Islamism Now

How the January 25 Revolution Changed Political Islam in Egypt

By Ibrahim El-Houdaiby

Egypt's revolution is transforming the country's Islamist landscape. The first wave of protests, which lasted for eighteen days and successfully ousted President Hosni Mubarak after three decades in office, triggered revolutionary changes within the country's Islamist movement. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), Egypt's largest organized political group, serves as a good example. The group—which stood united despite (or because of) oppression for long decades—witnessed major transformations in just a few months. After years of of insisting on the all-encompassing nature of the organization, it was only a few days after Mubarak's ousting that the group announced its intention to establish an independent political party and to retreat from politics and focus on social activities.

The MB-aligned Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was soon established, and its leaders had to resign from the MB's executive council. The party's platform avoided controversial stances adopted earlier by the draft manifesto released by the Brotherhood in 2007, including banning women and Copts from running for president. Within a few months, and parallel to the establishment of the FJP, some major splits took place within the MB; most important was the dismissal of Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, the group's iconic reformist leader, after he announced his candidacy for president. This was followed by the dismissal of many young cadres who had played a role during the eighteen days in Tahrir Square and who later came to form their own party: the Egyptian Current.

Revolutionary impact was not limited to the MB. Traditionally apolitical Salafi groups began to seek a political role in revolutionary Egypt. With no significant participation in the early days of protests, some Salafi groups joined the uprising a few days before Mubarak stepped down. Their politicization became more obvious later, when they

started institutionalizing their political activities and formed different political parties the potential of which is yet to be seen.

Attempting to understand these changes requires proper scrutiny of both movements' internal dynamics and ideology, as well as the governing external context. Two sets of variables affect Islamist movements' political outlook: perceived identity threat and political opportunity. The definition of the former varies due to differences in ideological orientation and political maturity, and its presence leads to Islamists' increased detachment from society and—consequently—their stagnation and unity. The latter, on the contrary, leads to inclusion and attachment that breeds diversity stemming from the emergence of more sophisticated forms of affiliation to Islamic identity. Post-revolutionary Islamism is therefore likely to witness further sliding transformation that will eventually lead to the transcendence of identity-based Islamism and the emergence of a new wave of diverse, policy-based Islamist activism.

The landscape of Islamist organizations prior to the Egyptian revolution was comprised of five main groups. First among them was the official religious establishment, at the heart of which lies Al-Azhar. Despite its legacy of centuries of scholarship, the institution had been increasingly disempowered and discredited since the 1950s. The MB, established in the late 1920s, represents along with its offshoots the second key player in the pre-revolution Islamist domain, being the country's largest opposition group and the world's oldest Islamist group. Third was the Salafi trend, which has been on the ascent in Egypt since the 1970s. Despite having a handful of institutional incubators, Salafism remains a largely social movement, with the vast majority of Salafis not being attached to any organization prior to the revolution. Fourth were the Sufi orders. While dominating the socio-religious scene until the turn of the nineteenth century, Sufi orders have been on the decline ever since, as they have come increasingly under the control of the state and lost social legitimacy. Neoliberal Islam—manifested in the discourse and audience of new preachers—represents the last group of pre-revolutionary Islamist actors. The trend emerged in Egypt in the 1990s and developed a strong presence among urban upper-middle classes. Other groups, including Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiya and Al-Jihad, were significant during the 1980s and 1990s, but have been on the decline ever since, and have established close ties with either Salafi or MB groups.

Neoliberal Islam
The trend of neoliberal Islam emerged with the emergence of 'new preachers' in the 1990s. With fewer scholarly qualifications and less training, a more modern facade, moderate discourse, and strong interpersonal skills, new preachers were "thick on ritual and remarkably thin on dissent," focusing primarily on "personal salvation, ethical enhancement and self-actualization."[1] Televangelist preachers soon became

popular among the conservative upper middle classes. Operating on the same modern, materialist paradigm of Salafism, advocates of neoliberal Islam stressed integration more than identity, leading to a complete shift in discourse that matched their audience, which was "inclined toward a piety that could accommodate their privilege and power."[2] Their discourse provided a 'safe alternative' for conservative upper-middle-class families and the Islamist business community.[3] On the one hand, a focus on morality and individual salvation meant detachment from the 'un-Islamic' aspects of their 'globalized' lifestyle. On the other hand, the Protestant-like neoliberal discourse provided them with enough legitimacy to sustain their lifestyle and retain their social networks despite their new religiosity. In other words, new preachers advocated a form of Islam that provided its followers with "safe religiosity which entails no confrontation with the state or society."[4]

Guided by audience interests, new preachers adopted an apolitical discourse that focused on charity and development efforts. Over the past decade, a few attempts have been made by some new preachers to step into the political domain. These attempts were met with fierce opposition from the regime, which attempted to use new preachers as a stabilizing force, both because they operated within the dominant neoliberal paradigm and hence provided the regime with Islamic legitimacy, and because their charitable and development activities compensated for the regime's failures at a very low political price, especially when compared to the MB. New preachers and their neoliberal Islamic audience were therefore operating on the margins of politics, focused more on covering the regime's shortcomings than on challenging the regime or questioning its very legitimacy. This stance has consistently put neoliberal Islamists at odds with other Islamists, who have deemed them to be government elements that corrupt Islam. While the neoliberal preachers, who were focused on integration, had programs on liberal satellite channels, other Islamists, who focused on identity, were increasingly retreating from this public sphere, choosing to present their shows on 'Islamist' satellite channels. Eventually, new preachers were not welcome to appear on Islamist channels, and were left with no option but to increasingly side with the regime's business cronies and other elements maintaining the status quo. Their neoliberal discourse, lack of scholarly qualifications, focus on integration (which seemed to jeopardize or dilute their Islamist identity), and mild stance toward the regime have provoked Sufis, Azharis, Salafis, and Muslim Brothers respectively. Criticism by these groups delegitimized the new preachers, who with their audience were then pushed further away from the other Islamists. Conflict between the new preachers and other Islamist groups escalated in the months preceding the revolution. Being more attached to the regime, some new preachers supported the ruling National Democratic Party candidates against the MB in the 2010 parliamentary elections, further widening this schism.

