

Introduction

The existence of electoral competition, at times fierce and expensive, seems paradoxical in an authoritarian context, where the selection of regime leadership has already been made. Yet nearly all autocrats hold some form of elections, and hegemonic party regimes – such as the one in Egypt – represent one of the most common forms of dictatorship in the world (Magaloni 2006). This book seeks to unravel a series of interrelated puzzles about elections in Egypt: In what ways does the authoritarian regime benefit from holding elections? Why do candidates spend scarce resources to run for a seat in a parliament that does not make policy? Why do citizens engage in the costly act of voting in such a context? And do we observe patterns of economic change surrounding autocratic elections that resemble the trends observed in democracies? The answers to these questions are critical to understanding the mechanics of authoritarian survival, both in Egypt and elsewhere. I argue that the authoritarian regime in Egypt has endured *not despite* competitive elections, but, to some degree, *because* of these elections.

A number of themes run throughout this project. The first is that the authoritarian regime in Egypt has made increasing use of competitive, market-style mechanisms to mediate political relationships over time. Second, economic change and a generalized withdrawal of the Egyptian state from its hegemonic economic role in society have both had an impact on the nature of relations among the regime, elite, and citizenry. Finally, although electoral authoritarianism in Egypt is currently stable, the by-products associated with this equilibrium – such as institutionalized corruption and budget-cycle-induced inefficiencies – have the potential to undermine its stability over time.¹

¹ Greif and Laitin (2004) argue that an institution can endogenously affect aspects of a political, economic, or social situation apart from the behavior in the transaction under consideration. For Greif and Laitin, such factors should be considered as variables in accounting for the self-reinforcement (i.e., long-term stability) of that equilibrium. They are thus quasi parameters.

1.1 THE ARGUMENT

The central argument here is that competitive parliamentary elections in Egypt represent a rational, and perhaps even best, response for an authoritarian regime that faces a number of political challenges.² A primary reason for this is that elections ease important forms of distributional conflict, particularly conflict over access to spoils within Egypt's broad class of elite, that represent an important source of support for the regime.³ The easing of distributional conflict is not, however, the only benefit of a competitive electoral market; elections institutionalize dominance through formal channels, provide important information for the regime regarding the performance of party leaders and rank-and-file cadre, offer a focal point for the redistribution of wealth to state employees and the citizenry,⁴ provide a façade for high-level corruption, and enhance the international reputation of the autocrat while strengthening his political hold. This is not to say that holding elections is without risk for the authoritarian leadership. There exists a trade-off between intra-elite peace and other benefits I describe, on the one hand, and costs related to the ways that elections exacerbate state–society relations, particularly relations between the state and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand. Yet even given the escalation of such state–society tension, I argue that the benefits of elections to the authoritarian leadership exceed the costs.⁵ All significant political actors in Egypt prefer the existence of competitive parliamentary elections to the elimination of these elections in both the short and medium term. In fact, the elimination of elections would represent a utility loss for nearly all major actors and societal groups that have come to rely on competitive electoral institutions. Elections, then, have a distinctly functional utility that

² Parliamentary elections exist within the context of a broader electoral structure in contemporary Egypt. In addition to lower-house elections, upper-house, municipal council, and, beginning in 2005, multicandidate presidential elections all take place. This is in addition to elections for the leadership of professional syndicates, sports clubs, and for leadership of other nonpublic institutions. Although most of the arguments of this book refer primarily to lower-house parliamentary elections, many of the processes are present in other types of elections as well.

³ Although conflict over the distribution of resources is not the only dimension of political relevance in contemporary Egypt, it is, perhaps, the most important and remains the focus of a number of prominent studies of how and why autocracy persists (Boix 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

⁴ Schelling (1960) describes a focal point as a solution that individuals will converge upon in the absence of communication because that particular solution seems to be natural or relevant. Whereas a focal point typically refers to an individual's expectation regarding the actions of other individuals, here, individual and regime convergence on a common action based on their mutual expectations is intended. In timing government giveaways, election season has come to be seen as a natural and relevant time for such giveaways to take place.

⁵ For some authoritarian regimes, the benefits associated with competitive elections do not exceed the costs. This is particularly the case in weakly institutionalized autocracies that hold elections primarily as a result of external influence. In such contexts, the destabilizing effects of competitive elections often outweigh the functional benefits. See Levitsky and Way (2010) for more details on the impact of elections for such regimes.

complements the preferences of a variety of different actors.⁶ The counterfactual claim implicit in this work is that, absent elections, the regime would not be so durable. A main reason for this is that the rent-seeking elite – which emerged as the regime’s key constituency under former President Anwar al-Sadat and has remained so under Hosni Mubarak – has required a system of resource allocation that minimizes the potential for destabilizing distributional conflict.⁷ Elections are a public, and credible, way to commit to such allocation. Managing concerns over access to material enrichment, in fact, lies at the very core of the regime’s stability.

These ideas build on a number of existing scholarly works, yet stand in contrast to both the dominant explanations for authoritarian persistence in Egypt and alternative theories regarding the functional role of elections in autocratic regimes. For example, this book expands on the important work of Geddes (2005), who has argued that dictators expend scarce resources on parties and elections – despite the risks – because these institutions help regimes solve problems. As a result, parties and elections are a central part of an “autocratic survival strategy” (Geddes 2005).⁸ Geddes primarily emphasizes the use of parties and elections as a counterbalance to the military or factions within the military. Although I concur with her general conclusion about the use of elections for solving intraregime conflict, my research focuses on the importance of elections as a mechanism for distributing rents and promotions, as a focal point for economic redistribution to the citizenry, and as a source of information for the autocratic regime, rather than the use of parties and elections as a balance to the military. In addition, my argument is distinct from that of Brownlee (2007), who finds that it is effective *parties*, not elections, that matter for solving intra-elite conflict. Although parties may be important venues for negotiating the role of elites, this book finds that the electoral process *itself* serves as a key mechanism for containing intra-elite competition as elections aid in the distribution of both rents and coveted positions within the regime, among other functions. This argument also complements, but is distinct from, the findings of Lust-Okar (2006), who focuses primarily on the distributive benefits of elections from the nonelite perspective, particularly how local constituents have come to expect parliamentarians to deliver pork and

⁶ Elster (1982) criticizes the use of functional explanations in social science, arguing that all social phenomena can be explained in terms of the goals, properties, and behaviors of individuals. Giddens (1982) suggests that the “weak” functionalist paradigm is probably not worth regarding as a form of functionalism. The weak paradigm, consistent with the discussion of authoritarian institutions described in this book, states that a pattern of behavior may have consequences that – although unintended or unforeseen by those initiating the pattern of behavior – confer some benefit. According to Giddens, Elster’s real objection was to the “strong” functionalist paradigm, in which patterns of behavior have a function and this function explains why behaviors exist in the first place, a tendency particularly apparent in Marxist and radical social science.

⁷ See Hinnebusch (1988a) and Springborg (1989) for more on the importance of the rent-seeking elite to the regime.

⁸ Also see Lust-Okar (2006), Magaloni (2006), and Greene (2007). See Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) for a review of the literature on authoritarian elections.

other benefits.⁹ My argument joins an increasingly well-established view that dictators create powersharing arrangements with their “loyal friends” and that parties and elections help serve this role (Magaloni 2006; Boix and Svoblik 2007; Magaloni 2008).

Magaloni (2008) considers the role of authoritarian institutions and argues that both parties and elections mitigate “the commitment problem” that exists between a dictator and his ruling coalition. She argues that autocracies with parties and elections are more stable because of their ability to establish “power-sharing deals,” in which these institutions serve as the contract between the dictator and his coalition.¹⁰ Parties and elections, then, can serve as a contract between an autocrat and his coalition of elite supporters via institutions that are negotiated over rights to intangible, often economic, forms of property.¹¹ Competitive parliamentary elections, and the informal norms that have developed surrounding these elections, commit the regime to a decentralized mechanism for patronage sharing with the politically relevant elite.¹² Elections are a credible mechanism of selection because canceling elections would entail significant costs for the regime, both domestically and internationally.

