Non-Islamist parties in post-2011 Egypt: winners in an MB-free political sphere

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Abstract

Purpose – Years after the 2011 uprising Egypt, it seems that the country's non-Islamist parties are still included in the political game. After significant alterations in their political sphere by mid-2013 at the advent of the Muslim Brother exclusion and the subsequent discrediting of Salafi al-Nour party, non-Islamist parties took clear part in the mobilization for presidential elections (2014, 2018) and competed for legislative seats in 2015. Nonetheless, it is difficult to expect them to turn into long-term key political players with clear-cut ideological postures, unique platforms and strong grass root mobilization. With the exception of the electoral gains scored by numbered parties like Free Egyptians' party and Nation's Future in 2015 legislative elections, these parties seem to be lagging behind esp. in terms of their popular base; who became winners at the advent of the radical exclusion of the MB from July 2013 onwards.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on archival research and guided by basic assumptions of rational choice institutionalism, mainly game-theoretic versions of the approach. It is divided into four sections, three of them are chronological and the last one is thematic.

Findings – Egypt's non-Islamists engaged in the post-2011 political sphere, with strong Islamist rivals crippling their political chances in the first two years following the 2011 uprising. They surely capitalized on the exclusion and discrediting of the latter, but they suffered lack of ideological clarity and fragmentation from 2011 onwards with no enough evidence these weaknesses were surpassed after Islamists were "out of their way". The only strand of non-Islamist parties which came out as "game winners" were those possessing the resources and enjoying overt "friendly" relations with al-Sisi regime. Nonetheless, internal conflicts inside key secularist parties shed light on their capacity to turn into long-term players in Egypt's political sphere.

Originality/value – Very few papers were published on Egypt's secularists parties after the 2011 uprising from the perspective of the alteration that occurred in their political environment affecting their political weight and gains. More generally, literature on non-ruling parties in authoritarian contexts mostly reduce these parties to secondary roles allocated by ruling regimes. The paper seeks to overcome both shortages.

Keywords Egypt, Elections, Arab Spring, Non-Islamist parties

Paper type Research paper

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party, non-Islamist parties took clear part in the mobilization for presidential elections (2014, 2018) and competed for legislative seats in 2015. Nonetheless, it is difficult to expect them to establish themselves as long-term key political players with clear-cut ideological postures, unique platforms and strong grass root mobilization. With the exception of the electoral gains scored by numbered parties like Free Egyptians' party and Nation's Future in 2015 legislative elections, these parties seem to be lagging behind esp. in terms of their popular base; who turned into winners at the advent of the radical exclusion of the MB from July 2013 onwards.

Guided by "game-theoretic versions" of rational choice institutionalism (Peters, 2012, pp. 57-59), this article argues that non-Islamist parties maintained their political inclusion due to their compliance to rules set by the "ruling regime" since the ouster of Mubarak in February 2011. According to this type of rational choice institutionalism, actors set rules of the game which should be followed by other actors to attain rewards and avoid punishment. In the case of post-2011 Egypt, the rules set by the regime changed from one phase to the other but were drastically altered starting mid-2013 and resulted in the exclusion of the Muslim Brother (MB) as actor non—compliant to game rules. Non-Islamists didn't defy regime-set rules, and thus were allowed to continue as political players to seek rewards. Nonetheless, gains attained by non-Islamist parties after 2013 can't be solely captured through their compliance; they could augment their political weight only after the MBs exclusion as the political sphere turned relatively stagnant compared to the two years directly following the 2011 popular uprising. In other words, changes in their political environment indirectly added to their opportunities in the game. As will be evident, chances and gains of these parties were partly confined by their own political incompetence and were relatively enhanced, only for numbered parties, through the abrupt exclusion of the MB from 2013 onwards; use of large resources and overt support to the ruling regime. Before moving to the state of the art on the topic, it is critical to note that the regime setting game rules was not a constant across time. During the interim period, it was mainly SCAF but after Mursi became president in 2012, SCAF retreated but still kept an eye on the course of civilian politics and largely shaped presidency of the latter through its June 2012 Addendum. After Mursi's ouster, it was back to SCAF for a second interim period but with al-Sisi election as president in 2014, it became al-Sisi regime setting these rules.

For long decades, multiple Comparative Politics contributions on the MENA region were evidently pre-occupied with either ruling regimes/parties; largely intended towards studying strategies and mechanisms of autocracies in this region (Hamid, 2010; Heiss, 2011) or the de-facto, mostly outlawed, political activism of societal forces, such as Muslim Brother movements (Mitchell, 1993; Lia, 1999). This left non-Islamist parties at the margins of scholarly attention; except for few and individual accounts on key political parties like Egypt's al-Wafd; which originally interested in the party's history as a key political player in pre-republican Egypt (Quraishi, 1967; Deeb, 1999). Briefly put, these parties did not represent a key focus of MENA scholarly efforts. On a more general account, research on political parties in autocratic regimes departs from, and frequently reiterates, an underlying rationale that ruling regimes define the allowed shares of political gains allocated to all non-regime parties, so called "pseudo opposition parties"; rendering the latter as ineffective and weak puppet political entities moved around by ruling regimes/leaders (Puddington, 2017, pp. 11-12). This rationale explains much of the reluctance to conduct intensive research on these parties in pre-2011 Egypt. Nonetheless, the 2011 Arab Spring sparked a flame of political dynamism in one of the most persistent autocratic regions of the world. Unfortunately, most of scholarly research on political parties during transitional periods is overly focused on the potential role political parties can play to promote the transition to democracy either theoretically or based on case studies (Biezen, 2003;

