



Citizenship in the discourse of Egyptian political parties

Arab Forum for Alternatives

Main Researcher: Mohamed Elagati

Researcher: Nouran Ahmed

Assistant Researcher: Mahmoud Bayoumi

June 2015

INTRODUCTION

The concept of citizenship is one of the most complicated in political and social sciences. Its long process of historical development makes dealing with it particularly complicated.

Citizenship is by nature a multi-dimensional concept: there is a legal citizenship, referring first to the equal legal status of individuals, for instance the equality between men and women. Legal citizenship also refers to a political dimension, the right to start and/or join political parties, or political participation more broadly. Thirdly, it has a religious dimension relating to the right of all religious groups to equally and freely practice their religious customs and rituals. Finally, legal citizenship possesses a socio-economic dimension related to the non-marginalisation of different social categories, for instance women. All of these dimensions, far from being purely objects of legal texts and codifications, are emerging as an arena of political struggle within the Egyptian society.

Citizenship as a concept has its roots in European history and, more specifically, the emergence of the nation state in Europe and the ensuing economic and social developments in these societies. These social developments and the rise of the nation state have worked in parallel, fostering the notion of an individual citizen bestowed with rights and obligations. This gradual interaction was very different from what happened in the context of the Arab world. The emerging of the nation state in Egypt was an outcome of modernisation efforts from the top-down; it coercively redesigned the social structure, by eliminating or weakening some social classes in favour of others. These efforts have had an impact on the state-society relation at least in two respects. First, on the overlapping relation between some social classes and the state, and second, on the ability of some social groups to self-organise, define and raise their demands.

This study identifies how different political parties in Egypt envision the multi-dimensional concept of citizenship. We focus on the following elements:

Nature of the state (identity, nature of the regime)

Liberties and rights (election laws, political party laws, etc.)

Right to gather and organise (syndicates, associations, etc.)

Freedom of expression and speech (right to protest, sit in, strike, etc.)

Public and individual liberties (freedom of belief, personal issues, etc.)

Rights of marginalised groups (women, minorities, etc.)

We have analysed the discourse of different Egyptian political factions with regard to the citizenship dimensions identified above.

We have also divided the parties into four families: Islamic ones, liberal parties, national parties and leftist parties. Within the group of Islamic parties we have analysed: the Freedom and Justice Party, the Nour party, the Al-Benaa party, the Wasat party and the Strong Egypt Party. Within the liberal current we have looked at the Free Egyptians Party, the New-Wafd party, the Democratic Front Party and the Dostour party. Then, within the national current we looked at: the Karama party and the Arabic Nasri party. Finally, the leftist current includes: the Tagmao party, the Popular Alliance Party and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party.

The criteria for our selection are; the parties' positions and how representative they are within each category in terms of disparity of stances; their founding, both before 2011 and after; and their media exposure, meaning we only considered parties whose positions are present in the media discourse and address the key issues raised in this paper.

Our research focused on all the parties, registered as such according to Egyptian law, as well as parties' political platforms and the statements pronounced by some of their leaders/spokesperson. Within the Islamic movement we analysed the speeches/declarations/statements released between 2011 and 2013, combining different sources such as newspapers statements, online sources and blogs from noted opinion makers such as Abbud al-Zumor, Tariq al-Zumor, Mohammed El-Beltagy, Yasser Borhammy, Abul-ElaMadi. The same goes for other currents, according to their availability. Within the liberal current, we identified the following opinion makers: Wahid Abdel Meguid, Mustafa El Nagar, Mohamed El Baradei, Amr Hamzawy, together with economically influential public figures, such as Naguib Sawiris and Al Saied Al Badawi. For the national current we selected Sameh Ashur, Hamden Sabahy, and Nader Fergany, and for the leftist current Hazem Beblawi, Khalid Ali, Wael Gamal and Wael Khalil. These opinion makers vary in terms of background, which ranges from finance and economics, to academia and political activism.

