to achieve huge margins of victory, the PRI had to produce high turnout as well as high levels of support, even though this process was quite costly.⁷ A second informational aspect to the Magaloni narrative involves the use of elections to provide information about supporters and opponents of the regime (2006). Using information about the geographic distribution of dissent, the PRI in Mexico was able to reward supporters with access to government funds as well as to punish defectors. Magaloni also writes that "elections are employed as means to distribute power among lower-level politicians. Autocratic regimes reward with office those politicians who prove most capable in mobilizing citizens to the party's rallies, getting voters to the polls, and preventing social turmoil in their districts" (2006, 8). In this paper, I argue that elections serve a very similar purpose in Egypt where they reveal information about the competence and loyalty of both bureaucratic officials and party cadre, providing the authoritarian leadership with what is perceived as a fairly even-handed way to make decisions about appointments.

To summarize, the primary argument of this paper is that the authoritarian regime in Egypt uses the highly competitive electoral market as an indirect mechanism for the allocation of rents or access to rents — both relatively scarce resources — to members of Egypt's broad elite coalition. This argument complements but is distinct from the findings put forth by Lust-Okar (2006) who primarily focuses on the distributive benefits of elections from the non-elite side. She argues that authoritarian elections help to stabilize the regime in Jordan by providing an important arena of competition over access to state resources for *citizens* that seek jobs or other privileges from the state sector (2006, 459). Individual voters cast their ballots for candidates whom they think can afford them *wāṣṭa*, or mediation, in their pursuit of receiving goods from the state (Lust-Okar 2006).

In Egypt there exist a series of reinforcing political and economic ties between the regime and the elite. Political entrepreneurs can seek one of two paths to personal enrichment. By running for parliament, members of the regime's broad coalition have a chance to bid for access to rents and opportunities for graft via elected office. Members of the elite coalition that operate in bureaucratic or party channels seek political appointment to high-level posi-

⁷This theory makes particular sense in the Mexican setting where the electoral contest of interest was the presidential race. Since no president could serve more than one six-year term, the PRI was forced to choose a new candidate every election cycle. Political entrepreneurs interested in someday competing for high office would recognize the invincibility of the PRI and choose not to defect. While the idea is broadly applicable to a wide variety of cases, its focus on the dynamics of presidential elections makes this aspect of the theory less relevant for authoritarian countries with competitive parliamentary but not presidential elections. For example, multi-candidate presidential elections were not introduced in Egypt until 2005 although competitive parliamentary elections were in place for a much longer period. Do supermajority victories on the part of the hegemonic party deter challengers and defections at the parliamentary level? Not in Egypt where both hegemonic party defectors and independent candidates associated with the Muslim Brotherhood fare well in parliamentary contests.

tions that afford them influence and opportunities for rents. Using elections as the primary mechanism distributing these opportunities provides two important benefits to the regime. First, competitive markets, including electoral markets, provide information; McMillan (ND) writes “well-functioning markets remove the need, in other words, for the government to pick winners.” This is particularly important in an authoritarian setting where making poor choices about these issues has particularly high stakes. Second, performance in elections provides a clear and public pattern of merit that is rewarded. Under a system of competitive electoral competition, all potential political entrepreneurs have a chance to bid for public office.⁸ Bureaucrats and party cadre who can prove both their competence and loyalty are able to compete for positions. Using election results and performance as a criterion for rent access is perceived as largely impartial.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 3 provides offers historical background on parliamentary elections in Egypt and the reasons why these elections were put into place originally under Sadat. In Section 4, I consider how elections have come to serve as a mechanism for the distribution of scarce resources during the Mubarak era. Section 5 discusses the main alternative hypotheses to the one that I have put forth in the context of authoritarianism in Egypt. A final section concludes.

3 Historical Background

Although elections took place in Egypt beginning in the late 1800s, historians have identified two significant periods of multi-party politics in the country (Beattie 2000). The first was following the promulgation of the 1923 constitution after the British declared an end to the protectorate and Egypt became an independent state.⁹ The second is the period which began in 1977 under Sadat and continues up until today. The following section considers the conditions under which multiparty politics were first introduced under Sadat. After that I describe the reasons why Mubarak continued to hold multiparty parliamentary elections following Sadat’s assassination.

3.1 Sadat and the Introduction of Multiparty Elections

Early in 1976, then-President Anwar Sadat convened a committee to discuss political reform; by March 1976 three platforms — which eventually became parties — were allowed to emerge from this discussion that formed the basis for competitive multipartyism in Egypt. Importantly, independent candidacy was also allowed, creating opportunities for individuals

⁸I use the term “bid” here consciously as elections are generally won by the individuals who are able buy the largest number of votes.

⁹Egyptian political reformers, like National Democratic Party defector Ossama Al-Ghazali Harb, have described this period as a potential model for competitive party politics in Egypt in the future. Interview with Ossama Al-Ghazali Harb, May 2 2006.

without party affiliation to run for office. There exists only limited consensus in the previous literature regarding why Sadat chose to implement competitive multi-party parliamentary elections in 1976. Two primary lines of reasoning are put forward though most scholars acknowledge the influence of multiple factors in the decision. A first line of reasoning emphasizes domestic political considerations and Sadat's desire to accommodate conservative elite preferences for greater political expression. As Sadat sought to move beyond the leftist bases of support enjoyed by Nasser, he turned increasingly to politicians on the right — who supported a more liberal political environment — as the base of his support. A second line of reasoning focuses on external factors. Proponents of this theory argue that in order to effectively make the transition from the Soviet orbit of influence to becoming an ally of the US, Sadat introduced a more liberal political system.

When asked today about this period, Egyptian politicians and political analysts tend to emphasize the importance of external influences on the decision to hold multi-party elections, though they are quick to point out that external factors do not influence the political behavior of the president unless the president expects to receive some domestic “utility” from the decision.¹⁰ In other words, when external pressure is coupled with an opportunity to improve a domestic political situation policy change can occur. As a result external influence is subject to strict agenda control of the authoritarian regime.¹¹ Some western academics have also focused on foreign influences and Sadat's reorientation toward the West. McDermott writes that “Sadat had in mind a European and Western audience in this particular exercise...he was conscious of wanting to show the world that Israel did not have the monopoly of multi-party systems” (McDermott 1988, 109). Beattie has also argued that being in the American camp was critical to Sadat's wider plan (Beattie 2000, 88) and that “much of Sadat's motivation came from wishing to please the West” (Beattie 2000, 223).

The weight of historical studies of this decision by both Western and Egyptian scholars, however, tends to focus on important domestic considerations, particularly a desire to manage the ideological preferences of various elite actors and groups. In particular, Sadat was seen as courting right-leaning elements of society in an effort to balance leftist rivals for power. In 1974 Sadat introduced the open-door economic policy (*infitāh*), which empowered Egypt's bourgeoisie; Sadat viewed this group as a “friendly force” and accommodated their demands and offered them privileged access to power (Hinnebusch 1988, 226-9). This group of bureaucratic and private-sector elite offered the best source of strategic support for Sadat as he sought to consolidate power (Abdelrahman 2004, 197-98). The shift toward economic liberalization has been viewed as a benefit to the entrepreneurial class, signaling an end to Nasserism (El-Mikaway 1999, 30).

