

Parties Over: The Demise of Egypt's Opposition Parties

JOSHUA A. STACHER*¹

ABSTRACT Heeding Eberhard Kienle's deliberalisation argument and Maye Kassem's work on legislative elections in Egypt, the article explores the government's tactics in causing fragmentation in Egypt's legalised political parties. In this vein, it extends both arguments applying them to opposition parties in Egypt. Since 1998, the Political Parties Committee (PPC) has closed seven of the sixteen legal opposition parties. The government is not only stifling group development, but also preventing prominent independent members of parliament (MPs) from using already existing parties to challenge the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). By examining the government's tactics towards opposition parties, this article shows that a re-entrenchment of authoritarianism has emerged, and argues that Egypt's democratisation process has ended.

When a State Council Administrative Court overruled the Political Parties Committee (PCC) establishing a new political party in February 2002, party life received another 'dose of democracy' in Egypt.² Through its successful appeal, the Democratic Generation Party became Egypt's seventeenth licensed political party. But despite the country's extensive paper democracy, which includes many of the institutions of a competitive democracy, party life is in a state of decline. Any political openings that existed in the 1980s closed during the 1990s, rendering opposition parties either ineffective or inactive. This goes against government officials' statements that claim that there is an equal level political field. For example, Sharif Wali, NDP Shura Council member, argues, 'we have four or five parties that are effective ... this is my personal view but we do not need more than six parties.'³ As will be argued, the government is vigorously undermining all opposition parties be they active or inactive in Egypt.

This article seeks to provide insight into recent political developments in Egypt's multi-party system. Basing my argument on recent works such as Eberhard Kienle's deliberalisation argument and Maye Kassem's work on

* Joshua A. Stacher, Deans Court, North Street, St. Andrews, Fife K416 9QT

¹ Phd candidate in the Department of International relations at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. I would like to thank Maye, Dr. Dan Tschirgi, Jason Brounlee and Charles-Antoine Allan for commenting on, editing, and reviewing this work. This article benefitted immeasurably from their input.

² Reference to a quote made by President Mubarak in April, 1987.

³ Sharif Wali, NDP elected Shura Council Member, 'The Future of Political Parties in Egypt,' 21 April, 2002. The Political Science Seminar, Oriental Hall, American University in Cairo.

Egyptian legislative elections, I extend these notions by exploring the government's tactics in causing fragmentation in Egypt's legalised political parties since 1998.⁴ Theoretical aspects of multi-party systems within authoritarian frameworks as well as its practical application to formidable opposition parties in Egypt serve as explanatory tools. In this vein, the cases of Al-Ahrar (Liberals), Al-'Amal (Labour), and the Nasserists serve as examples of incremental political deliberalisation.

Additionally, I will argue that the government has become less tolerant of the opposition parties. Egypt's experience of the past four years shows that the government is not only stifling group development, but also preventing high profile independent members of parliament (MPs) from challenging the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). The government has stopped popular independent MPs from reviving licensed, inactive opposition parties. The case of former Al-Wafd member Ayman Nur demonstrates this tactic.

Democratisation and Blocked Transitions

Studies of the Arab world and specifically Egypt have largely worked within a democratisation framework in the past decade. Since the publication of Huntington's *Third Wave* in 1991, many analysts have stood steadfast waiting for a democratic waterfall in Egypt. Some, such as Korany, have argued 'Egypt remains a maturing rather than a mature democracy.'⁵ Noting that Egypt has 14,000 civil society groups, a host of legal political parties, and numerous newspapers, he argues that 'freedom of speech and the press is largely assured, as well as the increasing role of the judiciary and rule of law—all important indicators of the progress of the democratization process.'⁶ Yet, despite the arguments that Egypt's managed process has a democratic endgame, the 1990s witnessed a rollback of civil society and political opposition.

It is not that analysts have been blinded to the political realities. Some observers have noted that deliberalisation has been the norm after a period of relative tolerance in the 1980s. As Kienle argues:

Since the early 1990s, Egypt has experienced a substantial degree of political deliberalisation which defies the notion of a blocked transition to democracy. Repressive amendments to the penal code and to legislation governing professional syndicates and trade unions as well as unprecedented electoral fraud are only some of the indicators. Though related to the conflict between the regime and armed Islamist groups, the erosion of political participation and liberties also reflects other factors, including attempts to contain opposition to economic liberalisation under the current reform program.⁷

Egypt's deliberalisation can be viewed through a matrix of regime crackdowns on civil and political liberties that have limited political expression and a

⁴ Of the sixteen legalised opposition parties, seven had their operations and the privileges associated with it, such as publishing a newspaper, suspended by the authorities since August 1998. One of these frozen parties, the inactive Social Justice party, was allowed to resume party activity in February 2002. The Al-Ahrar (Liberals) party has been allowed to publish its newspaper but a leadership dispute still plagues the party.

⁵ Bahgat Korany, 'Restricted Democratization from Above: Egypt' in Korany, Rex Brynen and Paul Noble (eds.) *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 65.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 64–65.

⁷ Eberhard Kienle, 'More than a Response to Islamism: The Political Deliberalization of Egypt in the 1990s' *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring, 1998), p. 219.

perpetual state of emergency.⁸ For example, the government has reinforced some of its more draconian laws such as Law 32/1964 that subordinates non-governmental associations to the ministry of social affairs. In this case, Law 84/2002 was easily passed by parliament in June 2002 and shows the regime's persisting goal of curtailing civil society and specifically human rights organisations. Under the new seventy-six-article law, the ministry of social affairs can refuse to license an organisation. Even if the ministry does license a NGO, 'it can influence the composition of the board or just dissolve the organisation outright, should it deem it to be a threat to the state.'⁹

In other cases, certain aspects of existing laws such as the six-month sentence that faces NGOs officials for accepting foreign funds were strengthened by new legislation. Thus, presidential decree 4/1992 states that accepting foreign funds without permission merits trial by military courts and carries a sentence of seven to fifteen years without the option of an appeal. This law, which was directed at the Islamists in the wake of the 1992 Cairo Earthquake, has been used against the secretary general of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) Hafiz Abu Sa'da in December 1998 and against the Egyptian-American intellectual Saad Eddin Ibrahim in 2000.¹⁰

While countries in transition to democracy may experience setbacks in the process, the general trajectory should be toward more representative and inclusive governance. Given Egypt's experience throughout the 1990s, including what has happened to its formal legal parties since 1998, observers can argue confidently that Egypt is not democratising. Indeed, more general critiques on the transition literature have recently appeared and are applicable to the case of Egypt.

