Egypt presidential election 2012: 
The survival of the July 1952 regime

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Since Mubarak was brought down by the 25 January “revolution” on 11th February 2011, the name of the new president has captured the attention of all Egyptians over the past 18 months. Throughout 3 decades of Mubarak’s rule, and 6 decades since the establishment of the republican regime, the president was always a key, if not the only player in Egyptian politics. On 23 and 24 of May 2012, Egyptians went out for the first time in their history to choose their ruler in Egypt’s first free and fair elections. While 13 candidates from different political backgrounds competed for the post in the first round, the results brought Mohammad Morsi, the candidate of the Muslim brotherhood, and Ahmad Shafik, the former prime minister of Mubarak, to the run-off. Despite the fierce competition between the two candidates, and the attempt to frame it within the struggle between the 25 January “revolution” and the old regime, this paper argues that both candidates represent a reproduction of the dualism of the 1952 regime: a military figure in civilian clothes versus the Muslim brotherhood, and it shows that the 25 January “revolution” has failed to change the old rules of the game.

In this paper, I will analyze the presidential elections, the reproduction of the 1952 regime dualism, and its impact on Egypt’s transition from authoritarianism.

Since the Egyptian revolution succeeded in overthrowing President Hosni Mubarak, no other topic has captured the attention of most Egyptians than the name of the new president. After three decades of Mubarak’s rule, and six decades of declaring the republic in Egypt, the president has been always a key, if not the only, player in Egyptian politics.

For the first time Egyptians went to the polling stations on 23 and 24 of May 2012 to elect their president in free and fair elections. There were thirteen candidates in the first round representing different political trends. This round ended with Muhammed Morsi, the Muslim Brothers Group’s candidate, and General Ahmed Shafik, the last prime minister under President Mubarak, before the

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run-off was resolved in favor of Morsi, thus becoming the first President of Egypt after the revolution.

Regardless of the feverish competition between Morsi and Shafik, their winning in the first round was a clear sign that Egypt is still captured by the old regime of July 1952; and that the January 25th Revolution has failed to overcome the dualism of the Muslim Brothers and the old regime. By the July 1952 regime, I mean the rules of the political game which has governed the political interactions in Egypt after July 1952. While during the pre-July 1952 era, Egypt witnessed diversity in ideas and organizations, the political choices were receded, to a great extent after the regime change in July 1952. The choices were either a ruling regime with military background, even though it wore civilian clothes, or the Muslim Brotherhood, the main opposition group to this regime since Nasser dissolved it in 1954 till the fall of Mubarak in 2011.

Over 60 years the confrontation between the Muslim Brothers and the regime continued, even though the rules of engagement between the two sides have changed.

The Nasser era was characterized with a tough confrontation between the regime and the Muslim Brothers. However, when President Anwar Sadat took over, the rules became different, for he allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to get back to the public sphere. And so did Mubarak. That made the Muslim brotherhood an unofficial political party, which participated in the legislative elections, as well as the syndicates’ elections.

This paper will analyze the presidential elections and the return of the dualism between the regime and the Brotherhood, and its impact on the future of the transition process in Egypt. It is divided into three parts: the first part will review the transitional period since Mubarak abandoned power, the legislative elections, and until the presidential elections. The second part will analyze the first and second round of the presidential elections. The last part will try to foresee the future of the transition process after the presidential election.

First: the transitional period and producing polarization

The transitional period, which started on February 11, 2011, with the Supreme Council of the Armed forces (SCAF) takeover of the power, was characterized with high degree of polarization. The military council insisted on following the path drawn by Mubarak to reform by amending constitution of 1971. The SCAF choose Tarek El-Bishry to chair a constitutional committee in order to amend some articles of the 1971 constitution.

The amendments dealt with the requirements to be met by the upcoming President and the conditions to accept the nomination for this position. They addressed the procedures and term of office, the conditions of nomination for the parliament, the appointment of Vice-President, and the conditions to declare a state of emergency and its duration.

The constitutional amendments also set a plan for the transitional period that begins with legislative elections in order to allow the elected representatives of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council to select a constitutional assembly that will write the constitution. The presidential elections, according to the amendments, would follow that.

Secular political groups opposed the plan set by the constitutional amendments and called for a vote with NO on the constitutional amendments. They pointed up that the constitution of 1971 has ended with the fall of Mubarak, and a new one must be written. On the other hand, the Muslims Brothers supported the amendments, and managed to
mobilize other Islamic movements. This was the beginning of a new phenomenon: vote division based on secular-religious polarization, which continued after that during the parliamentarian and presidential elections.

