PARTY ACTIVISTS
IN SYRIA AND EGYPT
Political Participation in
Authoritarian Modernizing States

RAYMOND A. HINNEBUSCH

Using data from questionnaires given to Ba'th activists in Syria and Wafd activists in Egypt, this article examines the character of political activism in Third World authoritarian regimes. Both class and ideology appear to be significant determinants of the party chosen for participation. A complex set of motivational considerations rooted in personal and primordial relationships is often found to blend and coexist with class and ideological interests. Autonomous and publicly purposive political activism is possible under such regimes, albeit over a narrower range of concerns than in electoral democracies.

This study examines political activists in Syria and Egypt, two developing Middle East countries ruled by authoritarian regimes. What is distinctive about political participation in such settings? First, it is often argued that political ties are predominately personal and primordial. Habits of broader association are rudimentary; hence the typical units of political action are small groups and client networks seeking immediate and particular benefits. Class and occupation are largely irrelevant; concern with broad issues and ideology is weak (Springborg, 1975; Torrey, 1975; Van Dusen, 1972; Van Dam, 1979; Bill and Leiden, 1973). Second, authoritarian political structures accentuate these conditions, suppress the rudiments of openly competitive group politics, yet lack the means to atomize traditional political issues and forge active followings. Hence, politics is largely a matter of patrons and favors, of élite manipulation of the masses, and of anomic, anti-regime violence (Almond and Powell, 1966; Moore, 1974). Thus throughout much of the Third World there is thought to be a vacuum of autonomous, publicly purposive, broad-based political participation.

84

A study of participation in two very different parties in similar Third World authoritarian settings, the nationalist-populist Syrian Ba'th party and the democratic-capitalist Egyptian New Wafd Party, may enable us to assess these propositions critically.

POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE
SYRIAN BA'TH PARTY

The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party emerged in the 1950s as a movement led by petty bourgeois intellectuals and junior army officers. In the name of nationalism, modernization, and reform, it challenged the rule of Syria's traditional agrarian-commercial bourgeois élite. It mobilized discontent over the distribution of land and opportunity and the inability of the traditional regime to stand up to Israel or throw off Western tutelage. In a multi-sectarian society, it tried to make a secular nationalist appeal. In 1963, the party seized power and tried to impose a revolution from above.[1] To create a base of ideologically supportive activists, the Ba'th forged a Leninist-like recruitment system that included periods of candidacy for membership, party indoctrination, screening to exclude "forces foreign to the party's goals" (chiefly upper-class persons), and a structure of cells in the villages, neighborhood, schools, and factories.[2]

This study of activism in the Ba'th is based on a small survey sample (N = 72) of party youth recruits. Because it was possible to give the survey only in three meetings of the youth auxiliary branches in several villages around Damascus, the sample is not technically representative of the country-wide organization. But, on the basis of other evidence about party composition, the writer believes respondents to be generally typical.[3]

SOCIAL COMPOSITION

Most (79%) of our respondents are students in middle or high school. The sample is dominated by lower-middle-class and lower-class students,[4] while higher strata are far less in evidence than their greater command of social resources would lead one to expect. This outcome is evidently due to the modest attraction of the Ba'th for the upper middle classes, deliberate efforts by the regime to screen out elements incompatible with its orientation, and, through populist ideology and recruitment targeting, to mobilize a base at the bottom of society.

ATTITUDES

A number of questions were posed to learn more about the attitude orientation of the recruits. Responses to two questions suggest a high degree of nationalist militancy toward Israel and its backers.[5] Two other questions tapped a strong étatist-populist tendency,[6] while the hostility toward large property and wealth and greater tolerance for small property that might be expected from a sample dominated by the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry are clear from replies to a fifth question.[7] The responses are congruent with Ba'th doctrine, although the differences between those advocating inheritance of "some" and "little or no" property may reflect historic cleavages between the party's right and left wings. Similarly, there is a split in attitudes toward the Arab monarchs,[8] reflecting the cleavage between leftists, who lump the traditional Arab regimes with imperialism and Zionism, and rightists, who favor an all-Arab front against Israel. The range of different opinions on two more questions measuring secularism[9] suggests that the combination of the Ba'ths' secular ideological thrust and recruitment from an Islamic-oriented mass base has resulted in a blend of views.

