# 14

# Islamists and Non-Islamists in the Egyptian Opposition

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In the 1970s the regime of late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat moved away from the more hegemonic or closed form of authoritarianism adopted under former president Gamal Abdel Nasser and toward a more pluralistic semiauthoritarian political formula. Sadat oversaw the creation of a number of opposition parties, allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to resume its activities, and extended greater freedoms to the media and to civil society organizations. However, the ruling party remained firmly in control of the real levers of power, restricting political contestation to the outer limits of the political system and thus insulating the core power elite from any serious political challenge or competition.

Over the past three decades, Sadat's semiauthoritarian formula has remained largely intact. President Hosni Mubarak's regime has institutionalized and consolidated semiauthoritarianism by continuing to extend a limited margin of political freedom to opposition parties and movements, while keeping in place a battery of laws and procedures that allows the regime to limit the autonomy and effectiveness of the opposition. Moreover, the Mubarak regime has relied extensively on emergency laws and procedures to suppress serious opposition to the regime, which have been in force continuously since the assassination of Sadat in 1981. These emergency measures have allowed the Mubarak regime to create parallel legal and judicial structures, and thus, to override many of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution and the normal judicial system. Such legal dualism has given the regime expansive powers while enabling it to maintain a thin veneer of democracy.

The resilience of semiauthoritarianism in Egypt has belied earlier claims that political liberalization is by definition an unstable equilibrium that must eventually give way either to full-fledged democratization or to a reversion to more repressive forms of authoritarianism. This claim was born out of the belief that, once authoritarian regimes open up, mass mobilization occurs on a wide scale and authoritarian regimes are forced either

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to democratize or to crack down.[1] However, Egypt's experiences with political liberalization indicate that it does not always lead to the resurrection of civil society and that, in some instances, political liberalization may in fact discourage further democratic mobilization. This tends to be the case in countries where opposition movements are divided along foundational, social, and economic issues and where a transition to full fledged democracy is perceived as a zero-sum game that could lead to the permanent exclusion of one or more of the main forces in the opposition.[2] In such situations, some groups in the opposition may prefer a semiauthoritarian formula, under which their interests are at least partially represented, to a complete transition to democracy where they may be permanently excluded.[3]

I contend that, in the Egyptian context, divisions between Islamists and non-Islamists have discouraged broad-based mobilization against the regime and have driven many democrats and would-be democrats to align themselves with the authoritarian regime against Islamist forces in the opposition. As a result, democratic mobilization in Egypt has been weak even during periods of relative political openness or regime crisis; the regime has thus been able to maintain a semiauthoritarian equilibrium for over three decades.

This research project examines how divisions among the different forces in the Egyptian opposition, particularly between Islamists and non-Islamists, have affected the capacity of the Egyptian opposition to challenge the authoritarian regime successfully. The project also examines how the regime has, in its turn, manipulated and perpetuated divisions within the opposition to reproduce its power even as its legitimacy and ability to govern effectively continue to decline.

I begin by considering efforts to build alliances in three arenas: parliamentary elections, issue-based movements and committees, and professional syndicates. As we shall see, the record suggests that successful alliance building has been a function of two distinct clusters of variables: those that are internal to the opposition and those that are imposed by the regime. Internal variables include the level of ideological convergence and polarization between Islamists and non-Islamists and the balance of power among different actors in the opposition. External variables include the degrees of political liberalization and repression as well as divide-and-rule tactics that the regime has employed to inhibit alliance building. The paper concludes by exploring the potential effects of presidential succession and

1. Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

2. Daniel Brumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2002), pp. 56–68.

3. Brumberg, "The Trap."

generational replacement—in both the regime and the opposition—on the prospects of alliance building between Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition, and proposes a number of different scenarios for the future.

## Alliance Building between Islamists and Non-Islamists in the Opposition

### *Electoral Alliances*

The regime in Egypt regularly manipulates parliamentary elections to ensure the ruling party's continued hold on the two-thirds majority necessary to amend the constitution. Nonetheless, despite their controlled nature, parliamentary elections are an important political event for opposition forces. Since the transition to limited political pluralism in the mid-1970s, the ruling party has allowed opposition parties and movements a limited degree of representation in parliament. Though such representation has never exceeded one-third of the seats, parliamentary representation nonetheless remains one of the few avenues available to political parties and movements to make their presence felt, to communicate with a broader public, and to break the isolation that the regime imposes on them.

Moreover, despite widespread rigging and fraud by the regime, parliamentary elections provide the various political forces with one of the few opportunities, in an otherwise opaque political system, to test their popularity and the size of their support, at least compared to other forces in the opposition. Opposition parties and movements have thus attempted to maximize their gains in parliamentary elections, either by forging alliances with other forces in the opposition or by making deals with the regime—often at the expense of other actors in the opposition.

