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ANALYSIS

Egypt's Islamist President: What Lies Ahead?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 30 June 2012, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was sworn in as Egypt's first ever democratically elected President. In an effort to address some of the questions raised by this development, we are republishing, with a new foreword, the Muslim Brotherhood chapter from the 2008 Lowy Institute Paper, 'Zealous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey'. Despite the passage of time, three observations made in our 2008 research seem particularly relevant to the situation today. First, that Egypt's rapid democratisation has left the Brotherhood in a pre-eminent political position, although one that will be increasingly challenged. Second, that real political participation will further expose the ideological tensions and personal rivalries within the movement, causing it to fragment over time. And finally, democratic participation won't necessarily moderate the Brotherhood's political positions, although the real constraints it faces will force it into compromises and deals.

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Egypt's New President

Foreword

On 30 June 2012, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was sworn in as Egypt's first ever democratically elected President. Even given the Brotherhood's widely acknowledged powers of political mobilisation, Morsi's victory was still remarkable for a movement that has spent most of its long history in opposition and, at times, on the verge of political extinction.

So what does a Muslim Brotherhood President mean for Egypt's future and for its still fragile democratic transition? In an effort to address these questions, we are republishing here the Muslim Brotherhood chapter from the 2008 Lowy Institute Paper, *Zealous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey*. That paper compared how three different Islamist movements operating in different political contexts adapted their ideas and activism to democratic or electoral participation. It sought to turn the usual question asked about Islamists and democracy on its head. Rather than asking what Islamists might do to democracy – whether they would abide by its rules and principles or attempt to subvert it – it asked what democracy might do to Islamists. Or put another way, rather than trying to prove or disprove than an Islamist could be a 'zealous democrat', to quote the ironic title we adopted for the paper, we explored how three political contexts, with differing degrees of democracy, shaped the Islamist response.

What does the Brotherhood in 2008 tell us about the Brotherhood in 2012?

There is no question that the Muslim Brotherhood has gone through some major changes since 2008 when our study was published. In particular, the movement was subjected to a major security crackdown by the Egyptian state and many of its key leaders were arrested. There was also a change in the top leadership, with the appointment of a new General Guide. At least until the Egyptian uprising in January 2011, there was a sense that the movement was withdrawing from politics and going into survival mode as it faced the onslaughts of the state security services. There were also internal tensions and controversies and a number of the movement's leading pragmatic or reformist members were sidelined. Most famous of these was Abd al-Mun'im Abul Futuh, who would eventually be forced out the movement altogether after the Egyptian uprising over his defiance of the Brotherhood's initial decision not to run a candidate in Egypt's first free Presidential election.

The cautiousness and conservatism of the period after 2008 was reflected in the Muslim Brotherhood's initial reaction to the Egyptian uprising. It rejected any formal participation in the early protests against the Mubarak regime called for by socially networked revolutionary youth – although individual Muslim Brothers did participate. Even as the protests began to threaten the regime, the Brotherhood's leaders equivocated about getting involved, something which caused great tension between the leadership and the Brotherhood youth. In fact, right up to the moment that Mubarak was forced from power, there were well-founded

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suspicions that the Brotherhood would be prepared to do a deal with the regime to serve its own political ends. To this day these suspicions about the Brotherhood remain alive. Even though the Brotherhood's relationship with Egypt's transitional rulers, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), has oscillated between cooperation and confrontation in public, many fear that behind the scenes the relationship is far cosier.

Our 2008 study provides some historical detail and a number of useful analytical insights for those seeking to understand how the Muslim Brotherhood will use its new-found political power and, in particular, what its impact will be on Egypt's nascent democracy. Indeed, despite the changes noted above, many of the Brotherhood's attitudes to politics, and to other political actors, have remained remarkably consistent.

Three observations we made in 2008 seem most relevant to the current situation:

First, we noted that a rapid democratisation would leave the Brotherhood in a pre-eminent, if not hegemonic, position politically. This was as much a reflection on the Brotherhood's ambivalent attitude towards democracy as it was an observation of the Egyptian political landscape. There has long been a tension in the Brotherhood's attitude toward other political actors. At times it has sought to cooperate with them, or has shown sensitivity to the fears others have held about the Brotherhood's ideological aims and organisational strength. As a result, the Brotherhood would regularly limit the scale of their participation in the parliamentary elections held in the Mubarak era. Following the uprising, the Brotherhood

seemed to adopt a similar posture, initially promising to only field candidates in around 25-30 per cent of seats and not to contest the presidential election. But the Brotherhood's subsequent decision to increase that number to 50 per cent, which saw it win a majority in parliament, and to stand a Presidential candidate, also demonstrated the other side of that tension – the Brotherhood's consistent desire to assert the movement's central position in Egypt's politics and to capitalise on political opportunities as they arise – remains strong.

