Counting Islam

Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt

Why does Islam seem to dominate electoral politics in the countries of the so-called Arab Spring, especially when endemic poverty and deep economic inequality would seem to render new Arab democracies promising terrain for a politics of radical redistribution rather than one of religious conservativism? This book argues that the answer lies not in the political unsophistication of voters, the subordination of economic interests to spiritual ones, or the ineptitude of secular and leftist politicians, but in structural factors that shape parties' opportunities for reaching potential voters. Tracing the performance of Islamists and their rivals in Egyptian elections over the course of almost forty years, this book not only explains why Islamists win elections but also illuminates the possibilities for the emergence in Egypt and the Arab world of the kind of political pluralism that is at the heart of what we expect from democracy.

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Preface

This is a book about how religious parties come to dominate the political life of a nascent democracy – in this case, Egypt, a country that in February 2011 overthrew its long-reigning dictator, Hosni Mubarak. Meet any Egyptian, and though he or she will more often than not be religious, he or she will almost certainly be many other things besides. She may be a farmer, a parent, a worker, an inhabitant of the Ṣaʿīd, a doctor, a member of the Ḥuwayṭāt clan, an Alexandrian, or one of any number of combinations of these things. And yet, a survey of elections conducted in the two years following Mubarak's ouster would seem to give the impression that in matters political, all those identities were trumped by one: Islam. In the country's first postauthoritarian parliamentary election, held in the winter of 2011, Islamists – led by the Muslim Brotherhood – won two-thirds of the seats in parliament. Six months later, they captured the country's presidency (before being ejected from it by the military scarcely a year later).

To many observers used to being surprised by events during the so-called Arab Spring, the dominance of Islamists in postauthoritarian elections was the one thing that was expected. After all, during the Mubarak era, the Muslim Brotherhood amassed an impressive string of electoral victories that had, by the waning years of Mubarak's term, rendered it practically the sole opposition voice in Egypt's legislature. Why did Islam seem to reign in Egyptian politics, especially when the country's endemic poverty and deep economic inequality would seem to render it promising terrain for a politics of radical redistribution rather than one of religious conservativism?

The conventional wisdom has long held that the answer lies somewhere in the Egyptian mind – that Egyptian citizens display both a desire for God's law and a strong antipathy to nonreligious, leftist ideologies that are thought to have failed around the world. This book argues that such ideological factors matter little. Instead, Islamist victories and leftist defeats can be chalked up to the institutional and social landscapes in which those parties must operate. Under Mubarak, the

left lost because it couldn't compete with the regime for the suffrages of the poor. Islamists avoided this fate by appealing to middle-class voters that the left could not reach. After Mubarak, though the votes of the poor were up for grabs, Islamists were more able to capture them as well, by virtue of their embeddedness in a religious social infrastructure that dwarfed the kinds of social institutions on which leftist parties rely – such as labor unions and occupational associations.

Tracing the Muslim Brotherhood's electoral victories and the secular left's losses over the course of nearly forty years, this book argues that the party system that emerged in transitional Egypt reflected not the structure of basic conflict in that society, but the structure of political opportunities that allowed Islamists to better convince voters of their superiority not in matters of faith, but rather in their ability and willingness to use their power to deliver more worldly benefits. They would eventually prove unable to deliver on this promise, with disastrous results.

This book is about more than why Islamists triumphed in elections, however. In the course of explaining Islam's (fleeting) victories, it explores the possibilities for the kind of political pluralism that is at the heart of what we expect from democracy. And although the majority of the empirical terrain covered by this book is located in Egypt, the answers this study generates are ones that will have resonances far beyond the banks of the Nile.

Acknowledgments

Eight years ago, I stood outside a police station in the Nile Delta town of al-Zaqāzīq, awaiting the results of a just-concluded parliamentary election. Around me were hundreds of Muslim Brothers, eager to know if their candidate – an incumbent whose fiery speeches against the regime had earned him a national reputation – would be returned to office for five more years. Inside the police station, the incumbent and his opponent – a former traffic officer who had been backed by the ruling party – watched as judges counted the ballots. Throughout the evening, we received reports on the tally from a Brother who was in cell-phone contact with the incumbent or one of his aides. Increasingly, his reports seemed to indicate that a Brotherhood victory was in the offing. This made sense – though the incumbent had angered the regime, the passion of his supporters was palpable, and the Brotherhood had been performing well in other districts throughout the country. Word of this particular Brother's impending success rippled through the crowd, which took on a cautiously celebratory atmosphere. It was not to last. After what seemed like several hours, word came that the judge overseeing the vote counting was huddled in fevered telephone consultations, presumably with superiors in Cairo. The mood turned darker. It seemed that although the Brother had come out on top, the judge had been commanded to swap the two candidates' tallies. The Brotherhood candidate, we heard, was arguing with him, pleading with him to fear God and do the right thing. The judge, who likely had plenty of more worldly things to fear if he actually took the candidate's advice, was reportedly apologetic. As he put pen to paper to complete the foul deed, he allegedly turned to the Brother and said, "All I ask is that if you want to curse someone, please just curse me and not my children."

