



Egypt

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 Author: Pieter Koekenbier
 Population:
 Prime minister:
 President:
 Governmental type:
 Ruling coalition:
 Last election:
 Next election:
 Sister parties:



The Arab Republic of Egypt lies in the North–Eastern corner of the African continent. Its geographical position, size and population, its intellectual achievements and, more recently, its control of the Suez Canal and its juxtaposition to Israel have made of Egypt a strategically important country. It has often taken or attempted to take the lead among Arab nations.

INTRODUCTION

Egypt is a presidential republic. Executive power lies with the president, who is also Head of State. The president is elected by popular vote for a six–year term. He in turn appoints the prime minister, council of ministers, governors of Egypt’s 26 provinces and other important posts. President since 14 October 1981 is Hosni Mubarak, who took over from the assassinated Anwar Sadat. Mubarak is currently serving his fifth term as president. He is also the leader of the National Democratic Party which dominates the parliament.

The legislative branch consists of a bicameral system which is in turn composed of the People’s Assembly and the Advisory Council. The People’s Assembly is made up of 454 members, 444 of which are elected out of 222 constituencies by popular vote for five–year terms, and 10 of which are appointed by the president to fill quotas of minorities. Under the constitution, one deputy from every district must be a worker or farmer, although precise definitions of these categories are vague. The advisory council (which indeed only functions in a consultative role) is made up of 264 seats; 176 of which are elected by popular vote for six–year terms, and 88 who are appointed by the president. Ultimate judicial power lies with the Supreme Constitutional Court.

RECENT ELECTIONS

Presidential elections – results

The first–ever multi–candidate Egyptian presidential elections were held on September 7, 2005. They were contested by ten candidates who were nominated by their respective parties. The official results are given in the table below.

Candidate	Party	Total Votes	%
Muhammad Husni Mubarak	National Democratic Party	6,316,784	88.6
Ayman Abd al–Aziz Nour	Al–Ghad Party	540,405	7.6
Noman Khalil Gomaa	Wafd Party	208,891	2.9
Osama Abd al–Shafi Shaltout	Solidarity Party	29,857	0.4



Wahid Fakhry al-Uksory	Egyptian Socialist Arab Party	11,881	0.2
Ibrahim Muhammad Abd al-Monem Tork	Democratic Union Party	5,831	0.1
Mamdouh Muhammad Ahmad Qenawi	Social Constitutional Party	5,481	0.1
Ahmad al-Sabahi Awadallah	Umma Party	4,393	0.1
Fawzi Khalil Ghazal	Egypt 2000 Party	4,222	0.1
Al-Said Rifaat Muhammad al-Agroudy	National Conciliation Party	4,106	0.1

29 potential candidates were rejected by the Presidential Election Commission, while other parties chose to boycott the elections by not fielding or endorsing a candidate. While independent election monitors criticised certain aspects of the elections, they were generally held in a calm environment. Criticism includes small-scale voter manipulation and general confusion due to a lack of information. According to official figures, a total of 7,305,036 people out of a registered electorate of 31,826,284 cast their votes, which amounts to 23 percent of registered voters, and about 10 percent of the total population. Of these votes, 7,131,851 or 97.6% were counted as valid. The next presidential elections are planned for 2011.

Parliamentary elections – results

Parliamentary elections, too, were held in 2005. They were held over three rounds in different parts of the country over the period 9 November to 7 December, with each round in turn consisting of two rounds. Every one of the 222 constituencies throughout the country delegates two MPs to the People’s Assembly in a first-past-the-post electoral system. If a candidate fails to obtain an absolute majority in the first round in his constituency, a second-round run-off decides the winner.

Party or affiliation	Seats in 2000 PA	Seats in 2005 PA
NDP	404	311
Wafd	5	6
Tagammu`	5	2
Nasserists	1	0
Al-Ahrar	1	0
Al-Ghad	6	1
Independent (affiliated with MB)	17	88
Other independent	15	24

12 seats remain undecided, as legal procedures are still in progress. Obvious results of the parliamentary elections are a serious decrease in seats for the NDP, which nevertheless holds on to a large majority, and a dramatic increase of seats for members affiliated with the officially-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. Implications of the elections are discussed in more detail below. The next parliamentary elections are planned for 2010, while advisory council elections are to be held in 2007.