In the immediate aftermath of the uprising there were signs that new political actors might emerge that would challenge the effective monopoly on political opposition held by the Muslim Brotherhood. After all, it had been relatively unknown and mainly secular forces that had been at the forefront of the popular uprising that overthrew Mubarak. But the failure of these forces to organise effectively – at least in conventional political terms – has left much of the field, for the moment at least, to more established players like the Brotherhood, or better organised ones like the Salafists. In this regard, the fact that the Brotherhood went back on early promises with respect to the parliamentary and Presidential elections must be judged negatively in terms of the movement's support for Egypt's democratic evolution. Of course, like any other political actor, the Brotherhood is perfectly entitled to contest any and all of Egypt's new free elections. The problem is that the Brotherhood is not just any political actor and it knows it. After decades of authoritarian rule it is not healthy for any one political actor – Islamist or otherwise – to so dominate the range of elected institutions. To be fair to the Brotherhood, however, it has not been the only political actor

in Egypt's transition that has placed its own interests ahead of those of the country's democratic transformation.

Second, as we noted in 2008, electoral participation brings to the surface the many personal and ideological tensions that exist within a movement the size and ideological breadth of the Brotherhood. One of the movement's great successes has been its ability to draw together a large and diverse membership, in part because its wide range of activities – religious, political, social, economic – has meant it could accommodate everyone from pragmatically minded political activists to conservative theologians. But the movement's capacity to absorb diversity was also a function of being an opposition movement that was more or less constantly under close supervision, and sometimes assault, by the state. Unity was a survival mechanism.

What was noteworthy in our 2008 study was the way that the movement's strong showing in the relatively free 2005 parliamentary elections and its discussion of forming a political party brought some of its internal ideological tensions and personal rivalries out into the open. Electoral participation and success forced the Brotherhood to answer questions about its attitudes to controversial issues such as the rights of women and non-Muslim minorities or Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. Answering those questions often exposed debates between leading figures in the movement about its platform but also about the lack of internal democracy and generational change within the movement. These internal debates subsided as the Mubarak regime launched a new assault on the movement post 2008, but the overthrow of the regime has brought many out into the open again. The result has been some high-level departures from the movement, like Abul Futuh, (although this was also a function of personal rivalries) and a breach with younger members, some of whom formed their own party to contest the parliamentary elections. This fragmentation is likely to continue and perhaps even accelerate with the Brotherhood in power. In particular, expect to see greater tensions between the parent movement and the vehicle it formed for its parliamentary activities, the Freedom and Justice party, as the competing imperatives of preaching and politics become more pronounced.

Democracy and policy

A final observation relates to the Brotherhood's policies in power. The Brotherhood's new power has raised many fears, both inside and outside of Egypt. These include everything from concerns that the Brotherhood will turn Egypt into an Islamic state and will export its revolution to other Arab states, to worries that the movement will tear up the country's peace treaty with Israel. Whilst our 2008 study touched on some of the Brotherhood's policy and ideological positions, our main concern was to explore how the movement would respond to the opportunities and challenges of democratic participation. To some degree this is a separate question from what the Brotherhood might do when they come to power. In fact, the Brotherhood might well use its popular mandate to do all the things that some people fear without at all compromising the Brotherhood's democratic pretensions. Democracy does not guarantee particular politicians or policies. It only guarantees that

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these can be changed once voters grow weary of either.

This is consistent with our research in 2008 that democratic participation does not necessarily moderate Islamist movements. Even in the more established democratic contexts of Indonesia and Turkey that we looked at, Islamist movements showed greater ideological dynamism and pragmatism, but in the end still oscillated between the views of their more hard-line and more pragmatic wings. What did, however, happen was a process of political normalisation. That is, Islamists became integrated members of the political system, operating by the rules and norms of democracy, developing more transparent leadership and party structures and expanding the bases of their membership.

