

# Egyptian junta extends presidential election due to massive abstention

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28 May 2014

The presidential elections in Egypt are a political travesty. They are a counterrevolutionary initiative of the Egyptian ruling elite and its imperialist backers to give a veneer of democratic legitimacy to the murderous regime that came to power in the July 3, 2013 coup, amid mass working class protests against Islamist President Mohamed Mursi.

The main presidential candidate, who is also the de facto leader of Egypt's US-backed military junta, General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, has overseen bloody massacres of Mursi supporters in past months and vowed to step up repression if elected. Sisi's nominal opponent in the election, the right-wing Nasserite politician Hamdeen Sabahi, was a token figure who constantly proclaimed his loyalty to the army.

The voter turnout was so low, due to popular hostility to the al-Sisi junta and disgust with the sham character of the elections, that the Presidential Elections Commission (PEC) decided to extend voting by one more day. Today is therefore day three in a counterrevolutionary electoral farce aimed at consolidating the army's grip over Egypt and preparing a confrontation with the working class.

While the PEC officially sought to justify its decision by claiming to respond to calls by "large swaths of the people" who were not able to cast their ballots, the truth is that polling stations remained largely empty yesterday. Reuters reported that "lines outside polling stations in various parts of Cairo were short, and in some cases no voters could be seen on Tuesday."

Noticeably in panic, the Egyptian regime, the media and religious figures intensified their propaganda campaign to get at least some voters to the ballot boxes. The justice ministry threatened to fine Egyptians who did not vote, while TV commentators denounced non-voters as "traitors, traitors, traitors."

Al-Azhar, Egypt's highest Islamic authority, said not voting was tantamount with "disobeying the nation", as Pope Tawadros, the head of Egypt's Coptic church, was put on state TV to urge Egyptians to cast a ballot.

From the start, an air of terror and intimidation hung over the elections. Under the barrel of tank guns, they are overshadowed by massive fraud and violence against the junta's political opponents. All over the country, army and police units are deployed in front of polling stations and the surrounding areas. Security is especially high in Egypt's capital, Cairo, and its major industrial centers.

In Alexandria, security forces dispersed a protest by supporters of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and arrested scores of demonstrators on Monday. Army helicopters hovered over the city of Suez to protect the entrance of the strategically important canal. In Cairo, dozens of tanks surrounded Tahrir Square, the symbolic centre of the Egyptian Revolution, where protests led to the ouster of longtime-dictator Hosni Mubarak after 18 days of mass working class struggles in early 2011.

Sisi personifies the counterrevolutionary efforts of the Egyptian ruling elite and its backers in the Western capitals to derail and ultimately suppress the revolutionary aspirations of the Egyptian workers and youth. A US-trained Egyptian general and former head of Mubarak's military intelligence, Sisi served in all subsequent governments following Mubarak's ouster. Sisi was first a member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta and then served as minister of defence under Islamist president Mohamed Mursi before ousting him in a bloody coup.

In his first major television interview, aired three weeks before the elections, he stated that he would "finish the Muslim Brotherhood as a group" once and for all. This was a barely veiled announcement of

planned mass murder. Since the coup, the junta has worked hard to politically and physically annihilate the MB, the main bourgeois opposition in Egypt. It banned the group, killed hundreds of its members, and jailed thousands. Only last month, an Egyptian court sentenced more than 1,000 MB members to death, including its Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie.

The main target of this campaign of repression will be the working class. In his interview, Sisi defended the junta's anti-protest law, declaring that he "will not let protests destroy the country." In a leaked recording of an off-the-record conversation, Sisi asked: "Will you bear it if I make you walk on your own feet? When I wake you up at five in the morning every day? Will you bear cutting back on food, cutting back on air-conditioners?" Then he threatened: "People think I'm a soft man. Sisi is torture and suffering."

All this must serve as a warning: Sisi and the junta are preparing for an ever more direct, fascistic dictatorship to enforce the austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund and international finance capital upon the Egyptian working class.

Sabahi, the only other candidate in the elections, is a political supporter of Sisi and the Egyptian military. On all central questions, he agrees with Sisi.

As one of the leaders of the National Salvation Front (NSF), he helped to organize the coup against Mursi and supported the subsequent violence against the MB. Sabahi never gives up an opportunity to praise Sisi and the Egyptian military. In a recent interview with *Al-Ahram Online*, he declared that the army is "needed more than ever, and to make it strong the army needs to be built as a qualified army in terms of arms, training, ability to fight, etc."

The presidential elections are another devastating exposure of the counterrevolutionary character of the affluent middle class milieu in Egypt. Most of the liberal and "left" organizations, which played a key role in channeling the mass protests against Mursi and the MB behind the military, are now supporting either Sisi or Sabahi.

The Tamarod movement, the liberal Wafd Party, the liberal Free Egyptians Party (founded by multi-billionaire business tycoon Naguib Sawiris), the Conference Party of former Mubarak-era official Amr Moussa and the Nasserite Tagammu and Nasserist

Parties openly lined up behind Sisi. Others such as Mohamed ElBaradei's Constitution Party, the Nasserite Karama Party, and the Socialist Popular Alliance support Sabahi.

Chief among the organizations seeking to subordinate the working class to the latest counterrevolutionary effort of the Egyptian ruling elite and its imperialist backers are the pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists. After backing Islamist candidate Mursi in the 2012 presidential elections, then supporting the military coup against him in 2013, they are now lending support to the fraudulent elections aimed to install Sisi by calling to vote for his reactionary ally, Sabahi.



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