

# State and regime capacity in authoritarian elections: Egypt before the Arab spring

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## Abstract

Scholarship on electoral authoritarianism has increasingly recognized state capacity as an element enhancing electoral control. Building on such arguments, I examine the interaction between state capacity and regime strength in authoritarian elections. Drawing on empirical evidence from Egyptian elections under Mubarak, I show that the degree to which official regime candidates were able to profit from state penetration depended on the strength of the ruling party. In urban settings where party structures were stronger, service provision by the state helped secure the dominance of the hegemonic National Democratic Party; in rural constituencies where the party was weak, by contrast, service provision strengthened local elites who often ran and won against the party's official candidates. This suggests that variation in regime capacity to channel political support needs to be taken into account when examining the relationship between state capacity and electoral control under authoritarianism.

## Keywords

State capacity, party strength, authoritarian elections, clientelism, Egypt

## Introduction

What is the relation between state and regime capacity in autocracies? Are autocratic regimes in stronger states more likely to endure? Does state capacity invariably enhance regime control over elections in electoral authoritarian regimes? Conceptually, state capacity can be defined as the 'ability of state institutions to effectively implement official goals' (Hanson, 2017), while regime capacity denotes the extent to which regime institutions shape and contain political processes. Recent scholarship has argued that, on the whole, political regimes in more capable states are likely to be more durable (Andersen et al., 2014). This contribution turns the relationship between state capacity and regime strength into a question by focusing on electoral politics in Egypt before the Arab Spring. In particular, I analyze the extent to which the Egyptian regime was able to translate

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state service provision into electoral control through its hegemonic party. I find that this translation was unequal. In urban settings where party structures were stronger, service provision by the state helped secure the dominance of the hegemonic National Democratic Party (NDP); in rural constituencies where the party was weak, by contrast, service provision strengthened local elites who often ran and won against the party's official candidates.

On the theoretical level, scholarship on electoral authoritarianism has increasingly recognized state capacity as an important determinant of authoritarian resilience. In a nutshell, it has been suggested that authoritarian elections will stabilize non-democratic regimes if state capacity is sufficiently high, while such contests are more likely to get out of hand and destabilize regimes in the absence of sufficient state capacity (Levitsky and Way, 2010; Seeberg, 2014). More concretely, state capacity has been shown to matter for electoral control (Seeberg, 2014) and to play a role in determining types of electoral fraud (Fortin-Rittberger, 2014), for example. Moreover, a range of scholars have argued that state capacity matters for regime stability more generally (Andersen et al., 2014; Slater, 2010; Way, 2005).

In contrast, a different strand of literature has sought the sources of regime stability in the institutional features of the regime, rather than the state. Barbara Geddes has famously suggested that incentives for cooperation within authoritarian ruling coalitions go a long way towards explaining regime durability (Geddes, 1999), and Milan Svoblik has examined the effects of different institutional configurations on the problems of authoritarian power sharing and control (Svoblik, 2012). With respect to the stability of electoral authoritarian regimes, arguments have focused in particular on the role of ruling parties in discouraging opposition and supporting elite cohesion (Brownlee, 2007; Smith, 2005).

These different perspectives are not as irreconcilable as it might seem at first sight. As scholars such as Jason Brownlee (2007), Dan Slater (2010), Benjamin Smith (2005), and Lucan Way (2005) have pointed out, empirical processes of state and regime-building are often tightly intertwined. Historically, regime institutions – notably ruling parties – have been important aspects of state attempts to administratively penetrate societies and to channel political activity into centrally controlled venues (Huntington and Moore, 1970). On a conceptual level, scholars have therefore called for analyzing the interaction between state and regime capacity: 'When considering the role of state capacity in facilitating authoritarian regime stability' writes Jonathan Hanson (in this special issue), 'it is important to also consider the regime's organizational and institutional capacities and how they interact with those of the state.'

This contribution takes an empirical look at the interaction between state and regime capacity by drawing on the case of electoral politics in Egypt before the Arab Spring. Historically, the capacity of state and regime institutions to penetrate Egyptian society have evolved in tandem. To use the words of Nazih Ayubi (1995), the Egyptian state has been fierce, rather than strong, possessing large amounts of despotic power, but lacking infrastructural capacity (Mann, 1986). The institutional capacity of the regime has been equally limited. Even though Egypt can look back on a comparatively long history of the development of political institutions, informal, personalist or neo-patrimonial processes have limited the extent to which such institutions have structured political dynamics (Kassem, 1999; Koehler, 2008).

In the Egyptian case, state capacity did not automatically translate into regime control of electoral politics. Indeed, rather than profiting from state capacity, the regime institutions meant to control the electoral arena in Egypt were actually weakened by state service provision. In particular, the specific strategy of electoral control employed by the Egyptian regime throughout the 2000s has had paradoxical effects. By employing the allocative capacities of the state to ensure legislative super-majorities, the regime has inadvertently empowered local elites and weakened the institutional capacities of the regime party. When push came to shove in the regime crisis of early

2011, therefore, the regime party could not be employed to mobilize support for the incumbent. In fact, the formerly hegemonic party was among the first institutions to collapse in the face of the mass uprising. In the Egyptian case, therefore, service provision by the state has weakened, rather than strengthened, the institutional capacity of the regime.

It is important to understand the scope conditions of the argument advanced here. While there are general implications beyond the Egyptian case, the specific form of electoral competition in Egypt should not be taken as representative of the larger group of electoral authoritarian regimes. Rather, the personalized dynamics of service provision that lay at the heart of the argument are likely limited to electoral authoritarian regimes dominated by what Ellen Lust-Okar has described as ‘competitive clientelism’ (Lust-Okar, 2006). For example, research on electoral authoritarianism in Mexico under the rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has demonstrated that state service provision can be successfully employed to strengthen authoritarian ruling parties (Magaloni, 2008). While a macro-comparative perspective is beyond the scope of this article, the within-case analysis of variation across Egyptian electoral constituencies suggests that pre-existing levels of institutional capacity shape the effect of service provision on regime institutions.