We did note, however, that normalisation was not itself inevitable and identified some of the common factors from the three cases studies we had considered which seemed to make normalisation more likely. These included: the real abandonment of violence and violent means; the existence of strong competition from other political actors, both Islamist and non-Islamist; and the existence of other countervailing forces or institutions that were also seen as legitimate by the most of the population.

Some of these factors are present in Egypt and some have the potential to develop. In this regard, there is a reasonable chance that the Brotherhood, for so long a broad-based religious movement that saw itself as above politics, will become a more ordinary actor within Egypt's evolving politics. This may not be very reassuring for those who fear the more

extreme aspects of the Brotherhood's position in the short term, but it should be remembered too that the Brotherhood's new power is still very highly circumscribed. For the moment, at least, the SCAF remains very much in control, and the decision by the Supreme Constitutional Court to dissolve the Egyptian parliament has reversed the movement's earlier success in the parliamentary elections. Over time the Brotherhood will also face greater competition from new political actors, both Islamist and non-Islamist. And the vast challenges facing Egypt, particularly socio-economic ones, will test the Brotherhood's political skills like nothing it has ever faced before. The result of all of this is that the Brotherhood will be forced into compromises and deals. The alternative would be to launch a head-on assault on other political players, and nothing the Brotherhood has done in recent decades, or recent months, suggest that it would adopt such an approach. In fact, the main charge made against it by opponents and some supporters alike is that it has been far too willing to do deals, particularly behind the scenes.

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Egypt: preachers or politicians?

We believe that Islam is an all-embracing concept which regulates every aspect of life, adjudicating on every one of its concerns and prescribing for it a solid and rigorous order. It does not stand helpless before life's problems, nor the steps one must take to improve mankind. Some people mistakenly understand by Islam something restricted to certain types of religious observances or spiritual exercise, and confine themselves and their understanding to these narrow areas determined by their limited grasp.

– Hasan al-Banna, founder and General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood[1]

The success of the Muslim Brotherhood should not frighten anybody: we respect the rights of all religious and political groups. So much damage has been inflicted on the country over the past century because of despotism and corruption that it would be impossible to embark on wider political reform and economic development without first repairing the damage to our basic institutions. Free and fair democratic elections are the first step along the path of reform toward a better future for Egypt and the entire region. We simply have no choice today but to reform.

– Khairat el-Shater, Second Deputy General Guide, Muslim Brotherhood[2]

In March 1928 in Isma'liyya, Egypt, Hasan al-Banna established the Society of Muslim Brothers.[3] The movement's formation was unremarkable enough, being one of a number of Islamic associations and welfare societies established in the period. Yet, in little over a decade, the charisma of its leader, and the strength and breadth of its organisation, would see the Muslim Brotherhood become a leading political actor in Egypt, which it remains to this day. More significantly, however, the movement would become the prototype for Islamist movements around the world, providing a model of faith-based activism for off-shoots and imitators alike. The Muslim Brotherhood can be thought of today in two senses: as a specific movement in Egypt and as the seminal ideological and activist tendency within Islamism.[4]

In an interview with a prominent Muslim Brother, Gamal Heshmat, we asked what lessons the movement drew from the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.[5] He responded that al-Qaeda's attacks had been a vindication of the Muslim Brothers' gradualist, non-violent approach. Implicit in this were messages both for governments in the Middle East and the West, and for militant Islamist movements. To the former, the tacit message was that there is a difference between the avowedly reformist and non-violent approach of the Muslim Brotherhood and the terrorism of the militants; and to militant Islamists, some of whom (such as al-Qaeda's deputy leader Ayyman al-Zawahiri) had been vocal critics of the Brotherhood's non-violent approach, it was that violence on an international scale would repeat the failures of the national Islamist violence of the 1990s in countries such as Egypt and Algeria.

Since the late 1970s the Muslim Brotherhood has sought to position itself domestically between militancy and political passivity. This chapter examines the ways in which the

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movement's ideology and model of activism has interacted with, and been influenced by, the opportunities and constraints of Egypt's non-democratic politics. In particular, it explores three issues that illustrate this interaction and the movement's consequential, if limited, evolution: its efforts to balance an avowal of democracy with its commitment to *shari'a*; its internal debate over whether to form a political party; and the impact of internal generational differences.

