REPORT

AN EYE ON ARAB DEMOCRATIZATION SERIES

Toda Peace Institute

EGYPT'S DIVIDED POLITICAL SOCIETY AND 'LOYAL OPPOSITION'

Mohammed Moussa

About the Author

MOHAMMED MOUSSA

Mohammed Moussa is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University. Dr Moussa is also a Fellow at Demos Tunisia. He was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He completed his doctorate at the University of Exeter. His publications include a Routledge monograph on the political thought of Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali (2015) and articles in The Journal of North African Studies, Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research, Protest and Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies.

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Executive summary

Egypt's opposition has failed to rise up to the challenge of being a democratic force in the country's politics. Horizontal solidarity and mounting challenges to incumbent governments are currently missing components among opposition actors. The status quo reveals a situation in which the multitude of political parties, officially numbering 87,[1] on the Egyptian political scene alternate between unity and division in their relations with each other and have failed to affect a shift from being a 'loyal' to 'democratic' opposition. Sustained interparty cooperation across the domains of shadow government, prisoners of conscience and election campaigns can contribute to remedying these weaknesses within Egypt's potentially vibrant opposition.

- The high number of officially licenced political parties has not been accompanied by the commensurate quality of horizontal solidarity or by challenges to incumbents.
- The current challenge faced by the loyal opposition is an inability to outgrow its allocated, and in a certain sense adopted, role.
- Ideological and political rivalries within the opposition have stymied genuine efforts to formulate unified stances and policies vis-à-vis the government.
- Interparty cooperation for running for parliament seats and contesting presidential elections among opposition actors is absent in Egypt's divided political society.
- Opposition political actors can make their coordination more effective through the formulation of a manifesto, the selection of a shadow government and agreement on a presidential candidate.

Context and scope of the problem

A decade before the 2011 overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, increasingly vocal protest movements had overtaken the political parties of the 'loyal opposition'. The latter included political parties across the ideological spectrum from the liberal-nationalist Wafd dating back to the colonial era to the leftwing Tagammu' (Rally), founded in 1976. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) remained officially prohibited but acted informally as the principal opposition movement. Two trends emerged among the protest movements. First, labour strikes and protests across the economy reached an estimated participation that exceeded 1.7 million workers between 2006 and 2009. Second, the rise of Kefaya (Enough) in 2004, founded by the inter-ideological cooperation among Islamists, socialists and liberals, specifically targeted the Mubarak regime.[2] As observed by the Nasserist Hamdeen Sabahi in early 2010, concerning the strength of the grassroots opposition, political initiative in Egypt had shifted to these protest movements, while the official opposition parties remained cosmetic and isolated.[3] Kefaya's call for boycotting the parliamentary and presidential elections for 2010 and 2011 respectively elicited lukewarm responses from opposition actors.[4] Despite predictions that the Muslim Brotherhood's parliamentary presence, which stood at 88 deputies, would dramatically fall, due to internal disagreements within the group, the nomination of fewer candidates, and state repression,[5] interparty cooperation about the elections was subordinated to priorities of the party leadership with little or no room for reaching a consensus with other political groups.

[1] "List of currently active parties," State Information Service, 24 September 2025. https://sis.gov.eg/en/egypt/system-of-government/political-parties/list-of-currently-active-parties/
[2] Michaelle Browers, "The Egyptian Movement for Change: Intellectual Antecedents and Generational Conflicts," *Contemporary Islam* Vol. 1, no. 1 (2007), pp. 72–74.
[3] Mahmoud Mosalem, "Q&A: Hamdin Sabahy on the Constitution, the presidency," *Egypt Independent*, 19 January 2010, https://cloudflare.egyptindependent.com/qa-hamdin-sabahy-constitution-presidency/
[4] Essam Fadl, "Kefaya launches 'anti-election' campaign, threatens to resort to international courts," *Daily News Egypt,* 20 August 2015, https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2009/08/17/kefaya-launches-anti-election-campaign-threatens-to-resort-to-international-courts/.
[5] Evan Hill, "What's at stake in Egypt election," *Al Jazeera,* 24 November 2010, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/11/24/whats-at-stake-in-egypt-election.