FIRST: CITIZENSHIP AND THE NATURE OF THE STATE

As could have been expected, we found that different parties hold different visions on the nature and role of the state, and this bears important implications for the issue of citizenship. Broadly speaking, with the exception of Islamist parties, we found convergence at the same time on the civil nature of the state and the role of Islamic law in Egyptian political life. This is reflected in the broad support for the second article of the Egyptian Constitution of 1971, which stipulates that the principles of Islamic law are the main source of legislation. . In fact, Article 2 enshrines Sharia as the main source of Egyptian legislation, but this recognition is not of a prescriptive character, but codifies the status quo in State/religion relations. The article became a taboo for all political forces which do not dare to challenge the role of religion in the public sphere in a direct manner. The taboo spread to the majority of the secular actors, which can't speak out against this article, and so rather talking timidly about the possibility of more progressive interpretations of the latter. Under Morsi, political Islamism used this article to harm the popularity of other secular actors among the Egyptian citizens, using it as a tool of manipulation and propaganda, which, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, people seemed to respond to. This evolution worried many minorities, who feared for the future of citizenship in Egypt for non-Muslims or women and for the right of people from religious minorities to occupy highly-ranked public positions.

In addition, the formulation of the second article of the constitution is regarded by the different political streams as a balanced one. It dates back to 1981, when it was amended for the last time in order to ensure that the Islamic law (Sharia) would become the main source of legislation. Indeed, Article 2 was the result of a compromise between political Islam and the regime of the time, to secure the support of Islamist forces to the government or at least to silence them in conjunction with President Anwar al-Sadat's move to extend the presidential term by decree. The compromise was reached. Today there is an agreement on this article among the different political currents and none of them can speak out against it. Despite that, some political groups such as the Free Egyptians Party called for adding an article on other religions, which could be interpreted as a form of protection against rising Islamic currents during the Morsi presidency. Many argue that the reference to "Islamic state" and "Islamic identity" in Islamist parties' programmes, particularly the Al-Nour party and Bena party platforms, might represent a threat to an inclusive notion of citizenship, because of a majoritarian understanding they would uphold of the state and of society. Moreover, these references might imply a replacement of loyalty to the State with loyalty to Islam itself, thereby threatening other religions and contradicting the idea of equal and universal citizenship. On the other hand, a number of key political parties – the Freedom and Justice Party, the El-Nour party and Bena party – seem to embrace a conception of the state that is based on Shura, which would pave the way for a completely different take on state-society relations, based on consultation and a constantly renewed pact among citizens and the state.

The ongoing challenge in conceptualising the relationship between political forces and social groups in Egypt lies in a superficial adherence to democracy beyond the electoral façade.

Four years after the start of the revolution, as will be pointed out, most political elites have shown a remarkable degree of pragmatism in their conception of democracy within not only a

strongly majoritarian view of politics, but a fiercely coercive one, as Nazih Ayubi would have it.

For instance, during SCAF's rule restricting basic civic and political rights was common: some citizens were sent to military trials, sit-ins were dispersed with violence, as exemplified by the Maspero massacre. During Morsi's presidency, the state continued to be seen by the political party in power as safeguarding mainly those holding offices and coercion remained the key tool to exercise power, as shown by the Port Said incident in January 2013. And it was the same after the 30th of June, when Hazem el-Beblawi's government (he is a member of Egyptian Socialist Democratic Party) issued a law to restrict the right to demonstrate. All these practices of state violence show that most Egyptian political elites have a restrictive understanding of the state and democracy.

We can conclude that the nature and pressure of the context in Egypt following the first days of the revolution revealed major ideas to be common and acceptable by the society at that time, regardless of their belief.

Following the first days of the revolution, it seemed that there was no chance for any political actors to get in the political sphere and gain popular support without adopting the main slogans of the revolution, like freedom, democracy, and social justice, even if they didn't have a genuine and deep-rooted belief in these values and ideas.

An analysis of the political party programmes reveals that parties with a lot of young people as members have overcome the strict definition of identity politics and have developed a progressive doctrine when it comes to religion and its relation to state and society, a set of ideas which is also known as 'post-Islamism'. This is the case with the Strong Egypt party and Dostour party who are beyond the traditional dualism of authenticity and modernity. It also applies to the Egyptian Social Democrat Party and the Popular Alliance Party, despite their different intellectual affiliations. They show a remarkable convergence on the value of citizenship, association of belonging and nationality as a base for that citizenship. In addition, they emphasise equality among all citizens without discrimination based on religion, gender or language.

