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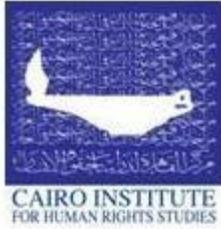
The independent coalition of election Observation

Summary of the third periodic report of the presidential elections, 2012

Run-off period

30 May : 18 June

Media Monitoring Report

Cairo, Egypt

Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies

Introduction:

Results of the first polling phase led to a whole new classification of the electoral process. While in our previous report we pointed out the notable features of the presidential elections – namely, that they have been individual rather than partisan and that candidates represent themselves and their programs more than expressing their political or ideological affiliations – the results of this election changed the run-off into a competition between the former regime and the Muslim Brotherhood. Both of these alternatives have deeply rooted systems within society and state institutions and thus are able to rally people around them, whether for political reasons or via the media, and as a result they both have great influence at the polls. This state of affairs changed the features of the media coverage during the campaigning leading up to the run-offs: political affiliation was the main driving force used for publicity, whether to push people to vote for or against a particular candidate. This focus on political affiliation at times took attention off of the individual candidates themselves. In some cases, the candidate himself was not accepted by voters, yet the crowds were nevertheless mobilized to elect the political movement he represents. In other cases, voters refrained from electing either of the candidates, not out of objection to the candidate himself or his platform but rather due to his political affiliation.

Following the end of the first round of elections, Counselor Hatem Bagato announced that Wednesday, May 30th would mark the beginning of campaigning for the run-offs, after appeals from candidates regarding count results had been settled. This campaigning phase was scheduled to continue until the afternoon of Friday, June 15th. Bagato also specified that spending on run-off campaigning should not exceed one million Egyptian pounds.[1] Hence, this report begins by reviewing the most prominent features of the media coverage of the campaigning stage and then moves on to the days of the election itself.

Run-off campaigning:

Campaigning during the run-off stage both resembled and differed from that of the first polling phase. Perhaps the most common factor between the two stages related to the ceiling for spending on election advertisement, which was set in the run-off stage at one million pounds over the period of nearly 15 days. We are certain that both candidates surpassed this amount, as the run-offs witnessed increased advertisements, especially in the visual media, which clearly exceed the allowed limit on spending. This becomes clear when one realizes that any advertisement officer in any daily paper, for example, knows that the average ad price per page in the daily newspaper ranges between 200-300 thousand pounds for one day. The cost of developing and disseminating television commercials and street advertisements is certainly much higher.

The most important features of the run-off campaigning can be reviewed as follows:

1- A pattern of negative advertising prevailed during the run-off campaigning. Propaganda of each candidate was based on defamation, criticism, ridicule and rebuttal of the other candidate. The media turned into arenas for verbal warfare between both candidates and their election campaigns. It should be noted that this advertisement pattern involved

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[1] Al Joumhouriya Daily, 27 May

several breaches of media professionalism for which the media alone cannot be held accountable. Both candidates were a major cause of these violations due to their offensive style and their attacking statements, including playing on prejudices and slandering the other. Al Goumhoriya Daily newspaper called this "beating under the belt" (June 4th), and Al-Ahram Daily "bone cracking battles" (June 6th). For instance, on June 4th Al Goumhoriya newspaper published the following descriptions of Shafiq made by the Muslim Brotherhood: liar, corrupt, Mubarak is his idol, defaming, slandering, and should be tried. Shafiq rebutted: Egypt is greater than Morsi, Al-Shater, and the Guide, and the Muslim Bothers squandered the rights of the martyrs. Those statements were part of different press conferences, and the media deliberately highlighted these statements in headlines, creating an atmosphere of conflict and recrimination.

