

Egypt's 2024 Presidential Elections: A Dead End



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(Position paper)

During the first few months of 2024, Egypt is scheduled to witness its third presidential elections since President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi assumed de-facto control of the country in July 2013. Yet given the existing arsenal of draconian legislation, the institutional setup that subjugates all the state's resources and institutions to the president, and the authorities' decade-long zero tolerance policy towards all forms of dissent, the upcoming elections cannot be considered free nor fair.

The National Dialogue, which is yet to launch after one year of being announced, will not positively influence the upcoming elections. The legal and political frameworks, which actively dispossess Egyptians of their political rights, do not meet the minimum benchmarks to guarantee that the authorities will impartially supervise elections. The absence of basic preconditions to hold free and fair presidential elections is exacerbated by the 2019 constitutional amendments, which further eroded separation of powers and institutional independence, including that of the judiciary. The amendments also legalized the military's intervention in politics and electoral processes, as previously occurred during the 2018 presidential elections when the military arrested two presidential candidates.

Over the course of the 2018 presidential elections, Egyptian authorities also placed one other candidate under house arrest and forced him to drop his bid, and exercised a degree of repression that led at least two other candidates to end their campaigns out of fear for the safety of their staff. Authorities also targeted members of the opposition who called for boycotting the 2018 elections, through imprisoning some and investigating others for crimes punishable by death. The electoral process was ultimately a farce that witnessed the reelection of Sisi with an unsurprising 97% of the vote for another four-year term that was supposed to end in 2022.

Since the 2013 coup, Egyptian authorities have imprisoned tens of thousands of peaceful individuals on political charges based on a myriad of repressive laws. Those imprisoned include members of the political opposition, human rights defenders, journalists, academics, and even apolitical citizens. Security agencies have also tightened their grip on public space, with an effective ban on peaceful street mobilization, the expropriation of civic space through relentless attacks on civil society organizations, and by dominating the vast majority of media platforms. The authorities' strict control over the flow of information, punishing the voicing of differing opinions, including on social media, and their monopoly over shaping narratives complement the large-scale repression undermining electoral processes in Egypt.

Codifying Authoritarianism

Presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, as well as referenda in Egypt are supervised by the National Election Authority (NEA), established by Law 198 of 2017. The NEA's self-proclaimed independence and impartiality are compromised by the means through which its members are appointed. The ten members of the NEA's board come from the senior ranks of five judicial entities and are selected by the

Supreme Council for the Judiciary and the entities to which they belong, then appointed by the president. The law in effect, gives the president the authority to appoint those who oversee all elections, including elections wherein he is personally running, rendering the NEA independent only in name. Prior to Law 198/2017, presidential elections were regulated according to Law 22 of 2014, whereby the committee supervising the elections was composed of the head of the Constitutional Court, the head of the Cairo Court of Appeals, and the most senior deputies of the heads of the Constitutional and Cassation courts, and the Council of State. During the 2018 presidential elections, violations committed by the NEA, along with the wider context of repression, led the opposition candidates who were not arrested or put under house arrest to end their campaigns, out of fear for the safety of their staff and out of belief that there are no "equal chances for the candidates."

Beyond the NEA, the president's growing control of the judiciary impedes the most basic principles of separation of powers and judicial autonomy, along with the integrity of any electoral process. Under the rule of former President Hosni Mubarak, the judiciary maintained a small margin of independence that was severely eroded following the coup in 2013. A Reuters investigation found that between 2013 and 2016, 59 judges were forcibly retired by disciplinary committees, in what many of those dismissed thought was a warning message to other judges to follow the government's line. In 2017, the parliament hastily passed Law 13 of 2017 regulating judicial entities, despite the objections of judges. The law replaced the tradition of appointing heads of judicial authorities according to their seniority (number of years in service) in favor of granting the president the right to select the heads of the entities from a pool of senior judges, thereby giving him unconstitutional control over the judiciary.

