



Written by [James Heiser](#) on June 18, 2012

Low Voter Turnout as Egypt Chooses a New President

Approximately 18 months after the “Arab Spring” uprising began in Egypt, the final outcome of the rebellion that ended the reign of President Hosni Mubarak remains to be seen. With press reports of a small turnout in Egypt’s runoff presidential elections that are intended to pick the successor of a man who led his nation for three decades, it is possible that the nation’s electorate may be choosing “none of the above.”



As [reported previously for *The New American*](#), the first round of elections narrowed the field of candidates to two men: Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ahmed Shafiq (also spelled Shafiq), the former Prime Minister of Egypt, who served during the last days of Mubarak’s reign. Because of his ties to Mubarak and the Egyptian military, the prospect of Shafiq’s being elected President evokes fears of a return to the “old days.” However, many Egyptians are not pleased with the prospect of Morsi’s election, either, since the radical Islamist views of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party have raised widespread concerns regarding the future that the Brotherhood may have in mind for the nation.

With the Muslim Brotherhood and its Salafist allies in the Al-Nour Party controlling a clear majority of seats in the Egyptian parliament, Islamists attempted to remove Shafiq from the ballot on account of his connection with the Mubarak government. The Egyptian Supreme Constitutional Court overthrew the law that had been passed to target Shafiq and then took the parliament to task, removing a third of the members of parliament for violating established electoral procedures: Partisan candidates had been elected to seats that had been specifically set aside for independent candidates. [According to the *Los Angeles Times*](#):

The judges were appointed by Mubarak and the law passed by parliament to prohibit former top government officials from running for president was widely regarded as unconstitutional. The law was supported by activists and the Brotherhood as a last chance to keep remnants of the old guard at bay and revive a revolution that inspired the Arab world.

Now, with Egyptians having had their second day at the polls — ballots were cast on June 16 and 17 — either a lack of enthusiasm, an abundance of fear, or both, no doubt kept many members of the electorate at home. In the words of [an article for the *Christian Science Monitor*](#):

Relatively few Egyptians appear to be turning out to cast ballots as the Brotherhood’s presidential candidate, [Mohamed Morsi](#), faces former military man [Ahmed Shafiq](#) in a race that has high stakes for the Brotherhood. If Mr. Shafiq wins, many in the once-banned organization fear a return to the days of ousted [President Hosni Mubarak](#), when Brotherhood members were often arrested in their homes and detained for years.

Whether or not such fear of Shafiq actually exists, what is certain is that many Egyptians are afraid of rule by the Muslim Brotherhood. [As the *New York Times* reported](#) on June 14, some non-Islamists were glad to lose their seats in parliament if it meant the Muslim Brotherhood would also be restrained:



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Some lawmakers said they welcomed the dissolution of Parliament even though it cost them their seats. They were afraid of the power of the Islamists, said Emad Gad, a leader of the secular Social Democratic Party's parliamentary bloc. He has endorsed Mr. Shafik.

"Definitely it is good," Mr. Gad said, arguing that the ruling was a blow to the Islamists' power and prestige, bolstering Mr. Shafik's chances to win the presidential election. He was less afraid that Mr. Shafik might become a Mubarak-like strongman than he was of the Islamists monopolizing power through their victories at the polls. "We can demonstrate against Shafik, but we cannot demonstrate against the Islamists," Mr. Gad said.

While many in the Western media have been quick to criticize the transitional government, the timeline that the military established for transition to a new government has been followed; arguably, if candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood had not allowed the desire to seize as many seats in parliament as possible to override their adherence to Egyptian election laws, the current electoral crisis could have been avoided. The decision by the Muslim Brotherhood to break its previous promise to not seek the presidency also contributed to the process of alienating many Egyptians who were sympathetic to their cause.

Despite the tensions and accusations of the campaign, several critical facts [reported by Deutsche Welle](#) give a sense of the relatively low occurrence of voting irregularities:

Forty-eight cases of illegal electioneering were detected on the first day of voting. More than 50 million people are eligible to vote at some 13,000 polling stations spread across the country's 27 provinces.

As the ballots are counted and various interpretations give for the "meaning" of the outcome of the election, one thing seems certain: The democratic process has not united Egyptians. Rather, several fundamental divisions within that society are more evident now than previously.

Photo of Muslim Brotherhood supporters: AP Images



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