

NOREF Report

The salafis are coming – but where are they going?

Jacob Høigilt

Executive summary

The Salafist movement has recently become a political actor in post-revolutionary Egypt but, despite intense media attention and serious sectarian incidents, its political impact is likely to remain limited. Three different strands of Salafism can be distinguished in Egypt. The traditional Salafi movement, established in the early 20th century, originally placed great emphasis on the purely doctrinal aspects of religion and was unconcerned with politics.

The second trend, the neotraditionalist Salafi current, emerged in the 1970s and is made up of individual Islamic sheikhs and their followers. These TV preachers have had a significant impact on Egyptian social life, which has in many respects become steadily more conservative under their influence. The third trend is the only one that has engaged in political activism. It emerged in the 1970s and was inspired by the radical Muslim Brother, Sayyid Qutb.

Despite incidents of political activism *à la jihad*, Salafism is mainly non-political; it is concerned with doctrine and individual religious practices. However, three modes of Salafi political engagement in the political transition have emerged. The first is seemingly leaderless and uncoordinated grassroots activism which manifests in attacks on Christians and Sufis, some of which have resulted in killings and

the destruction of churches. Nevertheless, the possibility of these actions escalating is rather small, since the sheikhs are reluctant to give their blessings to violent activism.

Second is the rising importance of traditional and neo-traditional Salafism, represented most visibly by well-known Salafi TV sheikhs. Their influence was most palpable in the referendum on constitutional change in March 2011 during which they campaigned successfully for a “yes” vote. Socially conservative political parties make up the third Salafi option. Rebuilt from radicalised groups which were banned in the wake of president Anwar Sadat’s assassination in 1981, they aim to establish Islamic *hudud* punishment and reverse liberal laws on women.

One of the main problems is that Salafi ideology tends to blur the boundaries between theology and politics which will make it difficult to reach compromises with a Salafi political party. In the wake of religious violence in May 2011, the Egyptian press exposed inflammatory acts by Salafi leaders, forcing TV sheikhs to criticise Salafist violence. However the press’s newfound role as a watchdog should not overshadow the fundamental problem: should religious reasoning be used as a public tool to resolve political and social conflicts? It appears that Salafism is here to stay, but only time will show what course the Salafist movement takes in Egypt.

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“The Salafis are coming!” roared the headline of *Al-Ahram al-Arabi*’s theme issue on 2 April¹, echoing the news reports, rumours, and analysis about the Egyptian Salafi movement that appeared in almost all of Egypt’s print media that week. Most reiterated alarmist messages, and the Salafis were accused of “stealing the revolution”, introducing “alien religious thoughts” in Egypt, inciting sectarian strife, and mounting a “counter-revolution”.

Despite serious incidents, such as the burning of a church and the desecration of Sufi shrines, even secular activists acknowledge that the media coverage of Salafism in early April was exaggerated.² However, it reflected new and important developments in Egyptian Salafism indicating that Salafi sheikhs have taken on a more political role than before. Several Salafi political parties are being formed at present.

Neo-Salafis have had a significant impact on Egyptian social life which has, in many respects, become steadily more conservative under the influence of the TV sheikhs.

As of late May 2011, the picture is still confused. What is clear, however, is that the Egyptian revolution has catapulted Salafism into political prominence, and that it will play a political role in Egypt both in the short and long run. This report

examines three questions: What are the emerging Salafi modes of political engagement? How is this engagement grounded in Salafi doctrine and practices in Egypt? What might the impact be on Egyptian politics?

Salafism in the 20th century

Theology is the main feature of Salafism, and *tawhid*, the doctrine of God’s absolute oneness, is the main feature of Salafi theology. Further to this doctrine, there are five specific theological views that are central to Salafism: a return to the authentic practices and beliefs of the first generation of Muslims (*al-salaf al-salih*); the need to fight unbelief actively; the belief in the Qur’an and Sunna as the only valid

sources of religious authority; the imperative to rid Islam of heretical inventions (*bid’a*); and the belief that specific answers to all conceivable questions are found in the Qur’an and Sunna.³ For Salafis, faith must be lived in order to be real, so it is central to perform the religious duties and to emulate the prophet Muhammad and his companions as closely as possible.

