

Egyptian elections marked by state violence and fraud

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The Egyptian parliamentary elections on Sunday were dominated by repression, violence and electoral fraud. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of President Hosni Mubarak won nearly all the seats while opposition parties won only seven. A further seven seats went to independent candidates.

The Muslim Brotherhood, the largest opposition group in the country, has not won a single seat as of this writing. In the last parliamentary election, five years ago, the party won 88 seats with 20 percent of the vote. Only 26 of the Muslim Brotherhood's candidates have qualified for the second round of voting on December 5. It is expected that the party will only have a handful of seats in the next parliament, or may not be represented at all.

Before the election, political observers predicted with the worsening political and economic crisis the NDP would not permit opposition parties to win a significant number of seats as they had in the 2005 elections.

A year before the presidential election, it is still not clear who will succeed the 81-year-old and physically ailing Hosni Mubarak, who has ruled the country by emergency decree since 1981. Fierce infighting over the succession is raging beneath the surface inside the NDP. This "uncertainty" could, according to an article in the independent daily *Al Masry Al Youm*, open the door to increased conflict in a country with widespread poverty, growing protests over rising food prices, unemployment and other economic hardships. The massive crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood was an expression of the regime's fear.

Against this background, violent and widespread repressive measures were introduced before the elections. TV channels were closed, critical journalists silenced and opposition candidates stopped from standing or arrested. Election monitors were not

granted permission to observe the poll and more than 1,000 followers of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested.

The massive repression of the banned but tolerated Muslim Brotherhood and the opposition was intensified on election day. According to human rights groups, voters and election monitors were systematically prevented from attending polling stations. "Armed plainclothes men and women were seen in many voting stations, while delegates and monitors were not allowed," said Hasiba Sahrawi, a representative of Amnesty International in the Middle East and North Africa.

In almost all parts of the country, security forces or thugs hired by the NDP candidates attacked their opponents. Joe Stork, director of Human Rights Watch (HRW) in the region, said that the presence of people with knives and machetes at polling stations had been used "with the intention of disrupting the voting process, intimidating voters and in some cases physically expelling independent candidates' representatives." Stork described the violence and physical attacks against the opposition on election day in the independent *Daily News Egyptas* "controlled violence". It appeared that the authorities were responsible for "what happened, and when."

In many places, there were violent clashes between supporters of rival candidates. According to a report by *Al Masry Youm*, 16 people died and 100 were injured. Security forces used tear gas against supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood who were demonstrating against voting irregularities and the repressive measures. *Daily News Egypt* reported a total of 180 arrests on election day, 100 alone in the city of Port Said. Most of those arrested were followers of the Muslim Brotherhood.

According to reports from eyewitnesses and

observers, the election results were massively falsified. The independent candidate for the electoral district of Al Raml in Alexandria, Adel Abdel Karim, told *Daily News Egypt*, “I went into Polling Station No. 25 early in the morning and I found the ballot box filled up with ballots [even though] the voting hadn’t even started.”

Magdy Abdel Hamid, director of the Egyptian Association for Community Participation, said that the elections were characterised by “chaos, robbery and crimes”.

Against this background, Egypt’s close ally the United States was forced to express “frustration” with the parliamentary elections. On Tuesday, the White House announced that the US was “disappointed” with the voting process. There was “concern” at the reports of “the lack of international monitors and the many problems encountered by domestic monitors, and the restrictions on the basic freedoms of association, speech and press.”

This is nothing but hypocrisy. In reality, the US is not concerned by the violation of human rights, but whether the Mubarak regime’s effort to maintain stability through intensified repression can be successful in the long term. Shortly before the elections, Michele Dunne, a former adviser to the State Department, said, “not every change should be suppressed if one is striving for greater stability.”

At the same time as issuing moderate criticism of the elections, the US stressed its long-standing partnership with Egypt, which was based on their “common interests” and “shared values”. The White House said it would continue to cooperate with Egypt to reach “political, social and economic aspirations consistent with international standards”.

The nature of the cooperation between US imperialism and Egypt is clearly shown by the recently published secret diplomatic documents by WikiLeaks. Some of the leaked documents were from the US Embassy in Cairo and penned by Ambassador Margaret Scobey.

She records the opinions of senior Egyptian representatives about the explosive regional conflicts. President Hosni Mubarak’s intelligence chief Omar Suleiman and Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit reveal themselves as unabashed agents of American imperialism in the region.

In a memorandum, Scobey describes Mubarak’s

hatred of Hamas and Iran and his advice to the US that they establish a dictatorship in Iraq because Iraqis were not suited for democracy.

Another records a conversation between Suleiman and US Admiral Michael Mullen in which Suleiman complains about the support Iran gives to Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in Lebanon. He is said to have told Mullen, “Iran must pay the price for its actions and not be allowed to interfere in regional affairs. If you want Egypt to cooperate with you on Iran, we will ... it would take a big burden off our shoulders.”



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