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During the 1980s, a favorable political and institutional environment encouraged electoral alliance building between Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition. For the 1984 elections, the newly reconstituted liberal Wafd party and the Muslim Brotherhood joined forces and ran a single list of candidates. The Wafd/Brotherhood list won fifty-eight seats, constituting the largest opposition bloc in parliament. Similarly, during the 1987 elections, the Socialist Labor Party, the Liberal Party, and the Muslim Brotherhood formed the Islamic Alliance, which won sixty seats and constituted the largest opposition bloc in the 1987 parliament.

During the 1990s, a more repressive political environment, growing polarization and asymmetry between Islamists and non-Islamists, and a new electoral system discouraged electoral alliances of the kind that occurred during the 1980s. Except for a flawed electoral boycott during the 1990 elections, there was a marked lack of coordination among the various opposition actors during the 1995 and 2000 elections.

After a decade of political deliberalization and polarization that inhibited successful cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition, the 2000–05 period experienced a renewed cycle of political liberalization. The relaxation of political controls during that period created conditions conducive to greater cooperation among different actors in the opposition. The crackdown on the Brotherhood during the second half of the 1990s drove the movement to moderate its discourse and seek alliances with other opposition actors, and the outbreak of the intifada and the first U.S. invasion of Iraq helped unify the various segments of the opposition after deep divisions over foreign policy issues during the 1990s. Furthermore, external pressures on the regime to democratize created a political opening that drove secularists and Islamists to converge around a fixed set of demands for political and constitutional reforms and provided them with an opportunity to mobilize more effectively against the regime.

The 2005 parliamentary elections acquired special importance because they occurred in an environment of heightened domestic mobilization around issues of democratization and unprecedented external pressure on the regime to democratize. Observers expected the elections to be freer and fairer than previous elections, given the international scrutiny, judicial supervision, and election monitoring by civil society associations. Opposition parties and movements hoped that these favorable conditions would allow them to end the long-standing two-thirds majority of the National Democratic Party (NDP). Attempts were made to build a grand coalition that united all actors in the opposition, but despite the favorable conditions, the efforts to unify failed. The Muslim Brotherhood, which felt empowered by the successes of Islamists elsewhere in the region and by external pressures on the regime to democratize, refused to join the National Front and decided to contest the elections independently. The other forces in the opposition succeeded in forming an electoral alliance, agreed on a joint program, and fielded a joint list of candidates. This was the first time that secularists and semisecularists in the opposition succeeded in forming an electoral alliance.

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### *Popular Committees and Issue-Based Movements*

Since the late 1970s, alliances between opposition parties and movements often have assumed the form of ad hoc committees created in response to international and domestic developments. These committees bring together organizations and individuals from the different segments of the opposition that share a common position toward a particular event or development. They tend to be issue specific and organized on an informal, decentralized, and nonhierarchical basis. The first such committee, the Egyptian Committee for the Defense of Freedoms (ECDF), was created by the Egyptian opposition shortly after the bread riots of 1977. The ECDF included representatives

from the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), the Liberal Party (LP), the Wafd Party, the Muslim Brotherhood, Marxists, and Nasserists, in addition to representatives from the Lawyers Syndicate, the Journalists Syndicate, human rights organizations, and independent public figures. The committee aimed to provide legal aid and support to activists who had been persecuted for their beliefs and political positions and to raise public awareness about freedom issues through publications, conferences, and partnerships with local and international organizations.[4]

The ECDF format became typical of subsequent committees that the opposition created. During the late 1970s and 1980s, a number of similar committees were created that centered primarily on foreign policy and democracy issues. After Egypt signed its peace treaty with Israel, which most forces in the opposition rejected, a number of committees were formed to oppose normalization with Israel and to protest Israeli policies in the region. These committees included the Egyptian Committee for the Defense of National Culture; a number of antinormalization and boycott committees; the National Committee for Supporting the Palestinian and Lebanese Peoples, which was formed in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon; and the Egyptian National Committee for supporting the Palestinian intifada, which was formed in January 1988, shortly after the outbreak of the first intifada.[5]

Other committees were created during that same period to address issues of political rights and democracy: in addition to the ECDF, the Alliance of Egyptians was formed after the fraudulent 1979 elections. The Alliance aimed to bring together a broad coalition of actors that included a large number of independent public figures in addition to representatives from political parties and movements. In 1983, the National Committee for the Defense of Democracy (NCDD) was formed to promote fairer electoral procedures, an end to the state of emergency, and comprehensive political reforms.