In the land of Pharaoh

The essential feature of modern Egyptian politics, from the Free Officers' revolution of 1952 to the present day, has been a paternalistic, authoritarian rule. Yet, the nature of that rule has changed in line with the personal styles of the three presidents who have controlled modern, independent Egypt — Gamal abd al-Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. The first phase, during the Nasser years, was marked by what could be called charismatic authoritarianism.[6] The autocratic state built by Nasser relied heavily on repression, but also on the President's charisma and popularity, around which was built a national consensus.[7] That consensus was embodied in the state ideology, Nasserism, combining, in particular, the principles of anti-imperialism, pan-Arabism and social democracy.

By the time Nasser died suddenly in 1970 the charismatic foundations of the regime had begun to crumble. Politically, Nasser survived the comprehensive defeat of Arab nationalist forces by Israel in 1967, but Nasserism as an ideology received a mortal blow. Not only had

it been defeated by Egypt's chief external enemy, internally its failure to meet the country's economic and social needs was becoming increasingly apparent. The result was the reawakening of popular dissent and political activism and fissures within the regime itself.

Responding to these pressures, Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, built a system of rule that Daniel Brumberg has termed 'liberal autocracy'.[8] Political parties were legalised, repression of the Muslim Brotherhood was eased, while state control of the economy was weakened, reflected in the policy of *Infitah* (literally 'opening'). Political and economic liberalisation had its limits, however. The only political party that was allowed to develop any real strength was Sadat's own National Democratic Party (NDP) and only a small group of oligarchs around the president benefited from the economic opening. Most importantly, Sadat institutionalised the authoritarian basis of the state by formalising the president's already considerable power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and cabinet, to issue decrees with the force of law and bypass parliament.

Sadat's approach may have consolidated the regime's hold on power, but it also contained contradictions. In the early years of his rule, the new president cultivated mainstream Islamists, hoping they would serve as a conservative pillar of his regime, a bulwark against both the remainder of the Nasserist left and more radical Islamists. But the social dislocation caused by economic liberalisation, the decision to break Arab ranks to sign a separate peace with Israel and the return to more repressive policies in the final year of his rule combined to put the

regime on a collision course with Islamists, culminating in Sadat's assassination by militant Islamists on 6 October 1981.

The poverty of Egyptian politics

For Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, there would be no dramatic break with Sadat's liberal-autocratic approach, although it perhaps became more managerial than 'liberal'. His rule has oscillated between the toleration of some degree of popular political participation and use of the formidable coercive capabilities at the president's disposal, not least the powers associated with the State of Emergency which has existed in Egypt since Sadat's assassination. The result has been a political system with an emasculated formal politics, a relatively lively informal politics, and related to both, a system that, unintentionally or otherwise, privileges Islamist over non-Islamist opposition.

The weakness of the formal political system is a key feature of contemporary Egyptian politics. The parliament is no more than a rubber stamp. It is dominated by the regime party, the NDP, which is primarily a mechanism for dispensing patronage. Electoral fraud and voter intimidation have been features, to varying degrees, of every parliamentary election. Legal opposition parties have either been created by the state or owe their existence to it. Led by mostly lacklustre, insipid and uninspiring leaders, and lacking the NDP's financial and organisational advantages, they lack the capacity to build popular constituencies.

More vitality is evident in the informal political sector, where the regime either tolerates or cannot fully control political activity. This sector includes the activities of myriad non-government organisations (or more accurately, private voluntary organisations, PVOs), from human rights groups, social and welfare organisations to more politically focused movements such as the Egyptian Movement for Change (known by its slogan *Kifaya*, literally, 'enough'). It also incorporates the political activism of journalists, judges and, more recently, bloggers, who have become an important outlet for venting criticism of the government and discussion of social, economic and political issues. There are, nevertheless, limits and constraints in the informal sector. All PVOs are licensed by the state, while the security authorities zealously police the not always well-defined red lines for political activity.

The weakness of the formal political system, combined with the opportunities available in the informal system for explicit and implicit political activism, has privileged Islamist activism over non-Islamist opposition. The most obvious example of this is the manner in which Islamists have been able to use the mosque as a tool for constituency and network building as well as for mobilisation. This has been reinforced by the lack of serious ideological competition, with the decline of Arab nationalism as an ideology since 1967 and the relative weakness of liberal and secular currents in Egypt. Nevertheless, Islamism has never been able to capitalise on this strength, at least not politically, given the constraints placed by the regime on the political system; hence, mainstream Islamism's interest in political reform.