In addition to the importance of elections as an institution, this book also builds on an emerging literature that argues that elections are important sources of information for the regime. Magaloni (2006) makes two important contributions to this literature. Referring to the overwhelming electoral victories of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico, Magaloni argues that elections communicate information about the regime’s strength, discouraging defections from the hegemonic party. To achieve huge margins of victory,

⁹ Lust-Okar (2006; 2008; 2009a) argues that elections are best understood as an arena of competition over access to a pool of state resources, or what she calls “competitive clientelism.” She argues that citizens vote for candidates who can provide them with *wasta*, or mediation, and tend to be individuals from their families, clans, or tribes. The hope is that, by electing a candidate with whom they enjoy a personal tie, the voter will gain access to a government job and discretionary funds (Lust-Okar 2006, 459). One factor left unexplained by the Lust-Okar explanation involves why citizens vote when only some relatively small fraction of voters will enjoy a benefit from their participation.

¹⁰ Boix and Svoblik (2007) make a related but slightly different point; they argue that legislatures provide the forum within which notables exchange information, and elections serve as a signal of the influence of individual notables. There is some question regarding a) the extent to which notables need a separate forum within which to share information, as they may already have overlapping social networks, and b) why a public forum, like a legislature, would be preferable to private fora for communication between notables.

¹¹ According to North (1993), institutions are constraints that structure human interaction, reducing the uncertainty arising from that interaction.

¹² Although formal institutional rules are openly codified, Helmke and Levitsky (2003) define informal institutional rules as those “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels.” Pioppi argues that limiting analysis to just the formal sector would suggest corruption and clientelism are signs of state weakness, whereas instead they should be viewed as “indicative of the efficiency of a system of power” (2007, 140). This is consistent with others who have argued that, in Egypt, informal norms and political institutions are as significant as formal institutions and key to the authoritarian regime’s survival (Blaydes 2005; Koehler 2008).

the PRI had to produce high turnout as well as high levels of support, even though this process was quite costly.¹³ Second, elections provide information about supporters and opponents of the regime.¹⁴ Using information about the geographic distribution of dissent, the PRI in Mexico was able to reward supporters with access to government funds, as well as to punish defectors. Magaloni writes that “elections are employed as means to distribute power among lower-level politicians. Autocratic regimes reward with office those politicians who prove most capable in mobilizing citizens to the party’s rallies, getting voters to the polls, and preventing social turmoil in their districts” (2006, 8). In this book, I argue that elections serve a very similar purpose in Egypt, where they reveal information about the competence and loyalty of both bureaucratic officials and party cadre, providing the authoritarian leadership with what is perceived as an even-handed way for the autocrat to decide who should receive party appointments. In addition, I find evidence to suggest that there also exists a “punishment regime” in Egypt, namely areas that supported the regime’s political opposition group were subsequently neglected when decisions regarding critical infrastructure distribution, like water and sewerage lines, were made.

Hermet, Rose, and Rouquie have argued that elections in authoritarian countries provide a rare opportunity to analyze the public manifestation of a regime’s attempt to perpetuate its control (1978, 9). The authors ask: “Are elections, considered as one of the most significant fields of analysis in Western multi-party states, so deprived of meaning in other regimes that they are not worth studying” (1978, 8)? This book finds that elections in an authoritarian context convey a great deal about the functioning of that regime and should be analyzed more for what they can tell us about the perpetuation of autocratic governments than as an indication of democratic transition. In fact, the elections solve political problems that have nothing to do with democracy. In Egypt, politics revolves around the complex interaction between a number of important societal actors, where elections have important implications for all.

¹³ This theory makes particular sense in the Mexican setting, where the electoral contest of interest was the presidential race. Because no president could serve more than one six-year term, the PRI was forced to choose a new candidate every election cycle. Political entrepreneurs interested in someday competing for high office would recognize the invincibility of the PRI and choose not to defect. Although the idea is broadly applicable to a wide variety of cases, its focus on the dynamics of presidential elections makes this aspect of the theory less relevant for authoritarian countries with competitive parliamentary, but not presidential, elections. For example, multicandidate presidential elections were not introduced in Egypt until 2005, although competitive parliamentary elections have been in place for a much longer period. Do supermajority victories on the part of the hegemonic party deter challengers and defections at the parliamentary level? Not in Egypt, where both hegemonic party defectors and independent candidates associated with the Muslim Brotherhood often fare well in parliamentary contests.

¹⁴ Keshavarian (2009) makes an interesting and related argument that, in Iran, the regime uses elections to gather information about the popularity and viability of allies.

1.1.1 Actors and Preferences

This book analyzes the triadic relationship between the leadership of the authoritarian regime, the rent-seeking elite that represents a critical pillar of support for this regime, and the broader Egyptian citizenry. In particular, it considers how both formal institutions – such as elections and the rules governing the prerogatives of parliamentarians – and informal norms mediate these relationships. Other relevant actors include the opposition Muslim Brotherhood and foreign actors such as the United States.

The Ruling Regime. Defining what constitutes the ruling regime in an authoritarian setting is a potentially treacherous undertaking, particularly because it is impossible to precisely identify the core of individuals who make up this body. The ruling regime in Egypt refers to those individuals who “exercise power”; this includes some actors who are not part of the formal state apparatus, and, conversely, there are many agents of the state who are not part of this elite grouping (Kienle 2001, 6). The regime in Egypt consists primarily of the president, his close family, and the small cadre of “super” elite that surround him, including selected senior military, party, and intelligence officers. This book will show that promotion decisions within the party and state structure are made on the basis of performance and revealed competence, and core membership in the regime elite is based on family ties, established loyalty, and personal connections. It is also noteworthy that the president serves as “patron-in-chief”; Kassem argues that the president’s powers combined with the patronage he can bestow on others has created a clientelist structure that renders him the “ultimate patron” (2004, 168). The National Democratic Party (NDP), created and re-created by the regime, helps maintain this network of clients (Kienle 2001, 8).

The relationship between the regime and the state is a complicated one, particularly given the fact that the Egyptian state is large, porous, and has a tendency to promulgate policies that appear to contradict each other.¹⁵ This suggests that the regime in Egypt sometimes finds itself in conflict with the very institutions that it has created (Bianchi 1989). At the start of my fieldwork for this book, I was troubled by this contradiction and concerned with the question of the intentionality of institutional selection. In other words, why would an authoritarian regime create or delegate power to institutions that either did not share its preferences or could not guarantee its preferred outcome? Over time, I came to realize that the policies put forth by the Egyptian regime, although they sometimes appeared ad hoc, represented a rational response to

¹⁵ Poggi defines the modern state as “a set of complex institutional arrangements for rule operating through the continuous and regulated activities of individuals acting as occupants of office. The state, as the sum total of such offices, reserves to itself the business of rule over a territorially bounded society” (1978, 1). An important goal of the state as an institution is to make allocation processes “relatively predictable and stable,” thus reflecting “consensus among all participants” (Poggi 1978, 2).

the day-to-day political events it was facing.¹⁶ As political actors work to solve problems, a series of short-term decisions accumulate into a set of policies and institutions.¹⁷ It also appears that the regime has engaged in a mixing of strategies, or what Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estevez (2007) describe as a “portfolio diversification” of authoritarian tactics. The result is what Wedeen might characterize as “strategies without a strategist” (1999, 153), and, in many ways, the regime has used a process of trial and error in the creation of the formal and informal political institutions that have come to characterize its rule.