Committees formed during the 1970s and 1980s tended to be fairly inclusive and broad based, given the high level of convergence that existed between actors in the opposition over foreign policy and democracy issues. During the 1980s, these committees were fairly successful at influencing the policy orientations of the regime. Committees focused on foreign policy issues helped create a public opinion antagonistic to Israel and resistant to any attempts to normalize relations with the Jewish state. For its part, the Mubarak regime responded by cooling relations with Israel and adopting a strategy of cold peace that did not promote economic or cultural exchange. Similarly, committees created around democracy issues helped reinforce the atmosphere of greater political openness that existed during the 1980s.

4. Abdel Ghafar Shukr, *Political Alliances in Egypt, 1976–1993* (Cairo: Al-Ahaly Books, 1994), p. 65.

5. Shukr, *Political Alliances*, p. 78.

Even though the regime never relinquished its control over the real levers of power, it significantly expanded the margin of political freedoms available to the opposition and responded to some of the opposition's demands to change the electoral system.

During the 1990s, as political parties began to fragment and atrophy—and as divisions between the various segments of the opposition over foreign policy, socioeconomic, and identity issues deepened—efforts to create broad-based committees were largely unsuccessful. The issue-based committees that were created in the 1990s tended to be more narrow, including only a fragment of the opposition rather than all the principal actors. Committees that were created to oppose privatization and the new land tenancy laws only included leftist forces from the opposition. Liberals and Islamists, who largely favored the privatization and land measures, did not join the committees.[6] Similarly, committees that were formed during the 1990s to oppose the peace process and regional cooperation schemes were not as inclusive as those of the 1980s, as some segments of the opposition supported these initiatives. The committees of the 1990s reflected the internal divisions that afflicted political parties and movements at that time, as a new generation of activists increasingly broke off from existing parties and movements and began to operate through the vehicle of these informal committees and movements.

Democratization issues, upon which opposition actors converged during the 1980s, proved to be a source of controversy during the 1990s. The National Consensus Project, initiated by activists from the 1970s generation in 1994 in an effort to arrest the growing polarization among the different opposition actors, failed because of divisions between secularists and Islamists on one hand and socialists and liberals on the other. Similarly, the Committee for the Defense of Democracy, created in 1999 to oppose a new restrictive non-governmental organization law and which comprised the major political parties and human rights organizations, did not include the Muslim Brotherhood, as the Brotherhood had supported the law.[7]

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The Committee for the Coordination among Political Parties and Forces was the only successful attempt to create a broad-based committee during the 1990s. The committee was created shortly after the 1995 elections, which were the most fraudulent and violent since Mubarak assumed power. The marginalization of Islamists and non-Islamists alike during those elections forced them closer together. Moreover, the Brotherhood's greater moderation—a result of government repression during the 1990s—allowed the committee's creation.

International and domestic developments in the 2000–05 period once again helped create conditions conducive to broad-based committees

6. Personal interview with Hamdeen Sabahi, September 30, 2003.

7. Personal interview with Hussein Abdel Razek, March 20, 2006.

focused on foreign policy and democracy issues. However, in contrast to the committees created during the late 1970s and 1980s, which were driven by the leaders of the principal political parties and movements, the issue-based committees created during the 2000–05 period were largely created by 1970s-generation activists who had split off from these parties and movements during the 1990s. As a result, the involvement of political parties and movements in these committees tended to be largely symbolic; often the older opposition movements perceived the new committees as competitors and attempted to undermine them.

After the polarization caused by the first Gulf War and the peace process during the 1990s, the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000 and the second invasion of Iraq in 2003 helped unite the opposition around a common foreign policy agenda. Shortly after the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada, 1970s-generation activists created the Egyptian Popular Committee for the Support of the Palestinian Intifada (EPCSPI). The Popular Committee succeeded in gaining the support of the various segments and forces that make up the opposition. However, unlike earlier committees, EPCSPI membership was open to all activists in their individual rather than institutional capacities. Thus, even though activists from all the major opposition parties and movements joined the committee, the committee was not, formally speaking, an alliance between political parties and movements. This format proved to be a successful mechanism for allowing a measure of cooperation between 1970s-generation activists and the parties and movements they broke with in the 1990s, and many of the opposition committees created afterward in the 2000–05 period adopted it.

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The period that followed the second invasion of Iraq witnessed a renewed interest in issues of political reform and democracy, driven in large measure by growing external, particularly U.S. pressures on the regime to democratize. In 2004–05, a number of issue-based movements and committees advocating long-standing demands for political and constitutional reforms came into being. The Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya) was created by some of the same founders of EPCSPI and it adopted the same organizational model. Though activists from all the main parties and movements joined Kifaya in their individual capacities, the movement was in large part representative of 1970s-generation activists from the leftist, Islamist, and liberal opposition.

