# 7

# "ONLY ME"

## Repression, legal engineering, and state-managed elections in Sisi's Egypt

*Hesham Sallam*

"If you really love Egypt … listen to only me", said President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi in a memorable televised remark in 2016. Al-Sisi's comment aptly summarizes the hallmarks of his rule: personalism, nationalist rhetoric, and a complete intolerance for opposing political viewpoints. The latter trend is heavily pronounced in the electoral arena, which the Sisi regime has structured to undermine opponents and reward allies. This chapter examines the strategies Sisi employed to shut serious competitors out of electoral contests, namely the 2014 and 2018 presidential elections, and the 2015 and 2020 legislative elections. It also identifies the political challenges and goals that shaped the regime's management of each of the four elections.

### Background: Sisi's rise to power

Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi ascended to power in the wake of a military coup that deposed President Mohamed Morsi on July 3, 2013. The coup ended Egypt's brief experiment with relatively competitive electoral politics and paved the way for a military-backed authoritarian regime with Sisi at its helm.

Sisi initially presented Morsi's ousting as an attempt at resetting the "transition". On the day of the coup, he announced a roadmap that suspended the 2012 constitution and gave presidential powers to the president of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour. Sisi outlined the steps for producing a new constitution and convening presidential and legislative elections. The following week, an interim government was sworn in, featuring individuals widely viewed as sympathetic to the Revolution of January 25. Appointed as vice president was Mohamed ElBaradei, who had come to symbolize demands for political change during the final years of Hosni Mubarak's rule. Senior military officials emphasized that they had no interest in staying in power, and Sisi vowed not to run for president. Some observers took these signals to mean that the army was—to borrow the words of then-US Secretary of State John Kerry—"restoring democracy" (BBC News 2013). The exact opposite was taking place.

As discussions about resetting the so-called transition were underway, the security establishment began repressing the Muslim Brotherhood and allies of the ousted president. The Brotherhood's top leaders, along with several thousands of the movement's members and supporters, were arrested and prosecuted on politically motivated charges. In August 2013, secu-

DOI: 10.4324/9781003185628-8

rity forces used deadly violence to end pro-Morsi rallies in Rabaa Al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda squares, killing over a thousand people (HRW 2014a). Two months later, the interim president issued a protest law heavily restricting the freedom of assembly and enhancing authorities' power to repress and punish expressions of dissent. A host of prominent activists were detained and prosecuted based on that law (BBC News 2017). These include leaders of the April 6 Youth Movement, a major driver of anti-Mubarak protests in the lead up to the January 25 Uprising.

With this wave of repression in progress, a new constitution was approved by 98 per cent of voters in a popular referendum held in January 2014. The 2014 constitution propped up presidential powers to some degree and enhanced the military's role in selecting ministers of defence (ACRPS 2014). Sisi announced in the spring that he would resign from his military post and run for president (Tawfeeq and Gumuchian 2014), thereby confirming prior suspicions that he had been posturing to retain political power ever since orchestrating the coup. Sisi ended up winning nearly 97 per cent of the votes, defeating his sole challenger Hamdeen Sabbahi, a long-time Nasserist politician.

Upon assuming power, Sisi deployed the security apparatus to curtail political rights, undermine and jail his opponents, and establish control over media outlets. To support these efforts, the president adopted a series of anti-terror laws authorizing state punishment and prosecution of peaceful dissidents (TIMEP 2018). The regime's clampdown against its adversaries widened and intensified in 2017—the same year Sisi enacted a state of emergency—with numerous politicians and activists from across the ideological spectrum routinely prosecuted or imprisoned without charge. A year into Sisi's 2018 presidential re-election, his allies managed to pass a set of constitutional amendments that have afforded him the chance to stay in power until 2030. Legislative elections were convened in late 2020, resulting in even greater dominance by Sisi's allies in parliament.

The following sections examine the strategies Sisi's ruling establishment employed to eliminate political rivals from electoral competition and prevent pockets of opposition from emerging inside the legislature. It situates these strategies in Sisi's broader efforts to consolidate political power and manage various challenges to his rule.

## The 2014 presidential election: political intimidation and media bullying

The context for the 2014 presidential election is the violent exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies from the political sphere and the marginalization of political actors who had supported anti-military popular mobilization in the past. In the aftermath of the July coup, authorities arrested almost all Muslim Brotherhood senior figures, along with prominent allies of the movement. The state levelled politically motivated charges against them and used deadly violence to disperse pro-Morsi sit-ins and rallies. It also declared the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, terrorist organizations, banned them, and froze and confiscated their assets (Zollner 2019).

As Sisi's major rival, the Brotherhood was eliminated from the political scene, and the state was able to do without the ballot-fixing tactics it later adopted in the 2018 election, as described below. Still, compared to the previous one, the 2014 election was rife with barriers that made it harder for qualified opposition candidates to run. For instance, the 2014 presidential election law did away with a provision from the 2012 version allowing each political party to field its own presidential candidate, if it enjoyed representation in the last parliament. Under the new law, an individual could run for president in 2014 only if they gathered 25,000 citizen endorsements from 15 different governorates.[1] Indeed, the minimum number of signatures needed to qualify

for candidacy was lower in comparison to that required by the 2012 election law (30,000) (Carter Center 2012). Yet, the new number was still a tall order for candidates who lacked access to large donors.

The extent to which state officials were involved in pressuring certain politicians to stay out of the race is unknown. In any case, Sisi's presidential bid and the political environment in which he announced it was enough to dissuade potential challengers from running. Shortly before Sisi's campaign commenced, the military issued a statement blessing the minister of defence's prospective presidential candidacy (BBC News 2014). The statement made it obvious to all observers that Sisi was the state's chosen candidate. Prior to that development, it had been unclear whether the military was prepared to tolerate some degree of competition in electoral politics—notwithstanding the exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was in that spirit of uncertainty that a host of prominent politicians expressed interest in running for president. After the military announced its support for Sisi, however, presidential hopefuls began dropping from the race.

Weeks after the said announcement, former Muslim Brotherhood member and Strong Egypt Party leader Abdel-Moneim Aboul-Fotouh revealed he would not run. Aboul-Fotouh, who ran for president in 2012, stated in one interview, "the military establishment's fielding of a candidate, regardless of my own opinion of him, means that there are no elections, and that the matter has already been settled" (Assabeel 2014). Expressing a similar sentiment, Khaled Ali announced his withdrawal from the race while arguing that the vote was nothing more than a theatrical production with a predictable outcome (DW 2014). Presidential hopeful and Mubarak's last prime minister, Ahmed Shafik, who had lost to Morsi by a small margin in 2012, stated that the military's endorsement of Sisi was a sign that it was preparing to rig the contest in favour of its chosen candidate (CNN 2014). Shafik's remarks came in a recorded private conversation that was leaked to the media. He dropped out of the race shortly after the recording surfaced.

