Setback: The Nour Party and the 2015 Parliamentary Elections

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Abstract:

Contrary to the assumption of domestic pundits regarding the performance of the Salafi Nour party in Egypt's 2015 parliamentary elections, the party secured few wins—which constituted its first major setback since its establishment in 2011. This article seeks to examine the dynamics that produced this outcome by relying on the three variables of social movement theory: political opportunity structures, mobilization structures, and frames. This involved investigating the interplay between the following: One, the political environment that emerged after Morsi's ouster in 2013, which further necessitated highlighting the views of the Nour leadership on this setting. Two, the discourse the leadership developed to explain its pragmatic responses to this setting. Three, the reliance on formal and informal mobilization structures, which together enabled the party to target its original adherents. This article argues that the hostile post-2013 political environment impelled the party leadership to make pragmatic decisions that were resented by its original supporters. Cognizant of this anger, the party focused its discourse and mobilization efforts on this base, which largely remained indifferent; thereby demonstrating the withdrawal of its support for the party at this critical juncture by refusing to turn up at the polling stations.

Keywords: *Nour party, Salafi, political environment, discourse, mobilization efforts, parliamentary elections.*

Introduction:

This article examines the performance of the Salafi (Ultraconservative) Nour party in the second parliamentary elections held in post-revolution Egypt, which ran in two phases between 17 October and 2 December 2015. As the government completed the arrangements for the final stage of the political roadmap (i.e. parliamentary elections) announced by Army Chief Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi on 3 July 2013, prominent Egyptian politicians predicted that the Nour party would imitate or even surpass its impressive electoral win of 2012, and thereby become a dominant force in parliament. For these reasoned that many Egyptians are religiously conservative, and so would certainly cast their vote for the only religious party competing in the elections. In a campaign rally held in the city of Alexandria (a Salafi stronghold) and organized by the secularist/liberalist "For the Love of Egypt" coalition, speakers addressed this impending threat, warning voters that the Nour Party "is worse than the Brotherhood…and if [Nour candidates] win, a civil war will erupt because they follow the same path of the Brotherhood and are in alliance with it."[1] However this election prediction did not materialize, as the Nour party performed very poorly; and this article seeks to explain the dynamics that produced this outcome.

My examination of the related dynamics draws on social movement theory, which utilizes three variables in the investigation of case studies. The first, political opportunity structures, specifies that the broader political environment (domestic or international) hinders or facilitates collective action. When examining the domestic politic order, studies often focus on "the opening and closing of political space,"[2] which further involves concentrating on certain factors, most particularly "the degree of political system receptivity to challenger groups,

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[1]   Ghada M. Al-Sharif, "Fi hub masr: al-nur aswa min al-akhwan," *Al-Masry al-Yawm*, 10 Oct. 2015.

[2]   William A. Gamson & David S. Meyer, "Framing Political Opportunity," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, & Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 277.

the prevalence of allies and opponents…and the nature of state repression."[1] The second variable, the mobilizing structures of a group, highlights the nature of the organizations established by the group. This variable specifies that movements rely on organizations in order to better pursue their cause, and that these range from the formal, like political parties, to the informal, as nongovernmental organizations. It is through these organizations that leaders "recruit like-minded individuals, socialize new participants…and mobilize contention."[2] The last variable, framing, focuses on the ideas designed by the group to explain its worldview in order to attract adherents and mobilize support on behalf of its cause. Movements are known to modify their views in response to emerging events, at which time they engage in "frame alignment processes." The literature identifies four alignment strategies, one being "frame amplification [which] involves the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs."[3]

My investigation of the Nour party's 2015 electoral experience utilizes these three variables, and accordingly seeks to examine how their interplay shaped the party's behavioral repertoire during this period. Thus this literature led me to ask the following questions: What was the place of the Nour party in the post-July 2013 political arena? Did the Nour party consider it to be a hospitable or inimical environment? How did its perception of this environment shape its ideas and positions on crucial issues?   Did the revision of its ideas further necessitate the development of a new mobilization strategy? This article argues that the political environment of post-2013 Egypt was hostile towards the Nour party, which prompted its leadership to behave pragmatically, making decisions that were resented by its original support base. Realizing this, the party developed a

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[1]   Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Introduction: Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 14.

[2]   Glenn E. Robinson, "Hamas as Social Movement," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 116.

[3]   Robert D. Benford & David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 26 (2000), 624.

discourse and mobilization strategy that targeted its Salafi base; but both were ultimately ineffective. For supporters largely remained unresponsive, granting the party very limited wins in the 2015 elections, thereby delegating it a minor place in Egyptian politics.

Finally, a brief comment on the sources on which this article relied. Much of the following discussion necessitated specifying the views of the leadership of the Nour party and that of its mother organization, al-Da'wa al-Salafiyyia (Salafi Call) movement, on various issues.[1] To learn these views, I basically relied on two types of primary sources: the interviews the Salafi leaders gave to the domestic newspapers, like *al-Shoruq* and *al-Masry al-Yawm*; and two, their postings on their Facebook pages and on the Salafi Call's website, labelled *anasalafy*.[2]

The Post-2013 Political Landscape: the embattled Islamists:

The rather permissive political environment that characterized Egypt after the January 2011 uprising changed dramatically after the 3 July 2013 ouster, becoming more intolerant of opposition groups.   As this new environment influenced the behavior of the Nour party and the organization from which it arose, the Salafi Call movement, it is necessary to depict its major features; my focus will be on: the public's assessment of the performance of Morsi's government, society's polarization into two camps, and the media's position vis-a-vis Islamists.   In addition, I delineate the views and reactions of the Nour/Salafi

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[1]   It is necessary to mention that the Nour party really constitutes the political arm of the Salafi Call movement. At the time of the party's establishment in May 2011, the party was headed by Emad Abd al-Ghaffour, who tried to assert the party's independence of the movement. However movement leader, Yasser Burhami disagreed with this view and fought it. In turn, Abd al-Ghaffour announced in December 2011 that he was separating from the party to establish a new one (Hizb al-Watan.) Thereafter, the Salafi Call leaders dominated the Nour party. (For more detailed explanations see: Stéphane Lacroix, "Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: the Politics of Hizb al-Nour," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 1 Nov. 2016. Available at http://carnegiendowment.org, accessed 13 Aug. 2017.

[2]   When referencing these internet sources, I specified the site title, the URL, and the date I accessed it. But if the URL was too lengthy to include in the notes, I abbreviated the URL and then added the author of the statement and the date it was posted.