Kifaya's success in generating domestic momentum for reform and attracting global attention drove some of the older movements and parties to establish competing movements and committees. During that same period, eight formal political parties formed the National Accord for Political Reform, which advanced some of the same demands advocated by Kifaya and which entered into a national dialogue with the ruling NDP. The dia-

logue was intended to pull the rug out from under movements such as Kifaya and to rechannel the political debate into the state-sanctioned pluralist order. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was shunned by the parties of the National Accord, also sought to create the National Alliance for Reform, which included some fringe Marxists who had refused to join Kifaya because of its soft attitude toward the United States. A number of public figures and former government ministers also decided to step into the debate by forming the National Union for Change, which focused on the question of constitutional reform and positioned itself as a movement of elders that sought to unite the various segments of the opposition and infuse moderation and wisdom into the debate on political reform.

In addition to the various movements and committees, the 2004–05 period also witnessed the emergence of more specialized issue-based movements and committees that sought to advance the long-standing demands of discreet social groups. These included the 9th of March Movement for the Independence of the Universities, formed by university professors to free Egyptian universities from the administrative and financial control of the regime and end the ubiquitous presence of state security forces on Egyptian university campuses.[8] Professors' clubs, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, perceived the 9th of March Movement as a challenger. However, the movement's visibility and activism on university campuses in 2004–05 drove professors' clubs to mobilize around some of the same issues that the movement raised.[9] Other movements that emerged during that same period included Artists for Change, Journalists for Change, Youth for Change, and Doctors for Change. Most of these movements gathered under Kifaya's umbrella and sought to advance both Kifaya's general demands and also demands particular to their own group or sector.[10]

That said, as mentioned above, the committees created from 2000 to 2005 tended to reflect the generational divide that had begun to characterize the Egyptian opposition starting in the 1990s. Even though most committees created during that period included activists from different ideological orientations, they were nonetheless largely representative of 1970s-generation activists who had broken off from the principal parties and movements of the opposition during the 1990s. The older parties and movements, for their part, tried to reassert their primacy by establishing parallel movements and committees; even as these various committees converged around a common set of demands, their fragmentation allowed the regime to pit the groups against one another and thus prevent the emergence of a broad-based coalition able to challenge the NDP's long-standing hegemony effectively.

8. Personal interview with Mohamed Abul Ghar, June 12, 2006.

9. Personal interview with Mohamed Abul Ghar.

10. Shaimaa Abdel Hady, "The Informal Opposition in Egypt: Kifaya and Its Sisters," *Ahwal Masriyya,* vol. 8, no. 31 (Winter 2006), pp. 99–111 (in Arabic).

Most of the movements and committees that emerged in 2000–05 became inactive or lost momentum in the wake of the 2005 elections, which revived the polarization between Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition. The successes of the Brotherhood during the 2005 elections and the parallel defeat of the non-Islamist opposition reduced external pressures on the regime to democratize and raised fears among some secularists that their activism helped pave the way for the Brotherhood's ascendance. In subsequent months, the regime proceeded to crack down, not only on the Brotherhood, but also on some of the movements that led the democratic activism of the 2004–05 period, such as Kifaya.

### *Professional Syndicates*

During the 1980s, professional syndicates became an important arena for conflict and cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition. Islamists began to penetrate professional syndicates during the 1980s, when many syndicates suffered serious internal divisions and high levels of financial mismanagement and corruption. The feuding between syndicate leaders affiliated with the regime and the secular opposition—and their mismanagement of syndicate resources, which were often considerable—created a high sense of disenchantment among the syndicate members.[11] This was particularly the case among young graduates who entered syndicates in large numbers during the 1970s and 1980s, who felt that syndicate leaders were oblivious to their needs and demands at a time of high unemployment and economic retrenchment. Islamists capitalized on this disenchantment by addressing the needs of these young graduates and distancing themselves from the infighting among the syndicate leaders. When Islamist activists began to contest syndicate elections during the 1980s, many Islamists and non-Islamists in professional syndicates supported them and saw them as a clean alternative to the corruption and factionalism of the old leaders.

However, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Brotherhood activists began to dominate the boards of a number of syndicates and adopt an exclusive attitude toward other political forces, non-Islamists began to turn against them.[12] During the 1990s, many non-Islamists—some of whom had previously supported the Brotherhood—tacitly supported the regime's measures, such as Law 100 in 1993, to reverse the ascendance of Islamists within professional syndicates. In fact, in a number of syndicates, such as the lawyers' and engineers' syndicates, non-Islamists used the provisions

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11. *The Arab Strategic Report 1999* (Cairo: Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2000), pp. 296–304.