Thomas Carothers has argued that it is time to stop forcing democratisation theory on countries that have moved away from political liberalisation. In his words, 'the transition paradigm has been somewhat useful during a time of momentous and often surprising political upheaval in the world. But it is increasingly clear that reality is no longer conforming to the model.'¹¹ Carothers notes that of the nearly 100 countries labelled 'transitional' in the last decade, 'only a relatively small number—probably fewer than 20—are clearly en route to becoming successful, well-functioning democracies.'¹² Real events are giving way to a new form of authoritarianism. In the words of Andreas Schedler:

Since the early days of the 'third wave' of global democratization, it has been clear that transitions from authoritarian rule can lead anywhere. Over the past quarter-century,

⁸ The expansive powers that the emergency laws provide the executive have been at Mubarak's disposal throughout his presidency (1981–present).

⁹ Paul Schemm, 'Back for good?', *Cairo Times* (16–22 May, 2002).

¹⁰ Hafiz Abu Sa'da was arrested in December 1998 and held under Emergency laws for six days. He was charged with accepting foreign funds without permission from the Ministry of Social Affairs but the case was dropped in 1999. Saad Eddin Ibrahim was charged with also accepting foreign funds and was held for forty-five days in summer 2000 and was imprisoned for nine months after being found guilty by a State Security Court in May 2001. Ibrahim was released in February 2002 pending a retrial, resented to seven years in July 2002, and released in December 2002. The Court of Cassations acquitted him in March 2003. Ibrahim's Ibn Khaldun Centre is registered as a private company and therefore should be exempt from the foreign funding charge. Despite his innocence, the Ibn Khaldun centre remains closed. This serves as one indication to the arbitrary nature of emergency laws and the political nature of the case.

¹¹ Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm,' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2002), p. 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

many have led to the establishment of some form of democracy. But many have not. They have given birth to new forms of authoritarianism that do not fit into our classic categories of one-party, military, or personal dictatorship.¹³

Egypt can be described as a country that not only has reached the political impasse of a blocked transition, but has also reverted to authoritarianism.

In this vein, Egypt has entered a political 'grey zone'.¹⁴ Counties in this grey zone, as Carothers argues:

[Have] some attributes of democratic political life, including at least limited political space for opposition parties and independent civil society, as well as regular elections and democratic constitutions. Yet they suffer from serious democratic deficits, often including poor representation of citizens' interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuse of law by government officials, elections of uncertain legitimacy, very low levels of public confidence in state institutions, and persistently poor institutional performance by the state.¹⁵

As Egypt underwent its deliberalisation in the 1990s, the system moved from a period of relative tolerance that marked the 1980s. The regime dictated the time, place and degree of political openings. The fact is that while the 1980s were a period of political tolerance and moderation, the existing authoritarian framework was never dismantled. Authoritarian mechanisms were not used as frequently as would be the case in the second decade of Mubarak's presidency, but remained available. During the 1990s, the government undertook an IMF-sponsored Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) and faced a radical Islamist insurgency producing a reaction that reintroduced the authoritarian substructure created by Gamal Abdel Nasser and sharpened by Anwar al-Sadat. This, in turn, led to movement away from any liberalising experiment. It did not simply block the transition, but re-entrenched an authoritarian regime that imposed new restrictions on political life.

The Role of Opposition Parties in Authoritarian Systems

To understand the impact of these constraints on Egypt's legal or licensed opposition parties, it is necessary to understand their conventional function in authoritarian systems. If political parties in the developing world are 'the most important institutions of political mobilization in the context of mass politics' then the functions they perform need to be examined.¹⁶

Foremost among these is the provision of legitimacy through 'ideologies, leadership or opportunities for political participation, or a combination of all three.'¹⁷ Additionally, they serve as a means of political recruitment, socialisation and stability.¹⁸ Parties give a certain amount of democratic legitimacy domestically and internationally while providing the ingredients for political development. In democratisation, parties are gateways to transition.

However, parties in developing systems can also sustain authoritarianism. In

¹³ Andreas Schedler, 'Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation,' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April, 2002), p. 36.

¹⁴ Carothers, p. 9.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 9–10.

¹⁶ B.C. Smith, *Understanding Third World Politics* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 198.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 199.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 199, 201.

the words of Maye Kassem, parties facilitate 'the extension of political activity to include the participation of 'opposition' elements in political life as efforts to recruit them into the government's clientalist apparatus so as to inhibit and contain their development and prevent them from becoming potential threats to the regime.'¹⁹ In this vein, opposition parties in Egypt resemble their counterparts in Mexico and the Philippines before transitions occurred there. The question arises as to why opposition parties participate in a system that strengthens the authoritarian status quo. Government resources are part of the answer. As Kassem argues, 'the opposition is aware that in order to obtain electoral gains it must be capable of channelling state resources into constituencies. The government, also aware of this dependency, readily manipulates the situation to ensure the opposition's compliance in the same manner it controls members of its own party.'²⁰ In this scenario, only by participating can parties gain access to resources.

Opposition parties in some types of authoritarian systems are weak entities, at best, and ineffectual if a government in power decides to limit their influence. Similarly, opposition parties can become part of the clientalist apparatus and immobilised before the ruling party or presidential elite. The outcome of this incorporation is often personal rule. Consequently, with the system centred on an individual or narrow circle of elites, democratisation or political liberalisation are easily blocked. Thus, the president's ruling party has an interest in maintaining that his party remains in power. To secure this, opposition parties are not allowed to become competent organisations because they could challenge the ruling group's power and disrupt the status quo. This is largely how opposition parties have been portrayed in Egypt. While there is merit in this argument, the Egyptian government also aids and encourages opposition parties' trajectory to this type of dependent and weak development.

The state's influence and fragmentation of legalised opposition parties does not encourage alternative development. Despite being internally weak and headed by authoritarian-style leadership, the parties have no incentive to unite in opposition. The parties propose different ideological platforms and assume it is more beneficial to stress these differences as they compete for the government's attention. By gaining its attention, they also could gain government support and influence. Therefore, there is no reason to compromise their ideologies if opposition unity will be considered a threat and will not allow them to share in power. As will be shown in the parties and legislative elections' section, the 1990 elections and the opposition parties' failed attempt to boycott them as a bloc because of the Tagammu's defection is evidence of this trend. Thus, opposition parties compete in legislative elections in the hopes of being the government's favoured opposition party.

This article does not indicate that the Egyptian government's tactics against its opposition parties are all stick and no carrot. No regime would be able to viably adapt using coercion alone. But this is not an either or distinction. The government offers more carrots than sticks at times and reverses this trend at other times. For example, the opposition parties were recipients of many more carrots than sticks in the 1980s, while this trend has been more stick than carrot

¹⁹ Maye Kassem, *In the Guise of Democracy* (London: Ithaca Press, 1999), p. 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

at the conclusion of the 1990s. This does not indicate the current relationship is destiny or an unchangeable trajectory. Instead, the tolerance of the 1980s has been temporarily replaced by authoritarian intolerance of legalised opposition parties in the more contemporary period.