Unanticipated heavy losses and alleged systematic vote rigging in the first round of the parliamentary elections, with Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) taking 424 out of 508 seats, provoked the Wafd Party and MB to adopt the call for boycott and to withdraw from the second round.[6] While the Wafd's position to withdraw was met by objections from its own candidates and clashes ensued at its party's headquarters,[7] the decision of the head of Tagammu' Party to still contest the second round led to senior and ordinary members trying to storm its headquarters after security forces refused them entry, and one of its district branches closed down in protest. [8]

Each one of the main opposition political parties, including the MB, sought a course of action that aligned with its perceived interests: participating in circumscribed elections and winning a limited number of seats. A subdued and divided 'political society' characterised the 2000s. Mubarak had managed to maintain a loyal opposition through a mixture of tactics involving coercion and co-optation that blunted the electoral threat of opposition parties.

The failure of inter-ideological cooperation

Egypt's troubled transition from the Mubarak regime was steered by the army through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) after it did not side with the beleaguered president and took over the reins of executive authority when the latter stepped down on 11 February 2011. While a popular and leaderless movement of protesters proved to be more successful than the opposition political parties in ending Mubarak's reign, the political opening that presented itself in Egypt after 2011 appeared to favour nationwide political parties and social movements. Moreover, the MB's newly founded Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was considered the Islamist movement's exclusive political entity. Various senior and youth figures within the MB, however, defied their leadership's insistence on joining the FJP and after resigning from the Islamist group, founded or joined political parties such as the Renaissance Party and Egyptian Current Party.[9] This process of splintering, nonetheless, did not prevent the FJP from cooperating with other political actors outside the Islamist trend.

These efforts to maintain unity among political groups with different ideological affiliations could be seen in Sabahi's Nasserist al-Karama Party joining the FJP-led Democratic Alliance, an electoral coalition, in a bid to avoid an Islamist-liberal cleavage in the elections expected in the same year.[10] Cooperating across newly established party lines appeared to be a priority in the early stages of the post-Mubarak era. This approach to bridging differences was, at least for former Wafd member Wahid Abdel Meguid and a senior Wafd leader, intended to avoid polarisation along ideological lines or more specifically a religious-secular divide.[11] Despite these public declarations, rivalries emerged among the participants in the Democratic Alliance revolving around elections. Disagreements about the positions of the various parties' candidates on the alliance's electoral lists led to the withdrawal of the Wafd and Salafists with al-Karama later following suit.[12]

[6] "Official results: 16 opposition, 424 NDP, 65 "independents"," *Ahram Online*, 6 Dec 2010, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/1321.aspx
[7] Ekram Ibrahim, "Wafd party withdraws from elections amid internal splits," *Ahram Online,* 2 December 2010, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/1092.aspx
[8] Salma El-Wardani, "Tagammu's Rifaat El-Said under fire," *Ahram Online,* 4 December 2010, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/1141.aspx
[9] Salma Shukrallah, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood struggles to contain cracks," *Ahram Online,* 19 July 2011, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/16782.aspx
[10] Egyptian Elections Watch (Ahram Online and Jadaliyya), "Al-Karama," *Ahram Online,* 18 November 2011, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/26690.aspx.
[11] Abdel-Rahman Hussein, "Egypt's oldest liberal party faces controversy over alliance with Brotherhood," *Egypt Independent,* 7 September 2011, https://www.egyptindependent.com/egypts-oldest-liberal-party-faces-controversy-over-alliance-brotherhood/.
[12] "Nasserist Karama Party pulls out of Brotherhood led Alliance," *Ahram Online,* 20 October 2011, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/24680.aspx.