Traditional Salafism

In Egypt, three different strands of Salafism can be distinguished. The first is the traditional Salafi movement which was established in the early 20th century and is represented by two organizations: The Lawful Association of the Adherents of the Book and the Sunna (*al-Jam’iyya al-Shar’iyya li-l’amilin bi-l-kitab wa-l-sunna*) and The Society of the Supporters of the Muhammadan Sunna (*Jama’at Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyah*).⁴ Founded in 1912 and 1926, respectively, they are well-established in the Egyptian Islamic landscape. Their membership is a matter of conjecture, but they are probably not very big; active members have been estimated in the tens of thousands.⁵ Both originally placed great emphasis on the purely doctrinal aspects of religion and were unconcerned with politics.

Neotraditionalist TV sheikhs

The second trend, the neotraditionalist Salafi current, is fairly widespread but not organized. Usually known by the generic name *al-Da’wa al-Salafiyya*, it emerged in the 1970s and is made up of individual Islamic sheikhs and their followers, who are spread all over Egypt. These sheikhs subscribe to classic Salafi doctrine as described above, but they are also influenced by the Saudi Arabian Wahhabi doctrine, which is a particularly xenophobic version of Salafism. Taken together, the adherents of these sheikhs most probably number several hundred thousand.

3 Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action”, Roel Meijer, ed, *Global Salafism: Islam’s new religious movement*, London, Hurst & Company, 2009, pp 38-39, <http://www.hurstpub.co.uk/BrowseBook.aspx?pg=2>, accessed 20 June 2011.

4 Ahmad Zaghul Shalata, *The State of Contemporary Salafism in Egypt*, Cairo, Maktabat Madbuli, 2011, pp 201-263.

5 Abd al-Mun’im Munib, *Map of the Islamic movements in Egypt (in Arabic)*, Cairo: The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2009, pp 26-28, <http://www.anhri.net/reports/islamic-map/>, accessed 20 June 2011.

1 Sayyid Mahmud Hasan, “The Salafis Are Coming”, *al-Ahram al-rrabi* print edition, 2 April 2011.

2 Interview with Dr. Emad Abdel-Latif, Cairo University, 5 April 2011.

While there is a long history of popular “cassette preachers” in Egypt (like Sheikh Kishk and Umar Abd al-Kafi), the advent of satellite television further enhanced the importance of Salafi TV preachers, and some of the most well-known names today are Muhammad Hassaan, Muhammad Husayn Ya’qub, and Yasir al-Burhami, the first of whom has his own TV channel, *al-Rahma*. Through such means of outreach, the neo-Salafis have had a significant impact on Egyptian social life which has, in many respects, become steadily more conservative under the influence of the TV sheikhs. Despite the fact that this trend is not organized, there is a remarkable degree of contact and trust between its members. When the author of this report approached some young Salafi students at the Nur mosque in Cairo, it took them a mere half an hour, two mobile phones, and half a dozen phone calls to reach the famous sheikh Muhammad Hassaan in order to arrange a meeting.

Muslim Brothers

The third trend is the only one that has engaged in political activism. It emerged in the 1970s and rather than being an offshoot of the existing Salafi organizations, it was inspired by the radical Muslim Brother, Sayyid Qutb (executed in 1966), who developed a militant doctrine based on the political readings of early Islamic history as transmitted by the Pakistani ideologue Abu al-A’la Mawdudi.

Represented by groups such as *al-Jihad* and *al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya*, this trend accused both Egyptian society and the regime of being unbelievers and sought to rectify matters by the use of intimidation and force. Members of these groups were responsible for the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981.⁶ Their leaders were arrested or fled abroad – one of them, Ayman al-Zawahiri, merged his group with al-Qaeda in 2000 and became second in command after Osama bin Ladin.⁷ While in prison, a number of the movement’s leaders “repented” and revised their militant doctrine. Two prominent leaders of *al-Jihad* and *al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya*, Abboud and Tariq al-Zumar, were released on 11 March 2011,

after having served nearly 30 years in prison. Their declared intention to form a political party was a signal that this trend aspires once again to play a role in Egyptian politics.

