

**Credible Commitments and the Perils of Moderation:
Why the Egyptian Opposition is Met by Repression**

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Abstract: Explanations of opposition electoral failure in majority Muslim countries have highlighted the need for credible commitments by moderate opposition forces. This paper shows such commitments may not bring incumbents to recognize the challenger's electoral mandate. Since 1990 Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak has spurned and suppressed his country's non-revolutionary opposition groups, religious and non-religious. Significantly, this stance extends through two different periods, in which the context of regime-opposition relations changed dramatically. During the 1990s Mubarak's forces waged an internal war to stop Al-Jama`a Al-Islamiyya's violent bid for Islamic revolution. In March 1999 Al-Jama`a officially surrendered and subsequently has conducted no attacks. During this recent period of domestic stability (March 1999 – April 2008) Mubarak continued suppressing a range of reformist challengers, including the Muslim Brothers and non-religious parties. This pattern of behavior indicates authoritarian rulers may find moderate opposition movements as threatening and intolerable as militant challengers. To the extent that incumbents can steal elections and jail dissidents at little cost, the opposition's moderation may encourage the regime to eschew compromise and pacts.

Introduction

For decades political parties based on Islamic principles have struggled to achieve power through elections. While exceptions remain, the trend across the Muslim World has been that when Islamic political movements contested elections they performed poorly, were obstructed from realizing their electoral mandate, or experienced some combination of the two.¹ The incumbents they faced thus retained power through successive electoral cycles. This record of regime persistence amid Islamic challenges today forms a central analytic problem in literature on democratization and its absence in much of the Middle East and the Muslim World (among others, Waterbury 1994; Tessler 2002; Fish 2003; Lust-Okar 2007). Seeking to avoid the cultural determinism of an earlier literature on Catholicism and authoritarianism, comparativists have pursued more nuanced analyzes of the tactics and programs of those parties contesting power. They have situated discussions of ideational and organizational evolution in generalizable theories of democratization, particularly the transitions approach and its attention to strategic interactions among self-interested elites and oppositionists.

¹ I have chosen not to use the term "Islamist," and instead render the Arabic adjectives *islami(ya)* and *muslim(a)* through their conventional English equivalents: Islamic and Muslim. My use of the term Islamic political movements comports with Omar Ashour's definition of "Islamist" groups: "sociopolitical movements which base and justify their political principles, ideologies, behaviors, and objectives on their understanding of Islam or on their understanding of a certain past interpretation of Islam" (2007.) For detailed treatments of these labels and their lineage, consult Kramer (2003), Lockman (2004: 172-173, 216).

The present paper joins this line of scholarship and the increasing attention comparativists are paying to the moderation of Islamic political parties. Using Egypt as a case study in regime-opposition interaction I assess the impact of opposition moderation on the regime's willingness to include its challengers in government by allowing fairer, more competitive elections. Democratic transitions, pacts, and their likelihood in the Middle East are premised on consensual negotiations between reform-minded incumbents and moderate oppositionists. These deliberations over political reforms and institutional constraints stand to be undermined by the availability of radicals who deploy violent means and seek to overthrow the system. Yet few studies have looked at the difference made by the presence or absence of radicals. To do so I investigate two recent periods in Egypt, tracking cross-time variation in the nature of regime challengers, specifically the presence and absence of extremist, revolutionary threats to the system.

The contrast between historical periods in the single country of Egypt allows this study to hold constant a number of variables and focus on a stark change in the constellation of opposition forces. That change was the following: In Period 1 (October 1990 - March 1999) the regime of President Hosni Mubarak confronted a militant Islamic movement, which sought to take power violently, and an array of moderate opposition parties (Islamic and non-religious) contesting elections. In Period 2 (March 1999 - April 2008) the militants had been removed from the political arena; incumbents faced only the moderate opposition, which continued participating nonviolently in elections. The second period provides counterfactual evidence on the effect of a national, lasting shift among the regime's challengers in the abandonment of radical means. Incumbent and opposition behavior during this period sheds light on the obstacles to political reform and electoral competition under authoritarianism. As it happens, the comparison raises questions about the effects of the opposition's moderateness on the chances for fair elections and substantive reform.

Whereas analysts of “stalled transitions” have treated moderation as the linchpin of change, Mubarak proved no more willing to tolerate opposition in the second period as he had in the first, instead excluding and suppressing the Society of Muslim Brothers and non-religious parties alike. This electoral stalemate derived more from the regime’s stance than from the opposition’s tactics and policy positions. Political reform in Egypt appears to have stagnated not for lack of temperate challengers but despite them, largely because the ruling elite seems to oppose the instauration of a popularly elected government.

From here the paper first considers recent work on democratization and credible commitments, with special attention to Stathis Kalyvas’s comparison of religious parties and electoral mandates in Belgium and Algeria. The remainder of the text evaluates Kalyvas’s thesis in light of the experience of the Muslim Brothers and their non-religious counterparts in Egypt’s opposition. After surveying the country’s opposition movements, from radical militants to centrist reform advocates, I analyze the two selected periods of recent Egyptian history. Contextual contrasts between 1990-1999 and 1999-2008 – namely, the end of a revolutionary threat to the Egyptian state – place in relief the regime’s intolerance of challengers, including the very moderates whose fidelity to the electoral process should ostensibly presage an opening of the political arena. The paper’s final section considers the enigma of persistent authoritarianism despite the opposition’s prolonged and credible commitments to moderate politics. Rather than reassuring the regime, moderation and nonviolent challenges may actually be more threatening to incumbents than militant extremism, mainly because it is the moderates who present a viable alternative and political competitor. It follows that secure ruling elites will be unlikely to reciprocate moderation and nonviolent participation with their own commitments to pluralism and openness. In such circumstances a theory based on consensual negotiations for change may be less accurate than a pressure model, in which incumbents are forced out.

Transitions, Credible Commitments, and Islamic Parties

Although the democratic “transitions paradigm” weathered criticism in recent years, its core concepts have remain in use (Carothers 2002). As comparativists sought to bring Middle Eastern cases into the field’s mainstream, the voluntarist framework of Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter often structured their investigations of regime change. Scholars of autocracies in the Middle East, and the potential for their demise, invoked the language of pacts and compromises, seeking routes by which rulers might share power with their challengers (Waterbury 1994; Brumberg 2002; Wickham 2004; Cook 2006). The touchstone of this work remains Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter’s multivolume *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, which depicted an intricate drama among hardliners who would stick with the regime till the end, softliners willing to reform the system, moderate opposition actors seeking change through nonviolent means, and maximalist (or radical) oppositionists working to topple the system (1986: 15-16).²

Democratization in the 1970s and 1980s suggested that an exit from authoritarianism depended on softliners and moderates allying. Such partnerships necessarily excluded the fringe actors, in the regime and the opposition, who would endanger any regime change bargain. The resulting “pacts” promised more durable democratic outcomes than a direct imposition of the rules by outgoing elites or an insurgent overthrow by popular movements (Karl 1990).³ Yet even these centrist agreements would prove tenuous and elusive. Adam Przeworski observed that soft-liners in the regime might fear aligning with moderate opposition activists because the latter would fall under the sway of more extreme elements. While incumbent

² I follow this convention, and that of subsequent works, to distinguish “moderates” and “radicals” based on the methods they use (see, for example, Snyder 1998; Hafez 2003: 5; and, especially, Schedler 2006: 8). Moderates refrain from violent attacks and engage the state via the available institutions, including elections. Through such channels they typically pursue non-revolutionary political reform. Radicals are willing to physically attack government officials and civilians. They often carry an explicitly revolutionary agenda of completely overhauling the state.