Although the challenges facing the authoritarian regime in Egypt have changed and continue to change over time, since the mid-1970s, certain political exigencies emerged that resonate to this day. First, there exists a relatively large class of rent-seeking support elite, in which many individuals have a quasi-legitimate claim to state spoils.¹⁸ This class emerged in the period following Sadat’s open-door economic policies and grew in size with increasing economic liberalization. Second, the regime faces the challenge of millions of underemployed, poor citizens whose economic insecurity encourages a preference for small, targeted economic rewards immediately over the discounted value of programmatic benefits in the future.¹⁹ This comes in the context of a generalized withdrawal of the Egyptian state from its dominant role under President Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser and growing income inequality. Third, the regime faces the challenge of a popular Islamist opposition movement with a desire to express its support for political change. Channeling and neutralizing this movement, while simultaneously using elections as an occasion to gather critical information about popular support and cadre competence, provide both a challenge and an opportunity for the regime. Finally, Egypt increasingly exists in an external environment that encourages competitive elections.²⁰

Why do elections represent a rational response for the regime given the challenges it faces? Competitive parliamentary elections are a cornerstone of the regime’s political process and provide a myriad of benefits. It is not my contention that competitive elections were introduced for the purposes described

¹⁶ This is not unlike the way Barkey describes Ottoman leaders responding to the challenges they encountered (1997, 57).

¹⁷ As Pierson points out, “we should anticipate that there will be sizable gaps between the ex ante goals of powerful actors and the actual functioning of prominent institutions” (2004, 15).

¹⁸ Of course, the implicit comparison in this statement is to other regimes of this type rather than to the size of the elite in Western democracies. Thanks go to Jorge Dominguez for making this point.

¹⁹ See Desposato (2006) for a full description of this argument in the Latin American context. Levitsky (2007) further argues that, in contemporary Latin America, clientelist linkages are highly compatible with market-oriented economic reforms; one reason for this is that, in environments of large informal economies and widespread unemployment, clientelist links are particularly effective for winning votes.

²⁰ See Levitsky and Way (2005) for a description of the increasing cost of authoritarianism given a changing international environment.

in this book.²¹ Rather, the benefits of competitive electoral institutions became apparent and evolved over time. Many of the benefits of elections are related to the distributive choices faced by the regime in the context of a financially stretched, postsocialist Egyptian state. In particular, elections contribute to regime health by removing some aspects of social control from the hands of the regime and delegating them to the electoral market. The institutionalization of these difficult allocation decisions creates what Huntington would call an adaptable and coherent political system that can be “effective, authoritative [and] legitimate” (1968, 2).

Although authoritarian regimes like the one in Egypt are typically described as “rigid and inflexible,” it is increasingly clear that such regimes have the capacity to adapt in politically meaningful ways (Heydemann 2007b, 21). The existing institutions in Egypt enjoy a type of equilibrium yet are not static. Rather, change over time is an important part of the narrative as particular types of institutions, particularly ones that encourage a competitive political market, prevail.²² At the same time, there exist endogenous by-products of this equilibrium that have the potential to undermine its stability over the long term.

The Rent-Seeking Elite. Writing about authoritarian regimes in general, Egyptian commentator Ayman al-Amir describes the logic of authoritarian survival for the regime in the following way:

Autocracies perpetuate themselves in power through a supporting, beneficiary elite. This is not the standard electorate that votes governments and presidents in and out of office in decent democracies. Rather, they consist of exclusive special interest groups and include security officials, business tycoons, regime propagandists and self-serving political aspirants. To guarantee loyalty, the elite have to be awarded special privileges and lucrative incentives. They often stand to lose everything, and risk legal prosecution, should the alliance of interests collapse. So they are bonded to the regime and become its main apologists.²³

In Egypt, the rent-seeking elite includes influential family heads, tribal leaders, successful businessmen, and senior bureaucratic appointees, referred to by

²¹ Mahoney, for instance, has argued for the importance of distinguishing between the circumstances that led to the creation of an institution and the process by which that institution persists (2000, 512). Gandhi and Lust-Okar (2009) suggest that the factors associated with the emergence of a particular set of institutions do not necessarily explain their functioning over the long term and that, in fact, the institutionalization of elections and parliaments frequently preceded the development of ruling regimes.

²² A primary critique promoted by Elster of functionalist explanations is that they do not deal adequately with the dynamics of change. Berger and Offe, however, argue that the extent that “social arrangements can be compared to biological selection mechanisms, as is certainly possible in the case of market competition, functionalist explanations in the strict sense (that is, without any actor-related qualifications) appear to be perfectly admissible” (1982, 523), and, in fact, are beyond the scope of Elster’s critique.

²³ *Al-Abram Weekly*, April 10–16, 2008.

Baaklini, Deroeux, and Springburg as the loyal “foot soldiers” of the regime (1999, 237–8).²⁴ One editorialist deems them the “intermediates” (*taḥṭāniyīn*), or the level of people between the ruling regime in Cairo and the citizenry.²⁵ This class of elite is a critically important base of support for the ruling regime because the elites mediate the potentially contentious relationship between the regime and society.

The various iterations of hegemonic party structure that have emerged since the 1952 Free Officers’ Coup have provided important venues for the interests of this elite.²⁶ Egypt’s hegemonic party has drawn supporters as a result of its “inextricable ties to the state and the latter’s control of vast resources,” where “material interest and opportunism” are the main draws (Beattie 1991, 42–3). Beattie (1991) asks a powerful question: What happens to this support network when state resources dry up? Writing in the early 1990s, he predicts that support for the party would also evaporate (Beattie 1991, 42–3). This seems entirely reasonable given the experience of countries like Mexico, where single-party dominance as an equilibrium was unsettled by changing economic conditions (Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007). Yet even in the context of a postsocialist Egyptian state, the ruling regime in Egypt has been able to adapt and secure the continued loyalty of the rent-seeking elite. Competitive parliamentary elections, particularly elections that provide opportunities for competition within the NDP, emerged as the primary mechanism by which the authoritarian regime in Egypt makes difficult decisions about the allocation of spoils in the context of a broad, rent-seeking elite support base.

Competitive parliamentary elections – in contrast to lotteries, queues, or other allocation mechanisms – serve this purpose quite well. Highly contested elections in Egypt closely resemble an all-pay auction, with bidders (parliamentary candidates) paying for a shot at the prize (the parliamentary seat). The bid that candidates pay is the cost of the electoral campaign, which is not financed by the hegemonic party. Rather than payment going to the regime directly, however, the largest expense associated with a campaign involves side payments to supporters as part of election mobilization. In this way, the cost of popular mobilization at election time is passed on to elite office seekers, who are required to construct their own local support networks to win office. From the perspective of the authoritarian regime, this is a positive externality created by electoral competition that lotteries, queues, and other allocation mechanisms would not generate. From the perspective of the rent-seeking elite, allocation

²⁴ This is not to say – quite cynically – that all family heads, tribal leaders, bureaucrats, and successful businessmen in Egypt are concerned only, or even primarily, with rent seeking. Many are motivated by status, prestige, and the desire to effect political change and improve living conditions of the poor. The importance of rent seeking as a political activity among individuals of this class is important enough, however, that it is a focus here.

²⁵ *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, March 19, 2008.

²⁶ My use of the term “hegemonic” party is not intended to make a statement about a regime’s use of power, rather than force, to achieve its political goals. Rather, I adopt the expression in continuity with previous scholarly work.

decisions are made according to established norms and expectations; individuals who engage in the largest amount of redistribution within their districts are given the opportunity to reap the benefits of membership in parliament. Elections, then, are a decentralized distribution mechanism that aids authoritarian survival by regularizing intra-elite competition, while at the same time outsourcing the cost of political mobilization and redistribution.

