Kefaya protests Mubarak's referendum and re-election, Egypt, 2005

March
2005
to: September
2005
Country: Egypt
Location City/State/Province: Cairo
Location Description: Major Egyptian cities, especially Cairo

Goals:
"Cancellation of the state of Emergency Law and all special laws that restrict freedoms first in order to have meaningful elections."

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 146. Judicial noncooperation

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 034. Vigils
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 124. Boycott of elections

Methods in 4th segment:
Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 124. Boycott of elections

Classifications

Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Democracy
Group characterization:

- intellectuals
- political activists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Kefaya

George Ishaq, Amin Iskandar

Partners:
Not known

External allies:
Not known

Involvement of social elites:
Egyptian judges

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:
Kefaya (meaning ‘Enough’ in Arabic), is the moniker for the grassroots coalition the Egyptian Movement for Change. Beginning in 2003, Kefaya was a group of Egyptians of various political parties and ideologies that first met to discuss the Egyptian political scene. The group became official after affiliated Egyptian intellectuals and political activists created and signed a petition demanding fair and transparent democratic presidential elections with multiple candidates in August 2004; the petition became Kefaya’s founding declaration. Perhaps highest among its other common sentiments, the group had had enough of then-President Mubarak’s 24-year rule and worried that his son, Gamal, would only be a continuation of the president’s iron grip.

Kefaya’s first action centered on these grievances and garnered much attention from the Egyptian public. On December 12, 2004, 300 Kefaya members demonstrated in front of the High Court Building in downtown Cairo. They covered their mouths with tape with the word ‘Kefaya’ and held a banner reading, “Kefaya: No Extension of Mubarak’s Fourth Term in Office, No to Mubarak’s Succession by His Son.” The protest was one of Egypt’s first out-stated political messages against Mubarak’s rule and earned the group immediate respect from Egyptians across the country feeling similarly. Kefaya continued protests the next
month, but began choosing strategic locations where they could gather the most public attention. They protested at the Cairo Book Fair, on university campuses, and at downtown Tahrir Square, and started gaining more notice.

In February 2005, Mubarak announced an amendment to Article 76 of the constitution allowing a multi-candidate election with the caveat that any politician running for the presidency must get written support from 250 individual elected officials. Since the Mubarak’s National Democratic Party was in command of all political bodies, the proposed amendment effectively disabled anyone from running against Mubarak. He announced the change looking forward to the upcoming September 7th presidential election, in which he faced his fifth time running for the presidency. Mubarak’s proposed amendment was scheduled for a May 25th referendum.

Mubarak’s announcement jumpstarted Kefaya’s actions, shifting their organization from a more general movement to a specific campaign. The group immediately publicly condemned the amendment, calling it “theatrics,” “fake reform,” and “reformulation of the dictatorship.” Kefaya instead demanded that multiple candidates from the public be allowed run for the presidency with no caveats. The group then devised a more specific strategy to oppose the referendum. They stated their goal for the campaign succinctly: “Cancellation of the state of Emergency Law and all special laws that restrict freedoms first in order to have meaningful elections.” Kefaya also added its condemnations of the government’s lack of countrywide social welfare, employment, and education to their campaign’s subheading.

On March 30, Kefaya organized three demonstrations against the referendum and Mubarak’s re-election in the cities of Cairo, Alexandria, and Mansoura. Common slogans of Kefaya included, “No to a fifth mandate”, “No to Mubarak, his party and his son”, “Mubarak you failed us, what did you do with our money?”, and “Mubarak, American agent.”

In late April, Kefaya sent a message through its website urging for demonstrations that would be “peaceful and silent and in favor of rapid changes.” The group also asked for a “new constitution, drafted by a constituent and freely elected assembly,” “the freedom to form political parties and publish papers,” and a “clean hands campaign.” On April 28, Kefaya’s call was met as the group held protests in fourteen cities simultaneously across Egypt, which were joined by other opposition groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. Kefaya members and supporters held the banner, “No Constitution without Freedom.” Across the country approximately 75 protesters were arrested but later freed. Kefaya gained the support of the judiciary, which tried to pressure Mubarak into getting election monitors and, at a meeting in Alexandria, 1,200 judges (though acting as nonpartisans) stated they would not oversee the presidential and parliamentary elections unless they were granted independence and command of the election processes. To gain publicity, Kefaya made effective use of press conferences in which they invited international journalists as well as Arab satellite television. The group organized mainly through electronic media, especially email and SMS mobile phone messages.

On May 25, the day of the referendum, Kefaya held a large demonstration encouraging people to boycott the referendum at the Saad Zaghlul mausoleum (Saad Zaghlul was a national hero who had led the most significant nonviolent campaign in Egypt’s modern history against the British from 1919-1921) and near the Press Syndicate headquarters. The two locations totaled about 100 Kefaya demonstrators. As Human Rights Watch and media outlets reported, protesters at both areas were met with violence from the government-sponsored plainclothes policemen and thugs, and two women were reportedly beaten and sexually assaulted. The Egyptian public was outraged at the violence and Kefaya took advantage of the support and from then on organized protests every Wednesday for the entire summer. Only 18% of Egyptians voted in the referendum, according to the Egyptian Independent Committee (the government reported about 23%), and Kefaya felt it had influenced the low turnout.

On June 8, 2,000 Egyptians from Kefaya and other opposition groups participated in a candlelight vigil at the Saad Zaghlul mausoleum to honor the victims of the May 25th crackdown.

On July 30, at a Kefaya-led protest in Cairo denouncing Mubarak’s presidency, the opposition was again met with violence by Mubarak-sponsored plainclothed and uniformed policemen who attacked the group of 200 demonstrators. Perhaps having felt the threat of violence many times now, Kefaya changed its plans of supporting several well-known political figures in the presidential election, instead leading a boycott of the voting.
The presidential elections occurred on September 7, and Mubarak was reelected with 88% of the vote (undeniably by fraud). Kefaya held protests on the election day, which were not met with violence. George Ishak, a leader of Kefaya, attributed the lack of brutality to the global attention to Egypt’s first multi-candidate election, saying, "There are 1,800 foreign correspondents watching the elections; do you think the regime would show its hideous face to the world? They behaved the way they did because of the huge media presence."

On September 27, Mubarak was sworn in as Egyptian President for the fifth time since he first took office in 1981. In response, 7,000 Egyptians marched through downtown Cairo. Kefaya also announced its rejection of the results and used the slogan “Batel,” or invalid, to describe Mubarak.

Kefaya’s vocal opposition to Mubarak sharply declined after his reelection. Mubarak’s administration discouraged U.S. involvement in Egyptian democracy by promoting an Islamist electoral parliamentary victory. With decreased U.S. attention to the Egyptian government, Mubarak was left with more power to harass and frighten Kefaya members, authorizing vicious attacks, torture, and detainment without trial. Due to this violent repression, plus internal conflicts and leadership change, Kefaya mostly receded from public prominence; however, the group reportedly joined the Egyptian pro-democracy protests in 2011 (see “Egyptians campaign to oust President Mubarak, 2011”).

Research Notes

Influences:

Influenced the start of Egypt’s groups Youth for Change and the Popular Campaign for Change, as well as Kabaat (We Are Sick of That) in Jordan, Khalas (Enough) in Libya, and Erhalo (Leave Us) in Yemen. Kefaya also inspired labor groups to begin their own campaigns throughout Egypt. (2)

Sources:


Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Elliana Bisgaard-Church, 08/10/2011

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