The Salafi Movement

Scholars argue that Salafism is "par excellence a modern phenomenon and the result of the objectification of religion."[5] Egypt's first wave of Salafism came in the early twentieth century at the hands of Sheikh Hamed Al-Fiqi, who established Gam'iyyat Ansar Al-Sunna in 1926 with the intention of reviving 'orthodox' Islam. While that planted the movement's first seeds, it was only in the 1970s that Salafism became a popular movement. A few reasons contributed to the Salafi rise. Besides the disempowerment of Al-Azhar, Egypt's 1967 defeat in the war against Israel created an identity crisis, which caused many Egyptians to turn to Islamism. During his presidency, Anwar Sadat encouraged Salafism as an apolitical discourse that would nonetheless delegitimize both Nasserists and Muslim Brothers, especially after the latter reorganized. The return of Egyptian workers and professionals who had exiled themselves to the Gulf during Nasser's presidency further contributed to the rise of Salafism, alongside the 'petrodollar effect.' (The term 'petrodollar effect' refers to the sponsorship of religious textbooks and the like by rich Gulf States, and the resulting export of Salafi ideology.)

Salafism grew in Egypt as a 'new social movement.' Instead of relying on an organization—as the MB did—Salafis relied on a multi-polar network of preachers, largely connected to Saudi Wahhabi scholars.[6] While the number of organizations proliferated, only a few had real significance. Most important are the Ansarul-Sunna organization—with branches all over Egypt—and Al-Da'wa Al-Salafiya in Alexandria (DSA). Due to the way it was revived under Sadat, Salafism had no significant political presence; its role was limited to the socio-religious domains. Most Salafi scholars preached political quietism and kept themselves away from the contentious issues, focusing instead on ritual and individual salvation in their proselytizing. The attacks of September 11, 2001, swiftly transformed their relationship with the Egyptian regime, as their intellectual ties with Salafi jihadists were more closely scrutinized, leading to aggressive interrogation and recurrent imprisonment for Salafi leaders and members.

With the evident failure of Mubarak's regime in the months preceding the 2011 revolution, socio-religious tensions emerged which triggered the politicization of Salafis. Lack of transparency and rule of law transformed the tensions which surrounded the case of Kamilia Shehata in September and October 2010 into serious religious strife, where Salafi antagonism was targeted at the Church instead of the failed state.[7] It was only a few months later that terrorist attacks targeted a Coptic church in Alexandria, a Salafi stronghold, on New Year's Eve. State Security soon assumed a link between earlier Salafi protests and these attacks, and hundreds of Salafi activists were rounded up and held in custody. Some were seriously tortured during interrogation, and one follower of DSA—Sayed Belal—died in prison.

Fearing a confrontation with the regime, key DSA figures decided not to join the protests denouncing the murder of Belal. Only a few days later—and following the ousting of President Ben Ali in Tunisia—Abdel Moneim Al-Shahhat, DSA spokesman, made a statement rejecting calls for protests on January 25, raising questions about the organizers' aims and insisting that they would cause more damage to the Salafis and to the country.[8] DSA and other Salafi groups maintained their hostility towards revolutionaries until the second week of protests.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The MB is Egypt's largest opposition group, and the world's oldest existing Islamist movement. Over time, at least four different schools of thought, or what could be seen as ideological leanings, have come to coexist within the MB.[9] First is the founder's school: a relatively modernist school that existed on the margins of Al-Azhar in the early twentieth century. It rejects *turath* (the accumulated heritage of Islamic knowledge) as the defining authority, and calls for a return to the Quran and Sunna as original sources, and to practicing *ijtihad* (independent judgment) with guidance rather than with slavish adherence to the ideas in *turath*. Second is the traditionalist school, championed by Al-Azhar's long history of scholarship. It is characterized by heavy reliance on *turath* and acceptance of the full authenticity of the four main Sunni schools of jurisprudence. The traditionalist school also promotes the notion of 'balanced identity,' arguing that each individual belongs to different circles of affiliation, including schools of jurisprudence and theology, Sufi order, hometown, profession, guild, family, and so on. Qutbism, the third school, is characterized by its highly politicized and revolutionary interpretation of the Quran, which divides people into those who belong to/support Islam/Islamism and those who oppose it, with no gray areas in between. This school emphasizes the necessity of developing a detached vanguard that focuses on recruitment and ways to empower the organization while postponing all intellectual questions. While hardcore Qutbism opens doors for political violence, Qutbis within the MB follow a demilitarized version of the ideology, clearly distancing themselves from notions of *takfir* (disbelief) and violence. The Salafi/Wahhabi school made its way to the MB (and to broader Egyptian society) in the 1970s, forming the fourth leaning within the organization. It is a modernist Islamist ideology that has minimal respect for *turath*, relying instead on "a direct interface with the texts of revelation," which leads to "a relatively shallow and limited hierarchy of scholarly authorities."[10] Salafism is characterized by a conservative reading of *sharia* because it relies on "a textual approach, which uses text more than wisdom and reason in understanding it, and adage more than opinion,"[11] leaving only small room for diversity. Salafi and Qutbi acceptance of notions like democracy and diversity are minimal, and they generally believe in a strong, broad central state that plays a major role in defining and upholding public morality.

