

TAHRIR FORUM

Egyptian Elections 2012

DEMOCRACY'S GROWING PAINS

Parsing Egypt's Presidential Contest

By Ashraf Khalil

As Egyptians prepare to vote in the first presidential election since the end of Hosni Mubarak's regime, the old aphorism comes to mind: "Every nation has the government it deserves." Egypt seems to be getting the presidential election it deserves—one reflecting the social and institutional weaknesses that have plagued the country for too long. There is confusion, suspicion, polarization. Conspiracy theories abound. And there is the mounting anxiety over the economy and public security. Increasingly, it seems, nervous citizens are pining for the stability—or at least the predictability—of Mubarak's three decades in power.

Thirteen politicians are standing as candidates in the May 23–24 balloting. Scarcely a month before the polls were set to open, there was the shock of eleventh-hour candidacies announced by powerful Muslim Brotherhood financier Khairat El-Shater and Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's longtime intelligence chief; then came the dramatic last-second disqualifications of both men, and of popular Salafist preacher Hazem Abou Ismail, as well as of seven other hopefuls—all on technical grounds.

That basically leaves a three-way contest pitting Amr Moussa, the ex-foreign minister and former secretary general of the Arab League, against two Islamists; former senior Muslim Brotherhood official Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, and Mohammed Morsi, the official candidate of the Brotherhood's political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). Moussa, who announced his bid as an independent within months of Mubarak's fall, banks on his longstanding popularity as an outspoken critic of Israel and stature as an international statesman to overcome the baggage of his ties to the ousted former regime.

But the resounding victory of Islamists in the parliamentary voting held earlier this year seems to presage the election of an Islamist president. The question is: Who?

Aboul Fotouh, running as an independent, casts himself as an Islamic liberal—who would appoint a Christian or a woman as vice president—but it is unclear how much he will ultimately appeal to either Islamists or liberals. The Muslim Brotherhood is putting its considerable machine at Morsi's service. But even if he does emerge victorious, Egyptians cannot be entirely certain about what it will mean to have an Islamist president; the FJP downplays the old Brotherhood slogan of "Islam is the solution" in favor of emphasizing a "Renaissance Project" as its platform.

The top contenders are striving to entice the disparate elements of the voter blocs left adrift by candidate disqualifications. Fringe Islamists, like Mohammed Selim El-Awwa, seek to attract supporters of El-Shater and Abou Ismail. A notable factor in the race is the absence of a strong secularist candidate—or, one without connections to the former regime. Secularist candidates with revolutionary credentials, such as long-time activist and former parliamentarian Hamdeen Sabahi and human rights lawyer Khaled Ali, have been relegated to the fringes.

What the candidates have been saying on the campaign trail reflects the anxieties of a nervous nation. They highlight the economy, as well as the need for Egypt to resume its rightful regional leadership role. A common refrain—but not a major focus for any candidate—is a call for reassessing Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel. The political pageant is unfolding as uncertainty lingers over the role of the future president, an office whose powers and limitations have yet to be defined. The Islamist-controlled parliament is overseeing the drafting of a new constitution by a one-hundred-person constituent assembly; yet an April court decision disbanded that committee, further confusing the transition process.

There is also the related question of what happens to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the generals who have run the country since giving Mubarak the final shove from power in February 2011. SCAF's track record has been checkered, causing Egyptians to speculate whether the generals were actively devious or just plain incompetent. SCAF promises to hand over authority by July. Protests spiked in the run-up to the election, sending a message to the generals to keep their word.

Through the years, Egyptians became accustomed to elections—Mubarak faced voters five times—but they gained little experience in democracy. Little wonder then, that the democratic transition has been so muddled. It may be that the country will spend considerably more time at the crossroads, without moving decisively on issues ranging from the powers of the state to the role of Islam in society. Egypt's next president will take the helm of a country on the cusp of a renaissance and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Whatever the outcome, the presidential election of 2012 is giving Egyptians the first real choice they have ever had to select one of their own to lead their country.