³ Karl defined pacts as “explicit (though not always public) agreements between contending actors, which define the rules of governance on the basis of mutual guarantees for the ‘vital interests’ of those involved” (1990: 9).

reformers were expected to favor sustainable democracy over further authoritarianism, the potential for radicals usurping power often overshadowed the first option:

If they [the Reformers] ally with Hardliners, the result will be the status quo, which is the second-best outcome. They would be better off under democracy under guarantees. But if they decide to negotiate with the Moderates, the latter will opt for an alliance with Radicals, which will result in the worst outcome for Reformers. Hence, Reformers stay with the regime” (Przeworski, 1991: 71).

Revolutionary outcomes across the developing show such insecurities are particularly justified when radicals have eclipsed moderates in strength (Snyder 1998: 61). These complications force moderates to bear the burden of proving that a pact will not simply become the Trojan horse through which extremists take power. This “commitment problem” has been invoked to explain why moderates who contest elections but refrain from violence are still rebuffed. Stathis Kalyvas found the problem becomes even more acute when challengers have adopted an overtly religious political program (2000: 380).⁴

Kalyvas identified two cases in which religious opposition parties achieved clear electoral mandates: Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) (1988-1992) and Belgium’s Catholic party (1870-1884). He then investigated the conditions that prevented the FIS from exercising its electoral mandate while the Catholic party was allowed into government. Both groups were led by moderates “willing to compromise with incumbents” and the variance in outcomes demonstrated that a religious platform *per se* was not an impediment to electoral success (2000: 384). Sectarian movements, Christian and Islamic, faced a common challenge when contesting elections:

⁴ Kalyvas’s notion of a commitment problem conforms to the democratization literature’s emphasis on partnerships between reform-inclined elites and their non-militant challengers. It is, however, an inversion of the traditional commitment problem, in which the solution lay in binding one’s self to *immoderate* means and thereby forcing the other party to back down (Schelling 1960: 122-131). The fictitious Soviet “Doomsday Machine” of the tragicomic film *Dr. Strangelove* epitomizes Schelling’s concept of credible commitment. Once it is triggered by an American strike on Soviet soil, the machine’s nuclear counterattack sequence cannot be stopped.

[F]or democratization to proceed it is necessary (though not sufficient) for religious challengers to solve their commitment problem. They must send credible signals about their postelectoral behavior prior to the elections. How do religious parties succeed or fail to overcome this commitment problem? (2000: 380).

The answer lay not in what the groups believed, but in how they behaved.

According to Kalyvas, the FIS failed to credibly commit to its stated goals regarding postelectoral outcomes, aims of political change but not revolution. By contrast, the Catholic party in Belgium dispelled the ruling party's concerns by communicating a clear message of moderation. This difference in signaling hinged largely on each party's ability to regulate its ranks.⁵ In Belgium the moderates faced their more extreme peers and "demanded the radicals abandon their maximalist discourse," in which religiosity was to trump constitutionalism (Kalyvas 2000: 383). By contrast, the FIS emitted dissonant messages, for its moderates had failed to "silence the radicals" (Kalyvas 2000: 387-388). The party was not sufficiently disciplined internally to assuage concerns that its election victory would simply become a bridge for maximalists to conquer the state. Somewhat counterintuitively, the religious party with stronger centralization, firmer religious hierarchy, and greater organizational autocracy (the Catholic party) was more able to make a credible commitment about what it would do after the election. Thus the Catholics were permitted to exercise their electoral mandate, while the FIS was excluded, by a military coup that froze voting.

Comparison of the FIS and the Catholic party reinforces Przeworski's argument that reformists within the regime are more likely to accept moderate oppositionists when they, the incumbents, are reassured such compromises will not advantage militants. One factor that contributes to such a credible commitment is if "Radicals become moderates," often by harking

⁵ An alternative interpretation of opposition victory in Belgium and failure in Algeria would be that there is something about Islamic parties in particular that prevents them from credibly pledging to honor a non-revolutionary electoral mandate. Kalyvas explicitly rejects such an argument, citing the risk of retrospective determinism and the inherent malleability of religious doctrine (2000: 384-385).

to the “siren song of elections” (Przeworski 1991: 73-74). Alternatively, a second way the religious opposition may boost its chances is by purging or strictly policing its radicals, as Kalyvas discusses in the Belgian case. These two changes help construct a center-heavy set of moderate oppositionists and incumbent reformists who no longer have to fear extremists spoiling the deals they strike. Additionally, even after the opposition has taken these steps, Kalyvas notes that some especially “inflexible” incumbents may be wary of acceding to a religious party’s electoral mandate. In such circumstances, opposition politicians should establish a modest parliamentary foothold and work at gradually enlarging that bloc. This incremental process signals that the challengers will honor the extant electoral rules (Kalyvas 2000: 391-392).

The Limits of Credible Commitments: Evidence from Egypt

Prior literature offers three steps by which religious parties, including Islamic movements, may demonstrate their commitments, assuage incumbents, and achieve power via elections. First, through an ideological shift in which radicals moderate their position. Second, with a firm organizational hierarchy that disciplines members and communicates a consistent, non-revolutionary message. Third, by realizing the party’s electoral mandate gradually, slowly expanding its presence in government over time. These ingredients for the success of religious opposition parties yield clear, testable implications for the ongoing study of authoritarianism in the Muslim World: Have Islamic parties that satisfied the requirement for credible commitments been permitted to take power, and if not, how might that impasse be explained?

