



EGYPT PARLIAMENT WATCH



WEEK IN BRIEF JANUARY 7–JANUARY 13, 2018

Summary

- The vast majority of representatives reacted to the announcement of the presidential election timetable by officially endorsing President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi for reelection, though he has not publicly stated he would seek it. One way to fulfill the constitutional mandates for presidential candidacy is to receive the endorsement of 20 representatives. Sisi currently has the endorsements of as many as 516 of the 595 representatives.
- Though the National Elections Commission stated thus far no international organizations have applied to monitor the presidential election, several representatives have already begun denigrating the idea of foreign oversight of the process.
- Representative Mortada Mansour announced his intention to run for president after former representative Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat withdrew from the race.

Notable Developments

Reaction to Presidential Election Timetable:

After the National Elections Commission [announced](#) on January 8 the timetable for presidential elections, the discussion of the election among representatives increased drastically. The majority of representatives appear to have taken advantage of the special room in parliament where the Coalition in Support of Egypt was [collecting](#) signatures to fulfill the constitutional endorsement requirement for President Abdel-Fattah El Sisi's candidacy for reelection. Various [sources reported that between](#) 464 and 516 of the 595 representatives endorsed Sisi, though he still has yet to declare that he is running for reelection. Sisi's supporters include Speaker of the House Ali Abdel 'Al, the [majority](#)

coalition, and, following this weekend's [Wafd Party](#) and [Tagammu Party](#) endorsements, every party within the legislature except for the Nour Party and the 25-30 Bloc. Rumors that this level of support for Sisi's unannounced candidacy, which includes whole committees unanimously [supporting](#) him and representatives [using](#) their private offices to collect citizens' endorsements of Sisi, stem from a mandate from Abdel 'Al were [dismissed](#) by the new spokesman for the House of Representatives. Support for other candidates has been minimal to nonexistent, however. Even representatives who have not declared support for Sisi [reportedly](#) ignored requests for meetings and endorsements from current presidential candidate Khaled Ali and withdrawn candidate Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat.

Representatives in Presidential Race:

While the House of Representatives has focused primarily on endorsing presidential candidates, several individuals with ties to the legislature have personally involved themselves with the race. Current Representative Mortada Mansour [announced](#) his intention to run for the presidency. It should be noted that in the previous election he also said that he intended to run but withdrew before campaigning began. Former representative Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat, who was voted out of parliament for leaking a draft of the controversial NGO Law, [withdrew](#) from the race for the presidency after spending the last six months as a rumored candidate. Ahmed Shafiq—the chairman of the National Movement Party, which holds [four](#) seats in the House of Representatives—also [withdrew](#) from the race last week.

Perspectives on Elections Monitoring:

A number of representatives, including leading members of the Human Rights Committee, have also preemptively denigrated the idea of foreign monitoring and coverage of the elections. Their arguments against this [have typically](#) centered on the idea that these organizations add nothing to the election because they are funded by hostile foreign entities seeking to undermine the state. According to the most recent [statement](#) by the National Elections Commission, no foreign organization has applied to monitor the election yet.

Reaction to New York Times Article:

On January 6, David Kirkpatrick published an [article](#) in the *New York Times* that claimed a member of the Egyptian security services had contacted several Egyptian media members to instruct them to put a positive spin on United States President Donald Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. Several representatives, including Saad Hassassein, who was named in the article, said that by running this story, the *New York Times* was attempting to undermine the [Egyptian state](#), its [political stability](#), and its [image](#). Representative Tariq al-Khouli [characterized](#) the article as part of the news organization's long and black history of attacking Egypt, which Hassassein [claims](#) stems from the organization's war on the state since June 2013 and its funders in Turkey, Qatar, and international terrorist groups. There have been [calls](#) within the legislature for the Egyptian government to sue the *New York Times* over the article, and Representative Muhammad al-Koumi said that he is gathering signatures to submit an official complaint to the Inter-Parliamentary Union against the news organization.

Other Developments

In Legislation:

When quorum was finally achieved this week, the House [approved](#) amendments to the Civil Status Law that [make](#) it mandatory for citizens to register their updated information at government offices that provide them with various social welfare services and benefits. Citizens will have one year from when the law is published in the Official Gazette to comply with new regulations, or they risk seeing services—such as bread and commodity subsidies—suspended, in addition to facing a fine of 1,000 to 5,000 Egyptian pounds (LE).

