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Inside Egyptian Parliamentary Campaigns

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Although a considerable literature about Egyptian parliamentary elections exists, mostly in Arabic, there are few works that deal with political campaigns in Egypt and even fewer that examine individual campaigns in detail.¹ This chapter addresses issues related to Egyptian parliamentary campaigns including how many Egyptians understand the role and function of a parliamentarian, voting behavior and the possible implications of this for governance and “democratization.”

In Egypt, as elsewhere in the Arab world (see Chapter 5), people do not vote primarily on the basis of party affiliation, electoral program, or ideology, but rather on the provision of services, including individual services provided to district residents. This affects both voting behavior (e.g., *who* votes in Egyptian elections) and the character of campaigns. In contrast to many developed countries, in Egypt there is an inverse relationship between income and education, and political participation (e.g., voting): wealthier and better-educated Egyptians are less likely to vote. I explain the logic of this antinomy and speculate about what this and the related phenomenon of voting for services might imply for the functioning of parliament, good governance, and the relationship between voting and prospects for “democratization.”

Political campaigns are also important, constituting one of the most basic components of electoral politics and a direct form of political participation for both candidates and voters. Campaigns often provide citizens with a chance to listen to candidates and hear contrasting views on political issues. They can also be opportunities for citizens to directly question sitting and future lawmakers and to make their own concerns heard. This is true of executive as well as legislative campaigns and elections.

But what are political campaigns in Egypt like?² What does campaigning entail and what are the most common features of Egyptian parliamen-

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tary campaigns? How do candidates “connect” with voters and how do citizens understand the role and function of a parliamentarian? And on what basis do people vote for candidates?

This chapter examines the political campaign of a single candidate who ran for reelection in 2005, Mounir Fakhry Abdelnour. Abdelnour, one of Egypt’s leading liberal politicians, represented the El-Waily district in central Cairo, better known as Abbassaya, between 2000 and 2005 and served as the head of the Wafd Party’s parliamentary delegation during that time. An analysis of his 2005 campaign demonstrates the strong emphasis on service provision over policymaking in Egyptian electoral politics, and yields broader insights into the character of Egyptian elections.

■ **Mounir Fakhry Abdelnour**

Until his defeat in the November 2005 elections, Mounir Abdelnour was one of the most visible opposition parliamentarians. He served on the parliament’s Economic Affairs and Foreign Relations Committee and was a guest on both Egyptian state and Arab satellite television. As a prominent parliamentarian and a high-ranking Wafd Party official, his political statements were well covered in the national print media. He is a respected national personality and is also one of only a handful of independents who sat on the government’s National Council for Human Rights.

Abdelnour represents Egyptian secular politics with links to the nation’s liberal era. He descends from a distinguished Coptic family with a

tradition of political involvement long before the July 1952 “revolution.” In an era of political Islam and the assault on secular politics, a Coptic parliamentarian is a rarity.³ Before his defeat, Abdelnour was the most visible Coptic opposition deputy.

Abdelnour’s opponents in the 2005, as well as in the 2000 and 1995 electoral races, represented more typical political trajectories. The first time he ran for office, in 1995, Abdelnour’s opponent was Ahmed Fouad, a titan of Egyptian politics and a sitting parliamentarian. Ahmed Fouad embodied the Egyptian state in each of its various historical guises, from the 1952 revolution to the present: first as the socialist regime of Gamal Abdul Nasser in the 1960s, then as a parliamentarian under Anwar Sadat in the 1970s, and most recently as a leading member of Hosni Mubarak’s National Democratic Party (NDP).

Fouad was a member of the Arab Socialist Union’s Central Committee in the 1960s. He served in the Maglis al-Umma (National Assembly) from 1968 until 1979.⁴ He joined the National Democratic Party when it was formed in 1978, already enjoying strong ties to powerful NDP officials. Fouad was then elected to the Maglis al-Shaab (People’s Assembly) in 1990 as the representative of the El-Waily district, and quickly became the head of its Education Committee. In El-Waily, it was said that Fouad “owned” the district, which he represented until 2000.

In his first bid for parliament in 1995, Abdelnour lost to Fouad in a runoff election. In his second run for office in 2000, Abdelnour unseated Fouad after an intense and ugly campaign, followed by a runoff election. Realizing his seat was in jeopardy during the 2000 campaign, Fouad had begun politicizing religion and employed bigoted religious discourse against Abdelnour. Despite these techniques, Fouad lost and less than nine months after his humiliating defeat suffered a debilitating stroke. He died shortly thereafter.

Abdelnour’s subsequent election experiences are even more intriguing, however. The 2005 electoral battle in El-Waily featured another member of the Fouad family. Ahmed Fouad’s son, Shireen Ahmed Fouad, ran as the National Democratic Party candidate for the district in the November 2005 elections.⁵ For the younger Fouad, however, the election went beyond politics: it was personal and familial. It was often said in the district that Shireen Ahmed Fouad blamed Abdelnour for his father’s stroke and ultimate death. He considered the 2005 race a personal vendetta against Abdelnour; for him, the election was about avenging his father’s defeat and ultimately his death.

If this was the end of the story, it would have the makings of a good television soap opera, but the drama continues. As often occurs in Egyptian elections, the circumstances in which Abdelnour “lost” gave rise to suspicion. After the votes had initially been counted and the preliminary results

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had been relayed to the candidates and announced on *AlArabiya* television, the judge in charge of the district's elections left the school where the ballots were being counted and headed to the district's main police station across the street, paper tabulations in hand. There he locked himself in a room along with two assistants for more than three hours. When the judge finally reappeared, he announced entirely different results. Instead of 7,000 total votes cast with no single candidate securing more than 50 percent of the vote, thereby necessitating a runoff, the judge declared the NDP candidate, Shireen Ahmed Fouad, the winner. The total number of votes cast in the district had mysteriously risen by 2,000—all for Fouad—giving him the necessary margin (50 percent plus one vote) needed for victory without the necessity of a runoff (see Table 6.1).

Within days of the voting, an administrative court ruled that the district's elections were invalid, but for an entirely unrelated reason. The court declared that one of the candidates, Abdelhamid Sha'lan, competing for the "worker/farmer" seat, did not qualify to run as a "worker."⁶ Sha'lan, an "independent NDP" candidate, the court ruled, should have been competing for the "group" parliamentary seat instead. Apparently, Sha'lan had previously run as a "group" candidate in local council elections, and his legal employment status, as an owner of a business and not an employee, disqualified him from running in the "worker/farmer" category.⁷ Sha'lan, incidentally, received the most votes in the first round of the election for the "worker/farmer" seat and ultimately defeated the sitting NDP incumbent, Fawzi Shaheen, in the runoff. Despite the court's ruling, which was never implemented, Sha'lan now sits in the People's Assembly representing the El-Waily district. After his election, like many other "independent NDP" candidates, he rejoined the party.

Table 6.1 Official El-Waily Results, Egyptian Parliamentary Elections, First Round, 2005

Registered Voters	Votes Cast	Valid Votes	Spoiled Ballots	Turnout (percentage)	Votes for Shireen Ahmed Fouad (NDP group candidate)	
					Number	Percentage
91,999	9,116	8,422	694	9.91	4,310	51.8

Source: Egypt State Information Service.

