



نظرة  
للدراستات النسوية  
Nazra for Feminist Studies

# She and Elections

**Report** Mentoring on the Ground  
With the Candidates 2011/2012



## Table of Contents

Women’s Political Participation Academy.....	3
About Mentoring on the Ground.....	5
Criteria for Joining the Academy .....	5
Legal Issues and the Electoral System of the 2011-2012 Parliament.....	6
Political Climate.....	7
Electoral Context.....	9
People’s Assembly Elections 2011-2012: Indicators and Outcomes .....	11
Recommendations.....	14
Acknowledgements.....	15

## Women's Political Participation Academy

Egyptian women gained the right to vote and run for office in the 1956 constitution, when women won two seats in the parliament. Women won 9 seats in the 1964 elections; 2 in 1969; 8 in 1971; and 6 in 1979. After the adoption of Law 188/1978, establishing a quota system for women, women won 35 seats; 30 of which were quota seats, and 5 were appointed. Women won 36 seats in the 1984 parliament; 18 seats in the 1987 parliament; 10 seats in the 1990 parliament; and 10 seats in the 1995 parliament. In 2000, women won 15 seats in parliament, 4 of them by appointment; while in 2005, women won 10 seats in elections and gained another 4 seats by appointment. In June 2009, the People's Assembly law was amended to add 64 seats for women using a quota system, after which female members of the dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP) won 46 seats in the first round of the 2010 elections (100 percent of seats in the first round) and 54 out of 64 seats in the run-offs.

A flawed quota system was applied in the 2010 elections whereby new seats were added to the parliament instead of setting aside already existing seats for women, a move that raised questions about the state's seriousness about reducing male dominance in Egyptian politics. Under the quota, women competed for seats on a governorate-wide level, with the exception of four governorates, making it difficult for women without substantial financial resources and who did not belong to the NDP to run efficient campaigns in a governorate.

In addition, vote rigging, as documented by numerous advocacy groups, ultimately led to the overwhelming victory of female NDP members. Due to the procedural and organizational obstacles they faced, the system did not contribute to honing the political skills of female candidates. The victory of NDP women sent a clear message to Egyptian society: only women of this party have a right to participate in politics. As a result of the fraudulent elections, the entire quota system was rejected, as it simply served to increase the number of NDP parliamentarians.

Based on this knowledge of the electoral system, Nazra for Feminist Studies recognized the importance of cultivating women candidates who are capable of engaging in politics, compete, reach the public, and represent their communities. The intent is not to abandon women's issues; rather, the history of women in elections in Egypt has shown that only experience and political practice can give rise to genuine representatives and politicians able to reach out to the electorate.

The Academy's team worked with 16 female candidates for the People's Assembly elections, both in individual constituencies and on lists, independents and party members. The

candidates involved were spread out across eight governorates: Cairo, Giza, Daqahliya, Assyout, Beheira, Minya, Kafr al-Sheikh, and Aswan. They include:

- 1- Sana al-Said; Assyout second district; list candidate (second on the workers' list); Egyptian Bloc/Egyptian Social Democratic Party,
- 2- Magi Mahrous; Cairo ninth district; individual constituency; professional; Egyptian Social Democratic Party,
- 3- Tereza Samir; Minya second district; list candidate (third on the professionals' list); Egyptian Bloc/Egyptian Social Democratic Party,
- 4- Mona Rabia; Aswan; list candidate; professional (third on the list); Egyptian Bloc/Tagammu Party,
- 5- Mervat al-Said; Cairo first district; list candidate; professional (third on the list); Revolution Continues/Popular Socialist Alliance,
- 6- Hoda Rashad Nasrallah; Cairo first district; list candidate; professional (third on the list); Revolution Continues/Popular Socialist Alliance,
- 7- Amani al-Sibai; Kafr a-Sheikh second district; list candidate (fourth on the list); Revolution Continues/Popular Socialist Alliance,
- 8- Noha al-Sharqawi; Daqahliya first district; list candidate (third on the list); Revolution Continues/Masr al-Hurriya Party,
- 9- Mona Qora; Daqahliya second district; list candidate (seventh on the list); Revolution Continues/Popular Socialist Alliance,
- 10-Amal Ismail; Daqahliya third district; list candidate (seventh on the list); Revolution Continues,
- 11-Amal Mamdouh; Daqahliya first district; individual constituency; Popular Socialist Alliance,
- 12-Fatma al-Ashri; Daqahliya first district; list candidate (fourth on the list); Revolution Continues/Popular Socialist Alliance,
- 13-Amani Issawi; Giza third district; individual constituency; professional; independent,
- 14-Nadia Mersal; Beheira first district; list candidate (eleventh on the workers' list); Revolution Continues/Popular Socialist Alliance,