Cooper sees external and exogenous crises as precipitating Sadat's move toward liberalization but the impetus for liberalization as largely domestic. He writes, “In brief, the

¹⁰Interviews with Moheb Zaki, Assistant Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center, April 30 2006; Gehad Auda, NDP Media Committee, May 1 2006; Mohammed Batran, former member of Parliament, May 1 2006.

¹¹See Blaydes 2006b for more details on this argument.

pressure on the regime and the particular way that interests were juxtaposed, especially in the tension-filled months after the June 1967 defeat and the death of Nasser in September 1970, pushed toward liberalization” (1982, 134). The goal, therefore, was to build consensus around specific policy objectives (Cooper 1982, 132). Tucker argues that political liberalization served as a substitute for the failures of *infitāh*; since Sadat was not able to improve the material condition of most Egyptians, he instead focused on defeating Nasser’s totalitarianism (Tucker 1978). Waterbury emphasized the informational aspects of holding elections. He writes that Sadat was willing to sacrifice some of the control that obsessed Nasser in order to “see more clearly the forces that warranted control” (1978, 354).

Hinnebusch provides one of the most comprehensive looks at this subject. He argues that the ideological center of gravity of the party elite had moved to the right, though that these conservative tendencies were largely based on pragmatic rather than purely programmatic concerns (1988, 161; 1988, 120-1). Many of these individuals represented the business elite. He writes that this group sought,

“...enough political liberalization to protect itself from the arbitrary power of the ruler and allow it greater freedom of political expression, and that Sadat sought to accommodate it; but both feared that excessive liberalization might result in the erosion of authority or the mobilization by counter-elites of a mass challenge to the policies they favored. Hence they wanted a strictly limited liberalization confined to elite levels which would not result in the pluralization of the mass political arena” (Hinnebusch 1988, 119).

In addition to the desire to accommodate this group at the expense of the masses, Hinnebusch also acknowledges the importance of the external environment. He writes that Egypt needed to cultivate Western goodwill at this time, both to ease budgetary distress as well as to gain Western support for his foreign policy agenda (Hinnebusch 1988, 135). Multiple objectives, therefore, were met with the plan to open up the system of multiparty competition at the parliamentary level; this included the desire to “differentiate his regime from Nasser’s, satisfy participatory pressures, win support from liberal elements of the bourgeoisie, please the Americans on whom his diplomatic initiative depended and encourage the economic liberalization he was launching” (Hinnebusch 1988, 158-9). Others, like Fahmy, have also emphasized both the importance of seeking funds from the US as well as Sadat’s desire to represent the interests of the bourgeoisie as the explanation for the introduction of multipartyism (2002, 63-4).

The elections, therefore, were introduced during a time when there still existed fairly clear ideological distinctions between two important factions of Egypt’s political elite, though these ideological differences may have been strongly motivated by pragmatic (rather than programmatic) concerns. The move toward elections was seen as a shift in favor of right-leaning and business-oriented elements of this political class. It is this class, in fact, that continues to dominate Egyptian elite today. While the importance of external factors —

particularly the desire to court the West — cannot be ignored, the decision to hold elections was rooted, at least to some extent, in a desire to manage the country’s political elite. In the following section, I argue that once the right-leaning business elite came to enjoy a dominant position, the nature of intra-elite conflict became increasingly focused on the distribution of resources (and access to resources) within a single class of entrepreneurial elite and that this tendency was exacerbated by the increased opportunities for private-wealth accumulation that accompanied structural adjustment.

3.2 Elections in the Mubarak Era

Minimal policy change was evident following the assassination of Sadat (Dawisha and Zartman 1988). Hinnebusch describes the Mubarak era as one of continuity during which the initiatives introduced by Sadat “crystallized”; the most important of these legacies included the open-door economic policy and subsequent growth of a new bourgeoisie as well as the massive dependence on the US (1988, 298). Part of this legacy included the multi-party parliamentary elections that Sadat first introduced. Early on, Mubarak signaled some continued commitment to pluralism; opposition candidates competing in two by-elections held in the early 1980s conceded that the elections were run fairly (McDermott 1988, 77). Political elite on the right intensified their demands for pluralism during this period (El-Mikaway 1999, 42). The Wafd won a lawsuit in 1983 allowing the party to contest the 1984 election; together in coalition with the Muslim Brothers the Wafd/MB alliance won 58 seats and 15 percent of the total vote.¹² In fact, Ayubi has suggested that the “real” Mubarak era began in 1984 with this hotly contested parliamentary election (1989, 13), which was considered by many to have been fairly-run (McDermott 1988, 77). Why did Mubarak continue the multi-party politics experiment and even take it further by allowing more intense forms of contestation than had been permitted under Sadat?

Springborg posits a number of possible hypotheses to this question without committing fully to a particular answer (Springborg 1989, 135-7). First, he suggests that perhaps the president lacked the power to reverse the process that Sadat began of deconstructing Nasser’s political legacy. A second explanation is that Mubarak implemented greater political pluralism as a counterweight to tightening economic conditions where pluralism would serve as a political safety valve for economic discontent. While Springborg does not offer an unequivocal answer his strongest support seems to be behind the theory that Mubarak inherited an NDP that served primarily as a vehicle for the interests of the Sadatist and business-oriented elements (1989, 157) and that this group may have been easy to mobilize since it would not involve expanding the base of the party. The 1984 elections eliminated the left and gave the regime an opposition from the right (Zartman 1988, 76). Over time, it would be this

¹²The Wafd was formally reintroduced in 1978 but disbanded shortly thereafter when Sadat issued an internal security law barring anyone who had held a ministerial position before 1952 from participating in politics. This law was overturned in 1983 by Egyptian courts (Goldschmidt and Johnston 2004, 415).

challenge from first an alliance of the Wafd and Muslim Brotherhood, and increasingly from just the Muslim Brotherhood, that would become the relevant, ideological split in the elite. The business-oriented elite came to be the base of the Mubarak regime and keeping this class of individuals in tacit alliance with the authoritarian leadership became the key to continued stability.

My argument in this and the following sections is that following Sadat's decision to support right-leaning elements of the party in the 1970s, that these business-oriented elements of society came to dominate the political elite in Egypt and to a large extent still dominate Egypt today. In the words of one Egyptian commentator, what emerged was a "natural alliance between the regime and the bourgeoisie."¹³ During the Mubarak era, therefore, the regime's focus was not on whether elections would occur but rather on the various tools and tactics the regime could employ to manage those elections. In fact, Soliman writes that the great change was seen in terms of the mechanisms for controlling elections not over the question of whether or not elections would be held (2006). An authoritarian leadership with surprisingly free and fair competitive parliamentary elections, therefore, has turned out to be a remarkably stable formulation. This is in contrast to arguments by Huntington (1991) and others who have written that liberalized authoritarianism is not a stable equilibrium. Elections serve a number of important functions that are primarily related to the issue of elite management, regarding both office seekers as well as party apparatchik. In the following section, I develop a functional logic of authoritarian elections in Egypt that focuses on elite management.