The argument proceeds as follows. The next section spells out the conceptual problem of state capacity, regime control, and electoral authoritarian resilience in greater detail. A second section examines the particular solution to this problem adopted by the Egyptian regime as a consequence of patterns of state and regime building that failed to turn party organizations into strong institutions. A third section then empirically demonstrates how Egypt’s NDP was able to capitalize on state administrative penetration in urban settings, while it failed to capture the periphery despite, or even because of, state penetration there. This dynamic sent the party into a downward spiral of institutional decay.

## **State, regime, and endogenous institutions**

Dan Slater and Sofia Fenner (2011) have urged students of political regime dynamics to take into account variation in state capacity. Drawing on Mann’s (1986) classical distinction between despotic and infrastructural power, Slater and Fenner point out that recent scholarship on the institutional foundations of authoritarian stability has neglected the infrastructural underpinnings of the authoritarian projection of power. Indeed, similar calls for attention to the historical context in which authoritarian institutions emerge have been made before (Smith, 2005) and since (Levitsky and Way, 2012). Understanding how the institutional strength of the regime depends on the administrative capacity of the state is a crucial step in this regard.

In the larger scheme of things such ideas are anything but new. In fact, the early literature on political development in general (see e.g. Binder et al., 1974; Huntington, 1968) and on the emergence and development of (single) parties in the developing world in particular (e.g. Huntington and Moore, 1970; Moore, 1965; La Palombara and Weiner, 1966) was preoccupied with the ‘integrative’ function of party institutions in the context of state building. Thus, David Apter noted that ruling parties ‘formed a major element in the societalization of what was a predominantly localized and fragmented set of tribal and regional purview’ (Apter, 1955: 212) and Ruth Schachter observed that the interaction between state and party building in West Africa was so close that mass parties in some cases ‘substituted ... their structure for that of the state’ (Schachter, 1961: 299).

Later analysts began, in Huntington’s terms (Huntington, 1968), to turn from the extent of political order to its form, however. Emphasizing variation in institutionally defined regime types, most notably in arguments on authoritarian persistence (Gandhi, 2008; Geddes, 1999; Svobik, 2012), such later approaches placed much less emphasis on the interaction between state and regime strength. This emphasis threatened to privilege institutional form over institutional strength.

Benjamin Smith (2005) was among the first to point out that the institutionalist literature on authoritarian persistence risked missing much crucial variation in institutional strength (also see Levitsky and Murillo, 2009). Examining the effect of ruling parties on authoritarian regime durability, which was thought to be one of the more robust findings in the literature on authoritarian institutions (Geddes, 1999), he demonstrated that this effect disproportionately relied on the exceptional durability of just two single-party regimes, Mexico and the USSR. Excluding these cases from the sample turned the single-party effect statistically insignificant. Calling for a more historical perspective, Smith concluded that the subfield lacked “an explanation for how powerful authoritarian regimes come into being in the first place since institutions are taken as given. Missing from the study of authoritarianism is a causal account linking origins to institutions and institutions to outcomes, that is, a theory of how the origins of regimes shape their long-term prospects for survival” (Smith, 2005: 421).

What sets the best of these newer works apart from the classical political development perspective is their explicit attention to the context in which regime institutions emerge. While the literature on authoritarian regimes specifically, and on the effects of institutions more generally, has focused on unearthing and explaining particular institutional effects, less attention has been devoted to explaining the origin of such institutions. This is not a mere question of perspective, however. Rather, as Jonathan Rodden observed, ‘institutions...are themselves endogenous, and we know relatively little about the processes by which history assigns countries to institutional categories’ (Rodden, 2009: 334). Only if we understand the origin of institutions, therefore, can we hope to understand if institutional effects are indeed real or if institutions are mere epiphenomena of underlying structural processes.

In the case of Egypt, the emergence of regime institutions must be understood in the context of larger state building dynamics. Following David Waldner (1999: 21), state building can be understood as the transition from indirect to direct forms of rule. In the course of this transition, institutions controlled by the political center expand geographically and socially. Local mediating elites are increasingly replaced with state appointees as non-elites begin to interact directly with the state bureaucracy, rather than with landowners, religious leaders, or other types of traditional elites. In several Middle Eastern cases, and notably in Egypt, the emergence of party institutions is intimately linked to this process of state growth. Such a perspective enables us to see how regime and state institutions co-evolved and how party organizations in particular played an important role in this process.

Without falling into crude historical determinism, the next section thus outlines the development of political institutions in Egypt with a particular emphasis on the degree to which successive party institutions succeeded in incorporating local elites. Against this background, I then suggest that the weakness of regime institutions was a major intervening factor that prevented the Egyptian regime from translating state capacity into political control.

### *State and party building in Egypt: The government’s party, not the governing party<sup>1</sup>*

Clement Henry Moore (1974) observed, more than 40 years ago, that Egypt under Nasser was in important ways an ‘unincorporated’ society that defied modernization theoretical assumptions about the organizational consequences of development. “At no level of community,” he argued, “do organizations acquire a high degree of institutionalization. The weakness of the engineers, or indeed of any categorical group in Egyptian society, in a sense reflects that of the political infrastructure” (Moore, 1974: 214). Much the same claim was aired a quarter of a century later by Egyptian political scientist and one-time member of parliament Amr el-Shobaki, who argued that the ‘absence of any institutional tradition in the trades and in the structure of the Egyptian state is

the same [institutional weakness] we witness in elections at the end of the decade' (el-Shobaki, 2001: 87–88).

The history of party building in Egypt since 1952 is closely connected to the Nasserist project of state building. Having come to power by way of a military coup and lacking even minimal ideological coherence, the Free Officers around Gamal Abd al-Nasser could not rely on the support of any organized political force. The Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, MB) initially lent its support to the military, but the relationship soon soured and the Free Officers began to contemplate ways of institutionalizing political support. They finally tried to channel political support through a succession of single party organizations in which the social groups that profited from the regime's development policies, primarily land reform and public sector development, constituted the dominant forces (Harik, 1973).