Power and Shoot, 2012), which is not the focus of this article. Therefore, the basic assumptions of the aforementioned game theory in rational choice institutionalism will be used to examine the alterations in rules of the game and how non-Islamist parties adapted to these alterations to attain rewards (mainly continued inclusion) and avoid punishment (exclusion or marginalization).

The ouster of a thirty-year dictator, Mubarak, triggered furious political competition challenging long decades of political settings and theorizing; research interested in post-2011 Egypt classified political parties into two main groupings: Islamist and secularist/non-Islamist- parties (Tadros, 2013; Sadiki, 2011; Hamzawy and Dunne, 2017). With the former dominating much of relevant scholarly publications from 2011 onwards, non-Islamist parties, were largely overlooked and under-researched with scant exceptions, as stated above. Although the article does relate to what was commonly referred to as secularist parties in relevant studies, it would be more accurate to use the term "non-Islamist" to refer to the amalgamation of political parties actively participating in post-2011 Egypt as most of these parties don't overtly advocate secularism or secularist state. What they really have in common is that they don't use religion (here Islam) in their party statute, platform or propaganda.

To depict alterations in rules of the game set by the regime and their subsequent impact on different actors in post-2011 Egypt, a zoomed-in focus on three major political intervals is presented: pre-2011 legislative elections, 2012 Presidential elections till Mursi's ouster, and post-Mursi onwards. In the last section of the article, special attention is paid to internal conflicts plaguing key non-Islamist parties as a factor towards diminishing their prospect for developing into long-term term key political players despite of their evident compliance to rules of the game.

In addition, throughout the various sections of the article, brief accounts on key non-Islamist parties/alliances will be highlighted towards validating specific claims especially on their weaknesses. Nonetheless, as no one single non-Islamist party/alliance can actually fully capture or represent the larger landscape of their party politics in post-2011 Egypt, the paper will opt for the commonly-used category of non-Islamist/secularist parties to denote political parties which engaged in politics with no reference to religion in their statute, platform or propaganda. Still, it is by no means the argument here that ALL non-Islamist parties behave similarly or possess the same exact traits; rather, that there are general discernible patterns that could be depicted here. Finally, although the article has no direct interest in addressing the intensively studied Islamist parties, brief comparisons of non-Islamist parties' political competition and/or mobilization to that of their Islamist counterparts will be occasionally highlighted, mainly to show the compliance element of analysis and the factors that undermined non-Islamist gains before Mursi's ouster.

2011, active engagement but limited gains

Before going through the various aspects of non-Islamist parties' political competition in the early months following the uprising, it is important to define rules of the game regulating this phase of post-2011 Egypt; a phase where both Islamist and non-Islamist parties played according to rules and thus insured their inclusion and other potential rewards. These rules were mainly laid by SCAF through the 2011 roadmap (Roll, 2016, p. 27) and the 2011 election law. The core of these rules was that SCAF will lead the interim period and will decide on when the drafting of the constitution begins, with three other aspects on legislative elections, presidency and the new constitution left for citizens to decide upon through the act of voting. For the law, it was seen as complicated for ordinary citizens, as it adopted a mixed system, which gave one third of the lower house to majoritarian system and two thirds to

proportional representation (Hassan, 2011), but political parties mobilized voters accordingly.

During the uprising, non-Islamist forces seemed to take the lead; Islamists joined later on. Wael Ghunem, the Egyptian young man who launched the Facebook group calling for the initial protests "Kuluna Khalid Sai'd" was not an Islamist; Copts, labor, students and professionals joined forces in protest of the Mubarak rule (Goldstone, 2011, p. 458). This should have given these forces an edge vis-a-vis Islamists counterparts, but Islamists' strong capacity to mobilize and organize counterbalanced, and even outweighed, the initial role of non-Islamists in the uprising.

This became clearest more than once in 2011. First, during the March constitutional referendum, when they campaigned for a "no vote" to the constitutional referendum of March 2011, at the hope that a new constitution would be drafted and passed before parliamentary elections (MacFarquhar, 2011); the referendum was passed with a majority of over 70 per cent (Lindsey, 2014). Second, in the 2011 legislative elections when both the MB Freedom and Justice party and Salafi al-Nour party won more than two thirds of the seats in the National Assembly (Kirkpatrick, 2012).

More generally, non-Islamist parties were quite active in 2011; that was part of the dynamism of the few months following the uprising. They formed the Egyptian Bloc, in support of the "civil state", which was believed to seek counterbalancing Islamist parties in the first post-revolution legislative elections (The Egyptian Bloc, 2011) and they protested, along with MBs and Salafis in November 2011, days before the legislative elections, against an intended delay of handing the cabinet over to civilians (Awad, 2011).