15-Sahar Zuheir; Beheira first district,; list candidate; worker (twelfth on the list); Revolution Continues/Popular Socialist Alliance,

16-Sabah Ismail; Beheira second district; list candidate; professional (fifth on the list); Egyptian Bloc/Egyptian Social Democratic Party.

### About Mentoring on the Ground

It is a strategy to work with candidates and their teams closely, where it's not suffice to train them but also to Mentor them on their grounds during campaigning to analyzes their strengths, weaknesses, risks and opportunities. Starting by analyzing her constituency to see her needs during election campaign. This is done for each candidate individually in order to support her on the legal, political, and psychological level. And also providing the same support for their election campaign team.

### Criteria for Joining the Academy

The Academy drafted the following criteria for selecting women to the Academy:

- Did not previously run for office with the NDP.
- Not older than 45 years old.
- Has experience in social, advocacy, or labor work.
- Less empowered within her community.

The Academy did not support candidates aligned with religious forces, as none applied to join the program. This decision was not made to exclude any genuine social force, but was rather motivated by a desire to support female candidates that are genuinely less empowered. Most female candidates aligned with religious forces are politically capable due to their experience with politics within their groups or because they have the financial means to run a strong campaign, in contrast with women candidates that are aligned with civil forces, who require support and political, legal, and psychological empowerment.

The refusal to support women who had run for office with the NDP was motivated by the fact that women who had run for office on the NDP slate received the support of the former regime, most of them not experiencing the political hardship of women who decided to seek office outside the framework of the NDP. The decision also grew out a view of women's political action as inseparable from political action in general and the belief that women's rights will be achieved in a democratic framework that supports human rights. This was not the case

in the practice of the former repressive and undemocratic regime, which attempted to use women's issues and women's political participation as a tool to further political goals. Such attempts government tool had a negative impact on women's issues and created a form of state feminism, separating women's concerns and issues from the larger sociopolitical reality. The latter effects only served to further ghettoized women's issues. The selection criteria also guaranteed that the Academy did not engage with parties or forces that adopt forms of popular mobilization the Academy rejects, such as the power of money or religious mobilization or polarization.

Nazra for Feminist Studies, represented by the Academy's team, decided to join female candidates on their political journey and offered legal and psychological aid, helping each candidate understand her electoral district, and analyzing strong weak and points, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis). More specifically, the Academy worked with the female candidates by mentoring on the ground, participating in their campaigns, and working with them in their districts, parties, and lists. The Academy also convened theoretical and practical training sessions for candidates, their campaign staff, and their proxies in polling stations. During its work, the Academy team maintained an equal, neutral stance from all political forces, supporting candidates in accordance with the team's ability and availability regardless of their partisan affiliations, the only conditions applied with the candidates being the aforementioned criteria and conditions for the selection of candidates

### **Legal Issues and the Electoral System of the 2011-2012 Parliament**

The electoral process was governed by four laws, in addition to the articles in the constitutional declaration published in the Official Gazette in issue no. 12(*bis*) (b) on March 30, 2011 and its amendments and decrees issued by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) regulating elections for the People's Assembly and Shura Council. These four laws are: Law 110/2011 on the exercise of political rights, amending Law 73/1956; Law 108/2011 on the People's Assembly, amending Law 38/1972; Law 120/2011 on the Shura Council, amending Law 120/1980; and Law 121/2011 on the apportionment of electoral districts, amending Law 206/1990.

The SCAF's constitutional declaration, issued to govern the People's Assembly and Shura Council elections, introduced a system of proportional lists for two-thirds of the seats and individual constituencies for the remaining one-third of seats, elected by direct, secret ballot. The system permitted party candidates to compete in individual constituencies, and the law required that at least one woman be included on each party list, without specifying her position on the list. The law also allowed women to run for individual constituencies on equal footing with men, whether as independents or party candidates. The new system did not adopt the

quota applied in the 2010 legislative elections, which set aside 64 of 508 seats in the People's Assembly for women, pursuant to Law 149/2009, while preserving the 50 percent quota for workers and farmers.