The MB responded to years of threats and actual persecution by state authorities by developing a "pyramid-shaped hierarchy [which] ensures that members dutifully execute the aims of its national leadership at the local level."[12] Through its strategy of centralizing decision-making and decentralizing implementation, the MB has sought to sustain unity within the organization. Centralized decision-making was intended to keep disputes contained in limited domains, while decentralization was an attempt to avoid the possible consequences of security crackdowns, to create a sense of belonging and empowerment among members, and to develop members' executive capabilities. This was reflected in the group's recruitment and promotion criteria, which are based on standards of religious practice and organizational discipline. Observers note that "becoming a full-fledged Muslim Brother is a five-to-eight year process during which aspiring members are closely watched for their loyalty."[13]

Arguably, only a few principles kept the MB united as an organization despite the varied ideological leanings of its members: a belief that Islam is an all-encompassing system; rejecting violence as a means of political change in domestic politics; accepting democracy as a political system; consequently accepting political pluralism; and supporting resistance movements operating against foreign occupation.

This search for common grounds among the different MB factions had a structural impact on the Brotherhood. It led to the emergence of a heavy-weight organization, with exponentially growing membership and enormous room to maneuver due to the diversity of activities in which the group is engaged. Yet, with the high centralization of its decision-making, the MB was easily pressured by successive regimes who wanted to control its decisions. Over the course of decades, this led to the emergence of unspoken rules of engagement that enabled the MB to oppose the regime while not seriously challenging it.[14]

Over the past decade, the MB has had to undergo serious transformations. It was part of the opposition that united around a "common foreign policy agenda" following the Palestinian Intifada in 2000 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Its domestic agenda has also increasingly prioritized democracy since 2005. After the Brotherhood secured 20 percent of parliamentary seats in the 2005 elections, it faced a vicious crackdown from the regime. This swift change from inclusion to exclusion sparked dissent among members as they became more focused on questions of policy and reform. While some chose to resign, others remained in the group and added their critical discourse to its internal dynamics.

Another wave of Brotherhood changes came from within. In mid-2009, former chairman Mahdi Akef announced his decision to step down. This was significant not just because of the precedent it set, but also because Akef was the last MB leader with the historical legitimacy gained by joining the group at an early stage and working directly with its founder. Mohammed Badie, Akef's successor, who follows the Qutbi tendency, belongs to another generation that lacks the gravitas of Akef and his predecessors,[15] a

quality which had helped them to resolve internal disputes within the MB. Without this authority among its leaders, it became more difficult for the MB to postpone intellectual and political debates while maintaining unity, particularly in light of the narrow decision-making structures and the absence of proper internal governance structures.[16]

The subsequent executive council elections took the competition between different MB factions to another level. Elections took place in a context of exclusion, where the regime was fiercely cracking down on the organization and the path for integration seemed occluded. The Salafi-Qutbi faction—being the most powerful, as it was operating in its ideal historical moment—adopted an exclusionary position, fearing that diversity in decision-making would lead to organizational splits. The newly elected executive council did not include key reformist figures like Aboul Fotouh and Mohammed Habib, the former deputy chairman. The chairman's selection of deputies also reflected this trend: all three belonged to the Salafi–Qutbi school.

The new leadership was soon faced with a wide range of challenges. The start of 2010 saw the return of Mohammad ElBaradei, former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the establishment of the National Association for Change (NAC). The MB's political calculation inspired it to keep one foot in time with ElBaradei and the NAC, who were focused on challenging the regime, and the other in line with its own social activities.[17] The year ended with parliamentary elections in which the MB won no seats, which had a serious impact on its membership. Having no parliamentary representatives for the next five years meant that street presence was the only way for the organization—officially outlawed—to remain heard. This, in turn, meant that the MB needed to move one step closer to the NAC and other opposition groups. Occlusion of political opportunity was met with despair and helplessness by senior MB members, but the reaction of MB juniors was fury—and this anger was soon transformed into hope with the ousting of Ben Ali in Tunisia.

Conclusions on the Pre-Revolutionary Scene

Islamists were generally excluded from the Egyptian polity prior to the 2011 revolution. Not a single Islamist political group was legally recognized, and tolerance for their extralegal integration was dictated by the regime's need for legitimacy. During the 1980s, Mubarak's regime "needed a measure of legitimacy to help it maintain stability,"[18] and sought it partially by tolerating nonviolent groups. Islamists—primarily the MB—exploited the opportunity by strengthening their organization and securing de facto legitimacy by participating in parliamentary, student union, and syndicate elections. Other symptoms of Islamic ascent included the rise of a 'parallel Islamic sector,' which "had begun to coalesce in the interstices of Egypt's authoritarian state,"[19] and an unprecedented boom in the number of private mosques and Islamic associations, as well

as growth of a parallel Islamic banking sector. Islamic revival had "reached its peak by the early 1990s."[20] Islamists started "politicizing their achievements of social legitimacy in society,"[21] which contributed to the gradual erosion of the regime's legitimacy.

The Islamists' threat to the regime's legitimacy inspired a strategic transformation during the 1990s: while crushing radical Islamists, the regime resorted to less violent measures to sideline moderates. Components of the exclusion strategy included "divide-and-rule tactics to break the ranks of the opposition and prevent sustainable alliance building between Islamists and non-Islamists," and adopting policies that "significantly raised the costs of cooperation with Islamists."[22] This was coupled with crackdowns on Islamist strongholds, including student unions, syndicates, private mosques, the banking sector, and private enterprise. The alignment of some secularitsts with the regime legitimized these efforts, leading to both the exclusion of Islamists and the emergence of a dual public sphere phenomenon that defined both the political and socio-religious domains. The exclusion of moderate Islamists created space for more extreme elements to flourish. Apolitical Salafism capitalized on its historical moment and grew steadily—alongside neoliberal Islam—during the second half of the 1990s. This, in turn, led to further divisions between Islamist and non-Islamist opposition factions.