Informing the scepticism of qualified contenders were the attacks that military-allied media waged against Sisi's challengers, whose integrity and patriotism was questioned. Among their top targets was former Army Chief of Staff Sami Anan, whom pro-Sisi commentators accused of doing the bidding of the Muslim Brotherhood.[2] Anan eventually dropped his bid, reportedly under pressure from the state (Hassan 2014). These developments were taking place in a political environment in which individuals contradicting the *de facto* official line that Sisi was Egypt's saviour and rightful leader were usually accused of being unpatriotic.

There were additional signs that the presidential election would be nothing more than window dressing for a preordained Sisi presidency. The state's management of the January 2014 constitutional referendum was one of such signs. In the lead up to the vote, authorities arrested activists campaigning on behalf of the "no" vote, whereas state allies were free to promote the draft constitution and slander its critics (HRW 2014b). In one telling incident, one provincial governor blatantly declared, "whoever votes 'no' to the constitution is a traitor" (Khalil 2014). Meanwhile, the state was using anti-terror laws to jail opponents and silence dissidents (El-Sadany 2014). Given this political climate, no serious presidential candidate was to believe that they stood a chance against Sisi, the state's *de facto* candidate. Ultimately, the only politician who agreed to play by the regime's rules and succeeded in getting his name on the ballot alongside Sisi was Hamdeen Sabbahi. Despite his decades-long history as an opposition politician, Sabbahi was by no means a serious challenger to Sisi.

Although a Sisi victory was practically guaranteed, the ruling establishment was clearly seeking more than just a routine victory. After all, the vote was an opportunity to bestow upon the coup a façade of popular legitimacy, and thus, there was real pressure for Sisi to win by an over-

whelming margin with a significant turnout. It is perhaps for that reason that Sisi's campaign submitted over 180,000 endorsements in its official petition for candidacy, exceeding the legally mandated threshold (25,000) seven folds. Equally revealingly, both authorities and Sisi supporters stifled Sabbahi's campaign's efforts to gather and notarize endorsements (Lashin 2014; Al-Masry and Aly 2014), presumably to dwarf his perceived popularity relative to that of Sisi. Neither was it surprising that Sisi's allies were unsettled by reports of low turnout when voting was underway. In fact, alarmed pro-Sisi television commentators went as far as scolding viewers for not casting their votes.[3] Eventually, voting was extended for an extra day in the hope that more voters would show up. Finally, when Sisi was declared the winner with 97 per cent of the votes, the state-funded press emphasized that the votes he won were double those received by Morsi in the 2012 election (Ahmed 2014).

To recap, the 2014 presidential election was held in an exclusionary, repressive political environment in which the state signalled very clearly that Sisi was its chosen candidate. That reality dissuaded some competitive presidential contenders from running and intimidated others into dropping out of the race. The legal requirements for candidacy were somewhat restrictive to the extent that political parties with previous parliamentary representation were no longer allowed to field candidates, as was the case in the 2012 presidential election. Although Sisi emerged as the decisive winner, it was apparent that the election turnout did not meet the political leadership's expectations.

## The 2015 parliamentary election: the fragmented parliament strategy

Even with the Muslim Brotherhood excluded from the political scene, the first parliamentary elections presented a major predicament for President Sisi. On the one hand, the roadmap announced after the 2013 coup mandated the convening of legislative elections within two months of the ratification of a new constitution.[4] By the time Sisi was sworn in as president, that deadline had already passed, and there was significant pressure to hold a parliamentary election without delay. On the other hand, the new president appeared reluctant to cede legislative power to the prospective parliament. The 2014 constitution gave the House of Representatives the power to withdraw confidence from the president and charge him with high treason, along with sufficient authority to force government resignations. Adding to Sisi's worries, the elected parliament was expected to vote to either approve or repeal the laws he and his predecessor had decreed after the coup. In other words, Sisi had reason to believe that the prospective legislature could have greatly impeded his presidency.

These concerns shaped the state's engineering of the election—or what I refer to as the "fragmented parliament strategy"—which sought to ensure that the legislature would be devoid of a majority bloc capable of challenging the president. Contributing to that strategy was the conspicuous absence of a ruling party akin to Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP). That is, a body that can organize regime allies and field candidates who strike the right balance between enjoying public credibility and demonstrating political loyalty to the regime. Although the Nation's Future Party (NFP) would later emerge as the ruling establishment's primary political arm, it had not been decisively tasked with that role prior to the 2015 legislative race. Put simply, lacking a reliable ruling party organization, Sisi was seeking to generate a parliament that was too disorganized to either block his legislative agenda or hold executive bodies to account.

The fragmented parliament strategy was equally apparent in Sisi's proclamations leading up to the election season. He called on all political parties to unite under a single electoral coalition in a veiled attempt to discourage any one political force from contesting a majority of the seats

(Al-Gali 2015). Efforts to devise a unified coalition had already kicked off in 2014 under the leadership of former Prime Minister Kamal Al-Ganzouri. Later, as these efforts proved unwieldy, the political leadership tasked the General Intelligence Services (GIS) with devising a pro-Sisi electoral alliance in collaboration with major political parties. The outcome was the "For Love of Egypt (FLE)" alliance. The FLE included the Al-Wafd Party, the GIS-linked NFP, and the Free Egyptians Party (FEP), which was then associated with business mogul Naguib Sawiris.

The fragmented parliament strategy was also enshrined in the design of the electoral system. Of all the seats up for grabs, about a fifth was designated for party-list races, compared to two-thirds in the 2011–2012 election. The other 80 per cent of the seats were filled through first-past-the-post individual candidacy (IC) races held in relatively small districts. Their reconfiguration in favour of IC races was significant. That arrangement was known to be advantageous to prominent local figures who normally run as non-partisan candidates (El-Shewy 2015). Politicians of such profile have historically sought to court rather than challenge authority, because they usually pursue locally oriented goals that rely on state patronage, as opposed to national agendas that are likely to provoke the ruling establishment. That is to say, the IC races were expected to generate predominantly non-partisan legislators unlikely to antagonize the government. Ultimately, the fragmented parliament strategy worked to the extent that no one party was able to pick up more than 11 per cent of the seats, and half of the parliament was occupied by lawmakers who had run as independents.

The electoral design was also tailored to limit the fortunes of independent political groups that could have run against the state-sponsored coalition. Potential competitors comprised three main communities: Islamist parties like the Salafist Al-Nour, Mubarak regime remnants and business associates who rallied around presidential hopeful Ahmed Shafik, and leftist and liberal parties that housed elements nominally associated with the January 25 Revolution like Al-Dostour, Al-Karama, the Socialist Popular Alliance (SPA), and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ESDP).

By replacing the proportional representation (PR) formula used in the 2011–2012 election with a winner-take-all (WTA) one, the 2015 election law made it virtually impossible for any party to enter parliament unless it joined the GIS-sponsored list. The most obvious political casualty of this change was Al-Nour, a Salafist party that generally advocates for a gradual Islamization of society and that has enjoyed a cooperative relationship with the state apparatus since its founding in 2011. Al-Nour's sizeable gains in 2011–2012 were in no small part the result of the PR formula, which enabled it to pick up seats in districts where it failed to secure a majority or plurality of the votes. Because the 2015 election law's WTA formula handed all the seats in each district to the list that secured the majority of the votes and none to second- or third-place winners, Al-Nour was unlikely to repeat the electoral gains it scored in 2011–2012.