Note: For parliamentary elections, the Egyptian government only makes public the number of votes the winning candidate receives, not the complete vote breakdown.

In yet another interesting twist, less than two weeks after the election, the front page of the *Wafd* newspaper, the mouthpiece of Mounir Abdelnour's party, declared that he had been expelled from the party (Shehab 2005). The newspaper alleged that Abdelnour was a traitor and a spy, with questionable links to foreign powers, including the US government.

What had in fact happened was that Abdelnour had criticized his party's electoral performance and the party leadership several days earlier on television. This was not the first time Abdelnour had criticized the way the Wafd Party was being run. This time, however, the party's aging and autocratic leader, seventy-one-year-old No'man Gomaa, who two months earlier had stood in presidential elections against Mubarak and received less than 3 percent of the vote, unilaterally and unceremoniously kicked Abdelnour out of the party. Several weeks later the Wafd Party's Higher Council fully reinstated Abdelnour, and Gomaa eventually was removed as head of the party (Shehab 2006).⁸

■ Research Method

My primary method was participant observation inside Mounir Abdelnour's reelection campaign, beginning shortly after the campaign's inception in early October 2005, and ending when the election results were announced on November 10, 2005. This entailed spending nearly every evening in Abbassaya at the campaign headquarters, following Abdelnour around the district, attending all campaign-related activities (e.g., *nadawat* [meetings], campaign walks, funerals, and weddings) with the candidate, speaking with campaign staff and supporters, and occasionally socializing with them in our free time. I spoke with Abdelnour throughout the campaign, either alone or in the context of wider conversations, and had a number of discussions with him about campaign strategy, which themes people reacted positively to, and which speakers were effective. On several occasions, he sought out my opinion about how a particular *nadwa* went or the audience's reaction to a speech.

I quickly became associated with Abdelnour's campaign in the district, and many within the campaign learned that I knew the candidate personally. During my second evening in Abbassaya, Abdelnour sat with a number of supporters and campaign workers, including myself, in front of his headquarters (*al-maqar*). He ordered tea for everyone from the coffee shop across the street and, in the middle of general conversation, introduced me, telling those present, about twenty men of varying ages all associated with the campaign, that I was an Egyptian American professor at Georgetown University in the United States and that Georgetown was particularly well known for Middle Eastern studies. Abdelnour went further, exaggerating considerably, stating that I was a frequent commentator for the Cable News

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Network and other English-language television channels on Middle Eastern politics, and added that whenever the Middle East was in the news, I would be invited to appear on television and give my opinion. Whatever the reason and regardless of the veracity of his statements, this seemed to impress those gathered more than my status as a professor or an Egyptian American. Abdelnour also mentioned that his daughter had taken several courses with me at the university and that this was how we had originally met.

After this evening, I became ingratiated with almost everyone involved in the reelection effort.⁹ Whatever they thought of me or my research, they knew that I had a personal relationship with the candidate and that he was aware of and agreeable to my project. The candidate's words also reassured people about my loyalty. Campaigns are full of secrets and sensitive information, and I was warned more than once about certain individuals who sometimes appeared at campaign headquarters but who were less than completely trustworthy. I became part of the reelection effort, engaged in everything from giving my opinion about election related matters to transporting campaign staff and supporters to election-related events.

In addition to participant observation, I gathered information on the election campaign from a number of additional sources. After the elections, I conducted multiple interviews with the candidate and a number of people involved in the campaign. Both the print and television media also regularly reported on Abdelnour's campaign.¹⁰ Even after the elections, given Abdelnour's prominence in national politics and his leadership position in the Wafd Party, he appeared on a number of television programs, including *Malaf Khaas* (Special File) and the popular *Al-Bayt Baytak* (Your Home) on Egyptian state television. Finally, after the election, Abdelnour himself wrote several newspaper articles in *Al-Misry al-Yuwm* that concerned his own race and Egyptian politics more generally. These materials, and others, provided additional insights into the candidate, the district, and the reelection effort.

■ The Stakes

Getting inside an election campaign is not easy, since campaigns are electoral battles that produce winners and losers, with much at stake for political parties and especially for candidates. Anything that can potentially affect the outcome, even slightly, is taken into consideration. What hangs in the balance, of course, is power, and for candidates, membership in one of society's most prestigious institutions, with all of the privileges and opportunities this entails.

In Egypt, like elsewhere, elections are also serious business. For most candidates, campaigns constitute a major economic undertaking. The overwhelming majority of the more than 5,000 candidates who ran in the 2005

parliamentary elections, did so as independents. Independent candidates, for the most part, receive virtually no support, financial or otherwise, from independent groups, organizations, or individuals. The legal opposition parties also have extremely limited funds to offer their candidates. Most candidates finance their own campaigns, and although the legal limit regarding campaign spending is about US\$12,300 (70,000 pounds)—already a tremendous sum in a country where the average gross national product per capita is less than US\$1,500 (9,000 pounds) per year—some spend millions trying to get elected.¹¹

In the 2005 election, only the NDP and the Muslim Brotherhood provided substantial financial and organizational support to their candidates, although in neither case was it clear how much support was provided. And even in the case of candidates representing the ruling party, many spent significant sums, out of their own pockets, on their campaigns.

Why do people spend so much money trying to get into the People's Assembly?¹² What is so alluring about becoming a parliamentarian that many are willing to spend so much money, without any guarantee of success, in order to get elected? Of course, it is impossible to answer these questions definitively, because they concern the motivations of different candidates. Many undoubtedly are enticed by the glamour and social standing that membership in the People's Assembly confers. Others who have already achieved tremendous wealth through business and industry desire the political power that comes with being a parliamentarian. And still others, possibly the minority, seek to better their country through holding public office, serving the nation, proposing legislation, and keeping government accountable.

Many in Egypt, however, believe that the reason people are willing to spend so much money running for parliament is because membership in the

Table 6.2 Parliamentary Candidates in Egypt, 1984–2005

	Total Number of Elected Seats	Total Number of Candidates
1984	448	3,879
1987	448	3,592
1990	444	2,676
1995	444	3,980
2000	444	3,957
2005	444	5,177

Sources: 1984–2000, Ministry of Interior Ministry; 2005, Higher Commission for Parliamentary Elections.

Note: Election figures for 2005 do not include the number of candidates and voters in six constituencies in which elections had not yet been conducted (Essam el-Din 2005).

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chamber provides legal immunity (*hasana*), which can be extremely rewarding financially.¹³ The immunity that parliamentarians receive, in fact, can only be lifted by the People's Assembly itself. And it sometimes is.¹⁴ Immunity from prosecution, it is said, allows some parliamentarians to engage in all sorts of extralegal and sometimes illegal practices and business ventures, making significant sums of money in the process. In addition, membership in the People's Assembly, it is believed, opens up all sorts of other opportunities for pecuniary gain (e.g., selling favors, including jobs, licenses, access to government land at below-market price). According to this logic, the money that candidates spend getting elected is recovered through the benefits of holding office; the money spent on political campaigns, at least in part, becomes a business expense. Regardless of these issues, given the amounts of money at stake, anything that could threaten the success of the enterprise, including my presence researching political campaigns, would be looked at unfavorably.