The new millennium witnessed the ascent of a new generation to the frontlines of Egyptian politics. Disenchanted with established political divisions, this generation (usually referred to as the '1970s generation') was more focused on issues of national consensus. Its ascent increased "the prospects for effective alliance building… [as activists] demonstrated a greater propensity for pragmatism and compromise, despite their varying ideological commitments."[23] Islamists belonging to this generation were challenging the tactics of their respective organizations and their focus on divisive identity politics instead of uniting lines to achieve nationwide goals. Operating against the backdrop of their own historical moment, these activists were increasingly marginalized within Islamist circles, only to regain their influence in post-revolutionary Egypt.

Islamists in the Revolution

Inspired by Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor whose self-immolation sparked that country's revolution, a few Egyptians set themselves on fire in front of the parliament, to protest their living conditions and the country's socioeconomic problems. Politicians and activists soon followed by calling for a massive demonstration on Police Day, January 25—a call which had different responses from different Islamist groups.

While some Salafi groups were fast in their denunciation of the call for protest (including the influential DSA), the relatively insignificant Salafi group Hafs issued a statement encouraging Egyptians to participate.[24] Consistent with the regime's

strategy to downplay the significance of calls to protest, Sufi orders and the official religious establishment remained silent.

The Brotherhood's reaction was more sophisticated. The group's leadership was cornered between two choices: extreme provocation of the regime, or detachment from the broader nationalist movement. It therefore issued three statements between January 15 and January 23 in escalating tones. The first statement congratulated the Tunisian people for the successful ousting of Ben Ali and called upon Arab regimes to "listen to the voice of wisdom" from their people calling for reform; the second statement, issued January 19, included a ten-point roadmap for reform to be enacted immediately; the third condemned the interrogation and threats faced by MB leaders being pressured to boycott the protests, and called for dialogue.[25] While these official statements remained ambiguous about the degree of the group's own participation, a group of MB youth members were quick to endorse the protest calls and begin rallying for the cause.

The turnout on January 25 exceeded expectations and thereby altered the political calculation of the various parties. Between January 25 and 28, the co-opted official religious institution and politically inexperienced Salafis were slow to react, while the MB was modifying its position around the clock. In a statement on January 26, the Brotherhood asserted that its members were participating in their personal capacity and that the regime should "comply to people's will,"[26] and on the eve of January 28, the group announced its endorsement of the calls for nationwide demonstrations. The regime responded by preemptively arresting a large number of key MB leaders and activists, including a handful of executive council members.

Islamists responded differently to the unprecedented clashes that took place on January 28, and their shocking death toll. Despite its conservative nature, the MB's political experience facilitated a swift change of rhetoric. Four increasingly strident statements were made between January 29 and February 1, the last outspokenly calling for Mubarak to step down. Meanwhile, a statement issued by the DSA on January 30 condemned the "destruction of public property," while not declaring a stance vis-à-vis the protests, a position that the group maintained in its statement following Mubarak's second television appearance. Again, the official religious establishment and Sufi orders remained largely silent.

When Mubarak addressed the nation in his second televised speech, following the million man march on February 1, he made some minor concessions.[27] He offered a roadmap for change that was more aligned with Islamists' conservative thinking, as the apparent 'unconstitutionality' of his stepping down made calls for him to do so seem irrational, especially given the absence of a clear alternative. The official establishment used the pro-Mubarak demonstrations that followed this speech to confirm its loyalty to the regime. Both the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar and the Grand Mufti issued

statements hailing the president's speech and the changes it promised. The Sufi establishment remained silent, although some Sufi sheikhs and Al-Azhar scholars joined the protests, giving rise to dissent within the institutions upon which the regime depended.

The positions taken by the MB during this period reflected an internal divide. On-the-ground activists played an instrumental role in defending revolutionaries when thugs attacked Tahrir Square the following day; they chanted alongside other protesters and rejected talks with regime officials, thereby moving closer to the core of the revolutionary movement. The MB leadership, however, was shaken by Vice President Omar Suleiman's carrot-and-stick interview in which he offered the Brotherhood a seat in negotiations while accusing it of political opportunism and jeopardizing the country's national interests. The MB statement of February 3 reflected a return to their earlier conservative position: while it clearly rejected the regime's threats and endorsed the revolutionary demands, it opened the door to a "constructive, productive, and sincere dialogue," with the regime. The persistence of the revolutionaries was shaking the balance of power, however, and caused the retreat of MB leaders from talks with Suleiman after only one round.

Salafis emerged in support of the protests only a few days before Mubarak stepped down. Clearly departing from its earlier anti-revolutionary stance, the DSA issued two statements on February 2. While the first condemned violence by protesters, the second outlined a rather conservative roadmap for reform that including abolishing the Emergency Law, combating corruption, and hiring the competent and the pious. A few iconic Salafi figures began to appear at protests.[28] The official religious establishment remained all the while silent, while facing serious pressure from those among its scholars who joined the demonstrators.

Immediate Revolutionary Impact on Islamists

The eighteen days preceding Mubarak's fall had a deep impact on the Islamists who took part in protests. Most significantly, it pushed them beyond the borders of identity politics. Through their interactions with other groups and activists, Islamists realized that their social and political counterparts were not hostile toward Islam, and that their agendas were not anti-Islamic. Although legal barriers to inclusion were removed, allowing the MB to form a legal political party, this inclusive dynamic lasted no longer than a few weeks. A few days after Mubarak's resignation, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) established a committee to draft constitutional amendments that would facilitate the transition process. The committee was headed by retired judge Tariq Al-Bishri and included a handful of judges and law professors, as well as Subhi Salih, lawyer and former MB parliamentarian.[29] While the MB accepted the proposed roadmap, other political groups remained opposed. Soon, the procedural debate was transformed into

an ideological one: supporters of the amendments were considered Islamists; those who opposed it were branded anti-Islamists. This re-polarization revived the split in the public sphere, which in turn had its impact on Islamists.[30]

The short era of inclusion had a significant impact on all different Islamist groups, but most importantly on the MB, which had relied on identity politics to maintain its organizational unity. One week after Mubarak's fall, the Brotherhood declared its intention to establish a political party, and the FJP was born. While the nomination of leaders (all of whom were members of the MB executive council) raised serious questions about the party's autonomy, the establishment of a political party reflected a major shift in the group's political thinking.