12. Ahmed Hussein Hasan, *The Political Rise of Islamists within Professional Syndicates: A Case Study of the Egyptian Engineers Syndicate* (Cairo: Al Dar Al Thaqafiyya Publishing, 2000), p. 52 (in Arabic).

of Law 100 to call for the dissolution of the elected boards of their syndicates and the appointment of judicial committees in their stead. Moreover, some non-Islamists in these syndicates cooperated with the regime in its efforts to postpone elections indefinitely by contesting the integrity of the membership rosters of these syndicates. As a result of these divisions, most of those syndicates that had fallen under the control of the Brotherhood during the late 1980s and early 1990s were placed under the control of state-appointed judicial committees and most have been unable to hold elections for over a decade.

During the 2000–05 period, Islamist and non-Islamist activists joined forces in a number of professional syndicates to end continued state control and convene new elections. In the lawyers' syndicate, such cooperation was made possible by the emergence of an implicit and often tenuous power-sharing arrangement between Islamists and non-Islamists on the board of the syndicate. In the engineers' syndicate, Islamists and non-Islamists formed Engineers Against State Control, which, since 2003, has been attempting to pressure the regime to end judicial control and allow for the convocation of new elections. However, despite these efforts, most of the syndicates that fell under the control of the Brotherhood during the late 1980s and early 1990s continue to be controlled by a state-appointed judicial committee. The regime and some non-Islamists within these syndicates have resisted efforts to convene new elections, fearing that the Brotherhood will once again assume control.

## External and Internal Obstacles to Successful Alliance Building between Islamists and Non-Islamists

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The various instances of alliance building and cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition reviewed in the previous section indicate that successful alliance building is a function of two distinct clusters of variables: those that are internal to the opposition and those that are imposed by the regime. Internal variables include the level of ideological convergence or polarization between Islamists and non-Islamists and the balance of power between Islamist and non-Islamists. External variables include the degree of political liberalization or repression and divide-and-rule tactics employed by the regime. And even though, in reality, these variables are closely intertwined and often mutually constitutive, it is nonetheless useful, for analytical purposes, to consider them independently.

### *Internal Factors*

*Ideological Convergence and Polarization:* Successful instances of cooperation and alliance building between Islamists and non-Islamists have been more likely during periods of ideological convergence and less likely during

periods of ideological polarization. During the 1980s, as the regime adopted less divisive foreign and domestic policies and the secular opposition increasingly began to Islamize its discourse, the ideological gap between Islamists and non-Islamists began to narrow and cooperation was made more possible. During that period, Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition converged on a common agenda for political reform and shared common positions regarding the principal foreign policy issues of the day.[13] This convergence allowed for a number of successful alliances between Islamists and non-Islamists in parliamentary elections, issue-based movements, and some professional syndicates during the 1980s.

Similarly, during the 2000–05 period, support for the Palestinian intifada and opposition to the war in Iraq helped unite the opposition behind a common foreign policy agenda. External pressure on the Egyptian regime to democratize helped focus the attention of Islamists and non-Islamists alike on issues of political and constitutional reform and away from some of the more divisive social and economic issues. During those five years, Islamists and non-Islamists mobilized separately and jointly around foreign policy and democracy issues and converged on a fixed set of demands. This convergence allowed for greater cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists in movements, such as EPCSPI and Kifaya, and in a number of syndicates, including the lawyers', journalists', and engineers' syndicates.

In contrast, polarization during the 1990s over questions such as sharia, the peace process, and economic reform inhibited cooperation and alliance building between Islamists and non-Islamists, on one hand, and liberals and socialists, on the other. During the 1990s, the division between secularists and Islamists became the principal fault line in the Egyptian polity and many non-Islamists aligned themselves with the regime in its attempts to crack down on both radical and moderate Islamists. Except for the Committee for the Coordination between Political Parties and Forces, most attempts at coalition building during the 1990s were largely unsuccessful.

Though ideological convergence seems to create conditions conducive to cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists, it does not necessarily ensure that such cooperation occurs. This was amply demonstrated during the 2005 elections: Despite the high level of programmatic convergence between Islamists and non-Islamists on foreign policy and democracy issues during the 2000–05 period, Islamists refused to enter an alliance with other forces in the opposition and decided to contest these elections independently.