CANDIDATES IN THE 2012 EGYPTIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Compiled by Thomas Plofchan

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Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh

Independent Candidate

Secretary General, Arab Medical Union (2004–present)

Member, Muslim Brotherhood Guidance Bureau (1987–2009)

Born in Cairo, 1951

Biography

Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, symbol of the Muslim Brotherhood's liberal wing, is a pediatrician and political activist. As a student leader in the 1970s, he famously stood up to President Anwar Sadat at a Cairo University meeting and criticized the regime's crackdown on the Brotherhood. He received degrees in medicine and law from Cairo University and a master's in hospital administration from Helwan University. He is the secretary general of the Arab Medical Union. He has been known for his progressive views within the Brotherhood, notably on women's rights, Muslim-Christian relations, and protecting minorities, and is considered popular with the organization's younger members.

After announcing his candidacy for president as an independent, he broke with the Brotherhood, which had initially declared that it would refrain from nominating a candidate for Egypt's highest office. He announced his platform at a rally in Cairo's Al-Azhar Park attended by thousands of supporters. He portrays himself as the best candidate to bridge the gap between secular liberals and Islamists.

Platform

- Stresses the importance of religion *and* democracy in Egypt and emphasizes the necessity for increased integration between Muslims and non-Muslims.
- Stands for the guaranteed protection of minorities.

- Says that Egyptians do not need the government to teach them how to be pious, and rejects compulsory veiling.
- Supports free trade and private enterprise alongside government playing a role to ensure social justice.
- Advocates a strong presidential system for Egypt, at least until a variety of strong political parties can be established.
- Promises to appoint a vice president under the age of forty-five and a number of ministers in the same age range—as a commitment to the youth who launched the revolution.
- Promises to name a woman or a Coptic Christian as vice president.
- Advocates an end of military trials for civilians and the retrial, in civilian courts, of those convicted in military courts since the revolution.

Khaled Ali

Independent Candidate

Founder and Former Director, Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights

Co-Founder, Hisham Mubarak Law Centre

Born in Daqahliya governorate, 1972

Biography

Khaled Ali, the youngest of the presidential candidates, is a human rights lawyer and labor activist. In 2010, he won a highly publicized case directing a 1,200 Egyptian pound minimum monthly wage for Egypt's public sector employees.

He commands wide respect in the human rights community as founder of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre and the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights. In March, he filed a lawsuit against parliament, challenging the constitutionality of the majority Islamist hundred-member assembly tasked with drafting the new constitution, and he has participated in protests in front of the assembly's meeting place.

Ali reportedly turned down a cabinet post offered by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. He advocates social justice and ending government corruption, arguing that "Egypt is not poor. Egypt has great resources. What we do have, however, [are] policies that create poverty."

He says that his candidacy addresses Egypt's youth. "My decision to run is not about filling a gap," he told Reuters. "It's about being a different voice, from a different generation, presenting a different political discourse."

Platform

- Wants to revive the public sector while fostering competition in the private sector.
- Advocates dismissal of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and trial of SCAF members for crimes committed since gaining power in February 2011.
- Proposes funding increase for state colleges and universities.
- Rejects Egypt's need for foreign aid, such as the \$3.2 billion International Monetary Fund loan under consideration in parliament.
- Promises appointment of three deputy presidents, with at least one position reserved for a woman and another for a Coptic Christian. Says at least 75 percent of his advisers will come from the “youth”—thirty-five years and under.

Abdullah El-Ashal

Candidate of Al-Asala (Authenticity) Party

Director, Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2001–03)

Assistant Minister of International Legal Affairs and Treaties, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1999–2001)

Born in Sharqiya governorate, 1945

Biography

Abdullah El-Ashal is an arbitrator for the Egyptian minister of justice and a professor of international law at the American University in Cairo. He studied economics and political science at Cairo University, law at Alexandria University, undertook post-graduate studies at both the Sorbonne and Harvard, and earned a PhD in international law at Université Paris.