What kinds of benefits can one expect as a result of holding office? Holding a parliamentary seat in Egypt does not afford one the opportunity to influence policy in a meaningful way. Rather, the benefits of holding a parliamentary seat come from the informal access and preferential treatment given to legislators, particularly Egypt's high guarantee of parliamentary immunity, which protects parliamentarians from arrest, detention, or charge of criminal activity. In other words, holding a seat in parliament offers important opportunities for rent seeking simultaneously with protection from charges of corruption.²⁷ This arrangement is more credible than simply investing the elite in graft. In order for parliamentary immunity to be lifted, two-thirds of the assembly must vote to do so, and most parliamentarians, given the state of their own financial dealings, are reluctant to lift their colleagues' immunity in all but the most egregious cases. As a result, members of the rent-seeking elite spend a significant amount on their parliamentary campaigns. In 2005, the average campaign was reported to cost more than LE 12 million.²⁸ As one opposition journalist put it, parliamentary hopefuls spend millions to reap billions.²⁹

Much of the competition for these seats takes place within Egypt's hegemonic party as NDP official candidates compete with NDP independents, who rejoin the party upon winning their seat. Independent candidacy has become exceedingly common, particularly for NDP-affiliated individuals who are not able to secure a place on the official party list. In 2005, 85 percent of all candidates running were independents, many of them affiliated with the NDP (Teti, Gervasio, and Rucci 2006).

By investing members of the rent-seeking elite in corrupt or, at the very least, below-board economic activity, members of this class become vulnerable to charges of economic crimes either under the current regime or under some future democratic or authoritarian government. As a result, current and former parliamentarians who engage in semi-licit or illicit activity find it harder to defect against the ruling regime, which maintains an extensive apparatus for collecting information on the dealings of these individuals. Thus, in the context of the declining role of the Egyptian state in the economy, the ruling regime has – to a large, but not total extent – substituted distribution of state largesse for

²⁷ A parliamentarian earns benefits that are a function of his effort and skill at taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by holding office. This is not unlike Akerlof's description of the "rat race" (1976), where there are wage differentials for workers who are able to work more quickly or under more difficult conditions.

²⁸ *Egyptian Gazette*, February 5, 2007; the exchange rate at the time was about LE 6:US\$ 1.

²⁹ *Al-Wafd*, September 20, 2005.

access to market-based corruption via parliamentary office.³⁰ Noted Egyptian economist Galal Amin describes corruption in Egypt over the past four decades in the following way:

While corruption in Nasser's era, especially in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, was still in its infancy and was met with strong condemnation, it turned into a big festival in Sadat's era as people enjoyed every possible opportunity [to commit corrupt actions] fearlessly. In Mubarak's era, however, condemnation of corruption has disappeared . . . corruption has become part and parcel of the regime itself . . . in other words, since the 1980s corruption has been gradually legalized.³¹

Amin's observations and the prevailing political wisdom in Egypt both suggest that elite corruption has emerged as a growing trend. Editorialist Soliman Gouda has gone so far as to describe parliament as a greenhouse for below-board business interests, where corruption is allowed to flourish.³² Competitive elections serve as a façade for elite corruption, creating an alliance that binds the highest levels of the Mubarak regime and Egypt's rent-seeking elite.

The Citizenry. Citizens face a complex set of factors when making decisions about how they should participate in electoral contests within an authoritarian context. On one hand, elections provide an opportunity for public expression, even if limited. Supporters of Egypt's opposition Muslim Brotherhood have the chance to vote their candidates into office, raising the profile of the group. Voters also have the opportunity to send a signal to the regime (or to corrupt vote buyers) by spoiling their ballots. In addition, citizens have the opportunity to gain material rewards through their participation in the competitive elections. This is not a new phenomenon in the Egyptian context. Noted playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim commented that the biggest beneficiary of the 1938 elections was the "poor peasant . . . this neglected, forgotten, and despised being is only valued on voting day. At any other time, his voice is lost in the wind, but on this particular day price is a function of demand."³³ Vote buying remains a common phenomenon in Egyptian elections, and the electoral season becomes a key opportunity for the masses to interact with elites.³⁴ Elections serve as a focal point for other types of giveaways as well, particularly increases in bonuses and incentive pay for state sector employees in the run-up to parliamentary contests. These small increases in salaries and other benefits offer

³⁰ This type of substitution has not occurred in all authoritarian regimes undergoing economic liberalization, however. For example, Greene argues that, in the Mexican case of economic liberalization, privatization of state-owned enterprises caused "well-greased patronage networks to run dry" (2007, 33-4).

³¹ *Al-Abram Weekly*, April 3-9, 2008.

³² *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, September 23, 2008.

³³ Quoted in *Al-Abram*, November 8, 2000.

³⁴ *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, June 28, 2007.

the possibility of a gradual improvement for public sector workers and other beneficiaries.

On the other hand, participation in elections is a potentially costly act. Elections are often accompanied by violence, as the hired thugs of various candidates jockey outside polling stations, and the government – in some cases – works to stem the success of candidates associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Even under the best circumstances, voting often requires a lengthy wait in line. As a result, participation in parliamentary elections has been confined largely to a) poor individuals who believe that the material rewards associated with their participation outweigh the costs and b) ideological supporters of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood. Large blocs of the middle and upper-middle classes have been left out of the electoral equation (Soliman 2006). Survey results suggest, however, that 98 percent of a representative sample of Egyptians believe that democracy is a very good or fairly good way to govern their country, where elections are closely associated with democracy (Tessler and Gao 2005). The direct benefit from elections for poor Egyptians who sell their votes to local political entrepreneurs is the cash or favor they receive and use to meet their immediate financial needs. The long-term cost of these elections, in terms of how they perpetuate the authoritarian regime, is less obvious and more dispersed.

Other Actors. Although the focus of this book is on the triadic relationship between the ruling regime, the rent-seeking elite, and the broader citizenry, other relevant political actors are considered in the analysis. These actors include the Muslim Brotherhood, liberal intellectuals, and external actors such as the United States. The Muslim Brotherhood participates because elections are seen as an opportunity for the organization to establish itself as the most viable opposition group in the country, without posing a direct challenge to the existing regime. Liberal intellectuals have not challenged the authoritarian status quo more forcefully because they find democratic transition less appealing than their counterparts in other parts of the world. This is because the results of a free election might bring Islamist parties to power, and they have a history of censoring important forms of intellectual output, such as philosophy, art, and literature. This suggests that democracy – as a reflection of the preferences of the median voter – has the potential to impact the distribution of rights and civil liberties in important ways that hinder democratic transition. Finally, I find that electoral authoritarianism is incentive compatible for the United States, a key ally of and major foreign aid donor to Egypt.

1.1.2 Existing Explanations for Autocratic Resilience in Egypt

Theories to explain the resilience of authoritarianism in Egypt generally fall into one of two categories. The first contains essentialist explanations that consider authoritarianism in Egypt either a historic by-product of Egypt's natural environment or an outgrowth of Egypt's religious or cultural tradition. Some

of these theories trace the authoritarian nature of Egyptian government back to antiquity, when pharaohs enjoyed an exalted position and power was highly concentrated in a single individual. Karl Wittfogel, in his classic text entitled *Oriental Despotism*, called Egypt a hydraulic society in which a powerful and centralized state is responsible for the large-scale government works needed for irrigation and flood control of the Nile (1957). This theme is also reflected in Gamal Hamdan's *Shakhsiat Miṣr (The Personality of Egypt)* (1967). Others in this category have argued that Islam is associated with authoritarianism, both in an older generation of scholarship and more recently. The adage "one-thousand nights of despotism is preferable to one night of anarchy" is attributed to Islamic thought; others point to Koranic sources regarding the need for Muslims to obey their rulers as an explanation for authoritarian stability. In the contemporary literature, Fish (2002) argues that Muslim countries are democratic "underachievers" and suggests that Islam's "subordination of women" may be the causal explanation for the Muslim world's authoritarian status. Even among contemporary Egyptian social scientists, there is a sense that "authoritarian beliefs are deeply embedded in the Egyptian culture" (Zaki 1998, 116). Zaki identifies both submissiveness to authoritarianism and tolerance as two broad characteristics of Egyptian political culture that are ingrained in Egyptian consciousness as a result of Egypt's Islamic legacy (1995, 137). There is also the sense that *fitna*, or discord, cannot be tolerated in Islam. According to Zaki, "the fear of *fitna* has inculcated Egyptian society with a deep aversion to opposition and division and an appreciation of strong authority" (1995, 139).