It may initially seem that electing two-thirds of parliamentary seats using a party-based list system might improve women's chances for representation when compared to the individual candidate system. However, the electoral system only required the inclusion of at least one woman on each list, but did not specify her position on the list, as demanded by some political and advocacy organizations before the law was issued.

The adoption of a combined list-individual system in the new elections law created additional campaign difficulties for candidates, especially given the relatively large electoral districts. In addition, an examination of the final list of candidates revealed that many parties included women on their lists as a merely formal move to meet the legal requirement, placing them towards the bottom of the list and thus reducing their chances of winning a seat, even though some female candidates were more capable and proficient than the male candidates placed at the top of the list. In very few cases, female candidates were placed on the number two spot on the list; for example, Sana Said, a candidate from Assyout, who was placed second on the list of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party due to her experience in politics and her popularity in her district. The new law created placed several hindrances to female candidates, who had to wage a battle within their parties to prove themselves and win a top spot on the list, after which they waged another battle to reach voters and convince them of their ability to represent them in parliament. Some Islamist parties, which considered women's entry to the parliament corrupting and saw their inclusion on lists as a necessary evil, refused to put a photo of their female candidates on their posters, replacing it with a photo of the candidate's husband or with a rose. Many civil parties did not differ from Islamist parties in their treatment of female candidates, the result being that women were not given sufficient space on the lists of civil parties, whether leftist or liberal. their perspective differs. The result, however, was that

### **Political Climate**

The run-up to the People's Assembly elections witnessed several crises, starting with the events at the Balloon Theater, followed by those at the Marinab Church and Maspero, and, immediately before elections, the crisis of Mohammed Mahmoud Street, which began on November 19 with demonstrations in Tahrir Square and its environs after the "Friday of One Demand," joined by many political forces. After that large Friday assembly, a group of martyrs' families and young people staged a sit-in. The attempt by police forces, supported by the army to disperse the sit-in, sparked clashes that lasted until November 25, only 48 hours before the first round of voting was scheduled to begin. Although the events of Mohammed Mahmoud

Street were not the most violent since the start of the revolution, the events created confusion and stoked strong divisions between political forces participating in the elections. In general, these differences put political forces in one of three camps:

1. The first camp demanded the postponement of elections until the end of clashes on Mohammed Mahmoud Street and the restoration of security, fearing that the violence would deter voters and depress voter turnout,
2. The second camp demanded the cancellation of elections before the turnover of power to a civilian transitional government, and accused any force participating in the elections of political opportunism and attempting to attain power without regard to those killed in the clashes,
3. The third camp demanded that elections proceed on schedule, seeing them as the only legitimate means to affect a power transfer. The SCAF supported this camp and called on citizens to vote while promising to provide security for voters at the polls.

This political crisis put candidates on both party lists and in individual constituencies in a quandary: they could either ignore the events and continue with their campaigns; or respond to calls for an election boycott, leaving the political arena to competitors and allowing them to win an easy majority in a parliament that is tasked with drafting a new constitution. This was an important consideration since Islamist parties, most importantly the Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafi Nour Party, decided against boycotting the elections.

The political conflict had a negative impact on the performance of all candidates, men and women alike, particularly those belonging to new, civil parties, many of whom decided to suspend their campaigns as a means of pressuring the SCAF and other parties to end the violence on Mohammed Mahmoud Street. Although this affected candidates regardless of gender, the continuation of the violence especially affected female candidates' ability to suspend and continue their campaigns, particularly in urban areas, where most candidates were based. This was exacerbated by the fact that some parties took a substantial amount of time to decide whether to join or boycott elections.

Given the security fears and the potentially large electorate, the SCAF decided to hold the vote over two days in each round. It also set aside special polling stations for women, which facilitated women's ability to stand in lines for long periods without fears of being subjected to violence or harassment. It also enabled them to take their children with them to polling stations. These latter policies played a positive role in encouraging voter turnout, especially among women, around 52 percent of eligible voters turning out, and an especially high turnout

from women. Nevertheless, candidates, both male and female, faced several difficulties, the impact of which was greater on women candidates.

## **Electoral Context**

Difficulties facing candidates were not necessarily political, but rather were linked to the electoral context. These included procedural and organizational obstacles, as well as prevailing political practices.