El-Ashal served in Egypt's diplomatic service for nearly four decades, retiring with the rank of assistant minister for international legal affairs and treaties. He is the author of over fifty books and is a legal scholar known for his work on the Lockerbie bombing case and the assassination of Rafik Hariri.

He is a member of the Law Committee at the Supreme Council for Culture. He also heads the independent legal committee established to follow-up the execution of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (also known as the Goldstone Report). The Salafi Al-Asala party officially endorsed his candidacy.

Platform

- Calls his platform the “Project for Egyptian National Revival.”

- Claims that he will reduce unemployment within four years.
- Advocates agricultural reform.
- Calls for review of 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

Mohammed Selim El-Awwa

Independent Candidate

Secretary General, International Union for Muslim Scholars

Co-Founder, Arab Muslim-Christian Dialogue Group

Born in Alexandria, 1942

Biography

Mohammed Selim El-Awwa is an Islamist thinker and senior member of the Al-Wasat (Middle) party. He obtained a bachelor's degree in law at Alexandria University in 1965 and a doctorate in philosophy from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 1975.

El-Awwa is one of the founders of the Arab Muslim-Christian Dialogue Group and has worked extensively on bridging Sunni-Shiite divisions. Despite his efforts on Muslim-Christian interaction, he made controversial remarks to Al Jazeera about the Coptic Church's "stocking arms and ammunition in their churches and monasteries." He denies news reports claiming that he called the Coptic Church a 'state within a state.'

As the nominee of the Islamist Al-Wasat party, which won ten seats in the recent parliamentary elections, he is competing to be the moderate Islamist candidate of choice. Al-Wasat, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, was formed in 1996 but was only formally recognized as a political party in February 2011. The party's centrist tendencies offer Islamist voters an alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the largest Salafi party, Al-Nour.

Platform

- Calls for the committee that will write the new constitution to be representative of all aspects of Egyptian society, despite the Islamist majority in parliament.
- Opposes granting the military special status, but has generally been either friendly or indifferent towards the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).
- Advocates a mixed system of presidential and parliamentary power.
- Says that the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty "should be reexamined once things have settled down in Egypt."

Hisham El-Bastawisi

Candidate of National Progressive Unionist (Tagammu) Party

Judge and Vice President, Court of Cassation (2000–06)

Prosecutor, Court of Cassation (1988–98)

Born in Cairo, 1951

Biography

Hisham El-Bastawisi is a jurist known for his advocacy on behalf of an independent judiciary. He most recently served as the vice president of the Court of Cassation, one of Egypt's highest appellate courts. He received a law degree from Cairo University in 1976.

He became widely known for challenging the integrity of the parliamentary and presidential elections held in 2005 under the former Mubarak regime. For his outspoken criticism, he had his judicial immunity revoked by the Egyptian Supreme Judicial Council in April 2006. Popular protests supporting El-Bastawisi enabled him to keep his position on the court, but he later fled to Kuwait citing “evil and obscene” pressures from the Mubarak regime. He returned to Egypt after the January 2011 uprising.

El-Bastawisi announced that the socialist Tagammu party, which holds four seats in parliament, had nominated him to become the party's presidential candidate. The April 6 Movement, one of the most influential youth organizations, supports his candidacy.

Platform

- Calls for the Egyptian military to be held accountable for crimes since taking power in February 2011.
- Labels education a top priority, and advocates free public education for all Egyptian citizens through high school.
- Says drafting a new constitution is the country's top priority.
- Dismisses secularist fears of Islamic rule, saying that Article 2 of the 1971 Constitution makes Islamic jurisprudence the principle source but not the sole source of legislation in Egypt.
- Says renegotiating the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty is an Egyptian right, but argues canceling the treaty would damage Egypt's international standing.
- Supports renegotiating or abolishing gas exports to Israel.
- Advocates a mixed system of presidential and parliamentary power.