The second category of explanations focuses on the impact of repression and fraud to perpetuate the existing regime. Journalistic accounts of authoritarianism in Egypt tend to emphasize the repressive prowess of the state and the use of force and electoral manipulation. There is no question that the country's domestic security services are key to safeguarding the regime. The tragedy of modern dictatorship in countries like Egypt, however, is that repressive measures (or the threat of repressive measures) are not even necessary for the vast majority of the population, because many citizens either abstain from political participation or turn out to support the ruling regime and its political allies.³⁵ This has led Zartman to call on scholars to look "beyond coercion" to explain the durability of the Arab state (1988a). I find that, unlike popular and journalistic portrayals of authoritarian rulers as despised and dependent on repression and electoral fraud to perpetuate their power, authoritarianism in Egypt is sustained through more subtle, though equally effective, systematic and institutionalized channels. As a result, electoral institutions have been a key element of the Mubarak regime's longevity.

This book builds on a variety of works that focus on the institutional sources of authoritarian stability in Egypt. Whereas some have focused on the role of

³⁵ This is what Diaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Weingast (2003) call the "tragic brilliance" of hegemonic party regimes.

informal institutions (Singerman 1995), others have considered how political pluralism (Kassem 1999; Albrecht 2005; Koehler 2008) and the authoritarian party structure (Brownlee 2007) reinforce autocracy in Egypt. Writing about Egypt in the context of the broader Arab world, Lust-Okar (2005) seeks to explain opposition pressure for political reform, given a state of prolonged economic crisis. An implication of her argument is that opposition pressure is a precursor, or perhaps even a necessary condition, for regime change. Lust-Okar finds that countries that allow managed political liberalization are able to effectively control their opposition. This occurs because moderates come to enjoy the benefits of participation in government institutions and are thus reluctant to join radicals in their fight against the regime. Although Lust-Okar does not argue that this is why countries have competitive elections, political liberalization is typically associated with competitive electoral contestation.³⁶ Although the mechanisms that I describe for the persistence of autocracy in Egypt differ from those mentioned by Lust-Okar (2005), they share a common focus on the use of seemingly democratic political institutions to perpetuate authoritarian rule.

1.1.3 Alternative Theories for the Role of Elections in Autocracies

Although some scholars have considered electoral authoritarianism an unstable “halfway house” between democracy and autocracy, the idea that countries move along a democratic trajectory has been challenged (Levitsky and Way 2003).³⁷ It is becoming increasingly clear that many authoritarian regimes that hold elections are not democratizing at all; rather, they are simply “well-institutionalized authoritarian regimes” (Geddes 2005). In fact, increasingly, scholars of authoritarian regimes find that autocratic elections stabilize these regimes (Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007).

The longevity of many electoral authoritarian regimes has led to a burgeoning literature on the reasons authoritarians hold elections and the political and other effects that these elections engender. Whereas some works have attempted to characterize these regimes definitionally and theoretically, others have sought either to explain the inner workings of these regimes or to generalize about some larger set of cases. Cox (2008), for example, focuses on

³⁶ In the 1990s, the regime faced an almost decade-long battle against an extremist Islamist movement. The moderates, although often conflated with radicals in government propaganda and repression campaigns, did not join in this fight, however. The cost of joining the radicals was simply too high. In fact, over time, we see the endogenous formation of preference for these groups; Egyptian radicals eventually came to moderate their political views, and some even stood for parliamentary seats in the 2005 elections. See Blaydes and Rubin (2008) for a more thorough discussion of the deradicalization process.

³⁷ The idea of liberalized authoritarianism as an unstable “halfway house” was promoted by Huntington (1991, 137). Diamond (1989) has argued that low levels of institutionalization make pseudo-democratic regimes unstable.

an autocrat's desire to maintain his personal safety, arguing that authoritarian rulers agree to electoral risk to reduce the likelihood of violent removal from office via coup or revolution. Lust-Okar (2005) argues that dictators use the rules surrounding authoritarian elections to create "divided structures of contestation," where parties that participate in these contests become more invested in the regime.

As Geddes (2005) points out, authoritarian regimes that hold elections tend also to have political parties and some form of legislature. As a result, there is significant overlap in the relevant literature. Here, I review three major themes in the existing literature that theorize how authoritarian regimes use electoral and related institutions in an effort to explain why the existing literature does an inadequate job of handling the Egyptian case – a case that I believe is emblematic of many Middle Eastern and other autocracies.

Cooptation through Legislative Policy Sharing. Gandhi and Przeworski (2001; 2006) and Gandhi (2008) are associated with the idea that political opposition is coopted through its participation in policy-influential legislatures by way of electoral competition. They argue that when the opposition is strong, dictators make more extensive policy compromises to keep the opposition from rebelling. "Policy concessions require a forum in which demands can be revealed and agreements can be hammered out. Hence, we assume that the presence of institutions, especially of parties in legislatures, is an indicator of policy concessions" (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006).³⁸ Although this may be the case in some authoritarian countries, the assumption that legislatures legislate is an inaccurate characterization for many autocracies, particularly those in the Middle East.³⁹

Although the Egyptian legislature enjoys broad policy-making authority in principle, in practice, the president controls a docile majority in parliament, which generally renders his legislature prerogatives into formal laws. The president is considered to be above parliamentary authority, and he has many options for pushing his policy agenda. For example, the president can legislate by decree when parliament is not in session and can also bypass parliament through a government-sponsored referendum. Although Article 151 of the constitution stipulates that parliamentary approval is necessary for international

³⁸ Wright (2008) convincingly argues that, although much of the previous literature on authoritarian institutions assumes that authoritarian legislatures serve the same purpose in all kinds of regimes, in fact, there are important distinctions to be made between different types of authoritarian legislative institutions. He finds that legislatures improve economic performance in dominant-party and military regimes but not in personalist dictatorships and monarchies, arguing that different types of authoritarian legislatures serve different functions.

³⁹ For example, although the authors use the existence of Islamist parliamentarians in the Jordanian parliament as evidence that policy compromises were taking place, Jordan specialists cast doubt on this evidence by reporting that Jordanian parliamentarians (and the public more generally) view the job of legislators as providing jobs and delivering services to their local constituents and families, not making policy (Lust-Okar 2006).

agreements, this is not enforced. In 1997, for example, the parliament rubber stamped eighty-seven international agreements in one parliamentary meeting, and eighteen were never even discussed at that meeting (Fahmy 2002, 52). Likewise, defense and foreign policy matters are reserved for the executive. The situation is similar regarding domestic and budgetary issues, leaving little room for opposition policy influence. This suggests that parliaments and the elections that bring them to power, in cases like Egypt, exist to serve some other purpose than cooptation via a shared policy space.