4 Managing Distributive Expectations via Elections

Why do political entrepreneurs in Egypt spend huge sums of money to run for parliamentary seats in a legislature that does not make policy? If selection into parliament was made purely by appointment, surely there would be no need for candidates to contest these elections so hotly. In Egypt, elections are highly contested by multiple candidates from both within and outside of the hegemonic party. While electoral manipulation takes place in a limited number of cases (usually aimed against the opposition Muslim Brotherhood), the vast majority of the 444 electoral contests are genuinely competitive.¹⁴ In this section, I argue that parliamentary elections in Egypt provide a myriad of functions for the authoritarian regime related to the management of political elite. Most importantly, elections allow the regime to *manage distributive expectations* for Egypt's political elites, particularly with regard to the distribution of power, promotions, rents, access to state resources, and immunity from criminal prosecution for corrupt practices. In this way, elections provide a well-structured

¹³Interview with Moheb Zaki, Assistant Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center, May 23 2007.

¹⁴Lust-Okar finds a similar pattern in Jordan and writes that these Jordanian elections "are not generally manipulated" (2006, 458).

environment for elite competition and preempt more serious conflict between individuals and groups. At the same time, elections allow the authoritarian leadership to push-off some of the costs of political mobilization onto this elite class.¹⁵ Elections, therefore, contribute to the health of an authoritarian regime in a variety of ways beyond conventional expectations.

4.1 Distributing Access to State Rents

The political elite in Egypt can be divided into a number of categories. The most significant grouping is the set of influential family heads and businessmen that seek parliamentary seats. The categories of family head and businessman are not mutually exclusive (in fact almost all elite Egyptians have extensive business dealings) and these individuals are the present day successors to the entrepreneurial Sadatists of the 1970s. They compete vigorously for the chance to serve in parliament and spend millions of Egyptian pounds on expensive election campaigns, leading one commentator to suggest that there is a “flourishing electoral economy” in Egypt where citizens witness a “war of the wallets” at ballot time (Boutaleb 2002). In 2000, average candidates spent between 3-5 million LE just buying votes (Boutaleb 2002), with the cost of candidacy rising even higher in 2005. It is rumored that in 2005 a wealth hotelier in Cairo spent over 20 million LE on the day of the parliamentary election in her district alone.¹⁶ Local press reports suggest that candidates in other district spent upwards of 10 million LE on their campaigns.¹⁷

So why do candidates go to such lengths to secure seats in a parliament that is known to be little more than a rubber stamp for the prerogatives of the authoritarian regime? With highly circumscribed policy influence, it seems irrational that candidates would expend such effort and resources to win in these elections. In fact, expensive campaigns are not in fact irrational at all given the use elections in Egypt as a sorting mechanism for the distribution of resources and access to state largesse. From the perspective of the authoritarian leadership, there is a strong need for a distributional mechanism by which to provide members of the political elite with continued “payment” in exchange for their support. What types of arrangements could exist? One strategy might be to appoint individuals to parliament or some other body and distribute benefits on this basis. This strategy, however, has a potential downside. Those that are excluded from the distribution of spoils may become embittered and seek strategies for the overthrow of the leadership. And on what basis would elite rotate in such a system? By distributing access to state resources in what is perceived to be a fairly free and competitive basis, disgruntled individuals have little recourse or basis for complaint. In a recent interview, NDP heavyweight Fathi Sorour characterized parliamentary elections

¹⁵See Blaydes 2006a for a discussion of how electoral budget cycles and vote buying surrounding elections serve as a focal point for the redistribution of benefits to the citizenry.

¹⁶In 2005, the \$US-LE exchange rate was approximately 6:1.

¹⁷Al-Ghad November 23 2005

in Egypt as survival of the fittest.¹⁸ Those that spend the most on campaigning, therefore, are the ones that are likely to prevail. The party does not significantly finance these election campaigns and very often candidates are competing against independents from within their own parties making ideological considerations less relevant.¹⁹

What kinds of benefits can one expect as a result of holding office? Individuals seeking material advancement in Egypt remain highly dependent on state channels for access to privilege; in addition, business success can be best safeguarded by developing strong ties to the state (2004, 81-2). A position in parliament provides numerous opportunities for money-making and influence (though not in a way related to state policy, *per se*). Parliamentarians capture state resources through both authorized and informal channels. Holding a seat in parliament provides potential opportunities to barter or sell appointments and jobs. Parliamentarians are often able to expedite the issuing of permits, allowing them to expand their businesses. Parliamentarians are sometimes bribed for their influence or access to ministers who can provide services to districts. Wurzel writes that political entrepreneurs enter parliament to do their own deals, with no systematic interest in reform (2004, 125). A recent study establishes one way that politicians benefit from their privileged access in a developing country context. Using loan-level data of 90,000 firms in Pakistan (representing the entire universe of corporate lending between 1996 and 2002), Khwaja and Mian (2005) find that politically-connected firms receive preferential treatment in access to government loans. The more powerful and successful a politician, for example being a parliamentarian or member of the ruling party, increases the ability of the individual to influence the banks. In Egypt, similarly loans without interest or collateral are reported to have been negotiated between bank officials and parliamentarians (Kienle 2004, 288).

In addition to these — what I would describe as “typical” — avenues of influence and benefit, parliamentarians also use immunity granted to officeholders for more nefarious purposes. As a result, it is widely believed that more important than the legal or quasi-legal benefits of holding a parliamentary seat are the myriad of illegitimate opportunities available to parliamentarians as a result of their protection from prosecution for corruption. Norms establishing unusually high guarantees of parliamentary immunity in Egypt, therefore, are a major motivation for legislative office seeking.²⁰ While the formal institution of parlia-

¹⁸Al-Masry Al-Youm March 24 2007

¹⁹See Blaydes and El-Tarouty (forthcoming) for more details on the impact of intra-party competition on election campaigns in Egypt.

²⁰In countries influenced by the British legal tradition, parliamentarians are only protected for acts related to legislative activity. For example, a legislator would be protected from accusations of slander and libel for speeches made on the floor while discussing legislation. Countries like Egypt that have taken the French system as a basis for their constitution, offer parliamentarians even more protection than is afforded to former commonwealth countries. In addition to protection from libel charges, for parliamentarians in these systems, there are often severe restrictions regarding the ability of the police to arrest, detain, or otherwise charge them for crimes. In order for prosecution against a parliamentarian to proceed, a court or often the parliament itself has to lift immunity before any action can be taken (Wigley 2003).

mentary immunity — or the granting of protection from prosecution for their actions as parliamentarians — has historically been used to protect legislators from civil actions for libel or defamation, the authoritarian leadership has encouraged informal norms to emerge that allow parliamentarians to engage in corrupt and illegal activities with impunity.²¹

The abuses of immunity undertaken by parliamentarians include everything from relatively minor infractions to large-scale fraud and embezzlement rings. In El-Karanshawy's ethnographic account of village politics, he writes that the candidate that won the 1987 election in the village under study was one of the biggest drug dealers the area had ever known (1997). Deputies have been accused of illegally importing 1700 kg of the drug Viagra.²² Deputies have been found illegally selling permits for the pilgrimage to Mecca and bouncing thousands of dollars in checks.²³ In the governorate of Menoufiya, parliamentarians have been suspected of evading payment on the purchase of property, embezzlement, and other crimes.²⁴ In a particularly tragic case involving high-level corruption, over 1000 Egyptians perished in 2006 when a ferry boat owned by parliamentarian Mamdouh Ismail sank in the Red Sea while traveling between Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian coast. Subsequent reports on the causes of the disaster have suggested that negligence sank the vessel. Ismail was able to flee to Europe as a result of his parliamentary immunity.

