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EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

Reports

4 SEPTEMBER 2018

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How Presidents Rig Elections

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Elections do not mean democracy, as Andreas Schedler, Chairman of the Committee on Concepts and Methods of the International Political Science Association, says, stating that political systems are generally divided between “electoral democracies” and “electoral authoritarianism”.

Schedler asserts that there are neither completely-democratic regimes nor absolute authoritarian regimes. Rather, all regimes remain in a “foggy region” that is only a point on a continuum between full democracy and authoritarianism. Schedler rejected attempts to divide the world between “democratic” and “semi-democratic” regimes; or between “non-liberal” regimes and “delegative democracies”. However, he insisted dividing regimes between what he called “electoral democracies” and “electoral authoritarianism”, which are authoritarian regimes that cannot show naked with their tyranny. Therefore, these electoral authoritarian regimes resort to different “actions” in an attempt to beautify the “ugliness” which has become synonymous of the word “tyranny”. The contemporary trends in distinguishing between authoritarian regimes and democratic regimes no longer depend on whether they follow democratic processes or not, but on the level of standards they adhere to.

Schedler emphasizes that in "electoral democracies", there are standards and rules that provide the minimum for democratic elections, whereas in "electoral authoritarianism" such standards are minimized or may never be available. Certainly, there are election manipulation in one way or another in democratic countries. A South Korean intelligence official admitted that the Korean authorities had recruited a

team of psychologists into an illegal campaign to ensure that conservative candidate Park Ji-she beat her liberal opponent in the presidential election. Also, the world is still witnessing developments in the issue of Russian intervention in the presidential campaign by funding the production and circulation of “false news” to weaken the position of former Democratic Candidate “Hillary Clinton” in the face of Donald Trump, who has become the forty-fifth President of the United States.

However, this paper does not address the tricks of Western politicians; which although they involve manipulation of the voters' awareness, they do not undermine their will altogether. However, the paper here is more concerned with the societies of the South that suffer from tyranny and the ruling authorities' manipulation of the electorate's will, which, in Schedler's words, tend to appear in a democratic fashion for escaping the risks of uncertainty associated with the criteria of sound democratic practice. This, of course, does not mean that the battle in the South does not seek to manipulate the awareness of masses, but they resort to more supportive tricks.

On manipulation tricks

Most of the studies conducted around the world have focused on the legislative elections. In this regard, we need to talk about tricks in the redistricting plans and the engineering of constituencies (through redistribution of electoral districts in order to win the majority of votes), banning parties, as well as the tricks used in both the presidential and legislative elections, taking into consideration that studies that address the presidential elections are limited. However, it is possible to start from the common tricks, focusing on the presidential elections. Carolien van Ham & Stefan I. Lindberg of the V-Dem Institute, University of Gethenburg, Sweden, provide five

criteria that can be built on; that is, party ban, electoral violence, intimidation of voters, lack of independence to the election commission, and election bribery.

There are two remarks on the scams that were mentioned in the study of Carolien van Ham & Stafan I. Lindberg, that will be addressed through this study:

1) The prohibition of parties is more concerned with the legislative elections, and is more likely to be related to parliamentary rather than presidential systems. This trick can be replaced by the hindrance of candidates.

2) In Carolien van Ham's study, part of the competence of the commission that is assigned to supervise elections is to draft the election law. This cannot be generalized in various political systems; as the drafting of the law on running for the presidential election is usually undertaken by political bodies other than those that supervise the election process. That is why we should distinguish between the two roles.

First: Scams with candidates

The first pattern of tyranny in manipulating elections is to address the most dangerous elements of the electoral landscape, i.e. the competing candidates. The presidential candidates are the most important element of the electoral process, because these candidates have a high degree of culture and awareness, and strengths that enabled them to reach the stage of presidential election. There are five basic tricks in this regard, the features of which can be identified below:

a- Violence against potential candidates

One of the most blatant mechanisms in the world for manipulating presidential elections is that tyrants use violence against potential candidates. With regard to the presidential election in Egypt in 2018, the authorities deleted two main competitors who announced their intention to run for the presidential election. They hindered

potential candidates: retired Lt. General Sami Anan and Colonel Ahmed Konsowa, by imprisoning them under various charges. In addition, authorities blocked the third potential presidential candidate, Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq, the former prime minister and commander of the air force, by placing him under undeclared house arrest until he withdrew from the presidential race. The other two potential candidates, human rights lawyer Khalid Ali and former parliamentarian Mohamed Anwar al-Sadat, also announced withdrawing from the election race due to the “existing repressive climate”.