I attempt to answer this question with a close study of politics in the Arab Republic of Egypt, which provides a crucial case of an Islamic movement participating in elections. Home to over 80 million people, Egypt is the most populous state in the Middle East and the third most populous majority Muslim country in the world (after Indonesia and Pakistan). For centuries it

has been a hub of Islamic scholarship and, since the late 1800s, the origin point for some of the most influential modern Islamic thinkers and movements. Today Egypt's size and political system have placed it among the so-called swing states for democratization (Diamond 2000: 96). Further, the country's socioeconomic profile shows that it is not poorly suited for domestic regime change. Research on the economic prerequisites for democratization has honed in on the negative influences oil wealth and economic inequality pose for political pluralism (Ross 2001, 2008; Boix 2003). Compared to its peers around the region Egypt has substantially more promising values on both of these variables: The country draws less than half of its export revenue from oil exports and has a gini score of 34.4 (placing 38th out of 126 countries with data on economic equality) (UN 2008; World Bank 2008). Oil does not predominate in Egypt's economy and the population is not unusually stratified. Because social structural impediments to democratization in Egypt are not insurmountable the interplay of domestic political forces becomes all the more salient.

In light of its demographic, historical, and economic profile, Egypt presents an anomaly for extant theories of credible commitment and opposition electoral performance. Since 1976 the Egyptian government has permitted opposition currents to vie against the ruling party for seats in parliament. In these contests the Society of Muslim Brothers (Jama'at al-Ikhkwan al-Muslimun, hereafter abbreviated as SMB) has regularly stood out as the most viable opposition group.⁶ As a movement that aims to bring Egypt's laws into greater conformity with Islamic law, the SMB provides a suitable analogue to the FIS in Algeria or, in a broader sense, the Catholic party in Belgium. Interestingly, over the past three decades the SMB overcame the organizational handicaps that hindered the FIS, but it proved unable to replicate the Catholic

⁶ The Society of Muslim Brothers has upstaged Egypt opposition parties, although it has not been licensed as a formal party by the government-run Political Parties Committee. In comparative analysis, the SMB is conventionally regarded as a party, because of "the Brotherhood's well-knit organization, its distinct ideology and political orientation, its substantial following, but above all because the Brotherhood, in fact, does operate as a party, typically running candidates in national elections under their own colors" (Zaki 1995: 75).

party's success. The SMB has eschewed violent tactics, closely regulated its internal membership, and contested elections in a limited manner designed to allay incumbents' fears. Despite the Brothers' institutional strengths for demonstrating credible commitments, the Egyptian regime has not responded by opening political space or permitting the group to exercise its electoral mandate. Instead of taking power like their counterparts in Belgium a century ago, the SMB has endured an unrelenting campaign of repression. The Mubarak regime's treatment of other opposition movements further accentuates the puzzling fate of the Muslim Brothers.

For much of its recent history the SMB was flanked on one side by an explicitly radical and militant movement bent on toppling the state and imposing a traditionalist vision of Islamic society: al-Jama`a al-Islamiya (the Islamic Group, henceforth the Jama`a). The leadership of the Jama`a participated in the plot to kill Anwar Sadat in 1981 and also attempted to assassinate Mubarak in 1995. After Sadat's death the group pursued a strategy of insurgent warfare against Mubarak's government, which peaked after its gunmen killed a former speaker of the parliament in October 1990. For the better part of the decade the state fought the Jama`a in a conflict that claimed some 1300 lives, the bulk of those casualties coming in the single year of 1993. But in 1997 the Jama`a's leadership acknowledged defeat and declared a ceasefire; in March 1999 the group's membership officially accepted the surrender and has subsequently launched no attacks. Whereas it is possible to infer that the Jama`a's revolutionary campaign interfered with the SMB's moderate message during the 1990-1999 period, the later period of domestic tranquility makes the regime's assaults against the Muslim Brothers all the more curious.

A related deviation from the regime's expected behavior is its relationship with Egypt's non-religious moderate opposition parties. For the most part, these parties have not proven as capable as the SMB of marshaling broad electoral support for their platforms. When they have occasionally presented a viable alternative, though, these parties have faced the same

obstructionism that has impeded the Muslim Brothers. In sum, the Mubarak regime presents a study in consistency. Despite the organizational characteristics and incremental tactics that are supposed to allow religious movements electoral victories, the SMB has been thwarted.

Despite, non-religious platforms that range from Nasserist leftism to Western liberalism, Egypt's nonreligious opposition parties have been similarly barred from power. During 1999-2008 Mubarak suppressed the kinds of moderate forces shown by prior scholarship to be ideal for pacts and fair elections. This record, extending after the decisive defeat of would be Islamic revolutionaries, suggests there are other dynamics at work in the success and defeat of religious parties, as well as in the performance of their non-religious peers.

Credible commitments by opposition forces in Egypt have not garnered the same official response as equivalent commitments by electoral challengers in Belgium. Mubarak did not answer the opposition's fidelity to institutions and reliance on nonviolent participation by liberalizing the system and allowing challengers to translate their social support into governing influence. Instead the regime practiced what Gilles Kepel has called a "zero tolerance" policy (2002). Kalyvas pointed to the lack of a credible commitment as the FIS's Achilles' heel, but the failure of Egypt's opposition appears to stem from the ruling elite's own attitudes and commitments. The regime has proven intransigent, even in the context of diminishing threats to Mubarak's power and a correspondingly increased chance of reformist pacts. The comparison developed below delineates the ways in which regime-opposition relations appear to defy the expected process of consensual negotiations between incumbents and moderate challengers. Evidence from Egypt, particularly in the 1999-2008 period, points to an alternative hypothesis of opposition performance that may account for the seemingly anomalous stalemate of moderate Islamic parties there and elsewhere.

The theory for future research is developed in the paper's conclusions, but I preview it here. Resistance to negotiation and pacting occurs when rulers recognize that moderates pose as severe a threat to their goal of retaining power as militants. Even in the face of a nonviolent

moderate opposition likely to deliver institutional reforms without revolution, incumbents favor the status quo over power-sharing and diminished privileges. This appetite for hoarding power appears to have been underestimated in discussions of authoritarianism that predict negotiated transitions will emerge once moderate oppositionists make their presence known. For authoritarian rulers the “threat” of simple electoral defeat may figure more prominently in their calculations than the less probable scenario of revolutionary overthrow.

Political Opposition under Sadat and Mubarak

From 1954 until 1976 Egypt operated as a pure single-party system with no formal opposition parties. President Anwar Sadat (r. 1971-1981), pluralized the system to a degree. In 1976 he introduced three “platforms” (*minabir*) for that year’s parliamentary elections. Party formation was legalized in 1977 and during 1979-2005 Egypt has held seven elections in which opposition parties competed with the dominant National Democratic Party. Despite Sadat’s *de jure* shift from single-party rule, the NDP (f. 1978) has maintained a two-thirds super majority of parliamentary seats throughout its existence. Because of the opposition’s relatively weak showing – challengers typically take less than a dozen seats in a People’s Assembly of 444 elected seats – the number of “effective parties” has ranged from 1.1 to 1.7 during the multiparty era.⁷

Sadat’s nominal liberalization of the party system was soon overshadowed by his policies toward Islamic movements. The president initially cultivated Islamic activists as a counterweight to his critics on the left. Leaders of the officially banned Society of Muslim Brothers were released from prison in 1972 and allowed to reconstitute their organization (Ali 2007: 214). More militant groups also emerged, often inspired by the Muslim Brothers’ erstwhile luminary Sayid Qutb (Hafez 2003: 32). In 1974 and 1977 two relatively small factions attacked

⁷ The number of effective parties is based on the share of seats parties hold in parliament. Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World’s Electoral Systems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

government installations and officials but were quickly suppressed (Ibrahim 1980: 424-425). There then arose the more influential al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya, whose campaign began under Sadat and continued under his successor.