Egyptian economic policy has made the offer of parliamentary immunity even more enticing over time. Egypt's implementation of an IMF-mandated privatization and economic liberalization program beginning in the late 1980s had a significant effect on the increasing influence of money and corruption in politics. Egypt's inability to finance its debt led to the introduction of an IMF structural adjustment program (SAP) which included among other things "a reduction in government spending, the gradual cutting of subsidies, privatization of the economy, a contraction of government intervention in the economy and a much greater reliance on market mechanisms" (Zaki 1995, 164). A half-hearted implementation of the IMF prescription, however, created the impression that economic liberalization — rather than creating growth for large segments of the population — was instead to blame for giving rise to a new wealthy and corrupt capitalist class (Zaki 1995, 166). Zaki writes,

"Running parallel with the government's successful achievements in its SAP [structural adjustment program] is a stream-flow of corrupt practices, (with) most stories implying the existence of interlocking interests between certain elements of big business, and certain members within the ruling circles" (Zaki 1998, 147).

Analyst Amr al-Shobky summarizes the events concisely. He argues that in the years

²¹Migdal, writing of Egypt, argues that "corruption tolerated by state leaders on the part of those they have co-opted can be a further source of political control" (220, 1988).

²²Al-Ahram Weekly March 16 - 22 2006

²³Vickie Langohr, Middle East Report, November 7 2000

²⁴Al-Ahram Weekly August 19 - 25 1999

following Sadat's decision to hold multi-party elections, parliamentarians came to play an important role in negotiating services and infrastructure improvements for their constituents, like roads, hospitals, schools, and helping people find jobs.²⁵ These deputies are often referred to as 'service deputies' (*nā'ib al-khadamāt* — singular). Al-Shobky writes that over time, however, parliamentarians found themselves less able to provide these services as ministers — who served as gatekeepers to public funds — became unwilling to make the same types of concessions as before.²⁶ While al-Shobky does not attribute this belt tightening to any particular factor, Zaki argues that it was the economic crisis and subsequent SAP that decreased the level of funds available for patronage activities (Zaki 1995, 229). Shobky writes,

“This situation was behind the emergence of a new pattern of parliament members who gained seats through direct vote buying rather than promises to provide services to the people. Thus an unprecedented process of vote buying appeared on the surface to reflect the absence of people's confidence in deputies with political discourse as well as those of services. Because voters were sure that they would not see candidates again, they preferred to directly sell their votes to those who can afford them. The third significant phenomenon was the dominant role of cash money, which came to substitute for the services that were usually offered to residents of many electoral constituencies.”²⁷

Increasingly, Egyptian scholars argue that electoral campaigns are extremely costly (Ouda et. al. 2002, 65). Economic estimates suggest that total candidate expenditure in the 2000 election was 10 billion LE compared to 4 billion LE in the 1995 election and that the number of businessmen doubled in parliament between 1995 and 2000 (Ouda et. al. 2002, 66). The price of a parliamentary seat is commensurate with the value that political elite expect to receive as a result of holding that seat. An increasingly liberalized economy combined with immunity from prosecution have actually increased the value of a parliamentary seat over time. The ability to engage in corruption under more open economic conditions is more valuable to individual candidates than the selling or trading of services captured through informal influence over the state sector.

Elections are perceived as a relatively fair and even-handed way for distributing these sought-after benefits and opportunities. Individuals that lose any particular election always have a chance to gather their resources and mount a campaign in the future. This means that the Egyptian political elite see their interaction with the authoritarian leadership as an iterated game; there is little incentive to dismantle a system today that could offer you important opportunities tomorrow. As a result, Egyptian politicians tend to have a very

²⁵Amr al-Shobky, “Legislative Elections in Egypt: Indicators and Consequences,” Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Issue 46, December 2005

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

Table 1: *Reelection Rates for Recent Egyptian Elections (author's calculation)*

Election Year	Percent of Reelected Parliamentarians
1987	40%
1990	21%
1995	42%
2000	26%
2005	19%

long-time horizon with regard to their political futures; many often mount successful comebacks after being out of office for a number of years.

In addition, as the nature of the Egyptian economy has changed over time, the tacit bargain between political elite and the regime has changed as well. While parliamentarians used to have a greater “service” role in their districts, increasingly they are rewarded with opportunities for graft rather than with the ability to distribute services or jobs. In a sense, this has made the value of a parliamentary seat more valuable over time as the opportunities for graft are only limited by regime and public tolerance.

If my arguments are true, then we would expect evidence to support at least two empirical regularities. First, there should always have been evidence of relatively high turnover of parliamentarians since the existence of permanent or semi-permanent seats in parliament would imply that some members of the political elite would be perpetually outside of the system of benefits. High incumbency rates, therefore, would not look significantly different than benefit by appointment. As a result, relatively low incumbency rates would be consistent with my theory. In addition, if the value of a parliamentary seat has gone up over time as a result of the changing economic environment, then we should also expect to see a decline in incumbency since the introduction of structural adjustment as more potential candidates seek to “capture” the benefits associated with being in office.

I collected parliamentary lists from 1984 until present, calculated reelection rates, and found that incumbency rates have been relatively low during this period and appear to be dropping over time (see Table 1).²⁸ The highest recorded incumbency reelection rate was 42 percent in 1995 and the lowest was 19 percent in 2005. I also found that incumbent reelection rates did appear to fall over time. An important exception to that trend was the 1990 election, which was boycotted by the opposition. As a result most of the opposition parliamentarians that had been seated in 1987 were not up for reelection in 1990, a likely reason for the anomalous figure in 1990.

What does the authoritarian leadership get out of this arrangement? First, the autocrat creates a relatively even-handed mechanism for the distribution of spoils to members of

²⁸It is significant that structural adjustment in Egypt intensified in the mid-1990s.

the political elite. Political entrepreneurs voluntarily buy into the authoritarian system and remain tacit supporters of the regime as they pursue resources and wealth. At the same time, this system cleverly passes on the costs of mass mobilization to the political elite at the local level. In Egypt, it is widely known that political parties do not pay for campaigns of individual candidates.²⁹ For example, in El-Abnoudy's documentary film on female candidates in Egypt (1996), NDP candidates state that the party gives them no funds to run their campaigns. In order to win, therefore, candidates fund their campaigns entirely through their own personal and family resources. Mass mobilization of voters at the local level leads to considerable economic redistribution during election years as a result of transfers from the political elite to the masses via vote buying schemes (Blaydes 2006a). A voting system based on patronage is acceptable, and perhaps even desirable, from the perspective of the authoritarian regime.³⁰ Candidates who are part of the local political elite, therefore, link the authoritarian elite to the masses without any explicit call to ideology. In this way, parliamentary candidates solve the regime's problem of mass mobilization. Finally, there is a self-limiting aspect to the accumulation of rents and corruption. The more valuable it is to hold office, the more competitive parliamentary elections become. This necessitates higher levels of campaign expenditure (i.e. redistribution via vote buying) in order to win office. In sum, the competitive parliamentary elections solve a number of important problems for the authoritarian leadership in Egypt, including distribution of spoils to political elite and local-level political mobilization. In the section to follow, I describe an additional function of competitive elections related to elite management, particularly the management of party apparatus.