b- Temporary president

This is one of the most important tricks used by dictators or military coups: When more time is needed to prepare the public opinion, avoid a serious legal obstacle, or absorb public discontent, the autocratic regime resort to allow election of a temporary president, and provoke people against him from the very beginning of his term in office.

One of the most striking examples in which this case was applied was the Russian model, where Vladimir Putin assumed the post of president of the Russian Federation for two consecutive terms: 2000 and 2004; and for his political assessment of public opinion trends, he refused to run for the third round, although the Russian constitution does not prevent him from doing so. The candidate, first deputy prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev, chose to succeed him for a term of office as president. Before he was elected, Medvedev suggested appointment of Putin as prime minister. When Putin was later reelected, he rewarded Medvedev by appointing him as prime minister, which led to the emergence of a new term in political science called: Tandemocracy, on which we have reservations.

- Also, Egypt has seen adoption of the same model, but with different circumstances. Observers believe that the Egyptian military had decided to respond to the popular pressure by allowing free elections, which were thought to a president belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, and prepare circumstances for restoring the main legal/political position in the country. “Electoral Manipulation as Bureaucratic Control” by Scott Gehlbach, University of Wisconsin–Madison, and Alberto Simpser, University of Chicago, on the political role that bureaucracy can play, states that “Bureaucratic compliance is often crucial for political survival, yet eliciting that compliance in weakly institutionalized environments requires that political principals convince agents that their hold on power is secure.” Comparing Egypt under the administration of Morsi and Belarus under the administration of Alexander Lukashenko, the study, citing the New York Times, said “Despite coming to power through the freest elections in Egyptian history, Mr. Morsi was unable to extend his authority over the sprawling state apparatus” due to the weak cooperation between the Egyptian bureaucracy and the elected president.

c- Seeking a puppet candidate

This is also common among autocrats, where they tend to choose weak candidates to benefit from them in legitimizing the electoral process, while at the same time they can easily overcome them. One of the most prominent examples for this is Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's crackdown on potential candidates allowing only weak candidates to run for elections under European pressures. He was forced to allow 15 politicians who were politically weak to apply for candidacy; and six of them even withdrew before the election began, while 9 candidates continued. Lukashenko won

80% of the votes, while the closest candidate: Andrea Seneca won about 3% of the vote.

It is to be mentioned that six of the nine candidates were later sentenced to five years in prison and their funds were confiscated; also one of the competitors was killed by hanging, which was considered by the Belarusian police as suicide. However, one of the candidates, Andrea Seneca, had expressed suspicions that the death of the former presidential candidate was due to suicide before he, himself, was sentenced to five years in prison. This harassment came as part of the Belarusian president's attempt to warn all those who would like to run for elections in the future against the president. This has almost typically happened in Egypt, but before the elections and not after.

The search for a weak candidate was repeated in Egypt in the 2014 elections, where the head of the July 3 administration (Sisi) allowed the former presidential candidate and Nasserite leader Hamdeen Sabahi to stand for election. In the Egyptian elections 2014, the puppet candidate received only 734,000 votes, 3% of the votes; a number that was even less than the number of the invalid votes, which amounted to 22,772 votes, 4.1% of the votes; while the head of the administration of July 3 (Sisi) obtained about 23 million votes by 92.9%. Moreover, Sisi government repeated the same scenario in the 2018 presidential election, when it managed to push a puppet candidate in the final minutes to save the image of the electoral process.

d- Forcing opponents to withdraw after winning

The abolition of the results of some rounds of elections is also a weapon used in critical situations where there is a misconception in the authoritarian regimes' chances of winning presidential elections. In the 2008 presidential election in Zimbabwe, the ruling Zanu PF party, headed by President Mugabe, forced MDC-T President Morgan

to withdraw from the presidential election after bloody violence by supporters of Mugabe.

e- Referendum on the president

The referendum is a blatant form of the absence of an electoral phenomenon. It may be the only exception to Schedler's approach, classifying regimes as “election democracies” and “electoral authoritarianism”. The referendum cannot be interpreted as a voting process, as it allows expressing opinion about the same person.