The 2015 election law posed additional obstacles to Al-Nour. For instance, the law required each party list to meet certain quotas for the representation of women, Christians, workers and farmers, youth, Egyptians abroad, and persons with disabilities. Naturally, the quota for Christians was expected to disadvantage Islamist contenders, since they were expected to struggle in recruiting Christian candidates.[5]

To the shock of the regime, Al-Nour was able to meet the quota, but it was the target of a smear campaign in the media, accusing it of serving as a proxy for the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Hanafy and Ghoneim 2015). During this same period, private individuals, likely at the behest of the regime, filed lawsuits petitioning authorities to dissolve Al-Nour on the grounds that it was formed on a religious platform in violation of the constitution (Makhlouf and Al-Qaranshawy 2015). Coinciding with the lawsuits was a broader campaign calling for banning

all religious parties, including Al–Nour (Sarhan 2015). Unnerved by this political intimidation, Al–Nour withdrew from two (of the four) party-list races, and in the two it contested it ended up losing to the GIS-sponsored FLE (Bahgat 2016). While it managed to pick up a limited number of seats in the IC contests, its share of the elected seats amounted to a modest 2 per cent.

Another target of regime intimidation was the Ahmed Shafik-tied Egyptian Patriotic Movement Party, founded by supporters of the former prime minister. Seeing that prominent political and business figures were rallying behind the Shafik-supported "Egypt List", the regime began signalling publicly that the former prime minister was *persona non grata*, presumably to dissuade credible candidates from joining his list. In other words, even without formally excluding the Egyptian Patriotic Movement Party, the political leadership tacitly undermined it to drive politicians away from it.

As for smaller parties nominally associated with the goals of the January 25 Uprising, the road to parliament was much more difficult. For these parties, the election law was a major obstacle, as it made electoral districts immensely large. It divided the entire country into only four party-list electoral districts, each spanning several governorates. So even if these nascent, underfunded parties could recruit competitive candidates across such vast regions, they were unlikely to muster enough resources to campaign effectively in large districts. Campaign funding and candidate recruitment aside, the payoffs of contesting the party-list races were largely uncertain because with a WTA formula in place, securing seats required an impossible mission: defeating the state-backed list with a majority of the votes. The IC race may have offered a more viable path to parliament for these parties, since its districts spanned smaller geographical areas. But IC contests still presented an uphill battle because they often featured non-partisan candidates from among local notables who could not be easily defeated without both local support networks and, once again, a level of funding these parties were unlikely to possess. Exacerbating these difficulties was the prevalence of vote-buying in its various forms in IC races, which further undermined the electoral fortunes of these relatively young parties.

Thus, many of the parties that organized under the banner of the "Civil Democratic Movement", including Al–Dostour and Bread and Freedom, ended up boycotting the election in part due to what they viewed as an objectionable election law.[6] They had demanded amending it to allocate more seats for party-list races and reinstituting a PR formula along the lines of the 2011–2012 election, but to no avail (Samir 2016: 12; Al-Quds Al-Araby 2015). These parties' grievances did not stop at the election law. A major concern for them was the increasingly repressive environment in which the contest was scheduled to take place: the 2013 restrictive protest law, the prosecution of political dissidents, and security forces' chronic use of deadly violence against protesters and activists (Arabi21 2015).

## The 2018 presidential election: brute force in the face of dissent

As the presidential election was about to kick off in the spring of 2018, the state had already spent years silencing dissidents and closing off political space. In contrast to the immediate aftermath of the 2013 coup when Sisi appeared widely popular, criticism of his policies became more visible in 2015 and 2016, even among social and political forces that once supported him. In February 2016, the Medical Doctors' Syndicate mobilized in protest of police brutality against medical professionals (CNN 2016). Months later, the government was under fire after security forces illegally stormed the Journalists' Syndicate to arrest writers accused of stirring up instability (BBC News 2016a). Protests ensued in large cities in November in response to deteriorating economic conditions (BBC News 2016b). These events were taking place against a backdrop of widespread anger at Sisi's decision to cede sovereignty over the islands of Tiran

and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia (France24 2016). That move put the president in a particularly vulnerable position. Sisi had spent his first two years in office convincing the public that his primary mandate as president was protecting Egypt's national security from outside threats. Having relinquished sovereignty over the islands, Sisi was then forced to contend with those questioning his commitment to the patriotic mission he had set out for himself at the outset of his tenure.

With rising opposition, the president grew viscerally intolerant of criticism. Prosecution of political activists and forced disappearances of dissidents became routinized (Amnesty International 2016), and restrictions on the activities of civil society organizations and opposition movements grew markedly (Hamzawy 2017). In parallel, state control of the media tightened. In fact, starting in 2016, security agencies became heavily involved in the media sector not only by ways of regulation and censorship, but also through ownership and management (Reuters 2019b).

In this context, the possibility of allowing a prominent challenger on the 2018 presidential election ballot was out of the question. Facing off with an unfriendly challenger would have forced Sisi to defend his performance and unpopular policies. On a more fundamental level, the very idea of pitting the president against a capable politician risked shattering Sisi's image as a national hero and an unmatched statesman who stands above the fray of conventional politics. Accordingly, in the months leading up to the vote, the political leadership engaged in blatantly aggressive ballot-fixing, robbing the electoral process of the slightest hint of democratic appearance. Every competitive candidate who tried to get on the ballot was eliminated through repression and intimidation. Among them was Ahmed Shafik, who was pressured by officials to drop his presidential bid.

That former military officials like Shafik were seeking to enter the race was a disturbing development for Sisi, because it implied that the military establishment was not unified in its support for the president. During the years preceding the election, Sisi was seemingly preoccupied with pre-empting political challenges from military and intelligence bodies (Gamal 2021). That trend was most visible in the GIS, which the president perceived as a site of subversive potential. He purged the agency's senior leaders and replaced them with a cadre of loyalists, including his own son Mahmoud (Reuters 2019a). Sisi's obsession with competing centres of influence inside military bureaucracies likely deepened his own perception of the threat emanating from the former officers who announced their intent on running for president.

For Sisi, the candidacy of another officer was also threatening because having multiple contenders with a military background raised an uncomfortable question within the ranks of the armed forces. That is, whether their interests would be better served under a military–tied president other than Sisi. Given these stakes, the political leadership was more than alarmed when former Army Chief of Staff Sami Anan revealed his intention to run for president in a widely publicized video statement in January 2018. The statement criticized Sisi's foreign and domestic policies, as well as his overreliance on the military in governing the country. In a show of confidence, Anan called on state institutions to behave impartially toward all candidates, including the current president, while implying that there was a good possibility Sisi would be leaving office at the end of the race.[7] The Sisi regime's response was decisive and unforgiving. Anan was arrested and referred to military prosecution on the grounds that, as a member of the military reserves, he was not authorized to run for public office (Mada Masr 2018). Anan was kept in detention and would not be released until late 2019. Members of his presidential bid team were prosecuted, imprisoned, and, in one case, violently beaten up.

