

Reports

An Initial Reading of the Results of the First Stage of the Egyptian Parliamentary Elections

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The Electoral Process

The first stage of the Egyptian parliamentary elections was launched on 28-29 June November. It was conducted in nine of Egypt's governorates, including the two most heavily populated governorates, Cairo (east of Greater Cairo) and Alexandria. The initial numbers of the Supreme Electoral Commission indicated that about eight and a half million Egyptians cast their votes from a total of seventeen million registered voters. The voters turn out was the highest it had been in over sixty years, constituting of 52 percent. However, more than half a million votes have been annulled for one reason or another, including complications of the electoral process, the large number of competing lists, and the even larger number of candidates running for individual seats.

The elections were conducted in accordance with a law that granted 75 percent of the next People's Assembly's seats (i.e. 498) to lists of party coalitions and 25 percent to individuals. The country has therefore been divided into different circles, larger circles for lists and smaller ones for individuals. Since the vast majority of individual seats have not been settled in the first round, a recount was conducted among the two candidates that acquired the most votes a week after the first round.

Although the electoral process was fair and transparent to a reasonable extent, it was marred by numerous shortcomings whether from the candidates, some of whom continued to campaign until election day, or from the Supreme Electoral Commission, which lacks the experience required to administer such an immense electoral process as that of Egypt. Perhaps money was used by some party forces, especially in rural poor urban areas. Regarding the party-list elections in particular, there was no sufficient supervision for the process of vote counting and the transmittance of the vote count from substations to the centre.

These shortcomings led to the issuance of a court rule cancelling the whole electoral process in the Cairo coastal department, which is considered of the greater departments in the capital, a department in Alexandria, and two others in Asyut. The elections were expected to be cancelled in other departments in Alexandria and Asyut as well; and this is what renders the results of this stage of elections provisional as the resumption of elections in cancelled departments is awaited.

Incomplete Results

It is not easy, especially after the cancellation of election results in the four departments, to assess the percentage of votes each completing bloc received in the division concerning party-lists. However, seat results have become clear whether in list system section or individual seats, taking into account that the seats competed for in this stage amount to 162 and that the elections will recommence in January 2012 for 18 of them in the cancelled departments. Hence, all percentages announced pertain to only 150 seats.

Thus, it can be estimated that the Freedom and Justice bloc received around 38 to 40 percent of the votes in the list system. Nevertheless, its results for individual seats were certainly great, and even more than expected, and increased the Freedom and Justice Party's final share of seats. In accordance with initial calculations, the Freedom and Justice Party won 69 seats from a total of 150 sought after seats, which means that party-list won 46 percent of the seats.

The Salafi Al Nour Party is estimated to win 22 to 24 percent of the party-list votes but it won only five individual seats, which gives it a total of 31 seats or nearly 21 percent.

The Egyptian Bloc, however, received about 10 percent of votes in favour of the party-lists and won only one individual seat, giving it a total of 14 seats. The Wafd Party won less than eight percent of the party-list votes and one individual seat, which qualifies it to receive a total of eleven seats. The al-Wasat Party and the Revolution Continues Alliance both each won four seats, or less than three percent of the total number of

seats. What remained of the seats went to independents and small parties.

The Justice Party acquired one individual seat for its chairman while the Revolution Continues Alliance received none. However, results showed the abysmal failure that the parties that stem from the National Party suffered and became a source of worry for all the factions in the political arena in the previous election period.

Signs and Indications

In contrast to earlier calculations of liberal blocs and the Muslim Brotherhood that were based on the assumption that the essence of the elections would be conflict between them, the Salafi bloc emerged under the leadership of the Al Nour Party as a surprise in the first stage. The unexpected achievement realized by the Salafi party-list is attributed not only to the depth of Egyptians' Islamic sentiment but also to the Salafis' great capability of popular mobilization. It is also attributed to the fact that the election campaigns of both the liberals and the Brotherhood was directed largely to their supporters while clearly neglecting or ignoring Salafis.

However, it is certain that most of the votes the Salafi bloc received came from popular factions supporting the Salafi current and sheikhs, and that this stage of elections was conducted in a number of Egyptian governorates known to be traditional Salafi strongholds such as Alexandria, Cairo, Kafr el-Sheikh, and Dumyat. It appears that the vast media expansion of Salafi leadership between the first round of elections and re-elections (which was conducted for most individual seats) harmed the Salafis and provoked the concerns of the Egyptian voter over how the country can be administered. Hence, the Salafis' results in individual seats were fairly small and cannot be compared to those of the Freedom and Justice Party.

The second surprise in these elections was the Wafd Party's great loss despite its renown as one of the most well-known and oldest Egyptian parties as first stage results indicate its regression to fourth place after the Freedom and Justice Party, the Al Nour Party, and the Egyptian Bloc. The decline of its popularity is attributed to its decision to run for elections on its own after leaving the Democratic Alliance led by the Freedom and Justice Party, its lack of agreement with the Egyptian Bloc, its loss of a large percentage of votes from Copts, who historically had tended to vote for it but shifted to the Free Egyptians Party led by the Egyptian Bloc due to orders from the Coptic Church as stated in reports. Although a sector of Wafd leaders possess great financial abilities, the Wafd Party was unable to compete with the Coptic businessman, Naguib Sawiris, who backs the Egyptian Bloc financially.

The Revolution Continues Alliance – which includes new Leftist parties such as the Popular Socialist Alliance Party, the Socialist Party of Egypt, the Equality and Development Party, and the Egyptian Current Party (which was established by some dissident Muslim Brotherhood youth who became known for their prominent role in the popular revolution) – also failed to achieve substantial results. This coalition's list and candidates failed did not acquire any individual seats; and it is not expected to acquire more than a few in the party-list system. This failure is ascribed to weak organization, meager funding for the election campaign, and lack of experience in managing the election battle. It is also ascribed to the suspension of the election campaign by this bloc's youth leaders during the two weeks between the eruption of the second wave of revolution and the launch of the electoral process.

The main champion in the first stage of elections was, in brief, the Freedom and Justice Party which undertook an organized and professional election battle and put forward candidates that have confidence and credibility. It benefitted from the aspirations of the Egyptian voter, as in all the countries of Arab revolutions, in breaking with the previous regime and its legacy. Because the Muslim Brotherhood was a prominent party opposing the regime, voters automatically voted for them. Perhaps it can also be assumed that the Egyptian voter acts according to two central motives: the desire to give the Islamists

an opportunity to rule, and the belief that Islamists are the most able to save the country in this stage from the gap pushed towards it in the last decade in particular.

It is likely that voting rates for the Freedom and Justice party-list will increase during the next two stages considering that the Muslim Brotherhood have always found it more difficult to promote their presence in a number of heavily populated neighborhoods in Cairo and Alexandria governorates than in the governorates of the first stage. Furthermore, the challenge of the Salafi current is greatest in the following four governorates: Cairo, Alexandria, Dumyat, and Kafr el-Sheikh.

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