One of the most prominent examples of referendums was the Syrian Baath Party's referendum on transference of power to Bashar Assad through a referendum to succeed his father, Hafez al-Assad, who ruled Syria for more than 30 years before his death on June 10, 2000. The Baath Party organized a referendum on July 11, 2000, only to legitimize the transference of power to the president's son. As the Baath party dominated Syria's legal and military capabilities, it had made several arrangements to ensure the legitimacy of “heredity”, by amending the constitution to provide for a minimum age of 34 years to fit the age of the “heir” at the time.

The military branch of the Baath Party also issued a decision promoting Bashar to the rank of Lt. General, and moved to arrest his potential rival, Mohammed al-Zu'bi, who committed suicide with the arrival of the security forces to arrest him.

Egypt is one of the most countries that organized referendums on the president, as there were nine presidential referendums. The first of them was the double referendum held on June 23, 1956 on the constitution of independence and the first presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser. The second was also a double referendum and was held on February 21, 1958 in Egypt and Syria, on the unity between the two countries, and on Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser as head of the unified state.

The third referendum was the presidential referendum of the United Arab Republic 1965, which was held on 15 March 1965 in support of Gamal Abdel Nasser's assumption of the post of President of the United Arab Republic for a second term, as Egypt retained the name of the United Arab Republic after the secession of Syria.

The fourth referendum was held on October 15, 1970, and was related to the selection of former Egyptian President Mohamed Anwar Sadat as president. The fifth referendum, was held on 16 September 1976, on the renewal of Sadat's presidency.

The sixth referendum was on 13 October 1981 to approve the appointment of Vice President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak in the post of President after the assassination of President Sadat. The three remaining referendums were on renewal of the presidency terms of former President Mubarak in 1987, 1993, and 1999.

Second: Legal tricks

One of the main tricks against potential candidates to ensure the continuation of the tyrant in his chair is resorting to issuance of laws to block the possibility of a wide range for potential candidates. The ability to formulate the rules of the political game is one of the most important pillars of power that tyrants are keen to keep in their hand, especially the ability to formulate laws governing the public sphere. Thus, the tyrant resorts to issuance of laws to crack down on potential rivals.

a- Hindrance rival candidates

In this mechanism, the tyrant uses his ability to manipulate the law and enact legislation to prevent strong rivals from running for elections. One of the most prominent issues in the world in this regard was Kenya in mid-2017, when there were media reports about the arrest of potential independent presidential candidate Peter Solomon Gichira. The Kenyan authorities then announced that the arrest of Gichira

came because he had attempted to commit suicide by jumping from the sixth floor of the IEBC building, when a staff member told him that his candidature had not been accepted because he did not meet the requirements of the Electoral Law.

In Egypt, the authorities decided to exclude Dr. Ayman Nour from the race to run for presidency in 2012 for convicting him in a crime (No. 4245 of 2005, Abdin) fabricated against him by former President Hosni Mubarak, although he was pardoned by the President of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces at the time. Also, Vice President Omar Suleiman was deleted from the list of candidates for failing to acquire only 31 citizens' powers of attorney from Assiut Governorate. Hazem Salah Abu Ismail was also dismissed because of the nationality of his mother, despite the ruling of the administrative judiciary in his favor.

b- Exploitation of regime's control over judiciary

Manipulation of the legal framework includes gaps, like any other legal provision, hence the key to activation of the law lies in bearing responsibility for interpreting the law. One of the most immediate examples of the role of the judiciary in relation to the presidential elections is what Venezuela witnessed in connection with the 2018 elections when the judiciary decided to exclude the opposition coalition from running for the presidential elections, under the influence of the president, which was considered by Western countries to be devotion to tyranny, especially that the verdict was politicized in response to President Nicolas Maduro's desire to remove the opposition because they boycotted the municipal elections in Venezuela in early December 2017.