The structure and leadership of the FJP was met with dismay by different reformist figures within the group. Ibrahim Al-Za'farani, Khaled Dawood, and Hamid Al-Dafrawi—three prominent reformist figures from Alexandria, all considered disciples of Aboul Fotouh—decided to split with the MB and form their own political party. Soon enough, and as they moved beyond identity politics, they realized that the question of religious moderation was not the only one governing the political domain: political orientation was also crucial. They consequently split into three different political groups: two consider themselves center-right (the Nahda and Riyada parties); the third (the Society of Peace and Development Party) considers itself center-left.

Younger members who had operated for a far shorter time in the context of oppression found it much easier to move beyond identity politics and to rediscover Egypt's political landscape in light of revolutionary inclusiveness. A first wave of protest came from a group of Cairene youth, who called for a nationwide conference for MB youth with workshops that would focus on two main themes: transforming the MB from an organization to an institution, and discussing different scenarios for the relationship between socio-religious and political activities.[31] This conference, held on March 26, was followed by the dismissal of key figures, young and old, who refused to join the FJP and formed their own parties, or who joined Aboul Fotouh's presidential campaign.[32]

If the moment of inclusion was the main trigger for change within the MB, it was a combination of perceived identity threat and political opportunity that altered Salafi dynamics. Dozens of secular activists gathered in a demonstration in late February and called for the second article of the constitution, establishing the principles of *sharia* as the primary source of legislation, to be amended. Salafis, who perceived this as a threat, responded with a massive demonstration after prayers in Abbasiya the following Friday—the first Salafi demonstration since January 25. The widening split in the public sphere that emerged during the referendum on constitutional amendments further politicized Salafis. With the MB supporting the amendments and most 'secular' political forces rejecting them, Salafis—operating on identity politics—decided

to side with the MB. This decision was further encouraged by some marginal voices on the 'No' campaign calling for the wholesale removal of Article 2, and other, more significant voices, basing their opposition to the amendments in the assumption that a 'Yes' vote would empower Islamists. Over 77 percent of Egyptians voted for the constitutional amendments. And instead of reading these figures as representing the broader public's choice of a less risky path to change, mainstream media insisted that the outcome reflected the overwhelming electoral power of Islamists. This, in turn, fed into the Salafis' perception of themselves and highlighted the opportunities that appeared to be associated with political integration. Initially, however, and aware of their political inexperience, Salafis were still hesitant to establish their own political parties and instead announced their support of the MB.[33]

Subsequent events, however, illustrated the divergence of MB and Salafi positions. The resurfacing of the case of Kamilia Shehata and the state's failure to resolve it provoked Salafis to demonstrate again, calling for the Shehata's release from 'church arrest.' Demonstrations in front of the Coptic Church in Abbasiya led to clashes between Salafi and Coptic youth. The silence of the MB provoked Salafis to pursue an independent political track. They started establishing their own political parties, most significantly Al-Noor Party (NP), which was affiliated with leaders of the DSA. Despite these moves, Salafis remained marginal on Egypt's political scene as the MB retained its hegemony over the political Islamist discourse. But, with the increasingly loud call by some secular intellectuals and public figures for a set of supra-constitutional articles, Islamists who viewed this as threat decided to respond. Salafis, resorting again to identity politics, magnified the practically nonexistent fear of the marginalization of *sharia*—the adoption of supra-constitutional articles that would restrict the application of *sharia*. And on July 29, hundreds of thousands of pro-Islamist activists responded to a call by the DSA for a demonstration in Tahrir Square opposing these supra-constitutional principles, and were joined by other Islamist factions including the MB.[34] The predominantly Salafi parade sent alarming signals to some political and social groups, who feared that a Salafi ascent would jeopardize their civil liberties and alter the political system in undesirable ways.

The ousting of Mubarak took Egypt's religious establishment by surprise. Its primary challenge in the revolution's aftermath was to regain both its political and its scholarly legitimacy. Al-Azhar's Grand Sheikh adopted a multidimensional strategy for personal and institutional re-legitimization. On the one hand, he reversed his position while insisting that he had always been a strong supporter of the revolution, citing incidents such as sending an imam to lead the Friday prayers in Tahrir Square as proof. To avoid scrutiny of these claims, a key component of his strategy was to divert attention to other issues. He formed a committee to revise the laws governing Al-Azhar, and pledged to revitalize the organization in order to enable it to regain

its position as a leading scholarly institution. This was welcomed by observers who feared Salafi assimilation into the institution after long years of institutional disempowerment. He also relied on independent credible experts to revisit laws regulating Al-Azhar and propose new legislation that would offer a wider margin of financial and administrative independence. A shift was also effected in the broader discourse, with Al-Azhar and the Grand Sheikh's bureau issuing statements supporting Arab revolutions and condemning the dictatorship of Arab regimes.

Meanwhile, Al-Azhar's efforts to increase its legitimacy as an academic institution were based on positioning itself as the guardian of religious authenticity and moderation, and the patriarch of Islamists. Hence it launched initiatives that brought together iconic figures from all Islamist groups, including Salafis and the MB. It also embarked on a discussion about the 'nature of the state,' which provoked significant debate in the public sphere. Al-Azhar contributed to this debate by issuing a declaration representing its perception of the role and nature of the state.[35] Egypt's Grand Mufti, who had initially waged intellectual battles against Salafis, later followed in the footsteps of the Grand Sheikh and hosted Salafi preachers in his office, emphasizing the need for unity and cooperation.