4.2 Performance-Based Promotion Strategies

Existing studies describe a number of objectives authoritarians may have for the shuffling of party cadre. Migdal writes that "the powers of appointment and removal from office in state leaders' hands have proved an important tool in preventing state agencies or state-sponsored political parties from becoming threatening conglomerates of power" (1988, 214). Barkey argues that the leadership of the Ottoman empire engineered a system in which the military and bureaucratic elite were regularly rotated to make them unwilling to challenge its authority; "the patrimonial state performed its task of elite control and shuffling so that elites were constrained by their lack of autonomy, and their dependence on the state for office, awards, and status and brought into a seemingly natural competition" (Barkey 1994, 40). Using a game theoretic framework and evidence from Mughal India, Debs (2007) argues that agents of an authoritarian ruler are shuffled from one assignment to the other so that

²⁹NDP candidates may, however, enjoy the right to use state facilities and will be granted permits for rallies, etc, that opposition candidates may not be able to acquire.

³⁰Clientelism tends to be highly labor intensive; with a large population and high unemployment, the cost of labor is relatively low in Egypt making clientelist practices fairly cost effective.

no alliance could emerge between the agent and the local population.

A key to maintaining continued support from party bureaucrats involves the creation of a system of rotation that honors norms of consistency and fairness of treatment for party members thus avoiding unnecessary conflict within the party. For example, in her article on authoritarian elections and parties Geddes (2005) argues that elections create “routine ways of choosing lower level officials in order to reduce conflict among supporters.” Since this function of elections is not the focus of her article she does not elaborate that idea or provide evidence for the existence of such patterns. In this section, I pick up where Geddes leaves off and argue that such a pattern of behavior exists in Egypt as election performance for party members at the provincial level provides important information about their competence, connections, and commitment. Although these individuals are not seeking elected political office themselves, their ability to mobilize voters and achieve a favorable outcome for party candidates with a minimum of fraud and coercion reflects important characteristics, including capability and loyalty. In this way, the party is able to dismiss those individuals that are a) underperforming due to poor competence or b) whose loyalty to the party is in question. Elections reveal important information which can then be used to improve the overall performance of the hegemonic party and increase the internal stability of regime.³¹

How does this informational benefit of elections work? Executive and party authority is organized hierarchically in Egypt with provincial governors appointed by the president as the highest executive authority in the governorate and provincial secretaries as the head of the local party organization for each of 26 governorates.³² These individuals are typically strongly rooted in their local areas and are not generally assigned to other regions.³³ Together with governorate-level security officials, the governor and provincial secretary provide information to the candidate selection committee about local parliamentary hopefuls. In addition, these individuals play key roles in managing parliamentary elections within their geographic area to ensure that candidates associated with the ruling party enjoy strong performance.

In the six months after parliamentary elections, an overhaul is announced for leadership positions across different levels of both the executive and the party. A number of factors go into these decisions including the performance of provincial-level officials during the elec-

³¹Egorov and Sonin (2006) have suggested that there is a tradeoff between loyalty and competence in high-level agents (viziers) selected by authoritarian rulers. In their model, as the level of competence goes up for a vizier, the probability of betrayal also goes up. Unlike Egorov and Sonin, I do not make this same assumption; one reason for the distinction is that the value placed on loyalty for a trusted vizier is much higher than the value one would place on the loyalty of a mid-level party leader. It is not entirely clear, either, that this tradeoff exists for high-level advisors. For example, consider the decision of Arab monarchs to hire their family members as the heads of important technocratic positions; very often royal family members have the best educational training (i.e. highest levels of competence) suggesting that competence may be endogenous to loyalty in some cases.

³²I use the terms province and governorate interchangeably in reference to the Egyptian *muhāfazat*.

³³Interview with Mohamed Kamal, NDP Policies Secretariat, May 3 2006.

tion.³⁴ High-level sources within the hegemonic National Democratic Party, for example, are quoted in a major pan-Arab newspaper as saying that the party would be replacing provincial officers who did not perform well in the previous elections.³⁵ State-appointed village mayors (*'umda*)³⁶ and members of the security services³⁷ were also sacked for insufficient effort and support in favor of party candidates.

What constitutes good performance for an official appointed by the regime? One of the most important jobs of a provincial governor or party secretary involves popular mobilization for NDP candidates during elections.³⁸ Newspaper reports during the 2000 parliamentary election suggest that the party's particularly bad performance in the governorate of Suez led to the expectation that the provincial secretary would not continue in his position.³⁹ This individual was subsequently removed from his job.⁴⁰ Poor performance of the party in a particular area may be the result of incompetence on the part of a provincial secretary or governor, but there have also been allegations of secret alliances between regime agents and Islamist candidates, suggesting disloyalty may be a factor in addition to incompetence.⁴¹ How would disloyalty play out in such a situation? Sometimes conflicts arise between careerism and economic opportunity. A provincial-level official might hoodwink powers at the center regarding the relative popularity or reputation of a potential parliamentary candidate in exchange for cash payment;⁴² in such a case, a provincial secretary was fired for having lied to a central committee of the NDP.⁴³

In order to test this theory, I have collected data on turnover of governors and provincial secretaries in Egypt's 26 governorates following the 2005 parliamentary elections. The analysis yields a key finding — provincial secretaries and governors whose governorates witnessed increases in Muslim Brotherhood voteshare between 2000 and 2005 were more likely to be dismissed from their positions. In this regression, I control for the inherent difficulty of the job.⁴⁴ This variable is constructed by dividing the number of Muslim Brother candidates in

³⁴In some ways, Egypt resembles Ichino's 'tournament party' in that local actors compete with one another to become the agent for a particular location; the difference, however, is that there are not multiple agents operating simultaneously as in the Nigerian example.

³⁵Al-Sharq Al-Awsat February 11 2001

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Interview with Sherif Waly, NDP Member of the Shura Council from the Giza Governorate, May 24 2007.

³⁸Interview with Gamal al-Batran, NDP Secretary General Haram District Giza Governorate, July 19 2005.

³⁹Al-Sharq Al-Awsat November 2 2000

⁴⁰Al-Ahram February 27 2001

⁴¹Al-Sharq Al-Awsat November 24 2000

⁴²Interview with Gehad Auda, NDP Media Committee, May 23 2007.

⁴³Interview with Moheb Zaki, Assistant Director of the Ibn Khaldun Center, May 23 2007.