Demonstration Effects. A number of works describe the demonstration effects of authoritarian elections and how these effects shore up support for an autocratic regime (Geddes 2008; Magaloni 2006; Wedeen 2008). One important theory regarding the way authoritarians use elections involves electoral institutions as a means to perpetuate certain types of “national fictions,” particularly with regard to the popularity and strength of an authoritarian regime or leader. Wedeen writes that scholars who study the political importance of symbolic acts argue that these acts operate to produce forms of legitimacy and hegemony, enabling authoritarian leaders to strengthen their rule (1998, 505–6). Wedeen takes this argument one step further and finds that, in Syria, the Asad regime engages in similar behavior, but no one actually believes the fictitious public pronouncements and election results that come about from these institutions. Rather, citizens behave *as if* they do, and this ability to force citizens into particular symbolic acts serves as a mechanism of coercion (Wedeen 1998, 519). For Wedeen, elections are part of a subtle coercive apparatus. For example, former President Asad was congratulated for winning 99 percent of the vote. These “requirements of public dissimulation” are imposed on regular citizens, who are forced to participate in the authoritarian’s rule (Wedeen 1998, 504). Wedeen writes:

Political practices that encourage dissimulation register the participants’ fluency in the rhetorical operations that the regime puts forth. The regime’s power resides in its ability to sustain national fictions, to enforce obedience, to make people say and do what they otherwise would not. This obedience makes people complicit. It entangles them in self-enforcing relations of domination, thereby making it hard for participants to see themselves simply as victims of the state’s caprices (1998, 519).

For Wedeen, the use of symbolic power represents a weapon in the authoritarian arsenal alongside the use of various inducements and punishments. In other words, in the absence of the cult, other – perhaps more costly – disciplinary forms are required to sustain obedience (Wedeen 1999, 153). She writes: “Asad’s cult is an effective mechanism of power because while economizing on the actual use of force, it also works to generate obedience. . . . In other words, political systems are upheld not only by shared visions, material gains, and punishments, but also by unstable, shifting enactments of power and powerlessness, which are no less real for being symbolic” (Wedeen 1999,

146–7).⁴⁰ In the less overtly authoritarian context of Yemen, Wedeen finds that controlled electoralization of the political scene has been used to empty democratic procedures of what one would expect to be their true content – free and fair representation of voters (2008, 74). For Wedeen, the Yemeni regime’s ability to carry out a credible presidential election creates power “by demonstrating to regime officials and citizens alike that the regime could get away with the charade” (2008, 77). Whether regimes are sustained via habituation through symbolic acts (Wedeen 1998) or systematic depoliticization through competitive yet hollow elections (Wedeen 2008), neither explanation tackles the important material and distributive implications of contested elections, which are key in the Egyptian case.

Magaloni (2006) argues that elections disseminate public information about the strength of the regime’s hegemonic party and that this helped the PRI, Mexico’s hegemonic party, to create an image of invincibility that deterred potential entrants to the political market. To demonstrate this, high turnout and a supermajority victory were required for each election; at times, the PRI actually stuffed ballot boxes to create the impression of higher turnout without changing the relative distribution of votes. Geddes (2005) concurs, arguing that “high turnout and supermajoritarian election outcomes signal that citizens remain acquiescent,” thus deterring both civilian and military rivals. Yet, what happens when turnout is low and the hegemonic party cannot win a majority without reincorporating party defectors? Would elections of this type, as are common in Egypt, actually send the opposite signal to potential opponents? Geddes (2008) focuses on the positive demonstration effects that parties and elections can afford an incumbent authoritarian. She finds that the creation of a party increases the risk that a coup attempt will fail for two reasons: a) such parties increase the number of citizens who have something to lose from the ouster of the dictator, and b) such parties can mobilize citizens in street protests if needed at the time of a coup. Yet, coups happen very quickly, often more quickly than parties can organize proregime street demonstrations. Geddes (2008) also argues that elections serve the same basic function as street demonstrations in that they influence potential opponents’ perceptions of how hard it would be to take down the regime. Yet, in both Geddes (2008) and Magaloni (2006), for elections to matter in the way that they describe, both

⁴⁰ Rather than obedience becoming habitual via symbolic acts, as suggested by Wedeen (1998), Kuran argues that a lack of information about others’ preferences sustains authoritarian rule. Kuran argues that citizens living under authoritarian rule very often engage in the act of preference falsification, or the act of misrepresenting one’s genuine wants under perceived social pressures (1995, 3). Kuran contends that, when privately held preferences are revealed, the overthrow of an unpopular regime is a likely outcome (1995, 89). Application of Kuran’s ideas may be limited to the few, but nontrivial, examples of authoritarian regimes that also place considerable limits on political and press freedom. An increasing number of authoritarian countries, however, are sustained despite considerable freedom of expression, where citizens are able to reveal their private preferences to one another. For example, Egyptian political life is meaningfully open. Anti-Mubarak articles, jokes, placards, blogs, and e-mails routinely make the rounds in ways that do not suggest citizens are particularly fearful of retribution.

turnout and election results should favor the dominance of the hegemonic party. When elections typically mobilize less than a quarter of eligible voters – as is common in Egypt – it is hard to imagine that these displays have the meaningful deterrent demonstration effects, suggesting a different mechanism or series of mechanisms at work.

Parties and Elections to Balance Military Strength. In a pair of papers, Geddes (2005; 2008) argues that parties and elections are used by autocrats to counterbalance the threat of the regime's most formidable potential foe – the military or factions within the military. Geddes (2005) writes that “because of its control of weapons and men, the military is always a potential threat, even to dictators who are officers themselves.” The logic of her argument is that coup attempts are less likely to succeed in countries with party institutions because citizens are vested in the existing organizational structure of the regime (2005) and because of the positive demonstration effects that the party can create (2008). The implication is that “even when authoritarian parties are filled with opportunistic cadres who joined the party to get ahead . . . they still make a contribution to dictatorial longevity” (2005). The assumption that authoritarian institutions – like parties, parliaments, and elections – exist to balance potential threats from within the military is worth discussion independent of the mechanism elaborated previously. This is particularly so for the Egyptian case, where the military appears to be the final guarantor of the existing authoritarian regime. In fact, a similar argument was made about the Egyptian context by John Waterbury, who wrote that “Nasser had to build up the ASU (Arab Socialist Union) as a civilian counter to the military” when he was faced with the growing influence of Field Marshall ‘Abd al-Hakim ‘Amr (1983, 316).⁴¹ My primary argument here is that, although it is possible – and perhaps even likely – that the hegemonic party served as a counterbalance to Egypt's military in the Nasser era, in more recent years, the development of the party and the regime's decision to continue holding multiparty elections are, in fact, consistent with the military's objectives. As a result, my arguments and Geddes's theory of parties for “coup-proofing” are not mutually exclusive, as Geddes refers primarily to the early periods of authoritarian consolidation.

⁴¹ Although Waterbury describes the ASU as a counterweight to the military, he acknowledges that the military and the party were allies in at least some domains, particularly when it came to accepting policy packages that conformed with Soviet expectations in exchange for arms acquisitions (1983, 337). Cook disagrees with the argument that the ASU was established as a counterweight to the military (2003, 154). Leonard Binder makes the parallel but opposite argument to that put forward by Waterbury. Binder argues that ‘Amr was called upon by Nasser to limit the activities of the leftists (1978, 343). The two organizations, therefore, appeared to serve as a left–right balance within the regime, although there is also evidence that Nasser may have been balancing left–right elements within the ASU simultaneously. Binder argues that the decision to use elections to restructure the ASU was in response to a growing leftist element that supported appointments based on Marxist credentials rather than popular support (1978). This suggests that elections may not have been implemented to balance the military but rather to balance leftist elite elements within the hegemonic party structure.