Campaigns also involve secrets and sensitive information about strategy, tactics, political alliances, campaign spending, and the timing of events. Similarly, candidates everywhere are sensitive about their image and how they are perceived. They do not want potentially damaging information about themselves or their campaign leaked. Because the stakes are so high, candidates and political parties are understandably reticent about letting people they do not know and trust into their campaigns.¹⁵

Still, I was able to secure the kind of access to Mounir Abdelnour's campaign that was necessary for ethnographic research. Other candidates and political parties allowed me to attend campaign events and conduct interviews with candidates and campaign staff. But for the most part, these other candidates were unwilling to give me complete freedom inside their campaigns. For example, I was invited to several campaign events of the NDP and Tagammu Party (National Progressive Unionist Party).¹⁶ I was also able to interview high-ranking NDP officials about the parliamentary elections and other matters. I was even invited to the NDP's "operations room," and allowed to observe the high-tech command and control center in action, during the runoff election for the first phase of voting, on November 15, 2005. But most candidates and political parties were hesitant or even suspicious about my research.¹⁷

■ **Choosing Cases**

Although access was the most important factor in choosing to study Abdelnour's campaign, there were other important considerations. From the beginning I wanted to study more than one campaign ethnographically (through extensive, daily fieldwork), but I was limited by at least two factors in addition to the problem of *entrée*: the timing of the elections and the

fact that ethnographic research is tremendously time-intensive, meaning that it would be impossible to study more than one campaign at the same time using this method.¹⁸ Egypt's 2005 parliamentary elections, however, like those in 2000, were scheduled to take place over the span of an entire month, involving three separate phases of voting in three different sets of governorates (see Table 6.3). Therefore, I thought it would be possible to research only two campaigns thoroughly, if I studied one campaign in the first phase (November 9) and another during the third phase (December 1) of balloting. This would allow sufficient time to carry out the daily field-work I needed in each campaign.¹⁹ Mounir Abdelnour's reelection bid was the campaign I chose to research in the first phase of the elections.

Importantly, Mounir Abdelnour represented the Wafd Party, which had more parliamentarians during the 2000–2005 period than any other opposition party. The Wafd publishes a widely circulated newspaper, giving it some influence, and has a long and distinguished history in Egyptian politics.²⁰ Abdelnour's incumbency meant not only would he mount a serious campaign, but also that he had a considerable chance of being elected.²¹

Mounir Abdelnour made for an especially interesting candidate. Like anyone who follows Egyptian politics, I knew of Abdelnour before meeting him or deciding to study his reelection bid. I had read about him in the press and seen him on television. He is an impressive and articulate politician who holds well-developed political and economic views, something that sets him apart from the majority of Egyptian parliamentarians. Abdelnour was also one of the few Coptic elected officials, and so I thought that following his campaign would also provide an opportunity to explore the dynamics of religion and politics in Egypt.

El-Waily (also known as Abbassaya) also presented a fascinating district to study. Neither an elite neighborhood nor a particularly depressed

Table 6.3 Egyptian Parliamentary Election Schedule, 2005

	Governorate	Election Day	Run-off Elections
Phase One	Cairo, Giza, Menoufiya, Beni Souif, El-Menya, Assiut, Matrouh, Al-Wadi al-Gadid	November 9	November 15
Phase Two	Alexandria, Al-Beheira, Al-Ismaila, Port Said, Suez, Al-Qalyubiya, Al-Gharbia, Al-Fayoum, Qena	November 20	November 26
Phase Three	Al-Daqahliyya, Al-Sharqiyya, Kafr al-Shayhk, Damietta, Sohaq, Aswan, Red Sea, North Sinai, South Sinai	December 1	December 7

Note: Mounir Abdelnour's campaign took place in the Cairo governorate.

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area, Abbassaya is an older, middle-class section of Cairo, representative of much of urban Egypt. It is demographically diverse; home to one of Cairo's largest mosques (*Gama' al-Nur*) as well as the patriarchate of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The district includes commercial as well as residential areas, several government ministries (including the Ministry of Electricity), hospitals, schools, and public sector companies.

■ **Campaigning with Mounir Abdelnour**

The *nadwa* (panel discussion or meeting) is the quintessential campaign event. It provides an opportunity for candidates to address the community and for members of the public to question the person running for office. Campaign *nadawat* are public events; anyone and everyone is encouraged to attend. After all, they are intended to get people to listen to the candidate (and his supporters), and ultimately vote for him on election day. In the weeks leading up to the election, Abdelnour usually held one *nadwa* each evening and sometimes two in one night. Each usually lasted no more than a couple of hours. The campaign tried to hold at least one *nadwa* in each of the district's dozen or so *shayakhas* (subdivisions of the district, or *dayra*). Usually, *nadawat* took place in the proximity of a neighborhood coffee shop and almost always occurred outdoors—on the street, in an alley, between buildings, or in any open space.

The Abdelnour campaign's *nadawat* varied in size from between several dozen to several hundred attendees. Chairs were provided by the nearby coffee shop, but if a particularly large audience was anticipated, or if the *nadwa* was being held far from a coffee shop, rented chairs were brought in. Audiences were almost always male, although women would occasionally stop and listen if they happened to be walking by.

Coffee shops did well during election season.²² Politics is an evening sport in Egypt, and coffee shops see their fair share of campaign activity. The coffee shop in front of Mounir Abdelnour's headquarters, on Abbassaya Street, the district's main thoroughfare, for example, became the regular meeting place for many associated with Mounir's campaign. It also supplied (with the campaign picking up the tab) tea, coffee, and other drinks to the dozen or so people who were constantly gathered in front of campaign headquarters. One of the shop's workers could frequently be seen crossing Abbassaya Street (a four-lane road with a divider in the middle), delivering orders, and bringing back empty glasses. Sometimes he could even be seen lugging tables, chairs, and occasionally even a *shisha* (a water pipe used for smoking tobacco) from across the road.

In addition to the rows of chairs set up for the audience, a large table and a few chairs were placed in front for the candidate and any other speakers. Sometimes tablecloths, flowers, tissues, bottled water, and glasses for

the speakers were also provided, depending on the sophistication of the event. And *nadawat* almost always included some sort of inexpensive audio system to amplify sound. One of the goals of these public meetings, after all, was to reach as many people as possible, not just those seated in the audience. Microphones and speakers ensured that if you lived—or just happened to be—in the neighborhood where a *nadwa* was taking place, there was a good chance you would hear it, even if you did not want to.

Hand-painted cloth campaign banners were usually placed behind the speaker's table. Large posters of the candidate displaying his name, symbol, and number were also frequently positioned nearby, further clarifying what was happening and who was running for office. Mounir's posters read "Together, for a new El-Waily," and included a palm tree (his symbol) and the number 7 (his ballot number), on either side of a large picture of his smiling face.²³

More often than not, bright and colorful tent-making material—the kind also used in Egyptian funerals—was set up in the area where the *nadwa* was to occur. When raised as a backdrop or on the sides of where an event was being held, the material created the feeling of a semiprivate space, differentiating it from the surrounding public street. In the case of Egyptian funerals, the material is used to create what is essentially a large tent with three walls and a high ceiling.

Abdelnour's campaign never set up a proper tent, but at the very least a large piece of material was often raised behind the table where the candidate was seated and sometimes along one side of the area. Still, it was enough to create some sense of privacy. Of course, all of this cost money.