I do not know if the Brother complied with the judge's request, but I often like to think of that judge and to imagine what must have gone through his mind when, seven years after that day, he watched (along with millions of other Egyptians) as the man to whom he had denied a seat in parliament – an engineering professor

by the name of Mohamed Morsi – was elected to his country's presidency. And in these dog days of the summer of 2013, I increasingly find myself thinking of Mr. Morsi and what must have gone through *his* mind when, just a year after winning office, he was deprived of yet another electoral victory, this time by his own minister of defense.

For this author, those three episodes – Morsi's loss in a rigged election, his victory seven years later in a relatively fair one, and the eventual abrogation of that result – represent the signposts of an intellectual journey that began during the final years of the Mubarak regime and that now comes to fruition as what seemed like the opening of a hopeful democratic experiment has given way to what some fear is the beginning of a long dark period in that country's politics. Along the way, I accumulated many debts. And while some of my creditors may have at times felt like cursing me *and* my children, I hope that these modest words of thanks will begin to repay friends and relations without whose generosity and love this project would have foundered.

This book began its life as my doctoral dissertation at Yale University, completed in 2009. My dissertation chair, Frances Rosenbluth, is that rare breed of scholar who combines analytical precision with a fondness for bold arguments. The other members of my committee – Ian Shapiro, James Scott, and Ellen Lust – offered support, counsel, and criticism at key junctures in this project's development, long after it outgrew its roots as a dissertation about a narrow period in Egypt's political life. I am particularly grateful to Ellen for becoming a partner and collaborator after I left Yale, most notably in a series of surveys conducted in Egypt after the revolution, the first of which is analyzed in this book. I am also grateful to Ian and to Keith Darden for selecting this book for their series on problems in international politics and for allowing me the time to broaden its temporal aperture to encompass the dramatic changes – and depressing continuities – of the so-called Arab Spring. Thanks are especially due to the two anonymous reviewers who offered invaluable comments on the initial manuscript, and to Lew Bateman of Cambridge University Press for his faith and patience. I'm also grateful to Shaun Vigil and Abidha Sulaiman for steering this book through the shoals of the production process. I am proud as well to record my gratitude to the Carnegie Corporation of New York (and particularly to Patricia Rosenfeld of that institution) and to the Dubai Initiative of the Kennedy School of Government (in particular Ashraf Hegazy) for their support of this work.