Egypt's Opposition Parties: Legal but Restricted

Since April 1998, the Egyptian government has frozen seven of Egypt's sixteen current legalised opposition parties.²¹ The restrictions on Egypt's multi-party system aim to block the rise of viable challengers to the NDP. At the same time, the regime is also preventing high profile, charismatic independent MPs from reviving 'dead' or inactive parties. This represents a further incremental deliberalisation than was noted by Kienle's work on Egypt in the 1990s. My article extends Kienle's argument as it applies to opposition political parties. Given the fact that *A Grand Delusion* went to press shortly after the suspension of the Labour Party (May 2000), it is understandable why his deliberalisation argument could not completely cover the fate of Egypt's opposition parties.

Egypt's multi-party system began when Sadat created three forums in 1976. The left, centre and right wings participated in elections in 1977, which ended in an overwhelming victory for the President's Misr Party (Centre). The Misr party was founded in 1977 by then Prime Minister Mamduh Salim and formed the bulk of the NDP base, which Sadat established the following year.

Law 40/1977 set the parameters for party creation. No party can be created on the basis of religion, social class or the vision and platform espoused by an existing party. Applications for party status are primarily rejected on these grounds. In effect, Law 40/1977 prevents 'the establishment of any [party] that could possibly appeal to a widespread regional, religious or working-class constituency.'²² Sadat's pluralism from above experiment did not intend to allow for power-sharing.

The Political Parties Committee (PCC), a subsidiary of the Shura Council, mostly composed of NDP members, handles all party applications and oversees political parties. The PPC has been described as 'an agency of the regime ... required by law to explain its decision, which, however, it [does] not always do.'²³ As most political organisations in Egypt, the PPC is an arm of the executive. Three presidential appointed ministers on the committee appoint the other three members, who are senior retired judges. Currently, the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Kamal al-Shazli heads the PPC. Other members are Minister of Justice Faruk Sayf al-Nasr, Interior Minister Habib Al-Adli, Rif'at 'Abd Al-Mura'im (previously with the Administrative Prosecution Authority) Muhammad Hamdi (previously with Cairo's Appeals Court), and Yusif Shalabi (previously with the State Council).²⁴ In the words of one journalist, 'the

²¹ These parties include Misr al-Fatih (Young Egypt), 'Adil Ijtama'i (Social Justice), Al-Ahrar, Sha'b Dimuqrati (Democratic Peoples), Al-'Amal, Wafaq (National Accord), and Misr (Misr Al-'Arab Al-Ishtaraki).

²² Roger Owen, 'Socio-economic Change and Political Mobilization: The Case of Egypt,' in Ghassan Salame (ed.) *Democracy without Democrats?* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), p. 185.

²³ Kienle, *A Grand Delusion*, p. 29.

²⁴ Gamal Essam El-Din, 'Out on a limb', *Al-Ahram Weekly* (8-14 November, 2001).

committee is widely considered a government tool used to control political activists.²⁵

Judging from its performance record, the PPC is quite capable of blocking activists. The PPC has only granted one party licence in twenty-five years, when the National Accord party, whose president was a former Free Officer Ahmad Shuhab, was approved in March 2000.²⁶ Indeed, by May 1999, the PPC had rejected all fifty-one party applications received to that point, including no less than seven party applications in autumn 1998 alone.²⁷ The breadth of Law 40/1977 cushions the PPC's conservative stance. As Kienle argues, 'most of the programmatic conditions were so vague and general that it was easy to reject almost any demand for the creation of a new party by pointing to one section or another of its manifesto.'²⁸

Nonetheless, Egyptian opposition parties do gain legal status. Except for the three parties (Misr, Tagammu' and Liberals) created in 1976 with Sadat's pluralism-from-above experiment, the opposition parties were granted license from State Council courts.²⁹ There were six opposition parties in the 1980s and ten more by the end of the 1990s, of which all had gained legal status through appeals of PPC decisions.³⁰ Yet, even after parties gain legal status, they face further obstacles when competing for an effective role in government.

Egypt's Opposition Parties and Legislative Elections

As previously mentioned, many opposition parties in developing countries have been co-opted into the clientalist structure of an authoritarian system. In Egypt, this notion conforms to Kassem's theory quite well. For instance, when the opposition parties are examined in regard to their parliamentary representation under Mubarak, a pattern of deliberalisation and decline is apparent. This also reflects the 1980s tolerance and the 1990s reversal.

In the 1984 elections, the first conducted under the presidency of Husni Mubarak, the NDP won an eighty-seven percent majority of seats (394 seats). The opposition was represented in an alliance between the illegal but tolerated Muslim Brotherhood (eight seats) and the Wafd (forty-two), a total of fifty seats in the available elected 444 seats in parliament.³¹

The 1987 elections, which were called early because of a change in the electoral law that modified the system from a party list or proportional representation to mixed proportional representation individual candidacy, saw a marked increase in the opposition parties' parliamentary presence. The 1987 elections resulted in the NDP taking 339 seats (seventy-eight percent) while the opposition obtained 100 seats. These seats were distributed among the Wafd (thirty-five),

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Yet, even a PPC-approved party is not immune from the government's reach. This was shown when the National Accord party suffered from leadership disputes; the PPC quickly suspended its activities in August 2001.

²⁷ Simon Apiku, 'Egyptians rage about hapless state of opposition', *Middle East Times* (16–22 May, 1999).

²⁸ Kienle, *A Grand Delusion*, p. 29.

²⁹ This excludes the National Accord party.

³⁰ Of the ten parties created after 1990, only the Nasserist party has been able to win seats in legislative elections and publish a newspaper, *Al-'Arabi*, that has any street following.

³¹ An additional ten members are appointed by the president, bringing the total to 454 members in the Egyptian parliament.

Muslim Brotherhood (thirty-five), Labour (twenty-seven), Liberals (three), and independents (five).³² The seventy-eight percent majority provided enough leeway for the NDP above the two-thirds required by the constitution to pass legislation, renew the emergency laws and nominate a presidential candidate. Two-thirds also is needed to expel unruly MPs from parliament. Yet, a twenty-two percent share for the opposition was the limit of the regime's tolerance, and has not been exceeded in the three elections that followed (1990, 1995 and 2000).