Nonetheless, in the 2011 elections, as highlighted above, the Islamist edge was decidedly proven. Several constellations were established, including the Egyptian bloc, the Islamist Alliance, Democratic Alliance and Completing the Revolution Alliance. Except for the Egyptian Bloc made only of three parties, Islamists penetrated the three other alliances/ blocs (Map of Egyptian, 2011, p. 7). Compared to the "mixed" alliances, the only purely non-Islamist bloc (Egyptian Bloc) did not achieve much; it won 34 seats for party list and individual seats combined, that is less than al-Wafd party which won 41 seats for its party list and definitely much less than the seats won by Salafi al-Nur party (102 seats) or the MB Freedom and Justice party (216 seats) (Egypt Elections Roundup, 2012). In fact, this bloc was doomed to score poorly as it was once joined by more than 20 parties, but witnessed large defections ending up with only three parties after being accused of fielding candidates from the former Mubarak-time National Democratic party (Egyptian Social Democratic, 2011). Another reason for the defections was the conflicts over the respective shares of its constituent groups (The Egyptian Bloc, 2011).

On a different account, non-Islamist parties did not have a unified position regarding these elections. Whereas some of them did not even field candidates, like the Egyptian Communist party which claimed that a treason law was not enacted to prevent old guards from "sneaking back" to the legislature and the elections would subsequently serve their return to state institutions (Egypt's Communist Party, 2011), others presented candidates and won seats but did not attain the significant shares achieved by their Islamist rivals (Tadros, 2012). After Freedom and Justice party and al-Nour party won a minimum of half of the seats in each governorate in these elections (Martini and Worman, 2013, p. 6), it became fact that non-Islamist parties lacked the edge to effectively mobilize against the strong tide of Islamist social networks.

Many pre-2011 non-Islamist parties achieved poorly in terms of 2011 electoral gains because of their weak electoral appeal. Parties like Conservatives' party, Nasserist party and Egyptian Arab Social party which all date back to the pre-2011 Egypt were known not to

play a real opposition role. Under Mubarak, opposition parties were barely competing for parliamentary seats; their share of seats did not culminate to any significant weight in passing or blocking legislations (Hussein, 2018, p. 125). Back then, most opposition parties were regarded as "cardboard parties" (Hamid, 2014, p. 132). By virtue of political experience, competition in post-2011 Egypt was supposed to be more challenging to the newly-established non-Islamist parties like Free Egyptians' party (17 seats) and Egyptian Social Democratic party (14 seats) but surprisingly, these parties scored better than older counterparts like Reform and Development party (8 seats) and Dignity party (6 seats). The only exception to this trend was al-Wafd party which scored higher than all other pre and post-2011 non-Islamist parties in these elections (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017, p. 6). But al-Wafd is exceptional for it dates back to pre-republican Egypt when it contested and won seemingly free elections in the early twentieth century (Hamid, 2014, pp. 138-139). It might well be the case that authoritarian practices of pre-2011 republican Egypt have generally diminished the edge older parties might have enjoyed over newer parties in post-2011 Egypt.

When it comes to the larger category of non-Islamist parties, several factors could explain why they scored relatively less than their Islamist rivals. One factor is ties to the Mubarak old guard, which are believed to have minimized the chances of particular parties, like Tagammu' party, which participated on the list of the Egyptian bloc in 2011 and had the smallest share among parties of the bloc (3 seats) (Egypt Elections Roundup, 2012). Worth-mentioning, in March 2011, only few weeks after the 2011 uprising ousted Mubarak, members of Tagammu' party left a party conference in protest of alleged relations of the party to the Mubarak associates and joined an alliance intended to bring together leftists forces in Egypt, called the Popular Alliance (Fahmy, 2017).

A second factor to non-Islamist poor performance in these elections was a clear state of unintended fragmentation. Many parties were founded after the 2011 uprising with no clear-cut ideological lines of demarcation (Cunningham, 2013). Socialists and liberals organized into several parties with no clear ideological distinctions; it was quite difficult to tell in what ways Bread and Freedom party differed from the Socialist Popular Alliance or Tagammu' party; same with liberal parties Free Egyptians' party was not ideologically different from the Egyptian Alliance.

The multiplicity of parties was different in the case of Islamists; when Islamists had more than one party, they put their support base behind numbered parties with known Islamist leaders. Salafis had their focus on al-Nour party (25 per cent), mobilizing the bulk of Salafi supporters. Other parties attracted little attention and enjoyed little weight on their own as mobilizers, like Building and Development party (3 per cent), Asala party (0.9 per cent) or Fadila party (0 per cent). Same with the MBs which had their lever on Freedom and Justice party (34.9 per cent) (Gaub and Abd El Aziz, 2014, p. 11).

Other Islamist parties like al-Tayyar, founded by MB youth after a split in the lines of the latter, were left to their members to build and mobilize (Muslim Brotherhood, 2011). This party even joined a different bloc in the 2011 elections: Completing the Revolution Alliance (The Egyptian Current, 2011). In short, both Salafis and MBs knew better not to scatter/fragment their popular base over an array of several parties, they sought bulks of votes, and they did it through having one party for each group at the focus of their campaigning and thus evaded the electoral fragmentation of non-Islamist parties in the 2011 elections.

