



# Egypt's presidential election 2012

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Egyptians vote on 23 and 24 May to elect a new president. If no candidate wins 50%, a second round will be held on 16 and 17 June. There are signs, however, of a looming crisis over the division of power and the role of the military.

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## 1 Results of the parliamentary election

Party	Seats	% of the vote
Freedom and Justice Party	235	47.2
Nour Party	121	24.3
New Wafd Party	38	7.6
Egyptian Bloc	34	6.8
Al-Wasat Party	10	2
Reform and Development Party	9	1.8
Revolution Continues	7	1.4
Other parties	18	3.6
Independents	26	5.2
Seats appointed by military council	10	

Source BBC News Online

## 2 Constitution

At present, Egypt is ruled under the provisions of the constitutional declaration issued after a referendum in March 2011.

A 100-member assembly was set up by the parliament after the 2011/12 parliamentary election and the SCAF has insisted that the drafting process must be completed before power is handed over to the new president, which is due to happen on 30 June. Most political parties want the powers of the presidency to be limited, to prevent the emergence of another 'pharaoh'. Analysts expect parliament to be given increased powers and a mixed parliamentary/presidential system to emerge.

However, the process to has been beset by difficulties from the outset and its failure to come to a conclusion is a clear danger to the transition. In March, liberal and leftist parties moved to boycott the assembly. In April, the Coptic Church withdrew its participation in the assembly. And later, the administrative court in Cairo suspended the assembly after complaints that its composition was unrepresentative and its establishment unconstitutional.<sup>1</sup>

On 15 May, the parliament reached a tentative agreement on how to re-formulate the assembly.<sup>2</sup>

## 3 Parties

In 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood made a pledge not to enter a candidate for the presidential election. This decision was generally ascribed to a fear among the Brotherhood's leaders

<sup>1</sup> "Egypt court suspends constitutional assembly", *BBC News Online*, 10 April 2012

<sup>2</sup> "Parliament nears resolution on Constituent Assembly formation", *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 16 May 2012

that the prospect of Islamists sweeping the board after parliamentary and presidential elections would be too alarming for Egypt's military forces, inviting a crackdown and re-imposition of a dictatorship. Another reason for the reluctance to stand for the presidency could be the fear that expectations in Egypt are so high and the prospect of fulfilling them so remote that the first president will only get one term and risks being viewed as a failure. The clever option, then, might be to stand in the second election and have a chance of getting the credit if reforms begin to show results.

On 31 March, the Brotherhood announced that it would field a candidate, Khairat al-Shatir, after all. According to the party's deputy leader, the decision to reverse the 2011 pledge was taken because the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) was making "attempts to abort the revolution."<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the SCAF declined the Brotherhood's requests to appoint a new cabinet that would more closely reflect the makeup of parliament after the election. Although there was no re-shuffle, the Brotherhood has been busy in parliamentary committees and has begun to influence policy. One decision that has been attributed in part to the Brotherhood's influence in parliament was the withdrawal of the Egyptian ambassador to Damascus – the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is influential in the Syrian opposition movement. Another factor in the decision to put up a candidate may have been the entry into the competition of rebellious former Brotherhood member Abdul Moneim Aboul Fotouh.

The frequent clashes between the Brotherhood and the SCAF, and the decision to field a candidate, have reduced fears among Egyptian liberals that the military and the Brotherhood would enter an 'unholy alliance' to prevent liberals from gaining power. After the poor performance of liberal candidates in the parliamentary election, and particularly the unexpectedly strong showing by the Salafist (extreme Islamist) Noor party, the need for the SCAF to fear the liberals has receded.

The Noor party burst onto the Egyptian political scene with its success at the parliamentary election, gaining 28% of the vote along with its allies in the Islamist Bloc, second only to the Muslim Brotherhood. Its support was largely based in rural areas, both in Upper Egypt and in the Nile Delta, among people whose views had perhaps been under-reported in opinion polls and the news media.

