



Written by [James Heiser](#) on May 24, 2012

Egyptians Cast Vote for Next President

While news headlines proclaim Egypt's "[first free election in 5000 years](#)," the final hours of the presidential campaign are giving some observers the impression that what is transpiring is more of the same old Egyptian politics.

As [reported previously for *The New American*](#), the two frontrunners in the Egyptian presidential race are less closely aligned to the Islamist agenda than either the Muslim Brotherhood or their Salafist allies would like. When an elections committee removed several candidates from the race based on prior criminal convictions or other disqualifications, Islamists took to the streets because several of their favored candidates were among those eliminated. (For example, the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate — Khairat el-Shater — was removed from the ballot because of his Mubarak-era [convictions for money laundering and terrorism](#).) The violence in the streets which followed in the aftermath of the committee removing the candidates raised concerns about whether the elections would actually take place on schedule.



Now, with balloting taking place and the election results likely to be released next week, the two frontrunners are men with a background which may fall short of the expectations of many Islamist extremists. According to [an article for *The Mail*](#) (Britain), the two leading candidates were part of the political system under the ousted former leader, Hosni Mubarak, whose government fell during last year's "Arab Spring," but their standing has not excluded the Islamists from still having a chance for victory:

A favourite to go through to the second round is Amr Moussa, who was Mubarak's foreign minister. Ahmed Shafiq, who was prime minister in the last days of the Mubarak administration, is also standing.

Islamists are also expected to do very well, following the Muslim Brotherhood winning an overall majority in parliamentary elections earlier this year.

Mohammed Mursi, the head of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, is standing, along with Abdul Moneim Aboul Fotouh, a former party member.

And, as the hours of the first round of the elections draw to a close, all three of the leading candidates



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are reported to have virtually abandoned adherence to election laws regarding their political activities while Egyptians are at the polls. A story for the BBC ("[Candidates spar on final day of Egypt presidential poll](#)") reports that Egyptian politicians certainly seem to share in one of the oldest pursuits of a political campaign: flinging "mud":

Amr Moussa and Ahmed Shafiq traded accusations, saying false rumours were being spread that each was about to withdraw from the hotly contested race.

Other candidates have also been accused of breaking "election silence" rules....

In a BBC interview, Mr Moussa launched an angry attack on his rival Mr Shafiq — who was appointed prime minister in the dying days of Mr Mubarak's rule — saying he represented the ideas of the old regime.

Mr Moussa denied what he described as "sinister rumours" that he was about to withdraw from the race.

But in later interviews Mr Shafiq hit back, accusing Mr Moussa's campaigns of spreading similar rumours — and pointing out Mr Moussa's connections to the old regime. Mr Moussa served as a minister under Mubarak from 1991 to 2001.

Mr Shafiq, Mr Fotouh and Mr Mursi have all been accused of breaking rules requiring candidates [to] keep silent on polling days and on Wednesday the election commission said it would be investigating such allegations.

Given the previous actions of the election commission, which removed several frontrunners from the race little more than a month before Egyptians began going to the polls, one might have anticipated greater caution during the remainder of the race. But there is a factor in the presidential race that no doubt looms large in the minds of the leading candidates: Whatever the outcome of the current round of elections, a runoff is seen to be virtually inevitable.

As noted in the BCC article, "The elections pit Islamists against secularists, and revolutionaries against Mubarak-era ministers." In the past year, such contests have rarely ended well for the less-Islamist candidates, as the Muslim Brotherhood and its the ideologically-similar Salafist party have largely excluded secular or Christian candidates from office in the two houses of the Egyptian parliament. With Islamists winning many of the races, the Muslim Brotherhood [chose to break its prior promise](#) and entered the presidential race. The brotherhood's candidate — el-Shater — was highly favored until he was excluded from the race based on his prior criminal convictions.

At present, it seems uncertain precisely when the official results of the election will be reported. According to the BBC, the results from some of the nation's 13,000 polling stations may be reported as early as Friday morning; however, the full results are not likely to be released until Tuesday morning. If no candidate receives over 50 percent of the popular vote on the first ballot, a runoff election will be held in June.

Photo: Former U.S. first lady Rosalynn Carter, left, speaks with a poll worker inside a polling station in the Sayeda Aisha neighborhood of Cairo, Egypt, May 23, 2012.: AP Images



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