POLITICAL SITUATION

Constitutional referendum 2007

On 26 March 2007 a constitutional referendum was held in Egypt to vote for or against 34 amendments of the Constitution. It was a “take it or leave it” deal: voters could either agree or disagree on the whole package of amendments. Voting for each amendment separately was simply not possible.

The amendments were proposed by the incumbent president Mubarak. They were mostly meant to change the electoral law of Egypt. President Mubarak said that the reforms were meant to prevent the Islam from being misused for political purposes. A proposed ban on religion-based political parties was one of the most controversial amendments. In fact, the amendments would strengthen the position of the President.

The campaign for the referendum was short: just 21 days. This period was too short for the oppositional forces to



start a good “No-campaign” and it gave the President the possibility to emphasise again the importance of a “Yes” by the Egyptian voters.

Official results state that 75,9% of the voters agreed with the constitutional amendments. The turnout was 27,1%. However, government critics claim that the turnout was not higher than 5%. Amnesty International described the changes as the “greatest erosion of human rights in 26 years”.

A Constitutional Amendment 2005

A lot has happened in recent months with regard to Egypt’s political system. In February 2005, with presidential elections looming later in the year, president Mubarak announced his decision to change article 76 of the Egyptian constitution, which defines the procedure for the election of the president. The main change was that for the first time, the president would be chosen from among multiple candidates, instead of a single candidate being nominated by the People’s Assembly and then submitted to the people for approval. Although there were to be conditions for the eligibility of individual candidates, some of these were to be waived for the 2005 elections.

Although the news was initially met with cautious optimism by people concerned with the state of Egypt’s democracy, subsequent conditions and further laws severely restricted the potential electoral freedom. The new amendment to the constitution was, however, voted in by the People’s assembly and subsequently ratified by popular referendum in May 2005 despite opposition and boycotts by several opposition parties. Official numbers put the number of votes in favour at 82.8 per cent with a turnout of 53.6 per cent, although these numbers were challenged by both the Egyptian Judges Club, responsible for judicial supervision of elections, and the Independent Committee for Monitoring Elections.

The amendment requires all independent presidential candidate nominations to be supported by at least 250 members of legislative bodies, including at least 65 members of the People’s Assembly, 25 members of the Advisory Council, and 140 members of local councils spread over at least 14 governorates (out of a total 26). These conditions do not apply for candidates fielded by legal political parties. These parties, however, must comply with another set of conditions, namely that they are active (i.e. not “frozen” by the Political Parties Committee), at least five years old and have won at least 5 per cent of candidates in both People’s Assembly and Advisory Council. The conditions for legal parties, however, were waived for the 2005 elections. These rules entailed that independents could not realistically run in these elections, thus ruling out possible candidacies of human rights activist Saad Eddine Ibrahim and feminist Nawal al-Saadawi, as well as of a Muslim Brother candidate running as an independent. Perhaps even more importantly, the rules for party candidates, particularly the 5 per cent rule, if enforced at future elections, will make it very difficult for them too to field any candidates if they do not have sufficient seats in both Chambers, something which is hard to achieve in the majority system of Egypt’s elections.

Apart from the restrictive details of the amendment, a series of other laws were changed or newly enacted that would further reduce political freedoms and disadvantage the opposition parties. The results of all this are that the immediate results of what has on occasion optimistically been dubbed the Cairo Spring have been mixed at best. Clearly, concessions have been made by the NDP that limit the extent of the de facto one-party system. However, these concessions have been balanced by other legislations that have imposed stricter rules and thus established more control for the ruling party. The NDP can allow some more freedom as it sees fit, depending on whether they feel threatened at a particular moment. Thus, the strict regulations on existing parties fielding a candidate were waived for the 2005 presidential election. But when the NDP feels needs to clamp down, the mechanisms are in place.

Consequences of the elections

It is clear from the results of the presidential elections (and, perhaps, also to an extent from the low turnout) they never were a real competition. This is the result of several factors. First, the established nature of the NDP allows it to take advantage of a network of patronage, a strategy that no other party fielding a candidate could utilise. Second, there is still a large measure of repression of political activity, although certainly less than in the near past. Third, the 21 days that the election campaign was limited to was hardly enough for the opposition parties to familiarise large parts of the population with their candidates and platforms after so many years of electoral inactivity. Of course the rather short time period between the electoral changes and the elections itself did not help. Fourth, the opposition parties themselves did not articulate original electoral programs that were real alternatives to the programs of the NDP.