A third factor is evident hesitation on the part of several non-Islamist coalitions in the few months following the 2011 uprising. The Revolution Continues Alliance (RCA) suspended its campaign and started a sit-in in Tahrir square after the assaults on protesters

in November 2011 calling for an end to military rule (Maher, 2011). Yet, it eventually continued campaigning for the elections (Egyptian Bloc, Revolution, 2011).

Still, there were two factors that non-Islamist parties didn't have direct role in, namely: the sheer number of newly established parties after the 2011 uprising and the short time period available for parties to mobilize. More than 50 parties were registered before the 2011 legislative election (Bakr, 2012, p. 73), and few months were definitely not enough time to politically educate and mobilize ordinary Egyptians but constituted no challenge for established movements like the Muslim Brotherhood vi-a-vis the newly-established constellations (Arntzen, 2014, pp. 2-5). Add to this, from the ouster of Mubarak to the 2011 legislative election results, non-Islamist forces worked under the pressure of the gossip on a tacit alliance between SCAF and Islamists (Brooks, 2015, p. 21).

A general distrust of non-Islamist parties might have also affected their chances in a traditionally conservative society like Egypt. In fact, many of these parties gave the impression they were anti-Islamists, with no "ideological common ground" and a vaguely-broad idea of a "civil state" (Tadros, 2012). For instance, the civil state in the post-2011 debate was used to mitigate the concern about the secular state. Yet, there is nothing in academic literature as a civil state, it is an invention of Arab intellectuals, used sometimes to be distinguished from a fully theocratic state and some other times to connote opposing military state (The Civil State, 2014).

Many non-Islamist parties joined the Egyptian Bloc as to promote a civil state, but without further clarification. Because the bloc was established to counterbalance the power of Islamists, it is believed that "civil" meant "non-Islamist" (The Egyptian Bloc, 2011). But the inability of Egyptian non-Islamist parties to build a common ground was due to parallel disagreement associated with varying understandings of the term "civil state" amongst them (Lavie, 2017, p. 23).

The danger of presenting a blurred and controversial idea of a civil state viewed as synonymous to anti-Islamist state emanates from the fact that republican Egypt never knew a real separation between state and religion, and there were many instances when Egyptian presidents used the power of the faith to legitimize their rule and/policies. Sadat portraying himself as a pious Muslim (Kogelmann, 1994, p. 87), using Islamist activists against Nasserists in the 1970s (Zahid, 2010, p. 82) and the Azhar clergy issuing fatwas asserting bank interests are not usury, after Islamist businesses boomed in the 1980s (Mostyn, 2010) are just few examples.

To further validate this point, the effort to establish a secularist party dated back to the time of Mubarak but there was always the concern regarding violating the Egyptian constitution. The first overtly secular party in post-2011 Egypt was established in 2015 under the name The Egyptian Secular party, that is four years after the 2011 uprising and was expected to appeal only to those with hardcore secularist views; it was eventually accused of advocating atheism (Fouad, 2015). Party representative "Hisham Ouf" already expected the party to face severe criticism from Islamists (Secular Party Founder, 2015). In other words, Islamists had supporters who believed in their call and mastered large philanthropic networks facilitating their mobilization (Abdelhadi, 2012), non-Islamists were mostly regarded with skepticism and overtly secularist parties attracted limited number of supporters.

Last but not the least, non-Islamists did not just perform poorly in the 2011 legislative elections; they also chose to blame others for it. Instead of addressing their own weaknesses in terms of ideology and strategies, Egypt's non-Islamists made all sorts of accusations, ranging from Islamist success powered by military backing to an illiterate populace easily manipulated by Islamists to claims of forged elections (Tadros, 2012).

Aside form non-Islamist parties' weaknesses and the edge posited by Islamist parties, what could be verified is that the basic feature of the months stretching form Mubarak's ouster in February and the November 2011 elections Egypt were the "freest" and most promising to all political parties/alliances; a feature that gradually faded away in favor of a more restrictive and less dynamic political sphere specially after the ouster of Mohamed Mursi in 2013. Both Islamist and non-Islamist parties benefited from this openness, although at varying degrees, and both played according to rules of the game set by SCAF and thus were allowed to seek rewards and stay included.

2012 Presidential elections till Mursi's ouster

After the 2011 elections, it became clear Islamists could easily use their edge in political mobilization to win sheer seats in Parliament. Non-Islamists not only realized they cannot achieve much in terms of electoral gains in competition with Islamists, but also had to deal with an Islamist-dominated legislature. It seemed as if they lost one battle but another important one was still ahead: the 2012 presidential elections. Because a new constitution was not yet drafted, the elected president would enjoy vast prerogatives similar to those enjoyed by the ousted president Mubarak (Fadel, 2012). The prospect of a president with an Islamist background meant the potential for more control of decision-making processes by Islamists to the detriment of non-Islamists. Briefly-put, non-Islamist parties were strongly motivated to better their mobilization, to stop Islamists from winning another electoral battle.