The 1990 elections were also called early because the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) ruled that the mixed-candidacy system was unconstitutional. In this election, the individual-candidacy system was used. Before the elections occurred, however, Mubarak accepted the terms of the US debt-relief deal and joined the US coalition against Iraq in 1990. While Mubarak tried to manipulate domestic opinion by claiming the Egyptian troops were under Saudi command, as opposed to American, criticism began to mount in opposition newspapers.³³ As discontent grew, the opposition parties tried to tarnish Egypt's democratic image in the West. Specifically, the parties appear to have felt that boycotting the 1990 legislative elections would create domestic difficulties for the United States who would be forced to justify its relationship with an undemocratic regime.³⁴ But the Egyptian opposition misplayed their hand. In the words of Lesch, the parties 'misperceived the bases of American support for Mubarak and the degree of American interest in democratisation in Egypt. Instead of viewing the boycott as a sign of the regime's failure, the US ignored the elections and Mubarak used them to consolidate his control.'³⁵

In the 1990 elections, the NDP won 360 seats, gaining an eighty-six percent majority. More significantly, the opposition obtained a mere seven percent of the seats.³⁶ The independents, which included opposition party members, won fifty-five seats. Of the winning independent candidates, the Wafd could claim fourteen, the Labour party eight and the Liberals one seat respectively. While the opposition was officially boycotting the elections, party members ran as independents and upon winning began to represent their parties in parliament. The Tagammu^c was the only opposition party to officially break the opposition's boycott and participate in the elections. It won six seats. The government had begun reversing any liberalisation measures it had started in the 1980s.

The 1995 elections made a bad situation worse where opposition parties' were concerned. In what were Egypt's bloodiest elections, resulting in eighty-seven deaths and as many as 1500 injured,³⁷ the opposition managed to win only thirteen seats (3 percent). The Wafd was the largest opposition group winning six seats; the Tagammu^c won five; the Liberals one; the Nasserists one. Independent

³² Technically, the opposition was sixty-five seats with an additional thirty-five seats going to the illegal but tolerated Muslim Brotherhood.

³³ Ann Lesch, 'Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Egypt,' in David Garnham and Mark Tessler (eds.) *Democracy, War, and Peace in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 236.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³⁶ This is in comparison to the 1987 elections when they gleaned twenty-one percent and 1984 when they won eleven percent.

³⁷ 'Egypt's Parliamentary Elections: An Assessment of the Results,' *The Estimate*, <http://www.theestimate.com/public/111700.html>. accessed on May 19, 2003. According to *The Estimate*, these figure were on the lower end of the estimates.

candidates obtained thirteen seats while the remaining 417 seats went to the ruling NDP, who took a dominating ninety-four percent majority. As the regime fought its war with the radical Islamist Jama'at Al-Islamiyya, deliberalisation of the polity was in full swing.

The 2000 legislative elections marked a moderate improvement for the opposition. The parties obtained seventeen seats (4 per cent). The Wafd won seven seats; the Tagammu' six; Nasserists three; Liberals one.³⁸ Independent candidates won a further twenty-one seats, while the Muslim Brotherhood won its largest number of seats since 1987, obtaining sixteen. The NDP went on to win 390 seats and an eighty-eight percent majority.

The 2000 legislative elections have been considered by observers as the fairest of all the elections held under Mubarak's presidency. The reason for this is that the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) claimed judicial supervision was a requirement of article eight-eight of the constitution, and therefore declared article twenty-four of Law 73/1956 unconstitutional on 8 July 2000.³⁹ Article eighty-eight states that voting in the parliamentary elections should be monitored completely by members of the judiciary. This meant members of the judiciary should be in the polling stations instead of at central stations where they counted rigged ballots after the security forces delivered them.⁴⁰ In turn, this also meant the judges would neither allow unregistered voters to vote nor the police to transport the ballot boxes to the central stations—thereby limiting electoral interference.⁴¹ Reform of voting procedures, however, simply pushed the regime to interfere elsewhere and bar voters from getting into the polling stations. As Kassem notes:

Electoral violence until the 2000 elections was predominantly confined to conflict between competing candidates and their personal groups of supporters. This is a pattern that is not unusual in developing systems in which political parties are weak. The 2000 legislative elections however, brought violence largely stemming from the state targeting and confronting its citizens.⁴²

The reduction in opposition representation in parliament during the 1990, 1995 and 2000 elections was accompanied by direct attacks upon the parties and led to the freezing of several opposition parties.

Arresting Group Development

Only five opposition parties have been capable of truly participating in party life during Mubarak's tenure: Al-Wafd, Al-Ahrar (Liberals), Al-'Amal (Labour), Tagammu' and the Nasserist. Some of the remaining parties neither publish periodicals nor participate in elections. For example, the Misr party fielded no candidates for the 2000 elections and had not published a newspaper since May

³⁸ Three MPs representing the Wafd have been expelled from the party since the 2000 elections.

³⁹ Gamal Essam El-Din, 'Making History at the Supreme Court', *Al-Ahram Weekly* (13–19 July, 2000).

⁴⁰ Maye Kassem, 'Egypt's 2000 Legislative Elections: New Rules, New Tactics', *Cairo Papers in Social Science* (Cairo: AUC Press, forthcoming).

⁴¹ Jason Brownlee, 'The Decline of Pluralism in Mubarak's Egypt', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (October, 2002), p. 9.

⁴² Kassem, 'New Rules, New Tactics.'

2000 before it was frozen by the PPC in October 2001.⁴³ My discussion here concerns the restrictions on the few active parties.

The government stifles an opposition party in three main ways. When it perceives an opposition party to have crossed red lines the government utilises pressure points to isolate and fragment the opposition party involved. Firstly, the government reacts to its opposition is to sit and wait while the situation deteriorates within the party's ranks. Other transgressions that provoke such a response include rejecting a NDP objective, such as renomination of the president for another term, or causing a public disturbance such as a demonstration. As a result, the government uses indirect financial pressure as a way to force compliance. Another way is for the government to place pro-government agents into the parties. In the case of the latter, when a pro-government agent infiltrates an opposition party he vies for party leadership, which fragments the party's ranks and gives the PPC justification to freeze party activities. These three approaches, used singularly or in combination, elicit a particular type of behaviour from the opposition parties. Specifically, they promote autocracy and internal divisions within the opposition parties. In the case of the death of an opposition party leader, the government may choose not to intervene and just watches a weak party implode under the weight of its own in-fighting. These tactics make up the government's repertoire for controlling licensed opposition parties.

