

Taking Egypt's electoral pulse: an analysis of voter preferences prior to May 2014 elections

By Mariz Tadros

May 2014



Taking Egypt's electoral pulse: an analysis of voter preferences prior to May 2014 elections

Analysis from a 2014 survey undertaken by the Institute of Development Studies and Al Karma
Edutainment Outreach and Development Division

By Mariz Tadros

May 2014

About

This survey and analysis forms part of work on Egypt's political settlements, part of the Addressing and Mitigating Violence programme at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which is supported with UK aid from the UK Government.

The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS or the UK government's official policies.

Copyright

Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce this material from. In return, IDS requests due acknowledgment and quotes to be referenced as above.

Taking Egypt's electoral pulse: an analysis of voter preferences prior to May 2014 presidential elections

With presidential elections in Egypt about to take place at the end of May, there are important lessons to be drawn from an analysis of political constituencies and electoral demographics. The indeterminacy of the current situation in Egypt should not deter the media, academics and policy analysts from making a genuine attempt to capture the pulse of the citizenry and make sense of it.

Methodology

The [Institute of Development Studies \(IDS\)](#) together with [Al Karma Edutainment Outreach and Development Division](#), a politically non-partisan non-state actor with an extensive community outreach programme in Egypt undertook a survey in six governorates of 2,423 citizens who endorsed or participated in the protests that erupted on the 30 June 2013. The survey did not encompass protestors supporting the incumbent (at the time) President Morsi on two counts. First, the focus of the survey was to capture who were the unknown masses who revolted against the regime (the profile and motives of protestors endorsing Morsi are known). Second, in view of the security crackdown against members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, the risks for respondents were felt to be too significant.

Local researchers used a snowballing method to identify persons who had endorsed the revolts around the 30 of June 2013 elections either by participating in the protests or by openly supporting them. The survey was conducted in more than thirty communities in Cairo and Alexandria, Fayoum, Beni Suef, Minya, and Qena, thereby covering governorates in Upper and Lower Egypt and the major cities and accounted for gender and urban/rural differentials. Since the survey was conducted in areas that are characterized by high levels of economic marginalization, this was reflected in the outcome: 58.8% earned an income of less than LE1200 (equivalent of roughly £100), 25.3% cited no income, and 15.9% cited an income of more than LE1200. The results showed that 60% of the respondents were under 36 years of age. Ten focus groups were conducted nationwide in order to gain local insights and deepen understandings of survey findings.

An analysis of the findings

The findings on electoral preferences were (based on January 2014) as follows:

Candidate	Frequency	Percent
Abdel Fattah Al Sissi, First Deputy Prime Minister (former Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces)	1,313	54.19%
Hamdeen Sabahi, leader of the Egyptian Popular Current and co-leader of the National Salvation Front	57	2.35%
Undecided	873	36.03%
Others	180	7.43%
Total	2,423	100.00%