⁴⁴This statement is comparable to saying that it is much more difficult for a Republican to get elected to become mayor of San Francisco than a Democratic. Should the Republican Party punish the local official who fails in this regard? She was dealt a much tougher assignment and had a low probability of success

Table 2: Dependent Variable is regime appointed official retaining post

	Provincial Secretary	Governor
Constant	-0.208 (0.500)	-0.399 (0.487)
MB candidates/population	0.510 (0.441)	0.932 (0.443)
Percent increase in MB representation	-0.034 (0.023)	-0.041 (0.024)
Sinai governorates	(dropped)	-0.661 (1.277)
Pseudo R^2	0.07	0.15
Observations	24	26

Standard errors in parentheses.

a particular governorate by the percent of Egypt’s total population in that governorate. The idea is that this variable captures the difficulty of garnering NDP voteshare in any particular governorate. A high-level NDP official conveyed that under certain circumstances, the party do not expect a particular “task” to be achieved with complete success, depending on the difficulty of the assignment.⁴⁵ For example, in 2005 the Muslim Brotherhood did tremendously well in districts across Alexandria; appointed officials were not removed, however, since regime officials in Cairo realized that it would be impossible to keep the Brotherhood from winning in this area.⁴⁶ I also control for whether the governorate is located on the Sinai peninsula where rotation is determined on the basis of security factors rather than election results.⁴⁷

The statistical model I run to analyze this data is a probit, where the dependent variable is a “one” if the governor or provincial secretary retained his post and a “zero” if he did not. The analysis suggests that after controlling for the difficulty of the governorate, both provincial secretaries and governors are less likely to retain their posts when the Muslim Brotherhood saw large increases in representation in the areas under their control. The result for provincial secretaries is significant at the 0.85 level and the result for governors is

to begin with. Similarly, there are certain areas that may have been predisposed to support the Muslim Brothers.

⁴⁵Ali al-Din Hilal, Member of the Steering Office of the General Secretariat of the NDP and NDP Media Secretary, April 30 2007.

⁴⁶Interview with Sherif Waly, NDP Member of the Shura Council from the Giza Governorate, May 24 2007.

⁴⁷The NDP has never lost a seat in either North or South Sinai and security considerations are of utmost importance in this part of the country as a result of proximity to both Israel and Gaza.

significant at the 0.9 level. These results are displayed in Table 2. The results suggest that, for example, governors who saw no increase in Muslim Brother seats in their governorate had a 75 percent chance of retaining their positions. Officials who witnessed a 25 percent increase in their governorates only had a 50 percent chance of keeping their jobs. Those that saw a 50 percent increase in Muslim Brother representation on their watch only had a 20 percent chance of retaining their position. A similar result was found for provincial secretaries.

These results suggest that the regime uses election results to make determinations about promotions and job security within the NDP. Why is this important? Elections provide the means by which competent and loyal party apparatchik can be selected and promoted through the organization's pyramidal system. The expectations of party and regime officials are fairly clear; large gains for the opposition are seen as a basis upon which to fire or demote. These expectations take into consideration, however, the inherent difficulty of stemming support for the Brotherhood in some areas versus others.

Elections act as a tool for the regime, therefore, to resolve disputes between various political elite whether they be party apparatchik hoping to maintain their status within the single party structure or locally influential elite seeking the benefits of a parliamentary seat. While elections in Egypt were not introduced with these express purposes in mind, the management of elite has always been at the core of most arguments regarding Egypt's transition to competitive parliamentary elections. In the following section, I will consider some of the alternative hypotheses laid out by a variety of authors regarding the goals of elections under authoritarian regimes and consider the applicability of each of these theories to the study of elections in Egypt.

5 Alternative Theories

While a previous generation of scholars considered electoral authoritarianism a "halfway house" between democracy and autocracy, the idea that countries move along a democratic trajectory has been challenged (Levitsky and Way 2003). It is becoming increasingly clear that many authoritarian regimes that hold elections are not democratizing at all, rather, they are simply "well-institutionalized authoritarian regimes" (Geddes 2005). The longevity of many of these regimes has led to a burgeoning literature on the subject of incentives authoritarians have for holding elections and the political and other effects that these elections engender. While some works have attempted to characterize these regimes, definitionally and theoretically, others have sought to explain either the inner workings of some of these regimes (Magaloni 2006) or to generalize about some larger set of cases.

As Geddes (2005) points out, authoritarian regimes that hold elections tend to also be the same regimes that have political parties and that have some form of legislature institution so there is some overlap in these literatures. Here, I review the major works that theorize

regarding how authoritarian regimes use electoral institutions. I seek to explain why the existing literature does an inadequate job of handling the Egyptian case, which I believe is emblematic of many Middle Eastern and African autocracies.

5.1 Perpetuation of “National Fictions” through Symbolic Acts

One important theory regarding the way authoritarians use elections involves electoral institutions as a means to perpetuate certain types of “national fictions” particularly with regard to the popularity and strength of an authoritarian regime or leader. Wedeen writes that scholars who study the political importance of symbolic acts argue that these acts operate to produce forms of legitimacy and hegemony enabling authoritarian leaders to support their rule (1998, 505-6). She takes this argument one step further and finds that in Syria, the Asad regime engages in similar behavior but that no one actually believes the fictitious public pronouncements and election results that come about from these institutions. Rather, citizens behave *as if* they do, and these symbolic acts of serve as mechanisms of coercion (Wedeen 1998, 519).

Wedeen argues that elections are part of this subtlety coercive apparatus. For example, former President Asad was congratulated for winning 99 percent of the vote. These “requirements of public dissimulation” are imposed on regular citizens who are forced to participate in the authoritarian’s rule (Wedeen 1998, 504). She writes:

“Political practices that encourage dissimulation register the participants’ fluency in the rhetorical operations that the regime puts forth. The regime’s power resides in its ability to sustain national fictions, to enforce obedience, to make people say and do what they otherwise would not. This obedience makes people complicit. It entangles them in self-enforcing relations of domination, thereby making it hard for participants to see themselves simply as victims of the state’s caprices” (Wedeen 1998, 519).

For Wedeen, the use of symbolic power represents a weapon in the authoritarian arsenal alongside the use of various inducements and (perhaps more importantly) punishments. In other words, in the absence of the cult, then other — perhaps more costly — disciplinary forms are required to sustain obedience (Wedeen 1999, 153). She writes “Asad’s cult is an effective mechanism of power because while economizing on the actual use of force, it also works to generate obedience...In other words, political systems are upheld not only by shared visions, material gains, and punishments, but also be unstable, shifting enactments of power and powerlessness, which are no less real for being symbolic” (Wedeen 1999, 146-7). One thing left unclear in this explanation, however, is whether the cult of Asad sustains obedience or if it is the fear of punishment that sustains both the cult of Asad and obedience? If it is the latter, Kuran provides some ideas regarding how rather than obedience becoming habitual via symbolic acts — as suggested by Wedeen — it is the actual lack of information

about others preferences that sustains authoritarian rule. Kuran argues that citizens living under authoritarian rule very often must engage in the act of preference falsification, or the act of misrepresenting one's genuine wants under perceived social pressures (Kuran 1995, 3). Kuran argues that when privately held preferences are revealed, the overthrow of an unpopular regime is a likely outcome (1995, 89).