Salafi doctrine and practices in Egypt

Despite incidents of political activism *à la jihad*, Salafism is mostly non-political; it is concerned with doctrine and individual religious practices, with a focus on emulating the “pious forefathers” (*al-salaf al-salih*, hence the term Salafism). In Egypt, the Salafi trend was allowed a measure of freedom by the regime since it stayed out of politics and represented a non-political Islamic alternative to the politically active Muslim Brothers. This fact partly explains the hesitant response among Salafi sheikhs to the 25 January movement. They kept a low profile during the demonstrations, or even opposed them, arguing that the demonstrators incited intra-Muslim strife (*fitna*) and that Islam forbids disobedience to a Muslim ruler, citing the Qur’anic verse: “Obey God, the Prophet and those with authority among you.” (Qur’an 4:59)

Seemingly leaderless and uncoordinated grassroots activism has led to attacks against Christians and Sufis.

However, as the protest movement gathered force, some Salafi TV personalities such as Safwat Hijazi, Muhammad Abd al-Maqsud and Muhammad Hassaan joined the demonstrators at Tahrir square and later tried to give the impression that they had supported the opposition from the outset.⁸ At present, three modes of Salafi political engagement in the political transition can be identified.

Grassroots activism

The first mode is represented by seemingly leaderless and uncoordinated grassroots activism. Clashes between Salafis and other local inhabitants have been widespread, particularly in Upper Egypt (the southern region), and there have been many reports of Salafi intimidation of Christians.⁹ In Helwan, a

6 Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim extremism in Egypt*, translated by Jon Rothschild, London, Al Saqi Books, distributed by Zed Books, 1985, pp 204-207.

7 Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p 110.

8 See, for instance, the talkshow on the Salafi-leaning satellite channel *al-Nas*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glfnoDLmAXI&feature=related>, accessed 20 June 2011.

9 Michelle Abdallah, Mahir Abd al-Sabur, and Yunus Darwish, “One person in Fayyum killed and another in Buhayra - and

suburb outside Cairo, Salafis burnt a church to the ground and protested against its rebuilding. And towards the end of March 2011, Salafi activists in Qalyub province desecrated four Sufi shrines, which are regarded as heretical innovations in Salafi doctrine.¹⁰ This awakened the wrath of the 10-15 million strong Sufi movements in Egypt, whose leaders warned of the danger of religious civil war.¹¹ The most serious post-revolutionary incident to date occurred in early May 2011, when Salafis in the low-income district of Imbaba in Cairo protested against alleged attempts by the Coptic church to hinder Christian women from converting to Islam. The protest got out of hand – 12 people were killed, more than 200 wounded, and two Coptic churches in the area were set on fire and partly destroyed.¹²

Even though the violent activism at the grassroots level has been highlighted by the Egyptian media, it is arguably the mode of political contention that has the least potential for evolving into a powerful social movement. The burning of churches and desecration of shrines must of course be taken seriously, but such acts are not likely to herald the organized persecution of Christians and secularists, as some commentators have suggested. The reason for this is simple: all the well-known and respected Salafi sheikhs have explicitly condemned such practices.

Muhammad Hassaan repeated twice during his Friday prayer sermon at a Cairo mosque on 8 April 2011 that “hindering the prohibited by using tools that are even more prohibited [i.e., violence] is absolutely forbidden!”¹³ A local Salafi leader in Qena also weighed in and dissociated Salafism

from violent sectarian acts.¹⁴ In other words, the possibility of what Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow call an “upward scale shift” – the merging, coordination and organization of political claims by individual actors – is rather small, since the leaders who could potentially unite and give impetus to such claim-making are reluctant to give their blessings to violent activism.¹⁵

Another political limitation to this activism is its local character. Although Salafis participate in this kind of activism, and it is often clad in religious garb, in practice it is more likely to be rooted in local political grievances than religious ideology and convictions. One example of this is the virulent protests among Salafis (and other Muslim

activists) in Qena against the appointment of a Christian governor in that province.¹⁶ The prominent Salafi sheikhs who were called in to mediate between the central government and the protesters got nowhere, precisely because this issue was less about religious ideology than local mutual animosities. In fact, southern Egyptians’ deep-felt resentment of centrally imposed policies and corruption has been a long-standing cause of violent clashes between government forces and locals in the south.