Egypt has also witnessed a similar pattern by pushing some lawyers to intervene in political life through the gate of justice in implementation of the executive authority

in punishing opponents, whether they are election candidates or politicians. A lawyer, Samir Sabry, filed a lawsuit against Khaled Ali, the potential presidential candidate for the 2018 elections for allegedly committing “a flagrant act”. The case was filed days after Khaled Ali said he was seriously considering running for president.

Third: Tricks used with voters

Rigging the will of the electorate is one of the most common scams in the South and is used in both presidential and legislative elections. The ruling administrations have several moves in this regard, which can be illustrated as follows:

a- Intimidating voters and election observers

The scruples of autocrats to win the presidency are not only based on attracting voters through vote-buying mechanisms, electoral bribery, or the announcement of a package of promises to a sector of the electorate to secure granting the tyrant the presidential seat. However, the oppressor sometimes resorts to intimidating voters. Paul Goldstein, the political observer for Globe Afrique, confirms that Liberia's 2017 election that was won by ex-footballer George Wea against former vice president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, had many interventions in favor of Wea, including intimidation of voters. There were also reports that the Liberian authorities intimidated election observers. Also, violence swept through a large number of presidential elections, most notably the violence in Nigeria's 2007 presidential election, and the violence in Honduras in the 2017 election, where opposition candidate Salvador Nasrallah accused his rival Orlando Hernandez of launching a political coup by attempting to manipulate the election results.

b- Manipulation of electorate lists

This is one of the most common manipulation mechanisms in countries where there is weak civil control on official records. In Zimbabwe's 2013 election, observers discovered that there were more than a million false votes on voters' lists, part of which belonged to dead citizens. At the same time, the ZESN, a local election monitoring network with about 7,000 volunteer observers, published a report containing reports of the disappearance of more than one million votes in cities, the strongholds of the largest opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MCD).

A report prepared by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on the Russian presidential elections in 2000 concluded that voter registries were not updated prior to elections, including large numbers of Russian dead.

c- Manipulation of the electorate's will

One of the most prominent examples of the direct manipulation of the will of voters by replacing their choices is the Russian presidential elections held in March 2000, where a report by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on these elections referred to serious irregularities, including what is known in Egypt as "Stuffing the Ballot Boxes". This mechanism includes filling the ballot boxes with the equivalent of the number of voters registered in the committee's lists, so that the voting process in such committee can be declared immediately after all the electoral rolls have been signed.

The most important mechanisms of this trick is the replacement of votes, a process in which the contents of the ballot box are manipulated, in the absence of representatives of candidates or observers, and accordingly the will of voters is rigged.

This is one of the least costly methods used by authoritarian regimes, which is guaranteed by the protection of the outcome of the voting process by using widespread repression in the event of outbreak of popular protests.

d- Buying votes

It is a process in which the tyrant manipulates the will of the simple social segments of the people by giving them sums of money in exchange for their votes. The most recent elections where these mechanisms were used are the elections of Argentina 2015, Nigeria 2007, and Venezuela 2013. These are only examples; as this model is widely shared in Asia, Africa and Latin America, despite reform efforts which have led to a decline in spread of this phenomenon in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina to a large extent.

Conclusion

In the end, the most influential element in the spectacle of the manipulation of democracy through the intervention of the authoritarian executive authority and presidents in the electoral process, to perpetuate their continuation and domination, is due to two overlapping factors: First, the absence of the right holder, i.e. the people, from claiming their right, their future and destiny. The second factor regards those who could lead these masses. The absence of the competent and aware leadership was one of the causes of dragging the January 25 project into the June 30 (coup d'etat); and the most prominent consequences of this is that the Egyptian opposition has lost the political capital that it had acquired during the last decade of its confrontation with the Mubarak administration. It is undoubtedly that there are many factors that have contributed to the production of such weak relationship between leadership and the masses. However, we hope that there will be an opportunity to produce historical political diligence capable of correcting the tragic consequences of these factors.