The Sufis, like the Salafis, were politicized as a result of the perceived threat to their identity. The split in the public sphere between Islamists and secularists catalyzed their politicization. Realizing there was an opportunity to oppose the Salafis on a more moderate and inclusive platform while still enjoying Islamist authenticity, Sufi orders began to increase their political presence.[36] Following a similar strategy to Al-Azhar, their politically active elements chose to align themselves more closely with secularists than with Islamists, since their identity was constantly threatened by their religious rivals, the Salafis. This rivalry was further fueled by the Salafis' show of force in the July 29 demonstration, which the Sufis avoided. To no one's surprise, the first Sufi political party was formed by the sheikh of the Azmiya order, who had been growing increasingly politicized in recent years. With little political experience and limited capacity to organize and mobilize, the party has not yet left the margins of Egypt's political landscape.

Islamists' Post-Revolutionary Challenges

The split in the public sphere has led to an identity-based polarization, with political actors characterized on one side as Islamist, and on the other, as secular. This polarization has had the effect of marginalizing serious questions of reform and policy which Islamists will have to face in post-revolutionary Egypt. These include the relationships between state and religion, authenticity and modernity, as well as the challenge of developing a coherent political program and the unprecedented empowerment of individuals within organizations.

Various scholarly attempts have been made to define the term 'secular' and assess how it relates to religious values. Of these attempts, perhaps the most important in the Egyptian context is that of Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri, who distinguishes between two layers of secularism: the procedural and the absolute. While procedural secularism amends procedures without challenging the governing value system, absolute secularism aims at constructing its own frame of reference, challenging the transcendental religious values that governed societies in pre-secular times. For Elmessiri, these forms exist on a continuum, with theocracies at one end, procedural secularism somewhere in the middle, and absolute secularism at the other end. This clustering has a much greater illustrative capacity than traditional Islamist-secular polarization. Arguably, the notion of 'absolute secularism' has only marginal (if any) presence in Egypt's public debate. The question is therefore not *whether* religion should have a role in the political system, but rather *how* this role should be managed, and which domains it should cover.

Islamists have responded differently to these questions. While Salafis refuse terms designed to bridge the gap (such as the 'civil state,' a vaguely defined term coined to end the secular-Islamist dichotomy, and intended to mean a state that is neither hostile towards religion nor theocratic), Sufis tend to bypass the entire question in their political discourse by avoiding any discussion on the matter. The MB and Al-Azhar, meanwhile, demonstrate higher levels of sophistication. With the experience of years of debate and discussion on the matter, the MB presented its vision for a 'civil state with an Islamic frame of reference.' While this articulation is still considerably vague, the group has successfully distanced itself from the traditional Salafi stance and is working hard to present itself as mainstream movement capable of acting as a bridge between both sides of the political spectrum.[37] Al-Azhar—with solid academic credentials, insufficient political experience, and a dire need to re-legitimize the institution—took part in the debate through its declaration on the political system. The declaration successfully grabbed the attention of both secular and Islamist activists, yet was harshly criticized by Islamists on both political and scholarly grounds.[38] An earlier attempt by Al-Azhar to approach this rather contentious question had been made by Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa before the revolution. Focusing on the 'uniqueness' of Egyptians' understanding of religion, Gomaa examined modern history arguing that "Egypt had not detached itself from Islam, but was only trying to respond to contemporary challenges" through its legislation.[39] He argued that the contemporary Egyptian legal system presents a successful model for a civil state that upholds *sharia*.

This question of the relationship between religion and politics will play an instrumental role in shaping the future for Islamist groups. The scholarly question of what constitutes *sharia* and the political question of how much the state—rather than the individual and society—should be involved in the application of *sharia* are likely to spark real debates amongst Islamists. Upcoming events will encourage Islamists to

scrutinize this relationship between religion and politics, and will eventually lead to the redefinition of the Islamist landscape.

Another major factor that will affect the future of Islamism is the authenticity-modernity dialectic. Long decades of exclusion from the polity have hindered Islamist scholarship in sociopolitical domains. However, since authenticity is such an integral component of Islamism, Islamists cannot simply discard authenticity and unconditionally accept modern notions such as democracy. If more politically experienced groups do so, they are criticized by less experienced, more stagnant ones as 'inauthentic,' and their 'Islamist legitimacy' is consequently jeopardized.

This authenticity-modernity dialectic is most clearly manifested in the relationship between neoliberal Islamists and all the others. While the neoliberals' unconditional pursuit of relevance to modern societies has boosted their popularity among globalized, modern segments of the society, their lack of focus on authenticity has almost completely discredited them among other Islamists.

Striking a balance between authenticity and sociopolitical relevance is a major challenge for different Islamist groups. Attitudes toward notions like 'democracy' and 'the state' reflect different groups' positions on the matter. Al-Azhar—the symbol of authenticity—issued a statement outlining the principles of an 'Islamically acceptable' political system. While the definition was widely accepted by different social groups and by intellectuals, signaling success on the moderation parameter, it was criticized by Islamists, and particularly by Salafis. More significantly, none of the Islamic activists or intellectuals were invited to the first round of talks and workshops that Al-Azhar held in the run-up to the publication of this key declaration. Arguably, Al-Azhar made a political calculation—influenced by long years of disempowerment and state control and the difficulty of fighting Islamists in the struggle for legitimacy—to side with other social actors, and to win the battle for religious authenticity and representation on non-Islamist grounds.

The MB, being the most experienced political Islamist group, approached the challenge differently. The group resorted to the writings of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi[40] and other credible scholars to justify its acceptance of a 'civil' state and emphasize the authenticity of that position. On other matters, including questions of public morality, the group's position remains vague, as they attempt to appease audiences on both sides. The separation of the FJP from the MB has given the group more room for political maneuvering, wherein the party could adopt a politically correct stance while the Brotherhood as a whole stresses religious authenticity.