Interparty cooperation among Egyptian parties across the ideological spectrum was gradually unravelling as the dates for parliamentary elections approached. While Nasserists, liberals and Islamists could and did initially work together, each party's willingness to sustain a united front was challenged by the FJP's desire to capitalise on its larger organisational and mobilising capacity often at the expense of the other political actors with whom it was allied. Voting had given Islamists a majority in the new parliament.[13] Tensions were subsequently heightened between Islamists and liberals. Polarisation within political society seems to have been directly tied to the success of the MB and failure of the Tagammu' and other parties at the ballot box. Drafting constitutional documents in the transitional period widened the gulf between political actors. Rivalries quickly emerged over the foundational core of what the Egyptian state ought to be. Disagreements about the extent and boundaries of the future power of a president before the elections planned for it in 2012 were played out in very public spaces such as newspapers and the media.[14] SCAF waded into this controversy about elected parliament's failure to establish a body to draft a new constitution and expressed its intention to make an interim constitution delineating the authorities of not only the president but also the army's privileged status in national security and undisputed control over its internal affairs.[15] A constitutional declaration was issued by SCAF after the dissolution of parliament which possessed the force of law that granted it wide-ranging executive and legislative powers at the expense of a future president.[16] The actions of the army's top officers threatened to upset the balance within political society that was tipping towards nation-wide political parties and social movements.

Newly elected Muhammad Morsi, the FJP's presidential candidate, was involved in political wranglings with SCAF and an emerging opposition movement. The constitutional declaration issued by former President Morsi in November 2012 that protected his decisions from the judiciary spurred interparty cooperation among the leaders of the Wafd, Conference Party, Popular Current Party, Democratic Front Party, al-Karama Party and Development and Reform Party in forming the National Salvation Front (NSF) with Wahid Abdel Meguid, formerly of the FJP-led Democratic Alliance, as its spokesperson.[17] Moreover, the NSF alternated between questioning [18] and acknowledging [19] Morsi's legitimacy as president in its campaign against his actions and policies. Although interparty cooperation within the front enabled it to present a unified stance against the Morsi government, this strategy and the latter's reactions contributed to the widening of the gulf between these two broadly constituted groups.

Parliamentary elections slated for spring 2013 created an opportunity for the main political actors in the NSF to enhance their cooperation. However, the unity of these political parties faced the expected partisan rivalry of running in elections. One solution was proposed that would enable the front to run in elections using two separate lists of candidates amid the tensions between youth activists and Amr Moussa's Conference and the Wafd about the latter's past complicity with the Mubarak regime. [20] Efforts were made not only to maintain the political unity of the NSF through negotiations among its various groups but to reach out to potential new members for a more inclusive form of cooperation. One such proposal would have seen the Strong Egypt

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[13] Ibrahim Qassim, " *"Al-Youm al-Sābaʿ" yanshar asmāʾ nūwāb al-barlamān al-fāʾizīn bi-niẓām al-qawāʾin al- ḥizbiyya* ("Youm7" publishes the names of the winning members of parliament through the party list system)," Youm7, 21 January 2012, https://tinyurl.com/5af5bchh The political party list results distributed the following number of seats to the top four parties: 127 for the FJP, 96 for the Salafist al-Nour Party, 36 for the Wafd and 33 for the Egyptian Bloc alliance.

[14] "Egypt's parties fail to agree on constitutional annex, says MP," Ahram Online, 21 May 2012, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/42281.aspx.

[15] Gamal Essam El-Din, "SCAF to issue interim constitution before presidential poll," *Ahram Online*, 21 May 2012, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/42159.aspx.

[16] Evan Hill, "Background: SCAF's last-minute power grab," *Al Jazeera,* 18 June 2012 , https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/6/18/background-scafs-last-minute-power-grab.

[17] "National Salvation Front threatens civil disobedience," *Egypt Independent,* 30 November 2012, https://www.egyptindependent.com/national-salvation-front-threatens-civil-disobedience/.

[18] "Salvation Front: Morsy has lost legitimacy," *Egypt Independent,* 6 December 2012, https://www.egyptindependent.com/salvation-front-morsy-has-lost-legitimacy/.

[19] "Moussa: National Salvation Front respects Morsy's legitimacy," *Egypt Independent,* 10 February 2013, https://www.egyptindependent.com/moussa-national-salvation-front-respects-morsy-s-legitimacy/.

[20] Salma Shukrallah, "Egypt's Salvation Front determined to maintain unity for parliamentary poll," *Ahram Online,* 17 January 2013, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/62573.aspx.

