



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on December 5, 2011

Egypt Islamists Win Big in Election, Sparking Fears

Official election results released on Sunday showed the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) garnering a sizeable lead with almost 37 percent of the vote. The more radical [Salafi](#) Muslim party Al Nour did far better than expected with close to 25 percent of the 10 million votes cast in the first of three rounds of elections.



The most significant secular party, the Egyptian Bloc, won less than 14 percent and came in third overall. But smaller moderate Islamic and secular parties performed poorly.

Questions are growing about what the new Egyptian government might look like after the first real elections in decades. It remains unclear whether the Brotherhood's FJP will ally itself with the even more radical Islamist parties or form a coalition with liberal groups.

"We welcome the Egyptian people's choice," an FJP spokesman told reporters after the results were published. "Egypt now needs all parties to co-operate together to get it out of its crisis."

The Muslim Brotherhood was widely forecast to do well and its victory was not a surprise to analysts. Despite being banned under the now-toppled Mubarak regime, the group maintained a solid underground organization that was known among Egyptians for its charity work and its long-running battle against the Egyptian dictator.

In the run-up to elections, Brotherhood officials emphasized that Islamic Sharia law should be the basis of Egypt's new Constitution. However, the group also promised to respect individual rights and religious liberty. Now the Brotherhood's sincerity and credibility will be put to the test.

"We represent a moderate and fair party," deputy FJP chief Essam el-Erian [told](#) the Associated Press, implying a clear contrast between his party and the Salafist Al Nour party, which advocates a strict interpretation of the Koran along the lines of the Saudi Arabian dictatorship. "We want to apply the basics of Sharia law in a fair way that respects human rights and personal rights." He also promised that the party would respect religious freedom.

Despite the reassurances of moderation offered by the FJP and its candidates, however, [not everyone is convinced](#) — especially considering the Brotherhood's [long track record of extremism](#). Liberty-minded activists and the sizeable Coptic Christian minority within the country worry that Egypt could turn toward theocratic despotism.

The Coptic Christian community, which represents around 10 percent of the Egyptian population, has good cause to fear the rise of extremist political Islam. Even under the relatively secular Mubarak regime, the minority was [frequently victimized](#) in terror attacks on churches.

After the revolution toppled the U.S.-backed strongman, [dozens of Coptic protesters were killed](#) by the ruling military junta during protests. Many Christians fear they will become second-class citizens under the emerging new regime.



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Young liberals and democracy activists who played a key role in bringing down Mubarak have also expressed concern. Al Nour party candidates have, for example, threatened to ban alcohol, force women to wear veils, and more.

Some activists have even refused to accept the election results so far. “The next parliament will be illegitimate because religious slogans were excessively used and religious parties violated election rules and regulations,” [said](#) Aboul Ezz Hariri of the Continuing Revolution group. “This did not give newly formed parties the chance to fairly compete.”

In the Middle East, Israeli officials are concerned, too. “We are worried,” [said](#) Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz after the results were announced. He also said he hoped Egypt “won’t become an extremist Islamist state because that would put the whole region in danger.”

One particularly serious issue is the 1979 peace deal between Egypt and Israel, which some experts fear could be scrapped if radical anti-Israel Islamists seize power. But the powerful Egyptian military supports the agreement and still [largely holds power behind the scenes](#). So some analysts have suggested those fears could be overblown.

The so-called “Arab Spring” has led to profound changes all across the region, well beyond Egypt. After the fall of Libyan despot Moammar Gadhafi in a NATO-backed regime change operation, Islamic extremists who once fought America have [largely succeeded in seizing power](#). Chaos, violence, and power struggles still plague the new Libya.

In Tunisia, meanwhile, Islamist parties crushed the opposition in recent elections after an uprising overthrew longtime despot Ben Ali. And in Yemen, mass [chaos and bloody fighting continues](#) to rage after U.S.-backed “President” Ali Abdullah Saleh was forced to step down.

Violence, albeit more moderate, has also continued to rear its head on the Egyptian political scene in the run-up to the election. Dozens have been killed and thousands injured in [violent protests and clashes](#). And over the weekend, a candidate’s driver was [killed](#) in a gun battle with supporters of another party.

Run-off elections in the first round of elections in Egypt, which included voters in Cairo and Alexandria, will be held today and tomorrow. Final nationwide results for the lower house of parliament are expected by mid-January.

Photo of woman casting her ballot in Egypt: AP Images

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