When it comes to rules of the game at this phase, SCAF was officially ending the interim period at the presidential elections. So, the expectation was that civilian politics would take course and elected bodies would rule the country. Nonetheless, the explicit rules of this phase were two folded: one, the 2012 military addendum stripping the upcoming president from many of his powers (Pioppi, 2013); two, the parliament would assign a constituent assembly with the task of drafting a new constitution (Ottaway, 2012) which will be decided upon through a referendum (National Salvation Front, 2013). Although both the High Election Committee guidelines for presidential candidacy and the dissolution of the National Assembly in 2012 were rumored to be orchestrated, or at least coordinated by SCAF (Roll, 2016, p. 29), these claims cannot be firmly established.

At the advent of the 2012 presidential elections, the major challenge for non-Islamist parties was to present/support non-Islamist candidates who stood a chance to win against Islamist presidential runners, but like with the 2011 legislative elections, they could not cope with the popular base of Islamist parties. Several non-Islamist candidates joined the rally for the presidency; this made it difficult for them to unite behind one runner who would stand a chance to defeat Islamist candidates.

In the second round, non-Islamists struggled with the uneasy equation of supporting Shafiq, the non-Islamist "old guard" contender or Mursi, the overtly Islamist MB runner (Friedman, 2012). Although some of them boycotted the vote in the second round, disliking both candidates, there were reportedly non-Islamists who supported Mursi to minimize the chances of Mubarak-time Shafiq from becoming president (Muslim Brotherhood-backed, 2012). So, non-Islamist votes were split among those who boycotted the elections in the second round, those who supported Shafiq and those who supported Mursi.

More generally, non-Islamist candidates also seemed to miss on important topics concerning women in Egypt. In addition to the fact that the list of presidential candidates did not include a single woman, key non-Islamist runners were criticized on their stance on women rights. Amr Moussa, Ahmed Shafiq and Hamdeen Sabbahy spoke of women reaching positions other than the presidency, although it is a right granted by constitution

and laws, and they failed to address the persistent questions on discrimination against women (Sholkamy, 2012). After reaching the second round against Shafiq, Mursi won the presidency on a tight vote (Saleh and Awad, 2012).

Although an Islamist figure became Egypt's president in July 2012, two developments worked to the benefit of non-Islamist parties. One the dissolution of the Islamist-dominated National Assembly in June 2012, just before the presidential second round (Voelkel, 2017, p. 604) and the addendum -key rule of the game in this phase- issued by SCAF at the end of the same round which stripped away many of the president's constitutional prerogatives (Pioppi, 2013, p. 58). These developments translated into a restricted MB political weight in state organs which served, at least in principle, the interests of their non-Islamist rivals.

Moreover, two counter moves on the part of Mursi worsened the MB public image and played for the benefit of non-Islamist parties: Mursi's attempts to penetrate several ministries and state bureaucracy (Aly, 2014) and the November 2012 declaration shielding his decisions from judicial scrutiny (Pioppi, 2013, pp. 60-61). In addition, with an MB president and good MB-Salafi cooperation at the time of Mursi's election, non-Islamist parties turned to play THE opposition.

However, until November 2012, they seemed to lack the initiative to engage in strong anti-regime mobilization. Even when it seemed as if they could break away from their evident inability to effectively work together when they formed the National Salvation Front (NSF) (Jabhat al-Inqaz), comprising a large array of more than 30 political parties (Gaub and Abd el Aziz, 2014, p. 12), and engaged in large protests against Mursi's aforementioned November declaration, they still could not counter the MB mobilization capacity. Mursi could swiftly hit back on the NSF when he rushed a vote on the constitutional draft in the Constituent Assembly and won a referendum with more than 60 per cent of the vote, against the call of the NSF on voters first to boycott, then to reject the referendum (National Salvation Front, 2013).

Furthermore, the exceptional unity exhibited by non-Islamist parties in November 2012 was only facilitated by the more general popular dissatisfaction with Mursi's overt encroachment on judicial authority in Egypt and was not repeatable in post-2013 Egypt. They were divided on support of the military after Mursi's ouster (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017, pp. 18-19, p. 22). Divisions inside the Front along with disagreements with the interim government that ruled the country after the ouster diminished the prospect for the Front's former unity to be continued (National Salvation Front, 2013).

Another instance which signified their limited capacity to mobilize was when Tamarrud came out in April 2013 from outside all existing non-Islamist parties to announce a call and petition to oust Mursi from the presidency. Tamarrud was founded by a group of activists who were not known in the Egyptian political sphere (Profile: Egypt's Tamarod, 2013). It might be worth mentioning that that founders of the call were rumored to work for intelligence agencies (Ketchley, 2017), but this information was never confirmed by the group.