This is something they can only blame themselves for. It is not enough to claim that the NDP has failed in effectively and successfully ruling Egypt from the population's point of view (although if one looks at the current economic and social situation they at least have a point there), the opposition parties also have to come up with an alternative program if they are to be taken seriously, and that is something they have consistently failed to do. Fifth, the opposition parties' election campaigns were not especially well run, with only Nour's al-Ghad Party making an effort to reach out to many Egyptians through modern communication technologies and visits to major cities. Mubarak himself seems to have been campaigning quite vigorously, hiring professional promoters, visiting lots of cities in different provinces, and even granting the country's civil servants a substantial pay rise.

Turning to the parliamentary elections, it is clear that the stakes of the 2005 parliamentary elections were high for all parties. The NDP was determined to hold on to a two-thirds majority, needed to push through constitutional amendments, while attempting to appease foreign allies, particularly the United States, with a semblance of democracy. The Muslim Brothers were finally in a position to capitalise politically on their position of popularity. The other opposition parties, too, were desperate to try as hard as they could to obtain more seats in parliament. They wanted this both as an end in itself and because of the 5% requirement for the next presidential elections. In fact, the presidential term is six years compared to five years for parliament. Therefore, if Mubarak finishes his term it will not be this parliament but the next one that will have to approve possible presidential candidates in 2011. However, should Mubarak die in office during this term, something not entirely unthinkable considering his age (he is 77 years old and has recently been treated in a German hospital), the next presidential elections will be held under this parliament. Moreover, a relatively strong position in this parliament will be something to build on for the next elections.

The most important results of the parliamentary elections are: a bitterly fought election process marred by violence and fraud; a decrease in the number of seats for the ruling NDP, who now have fewer seats than ever before but still over two-thirds of the total; the radical rise in the number of seats for the Muslim Brotherhood, which however remains officially banned; and the failure by the secular opposition parties to even consolidate their number of seats in the previous parliament.

Official monitoring of the election was a task for the country's judges in cooperation with the government-controlled National Council for Human Rights. In addition to monitoring by the judges, several NGOs or coalitions of NGOs, in particular the Egyptian Association for the Support of Democratic Development (EASD) and the Independent Committee on Election Monitoring (ICEM), have attempted to assess the fairness of the elections independently by dispatching monitors and assembling reports based on their findings. International monitoring was refused because it is considered an infringement on national sovereignty. Most parties seem to agree on this.

In general, from reports of the Judges' Club, independent monitors and the press, there seem to have been widespread and pervasive violations. In the first rounds, there were reports of voter intimidation, vote-buying, ballot stuffing, and inaccurate voters' lists. These violations seemed to get more serious as the elections progressed. In the first round of the parliamentary elections large-scale violence did not occur and some of the more serious complaints were about 'thugs' allegedly hired by the NDP to harass and threaten voters and the 'excessive neutrality' (i.e. passiveness) of the security forces in these situations. However, in the later rounds, and particularly the third round, it was the security forces themselves which were accused of violence, intimidation and harassment of voters. A favourite tactic of these forces was to form a cordon around a polling station to prevent anyone from entering and casting their votes. At certain polling stations, security forces opened fire at crowds trying to break through their cordons, shooting with both rubber bullets and live munitions. Thirteen civilians were killed in the violence. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 1,600 political activists have also been arrested during the month-long elections.

The striking increase in violence over the period of the elections seems to have been driven largely by the unexpectedly strong results of the Muslim Brotherhood in the first two phases of the elections. In the first round of the elections, the security forces were reported to be neutral. After 34 Brotherhood candidates had won seats in the first round, security forces started to become more active in trying to slow down the group's progress. These new tactics included arrests of MB campaigners, and the closing of polling stations in areas that were considered Brotherhood strongholds. Despite these tactics, the Brothers won another 34 seats in the second round. In the third phase, then, things turned more violent still. Riot police and soldiers with armoured vehicles were deployed, judges



overseeing the voting process and journalists were harassed, and many more polling stations were closed off. The Brothers only managed to win 20 seats in the third round. Apart from, and perhaps partly because of the violence, the elections were characterised by an appallingly low voter turnout. If official numbers for the presidential elections were still around 23 percent, and popular estimates around 16 percent, in the third round of the parliamentary elections estimates were as low as 8 percent.