Nevertheless, it is the 2019 constitutional amendments, which aimed to cement the president's power and extend his rule, that dealt the final blow to judicial

independence by constitutionalizing Law 13/2017. Amendments to articles 185 and 193 of the constitution gave the president the power to appoint the heads of judicial authorities, allowing him to influence the makeup of the Supreme Council for the Judiciary and the NEA. The means through which the 2019 amendments render presidential elections unfree and unfair extend beyond subjugation of the judiciary. According to Article 140 of the 2014 Egyptian constitution (under which the 2014 and 2018 elections were held), the president of the republic is to serve four-year terms in office and can be reelected only once. Article 226 of the constitution had explicitly banned amendments to constitutional articles concerning the reelection of the president, freedoms, and equality unless those amendments sought to provide more guarantees on rights and freedoms. Article 140 was amended to extend presidential terms from four years to six years, while Article 241 of the amendments, conspicuously tailored for the sitting president, states that his ongoing term expires in 2024 rather than in 2022. It exempts only him from the two-term limit, allowing him to run for a third and supposedly final term that would begin in 2024. In other words, the fact that the presidential elections will be organized in 2024 rather than 2022, is in and of itself a testament to its absurdity.

Meanwhile, Article 200 of the amendments gave the military the green light to directly intervene in politics to “preserve the constitution and democracy, protect the basic principles of the state and its civil nature, and protect the people’s rights and freedoms.” The vaguely worded amendment, along with Law 167 of 2020, gave the military legal cover to intervene in electoral processes, including presidential elections, for whatever it deems as a violation of the “principles of the state.” Law 167/2020 stipulates that retired military officers cannot run for presidential, parliamentary, or local elections without the approval of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, a restriction that previously applied only to officers in service. The law additionally gave the military the right to “give opinion” on constitutional amendments and laws regulating the exercise of political rights, and presidential, parliamentary, and local

elections. The military's legalized intervention in politics became further entrenched in 2022, when General Salah al-Ruwainy, the head of the military judiciary, was appointed by presidential decree as the first deputy of the Supreme Constitutional Court. Considering the powers given to the president by the constitutional amendments, some believe Ruwainy is likely to succeed the current head of the court when he retires in 2027.

The constitutional coup of 2019, and other legislative transgressions, were made possible by the authoritarian entrenchment of the preceding years. In February 2015, only six months after Sisi formally became president, security agencies and the president's office began holding a series of meetings that ultimately produced a parliament under their complete control. The president's domination of the parliament explains why the unequivocally unconstitutional amendments passed in parliament with the approval of 531 members and the opposition of only 22 members. Some of the parliamentarians who had voiced their opposition to the amendments came under attack from pro-government media and security services, to the point where one of them had to flee Egypt for fear of persecution.

The 2019 amendments merely constituted one of the 2015 parliament's last bids to enable codifying the authoritarian status quo before a new parliament was formally elected in 2020. In January 2016, the parliament approved en masse 341 presidential decrees, issued between mid 2013 and 2015, turning them into legislation. The approved laws included some of the most repressive ones currently used by the Egyptian authorities to silence dissent and target opposition to the president. One of the earliest legislative acts carried out after the 2013 coup was the issuance by presidential decree of Law 107 of 2013 regulating protests. The law effectively gives security officials the right to ban any protests at their discretion, and to forcibly dispersal protests, while carrying heavy sentences for protesters. The law additionally gives the interior ministry the right to ban public gathering of over ten people,

including meetings related to electoral campaigns or referenda. Meanwhile, Law 10 of 1914 on assembly stated that if a crime is committed with the intent of realizing the purpose of the assembly, all persons who comprise the assembly at the time of the commission of this crime bear criminal liability as accomplices. Law 10/1914 was repealed in 1928, yet the bill parliament adopted to repeal it was never published in the Official Gazette, and accordingly is still illegally in use.

