



Written by [James Heiser](#) on April 5, 2012

Muslim Brotherhood Breaks Promise, Seeks Egyptian Presidency

As reported for *The New American* in late February, two Islamist parties — the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafist Al-Nour Party — have won a strong majority in both houses of the Egyptian parliament in recent elections. As was noted at that time, the election results for the upper house of parliament demonstrated a clear repudiation of political parties that were more secular or liberal, with the Freedom and Justice Party taking 58 percent of the available seats, and the even more extremist Al-Nour Party winning another quarter of the seats.



With such firm control of parliament, it was little surprise when the forum charged with drafting a new constitution for Egypt selected Mohamed Saad al-Katatni (above left) to oversee the process. Al-Katatni was the first Secretary General of the Freedom and Justice Party, who resigned that leadership role to be selected as the Speaker of the lower house of parliament. The selection of al-Katatni — who ran unopposed for leadership of the constitutional committee — was met by the resignation of many of the token liberals and Christians on that committee.

Now, the Muslim Brotherhood is reneging on its promise that its members would not seek the presidency of Egypt. [An article for the Washington Post](#) explains that the impact of the decision could actually end up denying control of the presidency to the Islamists:

The Muslim Brotherhood announced at a news conference that Khairat el-Shater, the group's top financier and arguably its most influential member, would be the candidate of its political wing, as a rift grows between the Islamist group and the country's ruling military leaders.

The group recently said it was considering fielding a candidate in the May election only because it was concerned that former regime figures backed by the ruling military council would win if it did not.

The Muslim Brotherhood is the most powerful political force in Egypt, and its political wing won nearly half the seats in the newly elected parliament. But at least two other prominent Islamists are running for president, and the Brotherhood's move could split the vote.

In other words, if the Muslim Brotherhood were simply interested in defeating a candidate aligned with the military leadership, it could back one of the other two Islamist candidates already in the race. The decision for Khairat el-Shater to enter the contest would presumably further divide the Muslim voting block — but it would offer the Muslim Brotherhood the opportunity to control not only the parliament, but also the presidency.

The decision to enter the presidential race is a very significant reversal for the party; again, as noted in the *Washington Post* article: "Since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak more than a year ago, the Brotherhood



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had said it would not nominate a candidate. When a progressive member of the organization, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, announced his intent to run last year, he was ousted from the group for breaking the rules." Now, however, with the decision of the most important man in the organization to enter the race, that promise is now null and void.

Critics of the Muslim Brotherhood's *volte-face* have been quick to point to the danger which the decision now poses to any possibility of a more liberal future for the nation. As NBC correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin wrote in an article for MSNBC.com:

The decision by the Muslim Brotherhood to seek control of the executive branch highlights a potentially dangerous political reality that has many worried in Egypt.

Already with control of the parliament and as the majority in the constitutional convention tasked with writing a new constitution, the Brotherhood is ubiquitous in Egypt's political life. Add the presidency and they would control virtually the whole political system.

Critics say such a move would allow the Brotherhood to steamroll its conservative agenda across Egypt. They compare the monopolization of power by a single party to the Mubarak-era rule of the National Democratic Party, which also controlled all three branches of government and thousands of local councils.

Whether or not one is surprised by the notion that the very forces which overthrew Mubarak would essentially try to assume the power he once held, the Muslim Brotherhood's current course of action — both at home and abroad — appears to be moving in the direction of consolidating and expanding its power. As reported previously for *The New American*, reports are now surfacing in the United Arab Emirates that the Muslim Brotherhood may be planning to gain power throughout the entire region by influencing various parliamentary elections in neighboring countries over the next four years. For example, Islamists already captured 23 out of 50 seats in the Kuwaiti parliament in elections this past February.

Egypt's presidential election is scheduled for May 23, but as yet the powers of the President await definition by the commission writing the new constitution. In the words of the *Washington Post* article, "The presidential election is scheduled to begin May 23, but the parliament has only just appointed the panel tasked with writing a new constitution, which would delineate the powers of parliament and the president. But even that is controversial, with non-Islamists angry about the number of Islamists on the body. The constitution will most likely not be completed by the time the president is elected."

With the Muslim Brotherhood controlling parliament, rewriting the constitution, and now seeking control of the presidency, there seems like doubt about the future of Egypt in the aftermath of the "Arab Spring."

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