The radical Jama`a posed an escalating challenge to the Egyptian state from the 1970s through the mid-1990s. It began as a primarily evangelical movement on university campuses, such as at Minya University, where it won control of the student union in 1977-1978. Its members turned the attention upon the state after Sadat signed the Camp David Accords in 1978 (Mubarak 1996: 40). In October 1981, the Jama`a acted as a junior partner in Islamic Jihad's plot to assassinate Sadat. Unlike Jihad, which sought to overthrow the state from above, the Jama`a pursued a strategy of mobilizing support from below, especially in southern Egypt where it was strongest but also in depressed urban areas. Through this approach the group made inroads, establishing "liberated zones" and then regulating social life in those neighborhoods (Hafez 2003: 82). The Jama`a's mix of religious ministry (*d`awa*) and armed struggle steadily help the group become a formidable contender beyond the bounds of Egypt's carefully circumscribed electoral arena.

Some members of the *Jama`a* had gravitated toward the moderate Society of Muslim Brothers, splitting away completely in 1978 (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob 1999: 82). The renascent SMB advocated a conservative religious program much like what Kalyvas describes among the modern elite of the FIS (2000: 382). New members had chosen to support the SMB's nonviolent program instead of joining the more militant currents that were available (Ali 2007: 227). Carrie Wickham emphasizes how the SMB's leaders in the 1980s distinguished themselves from their organization's more militant past:

Gone in most cases were the untrimmed beards of their defiant student days; instead, most were clean shaven or had neatly trimmed beards and wore standard Western- or civil-service-style suits. From modest dormitory rooms, they had moved into the air-conditioned offices of the association headquarters, where they supervised a large

staff, received visitors from the provinces, were interviewed by journalists, and met with other association or party leaders to coordinate strategy on issues of shared concern. Such contrasts graphically illustrate their shift from direct confrontation with the regime to a more cautious and grudging accommodation” (2002: 193).

Indeed the transformation was significant enough to irk the Jama`a, whose members disdained the SMB’s temperance (El-Ghobashy 2005: 379.)

Although still formally banned, the SMB was allowed to contest elections, first in one of Sadat’s platforms, then in alliance with official opposition parties in 1984 and 1987 during elections held under proportional representation rules. In 1976 the Muslim Brothers won 6 seats through Sadat’s “Center Party” platform. In 1984 12 of the Brothers’ members were elected alongside the Wafd and the group gained 36 seats in the 1987 through a similar electoral partnership with the Liberal (al-Ahrar) and Labor (al-`Aml) parties (Pripstein-Posusney 1998: 14-15; International Crisis Group 2004: 12). These achievements demonstrated the SMB’s commitment to pragmatism and their desire to be incorporated in Egypt’s nascent multiparty system (Ali 2007: 216). On this course of pragmatic politicking, an emerging generation of white collar professionals served as the “masterminds of the Muslim Brothers’ parliamentary alliances” (El-Ghobashy 2005: 380-381). The SMB’s victories – and the political sophistication they revealed – dwarfed gains made by most of the official descendants of Sadat’s multiparty system, but they never encroached on the ruling party’s parliamentary dominance. Hence they epitomized the incremental gains recommended by Kalyvas for religious parties pursuing an electoral mandate.

In addition to the Society for Muslim Brothers, an array of non-religious opposition parties, formally licensed by the government-run Political Parties Committee, have contested elections.⁸ During the initial elections of the multiparty system, the most visible official

⁸ Two of them, the National Progressive Unionist Party and the Liberal Party, were formed when Sadat converted the platforms into parties (Stacher: 2004: 221).

contestants were the leftist National Progressive Unionist Party, the New Wafd Party, the Liberal Party, and the Labor Party. Still, in most of their operations these parties were like “pieces of cork floating on the surface of society” and only the Wafd and the Muslim Brothers proved capable of fielding candidates for more than a fifth of parliamentary seats (Zaki 1995: 82, 86).

Gunmen from the Jama`a and Jihad assassinated Sadat on October 6, 1981. Vice president Hosni Mubarak then took office by way of a single-candidate plebiscite for an initial six-year term. Rather than continuing the domestic policies of his predecessor, Mubarak quickly reversed course and tried to mend fences with the opposition. Although the formal boundaries on dissent remained in place, the room for organization, newspaper publishing, and criticism of the government expanded (Zaki 1995: 77). The president and his critics thus enjoyed a kind of political honeymoon for the better part of the decade. Relations between the regime and the opposition were so strong that the Muslim Brothers and their alliance partners (the Labor and Liberal parties) endorsed Mubarak’s nomination for a second term in 1987 (Guindi 1987). Their détente did not last much longer. In 1990 Islamic militants ramped up their attacks on Mubarak’s government and a change in electoral law curtailed the pluralist trend in Egypt’s parliament.

Mubarak Battles Radicals and Moderates (October 1990 – March 1999)

Violence between Islamic radicals and the state had subsided in the immediate wake of Sadat’s death only to return in the late 1980s.⁹ A turning point in the Jama`a’s challenge to Mubarak can be dated to October 5, 1990 when members of the group assassinated former speaker of the parliament Rifaat Al-Mahjoub.¹⁰ On June 8, 1992 they killed writer Farag Foda (International Crisis Group 2004: 6). The Jama`a posed a revolutionary challenge to the state, working to establish its rule over portions of the population and targeting government officials. The

⁹ By the 1990s, Jihad, led by Ayman Zawahiri, was operating primarily in exile and did not figure prominently during this period (Kepel 2002: 282).

¹⁰ The attack was apparently precipitated by the state’s assassination of Jama`a spokesman Ala Muhyi al-Din by state forces earlier that year (Hafez 2003: 84).

impoverished Cairo community of Imbaba provided a microcosm of the Jama`a's goal. Having overtaken the neighborhood in 1984, the group succeeded in creating a mini religious state complete with Islamicized street names and a culture of intimidation against non-Muslims. Mubarak dispensed with the self-proclaimed "Islamic Republic" in December 1992, deploying 14,000 soldiers and arresting or removing "some 5,000 people" (Kepel 2002: 290-291).