Overall voter preference

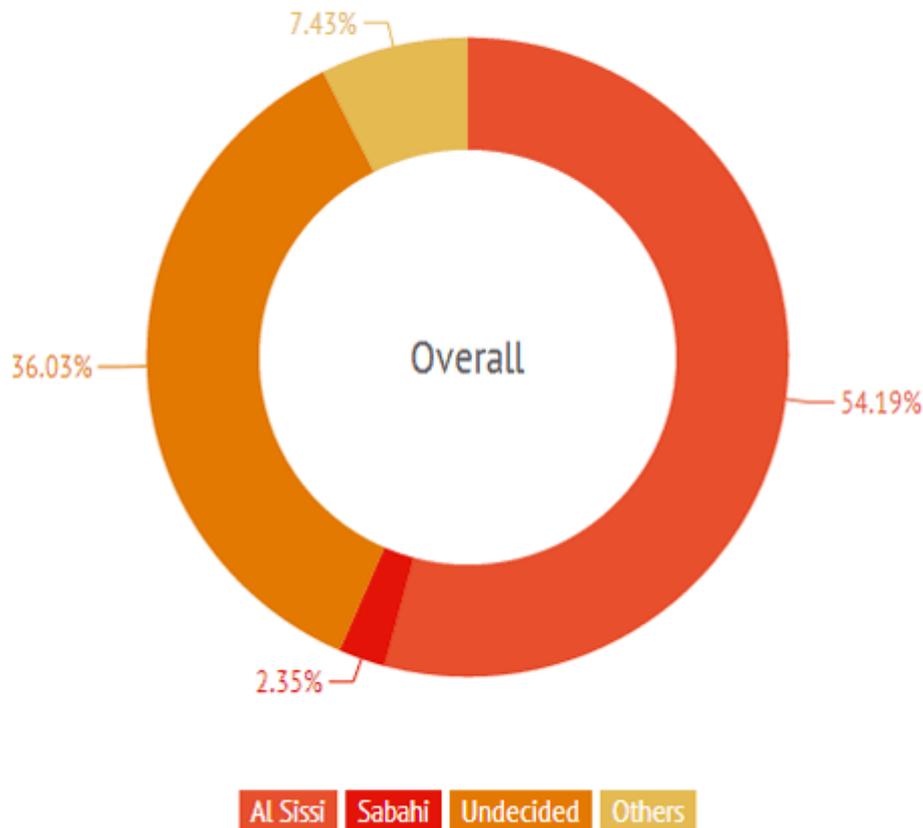


Figure 1: Overall Voter Preference "Taking Egypt's Electoral Pulse" [IDS / Al Karma Survey](#)

These results resonate to a large extent with the findings of two recent nationwide surveys the first by Ibn Khaldoun and the second by Al Baseera¹.

The absence of the Muslim Brotherhood members from the IDS/Al Karma survey does not have a bearing on the voter trends because they have declared that they will boycott the presidential elections on account of their perceived illegitimacy².

¹ <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/419713> Accessed 06 May 2014

² <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/99975/Egypt/Politics-/ElSisi-urges-big-turnout-in-Egypt-presidential-pol.aspx>