Leftist and socially liberal parties performed poorly in the parliamentary election and have been somewhat marginalised in the presidential campaign. They may have an opportunity to come back if the largely free-market economic policies of the leading candidates do not quickly lead to improvements in living standards for the mass of poor Egyptians.

## 4 Candidates

- **Ahmed Shafiq:** Former Air Force commander and was briefly prime minister during the crisis of February 2011. Many Egyptians are said to believe that he is the favoured candidate of the SCAF. His candidacy was originally blocked, however, but re-instated on appeal.
- **Abdul Moneim Aboul Fotouh:** He was a leading member of the Brotherhood but left the party after announcing his candidacy for the presidential election, when the FJP's policy was still that it would not field a candidate. He now has the support of the Salafist Noor party, but has promoted a more moderate version of Islamism than his rival from the Muslim Brotherhood. Has worked to court women's votes.

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<sup>3</sup> "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood names presidency candidate",

- **Amr Moussa:** Former foreign minister and once Secretary General of the Arab League. He is reportedly popular and well-known among Egyptians.
- **Mohammed Mursi:** Heads Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. Not as charismatic or well-known as his disqualified predecessor, he may struggle to repeat the FJP's performance in the parliamentary election.
- **Other candidates** include Islamic theorist Muhammad Selim al-Awwa; judge Hisham al-Bastawisi; Popular Socialist Alliance MP Abu al-Izz al-Hariri; labour lawyer and activist Khalid Ali; co-founder of the Nasserist Karama party Hamdin Sabbahi; Democratic Peace Party member and former intelligence officer Hossam Khairallah.

13 candidates will contest the election. If Egypt's transition has been called "chaotic", it has been in part because of the selection and approval of candidates for the presidential election. The Supreme Presidential Election Commission, a body whose independence from the SCAF has been questioned, disqualified 10 candidates in April, three of whom were front runners. Khairat al-Shatir was the favoured candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and was the most high-profile disqualified candidate. Al-Shatir is a prominent businessman and one of the Brotherhood's chief financiers. He spent several years in prison after a conviction that was widely accepted as politically motivated, but this conviction was the basis of his disqualification by the Election Commission. His replacement, the president of the FJP, is Mohammed Mursi, who is reported to be a less convincing candidate.

Mohammed elBaradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Authority and prominent figure in the early days of the uprising, withdrew his presidential candidacy in January.

## 5 Opinion polls

Polls in Egypt are not very reliable. There is not a long history of sampling of public opinion, as is often the case in authoritarian systems, and Egyptian polling organisations are still learning about the techniques.

Before the parliamentary election, polls failed to predict the strong showing of the Noor party, perhaps an indication that the pollsters are failing to pick up on the opinions of the rural poor.

Many polls on the presidential election have given contradictory results so it is difficult to gain a clear picture of opinion. In any case, maybe a third of Egyptians are undecided, making any prediction of the likely results impossible. One survey of polls recently did give one consistent result:<sup>4</sup> that the Muslim Brotherhood's FJP candidate Mohammed Mursi gained less support than his independent Islamist rival, Abdul Moneim Aboul Fotouh. Ahmed Shafiq has performed strongly in several recent polls,<sup>5</sup> while Amr Moussa has long been considered a front runner but his popularity may have faded somewhat in recent weeks.

## 6 Role of the military

While excitement is building in Egypt at the first genuinely democratic presidential election in Egypt's history, the question remains as to what will be the real balance of power after the handover to the new president.

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<sup>4</sup> "Opinion polls give few clues to Egypt presidential election", *BBC News Online*, 18 May 2012

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, [Egyptian presidential election, 2012](#)

The generals probably do not want to rule directly but they would like to be the power behind a weak presidency and a parliament with limited powers. A red line for the military appears to be civilian scrutiny of its budget. The military also wants immunity from prosecution. This is perhaps not surprising since the military has gained substantial business interests over the last few decades and is suspected of participating in many of the nepotistic deals that were notorious under the previous regime.

Without this scrutiny and subjection to the law, the military could not be said to be subordinate to the civilian power. The relationship between the military and democracy is basically undecided as Egypt enters the election.