*Balance of Power between Islamists and Non-Islamists:* Alliance building and cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists proved to be more likely

13. Noha El Mikawy, *The Building of Consensus in Egypt's Transition Process* (Cairo: American University Press, 1999).

when there existed some parity between the two sides and less likely when there existed a large imbalance between them. During the 1980s, the Wafd party was a strong secular counterweight to the Muslim Brotherhood; it was the biggest winner in the 1984 elections, winning fifty seats compared to the eight seats won by the Brotherhood. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Islamists began to realize a series of electoral successes in both Egypt and other Arab countries and to push non-Islamists from spaces they had previously dominated, relations between Islamists and non-Islamists deteriorated significantly and cooperation declined visibly. During the 1990s, secularists aligned themselves with the regime, reasserted their commitment to a secular state and to the principles of pluralism and equal citizenship, and became less willing to appease the Brotherhood on issues of sharia, as they had done in the 1980s.

During the late 1990s, after suffering a series of blows at the hands of the regime, a humbled Brotherhood showed greater willingness to moderate its discourse and cooperate with the secular opposition. During the 2000–05 period, Brotherhood activists cooperated with non-Islamists on foreign policy and democracy issues and Brotherhood activists joined movements such as EPCSPI, the Popular Campaign, and Kifaya. However, as these movements tended to be dominated by 1970s-generation activists, some of whom had split off from the Brotherhood during the 1990s, the participation of the Brotherhood tended to be largely symbolic. During that period, Brotherhood activists also cooperated with non-Islamists in a number of professional syndicates.

In 2005 the Brotherhood began to abandon its accommodating and cooperative attitude toward other opposition actors in favor of a more competitive and exclusive approach. Foreign pressure on the regime to democratize placed the regime on the defensive and emboldened the opposition, including the Brotherhood. Moreover, signals sent by the United States and Europe that they were willing to cooperate with moderate Islamists, coupled with the electoral successes of Islamists in Iraq and Palestine, emboldened the Brotherhood. Feeling strengthened, the Brotherhood began to shun cooperation with other forces in the opposition and refused proposals to form a grand coalition with the other forces in the opposition for the 2005 elections. The Brotherhood contested these elections separately and won 20 percent of the votes compared to the 2 percent won by the non-Islamist opposition. The large gap between the performance of the Brotherhood and that of non-Islamists reinforced divisions within the opposition and created a situation akin to that which existed in the early 1990s, giving the regime the excuse it needed to usher in another episode of political deliberalization, which negatively affected Islamists and non-Islamists alike.

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### *External Factors and the Prospects for Cooperation*

*Levels of Repression or Toleration:* Cooperation and alliance building have been more likely during periods of relative political liberalization and less likely during periods of political closure or deliberalization. In the 1980s and in the 2000–05 period, the regime tolerated efforts at alliance building between Islamists and non-Islamists in the opposition. In the 1980s, and despite an electoral law that restricted independents and nonparty actors from running for parliament, the regime allowed Brotherhood candidates to run on the slates of officially recognized political parties. As a result, the Wafd party and the Brotherhood formed electoral alliances in 1984, and the SLP, the LP, and the Brotherhood formed the Islamic Alliance in 1987. Similarly, during the 2000–05 period, the regime tolerated cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists within the context of issue-based movements that focused on foreign policy and democracy issues.

In contrast, during the 1990s, as the regime began to crack down on the Islamist opposition, it significantly raised the costs of cooperation with Islamists. The regime made it clear that it no longer tolerated the longstanding alliance between the SLP and the MB. As a result, the Islamic Alliance was formally dissolved and the SLP, the LP, and the MB had to contest the 1995 election separately. When the SLP continued to cooperate with the Brotherhood and to provide its activists with a formal platform through which to operate, the regime retaliated by suspending the SLP and its newspaper. The regime similarly suspended the activities of a smaller and less-known political party, the National Accord Party, whose leader had approached the Brotherhood and proposed an alliance.[14] And even though the regime was willing at times to use blunt tactics to prevent cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists, more often than not, the regime relied on less direct divide-and-rule strategies to prevent the emergence of a broad-based coalition among actors in the opposition.

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*Divide-and-Rule Tactics:* The regime has been extremely adept at using a variety of divide-and-rule tactics to break the ranks of the opposition and prevent sustainable alliance building between Islamists and non-Islamists. The extension of selective incentives to individual groups in the opposition and the convocation of national dialogues with a chosen group of opposition parties have been favorite tactics. The regime has also often preempted joint mobilization in the opposition by making partial concessions to the opposition and rechanneling the political debate back into the state-sanctioned pluralist order. In the 1980s, as joint mobilization by the opposition focused on the question of electoral reform, the regime preempted this mobilization by making frequent cosmetic amendments to the election law, dissolving

14. Amr Rabie Hashem, ed., *Small Political Parties and the Party System in Egypt* (Cairo: Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2003) (in Arabic).

parliament, and calling for early elections. Thus the regime diverted the opposition's attention away from joint mobilization and toward electoral competition. Moreover, the regime prevented the opposition from forming a grand coalition by promising seats in parliament to parties that refused to join alliances with other opposition actors.