Anan was not alone in suffering the wrath of military prosecution. Joining him was army Colonel Ahmed Konsowa who released a video statement in late November announcing that he would run for president, while criticizing prevailing economic and social policies. Within a few

weeks, a military tribunal handed Konsowa a six-year prison sentence for expressing political views in uniform—an act that was deemed a violation of military rules.

To avert a similar fiasco from occurring in the future, Sisi eventually made it even harder for military affiliates and retirees to run against him. In June 2020, he signed a law barring both current and former members of the armed forces from running for public office without prior approval from the military (France24 2020). But as far as the 2018 race was concerned, the intimidation, prosecution, and imprisonment of multiple candidates sent the message loud and clear: the race is closed off to real competition, and the state is not interested in salvaging any pretensions of impartiality.

In mid-January, the leader of the Reform and Development Party, Mohamed Anwar Al-Sadat, dropped his presidential bid. Al-Sadat cited the underlying restrictive political climate, while noting that the authorities made it difficult for him to gather the endorsements necessary to qualify for running (Ghali 2018). Similarly, presidential hopeful Khaled Ali announced his withdrawal from the race, arguing that there was no longer an opportunity to use the election to advance popular aspirations for change (CNN 2018). Accompanying Ali's withdrawal from the race was a wider call for a boycott from the Civil Democratic Movement, which includes the SPA, Al-Karama, Al-Dostour, and the Bread and Freedom parties. The coalition described the election as an "absurd theatrical play", as evidenced by the lack of candidates and the absence of legal guarantees (BBC News 2018).

By the time election season was about the commence, the state had succeeded in preventing every potential contender from running against Sisi, who was therefore poised to run unchallenged. Whereas that reality reinforced the regime's narrative that the president was a legendary leader whom no politician could dare challenge, pressure from the US Government forced Sisi to backtrack on that arrangement and find someone who could run against him. Otherwise, the argument went, it would have been embarrassingly obvious to Sisi's critics in Washington that the entire electoral process was a complete sham (Soliman 2018). And thus, Sisi embarked on a desperate (and dark comedic) search for a "pretend challenger". The first contender for the job was Al-Wafd Party leader Al-Sayyid Al-Badawy, who enjoyed a cooperative relationship with the regime. According to the election law, for an individual to qualify for running, they had to obtain either 25,000 public endorsements, as was the case in 2014, or endorsements from 20 lawmakers. Given that Al-Wafd had over 30 deputies in the House of Representatives, getting Al-Badawy on the ballot seemed quite feasible. Certainly, the Al-Wafd chief was not a perfect choice, because, at that point, the party had already announced that it would not field a presidential candidate and that it would endorse Sisi instead. Yet Al-Badawy seemed receptive to filling the role of pretend challenger and took steps to prepare for running. Al-Wafd's Supreme Council, however, would not play along. It voted down the proposal for Al-Badawy to run, largely out of concern that the move would give the party the stigma of being the president's "political extra". With Al-Badawy out and the official deadline to apply for candidacy only a few days away, Sisi was left in a precarious position.

Ultimately the regime managed to recruit an alternate: Moussa Mostafa Moussa, a politician with a rich history of collaboration with security agencies (Abu-Shanab and Gawish 2008). Getting Moussa on the ballot required asking legislators who had already endorsed Sisi to withdraw their endorsement of the president and redirect it to Moussa so that he can meet the official requirements for candidacy (Soliman 2018). The plan was messy, but it ultimately worked, and Moussa managed to apply for candidacy minutes before the official deadline closed. Moussa still was not able to save the election from embarrassment and mockery. It was crystal clear to all observers that, notwithstanding the regime's pretend challenger, Sisi was, in effect, running unopposed. And when the election results were announced, with Sisi winning 97

per cent of the vote, many commentators baulked at the fact that there were more invalid ballots in the election than there were votes for Moussa (Al-Gamal and Al-Issawi 2018). Others questioned the official turnout figure, 41 per cent, which did not align with reports of largely empty polling sites (Ketchley 2021).

In sum, the 2018 presidential election reflected the Sisi regime's preoccupation with silencing criticism and pre-empting potential challenges from within military and intelligence bodies. Thus, compared to its conduct in the 2014 presidential race, in 2018, the state was much more heavy-handed in eliminating its opponents and fixing the candidate list.

## The 2020 parliamentary elections: the party-centred strategy

By the time legislative elections were about to kick off in 2020, the regime had already abandoned the fragmented parliament strategy of the 2015 election. Certainly, the previous strategy had some success in limiting the representation of independent parties, none of which were able to form a legislative bloc large enough to threaten the ruling establishment. Yet as time passed, it became apparent that the GIS-engineered parliament was not as politically pacified as the political leadership had hoped. Even without effective partisan blocs, parliament still had a vocal, albeit small, group of lawmakers who caucused under the banner of the "25–30 Alliance"[8] and tried to challenge the government's positions on a variety of occasions. Although its interventions never stifled Sisi's agenda meaningfully, the Alliance generated a spectacle of opposition the regime was clearly uncomfortable with (Al-Fadali 2018).

The prospect of having a similarly pronounced voice of dissent inside the next parliament was particularly troubling for the political leadership, especially after expressions of popular anger surfaced in 2019. In addition, the president was also showing unease with the incompetence of the regime's parliamentary interlocutors and their inability to manage differences among the ruling establishment's allies (Mada Masr 2019). In other words, the time was ripe for a change in course and with it a new approach to engineering the next parliament.

Replacing the 2015 fragmented parliament plan was a party-driven strategy that sought to achieve a decisive legislative majority through the NFP, which by 2020 became a major vehicle for organizing pro-Sisi elements. The appeal of that approach stemmed in part from the regime's interest in asserting greater control over its own allies and containing the growing visible rivalries among their ranks—tasks that the NFP appeared well-placed to handle. The NFP also seemed a useful instrument for integrating politically valuable stakeholders into Sisi's circle of support, especially prominent political and business families once tied to the Mubarak ruling establishment (Mada Masr 2020a). Thus, as the 2020 legislative election neared, businessmen formerly associated with the defunct NDP were gaining visible roles inside the NFP, including Mohamed Aboul-Enein, who became the party's vice president.[9]

Elevating the NFP's role was not the only element of the party-centred strategy. The regime was also using other political parties to prop up the parliamentary representation of pro-Sisi forces. In addition to the NFP, the regime threw its support behind the security apparatus-linked Republican People's Party (RPP) (Diab 2021), the retired generals-led Homeland Defenders Party (HDP), as well as smaller parties housing disparate elements that hailed from the former ruling NDP.

The party-centred strategy was institutionalized in the 2020 parliamentary election law, which awarded half of the elected seats to party-list races (compared to one-fifth in 2015), with the other half designated to first-past-the-post IC races. The new electoral formula reflected the extent to which the security establishment's grip over party life had tightened since the previ-

ous election cycle. And therein lay the key difference between the regime's approaches to the elections in 2015 and 2020, respectively.

