

Egypt's presidential candidates pledge to boost science

Research investment is key to development strategies.

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As Egyptians prepare to vote in next month's presidential elections (23-24 May), many candidates have promised new strategies for science, technology and innovation, and pledged to increase government expenditure on research.

The frontrunner, the independent candidate Amr Moussa, has told *SciDev.Net* he will increase the national research budget to "two per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2016" if elected.

"In my first 100 days as a president I will mandate the Supreme Council for Science and Technology and the Ministry of Scientific Research to develop a national strategy for scientific research, with objectives and clear priorities linked to the priorities of development of the state, and plans to support the competitiveness of the Egyptian economy globally," he told *SciDev.Net*.

Mohamed Morsy, the candidate for the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party, also promised to boost the proportion of GDP spent on science research to two per cent.

"Morsy's main focus will target reforming the system of scientific research to help it [generate] marketable products", Yasser Ali, Morsy's presidential campaign coordinator, told *SciDev.Net*, adding that an FJP president would work towards "localising science" and linking it to industry. Non-governmental organisations with an interest in science would also be strengthened.

Morsy was initially a back-up candidate to the Muslim Brotherhood's Khairat El-Shater, but is now the party's main candidate after El-Shater was disqualified from standing, along with nine other candidates, by the Election Commission on 14 April.

Significantly higher proportions of GDP investment have been promised by two other candidates – the moderate Islamist, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, and Hamdeen Sabahi, the leader of the Nasserist Dignity Party.

Aboul Fotouh is on the record as saying that science and technology in Egypt must engage more fully with the developed world, and is understood to have plans to raise the national science research budget to six per cent of GDP during his time in office.

Khaled ElSherbini, Aboul Fotouh's scientific advisor, told *SciDev.Net* that "the huge [increase] in the scientific research budget will be allocated to few large national projects instead of dividing budgets and efforts across many small research projects", adding that "agricultural research, and transferring technology to renewable energy" would be the main areas of focus.

Sabahi has also said that a six per cent GDP investment in science is justified "given that scientific research [must be at] the forefront of intellectual and systematic planning for the future of any country".



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okesman, told *SciDev.Net* that Sabahi will rely on research to help set the country's future directions and solve structural problems.

Alaa Edris, chairman of the Scientific Research Committee at the Misr El-Kheir Foundation, a non-profit sustainable development agency, told *SciDev.Net* that the candidates might find it difficult to convince ordinary voters of the importance of boosting research investment.

"Unfortunately, scientific research is not on the average voter's agenda. It is out of their minds when [they are] evaluating candidates," he said, adding that "most Egyptian voters still don't see the link between science and development, so it will be the next president's role to show this link".

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