Call leadership to these features; for a group's actions are determined by its interpretation of the environment in which it operates.[1]

By the early summer of 2013, large swathes of the Egyptian public were openly agitating against the country's first freely-elected President, Islamist Muhammad Morsi. That they applauded his forcible removal really constituted an expression of their disappointment in his performance. At the time of the 2012 presidential elections, many ordinary citizens believed they had chosen a leader who would be guided by religious principles, and so would dedicate himself to improving their living conditions.[2] By the spring of the following year, public goodwill had noticeably dissipated. Many Egyptians felt that the Muslim Brotherhood was paying greater attention to the aggrandizement of their power (referred to as "Brotherhoodization of the state"[3]) than to addressing the country's chronic problems; and in their view this spelt ineffective governance.[4] Hawash Heikel, a 58 year old lawyer who joined the June 30 demonstrations (that had called for the ouster of Morsi), gave expression to his compatriots' frustrations accordingly: "I have travelled all the way from [the governorate of] Menoufiya. We've come in a group to say that Egypt made a contract with the president when we went to the ballot box, and he has broken that agreement…Instead of telling us how he is going to fix these issues that are making our daily lives hell, he keeps

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[1]   Charles Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution in 1979," in *American Sociological Review*, 61 (Feb. 1996), 153-170.

[2]   Author interviews with Egyptian voters; Cairo, June 2012.

[3]   This generally refers to President Morsi's decision to appoint Muslim Brotherhood loyalists to government posts. This wish to dominate state institutions should not only be viewed as a 'power grab'; as this wish is grounded in the leadership's belief that only the Brotherhood observes True Islam and that outsiders should not be trusted. Thus for example, Brotherhood leader Subhi Saleh was known to urge members to marry only from the Brotherhood society, because "Muslim maidens belonging to the society are better than Muslim maidens outside it." See: Muhammad Fayez Farahat, "Tajribat al-Islamiyyin fi hukm misr: al-inkishaf al-fikri wa al-tanthimi" [The Experience of the Islamists in Governing Egypt: Revealing their Ideas and Organization], *al-Ahram Center for Political & Strategic Studies*, 248 (2014), 9.

[4]   *The Economist*, "Going to the Dogs," 30 March 2013. Available at http://www.economist.com/news/, accessed 30 May 2016.

talking about the big picture, and how Egypt is 'moving forward.' But he doesn't give specifics."[1]

Aware of these sentiments, the Nour party sympathized with them, justifying them in its statement of 4 July, specifying that: "After the great popular revolution [of January 2011]…, Egyptians hoped that the first elected president would succeed; but unfortunately his experience ended with his ouster…There is no doubt that this setback constituted the natural result of [the president's] inappropriate decisions."[2] Two weeks later, Yasser Burhami, Vice-President of the Salafi Call movement, also weighed in on this issue, noting that "everyone knows that some of the problems [that confronted Morsi] were of a specious nature, and this confirms the fact that he did not control [state institutions]; then his failure to resolve national problems led to wide popular resentment."   Indeed, continued Burhami, this general resentment towards the Islamist leadership soon parlayed into "an antipathy for everything that is 'Islamist'…which is clear to all, especially bearded men, and women who wear the face-veil .. [as they endure] curses, accusations, and sometimes assaults."[3]

Yet this latter comment does more than demonstrate cognizance of the level of antipathy vis-a-vis Islamists; as it also indicates awareness of the fact that society was severely polarized at that time. For by the summer of 2013, Egyptian society had roughly divided into two camps, the pro-Morsi and the anti-Morsi camps. On one hand, the pro-Morsi camp dismissed the anti-camp as "infidels", meaning they had betrayed the Islamist cause and no longer counted as Muslims, while others designated them as "*feloul*," meaning Mubarak loyalists. And on the other, the anti-camp often designated the pro-camp as *khirfan*, or sheep, thereby suggesting that "Morsi supporters are all members of the Muslim Brotherhood,

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[1]   B. Trew, "Millions of Egyptians Turn Out Nationwide for Anti-Morsi Rallies; 7 Dead in Violence," *Ahram Online*, 1 July 2013. Available at
http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/75361/Egypt/Politics-/Millions-of-Egyptians-turn-out-nationwide-for-anti.aspx, accessed 15 Sept. 2017.

[2]   Available at https://www.facebook.com/AlnourParty Official Page/posts/ 399400673498200:0, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

[3]   Available at https://www.facebook.com/Salaficall/posts/399733820148246:0, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

and all [are] unthinking androids programmed by the Supreme Guide." According to journalist Sarah Carr, the aim of each side was to "dehumanize and deny [the] agency" of the other.[1] Yunis Makhyun, Nour party chairman, identified this situation as a serious problem that required immediate attention. Thus to this end, the party proposed (on 5 July) to organize a national reconciliation conference where all social forces would contribute to "the development of a roadmap that would allow us to put the past behind us and start anew in the building of a new future for our great nation."[2] While this proposal demonstrates the party's interest to contribute to the development of the country, or its nationalist concerns, it also reveals another important aim. Here it might be useful to point out that one of the reasons that prompted the Nour/Salafi Call leadership to support the July ouster was to ensure their continued participation in formal politics. But that the country was in the grips of intense societal polarization really meant that large numbers of citizens harbored feelings of antipathy towards Islamists of all stripes, thereby threatening the Nour party's position in the new political arena. Thus Nour leaders probably reasoned it was necessary to defuse such negative sentiments and promote national reconciliation.

But rather than reconciliation and the emergence of dialogue between the two camps, what happened instead was a hardening of positions. This environment prompted the emergence of a movement that labelled itself "No to religious parties" and aimed to "warn citizens about the danger of voting for parties of a religious orientation, and most particularly, al-Nour [party]."[3] Tala'at Marzuq, the Assistant to the Chair in Legal Affairs, responded to this thinking by pointing out that: "It is not logical to accept parties of a liberalist or socialist or Nasserist orientation, and to reject parties of a religious orientation in a country whose…

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[1] Sarah Carr, "On Sheep and Infidels," *Jadaliyya*, 8 July 2013. Available at http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12779/on-sheep-and-infidels, accessed 15 Sept. 2017.

[2] Available at https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%D8%, accessed 24 Feb. 2017. (By Yunis Makhyun, posted 5 July 2013)

[3] Sa'id Ali, "Al-nur: khudna al-intikhabat li-himayat al-balad min al-harb al-ahliyya" [Al-Nour: We Competed in the Elections to Protect the Country from Civil War] *Al-Masry al-Yaum*, 26 Oct. 2015.

constitution specifies that: 'Islam is the religion of the state, and the Arabic language is its official language, and the principles of the Islamic *shari'a* constitute the principle source for legislation.' "[1] Later, after the publication of the results of the first phase of the 2015 elections, the Nour party would link its poor performance to the fact that the polarization tensions had remained high during this period, leading many to retain a negative perceptions of Islamists.[2]

The efforts of the Nour/Salafi Call leadership to defuse polarization tensions and rectify the image of the Islamists were hindered by the media. For prominent TV anchors, like Amany al-Khayyat, were known to refer to Islamists as terrorists and to caution citizens about their evil intentions towards Egypt.   Responding to such defamation attempts, the Nour/Salafi Call leaders urged media personalities to refrain from using hate discourse when referring to Islamists, and to desist trying to marginalize "patriotic groups because their ideology is based on the Islamic *shari'a*, which is observed by the entire nation."[3] And on 20 July, they demanded that the government "deal decisively with the stations and programs that foment chaos and hatred among citizens."[4]   They pointed to the fact that when state authorities apprehended Muslim Brotherhood leaders in the wake of the July ouster, the media was on hand to film the actual scene of the arrests, and had later broadcast this footage. In their turn, the Salafi Call leaders viewed such airings as "a flagrant violation of human rights."[5] What made matters worse for the Nour/Salafi Call leaders was the fact that the state authorities shut down three Islamist satellite television stations in the immediate aftermath of the ouster. The first to be forced off the air was the *Egypt 25* channel, owned by the Muslim Brotherhood; then the popular Salafi stations, *al-Hafiz* (The Memorizer) and *Al-Nas* (The People). According to *Al-Arabiya* newspaper, these stations "were

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[1]   Sa'id Ali & Ghada M. Al-Sharif, "Jawla salafiyya fi al-riyad lil-da'aya li-murashihi al-nur" [A Salafi Trip to Riyadh to Campaign for Nour Candidates] *Al-Masry al-Yaum*, 11 Oct. 2015.