The main reason for those two trends to have different positions regarding this issue is that the secular forces thought that the priority should be to reach a consensus on constitutional principles which will govern the political scene in Egypt after Mubarak, before the relative sizes of each political party are known in the elections. As for the Muslims Brothers, they wanted to start the transitional period with the elections that they thought they will win, and hence they would have more leverage over the writing process of the new constitution.

On March 19th, Egyptians went to polls to cast their votes at the constitutional amendments referendum. The results showed that 77.3% of the voters (14,192,577) voted in favour of the amendments while only 22.7% (4,174,187) voted against.

Following this road map, the parliament elections took place in three stages from Nov. 2011 to Jan. 2012. These elections were characterized with a sharp secular-religious polarization between the Islamic movements and the secular parties. Among the most prominent political forces which took part in these elections were the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) Coalition, the Salafi El-Nour Party Coalition, the Egyptian Bloc and El Wafd party.

Results showed, as chart 1 below shows, that the Islamic forces overwhelmingly won the election; the Democratic Alliance which included the FJP, El-Karama (Dignity) Party, El-Hadara (Civilization) Party and El Amal (Labor) Party, got 228 seats with a percentage of 45.7%, while the alliance of El-Nour Party, which included beside El Nour Party El-Benaa and El Tanmia (Building and Development) Party, and El Asalah (Originality) Party, ranked second with 127 seats (24.6%). Al Wasat Party got 10 seats (2%). As for the secular forces, El-Wafd got 38 seats (8.4%), the Egyptian Bloc coalition got 34 seats (606%), El-Eslah and El Tanmia Party (Reform and Development) got 9 seats, and the El Thawra Mostamera (the Revolution is continuing) coalition got 7 seats.

For the parties that came out from the dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP) of former President Hosni Mubarak, they got 14 seats (3%): the Egypt National Party and the Freedom Party got 5 seats each, while the Egyptian Citizen Party got 4 seats.

[Source: El-Shorouq newspaper, issue no.1086, 22 Jan. 2012]

Chart 1

Second: The Presidential Elections

The presidential elections scene was characterized with a continuous change in the list of presidential candidates since the nomination process started in March 2012. The Muslims Brotherhood’s decision to nominate a candidate to run the presidential elections was quite a surprise to many Egyptians, especially
that the Muslim Brothers had time and again reiterated the Brotherhood Shoura Council decision, which was announced one day before former President Hosni Mubarak stepped down, that the Muslim Brothers will not nominate a candidate for the Presidency. The Group even expelled Dr. Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh when he declared his intention to run for the Presidency.

In anticipation of potential exclusion of its candidate, the Brotherhood decided to nominate two of its leaders: Mohammed Khairat El Shater, Deputy Supreme Guide of the Group and Mohamed Morsi, the leader of FJP, the political arm of Muslim brotherhood. Another surprise was also Omar Suleiman’s decision to run the elections. Suleiman, the man of the Intelligence and the Vice President under Mubarak, had announced before that he wouldn’t practice politics again, and that he had no intention to run the election.

Another surprise came from the High Presidential Committee (HPC) who excluded a number of candidates including Sheikh Hazem Salah Abu Ismail, General Omar Suleiman, Khairat El Shater, and Dr. Ayman Nour, as they failed to provide the complete required conditions (papers) for the elections.

On the other hand, the Parliament, dominated by Islamic forces, voted the Political Isolation Act (Law 17, 2012) against members of the Mubarak regime to ban Suleiman and General Shafik from running the elections. But the HPC accepted Shafiq’s appeal against this law, and rendered it to the High Constitutional Court to decide on its constitutionality. By doing this, Shafik was included in the final list of candidates. The final list of candidates included the names of 13 nominees, among whom Muhammed Morsi, Ahmed Shafik, Hamdeen Sabahi, Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh, Amr Moussa, Mohamed Salim Al-Awa, and Hisham Bastawisi were the most prominent. Looking at the candidates’ position, one could easily recognize that the electoral scene was divided into two main polarizations: a secular – religious one and a revolutionary – conservative one.