The first of these attempts was the Liberation Rally (*Hay'a al-Tahrir*, LR), active between 1953 and 1958. The LR was an attempt to offset the effects of the dissolution of all political parties in 1952 and was used by Nasser in his struggle for dominance against General Naguib in 1954. In this context, the LR succeeded in enlisting the support of parts of the urban labor movement and staged demonstrations in support of Nasser and against the return to a parliamentary system as advocated by Naguib. Despite this selective mobilization, however, the LR remained institutionally weak. As Leonard Binder described it, there 'has never been any intention of granting an effective voice to the members of the mass party. The purpose of the mass parties has been exploitative in the extreme, since they were means of mobilizing sentiment for the regime and ... means of rendering the masses unavailable to alternative leaders' (Binder, 1966: 227).

The next attempt at institutionalizing political support came with the National Union (*al-Ittihad al-Qawmi*, NU) in the context of Egypt's ill-fated union with Syria in the United Arab Republic (UAR) between 1958 and 1961. Membership in the NU was universal and the organization developed a nation-wide structure of cells and committees but barely showed initiative beyond that. Rather, the NU 'served mostly to bind locally influential people to the regime, and to prevent Nasser's opponents from running for office' (Harik, 1973: 86). Like its predecessor, therefore, the NU was short-lived and did not survive the dissolution of the UAR. With the 'Syrian region' seceding from the union in the wake of a rightist military coup in Damascus in 1961, Nasser was arguably concerned about the NU forming a platform for similar events in Egypt. Consequently, the NU was dissolved and preparations were made for its replacement by yet another party-like organization, the Arab Socialist Union (*al-Ittihad al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki*, ASU).

In contrast to the LR and the NU, the ASU was constructed along corporatist lines representing the 'alliance of working forces' constituted by workers, farmers, national capitalists, soldiers, and intellectuals (Binder, 1966: 321; Harik, 1973: 86–87). These broad functional groups were supposed to be organized in party cells at their respective workplaces. Lower-level leaders in the ASU, however, were elected without much interference by the regime and the party's lower cadres thus tended to represent 'the distribution of influence in their own communities without being indebted to the regime for their election. The most prominent leaders of the ASU in the countryside were well-to-do farmers, headmen (*'umdahs*), and the educated who had urban occupations but had maintained their ties with the countryside' (Harik, 1973: 87–88). The ASU thus served as an instrument for binding locally influential elites to the regime, not for mobilizing constituencies in support of further political and social change and, 'in practice, discipline at the elite level never originated in the party and discipline at the mass level never flowed through the party. The elite was disciplined by Presidential appointment and dismissal; the masses were disciplined by the police' (Cooper, 1982: 32).

The social strata that dominated the ASU were strikingly similar to the coalition of rural middle classes and urban *effendiya* that had emerged after the 1919 revolution and subsequently constituted

the main base of the Wafd Party and the nationalist movement throughout Egypt's so-called liberal era (1923–1952). As a result of the land reforms implemented in the 1950s and early 1960s, the formerly leading rural upper classes had been substantially weakened and 'farmers and urban professionals stepped in to fill the gap created by the collapse of the influence of the upper class in the provinces, and thereby became allies of the new regime' (Harik, 1973: 88). In Weberian terms, however, those local elites were *honorationes* who were incorporated by the central state precisely because they could not be replaced by direct state influence (Weber, 1968: 1055). The impact of the state on the local distribution of power in the countryside therefore remained minimal.

This became apparent during a phase of radicalization in the mid-1960s. Under the leadership of 'Ali Sabri, who was appointed ASU secretary general in 1965, an attempt was made to improve the mobilization potential of the ASU, not least through the activities of the Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism, formed in 1966. This attempt is instructive in terms of the relationship between the central political leadership and peripheral elites. Sabri tried to change the balance of power within the ASU by abolishing the election of local cadres, who were to be instead appointed by the center. Charged with investigating non-compliance with land reform measures, moreover, the Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism unearthed numerous cases in which land reform had been evaded, many of which involved local ASU cadres (Harik, 1973: 88). Sabri's mobilizational drive, however, did not last long enough to bring about a full transformation of the ASU into a mass mobilizing party, if such a transformation was indeed ever intended. Rather, in the context of the general reorientation of Egyptian development policies after the 1967 war, ASU reform was abandoned.

The crisis following Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war was a driving force behind the re-emergence of multipartyism. Initially, greater ideological diversity and freedom of expression within the framework of the ASU was allowed. In September 1974, a paper on the Development of the Arab Socialist Union was published and triggered debates on the future of the ASU within the party and within the larger political public. The concept put forward was that of *manabir* (plural of *minbar*, Arabic for pulpit), representing different ideological currents within the framework of a single party. This led to an explosion of political pluralism within the ASU and in late 1975, 43 such 'platforms' had emerged and applied for official recognition (Beattie, 2000: 190).

In March 1976, of the 43 original platforms proposed, three were authorized to operate within the ASU, including a platform of the left, one of the center, and one of the right. The rightist platform was led by Mustafa Kamal Murad, a Free Officer and personal friend of Sadat, and was generally supportive of the president's policies. From this grouping, the Liberal Socialist Party (*Hizb al-Ahrar al-Ishtiraki*) was to emerge. To the left, a platform under the leadership of Free Officer Khalid Muhi al-Din was authorized, which would later develop into the National Progressive Unionist Party (*Hizb al-Tagammu' al-Watani al-Taqaddumi al-Wahdawi*, or Tagammu, in short). The political center was organized into the Egyptian Arab Socialist Organization, which was later transformed, in several stages, first into the Egyptian Arab Socialist Party (*Hizb Masr al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki*) under the leadership of Prime Minister Mamduh Salim (Beattie, 2000: 192–196), and then into the NDP (*Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati*, NDP). These former parts of the ASU formed the nucleus of Egypt's party system until 2011, with the NDP occupying the hegemonic position.

