



The Egyptian Presidential Election on Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

The Egyptian presidential election, which took place on May 26-27, 2014, has sparked a lively discourse on social networks. On the one hand, the secular Tamarod movement, the Salafist Al-Nour Party and other groups supported Sisi's presidential nomination, on the other hand the secular April 6 Youth Movement and the Muslim Brothers called for a boycott of the elections and denounced the militarization of Egypt resulting from Sisi's nomination.

This discourse reflects a deep rift, split and polarization among Egyptian society that threatens the security and stability of Egypt. In this atmosphere, terror can also arise.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

The Egyptian Presidential Election on Social Networks

The Egyptian presidential election, which took place on May 26-27, 2014, and the candidacy of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for the presidency, sparked a lively dialogue on social networks. A review of the discourse identifies two main camps: the camp that offered unconditional support for Sisi, including the secular Tamarod movement, the Salafist Al-Nour Party, the Coptic minority, and Sufi orders such as the Azamiya Order; and the camp that opposed Sisi and called for a boycott of the elections, including the Muslim Brotherhood and secular groups such as the April 6 Youth Movement.¹

From the discourse on social networks it is evident that the camp in support of Sisi considers him to be the only leader capable of returning stability to the country, defeating the terrorism spreading within it, and restoring Egypt to its former glory. One example of an expression of support used in the networks was the caption, “Al-Sisi Raisi” (“Al-Sisi is my President” – see photo), which some visitors added underneath their photos in calling on others to go out and vote for him. In addition, there were also those who denounced Hamdeen



Sabahy, the candidate who ran against Sisi in the election. On his Twitter account, Muhammad Nabawi Spokesman for the Tamarod movement, which supports Sisi, accused supporters of the Sabahy campaign of being “liars [who speak] in the name of the revolution”.²

Support for Sisi was also evident in accusations that the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to sabotage the elections. Nader Bakkar, assistant to the head of the Salafist Al-Nour Party, noted on his Twitter account that the Muslim Brotherhood’s violent and terrorist acts towards members of his party did not frighten them and would not cause them to withdraw

their support for Sisi. Bakkar justified the party's support, which was not obvious in light of Al-Nour's religious ideology, by explaining that Egypt's process of transformation into an Islamic state is not dependent on the elected president but rather on the process of introducing appropriate legislation through the Parliament.³

In contrast to this support stood the Muslim Brotherhood, which maintained that deposed President Morsi was the lawful President of Egypt as he was voted into power through democratic elections and illegally deposed. It described Sisi, who led the rebellion, as a military dictator similar to Pharaoh, a religious symbol of tyranny and evil. Some supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood accused the United States of supporting Sisi in the presidential race due to its desire to establish dictatorial regimes that will comply with its edicts. For instance, some visitors [to social network sites] compared the latest coup in Libya, led by General Haftar, to Sisi's military coup by pointing out that both coups were supported by the United States in light of America's interest in establishing a pro-Western regime in the region. Another visitor sarcastically remarked that "There is a similar factory for [producing] tyrants. Haftar is the second version after Sisi." Other visitors claimed that Libyan oil revenues were currently being transferred to Egypt in order to strengthen Sisi's regime.⁴ Another accusation was leveled at the movements and parties in support of Sisi's election to the presidency. In light of this, one visitor expressed hope that "the Tamaroud movement, the revolution, and Sisi the criminal, terrorist and traitor as well his partners – all of which are partners of Israel – will be defeated", and he concluded by saying: "Long live Dr. Morsi, Egypt's only lawful president!".

In the framework of the revolution, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood called for a boycott of the election and



encouraged visitors to hold mass demonstration against the election. To this end, they launched several campaigns on social networks under slogans such as “Vote for the Pimp” (see photo) and “Boycott the Presidency of Blood”.⁵ Mamduh Al-Wali, previously appointed by Morsi to run the Al-Ahram daily, protested against the elections and wrote on his Twitter and Facebook accounts: “We will not betray the blood of the martyrs. We will not participate in the face of the presidential elections. To take part in the elections is to accept the illegal bloody coup and to surrender to deceitful hegemony, brutality and tyranny. Participation in the elections is a betrayal of the thousands of pure martyr souls and a betrayal of the blood of the thousands of wounded”.⁶

Several liberal and secular movements in Egypt, including the April 6 Youth Movement and the Revolutionary Socialists, expressed a similar position to that of the Muslim Brotherhood. They protested against the trend towards the militarization of Egypt and claimed that the election of Sisi was a betrayal of the principles of the revolution. A member of the April 6 Youth Movement noted on his Twitter account that they cannot



“suppress an entire generation that aims to give a new face to Egypt and is no longer interested in its ugly military façade”.⁷ Other writers declared that the presidential elections were fake and “fixed” in advance. One member noted that “not everyone who votes for Sisi

is necessarily corrupt and not everyone who votes for Sabahy is necessarily confused, but the problem is that both sides are convinced that an election [process] is taking place”.⁸ Young visitors added, disparagingly, that the current elections are clearly a kind of farce.⁹ In an official announcement sent to Sisi from the April 6 Youth Movement, it stated: “A candidate without young [supporters] has no future, since young supporters are considered essential for any presidential candidate. Young people are the future, young people are the anger, young people are the revolution, young people are the country”. The announcement ended with a warning to Sisi: “Young people are [like] fire that should not be played with, [so] don’t do so”.

In conclusion, the discourse on social networks points to a deep rift, split and polarization among Egyptian society that is likely to worsen after the results of the election are made clear. The secular **Tamarod** movement prefers to see Sisi rise to power in order to continue his efforts to exclude the Muslim Brotherhood from the religious and public spheres, while the **April 6 Youth Movement** views his election as a great tragedy that destroys the accomplishments of the revolution; a return to the days of military dictatorship that began with the “Free Officers” Revolution (1952). Another deep polarization can be seen between the Salafist **Al-Nour** Party and the **Muslim Brotherhood** in light of the former’s support of Sisi. The **Salafists**, who were disappointed with Morsi’s discriminatory policies towards them during his presidency, are now supporting Sisi’s efforts to limit their power while the Muslim Brotherhood views the Salafists as traitors who are collaborating with their enemy.

¹ السيسي_رئيسي_2014##; تحيا_مصر #; نتخب_السيسي_رمز_النجمه

² https://twitter.com/mohamed_nabwy

³ <https://twitter.com/naderbakkar>

⁴ حرب_السيسي_حفتر # May 20, 2014

⁵ قدم_حلول_كانك_السيسي #; قاطع_انتخابات_الدم #; قاطع_رئاسة_الدم #; انتخبوا_العصر #; مرسي_رئيسي

⁶ [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10152828961679196&id=682669195;](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10152828961679196&id=682669195)
<https://twitter.com/MamdouhElWaly>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/ElnagaF> May 23, 2014

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/shabab6april> May 22, 2014; <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/6aprilshabab;>

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⁹ #مسرحية_الانتخابات