Candidates are rarely the first to speak at their own events. One, two, and sometimes three speakers would often first take the microphone to introduce Abdelnour in the most glowing manner possible. The individuals who introduced him sometimes varied from one event to another. People were chosen to introduce the candidate based on a number of factors. In addition to supporting Abdelnour, of course, being well known and somewhat respected in the immediate area where the *nadwa* was taking place was vital. Someone the audience knew and trusted, it was thought, would only further the candidate's standing in the community. It also helped if one could string a few sweet-sounding sentences together.

Hassan Heyba was not talented at introductions, but as one of the most visible members of the Abdelnour campaign, he was present at almost all of the *nadawat*. At most events, he managed to get hold of the microphone. Heyba was a real character: a foul-mouthed chain-smoker who appeared to be in his late sixties or early seventies who had been involved in the district's politics for nearly his entire life. Heyba always looked disheveled and often wore the same old maroon-colored cardigan. He also was most often unshaven. But because of his age and the color of his hair, his beard growth

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always took the form of white stubble. Short (around five feet six inches), slim, with a light complexion, thinning white hair, and a deep scratchy voice, Heyba was fond of telling me that he had “learned politics in Ahmed Fouad’s kitchen.”²⁴ It was partially because of his previous involvement in Abbassaya’s politics as well as his age that he was known to many in the district. With a cigarette in one hand and the microphone in the other, Heyba was almost always one of the people who introduced Mounir.

Said Abdel Mon‘em was another of the regulars at Abdelnour’s campaign events. Only a few years younger than Heyba, Said was also a long-standing fixture in the district’s politics. A tall, well-built man who often wore “third world suits,” Said was a member of the National Democratic Party who had a history of involvement with the Egyptian state. From 1961 to 1967, under Gamal Abdul Nasser, Said was a member of the Youth Organization of the Arab Socialist Union. He reached the post of director of youth in the General Organization for Printing, in Imbaba, another neighborhood in Cairo.

Said fancied himself an orator and his introductions went on quite a bit longer than most. When making his remarks, he would usually mention that he was a member of the NDP but was supporting Mounir Abdelnour despite this. In fact, Said had backed Abdelnour’s opponent, Ahmed Fouad, the NDP candidate, in both the 1995 and 2000 elections. Several months after the 2005 elections, Said told me that he had been officially summoned to NDP headquarters, where he was asked why he had supported Abdelnour instead of his own party’s candidate.

Hassan Heyba and Said Abdel Mon‘em often made many of the same basic points in their introductions. Both men emphasized that Abdelnour had roots in the district, was an honest politician and statesman, and was not running for personal benefit. For example, during one such introduction, on October 21, 2005, Heyba repeated the word “respectable” over and over again: “The respectable, the respectable, the respectable [one], the true son of El-Waily.”²⁵ Heyba then shouted into the microphone, “He is really El-Waily’s son, who was brought up in the lap of his grandfather, a colleague of Sa‘ad Zaghloul’s!” Heyba went on, asking the crowd rhetorically: “Why did he run? Not for immunity, not for personal interests, not for the accumulation of wealth, but for Egypt! He comes from a big, old, well-known family. His father and grand father . . . were with Sa‘ad Zaghloul.”

The fact that Abdelnour’s family villa once stood on Abbassaya Street, the district’s main thoroughfare, on the current site of the Omar Effendi department store, was also often mentioned.²⁶ A street in the district had been named after his grandfather. At other times, Abdelnour’s worldliness and diplomacy were emphasized, with speakers recounting that he had represented Egypt overseas, in the United States, France, and other countries.

Establishing a candidate's connection to his or her district is almost universal in electoral politics. This is particularly important in Egypt, however, because there are no legal restrictions or residence requirements in order to run for parliament and represent a particular district. Someone can be from Alexandria in the far north, for example, yet run for parliament in Aswan, in the far south. Parliamentarians are nonetheless supposed to represent the districts that elected them. This partially explains the emphasis, when introducing Abdelnour, on his relationship and connection to the district. In fact, although Abdelnour has a historical relationship to El-Waily, he does not live there. He resides in Zamalek, an island in the middle of the Nile and one of Cairo's most posh neighborhoods.²⁷

■ Mounir Abdelnour's Political Discourse

Abdelnour's speech was the main event of each evening's *nadwa*. He is a fairly skilled orator and, like candidates everywhere, he had a stock speech he delivered, changing the specifics depending on the circumstances. His first words were usually, "In the name of the one God that all of us believe in," followed by a few words thanking those in attendance and his supporters. The reference to God was a variation of the first line of the Quran ("In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"), which is how many Muslims begin speeches and other activities. This established to those present that Abdelnour was religious and that he too believed in God, the same God in which Muslims believe.²⁸

Abdelnour's personality is frank and his speeches reflected this. After these brief opening remarks he would often proceed to say that the *nadwa* was being held so that he could present an accounting (*kashf hisab*) to the residents of El-Waily, and more specifically, to the residents of the particular *shayakha* where the *nadwa* was taking place. The *kashf hisab* was about what he had accomplished as the district's representative over the preceding five years. Abdelnour would then say that he also wanted to hear from district residents in attendance, and that after his remarks people would have a chance to ask questions and state whatever was on their minds.

It was about this time each evening that the campaign staff would distribute a short pamphlet (*kutayib*) bearing on its cover a color picture of Abdelnour delivering a speech in the People's Assembly, and detailing within what he had accomplished in parliament over the preceding five years. This short document of no more than ten small pages served as both Abdelnour's *kashf hisab* and his political program.

To provide an example of the Abdelnour's discourse, the language he employed, and the arguments he made, in addition to allowing his own voice to emerge, I have quoted extensively here from one of his typical speeches. I heard variations of this stock speech at each *nadwa* I attended:

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I need to correct something that has been said. The introductory speaker said that you are here to support me. That's not what we're here for but for you to listen to me, to find out what I've done, to keep me accountable and then to support me or not, it's your decision . . . to see what I have done in the last five years.

. . . It has been said, especially in this area, that I got into parliament and did not do much, forgot about the area, did not deliver as much as I should have.²⁹

Next, Abdelnour proceeded to explain to the audience (as he usually does) the proper role and function of a parliamentarian, who has three basic obligations—the first is to legislate or to make laws (*al-tashre'*), the second is to keep the government accountable (*al-rikaba*)—especially concerning the budget and government expenditures, and the third (*al-khadamat*) is to serve the district and its residents: “I know that according to the people in the community, the priorities are reversed. People are concerned with services . . . for a number of reasons. Although according to the law the priorities are not supposed to be this way. We suffer from a lack of jobs, inflation, and poor education.”

At this point a lower-middle-class, veiled woman standing behind the last row of chairs interrupted him and said that a teacher had hit her son in school. Abdelnour asked her to reveal the teacher's name, and promised to look into the matter and do something about it. He continued:

We all suffer from the poor quality of health care and public health services. And the private hospitals are incredibly expensive.

. . . No one can solve any of these problems—not a minister, not the prime minister, not the president. The only thing that can solve these issues is *good policy*; reasoning, analysis, and sound policy. And therefore the first duty of the parliamentarian is what will solve our problems [meaning, formulating good policies] and not the providing of services.