However, it should also be noted that some of those arrested after the incident in Imbaba (both Muslims and Copts) reportedly belong to the dissolved National Democratic Party.¹⁷ This lends further credence to the already widespread talk of a “counter-revolution”, in which elements of the former regime are taking advantage of religious tensions to spread instability and dissatisfaction with the revolution.

Elements of the former regime are taking advantage of religious tensions to spread dissatisfaction with the revolution, which could have potentially destabilising effects.

news about the involvement of salafis,” *al-Shuruq*, Cairo, 29 March 2011, <http://www.shorouknews.com/ContentData.aspx?id=419368>, accessed 20 June 2011.

- 10 Khalid Musa and Hasan Salih, “After the destruction of four shrines in Qalyub: Salafis threaten to destroy the Shrine of al-Hasan, and lawyers demand that the rector of Al-Azhar intervene”, *al-Shuruq*, Cairo, 1 April 2011, <http://www.shorouknews.com/contentdata.aspx?id=421166>, accessed 20 June 2011.
- 11 Khalid Musa, “Sufis warn of civil war if the shrine-burning strife continues”, *al-Shuruq*, Cairo, 5 April 2011, <http://www.shorouknews.com/contentData.aspx?id=425010>, accessed 20 June 2011.
- 12 “Egypt shaken by deadly Cairo clashes”, BBC, 9 May 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13341900>, accessed 20 June 2011.
- 13 Muhammad Hassan’s khutba at Dar al-Arqam mosque in al-Hayy al-Thamin, Cairo, 8 April 2011, author’s notes.

- 14 Sayyid Nun and Hammada Ashur, “Salafi leader: We have toiled for 20 years, and the time for harvest has come,” *al-Shuruq* print edition, 4 April 2011.
- 15 Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, Paradigm Publishers, 2006, p 61.
- 16 Sami ’Abd al-Radi, “Demonstrators in Qena reject the proposal of Hassan, Hijazi and Bakri, and threaten with escalation,” *al-Misri al-Yawm*, Cairo, 20 April 2011, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/406754>, accessed 20 June 2011.
- 17 “The incident in Imbaba,” *10 o’clock in the evening*, 10 May 2011, <http://dreamstv.im2all.com/ShowTV.aspx?index=13>, accessed 20 June 2011.

Accordingly, the destabilizing potential of these elements should not be underestimated, despite their limited potential of evolving into a more organized and permanent movement.

The rise of Salafi TV sheikhs

The rising importance of traditional and neo-traditional Salafism, represented most visibly by the public role of well-known Salafi TV sheikhs, is the second mode of political engagement. Their political importance was highlighted during the referendum on constitutional change which was held on 19 March 2011. While all the secular activist organizations in Egypt were against the changes, which they felt did not go far enough, the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis campaigned vigorously for a “yes” vote.

Salafi parties aim to implement Islamic hudud punishment and reverse liberal laws on women.

The Salafi rationale for entering the political struggle was fear that article two of the Constitution – which states that Islam is the state religion and that sharia is the main source of law – was under threat, even though this paragraph was not the subject of the proposed changes. Salafi leaders publicly declared that a “yes” vote was a yes to Islam – and vice versa. When the referendum resulted in an overwhelming “yes” vote,¹⁸ TV sheikh Muhammad Husayn Ya’qub proclaimed that the Salafi trend had won the campaign (*ghazwa*) of the ballot boxes, provocatively using vocabulary that is associated with warfare.¹⁹ He also stated that those who did not like the result could go and live in Canada or the United States, since they probably held passports to those countries already. Ya’qub’s ill-judged statements triggered a firestorm of media criticism; commentators speculated as to what exactly the Salafis wanted and if they were preparing to take over Egypt – in the process jettisoning the country’s perceived tradition of religious tolerance and moderation.

Favourable conditions exist for Egyptian Salafis to engage peacefully in politics. An organizational apparatus already exists in parts of the Salafi

movement. *Al-Jam’iyya al-Shar’iyya* and *Jama’at Ansar al-Sunna* are well-established organizations with local chapters – *Jama’at Ansar* reportedly has 100 such chapters and controls 1,000 mosques all over Egypt.²⁰ It also publishes a monthly magazine, *al-Tawhid*.²¹ Some of its members wish to engage in politics, and are planning to run for parliamentary elections. And while some elements of the less organized *da’wa salafiyya* say it is best to stay away from politics, (for example, Muhammad Hassaan), others are keen to enter the political arena by establishing a party.²² Both the traditional Salafi currents and the neo-traditional *da’wa salafiyya* have enjoyed relative freedom over the years as the Mubarak regime concentrated on openly political forms of Islamic activism, and they have been able to quietly build a popular base in Alexandria, Cairo, and Upper Egypt.