Whether “national fictions” about the supposed popularity of authoritarian rulers and regimes are sustained via the mechanisms described by Wedeen (habituation through symbolic acts) or those espoused by Kuran (widespread preference falsification), there are some questions about the more general applicability of these ideas.⁴⁸ For example, the degree of political and press freedom varies considerably across authoritarian regimes. As political life becomes increasingly open and free, the symbolic importance of 99 percent support for the authoritarian ruler becomes less important (and more difficult to manufacture). In addition, in countries with press openness and relative freedom of expression, individuals may have more information about the preferences of others in their country and community, also rendering symbolic acts and acts of preference falsification less effective. This suggests that perhaps the universe of cases for which Wedeen or Kuran's ideas is applicable may be limited to the few but non-trivial examples of authoritarian regimes that also place considerable limits on political freedom and press openness. An increasing number of authoritarian countries, however, do not resemble Asad's Syria or Eastern Europe under communism. Rather, these are authoritarian regimes that are sustained despite considerable freedom of the press where citizens are able to reveal their previously private preferences to one another. For example, Egyptian political life is meaningfully open. There exists a relatively free press. In Egypt, we see large segments of the population no longer acting *as if* they support or buy into the authoritarian rhetoric. Anti-Mubarak articles, jokes, placards, blogs and e-mails routinely make the rounds. If one of the goals of this project is to understand the bases of durable authoritarian rule in Egypt, it does not appear that maintaining these “national fictions” has or will suffice. This is not to diminish the importance of symbolic acts or preference falsification; both exist in politically significant forms today in Egypt. Most of the authoritarian regime's most important tropes or fictions seem to have been exposed however (for example NDP party-list candidates won only about a third of the votes in the 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections), and forms of political protest, including scathing political cartoons and editorials have been evident since the late 1970s.

5.2 Parties and Elections to Balance Military Strength

The primary argument Geddes puts forth in “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes” is that parties and elections counterbalance the threat of the regime's most formidable potential foe — the military or factions within the military. Geddes writes that

⁴⁸Kuran (1995) also points out that dictatorial regimes have to retain the public allegiance of certain critical groups and suggests that some of these regimes may actually retain considerable public support.

“because of its control of weapons and men, the military is always a potential threat, even to dictators who are officers themselves.” The logic of her argument is as follows; coup attempts are less likely to succeed in countries with these institutions because authoritarian regimes with parties have more citizens vested in the existing organizational structure of the regime. The implication is that “even when authoritarian parties are filled with opportunistic cadres who joined the party to get ahead and steal from ordinary citizens, they still make a contribution to dictatorial longevity”.

This logic seems well-suited to the Egyptian case where the military appears to be the final guarantor of the existing authoritarian regime. In fact, a similar argument was made by John Waterbury who wrote, “...Nasser had to build up the ASU (Arabic Socialist Union) as a civilian counter to the military” when he was faced with the growing influence of Field Marshall Abd al-Hakim Amr (1983, 316).⁴⁹ Steven Cook, however, in his study of military-civil society relations in Egypt, Turkey, and Algeria, disagrees with the argument that the ASU was established as a counterweight to the military (2003, 154). Leonard Binder makes the parallel, but opposite argument to that put forward by Waterbury; Binder argues that Amr was called upon by Nasser to limit the activities of the leftists (1978, 343). The two organizations, therefore, appeared to serve as a left-right balance within the regime, although there is also evidence that Nasser may have been balancing left-right elements within the ASU simultaneously. Binder argues that the decision to use elections to restructure the ASU was in response to a growing leftist element that supported appointments based on Marxist credentials rather than popular support (1978). This suggests that elections may not have been implemented to balance the military, but rather to balance leftist elite elements within the hegemonic party structure.

My primary argument here is that while it is possible that the hegemonic party may have served as a counterbalance to Egypt’s military in the Nasser era, in more recent years, the development of the party and the regime’s decision to hold multi-party elections are consistent with the military’s objectives. While I agree with Geddes’s argument (2005) that parties and elections are a central part of the survival strategy for many authoritarian regimes, my argument is in contrast to Geddes’s claim that parties counterbalance the military or factions within the military for the case of Egypt.

The most compelling argument for this perspective is put forth by Cook (2003). He argues that the Egyptian military has a clear hierarchy of interests where regime survival is the top objective. He finds that in Egypt, Turkey and Algeria — all of which were dominated by single parties — when states moved from single to multi-party systems, the militaries did not object and may even have anticipated the benefits from this type of change (Cook 2003, 15). Cook’s first point is that the military will support institutional changes when those changes shore up the overall stability of the regime. In particular, the military will only respond in a

⁴⁹Although Waterbury describes the ASU as a counterweight to the military, he acknowledges that the military and the party were allies in at least some domains, particularly when it came to accepting policy packages that conformed with Soviet expectations in exchange for arms acquisitions (1983, 337).

reactionary fashion to elections when it perceives an encroachment on its core issue areas — most importantly a threat to the political order (Cook 2003). For example, the hegemony of the NDP in the People’s Assembly did not serve as a threat to the military, particularly since the parliament had increasingly become an extension of the executive branch, according to Cook (2003, 156). He writes:

“This arrangement is significant to the officer corps as the presidency remains the crucial institutional mechanism of the military establishment’s political influence. In this way, engineering the dominance of the NDP was (and remains) a means through which the leadership of Egypt’s military-dominated state has sought to ensure both the regime and its attendant benefits” (Cook 2003, 156).

The establishment of a dominant single party structure via elections, therefore, served the overall interests of the regime, and as a result the interests of the military as well. In addition, Cook argues that there is a type of flexibility associated with maintaining a democratic facade. In particular, Mubarak and his allies believed that by allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in politics this would reduce the willingness of Islamists activists to express themselves through strikes and more violent actions (Cook 2003, 167).

Cook’s second point is that there may actually be benefits to the military from the development of parties and elections. Greater political openness was accompanied by a more liberal economic environment and this economic openness has provided the Egyptian military with some significant benefits and opportunities. Sadat’s open-door economic policy allowed the military establishment to benefit from the “commissions game” which allowed officers to get rich via military contracts (Cook 2003, 21). The military also got into the business of arms production and the manufacturing of civilian goods as well. By 1994, the military-controlled Administration of National Service Projects ran 16 factories which employed 75,000 workers, producing everything from agricultural machines to medications to and ovens and the military’s economic mandate has been extended since the early 1990s (Frisch 2001). Increased foreign direct investment and rent streams from the US were particularly important to the military in development these industries (Cook 2003, 177).

The existence of semi-competitive parliamentary elections helped to ease the relationship between the Egyptian regime and its most important aid donor, the United States. In fact, Frisch and others have argued that the Egyptian military has been modernized almost completely at the expense of the US and that this is particularly the case regarding “big ticket” and prestige items (2001). Zaki writes:

“To ensure the continued support of the military for his regime, Mubarak has successfully managed, so far, to preserve uninterrupted access to advanced weapons, training and other benefits that come mainly from the United States — thus guaranteeing that the army has a ‘direct stake in both his rule and the relationship to the US which means inevitably a continued flow of advanced weaponry” (Zaki 1995, 131).

