

Egypt's Parliamentary Election at Stake

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Brief Analysis

Egypt's upcoming elections are shining the spotlight on the parliament's deteriorating performance and credibility.

Egypt is expected to hold its parliamentary elections in the next few weeks, with the first phase of Egypt's parliamentary election process taking place between October 24 and 25 in 14 governorates, and the second phase taking place on November 7 and 8 in 13 governorates. Several reports have claimed that the elections have already seen the extensive use of political money to buy candidacies and underscore the rare participation of several political parties in the elections.

Candidates are vying for a large number of seats. The total number of seats up for election in the House of Representatives is 568, of which 284 seats are elected by the 'individual system' and the other 284 seats are elected by the system of 'absolute-closed lists.' Women are allocated no less than 25% of the seats, and the president may appoint no more than 5% of the members.

Like in the Senate elections held on September 8 this year, several analysts believe that voter turnout in the upcoming elections will remain low. Such a low turnout arises from several causes: the poor performance of the previous House which damaged the House's credibility, dominance of political money, and the consistent decline of opposition parties.

Deteriorating Performance and Credibility

The Egyptian House of Representatives has generally failed to present itself as a capable and trustworthy public institution. The experience of the current parliament—of which the House of Representatives was the only component before a constitutional amendment established a senate—has been marred by its failures to represent oppositional political forces and parties, a trend that has turned the parliament into a puppet of the regime. The few opposition voices that have appeared in parliament have been curbed by the regime-affiliate majority.

Unfortunately, the general performance of this parliament—despite its pro-regime continuity—has been disappointing. Citizens have watched their parliament legislate hundreds of acts that have tightened the ruling

regime's grip on many aspects of Egyptian political life. Remarkably, the House of Representatives approved 233 draft laws with a total of 2,490 articles during its 10-month fifth legislation session, despite interruptions due to the spread of Covid-19.

These thousands of pieces of legislation enacted by parliament have often worked against citizens' interests and deepened their poverty. The Construction Violations Reconciliation Law is a prime example of this kind of legislation. In August 2020 the law pushed the government to send a warning to citizens residing in illegally constructed houses to engage in a reconciliation process or see their houses demolished. When the government received few responses to the warning, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi warned in a public speech that he would consider deploying the army to enforce the proper application of the law.

As a result, the government began demolishing hundreds of houses, leaving thousands of citizens displaced without any compensation or governmental assistance. The campaign was met by rare protests on September 20 in several governorates and villages, pushing the government to extend the deadline for reconciliation from the end of September to the end of October. Nevertheless, demolitions are likely to return once this new deadline has passed.

The current parliament has failed to make use of interrogations—one of its most important legislative checks on the government—even once during its session. Instead, the parliament burdened the country with a series of huge debts that ailing state revenue streams will not be able to fulfill. To make matters worse, the debt burdens devour a large part of the annual state budget, which has reached 121% of the gross national product according to the figures of the Central Bank.

The Egyptian parliament has failed to take any effective steps to alleviate persistent poverty or improve Egypt's health and education systems. During its sessions, Egypt's parliament passed five unconstitutional state general budgets, none of which met the ten percent of the gross national product allocated to the sectors of health, education, and scientific research. Though the Egyptian parliament is constitutionally entitled to review and even abrogate the Central Bank's decisions, it remained silent when the Bank decided to float the Egyptian pound in 2016, a decision that significantly intensified poverty and inflation. In addition, the current parliament's approval of fourteen decisions by Sisi to extend the state of emergency throughout the country has also intensified people distrust in the parliament.

The Egyptian parliament's approach to foreign policy has been similarly weak and ineffective. The current parliament approved of the highly controversial agreement to cede the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, despite the Supreme Administrative Court's ruling that "Tiran and Sanafir" are Egyptian lands. The parliament has also failed to formulate a proper response or policy against the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/convergence-of-crises-egypt>), which is expected to decrease Egypt's share in the Nile's waters.

As such, the Egyptian parliament has not accrued a great amount of support among Egyptians, but while the current parliament's efforts have been far from popular, the likelihood of a true policy shift through the upcoming elections is highly limited.