Violence escalated in the following year to a level four times as lethal as in 1992; over eleven hundred were killed amid the conflict (Ibrahim 1996: 73). By this point the Jama`a's challenge to the state bore the traits of violent radical movements elsewhere. The group's position at the vanguard of Islamic militancy differentiated it from the relatively minor role of al-Jihad (which had fled into exile) and from the SMB, "which shunned violence altogether" (Hafez 2003: 34).¹¹ The state deployed thousands of soldiers during 1992-1993 for operations in Imbaba and upper Egypt, an onslaught that weakened the Jama`a and portended its defeat (Hafez 2003: 85). Gilles Kepel describes how the conflict flared and subsided:

The government's response to a series of daring attacks—one of which nearly killed Mubarak himself in Addis Ababa in June 1995—was ruthless repression, and in the end the tide swung decisively in its favor. The Jama`a had failed to mobilize the urban masses after the setback in Imbaba, and was now obliged to fall back on sporadic sorties against tourists, Copts, and policemen from its bases in the Nile Valley. By the beginning of 1996, the movement was beginning to show signs of exhaustion (Kepel 2002: 294).

Sources of that fatigue included the attrition of the group's more experienced fighters and the increasing financial difficulties of supporting the families of members (Salah 2001: 139-144). Militarily the Jama`a had been vastly overpowered and the movement's stark defeat prompted its realignment.

¹¹ Likewise, in 1993 al-Jama`a leader Tal'at Fuad Qasim said the group rejected the Brothers' tactics and ideas: "Our disagreements with the brothers prevent cooperation" (Mubarak 1996: 41).

On July 5, 1997 the historic leaders of the movement that was in prison for Sadat's assassination announced a unilateral ceasefire (Salah 2001: 131). Their decision was reinforced by the former commander of al-Jama`a, Omar Abdel Rahman, "who issued a call from his U.S. prison cell to abide by the initiative" (Hafez 2003: 135). The ceasefire was initially rejected by some of the group's lieutenants, who responded with a brutal attack in Luxor on November 17, 1997. But the massacre of fifty-eight foreign tourists and four Egyptians was to be the final military operation in al-Jama`a's campaign. Those who had defended the event found themselves isolated and were effectively expelled from the movement. Other leaders, such as Mustafa Hamza, who were willing to endorse the group's nonviolent turn were promoted in the Consultative Council and buttressed the change in course (Salah 2001: 132-133). internal debate stretched more than a year after the Luxor attacks. In March 1999 the group's Consultative Council declared a ceasefire that has held ever since. As the decade drew to a close, and Mubarak approached the end of his third term, the Jama`a was defeated – its military campaign concluded.

Parallel to his effort quelling the Jama`a during the 1990s, President Mubarak proved just as successful at fending off moderates. This battle on a second front seemed to escalate even as the non-militant opposition, after a brief and ineffectual abstention, resumed their pursuit of change through elections. In 1990 the electoral system had reverted to majoritarian voting rules, but with heavily gerrymandered districts that promised to nullify the opposition's earlier gains. The SMB, Labor, Liberal, and Wafd parties boycotted the 1990 elections, protesting the system's bias in favor of the ruling party and the absence of independent judicial oversight. Their complaints fell on deaf ears and the National Democratic Party established an ironclad 87% majority for the 1990-1995 parliament (Zaki 1995: 93-94). A viselike grip on the legislature did not prompt Mubarak to relieve pressure on his opponents in other areas. To the contrary, restrictions on civil society activity tightened. Law 100 of 1993 undermined the Muslim Brother's growing presence in the elected leadership of Egypt's professional syndicates

(Wickham 2002: 200-202). More draconian measures followed, including a wave of detentions that placed an estimated 20,000 Egyptians in prison by 1994, under the pretext of the regime's war upon al-Jama`a al-Islamiya (Lust-Okar 2005: 145).

Long-standing distinctions between the SMB and the Jama`a were ignored or deliberately obscured by the regime's repression, an approach that grew harsher as the Brothers sought new means of involvement in mainstream politics. In January 1995, Essam al-Iryan — at that time vice president of the Doctors' Syndicate — called for legalization of the Muslim Brothers as a political party. Eighty-two of the SMB's leading members were then "rounded up and detained in the first round of a sweeping crackdown unseen since the 1950s" (El-Ghobashy 2005: 384). That November, al-Iryan and fifty-three of the group's other white collar professionals were charged with building a contraband organization and given prison sentences of three to five years (Kepel 2002: 296). The arrests had the convenient effect of removing sixteen of the SMB's candidates from the upcoming legislative elections. The Brothers nevertheless ran some one hundred candidates (Makram-Ebeid 1996: 126-127).¹²

Despite rising tension between Mubarak and his challengers, the major opposition groups had opted to rejoin elections in 1995. Although candidates expected the polls would prove as biased for the ruling party as they had claimed in 1990, they saw elections as the main avenue for advancing (Kassem 1999: 108). Yet their route back into the legislature proved high impassable. NDP candidates took a record 94% of seats, stoked by pre-electoral attacks on the Brothers combined with fraud and violence on election day (Egyptian National Committee 1995: 45-63). The official opposition scraped out a meager thirteen seats (Ries 1999: 344). Only one candidate from the Society of Muslim Brothers was elected; he was stripped of his seat the following year, under the charge of belonging to an illegal organization (Hafez 2003: 53). Also in 1996, organizers of an alternative, more progressive Islamist party, al-Wasat (Center), were

¹² In his comparative study of Islamic militant groups, Mohammed Hafez notes that the Muslim Brothers' commitment to electoral methods despite the regime's crackdown distinguished them from FIS leaders in Algeria willing to endorse violence (2003: 89).

denied authorization and arrested early the following year. These actions demonstrated what Kepel dubbed the regime's "zero tolerance" policy toward Islamic movements, irrespective of their methods and vision (Kepel 2002: 297). The miniscule opposition presence in parliament showed Mubarak was just as hostile to non-Islamic parties as well. Setbacks for political reform advocates – the "deliberalization" of the 1990s – continued even after Al-Jama`a surrendered (Kienle 1998: 219).

The Mubarak regime's fight against Islamic militants provided a parlous and capacious leitmotif for 1990-1999. Nonviolent challengers, particularly the Muslim Brothers, suffered tremendous setbacks despite their consistently moderate methods and aims. Deploying methods western officials would later extol, Mubarak was waging his own war on terrorism and would emerge victorious.¹³ This blanket of repression concealed but did not eliminate stark distinctions between the SMB and the Jama`a, differences that led militants to disparage the Brothers' rejection of violence as naïve and counterproductive (Hafez 2003: 55.) Leaders of the Jama`a reached internal consensus in 1999 on renouncing violence. The holdouts of Islamic radicalism in Egypt had capitulated. Meanwhile, many middle generation leaders from the SMB had spent the second half of the decade in prison. For the first time since assuming the presidency Mubarak no longer contended with a major extremist threat.