Law 107/2013, along with Law 10/1914, have been instrumental legislative tools to deter and severely punish any form of peaceful mobilization. Additionally, the Counterterrorism Law (94 of 2015) and the Terrorist Entities Law (8 of 2015) were issued by the president despite the strong opposition of political parties, civil society NGOs, and the press syndicate. The vague wording of the laws, the broad powers they gave to security agencies are central pillars of the authoritarian architecture in Egypt today, keeping tens of thousands of dissidents and even apolitical citizens behind bars, and undermining electoral processes.

Politics Repressed and Nationalized

The arsenal of draconian legislation at the disposal of Egyptian authorities has all but eroded the prospects for a healthy political life and the potential for free and fair elections. The capacity of political opposition and pro-democracy actors to organize has been greatly diminished by the targeting of their leadership and rank-and-file members. Abdelmoniem Aboul Fotouh, a prominent opposition leader and head of the Strong Egypt party, and his deputy Mohamed al-Qasas, were arrested in 2018 and faced baseless terrorism charges as part of the crackdown amidst the presidential elections. Not only did the arrests effectively upend the party, but they also sent a strong message to political opposition; after all, Aboul Fotouh was an internationally renowned and widely respected head of a legitimate political party. After four years in pretrial detention, during which he was arbitrarily placed on the terrorist entities list,

Aboul Fotouh and al-Qasas were sentenced in May 2022 by an emergency court to fifteen and ten years in jail respectively.

Similarly, attempts by the political opposition to stop the constitutional amendments of 2019 were met with unrelenting repression. In January 2019 Yahia Hussein Abdelhady, a leading figure in the Civil Democratic Movement, a grouping of leftwing and liberal parties, was arrested for spearheading efforts to oppose the amendments, amid a crackdown that included dozens of others. Abdelhady's arrest came a few hours after the Movement publicly called on the authorities to release five of its activists who had been arrested earlier in the week. Mohamed Mohieldin, who also coordinated efforts to peacefully challenge the amendments, was arrested on terrorism charges, and was joined by four members of the Dostour party.

After the constitutional amendments were passed, the political opposition began to internally organize to form a joint list to run in the 2020 parliamentary elections. Zyad al-Eleimy, a former parliamentarian and one of the founders of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, and Hossam Moanes, one of the founders of the Popular Current leftist party, were among several members of the opposition who were meeting to form a unified parliamentary electoral list they named the Hope Coalition. In late June 2019, al-Eleimy and Moanes, along with other members of the opposition, syndicates, journalists, and businessmen including Ramy Shaath, Hassan Barbary, Omar Sheneity, and Hisham Fouad, were arrested and charged with terrorism in Case 930 of 2019. At least thirteen of them were subsequently added by a court to the terrorism list. By 24 July 2019, at least 83 people have been detained across the country.

After the Hope Case defendants had reached the maximum legal limit of two years in pretrial detention, six of them, including al-Eleimy and Moanes, learned that they were added to another case which lawyers say contained identical paragraphs and

sections of Case 930/2019. Egyptian authorities would accordingly be able to keep al-Eleimy and Moanes in pretrial detention for two more years, which could be renewed again under another new case after the second set of two years expire—a practice notoriously dubbed “recycling detainees.” The ordeal of the Hope Case defendants was emblematic of a wider trend; between January 2018 and December 2021 at least 1,764 detainees were recycled into new cases.

The Hope Case devastated the political opposition’s ability to organize for the 2020 parliamentary elections; the arrest of opposition parties’ leaders and rank-and-file, many of whom are known for their vehement opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, undermined the opposition’s organizational capacities and sent a clear message on the high cost of challenging the authorities, even through elections. The 2020 parliamentary elections predictably produced another rubber-stamp parliament.

