



The poll was in danger last week as unrest gripped the country, but military ruler Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi has stuck to the schedule and called for a large turnout.

The formerly banned Muslim Brotherhood, a moderate Islamist group, is widely expected to emerge as the largest power when results are published on January 13.

Hardline Islamists, secular parties and groups representing the interests of the former Mubarak regime are all expected to win seats, raising the prospect of a highly fragmented and ideologically split new Parliament.

"For most Arabs, the primary examples of democratic processes in the Arab world are in Iraq and Lebanon," said Bruce Rutherford, a Middle East specialist and author on Egypt at the US-based Colgate University.

"In both cases, elections produced weak, fragmented, and largely ineffectual governments. If Egypt produces the same result, then the appeal of democracy in the region may be weakened. However, if the Egyptian experience is positive ... the effect could be very powerful."