[2]   Ali, "Al-nur: khudna al-intikhabat."

[3]   Available at http://anasalafy.com/print.php?id=41840, accessed 10 Feb. 2017.

[4]   Available at http://anasalafy.com/print.php?id=42016, accessed 10 Feb. 2017.

[5]   Available at https://www.facebook.com/Salafiacall/posts/394292224025739:0, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

known for their criticism of the liberal forces behind the June 30 uprising and were seen as propaganda media arms of the Muslim Brotherhood and associated groups."[1] The Salafi channels, which had begun operating in Egypt since 2006, were particularly popular, as indicated by their high viewership.[2] According to Khalil al-Anani, expert on Islamist movements, the "role these channels had in propagating Salafis' ideology…was remarkable."[3] Thus it was precisely this ability to influence the public that the government wished to undermine. Realizing this, the Nour/Salafi Call leadership protested this official decision, claiming it had lacked legal sanction.[4]

   Media hostility continued unabated until the time of the 2015 elections. State and private media outlets liked to link the Nour party to terrorism, in one case describing it as the "ISIS of the future," and to run stories that depicted party leaders as corrupt and immoral.[5] In addition, women journalists liked to remind their female compatriots that the Nour party regarded them as inferior beings, and had placed women candidates on their party lists only to satisfy a requirement of the 2014 electoral law; accordingly female journalists, like Samar Marzaban (who incidentally wears a headscarf) urged women to refrain from voting for it.[6] Even the Muslim Brotherhood, erstwhile ally turned strident enemy, jumped into the

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[1]   Hind Mustafa, ""Media Watchdogs Slam Closure of Islamist TV Stations in Egypt," *Al-Arabiya*, 5 July 2013. Available at http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/2013/07/05/Media-watchdogs-slam-closure-of-Islamist-TV-stations-in-Egypt-.html, accessed 15 Sept. 2017.

[2]   Nathan Field & Ahmed Hamam, "Satellite TV in Egypt," *Arab Media & Society* (Spring, 2009).

    Available at http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=712, accessed 10 Sept. 2017.

[3]   Khalil al-Anani, "Unpacking the Sacred Canopy: Egypt's Salafis between Religion and Politics," in F. Cavatorta & F. Merone, eds., *Salafism after the Arab Awakening: Contending with People's Power* (London: Hurst & Company: 2016), 30.

[4]   Available at http://www.facebook.com/Salafiacall/posts/393750884079873:0, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

[5]   Najih Ibrahim, "Al-asbab al-sab'a li-hazimat hizb al-nur" [Seven Reasons for the Defeat of the Nour Party] *Al-Shuruq*, 24 Oct. 2015; Shawqi Abd al-Qadir, "Hata la nansa 'anatil hizb al-nur" [So that We Do Not Forget the (Infamous) Figures of the Nour Party] *Al-Yawm al-Sabi,* 12 Oct. 2015.

[6]   *Al-Yawm al-Sabi*, "6 Sahafiyat muhajabat min al-yawm al-sabi' yaktabin risala illa hizb al-nur" [6 Women Journalists from al-Yawm al-Sabi' Write a Message to the Nour Party], 6 Oct. 2015.

fray by making use of social media to claim that the Nour party had betrayed the Islamist cause and could no longer count as a true representative of Islam.[1] In its turn, the Nour party likewise accessed social media to clarify its views and positions, which for example can be seen in the regular postings on its Facebook page. But that was not enough for the Nour leaders, who complained that the state had shut down their more important media outlets (the popular Salafi satellite TV channels), thereby handicapping their defense against the multi-media attacks.[2]

The State and the Nour Party: Negative State Signaling:

At the time of the July ouster, the Nour/Salafi Call leaders assumed that they could look forward to an alliance with the state.[3] For Egyptian society was largely made up of religiously conservative people that would appreciate a strong religious representative in government. But as the months passed, the new military-backed state repeatedly demonstrated its intent to marginalize all Islamist activists - the Nour party included.

This began with the arrest of the Brotherhood leaders at the time of Morsi's ouster.   Here the Nour party worried that the state would broaden its dragnet, and detain greater numbers from the Islamist rank and file.   This prompted the party to issue a statement on 4 July that called on the "military and the Ministry of Interior to refrain from pursuing the members of the Islamist movement…if they have not violated the law… even if these oppose [official views]."[4] The Salafi Call leadership took up the same plea, urging the police/security services not to distinguish between citizens on the basis of their political orientations, declaring that "the worst [aspect] of this tendency is the discrimination against individuals of Islamist characteristics."[5] But these pleas largely went unheeded, as can be seen

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[1]　　Ibrahim, "Al-asbab al-sab'a".

[2]　　Tariq Salah & Sa'id Ali, "Burhami yatahim al-amin wa-al-ikhwan bi-al-tasabib fi khusarat al-nur" [Borhami Accuses the Security Services and the Muslim Brotherhood for the Nour's Losses] *Al-Masry al-Yaum,* 25 Oct. 2015.

[3]　　Lacroix, "Egypt's Pragmatic."

[4]　　Available at https://www.facebook.com/AlnourParty Official Page/posts/ 399400673498200:0, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

[5]　　Available at https://www.facebook.com/Salafiacall/posts/394292224025739:0, accessed 5, Nov. 2015.

from the following statement issued by *Amnesty International*, which announced that during the five months following President Morsi's removal "more than 3,000 Islamist activists including Brotherhood members and their supporters, among them journalists, have been arrested…[and there is concern] that among those arrested are men and women who were merely exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly by protesting in support of the ousted former president."[1]

But state suppression of Islamist activism did not end here; for the security authorities dealt harshly with pro-Morsi supporters on another two occasions. The first occurred on 8 July, when protestors at the Republican Guard compound clashed with the military contingent on duty. The clashes, which both sides claimed was initiated by the other, involved heavy bloodshed, as 51 were killed and 435 were wounded.   In reaction, the Nour party declared (on 8 July) to *The Guardian* journalists that "it would cease participation in the political transition on account of the bloodshed."[2] At first sight, this statement suggests that the party was actually withdrawing its support for the military-backed interim government. But the statement it posted on its Facebook page on the same day suggests otherwise: for it called for "a new political roadmap that would be developed by all political forces and the military [which would work together with] a national reconciliation committee."[3] In other words, that the party wanted to modify the roadmap in coordination with the military really meant that it accepted the new political order and intended to continue to participate in it. Thus what it had achieved at that point was the public documentation of its disapproval of the state's use of excessive violence against Islamist supporters. The second occasion of violent state suppression of Islamists took place on 14 August, when security contingents forcibly dispersed the Rab'a and al-Nahda sit-ins. This time too, it used excessive force, which again resulted in high death tolls: *Human Rights*

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[1]   Gihan Shahine, "Democracy at a Crossroads," *Ahram Weekly*, Issue 1175, 5-11 Dec. 2013.
       Available at http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/4870.aspx, accessed 15 Sept. 2017.