The military may have come to appreciate the “range of pseudo-democratic institutions and representative structures” which served to insulate them from politics (Cook 2003, 168). Public dissatisfaction could be directed at other institutions, perhaps allowing the military to focus on their core interests like force development and rent seeking.

The Egyptian military has also witnessed a change in its role over time. While the Egyptian military was a crucial pillar of the regime at its establishment, since the 1967 defeat, the military has maintained a relatively low profile (Cook 2003, 136-7). Beginning with Nasser and intensifying under Sadat, the Egyptian military was intentionally and systematically depoliticized and professionalized, with little resistance (Zaki 1995, 128-9). While the military played a more active role in the day-to-day activities of the regime in the pre-1967 period, post-1967 the military was largely out of the business of politics, perhaps in a bid to appear above the political fray and seek some insulation from criticism. Waterbury has argued that the “tentacular spread of the military into the civilian sphere sapped it of its fighting capacity” (Waterbury 1983, 337); this perception may have been part of the reason why the military retrenched to some degree from civilian political life. By the 1980s the military was “merely one of a number of institutional interest groups and, if its claim on the budget, which slightly declined as a proportion of total spending and GNP, was any indicator, one carrying little privileged weight” (Hinnebusch 1988a, 131). While still a key pillar of the regime, what Bianchi calls the “entrepreneurial army” (1989, 5) is also increasingly a bourgeois enclave with ready access to consumer goods and special housing (Beattie 1991).⁵⁰

The viewpoint presented here challenges existing conceptions of the hegemonic party and the military as competitors as presented by Waterbury and Geddes. Binder (1978) and Cook (2003) have presented competing views about the use of the party to balance the military at the time of its introduction and it becomes even less clear over time that this remained an important role for the party. Perhaps more important than the balancing of military by political party is the balancing that takes place between competing and overlapping institutions in related spheres of influence. For example, the oversight role of the parliament has been strengthened at various points in time in order to provide a counterweight to the hegemonic party. Nasser bolstered the powers of the parliament vis-a-vis the ASU by dropping ASU membership as a requirement for serving in parliament (Beattie 2000, 84). In addition, the Ministry of Interior’s Central Security Forces (CSF) provide the most important counterbalance to the conventional armed forces. Springborg argues that Sadat’s policy of demilitarization worked in the favor of the Ministry of Interior (Springborg 1989, 140) and Mubarak continued to build up the CSF in order to balance military power (Frisch 2001).

⁵⁰The Egyptian army constructed at least 17 military cities to physically isolate the military enclave from the civilian population (Frisch 2001).

5.3 Cooptation through Legislative Policy Sharing

Gandhi and Przeworski are associated with the idea that political opposition is coopted through its participation in policy-influential legislatures by way of electoral competition (2001, 2003). They argue that when the opposition is strong, dictators make more extensive policy compromises to keep the opposition from rebelling. “Policy concessions require a forum in which demands can be revealed and agreements can be hammered out. Hence, we assume that the presence of institutions, especially of parties in legislatures, is an indicator of policy concessions” (Gandhi and Przeworski 2003).⁵¹ While this may be the case in some authoritarian countries, the assumption that legislatures actually exist to legislate is unfortunately an optimistic characterization for many autocracies, particularly those in the Middle East. While they authors use the existence of Islamist parliamentarians in the Jordanian parliament as evidence that policy compromises were taking place, Jordan specialists cast doubt on this evidence by reporting that Jordanian parliamentarians (and the public more generally) view the job of legislators as providing jobs and delivering services to their local constituents and families, not making policy (Lust-Okar 2006).

While the Egyptian legislature enjoys broad policymaking authority in principle, in practice the President controls a docile majority in parliament, which generally renders his legislature prerogatives into formal laws. The president is considered to be above parliamentary authority and he has many options for pushing through his policy agenda; for example, the President can legislate by decree when parliament is not in session and can also bypass parliament through a government-sponsored referendum. Article 151 of the constitution suggests that parliamentary approval is necessary for international agreements. This is not enforced, however. In 1997, for example, 87 international agreements were approved in one parliamentary meeting and 18 were never even discussed (Fahmy 2002, 52). Likewise, defense and foreign policy matters are reserved for the executive. During negotiations over the peace treaty with Israel, Sadat rejected, without repercussions, nearly unanimous parliamentary resolutions to break off the negotiations, to give the Arab Defense Pact priority over the treaty, and to permit normalization of relations with Israel to proceed only within the framework of a comprehensive settlement. The situation is similar regarding domestic and budgetary issues, leaving little room for opposition policy influence. This suggests that parties and parliaments in Middle Eastern cases like Egypt exist to serve some other purpose than cooptation via a shared policy space.

⁵¹Wright (2008) convincingly argues that while much of the previous literature on authoritarian institutions assumes that authoritarian legislatures serve the same purpose in all kinds of regimes, in fact, there are important distinctions to be made between different types of authoritarian legislative institutions.

6 Conclusions

Competitive parliamentary elections serve a variety of purposes for the authoritarian regime in Egypt that go beyond the conventional explanation that elections are used to confer legitimacy. When these elections were first introduced in the 1970s, then-president Sadat was responding in large part to the emergence of right-wing trends within the political elite. Economic opening had created a class of what some have called ‘parasitic capitalists’ who sought ties to the state to improve their economic fortunes (Beattie 1991). The hegemonic party that emerged from this period — the National Democratic Party — acted as a “steering committee of Egypt’s private sector” by serving as its conduit for getting access to state largesse (Bianchi 1989, 15-16). I have argued that parliamentary elections have provided the arena of competition for those capitalist interests during the Mubarak era. Individual political entrepreneurs seek a parliamentary seat to enjoy both the legitimate and illegitimate benefits afforded by holding office. This is largely in line with Ayubi’s argument that businessmen and opportunists exploit the party and the regime’s parliamentary facade (1989, 17). Corruption is tolerated by the regime since it ensures the long-term loyalty of this influential class. I have also shown that elections provide important information to the authoritarian regime regarding the competence of party apparatchik. This information allows the authoritarian leadership to make promotions on a non-arbitrary basis.

In these ways elections are a kind of market mechanism, helping to resolve disputes between various groups and individuals operating within Egypt’s broad class of political elite. The existence of a relatively evenhanded mechanism for providing benefits keeps the regime’s coalition invested in the authoritarian system. This suggests that a certain consistency to the rules of the game are important for handling elite expectations in the context of authoritarian regimes. There is little doubt that the majority of these individuals would do worse under a democratic system where increased accountability would limit opportunities for graft and corruption. As a result, the electoral formula has thus far proven to be an effective one for the authoritarian leadership in Egypt. Scholars have raised questions, however, about the long-term sustainability of systems dependent on this type of crony capitalism. Haber (2002, xvi) argues that crony capitalism is economically inefficient, with the implication that the equilibrium that we see is ultimately also self-undermining.⁵² Elite supported political change is unlikely unless the costs *to the elite* associated with maintaining systematic corruption exceed the benefits currently accruing to the coalition.

⁵²See Greif and Laitin (2004).

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