Mubarak Suppresses the Moderates (March 1999 - April 2008)

Palpable calm followed the Jama`a's surrender and by late April 1999 the state had released 7,000 detainees connected to the group. Twenty-four higher-ranking figures were given reduced prison sentences and none were executed, despite having been charged with capital offenses

¹³ Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, US Secretary of State Colin Powell commented that in the area of counterterrorism, "Egypt... is way ahead of us... And we have much to learn from them and there is much we can do together." Colin Powell, "Remarks with Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Maher," Washington, D.C., 26 September 2001 (www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/5066.htm).

(Hafez 2003: 152-153). Uncharacteristic leniency bespoke the significance of the Jama`a's realignment and the milestone achieved by Mubarak's regime:

This unilateral declaration of a cease-fire represented a historical turning point in al-Jama`a's evolution since its establishment in the 1970s and an acknowledgment of the dismal failure of its armed insurrection... For now the Egyptian government has eliminated the military threat represented by militant Islamists (Gerges 2000).

Such analysis and the forecasts they carried were borne out in subsequent years of domestic calm. Yet levels of stability unknown since the 1970s did not prompt Mubarak to reconcile with the moderate forces he had aggressed against during the 1990s. The radicals' challenge had disappeared but the regime's proclivity for dominance remained.

If authoritarian leaders seek the triumph of moderate movements over radical challengers and if such moments offer the chance for democratizing pacts among reform-minded insiders and activists, then the years after the Jama`a's surrender provided a golden opportunity. Mubarak, easily re-approved for a fourth six-year term in October 1999, faced a plethora of moderate Islamic activists and secularist politicians eager to turn the page and develop true multi-partyism. Egypt's political arena was devoid of a major militant movement threatening domestic stability or promising to subvert any agreements that might have been reached. Rather than exploiting his victory over Islamist radicals to embrace the array of centrist movements available, Mubarak instead maintained draconian restrictions upon nonviolent movements of all kinds. The militants' ceasefire had put to rest the specter of radical Islam and, according to the prevailing assumptions of democratic transitions theory, should have midwived productive negotiations. Instead, the regime unilaterally excluded its critics. After decisively defeating radical challengers, President Mubarak moved to eliminate his non-militant opponents, showing in the process that moderates were deemed as intolerable as extremists. Young opposition politicians, revered members of the judiciary, and numerous leaders of the Muslim Brothers bore the brunt of this authoritarian tact.

Electoral politics continued to be a bellwether of broader trends. In 2000, at long last members of the judiciary provided independent oversight of parliamentary elections. Voting took place in three successive stages during October-November. Beyond the judges' purview, official and informal security agents intervened to curb opposition victories. Even so, the Society of Muslim Brothers won seventeen seats, surpassing what the licensed opposition parties achieved collectively (Rabei 2001: 195). The SMB's work in parliament resumed the themes of gradual political and legal reform they had pursued in the 1980s (Heshmat 2006: 135). It was not long before their effectiveness as a parliamentary bloc provoked a backlash. The regime retaliated against the SMB's legislative delegation by eventually forcing two of the group's more outspoken MPs to re-contest – and thereby lose – their seats in fresh, heavily manipulated elections (El-Ghobashy 2005: 388). The exclusion of individual politicians was not confined to Egypt's leading religious movement though. Mubarak also worked to neutralize leaders from the non-religious opposition parties. Foremost among these was Ayman Nour.

A youthful attorney and twice-elected member of parliament, Nour organized a new centrist party, Tomorrow (al-Ghad), and ran against Mubarak in Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential elections, held in September 2005. In that race he finished a distance second, far behind Mubarak's 89% voteshare, but outperformed the other contestants in every governorate across Egypt (Rabei 2005: 410-412). The election would have expectedly provided a launching pad for future bids by Nour for national office, but his political rise was soon interrupted. In November, government interference prevented Nour from winning reelection to parliament in his home district; the following month he was sentenced to five years imprisonment on charges of forging the paperwork for creating his party (Slackman 2005, Abou El-Magd 2005). Nour's fate demonstrated that secular-minded reform advocates were just as vulnerable to Mubarak's retaliation as their religiously oriented colleagues in the SMB. In a field void of radicals, the regime saw threats among nonviolent activists who had never taken up arms. Even officials in the country's revered judiciary could not escape this skewed perspective. After exposing

electoral fraud in the 2005 parliamentary elections, judges Hisham al-Bastiwisi and Ahmed Mekki were stripped of their judicial immunity and brought before a disciplinary hearing. Immediately their case became a cause célèbre for dissenters of all stripes. Mekki was eventually acquitted and al-Bastiwisi received a symbolic reprimand, but Mubarak's regime had conveyed its message about the limits of judicial independence (Moustafa 2007: 214-216).

The SMB's experience in the 2005 polls had been a centerpiece of the judges' complaints about electoral interference. The group had exceeded expectations, including those of the ruling party, when they won dozens of seats during the first round of voting. Mubarak's government, hoping to muffle foreign criticisms of its political process, had sought to permit a modicum of pluralism in the results (Telhami 2007: 108).¹⁴ The breadth of the Muslim Brothers' electoral strength quickly dwarfed what regime elites had envisioned. SMB candidates eventually won 88 seats (nearly 20% of parliament) and formed a bloc of MPs hailing from twenty-one of twenty-six governorates (Shehata and Stacher 2006). Yet the group's progress was decidedly uneven, particularly after the SMB's initial momentum had become clear. Implausible victories by ruling party candidates against SMB stalwarts, displayed the kinds of electoral corruption highlighted by Mekki and al-Bastiwisi. Thus staggering numerical gains for the Society of Muslim Brothers – a quintupling in the size of their legislative delegation – were dampened as the regime ensured the group's most seasoned leaders would not return to the People's Assembly. Veteran SMB politicians lost elections just weeks after Nour's defeat. Mubarak's agents thus showed a certain consistency in suppressing religious and non-religious reformists alike. Developments during 2006 to 2008 showed Egypt's presidential and parliamentary elections inaugurated not a new chapter in political reform, but a return to the zero-tolerance policy of the past.

¹⁴ It is difficult to know how many SMB victories the Mubarak regime deemed acceptable at the outset of elections. One indication comes from prime minister Ahmed Nazif, response to an American journalist asking about the Brothers' role in Egyptian politics, "Let them prove that they are real democrats through the process that exists today. Let them have twenty, thirty independents in parliament and see how they'll behave." Newsmaker: Ahmed Nazif, *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, May 20, 2005.