[2]   *The Guardian*, "Egypt: 51 Morsi Supporters Killed in Shooting at Republican Guard Compound—as it Happened," 8 July 2013. Available at http://www.theguardian. com, accessed14 June 2018.

[3]   Available   at   https://www.facebook.com/Salafiacall/posts/394959770625651:0, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

Watch estimated a death count of 87 in al-Nahda, and between 817 to more than 1000 in Rab'a.[1] As can be expected, the Nour/Salafi Call leaders strongly condemned this violence;[2] but then on the next day (15 August) demonstrated its support for the new regime by "reminding everyone that the Egyptian military is the only Arab army in the region that has not been destroyed, and Islamic, Arab and national interests require all to strive as hard as they might to preserve it, and to overlook any political differences that hinder [such demonstration of support]."[3]

That the state seemed intent on containing and marginalizing the Islamists and their leaders was demonstrated in other ways besides the use of violence. First, there was the matter of the 2013 Constitutional Declaration, issued by the interim president, Adli Mansur; and deemed problematic by the Nour/Salafi Call leadership. On 4 July, Ahmad Rashwan, Secretary-General of the party, reported on the conversation he had had with Galal Mura, the Nour party representative who had contributed to the discussions with Army Chief al-Sisi regarding the post-Morsi political transition. This conversation highlighted the necessity of ensuring that an Islamist representative participated in these discussions, and as the Muslim Brotherhood had refused the military's invitation to join, Gala Mura felt that the responsibility had fallen onto the Nour party. Thus he felt that his primary duty was to protect the religiously-inspired clauses of the 2012 Constitution. It seems he was quite persuasive, for he explained that: "the military and the Azhar [stood with me against El Baredi] to preserve the identity articles…and the articles regulating the restriction of liberties, and the article concerning the submission of legislative proposals to the Azhar."[4] But, much to the consternation of the Nour party, the new regime did not observe this pledge; as the 2013 Constitutional Declaration "eliminated the provisions that concern [Egypt's] belonging to the

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[1]   *Human Rights Watch*, "All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protestors in Egypt," 12 Aug. 2014. Available at https://www.hrw.org/, accessed 10 June 2016.

[2]   Available at https://anasalafy.com/play.php?catsmktba=42410, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

[3]   Available at: http://www.anasalafy.com/print.php?id=42436, accessed 2 Oct. 2017.

[4]   Available at https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%D8%AD%, accessed 24 Feb. 2017. (By Ahmad Rashwan, posted 4 July 2013)

Arab nation and the Islamic *umma*…as well as that which concerns the Arabic language; and also eliminated were [the identity] Articles 219, 81 and 4."[1] Second, at this juncture too, (on 5 July) the interim president announced the suspension of the *Majlis Shura*, the upper house of parliament which was dominated by the Islamists; this too was strongly condemned by the Nour/Salafi Call leadership.[2] Third, on July 16, the Nour leaders observed that the individuals that were being considered for ministerial positions identified with the secularist/liberalist camp; and the party "does not accept that one [ideological] camp replaces another in controlling the government, which should be completely impartial…."[3] Fourth, on 1 September the new regime announced the composition of the constitution panel that would be charged with drafting the country's new constitution, naming only two Islamists, ex-Muslim Brotherhood leader Kamal al-Helbawy and Nour Party leader Bassam al-Zarqa. Here Nour spokesman, Sherif Taha commented that "the formation of the committee is really bad and reflects the domination of the leftist-Nasserist faction." In the opinion of Yasser Burhami, major ideologue of the Salafi Call movement, the assembly was dominated by "enemies of Sharia [Islamic law] and the Islamic project.[4]

Finally, interim president Adli Mansour issued a new parliamentary law, which contained two problematic aspects. The first concerns the abandonment of the proportional representation system. Instead, the new law institutes a mixed electoral system, where 22.2% of house seats are to be contested by party lists, and 77.8% of seats by individual candidates. Regarding the party-list competition, the list that secures a win of more than 50% of total votes in the district takes all the

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[1] Available at https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%D8%AD%, accessed 24 Feb. 2017. (Nour Party's Announcement Regarding the Establishment of a Council of Wise-men, posted 8 July 2013)

[2] Available at https://www.facebook.com/Salafiacall/posts/394959770625651:0, accessed 5 Nov. 2015.

[3] Available at https://www.anasalafy.com/print.php?id=41946, accessed 2 Oct. 2017.

[4] *Ahram Online*, "Egypt's Constitutional Committee Marginalizes Islamists: Nour Party," 2 Sept. 2013.

Available at http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/80570/Egypt/0/Egypts-constitutional-committee-marginalises-Islam.aspx, accessed 21 Sept. 2017.

district seats—a change from the proportional representation system adopted in 2011. Thus this new rule means that the lists with less than the majority vote will not be represented; while the fact that the independent candidates will dominate the house means that those with the strongest patronage networks and state connections will win.   In the view of the Egyptian political parties, these combined changes would only work to hinder the emergence of a pluralistic, democratic order that represents all groups in society.   According to Khaled Dawoud, journalist and spokesperson for the Destour party, "the individual system [advantages] those who have capabilities, lots of money. As new political parties, we cannot compete [by these] conditions…This is a real setback for political parties in Egypt."   Similarly Yunis Makhyun, Chairman of the Nour party, publically urged "President Adly Mansour not to end his time of service (as president) with passing this controversial law..."[1] The second problematic aspect of the new parliamentary law concerned its requirement that party lists include members of certain groups; these are: Christians, farmers, workers, women, people with disabilities, and citizens who live abroad.   The purpose of this requirement, explained Ahmed Abu Zeid, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, is to provide "more opportunities for women and other groups that did not traditionally gain sufficient representation in Egypt's parliament."[2]   This new requirement regarding group quotas meant that the Nour party was required to include women and Coptic Christians on its party lists; but the problem for the party was that such inclusion ran counter to Salafist thinking regarding the proper way to deal with members of the two groups. Thus the party leadership knew that their compliance with this stipulation would certainly trigger the resentment of its adherents.

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[1]   *Reuters*, "Egypt Political Parties Concerned Over New Parliamentary Election Law," 6 June 2014.

Available at http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKBN0EH16L20140606, accessed 21 Sept. 2017.

[2]   *Egypt MFA Blog*, "Egypt's Parliamentary Elections: Setting the Record Straight," 14 Jan. 2016.