The second important aspect of the parliamentary elections is the loss of parliamentary seats by the NDP. Even the seats they did manage to gain were the outcome, partly of fraud and intimidation, partly of resorting to patronage tactics, and particularly, as before, of the reincorporation into the party of nominally independent candidates who had beaten official NDP candidates at the polls. But while the NDP might still control parliament, a much higher number of opposition seats in parliament than ever before will make the NDP somewhat more accountable to its critics.

Perhaps the most important result are the spectacular gains the Muslim Brotherhood have made. This clearly shows that they are the only credible opposition force at the moment. However, their wings are clearly clipped by the fact that they are both officially banned, and not a political party. They will have to walk a very fine line between remaining true to their Islamic principles, while pushing for their proclaimed commitment to democratic reform, and at the same time taking care not to antagonise the regime too much lest they be once again subjected to mass arrests and other oppressive measures. On the other hand, their position might have become somewhat more secure because they are now, domestically and internationally, recognised as legitimate opposition, if not legally, then morally. This will tie Mubarak's hands somewhat in his dealings with the Brothers. A final aspect of this new status is that the Brothers will have to become somewhat more pragmatic and realistic in their political approach. Slogans are no longer sufficient; they now need to translate these to actual programmes and strategies. This will hopefully also help to clear up the ambiguities about the Brothers' positions on several issues.

The final major result of the elections is the failure of the secular opposition parties to make any significant impact in the elections. This is a result of several factors: regime oppression and fraud, the lack of a democratic tradition, the lack of a patronage network for opposition parties, but also party infighting and the lack of credible opposition programmes and serious campaigning. And while the gains of the Brotherhood are gains for the democratic situation in Egypt, at least if the Brothers stay loyal to their commitment to democracy and democratic reform, a democracy in which the choice is limited to the NDP and the Brothers is hardly a fully fledged democracy. It remains to be seen whether there will be any more progress in Egypt's democratic situation.

A bad sign is the conviction of Ayman Nour, leader of the Ghad party and runner-up in the earlier presidential elections on forgery charges and the five-year jail sentence he received. Human Rights Watch considers the case "highly politicised" and has criticised the proceedings and the conduct of the presiding judge. Nour had also lost his parliamentary seat in the Cairo Bab al-Shariya constituency.

The Iraq war

The war on Iraq that the US-led 'Coalition of the Willing' embarked upon in February 2003 had its reverberations in Egypt. The situation was already charged because of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the popularity of the al-Aqsa intifada and the biased role the US is perceived to be playing in that conflict. Massive demonstrations against the war in Cairo in February and March brought out hundreds of thousands of people, who directed their anger at the US but also occasionally against their own government. The government itself found itself in an uncomfortable position between the anger of the population and its strategic relationship to the US. Although it openly disapproved of the war, it was still being criticised for being too feeble in its resistance. Moreover, the regime, though allowing and even participating in anti war protests (on 5 March it even staged its own demonstration), soon found itself struggling to control them. Spontaneous demonstrations at Tahrir Square in Central Cairo on 20 and 21 March marked the first such events since 1977. After this, police suppression of demonstrations and oppression of activists resumed. On the whole, although agitation has since died down, the war and subsequent scandals like Abu Ghraib seem to have led to increased criticism of the US and of the Mubarak regime.

The economy

The effects of the Iraq war and even of the 2005 Sharm al-Sheikh bombings on the Egyptian economy were less severe than originally forecast. Tourism recovered quickly after the end of the military campaign in 2003, and the loss in exports to Iraq under the oil-for-food programme was largely offset by the involvement of Egyptian



