

**EGYPT'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS:
MOVING BEYOND AUTHORITARIANISM?***Andrea Teti* and Gennaro Gervasio***

The recognition of Mohammed Morsy, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) political party, as Egypt's new President, the first in the country's history to be voted in through genuinely competitive elections, is doubtlessly a momentous occasion, particularly coming as it did hard on the heels of the dissolution of Parliament and the nullification of the "political isolation law" barely two weeks ago. The symbolic significance of Morsy's election should not be underestimated – he has, after all, become an elected Islamist leader of the most populous Arab country by far, and certainly one of the region's most strategic. However, it does not necessarily signal a shift in the balance of power towards the Brotherhood. The military are well-entrenched behind a self-made constitutional design which shields its privileges, and particularly its control of both coercive and economic levers, making it the country's single most powerful actor. In this context, Morsy's presidency thrusts the Brotherhood again to the forefront of public attention, with the expectation that it will help solve the country's deep social cleavages and urgent economic problems, just when doing so will necessarily pit them against the military's privileges. This makes whatever deal was struck between the Brotherhood and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) particularly precarious. It also points to the fact that, whatever the contingent tensions between major political actors might be, much of Egypt's political future will depend heavily on whether whatever groups govern the country manage to address underlying socioeconomic tensions and questions of political representation enough not to be delegitimized, or indeed provoke another uprising.

The Military

The Egyptian uprising of January 2011¹ resulted in a purge of parts of the old regime by the armed forces leadership, with both the military junta and the leadership of the principal opposition force, the MB, jostling to hijack the symbolic legitimacy of an uprising they

*Andrea Teti is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Aberdeen and Senior Fellow at the European Centre for International Affairs.

**Gennaro Gervasio is a Lecturer in Middle Eastern Politics and History at the British University in Egypt.
1. Gennaro Gervasio and Andrea Teti, "Egypt's Second January Uprising", IEMed. Mediterranean Yearbook Med. 2011, 2011, <http://www.iemed.org/publicacions-en/historic-de-publicacions/anuari-de-la-mediterrania/anuari-de-la-mediterrania-2011>.

initially opposed. The fundamental question about the military has from the outset been whether they intended to protect their financial and institutional interests by replacing factions which had become increasingly powerful under Mubarak and had marginalised the armed forces, or whether they instead intended to control the machinery of state directly. All the junta's public actions until the presidential run-off would suggest the latter, although Morsy's recognition as President suggests a compromise with the Brotherhood has been found, at least temporarily. This is ultimately also in the military leadership's interest, since its popularity as "defender of the revolution" has declined sharply in its 18 months in power.

The junta which has ruled Egypt since it removed Mubarak² in February 2011 has adopted an institutional instrument – SCAF – to legitimize its interventions in Egypt's politics and its institutional design. This it has done continuously ever since, resulting in the constitutional limbo³ the country currently finds itself in. Over the past two weeks⁴ alone, a pliant Constitutional Court dissolved Parliament⁵ and reversed the "political isolation law"⁶ – Egypt's only attempt at transitional justice – and an equally pliant Interior Minister granted the military police powers to arrest civilians.⁷ The junta also revised its own "constitutional declaration", awarding itself⁸ legislative powers, control over the state budget (and thus, crucially, its own), veto over the presidency's ability to declare war, and even removed the presidency's command of the armed forces. In addition, aside from loyalists holding cabinet portfolios such as Defence, Interior, Foreign Affairs and Military Production, the junta has been consolidating their grip on both security and civilian institutions.⁹ In the political arena, aside from a series of measures against independent trade unions and opposition groups, every

2. Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, "Egypt's Presidential Run-Off: Legal Limbo and the Transition to Nowhere", openDemocracy, 19th June 2012, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/andrea-teti-gennaro-gervasio/egypt%E2%80%99s-presidential-run-off-legal-limbo-and-transition-to-nowhere>.

3. Ibid.

4. Amy Goodman and Sharif Abdel Kuddous, "A Judicial Coup in Egypt", Democracy Now, 15th June 2012, http://www.democracynow.org/2012/6/15/a_judicial_coup_in_egypt_muslim.