The most compelling argument for a confluence of regime–military interests in the Mubarak era is presented by Cook (2003; 2007). He argues that the Egyptian military has a clear “hierarchy of interests” with regime survival as the top objective. He finds that, in Egypt, the military did not object and may even have anticipated the benefits from this type of change (Cook 2007). In particular, the military will only respond to elections in a reactionary fashion when it perceives an encroachment on its core issue areas – most importantly, a threat to the political order (Cook 2007). For example, the hegemony of the NDP in the People’s Assembly did not serve as a threat to the military, particularly because the parliament had increasingly become an “extension of the executive branch,” according to Cook (2007, 70). The establishment of a dominant single-party structure via elections, therefore, served the overall interests of the regime and, as a result, the interests of the military as well.⁴²

Cook also argues that there may actually be benefits to the military from the development of parties and elections. Greater political openness was accompanied by a more liberal economic environment, and this economic openness has provided the Egyptian military with some significant opportunities. Sadat’s open-door economic policy allowed the military establishment to benefit from the “commissions game,” permitting officers to get rich with lucrative military contracts (Cook 2007, 19). The military also got into the business of arms production and the manufacturing of civilian goods. By the late 1980s, defense industries sold civilian goods, including refrigerators, heavy turbines, and food products, worth hundreds of millions of Egyptian pounds annually (Waterbury 1993, 105). In these ways, Egypt’s military regime “groped its way toward some form of state capitalism” (Waterbury 1993, 60). According to Brommelhorster and Paes, this is not unusual in the developing world, where “the special status enjoyed by members of the armed forces in many countries . . . gives them a degree of political leverage and economic privilege over and above their private sector competitors or other state enterprises” (2003, 1).⁴³

Finally, the existence of semicompetitive parliamentary elections also helped to ease the relationship between the Egyptian regime and its most important

⁴² In addition, Cook argues that there is a type of flexibility associated with maintaining a democratic façade. In particular, Mubarak and his allies believe that allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in politics would reduce the willingness of Islamist activists to express themselves through strikes and more violent actions (Cook 2003, 167).

⁴³ For example, by 1994, the military-controlled Administration of National Service Projects in Egypt ran more than a dozen factories that employed tens of thousands of workers and produced everything from agricultural machines to medications to ovens (Frisch 2001). Increased foreign direct investment and rent streams from the United States were particularly important to the military in the development of these industries (Cook 2003, 177). Siddiqi (2007) describes the extensive business interests of the military in Pakistan. In Pakistan – like in Egypt – the military runs a commercial empire. The military in Pakistan derives a number of benefits as a result of the economic interests of the organization. These benefits include state land transferred to military personnel as well as military resources spent on perks and privileges for personnel. In Pakistan, these items are not on the official defense budget.

aid donor – the United States. In fact, Frisch (2001) and others have argued that the Egyptian military has been modernized almost completely at the expense of the United States and that this is particularly the case for “big ticket” and prestige items. Zaki argues that, to ensure the continued support of the military for his regime, Mubarak strove to preserve uninterrupted access to advanced weapons, training, and other benefits from the United States; this guaranteed that the army would have a direct stake in both his rule and the relationship to the United States (1995, 131). This suggests that the military may have come to appreciate the “range of pseudo-democratic institutions and representative structures,” which served to insulate them from politics (Cook 2003, 168). Public dissatisfaction could be directed at other institutions, perhaps allowing the military to focus on its core interests, such as force development and rent seeking.⁴⁴

The viewpoint presented here challenges existing conceptions that the hegemonic party and the military are competitors. Perhaps more important than the balancing of the military with political parties is the balancing that takes place between competing and overlapping institutions in related spheres of influence. For example, the oversight role of the parliament has been strengthened at various points in time to provide a counterweight to the hegemonic party. Nasser bolstered the powers of the parliament vis-à-vis the ASU by dropping ASU membership as a requirement for serving in parliament (Beattie 2000, 84). In addition, the Ministry of Interior's Central Security Forces (CSF) provide an important counterbalance to the conventional armed forces.⁴⁵ Springborg argues that Sadat's policy of demilitarization worked in favor of the Ministry of Interior (Springborg 1989, 140), and Mubarak continued to build up the CSF in order to balance military power (Frisch 2001).

⁴⁴ In addition, the Egyptian military has also witnessed a change in its role over time. Although the Egyptian military was a crucial pillar of the regime at its establishment, since its 1967 defeat by the Israelis, the military has maintained a relatively low profile (Cook 2003, 136–7). Beginning with Nasser and intensifying under Sadat, the Egyptian military has been intentionally and systematically depoliticized and professionalized, with little resistance (Zaki 1995, 128–9). Although the military played a more active role in the day-to-day activities of the regime in the pre-1967 period, post-1967 the military was largely absent from politics, perhaps in a bid to appear above the political fray. Waterbury has argued that the “tentacular spread of the military into the civilian sphere sapped it of its fighting capacity” (1983, 337). By the 1980s, the military was “merely one of a number of institutional interest groups and, if its claim on the budget, which slightly declined as a proportion of total spending and GNP, was any indicator, one carrying little privileged weight” (Hinnebusch 1988a, 131). Although still a key pillar of the regime, what Bianchi calls the “entrepreneurial army” (1989, 5) is also increasingly a bourgeois enclave with ready access to consumer goods and special housing (Beattie 1991). For example, the Egyptian army has constructed at least seventeen military cities to physically isolate the military enclave from the civilian population (Frisch 2001).

⁴⁵ The CSF is a paramilitary force responsible for the protection of public buildings, foreign embassies, and tourist attractions.

1.2 WHY EGYPT?

Why does Egypt make a good subject for the study of electoral authoritarianism? With more than 80 million citizens, Egypt is the largest country in the Arab world and one of the largest and most politically significant in the Middle East. Egypt has long served as a political leader to countries in the region. In particular, political institutions that have developed in Egypt often find their way to other Arab states. As a result of its role as a bellwether for political developments across the Middle East, Egypt, as a subject of academic research, has been the subject of intense scrutiny. And with many of the world's remaining authoritarian regimes found in this region, examining autocracy in such a context is useful for both theory building and empirical testing.

From a theoretical perspective, studying Egypt offers a number of important opportunities. First, Egypt's institutional arrangements closely resemble the modal authoritarian regime that exists in the world today. As a result, Egypt has been described as the "perfect model" of semi-authoritarianism (Ottaway 2003, 31). Whereas the Egyptian case may be definitionally distinct from examples of "competitive authoritarian" regimes, as described by Levitsky and Way (2002), electoralization in Egypt bears important similarities to electoral processes in competitive authoritarian regimes, such as Malaysia, Mexico under the PRI, and Russia. In addition, Egypt also represents an excellent case for the study of comparative clientelism. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) find that there has been a lack of scholarly attention paid to patterns of linkage among politicians, parties, and citizens, particularly in authoritarian regimes, and this book seeks, in part, to address that omission.

In the introduction to *Autocracy*, Gordon Tullock correctly points out that collecting information in a nondemocratic setting is highly challenging and that these difficulties explain why the existing literature on nondemocracies tends to be sparse and poor (1987, 31). There is no question that researching authoritarianism in Egypt poses similar challenges, yet the setting also offers a number of important opportunities. First, the institutions that constitute the government and regime in Egypt are, as I have mentioned, both large and porous, offering multiple openings for a researcher to collect data and interview participants. In addition, Egypt's storied bureaucratic tradition means that certain types of data are available to a greater extent than in other authoritarian settings. During the period under study, Egypt also enjoyed a relatively free press and an extensive state-associated media bureaucracy responsible for publishing multiple daily and weekly newspapers as well as news magazines. As a result, this project makes considerable use of state, opposition, and independent media, both as sources of empirical information as well as to gauge elite and popular opinion on a variety of issues.

Although the questions that this book addresses are general, my methodological strategy has been to test these broad theories in very narrow, focused, and specific circumstances that allow for a degree of experimental control. The

datasets I have collected exploit variation in Egypt across time (yearly and, in some cases, monthly data) and across space (governorates, neighborhoods, and electoral districts as units of analysis). I complement the quantitative analysis with more than eighty interviews conducted with Egyptian politicians, government employees, local council leaders, journalists, human rights activists, and academics during a year of field research in Egypt⁴⁶ and a close reading of the highly informative Egyptian press. Although a number of excellent projects have sought to develop sophisticated formal models of authoritarianism, or have employed large-*N* statistical analysis with country or regime as the unit of observation, few scholarly works have sought to develop theory and test the empirical implications of that theory within an authoritarian setting.