In 1994, in its attempts to gain the support of secular opposition forces, the regime invited officially recognized political parties to a national dialogue, from which the Brotherhood was excluded, demarcating the emergence of a new fault line between secularists in the regime and the opposition on one hand and radical and moderate Islamists on the other. In the course of this dialogue, the regime secured from opposition parties a strong condemnation of terrorism; in return, the regime made some nominal concessions.[15] Similarly, in 2005, as mobilization around issues of reform and democratization was coming to a head, the regime, in an attempt to divide the opposition and isolate both the Brotherhood and new secular movements such as Kifaya, invited officially recognized political parties to yet another national dialogue. In the course of this dialogue, the regime managed to convince political parties to postpone demands for constitutional reform until after the parliamentary elections. However, just a few weeks later, the president embarrassed opposition parties by proposing a constitutional amendment to allow for competitive presidential elections. Aware of the weakness and fragmentation in the secular opposition, the regime has not felt the need to pay a high price to reward secular forces that have cooperated with it against the Brotherhood. Opposition parties have repeatedly demonstrated that they can be coopted for a very low price.

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## Succession, Generational Replacement, and Breaking the Vicious Cycle

Over the past quarter-century, government-opposition and opposition-opposition relations in Egypt have fallen into a cyclical pattern, or a vicious cycle, that has inhibited progress toward greater political liberalization and a full-fledged transition to democracy. On a number of occasions, domestic or external crises have driven the regime to liberalize the political sphere. Liberalization measures, in turn, have encouraged opposition forces to mobilize against the regime and demand further liberalization. Elections are held and Islamists, who command greater mobilizational and organizational skills, can overpower other opposition forces and polarization ensues. Strengthened by the growing divide between actors in the opposition, the regime cracks down on Islamists and proceeds to deliberalize

15. *The Arab Strategic Report 1994* (Cairo: Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1994), p. 37; Mona Makram Ebeid, "Democratization in Egypt: The 'Algeria Complex,'" *Middle East Policy*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1994), pp. 119–124.

the political sphere. This pattern occurred during the second half of the 1970s, again during the late 1990s, and most recently in the wake of the 2005 elections.

Islamists and non-Islamists often have cooperated during the early stages of mobilization. However, once it becomes apparent that Islamists alone reap the benefits of such mobilization, both sides begin to shun cooperation. Islamists feel that, as the stronger party, they should not be forced to make concessions and share power with other opposition forces. Non-Islamists fear being overpowered and ultimately excluded by Islamists, and because they cannot compete electorally with Islamists, they often have aligned themselves with the regime, which they perceive as the lesser of two evils. As a result, non-Islamists often have tacitly supported measures to deliberalize the political sphere and arrest Islamist ascendance, even though such measures tend also to undermine the secular opposition. This vicious cycle has inhibited sustainable cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists and has prevented the emergence of a broad coalition able to challenge the long-standing hegemony of the ruling NDP effectively.

Given the continued weakness and fragmentation of the secular opposition and the Brotherhood's continued ambivalence regarding questions of citizenship and equality, it is conceivable that this cyclical pattern will continue to repeat itself into the foreseeable future, allowing the regime to reproduce its power even as its legitimacy and ability to govern continues to decline. However, given that both the Egyptian regime and the opposition are undergoing processes of generational replacement, it is also conceivable that this cyclical dynamic could be broken in the medium or long term.

After the NDP's poor performance in the 2000 elections, the ruling party began a process of elite recruitment to revamp its base of support and rehabilitate its public image. This process was led by President Mubarak's son, Gamal, who is a former banker with close ties to the Egyptian business community and good relations with Western governments. Positioning himself as a reformer with a neoliberal economic vision and pro-Western orientation, the young Mubarak began to recruit businessmen, technocrats, and liberal intellectuals into the NDP's newly created High Council of Policies as well as the Policies Secretariat, which he presided over. The new recruits oversaw the redrafting of the party's basic principles to emphasize the party's commitment to economic liberalism, citizenship rights, civil society, the empowerment of women, and the peace process.[16] Moreover, reformers within the NDP oversaw the adoption of a number of largely cosmetic political reforms, which were nonetheless the first to be adopted after nearly a decade of political deliberalization. These included the creation

16. Amr Rabie Hashem, *The National Democratic Party* (Cairo: Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2004), p. 40 (in Arabic).

of the National Human Rights Council, the dissolution of state security courts, and some minor amendments to the political parties and political participation laws.