construction companies in Iraq and of additional US economic aid. (0 million in direct economic aid and billion in loan guarantees were approved by the US Congress in April 2003). High oil and gas prices boost energy export values, and Suez Canal revenues are at record heights. Still, the economy is struggling. The floating of the Egyptian Pound in January 2003, while welcomed by most economists and contributing to a rise in the Cairo Hermes stock index, has also led to a severe depreciation of the pound and resulting inflation. On the other hand, this depreciation might boost exports. Foodstuffs especially have risen in price, signifying added difficulties for Egypt's many poor. Unemployment is still high, somewhere between the official nine per cent and estimates that are closer to twenty. It is further exacerbated by certain government policies, such as the decision to contract Cairo and Giza governorates trash collection to private European companies which displaced many traditional garbage collectors. The current cabinet seems more committed than previous ones to economic achievements. It has simplified and reduced tariffs and taxes, improved the transparency of the national budget, revived stalled privatisations of public enterprises and implemented economic legislation designed to foster private sector-driven economic growth and improve Egypt's competitiveness. NDP and opposition campaigns for both presidential and parliamentary elections focused heavily on domestic economic issues, indicating both its importance and the regime's uneasiness with the international situation. It is clear that the regime is sensitive to criticisms of economic neglect, and it is to be hoped that these measures will do something to kick-start the economy.

Gamal

The issue of the position of President Mubarak's son Gamal Mubarak has become more topical with the latter's promotion to head of the newly created Policies Secretariat. This new body brings together some of the best minds in Egypt from the NDP, business circles and academia in order to fulfil its mandate of devising ways of modernising the party by de-linking it from the government. Gamal Mubarak has also headed senior delegations to the US and is becoming a regular appearance in the state media. His new high-profile role has reinforced popular belief that he is being groomed to take over the presidency from his father and has sparked criticism. He himself and others within the NDP have repeatedly denied such rumours.

Israel / Gaza

The Egyptian-Israeli relationship remains a major issue for Egypt, both on a popular and on a political level. (The comedy 'al-safara fi_l-`amara' by Sharif Arafa in which an actor playing the Israeli ambassador to Egypt performs the role of villain was released in 2005 despite protests by Israel and became a big hit.) The peace that was established by a peace treaty in 1979 has often been characterised as a 'cold peace', with strained relations and very limited contact in the areas of trade, business, culture or tourism. This issue has come to the fore again with the implementation of Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan. Although this has often been called a unilateral step, there have indeed been negotiations with Egypt resulting in the Agreed Arrangements that created an Egyptian border patrol force along the Philadelphia Corridor that forms the border between Egypt and Gaza. Although the Israeli defence establishment disapproved of Israel's giving away control of that border, ultimately other considerations prevailed. One was the fact that Israel's maintaining its presence at the border would be construed as a continuation of the occupation, destabilising the post-disengagement situation. Another reason was that Israel's desire to completely wash its hands of the Gaza situation required a complete withdrawal. On the Egyptian side, the fear of the effect of an unoccupied Gaza ruled by Hamas on the Egyptian domestic situation as well as the Egyptian desire to portray itself as a force for peace and moderation in the Middle East compelled it to agree to guard the Gaza border, despite the fact that it does not want to be perceived as doing Israel's dirty work. The question now is whether the Egyptians live up to their part of the agreement, and whether the Israelis acknowledge it if they do. If this is both the case, traffic in and out of Gaza can be facilitated, a major requirement if the experiment of an unoccupied Gaza is to work for its inhabitants and thus for the region.

Gender Issues

Gender equality remains a problem in Egypt. The recent parliamentary elections have been criticised for their very low share of female candidates. Only six out of 444 NDP candidates were women, as was one of the Brotherhood's 137 candidates. Some of the other opposition parties did relatively better, but altogether only about 50 out of almost 5,000 candidates were female, which is reflected in the eventual distribution of seats. As no quota mechanisms for the number of women in parliament currently operate, only six women are now represented, of whom one was elected and five appointed. This is a decrease from eight in the previous parliament. Thirteen of the members of the Shura Council are currently women.



POLITICAL PARTIES

Brief history

During the period between 1922, when Egypt formally gained its independence from the British mandatory power, and the revolution of 1952, Egypt experienced an era of relative political openness in which a certain measure of party pluralism was developed. The most famous party in this period was the Wafd party, which was founded in 1918 as an Egyptian delegation that pleaded for complete Egyptian independence from the British. Following the 1952 revolution that ended King Farouk's reign and the era of British domination, the Free Officers came to power, of which Nasser soon proved to be the leader. In January 1953, all political parties were disbanded and a one-party system was officially adopted. The ruling party would be called the Liberation Group (1953–1956), the National Union (1956–1962) and the Arab Socialist Union (1962–1976), respectively.