1.3 THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

This book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides a brief history of economic and political change in Egypt since 1952 with an eye toward two overarching themes: the long-term trend toward more competitive electoral institutions and the gradual withdrawal of the state from its dominating role under Nasser. It is not a primary goal of this book to explain *why* competitive elections first emerged in Egypt. Describing the changing nature of political and economic institutions, however, elucidates the goals and priorities of the regime, particularly the need to establish and maintain an elite base of support. In particular, Chapter 2 seeks to explain how Egypt has converged on a particular set of electoral authoritarian institutions.

Chapter 3 describes some of the benefits that the authoritarian regime in Egypt derives from holding competitive elections. A primary argument of Chapter 3 is that parliamentary elections serve as an important means for distributing access to rents and opportunities for graft and, as a result, ease certain types of distributional conflicts, particularly within Egypt's hegemonic party – the NDP. Since 1990, official NDP candidates have competed vigorously with both NDP-affiliated and opposition candidates in expensive electoral races. Elections act as a kind of auction where the candidates who are willing to engage in the largest amount of economic redistribution to their districts are able to win parliamentary seats.⁴⁷ The benefits of holding office include access to rents and influence as well as parliamentary immunity from criminal prosecution, which is often used by office holders to avoid prosecution for corruption. In Chapter 3, I will also show how election results provide important information to the authoritarian regime regarding the competence of bureaucratic and party apparatchik.

Chapter 4 describes how election results provide the regime with a map of areas of political support for the opposition. Using election results and

⁴⁶ The primary fieldwork for this project took place March–December 2005 with follow-up trips in April–May 2006, April–May 2007, and August–September 2009.

⁴⁷ NDP and NDP-affiliated candidates finance campaigns out of their own pockets.

data from the Egyptian census, I find that, between 1986 and 1996, areas that supported the opposition subsequently saw smaller improvements by the government to their water and sewerage infrastructures than areas that supported regime candidates. The results of this analysis are consistent with core-voter models, where the incumbent elite reward loyal constituencies and punish opposition constituencies.

Chapter 5 considers the following question: Does the authoritarian regime in Egypt manipulate economic policy in the run-up to parliamentary elections? Although empirical evidence for the existence of electoral budget cycles is inconclusive in democratic countries, increasingly, the strongest statistical evidence for the phenomenon has been in authoritarian regimes. In Chapter 5, I argue that Egypt – with a highly centralized process for economic policy making – exhibits such patterns. Through analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, I describe the particular strategies used by the regime for orchestrating economic incentives to induce support prior to elections.

Chapter 6 considers why citizens vote in Egyptian elections and under what circumstances ballots are spoiled. In Egypt, vote buying is common and, in line with the argument that a poor person benefits from a consumption good more than a wealthy person, I expect the poor to be more responsive to targeted rewards. In addition, I find that formal institutional factors, like the threat of economic sanction for failing to turn out, and informal norms, like the use of state media to support regime candidates, make the poor more likely to vote. In order to test my arguments, I have collected data on voter turnout for the 2000 parliamentary, 2002 municipal, and 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections at the local level. Using the appropriate ecological inference techniques, I find that illiterate people vote at nearly twice the rate of literate people in Egyptian elections. I also investigate the likelihood of ballot spoiling, or the intentional defiling or marking of a ballot to make it invalid. I argue that some vote sellers intentionally spoil their ballots as a political signal. Using data on spoiled ballots from more than 200 electoral districts for the 2005 parliamentary elections and 26 governorates for the 2005 presidential elections, I find empirical support for this theory.

Chapter 7 describes more fully why political entrepreneurs run for parliament when legislative institutions have little influence on policy. I argue that formal institutions and informal norms regarding the perks of holding office have made personal economic enrichment a primary motivation for seeking a seat in parliament. For a significant swath of the rent-seeking elite, elections provide a façade for political corruption; political entrepreneurs compete for parliamentary immunity, which allows them to engage in illegal profiteering with little fear of prosecution. In this way, the rent-seeking elite have come to enjoy a tacit alliance with the authoritarian regime that protects them from prosecution for graft.

Chapter 8 seeks to explain why the Muslim Brotherhood participates in parliamentary elections that, I have argued, work to stabilize the authoritarian regime as well as what factors explain the propensity of individuals to turn

out to vote for a programmatic, Islamist agenda. The vast majority of ideological voters support candidates from the opposition Muslim Brotherhood. I find that participation in competitive parliamentary elections presents an opportunity for the Brotherhood to advance its agenda and signal its willingness to cooperate with the regime leadership. A second part of Chapter 8 examines both the structural factors that lead individuals to support the Brotherhood in elections as well as the specific strategies the Brotherhood employs to encourage individuals to turn out in support of its candidates. Using a selection model that considers the decision to run in a district as well as the determinants of electoral success once the commitment to run has been made, I find that the Brotherhood targets districts that are populated by their core constituency – individuals that are literate but relatively underprivileged. Their ability to win in a particular district, however, is a function of the level of regime repression.

Chapter 9 considers the implications of democratic transition for the distribution of civil rights and liberties to Egyptian artists and liberal intellectuals. I argue that, although artists and liberal intellectuals have played an influential, if not pivotal, role in transitions to democracy in many countries around the world, Egyptian artists and intellectuals have been reluctant to push for democratic change because free elections are likely to bring to power Islamist organizations that have a history of censoring important intellectual outputs, such as philosophy, art, and literature. Which groups, then, have the incentive to challenge the authoritarian regime more forcefully for democracy? I argue that labor organizations, peasants, and university students are most likely to lead an effective grassroots, anti-authoritarian movement in Egypt, potentially in alliance with Islamist groupings.

Chapter 10 argues that the distributive significance of electoral competition extends beyond the domestic sphere to Egypt's relationship with external actors, including foreign aid donors like the United States, that play a critical role in providing financial assistance for the regime. Particularly, this chapter seeks to explain why foreign government efforts to promote democratization in Egypt have been so unsuccessful. To answer this question, I develop an agenda-setting model of democratization in authoritarian regimes, where foreign actors, such as the United States or international financial institutions, serve as veto players along with the regime leadership. I argue that foreign actors tend to promote the electoralization of authoritarian regimes rather than policies that diminish regime dominance. This is because authoritarians are the agenda setters, and they have the ability to select their preferred point (i.e., the set of institutions) after considering the winset of the foreign actor as a constraint.

Chapter 11 considers the Egyptian experience in a broader comparative perspective. I find that there are four primary types of electoral–institutional arrangements across the authoritarian states of the Arab world: a) hegemonic party regimes with high levels of political contestation, such as Egypt; b) constitutional monarchies with high levels of contestation; c) single-party regimes with limited electoral competition; and d) nonconstitutional monarchies

with low levels of electoral contestation. I describe how Egypt's experience with electoral competition compares with that of other states in the region. Chapter 11 also offers some tentative conclusions regarding where and when we would expect to see competitive authoritarian elections emerging across the Arab Middle East. I argue that two factors stand out as being of particular importance when describing observed variation in electoral competition across Arab states. The first is the relative wealth of citizens in the polity, which tends to be largely a function of access to external rents, such as oil revenue. In countries with higher levels of natural resource wealth, authoritarian regimes are less in need of mechanisms to distribute patronage as individuals are more likely to have their financial needs met. The second dimension of interest involves the size and nature of the ruling coalition. Regimes that are ruled by a minority group – whether ethnic, religious, geographic, tribal, or otherwise – may already have mechanisms for patronage distribution in place, minimizing the need for elections to serve this role. In such regimes, the size of the elite may be fairly small, easing certain types of patronage distribution pressures.

Chapter 12 discusses the possibility for future political change in Egypt through an exploration of how the electoral authoritarian equilibrium that I have described contains within itself undermining factors that have the potential to destabilize this equilibrium over time.