The current government is looking back to the Mubarak regime's systematic plan to suppress opposition within Parliament by affiliating the regime with a political party, then the National Democratic Party. The current regime has appointed the Nation's Future Party (NFP) to play the same role. In the 2015 elections, The *NFP formed an electoral coalition entitled For the Love of Egypt* list to compete for the parliamentary elections. The coalition included the Alwafd Party, The Free Egyptians Party, National Progressive Unionist Party, and the NFP. This coalition managed to win the highest number of seats in the House (120) seats, followed by Egypt Free party (65 seats). The same coalition managed to win 70 percent of the newly formed Senate elections in August 2020.

Currently, the same coalition has managed to mobilize 12 Egyptian parties which will run under its list in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Political Money

In Egypt's previous elections, it was usual to see the use of political money for buying votes during the electoral campaigns. However, this election is unusual in that various actors are now using political money to buy candidacies. Several leaks have recently shown that the For the Love of Egypt list, headed by the pro-regime NFP, has accepted the inclusion of certain candidates in return for money. **Reports** (<https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-54452226>) also indicated that various security agencies have been involved in the selection process that resulted in the exclusion of half of the members of the current parliament from the candidate list. Surprisingly, some pro-regime figures—such as MP Mortada Mansour, who had been excluded from the For the Love of Egypt list—**denounced** (https://arabi21.com/story/1306391/%D8%BA%D8%B6%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%81-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86-%D9%84%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%80-%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A8)) the NFP and accused the party of selling candidacy on its list.

Mansour's attack comes two weeks after the Egyptian security forces arrested lawyer **Tariq Jamil Saeed** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKsIC0UlfFs&ab_channel=MohamedBayomi), who is loyal to the regime, and referred him to the Supreme State Security Prosecution, which decided to imprison him for 15 days after he had also criticized the NFP of selling candidacy and seats. Those testimonies from among the supporters of the regime may significantly undermine the credibility of the next parliament. Moreover, the expansion of electoral districts in the individual system, part of the newly enacted electoral law, explicitly favors rich candidates while undermining other candidates who cannot generate sufficient money to run their campaigns.

Therefore, it seems that the NFP has become the center of gravity for opposition parties—their only gate to the Parliament. Several political parties who had joined the NFP list have since made **accusations** (http://ademocracynet.com/article_print.php?id=32081§ion=news) against them, but their success at the polls is nevertheless likely.

The current House has largely failed to act as a genuine representative of the public. Nonetheless, despite the legislature's above-mentioned deficiencies, the upcoming parliamentary elections may witness a slight rise in voter turnout. This potential increase is likely due to the fact that the parliament is historically considered a symbol of power and influence in Egypt, and political actors will put a lot of effort into their campaigns. Political and tribal figures still do not hesitate to compete for power under the umbrella of political parties close to the government, opposing it, or independently. Therefore, intensive mobilization campaigns and the potential buying of votes will likely be responsible for any increase in voter turnout.

Overall, however, voter turnout is likely to remain low. This is despite the fact that those who boycott the elections will be referred to prosecutors and pay fines—as was the case in the previous Senate elections. Then, Egypt's election commission referred about 54 million people who boycotted the elections to prosecutors.

Currently, there are two prevalent visions among the official circles on the future of parliament beyond the current elections. The first vision calls for openness and the allowance of fresh faces into parliament that would save the reputation of the regime and improve its image. The second vision refuses that proposal for fear of elements who may be secretly supporting the Brotherhood. As for now, it seems that the regime will adapt the second vision and continue to tighten its grip on the legislative body, avoiding potential oppositionist disruptions to the currently

entrenched legislative process. ❖

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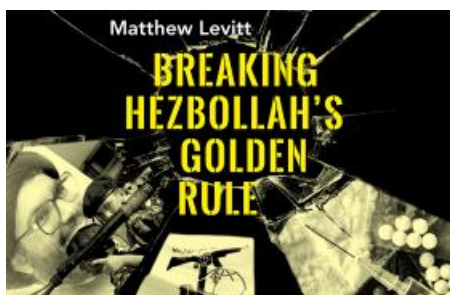
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