The crackdown on the political opposition was complemented by a zero tolerance policy towards street mobilization, using the same set of draconian legislation. When protests broke out in September 2019 in response to corruption scandals surrounding Sisi, decisive repression rooted it out. During what became known as the “September 20 Events” and in the span of no more than two weeks, 4,400 people were arrested. Some of them were apprehended from their homes while others were arbitrarily arrested in public places. Security forces would randomly stop people on the streets, search through their phones, and arrest them on the spot for as little as liking or sharing social media posts with political connotation. The campaign of mass arrests that followed the September 20 Events was repeated on several different occasions, including in September 2021 and November 2022, putting thousands more behind bars.

Counterterrorism legislation was again paramount to enforcing this degree of repression; over the span of the past year, terrorism courts have renewed the pretrial

detention of around 25,000 individuals. The wide-scale and systematic nature of deploying repressive legislation to hold tens of thousands of people in pretrial detention and recycle them into new cases, or sentence them in grossly unfair trials as was the case with al-Eleimy, Aboul Fotouh, and al-Qasas, points to the complicit role of the judiciary and prosecution. And while many members of the political opposition and activists remain undeterred, the Kafkaesque reality detainees face in prisons has rendered political activism an immensely dangerous endeavor; as the relative of one political detainee put it after the release of his family member: “We repent...we won’t be involved in politics again.” Such a reality bodes ill for the prospects of free elections.

The efforts of political opposition to challenge the government or even develop policy alternatives have not been hampered solely by the direct targeting of its leaders and members, but also through more subtle strategies. The Free Egyptians party was established in 2011 by tycoon Naguib Sawiris, and was regarded as one of the most serious challengers of the Muslim Brotherhood, boasting the membership of 100,000 individuals. Although the party supported the 2013 coup and Sisi in the 2014 presidential elections, it had attempted to maintain its independence and lacked the complete level of conformity desired by authorities.

By the end of 2016, security agencies' infiltration of the party catalyzed the ousting of its leadership in what was described by Sawiris as the nationalization of the party, ultimately leading to the installment of a new, more amenable leadership. After the 2020 parliamentary elections, the Free Egyptians party, which had the largest number of seats in 2015, did not have a single seat in parliament. Sabotaging parties from within was not a particularly new phenomenon; during the Mubarak era, the Wafd and Ghad parties had somewhat similar fates. What was remarkable about the undoing of the Free Egyptians party was the fact that it could have hardly been

described as an opposition party and that the slight margin of independence it sought was that insufferable to Egyptian authorities.

Other parties, especially those lacking the immense financial resources that were at the disposal of the Free Egyptians party, faced other types of hurdles. The law regulating political parties (74 of 1977), amended in 2011 by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, is another obstacle to a free political life. The law gives the judicial committee tasked with licensing parties the authority to deny license requests based on the vague criteria of violating "national security," "national unity," or "social peace." As part of the application process to form parties, the law requires the signature of at least 5,000 founding members from across at least ten governorates, with a minimum of 300 individuals from each governorate. Impediments posed by Law 74/1977 have hindered the establishment of new parties, including the Bread and Freedom party (pending registration), which has been unable to meet the stipulated criteria, especially in light of the informal ban on independent political activity.

Security services routinely prevent opposition political parties from organizing conferences or meeting in public places. Venues refuse to host events and inform the organizers that security services ordered them to refuse. On one occasion, a social event organized by the Civil Democratic Movement and attended by many of the opposition's leadership and members, was crashed by thugs who assaulted the participants while shouting "traitors and spies."

Expropriating Civic Space

Egyptian authorities' systematic crackdown on political opposition was complemented by a strategy to expropriate civic space altogether; strictly controlling the flow of information and public debates. Independent civil society organizations and free media have therefore been other primary targets of the post-2013 repression. In

2015, authorities included Egyptian rights organizations in the so-called “Foreign Funding Case” (173 of 2011), which had originally been opened in 2011 under the interim government of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to target international NGOs. By 2016, dozens of independent Egyptian human rights organizations and human rights defenders had their assets frozen and were placed under travel bans while facing baseless charges that carry a potential sentence of life imprisonment. Although by early 2022 Egyptian authorities formally closed the investigation against a handful of Egyptians organizations and defenders, the vast majority of those accused in Case 173/2011 remain under punitive measures, including some of those whom are no longer formally under investigation.