In 2015, the political leadership viewed the realm of party politics with a high degree of scepticism, hence its attempts to limit all parties' legislative representation through the fragmented parliament strategy. In 2020, on the other hand, the regime dealt with parties with greater confidence, having successfully neutralized the oppositionist inclinations that permeated many of them. For example, pro-Sisi forces gained complete control over Al-Wafd in 2018 when Sisi's ally and cheerleader, Bahaa Abu-Shoqqah, became party president (Al-Mawqif Al-Misry 2020). Two years earlier, pro-regime leaders in the FEP began antagonizing party affiliates who voiced opposition to government policies (Assaad 2017). By the 2020 election season, the party, which once controlled the largest bloc in parliament, fell into political oblivion due to these internal divisions and the defections they prompted (Ahmed 2020).

The meddling of Sisi's security establishment in the internal affairs of political parties in recent years is not unlike the notorious conduct of the security apparatus during the Mubarak era. The surfacing of these similarities was perhaps the logical outcome of the shifting balance of power inside Sisi's security sector. In 2018, Sisi awarded the National Security Agency (NSA) a greater role in managing domestic political files previously designated to the GIS but that the latter had not handled as effectively as the president would have liked. Legislative elections comprised one such file. Unlike the GIS, the NSA, formerly known as the State Security Investigations Service, had a long experience under Mubarak in directing opposition parties from behind the scenes and striking covert electoral bargains with their leaders. Accordingly, once Sisi developed an interest in controlling independent political parties and pressuring them into executing his own electoral schemes, it was only natural for him to lean on the NSA's help more heavily.

It must be emphasized, however, that asserting Sisi's dominance over party politics took a lot more than just infiltrating parties and co-opting their leaders. It also involved multiple rounds of repression against the president's rivals. For example, after detecting an opposition effort to devise an electoral coalition for the 2020 parliamentary race, authorities arrested over a dozen activists and organizers in the summer of 2019. Defendants were prosecuted on fabricated charges of "terrorism" in what became known as the "Hope Alliance case" (Mohie 2021).

According to the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, in March 2020, every opposition party had at least several members and/or leaders behind bars for politically motivated reasons. These include Al-Dostour, the SPA, Al-Karama, the ESDP, Bread and Freedom, and Strong Egypt (ANHRI 2020). For some observers, authorities intentionally targeted individuals with known credentials as lead campaigners and coalition-builders for the purpose of stifling the growth of opposition forces and isolating them from their "movers and shakers" (Mada Masr 2020c). Beyond the imprisonment of political activists, pro-regime elements were filing lawsuits seeking the dissolution of opposition parties, including the Strong Egypt and the Bread and Freedom parties (Daaarb 2021). In other words, the context for the 2020 legislative election was one in which licensed independent parties were fighting for their own survival, with no real opportunities to organize and compete effectively in electoral contests.

What was equally significant is that the heightening repression of prominent opposition figures coincided with the political leadership's efforts to build its own cadre of loyal politicians and public servants through state-sponsored youth programmes and associations (Brown and Berlin 2020). Sisi, in other words, was putting his own house in order just as he was working actively on undermining and weakening his opponents' organizational capacities. Put simply, well before the 2020 election, the regime had been structuring the political field to its own advantage. And when the race for parliament came, there was no real political force that could have challenged the state-sponsored coalition.

With all the cards in Sisi's hands in 2020, there was no mystery surrounding the outcome of the election. The lack of uncertainty was the product of not only the repression and co-optation of the opposition but just as equally of a carefully engineered electoral design. Half of the seats up for grabs were due to be elected through four unusually large party-list districts, which, as was the case in 2015, spanned several governorates. Given the inordinate size of the districts, there was virtually no chance for any opposition group to singlehandedly recruit enough candidates from across the vast regions each of these districts covered. And if any of them did, they could not have possibly mustered enough resources to launch a cross-governorate campaign capable of competing with the well-funded state-sponsored coalition.

Indeed, had the seats been distributed according to a PR formula, opposition parties may have stood a chance, since, under such an arrangement, they conceivably could have won seats even if they ended up in second or third place in the vote tally. But the regime had no interest in making the party-list races competitive. Instead, it wanted to make them as arduous as possible for independent parties so that they would have no choice but either to drop out or join the state-sponsored "National List", which, thanks to the WTA formula, was poised to sweep all the seats.

The regime's scheme worked. The sole list that ran in all four party-list races was its own National List. While a few independent lists contested these races on paper, major opposition parties either steered clear of the party-list races or gave into regime pressure and joined the National List—that is, capitulated to the state's own terms and conditions, as described below. Those that did not run for the list races include Al-Nour, which contested the IC seats instead. Al-Dostour boycotted the election altogether (Talab 2020), whereas the SPA, Al-Karama, and Bread and Freedom endorsed a limited number of candidates in the IC races (Salama 2020). The parties that chose to play by the regime's rules and joined the National List, Al-Wafd, the ESDP, Al-Tagammu, and Al-Adl were each allowed 21, 7, 5, and 2 candidates, respectively. The bulk of the 284 candidate slots on the National List went to the NFP (145), the RPP (28), and HDP (19), and the rest was divided among smaller parties linked to the defunct NDP (Rabie 2021).

Within this picture, it becomes embarrassingly clear that as far as any independent party was concerned, getting a parliamentary seat through the party-list races had nothing to do with running a campaign or reaching out to voters. Rather, it entailed negotiating with the security apparatus behind closed doors to get on the regime's National List. Stated differently, despite the façade of competitive, multi-party elections, the ruling establishment was in complete control of who gets to enter parliament and who is left out. For independent parties that agreed to join the National List, the terms of participation were both unfavourable and undignified, as only candidates who were preapproved by security agencies were permitted to run. In some cases, parties were shocked to learn that their proposed list of candidates was basically discarded by the regime, which instead picked outsiders to run on these parties' own behalf. What gave the regime greater latitude in picking and choosing each party's candidates was the fact that it managed to cultivate a network of loyalists at various opposition parties through the political parties' Youth Coordination Committee. The Committee comprised young leaders from a range of political parties and was one of the multiple initiatives the ruling establishment used to recruit dependable political collaborators under the guise of youth empowerment (Al-Ahram 2019). A handful of the Committee's members ran on the National List representing various political parties (Mada Masr 2020b).

The real uncertainty in the 2020 House of Representatives election rested in the IC races, which comprised the other half of the elected seats. In 2020, the number of seats allotted to IC decreased to 284, compared to 448 in 2015. Accordingly, the districts for these races increased in size significantly, which marked a major setback for the opposition. The resizing, as many

opposition candidates protested, handed the edge to state-linked wealthy candidates who were more likely to have the financial means to campaign across large regions and set up vote-buying machines (Salama 2020). Adding to the opposition's woes, the regime was pursuing IC seats more aggressively than it did in the 2015 election. Whereas in 2015, the fragmented parliament strategy left the opposition some wiggle room in the IC races, in 2020, the regime was actively working on securing a majority of these seats for the NFP and thus was bound to marginalize opposition and independent candidates.