Available at https://mfaegypt.org/2016/01/14/egypts-parliamentary-elections-setting, accessed 22 Aug. 2017.

I conclude this examination of the post-2013 political environment by emphasizing that the major trends depicted above really amounted to "the closing of political space." This can be discerned on three levels. The first is the degree of the acceptance of opposition groups by the new political order; which in a word, generally demonstrated antipathy for Islamists. Large numbers of ordinary citizens had come to resent Morsi's government quite simply because it had not improved their daily lives. At the same time, the existence of a similarly large camp that chose to defend the Islamist president meant that the nation was divided into two opposing camps. While the Nour party tried to defuse this tense environment, thereby calling for national reconciliation strategies, the fault lines only seemed to harden. Thus the anti-Islamist camp produced the 'No to religious parties' movement; and more importantly produced a noticeably hostile media that described all Islamists in starkly negative terms. The second factor that reveals the narrowing of political space focuses on the existence of allies. At the time of the July ouster, the Nour party's decision to support the new regime meant that it made an enemy of its former ally, the Muslim Brotherhood. But the main reason the party had chosen to stand with the new regime was because it hoped the state would treat it as an ally. Yet this hope did not materialize, which further meant that the Nour party found the new political order empty of allies. The final factor that was examined here deals with the nature of state repression. The state demonstrated repeatedly that its tolerance threshold for Islamist activists had become very low: it not only arrested Brotherhood leaders but also detained large numbers of individuals that merely counted as sympathizers rather than dangerous activists; and it did not shrink from using excessive force to quell the demonstrators at the Republican Guard compound and to disperse the Rab'a and Nahda sit-ins. But in the containment of the Islamists, the state's arsenal contained more than physical force. For it issued several decisions that decisively signaled its intention to marginalize the Islamists; as for example its decision to suspend the upper house of parliament (Majlis Shura), which was dominated by Islamists, and to name only two Islamists to the constitution panel that was charged with drafting the new constitution. Here mention must also be made of the interim president's final act before leaving his post, his issuance of the June

2014 parliamentary law. While this had not been directed at the Islamists, its stipulation regarding the inclusion of representatives of minority groups on party lists was not well-received by the Nour party, which (rightly) feared the reaction of its support base.

The Dictates of Pragmatism:

Because the Nour/Salafi Call leadership was highly cognizant of operating in a hostile environment, its first order of business was to ensure its continued survival in the post-2013 arena. This led it to make several pragmatic decisions. After having declared its support for the military's removal of President Morsi, its next momentous step was to order its adherents to stay away from the Rab'a and Nahda sit-ins, which "not about the Islamist [cause], as they also include Christians, secularist and liberalists…but the real issue is who is with the coup and who is against the coup."[1] Then came the matter of the new constitution. When the interim government announced the names of the individuals that would make up the 50-member constitution panel, the Nour party found it was allotted only 1 seat—much less than what it had expected. Nevertheless, it chose to put aside its reservations and accept this invitation, here justifying its decision by declaring that it was motivated by the wish to "protect the gains achieved by the revolution of 25 January, and also to defend the [religiously-inspired] identity provisions which truly reflect the identity of the Egyptian nation…"[2] Upon the completion of the constitution, it was put to a national referendum, at which time the Nour party campaigned widely alongside the yes-camp to encourage Salafi adherents to approve the new constitution, which they described as "the best constitution Egypt has known."[3] Their campaign efforts, though, had little impact on the Salafi base; as voter turn-out for this group was very low.[4]

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[1]   *Al-Masry al-Yawm*, "Al-Nur yakshif khataya al-Ikhwan khilal fatrat hukm Morsi," [Al-Nur Reveals the Mistakes of the Brotherhood during Morsi's rule], 20 July, 2013.

[2]   Available at: http://www.anasalafy.com/print.php?id=42562, accessed 2 Oct. 2017.

[3]   Mustafa al-Najjar, "Hal khan hizb al-nur al-ikhwan?" [Did the Nour Party Betray the Brotherhood], *Al-Masry al-Yawm*, 28 March 2014.

[4]   Clément Steuer, "Current Developments in the Egyptian Salafist Scene," *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*, March 2017. Available at www.frstrategie.org, accessed 15 June 2018.

The matter of the constitution was quickly followed by the 2014 presidential elections. Prior to the official announcement of the candidates that would compete in the elections, a *Reuters*' reporter approached Yasser Burhami, prominent leader of the Salafi Call movement, to ask whether the Nour/Salafi Call leadership would support Sisi if he chose to run. To this Burhami declared: "The Islamist movement finds Army Chief Sisi problematic [and this is due to] the issue of the dispersal of Rab'a…and the blood that was spilt." Here he emphasized that this matter was "important for the rank and file, and [thus] what happened must be clarified." But by the end of January 2014, Burhami had distinctly modified his position, completely absolving Army Chief Sisi of any responsibility for the Rab'a bloodshed, and instead turned to praising him, recalling that (at the time of President Morsi's appointment of Sisi as Minister of Defense) he had been informed by Brotherhood leader Khayrat al-Shatir that Sisi was "the most religious and ethical military officer." Burhami further added to this commendation of Sisi when the latter declared his nomination, listing such laudable characteristics as his ability to lead the military institution and his massive popularity. Other Salafi voices joined that of Burhami's: Salafi Call leader, Shaykh Sameh Abd al-Hamid, declared that he believed that "Sisi would lift Egypt from its troubles", and Nour party leader, Nader Bakkar, described him as a "patriotic candidate, welcomed [by the nation]." But the Nour/Salafi Call leadership was not content to merely praise candidate Sisi, but also campaigned on his behalf, organizing a number of rallies in the different governorates of the country.[1] And just as had occurred with the 2014 constitution campaign efforts, the party efforts primarily targeted the Salafi base, which again largely remained indifferent.   This is confirmed by observer Clément Steuer upon examining the two 2014 electoral occasions; for he concluded that: "The instructions of the Nour Party…seemed to have little effect on their voters."[2]

This brings us to the final stage of the political roadmap announced on 3 July by Army Chief Sisi, the parliamentary elections of 2015. At this juncture, there

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[1]   Al-Najjar, "Hal khan hizb al-nur."

[2]   Steuer, "Current Developments."

was no prevarication on the part of the Nour party regarding its participation in the elections. Indeed, some of its leaders looked forward to this stage, believing that "the parliamentary elections will confirm [the party's] popularity."[1] But this stage too necessitated making some hard decisions. One of these involved the development of an electoral program that did not refer to the implementation of shari'a; a decision that was undoubtedly prompted by the growing strength of the "No to Religious Parties" movement and the need to deflect its criticism. Here the Nour leadership deemed it necessary to address the concerns of its Salafi base, pointing out that the 2014 Constitution specifies that legislation is to be based on shari'a, which meant that its inclusion in the Nour electoral program was unnecessary.[2]

More problematic, though, was the Nour party's observance of the stipulations of the new parliamentary law, thereby including Coptic Christians and women on its party lists. To explain such inclusions to their base, Salafi leaders referred to Islamic jurisprudence rules which allow for the acceptance of a problematic idea if it benefits the Islamic community. Thus including Coptic Christians on their party lists meant that Islamists could be certain of having a Christian member of parliament who appreciated Islam.[3] Yet despite this, Nour party chairman, Yunis Makhyun, could not help articulating his resentment of this electoral requirement, stating: "if not for the law, we would have refused the nomination of Copts on our lists."[4] The party leaders dealt with the issue of the inclusion of women in the same way: after explaining that it was better to have conservative, religious women in parliament rather than those who uphold Western mores, they assured their public that their women candidates were placed at the bottom of their lists so as to ensure they did not win seats.[5] Thus the intent

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[1] Al-Najjar, "Hal khan hizb al-nur"; also see Lacroix, "Egypt's Pragmatic."