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Mark Tessler, Lisa Wedeen, Elisabeth Wood, and Sean Yom. Nathan Brown and Jillian Schwedler read the entire manuscript at a critical earlier phase in its existence, and both made comments and suggestions that practically sent me back to the drawing board. Amaney Jamal, my collaborator on a new project on Islamism, was a source of valuable counsel and encouragement, particularly as I neared the finish line. In Egypt, I benefited from conversations with Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ghanī, Moheb Zaki, Gamal ʿAbd al-Gawād, Ezzat Ibrahim, Maggie Michael, Karim Haggag, Amānī Qandīl, Saadeddin Ibrahim, Gehad Auda, Ṣubḥī ʿIsīla, Yusrī al-ʿIzbāwī, al-Sayyid al-Badawī, Zakī Shaḥāta, Muḥammad Kamāl, Amīr Bassām, al-Saʿdani Aḥmad,ʿAli al-Dīn Hilāl, Muḥammad Kamāl, Aḥmad Sarḥān, Ḥamdī Ḥassan, Wafīq al-Ghīṭānī, and ʿAmr Hāshim Rabīʿ. Finally, Emad Shahin and John Esposito were kind enough to invite me to contribute to their excellent *Oxford Handbook on Islam and Politics*. I am grateful to them and to Oxford University Press for allowing me to adapt some of that material for this volume.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Harvard Kennedy School, one of the greatest places for a political scientist interested in politics to work. It would not be an exaggeration to record the names of the school's entire faculty and staff – so indebted am I to almost everyone there – but a few deserve special mention: Graham Allison, Arthur Applbaum, Mary-Jo Bane, Gretchen Bartlett, Matthew Baum, Mary Anne Baumgartner, Iris Bohnet, Nicholas Burns, Ash Carter, Julian Chang, Suzanne Cooper, Pepper Culpepper, Mayumi Cutler, David Dapice, Jessica Eykholt, Archon Fung, Marshall Ganz, Krysten Hartman, Arn Howitt, Noelle Janka, Steven Kelman, Alex Keyssar, Asim Khwaja, David Lazer, Jenny Mansbridge, Marty Mauzy, Quinton Mayne, Richard Parker, Hilary Rantisi, Jay Rosengard, Tony Saich, Kathleen Schnaidt, Moshik Temkin, Thomas Vallely, Steven Walt, Barbara Whalen, Julie Wilson, Kenneth Winston, and Richard Zeckhauser. The Kennedy School also provided me with a stellar group of students: Paul Much, Ahmed Kouchouk, Jake Stefanik, Hummy Song, Ozge Guzelsu, Aaron Miller, Todd Mostak (now a brilliant researcher and inventor), and Kash Patel asked me probing questions about my work, offered me new ways of thinking about things, and reminded me of my responsibility to say something of real-world importance. I also had spectacular research assistants: Daniel Masterson (who now is pursuing his own scholarly career at Yale), Safia Trabelsi, Julia Groeblacher, Duncan Pickard, Ibrahim Ouf, and Rania Elhattab all contributed to this project in essential ways. I am grateful to them all. Also at Harvard, Leila Ahmed, Bill Granara, Roger Owen, and Malika Zeghal have been extraordinary engaged colleagues from whom I have learned much about the region we all study. Finally, Martha Stewart has been a friendly face at numerous events on campus, who generously gave of her time and photographic expertise to help me with this book's cover design.

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in-laws a boy from Sandanhūr, Egypt, via Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia, could have. Mohamed Badr has been my friend for most of my life, a fact that makes me smile as I type it. My favorite Irishmen, William J. Dobson and Frank Gavin, knew just when to buck me up or cut me down to size. Drew Erdmann, Stanley Hegginbotham, Warren Ilchman, Aftab Karim, Andrew Loewenstein, Neysun Mahboubi, Douglas McGray, Jonathan Rosenberg, Joshua Rosenblum, Daniel Sagalyn, Peter Scoblic, and Nicholas Thompson all offered pleasant diversions and sage counsel at numerous points during the writing of this project and in some ways contributed directly to it. Finally, Fareed Zakaria has been a generous mentor and loyal friend ever since I first interned for him almost twenty years ago.

I dedicate this book to my parents, El-Miselhy Abdel Hamid Masoud and Nadia Hamid al-Banna. When my father was nine years old, my grandmother sent him from his tiny Nile Delta village to begin his formal schooling ten miles away in al-Zaqāzīq, the city that Mohamed Morsi would represent in parliament fifty years later. My father died shortly before I began graduate school, but I think he would have been surprised, and gratified, to learn that, sixty years after his own sojourn there, his American-born son would also trek to Zagāzīg (as it is pronounced locally) in search of knowledge. A Freudian might conclude that this was no accident, that a subconscious desire to remain close to my father dictated the course of my research. This is almost certainly true, as much for the subject matter as for the geography. Some of my earliest memories of life are of swimming in the pool at our local YMCA while my dad read from black leatherbound volumes by the Brotherhood's founder, Ḥasan al-Bannā, and Sayyid Quṭb, one of its leading ideologues. I like to think he would have found much in this book to disagree with, and debate, but ultimately, to be proud of.

The great Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqī (1868–1932) wrote, "The mother is a school. If you prepare her, you prepare a nation of noble character." If this is true, then my own mother is a university unto herself. It was my mother – a schoolteacher – who taught me to read and write, who encouraged me to bury myself in books, who helped me with my homework, and who later gave me the nudge I needed to pursue an academic career over one as a journalist. She is my first telephone call whenever I'm feeling low or in need of advice on the parenting of energetic young children, but also whenever I'm having trouble putting a survey question into elegant Arabic or need to think through the latest developments in Egypt's ever-changing and always-entertaining political landscape. I like to joke that I am the least favorite of my mother's five sons (on account of the fact that I alone eschewed medicine and engineering), but she knows that I have never felt anything other than incredibly loved and nurtured by her. To her, and to my late father, I offer my deepest thanks and love.