In other cases, the authorities have been even more blatant in their targeting of human rights defenders. Ibrahim Metwally, the founder of the League of the Families of the Disappeared, was disappeared from Cairo International Airport in 2017 when traveling to meet with the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearance. Metwally subsequently faced terrorism-related charges and has been recycled into new cases more than once, including Case 786 of 2020. Over five years after his arrest, Metwally remains in pretrial detention.

Metwally’s ordeal is merely one of many others, the most recent of which is the case of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, where 29 of its staff and leadership have been sentenced to between five and fifteen years in prison on terrorism charges in an unfair trial. Many other human rights defenders remain behind bars or suffer punitive measures. Mohamed al-Baquer, a human rights lawyer, was arrested in 2019 while representing his client Alaa Abdel Fattah in an investigation. Both were recycled into new cases more than once and were ultimately sentenced to four and five years in prison respectively by an emergency court, and were added to terrorism lists. For their human rights work, five of the staff of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, including its director, are under punitive

measures, including travel bans and asset freezes. And in 2020 Bahey eldin Hassan, the director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, was sentenced in absentia to fifteen years in jail for comments he made at a United Nations event.

Egyptian authorities have been using the counterterrorism and criminal procedure laws to target human rights defenders as part of their wider strategy to silence dissent and control narratives. Their intent on subjugating human rights organizations has also manifested through the draconian NGO law (149 of 2019), which gives Egyptian authorities sweeping powers over NGOs and their work, in effect eradicating their independence. The law stipulates that NGO work must be related to development-oriented activities that conform to the government's development plan; authorities may deny the registration of NGOs if their activities are—arbitrarily—deemed violations of vague terms such as “public morals.” The law additionally allows government officials to have immediate access upon notice to NGOs’ headquarters to review records and monitor activities. Such infringement on the freedom of assembly and association undermines the integrity of electoral processes, given independent civil society’s role in protecting civic and political space, shaping debates, and monitoring elections.

Like independent civil society, free media has also suffered systematic attacks over the past decade. Since 2014, security services have come to dominate all but a handful of media platforms in Egypt, effectively possessing an unencumbered ability to shape public narratives. During Mubarak’s era, state-owned media toed the government’s line, and various businessmen with ties to the government owned private newspapers and satellite channels that largely echoed the government’s narrative but within a wider margin of independence. Although the margin of independence exponentially grew in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 overthrow of Mubarak, with 2013 coup it regressed to a state far worse than it had been over the past decades.

Sisi has repeatedly expressed publicly his wish for all media platforms to strictly adhere to the official narrative and unconditionally back the government. As early as August 2014, Sisi noted how former President Gamal Abdel Nasser was “lucky” because the media toed the line, in reference to one of the most repressive eras for media in Egyptian history. After the coup, security agencies have quickly come to take over media outlets, gaining exceptional abilities to control and shape narratives. Informally banning coverage of political opposition, negative coverage of ministers—let alone the president, or covering specific topics, such as the economic crisis, became the norm rather than the exception. A report by the Association of Freedom of Thought and Expression has found that Egyptian authorities have repeatedly imposed formal bans on news coverage of cases where government officials are accused of crimes, including rape, torture, murder, and corruption, often leading to impunity. Authorities continue to block at least hundreds of websites of news outlets and human rights organizations. International media hasn’t been spared, with Egyptian officials threatening foreign media outlets and at times deporting foreign journalists over the course of the 2018 presidential elections.