Abdelnour had brought with him all the statements he had made in parliament over the preceding five years, published in book form. He next accused the government of misspending government resources instead of solving problems such as unemployment, stating: “I have not let any of you down with regard to this—legislating and keeping the government accountable.” He gave the example of his objection to the increase of commercial rents on stores by 10 percent a year “in these especially difficult economic times.” His view had won out and rents had been raised by only 2 percent a year. He also spoke about some of the policies that he wanted and the things that he has called for. For example, he has called for the transfer of the mental hospital out of Abbassaya, because when it was built, Abbassaya was a desert, outside Cairo, empty space. Now Abbassaya is crowded and the space could be used for much better purposes. He has also called for the

transfer of the police academy, to be replaced by space for youth centers and other projects that could benefit the area and its residents, including housing. Abdelnour continued:

The solving of our problems will come through good policies—encouraging private capital to invest so that they can create jobs—I called for this—and the lowering of taxes . . . and this law went through. I also called for the lowering of customs . . . and I succeeded . . . and all of this was in my 2000 platform. I encourage you to look at my pamphlet.

I put all of this aside—unfortunately—because I know what is important to you. It is services. My little pamphlet describes what I have done for the district in terms of job creation.

In the last five years, 9,022 people have come to my district office. We have responded to 6,400 of them; 5,780 people have been from El-Waily and 693 were from outside El-Waily but had some connection to the district.

. . . I have found employment for 431 people . . . 253 of them are people with low degrees and they were employed in security companies and other companies; 127 were employed in Ministries and state organizations including the Ministries of Petroleum, Agriculture, Electricity, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Military Factories.”

He went on to state the number of people he had employed in the private sector, and said that this figure had risen in the preceding two weeks.

At this point, a man in his late sixties or early seventies who was standing off to the side and whom I had never seen before, interrupted Abdelnour—“Don’t forget my son. You got my son a job!”—and then added one person to the figure that Abdelnour had just cited.³⁰ Abdelnour continued:

This number is a small number, a drop in an ocean. I think—my estimation is that that the number of unemployed in the district is 25,000 to 30,000. The answer is good policies, reviewing laws, suggesting laws. . . . Not in a parliament that only knows how to raise their hands in agreement and clap.³¹ This will not solve our problems.

. . . I have served you honestly [at which point someone stood up and recited a line of poetry, in rhyme, about Abdelnour: *lafayna El-Waily lafayna, zay Mounir ma laqayna*].³² I have served and it has been at a cost, personally, and on my family. . . . I ask you to hold me accountable.

Abdelnour’s understanding of the role of parliamentarians and legislative bodies—to legislate, to keep the government accountable, primarily by reviewing government budgets and expenditures, and to provide services and look after constituent interests—is fairly standard in Egypt, and the Egyptian constitution states as much almost explicitly.³³ Articles 109–126 discuss the functions, responsibilities, and powers of parliament. Article 109 states that “the President of the Republic and every member of the

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People's Assembly shall have the right to propose laws." Article 114 states that "the People's Assembly shall approve the general plan for economic and social development." Article 115 states that "the draft general budget shall be submitted to the people's Assembly." Article 118 outlines the oversight powers of the People's Assembly over other state organizations regarding the budget (the Central Agency for Accounting). And Articles 124–126 provide the People's Assembly with the power to question government ministers, including the prime minister, and even to withdraw confidence from "any of the Prime Minister's deputies or from many of the Ministers or their deputies."

Not only would Abdelnour devote a good part of each evening's speech to recounting the "services" he had provided to the district, but his campaign pamphlet provided a comprehensive accounting—in greater detail and with statistics—of the services he had provided to the community and its residents. For example, Abdelnour arranged for a pedestrian bridge to be built over Ramsis Street, a busy thoroughfare with speeding traffic, at a crossing where pedestrians were often involved in traffic accidents. He also lobbied the government to build a "Heart Institute" in the district (which is currently under construction). This took tremendous coordination on Abdelnour's part between the Ministries of Health and Higher Education and other government bureaucracies. In addition, he also undertook a major restoration of Maktabat al-Barudi (Barudi Library), transforming it into a neighborhood cultural and educational center in the district; established educational services for the district's school-age children; and, in response to the educational crisis in Egypt and the phenomenal expense of private lessons (*dunṣ khussussaya*, which many parents cannot afford), purchased educational videos intended to strengthen the academic skills of students.³⁴

The questions that district residents asked after Abdelnour's speeches frequently reflected the overwhelming concern with personal "services." For example, the first person to speak on the evening of the above-quoted speech proceeded to describe his own problems dealing with the Ministry of Housing. In fact, his remarks were not stated in the form of a question but rather as an appeal to the district's representative.³⁵ The man had apparently received legal authorization from the ministry, based on his socioeconomic condition, for a subsidized apartment more than a year earlier, but had still not received an apartment. His remarks concerned his own personal situation, and not the general state of housing policy or community services. Abdelnour took a stack of documents from the man, promised to look into the matter, and said:

Personal services (*al-khadamat al-khassa*) will not solve all of our problems. Personal favors and services will not solve the problem. We need to attract foreign capital, Arab capital and Egyptians to invest in big and small industry. [Abdelnour went on to briefly explain how this would help

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the economy and unemployment.] And democracy is the only way to deal with corruption. It will provide accountability . . . and a parliament that has the right to withdraw its trust (*thiqqa*) and support from the government. . . . The Egyptian constitution must be changed, it must be amended.³⁶

The constant requests for services from parliamentarians were literally neverending. It was quite common, for example, for streams of people to approach Abdelnour during the *nadwa* itself, often when someone was introducing him or during someone else's speech, and begin explaining their problems to him there and then, and ask for his help. Sometimes people even interrupted Abdelnour while he was delivering his speech, recounting their dilemmas loudly in front of everyone gathered, and then appeal for his assistance.

The appeals to Abdelnour often became even more pronounced once the *nadwa* had concluded. Dozens of men would surround Abdelnour as he tried to walk back to his district offices, pushing, nudging, and sometimes shoving each other to get close to the parliamentarian and say something or make a request. Usually, Abdelnour was remarkably pleasant and calm considering the circumstances, and he could frequently be heard during such moments saying "*hader, hader*" (yes, yes) and suggesting to these people that they come to his office to speak about their concerns in detail. Abdelnour was also quite plainspoken about what he could and could not do for constituents. After one such *nadwa*, for example, Abdelnour turned to someone who had apparently asked for something he could not possibly deliver, looked him directly in the face, and simply said, "I do not have magical powers."

Later during the evening of the above-quoted *nadwa*, I spoke with Mohamed Serrafi in the coffee shop across from Abdelnour's headquarters. Serrafi was one of the lower-level workers in the campaign, someone I would eventually become very close to. He was almost always present at campaign headquarters and attended all of the public meetings, unless he had work to do elsewhere for the campaign. For the most part, he did the simplest of tasks: carrying pamphlets to the evening meetings, helping with event preparations, preparing posters of the candidate and political banners, and the like. Serrafi was a short, thin, man in his early fifties, always unshaven, a smoker, divorced, with two kids; he was very smart but somewhat unstable. He wore the same clothes most evenings and had a down-and-out quality to him. It was clear that life hadn't gone his way and he was paying the price. His ex-wife and children lived in Maadi while he rented a single room in a boarding house in a poorer section of Abbassaya. But Serrafi loved politics and had a history of political activity in a nearby area, Bab Al Shaa'raya, Ayman Nour's district. Serrafi was also fiercely opposed to the government. Our conversation that evening focused on the campaign,

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parliamentary elections, and more specifically, how people view parliamentarians in Egypt. Speaking about the poorer sections of El-Waily, Serrafi said: “Those people consider the parliamentarian a God—able to deliver all of the personal services and favors they want . . . with a magic wand.”