2- The media contributed to the situation of partisanship and division that the Egyptian street suffered from during the run-offs and which is still casting its shadow over the current political situation. Due to both editorial and directorial factors, the media played into the consolidation of the appearance of a confrontation between the candidates and the rift in society because of them, going so far as to identify the sectors and segments of society which supported each candidate. Press coverage highlighted clashes between supporters of the candidates as well as polarizing statements, reflecting to the public that people should choose to join the ranks of a specific team and that doing so required crudely attacking the opposing group. This focus created the basis for a situation of animosity between voters and produced a climate of intolerance, the detrimental effects of which may be witnessed after the announcement of the election results. For instance, Al Goumhoriya Newspaper chose as its headline for the May 27th issue: "Salafis, Islamic Group (Al Jamaa Al Islamiya) and al-Jihad back Morsy, while Christians, Sufis, NDP followers, and supporters of the reinstitution of security back Shafiq. This generalization neglected to provide persuasive grounds for its claims, simply deepening the spirit of division. Newspapers in particular were keen to present their news pages in the form of confrontations, whereby the paper would be divided into two opposing sides related to the headlines, in a pattern set up as an exchange of accusations (Al Ahram). As for TV channels, they have exchanged roles between themselves, for while Al Youm channel hosts candidate Mohamed Morsi, another channel hosts the rival candidate, and so on. However, the confrontational style was not as clear in the visual media as it was in printed newspapers.

3- The run-off campaigning phase coincided with the verdict of Mubarak, his interior minister, and his aids (on June 2nd), as well as a situation of intense anticipation of the court decision on political isolation, which threatened to disqualify presidential candidate Ahmed Shafiq from the run-offs. It should be noted here that Al Shorouq newspaper's error of confirming that Shafiq was out of the presidential race, came as part of a pattern of negative propaganda and misinformation which led to confusion. An atmosphere of anxious anticipation both on the ground and in the media accompanied the trial of the century and the subsequent exasperation and objections. For example, al-Ahram dedicated whole pages to the million-person march dubbed "In support of isolation" (which might be classified under a pattern of propaganda against candidate Ahmed Shafiq), deliberately

chose footage and photo angles to corroborate the numerical strength of the demonstrators, and was keen to provide coverage of most governorates (June 7th). All this led to the recession of the space allocated to elections in quantitative terms during the run-off.

4- Printed media was keen during the run-off campaign not to be biased in favor of any political force. They tried to observe the highest degree of neutrality in the spaces allotted to each candidate at least, as well as the layout, photo sizes, headlines, etc., and even in ads. Apart from Al-Goumhoriya newspaper, printed newspapers under study were devoid of ads for either of the candidates during the campaign phase. However, the qualitative analysis reveals that newspapers varied in their extent of rejection of candidates. Both Al-Goumhoriya and al-Ahram refused categorically to support Mohamed Morsi but were afraid to show their bias in favor of Lieutenant General Ahmed Shafiq, while al-Masry Al Youm and Al-Shourouq newspapers unequivocally refused to support Ahmed Shafiq, which was clear in the wording of their news. On the other hand, neither newspaper could support candidate Mohamed Morsi either. This explains the shrinking space allocated to elections in newspapers on the one hand, and their success in striking an equilibrium to some extent, on the other.

5- At the level of visual media, state-owned channels were keen to criticize the Muslim Brotherhood but without providing information in support of the rival candidate. They were also held responsible for the consolidation of the idea of confrontation between the religious and civil state and the necessity of choosing between them. This terminology was used in questions to guests or in the introductions of programs, in an attempt to avoid mentioning the names of candidates (Channel 1 on June 15th). Channel One was also the first channel (30 May) to raise the question: "Which of the two candidates is the representative of the revolution?" Answers were used to support one of the candidates and attack the other. Private channels, for their part, as much as they were keen to maintain objectivity vis-à-vis both candidates, individual anchors did display bias. Ibrahim Issa exhibited sheer bias against Muslim Brother candidate on the ON TV channel (as seen in the episode of May 30th), while Wael Al-Ibrashi, an anchor on Dream TV channel, deliberately attacked Islamic currents repeatedly and unequally.

6- On June 8th, Al-Ahram newspaper conducted an interview on the page dubbed *Confrontation* entitled "An Hour in the House of the Potential President," in which the newspaper published a lengthy interview with Ahmed Shafik. This interview lacked the standards of impartiality and objectivity, both in the pattern of questions, headlines, or introductions, as it played upon emotions. It began with a romantic humanitarian introduction, describing the elegant taste of his house, his love of music and art, which the editor demonstrated through a description of the three "pianos" which adorn his home. The interview aimed at creating a state of familiarity with the candidate, both through the footage and the introduction. The questions portrayed the candidate as oppressed, and the interviewer began by asking, "What will you do now that your campaign headquarters in Dokki has been burned down?" Although the page carries the title of *Confrontation*, suggesting that the opposite page will include an interview with the contending candidate, the opposite page was an interview with the head of al-Wafd party and included four

questions related to the behavior of the Muslim Brotherhood and their political performance. This practice entails a bias against them and a clear support of the contending candidate.