Measures of general ideological orientation, nationalism, socialist leanings, and secularism also reveal some noteworthy variations. The distinctions between strata on social policy are roughly what might be expected were respondents conscious of their class interests.

RECRUITMENT STIMULI

Asked about their recruitment, most reported they had been brought into the party by friends, classmates, or a party worker; only 11% claimed self-activation. This does suggest a "mobilization" model rather than a voluntarist recruitment pattern. However, most respondents could cite memorable events or issues linked to their joining the party.

Nationalism is probably the strongest generator of voluntary commitments. Two thirds of those self-activated spoke of the two Israeli wars, the Palestine issue, or the protracted struggle with Western "imperialism." While 55% of the rurals mentioned these issues, only 21% of the urbanites did. If Arab unity (picked by 6%) is added, 39% stressed such a theme.

Social themes were commonly voiced (17%), as was the need to overcome backwardness (15%). These responses are congruent with the strong populist and étatist modernization efforts on which the regime has tried to base a claim for support. In general, issues were often involved in the recruitment of these activists, although 26% cited no memorable occasions. Analysis suggests that nationalism has been the

chief mobilizational impetus among the lower groups, and that only subsequently, through membership, does class consciousness become sharper. Among the lower middle, the two hold equal weight beforehand.

What would they miss if they left the organization? Satisfaction from collective goal seeking or performance of public duty was cited by 46%, while 42% cited participation, comradeship, esteem, identity, or integration—what might be called "solidary" rewards—and 12% did not cite anything. The upper class was notably more likely (75%) than either the lower strata (44%) or the middle (39%) to cite solidary rewards.

RECRUITMENT MOTIVATIONS

Respondents were asked to choose five reasons for joining the organization from a list of ten.[10] On the basis of correlations between respondents' choices and conceptual congruity, the items were clustered into three major motivation types as indicated.[11]

Each motivational type seems to account for roughly one-third of total motivation. Presence of the ideological type, showing strong issue and goal orientation, is crucial for the performance of a revolutionary party. The type does seem to be respectably represented, although less widely than might be expected in a party seeking to maximize ideological recruitment.[12]

Careerism, in a state in which scarce opportunities are politically controlled and in which party recruitment has broadened access for previously deprived strata, is understandably also important in motivation. The positive correlation of "friends in the party" with this cluster suggests a tendency to rely on personal connections to further career ambitions, hence of clientalism is the party. Careerism is not strongly associated with any attitude scale or social group.

PERSONALIST-LOCALIST

A more traditional way in which persons are linked to an organization is by personal or kinship ties and by local loyalties rather than by wider issues or high ambition. From the point of view of a revolutionary party, excessive reliance on the personal-local motivation pattern may risk turning local branches into closed, particularist in-groups based on personality and family, but it is an inexpensive way of forging roots in the local community (Barnes, 1968).

The political activism of the three social strata falls into distinct patterns. The upper group, unreceptive to an ideology incompatible with its social interests, is linked to the party through personal-local

connections and solidary rewards, and is not very efficacious, intense, or purposive in its activism. The middle group, socially mobilized and favored by Ba'thism, is most motivated by ideology and least by personal-local ties, and is the most efficacious, intense, and purposive in its activism. The lower group is most likely to be attracted on nationalist or personal-local grounds. That its attitudes are more ideologically correct than the middle group, in spite of lesser efficacy and ideological recruitment motivation, suggests either a lesser level of autonomous mobilization, or that, once indoctrinated to its class interests, it embraces them with alacrity.

POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THE EGYPTIAN
NEW WAFD PARTY

The New Wafd Party was a resurrection of Egypt's veteran liberal-nationalist independence movement, the Wafd. In 1978 President Anwar Sadat initiated a cautious political liberalization experiment that, while keeping intact the authoritarian powers of the presidency, permitted a broader measure of political expression and the emergence of parties in opposition to the dominant government party. This allowed the old Wafdist leaders, long repressed under Nasir, to resurrect their political party. The leaders of the new party were chiefly men of property and substance, Western-educated and -oriented landowners and professionals. Their mission, as they saw it, was to hasten the dismantling of the authoritarian-populist regime created by Nasir, to act as a genuine opposition party capable of holding the government accountable, and hence, to push Egypt in a liberal-democratic-capitalist direction.[13] This program allowed the New Wafdists to challenge the Sadat regime for the loyalties of the upper and middle classes. Because the challenge proved too militant and potent, it was soon repressed, but the Wafd's brief reappearance nevertheless gave a valuable glimpse of the liberal side of Egypt's political arena.

This study is based on a sample of 44 New Wafd activists encountered at meetings at party headquarters; as in the Syrian case, rigorous sampling was impossible and the sample is not technically representative of all activists.[14]

SOCIAL COMPOSITION

By occupation, a third of the sample is made up of professionals, a third, officials, and about a fifth, businessmen. When occupational

prestige, economic interest, and organizational position are combined, 36% qualify as "upper status" (high on two of three counts) and 16% as "lower middle" (not high on any count). In between are the upper middle—48%.

Clearly, the sample has its social center of gravity between the upper and middle classes, while those below these strata are scarcely repre-sented. While 64% were born in the provinces (and often own land there), 91% now live in Cairo or Alexandria. The social composition of the sample, thus, reflects a group with only slightly lower status than the party's top leadership.[15]

ATTITUDES

An effort was made to gauge the attitudes of our respondents on socio-economic and national matters; they were asked to make appraisals of Egypt's "open door" policy,[16] of Sadat's actions,[17] and Nasir's leadership.[18] The results make clear that a great majority of the sample support Egypt's opening to capitalism; most of those with mixed feelings, moreover, support the idea of the open door, but are critical of its inefficient or corrupt implementation.[19] Officially, the Wafd party supports the peace with Israel, although uneasy over Sadat's approach to it; half of its activists generally support his course, while a significant minority opposes the damage done to Egypt's Arab relations by his policies. On the whole, Wafdists can be considered moderate nation-alists. Finally, respondents' extreme dislike for Nasir and all his works is clear; those with mixed feelings either acknowledged that there had been some positive aspects to his rule or that, if the results were bad, his intentions had been good.

RECRUITMENT OCCASIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

Unlike the Ba'th, the New Wafd conceived of itself as an open, not an ideologically selective, party; moreover, it had little time to develop a formal recruitment mechanism and relied instead on the appeal of its program to self-activated recruits and on the wide political and personal contacts of its veteran leaders. Two questions asked of respondents had bearing on recruitment. When asked, 58% reported previous involve-ment by their families in politics, and 30% explicitly reported such activity in the old Wafd. Given that two-thirds of the New Wafd leaders were formally active in the old Wafd, it seems certain that many recruits were brought into the new party through family and friendship ties to such leaders. Respondents were also asked why they had joined the

party. The predominant reason given for joining was the desire for liberal democracy, either to work for it or the belief that the party was a vehicle of it (46%). Work for reform or belief in the party's goals constituted a second category of goal-oriented motives (30%). Those who cited trust of party leaders (11%) seemed to express more person-oriented motives. In sum, the primary motivations for recruitment seem to be ideological ends and personal ties; careerism seems irrelevant since membership in the New Wafd, an opposition party with little immediate chance of power in an authoritarian regime, was more a detriment to, than a vehicle of, career ambitions.

THE BA'TH, THE WAFD, AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN THIRD WORLD AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

The data in these cases, although very tentative, do suggest a need for qualification of the dominant view of participation in Third World authoritarian regimes. First, the view that issues and ideology deriving from class interests play a small role is not supported. The contrasts in both the social composition and attitudinal orientation of the Ba'th and Wafd are striking evidence to the contrary. These contrasts would be unlikely were ideology and class interests inoperative; in fact, it is clear that party élites who sought political bases compatible with their own class-shaped ideologies and recruits were often attracted by the class appeal of these ideologies.