The successive Egyptian ruling parties, especially the ASU, were meant to function as instruments for extending regime control into the periphery. The social strata that benefitted from the Nasserist strategies of state building – small and middling landowners in the countryside and public sector workers in urban areas – were to be organizationally tied to the center through the institutional channel of the party. The impact of state building on local power relations in the countryside remained limited, however. While the Nasserist land reforms did break the power of landholding

elites, the main beneficiaries were members of a newly emerging rural middle class, whose social position did not depend on the regime (Binder, 1978). Moreover, in the context of the liberalization of Egyptian agriculture in the 1990s, the re-concentration of landownership in the Egyptian countryside led to the re-emergence of a highly unequal rural economy and strengthened the position of rural elites. The liberalization of agricultural rents in law 92 of 1996, in particular, consolidated the position of landholders. As a consequence, landholders – in many cases members of the same families that had lost land under the Nasserist reform laws – regained much of their economic and social power in the countryside (Bush, 2007). The electoral results of this phenomenon were particularly visible in the 2000s.

## A legislative lion, an electoral cat: Electoral politics in the 2000s

On the level of aggregate results, electoral politics before the fall of Mubarak in 2011 present an almost uniform picture: The NDP regularly commanded strong majorities, while other political parties were largely inconsequential. The only organized competitor on the Egyptian political scene, paradoxically, was the Muslim Brotherhood, a social movement that fulfilled many functions of a political party more efficiently than any of the formal political parties in Egypt (Masoud, 2014; Wickham, 2013). As Table 1 shows, however, the NDP always commanded a position of strength in the People's Assembly (*Maglis al-Sha'b*, PA).

Actually, however, the party's dominance on the legislative level masked its institutional weakness. This weakness became apparent with the introduction of an electoral system based on individual candidates in 1990. This reform was the result of a decision by Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court (*al-Mahkama al-Dusturiyya al-'Aliya*, SCC), which ruled the 1987 parliament unconstitutional because the mixed electoral system (with a dominant proportional representation (PR) component) used in 1987 had discriminated against independent candidates (Kassem, 1999). From the 1990 contest onwards, elections were thus held under an individual candidacy system with a varying number of two-member constituencies. As a nod to Egypt's Nasserist past, one member from each district was elected from among workers or farmers (*'umal* or *fallahin*), while the second member was chosen from candidates belonging to the liberal professions (*fi'at*). The NDP regularly presented candidates for both categories in all national constituencies, while smaller parties usually ran candidates in only a limited number of places. More significantly, from the 1990 elections on, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to run its own candidates as independents

**Table 1.** Elections under Mubarak, 1984–2010.

Year	<i>Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati</i> (NDP) (share)	<i>al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin</i> (MB) (share)	Strongest opposition party (share)
1984	390 (87%)	9 (2%)	49 (11%) <sup>a</sup>
1987	348 (77%)	38 (8%)	36 (8%) <sup>a</sup>
1990	360 (81%)	— <sup>b</sup>	5 (1%) <sup>b</sup>
1995	417 (94%)	1 (0.2%)	6 (1%) <sup>a</sup>
2000	388 (88%)	17 (4%)	7 (2%) <sup>a</sup>
2005	311 (72%)	88 (20%)	6 (1%) <sup>a</sup>
2010	420 (83%)	1 (0.2%)	6 (1%) <sup>a</sup>

Source: Masoud (2014: 78).

<sup>a</sup>*Hizb al-Wafd* (in an electoral alliance with the MB in 1984).

<sup>b</sup>Election boycott by the MB and most opposition parties, the five members of parliament are from Tagammu.

**Table 2.** Seat shares of official and independent NDP candidates, 1990–2010.

Year	Seats	<i>Hizb al- Watani al-Dimuqrati</i> (NDP) seat share (#)	Official NDP seat share (#)	NDPendent seat share (#)
1990	444	81% (360)	60% (265)	21% (95)
1995	444	94% (417)	71% (317)	23% (100)
2000	442	88% (388)	38% (170)	49% (218)
2005	432	72% (311)	33% (141)	39% (170)
2010	504	83% (420)	83% (420)	— <sup>a</sup>

Sources: Brownlee (2007); Koehler (2008); Masoud (2014); Zahran (2006).

<sup>a</sup>In 2010, the NDP nominated several official candidates in many constituencies, which explains the absence of NDPendents.

without having to enter into electoral alliances with formal political parties and despite being considered an illegal organization.

This particular electoral system brought the institutional weakness of the NDP to the fore. While the NDP ran official candidates in all constituencies in all five electoral contests between 1990 and 2010, renegade party members (so-called NDPendents) began to challenge official ruling party candidates on the local level. From 1990 onwards, the legislative dominance of the NDP could only be upheld by re-admitting such renegades into the party's parliamentary group once they had won the elections. Table 2 shows the breakdown of members of parliament (MPs) into official and unofficial NDP members to illustrate the extent of the phenomenon.

As soon as the NDP lost the institutional support of the strong PR component in the electoral law that had regulated elections before 1990, it also lost its two-thirds majority. On the legislative level, this majority could be sustained by allowing non-official candidates into the party caucus, but the party as an organization barely dominated electoral politics in Egypt in the last two decades of Mubarak's rule.