For almost a decade, Egyptian authorities have consistently attacked journalists and censored the press, with its rank on the Press Freedom Index steadily deteriorating; in 2013 Egypt ranked 158 out of 180 countries and by 2022, it ranked 168. Egypt is also classified as one of the worst jailers of journalists, ranking among the top countries with journalists behind bars. Even social media did not escape the grip of security services, with Law 75 of 2018 nominally addressing cybercrimes and Law 180 of 2018 regulating media and journalism imposing prison sentences and hefty fines on social media users for posting “fake news” or “violating family values” among other vaguely worded offenses. Beyond news outlets and social media, authorities’ pursuit of controlling narratives has even extended to the TV and film industry. In a public speech, Sisi had called out a movie produced in the 1990s by name, stating that it had turned the state into “an adversary” and catalyzed the events of 2011. With

such an outlook, intelligence services have come to establish a near monopoly on the entertainment industry through its conglomerate.

Through its decade-long efforts to nationalize politics and monopolize its control of narratives, Egyptian authorities have effectively sealed the public space shut. With human rights NGOs and free media constantly under attack, the status of civic space in Egypt clearly does not allow for free and fair elections to be held.

The Illusion of a Political Opening and the 2024 Presidential Elections

In April 2022, Sisi called for the start of a national dialogue with the political opposition, hinting at an alleged readiness to ease the informal ban on political activity. The call for dialogue primarily stemmed from the economic crisis Egypt was about to face. The unsustainable economic model adopted by Sisi, heavily relying on foreign debt and an ever-expanding role of the military in economic activity, has come under heavy strain from the financial ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The National Dialogue, on the one hand, would nominally make the opposition share part of the responsibility for the economic woes that are yet to come, and imply that impending unpopular economic policies are the result of a political consensus, rather than the unilateral decision-making process of the previous decade. On the other hand, a political opening or at least the illusion of one will likely placate Western allies and international financial institutions—actors that are essential to throwing the economy a lifeline of more loans and aid.

After the call for National Dialogue, the Civil Democratic Movement outlined a number of demands that were meant to set an environment conducive to meaningful political opening, most prominently, the release of all peaceful political prisoners. Over the span of a year, through a combination of presidential pardons and releases from pretrial detention, the government boasted the freeing of over 900 prisoners. They included Yahia Hussein Abdelhady, who was pardoned in June 2022 after being

sentenced the week before to four years in prison and spending over three years in pretrial detention. Mohamed Mohieldin was also released in October 2022 after being held in pretrial detention for three years. Zyad al-Eleimy and Hossam Moanes of the Hope Case were also released after three years of unjust imprisonment. The release of high-profile figures was complemented by other maneuvers that aimed to deceptively show that a political opening is underway. In March 2023, Sisi “directed the government and state agencies” to examine a proposal by the National Dialogue’s secretariat on extending the mandate of the judiciary’s supervision of elections, which is set to expire before the upcoming elections.

The bigger picture, however, points to a different reality, especially when it comes to the integrity of presidential elections. Ten years after seizing control of Egypt, the president has locked his control over all state institutions, including the judiciary, rendering its supervision of elections redundant. And while several high-profile figures have been released from prison, others like Aboul Fotouh, al-Qasas, and tens of thousands of others still languish in jail. In fact, Abdelhady was charged in April 2023 in a new case for social media comments criticizing the atmosphere of repression and its effect on presidential elections. Although over 900 individuals have been released since April 2022, more than 3,000 others have been newly arrested over the same period of time. Members of the opposition and apolitical citizens continue to be arrested and face terrorism-related charges for their social media posts, including satirical posts on price hikes. In April 2023, an Egyptian doctor was arrested and charged with terrorism in Case 508 of 2023 for a Facebook post criticizing Sisi. Even Zyad al-Eleimy and Hossam Moanes who had been pardoned, are still placed on the terrorist entities list along with many other dissidents, and are therefore under travel ban and cannot run for political office.

