

RELEASE IN FULL

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From: OpsNewsTicker
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Subject: Latest Egypt vote brings Islamists closer to win (Reuters)

CAIRO (Reuters) - The Muslim Brotherhood won more than a third of the votes in the last stage of elections for Egypt's lower house of parliament, according to partial results on Friday, showing the Islamists are set to dominate the legislature.

Banned under deposed President Hosni Mubarak, the Brotherhood has emerged as a major winner from the uprising that toppled him, exploiting a well-organised support base in the first free legislative vote in decades.

The Brotherhood's party list won 37.5 percent of the vote in the third and final stage of voting. Repeating a pattern seen in previous rounds, the hardline Islamist Nour Party list came second in most of the districts after this week's vote, results on its party website showed.

The Islamists now look set to wield major influence over the shape of a new constitution to be drafted by a 100-strong body that the new legislature will pick, though the Brotherhood has promised that Egyptians of all persuasions will have a say.

"We are happy with the results and are also happy that there are 15 or 16 parties in the parliament so far," Essam al-Erian, deputy head of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, told Reuters.

"This means all voices will be heard in the parliament," he said, speaking at a party rally which drew hundreds of supporters to a working class district of Cairo.

"Together we make the future of Egypt," declared a banner at the rally, held in a tent decked out with Egyptian and party flags. Freedom and Justice Party songs blasted out over loudspeakers.

Though the success of the Brotherhood and Nour Party has alarmed some Egyptians and the Western governments which backed Mubarak, it is unclear to what extent the rival Islamists will cooperate or compete in the new legislature.

The Nour Party seeks a strict application of Islamic law and some analysts believe the more moderate Brotherhood may seek an alliance with liberal groups to allay concerns about the prospect of an Islamist-led Egypt.

For now, the military generals who assumed Mubarak's powers last February will stay in power. They are set to rule until the end of June, by which time they say the country will have a new elected president to whom they will hand power.

MORE VOTING TO COME

Official results of the voting held this week are due on Saturday, but it will take longer before the exact shape of the 498-seat lower house is known.

There are run-offs for seats being contested by individuals in the latest round which will be held on Jan. 10 and 11. And voting must also be held again in a district where the election was cancelled due to irregularities in the first round.

According to a complex electoral system, a third of the seats are reserved for individuals. The other two thirds will be distributed among the lists on a proportional representation basis.

As well as contesting the lists, both the Freedom and Justice Party and the Nour Party have fielded candidates for the individual seats. Polls for the upper house of parliament will follow later this month and conclude in February.

With the elections for the lower house drawing to a close, debate is now likely to focus on the new constitution that will take the place of the one that kept Mubarak in power for three decades.

One main area of discussion will be whether there should be a dilution of presidential powers which underpinned his rule.

Those powers are now exercised by the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which has faced mounting criticism from activists who accuse it of seeking to hold on to power and privilege.

The military council decided on Jan. 1 to accelerate the timetable for the elections, an apparent response to street protests demanding a faster end to army rule.

The council has said that Kamal al-Ganzouri, appointed prime minister in November, will stay in his post after the legislative election. But some analysts believe the emergence of a new legislature with a popular mandate could force changes in cabinet.

Erian said the new parliament would make demands of the Ganzouri government, but without saying what they might be. "There is no excuse for provoking any conflict in this country because we are on a threshold of a new period," he said.

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