While much has been written about authoritarianism and democratization in order to understand changing or enduring regimes in Egypt, examining evolving patterns of electoral participation under one-party rule has rarely been addressed in research. The chapters in this dissertation detail aspects of electoral politics, political participation, and their interaction and impact on political parties in contemporary Egypt. The study has drawn attention to legal, political and electoral determinants that have shaped party politics in various periods of modern Egypt; under the pre-1952 constitutional monarchy era; one-party rule under Jamāl Abd al-Nāṣir; and controlled multiparty system under the Anwar al-Sādāt and Ḥusnī Mubārak regimes. The dissertation focuses on exploring factors that have shaped electoral politics and political participation under various electoral systems in Egypt’s parliamentary elections since 1984.

As a starting point, the first chapter of the dissertation explores the existing arguments and the debates on authoritarianism and democratization in the Arab World and Egypt. Then the discussion moves on to review a wide range of literature that debates the relevance and irrelevance of elections under single-party rule. This review addresses and analyzes the current scholarly arguments that place great importance on the impact of formal and informal institutions on determining electoral processes.

The second chapter introduces party building and regime formation in the Middle East and Egypt. It outlines the main scholarly works that have examined the background
factors behind the emergence of political parties and their role in widening political participation. The study moves on to identify specific characteristics of Egypt’s political system under the constitutional monarchical rule in order to provide an in-depth explanation for how and why pluralistic monarchical system transformed into one-party rule in the era of post-July revolution 1952. Then the study examines important dimensions of the political and social project of the Nasserite state, the consolidation of one-party rule and its impact on the development of political institution building and political pluralism. The importance of this chapter lies in its thorough analysis of the circumstances and sequence of events that paved the way for the reintroduction of party pluralism. These analyses helped examine the characteristics of the shift to multiparty system and the development of the regime-opposition relationship under the rule of Anwar Sādāt and Ḥusnī Mubārak.

The third chapter examines the 1984 and 1987 parliamentary elections under Mubārak. It analyzes the interaction between electoral systems and party institutions in order to demonstrate the impact of electoral systems and its rules on party politics with special focus on the dynamics of the Muslim Brotherhood’s (Brotherhood hereafter) electoral participation. The importance this study places on the electoral role of the Brotherhood is attributed to its influential role as the most popular sociopolitical force on the political scene and the most powerful opposition electoral force next to the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP hereafter). The dissertation further reveals unexamined dimensions of three different changing electoral systems in Egypt under the rule of Mubārak since 1984. It examines thoroughly the legal, constitutional and political frameworks under which different electoral systems have been enacted. It explains how these changing electoral rules have defined political pluralism in Egypt. It further explains how electoral rules have shaped opposition electoral strategies and drove its leaders to reach out to the Brotherhood in order to overturn restrictions imposed on their electoral participation. The other dimension this study demonstrates in the third chapter is the impact of the Brotherhood’s electoral participation on its ideological transformation and on the existing formal opposition parties and their internal cohesion.

The fourth chapter closely examines the socioeconomic and political contexts, in particular the so-called ‘political de-liberalization,’ under which restrictions on political participation were an important factor that limited electoral contestation and the
Brotherhood's in particular. It further explains how the inability of the Brotherhood to engage in electoral contestation to enter parliament represented an opportunity for the Brotherhood to focus on increasing its engagement in professional syndicates, which will prove to be an essential source of mobilization of its electoral strategies in 2000 and 2005 elections. Moreover, the changing electoral rules, from party-list based proportional representation system in the 1980s to candidate-centered since 1990 elections, helped the Brotherhood to enhance its electoral role and to negatively affect electoral strategies of political parties, both the opposition and the ruling NDP.

The fifth chapter moves on to examine electoral processes in 2000 and 2005 elections and the impact of the new political and constitutional frameworks on the electoral participation of the Brotherhood, the opposition parties, and the ruling NDP. It examines the role played by electoral rules in the emergence of new electoral phenomena and their impact on the electoral processes and political parties, in particular the ruling NDP. It also highlights a range of other important procedural issues and flaws, such as the process of electoral registration, constituency malapportionment and disproportionment, which have had direct impact on electoral processes. In addition, this chapter explains the correlation between the kind of electoral system and the increasing role of electoral violence and money during parliamentary elections. Then the focus shifts to examine the Brotherhood's electoral strategy and the reasons behind its ability to overcome electoral flaws, legal and security restrictions during elections.

The dissertation concludes that it is hard to examine electoral processes without carefully considering the kind of electoral system, constitutional legal, and political frameworks under which parliamentary elections have taken place in Egypt since 1984. This dissertation intended to switch focus of attention away from arguments of enduring authoritarianism and democratization, towards the interaction of electoral politics and participation under one-party rule in Egypt. Despite the ability of the Egyptian regime to manipulate the election results through various means of fraud, security measures, legal, electoral and constitutional amendments, electoral processes have had independent effects on party politics and represented a continuous electoral and legitimacy challenges to the ruling NDP.