Voter preference by age group

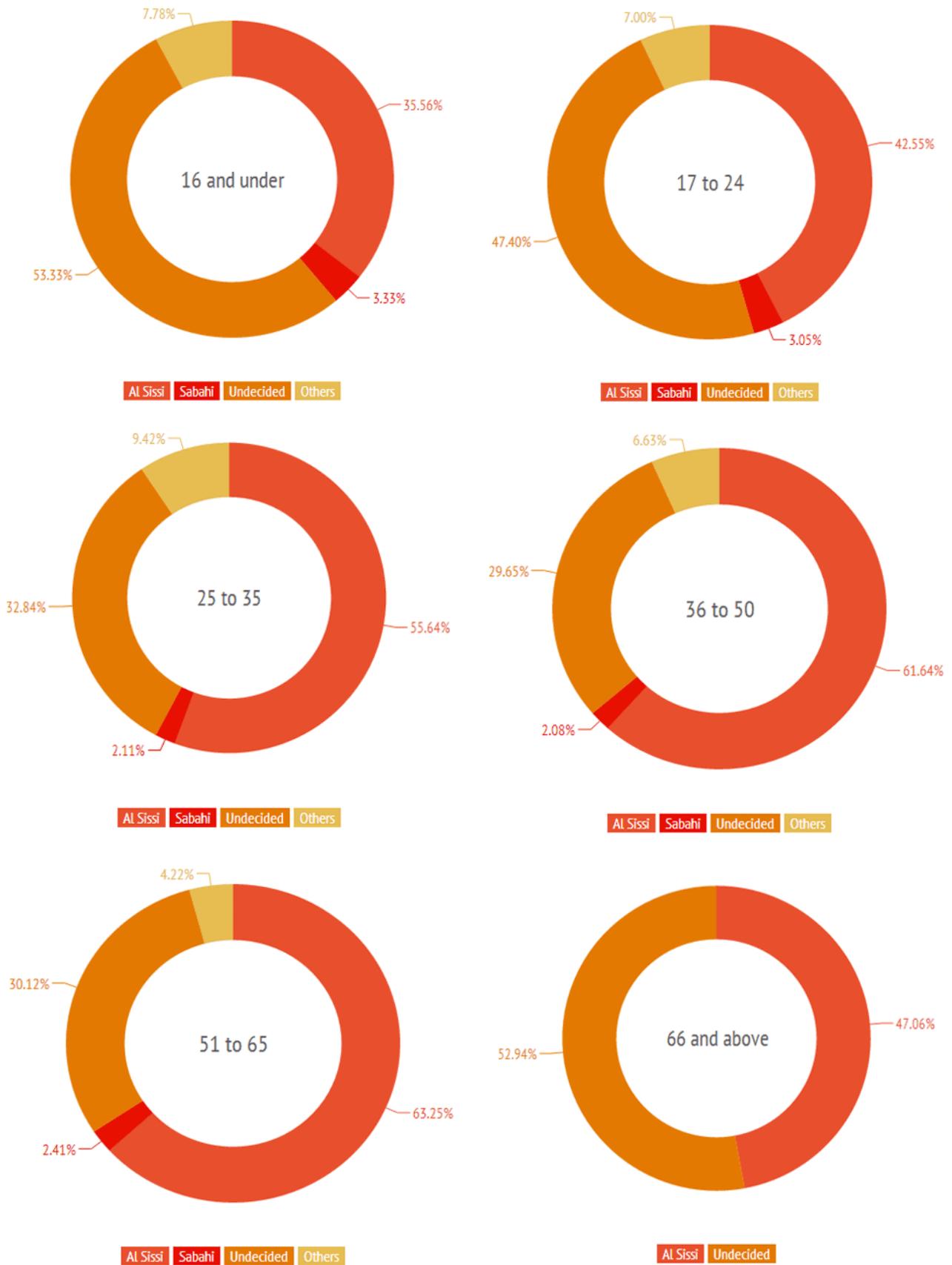


Figure 2: Voter Preference by Age Group "Taking Egypt's Electoral Pulse" [IDS / Al Karma Survey](#)

Profiling Al Sissi's political constituency

The IDS/Al Karma survey indicated that Al Sissi's popularity peaks among the middle aged and older groups, and voters are more likely to be rural based with slightly more women than men.

63.5% of those aged between 51-65 years of age said they would vote for Al Sissi, followed by 61.6% of those aged between 36-50. When it comes to those aged between 17-24, just under said they would vote for Al Sissi (42.5%). Al Sissi's popularity is also higher in rural areas (59.5%) than in urban ones (49.2%). There is also a slight gender differential: 51.8% of men said they would vote for Al Sissi, compared to 56.1% of women.

In focus groups, when asked why they endorsed Al Sissi's candidature, the prime reason given was that he responded to the people's desire to get rid of the Muslim Brotherhood and by intervening averted the country from falling into a civil war (they all mentioned that in June 2013 they were terrified that confrontations between pro and anti Morsi groups would turn into a bloodbath). Another reason given is the aspiration of lifting Egypt "from the chaos it is in" – underpinned by the belief that law and order are prerequisites for security and prosperity.

An interesting response was an entirely sentimental one: one young woman said

"We have not had a ruler who was henayen [kind, compassionate] towards us. Every day of our lives we face harshness, and this is why I liked Al Sissi, he spoke to the people with kindness."

Al Sissi's words that "whoever touches the Egyptians will have his hand cut" elicited strong emotional responses in a context in which people felt that their sense of dignity has been trodden upon. These are all temporal reasons which risk fading away with time, but they indicate a strong paradox between the view from outside (by western analysts) on why people have looked to Al Sissi and the reasons given when engaging local citizens who said they will give him their vote.

The Undecided

The second largest group are the undecided who represented 36% of the sample. However, another survey which covered a broader section of the Egyptian population (not only those who supported the 30 June revolution) suggested that half of Egyptians have yet to decide on their presidential candidate³. The Undecided in our sample tended to be mostly concentrated among the youth. Of those in the age category 17-24 years, 47.4% of them had not made up their mind yet. Of those who are in the age category 25-35, 32.84% of them are undecided. Of those in the age category from 36 to 50, 29.65% of them are undecided. Of those in the age category 51-65, 30.12% of them were undecided. Of those in the age category 66 from above, 52.94% were undecided (however the later comprised a small number of 34 participants of a 2423 sample so has to be read with caution).

³ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/nearly-half-egyptians-undecided-presidential-elections> Accessed 6 May 2014

Undecided voters by age group

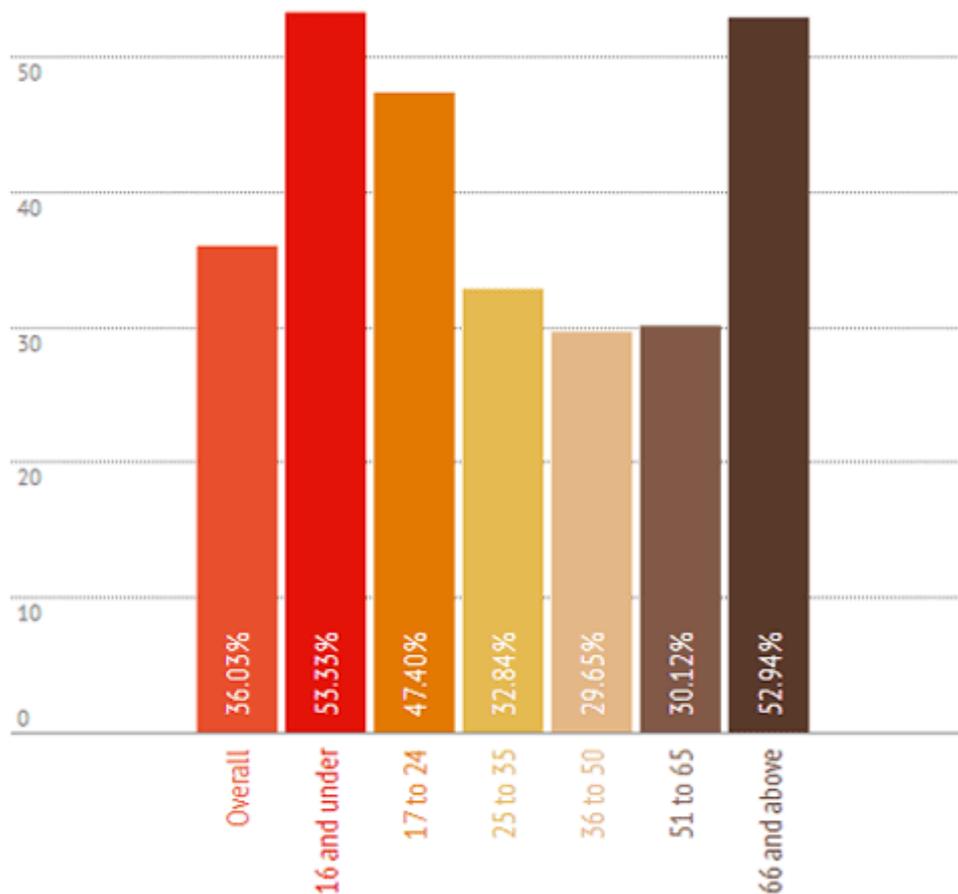


Figure 3: Undecided voters by age group "Taking Egypt's Electoral Pulse" [IDS / Al Karma Survey](#)

The undecided are more likely to be in the urban areas (41.8% of the total urban population say they are undecided compared to 29.8% of the total rural community said they do not know who to vote for).

The Undecided are unlikely to influence the electoral outcome in terms of who wins since the gap between Al Sissi and other candidates is so conspicuously large.

However, *how* they vote will have an impact on the moral and political legitimacy of the regime. It is also possible that if the youth that constitute a significant percentage of the Undecided choose to boycott the elections, this will serve Hamdeen's campaign because it would lower the percentage of voters supporting Al Sissi.

Where are all the youth?

Where Al Sissi loses a few percentage points below the 50% line, Sabahi gains a few of them. Of the 2.4% who said they would vote for Hamdeen Sabahi, his most numerous supporters are among the 17-24 age bracket (3.1%) and are more likely to be in the urban areas than the rural (3.0% and 1.7% respectively). 3.1% of men said they would vote for Al Sissi, compared to 1.8% women.