■ **Voting for Services**

What I have described in this chapter is neither specific to the El-Waily district or to Mounir Abdelnour. It is also not specific to sitting parliamentarians: providing services for the community and, more importantly, providing personal services for constituents, is the name of the game in Egyptian parliamentary elections. I witnessed the same phenomenon in other districts and with other candidates. No one better symbolized this than Hisham Mustapha Khalil, an “independent” NDP candidate in the Qasr el-Nil district of central Cairo.

Khalil is the son of Mustafa Khalil, a former prime minister and head of the NDP, and his electoral contest received intense national attention. In addition to his father’s status, Khalil was one of the hundreds of NDP members who, when they were not nominated by the party to run for office, subsequently resigned from the party so they could run as “independents,” competing against the party’s official candidates. Making the electoral contest more interesting, the official NDP candidate and incumbent whom Khalil ran against—Hosam Badrawi—is a prominent reformer known to be close to Gamal Mubarak, and a member of the influential NDP policies secretariat.³⁷

I interviewed both Hisham Mustapha Khalil and Hosam Badrawi and I also attended campaign functions organized by both candidates. The race was thought to be one of the costliest in the entire country, with each candidate spending exorbitant sums of money on their campaigns. In addition to posters and other forms of political advertising, Hisham Mustapha Khalil spent significant sums of his own money on infrastructure and beautification projects in his district. In fact, late one evening after one of his campaign events, Khalil took me on a personal tour of some of the projects he had financed, including trash removal, painting of buildings, and restoration of once badly deteriorated steps and alleyways in poorer areas.³⁸ Khalil paid for these improvements out of his own pocket and promised the district’s residents that he would continue to do so, even if his election bid was unsuccessful. Khalil’s political posters, in fact, were particularly distinctive, because they featured “before” and “after” photographs of the neighborhoods and streets where he had financed improvements, visually referencing the services he provided to the community, even before being elected to parliament.³⁹ Of course, his own picture was positioned in the middle of the photos, as a reminder of who had paid for the improvements and local services.

Hisham Mustapha Khalil clearly understood the logic of voting behavior in Egypt, and if he ever forgot, local residents were always present to remind him. Khalil had been invited to speak to residents of Ma'aruf, one of the *shayakhas* in the Qasr el-Nil district, known for its car-repair shops and mechanics, on one of the evenings, October 22, 2005, that I accompanied him. Not much of an orator, he usually spoke no more than a few minutes. The following question was the first he received that evening, from a mechanic who worked in the area: "I know that a legislator is not primarily supposed to provide services. And the members of the local councils are supposed to do this—but—unfortunately with respect to the members of the local councils—they are powerless, they have no power. So, what will you do for us?"

The importance of providing services to constituents came through time and time again during my research. For example, Ahmed Ezz (the director of membership of the NDP, a parliamentarian, a member of the policies secretariat, and arguably one of the most important people in the party), during an interview on October 18, 2005, declared that Egyptian parliamentary elections were about two things: "What voters care about is: (1) how are you negotiating with government to get us the services before others—other areas—get them, and (2) personal relationships: Do they see you enough? Do you attend weddings, funerals? Are you in the district and visible, shaking people's hands? If you are rich, are you philanthropic?"

■ Conclusion

The cases presented in this chapter are not simply "anecdotal," based on casual interactions, but representative of hundreds of other cases, based on months of daily fieldwork with candidates and voters. Based on their speech and actions, Mounir Abdelnour, Hisham Mustapha Khalil, and Ahmed Ezz, two of whom were sitting parliamentarians in the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections, seem to believe that Egyptian voting behavior is primarily based on the provision of services and not on ideology, party affiliation, or campaign programs. Moreover, they seem to operate largely based on this assumption. Local residents, based on their questions and actions, also seem to confirm that voting behavior is governed by this logic.

For those who follow Egyptian politics, in fact, the terms *na'ib khidma* (service representative) and *na'ib umma* (national representative) have become part of the local political language.⁴⁰ Sometimes used disparagingly to criticize parliamentarians who are said to be only capable of delivering services (e.g., as opposed to the "more important" functions of legislating and keeping the government accountable), and at other times used to explain electoral outcomes (e.g. "service representatives" are thought to be more likely to win elections), the discourse of "service representatives" and

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“national representatives” further indicates the extent to which this type of voting behavior is thought to occur in Egypt.

Most Egyptians do not vote on the basis of party platforms or political programs, policy issues, or ideology. Many if not most vote for candidates who they believe will provide them with *khadamat* (services). Services, however, are understood to be not just public goods for the entire community or the electoral district (e.g., better roads, improved schools, sewage systems, public improvements). They are also frequently understood to be individual services for district residents and include things like helping residents and their children find employment, secure housing, and gain access to healthcare, in addition to facilitating all sorts of dealings between individuals, the government, and its bureaucracy.

Why is this so? Why do many if not most Egyptians understand the role of a parliamentarian as one of providing individual services (let alone collective services for the district) and not one of legislating, holding the government accountable, considering policy options, and debating foreign affairs?

Several factors most likely explain this phenomenon. Most Egyptians realize that parliamentarians simply do not have the power to make major policy decisions or undertake significant political change.⁴¹ They understand, quite accurately, that parliamentarians have only limited powers, much less than those outlined in the constitution, and that the overwhelming concentration of government power resides in the executive branch and, more specifically, in the person of the president. Like political scientists, Egyptians are very aware of the fact that they live in an authoritarian or semiauthoritarian political system, a system in which the legislature or parliament (in this case, the People’s Assembly) functions neither ideally nor according to the principles of democratic theory.

Moreover, the socioeconomic context is such that many if not most Egyptians are in desperate economic need and find themselves in a social, political, and economic system based largely on connections. Without connections themselves, their district’s representatives in parliament represent one such connection (and as such, an opportunity) for socially and economically disenfranchised citizens who otherwise lack many connections with other powerful and networked individuals. Furthermore, candidates and district representatives need something from districts residents (i.e., their support and, more specifically, their votes) and at the same time are supposed to represent their interests.

The logic of voting behavior in Egypt might also shed light on the question of *who* votes in Egyptian elections. Participation in Egyptian elections is extremely low. In the country’s first-ever presidential election, in September 2005, for example, voter participation was less than 24 percent. Similarly, overall participation rates in the November–December 2005 parliamentary elections were below 28 percent. Unlike in the United States and other developing countries, I postulate that in Egypt there is an inverse rela-

tionship between participation and voting, and education and income. In other words, while the better educated and wealthy are more likely to vote in the United States and other developed countries, there are indications that the situation is exactly the opposite in Egypt: the better educated and wealthy are less likely to turn up at the polling station.