In 1976, Sadat called for the Arab Socialist Union to be split in three parts. The left wing was to be called the National Progressive Unionist Organisation (now usually known as Tajammu`), the central wing would be the Egypt Arab Socialist Organisation (now the NDP), and the right wing would be known as the Liberal Socialist Organisation (now al-Ahrar, the Liberal Party). In 1977, a new law on the formation and existence of political parties was enacted. The new law stipulated party principles should not run counter to the shari`a and preserve national unity, social peace, the socialist-democratic system as well as the benefits of socialism. It also stated that the party should not be formed on ethnic, racial, geographical or discriminatory bases due to sex, origin, religion or creed. Following the signing of the peace accord with Israel in 1979, the law further stipulated parties should not be opponents of the peace accord. In effect, these conditions gave the state massive power over the existence of rival political parties, whose founding and functioning could be thwarted and who could be frozen at any time. Two parties that did obtain legal status were the Wafd Party (now known as New Wafd) and the Socialist Labour Party. One more party, the Nation Party, was legalised in the 1980s, while the last 20 years have seen the creation of 14 new parties, bringing the total to 20.

This system has allowed presidents Sadat and Mubarak to claim that Egypt enjoys political pluralism and even democracy, while at the same time manipulating the system to ensure continued supremacy of the NDP. All the other parties are relegated to a role in the very margins of Egyptian politics by the state's (i.e. NDP) playing them off against each other, harassing them, or freezing them as the situation warrants.

As a result of this history, many of the parties in Egypt are not real political parties in the Western sense of political movements developed by certain segments of society with a particular ideology or programme. The fact that all parties owe their continued existence to the NDP regime means that it is very hard for them to develop into more autonomous political entities. As such, they have been unable to appeal to large segments of the population, even the politically conscious population, which partly explains the popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood and new organisations like Kifaya.

The different parties

Of the 20 parties currently existing in Egypt, there are really only seven main parties. These are parties that have specific ideological orientations, that have a popular base of some size, that carry out political activity in the interest of certain social groups, and that have had parliamentary responsibility. These are treated below. So are the Muslim Brothers, who though officially not a political party have acquired much political power.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

National Democratic Party: http://www.ndp.org.eg/index_en.htm

The ruling NDP is the only Egyptian member of the Socialist International. Ideologically, Tagammu` is perhaps the party whose views are closest related to Western social democracy. However, because of the very different historical and current political situation, the Egyptian political spectrum is hardly comparable to a typical European left-to-right spectrum.

The National Democratic Party was officially founded in 1978 as a continuation of the central part of the Arab



Socialist Union. According to its programme, the party is committed to the ideals of the 1952 revolution. Apart from ending the monarchy and British dominance, these ideals were the implementation of agrarian reform, nationalization of key industries, a one-party state, and closer ties with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It is clear that the NDP's proclaimed continuing loyalty to these ideals exists on paper only. The NDP is further officially committed to political freedom, social justice, and implementing democracy. However, the party is ideologically extremely weak. It lacks further ideological direction which could define it as either left or right, and it does not even live up to its own rhetoric. It is, thus, more a framework of regime domination than a traditional political party. However, the NDP leadership has recently embarked upon a programme of party modernisation and democratisation. A September 2002 party conference, which had as slogan 'government of the party instead of party of the government' called for change and political renewal. More people would be elected instead of appointed as had been the case before, and the Policies Secretariat was created to help modernise the party and even, according to its official mandate, de-link it from government. While these events should be followed with a certain dose of scepticism, it is too easy to dismiss it all as mere window-dressing; real changes are happening within the NDP.

OTHER PARTIES

The New Wafd

The New Wafd, created in 1978, is essentially a continuation of the pre-1952 Wafd Party. It is a liberal capitalist party that calls for public freedoms and a maximum reduction of the economic role of the state. It encourages Arab and foreign investment, the liberalisation of foreign trade and the exchange rates, privatisation of certain parts of the public sector. On an economic level, most of the Wafd ideas have been taken over by the NDP. On the issue of political freedom and democratic reform, however, the Wafd is much more liberal than the NDP.