The independent phenomenon was frequently analyzed as an instrument of elite management. Lisa Blaydes (2011) interprets this system as a type of vetting procedure through which the regime determined which local elites would have access to state resources. Egyptian elections in the last two decades of Mubarak's rule, she concludes, '[were] a kind of market mechanism, helping to resolve disputes between various groups and individuals operating within Egypt's broad class of political elite. The existence of a relatively even-handed mechanism for providing benefits [kept] the regime's coalition invested in the authoritarian system' (Blaydes, 2011: 63). Tarek Masoud (2014) offers a similar interpretation. For the NDP, he maintains, 'the appearance of new competitors with access to private resources was but a minor annoyance. Most of the new entrants into the electoral game were more interested in joining the ruling party than running against it. In the five elections held between 1990 and 2010, regime-friendly candidates who had failed to garner the ruling party's nomination ran as independents "on the principles and program of the National Democratic Party," hastening to join the ranks of the party if they were lucky enough to win a seat in parliament' (Masoud, 2014: 98–99).

Other analysts have tended to focus their interpretations on the increasing role of money in electoral politics and on the attendant resurgence of solidarity networks based on clan or family *'asabiyya* (group feeling). Sarah Ben Nefissa and Alaa al-Din Arafat (2005), for example, have analyzed the 2000 elections in detail and have interpreted them as a failure of political parties in general and the NDP in particular. Based on an in-depth examination of a single constituency in Menoufiya governorate, Ben Nefissa and Arafat emphasize the role of local *'asabiyya* and service



provision in electoral politics. Still others have attempted to link the independent phenomenon to internal party reforms and to the rise of the president's son, Gamal Mubarak, to prominence after 2002 (Arafat, 2009; Brownlee, 2007). Jason Brownlee has suggested that the particular strength of the independent phenomenon in the 2000 elections was the combined result of systematic judicial supervision of these elections, and a high turnover in terms of official NDP candidates. He argues that the 42% turnover rate in terms of NDP candidates at least partially reflected the re-integration of younger renegades into the party who had gathered around Mubarak's son Gamal and were brought back into the NDP after they had considered forming an independent group (Brownlee, 2007: 133–136).

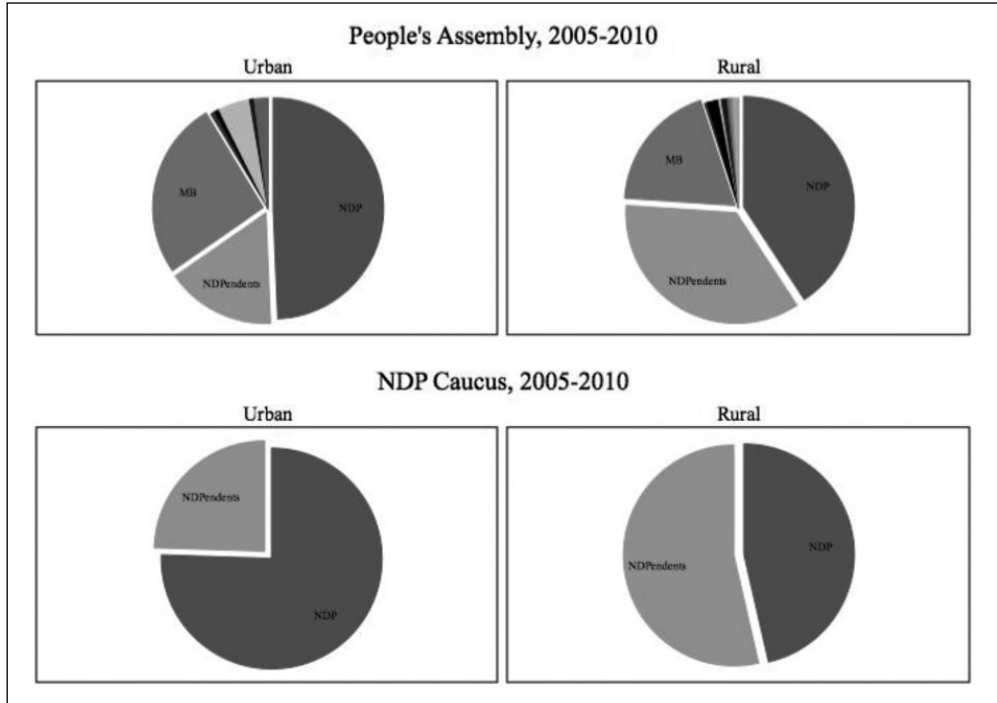
While there is merit in these interpretations, they overemphasize the degree to which the NDP and its leadership were in control of the process. For example, while Brownlee's observation that the Gamal-faction was integrated into the party is certainly correct, the subsequent attempts of some Gamal associates, most notably Ahmad Ezz and Muhammad Kamal, to reorganize and institutionalize candidate selection within the party would seem to suggest that this group perceived the party's low institutional capacities as a problem (Arafat, 2009). Following the rise of Gamal within the party after 2002, a system of internal party primaries, so-called electoral colleges (*al-mugamma' al-intikhabi*), was devised so as to make sure that the party would succeed in selecting the strongest candidates (Koehler, 2008). This system included a combination of surveys conducted within the party on the local level and probing the popularity of competing candidates, as well as security reports on potential candidates.<sup>2</sup> Political scientist Muhammad Kamal, an adviser to the party reformers around Gamal, described the aim as strengthening the institutional capacity of the party.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these internal reforms, however, the ratio of NDPendents to official NDP MPs stayed almost the same in 2005 (1.3 in 2000 versus 1.2 in 2005). This clearly suggests that the NDPendent phenomenon could not be contained by internal party reforms and that its causes lay beyond the increasing role of business elites and Gamal associates as official candidates. In a way, the phenomenon of NDPendents reached its peak in the 2010 elections. While the actual number of NDP-MPs elected as independents was very low, this is due to the fact that the NDP presented several official candidates in almost half of all constituencies. Thus, 742 official NDP-candidates competed in the 444 electoral constituencies (amounting to around 1.7 candidates per seat). While then NDP Secretary General Safwat al-Sharif justified this strategy with reference to internal elections and pointed out that this would give greater choice to voters,<sup>4</sup> this step clearly signifies the breakdown of internal mechanisms of candidate selection (also see Rabi', 2006: 23–26).