Undoubtedly, the section among the youth who aspire to have a civilian candidate and who associate Al Sissi with the return of military rule will either boycott elections or vote for Sabahi. Analysts who focus on the political exclusion of youth are often prone to three erroneous assumptions:

1. The youth represent one bloc with one uniform political voice: as the survey shows, the youth are divided in their stances.
2. Youth movements share one political position/stance on the presidential election: while some youth, such as those whose voices are represented in a *New York Times* article⁴, feel disenfranchised within the current configuration of power and the direction the country is heading towards, other youth coalitions have openly stated they will support Al Sissi⁵
3. Confusing the youth bulge in demographic terms with their proportion of the eligible voting age population: Egypt's youth population below 18 years of age comprise about 32 million of the 82 million population of Egypt (approx 39%), however, they are not yet eligible to vote. Of the roughly 52 million *eligible* voters (according to the official statistics authority CAPMAS 2014), those aged from 18-24 years only come to 12 million voters (24.57 % of the electorate). Whereas middle-aged voters (36-50) comprise a much bigger segment of votes, at 14.7 million. If the findings are anything to go by, then the size of Al Sissi's political constituency (among the middle aged and older group) is likely to provide a sufficient electoral base to compensate any losses among the younger voters (below 24 years of age). Even if a high percentage of youth do vote for Hamdeen Sabahi, it would still not be sufficient to change the outcome.

How the proportion of eligible voters is distributed between age groups

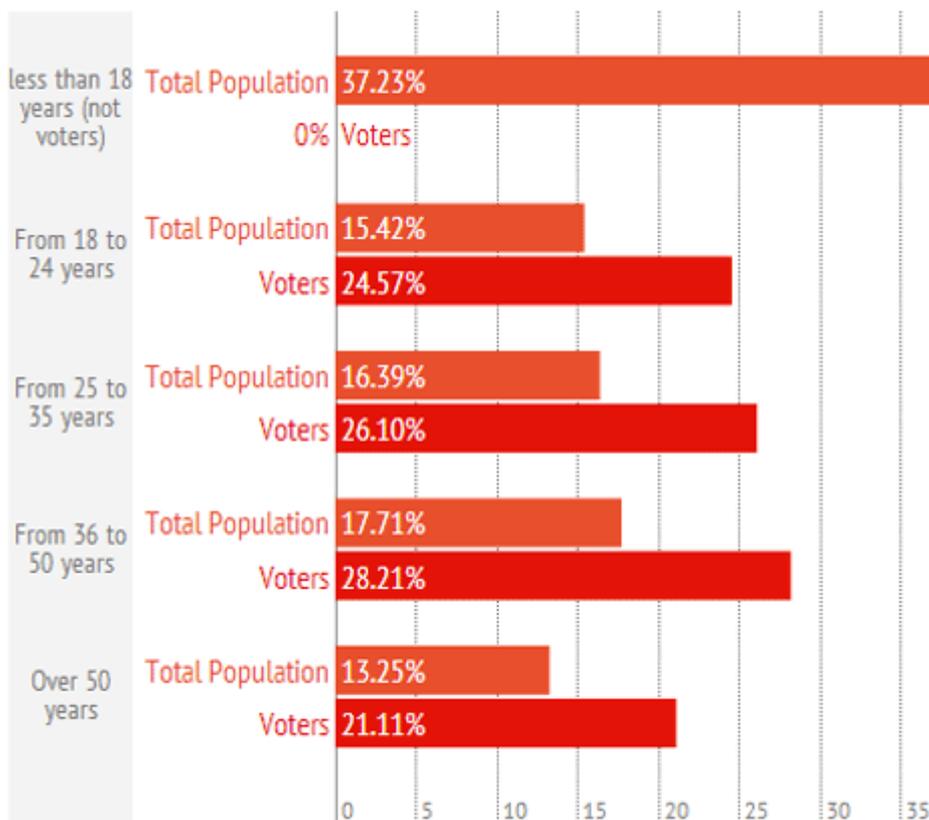


Figure 4: Distribution of eligible voters by age group "Taking Egypt's Electoral Pulse" [IDS / Al Karma Survey](#)

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/17/world/middleeast/a-chasm-grows-between-young-and-old-in-egypt.html> Accessed on 6 May 2014

⁵ <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=1611457#.U2ulh1dN20K> Accessed 6 May 2014

Does religion make a difference in voting patterns?

Muslims comprise about 90% of the population, with the Christian population comprising about 10%. It was not possible to adjust exactly for religious affiliation in our selection process (unlike gender and rural/urban differentials for example). However, when disaggregating the data along the lines of religious affiliation with respect to voting patterns, we were able to arrive at some interesting findings.

There has been a widely circulated myth that the Copts are all voting for Al Sissi. Supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood have often conveyed the Christians as key parties to the conspiracy against them and as key allies to Al Sissi.