Al-Ahrar (the Liberals)

Al-Ahrar is one of Egypt's oldest political parties in the post-1976 period. After Sadat created the left, centre, and right forums of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), Al-Ahrar became the right faction. A former Free Officer, Mustapha Kamal Murad, occupied Al-Ahrar's chairmanship until his death in August 1998. From the party's founding, Murad ran the party autocratically, kept it loyal to the president in power, and, as a result, was never attacked by the regime. For example, in 1996, when Mustapha Bakri, then editor-in-chief of the party's mouthpiece *Al-Ahrar*, was using the paper to promote his personal Nasserist views, Murad decided to fire him. Bakri responded by gathering a group of his supporters, some of whom were armed, and conducted a sit-in on the party's premises. The government, in support of Murad, sent security forces and evicted Bakri and his supporters. Thus, Murad ran al-Ahrar in cooperation with the government as well as with its support.

Towards the end of Murad's life, al-Ahrar members jockeyed for position in the (post-Murad) party. Murad and his supporters responded in kind by purging 'renegade members' from the party's ranks in July 1998.⁴⁴ One of those expelled was Farid Zakariya. A statement issued by the party claimed that the Shura council had been informed by a written notification, signed by Murad, of Zakariya's dismissal. However, Zakariya responded that the document was forged and that a group of Islamic fundamentalists were exploiting Murad's illness to their gain.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ashraf Khalil, 'Deep Freeze-Part VII', *Cairo Times* (1–7 November, 2001).

⁴⁴ Simon Apiku, 'Ahrar evicts renegades in further squabbles', *Middle East Times* (2–8 August, 1998).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

When Murad passed away in August 1998, the internal split grew. Two different groups submitted papers to the PPC, each declaring a different party president. The conflict pitted an Islamist-leaning group headed by Hamza Dabas and the party's lone MP Raghieb Hamida against the nationalist faction led by Farid Zakariya, the allegedly expelled member. Dabas' faction gained control of the party's forty national offices and newspaper, while Zakariya worked out of his office in the Shura council. With each side labelling the other as impostors and agents of foreign governments, the PPC gave the party sixty days to sort out its leadership dispute on August 30, 1998. Less than a month later, Zakariya's faction was beginning to look like the weaker of the two groups. In what was initially two factions struggling for leadership, the situation deteriorated further as more groups began to surface to vie for control.

Evidence of Zakariya's weak position was evident through his appeal to the government to intervene in early September.⁴⁶ The government, whose strategy was to not act, instead watched the party implode. The crisis climaxed on September 23, 1998 when Al-Ahrar member Talat Sadat, the nephew of the former President Sadat, and a group of his supporters laid siege to the party's headquarters in downtown Cairo. Clashes erupted in what the local press described as a 'cowboy raid'. As one journalist reported, 'with the help of a battalion of thugs wielding knives and throwing Molotov cocktails at anyone who obstructed their entry into the building, Sadat's hired hands managed to throw out Hamida, his supporters and hired thugs from the building.'⁴⁷ Sadat convened a meeting and was then elected leader by his supporters. As further evidence of the government's willingness to permit an opposition party to destroy itself, riot police who had arrived on the scene almost immediately stood by, claiming 'they could not enter without permission from public prosecutors.'⁴⁸ Finally, after nine hours of fighting, the police intervened and expelled everyone from the party's headquarters. The government then ordered the closure of the headquarters until the factions settled the dispute, but Al-Ahrar's offices were effectively closed indefinitely. The PPC froze Al-Ahrar party activity but has allowed it to continue publishing an independent newspaper.

In this example, the government showed no interest in meddling with Al-Ahrar's affairs after the death of Murad. Instead it chose to watch the party disintegrate. This tactic of inactivity in regulating opposition parties serves the regime's interest. Once the progovernment opposition leader passes away, the authorities are willing to let the party die for sake of stability and predictability. While this demonstrates the dependent nature of opposition parties in Egypt, it also shows that the regime is not supporting party pluralism, much less democratisation. If the government maintained its non-intervention policy with all opposition parties, political development might benefit. However the regime only works to fragment parties if they seem to pose a threat to the political status quo.

⁴⁶ Simon Apiku, 'Ahrar crisis gets more intricate' *Middle East Times* (20–26 September, 1998).

⁴⁷ Simon Apiku, 'Ahrar dispute turns bloody', *Middle East Times* (4–10 October, 1998).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The Nasserists

In 1992, a State Council Administrative court overturned the PPC's rejection of the Arab Democratic Nasserists Party—ending a decade-long in the courts. The party's president is Diya al-Din Dawud, who served as a high-ranking official and minister in the ASU under President Abdel Nasser. True to Abdel Nasser's legacy, the party rejects Zionism and American imperialism, and feels the state should be the principle source of economic growth.

The Nasserist party has been the only opposition party of the ten legalised after 1990 to have won seats in parliament or attract a moderate following, primarily through the party's mouthpiece, *Al-ʿArabi*. The party's experience shows the extent of the government's commitment to disrupt opposition parties. The Nasserist party was the only opposition group not to endorse Mubarak's referendum nomination in a May 1999 parliamentary session, the last before Mubarak was reaffirmed with ninety-three percent of the popular vote for a fourth term. One observer provided an analysis of the party's public objection to Mubarak. In the words of Wahid ʿAbd Al-Magid, 'the Nasserist highlighted the need for political reform to safeguard economic achievements and attain social equality. Apart from the Nasserist's report, the contents of other official reports can be described as showering praise of the President and his achievements.'⁴⁹ In reaction to what was perceived as tantamount to a direct challenge, the government began to pressure the party financially.

When the Nasserist party disclosed its problems finacing its daily *Al-ʿArabi* in March 1999, with reports claiming a three million LE debt, the government began to use the paper's financial situation to force compliance. Nearly all opposition papers, because they are required to publish with the government's publishing house, Al-Ahram, are forced to maintain debts and thus never truly become independent from the state's reach.⁵⁰ This practice of operating in debt is usually tolerated, but the state uses it as an economic lever to be deployed at the first sign of dissent. After the Nasserist party's rejection of Mubarak's nomination, the state decided to call in the paper's publishing debts. The paper owed at least one million LE for back printing costs to Al-Ahram publishing house and another two million LE to the department of social insurance and the ministry of finance for unpaid taxes.

Yet, the state did not stop there. Opposition newspapers do not make their revenue from street sales due to low circulation. Instead, they rely mostly on the state's public sector companies' advertisements. The Nasserist suddenly saw a majority of the state's companies pull their advertisements from *Al-ʿArabi*. As the former managing editor of the paper, Jamal Fahmi claimed, 'People which refuse to toe the line often meet with unfavourable consequences such as losing advertisements from state-owned enterprises.'⁵¹

To combat this challenge to the paper's existence, Dawud proposed the party seek a private investor to buy the paper while the party could control the paper's content. The High Press Council claimed that 'the state was against the idea,' and the only serious investor, ʿAsam Fahmi, wanted to appoint *Ruz Al-Yusif's*

⁴⁹ Wahid ʿAbd Al-Magid, 'President Mubarak's re-election', *Al-Hiyyat* (9 June, 1999).