### **Procedural Difficulties**

#### *Short campaign period*

The confused political circumstances produced a number of procedural obstacles. Most significantly, the release of party lists was delayed until November 1, 2011, just 27 days, or less than one month, before the vote, although the deadline for the application for candidacy was October 24. Campaigning began on November 2 and was set to last for 24 days before the beginning of the campaign moratorium, which bans all campaigning starting 48 hours before the polls open in each round. In addition, campaigning began on virtually the same day that lists were announced, which confused parties and candidates, leading female candidates to wonder if their applications had been accepted by the High Electoral Committee (HEC), which further reduced the time allotted for campaigning. Moreover, some female candidates had their electoral symbols changed after initial approval, which required them to either replace their campaign posters and flyers or find other ways to alert the public of this modification.

### **Organizational Difficulties**

#### *Managing Female Candidates' Campaigns*

With the exception of candidates who had previous experience running for national or local office, the Academy for Women's Political Participation found that most female candidates did not maintain a permanent, paid campaign staff. Parties provided only the most limited campaign support via the larger party campaign, which, naturally, worked for the party as a whole and was more focused on the candidates placed at the top of the party lists. Most female candidates relied on first-degree relatives and volunteers among their neighbors and colleagues, who did not necessarily have political experience. In practice, this meant that campaign activities were often cancelled, either to protect candidates from possible harm given the prevailing political circumstances, to avoid burdening the unpaid campaign staff, or due to the lack of political experience necessary to understand candidates' constituencies and how to intervene to effectively support candidates.

At the same time, however, having a candidate's relative on the campaign team, especially her husband, had an extremely positive impact, shoring up the candidate's credibility among voters. This portrayed the candidate as first and foremost a successful homemaker who entered the political arena with the consent and encouragement of her husband, thus boosting her legitimacy, especially in rural areas. This created a dilemma for unmarried candidates, whom the Academy advised to compensate for the absence of a husband by recruiting another first-degree relative to their campaigns, such as a father, brother, or mother. The same difficulties in maintaining campaign staff applied to candidates' ability to provide and train their deputies to observe polling stations on voting day.

### *Size of Electoral Constituencies*

The relatively large size of electoral constituencies was a problem faced by both female and male candidates, but was a more complex issue for candidates running as individuals than those on party lists. Larger districts required extra effort from female candidates, as many male candidates did not comply with campaign spending caps, and the aforementioned political and security issues compelled many female candidates to campaign primarily by knocking on doors, and holding popular meetings.

## **Problems Related to Prevailing Political Practices**

### *Money and Electoral Bribes*

The prevailing practices of using money and electoral bribes, as well as the distribution of food for political purposes, were observed. These practices cannot be attributed to certain parties to the exclusion of others.

### *Religious Mobilization*

Although violence was less prevalent in these elections compared to previous parliamentary polls, the conflict over the state's identity (religious vs. civil) was reflected in the elections and the means candidates used to mobilize the public, creating an unprecedented degree of religious polarization (Islamist vs. civil and Islamist vs. Christian). It should be noted that most of the candidates participating in the Academy were veiled. Of the 16 candidates, 2 were Christian, and of the 14 Muslim candidates, only one was unveiled.

This was one of the most significant electoral issues, and was reflected in the discourse of female candidates, whether within Islamist or civil forces. The focus of the Islamist discourse and their female candidates on the role of women in the public sphere worked to limit the role of women within certain confines and limit their political participation. Such a focus is posed a