Party joining an electoral alliance consisting of the Constitution Party and Egypt Party [21] but hinged on the former's precondition of the exclusion of the *feloul* (remnants) or Mubarak-era figures from the NSF.[22] Many political actors were able to put their differences aside, especially the ideological rivalry between Nasserists and liberals, to confront the MB's putative take-over of the Egyptian state.

Unresolved controversies persisted about the former Mubarak loyalists in Egypt's political life. This divide between grassroots activists and formal political parties, conflating ex-National Democratic Party members and the Mubarak-era loyal opposition, was seemingly bridged several months later in mid-2013 but it would reemerge in a more pronounced form after Morsi's ousting from the position of president. Although public reticence was voiced by a senior member of the NSF in March 2013 about the prospect of the army stepping in, with the acceptable exception of preventing a civil war, to end perceived Islamist domination (read Morsi's presidency),[23] the front's stance would change and be entirely behind military intervention. Formal political parties and grassroots activists finally came together when the NSF and *Tamarrod* (Rebellion) movement issued a joint statement calling for the army to intervene to take over Egypt's transition since Morsi had squandered his legitimacy.[24] Divisions within political society became polarised to the extent that force was perceived in some influential quarters to be an acceptable way to get rid of Morsi rather than waiting for the next election to unseat the then incumbent president.

After Morsi: 'Loyal opposition' redux

Cracks soon began to appear within the NSF after Morsi's overthrow on 3 July 2013. ElBaradei resigned from his position as vice-president in the new interim government because he resolutely rejected the use of force against the pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo.[25] Another sign of the NSF's inability to remain unified became apparent in discussions about nominating a candidate in the 2014 presidential elections. Although Sabahi was touted as the front's nomination at one point,[26] doubts about its continued existence threw into question the need to agree on a presidential candidate among senior NSF leaders.[27] The front had to confront a new political reality of coordinating without the perceived problem of the MB monopolising the state and the renewed importance of the army in politics. Against this backdrop, Sabahi's support from the NSF was clouded with uncertainty [28] and then with a volte-face of outright backing, particularly from Amr Moussa and one-time Sabahi supporter Hamdi Qandil, for Abdel Fattah al-Sisi even before the army chief declared his intention to

[21] "ElBaradei and Abouel Fotouh discuss alliance in next elections," *Egypt Independent,* 6 January 2013, https://www.egyptindependent.com/elbaradei-and-abouel-fotouh-discuss-alliance-next-elections/
[22] "Abouel Fotouh: National Salvation Front should purge itself of feloul," *Egypt Independent,* 6 January 2013, https://www.egyptindependent.com/abouel-fotouh-national-salvation-front-should-purge-itself-feloul/.
[23] "Opposition leader: We are not flirting with the army," *Egypt Independent,* 16 March 2013, https://www.egyptindependent.com/opposition-leader-we-are-not-flirting-army/.
[24] Rana Muhammad Taha, "National Salvation Front and Tamarod call on army to intervene," *Daily News Egypt,* July 3, 2013, https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/07/03/national-salvation-front-and-tamarod-call-on-army-to-intervene/. It was also reported at the time that Naguib Sawiris, the media mogul, Mubarak-era judge Tahani al-Gebali and other prominent individuals supported Tamarrod in various guises ranging from funding to organisation. See Ben Hubbard and David D. Kirkpatrick, "Sudden Improvements in Egypt Suggest a Campaign to Undermine Morsi," *The New York Times,* 10 February 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/11/world/middleeast/improvements-in-egypt-suggest-a-campaign-that-undermined-morsi.html?_r=0.
[25] "Egypt's VP ElBaradei sets out reasons for resignation," *Ahram Online*, 14 August 2013, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/79042.aspx
[26] "NSF agrees to nominate Hamdeen Sabbahi for president, says official," *Egypt Independent,* 21 July 2013, https://egyptindependent.com/nsf-agrees-nominate-hamdeen-sabbahi-president-says-official/
[27] "Leaders: NSF may not back one presidential candidate, may be dissolved," *Egypt Independent,* 3 January 2014, https://egyptindependent.com/leaders-nsf-may-not-back-one-presidential-candidate-may-be-dissolved/
[28] Basil El-Dabh, "NSF decides to remain intact," *Daily News Egypt,* 3 February 2014, https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/02/03/nsf-decides-remain-intact/.

run for the presidency.[29] A 'loyal opposition' was rebooted from the NSF's internal rumblings. When al-Sisi did announce his candidacy, he faced only one contender, the Nasserist Sabahi, and the former won a landslide victory.