Mohammed Fawzi Eissa

Candidate of Al-Geel Al-Democrati (Democratic Generation) Party

Born in 1967

Biography

Mohammed Fawzi Eissa is a lawyer and former police officer. A graduate of Ain Shams University and recipient of a police science diploma from the Police Academy, he started his career as an officer in Cairo's Abdeen district. He worked as an investigator in Upper Egypt and served as the head of Salamout city council.

Platform

- Calls for social justice.
- Advocates greater trade union rights.
- Promotes education reform.

Mahmoud Hossam El-Din Galal

Independent Candidate

Head, Bedaya (Beginning) Party

Born in Alexandria, 1964

Biography

Mahmoud Hossam comes from a military family and is a graduate of the Police Academy. He was a member of State Security for much of his career and worked in the United Nations' Middle East Human Rights Department from 1992 to 1994. He aims to restore security and purge the police force. His economic program focuses on increasing agricultural production.

Abul-Ezz El-Hariri

Candidate of Socialist Popular Alliance Party

Founding Member, Socialist Popular Alliance Party

Founding Member, National Association for Change

Member of Parliament (1976–1979), (1984–1989), (2000–2005)

Born in Daqahliya governorate, 1944

Biography

Abul-Ezz El-Hariri is a strong advocate for social justice. He joined the Arab Socialist Union and Youth Organization in 1966, and the leftist opposition Tagammu party in 1976. That year, he became Egypt's youngest member of parliament—elected as a representative from Alexandria. He had his parliamentary immunity lifted in 1977 due to his involvement in massive labor strikes. He became a founding member of the opposition National Association for Change during the rule of the Mubarak regime. He split with the Tagammu party in 2011 and cofounded the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, which holds six seats in parliament.

Platform

- Advocates social justice and wealth redistribution.
- Seeks revision of Egypt's foreign relations with the United States and Israel.
- Calls for amending the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, calling it an embarrassment to Egypt.
- Criticizes actions of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

Hossam Khairallah

Candidate of Al-Salam Al-Democrati (Democratic Peace) Party
Assistant Chairman, General Intelligence Service (2000–05)
Born in 1945

Biography

Hossam Khairallah is closely associated with Egypt's national security services. His father was the founder of Egypt's Central Security Agency, a former governor of Aswan, and a former deputy prime minister. His grandfather was an admiral in the Egyptian navy and chief of the Giza police. Following in their footsteps, Khairallah graduated from the military academy in 1964 and served as a paratrooper during Egyptian involvement in the Yemen Civil War, as well as in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. In the mid 1970s, he left the military to join the General Intelligence Service (GIS).

From 2000 to 2005, he served as assistant chairman of the GIS, under Omar Suleiman, who briefly became Egyptian vice president in the final days of the Mubarak regime. He reportedly chairs an investment organization, the Nile Investment Company. His campaign focuses on economic development and unemployment.

Platform

- Proposes aggressive development of Egypt's Mediterranean Coast to alleviate

population pressure along the Nile River. Also proposes the creation of an agricultural development corridor from the Qattara Depression to the western oases.

- Says drafting a new constitution to define division of power is a priority.
- Calls for review of 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and says stability with Israel is best achieved through development of the Sinai Peninsula.

Mohammed Morsi

Candidate of Freedom and Justice Party

President, Freedom and Justice Party (2011–present)

Member of Parliament (2000–05)

Born in Sharqiya governorate, 1952

Biography

Mohammed Morsi heads the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm. He is a professor in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Zagazig. From 2000 to 2005, he served in parliament as an independent. Considered a conservative within the Brotherhood, he headed a group drafting a party platform in 2007 that included a provision calling for restricting the presidency to Muslim men.

Morsi received a BA and MA in engineering from Cairo University in 1975 and 1978, respectively. He earned a PhD in engineering from the University of Southern California in 1982, and served as an assistant professor at California State University, Northridge.

