

Electoral Campaigns

(Strategies and challenges)

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The book aims to discuss different strategies used in managing election campaigns, focusing on the case of parliamentary elections in 2011 and the way various political and party blocs stood for election amid the difficult circumstances during the transitional period that followed the January 25 Revolution. At the end of every chapter, an international expert in the field of election campaign management will set out a number of recommendations and summarize international experience in this field.

The book is divided into six chapters, each one dealing with the basic issues that dominated the Egyptian political arena during the 2011 elections and that will continue to shape essential concerns among current parties and political forces if they decide to run in the upcoming elections. The chapters deal with the following subjects: the politics and management of election campaigns; how to create a place for yourself in a crowded political scene; the experience of running in parliamentary elections as an independent candidate; how parties link their ideas to their election campaigns; how new political parties conduct their election campaigns; and the role of new means of communication in election campaigns.

Regarding election campaign management, we try to get a sense of the experience of major parties and political forces (those which have successfully won the greatest number of seats in the former People's Assembly in 2011) and the way they managed their election campaigns. These parties include: the Democratic Alliance led by the Freedom and Justice party, the Islamic Alliance issuing from the Salafist Nour party, and the Wafd party, which chose to compete in elections individually after withdrawing from the Democratic Alliance. The chapter surveys these various election campaign approaches and the differences between

them with regards to management and organizational styles. For example, the Freedom and Justice Party tried to form an electoral alliance comprising a large number of ideologically diverse parties called the “Democratic Alliance,” in an attempt to achieve a certain national consensus that would exclude the parties that emerged from under the mantle of the dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP). Meanwhile, defections by a large number of parties from the Democratic Alliance -- foremost among them the Nour and Wafd parties – gave rise to the experience of managing a large electoral alliance based on a single, unified ideology -- that of the “Islamic Alliance,” founded by the Nour Party. The alliance included the Nour, Building and Development and Authenticity parties. On the other hand, the Wafd party adopted a completely different style, whereby it entered the elections on its own and formed its own electoral list. The nature of the electoral machine was closely linked to the party apparatus. In the case of the Democratic Alliance, the Muslim Brotherhood mostly controlled decisions, while most electoral campaigns were managed in a decentralized manner. However, the Democratic Alliance managed its campaigns using a centralized approach, but using different tactics in each individual campaign.

The second chapter, which deals with how new parties managed election campaigns, presents the experience of the parties within the “Egyptian Bloc,” as most of them are newly established and emerging parties. It also demonstrates how they dealt with the issue of election campaign funding, which has caused crippling crises for the smaller new parties that have emerged since the revolution, as well as issues of party loyalty. This last issue has caused repeated defections from different alliances because of disputes over

each party's share of candidates on the electoral lists, who should occupy the top of the lists, etc. The chapter also looks at how the electoral alliance was managed in spite of the several ideological and organizational disagreements that surfaced during the elections.

The **third chapter attempts to reveal how parties can link their ideas to their election campaigns** by looking at the experience of the “Revolution Continues” alliance, comprising a group of parties and political forces which, despite their different affiliations, all affirm that the demands of the revolution should be placed at the fore. Chief among these demands is social justice, amid ongoing polarization between various civil and Islamist political forces. The chapter also observes how this alliance drew a link between its own demands and allowing the revolutionary youth to play effective political roles. The chapter also describes some of the material challenges and difficulties faced by the alliance in terms of poor funding and lack of experience among the youth in managing election campaigns. It deals with how the emerging alliance overcame time constraints and limited financial resources, and how it utilized new methods to promote the central issue of its platform: social justice.

In the fourth chapter, the author looks at another type of experience in election campaign management--**running as an independent candidate**—by focusing on the challenges faced by candidates in managing their own election campaigns and the strategies and tactics they resort to through case studies of Dr. Amer al-Shobki and Mr. Islam Lotfi.

The chapter attempts to reveal how each of them attempted to overcome material obstacles to fund their campaigns, how they recruited and communicated with youth

volunteers, and how they came up with innovative ways of reaching out to the electorate. The chapter further treats the subject of how independent candidates should deal with large electoral districts, especially in the absence of a party machine to back them up. It also looks at how each of them has handled the polarization between Islamists and secularists in the political arena.

In the fifth chapter, the author discusses another model for election campaign management: **how a new political party can create a place for itself in a political scene crowded with similarly oriented parties.** The author uses the experience of the al-Wasat party as an example of a new political party that obtained a legal operating license after the revolution.

In spite of a political arena in Egypt that is congested with parties that have an Islamist background or orientation, the al-Wasat party has tried to present itself as a secular party that relies on an Islamist frame of reference. In this chapter, we try to shed light on the experience of this party running in parliamentary elections for the first time completely alone, outside any electoral alliance. The chapter also tries to describe the party's basic election campaign management strategies, by which it succeeded in making tangible political gains, in spite of the fact that it is an individual and independent party. The party obtained a considerable share of parliamentary seats (around 10). The chapter also notes how it overcame different obstacles and challenges, such as attaining the necessary funding and organizational structure. In the sixth and final chapter of the book, we try to shed some light on the **role of new means of communication in campaigns.** In the wake of the January 25 Revolution, the Egyptian political climate was no longer limited to one form of campaign advertising. Instead, there were many different

outlets for campaigning and communicating that parties and electoral coalitions had to use to target the greatest number of voters. In this context, modern communication outlets such as social media sites had clearly become essential tools to rally and mobilize voters in the first elections following the revolution. Therefore, this chapter describes the role of social media in mobilizing voters in comparison to other conventional and non-conventional media.