We can begin to explain why this might be the case based on what we have established about the logic of voting behavior in Egypt. Middle- and upper-middle-class Egyptians are less likely to need a candidate or parliamentarian as a *wasta* (a connection) to find them jobs, provide low-cost healthcare, and navigate the government bureaucracy, because they already have connections themselves or can gain access through their families and friends. Poorer people, however, are less likely to have such connections and therefore are more likely to participate and vote in parliamentary elections, in hope of establishing a connection with a candidate or parliamentarian and securing services in return. Poorer people are also more likely to participate in elections in order to “sell” their votes, a phenomenon that is fairly widespread in Egypt. Of course, this question is in need of much further investigation.

We can also only speculate here about the larger macropolitical consequences of this type of voting behavior on Egyptian politics and more specifically on issues of good governance and the possibilities of democratization. It would seem that voting for candidates primarily based on the provision of services (and particularly individual services) would have negative consequences on good governance. Simply put, in such a system, parliamentarians must spend much if not all their time providing services for individual members of their constituencies rather than attending to national interests, keeping government accountable, and proposing sound and just legislation.

If Egyptian parliamentarians concentrate primarily on providing constituent services, as many parliamentarians frequently claim, one might reasonably ask whether the Egyptian parliament actually functions as a check on the power of the other branches of government, the way a parliament is supposed to function according to democratic theory. It could very well be the case that the Egyptian parliament (and legislative bodies in semiauthoritarian states more generally) functions in a thoroughly different manner than legislative bodies in democratic states, and also in vastly different ways than prescribed by the Egyptian constitution itself. These are surely fruitful questions for further research.

■ Notes

1. See the series of books published by the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies on Egyptian parliamentary elections, including Moustafa 1995, 2001. See also al-Minoufi 1995; al-Sawi 2004; Bin Nafisa and al-Din Arafat 2005; al-‘Alam 2005; and Mineesy and Lutfi (2001). See also Hamdy 2004. For an account

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of Amina Shafiq's campaign efforts in 2000, see Shafiq 2001; Shafiq also writes for *Al-Ahram* and is a longtime member of the Tagammu Party. She ran unsuccessfully in the 2005 elections in Boulaq.

2. Stated differently, are political campaigns in Egypt different from campaigns elsewhere, or are they similar to campaigns in other countries, including democracies? Or alternatively, do political campaigns in semiauthoritarian states have unique characteristics?

3. There were no more than seven Coptic parliamentarians in the People's Assembly during the 2000–2005 session. In the current parliament there are only six, five of whom were appointed by the president. According to Article 87 of the Egyptian constitution, the president has the power to appoint up to ten individuals to parliament. President Mubarak has traditionally used this power to appoint underrepresented groups such as women and Copts to the People's Assembly. The only Coptic candidate who was elected to parliament in the 2005 elections was Yousef Boutrus Ghali, the current minister of finance. Many speculate that his election was rigged, however, as he is a long-serving cabinet minister who previously held the position of minister of foreign trade. The National Democratic Party only nominated two Copts out of 444 candidates in the 2005 elections, while the United National Front for Change, a broad coalition of antigovernment parties and political forces, nominated thirteen Coptic candidates.

4. The Egyptian parliament, now known as the Maglis al-Shaab (People's Assembly), was officially termed the Maglis al-Umma (National Assembly) until the late 1970s.

5. As in other countries, political families or dynasties are a phenomenon in Egypt. Although I do not have precise data about this, my impression is that this occurs in Egypt more often than in most democratic states (see "Zahrat tawrith" 2006).

6. Article 87 of the Egyptian constitution prescribes that half the members of the People's Assembly "must be workers and farmers." Candidates are registered before an election as either "worker/farmer" or "group/professional," and compete under this classification system. In accordance, each electoral district is represented by two parliamentarians, most often one "worker/farmer" and one "group/professional." As such, voters in each district choose two candidates to represent them, one of whom must be a "worker/farmer."

7. Things are even more complicated, apparently. I was told by a candidate who filed a legal appeal against Sha'lan that, according to the court ruling, Sha'lan could not be both an employee and the owner of a company simultaneously. Another complicating factor that speaks to the exceedingly convoluted character of Egyptian parliamentary elections is that Sha'lan's victory has put the entire district's elections (and its parliamentary representation) into question. Because Sha'lan has been categorized as a "group," the El-Waily district presently has two "group" representatives in the chamber. This, in itself, is unconstitutional, and many speculated that further legal action regarding the district's elections would take place.

8. Gomaa was removed as party head on January 18, 2006. On April 1, 2006, in an attempt to restore his control, Gomaa stormed the Wafd Party's headquarters with a group of armed supporters and thugs. The resulting violence lasted ten hours and left twenty-eight people, mostly journalists in the party's daily newspaper, injured. The incident, which involved gunshots and a fire, also caused significant damage to the party's headquarters, not to mention its reputation.

9. I experienced a few tense moments with people over the course of the campaign, but this was the normal result of working closely and intensely together in difficult circumstances.

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10. A number of articles were written about Abdelnour in *Al-Ahram* and in *Al-Misryal-Yuwm* in November and December 2005.

11. It is virtually impossible to obtain accurate information about campaign spending in Egypt. Most who spend over the legal limit, of course, are unwilling to admit this. And as far as I know, no government agency systematically collects data about campaign spending. Nonetheless, it is perfectly clear that some candidates spent vast sums of money on their campaigns. In the few districts that I followed—for example, Abdelhamid Sha‘alan (El-Waily), Hisham Mustapha Khalil and Hosam Badrawi (Qasr el-Nil), and Momahmed al-Massoud (Boulaq), each spent at least US\$ 180,000 (1 million pounds) on their campaigns. Khalil and Massoud, it is speculated, each spent over \$550,000 (3 million pounds) on their election efforts.

12. Another important and related question is why so many people in Egypt run for parliament. The number of candidates competing for the same number of seats has approximately doubled since 1995. This also has an impact on campaign spending and the intensity of electoral competition. By comparison, India, the world’s largest democracy, with a population over 1 billion, only saw 5,398 candidates in the 2004 elections, with 675 million registered voters electing 545 parliamentarians (two parliamentarians were appointed). See <http://www.indian-elections.com/facts-figures.html>.

13. Article 99 of the Egyptian constitution states, “No member of the People’s Assembly shall be subject to a criminal prosecution without the permission of the Assembly except in cases of flagrant delicto.” In theory, of course, this article is included in the constitution in order to provide greater guarantees for the independence and freedom of parliamentarians to question government, criticize policies, and otherwise perform their jobs uninhibited by the possibility of politically motivated prosecution. In actual practice, however, the immunity provided to parliamentarians is a tremendous perk of office, commonly thought to be used unethically by parliamentarians for personal gain.

14. The infamous case of “the loan parliamentarians” is only one example. During the two previous parliamentary sessions, a number of parliamentarians were stripped of their immunity and prosecuted for taking advantage of their parliamentary status to obtain millions of pounds in unsecured loans. Much of the money was never paid back. In an *Al-Ahram Weekly* article, Gamal Essam el-Din noted, “Politically, it is expected that the harsh verdicts will thrust under sharp public scrutiny the increasing use of parliamentary immunity and political clout to make illegal profits” (Essam el-Din 2000a). In another article, Essam el-Din wrote, “Because the defendants included five former members of parliament (MPs) from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), the rulings reignited the debate on MPs’ abuse of parliamentary immunity to secure ill-gotten gains” (Essam el-Din 2002). See also Essam el-Din (2000b).

15. Academics and researchers are also interested in “objective” research and neutrality. Although these might be considered noble objectives when conducting research, they are potentially damming traits from the perspective of a candidate.