His plebiscitarian bona fides freshly burnished from Egypt's first multi-candidate election, President Mubarak seemed bent on repressing moderates during his fifth term. Hundreds of peaceful demonstrators, the overwhelming majority of them from the Muslim Brothers, were arrested in 2006 for protesting in solidarity with judges Mekki and al-Bastawisi (Shehata and Stacher 2006). New proposals by Mubarak to amend the constitution, announced in December 2006 and ratified the following March, set the stage for a fresh round of protests and crackdown. The amendments promised further restrictions on the SMB's activities through a ban on all political activity based on religion (Stacher and Shehata 2007). The amendments also signaled that the regime's experiment with vigilant judicial supervision had failed and subsequent elections would not be monitored so closely or so independently of the executive. Criticized by independent observers for further tilting the playing field in favor of Mubarak and his party, the 2007 constitutional amendments had the immediate effect of giving the regime one more weapon in its seemingly unrelenting campaign to shut the Brothers out of national politics (Brown, Dunne, and Hamzawy 2007). With one hand Mubarak's administration touted its institutional initiatives; with the other it struck at the moderates who offered a genuine chance of reform.¹⁵

In spring 2008 the Egyptian regime's intolerance took an especially flagrant turn as the government screened candidates for elections to Egypt's 52,000 municipal council positions. Municipal council elections had last been held in early 2002, at which time they were boycotted by the opposition and drew a trickle of participation that even paled in comparison with typical low levels of engagement in national elections. This time the Society of Muslim Brothers attempted to contest a small but significant 5,000 seats out of the total available. However, 90% of the group's nominees were excluded, sometimes despite explicit judicial decisions in their favor that the Ministry of Interior refused to recognize. Meanwhile, SMB candidates and

¹⁵ Aims of the Egyptian opposition during this period included such non-revolutionary changes as ending the State of Emergency and its martial law conditions, putting term limits on the president, and lifting restrictions on the formation and operation of political parties.

supporters experienced widespread detentions and harassment, as in the lead-up to prior polls. These tactics eroded the Brothers' potential presence in the councils. The day before voting was to take place the group withdrew its twenty permitted candidates and called for a national boycott of the elections.¹⁶ Even as the Brothers were publicizing the fraudulent electoral process, the regime engaged in one of its harshest crackdowns in living memory when it deployed official and plain clothes security forces to disperse thousands of blue collar protesters in the town of Mahalla al Kubra. The Mahalla clashes provided a fitting capstone to the nine years since Al Jama`a's official surrender: No challenge, whether based around a religious vision or on labor demands, would be broached. NDP candidates were unchallenged in 86% of the races for municipal council seats and the elections drew an estimated 1-5% turnout.¹⁷

In summary, the period since the ceasefire by al-Jama`a al-Islamiya in March 1999 brought Egypt domestic stability and a vista free of revolutionary threats to the state. The regime's security and self-assuredness did not prompt it to partner with the opposition or even implement calls for reform that would meaningfully constrain its own power. Quite the opposite: Mubarak displayed the same hostility to moderate reformists in the 1999-2008 that he had put into practice while fighting the Jama`a. Consistent, credible commitments by religious and non-religious opposition movements were not embraced as the foundation of democratic change; they were rebuffed. To explain this behavior and the elusiveness of transitions in cases like Egypt, comparativists may need to reconsider what kinds of opposition tactics "threaten" an authoritarian regime.

¹⁶ "Biyān al-Ikhwan bi sha'in al mawqif al naha'i min intikhabat al mahaliyat," 7 April 2008. <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=36174&SecID=212> Accessed 7 April 2008.

¹⁷ Ahmed Shelby, Adel Durra, and Ezza Masoud, "Al `Anf ``Yansaha" min Al Mahalla... Wa Al Aswat ``Taqat`a " Al Mahaliyat," *Al Masry Al Yawm*, 9 April 2008. <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=100572> Accessed 9 April 2008.

Lessons from Egypt: Authoritarianism and the Perils of Moderation

The experience of opposition movements in Egypt appears to defy the pattern gleaned by Kalyvas in his comparison of Algeria and Belgium. When Egypt's nonviolent opposition movements have attempted to demonstrate their commitment to the electoral process they have been consistently rejected. Foremost among these movements stood the Society of Muslim Brothers, which distanced itself from militant Islamic movements in the 1970s and to which many former radicals had gravitated to pursue an explicitly political course. By establishing a small bloc in parliament in the 1980s and maintaining a sophisticated and well-disciplined organization, the Muslim Brothers fit the mode of religious parties showing a credible commitment to the established rules of the game (Kalyvas 2000). Their commitments were not met by equivalent devotion to pluralism by those in power. Electoral fairness eroded rapidly in the 1990s and dozens of the Muslim Brothers' leaders were sent to prison. The regime's apparent intolerance for Islamic parties could perhaps be explained by considering its internal war against the Jama`a, whose guerilla warfare raised the specter that any deal with Moderates would ultimately empower the Radicals (Przeworski 1991). For the moment, so this argument would go, Mubarak's forces had to suppress extremist and moderate Islamic activists alike. Yet such reasoning fails to explain Mubarak's likeminded exclusion of non-religious moderates, presumably the very secularists who would provide a bulwark against any Islamic threat. It has even more difficulty accounting for events in the aftermath of the Jama`a's defeat.

Al-Jama`a's surrender in March 1999 left Egypt with an unusually temperate opposition. Mubarak would not have to fear that a pact with opposition moderates would simply bring militants to power. (From prison, members of Al-Jama`a even adopted the Muslim Brothers' program as a template for their own realignment.) Political commitments by Egypt's religious opposition had become more credible than ever. Similarly, official parties remained steadfast in contesting elections while eschewing radicalism. In a political field devoid of opposition militancy, the fulcrum for change would seemed to have shifted toward the center and a

democratizing pact far more likely in the 1990s. But while Mubarak's challengers pursued pluralism and liberalization, the president evaded compromise and scuttled reform. Rather than embracing opposition leaders as partners in a democratizing pact, he persisted in repressing them through electoral violence, political imprisonments, and mass detentions (Huweidy 2007).

By spring 2008, when the Muslim Brothers were being prevented from contesting even 1% of municipal council seats, it appeared that the regime felt as, if not more, challenged by moderate Islamic opposition than it had by violent radicals. The challenge stemmed not from the group's religiosity but its political capacity. Moderate Islam posed the same threat as moderate liberal (e.g., Ayman Nour and Al Ghad) and moderate leftwing movements (Nasserists). These nonviolent, non-revolutionary movements carried with them the potential to galvanize popular support and unseat the ruling party in free elections. Although Mubarak's surrogates regularly invoke Iran 1979 to justify their repressive measures, they have acted as if they are more concerned about the scenario of Chile 1989 or Mexico 2000, decisive electoral defeat and the medium term prospect of living in the opposition. To put the matter in Dahlian terms, the Egyptian regime has deemed that the costs of including the opposition are too high, not for lack of the other's commitments but in spite of them. Mubarak's zero-tolerance policy during 1990-2008 suggests the counterintuitive notion that moderation can prove more threatening than extremism to authoritarian incumbents. It is not difficult to understand why this is so and, accordingly, why the potential for pacts and transitions are exogenous to the opposition's own commitments to moderation.