SECOND: EQUALITY IN RIGHTS AS AN APPROACH TO CITIZENSHIP

Even though the right to vote and form political parties lie at the heart of citizenship in its civil and political aspects, reviewing the ideas and stances of the various political currents reveals striking differences. For example, many parties are not aware of the voting rights of Egyptians abroad or the relationship between nationality and citizenship. They also don't have any knowledge about the procedures related to the implementation of these rights. For instance, the voting rights of Egyptians abroad only became an issue with the emergence of candidates running for elections who held other nationalities besides the Egyptian citizenship. Double-citizenship is still a controversial issue, because most of the political actors don't have a clear vision on how to deal with it. So many of them avoid tackling it publicly. The Egyptian conception of citizenship is not compatible with the notion of 'double loyalty', or rather, has not yet been able to embrace the conditions of modern citizenship, such as the maintenance of nationality rights irrespective of territorial belonging.

Most of the political parties –with valuable exceptions, such as those of the Strong Egypt Party, which refers to participatory democracy in its platform – tend to have a somewhat procedural understanding of democracy, mostly centred around "free and fair elections", without paying much attention to the problem of exhaustion of this mechanism over the past four years in the absence of deep political and societal changes.

Internally, none of the parties or political movements discussed the integration of women and youth in the internal party structure as a way to achieve citizenship and democracy, except for the Karama Party, which stated that there must be a statement in the political parties' regulations on the necessity of internal elections every four years. However, their rulebook does not include positive discrimination clauses that could promote the participation of women and youth in the party structures either.

A key aspect of a democratic system is the democratic functioning of political parties, being intermediaries between individuals and the state. Unfortunately, the Egyptian political parties' regulations did not receive the same amount of attention as the election laws. For instance, the law bans parties based on religion, but without including a clear definition of what constitutes a religious basis. Moreover, it does not address the many contradictions in the conception of the role of religion in the 2014 Constitution. For example, the Constitution bans political parties with religious references, while prohibiting insults to the Prophets, continuing to consider Islamic law as the principal source of legislation and keeping art.11 on State protection of public morals. Therefore, it seems that the question on the role of religion in the public and political sphere has not been settled yet.

Political parties will increasingly struggle to remain independent given, on the one hand, the abolition of state financial aid according to the new amendments to the legislation on political parties in 2011 following the revolution, and on the other hand, the closing of external funding channels, which restricts NGO funding, presented to the public as a threat to the nation and to social harmony, particularly in the aftermath of the revolution. Only the Egyptian Social Democratic Party mentioned this problem in its programme (the relationship between money and politics).

THIRD: FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION AS AN ASPECT OF CITIZENSHIP

Broadly speaking, we have noticed that a majority of political parties, even though in their programmes and statements they acknowledge the right of trade unions to freely organise, in practice oppose a pluralistic view and stick to the idea that each profession must have only one union, as reflected in the 2012 Constitution. Only the Strong Egypt Party explicitly mentioned the necessity of pluralism of unions and syndicates. Problems with trade unions pluralism in Egypt dates back over 60 years, as the Egyptian workers associations' context was always characterised by monism, spurred by the State as the engine and founder of all major associations. After the 1952 coup, the main union was that of the Egyptian workers, totally dependent on and subjected to the State. In addition, the various regimes used to exploit them as a tool to boost their own legitimacy: therefore, they never leave room for real pluralism among trade union organisations, as they saw it as dangerous, likely to limit the regimes' ability to manoeuvre different sectors' demands. Moreover, the government adopts a negative stance towards trade and professional unions because they try to be vocal about freedom and the rights of the workers, thus going beyond their original mandate and financial and salary claims, by monitoring the activities of the government *vis-à-vis* its citizens. Trade unions' troubles are also exacerbated by the lack of interest shown by the great majority of political parties in boosting relations and institutional cooperation, which is in line with Egyptian parties' general disregard of cross-sectorial organisation.

Civil society associations on the other hand, usually do not face the same difficulties as unions do, especially if are dedicated to charities and non-political purposes (with the obvious exception of associations tied to the Brotherhood).

The government's negative attitude also applies to non-Islamist human rights organisations, as demonstrated by the numerous raids against American and German human rights organisations and other Egyptian centres working on human rights issues, such as the Hesham Mubarak centre.¹

In 2013, there were raids on the Egyptian centre for economic and social rights,² as well as on Islamic charities such as Jam'iyah Shar'iyah, and Ansar al-Sunna Muhammadiyah. In that very challenging moment, in the aftermath of the Muslim Brotherhood's demise and break-up, even the Islamic- and human rights-oriented charities were not able to escape the government's crackdown on human rights and were forced to work in a survival mode and accept the restrictive conditions of activity set by the latter, in order to avoid clashes and being dissolved. For instance, the Free Egyptians Party highlighted the need to separate charitable work from political action, a debate the Tunisian Ennahda is currently having as well.

