

The Muslim Brotherhood Will Fight On

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Given the Brotherhood and the military's mutually exclusive aims, Egypt's death-match will continue, with even deadlier stakes once Sisi becomes president.

The following is part of a New York Times "Room for Debate" discussion on stability vs. democracy in Egypt. Read the other contributions [on the Times website](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/01/27/stability-versus-democracy-in-egypt)

[\(<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/01/27/stability-versus-democracy-in-egypt>\)](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/01/27/stability-versus-democracy-in-egypt).

Field Marshal Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi's all-but-certain election as Egypt's next president will sharpen the kill-or-be-killed dynamic that has defined Egyptian politics since July, when the military responded to mass protests and impending state breakdown by ousting President Mohamed Morsi. Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood and its approximately 500,000 members actively and openly call for Sisi's death -- and Sisi will thus likely view the survival of his presidency as depending on more, and more severe, repression.

Of course, the odds are stacked heavily against the Brotherhood in this struggle, since it lacks the state's repressive capabilities. And yet it will likely continue its fight for two reasons.

First, the Brotherhood is structured for survival, and doesn't fear elimination that might force it to back down. At its core, the Brotherhood is a rigidly hierarchical vanguard, with a nationwide chain of command in which top leaders deliver orders down to small cells of members that are scattered throughout Egypt. While many Brotherhood leaders are in prison, the cells are largely intact -- particularly in the countryside -- and new lines of communication have been established with leaders in hiding or exile. The Brotherhood used this vast network to win every post-Mubarak election until Morsi's ouster, and seemingly intends to use it to continue its strategy of confrontational protests for some time.

Second, the Brotherhood is convinced that, despite what the polls say, public support is largely on its side. This unrealistic outlook stems from a central assumption of the Brotherhood's ideology: it views a non-Islamic state in

Egypt as an unnatural state of affairs imposed by Western-influenced "secular" actors, and therefore views its own pursuit of an Islamic state as reflecting the true popular will of a 90-percent-Muslim-majority Egypt. The Brotherhood thus believes that "reversing the coup" would yield its immediate return to power, so it is inclined to keep fighting.

Indeed, while international calls for more inclusive politics and reconciliation are well-intended, they are unlikely to be heeded in the near future. On account of both its structure and ideology, the Brotherhood expects to prevail -- and, as the Brotherhood demonstrated repeatedly during Morsi's year in power, those who expect to win rarely compromise. Given the Brotherhood and Sisi's mutually exclusive aims, Egypt's death-match will thus continue, with even higher and more deadly stakes once Sisi becomes president.

Eric Trager is the Wagner Fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

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