However, in the aftermath of the 2013 Mursi ouster, non-Islamist parties continued to lack distinctive political platforms (Cunningham, 2013). This is certainly not to negate they were the key winners from Mursi's ouster; Islamists, their major competent rivals, were either excluded (MBs) or discredited (Salafis). Competing with MBs in elections, then cooperating with Mursi when he became president then supporting SCAF on Mursi's ouster, Salafis lost much of their credibility. They were criticized for both supporting the ouster and participating in the 2015 elections; criticism that was mirrored in their scant electoral gains in 2015 legislative elections when they won only twelve seats (Girgis, 2018, p. 181); a loss that was somehow expected after they expressed support to ousting Mursi, an elected

Islamist president (Alterman and McCants, 2015, p. 131). For non-Islamist parties, the country was awaiting new legislative and presidential elections after Mursi's ouster and the playground was open for them as compliant actors to regime rules; their weaknesses will be mitigated through the less competitive post-2013 political sphere.

Post-Mursi onwards: favorable contexts but not for all

To be sure, the bulk of non-Islamist parties were not bewildered by the human rights question raised by the Rab'aa sit-in (The Sad State, 2015). They either outspokenly supported raiding the pro-MB protestors or remained silent on the incident (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017, p. 22). However, the most immediate split in their lines was rather the resignation of al-Barad'ie from his position in the interim government in protest of the NSF's support of the Rab'aa raiding (Kingsley, 2014a). Of course, there was also the concern that liberals' support of the 2013 Mursi ouster, exposed non-Islamists as not caring much for the democratic future of the country and would subsequently lose votes in the 2015 legislative elections (The Sad State, 2015).

Nonetheless, for those who publicly supported the raiding of the Rab'aa sit-in, political chances in post-Mursi Egypt were not diminished for many reasons: first, Islamists were discredited and millions of Egyptians took the streets against them in June 2013 upon the Tamarrud call. Second, the military already enjoyed a privileged status among the Egyptian citizenry and scored high (67 per cent) on popularity ratings and was welcomed to lead Egypt's transition (Ghanem, 2013, p. 18).

One year later, the abundant support enjoyed by Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi as a presidential runner -Minister of Defense under Mursi who ousted him in July 2013 and ordered the raiding of Rab'aa few weeks later- assured those who supported the ouster and/or Rab'a they did not have to worry about losing popular support. In the weeks preceding the 2014 presidential elections, it was clear the bulk of non-Islamist parties backed Sisi (Cunningham, 2013). This is not to imply there were other serious runners in these elections; Hamdeen Sabbahy, the only other candidate in 2014, was defeated in the 2012 presidential elections from the first round (Kingsley, 2014c); so, there was no reason for non-Islamist parties to divide over whom to support in these elections.

Subsequently, the regime setting rules of the game became al-Sisi regime. In this phase, rules of the game were altered through three key developments: the 2013 law on demonstration; the 2014 constitution (passed through referendum) and the 2014 electoral law respectively. Needless to say, the effect of these three developments on political competition wasn't the same. But the general features of this phase were laid down through these three legal documents. For instance, the prohibition of religious parties was introduced in the 2014 constitution (Farid, 2015). As will be evident in this section, freedoms of expression and organization were severely restricted through the 2013 law and candidates with strong family ties and wealth stood better chances regardless of party affiliation because of the 2014 election law.

At the advent of the 2015 legislative elections, the scene was a mix of boycotting and competing parties. Those boycotting the elections came from across the Islamist-non-Islamist dichotomy. From the Islamist camp were Wasat party, Watan party and Building and Development party, from the non-Islamist camp were Dustour party, Justice party and Egypt Freedom party (Messieh and Mohamed, 2015).

Parties which boycotted these elections made different allegations, such as pre-determined settings, non-stimulating political atmosphere and media defaming of the opposition (Afifi, 2015). Yet, there was also the question of party resources, some boycotting parties allegedly did not possess adequate resources to compete (Conrad, 2015). Overtly

talking about the critical role of resources in the 2015 elections was the Civil Democratic Current (Dawoud, 2015) and the Socialist Bread and Freedom party (Conrad, 2015). The pivotal role of resources is probably valid as the two parties with significant votes and seats in these elections were founded by big businessmen, namely, Naguib Sawiris of the Free Egyptians and Sayyid al-Badawi of al-Wafd (Egypt: Political Parties, 2017, p. 2).

Unsurprisingly, several parties which had already made it to the 2011 National Assembly decided to run for the 2015 elections, in spite of the calls to boycott ballots days before elections, sharing lists of those who were killed and jailed for political causes (Afifi, 2015). Nonetheless, from amongst those which decided to compete, parties supporting al-Sisi were expected to dominate the National Assembly (Low turnout, 2015); an expectation that proved accurate as the three parties winning significant proportions in terms of votes and seats, namely Free Egyptians' party (65 seats), Nation's Future party (53 seats) and al-Wafd party (35 seats), were either coopted or pro-state parties (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017, p. 5). In fact, these three parties belong to a larger pool of parties which were suspected to cooperate with "ruling Generals" to grant themselves place in the country's legislature and executive branches (Hamzawy, 2017, p. 4).

There is good reason to believe that supporting al-Sisi regime did boost the chances of some non-Islamist parties/alliances. For instance, For the Love of Egypt, the coalition which won all party list seats (120) in these elections (Halawa, 2016) was rumored to be supported by President al-Sisi (Egypt: Political Parties, 2017, p. 2) and created by Central Intelligence Agency (Bahgat, 2016). The coalition described itself as "backup" to al-Sisi and originally wanted to use his posters in their campaign but was not permitted to do so by court (Trew, 2015).