The House [approved](#) the fourth extension of the national state of emergency in the past year. It is set to go into force on January 13.

The House [approved](#) amendments to the Penal Code that increase the legal penalties for abducting or kidnapping children. Depending on the circumstances of the disappearance, perpetrators could face sentences of seven years to life in prison. The death penalty may also be invoked if the kidnapper commits a felony against a woman or a child who has been taken.

The legislature [approved](#) amendments to the Agriculture Law that increases the penalties for building on agricultural land to sentences of two to five years in prison and fines ranging from LE100,000 to LE5 million. The penalties for unauthorized cotton ginning were also increased to at least two years in prison and fines of LE10,000 to LE50,000.

The legislature [approved](#) the government's amendments to the Prison Law, which [sets](#) the [parameters](#) for the conditional release of convicted prisoners who have served at least half their prison sentence.

During its weekly meeting, the cabinet [agreed](#) to a draft National Council for Persons with Disabilities Law and a [draft](#) Unified Building Law. Both will be sent to the House of Representatives for debate.

In Session:

The House of Representatives [approved](#) in principle a draft Bankruptcy Law and a [draft General Body for Manufacturing Development Law](#). Each of these drafts require a final vote in front of a general session of parliament that has achieved quorum for them to become law.

The Suggestions and Complaints Committee [sent](#) Representative Bassem Felaifil's draft National Commission for Health Care and Hospitals Law to the Health Affairs Committee for further discussion.

Abdel 'Al [postponed](#) a general session discussion on the amendments to the Documentation and Registration Fees Law after several representatives [objected](#) to it.

A delegation of representatives [visited](#) Pope Tawadros II at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral to wish him and the Coptic Orthodox Church a merry Christmas. The delegation included Abdel 'Al, al-Sayyid al-Ashraf, Saad al-Gamal, Alaa Abed, Abdel Hadi al-Qasbi, Margaret Azer, Marion Azer, and Mona Mina.

Abdel 'Al and Social Solidarity Committee Chairman Abdel Hadi al-Qasbi [met](#) with a delegation from the Bahraini parliament, during which committee members said that the security of Bahrain is a red line for Egypt.

The Health Affairs Committee [visited](#) two hospitals in Qalyubia to follow up on statements by representatives.

Representative Muhammad al-Orabi [said](#) that a delegation from the legislature met with Robert Karem, U.S. deputy secretary of defense, to have him pass on to the Pentagon their total rejection

of the memo in the U.S. Congress on Coptic rights. Additionally, the Foreign Relations Committee reportedly finished its response to the memo.

In News and Statements:

Abdel 'Al responded to Representative Anisa Hassouna's request to have the body publish more information on its actions and achievements by saying that the House of Representatives is not beholden to external forces. However, Abdel 'Al did announce that Representative Salah Hasiballah would serve as the official spokesman for the House. Abdel 'Al reportedly made this decision to protect the body from the attacks against it in the media. He also cautioned representatives against passing information about the legislature to journalists. After his appointment, Hasiballah announced that the body would sue Hazem Abdel Azim over his defamation of representatives and parliament.

Nation's Future Party member Rashdi Wafqi won the seat of late representative Herqel Wafqi, his relative, in a fairly close race in Gerga.

Abdel 'Al threatened to punish representatives who use their social media accounts to criticize the government and its dealings.

Looking Ahead

- The number of representatives supporting Sisi's unannounced candidacy for the reelection has likely reached its ceiling, after the Wafd and Tagammu parties announced their endorsement of Sisi. The only other unannounced groups are the Nour Party, the 25-30 Bloc, and a few unaffiliated representatives. Endorsements from representatives are not an absolute necessity for candidacy, though.
- The tendency of the House of Representatives to denigrate foreign organizations, particularly in media and civil society (including recent vitriol against bodies such as the *New York Times*, Human Rights Watch, and the *Economist*, as well as preemptive statements against foreign monitors), as undermining Egypt suggests further advocacy against the participation of foreign organizations in monitoring the presidential elections. However, outside of introducing and passing new legislation on the matter, the House of Representatives has no official power to impact such decisions, which are specifically under the purview of the National Elections Commission.



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EGYPT **PARLIAMENT WATCH**

Egypt Parliament Watch is the most comprehensive project on Egypt's elected legislature, providing analysis of the body's performance in fulfilling its constitutionally mandated tasks, the legislation it produces, and the political dynamics at play.