### *The revenge of the periphery*

Analysts have not paid sufficient attention to the fact that the NDPendent phenomenon was not uniformly spread regionally. In fact, NDPendents were a distinctly rural and peripheral phenomenon. While NDPendents took eight out of urban Cairo's 50 constituencies in 2005 (about 16%), for example, the same ratio was 19 out of 28 in rural Daqahliya (68%). This relationship held more generally. There is a relatively strong and significant correlation between the percentage of rural inhabitants in a governorate, and the number of successful NDPendents in 2005 ( $r = 0.48$ ;  $p < 0.0123$ ). The same holds true for the relationship between the number of official NDP candidates in 2010 and the percentage of rural inhabitants of a governorate ( $r = 0.51$ ;  $p < 0.009$ ). Figure 1 graphically demonstrates the extent of this phenomenon for the 2005 elections.

This rural–urban divide in terms of the hegemonic party's institutional strength was exacerbated, rather than contained, by state administrative penetration. In a nutshell, while clientelist services were targeted at voters in poor urban and rural settings alike (Ben Nefissa and Arafat, 2005; Blaydes, 2011; Kassem, 1999), such strategies did not have a uniform effect. In urban

**Figure 1.** Affiliation of successful candidates (2005) in urban and rural constituencies.

settings, service provision by the state helped secure NDP dominance; in rural constituencies, by contrast, such services were controlled by local elites who often ran and won against the party's official candidates. Allowing such elites back into the ruling party caucus secured the NDP's legislative dominance, but it also seriously undermined the party's institutional capacities.

I test this argument by drawing on constituency-level data on the 2005 elections. The dependent variable is binary, coded one if a seat was won by an official NDP candidate, and zero otherwise. Since I am primarily interested in understanding the determinants of intra-party competition, I limit the analysis to those constituencies in which either an official or an unofficial NDP candidate won. If my interpretation of intra-party competition in Egypt during the 2000s is correct, I would expect the probability of an official NDP victory to increase with state administrative capacity in urban settings, but to decrease with increasing state penetration in rural constituencies.

The state's administrative capacity in a given electoral constituency is operationalized by measuring the proportion of households with access to the public sewage system. Access to the sewage system is not a direct measure of state capacity, but rather a measure of service provision. Nevertheless, if we accept the notion that the provision of a public sewage network is one aspect of state penetration, my hypothesis can still be tested by observing variation in the effects of service provision. Secondly, I use access to the sewage network – rather than other available indicators – because there is significant variation.<sup>5</sup> The data are drawn from the 1996 and 2006 censuses. Access to the public sewage system varied considerably across electoral constituencies in 2006, ranging between a minimum of zero and a maximum of 99%, with an average coverage of about 47% of households. Finally, I also employ a variable that classifies electoral constituencies into rural or urban, taken from the 2006 census as well. 38% of constituencies are classified as urban according to this measure.

**Table 3.** Service provision and electoral control (2005).

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Sewage 2006 (dummy)	-1.445*		
	(0.754)		
Urban*Sewage (dummy)	1.526*		
	(0.925)		
Sewage 2006 (%)		-1.855**	
		(0.748)	
Urban*Sewage (%)		2.009*	
		(1.089)	
Sewage 1996 (%)			-0.712
			(0.643)
Change in Sewage			-2.234**
			(0.953)
Urban*Change in Sewage			2.746*
			(1.555)
Urban	-0.711	-1.902	-0.524
	(1.089)	(1.424)	(0.987)
Illiteracy	-3.135	-5.254**	-4.243*
	(1.929)	(2.298)	(2.192)
Urban*Illiteracy	5.335	7.579*	5.490
	(3.688)	(4.023)	(3.630)
Constant	1.337*	2.441***	1.852**
	(0.710)	(0.940)	(0.864)
Observations	274	274	264

Standard errors in parentheses.

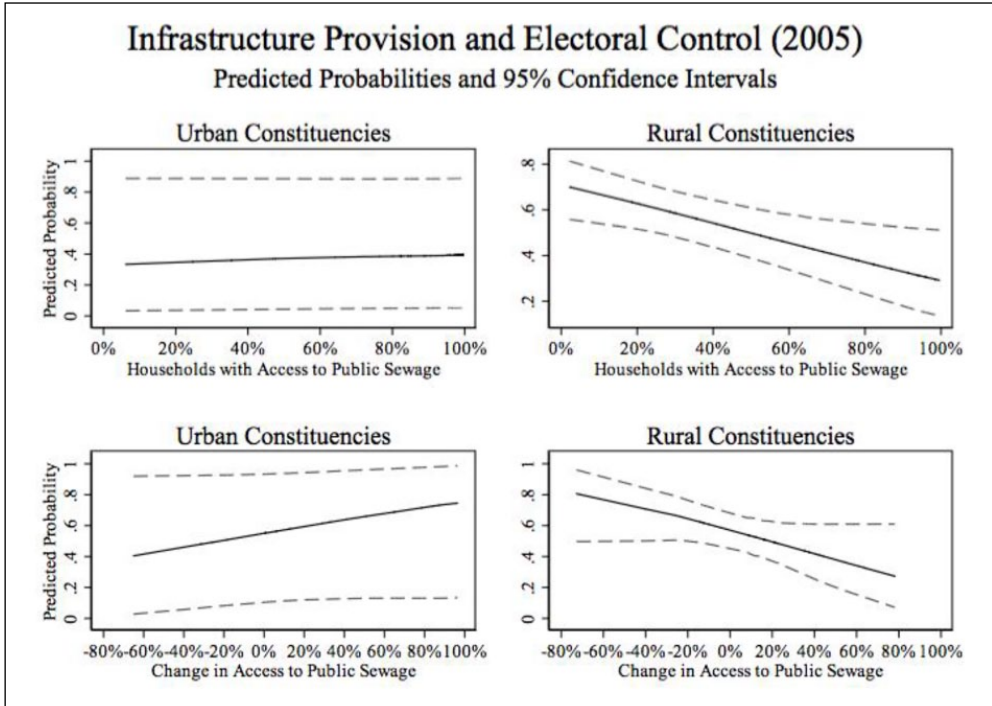
\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.1$ .

