

1) Surprisingly fair media coverage for the Presidential campaigning:

- The state owned TV channels are committed to a “fair” coverage of the news of the different candidates’ electoral campaigns. President *Mubarak* appears on the local TV for few hours on equal footing with other competitors, including the most outspoken one: *Ayman Nour*. In addition, the paid advertisements are broadcasted uncut and in suitable timing. Moreover, the local TV did not air the speech of President *Mubarak* that he delivered to inaugurate his electoral campaign. The speech was aired on the satellite channel (Dream TV).
- The state owned newspapers are generally observing a higher degree of neutrality than in the past. The news of the different candidates’ campaigns is well covered in the head lines. Also several interviews with the candidates are taking place. However, it should be noticed that **the pro-regime commentators and authors are widely published in *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Akhbar***. For example, *Al-Ahram* has published a series of articles propagating for *Mubarak* in its “**opinion pages**” written by the most reputable regime’s figures like *Osama El-Bazz*, the first advisor of the President. *Osama Saryah*, editor in chief of *Al-Ahram*, denied that these articles are “party line” and claimed that publishing such “opinions” can not be considered as violation of the neutrality of the media.

2) De-facto suspension of the emergency law:

- The security forces have showed unexpected tolerance regarding the rallies and the street conferences held by the opposition candidates. ***Ayman Nour thanked the Ministry of Interior for its “understanding” in Al-Ghad news paper issued on 21/08/2005.*** So far, *Nour* organized four street rallies in different governorates with no security harassment reported. In addition, there is no reported security harassment during distributing flyers or fixing the banners of the opposition candidates. There is, however, some harassment by local municipalities reported against the opposition candidates. *Noaman Goma’a*, the *Wafd* candidate, announced that local municipality in Port Said banned his supporters from fixing some street banners. Also, other low profile candidates claimed the same. However, these problems are usually settled following phone calls from State Security. Explanation: low-level civil servants are simply not yet used to the new atmosphere of the presidential campaigns and prefer to wait for a positive State security “authorisation”, which is so far forthcoming.

3) The High Commission for the Presidential Election:

- The High Commission for Presidential Election has also showed a great deal of neutrality in its work. However, it is still subject to criticism based on several reasons.
 - a) Following the announcement of the final list of the official candidates, the Commission was harshly criticised by the rejected parties’ leaders. **The Commission excluded all those that disputed the chairmanship of any opposition party**; a decision that was deemed unconstitutional by those litigants. However, the Commission insists that it has the right to exclude any candidate from the presidential race unless he obtains a Parties’ Committee’s clarification that he is the chairman of the respective party, which is not the case of any of the litigants. Anyway, none of the rejected candidates was a serious presidential competitor.
 - b) A harsher confrontation is going on between the Commission and the NGOs that are willing to observe the ballot. The three networks that are willing to observe the election have filed a case before the Administrative Court against the
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President of the Commission following his announcement in *Al-Ahram* on 15/08/05 that **he will not allow the Egyptian NGOs to monitor the presidential election**. *Hafez Abu Saeda*, the co-ordinator of the Civil Observatory for the Electoral Observation, which is supported by the NCHR, told the Delegation that the Commission did not reply to the repeated requests by the Observatory and the NCHR to allow the observers to get into the ballot stations. However, *Abu Saeda* alluded to the Delegation that this crisis may be settled through informal dialogues between the NCHR and the Commission. He expected that the Commission will accept the observation at the end of the day.

4) *The presidential candidates start campaigning:*

- President *Mubarak*:

- a) It is obvious that *Mubarak* considers the electoral campaign as an occasion to re-legitimize himself. He is always surrounded by his NDP's young new guard like his son *Gamal* or Dr. *Mohamed Kamal*, his campaign's director. In addition, *Mubarak* is eager this time to appear as a statesman but also "modern" manager who pursues realistic reform policies based on very precise statistics. He is moving far from the flowery rhetorical language that marked his speeches for ages.
- b) Although *Mubarak* focuses more on the economic and social reforms, especially the unemployment and the wages, he confirmed more than one time the political reform package that he mentioned where he announced his candidature e.g. vesting more powers in the Parliament and the Prime Minister.
- c) On the other hand, the launch of *Mubarak's* electoral campaign is another occasion to test the NDP's organizational influence and mobilization abilities. So far, the NDP is doing well. Billboards praising *Mubarak* cropped up overnight across the Egyptian capital and hundreds of university students were seen in every rally.

- Ayman Nour:

- a) As was expected, *Ayman Nour* has embarked upon a very active electoral campaign including the highest rate of street rallies in several governorates. While some of these rallies were attended by thousands of his supporters, especially the inaugural one that was held in his parliamentary constituency, others were basically held for the TV consumption.
- b) *Nour's* campaign focuses on the political reform issues. He announced that if elected, he would serve for a two-year transitional period, during which a new constitution that transforms the Egyptian political system to a parliamentary one would be drafted. Afterwards, new presidential elections would be staged. The program includes some vague suggestions regarding combating corruption, solving the unemployment problem, and controlling soaring prices.
- c) Earlier this month, *Nour* requested the **Muslim Brotherhood's endorsement in a meeting held with the (outlawed) group's supreme guide in the group's premises**; a situation that triggered harsh criticism among the secular opposition forces.

- Noaman Goma'a:

- a) Unlike the other two competitors, *Noaman Goma'a*, the last minute *Wafd's* candidate, does not usually appear in public. He is eager to appear as a wise old leader that is confident of his constituency. Also, he counts on his party's considerable financial abilities and historical legacy.
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- b) Being a well known secular party that gathers in its membership a considerable number of the Coptic public figures and business tycoons may enable him to obtain a good share of the Coptic votes. Some analysts argue that *Ayman Nour's* visit to the Muslim Brotherhood's premises has generated a great deal of the Coptic reluctance regarding the young leader.
- c) Unlike both *Mubarak* and *Nour*, *Goma'a's* program sticks to generalities with no well-defined policies. The party historically calls for transforming the Egyptian political system to a parliamentary one.

4) Muslim Brotherhood will not support Mubarak:

- The Muslim Brotherhood announced that its members will not back President *Mubarak*, denying reports that the Muslim Brotherhood might strike a deal with the regime. On the other hand, the Brotherhood official statement urged its members and supporters to participate in the coming election by voting to whomever candidates without supporting any one on particular refusing *Ayman Nour's* request of the group's official endorsement. According to a number of commentators, this is the ideal formula for the (outlawed) group. On one hand, it does not turn the regime angry by endorsing to *Ayman Nour* or by calling to boycott the ballot. On the other, it does not disappoint its followers by supporting *Mubarak*. Obviously, the Brotherhood's votes will be distributed between *Goma'a* and *Nour*.

5) Will the judicial supervision be complete?

- The chairman of the High Commission for the Presidential Election announced that the Commission came up with a practical solution to face the lack of judges compared to the number of ballot stations. **The Commission will combine every 5 ballot stations in a bigger ballot station and the one judge will supervise 5 boxes (one box for every former ballot station)**. The chairman of the Commission announced to the Egyptian TV on 22 August that there is no difference between watching one box and watching five boxes as long as they are in the same place. So far, the opposition candidates did not comment.
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