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The limits of political reform

In considering the characteristics of Egyptian politics, and the potential for reform, it is impossible to ignore the country's relationship with the United States. Regardless of whether the regime could survive without the roughly US$2 billion it receives annually from the United States in military and financial aid, that assistance undoubtedly provides Washington with a certain degree of leverage. This was demonstrated in the period from 2003 to 2005, when the Bush Administration took its more assertive stance, urging political reform and democratisation in the region, including in Egypt.

The extremity of Washington's push for political reform came in a speech by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Cairo in mid-2005. Rice noted that for 60 years the US 'pursued stability at the expense of democracy' in the Middle East and had 'achieved neither' and that this approach had to change.[9] In the months leading up to the speech, Cairo and Washington had been locked in a tense dialogue over political reform and the arrest of a prominent secular opposition figure, Ayyman Nour. These differences had culminated in a decision by Rice to cancel a visit to Egypt earlier that year. A day after the State Department announced the postponement of Rice's visit, President Mubarak, catching many observers by surprise, announced his intention to hold the first ever multi-candidate presidential elections in Egyptian history; Nour was later released on bail.

Such political ferment was not solely inspired by American suasion. The period saw the emergence of new civic movements for protest.

Kifaya in particular brought together a cross-section of the political opposition, including some Islamists, holding small but vocal public demonstrations calling on Mubarak to step down. Elements in the judiciary also pushed for greater autonomy and media critiques of the regime became more robust. But even given these internal forces for reform, the US dimension remained important. As one prominent Egyptian pro-reform activist said to us in 2005, US pressure on the regime was like having 'air cover' for those inside the country calling for change.[10]

Nevertheless, there were clear limits to the reforms the regime was willing to countenance, especially once US pressure on the regime subsided, as eventually it did. The constitutional amendment providing for multi-candidate presidential elections (Article 76) set an impossibly high bar for potential candidates in future polls.[11] The price for the Muslim Brotherhood's electoral gains in 2005 was another round of repression in which hundreds of members were arrested. Ultimately, what this period highlighted was not just the limits of regime-led reform, but also where the regime's real priorities lay — preparing the ground for a smooth succession from President Mubarak (now 80 years old) to either his son Gamal or some other incarnation of the regime.

Likewise, the period underlined the limits which the United States would travel in support of democratisation. By and large the Bush Administration stood by silently as these developments took place. Undoubtedly, it was concerned by Islamist electoral advances, a fear reinforced by the January 2006 victory of Hamas in Palestinian legislative elections. Yet the Mubarak regime's battery of the Muslim

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Brotherhood impacted on liberal and secular oppositionists as well. Provisions of the Emergency Law, which had been used in the past against Islamist and non-Islamist opponents alike, were incorporated into the constitution. A number of non-Islamist judges, journalists and bloggers were also detained, often without trial.

A constituency for God

Before addressing the ways in which the Muslim Brotherhood has sought to navigate the opportunities and constraints of Egyptian politics, it is worth considering who supports the movement. Reliable information on the Muslim Brotherhood's membership and supporters is scant. Nevertheless, at its initial peak, in the mid-1940s, the movement is estimated to have had anything from 1500-2000 branches and anywhere from 100,000 to two million members in Egypt, and another 500,000 sympathisers.[12] Current estimates of membership range from 100,000 to 500,000 members, with the higher figure probably including full members, partial members (who attend meetings but are not eligible to run in internal election), and supporters.[13]

Historically, the movement has drawn support from various segments of Egyptian society, rural and urban, although its most important base was among the so-called *effendi* class of urban, petty bourgeoisie who felt themselves economically disadvantaged by British colonial rule.[14] To this were added two groups that were direct products of Nasser's modernisation of Egypt: the newly urbanised; and what Carrie Wickham has colourfully called the 'lumpen intelligentsia' — the massive wave of students who entered university as a result of Nasser's expansion of tertiary education but, upon graduation, were unable to find jobs to fulfil their newly acquired professional qualifications.[15] Today, the middle class are better represented, at least among the movement's parliamentary activists. Of the movement's 88 members elected to parliament in 2005, the highest proportion was described by the Muslim Brotherhood as 'general managers and chief of sectors (14)' followed by accountants (10).[16]

The rise of Egypt's so-called pious middle class is well covered by commentators and scholars explaining the rise of Islamism and other forms of Islamic activism in Egypt in the 1980s and 1990s.[17] The term refers to those Egyptians who went to work in the booming economies of the oil-rich Gulf states in the 1970s and 1980s and returned relatively wealthy and conspicuously religious under the influence of the more fundamentalist forms of Islam found in countries of that region, most notably in Saudi Arabia. This new class provided both an important constituency for burgeoning Islamic and Islamist activism, and a source of funding through *zakat* (the obligation on Muslims to provide a certain percentage of their income to charity).