There is virtually nothing to denote significant alterations in non-Islamist parties' ideology, platforms or mobilizations strategies; they simply complied to the rules set by the regime including the adaptation to the new electoral laws which gave an edge to individual candidacy. In addition to the 28 appointments, the National Assembly, elected in 2015, had 448 individual seats and only 120 seats for parties (Egypt's Elections Committee, 2015). Thirty-one parties ran in these elections with individual candidates and only thirteen parties ran for party lists (Egypt: Political Parties, 2017, p. 2). For the 120 seats allocated to lists, only those winning absolute majorities could be allocated seats in four districts and the lists were not necessarily formed by political parties (Williamson and Brown, 2014). Technically, the law favored individual candidates with strong family influence and wealth to have an edge in the 2015 elections (Kirkpatrick, 2015), just like the electoral system under Mubarak which weakened political parties (Dawoud, 2014; McTighe, 2015).

Moreover, in these elections, the low voter turnout in 2015 compared to the 2011 elections (Waguih, 2015) made winning seats in big constituencies for those who enjoyed wealth and influence significantly easy (McTighe, 2015). This 2015 voter turnout was partly driven by the belief that election results were predictable (Voelkel, 2015). Taking into account that the number of legally-licensed parties declined from over a hundred in 2012 to about eighty parties in 2015 (Egypt: Political Parties, 2017), the 2015 elections were far less challenging to non-Islamist parties if contrasted to the elections in 2011.

Comparing results of the 2011 and 2015 elections, there was no drastic alteration in the relative strength of different non-Islamist parties. Both Free Egyptians' party and al-Wafd party, the two parties with the biggest shares of seats in the non-Islamist camp in the 2011 election, won significant shares of seats in 2015. Nonetheless, a key transformation is that parties which supported al-Sisi and possessed significant resources had the edge in these elections, shedding light on the importance of both resources and pro-state positions in enhancing the chances for mobilization in post-2013 Egypt.

Furthermore, the political environment was altered, not just through the MB exclusion and Salafi defamation; the elections were held in a political sphere confined by major impediments crippling campaigning. The November 2013 law on demonstration made it practically impossible for regime opponents to demonstrate; it granted police authorities the right to postpone the demonstrations or even call them off, if deemed threatening to security (Hamzawy, 2016). The law also gave state authorities wide powers in dispersing protests, the right to use excessive force against protesters who committed crimes and could potentially block all opposition parties' demonstrations (Egypt: New Protest law, 2013). Other Islamist parties, not just the banned Freedom and Justice party were reportedly persecuted (Youssef, 2019). Reports on tens of thousands of political prisoners in Egypt constituted a key challenge to those engaged in politics (Bar'el, 2016).

Summing up this section, non-Islamist parties dealt with "different" rules and political sphere in this phase. A new constitution was passed, a new president was elected, laws on demonstration and elections sharply molded the political sphere in which these parties competed. Parties adapted and those aiming to achieve on an edge in the 2015 elections relied on resources and overt support to al-Sisi regime.

Internal conflicts and prospect long-term political competition

In spite of the significant electoral gains attained by some non-Islamist parties in the 2015 elections, there is reason to doubt they can turn into key long-term political players. The argument here is that several key non-Islamist parties suffer from divisions and internal conflicts. This section illustrates recent examples of these conflicts.

During the run up for the legislative elections in 2015, after plans for cooperation between the Egyptian Front and For the Love of Egypt alliances, the former left and joined the Egyptian List, mainly comprising small Nasserist parties; Tagammu' party also left For the Love of Egypt after conflicts over the selection of candidates for the 2015 elections (Cox, 2015). Coalition candidates were absent during the early days of 2015 elections' candidate registration; this observation was attributed to the internal conflicts impeding candidacy by lists, including the conflict between the Egyptian Front and the For the Love of Egypt alliances above (Essam El-Din, 2015a).

More importantly, struggles inside key non-Islamist parties were no secret, even those which scored remarkable electoral gains in these elections. The internal struggles for power inside al-Wafd party made news in 2015, as the struggle lingered for months and revolved around the desire of a "reformist" faction inside the party to get rid of its leader Sayyed al-Badawi under allegations of concentrated authority and brining the party into financial hardships. A similar scenario took place in the Dustour party, founded by al-Barad'ie, against its leader Hala Shukrallah, accused by the party's "Council of Elders" of concentrating power in her hands (Essam El-Din, 2015b). The party allegedly never recovered from the time al-Barad'ie resigned in August 2013. Hala Shukrallla, who was elected as the party's chairwoman in 2014 (Kingsley, 2014b) complained she could not run the party because of pro-state senior members meddling with her work (Dunne and Hamzawy, 2017, p. 10).