Renewal of political Salafi groups

The third mode of Salafi political activism is the reinvigoration of political groups which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s calling themselves Salafis. Little is so far known about the proposed Salafi parties but the most well-known sheikhs have distanced themselves from them, preferring to stick to religious proselytizing and preaching. As of 5 April 2011, there were reports of seven political parties being formed.

The most publicized initiatives are associated with the politicized and radical groups *al-Jama’at al-Islamiyya* and *al-Jihad*, which assassinated President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Ismail Mamduh, former member of *al-Jihad*, has established the party *Hizb al-Nahda al-Misri* (The Egyptian Renaissance Party) which is already present on Facebook.²³ This socially conservative party aims to implement Islamic *hudud* punishment when they deem that Egyptians are ready for it. Liberal laws on women, which have been implemented in recent years, are to be reversed. Abbud al-Zumar, who was

18 “Egypt backs constitution changes”, BBC, 20 March 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12801125>, accessed 20 June 2011.

19 Umar al-Hadi, “Muhammad Husayn Ya’qub: We conquered the ballot boxes, the country is ours, and the people said ‘yes’ to Islam,” *al-Misri al-Yawm*, Cairo, 21 March, 2011, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/368589>, accessed 20 June 2011.

20 Shalata, *The State of Contemporary Salafism in Egypt*, p 218.

21 *Al-Tawhid*, <http://www.altawhed.com/>, accessed 20 June 2011.

22 Phone interview with Muhammad Ali Naji, Salafi sheikh and imam in Alexandria, 8 April 2011.

23 *Hizb al-Nahda al-Misri* (The Egyptian Renaissance Party), <http://www.facebook.com/7ezb.ElNahda.Official.Page>, accessed 20 June 2011.

released from prison in March 2011 after having served nearly 30 years in jail for the assassination of president Anwar Sadat in 1981, immediately announced his intention of forming a conservative Islamic coalition party as an alternative to the Muslim Brothers.²⁴ (In late June, together with his cousin and political compatriot, Tariq al-Zumar, he presented the Salafist party Development and Construction to the Egyptian public.)

Will Egyptian politics reshape the Salafis?

There is a real possibility for sustained Salafi engagement in Egyptian politics, and this raises three questions: What is the distinction between theology and politics? How may Salafism be reshaped by its entry into politics? Should religious brokerage prevail over rule of law in resolving social and political conflicts?

Blurring of Salafi theology and politics

Insofar as religious doctrine alone shapes the Salafi movement's political behaviour, it is poorly equipped to join the current political process. The ideological driving force in Salafism is a fundamental difference in theological views from other Islamic trends and a strong commitment to internal consistency. As Bernard Haykel points out in an article on Salafi religious ideology, "the focus on theological differences, as opposed to legal ones, is important because theology in Islam does not entertain a tolerance for a multiplicity of equally valid, but obviously different, beliefs – only one view is correct, and on this basis it becomes possible to exclude and excommunicate the adherents of other views."²⁵ In light of this fact, Salafis may find it hard to accept compromises on issues where they perceive a theological principle at stake.

Theological reasoning is colonizing the sphere of politics which will make it difficult to reach compromises with a Salafi political party that subscribes to this kind of logic.

24 Ahmad Imbabi, "Abbud al-Zumar in his first statements after being released: I intend to establish a coalition party including al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, al-Jihad and the Salafis to contest against the Muslim Brothers," *Rosa al-Yusuf Online*, Cairo, 14 March 2011), <http://www.rosaonline.net/Daily/News.asp?id=105412>, accessed 20 June 2011.

25 Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action", pp 41-42.