Tagammu`

Tagammu` was created in 1976 out of the left wing of the Arab Socialist Union. It is a leftist party which calls for the establishment of a socialist society free of exploitation. It believes in a class struggle that should be resolved peacefully and bases its programme upon the goals of the 1952 revolution

The Nasserist Democratic Arab Party

The NDAP was established in 1992. It is a progressive pan-Arab party that bases its ideology on the thoughts of Gamal `Abd al-Nasser. Its basic goals are freedom, socialism and Arab unity. Economically, the party is committed to a strong public sector, central planning, and a limitation of the control of market forces.

The Socialist Labour PartyThe SLP was created in 1978. Its ideology rests on two pillars: Islamic principles and socialism. It calls for an implementation of socialism based on Islam but is less strict in the economic implications of this socialism than other parties. It has in the past entered alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Ahrar Party.



The Ahrar Party

Although it describes itself as socialist because of its origin as the right wing of the Arab Socialist Union in 1976, Ahrar is in essence a liberal party. Its programme is based on capitalist thought and it calls for article 4 of the constitution, which says that the state is based on socialism, to be amended to say instead that Islam is the economic basis of the state, thus protecting legitimate gain. Thus, it attempts to explain its economic outlook through religious justifications, in the same way but with rather different results than the SLP, with which it has in the past formed an alliance.

Al-Ghad Party

Al-Ghad was created in 2004 when former Wafd-member Ayman Nour left the party due to disagreements with the party leadership. Its charter was rejected by the Political Parties Committee three times on the grounds that its programme was not sufficiently different from existing parties (i.e. Wafd), before it was approved a fourth time. There has been speculation that al-Ghad was approved to create a competitor to the Wafd Party, thus weakening both. Al-Ghad calls for democratic reform, with an emphasis on secularism and promoting the empowerment of women. It emphasises domestic economic development and is less interested in regional or international policies. Disagreements within the party have weakened it considerably in the latter half of 2005, and it only won one seat in the 2005 parliamentary elections, something that has also been blamed on NDP fraud, particularly in the case of Nour losing his Bab al-Shariya seat.

Minor parties Other parties, which have so far failed to exercise any significant influence on Egyptian politics, are the Solidarity Party, the Egypt Arab Socialist Party, the Democratic Unity Party, the Free Social Constitutional Party, the Umma Party, the Egypt 2000 Party, the National Accord Party, the Green Party, the Democratic Popular Party, the Democratic Peace party, the Young Egypt Party and the Social Justice Party. Several more parties have requested permission to be legalised as political parties but have so far been refused.

The Muslim Brothers Although not officially recognised as a political party, the Muslim Brothers have become a political force to reckon with. Founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, they quickly achieved a prominent place in Egypt as a popular social movement and rival to the nationalist Wafd. Although its beliefs were initially founded on those of Muslim reformers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh who sought to modernise Islam while adopting certain aspects of Western civilisation and political systems, they were increasingly influenced by al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. The latter especially instigated a massive radicalisation of the Brothers.

A related source of radicalisation was Nasser's outlawing of the organisation in 1954, forcing it underground and fostering, through the state's heavy-handed repression, a legacy of bitter opposition to that state. While Sadat from 1971 onwards loosened Nasser's repressive politics towards the Brothers, his new-found rapprochement has been uneasy and the relationship between the Brothers and the Egyptian state has been ambiguous ever since. On a doctrinal level, however, the Brothers have been distancing themselves from Qutb's radical ideas since the early 70s. At the same time, they have been building up an impressive system of social services that has allowed to connect with the people at a grassroots level and has in turn given them a certain measure of political power. However, since government policy is never to permit a political party based on religion, the Brothers remain



officially banned. They have, however, avoided this problem by having members run in elections as independents; they have thus been able to dominate professional associations and syndicates, and to gain parliamentary seats.

The Brotherhood itself states it is committed to democratic reform and will continue to coordinate with the other opposition parties on this issue. However, its position towards a lot of other issues is still unclear. These issues include the constitution, democracy, the role of women and the status of Copts in Egypt, the banking industry, and more. In that sense, now that they have been elevated to the position of most important opposition group, perhaps more important than any other in Egyptian history, they can no longer hide behind their arguably simplistic slogan 'islam is the solution'. They will have to come up with more detailed solutions to Egypt's problems and in the process have the chance to either reinforce or weaken prevalent distrust among seculars, christians and others.