President al-Sisi was quick to urge the heads of Egyptian political parties in a meeting to form "one inclusive coalition" prior to the parliamentary elections that would receive his endorsement.[30] While al-Sisi did not directly support any one party or coalition, the establishment of For the Love of Egypt electoral list, led by Sameh Saif El-Yazel, a former intelligence officer, with the plan for its dissolution once the alliance's candidates were successfully elected to parliament, was widely known to be supportive of the president.[31] This coalition swept the polls in 2015 and won all 120 parliamentary seats on the party list.[32] Moreover, the composition of the new unicameral legislature was largely dominated by independent members of parliament who numbered 325 out of 568 deputies.[33]

A pattern of reciprocal support emerged between the new political parties and electoral alliances and the al-Sisi regime around a '30 June Revolution' platform.[34] Subsequent elections consolidated the presence of parties supportive of al-Sisi's presidency and government policies. The 2020 parliament was dominated by four parties led by Mostaqbal Watan's 314 seats, the People's Republican Party's 50 seats, the Wafd's 26 seats and Homat al-Watan's 23 seats.[35] A newly restored 300-member Senate, the upper house of the Egyptian parliament, brought a comparable victory in the 200 seats that were contested for Mostaqbal Watan, about 70 per cent, followed by the People's Republican Party and the Wafd both with six senators.[36] However, the fact that al-Sisi remains unaffiliated with any political party implies that all the parties represented in parliament are formally neither in power nor in opposition. A formal distinction is missing within political society between the political actors that support or oppose the government.

Political parties from the Wafd through al-Tagammu' to the Free Egyptians expressed their backing for a second Sisi presidential term in early 2018.[37] When the head of the Wafd, Al-Sayyid al-Badawi, readied himself to be a presidential candidate, the majority of his fellow members refused to support his candidacy.[38] The majority of political parties were not prepared to back a candidate to directly run against al-Sisi for the post of president and most of the membership of one party, mentioned in the previous sentence, went against its leader's aspiration to do exactly that. Virtual unanimity characterised the attitudes of the various political

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[29] "National Salvation Front figures voting for Sisi," *Mada Masr,* 7 March 2014, https://www.madamasr.com/en/2014/03/07/news/u/national-salvation-front-figures-voting-for-sisi/.

[30] "Al-Sisi calls for '1 political coalition' in meeting with political party leaders," *Daily News Egypt,* 14 January 2015, https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/01/13/al-sisi-calls-1-political-coalition-meeting-political-party-leaders/.

[31] Omar Halawa, "For the Love of Egypt: High profile, low on politics in parliament race," *Ahram Online,* 12 October 2015, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/152658.aspx.

[32] "Graph: Breakdown of Egypt's parliamentary results so far -- winners and runoff hopefuls," *Ahram Online,* 26 November 2015, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/171865.aspx.

[33] "Egypt's elections committee announces final parliamentary results," *Ahram Online,* 18 December 2015, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/173877.aspx.

[34] Yezid Sayigh alerts us to the regime's "more decentralized model of outsourced political control" accompanied by the active role of the security services in choosing election candidates and the setting up of factions in parliament and the enlisting of Mubarak-era politicians for their organisational know-how. Yezid Sayigh, "The Second Republic: Remaking Egypt Under Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi," Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, May 2025, https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Sayigh-The%20Second%20Republic-1.pdf, 6, 19–20.

[35] Gamal Essam El-Din, "A new Egyptian parliament: End of the election marathon," *Ahram Online,* 19 December 2020, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/396952.aspx.