[2] Maha A. Ghalwash & Lawrie Phillips "The Nour Party: Weathering the Political Storm in Post-Revolutionary Egypt," *Middle East Critique*, 26:4 (2017), 326. DOI:10.1080/19436149.2017.1363532.

[3] Ibid., 326.

[4] *Al-Yaum al-Sabi'*. Makhyun: lawla al-qanun li-rafdna tarshih al-a'qbat 'ala qawa'mina [Makhyun: If Not for the Law, We Would Have Refused to Nominate Copts on our Lists] 12 Oct. 2015,

[5] Ghalwash & Phillips, "The Nour Party," 326.

of these explanations and caveats was to demonstrate to the conservative Salafi base that the Nour party could be counted a faithful Islamist representative.

In ending this brief overview of the pragmatic decisions made by the Nour party during the post-2013 period, we might conclude the following. The Nour party was intent on ensuring its survival in the new political arena. Its leaders realized that this aim necessitated making several controversial decisions that would be resented by their adherents. But they did not shrink from these decisions for two reasons: they tried to show that their decisions were at once pragmatic and just as distasteful to themselves as to their base; and knowing that large numbers of Egyptians are religiously conservative, they believed that these voters would remain steadfast in their support for the only religiously-oriented party to compete in the elections. Indeed it seems that the same belief pervaded official circles worried about an Islamist majority in the new parliament; for state authorities "ordered the party to run with two, instead of four lists in the parliamentary elections."[1]

The 2015 Electoral Discourse: the attempt to satisfy the Salafist base:

Prior to the 2011 uprising, the Salafi Call movement, drawing from the teachings of Classical Salafism which advocates political quietism,[2] tended to eschew formal politics. The position of Classical Salafism regarding politics is grounded in the ideas of conventional Sunni political thought, which specify that believers are required to obey their ruler so long as he does not urge people to abandon their religion and so long as he continues to profess Islam himself. Believers are further urged to embrace political quietism even if the ruler engages in unseemly, un-Islamic behavior.[3] Thus this thinking aims to discourage criticism and agitation against an unjust ruler in order to ensure stability. This thinking

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[1]   *Egypt Independent*, "Nour Party Forced to Run with only 2 Lists," 10 Sept. 2015. Available at http://www.egyptindependent.com/nour-party-forced-run-only-2-lists-source/, accessed 23 Sept. 2017.

[2]   Salah al-Din Hassan, *Al-Salafiyyun fi misr* [The Salafis in Egypt], (Cairo: Dar Awraq li al-Nashr: 2012), 44.

[3]   For the conventional Sunni intellectual position on political quietism, see: L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press: 2000), chapters 1-7.

was reinforced by the intolerance of Mubarak's security services for political activism, which prompted the Salafi Call movement to focus on preaching, religious scholarship and charity activities. Thus at the time of the eruption of the 2011 uprising, most Salafi leaders urged citizens not to join the protestors on the streets, but then turned to praising them when they realized that Mubarak would be compelled to step down. In explaining this revised position, prominent Salafi Call leaders took to developing a new discourse that highlighted two major concerns: national development and the Islamist cause. Accordingly at this juncture, they were known, for example, to identify the "elimination of corruption" as an Islamic duty.[1] The two major lines of this discourse was also observed by the movement's political wing, the Nour party, established in May 2011. What the Nour leaders tried to do was to strike a balance between nationalist and Islamists interests, which really constituted an effort to demonstrate to the public that they led a party that was both patriotic and religious. In this way, they sought to expand their support base and attract adherents outside the narrow Salafi circles.[2]

But when preparing for the 2015 parliamentary elections, the Nour/Salafi Call leaders were more concerned about retaining the support of their original adherents; many of which were disturbed by the party's decision to accept the July ouster and the new political order.[3] At the same time, the party was acutely aware of operating in an inhospitable political arena that contained no allies, which made the retention of the loyalty of its original support base an imperative.   This

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[1] *Islam Maghribi,* "Mawaqif wa-tahawalat shuykh al-salafiyin athna' wa-ba'id al-thawra" [The Position of the Salafi Shaykhs before and after the Revolution], 1 Dec. 2012. Available at http://www.islammaghribi.com, accessed 30 Sept. 2015.

[2] Ghalwash & Phillips, "The Nour Party."

[3] For opposition of Salafi leaders, see for example: Kamel Kamel & Ahmed Arafa, "Ma'raka salafiyya - salafiyya 'ala al-musharaka fi al-intakhabat" [A Salafiyya - Salafiyya Battle about Participating in the Elections] Al-Yaum al-Sabi' [Cairo], 25 Sept. 2015. For opposition of ordinary Salafi adherents, see for example: Mahmoud al-Tabakh, "Qiyadi bi-al-da'wa al-salafiyyia: tarshih al-mar'ah 'ala qawa'imna yuhid min al-mutabarajat bi-al-barlaman" [A Leader in the Salafi Call: The Nomination of Women on our Lists will Limit the Number of Loose Women in Parliament] Al-Bawaba News, 31 Jan. 2015. Available at

http://www.albawabhnews.com/, accessed 3 Nov. 2015.

necessitated developing a discourse that demonstrated the party's faithfulness to Islamic teachings.

This can be seen by examining the party's assessment of the concept of democracy. On 16 October, Abd al-Mun'im al-Shahhat, Nour party spokesman, presented this assessment of democracy: "If we want to offer a succinct judgement of democracy, this ruling…will be that it constitutes an ideology that opposes the Muslim doctrine regarding [al-hakimiyya lil-allah, or sovereignty resides with God], but it has positive aspects." Among these aspects is the fact that this ideology calls for the drafting of a constitution, "and so if we disregard the theoretical dimension of democracy, and focus on [its]…practical, political level, we see that it allows a constitution to include the traditions of each society." Thus it is the institutions of democracy, of which the most important is the constitution, "that allows us to design a political order that is appropriate for Muslim societies This subsequently means that the greatest challenge for Islamists is to ensure that the constitution includes a provision that stipulates that legislation must be based on the shari'a. And once this is realized, [believers] have the shari'a-based right to participate in the democratic order..."[1] In other words, as the 2014 Constitution includes the requisite provision pertaining to shari'a, the participation of Egyptian Islamists in the democratic process would not constitute a violation of Islamic law.