5. Noha El-Hennawy, "Experts: Court Rulings Constitute a Blow to Civilian Forces", Jadaliyya, 14th June 2012, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/6010/experts-court-rulings-constitute-a-blow-to-civilian>.

6. Egypt Independent staff, "Military Approves Long-Awaited Political Isolation Law", Egypt Independent, 21st November 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/military-approves-long-awaited-political-isolation-law>.

7. Al-Ahram Online staff, "Egypt Military Intelligence, Police Authorised to Arrest Civilians", Al-Ahram Online, 13th June 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/44786/Egypt/Politics-/UPDATED-Egypt-military-intelligence-police-author.aspx>. This provision was then declared null by the Supreme Administrative Court, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/46250/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-Supreme-Court-blocks-arrest-powers-for-milit.aspx>.

8. Agence France Presse, "SCAF to Amend Constitutional Declaration to Gain Legislative, Financial Powers", Egypt Independent, 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/scaf-amend-constitutional-declaration-gain-legislative-financial-powers>.

9. Robert Springborg, "Egypt's Cobra and Mongoose", Egypt Independent, 27th February 2012, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/683311>.

single election since Mubarak's removal, for example, has taken place in a legal limbo: the March 2011 referendum on nine constitutional articles quickly became a widely-criticised military-issued "constitutional declaration" of 63 articles;¹⁰ the election of both the President and both houses of the now-dissolved Parliament took place without a Constitution. In every post-uprising vote so far, SCAF have forced Egyptians to make decisions blind. Even the "Mubarak trial" appears to have amounted to little more than a purge of political opponents.¹¹

This strategy appears to have backfired. While the Army's take-over was initially welcomed by many, particularly as a defence against internal security forces, the more the military acted to protect its own interests, the more it undermined any notion that the armed forces were "defending the revolution." Indeed, its high-profile presence over the past 18 months has turned the spotlight on precisely those areas the armed forces wished to keep out of public scrutiny: its budget, its privileges both material and legal, and its considerable economic empire.¹² The price paid for the military's continued hold on this power has been a body blow to its political credibility. In this sense, the vote for Shafiq is deceptive, as it was primarily directed against the Brotherhood, rather than for the military. From this point of view, SCAF's attempt to "colonise the civil state" could be read as a sign of weakness, of its inability to find an alternative to direct action, an inability to find enough willing and able civilian loyalists, or an inability to compromise.

In a change of tactical direction – letting Morsy take on the presidency –, SCAF seems to be cognizant of the costs of its actions thus far. By recognising Morsy's win, the military may be calculating that allowing the Brotherhood into formal – albeit not real – power might be to its own advantage. First, because it allows the Brotherhood to fail in government, and Egypt's socioeconomic problems are nothing if not momentous. Indeed, so long as the Brotherhood is kept away from power, it will be able to build on its legitimacy as an opponent of official corruption and authoritarianism, as it has for the past several decades. It will also gain legitimacy from its charitable work – from schools to hospitals – which will virtually guarantee that most people will be willing to give it its "turn" in office. Secondly, SCAF may

10. Nathan J. Brown and Kristen Stilt, "A Haphazard Constitutional Compromise", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11th April 2011, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/04/11/haphazard-constitutional-compromise/10ls>.

11. Nadine Marroushi, "In Disappointing Transition, Analysts Say Mubarak's Verdict mocks Justice", Jadaliyya, 3rd June 2012, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/5822/in-disappointing-transition-analysts-say-mubarak-12>.
12. Sherine Tadros, "Egypt Military's Economic Empire", Al Jazeera English, 15th February 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/2012215195912519142.html>; Shana Marshall and Joshua Stacher, "Egypt's Generals and Transnational Capital," Middle East Report, Vol. 262, 2012, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer262/egypts-generals-transnational-capital>.

consider the Brotherhood's coming to power to coincide with its own interests, which are rather more in protecting its privileges than in exercising power directly. From this point of view, Morsy's ascent to the presidency may be a signal that the military have finally been able to find a compromise which would allow the Brotherhood enough space to falter.