As anticipated, the results of the IC races spoke to the regime's shifting strategy. The NFP ended up with nearly 60 per cent of these seats, whereas "independent" candidates got only a quarter of them, compared to half in 2015 (Rabie 2021). Meanwhile, the seven lawmakers who comprised the "25–30 Alliance" lost five of their seven IC seats (Gawish 2020). Parties not sponsored by the state apparatus performed rather poorly. In fact, the only parties that won IC seats were the ones that participated in the state-tied National List. The only exception to that trend was Al-Nour, which secured only seven seats. State differently, parties that were not "preapproved" by the security apparatus largely failed to score any victories in the IC contests.

The combined outcome of the IC and party-list races was a parliament controlled by the NFP, which received 55 per cent of the elected seats. The intelligence-tied RPP took 8 per cent, and the HDP and Al-Wafd got 4 per cent each. Each of the remaining parties' share of the elected seats did not exceed 2 per cent. Pro-regime forces comprised a decisive majority in the new legislature and, outside of the NFP, there were no partisan blocs that wielded enough seats to threaten the government's agenda. Accompanying NFP's victory was a reduced representation of independent lawmakers from 325 in 2015 to 93 in 2020. That decline was consistent with the shift in the regime's electoral strategy from a "fragmented parliament" in 2015 to the party-centred approach it adopted in the 2020 contest.

## Conclusion

Since the July 3, 2013, coup, Sisi has worked to erect a highly exclusionary political field structured to limit competition against him and his allies. Repression and intimidation tactics have remained central elements in the Sisi regime's management of electoral politics. The regime has also employed a variety of legal engineering tactics to make it impossible for independent political parties to compete effectively in electoral contests without prior negotiations with security officials. The regime's reliance on coercion in managing electoral competition expanded between the two presidential elections of 2014 and 2018 in part due to challenges posed by military figures who sought to enter the race, coupled with growing signs of opposition and popular discontent. Sisi began his presidency with a clear aversion to political parties, as reflected in his management of the 2015 legislative election. Yet the growing dominance of the security apparatus over the realm of party politics through repression and co-optation allowed the regime in the 2020 election to use trusted parties to advance its own electoral schemes. The future of that trend will largely depend on the role the regime will assign the NFP, which remains more of a political arm for the security establishment and less of a ruling party that organizes the country's governing class and political elite.

## Notes

1 Each of these governorates must contribute at least 1,000 signatures to the 25,000 required ones (Carter Center 2014).
2 See for example, September 2013 *ONTV* segment, available online at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_Wlu9chnIk>

3  See for example, May 2014 *Al-Jazeera* report on Egyptian media's response to the low turnout in the Egyptian presidential election, available online at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt_hnbGAg2o>

4  See unofficial translation of the July 8, 2013 Constitutional Declaration, available online at <www .refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=5491883b4>

5  The investigative reporting of Hossam Bahgat (2016) indicates that regime insiders were not expecting Al-Nour to be able to meet that requirement.

6  Some like-minded parties including the Socialist Popular Alliance and the Egyptian Social Democratic Parties boycotted the party-list races but contested a limited number of individual candidacy seats.

7  The full video can be accessed online at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=fT8MAs2oE-A>

8  The name references the uprisings of January 25, 2011 and June 30, 2013.

9  Ilhamy Al-Mirghani (2020) discusses the expanding profile of former NDP figures and their families inside the Sisi regime's political machine. In one notable incident, an NDP figure who was campaigning on behalf of NFP candidates in the 2020 election season outrightly said that the NFP was basically the "new NDP" (Mada Masr 2020d).

# References

Abu-Shanab, Fatima and Mohamed Gawish. 2008. 'Ihtiraq maqar al-Ghad bi-wasat al-Qahirah baʿd maʿrakah bi-l-mulutuf bayn jabhatay Ayman Nur wa Musa Mustafa'. *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, November 7. Available at: https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1931574.

ACRPS. 2014. *Dustur bi-l-ghulbah: 'Nazrah muqarinah bayn dustur 2012 wa mashruʿ dustur 2014'*. Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Available at: https://www.dohainstitute.org/ar/lists/ACRPS -PDFDocumentLibrary/document_5E5B2A92.pdf.

Ahmed, Makram Mohamed. 2014. 'Al-Sisy raʾisan li Misr'. *Al-Ahram*, June 3. Available at: https://gate .ahram.org.eg/daily/News/21202/11/291578/الأعمدة/السيسى-رئيسا-لمصر.aspx.

Ahmed, Mohamed. 2020. 'Baʿd tasaduruhu barlaman 2015: Kayf inhar hizb al-Misriyyin al-Ahrar'. *Arabi21*, September 26. Available at: https://arabi21 .com /story /1303173/ بعد-تصدره-برلمان-2015- كيف-انهار-حزب-المصريين-الأحرار

Al-Ahram. 2019. 'Tansiqyat shabab al-ahzab wa al-siyasiyyin taʿqid salunaha al-siyasy bi-maqar hizb al-tajammuʿ'. *Al-Ahram*, October 12 Available at: https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2292302.aspx.

Al-Fadali, Abdel-Aziz. 2018. 'Takatul "25–30"'. *Raseef22*, August 15. Available at: https://raseef22.net/arti-cle/159306-تكتل-30-25-قصة-تحالف-المعارضة-الوحيد-في-بر

Al-Gali, Mohamed. 2015. 'Al-Sisy yubdi istiʿdadih daʿm qaʾimah muwahadah li kul al-ahzab fi intikhabat majlis al-nuwab'. *Youm7*, May 27. Available at: https://www .youm7 .com /story /2015 /5 /27/ السيسى-يبدى-استعداده-دعم-قائمة-موحدة-لكل-الأحزاب-فى-انتخابات/2200229

Al-Gamal, Ahmed and Ahmed Al-Issawi. 2018. 'Al-Natijah al-kamilah li-intikhabat al-riʾasah 2018'. *Al-Shorouk*, April 2. Available at: https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=02042018&id =d61cd700-f410-46d5-b539-4a2f56e48649.

Al-Hanafy, Heba and Reda Ghoneim. 2015. 'Hizb Al-Nur wa al-Sisy'. *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, October 22. Available at: https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/831483.

Al-Masry, Ayman and Mohamed Aly. 2014. 'Hamlat Sabahy: Tajawuzat ansar al-Sisy mahzalah wa intiqadat Mubarak Wisam'. *Al-Araby Al-Jadid*, April 3. Available at: https://www .alaraby .co .uk/ حملة-صباحي-تجاوزات-أنصار-السيسي%22%-مهزلة-22%و انتقادات-مبارك%22%-وسام%22.

Al-Mawqif Al-Misry. 2020. 'Al-Mawqif Al-Misry Facebook Post'. *Facebook*, October 24. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/almawkef.almasry/photos/2942061409227070.