Although the referendum on constitutional amendments in March 2011 promoted secular – religious polarization, the scene started to change since November 2011, with the severe clashes that took place on Muhammed Mahmoud Street (the street where the Interior Ministry is), which witnessed confrontations between Tahrir protesters and the police forces. A new polarization started to appear on the surface; revolutionary – conservative polarization. Seeing that the revolution has failed to achieve its goals, the revolutionary groups decided they should take radical measures to eliminate the remnants of the old regime, and establish a new one. The conservative current conversely thought that they should stick to the road map set by the Military Council and that the legitimacy has been transferred from the square to the elected institutions, namely the Parliament. This division increased after clashes between the protesters and the armed forces that took place in front of the cabinet of ministers’ headquarters. Polarization reached the climax after a tragedy took place in the city of Port Said in February 2012, which left 74 victims, followed by a confrontation between protesters and the police forces in front of Interior Ministry. The parliament, dominated by the Islamic forces, insisted that legitimacy now is represented by the parliament not the square.

With the approaching presidential elections, the new revolutionary – conservative division has become together with the former secular – religious division an important variable according to which candidates were categorized and voters were mobilized.

Analyzing the situation of the most prominent candidates according to these two lines of polarization would show that the conservative front was divided into two sides: an Islamic side represented by Muhammed Morsi and a secular one represented by both Ahmed Shafik and Amr Moussa. On the other side the
revolutionary front has also an Islamic side represented by Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh, and a secular one represented by Hamdeen Sabahi.

From the beginning, Muhammed Morsi and Ahmed Shafik put up with their positions and did not seek to go beyond them. The other three candidates, however, tried to get out of this categorization in order to attract more voters and to enhance their chances in winning. The bravest and most ambitious among them was Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh, who tried to make his campaign represent all revolutionary trends, going, thus, beyond the secular-Islamic polarization. He even enhanced his campaign with leftist figures side by side with Islamic ones.

Hamdeen Sabahi also sought to attract votes from both the secular revolutionary and conservative blocs, especially from Christians who have become concerned about the ascending of Islamists.

As for Amr Moussa, he tried, but with little courage, to attract the youth who call for change, but not with much luck.

The first round of elections witnessed many political battles on more than one front:

1- On the Islamic front, between the Muslims Brotherhood and Islamic independent personages. The most serious case was of course Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh, who constituted a challenge for the Brotherhood and its leaders after he succeeded in attracting a grouping of young members of the Muslim Brothers, who believed in his ideas and project.

2- On the revolutionary front between Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh and Hamdeen Sabahi. They both competed with each other for the votes of the revolutionary bloc.

3- On the secular front between Amr Moussa, Ahmed Shafik, and Hamdeen Sabahi, as each one of them craved to be the candidate of the secular bloc, facing the ascending of the Islamic current.

4- Even in the circle of old regime, there was a conflict between Ahmed Shafik with his military background, and Amr Moussa with his experience in diplomatic field.

The results of the first round which brought Morsi and Shafik to the second round meant that old Egypt has won over the January 25, 2011 Egypt at every level mentioned above. Morsi defeated Abul Fotouh; also Shafik defeated Moussa and Sabahi.

The results came as a downright shock for the revolutionary current, as all its candidates had failed, including Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh and Hamdeen Sabahi. They also were a shock for the secular conservative current which objected that candidates with military background take over this post, when its candidate Amr Moussa had failed. Even some Islamic currents that objected the manipulation of power exercised by the Brotherhood were disappointed after the failure of their candidates Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh and Salim El-Awa. In brief, the results of the first round disappointed everybody who had hoped to build a new political regime that could overcome the dualism of the 1952 regime: a military political regime covered in civil clothes vs. the Muslim Brothers Group.

Although the interim period adopted new mechanisms, namely free and fair elections under the supervision of the judiciary, the Egyptian run-off came up with the same old choices between the military in civilian clothes and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The second round witnessed a feverish competition between Morsi and Shafik in order to take hold of the votes of the blocs which lost their candidates in the first round, especially that the difference between the votes obtained by Morsi and Shafik was no more than 260 thousand votes in favor of
Morsi. Morsi toiled to attract voters from the revolutionary bloc with Islamic orientation, which explains why he insists to present himself as the candidate of the revolution.

Shafik also tried to attract the votes which went to Moussa in the first round; adding some votes from people who are afraid of the ascending of the Islamic current who voted for Hamdeen Sabahi. It is exactly why he depicted himself as the candidate of the modern state, stressing on that he was a part of the July regime, rather than the Mubarak one.

While the results of the second round came as a pure representation of the everlasting conflict between the July regime and the Brotherhood, the results brought a historic victory to the Brotherhood, with Muhammed Morsi winning the run-off, with 51.726% of the valid votes (13.230.131 votes), while Ahmed Shafik gained 48.274% of valid votes (12.347.380 votes).

Third: The Presidential Elections and the future of the transition process in Egypt

The presidential elections in its first and second rounds have revealed several facts that will definitely have a great impact on the transition process in Egypt.