## 7 Outlook

Although there has been excitement about the election in Egypt, many voters are said to be basing their choice more on negative factors than any great enthusiasm for the candidates.<sup>6</sup> That may be quite normal in a democratic country. More serious is the prospect of the democratic transition hitting a crisis when power is due to be handed over to the elected president. The stalling constitutional process and the increasingly confrontational approach between the Islamists and the military have made that prospect more likely. In a recent report, the International Crisis Group highlights the possibility of a clash between the two forces:

The election may well be the SCAF's last chance to peacefully produce a "balanced" political system, reflecting the Muslim Brotherhood's parliamentary supremacy, yet also protecting interests critical to the military. Should Egyptians elect an Islamist without a prior understanding between the political forces and the military, the SCAF could well find itself at once powerful and helpless, unable to influence the process save by unconstitutional – and highly risky – moves. The prospect of renewed, widespread confrontation and an abrupt halt to the transitional process, once remote, no longer is unthinkable. The end result could be a presidential election that further inflames the situation, gives rise to institutional and extra-institutional challenges, jeopardises the transition and settles nothing.

Neither the SCAF nor the Muslim Brotherhood wanted it to come to this. For the two, the clash is premature. Both would have benefited from a compromise agreement, safeguarding essential military prerogatives while setting the country on a clear path toward full civilian rule, allowing the Islamists to govern but ensuring it happens gradually and inclusively, consistent with the Brotherhood's own fear of grabbing too much too soon. But, because the transition increasingly has taken on a winner-take-all quality, neither appears to feel it has a choice.<sup>7</sup>

Omar Ashour writes for the Brookings Institution that the other force in the country that should not be forgotten is the 'Tahrirists'.<sup>8</sup> In the event of a serious threat to the transition, people could again take to the streets:

If 2011 witnessed the miracle of Mubarak's removal, a brave parliament's institutional assertiveness, coupled with non-institutional Tahririst pressure, could force the generals to accept a transfer of power to civilian rule (with some reserved domains for the army establishment) in 2012. What is certain is that this year will not witness a return to the conditions of 2010. Egypt may become stuck in democratization's slow

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<sup>6</sup> "For Egypt's voters, revolution feels light years away", *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 22 May 2012

<sup>7</sup> "Lost in Transition: The World According to Egypt's SCAF", International Crisis Group, 24 April 2012

<sup>8</sup> "What Do Egypt's Generals Want?", Brookings Institution, 30 January 2012

lane, but there will be no U-turn. The hundreds of thousands who marched to Tahrir Square on the revolution's anniversary will guarantee that.<sup>9</sup>

Egyptian academic Ashraf el-Sherif writes that the result of the election may be a dangerous power vacuum that fails to tackle the country's pressing problems:

...the transitional period will never end — there will be no real transfer of power and real executive authority will not be held by any elected party, regardless of whether or not the presidential election take place and irrespective of their outcome.

Furthermore, the military will not take over executive rule in a direct and comprehensive manner in the Nasserist style as they cannot afford the cost of such an action. On the other hand, they will not allow any real transfer of executive power as this could threaten their interests. All they want is for executive power to continue to function in the current state of political vacuum with no real authority, as the black hole it is. Egypt, however, cannot bear this situation much longer considering the social and economic crises it faces.

Sooner or later the collapse of our deep state is imminent, as it cannot be revived nor given temporary sedation, not to mention the fact that Egypt will not continue to tolerate circum-political debates, instead of debates on the achievement of the much needed economic and political change, for much longer.<sup>10</sup>

The Turkish model has often been raised as an aspiration for Egypt as it moves towards a more democratic system that incorporates some form of political Islam. Having held its first free election in 1950, Turkey underwent decades of instability, including three military coups and the banning of major parties, in what was a prolonged struggle over secularism and the role of the military. That part of the Turkish model for Egypt would be better avoided.

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<sup>9</sup> "What Do Egypt's Generals Want?", Brookings Institution, 30 January 2012

<sup>10</sup> Ashraf el-Sherif, Egypt's transitional period will never end", *Egypt Independent*, 1 May 2012