Al-Mirghani, Ilhamy. 2020. 'Khalfiyat walimat Ashmun: Muhawalah li-l-bahth'. *Ahewar*, August 12. Available at: https://www.ahewar.org/debat/s.asp?aid=688168&t=4.

Al-Quds Al-Araby. 2015. 'Misr: Islamiyyun wa libraliyyun yuqarurun muqataʿat al-intikhabat al-barla-maniyya'. *Al-Quds Al-Araby*, February 14. Available at: https://www .alquds .co .uk/ %EF %BB %BF مصر -إسلاميون-وليبر اليون-يقررون-مقاط/ .

Amnesty International. 2016. *Egypt: 'Officially, You Do Not Exist'; Disappeared and Tortured in the Name of Counter-Terrorism*. London: Amnesty International. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/docu-ments/mde12/4368/2016/en/.

ANHRI. 2020. 'Fi-l-sijun waraqat mawqif fi-l-rad ʿala suʾal: Ayn al-ahzab al-madaniyya'. *ANHRI*, March 17. Available at: https://www.anhri.info/?p=15350.

Arabi21. 2015. 'Itisaʿ muqataʿat al-intikhabat bi Misr baʿd indimam hizb sadis'. *Arabi21*, February 8. Available at: https://arabi21.com/story/808859/اتساع-مقاطعة-الانتخابات-بمصر-بعد-انضمام-حزب-سادس.

Assaad, Karim. 2017. 'Hin taʾkul al-ahzab abaʾaha: Qisat itahat al-Misriyyin al-Ahrar bi-Sawiris'. *Ida2at*, January 1. Available at: https://www.ida2at.com/the-story-of-the-sawiris-overthrow-by -almasreyeenalahrrar/.

*Assabeel*. 2014. 'Abu al-Futuh: Intikhabat al-riʾasah mahsumah'. *Assabeel*, February 20. Available at: https:// assabeel.net/news/2014/02/20/أبو-الفتوح-انتخابات-الرئاسة-محسومة.

Bahgat, Hossam. 2016. 'Anatomy of an election'. *Mada Masr*, May 14. Available at: https://www.madamasr .com/en/2016/03/14/feature/politics/anatomy-of-an-election/.

*BBC NEWS*. 2013. 'Egypt army, "restoring democracy", says John Kerry'. *BBC News*, August 1. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23543744.

*BBC NEWS*. 2014. 'Al-Jaysh al-misry yunashid al-Sisy al-tarashuh li-l-riʾasah'. *BBC News*, January 27. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/01/140127_egypt_sisi_army _statement.

*BBC NEWS*. 2016a. 'Niqabat al-shafiyyin al-misriyya tutalib bi-iqalat wazir al-dakhliyya ithr iqtiham maqaraha'. *BBC News*, May 2. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2016/05/160501 _egypt_press_syndicate_strike.

*BBC NEWS*. 2016b. 'Misr: Al-miʾat yahtajun ʿala tarady al-awdaʿ al-iqtisadiyya fi ma atlaq ʿalihi nushataʾ thawrat al-ghalabah'. *BBC News*, November 11. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast –37951468.

*BBC NEWS*. 2017. 'Alaa Abdel Fattah: Egypt court upholds activist's sentence'. *BBC News*, November 8. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41915250.

*BBC NEWS*. 2018. 'Ahzab misriyya tuqarir muqataʿat intikhabat al-riʾasah al-muqbilah'. *BBC News*, January 30. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-42872494.

Brown, Nathan J. and Mark Berlin. 2020. 'Steering the wide Egyptian state: Ideology or administration?' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 28. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/2020 /05/28/steering-wide-egyptian-state-ideology-or-administration-pub-81924.

Carter Center. 2012. *Presidential Election in Egypt Final Report, May–June 2012*. Atlanta: The Carter Center. Available at: https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/ egypt-final-presidential-elections-2012.pdf.

Carter Center. 2014. *Carter Center Statement on the Legal and Political Context of Egypt's Presidential Elections*. The Carter Center. March 16. Available at: https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/pr/ egypt-05162014.pdf.

*CNN*. 2014. 'Ahmad Shafiq yuqir bi sihhat tasjil hajam fih al-Sisy'. *CNN*, March 12. Available at: https:// arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/03/13/shafik-easd-record.

*CNN*. 2016. 'Alaaf al-atibaʾ yantafidun did iʿtidaʾat al-shurtah al-misriyya'. *CNN*, February 12. Available at: https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/02/13/egypt-doctors-police-tensions.

*CNN*. 2018. 'Khalid ʿAly yatarajaʿ ʿan al-tarashuh li-intikhabat al-riʾasah al-misriyya'. *CNN*, January 24. Available at: https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/2018/01/24/egypt-presidential-elections-khalid-ali -out.

*Daaarb*. 2021. 'Bayan min Al-ʿAysh wa-l-Huriyah hawl qadiyat hazr al-hizb'. *Daaarb*, June 3. Available at: https://daaarb.com/بيان-من-العيش-والحرية-حول-قضية-حظر-الح.

Diab, Mostafa. 2021. 'Munir al-Shurbagy aminan ʿaman li-hizb Al-Shaʿb Al-Jumhury fi Shamal Saynaʾ'. *Al-Dostor*, April 30. Available at: https://www.dostor.org/3439788.

*DW*. 2014. 'Al-Nashit al-misry Khalid ʿAly: Lan akhud 'masrahiyat' al-intikhabat al-riʾasiyya'. *DW*, March 26. Available at: https://www .dw .com /ar/ a-17500004/الناشط-المصري-خالد-علي-لن-أخوض-مسرحية-الانتخابات-الرئاسية.

El-Sadany, Mai. 2014. 'Legislating terror in Egypt'. *Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, July 19. Available at: https://timep.org/esw/articles-analysis/legislating-terror-in-egypt/.

El-Shewy, Mohamed. 2015. 'Sisi's parliamentary fears'. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 6. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/59276.

*France*24. 2016. 'Misr: Iʿtiqal al-ʿasharat min al-mutazahirin did itifaq tarsim al-hudud al-baha-riyah maʿa al-Suʿudiyya'. *France24*, April 15. Available at: https://www .france24 .com /ar/ مصر-مظاهرة-تفريق-شرطة-السعودية-تيران-صنافير-20160415.

*France*24. 2020. 'Al-Sisy yusadiq ʿala qanun yashtarit muwafaqat al-jaysh ʿala tarashuh dubatuh li-l-riʾasah'. *France24*, July 29. Available at: https://www .france24 .com /ar/ السيسي-يصادق-على-قانون-يشترط-موافقة-الجيش-على-ترشح-ضباطه-للرئاسة-20200729/.

Gamal, Mahmoud. 2021. 'Al-Sisy wa siyasat al-haymanah ʿala qiyadat al-jaysh'. *Egyptian Institute for Studies*, June 16. Available at: https://eipss-eg.org/السيسي-وسياسات-الهيمنة-على-قيادات-الجيش/.

Gawish, Mahmoud. 2020. '25–20 yahzur ʿala aʿdaʾuh al-qawaʾim wa yakhud al-nuwab fardiyan'. *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, September 6. Available at: https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2029447.