While it is true that the percentage of Copts who said they will vote for Al Sissi is slightly higher than the Muslims, however, more Copts than Muslims have said they will vote for Hamdeen Sabahi. This is because the percentage of Copts who are undecided (at the time of the survey) is smaller than their Muslim counterparts. The official Coptic Orthodox Church, representing the largest Christian denomination in Egypt, has said it will not endorse any particular candidate, leaving it up to citizens to choose⁶.

Of the total percentage of Muslims, 51.26% said they will vote for Al Sissi, 37.72% were undecided, 1.84% said they will vote for Sabahi and 9.18% for other candidates. Of the total sample of Christians, 61.7% said they would vote for Al Sissi, 31.61% undecided, 3.65% for Sabahi, and 3.04% for others.

Switching allegiance

It is interesting to note that among those who revolted on the 30 June 2013, the majority had participated in the presidential elections which saw Mohamed Morsi win by a narrow margin of slightly less than 3% over his contender, Ahmed Shafik.

Among respondents in our sample, the percentage of those who had voted for Shafik and Morsi in the previous elections were 44.3% and 11.8%, respectively. What is surprising is the switch of votes: of those who supported Shafik in the previous election, 64.9% said they would support Al Sissi and 2% said they would opt for Sabahi while 28.4% of them were undecided. In essence, this means Shafik lost the main part of his constituency to Al Sissi.

⁶ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/100461/Egypt/Politics-/Church-not-for-any-candidate-in-Egypt's-presidentia.aspx> Accessed on 6 May 2014

Voter preferences of those who previously voted for Shafik

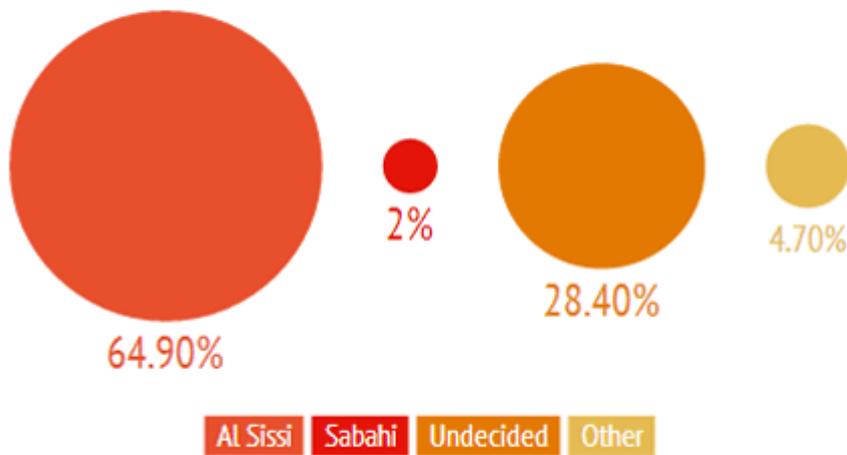


Figure 5: Voter preference of those who previously voted for Shafik "Taking Egypt's Electoral Pulse" [IDS / Al Karma Survey](#)

What is even more striking is the political constituency that previously supported Morsi which had shifted to Al Sissi (42.4% of them said they would vote for Al Sissi while 43.6% said they were undecided and 1% will not vote). Again, it means that almost half of Morsi's constituency had shifted to supporting Al Sissi.

Voter preferences of those who previously voted for Morsi

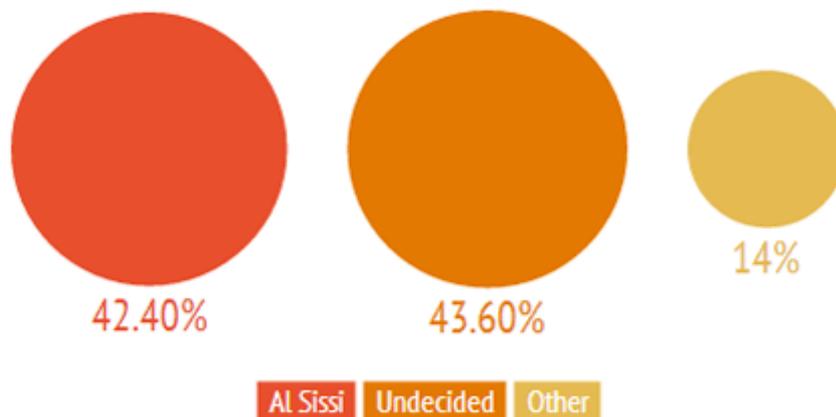


Figure 5: Voter preference of those who previously voted for Morsi "Taking Egypt's Electoral Pulse" [IDS / Al Karma Survey](#)