The first fact is that the results of second round indicate a sever division in the Egyptian society, as Morsi gained 51.726%, while Shafik gained 48.274%. Such a division, just at the time when the Egyptian political elite is expected to decide on the new political and constitutional rules could justify the continuity of the Military Council to interfere in the political process, under the pretext of protecting the state’s institutions and ensuring that all the spectrum of the society be represented in building the state process. It is in this context that one can perceive the constitutional declaration, issued by the military council on 18/June/2012, which gives the military mandates in writing the constitution, declaring war, and holding the legislative power until the new parliament is elected.

The second fact is the strong return of the remnants of the National Democratic Party (NDP) and the old regime to the political scene, after many believed that the old regime has vanished after the parliamentarian elections, when the parties which came out from the dissolving NDP got less than 3% of people assembly seats. However, the Presidential elections showed that there is a distinction between NPD and Mubarak regime remnants. When the NPD party collapsed institutionally, it couldn’t rearrange itself in the legislative elections. On the other hand, the presidential elections showed that the remnants of the old regime had the ability to organize, coordinate, and take action. The Mubarak regime networks, which includes – but is not limited to – the NPD remnants, managed to mobilize electorate to vote for Ahmed Shafik who won the second place in the first round with (23.663%) and got 48.3% of voters in the second round.

The third fact is that the Muslim brotherhood has lost a part of its popularity. While the list of Freedom and Justice got 37.458% in the legislative elections, Muhammed Morsi could not obtain more than 24.779% in the first round. In the same context, all the Islamic groups lost a part of its popularity as well. Whereas the list of Freedom and Justice, and Al Nour party together got 65.296% of votes in the legislative elections, Muhammed Morsi gained only 51.726% in the run–off, despite all the Islamic forces that were backing him.

There is no doubt that the Muslim Brotherhood is still the most organized political friction which has a great ability to mobilize masses. Nevertheless, its performance during the political transition has led to a significant decline in their popularity.
The fourth Fact is the remarkable performance of Hamdeen Sabahi, who was able to gain 20.719% of votes of the first round to be the third, and Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh, who came in fourth place with 17.473% of votes. Hamdeen Sabahi was able to offer a secular discourse that focuses on social justice, while Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh has managed to break the traditional secular-religious polarization, to provide an Islamic reformist discourse. The political projects of both Sabahi and Abdul Fotouh could be a base for a third way that could overcome the dualism of July 1952 between the military and Muslim Brotherhood.

It is true that the first round reflected a victory of the rules of the July 1952 regime over the ideas of the Jan 2011 generation, but the remarkable ascent of Hamdeen Sabahi and Abul-Fotouh means that the battle is not over yet and that the revolution still has a lot of supporters, who still dream of breaking the Military – Muslim Brotherhood dualism. The ideas of Jan 2011 are still alive in the hearts and souls of this generation, but they are still looking for an organizational frame, so that they would be capable of changing the political rules in Egypt after revolution.

### Table (1): the numbers and percentage of votes to the parties’ lists in the legislative elections 2011-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties gained more than 1%</th>
<th>Number of votes</th>
<th>Percentage¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freedom and Justice</td>
<td>10.138.134</td>
<td>%37.458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Nour</td>
<td>7.534.266</td>
<td>%27.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Wasat</td>
<td>989.004</td>
<td>%3.654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Wafd</td>
<td>2.480.391</td>
<td>%9.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian Bloc (Al Kutla al-masriya)</td>
<td>2.402.238</td>
<td>%8.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform and Development (Al Islah wal tanmiya)</td>
<td>604.415</td>
<td>%2.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolution Continues (Altharwa mostamera)</td>
<td>745.863</td>
<td>%2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty Party (Al-Hurriya)</td>
<td>514.029</td>
<td>%1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt National Party (Masr al-qawmi)</td>
<td>425.021</td>
<td>%1.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: Al Shorouk newspaper, issue1086-22 January 2012]

### Table (2): number and percentage of valid votes in the first round of the presidential elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominee name</th>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
<th>Percentage²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muhammed Morsi</td>
<td>5.764.952</td>
<td>%24.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed Shafik</td>
<td>5.505.327</td>
<td>%23.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamdeen Sabahi</td>
<td>4.820.273</td>
<td>%20.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul Moneim Abul Fotouh</td>
<td>4.065.239</td>
<td>%17.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amr Moussa</td>
<td>2.588.850</td>
<td>%11.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Source: Al-Masry al Youm, issue 2907, 29 May 2012]

¹ The total number of valid votes: 27.065.135
² The total number of valid votes: 23.265.516