In 2002–05, there was much talk in the Egyptian polity about an internal struggle within the ruling party, between a reformist new guard and a conservative old guard, which had dominated the party since its inception in 1979. During that period, many leading figures from the old guard were removed from positions of influence within both the party and the government and were replaced by individuals associated with the new guard. However, in the wake of the 2005 elections, as foreign pressures on the regime began to subside and as preparations for the prospective process of presidential succession got underway, reformers abandoned many of their reformist claims and the old guard and the new guard joined forces to set the stage for the process of succession. This convergence was reflected in the manner in which the constitution was amended in the spring of 2007 to give the NDP total control over the process of nominating presidential candidates in forthcoming presidential elections. Other amendments were also carefully drafted to tighten the regime's control over the political sphere, to preclude competition from the Muslim Brotherhood, and to limit judicial oversight over the electoral process.

However, despite growing convergence among the old and new guard within the NDP, it is conceivable that Gamal Mubarak and his supporters will feel the need to seek allies outside the regime to ensure a smooth process of succession. Unlike his father, whose legitimacy rests on his military background, his role in the 1973 war, and his previous position as vice president, Gamal Mubarak has no claim to legitimacy and a weak basis of support independent of his father. To consolidate his position, first and foremost, Gamal Mubarak will have to secure the support of the Egyptian security establishment, but he might also seek to gain the endorsement of actors in the opposition to imbue his accession to the presidency with a modicum of legitimacy. This could potentially pave the way for pactmaking between actors in the regime and in the opposition, creating opportunities to transcend an increasingly unsatisfactory status quo.

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For its part, the opposition is undergoing a process of generational replacement that could create opportunities to break the vicious cycle that has characterized Egyptian politics since the mid-1970s. The changing face of the Egyptian opposition became apparent during the 2000–05 period, when 1970s-generation activists began to assume a leading role in mobilizing opposition, overshadowing, at least temporarily, some of the older parties and movements of the opposition. The rise of Wasat-generation activists to leading positions within the opposition could enable greater cooperation and increase the prospects for effective alliance building,

particularly because 1970s-generation activists have, for the most part, demonstrated a greater propensity for pragmatism and compromise, despite their varying ideological commitments.

The political outlook of the 1970s generation of activists was deeply affected by Egypt's 1967 defeat at Israel's hands, which they attributed to the repressive and undemocratic features of the Nasser regime. Democracy became a priority for an important segment of this generation, the activists of which led the 1969 and 1971–72 student demonstrations that demanded, among other things, the restoration of political rights and freedoms. During the 1980s and 1990s, Wasat-generation activists were important in Egyptian public life. Leftist activists from the 1970s generation were largely responsible for creating the Egyptian human rights movements. They also were important in professional syndicates, particularly in the journalists' syndicates and in the media; some of them rose to become leading journalists, writers, and artists.

Islamist activists from the Wasat generation have also been important during the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the more radical elements formed militant Islamist groups and engaged in a violent confrontation with the regime for most of those two decades. However, the more moderate elements joined the Brotherhood in the late 1970s and were largely responsible for the electoral successes of the movement in student unions, professional syndicates, professors' clubs, and in parliament. Moreover, Wasat-generation activists tried to push the Brotherhood toward greater ideological moderation and were responsible for producing statements and declarations that affirmed the movement's commitment to pluralism and democracy.

During the 2000–05 period, Islamist and non-Islamist activists from the Wasat generation assumed a leading role in mobilizations around domestic and foreign policy issues. These activists oversaw the creation of new parties and movements, such as al Ghad, al Karama, al Wasat, EPCSPI, and Kifaya, and succeeded in injecting new dynamism into the Egyptian political sphere after a decade of political polarization and stagnation. Moreover, Wasat-generation activists made serious attempts to transcend the dichotomies that have polarized the Egyptian polity over the past quarter century and take their respective movements beyond ideology and toward greater moderation and pragmatism. This was demonstrated by the more pluralist and inclusive discourse that al Ghad, al Wasat, and al Karama adopted, and also by the successful cooperation between the various segments of the Wasat generation in the context of professional syndicates and issue-based social movements. However, despite the importance of Wasat-generation activists in Egyptian public life, over the past quarter century, their ability to rejuvenate the Egyptian opposition and transcend the dichotomies of the past has been limited by the efforts of both the regime and opposition old guards to

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isolate them. Yet, given the biological inevitability of generational replacement, these efforts are bound to fail; many of the older parties and movements are already experiencing the pangs of change. Soon the divide between the old and the new guard within the Egyptian opposition is bound to disappear, giving way to new dynamics that could lead to a fundamental change in the rules of the political game.

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