Facing both a violent challenge by militant Islamists in the 1980s and 1990s and a political challenge from the Muslim Brotherhood (for example, as it rapidly expanded its presence in professional syndicates, teaching institutions and the media), the Egyptian Government tried to co-opt this new piety. It provided everything from tax breaks for mosque construction, to additional hours of religious programming on state-owned media. Keen to cloak itself in

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Islamic legitimacy, it protested the Islamic nature of the Egyptian state and granted greater latitude to the religious establishment, represented in particular by the Islamic scholars of al-Azhar University. When the scholar of Islamic studies, Nasr Abu Zayed, was charged with apostasy in the early to mid-1990s, his initial accuser had been not an Islamist militant but a regime advisor on Islam and the chairman of the NDP's religious affairs committee.[18]

Asef Bayat has described this process as Egypt's 'passive revolution'.[19] Politically, the government successfully held both militant and the Islamist mainstream at bay, but socially, legally, culturally and economically, the Islamising goals of these movements were being achieved. As Bayat notes, the state adopted religious language and symbolism to 'regain moral mastery over society and secure political legitimacy, but in this process they were conditioned to think and act religiously'.[20] Moreover, the Islamists exploited this opportunity to expand their influence in the educational, legal and media sectors, reinforcing a new piety in society, as reflected in myriad ways: from the growth of Islamic discussion groups and home gatherings; rising mosque attendance; internet chat rooms, cassettes, CDs and popular television programs all focused on Islam; charitable activity; and the widespread adoption of the veil, including by young, educated women.[21]

Plainly, the Muslim Brotherhood has never been able to turn this constituency for Islam into political power, the most obvious reason being the state's refusal to allow an open electoral contest between itself and the movement. And yet the movement cannot be quite sure of this constituency either. When the movement does participate in parliamentary polls, for example, it is not clear whether people are voting for the Muslim Brotherhood's program, or against the regime. As the prominent Egyptian sociologist and activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim noted of the 2005 poll, the election was not one 'in which competing political programs were being debated but rather a choice between a regime perceived as despotic and corrupt on the one hand and any other decent or half-decent alternative on the other'.[22]

Political participation

The Muslim Brotherhood that emerged from the regime's prison camps in the 1970s had experienced a number of traumas. It had lost what came close to outright armed struggle between it and the newly formed Nasserist state, almost disappearing as an organised movement. Intellectually the movement was unsettled by the militant ideas of Sayyid Qutb, themselves a product of the confrontation with Nasser. Having then been thrown a lifeline by Sadat, the movement sought to cautiously exploit the opportunities of its new, if uncertain, status as a legally banned, but *de facto* tolerated organisation. At least formally, the Brotherhood closed its militant chapter in 1969, when Hassan al-Hudaibi, al-Banna's successor as General Guide of the movement, published *Du'ah, la Qudah* ('Preachers not Judges'), an attempt to distance the Muslim Brothers from Qutb's more militant ideas. Nevertheless, to this day the movement largely seeks to explain away Qutb's more militant writings by arguing that they have been 'taken out of context' and Qutb remains a critical part of the movement's intellectual heritage.[23]

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In effect, the Muslim Brotherhood that re-emerged in the 1970s re-connected with al-Banna's founding ideas. Its cautiousness at that time sat well with the didactic, missionary and social sides of the movement's activism that would allow the movement to pursue al-Banna's more gradualist model for Islamising society. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood was probably never going to be just a movement of preachers, teachers and social workers (even if the future activism of the movement was the subject of a great deal of internal debate at the time). Even the movement's cautious, 'prison generation' leadership saw advantages in electoral activism that enabled the movement to advertise its presence in society and to articulate a message of reform without, at the same time, directly confronting the regime.[24]