At this point, my argument can be turned into a testable operational hypothesis. In particular, the argument implies that state administrative penetration should have favored ruling party candidates in urban areas, but worked against official NDP standard bearers in rural settings. As a result of the history of party formation outlined above, party organization was weaker in rural than in urban settings. While patron–client networks centering on what Mohamed Menza (2012) has referred to as ‘lesser notables’ played a central role in urban and rural contexts alike, such notables could be contained within party structures in urban but not in rural settings. In order to test this hypothesis, I include an interaction between state administrative penetration (measured by the percentage of households connected to the public sewage system) and the urbanity variable. I expect this analysis to reveal the differential effects of state administrative capacity on electoral control.

A major alternative explanation, however, would hold that both state administrative penetration and electoral control is an effect of a district’s social profile: the more peripheral the district, the lower the likelihood that the state will provide both services and electoral control. In order to account for this possibility, I include the percentage of illiterates and an interaction of illiteracy with the urbanity variable in the models.

Table 3 displays the results of three different binary logit models with the electoral success of official NDP candidates as the dependent variable. In Model 1, I operationalize state penetration with a dummy variable simply contrasting high sewage coverage (above 80% of households) with low coverage (less than 80%), while Model 2 uses a continuous measure of sewage coverage. Model

**Figure 2.** Effects of infrastructure provision in rural and urban constituencies.



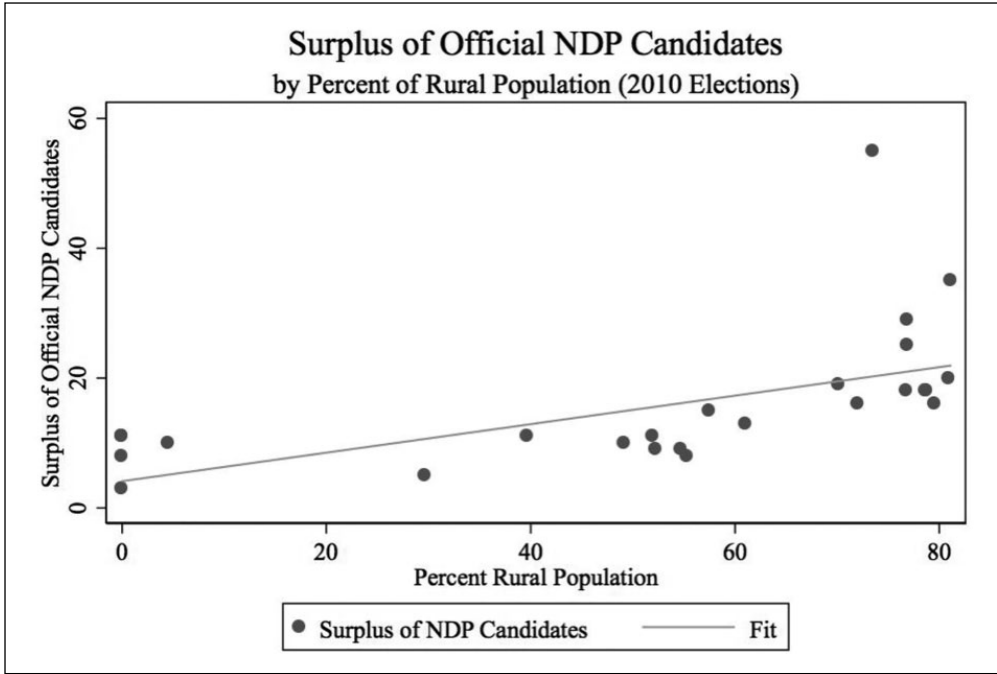
3, in turn, uses a measure of change in sewage coverage between the 1996 and 2006 censuses, as well as sewage network coverage in 1996 as the baseline. All three models include the interaction term between the respective measure of state penetration and the controls mentioned above.

The results displayed in Table 3 are supportive of my hypothesis. In all three models, state administrative penetration (as measured by the public provision of a sewage network<sup>6</sup>) exerts a positive effect on the degree of electoral control in urban areas, but a negative effect in rural constituencies. Moreover, as Model 3 demonstrates, an increase in public sewage network coverage in the roughly 10 years preceding the 2005 elections increased the hegemonic party’s electoral appeal in urban settings, but allowed local elites running against official NDP candidates to win in rural districts. Figure 2 is a graphical representation of the effect of (changes in) state administrative penetration on the predicted probability of an official NDP victory based on Models 2 and 3 above.

The baseline conclusion is that intra-party competition in Egypt in the 2005 elections was shaped by the party’s ability to capitalize on state administrative penetration. In urban settings where this ability was better developed, public service provision benefitted official NDP candidates. In rural settings, by contrast, service provision by the state worked against the regime party’s official candidates.

Evidence from the 2010 elections further supports this interpretation. As mentioned above, the party nominated several official candidates per seat in many constituencies. If the institutional capacity of the ruling party varies systematically between urban and rural settings, we would expect a higher number of official NDP candidates in rural contexts. Fine-grained data on the number of official NDP candidates running in each constituency is unfortunately not available. On the governorate level, however, the correlation between the number of official NDP candidates over and above the number of available seats and the percentage of rural inhabitants is positive and

**Figure 3.** Official National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates by rural population (2010).



significant ( $r = .56, p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that the party’s control over candidate selection was indeed more limited in rural settings. Figure 3 illustrates this relationship.