¹ الأمن المصري يدهم مكاتب بعض منظمات المجتمع المدني، b.b.c العربية، 29 ديسمبر 2011، <http://is.gd/kqgA0B>

² منظمات المجتمع المدني تستنكر مدهامة الأمن لمقر المركز المصري للحقوق، الوطن، 19 ديسمبر 2013، <http://is.gd/eDGF6N>

FOURTH: FREEDOM OF OPINION AND EXPRESSION AS CORE VALUES OF CITIZENSHIP

All parties seem consistent in their defence of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, especially Islamist parties that are struggling to get their voices heard. There are, however, some instances where these rights weren't upheld or respected, such as after the sit-in of Maspero in October 2011, when Christians protested against the continued attacks against Coptic churches. Back then, Islamist leaders criticised these sit-ins as attempts of the Coptic community to demand more social and political space and impose itself on the political scene. The situation changed in the wake of July 3rd coup, when Islamists were accused of sabotage, violence and terrorist acts. Some leftist and nationalist parties however continued to support the right to strike and demonstrate, even coming to the defence of the Brotherhood, while liberal parties stayed out of the fray and sometimes even went so far as to criticise the right to protest. So liberal parties endorsed state and security practices even though they were highly conflicting with their core historical values (right to freedom of expression, right to association) and without making any effort to reconcile their domestic stances with the positions of the international liberal political family. Therefore, liberal parties' conduct raises doubts about the accuracy of the classification of this current as liberal; it seems as if, despite the fact that these freedoms lie at the core of liberal thinking, they are not an integral part of the liberal parties' mission. Their classification as 'liberal' is rather based on their economic attitude, and not on their stance on human rights and their willingness to defend them.

FIFTH: CITIZENSHIP, AND PUBLIC AND INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES (FREEDOM OF RELIGION, PERSONAL STATUS)

Egyptian society today is characterised by discrimination and inequality before the law in the context of personal status laws, as is observable in the relationship between men and women, which is still based on religious and socially conservative visions. This also manifests itself in the absence of legislation regarding the personal status of Christians, which are only represented collectively by the Church, following a purely sectarian logic.

Most political parties, especially liberal ones, do not have a stance on how to guarantee personal status rights to non-Muslims. Leftist parties re-affirmed their support for full citizenship and equality before the law, regardless of ethnicity, gender, language or religion. The problem of legal discrimination also extends to Egyptian citizens who are not affiliated with Abrahamic religions. This matter is usually accompanied by denial and ignorance. Parties from the liberal and Islamic currents even refuse to recognise them, like when the Wafd Party held that only monotheistic religions have the right to practice their religious rituals. And it is not just about the status of the followers of non-Abrahamic religions - as was codified in Articles 2 and 3 of the 2012 and 2014 Constitution - but also extends to Muslims affiliated with other doctrines other than Sunni Islam - as was codified in the 2012 Egyptian Constitution, in Article 219. This provision has been dropped in the 2014 Constitution, but it does not include any legal mention of Muslim minorities, such as the Shia. The latter's demand to establish an independent party (Tahrir Party) and to gain official recognition (and state protection) for the 'Congregation of 'Ahl Al-Bayt' have been rejected. Moreover, there hasn't been any change in the government's attitudes towards the Shia' minority under the Sisi Presidency.

SIXTH: CITIZENSHIP AND LEGAL EQUALITY OF MARGINALISED GROUPS (WOMEN - MINORITIES)

When talking about so-called minorities, most political parties are strictly referring to women, Christians and Nubians. Others are left out, even though there are many other marginalised individuals and groups within sectors, occupations, and geographical areas in Egypt. For instance, the people living in the Sinai lie at the heart of the citizenship paradox in Egypt: Sinai's inhabitants are 'incomplete' citizens by government standards, and only figure in the state's policies as 'security concerns', which leads to them having poor access to state resources and services. They are considered 'incomplete' by the state because of their miserable economic status, and origin, which is different from ordinary Egyptians, but mostly because of their presumed disloyalty to the state. In fact, the state has neglected those peripheral areas for a long time and the Sinai region and its inhabitants lived through an exceptional situation since their liberation in the late 1970s. The state apparatus did not trust them due to the security situation of the territory and the long occupation by Israeli troops: it particularly feared Bedouins connections to Israeli security agencies. As a consequence, Bedouins are exempted from military service, do not have access to some state services and are deprived of official legal papers certifying their Egyptian nationality.