Beginning in the 1980s, the movement identified two particular opportunities for political activism: elections for Egypt's professional syndicates and associations; and parliamentary ('People's Assembly') elections. From the mid-1980s to the early-1990s the 'Islamic Trend', affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, won victories in nearly all the major professional syndicates and associations, including those of doctors, chemists, engineers, journalists and lawyers. The movement was able to capitalise on the fact that most syndicates included not just employed professionals, but unemployed graduates, who provided the Muslim Brotherhood with a ready constituency for its integrated message of Islamically inspired social, economic and political reform.[25]

In terms of parliamentary activism, the movement has contested every election since 1984, with the exception of 1990, which it boycotted with other opposition groups in protest at government changes to the electoral system. Initially it ran in coalitions with legal parties (the Wafd in 1984 and then Labour in 1987); since 1995, however, its candidates have run as independents. As with the rest of the opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood's fortunes in parliamentary elections have been highly dependent on the regime. Not only has it never been allowed to come close to overturning the NDP's overwhelming majority, its degree of success has been directly tied to the level of vote rigging and intimidation. In 1995, generally considered to be the most violent and corrupt election on record, the movement won only one seat. By contrast it won 17 seats in the 2000 election, seen as surprisingly fair by most observers, in large part because of the role played by the judiciary in supervising the poll.[26]

Hitherto, the apogee of the movement's electoral activism was in the 2005 parliamentary elections. A combination of international and internal pressure ensured that the early rounds of the election were relatively free and fair. The Brotherhood won a startling 88 seats, just short of 20% of the 454 seats that comprise the lower house of the Egyptian parliament. While this did not come close to challenging the NDP predominance, it highlighted both the movements electoral potential (consistent with a long-standing gradualist strategy, the movement only ran candidates in 160 seats),[27] but also the distance between it and other opposition parties which in total won only nine seats. The NDP's dominance was also somewhat overstated by the fact that its official candidates won only 145 seats, while 166 individuals nominally elected as 'independents' rejoined the NDP, underling once again the power of patronage.[28]

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The Brotherhood's success prompted it to expand its electoral strategy to encompass elections for municipal councils, the upper house of the parliament (the Shura Council), labour unions and even the boards of Cairo's social clubs.[29] Yet success also prompted a response from the regime. Following the 2005 elections, hundreds of Muslim Brothers were arrested. Twenty-five of the movement's leading members were sentenced to unexpectedly harsh jail terms of between three and ten years. Second Deputy Guide, Khairat el-Shater, was given a seven-year sentence, which is noteworthy for two reasons. First, his control of a number of commercial enterprises made him, reputedly, a significant source of the movement's financial strength (his sentence has also seen his financial assets frozen). Second, el-Shater has often mediated between the regime and the movement and his arrest therefore suggested the ascendancy of a more confrontational rather than conciliatory approach on the part of the former.[30]

During this period the regime also raised claims that the movement was undertaking paramilitary preparations and President Mubarak described the Brotherhood as a threat to national security.[31] Occasionally, the movement helped fuel these allegations: for example, when General Guide Muhammed Akef declared the movement's willingness to send 10,000 trained *mujahideen* to Lebanon during the month-long confrontation between Israel and Hizballah in 2006; or an infamous 'martial arts demonstration' by young Muslim Brothers on the campus of al-Azhar University in late 2006. Also, while the Muslim Brotherhood has repeatedly condemned al-Qaeda, it has also openly supported Hamas suicide attacks against Israeli citizens, and was equivocal in its condemnation of Islamist terrorism in Egypt in the 1990s. Nevertheless,

there has been little evidence to suggest that, since its official disavowal of Qutb's more militant ideas, the Muslim Brotherhood has either orchestrated or participated in acts of violence aimed at overthrowing the Egyptian regime. This cautiousness has extended even to not holding major demonstrations, although the movement could place large numbers on the street, should it so choose. It sat out opposition calls for a general strike in April 2008, despite (or more likely because of) its ongoing difficulties with the state.[32]

New democrats?