Other problematic issues were addressed in the same way: by clarifying to supporters that the party decisions were actually in line with Islamic teachings. Thus to those Salafis who decried the party's electoral program for failing to call for the implementation of shari'a, the party responded that the 2014 Constitution already embraces this goal - a response that further meant to say that the Nour leadership had *not* overlooked this important aim. And to the disgruntled Salafist leaders who criticized the party for including women and Coptic Christians on its party lists, the response of party leaders was to turn to Islamic jurisprudence:

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[1] Abd al-Mun'im al-Shahhat, "Shubhat wa-jawabiha hawal al-mawqif min al-ammaliyya al-intikhabiyya," [Doubts and Answers on the Position towards the Electoral Process].

Available at http://www.anasalafy.com/play.php?catsmktba=60218, accessed 18 Sept. 2017.

some took from it the welfare/disadvantage rule, which basically allows the acceptance of a problematic issue if its benefits outweigh its costs for the Muslim community, while others chose to rely on an old fatwa (religious ruling) issued by the prominent Salafist thinker, Nasir al-Din al-Albani, which consisted of relying on the "lesser of two evils rule."[1] Armed with these rulings, the party leadership pointed out that the 2014 parliamentary law stipulates the inclusion of these groups on party lists, and so for the Nour party to refuse to comply would mean it could not compete in the upcoming elections and accordingly would miss the opportunity of being included in the new parliament, "which will be a very important [parliament] because it will issue laws that will complete the constitution."[2] And this would harm the Islamist cause more greatly than the inclusion of individuals from such groups. In fact, ran the party argument, charging such individuals to represent the Nour party in parliament would work to assist, *not hurt*, the Islamist cause simply because the Nour party would select candidates who sympathized with and embraced its worldview.

This examination of the discourse strategy developed by the party for the 2105 parliamentary elections might end with three observations. One, at the time of the elections, the Salafi base saw their leaders engage in a conflictual discourse; by which I mean that some prominent Salafi shaykhs, like Ahmad al-Naqib, were very critical of some of the ideas of the party, which inevitably prompted a response from the latter. Here we might add that this conflictual discourse probably confused some members of the Salafi base, and further compounded the feelings of disillusionment they harbored towards the Nour party. Two, the party response to the criticism levelled against by Salafi thinkers generally involved its attempt to emphasize its observance of Islamic teachings; in other words, the party had engaged in "frame amplification." Three, the party attempt to explain crucial decisions by referring mainly to Islamic ideas leads us to conclude that they

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[1]   For reliance on Albani's ruling, see: Muhammad Abd al-Athim, "Hizb al-nour fi mahhab al-fatawa al-mutadariba wa-tanaqid al-mawaqif al-shar'iyya," [The Nour Party in the Face of Contradictory Rulings and Incongruous Shar'iyya Positions], 11 Oct. 2015, *Parlmany News*. Available at http://www.parlmany.com/News/7/1472/, accessed 3 Nov. 2015.

[2]   Al-Tabakh, "Qiyadi bi-al-da'wa."

primarily sought to address their original (and largely disgruntled) adherents. This view is confirmed by Tarek Fahmy, Cairo University expert on Egyptian politics, who stated a few days before the start of the elections that "the Nour party's [campaign discourse] addresses its supporters only, and does not address [the entirety] of the Egyptian nation."[1]

Mobilizing the Salafist Base:

A discussion on the mobilization abilities of the Nour party must include mention of both the informal and the formal institutions on which they relied to prepare for the 2015 parliamentary elections.   But first we might start with two observations by Najih Ibrahim, Islamist thinker and member of the Jama'a Islamiyya movement (part of the broader Salafist movement in Egypt). In his view, the mobilization ability of the entirety of the Salafiyya movement "is much weaker than that of the Muslim Brotherhood." While he sees the Brotherhood "as a political entity as well as a very active electoral one … that possesses a strong organizational structure … [on the other hand] the Salafiyya movement is not an organization and will never be one, but instead constitutes a theological scholastic school that focuses on knowledge and worship. It is new to politics, which it does not understand, and so has not been able to educate its adherents about political matters."[2]

According to Najih Ibrahim, this is particularly true for Salafi women members; who he compares to those belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood. While the latter woman contributes "positively to all activities of the Brotherhood…and prioritizes the affairs of the Brotherhood over all else…the Salafi woman is primarily a domestic being." This means that her horizons generally end with her family and her home; and "she is raised to hate politics and elections." Moreover, her very attire, the long black niqab, prevents her from communicating easily with others; and so "she could not stand in the street and distribute campaign pamphlets among female passers-by in the way that the Brotherhood female

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[1]   Ahmed Arafa, "Al-Iskandiriyyia ma'qal al-salafiyyin fi al-bilad" [Alexandria is the Salafi Stronghold in the Country] *Al-Yawm al-Sabi*, 14 Oct. 2015.

[2]   Ibrahim, "Al-asbab al-sab'a."

members had done." Thus while the Muslim Brotherhood could depend on its female members - described by Ibrahim as the "most politically active female group in Egypt" - to contribute to its campaign efforts, the Salafi movement could not do the same.[1]

On one hand, Ibrahim's comments on the mobilization capacities of the Salafi movement do not include mention of the fact that several Salafi parties were established in 2011, and that these competed very effectively in the Nov. 2011 - Jan. 2012 parliamentary elections, and that these developments stand as testimony to some level of organizational ability, mobilization capacity and political astuteness on the part of Salafist political actors. On the other, we might nevertheless draw a significant point from these comments, this being the fact that Salafist mobilization capacities (the Nour party included) are definitely weaker than those of the Brotherhood.

Although organizationally weaker than the Brotherhood, Nour campaign efforts could make use of the same type of informal institutions that the Brotherhood were known to rely on. One of these constituted its wide charity networks, which has contributed greatly to poverty reduction in the country. According to recent research on faith-based organizations, Islamists do not use the activities of these organizations to "buy" the loyalty of benefit-recipients in exchange for assistance. Instead, activists consider these charity organizations a good venue for political campaigning activities.[2] The other important venue for Salafi campaigning efforts constituted the mosques under their management. And although the state sought to undermine this management, partly by insisting that the Salafi Imams (preachers) deliver the Friday sermon on the topic specified in advance by the Ministry of Religious Affairs,[3] it is likely that Salafi leaders continued to utilize this venue to influence the citizens they led in prayer.

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[1]   Ibid.

[2]   Moustafa Khalil, "Faith-Based Organizations and Civic Engagement in Egypt, Can FBOs Be Agents for Change?" in Lesley Hustinx, Johan von Essen, Jacques Haers, and Sara Mels, eds., *Religion and Volunteering: Complex, Contested and Ambiguous Relationships* (Springer International Publishing, 2015).

[3]   Lacroix, "Egypt's Pragmatic."