My brothers, Nader, Wesam, Amir, and Hesham, were throughout this academic journey what they have been to me my entire life – my best friends, my right-hand men, my collective Rock of Gibraltar. Nader, the eldest, reminds me more of our late father every day. His pep talks keep me going and help me to

ward off the demons of self-doubt. My younger brother, Wesam, lifts my spirits with his warmth and sense of humor and is never without biting insight into the political sentiments of Cairo's glitterati (of which he is a fast-rising member). Amir offered such invaluable commentary and suggestions on practically every aspect of this work that I am convinced that his decision to become a physician was a crippling loss for the social sciences. And Hesham, my youngest brother (and also a physician), has enriched our lives in Boston immeasurably. Most important, he has been there for my two sons – taking them to movies, watching their soccer games, and generally hanging out – when I've been traveling, teaching, or holed up writing.

Finally, there is so much to thank my beloved wife Kristin for that to do the job properly would take a book of its own. To her and to my boys, Hamza and Ali, I can only offer my gratitude for their patience and my most profuse apologies for being too wrapped up in the politics and history of Egypt to take them to the beach. I can't promise life will be terribly different now that this book is done, but I promise to always do my best to make my time away from them worth it.

A Note on Transliteration

Transliterating Arabic is difficult and time-consuming. It's little wonder, then, that many books on the Arab world begin with disclaimers noting that "correct" transliteration of Arabic's many unique vowels and consonants has been foregone in the interests of simplification, ease of communication, and so on. That has not been done here. The heavy reliance of this text on Arabic sources means that proper transliteration of those sources is essential if readers and researchers are to be able to track them down and build on the findings presented here. Therefore, Arabic terms and proper names have been transliterated according to the system established by the Middle East Studies Association, described below.

Short vowels are rendered **a**, **i**, and **u**. Long vowels are rendered **ā**, **ī**, and **ū**. Emphatic versions of the consonants *s*, *d*, and *t* are rendered **ṣ**, **ḍ**, and **ṭ**. The voiceless glottal fricative (the familiar *h* sound) is rendered **h**, whereas the voiceless pharyngeal fricative (the "hard" *h* characteristic of Arabic and other Semitic languages) is rendered **ḥ**. As is common practice, the voiced velar fricative is rendered **gh**, the voiceless velar fricative is rendered **kh**, and the voiceless uvular plosive is denoted by **q**. The voiced alveolar fricative is written **z**, the pharyngealized voiced dental fricative is rendered **ẓ**, the voiced dental fricative is written **dh**, and the voiceless dental fricative is denoted by **th**. Egyptian proper names with the letter *jīm* (the voiced postalveolar affricate in classical and modern standard Arabic, as well as in most regional dialects) are spelled with a **g**, reflecting the Egyptian practice of pronouncing the letter *jīm* with the voiced velar plosive (the familiar "hard" *g* in English). Thus an individual who shares the given name of Egypt's military ruler from 1952 to 1970 would see his moniker written Gamāl, not Jamāl. Otherwise, *jīm* is rendered **j** as it would be in standard Arabic. Geminate consonants are indicated by writing the letter twice (as in the family name of the Muslim Brotherhood's founder, al-Ba**nn**ā). Finally, the voiced pharyngeal fricative (i.e., the Arabic letter *ʿayn*) is indicated by ‘, whereas the glottal stop

(known as the *hamza*) is indicated with ʾ. Thus the Arabic word for "dominant" would be rendered *sāʾid*, whereas the imperative form of "to help" would be written *sāʿid*.

Still, there are some departures from this scheme. When place names have English variants, I use those. Thus al-Qāhira is Cairo, al-ʾIskandariyya is Alexandria, Dumyāt is Damietta, al-ʾUqsur is Luxor, al-Suways is Suez, and so on. Likewise, the names of prominent figures are rendered as they most often appear in the press. Thus Egypt's longest-serving president is written here as Hosni Mubarak (as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* do it) instead of Husnī Mubārak. Finally, if I am aware of the way an individual spells his or her own name in English, I employ that spelling, except in cases where there is an established and well-known English rendering. Thus I write Gamal Abdel Nasser, Mohamed Morsi, Wael Ghonim, and Mohamed ElBaradei instead of Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir, Muḥammad Mursī, Wāʾil Ghunīm, and Muḥammad al-Barādʿī. Finally, until someone invents a spell-checker for Arabic romanizations, I beg the reader's forgiveness for any errors that may have crept into the text.