7- Advertisements for candidate Ahmed Shafiq appeared on the back page of Al-Goumhoriya newspaper for more than 10 days. Ads were signed by the "silent majority," which raises questions regarding the sources of funding of such ads. The cost of repeated advertisements on a full-page space - the back page – exceeds $3 million Egyptian pounds. Furthermore, advertising has seen a remarkable development in the formulation and layout. It was gradual, beginning by calling for support for the candidate through a review of the reasons for support and concluding with exposure of the defects of the contending candidate, to be defeated by Ahmed Shafiq. Such ads were fully consistent with the content of ads for the same candidate in visual media.

8- Al Hayat TV channel focused on the sectarian dimension of the run-off phase. An episode on June 1st was entitled "The reasons why Christians vote for Shafiq," in a generalization corroborated by the Channel's hosting of four Copts, including Coptic thinker Kamal Zakher, whose words were deliberately and repeatedly posted on the screen for long periods: "If Morsi becomes president, democracy will be repealed and will be replaced by the Shura Council".

9- Advertising was one of the press arts most worthy of study and observation during the run-off. Although the media is not responsible for the content of the ads, we imagine that they are entitled to object to some ads involving offensive or abusive sentences. While ads have deteriorated significantly in private newspapers, ads promoting voting for Shafiq occupied the largest space in national newspapers, particularly Al-Goumhoriya newspaper, where pro-Shafiq ads were on the back page for nearly a week before the elections. However, the ad rhetoric and style are worthy of analysis. At the beginning of the election campaign, ads for candidates explained the reasons for choosing either of them. As the elections approached, simplified language was added. On June 11th, candidate Shafiq's ad included an additional sentence: "Rule in the name of the people, not the Muslim Brothers." On June 12th, another sentence was added: "For a constitution of Egypt not of the Muslim Brothers, for a civil not a religious state." On June 13th, the media repeated journalist Ahmad Ragab's words on Ahmed Shafiq. In Al-Ahram the pattern was different. The newspaper dedicated almost half of the ad to negative testimonies of scholars and sheikhs on the Muslim Brothers, in an attempt to exploit quotes of religious scholars "which are taken out of their context" to criticize the Muslim Brothers, and thus support the rival candidate (June 15th). Candidate Mohamed Morsi's campaign used the same pattern, but less severely. In their ads, they used many sayings of Muslim leaders, sheikhs and religious men in support of the Muslim Brothers. However, the ads did not mention Mohammed Morsi. It is worth mentioning that figures appeared on both sets of ads, once criticizing the Muslim Brothers while supporting them on the other instance. TV ad discourse also witnessed a change, whereas candidate Ahmed Shafiq's ads evolved during the run-offs to introduce new terms in critique of the Muslim Brotherhood's line of thought and to attack their candidate, including "Egypt is not a religious state" and "we want to be governed by a president not by the Guide's word."

10- Voters fell prey to the bickering between the candidates and their campaigns during the run-offs. The media's interest in the voters and their alignments and choices clearly declined and instead focused on the fiery statements of the candidates. Except for the back page of Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper, which often addresses the human story of a citizen or voter and his/her ambitions and needs on a daily basis, the voter was almost absent during that period.

Features of media coverage on the ballot days.

Run-off ballots were similar to the first stage in the uncertainty of the legal interpretation of the electoral silence in the media. We still emphasize the need to determine controls and checks regarding media handling of the period of electoral silence in a practical, professional, specialist way commensurate with every medium, according to the timing of printing, broadcasting and run-off, so as not to leave any room for breaches. We should stress the indispensability of setting clear penalties for breaching electoral silence, whether committed by candidates or the media, to safeguard the right of the recipients and the voters to think and contemplate in an unbiased environment prior to polling.