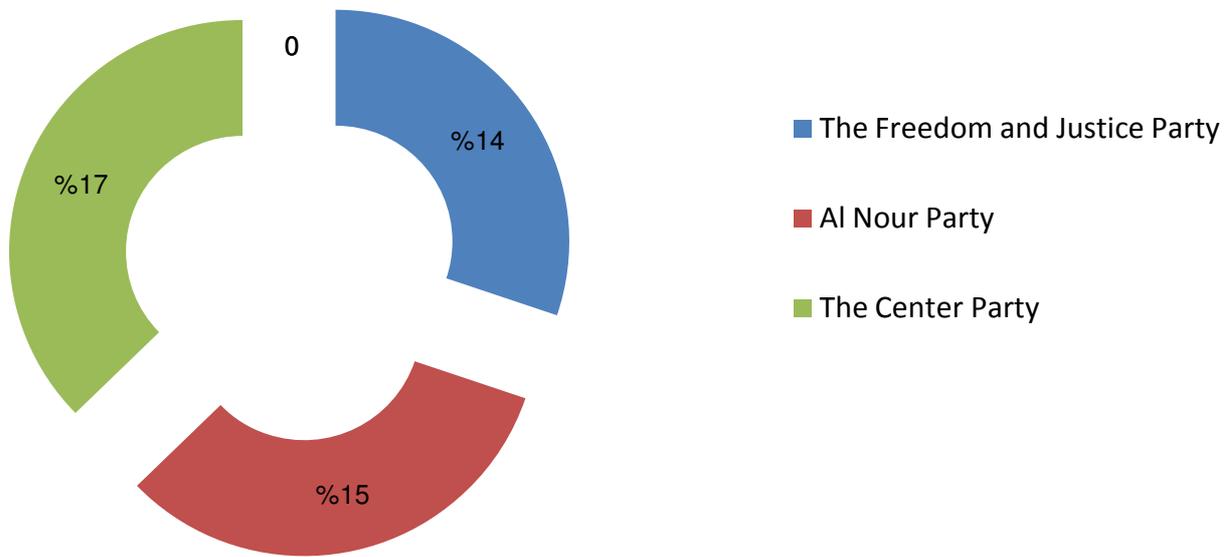
dilemma for female candidates in the civil camp for two reasons. First of all, it created a political discourse at odds with the discourse of female candidates in the Islamist blocs, as the former focused on the importance of empowering women and opening up equal fields of opportunity to them. In other words, women's issues became one of the priorities of their political discourse. Secondly, it turned candidates' political discourse into a political-social discourse that attempted to raise women's issues as part of prevailing social problems while the candidates simultaneously presented themselves as candidates that seek to represent their constituencies and that do not speak solely about women's issues. Although the religious polarization had a negative impact on all female candidates aligned with civil forces, whether Christians or observant Muslims, the effect was more pronounced for Christian candidates, and especially female candidates who are at the top of their party lists. In one case, a candidate participating in the Academy chose to abandon her spot on the list to a Muslim male candidate and move to the bottom of the list to avoid increasing the polarization, especially since there was another Christian male candidate on the same list.

### **People's Assembly Elections 2011-2012: Indicators and Outcomes**

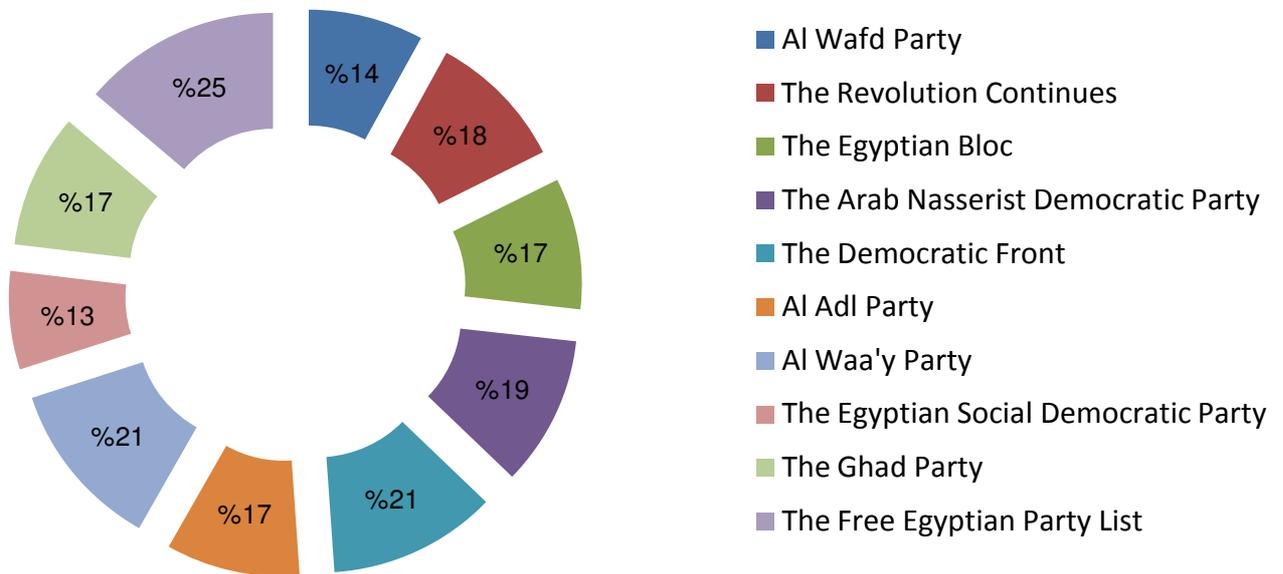
Of all the female candidates, none who ran as an individual candidate managed to win a seat. Of the women running on lists, only eight won seats. Among the participants in the Academy's program, Sana Said, a candidate with the Egyptian Social Democratic Party in the second district of Assyout, won a seat. This indicates that despite the difficulties facing women, the Egyptian electorate may vote for a female candidate if she can prove herself to be an adept politician involved in public life.