There was also the infamous struggle inside the Free Egyptians's party; which seemed to be functioning under the leadership of Essam Khalil, but after the 2015 National Assembly was seated the party faced another defection, with Emad Gad wishing to become an independent parliamentary deputy (Free Egyptians Party, 2015). Yet, the party faced a real challenge when the board of trustees was dissolved upon the decision of the party's General Assembly. Naguib Sawiris, founder of the party who was also member of the board of trustees, was removed from the party by the discipline committee. Sawiris filed legal

charges against the party and publicly accused Essam Khalil of having his friends and relatives in "a private business" (Liberal Free Egyptians, 2017). With two different Cairo headquarters, the party is now split between two major camps; one that is pro-Sawiris and his proponents, and another that is pro-Essam Khalil and his supporters (Bahgat, 2017).

Similarly, the conflict inside the Social Democratic party took a strong turn with the election of its new party leader in 2016, after Muhammed Abu al-Ghar decided he will not run for a second term. On a tight vote, the party split between two major camps, one leftist in favor of more overt opposition to regime policies, and the other reformist advocating a rally behind President Sisi (Dawoud, 2016).

Conclusion

As shown through the different sections of the article, rules of the game according to which rewards and punishments were assigned varied from one phase to the other. Before Mursi's election, key rules were set through the 2011 roadmap and the 2011 election law, the political sphere enjoyed remarkable freedom and both Islamists and non-Islamist parties benefited, though differently, from this openness. As the interim period came closer to an end with the presidential elections of 2012, the June addendum which stripped the president from significant prerogatives and the constituent assembly of the 2012 constitution were key rules in this phase; other factors not directly associated with SCAF also shaped the game on the ground and technically benefited non-Islamist parties, like the dissolution of the National Assembly in 2012, the worsened MB image after Mursi November declaration and attempts of the latter to penetrate the state bureaucracy. After Mursi's ouster, rules were set through the 2013 law on demonstration, the 2014 constitution and the 2014 election law. Non-Islamist parties adapted through use of overt regime support, nominating strong individual candidates and use of large resources to achieve an edge.

Comparing non-Islamist parties political competition to that of their Islamist counterparts, the latter stood a big chance to play politics in a more open political sphere at the advent of the 2011 popular uprising. The key challenge towards post-Mubarak role was the strong organization and mobilization capacity of their Islamist rivals. Although they exerted strong efforts to counterbalance the long-established grass-root power of Islamist parties, it became clear by the end of 2011 that they failed to overcome that challenge. They basically stayed scattered with blurred propositions of what the civil state they advocated was about and exhibiting no clear-cut ideological variety; eventually blaming others for their inability to cope with Islamists' electoral performance. Their only alliance "The Egyptian Bloc" scored modestly in the 2011 elections and even lost most of its member parties before the elections.

After Islamists won more than two thirds of the seats in the 2011 National assembly, Mursi's election as president in June 2012 asserted the balance was still tilted against non-Islamist parties. Yet, Islamists in power meant non-Islamist parties could play THE opposition, not just the non-Islamist opposition. This shift improved their chances for popular appeal among ordinary citizens, who disliked Mursi's rule and were willing to support Tamarrud call in 2013. Political chances of the bulk of non-Islamist parties which supported the ouster weren't diminished as indicated by the sheer victory of Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi in 2014 presidential elections.

Yet, non-Islamist parties gradually stood better chances and won more seats in the 2015 legislative elections because of changes in rules of the game and their political environment; not due to alterations in terms of ideological clarity or mobilization strategies. They achieved more in these elections because their Islamist rivals were either excluded or discredited. Particularly, the success realized by some key non-Islamist parties like al-Wafd

party, Nation's Future party or Free Egyptians' party should be viewed within the more restrictive environment of the post-2013 political sphere and the electoral law passed in 2014 favoring individual candidates with wealth and influence over political party structure. Plus, those highly-engaged non-Islamist parties which became frontrunners in 2015 legislative elections were supportive of al-Sisi regime and possessed vast resources to mobilize, which rendered electoral competition an equation of money and political stance.

Non-Islamist parties started out with significant weaknesses in terms of ideological clarity, fragmentation -with MBs and Salafis strategically putting their efforts behind Freedom and Justice party and al-Nour party to avoid fragmenting their votes- that undermined their political gains and there is no evidence their enhanced weight in the political sphere in post-2013 Egypt was the result of addressing these weaknesses. Key non-Islamist parties suffered from internal struggles that made headlines, prominent among them al-Wafd party, Free Egyptians' party and the Socialist Democratic party and thus are not expected to turn into key long-term political players in the country's political sphere.

To conclude, Egypt's non-Islamists engaged in the post-2011 political sphere, with strong Islamist rivals crippling their political chances in the first two years following the 2011 uprising. They surely capitalized on the exclusion and discrediting of the latter, but they suffered lack of ideological clarity and fragmentation from 2011 onwards with no enough evidence these weaknesses were surpassed after Islamists were "out of their way". In terms of electoral gains, the only strand of non-Islamist parties which came out as "game winners" were those possessing the resources and enjoying overt "friendly" relations with al-Sisi regime. Nonetheless, internal conflicts inside key secularist parties, even with big shares in the 2015 elections, shed light on their capacity to turn into long-term players in Egypt's political sphere. It might be of interest for future scholarly research on the topic to examine the political competition of these parties in the upcoming legislative elections to compare it to the findings of this article and more generally to study capacity of these parties to address their weaknesses and how this affects their chances in Egyptian politics.

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