In this book, it has been our intent not to restrict the chapters to the experience of Egypt's parliamentary elections in 2011. We have thus added at the end of each chapter commentary by an international expert with extensive experience campaign management issues. Based on analyses of the situation in Egypt and the challenges that arose in organizing and managing campaigns, these commentaries aim to put forward recommendations and advice to better manage each particular issue.

Executive Summary

Despite Egypt's long and deep-rooted parliamentary tradition, the circumstances surrounding the 2011 parliamentary elections remain exceptional by any measure. To begin with, these elections came in the wake of the January 25 Revolution, while the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) presided over a confusing and disorderly transitional period. In addition, a number of new political parties had arrived on the Egyptian scene and faced huge challenges while still in their formative stages. These included a lack of staff, campaign experience, and financing, as well as a limited amount of time before the elections. They also had to contend with the sheer size of the electoral districts, along with an Egyptian political climate that was dominated at the time by an intense polarization between Islamist and secular forces.

During the 2011 election, the various parties and alliances employed a number of different campaign strategies. Some, based on purely tactical considerations, decided to form broad alliances that encompassed political forces of varying ideologies. Other alliances were narrower in scope, and focused on a central idea or solid political platform agreed upon by all forces that joined in the coalition. Still others stood for election as an individual party, while some public figures ran as individual candidates. Moreover, it was apparent that campaign methods had changed since pre-revolutionary Egypt, with a clear and growing reliance on new forms of social media in particular.

Regarding campaign management, it is clear that the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) made an attempt, in its first post-revolution parliamentary elections, to form an electoral alliance (the Democratic Alliance) that included a number of different parties and ideological backgrounds. The main goal of this broad alliance was to achieve a national consensus among the various political forces that had opposed the Mubarak regime so as to exclude those parties which had emerged from under the mantle of the now-dissolved National Democratic Party, and whose members represented the old political elite. Thus, the alliance brought together both the leftist Karama Party and the liberal Ghad El-Thawra Party under the leadership of the FJP. Although this alliance had begun as an initiative of the Wafd and Nour Parties, these two split from the Democratic Alliance a short time before the election, along with other parties who did not agree with the management style of the FJP in its capacity as leading party and principal source of funding. These differences stemmed first of all from the share of candidates given to each party on the electoral lists, and the order in which they were assigned. They also were related to the strong centralization of the campaign management, which extended even to candidate selection.

The Nour Party, after its withdrawal from the Democratic Alliance, decided to establish a Salafist coalition, with a campaign platform based on sharia law, and including the Nour Party, the Building and Development Party, and the Authenticity Party. From the beginning, it was clear that the agreement of member parties on a single line of thinking and political action helped to reduce disagreements to a minimum. The Islamist Alliance also benefited from the support of the cadres of both the Salafi movement and the

al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya, from its decentralized campaign management, and from the great personal efforts of its candidates. This enabled it to overcome its lack of both funding and campaign experience and to achieve a very good showing in the election, becoming the second largest bloc in terms of seats in the People's Assembly.

The Wafd Party, on the other hand, decided after its withdrawal to run as an individual party in the elections. Despite the party's campaign experience, it became clear that the political climate had changed significantly from that of the previous regime. Given their prior experience in the political arena, it was logical that the party run a relatively centralized campaign, and that it run as an individual party. In other words, the election machine was closely linked to the party apparatus.

Along with these major parties, there were also several new ones running for the first time who decided to form a broad alliance called the Egyptian Bloc. This alliance, like the Democratic Alliance, brought together a range of parties and political currents, all of them secular. The Alliance's electoral program stressed a commitment to preserving the civil state and an opposition to the Islamist movement. However, this alliance also did not last long before a large number of its member organizations broke away, leaving only the Social Democratic Party, the Free Egyptians Party, and the National Progressive Unionist Party. This was due to several issues, including each party's share of candidates on the electoral lists, the order in which candidates were placed, and other problems having to do with party commitment. The most prominent issue, however, was that the breakaway parties took a principled stance not to

support remnants of the former regime -- which was a very sensitive topic. Furthermore, like other alliances, they faced the difficult challenge of obtaining the funds necessary to finance their campaign.

Other important campaign developments in the 2011 parliamentary elections included the ‘Revolution Continues’ alliance, primarily made up of parties that had left the Egyptian Bloc in the days leading up to the election. These included the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, the Egyptian Current Party and the Freedom Egypt Party. The alliance, which based its campaign platform on the issue of social justice, drew its support from among the ranks of young people who had taken part in the revolution, and who were themselves of various political orientations. It faced numerous challenges, including an incomplete organizational structure at the time of the elections, in addition to problems in funding its campaign and a lack of campaign experience among its young members. However, it attempted to overcome these challenges by decentralizing its campaign administration, and by employing innovative, low-cost campaign advertising.

