



Written by [James Heiser](#) on June 21, 2012

Egyptian Election Chaos Feeds on Lack of Trust

While the commission overseeing Egypt's presidential election has delayed release of the official vote tallies, supporters of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi are already protesting that the nation's military is trying to steal the election. The Presidential Election Commission maintains that it needs time to investigate roughly 400 accusations of voter fraud — accusations brought by both sides in the hotly contested race — before releasing the results of June 16-17 vote. Meanwhile, [according to press reports](#), both Morsi and his opponent — former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik — are claiming victory, with the Morsi campaign claiming a total of 52 percent of the vote, and Shafik claiming 51.5 percent.



As reported [previously for The New American](#), Morsi's allies in the Egyptian parliament attempted to remove Shafik from the race only days before the election by passing a law that would have banned him from the presidency based on his service in the Mubarak regime. Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court threw out the law as unconstitutional, and then removed one-third of the members of parliament, claiming that Egyptian election laws had been violated in their selection. The court's action effectively dissolved the Egyptian parliament.

Although the official results of the election were scheduled to be released on Thursday, the Muslim Brotherhood proclaimed victory on the morning after the election, and began to denounce the Egyptian military claiming that those who had been overseeing the nation's transition to a more democratic state were subverting the democratic process. And, unwilling to wait until the elections commission had finished its work, the Brotherhood began to flood Tahrir Square with protestors in an effort to conjure up memories of the 'Arab Spring' uprising which brought down the Mubarak government. [As Reuters reports](#), the Brotherhood has gone so far as to begin busing its supporters in, even as it denies that the organization is seeking a confrontation:

Hussein Ibrahim, a senior Brotherhood member of the dissolved parliament, told Reuters the SCAF order would prolong military rule: "We're back at square one.

"After Egyptians waited for the election of a new president to end the transitional period, we discovered that by electing a new president we are restarting the transitional period."

... At a news conference, a spokesman for the Brotherhood played down talk of head-on conflict with an army with which the movement has lately developed a cautious working relationship:

"Why do we rush to the word 'confrontation'?" said Yasser Ali. "We do not seek any confrontation with anyone. No one in Egypt wants confrontation.... There has to be dialogue between national forces, and the people alone must decide their fate."



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However, it seems likely that the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood understands precisely how volatile such mass demonstrations can be; it is hardly credible that, having brought in thousands of protestors to demand that the Brotherhood be given control of the government, that they are not engaged in a confrontation. Given the Brotherhood's preemptive declaration of victory, and the decision to gather for mass demonstrations in Cairo, it seems likely that they will settle for nothing less than control of the Egyptian government, regardless of the announced tally of votes: Either Morsi will be declared victor, or the election will be denounced as having been 'stolen' by the military.

Meanwhile, Egyptian Christians have given voice to their dread at prospects for a victory by the Muslim Brotherhood. [A recent Washington Post article](#) highlighted the persecution which such Christians faced while living under the relatively secular rule of Hosni Mubarak; the fears they experience when considering rule by a party committed to fully implementing sharia law in Egypt is certainly understandable. As noted in the article:

The fate of Copts looks as tenuous as ever as Egyptians struggle to determine who won this weekend's first-ever democratic presidential elections. Presented with what many saw as a lose-lose proposition, Egyptians had a choice between Ahmed Shafiq, former prime minister of ousted leader Hosni Mubarak, or Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, who many fear will turn the country into an Islamic state.

... a 2011 report by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life ranked Egypt in the top 5 percent of all countries on both government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion.

According to Brian Grim, senior researcher and lead author of the Pew report, government officials have often tried to prevent Coptic Christians from constructing new churches or improve existing ones. The Egyptian government has also "failed to prosecute perpetrators of violence against Coptic Christians in a number of cases," which "contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults."

While the Brotherhood protests in the streets, other Egyptians are afraid that when those protests end, it will mean an expansion in the persecution which they already face every day. And on all sides, there is a fundamental lack of trust: The military does not trust the Islamist parties; the Islamists do not trust the military; and the Christians have little reason to trust either of the Muslims factions which are contending for rule of Egypt. If further chaos erupts in Egypt — either a military crackdown or a second "Arab Spring" — the situation will likely become even more divided, a prospect that seems even more likely if the Obama administration insists on further interference in the course of Egyptian political reforms.



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