Second, the evidence suggests that political association in developing countries is more complex than the dominant view holds. It is best conceptualized as not exclusively "traditional" (personal, primordial) as opposed to "modern" (class, ideology), but as typically a "transitional" mix in which the blending and coexistence of traditional and modern is the dominant phenomenon (Lerner, 1958; Riggs, 1964). In both parties, ideology and issues counted in recruitment; and in Syria ideological motivations produced greater reliability, efficacy, and activism, while in Egypt they spurred activists to risk opposition to an authoritarian regime. In both parties, more traditional local and personal ties were also apparent. These ties did not prevent them from acting as relatively cohesive and significant forces in the political arena with definite ideological thrusts. Finally, careerism represents a form of association independent of the traditional-modern dimension that plays a varying role in different parties. The extent of careerism seems to be determined no only by the strength of ideology or personalism but also according to the social forces recruited and the rewards of activism. Thus a ruling

party recruited from deprived strata like the Ba'th is likely to attract more careerists wanting to "live off politics," while a party recruited from economically established persons and with few prospects of power, like the Wafd, is more likely to attract the gentleman amateur seeking to "live for politics."

Third, the cases suggest that autonomous, publicly purposive political activism is not incompatible with authoritarian regimes. Yet the cases also indicate the limits of such activism. In the Syrian case, many of those mobilized from above—careerists dependent on the regime for their livelihood, ideologically inert personalist-localists— probably cannot be considered highly autonomous participants. The more ideologically oriented and efficacious activists can be, but such activism is only open to those who share the political élites' goals. There is limited tolerance of overt challenges to élite policy even from such loyalists. In the Egyptian case, safety valve activism had a real impact although it invited its own repression. These cases suggest that activism may exist in authoritarian regimes and make a real difference, but it may be more sporadic and its range narrower than it is in competitive polities.

NOTES

1. It undertook to reshape society through land reform, nationalization, welfare programs and tried to challenge Western and Israeli power in the region. Amid intense conflict with the traditional establishment and external powers, it tried to create a single-party state, repressing activity by opposition groups and building a party apparatus to mobilize a following among workers, salaried state employees, and the peasantry.

2. By the 1970s, party membership stood at about 100,000. In addition, the party controlled a set of auxiliary organizations for peasants, workers, youth, women, and others. Through the party youth auxiliary, in particular, the regime sought to recruit lower-middle-class and lower-class youth as they were channeled into the expanding school system.

3. This survey was part of a research program done in Syria in 1974 with the permission of the Ba'th party authorities. At three meetings of a party youth organization in Damascus (in Katana, Ghouta-Sharqiyya, and Douma, all in the province of Rural Damascus), the writer administered the questionnaires personally and observed no attempts to control or bias responses. Unless otherwise noted, all statistical associations are significant at the .05 level.

4. Respondents are coded according to class on the basis of father's occupation and whether their families owned land or other property and employed anybody. Those who reported owning property and employing persons (8%) were classified as upper-middle class, while another 50% were lower-middle (drawn equally from employees-small professions, artisans-small merchants, and soldiers), and 42% had lower-class origins (drawn almost equally from peasant small holders, workers, and landless peasant non-holders).

5. Responding to, "Would it be justifiable for Syria to restrict Palestinian commando activity from Syrian bases if the cost of Israeli reprisals became too high?" 83% said no, 11% said sometimes, and 6% said yes. Again, replying to "Should Syria boycott goods from nations which heavily support Israel even if it means Syria must do without or pay higher prices for some goods?" 86% said yes.

6. Asked whether government should "ensure that national resources are equally distributed even if this means taking strong measures against the rich?" 95% said yes. Again, replying to, "Should the government supervise the private sector?" 82% said yes, 12% said sometimes, and 6% said no.

7. "How much property should people be allowed to inherit?" While 5% chose "any amount," 44% thought "moderate amounts" appropriate and 51% "little or none."

8. Asked whether Syria should "cooperate with the Arab monarchies?" 41% said "yes," while 47% said "sometimes" and only 12% said "no."