The question of identity governs the Salafi approach to this dilemma. Salafi leaders seize every possible opportunity to highlight differences between their position and those of other sociopolitical forces—including other Islamists—always attempting to emphasize their own authenticity. On the question of the nature of the state, for instance,

they continue to reject the 'civil' state, promote the 'Islamic' state, and stress their rejection of democracy.[41] It is the lack of Al-Azhar's credibility that allows Salafis—arguably presenting less scholarly sound and religiously authentic stances—to play the identity card in post-revolutionary Egypt.

Sufis, meanwhile, have adopted a stance contradictory to that of Salafis. Attempting to emphasize their moderation—their key political strength—Sufis seem to endorse democracy while emphasizing their authenticity in other domains, including their reliance on Al-Azhar as a reference in religious practice. Consequently, their rhetoric is hardly competitive on Islamist grounds, as they make no serious attempts to authenticate their political stances. On the question of the nature of the state, they too emphasize their acceptance of the 'civil state' with equal citizenship rights for all citizens regardless of religion and gender. They do not, however, provide any religious authority for this stance.

Neoliberal Islamists, operating through Al-Hadara Party, have adopted more progressive political stances (in contrast to their conservative economic ones): one party spokesman announced his rejection of state intervention in cultural and moral affairs, and insisted that movies and art should not be censored.[42] Credibility of this discourse among Islamists is minimal as it is hardly viewed as religiously authentic.

Developing coherent political programs is a key challenge for Islamists in the aftermath of the revolution. While the current polarization of the Egyptian public sphere is causing the retreat of most into identity politics, some remain persistent in their focus on policy and reform. As events progress, however, more Islamists are likely to be forced out of identity politics. With the abolishment of legal barriers to participation and legal recognition already being granted to a handful of Islamist parties, public debate will eventually reshape alliances in a way that shifts the focus to policy rather than identity. Questions of economy and foreign policy, among others, will prove to be more important to Egypt's public debate than Islamist identity politics. Nonetheless, Islamist movements venturing beyond identity domains will have to be cautious as they move into these new fields. A too-sudden shift will cause it to lose its constituency, which would then resort to more rigid forms of Islamism.

The current scene suggests that Al-Azhar together with the more sophisticated elements of the MB would be better able to navigate this path than other Islamist groups. Al-Azhar's authenticity and historical legacy, alongside its pursuit of moderation and social reconciliation, with the MB's political experience and credibility among Islamists could serve toward that end. Nonetheless, the political thinking of the current MB leadership seems to be more concerned with identity and organization, and consequently allies itself with more conservative elements. This kind of alliance therefore seems unlikely.

Egypt's revolution has caused a major shift in the thinking of Islamist organizations. The pre-revolutionary context—with its identity politics, split public sphere, and state

oppression—led to the emergence of autocratic organizations, in which leaders wielded tremendous power. This power was challenged by the decision of individual members to join the mass protests, usually against the will of their leaders, as highlighted in earlier sections. This decision by MB youth altered the group's chain-of-command legitimacy, with events proving the youth to have been right. Small, marginal Salafi groups, and junior members of the more prominent ones, who joined the protest in its earlier days came to be viewed by Salafis as political lifesavers: preachers who had begun by denouncing the demonstrations later pointed to a few martyrs broadly identified as Salafis as evidence of Salafi participation. The same applies to junior Al-Azhar scholars who participated in the demonstrations from the beginning, as well as the former spokesman of the Grand Sheikh, who resigned and joined the protests. These and other incidents have challenged the governing perceptions of leadership and led to a redistribution of power within Islamist groups, whereby individual choice will have a major role in their decision-making and limit top-down authority. The power of initiative-taking has been inspired and magnified by the revolution, and poses a clear challenge to the leadership of Islamist factions.

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1-2   Asef Bayat. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.

3   Patrick Haenni and Husam Tammam. "Egypt's Air Conditioned Islam." *Le Monde Diplomatique,* 3 September 2003. http://mondediplo.com/2003/09/03egyptislam.

4   Ibrahim El-Houdaiby. "Trends in Political Islam in Egypt." In *Islamist Radicalisation: The Challenge for Euro-Mediterranean Relations,* edited by Michael Emerson, Kristina Kausch, and Richard Youngs, pp. 25–51. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies; Madrid: FRIDE, 2009.

5   Roel Meijer. introduction to *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement,* edited by Roel Meijer. London: Hurst and Company, 2009.

6   Wahhabism is a school of Islamism that follows Muhammad ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab. It calls for the rejection of accumulated *turath* (accumulated heritage of Islamic sciences) and the return to the original sources of Islam to understand them. It is widely viewed as rigid, and while it claims to represent orthodox Islam, its authenticity is contested by various competing schools, including Al-Azhar.

7   Kamilia Shehata was the wife of a Coptic priest who allegedly converted to Islam, but was held in custody by the regime before being sent back to the Church. Salafi groups started mobilizing their supporters and staged demonstrations calling for her 'release' from church.

8   Abdel Moneim Al-Shahhat, "Lan Nataraja', Lan Nustadraj, Lan Nuwazzaf," 19 January 2011, http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=5105.

9   For more on the MB's version of Qutbism, see Bayat 2007, 36–42, and Ibrahim El Houdaiby, "Four

Decades after Sayyid Qutb's Execution," *Daily Star Egypt,* 28 August 2008, http://dailystaregypt. com/article.aspx?ArticleID=16062.

10   Bernard Haykel. "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer. London: Hurst and Company, 2009.

11   Mohammad Emara, "*Tayarat Al-Fikr Al-Islamy.*" Cairo: Al Shorouk, 2008

12-13 Eric Trager. "The Unbreakable Muslim Brotherhood: Grim Prospects for a Liberal Egypt," *Foreign Affairs* 90, No. 5 (September/October), 2011.

14   For more on the 'rules of the game,' see, for example, Khalil Al-Anani, "Al-Nizam wa-l-Ikhwan fi Misr: Hal Tataghayyar Qawa'id Al-Lu'ba?," Al-Jazeera, 3 August 2009, http://www.aljazeera. net/ NR/exeres/D25AB80C-7A5B-41B9-893E-23A8FFCE1727.htm; and Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, "Al-Mawqef Al-Estrateigy li-l-Ikhwan," *Al-Shorouk,* 23 July 2010.