[36] "Egypt's Senate members take constitutional oath," *Ahram Online,* 18 October 2020, https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/388613/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt%E2%80%99s-Senate-members-take-constitutional-oath.aspx.

[37] "Liberal and socialist parties to support Sisi for president," *Egypt Independent,* 14 January 2018, https://www.egyptindependent.com/liberal-socialist-parties-support-sisi-president/; Nawal Sayed, "Parties aim to amass 30M in 2018 presidential election," *Egypt Today,* 20 February 2018, https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/43274/Parties-aim-to-amass-30M-in-2018-presidential-election.

[38] "Wafd party head El-Sayed El-Badawi undergoes medical exam for Egypt presidential candidacy," *Ahram Online,* 26 January 2018, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/288816.aspx.

parties, established and newly founded, towards al-Sisi running for president. The eventual context did, however, witness a challenger in the form of the leader of al-Ghad Party but he received a paltry percentage of 2.1 per cent or just over 650,000 votes in the elections.[39]

The above pattern of reciprocal support, especially involving the parties founded after 2013, was repeated in the 2024 presidential elections. Political parties in the opposition camp founded the Civil Democratic Movement in 2017 to advocate democracy and the release of prisoners arrested for protesting peacefully.[40] Dividing lines soon erupted among the principal actors in this alliance. While most of the parties, such as al-Karama and al-Dostour, decided against participating in the presidential elections that they perceived would be unfair and biased, the Social Democratic Party and Justice Party took the contrary stance and the former nominated Mohammed Farid Zahran.[41] Across the political spectrum, prior to al-Sisi having declared his intention to run for a third presidential term, under a newly amended constitution, Galal Haridi of Homat al-Watan had called on the incumbent president to run again [42] and this position was echoed by endorsements from the Egyptian Parties Alliance, that brought 40 parties together such as the Sadat Democratic Party and Nasserist Party, and Mostaqbal Watan.[43]

Elections in Egypt can be understood as the means through which political actors manage to get themselves included in a ruling pact in the absence of a ruling party. Exclusionary top-down political relations, dominated by the presidency, are masked by the public performance of elections that lead to the routinisation of opposition activity in accordance with the regime's rules of the game. The presidential elections in 2024 earned al-Sisi another term in office, winning almost 90 per cent, with the losing candidates barely mounting a competitive campaign: Hazem Omar (People's Republican Party) with 4.5 per cent, Zahran (Social Democratic Party) with 4 per cent and Yamama (Wafd) with 1.9 per cent.[44] Obvious challenges in these elections ranged from the restrictions on the eligibility of candidates to the shrinking space for oppositional political activities in the run-up to the poll. Eligible candidates must have secured endorsements from at least 20 parliamentary deputies or obtained a minimum of 25,000 signatures from citizens from 15 governorates and with 1,000 from each governorate.[45] One failed attempt to become an eligible candidate by the then leader of the Karama Party witnessed his withdrawal before he was able to gather the needed number of signatures amid the reported harassment of his supporters.[46]

[39] "Sisi wins 2nd presidential term with landslide 21.8M votes (97.08%)," *Egypt Today,* 2 April 2018, https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/46801/Sisi-wins-2nd-presidential-term-with-landslide-21-8M-votes.
[40] "Egyptian leftist, liberal parties launch new Civil Democratic Movement," *Ahram Online,* 16 December 2017, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/285401.aspx.
[41] Rana Mamdouh, "Presidential elections: Seasonal oppositional division," *Mada Masr,* 2 December 2023, https://www.madamasr.com/en/2023/12/02/feature/politics/presidential-elections-seasonal-oppositional-division/.
[42] Gamal Essam El-Din, "Egypt's Homat Watan party calls upon President El-Sisi to run for a third presidential term," *Ahram Online,* 24 July 2023, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/505339.aspx.
[43] El-Sayed Gamal El-Din, "Alliance of 40 Egyptian political parties endorses President Sisi for a new term," *Ahram Online*, 28 August 2023, https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/507364.aspx.
[44] "After winning 2024 Presidential Election: Egyptian president meets with other candidates," *Egypt Today*, 19 December 2023, https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/129265/After-winning-2024-Presidential-Election-Egyptian-president-meets-with-other.
[45] "Guidelines for presidential candidacy," State Information Service, 20 September, 2023, https://sis.gov.eg/en/presidency/presidential-election-2024/guidelines-for-presidential-candidacy/.
[46] "Egypt presidential elections: Here's what you need to know," *Al Jazeera,* 1 December 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/1/egypt-presidential-elections-heres-what-you-need-to-know.