9. When asked, "What should be the role of the Quran and Sharia in legislation?" 20% thought "much" an appropriate answer, 44% thought "some," and 36% "little." Responding to, "Do good results come from the expenditure of effort or the will of God?" 52% chose the former, 21% chose the latter, and the rest had no opinion.

10. The response rates for each listed reason are these. In the cluster of ideological considerations, 36 chose "angered at things wrong with the country and wanted to change them," 32 picked "wanted to work for goals and programs important for the country," and 32 indicated they "wanted to help make the country strong." In the cluster of careerist considerations, 42 picked "wanted to be near those doing important things," 12 said they "wanted to make political work my profession," and 12 picked "have friends in the party." In the cluster of personal-local considerations, 36 opted for "gives feeling of recognition in my village," 55 said it "helps fulfill my sense of community duty," 8 indicated they "felt admiration for a party leader," and 17 felt that "trusted people were party members."

11. A correlation analysis (Pearson's r) was run on the picks of respondents and it was discovered that certain picks inter-correlated. The careerist and personal-local clusters were derived from this process. In the ideological cluster items 2 and 3 were correlated, but item 1 correlated negatively with them; nevertheless, these items were kept as a cluster as they seemed conceptually to fit best together. Each respondent was scored on each cluster by giving him a point for each pick of an item included in that cluster.

12. The ideologically motivated did register high scores on all attitudinal indices, i.e., higher ideological commitment (gamma = .35), higher nationalism (gamma = .35), higher socialism (gamma = .68), and higher secularism (gamma = .60). They also showed higher efficacy (gamma = .41) and higher participation levels (gamma = .47). Almost none came from the upper-middle-class group, and the other two strata were equally represented.

13. Their program attacked the 1952 revolution and called for a competitive parliamentary regime, full political freedom, radical cutbacks in the public sector and in populist subsidies and price controls, encouragement of the private sector, and a further opening of the economy to the world capitalist market.

14. The writer is confident, however, that those sampled were typical Wafdist recruits; at this early stage of the Wafd's formation, those active at party headquarters virtually were the party's cadre. However, the method and small numbers make the results merely suggestive.

15. The New Wafd sample was obtained by means of interviews with willing activists encountered in two meetings held at the party's Cairo headquarters in early 1978. The sample is small because interviewing was discontinued after warnings from the police. Several cautions regarding it are in order. Had more rigorous sampling been possible,

more rural activists might have been included. Also, had the Wafd been given more time to build its organization, a better sample might have reflected a greater pool of activists from the rural areas and from the lower strata. However, the largely urban, high-status sample actually obtained does seem typical of the activists who carried the burden of launching the new party.

16. "Some say the open door policy is needed to bring foreign capital and technology; others oppose it, saying it will lead to Egypt's colonization by foreign captial and allow the rich to get richer at the poor's expense. Which view do you support?" Needed, 69%; mixed view, 22%; opposed, 8%.

17. "Some say that Sadat's visit to Jerusalem was a victory for Egypt since it broke psychological barriers obstructing peace efforts and showed the world Egypt's genuine desire for peace; others say it destroyed the Arab's bargaining position and made Israel believe Egypt wanted peace at any price and hence more rigid. Which view do you support?" Victory for Egypt, 50%; mixed views, 24%; destroyed Arab position, 26%.

18. Some people think Nasir was a great leader who put Egypt on the road to modernity and national pride, while others say he ruined Egypt, destroying her economy, suppressing liberties and losing the battle with Israel. Which view do you support?" Great leader, 8%; mixed view, 17%; ruined Egypt, 75%.

19. Only a few voices oppose it on grounds that an excessive influx of luxury and consumer goods has stimulated inflation and jeopardized national investment and social peace.

Raymond A. Hinnebusch is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the College of Saint Catherine, St. Paul, Minnesota. Formerly at the American University in Cairo, he is primarily a specialist in Middle Eastern politics. His research interests have centered on the patterns of political participation and recruitment to leadership roles in authoritarian modernizing states.