In 2022, around 620 detainees were recycled into new cases, while 110 were recycled during the first three months of 2023. And in March 2023, Gamila Ismail, the head of the Dostour party, complained that her party is still not allowed to organize public

conferences outside its headquarters. Even ending the state of emergency, which the government celebrates as a positive development in Egypt's human rights record, is a hollow accomplishment considering that several sections of the emergency law have been adopted in common Egyptian legislation, including in the counterterrorism law. Additionally, Egyptian authorities sentenced more people to death in 2022 than they did in 2021 or 2020, despite pledges to consider suspending this sentence.

It is clear that the current authoritarian reality in Egypt does not allow for free and fair elections. The president's domination of all state institutions, including the judiciary, and the military's now-legalized intervention in politics and electoral processes, are incompatible with fundamental prerequisites for free elections, especially after the adoption of the 2019 constitutional amendments and other legislation further eroding judicial independence. Security forces still continue to rely on the existing arsenal of draconian legislation, especially laws relating to counterterrorism, to target peaceful opposition. The crackdown on political opposition's leadership and rank-and-file, in addition to other indirect obstructions posed by the authorities, systematically ensure that no political force can build constituency and present alternatives.

The ongoing decade-long assault on independent civil society through targeting its members on bogus terrorism charges or other punitive measures such as travel bans and asset freezes, and a repressive NGO law aiming to erode its independence, constitute a serious violation to freedom of assembly and association and by extension undermine electoral integrity. Additionally, the systematic attack on free speech, whether through domination of traditional media or the arrest of journalists and social media users, continues to erode necessary platforms for freedom of expression and opinion—another prerequisite for informed decision-making and free and fair elections.

Most importantly, the political will responsible for the greater framework of repression, which aims to dispossess citizens of exercising their political rights and holding their officials accountable, constitutes the greatest obstacle to free and fair elections. While organizing elections under judicial supervision, independent NGO monitoring, and any number of similar steps would typically be a welcomed development, only radical reform can bestow legitimacy on Egypt's presidential elections in 2024.

Background on the 2018 Presidential Elections

In November 2017, Ahmed Shafik, the former Air Force Commander and Mubarak-era minister who narrowly lost the 2012 presidential race, announced via video from the UAE that he will run against President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in the 2018 elections. After Shafik's announcement, Emirati authorities promptly deported him to Egypt, where he was kept under house arrest and pressured to withdraw his candidacy while three members of his party were arrested. Shafik was ultimately forced to publicly declare that he is no longer interested in running for elections.

After Shafik withdrew his nomination, Sami Annan, the army chief-of-staff under former president Hosni Mubarak, announced that he will be running for president, and named former Anti-Corruption Chief Hisham Geneina, and university professor Hazem Hosny, as his two advisers. The day following Annan's announcement, Sisi stated in a public speech "there are those who I know are corrupt, I will not allow them to get to this chair," while pointing at his chair. Annan was arrested within a few days of Sisi's speech, and Geneina was subsequently brutally assaulted on the streets before being arrested as well. Another candidate, Colonel Ahmed Konsowa, was arrested and sentenced by a military court after announcing his intention to run for presidency.

Beyond directly assaulting and coercing candidates, the climate of repression and obstacles placed by Egyptian authorities led other candidates to withdraw their bids. Khaled Ali, a lawyer and leftist politician, announced that he will not move forward with his bid for presidential elections, citing arrests of his campaigners and violations committed by the elections committee. Similarly, Mohamed Anwar al-Sadat, who had

early on declared his intention to run for presidency, decided to withdraw, pointing to fears over the safety of his campaigners and the general context of repression.

The unapologetic intervention of the president and security services in the elections led to calls for boycott. Authorities responded by opening an investigations against thirteen individuals, including leading opposition members Hamdeen Sabahy, the head of the Popular Current Party, and Khalid Dawoud, then the head of the Dostour party, on charges of treason and attempting to overthrow the regime, which are punishable by death. The 2018 elections was ultimately a farce that witnessed Sisi being challenged by a token candidate who had previously declared his public support for the incumbent for a second term. The end result was the reelection of Sisi with an 97% of the vote for another four-year term that was supposed to end in 2022.