The most conservative attitudes go even further: some Islamist parties see women and Christians as outsiders of the Egyptian national community. And when they do mention them, they consider them to be a minor part of society, not even taking the trouble to outline their rights or duties. Moreover, these parties tend to have a paternalistic attitude, whereby women and Christians are considered vulnerable groups in need of a permanent guardianship from adult male Muslims, as opposed to being treated equally. This becomes very clear in the Nour party's statement on wanting specific curricula tailor-made for women. An exception to that is represented by a more pro-empowerment approach by the Popular Alliance and the Dostour parties *vis-à-vis* categories risking discrimination or oppression. Similarly, a number of parties' programmes have tackled the issue of disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities or those belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. In this regard, it is important to refer to one of the good signs concerning the discrimination resistance efforts: Article 53 of the 2014 Constitution codifies the founding of a commission against discrimination resistance, which is still being discussed in parliament.

CONCLUSION

Citizenship as a concept and organization among political currents

Despite the differences that have been highlighted, we can make a set of general features peculiar to each party and shared by their constituencies. For instance, all Islamist parties converge on the importance of Islamic law and its central role in public life. Liberal parties refer to international human rights conventions. They put an emphasis on respecting religion as a general and cultural framework, which is not necessarily the Islamic Shari' a. But their lack of political engagement and consistency in upholding these ideas in turn raises doubts about the intellectual 'liberal' affiliation of these parties, and their vision on human rights and liberties. The national current was dominated by the national and Nasserist experience, which ignores the existence of sub-cultures and has a homogenous perception of the society, seeing it as a single, cohesive block bulk, with no differences between its subgroups. When defining citizenship, the leftist parties emphasise legal equality and full citizenship with a strong reference to economic and social rights and issues of discrimination.

There is also a set of commonalities between all parties with regard to citizenship and the relationship between religion and the state. The actual and procedural manifestation of that may be the consensus on the importance of the continuation of the Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution of 1971.

The other similarity is their response to the political and public context in Egypt after the revolution of January 25, when they adopted parallel thoughts with regard to fundamental rights and liberties, attributing pre-eminence to political and civil rights, before economic and social rights.

Another factor that became important after the revolution is the generation factor; younger generations were better able to provide new theses for the differences between the political currents. Their theses enable young people to be more able to overcome the classic dichotomies in Egyptian society and more likely to agree and find common spaces with respect to rights and liberties on the one hand, and with regard to political work on the other hand. However, it should be pointed out that secular youth parties did not overcome their differences with Islamist youth parties, which became further isolated on the political scene.

Citizenship and the positions of political parties and public figures

Reviewing the stances and positions of parties and public figures reveals that they appear to be more explicit when dealing with or adopting a position on public rights and liberties, as opposed to controversial issues such as identity, personal rights, and individual liberties, at least in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. However, over time, a rift emerged between revolutionary political forces due to their different responses to rising violence perpetrated by both terrorist groups and the government. Some parties denounced the government's increasingly hostile attitudes and the crackdown on the April 6 Movement activists, Islamist and leftist activists. Other parties stayed silent on violations while a number of others showed tolerance towards this policy, justifying it on the basis of the ongoing difficult political context characterised by rising violence and terrorism in the country.

Over the past four years, the revolution revealed a number of social and political issues that had previously been ignored in the national discourse. Before 2011, political parties did not engage in active politics and limited themselves to open debates on social and public issues without direct involvement.

Thus, the revolution was an occasion to shed a light on the many sectorial, functional and societal issues, and allowed many socially marginalised groups that did not have any access to the official channels and were near invisible prior the revolution to enter the political stage. The main challenge for Egyptian political parties now is to overcome the current discourse and adopt a more policy-oriented, pragmatic and moderate attitude aimed at including and integrating marginalised groups.