But the Nour party's most visible mobilization venue at this time was the campaign rally. As the Nour/Salafi Call leaders were highly cognizant of operating in a hostile political environment it seems that most of their rally activities focused on their stronghold—the West Delta electoral district, which included Alexandria, Buhayra and Marsa Matrouh provinces. According to journalist Ahmad Arafa, the party organization succeeded in holding more than fifteen rallies in Alexandria, another four in Buhayra, in addition to a few in Marsa Matrouh, and only three in Upper Egypt. He further observed that these rallies primarily sought to address its support base, for he notes that "most of the Nour party's rallies were attended by the members of the party, and we did not see outsiders in attendance, as the [party] discourse aimed to send messages to the Islamist element.[1] Here two additional points about these rallies might be mentioned. One, hardly any of the illustrious shaykhs were in attendance. In the attempt to win the support of the Salafist base, the Nour/Salafi Call leadership tried to secure the assistance of prominent Salafi *shaykh*s, like Muhammad Hassan and Muhammad Hussein Ya'qub. Specifically, they wanted these influential leaders to publicly urge Salafi supporters to vote for the Nour party, "as it is the [only] party to defend the shari'a." But all these leaders (except for Muhammad al-Zughby) completely refused this request, "as they preferred to distance themselves from politics."[2] Thus such absence was likely noticed by the rank and file, leading many to waver in their commitment to the Nour party. Two, had the Nour leaders tried to intensify their efforts in Upper Egypt, they might have convinced the members of the Jama'a Islamiyyia movement to change their stance vis-à-vis the party. For at the time that the Ministry of Interior was apprehending Nour party members (a few days before the elections began[3]), some of the Jama'a Islamiyya members were also caught up in its dragnet. The result was the "refusal of the Jama'a Islamiyya rank-and-file in Upper Egypt to support the Nour party in the parliamentary

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[1] Arafa, "Al-Iskandiriyyia ma'qal."

[2] Muhammad Khayal & Ali Kamal, "Al-Nur: kisabna 10 maqa'id wa-radiyyin [The Nour: We Won 10 Seats, and We Are Content], *Al-Shoruq*, 30 Oct. 2015.

[3] Tariq Salah & Sa'id Ali, Burhami yatahim al-amin wa-al-ikhwan bi-al-tasabib fi khusarat al-nur [Burhami Accuses the Security Services and the Muslim Brotherhood for the Nour's Losses] *Al-Masry al-Yaum,* 25 Oct. 2015.

elections … because they believe that this Salafi party constitutes the major reason for what happened to them and their relatives."[1]

In ending this examination of the Nour party's mobilization efforts, we might conclude the following: one, the party relied on both informal and formal organizations, and that each of these organization types undoubtedly complemented the other. Two, the party leaders organized campaign rallies with the intention of focusing on their original adherents; but that they most often had to do so without the support and assistance of illustrious Salafi shaykhs. This enabled the rank and file to discern the extent of disagreement between the party leadership and the broader Salafi movement, which undoubtedly caused some adherents to waver in their commitment to the party.

At this juncture, an important question comes to mind: did the party's mobilization strategy (composed of a discourse that highlights Islamic teachings and the reliance on formal & informal institutions to ensure that their message reached their original adherents) succeed in persuading the Salafist base to remain committed to the party? In a word, no. While the party leadership attributes its poor electoral performance to such factors as the media smear campaign waged by the Brotherhood and the fact that the Ministry of Interior apprehended more than 50 Nour members just a few days before the start of the elections,[2] other Salafi leaders simply point to the indifference of the Salafi base. In an interview with *Reuters*, Hani Sarhan, a former Nour official in Fayoum (southwest of Cairo), stated that: "The changing face of the party destroyed its popularity;" here recalling that the party had first backed the Brotherhood, then withdrew its support to ally with Sisi. Other former party members concurred with this assessment, stating that "it was Nour's attempts at compromise—which were regarded as selling out by its traditional supporters—and not any crackdown that cost it so much."[3] Salafist thinker, Najih Ibrahim also highlighted the indifference

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[1]   Ali & al-Sharif, "Jawla salafiyya fi al-riyad."

[2]   See above: No. 74.

[3]   Mahmoud Mourad, "Egypt's Remaining Islamist Party Cries Foul as it Flops in Election," *Reuters*, 23 Nov. 2015. Available at https://www.reuters.com, accessed 10 June 2018.

of the party's original adherents, having observed that "some of the Alexandria members of the Salafi Call movement and some members of the Nour party had withdrawn from politics and the elections, and these did not go to the polling stations…and some of these condemned several of the political decisions made by the Nour party."[1]

Conclusion:

The Nour party performed abysmally in the 2015 parliamentary elections; winning 10 seats in the first round,[2] and an additional one in the second, thus making their total win 11 seats out of 596 (1.85% of the total.) Party leader Abd al-Mun'im al-Shahhat attributed this outcome to several factors; most notably: the rules of the 2014 parliamentary law discounted the party's commendable performance in the West Delta district, where it had won 30% of the votes, because a more-than 50% win was needed to take the district; and the media campaign waged by state and private outlets led Nour party supporters to believe that the election results were a "forgone conclusion", which depressed "a large group of Nour party supporters…that chose not to vote."[3] Taken together, these two factors point to the crux of the problem: a large number of Nour party adherents had chosen not to vote.

This article sought to explain the dynamics that produced this low voter turn-out by relying on the three variables of social movement theory (SMT). Regarding the first, political opportunity structures, we saw that the Nour party was operating in a hostile political arena that displayed minimal tolerance for Islamists. For the anti-Islamist camp was large and strident, and included the influential state and private media outlets, while much of the pro-Islamist camp was equally strident in its condemnation of the Nour leadership. Added to that was the state's

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[1]   Ibrahim, "Al-asbab al-sab'a."

[2]   Khayal & Kamal, "Al-Nur: kisabna 10 maqa'id."

[3]   Abd al-Mun'im al-Shahhat, "Tahlil nata'ij hizb al-nur fi al-marhala al-ula min intakhabat 2015" [An Analysis of the Results of the Nour Party in Phase I of the 2015 Elections]. Available at http://fath-news.com/art.php?id=1072, accessed 20 Aug. 2017.

decision to work with the Azhar institution rather than the Nour leaders in the management of the country's religious affairs;[1] which further led it to ignore crucial Nour party demands and to harshly quash Islamist activists. Acutely aware of operating in an inimical environment, the Nour leaders scrambled to ensure their survival in formal politics by making several pragmatic yet controversial decisions. Upon discerning the wide resentment of the Islamist camp to these decisions, the Nour leaders stood fast, refusing to back down. This brings us to the second component of SMT utilized in the investigation of this case, frames. For instead of backing down, they chose to highlight their appreciation for core Islamist teachings by emphasizing that their pragmatic decisions were actually grounded in Islamic thought; thereby engaging in "frame amplification" in order to ensure that their new frames would resonate with their original adherents. At this juncture in the investigation of this case, I relied on the third component of SMT, mobilization structures. In the dissemination of its ideas, the Nour leadership depended on its charity networks, mosques and campaign rallies; with each venue ensuring its contact with its Salafist supporters. Thus this means that the Nour party had developed a discourse and mobilization strategy that primarily targeted one group, their original Salafist base. But despite these efforts, this base largely remained indifferent; for as one former Nour official had said: "the party had lost [its] credibility."[2]

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[1]   See Lacroix, "Egypt's Pragmatic."

[2]   Mourad, "Egypt's Remaining Islamist."