15   Sayed Zayed. "Hossam Tammam: Tayyar Al-Du'ah Al-Judud Lan Yantahi," *Al-Nahar,* 10 February 2010.

16   For more on the impact of leadership change in the MB, see Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, "Egypt's Brotherhood Faces Leadership Challenges," *Arab Reform Bulletin,* Carnegie Endowment, 10 November 2010, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2009/11/10/ egypt-s-brotherhood-faces-leadership-challenge/9k8.

17   Abigail Hauslohner, "Egypt's Opposition: Will the Islamists Join ElBaradei?," *TIME World,* 14 April 2010, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1981368,00.html.

18   Hesham Al-Awadi. *In Pursuit of Legitimacy: The Muslim Brothers and Mubarak, 1982-2000*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2005.

19   Carrie Rosefsky Wickham. *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*. New York: Columbia Press, 2002.

20   Bayat, 2007.

21   Al-Awadi, 2005.

22-23 Dina Shehata. "Islamists and Non-Islamists in Egyptian Opposition." In *Conflict, Identity and Reform in the Muslim World: Changes for U.S. Engagement*, pp. 309-26. Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2009.

24   Eman Abdelmonem, "Harakat Hafs Al-Salafiya Tad'u li-l-Musharaka Yawm 25 Yanayir Wa-Tu'Akkid: Al-Nizam Wasal li-Mada Ba'Id fi-l-Zulm," *Al-Dustur,* 20 January 2011, http://www.dostor. org/ politics/egypt/11/january/20/35443.

25-26 Amr Hamid Rabie. *Watha'iq 100 Yam 'ala Thawrat 25 Yanayer*. Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 2011.

27   In his televised statement, Mubarak made it clear that he would not be running for a sixth presiden-tial term, nor would his son Gamal run for the presidency. He also announced that he intended to make some constitutional changes.

28   Mohammed Hassan, an iconic Salafi television preacher, appeared in the square, and was inter- viewed by Al Arabiya on 31 January 2011: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZInCkm5vm8.

29   The committee suggested that nine articles of the constitution be amended, and that the transition begin with the election of a new parliament. That parliament would name a committee to draft a new constitution. A new president would be elected as a final step.

30   On the controversy preceding the referendum, see, for example, Salma Shukrallah, "Will Egypt Vote 'Yes' or 'No' to Constitutional Amendments?," Ahram Online, 15 March 2011, http://english.

ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/7707/Egypt/0/Will-Egypt-vote-Yes-or-No-to-constitutional-%20 %20amendm.aspx.

31   Hanaa Souliman, "The Muslim Brotherhood's New Guard Rocks the Boat," *Daily News Egypt,* 3 April 2011, http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/egypt/the-muslim-brotherhoods-new-guard- rocks-the-boat.html.

32   Jeffrey Fleishman, "In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood Showing Cracks in Its Solidarity," *Los Angeles Times,* 6 July 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/06/world/ la-fg-egypt-brotherhood-expelled-20110706.

33   Key figures, including Al-Shahhat and Hassan, openly declared their intent to support the MB (see, for example, "'Abdel Moneim al-Shahhat, al-mutahaddith bi-ism al-Jama'a al-Salafiya bi-l-Iskindiriya: Sa nad'am al-Ikhwan fi-l-intikhabat," Umma wahda, 20 April 2011, http://ummah- wahda.blogspot. com/2011/04/blog-post.html).

34   Anthony Shadid, "Islamists Flood Square in Cairo in Show of Strength," *New York Times,* 30 July 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/30/world/middleeast/30egypt.html.

35   Comprising eleven points, the declaration supported the establishment of a national, constitutional, democratic modern state with respect for civil liberties; emphasized Al-Azhar's role as the key scholarly Islamic institution; and announced its support for the Palestinian struggle. A copy of the declaration can be found at http://www.jusur.net/index-Dateien/image/azhar.pdf.

36   Ammar Ali Hassan. "Al-Darsal-siyasili-l-turuqal-sufiyaba'dthawrat25yanayir,"Aljazeera.net, 30 July 2011, http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/21FA3618-C1B2-4D1B-82E6-00699D58A650.htm.

37   The MB's attempts to outline the role of state can be traced in their political documents. The most significant attempts include the 2004 reform initiative, the draft manifesto of 2007, and platforms presented in different parliamentary elections. Main ideas of these arguments are summarized in Essam el-Erian, "Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun wa-mafhum al-dawla," *Sina'at Al-Fikr,* 30 November 2010, http://www.fikercenter.com/fiker/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=141:%D8% A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8 5%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%81%D9%87% D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-/-%D8%AF- %D8%B9%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A% D8%A7%D9%86&Itemid=72.

38   Mohammed Anz, "Al-Jadal hawl wathiqat al-Azhar yastammir bi-raghm al-tawafuq," *Al-Ahram,* 19 August 2011, http://www.ahram.org.eg/Al-Mashhad-Al-Syiassy/News/96106.aspx.

39   Ali Gomaa. *Al-Tajruba Al-Misriyya*. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2008.

40   A reputable Al-Azhar scholar and former member of the MB who fled the country to Qatar in the late 1960s and later resigned from the group to become the Mufti of Qatar, and the chairman and founder of the International Union of Muslim Scholars.

41   Prominent Salafi figures, including Al-Shahhat, Yasir Burhani, and Abu Ishaq Al-Huwayni, have made recurring appearances denouncing democracy, and insisting that it violates the sovereignty of God. The most frequently cited examples include the legalization of gay marriage and extramarital sexual relations in democratic countries.

42   For more insights on different views of Islamists on this matter, see Reem Magued's interview with representatives of four Islamist parties at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5F6e1LwlQoY.