⁵⁰ Simon Apiku, 'Nasserist daily denies privatization plans', *Middle East Times* (10–16, March 1999).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

pro-government journalist 'Adil Hamuda as *Al-'Arabi's* editor-in-chief.⁵² This response caused uproar within the party's ranks and Dawud dropped the matter.

It was the Nasserist party's public rejection of Mubarak that provoked the government's retaliation. The government used financial pressure on the party's paper to the point of nearly forcing bankruptcy. As a result, the party's mouthpiece was forced to go from being a daily to a weekly. The state, through its resources of Al-Ahram publishing house and the ministry of finance, used the paper's debts as a pressure point in order to induce political compliance.

The Nasserist party's experience shows that while the state is content to watch opposition parties implode, it is just as willing to intervene directly to meet its objectives. By maintaining financial levers against the opposition parties, the regime deters them from crossing red lines such as not supporting the president. The regime's measures see to it that although an opposition group may air its discontent, it will not persist to such a degree that it threatens its own existence as a political entity. The government is in a position to control the actions and sentiments the parties make because of its monopoly on the resources and the opposition's dependency. In this vein, these weak opposition parties exist because of the government's good will. Although the first two examples show moderated government responses toward opposition parties, the following demonstrates the degree to which the state will go to freeze a party's activities.

Al-'Amal (Labour)

Al-'Amal was created by President Anwar Sadat in 1978. The party originally had a socialist platform emphasizing the public sector's primacy in economic planning. In 1984, the party transformed itself into an Islamist-leaning party. When Al-'Amal entered an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, an illegal but tolerated moderate Islamist organisation, in the 1987 elections, it won sixty-two seats. Al-'Amal maintained its links with the Brotherhood and allowed its members to use the party's newspaper, *Al-Sha'b*, until the PPC froze the party's activities in May 2000. The party's president had been Ibrahim Shukri, who served as Minister of Agriculture under Sadat, since its establishment. Also, 'Adil Husayn played a major role in the party between the mid-1980s and his death on March 15, 2001. During that period, Husayn traded in his Marxist tendencies for Islamist ones and orientated the party towards that trend.

During the 1990s Al-'Amal was the government's main antagonist. More daring than other opposition parties, Al-'Amal used its newspaper to expose corruption among prominent politicians and their families. As one journalist claimed, "*Al-Sha'b* ... is possibly the most hawkish of all the opposition newspapers, using fiery rhetoric to lambast government policies and publishing provocative headlines."⁵³ This stance provoked tension between the paper's journalists and the authorities. *Al-Sha'b* editor-in-chief and 'Adil Husayn's nephew, Magdi, was brought up on charges of libel for disclosing a story about 'Ala al-Alfi, the son of then Minister of Interior Hasan al-Alfi, and his friends trashing parts of Cairo's five-star Semiramis hotel after refusing to pay for food and services. 'Ala sued Magdi Husayn. He was convicted and served four months of a

⁵² Rana Allam, 'Nasserists act to reform their party', *Al-Ahram Weekly* (September 20–26, 2001).

⁵³ 'Opposition blaster', *Al-Ahram Weekly* (26 October–1 November, 1995).

two-year jail sentence, under the newly updated press law (law 93/1995). This law carried harsher penalties for publishing false and slanderous news than the previous 1980 press law. Part of the government's general deliberalisation agenda of the 1990s, Law 93/1995 was passed because 'the government was targeting the opposition press, and *Al-sha'b* in particular.'⁵⁴

Another libel case was brought against *Al-sha'b* journalists in 1999. *Al-Sha'b* had launched a campaign against the Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Prime Minister Yusif Wali, accusing him of 'treason' for developing close cooperative contacts with the Israeli agricultural industry and promoting normalisation. In this case Magdi Husayn, Salah Badawi, and cartoonist 'Asam Hanafi were each sentenced to two years in prison and fined 20,000 LE for slandering Wali. The government responded to these two press incidents by placing pro-regime agents within Al-'Amal's ranks to fragment and disrupt the party.⁵⁵ 'Adil Husayn, then Secretary General of the party, recognized the government's tactic. In his words, 'governmental influences are working on creating a dissent movement in Labour. It puts up all the necessary obstacles in front of our political activities.'⁵⁶ While Husayn and Shukri were able to maintain control of the party despite the government's internal threat, its row with the government escalated.

Al-Sha'b, playing on its Islamist trend, began a campaign against the Minister of Culture, Faruk Husni, for re-printing the 1983 *Walima Shab al-Bahr* (*A Banquet for Seaweed*) by Syrian novelist Haydr Haydr. In April 2000, the party labelled the book 'blasphemous' for defaming Islam. The campaign incited a riot at Al-Azhar University on May 8, 2000. Clashes between students and central security forces lasted for hours. Fifty-five students were injured and another sixty were arrested. Three security officers were injured and ten cars and two buses were damaged. Although most students admitted they had not read the novel, 'their information about it came from a three-article series in the Islamist-oriented *Al-sha'b*.'⁵⁷ The Al-Azhar riots were some of the 'fiercest riots Cairo has seen for years' and one journalist wrote, 'now that the Haydr campaign has broken to the surface, it will be very difficult for the government to contain.'⁵⁸ While the government had responded to the previous press incidents by placing regime agents within Al-'Amal, inciting public demonstration was overtly suppressed. Less than two weeks after the Al-Azhar riots the PPC froze Al-'Amal's activities, including its publication of *Al-Sha'b*, under the pretext of a simmering internal leadership dispute on May 20, 2000.

The leadership struggle began when Ahmad Idris and movie actor Hamdi Ahmad lodged complaints with the PPC on May 16, 2000. Each individually claimed they had been elected as party leader replacing Ibrahim Shukri. Al-'Amal responded by holding a press conference the following day in order to clarify the situation. Ahmad Idris, one of the pretenders, claimed that he was the party's Secretary General since 1989. Claiming 'we have always been around, but they [Husayn and Shukri] had a voice in *Al-sha'b* and we didn't,' Idris' claims were tenuous because Al-'Amal did not have records of his party

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Joshua Stacher, 'Labor's Hussein blames state for party's schism', *Middle East Times* (19–25 November, 1999).

⁵⁶ Adil Husayn, interview by author, 14 November, 1999, Cairo.