A look at the party lists and the placement of female candidates reveals that no one political bloc was more woman-friendly than others. Thus, we attempted to divide electoral blocs and coalitions in these elections, given the aforementioned religious polarization, into four divisions: list coalitions composed largely of Islamist parties, list coalitions composed largely of civil parties, lists composed of the remnants of the NDP, and lists composed largely of ideologically indeterminate parties. This preliminary analysis (the final analysis will be reviewed in the final report) reveals that none of the four divisions were distinguished by the proportion of women on their lists. On average, all these blocs featured the same number of women on their lists, though the placement of the candidates differed. The following graphs illustrate the proportion of women on the lists of the four principal political blocs.

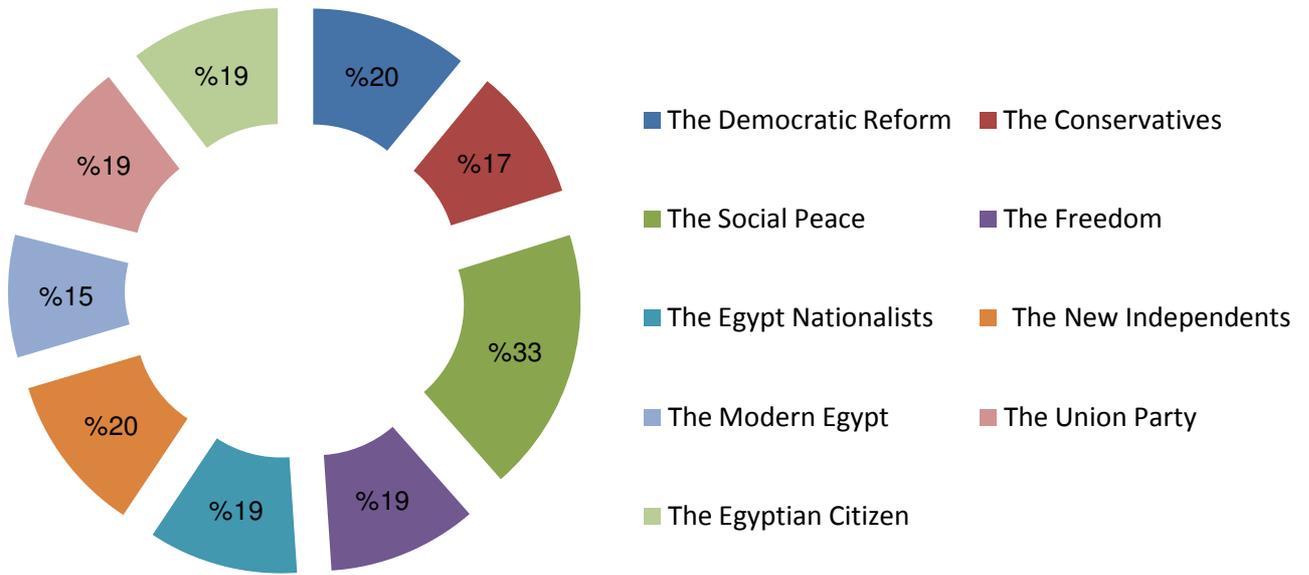
### Lists Dominated by Islamist Parties



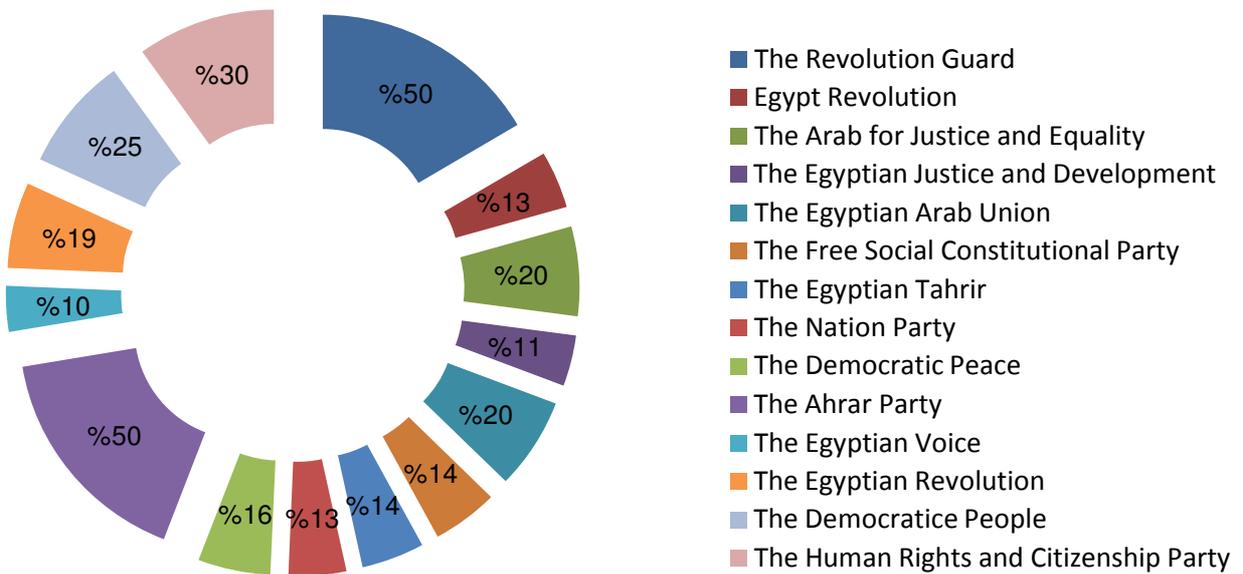
### Lists dominated by civil parties

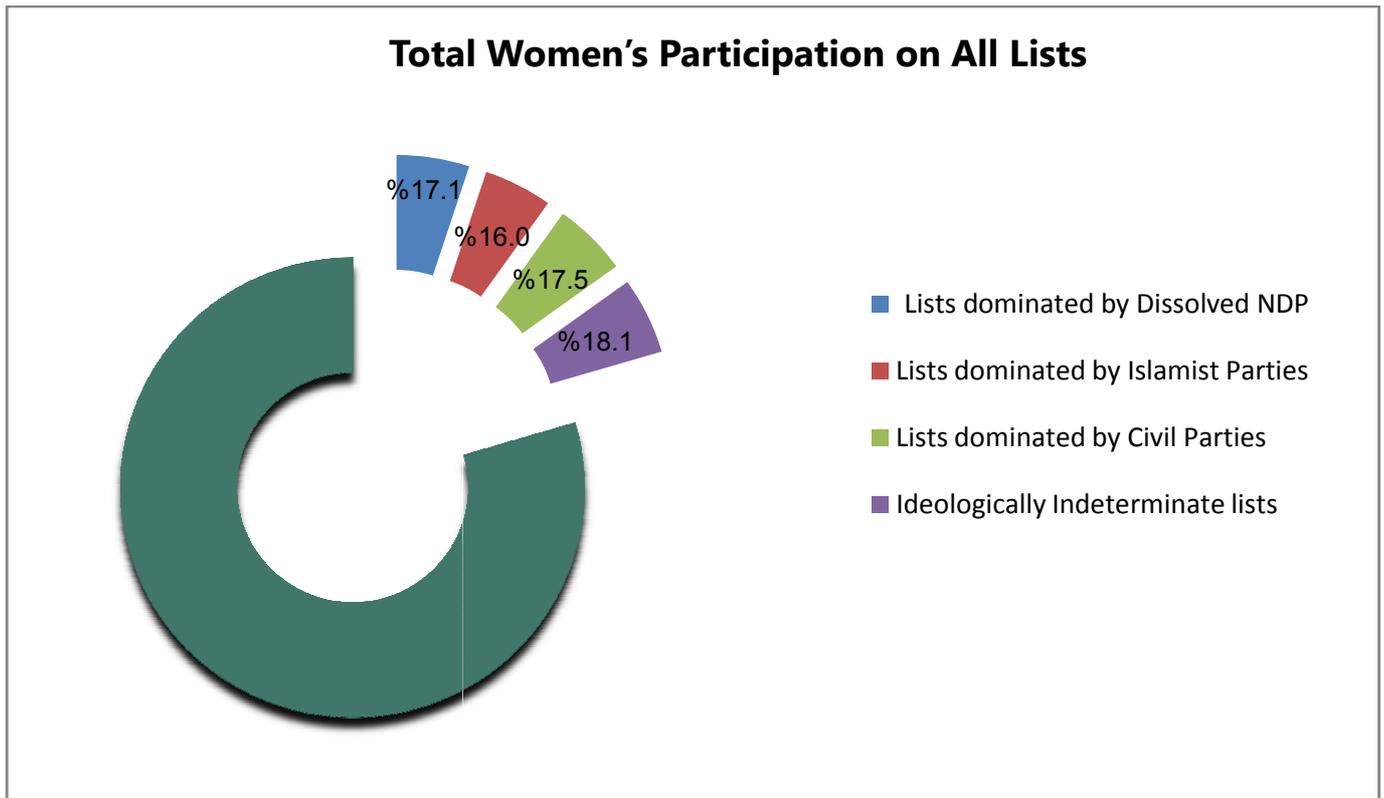


### Lists dominated by the dissolved NDP



### Ideologically Indeterminate Lists





## Recommendations

Clearly, the elections took place in the midst of extremely complex, fluid circumstances, in terms of the legal and political electoral context, and they were fraught with various procedural and organizational difficulties. Female candidates and voters faced the same obstacles as their male counterparts, although the impact was disproportionately felt by women, in addition to other problems faced solely by women. The Women's Political Participation Academy makes the following recommendations based on its experience:

