

Mohamed Morsi, Muslim Brotherhood 'party consensus candidate' in Egypt, dies after six years in jail

Egypt's first freely elected president failed to allay fears his party was laying the groundwork for theocracy.

by [Taylor Luck](#) in the [July 17, 2019](#) issue



Mohamed Morsi. [Some rights reserved](#) by Wilson Dias/ABr.

([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first freely elected president, who died during a courtroom appearance June 17, was remembered by some as a leader who could not live up to the task of pulling Egypt from decades of dictatorship into a 21st-century democracy.

Morsi struggled to fit the bill as "Egypt's George Washington" following the 2011 popular overthrow of Hosni Mubarak.

A soft-spoken engineer who completed his PhD at the University of Southern California, Morsi was neither a firebrand nor an innovator and not known for having the common touch. He rose through the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, then Egypt's largest opposition movement, by keeping his head down and following orders with unwavering loyalty.

"He is a party man, not a politician," many of his Brotherhood peers said in private during the country's 2012 elections.

The Brotherhood put forward Morsi as a party consensus candidate. He had no checkered past and had uttered no controversial statements that would alienate liberals or Christians. In the final runoff he received 51.7 percent of the vote.

With the Brotherhood controlling parliament and the presidency, Morsi followed a winner-take-all approach to democracy. Time and again, he either refused or failed to build ties with secularists, leftists, and nationalists or allay their fears that the Brotherhood was laying the groundwork for an Egyptian theocracy.

Mass protests erupted over his rule in June 2013. A military coup forced him out of office weeks later.

Morsi would spend the next six years in jail facing multiple show trials for murder and espionage. It was during the latest session in an espionage trial that he collapsed and died. He had been held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and denied medical treatment for diabetes and high blood pressure, his family said.

His political downfall provided a road map to movements elsewhere. Two years after Tunisia's revolution, when leftists and secularists protested en masse against the ruling Brotherhood-inspired Ennahda party, Tunisian Islamists stepped down from the government and formed a coalition with other parties.

The Brotherhood in Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco have since found common ground with liberals and leftists by focusing on electoral reform, corruption, and economic justice. Most recently, Algerian and Sudanese democratic activists have refused to leave the streets after toppling their strongmen to ensure their militaries complete the transition to civilian rule.

Such considerations were not at the forefront of Morsi's thinking. He had a steadfast belief that his love for country, much like his love for the party, was all that was needed for success. In his closing statement in his last court appearance, Mr. Morsi quoted a poem: "My country, even if it fought me, is dear to me. My people, even if they resented me, are honorable."

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "People: Mohamed Morsi."