Elites bent on preserving their own positions will often, pace Przeworski, favor sustainable authoritarianism over sustainable democracy. For leaders envisioning a long and prosperous career among the ruling elite, the unpalatable prospect of electoral defeat to an alternative movement weighs much more heavily than the meager chance of fringe elements toppling the state. It follows that the opposition's rejection of violence will not entice incumbents to the negotiating table and may simply alleviate the pressure upon them. To the extent that all

challenger movements become devoted to electoral means, regime leaders may view the costs of repression as irresistibly low. After defeating al-Jama`a al-Islamiya, Mubarak proved no less willing or able to suppress his moderate religious and non-religious opponents. Credible commitments to participation did not allow the SMB to achieve and exercise the electoral mandate its constituency warranted. The Brothers' travails would thus seem to challenge the counterfactual claim that Algeria's FIS could have followed the path of Catholic parties into power had it only been more internally regimented and consistent in its message of non-radicalism. These traits have not inspired Egypt's leadership to open its system but instead emboldened it to aggress against the very moderates it claims to be awaiting.

The Society of Muslim Brothers' experience over the past thirty years underlines the puzzle motivating Kalyvas's study. An emphasis on credible commitments and moderation implies the barriers to electoral success and democratic transition lie within the organizational structure of challenger movements. The experience of Egypt's religious and non-religious movements suggests that the most formidable obstructions to democratization are external to the opposition's structure and tactics. The kinds of credible commitments that seemed to propel Belgium's Catholic party into power have not borne success for the Muslim Brothers and the most immediate cause is the regime's refusal to countenance alternative currents that may imperil its electoral hegemony. Credible commitments to nonviolence and electoral participation do not dispel this fear. Instead, as the challenger appeals to modal voters such commitments may exacerbate fears among incumbents that they will lose their perks and power if they permit free elections. Accordingly, the putative effect of credible commitments to moderation may depend on sitting autocrats holding an especially enlightened and benevolent concept of self-interests, an attitude that has not manifested in Egypt and may be rare among contemporary authoritarian regimes elsewhere.

Analysis of Egypt's opposition not only serves to evaluate extant theory, it offers testable propositions that build upon prior work. Perhaps the most striking hypothesis to emerge from

this study is the idea that opposition moderation may prove more threatening than radicalism to sitting incumbents. This phenomenon – supported by the actions of the Mubarak regime during its tenure – recasts the conventional model of democratic transitions and pacts. Whereas democratization is regularly seen as a process of convergence and compromise among incumbents and oppositionists inclined toward change, authoritarian elites may, under certain circumstances, eschew such partnerships even as their challengers recommit themselves to temperate reforms. Under certain conditions regime soft-liners may fear a deal with Moderates will empower Radicals, as Prezeworski postulated. But incumbents may also retreat from pacting not out of fear but out of convenience; so long as the opposition of remaining aligned with Hardliners retains its appeals. In such a context an exodus from authoritarianism may actually become more elusive as oppositionists continue pursuing a centrist, moderate path and their would be partners in the regime persist in placating them. Egypt during the last nine epitomizes this scenario. How might this impasse be broken?

Although comparativists of the Middle East have given increasing attention to the issue of how Islamic parties moderate their platforms, the record in Egypt suggests the road to power is not paved by self-policing and good behavior. A hefty level of contention and pressure may be essential for inducing ruling elites to embrace the compromises and reforms long advocated by their critics. When incumbents are choosing between hegemony and compromise they will predictably continue defending the status quo. Disdaining all radical means, moderates neutralize themselves and reassure the regime. By contrast, if incumbents are faced with the choice between a reformist compromise – including retrenchment of their privileges and power – and an even more severe disruption of their status and livelihood, political reform may prove the least unpalatable of several unattractive scenarios.¹⁸ Thus the efficacy of temperance is fed by immoderation and chances for compromise grow with the possibility of confrontation. Absent the

¹⁸ The recent political transition in Nepal – where Maoist insurgents helped push the monarch from power, then contested the elections that followed – may epitomize this scenario of democratization through popular, even radical pressure (Bhattarai 2008).

second, the first loses its appeal for incumbents. As earlier scholars of democratization observed, democratic transitions were often brokered in the shadow of more violent threats or in the wake of sustained popular pressure (Bermeo 1997; Yashar 1999; Wood 2001). Mubarak's intolerance to competition suggests similar conditions may need to emerge before reform will overtake the world's authoritarian holdouts. His actions during 1990-2008 show the opposition's moderation may herald an autocrat's entrenchment.

Conclusion

On April 15, 2008, an Egyptian military court sentenced twenty-five members of the Society of Muslim Brothers to prison sentences of three, five, seven, or ten years.¹⁹ The move eerily recalled the crackdown of 1995, especially since its targets included leaders of a younger generation, like Khayrat al-Shater, who were buttressing the reformist direction of al-Iryan and other middle-generation leaders imprisoned previously (El-Ghobashy 2005: 389). Coming a week after the SMB's boycott of municipal elections, the sentences showed the regime aimed to keep the Brothers on the defensive. As the eighty year-old Mubarak consolidates his legacy it is increasingly clear he will bequeath to his successor a rigid autocracy steeped in the ways of self-preservation and profligately disdainful of its critics.

This kind of enduring authoritarianism in the Muslim World remains a major analytical problem for the social sciences. In that regard, comparativists have more to learn about how credible commitments affect religious and non-religious opposition campaigns. Students of Islamic movements may benefit from testing different kinds of credible commitments. Kalyvas's study explored the effects of commitments about what the opposition movements would do *after* an election victory. The Egyptian case indicates challengers may also need to reinforce what will happen *outside* of elections if they are denied a free and fair contest. For Egypt's ruling elite

¹⁹ Nas al-ahkam al-ja'ira fil qadiya al-'askariya lil ikhwan al-muslimin. April 15, 2008. <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=36427&SecID=114> Accessed April 15, 2008.

the costs of losing elections appear to outweigh the risks of stealing them. The earlier concept of credible commitments in international relations theory could conceivably bear upon that decision calculus. Those signals pertained to the consequences of aggression by the other party; the party making the commitment sought to rig “the incentives so that the other party must choose in one’s favor” (Schelling 1956: 294). For opposition parties facing authoritarian incumbents the question becomes, what commitments must they make to *deter* the regime’s violence and election rigging? A systematic answer to the question awaits closer study, but Egypt’s dissidents have imparted one lesson. Challengers’ fealty to representative institutions may enable their nominal participation, but absent other levers of influence it is unlikely to deliver success.

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