Like the Wafd Party, the al-Wasat Party also decided to run independently, without joining any of the political alliances already on the scene. This decision arose from a desire to stand out in a political climate already crowded with parties and blocs. The party defined itself as a civil party with an Islamic frame of reference, a vision that required the new party to carve out a new political space and identity among the other more established and clearly Islamist post-revolutionary parties. These included the FJP, with its links to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Nour Party (associated with

the Salafi movement), and the Building and Development Party (associated with al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya).

Also of note in this parliamentary election was the number of candidates who ran independently. Such candidates faced a number of challenges in the management of their campaigns. In the case of candidates Dr. Amr Shobaki and Professor Islam Lotfy, we find that both men personally funded their campaigns, a fact which points to the difficulty of raising the necessary funds. Both campaigns relied primarily on the efforts of groups of young people, and both employed various techniques to communicate their message to voters, including directly via mass rallies, and indirectly via social networking websites. Both suffered from the secular-Islamist polarization that dominated the political scene at that time, in addition to the division of the landscape into almost ridiculously vast electoral districts.

One of the key issues in the 2011 campaign season was the variety of campaign advertising techniques. The influence of modern means of communication, especially virtual communication via social networking sites, has become clear in the wake of the January Revolution. Now, in the first election since that revolution, these have developed into essential tools for mobilizing voters. However, conventional advertising methods continue to enjoy wide popular support. These include mass meetings, door-to-door campaigning, as well as other more indirect methods. In addition, the atmosphere of the Egyptian Revolution has had a profound effect on campaigns of all orientations, in that it has given them the space to invent new, creative, low-cost means of campaigning, such as automobile processions, direct campaigning in coffee shops, etc.

It is clear that many challenges were shared by all political parties on the Egyptian scene, such as low membership, which resulted in a diminished base of popular support. In the short time leading up to the election, parties were not able to build credibility with voters. This was exacerbated by a lack of on-the-ground organizational experience and an absence of material resources due to the small scale of financial contributions. Furthermore, the political culture among the average Egyptian voter is such that they have little interest in the ideological background of a given party, due to the legacy of personalized politics that has prevailed in recent decades. Parties also struggled to develop an internal structure, and to impose party loyalty on their members and candidates.

For followers of the Egyptian political scene, be they outsiders or insiders who are not specialists, the landscape seems crowded indeed. There is a confusing multiplicity of parties, which is not uncommon for new democracies, but much less widespread among established ones. For this reason, it might be better to reduce confusion for the Egyptian voter by forming political or electoral alliances, or even by merging into a single new entity. Despite the difficulties, such a move works to the advantage of political parties at all levels. It gives them a greater opportunity to appear before the general public, and reduces confusion among politicians and voters. Alliances need not be formed within or between political parties, but rather should be established by blocs from certain sectors or classes (laborers, businessmen, white-collar workers, etc.).

However, whenever a new party is established or an alliance entered into, there should be a prior consensus concerning the placement of candidates on electoral lists. Furthermore, there should be criteria for selecting candidates that are mutually agreed upon and appropriately enforced in order to avoid the problem of parties being unable to impose party discipline on their candidates. Agreement should be reached about a robust and fair selection mechanism that reflects the nature of the party, along with mechanisms for dealing with disputes, whether political or institutional. No alliance can succeed if it does not reach a broad, sustainable consensus on the major political questions.

It is also important that each party define itself, its policies, and its platform, in addition to what sets it apart from other parties. It might also be preferable in the next elections to target certain electoral districts and to concentrate the efforts of the party or alliance on these, instead of fanning out to cover different districts without achieving any tangible results. The most important issues are the number of seats that a party or alliance can win, and what it will do after it wins them. Campaign preparations must also begin well before the elections – basically the day after the previous election.

Each party must also identify its target political audience and concentrate on this group, as opposed to wasting time and effort with sectors that would not be responsive to their campaign. Despite the weak political culture of large sections of the Egyptian population, and the reality that state authorities must provide some of this education in a non-partisan way, political parties also have a role to play in this area.

Another essential point concerns the need to formulate a well-crafted political message for the party or coalition and stick to it. A high standard of organization should extend to all other matters as well. Candidates must also not deviate from their personal values or their basic political message, taking care to modify only the mode of expression. Parties should employ modern means of campaign advertising and must realize that they are competing against a large set of organizations and media for the attention of likely voters. Herein lies the importance of the new media, particularly social networks, as they are inexpensive, easy to use, and able to get around the censorship that conventional media is subject to. However, we must not downplay the importance of conventional techniques, such as door-to-door campaigning, holding rallies, and distributing flyers and publications. This is in addition to appearances on conventional media, such as TV stations, newspapers, and so forth.

The last and most important principle in organizing campaigns is that parties and alliances should focus on the issues that concern voters, and not those that benefit politicians. In order to attract voters, one must deal with their concerns and offer solutions to the problems they face in their daily life and not get bogged down in the minutiae of complicated political or economic issues.