Perhaps what is most unusual- and unexpected is that Sabahi had lost half of his own constituency to Al Sissi: 49.7% of those who had supported Sabahi in the previous presidential elections said they would give their vote to Al Sissi, while a third were not quite sure whom they wanted to go with (36.5% undecided). Since this survey was carried out six months ago, it suggests that from the outset Al Sissi's popularity was such that the presidential elections were not taking place on a level playing field (even if the elections were not to be rigged and the state owned media was less partisan to Al Sissi).

Aspirations for the new presidency – jobs, personal safety and end to corruption and injustice

In discussions in focus groups around what is expected from the new president, the most frequently cited aspiration is jobs, in particular for young men. Closely following on its heel was a desire for security: personal safety and freedom from violence and assault. Yet this was not a case of sacrificing political rights for socio-economic benefits: while no one talked about freedoms (except among some of the youth), almost everyone talked about an end to corruption and injustice.

Some Egyptians' support for Field Marshall Abdel Fattah Al Sissi, the former Defence Minister who ousted Morsi after a popular uprising has been described in terms such as this: "it is as if many Egyptians have relapsed into the infantilism of the Mubarak era"⁷. There is a dire need to challenge the credentials of any presidential candidate and hold him accountable (especially in the case of Al Sissi) and particularly in view of the narrowing space for contention in Egypt. However, "pre-revolutionary infantilism" hardly describes a reality in which even during Mubarak's reign, thousands of citizen-led protests took place), nor does it help us in scrutinising why a state of exaggerated adulation of Al Sissi exists in some circles.

People are not simply passive sponges soaking up state propaganda [one only has to look at the revolts under Mubarak and Morsi for evidence] nor can we dismiss them as having given up on their revolutionary aspirations. A significant proportion of the survey respondents (79.2%) and those who participated in the focus groups said they would rise again if their aspirations are not met. One can only wait and see.

Further reading

Ali, K. (2012), Precursors of the Egyptian Revolution. IDS Bulletin, 43: 16–25

Tadros, M. (2014) [*Settling After the Revolts? Egypt's Political Settlements and Violent Transition*](#) Evidence Report 57, Brighton: IDS

⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/abdul-fattah-alsisi-egyptian-general-is-idolised-for-deposing-former-president-mohamed-morsi-but-can-his-popularity-last-8940476.html> Accessed 6 May 2014

Appendix 1 – selected survey results

Profile of age groups vs. eligible votes in Egypt.

Total Population

Age category	#	%
less than 18 years (not voters)	30,900,000	37.23%
From 18 to 24 years	12,800,000	15.42%
From 25 to 35 years	13,600,000	16.39%
From 36 to 50 years	14,700,000	17.71%
Over 50 years	11,000,000	13.25%
Total	83,000,000	100.00%

Voters Only

Age category	#	%
From 18 to 24 years	12,800,000	24.57%
From 25 to 35 years	13,600,000	26.10%
From 36 to 50 years	14,700,000	28.21%
Over 50 years	11,000,000	21.11%
Total	52,100,000	100.00%

Voting preferences based on age category from our full sample

Age groups	Al Sissi		Sabahi		Undecided		Others		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
16 and under	32	35.56	3	3.33	48	53.33	7	7.78	90	100.00
17 – 24	237	42.55	17	3.05	264	47.40	39	7.00	557	100.00
25 – 35	449	55.64	17	2.11	265	32.84	76	9.42	807	100.00
36 – 50	474	61.64	16	2.08	228	29.65	51	6.63	769	100.00
51 – 65	105	63.25	4	2.41	50	30.12	7	4.22	166	100.00
66 and above	16	47.06	0	0.00	18	52.94	0	0.00	34	100.00
	1313	54.19	57	2.35	873	36.03	180	7.43	2423	100.00