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Voting Patterns in Post-Mubarak Egypt

Jeffrey Martini and Stephen M. Worman

Key findings

- Similar to the United States, Egypt has its own “red state–blue state” dynamics.
- Islamists run strongest in the governorates of Upper Egypt, outlying western governorates, and North Sinai.
- Non-Islamist parties have polled well in Cairo and its immediate environs, South Sinai, as well as in the more sparsely populated governorates abutting the Red Sea.
- The Delta has been contested territory, with Islamists underperforming their national averages but still doing well in absolute terms.
- Islamists achieved their high-water mark in the initial ballots after the January 25 Revolution, but the gap between them and their non-Islamist rivals has since narrowed.
- Although non-Islamists announced a boycott of the upcoming election, their influence is not weakening. Further, non-Islamist parties could benefit from extended Islamist leadership, if that leadership proves a disappointment to voters.
- Should non-Islamists reconsider the boycott and contest the 2013 parliamentary elections, they are likely to improve their performance from the 2011–2012 elections.

SUMMARY ■ The purpose of this report is to help U.S. policymakers and Middle East watchers better understand voting patterns in Egypt since the 2011 revolution. While much has been written on the electoral strength of Islamists, most analysis has dealt with Egypt at the national level, ignoring regional divides within the country. In contrast, this report identifies the areas within Egypt where Islamist parties run strongest and the areas where non-Islamists are most competitive.

To address this issue, the authors analyze electoral data from Egypt’s four major votes since the revolution, presented in governorate-level maps that depict sub-national voting patterns. The trends that emerge are then analyzed in light of recent political developments, including the street protests against the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) that roiled Egypt in late 2012 and early 2013, as well as the emergence of the National Salvation Front (NSF) as an umbrella for non-Islamist opposition groups.

Applying this study approach, the authors find that while Islamists perform well across the whole of the country, they draw their strongest electoral support in Upper Egypt, North Sinai, and the sparsely populated governorates in the west. In contrast, non-Islamist parties fare best in Cairo and its immediate environs, Port Said, South Sinai, and the sparsely populated governorates abutting the Red Sea. The Delta is contested, with Islamists winning by smaller margins of victory than would be expected given their historical roots in this region.

Tracking electoral performance over time reveals a narrowing of the gap between Islamist parties and their non-Islamist rivals. Islamists thoroughly dominated the initial parliamentary elections held in late 2011 and early 2012, just as their position

prevailed overwhelmingly in the March 2011 referendum on the interim constitution. However, the MB candidate eked out a victory in the June 2012 presidential contest, and the December 2012 referendum on the permanent constitution passed more narrowly than the interim charter.

At the time of this writing, the timing of Egypt's upcoming parliamentary election and the participation of the NSF in it are uncertain. Should elections go ahead and the major non-Islamist parties maintain the boycott they announced in February 2013, another Islamist victory would be all but inevitable. Should the non-Islamist parties reverse course and contest the vote, this report argues that non-Islamists would improve their position, picking up seats from their Islamist rivals. The potential boycott notwithstanding, Egypt does not appear "lost" to Islamists, nor are non-Islamists irrelevant to the country's future. Rather, Egypt appears headed toward a much more competitive political environment in which Islamists are increasingly challenged to maintain their electoral edge.