Ghali, Mina. 2018. 'Muhamad Anwar al-Sadat yuʿlin tarajuʿhu ʿan khawd al-intikhabat al-riʾasiyya'. *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, January 15. Available at: https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1245489.

Hamzawy, Amr. 2017. 'Legislating Authoritarianism: Egypt's New Era of Repression'. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Report* (March). Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_302_Hamzawy_Authoritarianism_Final_Web.pdf.

Hassan, Aly. 2014. 'Tafasil ijtimaʿ al-saʿat al-6 li iqnaʿ Samy ʿAnan bi-l-tarajuʿ ʿan al-tarashuh li-l-riʾasah'. *Youm7*, March 13. Available at: https://www .youm7 .com /story /2014 /3 /13/ تفاصيل-اجتماع-الساعات-الـ6-لإقناع-سامي-عنان-بالتراجع-عن-الترشح/1555109.

HRW. 2014a. 'All According to Plan: The Rabʿa Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt'. Human Rights Watch. August 12. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt.

HRW. 2014b. 'Misr: Iʿtiqal nushataʾ bi tuhmat al-tarwij li "la"'. Human Rights Watch. January 12. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2014/01/12/252324

Ketchley, Neil. 2021. 'Fraud in the 2018 Egyptian presidential election?' *Mediterranean Politics*, 26(1): 117–129.

Khalil, Mohamed Mahmoud. 2014. 'Muhafiz al-Qaliyubiyya: Man yaqul la li-l-dustur khaʾin wa ʿamil'. *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, January 9. Available at: https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/372989.

Lashin, Sameh. 2014. 'Hamlat Sabahy tuʿlin al-qabd ʿala ʿadad min aʿdaʾaha'. *Al-Ahram*, April 1. Available at: https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/474225.aspx.

*Mada Masr*. 2018. 'Former Armed Forces chief of staff arrested, referred to military prosecution after announcing presidential bid'. *Mada Masr*, January 23. Available at: https://www.madamasr.com/en/2018/01/23/news/u/former-armed-forces-chief-of-staff-arrested-referred-to-military-prosecution-after-announcing-presidential-bid/.

*Mada Masr*. 2019. 'A presidential directive to freeze parliament'. *Mada Masr*, October 1. Available at: https://www.madamasr.com/en/2019/10/01/feature/politics/a-presidential-directive-to-freeze-parliament/.

*Mada Masr*. 2020a. 'Senate elections: How we moved backward'. *Mada Masr*, August 7. Available at: https://www.madamasr.com/en/2020/08/07/feature/politics/senate-elections-how-we-moved-backward/.

*Mada Masr*. 2020b. 'The cost of playing monopoly: How the Nation's Future Party has caused rifts among parties in House elections'. *Mada Masr*, October 1. Available at: https://www.madamasr.com/en/2020/10/01/feature/politics/the-cost-of-playing-monopoly-how-the-nations-future-party-has-caused-rifts-among-parties-in-house-elections/.

*Mada Masr*. 2020c. 'Limadha tusharik ahzab al-muʿaradah fi intikhabat al-nuwab 2020?' *Mada Masr*, October 21. Available at: https://www .madamasr .com /ar /2020 /10 /21 / feature/لماذا-تشارك-أحزاب-المعارضة-في-انتخابا/سياسة/.

*Mada Masr*. 2020d. 'Intikhabat: Mustaqbal Watan yatabaraʾ min qiyady wasafuh bi-l-Hizb Al-Watany al-jadid'. *Mada Masr*, October 25. Available at: https://www .madamasr .com /ar /2020 /10 /25 /feature/ انتخابات-مستقبل-وطن-يتبرأ-من-قياد/سياسة/.

Makhlouf, Mostafa and Shaimaa Al-Qaranshawy. 2015. 'Al-Idariyah al-ʿuliya taqdy bi ʿadam jawaz ihalat daʿwa hal hizb al-Nur'. *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, July 5. Available at: https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/768527.

Mohie, Mostafa. 2021. 'Hossam Moanis: A backstage force in oppositional politics'. *Mada Masr*, January 7. Available at: https://www.madamasr.com/en/2021/01/07/feature/politics/hossam-moanis-a-backstage-force-in-oppositional-politics/.

Rabie, Amr Hashem. 2021. 'Natʾij intikhabat al-barlaman al-misry wa taʾthirataha al-muhtamalah fi ʾadaʾih wa ʿilaqatih al-mustaqbaliyah bi-l-hukumah'. *Emirates Policy Center*, January 20. Available at: https://epc.ae/ar/topic/results-of-egyptian-parliamentary-elections-potential-impact-on-its-performance-and-future-relationship-with-government.

*Reuters*. 2019a. 'Hakatha shadad Al-Sisy qabdatuh ʿala al-hukm fi misr'. Reuters. August 1. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-governance-ab6-idARAKCN1UR4D9

*Reuters*. 2019b. 'Al-Sisy yuwasiʿ hamlat al-tadiq li-tashmal khisman jadidan'. Reuters. December 2. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-media-ia6-idARAKBN1YG1C8

Salama, Ahmed. 2020. 'Darb yarsud istiʿdadat al-muʿaradah l-intikhabat al-nuwab'. *Daaarb*, September 30. https://daaarb.com/درب-يرصد-استعدادات-المعارضة-لانتخاب/.

Samir, Mina. 2016. *Muqataʿat al-intikhabat*. Cairo: Arab Forum for Alternatives. Available at: http://www.afalebanon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/YYYYYY_YYYYYYYYYY.pdf.

Sarhan, Hamam. 2015. 'Hizb al-Nur'. *Swissinfo*, September 8. Available at: https://www.swissinfo.ch/ara/مع-ق-رب-انتخابات-مجلس-النواب-في-مصر-حزب-النور-بين-تمثيل-الإسلام-السياسي-و-دعاوى-الحل/41623046.

Soliman, Asmahan. 2018. 'How Sisi has been sidelining his opponents'. *Mada Masr*, February 10. Available at: https://www.madamasr.com/en/2018/02/10/feature/politics/analysis-how-sisi-has-been-sidelining-his-opponents/.

Talab, Ibtisam. 2020. 'Al-Dustur yuʿlin muqataʿat al-intikhabat al-barlamaniyah'. *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, September 22. Available at: https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2043486.

Tawfeeq, Mohammed and Marie-Louise Gumuchian. 2014. 'Egypt's El-Sisi to resign, paving the way for presidential bid'. *CNN*, March 26. Available at: https://www.cnn.com/2014/03/26/world/meast/egypt-sisi-resignation/index.html.

TIMEP. 2018. *Egypt Security Watch: Five Years of Egypt's War on Terror*. Washington, DC: The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. Available at: https://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TIMEP-ESW-5yrReport-7.27.18.pdf.

Zollner, Barbara. 2019. 'Surviving repression: How Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has carried on'. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 11. Available at: https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/03/11/surviving-repression-how-egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood-has-carried-on-pub-78552.