The Brotherhood

The junta's weakness, however, does not necessarily mean growing Brotherhood influence. Indeed, aside from its poor performance in the short-lived Parliament, the drop of the Brotherhood's share of the vote from parliamentary elections – just shy of 40% – to Morsy's share in the presidential elections' first round – just over 20% – suggests the MB's compromise-prone leadership has lost support.

The recognition of Morsy's election, particularly after repeated delays in announcing results and persistent rumours of negotiations with the military, has provoked questions concerning exactly what compromises the Brotherhood reached with the junta. The risk for the Brotherhood is two-fold: first, such deals risk alienating internal constituencies, particularly the younger and more politically active elements, many of whom took part in the uprising against the leadership's directives, voted for non-Brotherhood candidates, or even left the organisation altogether. The second front is Egyptian public opinion: here, the Brotherhood has also displayed a notable inability – or unwillingness – to tackle Egypt's social and economic divisions in Parliament. On current electoral evidence, the combination of these factors appears to have damaged the Brotherhood's reputation, while the organisation has appeared caught between attempting to weather the storm of public opinion, and adapting its tactics, relying on mass mobilisation and on compromise more with opponents, not least because of ground lost to Salafists. For example, when the junta moved to secure the full spectrum of Egypt's institutions, abolishing Parliament and seemingly poised to appoint one of its own to the presidency, the Brotherhood negotiated, but also took to the streets.

A key question in the balance between military and Brotherhood will be whether Islamist groups' participation in parliamentary politics and in the government of the country will be routinized or not. In Egypt's now-dissolved first Parliament, Islamists appeared willing to act without building coalitions, while concentrating on occupying powerful positions and dealing with relatively trivial policy matters instead of tackling the country's acute social and economic tensions. Voting patterns and popular criticism of the Parliament's activity indicate that neither the armed forces nor political groups can rely on extensive and unconditional support, suggesting that parties – including the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice – will need to

respond to popular concerns if they are to avoid becoming as irrelevant as their pre-uprising predecessors. This in turn suggests that the underlying question which faces Egypt's would-be political protagonists is the country's political and socioeconomic system itself – it was, after all, the injustice of this system which brought people onto the streets in January-February 2011. From this standpoint, Egypt's problems appear far deeper than the question of Army-Brotherhood relations, and the alternatives offered by current political protagonists less convincing.

Finally, the results of the presidential election's first round should not be dismissed. Here, although Morsy and (surprisingly) Shafiq made the run-off, "revolutionary candidates" Hamdeen Sabbahy (from the Nasserist-Leftist Karama Party) and Abdel Moneim Aboul Futouh (who split from the Brotherhood over his support for the Revolution) gained close to 40% of the vote, with Sabbahy very narrowly missing out on second place (and significant allegations of voting irregularities in favour of Shafiq and Morsy). Sabbahy's victory in the Brotherhood and Salafi stronghold of Alexandria in particular is significant. These results suggest that the Brotherhood would be unwise to interpret its electoral victories as evidence of unshakeable popular support.

In brief, while Morsy's election is doubtlessly symbolically important, the Brotherhood's fortunes will turn on the twin pillars of its tactical ability to deal with the military and the ability to implement a strategic vision to address Egypt's social and economic problems.

Conclusion

Egypt's political landscape is more complex than Brotherhood-military relations, although their respective fortunes will turn not least on their ability to earn political support loyalties by addressing Egypt's deep socioeconomic cleavages. It is far from obvious that they will be able to do so, not only because both to different degrees rely on clientelistic practices, but also because their economic interests are inimical to a structural reform of Egypt's economy which would address the needs of key groups which supported the "January 25th Revolution" such as the poor and of workers. Egypt's presidential elections may have asked Egyptians to choose between the Brotherhood and the military, but as the first round spread of votes confirms, Egyptians across the political spectrum are likely to continue to demand more and better solutions from their political leadership.