Strategic–political recommendations

Political society in Egypt has been overtaken by an electoral politics that favours presidential incumbency and an absent ruling party. Rather than a democratic opposition, a diverse assortment of loyal political parties, most of which were founded after 2013, compete among each other to secure parliamentary seats. Opposition actors ranging from al-Karama to the Social Democratic party have been unable to undertake interparty cooperation to contest parliamentary and presidential polls despite their membership in the Civil Democratic Movement. Political challenges are therefore continually evolving for these parties. Their efforts at bridging political, ideological and personal divides, and coordinate as a single force have not borne much success. The policy recommendations that follow are aimed at state elites and political parties in the demanding struggle for a democratic *modus vivendi*:

1. All government cabinet positions, with certain qualified exceptions, should be appointed from the bicameral parliament. Although the post of president is chosen through elections, the presence in the cabinet of elected deputies and senators from the political party that constitutes the majority in both houses of parliament would in one fell swoop create a ruling party and an opposition. Increased accountability of the executive to the elected representatives of Egyptian citizens can be a key component of a competitive system that connects institutionally the executive to the legislature.

2. Opposition political parties can deepen their coordination in political alliances by forming a shadow government. The existing Democratic Civil Movement is a potentially important organisation in which committees headed by a chairperson and containing members can be set up for the purposes of developing policy initiatives and contributing to a general political platform. While ideological differences may mitigate a fully cohesive manifesto, this interparty coordination can create a common ground of policy ideas. The committee positions would be directly elected by the members of affiliated political parties. Another step in this process would entail appointing or electing shadow ministers who espouse formulated policy initiatives in their particular areas of concern. Encouraging internal democratic behaviour can also contribute to the emergence of a wider democratic culture in domestic politics.

3. Opposition political parties can foster and sustain horizontal solidarity among themselves through a unified stance on the rights of prisoners of conscience. They should take the initiative by creating a shadow amnesty committee that investigates individual cases, publishes regular reports, and advocates their release.

4. Opposition political parties in the Democratic Civil Movement can establish a committee that is specifically concerned with the nomination of a presidential candidate. Although the next presidential polls are distant in time, slated for 2029, the next four years may prove to be critical in forming a consensus, planning a campaign and generating media attention around a single candidate. The presidential candidacy committee's members can be chosen through elections among all political party members or with every party equally represented. Political parties in the alliance can agree in advance that the final conclusions or recommendations of this committee on nominating a presidential candidate are binding on all affiliated groups.

Conclusion

Egypt's political society can transform from a spectator to a participant in the country's political scene if opposition actors drastically build on their existing interparty cooperation. Meaningful systematic coordination in the areas of running for parliamentary elections, nominating presidential candidates, campaigning for civil society issues and formulating manifestos can generate a democratic *modus vivendi* within the opposition that could then impact the wider political environment. Ideological and political divisions among socialists, Nasserists, liberals and Islamists can be attenuated through open and frank discussions in specially established committees and workshops focused on the primary political, social and economic challenges affecting Egypt. The differences in ideology among parties are not insurmountable obstacles and could be narrowed down in the future, as they were during the Mubarak era. Despite the current lack of any direct ties, Islamists and liberals could reorient their priorities through emphasising a common national and democratic agenda in response to exclusionary top-down forms of politics. Moreover, the current government appears to rely, rather than being reliant, on electoral alliances and political parties to secure the parliament. This perception, however, belied by the interdependent relationship between the army and civilian actors is partly driven by the former's need to project a civilian character onto the government and the parliament in a context of converging and diverging expedient interests.

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CONTACT US

Toda Peace Institute
Samon Eleven Bldg. 5 th Floor
3-1 Samon-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0017, Japan

Email
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