Taken together, the results presented above suggest that intra-party competition in Egypt in the 2000s was fueled, rather than contained, by public service provision. The inability of the party to institutionalize and enforce efficient procedures of candidate selection, particularly in rural contexts, meant that growing state penetration could not be translated into ruling party control. While reform-oriented elites associated with Gamal Mubarak initiated internal reforms in the party in the wake of the 2000 elections (Arafat, 2009; Brownlee, 2007), the party never developed the institutional capacity to regulate candidate selection in the periphery. Intra-party competition during the 2000s should therefore be seen as the breakdown of electoral control by the NDP despite attempts to address the problem and to turn the party into a ‘real institution.’<sup>7</sup>

This suggests two further conclusions. To begin with, the empirical evidence presented here raises doubts regarding the functionalist explanation of intra-party competition advanced from a perspective of electoral authoritarianism (Blaydes, 2011). While the aggregate effects of intra-party competition are consistent with Blaydes’ model of a vetting procedure, the strong rural–urban contrast and the ineffectiveness of reforms aimed at containing the issue suggest that the party simply did not reach far enough into the countryside.

Secondly, while the Mubarak regime tightened its control of the electoral process in 2010, especially compared to the relatively liberal 2005 contest, intra-party competition nevertheless peaked in 2010. The regime possessed the despotic power necessary to rein in the opposition (in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, whose representation in parliament shrank from 88 seats in 2005 to 2 in 2010), but it lacked the infrastructural power necessary to impose discipline on its own supporters.

This interpretation is further supported by a look at the post-2005 careers of successful NDP candidates. If the functionalist interpretation were correct, we should expect to find that – having

demonstrated their electoral prowess – NDPendents successful in 2005 would make it onto the party's official list of candidates in the following contest, all the more given that the NDP nominated several official candidates per seat in many constituencies. If, on the other hand, the interpretation advanced here is correct and the NDPendent phenomenon is largely due to party weakness in the periphery, we should expect that NDPendents would be excluded from official NDP candidacy.

To begin with, only around one-half of the successful 2005 NDPendents were re-nominated in 2010 as one of the official NDP-candidates. This suggests that electoral success alone was not sufficient for re-nomination. Moreover, correlating the proportion of re-nominated NDPendents with the percentage of rural inhabitants reveals an interesting pattern: the re-nomination rate of NDPendents is medium to high in Egypt's four urban governorates (Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said, and Suez) and increases with an increasing percentage of rural inhabitants outside of the cities. Thus, while the correlation between the proportion of re-nominated NDPendents and the percentage of rural inhabitants is small and insignificant for all 26 governorates ( $r = 0.0083$ ;  $p = 0.9673$ ), it turns moderately strong and significant if the four urban governorates are excluded ( $r = 0.44$ ;  $p = 0.0383$ ).

Different logics drove the re-nomination of NDP-candidates in urban and rural settings: The NDP did not systematically nominate several candidates per seat in the cities, while it did in the countryside (1.06 versus 1.80 candidates per seat in cities versus non-cities,  $t = 0.01$ ; two-tailed). In the four urban governorates, the 2005 NDPendents were re-nominated and thus became the only official NDP candidates in 2010. This suggests that a dynamic similar to the vetting logic described by Blaydes (2011) could have been at work. In the countryside, however, this logic does not seem to apply. Instead, the proportion of re-nominated NDPendents increases with an increasing number of official NDP candidates per seat. In other words, in urban settings the party integrated NDPendents into its ranks in 2010, while it capitulated in the face of strong local networks in rural contexts.

## Conclusion

This article has suggested that the impact of state administrative penetration on electoral control in authoritarian elections is mediated by regime institutions' capacity to channel political support. While the targeted provision of state services can be an efficient tool for enhancing electoral control, such strategies only work in the context of strong regime institutions. In the absence of such institutions in Egypt, the provision of public services could not be turned into support for regime candidates but rather empowered local elites.

These findings are in line with historical evidence from half a century of party building in Egypt. As different analysts from Clement Henry Moore (1974) to Leonard Binder (1978) and Mark Cooper (1982) have suggested, the successive single-party organizations in Egyptian history tended to attract the same social constituencies, especially in the countryside. I suggest that this is by and large true for the NDP as well. Rather than structuring local political conflict around a regime/opposition cleavage, the NDP functioned as a sponge attracting whoever happened to come out first in competition based on local support networks.

This dynamic precipitated the institutional decay of the hegemonic NDP. Since the party relied on re-admitting renegade members into its parliamentary bloc and the patronage networks associated with it once these renegades had run and won against official party candidates, attempts to reform candidate selection within the party ultimately came to nothing. What is more, the party was little more than a façade for patronage networks channeling resource flows from the center. While this system was sufficient to uphold the NDP's legislative dominance, it did nothing to build

dependable support on the ground. When mass protests threatened the regime in 2011, therefore, the party could not be counted upon to mobilize support for the incumbent. In fact, once the survival of the political center was in doubt, party structures almost immediately collapsed. The local networks which structured electoral politics under Mubarak in the 2000s, however, have returned to reclaim their place in the political arena under the new regime.

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### Notes

1. I take this from Samer Soliman's (Soliman, 2006: 249) play on the Arabic terms *hizb al-hakim* (ruling party) and *hizb al-hukuma* (government's party).
2. Author interview with Fathi Na'matallah, National Democratic Party member of parliament and union functionary, October 2005.
3. Author's interview with Muhammad Kamal, Cairo, October 2005.
4. See Masress, 'Qa'imat asma' murashihi al-hizb al-watani fi-l-muhafazat li-l-intikhabat maglis al-sha'b,' 7 November 2010, see <http://www.masress.com/dostor/31726>.
5. The census data also includes a variable measuring access to fresh water. This variable varies little, however, with a mean of 0.93 and standard deviation of 0.1. In other words, access to some kind of fresh water supply was near universal according to the 2006 census data. This lack of variation means that this variable is of little use in the given context.
6. I reproduced Model 1 using fresh water supply as an alternative measure, despite the fact that the variable varies much less than the sewage measure (see note 5). The general direction of the effects remains, though the alternative measure does not reach statistical significance, a fact that can likely be explained with the lack of variation.
7. Author's interview with Muhammad Kamal, Cairo, October 2005.

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