Platform

- Supports a "Renaissance Project" aimed at developing Egypt within Islamic principles.
- Advocates increased privatization of industry, deregulation, and tax cuts to spur growth.
- Favors a parliamentary system, but agrees to a mixed presidential-parliamentary system for a transitional period.
- Believes U.S.-Egypt relations "must be balanced," and has cautioned that if the U.S. were to block aid to Egypt, the 1979 treaty with Israel could come under review.
- Calls on the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to hand over authority by June 30, 2012.

Amr Moussa

Independent Candidate

Secretary General, League of Arab States (2001–11)

Minister of Foreign Affairs (1991–2001)

Born in Cairo, 1936

Biography

Diplomat turned politician Amr Moussa graduated from Cairo University in 1957 with a degree in law. His career in the foreign ministry took him overseas and back, and ultimately to its top post. As a mid-level diplomat, he served as an advisor to the minister and held a number of ambassadorships, notably envoy to India (1983–86) and permanent representative to the United Nations (1990–91).

As minister of foreign affairs, he gained wide popularity in Egypt and throughout the Arab world especially due to his criticism of Israel. Moussa moved to the Arab League in 2001, prompting speculation that President Hosni Mubarak viewed him as a political rival. After he announced his candidacy for president in 2011, an early opinion poll conducted in Egypt made Moussa the runaway favorite with 40 percent support from decided voters.

Platform

- Calls for equality and integration of all Egyptians regardless of religion or location, and says Upper Egypt needs to be rapidly brought onto an equal footing with Cairo and Alexandria.
- Seeks to reform but not dismantle the State Security agency.
- Advocates the empowerment of women and youth to play a “more influential role in the future of Egypt.”
- Calls for amending the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and opening Egypt’s border with Gaza.

Hamdeen Sabahi

Independent Candidate

Member of Parliament (2000–10)

Founding Member, National Association for Change

Co-Founder, Kefaya! Movement

Born in Kafr El-Sheikh governorate, 1954

Biography

Hamdeen Sabahi is a former member of parliament and co-founder of the Kefaya! (Enough!) movement, launched in 2004 to fight corruption and the “hereditary succession” of Gamal Mubarak to the presidency. In 2010, he co-founded the National Association for Change.

He established the Al-Karama (Dignity) Party in 1996 after leaving the Arab Democratic Nasserist Party. Al-Karama was only formally recognized in August 2011, but Sabahi was elected to parliament in 2000 and reelected in 2005 as an independent. Sabahi was stripped of his parliamentary immunity in 2003 for his role in organizing demonstrations against the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. His Al-Karama Party is a member of the Freedom and Justice Party’s Democratic Alliance bloc, yet Sabahi is running for president as an independent.

Platform

- Advocates social justice and fighting poverty.
- Calls for review of 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and suggests putting the treaty to a national referendum.
- Criticizes actions of Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and opposes a ‘safe exit’ for its leadership.

Ahmed Shafik

Independent Candidate

Prime Minister (January 29-March 3, 2011)

Minister of Aviation (2002–11)

Commander of the Air Force (1996–2002)

Born in Cairo, 1941

Biography

Ahmed Shafik graduated from the Egyptian Air Force Academy in 1961 and served as a fighter pilot in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, under then-Air Force Commander Hosni Mubarak. After six years as commander of the air force he was appointed minister of aviation in 2002, and received acclaim for restructuring Egyptair. He helped secure World Bank funding for the construction of Cairo International Airport’s new terminal.

On January 29, 2011, Mubarak appointed Shafik as prime minister in response to the protests against his regime. Shafik resigned a little more than a month later amid protests decrying him as a holdover from a discredited, ousted regime.

Platform

- Supports the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF): “SCAF is serious about power handover and is seeking to achieve the goals of the revolution. SCAF stands at an equal distance from all political and religious powers.”
- Says his campaign does have a written platform, but prefers to focus on “practical work that provides specific solutions to specific problems.”