16. See Chapter 9 in this volume for more information on Egyptian political parties.

17. Yet another example of this concerns an acquaintance whose father happens to be an NDP parliamentarian from the Boulaq district in central Cairo. Although I was invited to attend several campaign events with his father, he was noticeably reticent about my research and seemed to be conscious that it could potentially portray his father in a negative light.

18. In fact, I hired four young researchers from the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies to help conduct election-related research. I assigned

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three of the researchers to different districts—Qasr el-Nil, Boulaq, and Imbaba—to follow the first phase of the elections. Although I had initially hoped they would be able to carry out ethnographic fieldwork in these districts, this soon proved unrealistic.

19. Most of the research for the campaign in the first phase of voting started in early October and continued through November 9, or November 15 if there was a run-off election. After the conclusion of the first phase of voting, I immediately began researching the campaign I had chosen for the third phase of the elections, scheduled for December 1.

20. The Wafd was for many years the only opposition party with a daily newspaper. This has changed somewhat with the appearance of Ayman Nour's Hizb Al-Ghad (Tomorrow Party), although that party's daily publication has a much smaller circulation.

21. Over 5,000 candidates ran for 444 seats in parliament, according to the Higher Commission for Parliamentary Elections. Many candidates, however, were people no one had heard of, and were not even residents of the districts where they were running for office. The majority of these candidates were not serious contenders, and their "campaigns" often reflected this. Although I met with a number of such candidates, I thought it would be more interesting and worthwhile to study candidates and campaigns that had some chance of success.

22. Elections were thought and said to be a *muwsim* (season) by many. People spoke of *muwsim al-intikhabat* (election season). This made sense in that certain types of activities (e.g., campaigning, *nadawat*) and opportunities (e.g., employment in campaigns and other opportunities to benefit from candidates) only took place when elections were held, or during election season.

23. Election ballots in Egypt display candidates' names along with corresponding symbols and numbers, or ballot positions. In a country with high illiteracy, the use of pictures and numbers for candidates makes some sense. Ostensibly, numbers and symbols are assigned based on when individuals register their candidacy (e.g., the earlier one registers, the more likely one is to receive a low number). In practice, however, ruling-party candidates always receive the first and second positions on the ballot and their corresponding symbols. The NDP "group/professional" candidate is always first on the ballot and is represented by the crescent moon, whereas the NDP "worker/farmer" candidate is always second and represented by the camel. A few days before the election, two candidates withdrew from the race and the numbers for all the candidates below them on the ballot changed accordingly. So although Abdlénour's number was 7 during the entire campaign—and much of his campaign material displayed the number 7 (e.g., posters, banners, printed material)—a few days before the election his number became 5. Those days saw campaign workers furiously making changes to banners, cutting off the number 7 on printed material and otherwise attempting to cope with what can only be described as incompetence in electoral administration. The only candidates whose ballot positions did not change were those who originally had lower numbers than the two candidates who withdrew. As number 1 and number 2 on the ballot, the NDP "group/professional" and "worker/farmer" candidates remained the same in terms of ballot position.

24. What Heyba meant, of course, was that he first learned about politics and campaigns by working for Ahmed Fouad. This, in itself, is interesting, as it means that one of the most important people in Abdlénour's campaign (a leading member of the largest opposition party) had previously worked for and led the election and reelection efforts of a member of the ruling party. Heyba once told me that during one such election for Ahmed Fouad many years ago, he stuffed so many ballot boxes

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that his fingers began to bleed. He recounted this with a contorted look on his face as if to demonstrate both the pain involved and the disgusting site of blood literally dripping from his fingernails. Heyba said that he stopped supporting Fouad when Abdelnour first ran for office in the district in 1995.

25. This was clearly intended to differentiate Abdelnour from many if not all of the other candidates running for parliament in the district. Moreover, '*al-na'ib al-muhtaram*' (the respected representative) is how parliamentarians are referred to in parliament. This is roughly the equivalent to "honorable congressman" in the US political system.

26. The irony of the fact that the Abdelnour family villa was located where the Omar Effendi department store in Abbassaya now stands cannot go without comment. Although Omar Effendi has its origins in the early twentieth century, since the store's nationalization in the 1960s it has come to be associated with some of the negative aspects of the country's socialist era in the Egyptian imagination: state control of the economy, low-quality goods, and limited selection. The Abbassaya store in particular is also an example of uninspiring socialist-era design and poor-quality construction. Abdelnour—and his family's once-grand villa—by contrast, represent the politics and economics of an earlier liberal capitalist period. The irony continues, as the Egyptian government recently privatized Omar Effendi.

27. Zamalek is located in the Qasr el-Nil electoral district.

28. Abdelnour could also often be seen with a *sibha* (worry beads) in hand. As a Copt, his religion was an issue; it was used against him by some of his opponents in his two previous campaigns, and I heard his religion discussed among supporters and campaign staff on several occasions.

29. These excerpts come directly from my field notes of October 17, 2005.

30. This scene was actually quite endearing. I believe this man was sincere. Interestingly, I never saw him again, possibly further indication that he was not a paid supporter.

31. Here he was referring to parliamentarians from the ruling party, who can regularly be seen sleeping in the chamber and are known to approve everything the government puts in front of them, by either clapping or raising their hands in approval.

32. Abdelnour, like some other candidates, had a campaign worker/supporter who functioned as a "poet," attending events and occasionally standing up to recite a line of *zagal* (colloquial poetry) about the candidate. This line roughly translates as: "we went around El-Waily [searching], we went around; the likes of Mounir we have not found."

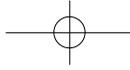
33. The Egyptian constitution is available at: <http://constitution.sis.gov.eg/en/enconst1.htm>.

34. The videotapes as well as many other "services" not recounted here were financed by Abdelnour's own money.

35. The resident's timing was important. Election season is the time during the course of a five-year parliamentary session that a parliamentarian is most vulnerable and in greatest need of support from constituents.

36. What Abdelnour meant by this is that under the current constitution, even if the parliament withdrew its confidence in the government, the matter would then go to the president, who would likely dismiss the vote of no confidence in his ministers, resulting in absolutely no change.

37. Many in Egypt considered this electoral contest to be a battle between two wings of the same party, the "old guard" of the NDP versus the new, modern, and younger-oriented generation of NDP reformers, led by Gamal Mubarak.



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38. On October 22, 2005, Khalil drove me around the district himself, in his new BMW sport utility vehicle (bearing “customs” license plates, meaning that import taxes had not been paid on the car), so that I could see for myself what he had accomplished.

39. Some of his posters featured pictures of medical equipment he had purchased (again out of his own pocket) for local hospitals. These posters featured photographs of the hospital rooms before equipment and after the equipment had been installed.

40. What is meant here, of course, is a differentiation of two types of parliamentarians—those who primarily provide services to their constituents (*na`ib khidma* or “service representatives”) and are either incapable or uninterested in the other functions of a parliamentarian, and those parliamentarians (*na`ib umma* or “national representatives”) who concentrate on the larger issues of national political importance. Also see “Representatives Win with Services” 2006.

41. See Ellen Lust-Okar’s quotation (2005b) of one Syrian parliamentarian who reportedly exclaimed, “We’re members of parliament. We don’t make laws!”