1. Parties and civil society institutions concerned about the political empowerment of women must begin cultivating qualified political female cadres immediately after the Shura Council elections, instead of waiting for the next elections to commence the search for qualified female candidates. Despite the short period of the Academy's work, our experience has shown that working with women based on the assumption that they are capable of engaging in politics, competing, reaching the public, and representing their communities bears fruit. Sana Said ran for office in 2005, 2008, and 2010, and decided not to limit herself inside the party to women's issues; as a result, she carries weight in her district and within the party. The Academy closely followed this experience through mentoring on the ground. The outcome of elections proved that political experience and practice are what creates genuine community representatives and politicians capable of reaching voters.

2. Although the elections law required at least one woman to be placed on each list, it did not specify their placement on the list. The results of the elections reveal that not one woman placed lower than number four on the list won a seat, given the difficulties of any list taking more than 50 percent of the vote except in exceptional cases. In turn, it is recommended that the parties' law require women to be placed in the first, second, or third position on party lists.
3. The High Electoral Commission (HEC) must confront candidates, women or men, who do not comply with campaign spending limits, which can be done through a set of administrative decrees. Although it is difficult to monitor spending by party and individual candidates, especially since candidates with large parties may receive donations in the form of substantial discounts from advertising and production companies, the HEC can set unified, specific criteria for visual campaign materials, for example, by defining and unifying the size of campaign posters.
4. Parties must support the campaigns of their female candidates, providing the necessary material and technical support to campaign staff to provide female candidates with a professional campaign team capable of fully supporting her in the run-up to the vote. It is preferable for one member of the staff to be a man, as men's support of female candidates breaks many social barriers and presents female candidates as politicians, not exclusively as representatives for women's issues.
5. The relatively large electoral districts, particularly in individual constituencies, showed that the individual candidate system, especially with the current district apportionment, is not friendly to women or minorities. Indeed, no woman won a seat in the individual constituencies. It is therefore recommended that districts be redrawn to make them smaller.

## Acknowledgements

Wafaa Osama, Nazra Consultant, author of this report. Yahia Zaied, Nazra Research Assistant, provided documentation. The report was reviewed by Mozn Hassan, Executive Director of Nazra for Feminists Studies.

Team of Field Work: Doaa Abdelaal, Consultant, Mentoring on the Ground of the Women Political Participation Academy. Mohamed Shirin Atef, Political Consultant. Pense Al Asiouty, Campaign Volunteers Coordinator.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License.