⁵⁷ Steve Negus, 'Azhar erupts over "blasphemous" novel', *Cairo Times* (11–17 May, 2000).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

membership.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Husayn argued that Hamdi Ahmad had been a member but was expelled in 1999 because ‘we thought he was an outside agent.’⁶⁰ The eventual closure of Al-‘Amal was opposed by Shukri and Husayn and welcomed as a ‘wise decision’ by both Ahmad and Idris. The PPC cited party infighting as the cause of Al-‘Amal’s closure, and not the controversy over Haydr’s book.

The evidence indicates the state played a large role. The government welcomed the decision to freeze Al-‘Amal’s activities and while the PPC was willing to restore the party once the leadership dispute ended, the state was less accommodating. The government went a step further than the PPC and decided that the party would remain banned until it expelled anti-regime ‘elements and abandons its Islamist rhetoric.’⁶¹ The state commented that it was ‘considering other means of getting rid of the “unruly” LP.’⁶² Furthermore, state prosecutors claimed that ‘Adil Husayn was ‘trying to make an extremist group’ and there would be criminal charges against Husayn’s faction for ‘illegally obtaining funds from abroad.’⁶³ Additional evidence shows the extent the government was willing to go to exclude Al-‘Amal from being reintroduced to party life.

On July 25, 2000, a High Administrative Court ruled the PPC had overstepped its authority and ruled that the party could resume normal activities. Yet, when Shukri showed up at the party’s headquarters in Cairo, security forces prevented him from entering the building. As a result, Shukri held a meeting at his house and claimed that *Al-Sha‘b* would resume printing. In a move reminiscent of the Nasserist party’s experience, Al-Ahram Publishing House announced that Al-‘Amal owed money for back printed issues and refused to print the party’s paper. As ‘Adil Husayn noted, ‘the government can simply order al-Ahram not to print our papers and the printers will comply.’⁶⁴ Al-‘Amal won another court battle in July 2000 but the government appealed and the case is held up in the courts.

Al-‘Amal’s example shows the lengths to which the government is willing to go to quell outspoken opposition parties. This is the most extreme example of the state’s tactics against an opposition party. It is clear that under no circumstances was the government willing to allow Al-‘Amal to operate again. By sending pro-regime agents into the party to disrupt activities, having pretenders vie for leadership, exploiting the party’s financial debts, and disregarding judicial rulings, the government has silenced the most tenacious opposition party. In the words of one journalist:

The ban has effectively silenced the party’s pesky newspaper, and that might be all it was meant to do. Either way, the state has drawn a clear line on the limits of acceptable political behavior: you can get friendly with the Muslim Brotherhood, you can defame ministers, and you can shout about Zionist elements taking over the country’s ministers, but you can’t make such a fuss that you provoke a demonstration. That is simply too much.⁶⁵

Prior to his death ‘Adil Husayn argued the party ‘was singled out for not toeing

⁵⁹ Ibid, and Simon Apiku, ‘Egypt cracks down on Islamist party’, *Middle East Times* (27 May–2 June, 2000).

⁶⁰ McClure.

⁶¹ Said Al Khamar, ‘State prosecutors ganging up against Labor’, *Middle East Times* (7–13 July, 2000).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Said Al Khamar, ‘Labor’s Al Shaeb free to print?’, *Middle East Times* (21–27 July, 2000).

⁶⁵ McClure.

the government's line' while the other opposition parties 'had been domesticated.'⁶⁶ Furthermore he argued, 'The government realised that we were capable of mobilizing popular support against its policies. This is an act of a serious opposition party and they resent us for that.'⁶⁷ Al-'Amal's experience shows that the government's tactics are relentless in thwarting the opposition's chances of operating freely. Yet, these cases of governmental interference were just a prelude of what follows, namely a more efficient and paranoid approach to Egypt's opposition and individuals participating in party life.

Blocking Emerging Personalities

There have been increased smatterings of high profile cases demonstrating an attempt to block emerging personalities, and the causes they represent, since the radical Islamists attacked Luxur's Hatshipsut temple in November 1997. While this tactic has been used throughout Mubarak's Egypt as in the example of the forced retirement of then Minister of Defence General 'Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazalla in 1989, blocking emerging personalities has increased in the post-1997 period. Some, such as Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights secretary-general Hafiz Abu Sa'da and Egyptian-American scholar Saad Eddin Ibrahim, have been held for limited periods or served prison sentences and others, such as former Minister of Foreign Affairs 'Amr Musa, have been transferred from domestically powerful political positions to postings that essentially phase them out of the Egyptian political scene.⁶⁸ The common denominator of blocking emerging personalities is deterrence. Firstly, the government blocks these specific individuals from participating so as not to threaten perceived public order and stability. This is consistent with the regime's encouraged security-conscious political environment. Yet, this strategy also aims to deter citizens from mixing in circles that champion certain causes such as democratic development, human rights, or solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada. Therefore, it deters citizen activism and depoliticises issues. Whether this is a new regime tactic is debatable. Nonetheless, there is evidence to indicate that incidences of blocking emerging personalities are increasing—both inside and outside legalised political parties. While the above examples of Abu Sa'da, Ibrahim, and Musa fall outside the spectrum of legal opposition parties, the phenomenon links to other examples within the opposition parties. Blocking emerging personalities from reviving existing but inactive parties is further evidence of the same concept.

Since Al-'Amal's closure in 2000, the government has been targeting prominent independent MPs working to revive existing but inactive parties. The government's main tactics include interfering with opposition parties' membership and conducting negative media campaigns. These tactics have been used against Ayman Nur, a former prominent member of Al-Wafd and current independent MP.

⁶⁶ Apiku, 'Egypt cracks down on Islamist party.'

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ While the position of Secretary-General of the Arab League is an important position and one that has strengthened since Musa took the post in May 2001, it came at the expense of his previous prominent position as foreign minister. There is speculation that he was forced out because of his popularity and public appeal, which included Shaba'n 'Abd Al-Rahim's popular song, 'I hate Israel and love 'Amr Musa'. Ahmad Mahir replaced him as Egyptian foreign minister.

The Case of Ayman Nur

Ayman Nur, a 37-year old MP, was elected to parliament in the 1995 and 2000 elections. He received overwhelming support from his Bab al-Sharqiya constituency in Cairo. In addition to channelling resources into his constituency and building a hospital, he was known for recruiting famous Egyptian singers, such as Muhammad Munir, to perform at election rallies. A lawyer with a Ph.D. from Russia, Nur is considered one of Egypt's youngest and brightest politicians. Despite his Al-Wafd membership, Nur's political popularity cuts across party lines and he maintains a following in the NDP.