This raises the question of how widely Salafis define theology. Theological discussions about the attributes of God have no political relevance, but the political status of Christians in an Islamic state (which may well be posed within a theological discussion) is crucial to contemporary Egyptian politics. Activists and sympathizers of *Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna* said they did not engage in politics, but one official from the organization defined crucial foreign policy issues such as the struggle against Zionism and American policies in the Middle East not as politics, but as religious obligations.²⁶ Such logic may lead avowedly non-political Salafists to engage in several fronts that other groups in society would define as belonging squarely to the realm of politics.

Salafi leaders claimed that the "no" vote to constitutional change was a vote against Islam. They have also issued *fatwas* that Christians should not hold any high public office, because no Muslim can be subject to a Christian. These are examples of theological reasoning colonizing the sphere of politics, and they will make it difficult to reach compromises with a Salafi political party that subscribes to this kind of logic.

The influence of the press and public opinion on Salafism

However, at the same time, Salafi discourse and practice may well be transformed by political engagement. This process was apparent during the first two weeks of April 2011 when inflammatory acts and statements by Salafi leaders were vehemently criticised in practically all the Egyptian press. As a result TV preacher, Muhammad Hassaan, pronounced a scathing criticism of the Salafist attacks on Christians and Sufis, and it was evident that Hassaan's appearance had been prompted in part by the critical media campaign. This is interesting because it highlights the great potential of free media in post-Mubarak Egypt.

While liberals and secularists worry that illiberal religious forces may gain prominence in a free Egypt, it is equally true that the press (at least for now) is at liberty to engage in independent, critical investigation of most issues and institutions in Egyptian society, including sensitive religious-political questions. Owing to this freedom, various newspapers were

26 Interview with Salah Hasan Mansur, al-Qawala mosque, Cairo, 9 April 2011.

able to expose Salafi practices and statements (as mentioned above), and it was this coverage that caused Salafi leaders to distance themselves from such practices and moderate their statements. The exposure to public view transmitted via a critical press may force Salafists to speak less in terms of religious absolutes and so become more pragmatic.

Controversial religious-political nexus

The press's newfound role as a watchdog should not, however, overshadow the fundamental problem of how the state deals with controversial religious politics – a question that is inevitably raised by recent Salafi activism and statements. Salafis demand an Islamic state, oppose full citizenship rights to Christians, and excommunicate Shias in their publications.

At the same time, Salafi leaders are called on as brokers or mediators in conflicts that are perceived by one or more parties to be religious in character. In some of the widely publicized sectarian incidents the alleged Salafi perpetrators insisted on talking to Salafi leaders to explain themselves, and the judiciary complied with their wish. The executive engaged in the same practice by sending a delegation of well-known Salafi sheikhs to Qena to parley with a group of Muslims who staged a sit-in to protest against the appointment of a Coptic governor in the province – the talks failed. But the fundamental question remains: should religious reasoning be used as a public tool to resolve political and social conflicts?

The Salafi movement will be shaped by the political process it participates in, but only time will show what course the Salafist movement takes in Egypt.

Egyptian intellectuals, all of whom oppose the Salafi trend, are currently grappling with this issue. Some advocate a liberal constitution that would allow intolerant religious-political statement, with the argument that such statements can be countered with a more tolerant Islamic line of thought, presumably the *wasatiyya* (moderation). Several Egyptian thinkers advocate this moderate current, including the head of the constitutional change committee, Tariq al-Bishri. Others argue for a stricter constitution that safeguards freedom of speech, while banning religiously based condemnation of political groups

or positions. Their argument is that the rule of law is the only effective way of combating religious authoritarianism.²⁷

Salafism has yet to prove its actual political strength. So far the movement has been viewed as a scapegoat: liberal-minded Egyptians point at it to warn of the dangers of letting religion define political life, while mainstream Islamists, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, contrast their own positions with those of the Salafis to prove how tolerant they are. In so doing they hope to gain the trust of people who are wary of Islamism in general.

It is impossible to predict to what extent Salafism will influence the political process, though it seems safe to say that it will become an established part of the scene for years to come. However, judging by the experience of the Muslim Brothers who, by their own admission, started from a less conservative and more politicized position, it is evident that participation fosters a will to compromise. By the same token, the Salafi movement itself will be shaped by the political process it participates in. But only time will show what course the Salafist movement takes in Egypt.

²⁷ These views were argued during the public seminar “Political discourse and the civil state”, Cairo University, 5 April 2011. Author’s notes from the seminar.