We can review the features of the media coverage on the ballot days as follows:

1- Most of the printed media breached the electoral silence, set by law from one day (Friday June 15th). Al-Ahram daily, Al- Masry Al-Youm, and Al-Goumhoriya breached electoral silence by posting full-page ads (for the first time throughout the run-off) of the candidate Ahmed Shafik. Al-Ahram also published coverage of the recent press conferences of both candidates. Al-Shourouq breached the electoral silence with a report on the third page (with a large photo exhibiting a negative bias), entitled "Western reports confirming Shafiq's victory opens the door wide to chaos in Egypt."

Visual media were the most committed to electoral silence. No TV channel engaged in direct advertisement to either of the two candidates, while some state-owned visual media pursued a pattern of indirect advertising. For instance, Channel One program "talk of the town" hosted a lady who spoke negatively about the Muslim Brothers, their history, and their involvement in the murder of late President Sadat. Anchor Mufid Fawzy also asked one of his guests, "Do you want to stand on the shore of a religious or civil state?" When the guest answered he asked him about his full name and when he realized he was Christian, he told him you are an Egyptian Copt, I think the message was conveyed. He asked another (bearded) citizen, "While casting your ballot tomorrow with all your convictions, would you cast it for a president who will be a civilian head of state or a religious head of state?" This involves a form of indirect advertising.

2- Media coverage of the first polling day involved a clear questioning of the integrity of the electoral process. All media outlets made reference to some abuses that threaten the integrity of the electoral process, including the marking of some election papers, rigging, etc. Perhaps such coverage which was apparently more pronounced in the state-owned media was a prelude to the current situation. Al-Ahram's June 18th issue includes 11 news items calling into question the integrity of the electoral process (on pages 2,3,4,6,7,8,9). News ranged between seizing 1081 electoral cards marked in favor of Morsi. Bagato:

Polling cards came out of the Al Amiriya print house presses with a mark, exclusion of police officers whose names were on the lists, the dead vote.

Al-Shourouq newspaper also opened its coverage of the elections on Sunday, June 17th with a front page headline: "Supporters of Morsi and Shafiq mark ballot papers," in addition to 4 other news items involving rigging incidents.

3- Al-Ahram was one of the most vehement attackers of ballot boycotters. The newspaper launched a campaign to promote polling and invalidate claims of boycott. In its June 15th edition, Al-Ahram wrote: "Calls for nullifying votes are a crime punishable by imprisonment." On the page dedicated to religious thought, it was written: "Casting the ballots is a legitimate necessity." The edition of the first polling day on June 17th included on its second page a report entitled "Media personnel against polling boycott," and the inside pages stated, "Nullifying your vote is a call rejected by enthusiastic voters." On the June 18th edition, the newspaper mentioned: "The nullification and boycott campaigns launch attack messages on both candidates and the military council".

On the other hand, private newspapers were more receptive to the idea of boycotting, especially the Al-Masry Al–Youm, which dedicated a full page to boycotters in the June 17th edition. The newspaper focused on publishing reports on the reasons for the boycott and the main methods of nullifying the votes. Visual media also accepted the idea of boycotting or nullifying the ballots, especially by hosting some public figures who announced their boycott. Satellite channels were keen to host boycotters to elucidate their position, such as Ammar Al Shereii and Hamdi Qandil (Dream 2 Channel, May 30th).

4- The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces issued a complementary constitutional declaration before the end of the second polling day. This proclamation drew the attention of the visual media away from following the process of sorting ballots and the final hours of voting. The media went from coverage of the polling stations to airing the SCAF proclamation and discussing its content. The same was true for the printed media; although their edition had largely been printed to be issued, some prepared new editions including the content of the supplementary constitutional proclamation. Media attention was diverted to focus on analyzing the course of the second polling day, which was much less than the first day.

Finally, it should be pointed out that media breaches did not stop until the final results were announced. Both candidates succeeded in attracting the media to play a role in the processes of polarization, mobilization of crowds, and lobbying performed by the candidates ahead of the announcement of results. This put many media outlets in a dilemma between conveying the statements and conferences of both candidates to the recipient and the need to comply with Supreme Election Committee decisions prohibiting the discussion of election results before their announcement formally. Furthermore, the continued bickering between the two candidates even after the end of the polling period forced the media to intervene as another party - at times biased - in this conflict, which remains ongoing.