Nur's problems began shortly after the autumn 2000 elections. Running for the position of deputy speaker in Parliament, he obtained 161 votes in late 2000. No one expected an opposition figure to receive such a high number of votes. Shortly after, Nur claims he 'felt [he] was beginning to be blacklisted and being targeted by the authorities.'⁶⁹ On March 11, 2001, he was dismissed from Al-Wafd ranks. Al-Wafd president, Nu'man Guma', claimed that he was expelled for supporting Farid Hasanayn's attempted coup of the party. Observers, however, argued that Guma', who was elected president in October 2000, was tailoring the party to block emerging personalities that challenge his authority.⁷⁰ As a result, a member with Nur's charisma was perceived as a threat. In the words of one young Al-Wafd member, 'It appears that Guma' doesn't only create positions in the party and newspaper to guarantee the largest number of supporters, but that he also spends party funds to get rid of those he does not want.'⁷¹ But Nur rather cites government interference, claiming 'it was the government who spoke to Guma' and made him feel threatened which, in turn, led to my dismissal from the party.'⁷²

Following Nur's expulsion from Al-Wafd, a photocopy of a check was published in the state's *Al-Ahram al-Riyadi*, which implicated him in a financial scandal, in July 2001. The paper had a picture of the two million LE check and stated it was CIA money. Nur traced the check back to an American NGO, the Centre for Voting and Democracy, which absolved him of any wrongdoing and issued a statement that the check was fabricated. In fact, the group said they had never heard of him. The Parisian bank in question also claimed that Nur neither had an account with it nor had they received a check for him from an NGO. After the check incident, Nur decided that instead of remaining an independent he wanted to become a member of another opposition party.

In October 2001, Nur was appointed first deputy of the Misr party as well as made editor-in-chief of the party's newspaper, *Misr*, by the party's president Jamal Rabi'. The Misr party was basically inactive. It had neither published its newspaper since May 2000 nor fielded candidates for the 2000 elections. The Misr party informed the Higher Parties Council (HPC) of the changes in the party leadership, which incorporated Nur, on October 25, 2001. Another Misr member, Walid al-Luksuri, convened a meeting in his house that night, according to the HPC's report. The meeting elected him president and ousted Rabi'

⁶⁹ Ayman Nur, interview by the author, 28 March, 2002, Cairo.

⁷⁰ Nu'man Guma' was elected Al-Wafd's president in October 2000 following the death of long-time party leader Fuad Sarag Al-Din the previous August.

⁷¹ Saeed Okasha, 'Infighting', *Cairo Times*, Vol. 5, Issue 23 (9–22 August, 2001).

⁷² Ayman Nur, interview.

from the position. Despite al-Luksuri's claims that he gathered 500 disgruntled party members, Nur dismissed it as ludicrous, 'I've seen his house. It fits ten people—thirteen maximum.'⁷³ He further charged that al-Luksuri's challenge was government supported. As Nur claims, 'it was a tactic by the government to create infighting so they had a reason to close the party due to a leadership struggle.'⁷⁴ Subsequently, on October 29, 2001, the HPC froze the Misr party's activities on the grounds that its leadership was disputed. Thus, it only took four days for the government to respond to Nur's joining the Misr party's ranks.

In the Nur example, the charisma of one opposition politician was enough to prompt the government's ending of the party's activities. While previously the government had waited until a party acted against the state, as in the cases of the Nasserist and Al-*Amal*, its tolerance had dwindled by the time of the Misr party's incident. Governmental interference in the Misr party example matches the experiences of other opposition parties. The Egyptian government has escalated its attacks toward the opposition and permitted less and less legitimate party activity. Indeed, the longer the regime has remained in power the less tolerant it has become.

Conclusion

Opposition parties in Egypt are weak organisations. They are autocratically run, easily fragmented, and incorporated into the co-option and patronage networks of Mubarak's Egypt. Dissent is no longer tolerated from the opposition parties. If it is expressed, a party can expect to have its activities frozen.

This is also a recent phenomenon. While deliberalisation began in the early 1990s, it was initially directed at Islamist activism and political aspirations. When the regime successfully dealt with the Islamists, it began to curtail its own weak opposition parties. Of the sixteen legalised opposition parties in Egypt, seven have been closed since 1998. Of the active opposition parties only Al-Wafd, the Nasserist, and the Tagammu' remain and they are under indirect state control. The government manipulates the parties to justify their closures. Indeed, the regime has been charged with directly meddling in the cases of Al-*Amal*, Misr party, and the National Accord. In the cases of the Nasserist, Al-Wafd, and Al-Ahrar the government applied economic pressure, worked with party leaders to expel outspoken members, and chose to be inactive so as to prevent any party potentially challenging the ruling NDP. Finally, the government is willing to freeze an inactive party rather than allow a charismatic figure to resuscitate it. These tactics are now applied at the slightest sign of dissent.

As one observer noted, the 'legal opposition is beginning to implode.'⁷⁵ The ruling regime remains stable and its replacement looks unlikely in the foreseeable future. As long as opposition parties exist, it can penetrate, then fragment them or close them. In a post-September 11 world, the situation is likely to get more repressive. The US ambassador to Egypt, David Welch, was indifferent to the Egyptian government tactics during a keynote address in Cairo in January

⁷³ Khalil, 'Deep Freeze.'

⁷⁴ Ayman Nur, interview.

⁷⁵ 'The perks are fine, forget the politics', *Economist* (21 November, 1998), p. 46.

2002.⁷⁶ Members of the audience questioned Welch whether America would encourage democratic development in Egypt. Welch replied that 'the United States considers Egypt a friend and we don't put pressure on our friends.'⁷⁷

The deliberalisation of the opposition is linked to the fact that there is a re-entrenchment of authoritarian rule. The situation has gone beyond the impasse of a blocked transition. The type of authoritarian system that is emerging is more sophisticated, efficient, and flexible than under Sadat before the transition began. Pluralism in Egypt is not allowed to become anything more than a cosmetic cover to prop up the one party that is allowed to function freely.

This account of Egyptian opposition parties serves as an introductory inquiry. As with most articles, it answers fewer questions than it initiates. There are connections that can be made between this party's argument and other arenas of association, speech, and assembly (NGOs, media/newspapers, publications, student activities on university campuses, and Emergency Laws). These connections need explored so that a detailed account evaluating the on-the-ground tactics that the government supplements with its legal edicts are added to the political studies literature on authoritarian persistence and variance in the developing world.

⁷⁶ Speech of David Welch, US Ambassador to Egypt, 'American Policy in the Middle East', 28 January, 2002, The English Public Lecture Series, Ewert Hall, American University in Cairo, Cairo.

⁷⁷ Ibid. While this statement represents more of a diplomatic dodge of the question, rather than explicit support for authoritarianism, it is increasingly arguable that there are limited cases, such as Saad Eddin Ibrahim's, the American administration raise against the Egyptian government.