In parallel with its move into electoral politics, the Muslim Brotherhood has gradually come to adopt a declaratory position on democracy at odds with the ambivalence of its founder Hasan al-Banna and the hostility of Sayyid Qutb. Since the mid-1990s the Brotherhood has declared its support for political parties (something that al-Banna explicitly rejected), as well as for elections and the rotation of power. In 2004, in response to the US-led 'Greater Middle East' democratisation initiative, the movement published its own 'Reform Initiative' which declared its commitment to a 'democratic, constitutional, parliamentary, presidential' political system, 'in the framework of Islamic principles'.[33]

Whether genuine or tactical, this avowal of democracy, together with the Muslim Brotherhood's foray into participatory politics, had consequences. First, the Brotherhood's electoral activism was led by and gave greater prominence to a generation of party activists who have played a critical role in the movement's political evolution. This so-called

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'middle generation' are activists, now in their 50s and 60s, who joined the movement in the 1970s, typically from the university campuses. The formative experience of Brothers such as Essam el-Erian, Abd al-Mun'im Abul Futuh, Mukhtar Nuh and former member, Abu al-Ela Madi was of a more overt and explicitly political activism. They put that experience to work — and developed it further — in the professional syndicates and parliament where they were at the forefront of the movement's activism. It was as a result of the imperatives of syndicate and parliamentary activism that the middle generation formed alliances with other political actors, sought to appeal to non-Islamist constituencies and most directly felt the absence of democratic political space in Egypt's heavily constrained political system.[34] Indeed, it is largely the imperatives of this form of political activism that has seen members of this generation emerge as key proponents of ideological pragmatism, if not moderation, within the movement.

Second, if the Muslim Brotherhood saw political activism as a way of engaging with society at large, it has also worked the other way. As journalists, opposition activists and voters came into contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, they sought clarification of the movement's stances. Nevertheless, this public interrogation of the movement's positions also cast a spotlight on the Brotherhood's often vague formulations on issues such as freedom of expression, *shari'a*, and the rights of women and minorities. In turn, efforts to clarify the movement's stances have not always been welcomed by more traditionalist elements in the movement. As we see below, on occasion this has sparked debates within the movement on the very issue being clarified.

One notable aspect of this dynamic has been the way it has pushed the movement's rhetoric from the sacred into the realms of the profane. Thus, prominent among issues raised by the movement in parliamentary sessions in 2006 were the government's poor response to outbreaks of bird flu, its mishandling of the 'al-Salam 98' ferry disaster, the situation in Iraq, and corruption and waste on the Toshka Canal project (one of the regime's headline infrastructure projects). When the movement did return to what might be seen as its traditional terrain, that of religion, it focused not on *shari'a* but on similarly populist concerns. For example, it raised in parliament the so-called Danish cartoon scandal (in which a Danish newspaper published cartoons derogatory of Islam), as well as Pope Benedict's allegedly insulting comments on Islam in a speech in September 2006.

A comparison of the movement's pre-election programs in 1987, 2005 and 2006 is also instructive. Prior to the 1987 election the movement published a 10-point election plan of which only two points dealt with socio-economic issues.[35] By comparison, the text of the 2005 program dealt with a range of socio-economic issues, such as industrial and agricultural development, education and scientific research, political and economic reform.[36] The 2007 draft party program — which we discuss in a moment — was the most detailed iteration of the movement's policies. Running to 128 pages it dealt with everything from political reform and foreign relations to economic and trade policy and education.[37] Indeed, the barrage of criticism that the program ultimately attracted on political and religious grounds (see below) obscured what was, in many respects, a more telling critique: as more

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than one observer noted, on economic matters the program espoused policies that, with a few significant exceptions, were virtually indistinguishable from those of the regime.[38]

Of course, there were also important differences. The Brotherhood's draft party program emphasised strong state intervention in the economy to ensure that social welfare goals would be met.[39] Thus, consistent with what the movement called the Islamic economic reference (*marja'iyya al-nizam al-iqtisadi al-Islami*), the government would have special powers to combat 'exploitation and monopoly'.[40] Nevertheless, what is also noteworthy is how key elements of the Muslim Brotherhood's economic outlook have evolved over time. In al-Banna's day, for example, reflecting its anti-colonial preoccupations, the movement was steadfastly against foreign investment. By contrast the draft party program listed foreign direct investment as a key measure for combating Egypt's economic ills, and noted the country's poor ranking in a World Bank report on global investment conditions.[41]

The Brotherhood would deny that such a secularisation of its political and economic program reflects anything other than Islam's concern for life's practical matters. Yet it is not always easy for its broader supporters to discern what is uniquely Islamic about the movement's attitude to international trade, or to the bird flu outbreak in Egypt. This is not to say the movement is giving up on its more religiously specific agenda, just that it recognises that to reach a broader constituency this is not enough. This was precisely the experience of the movement when it entered into the professional syndicates. The

movement's activists had to learn some new skills, in particular, the ability to appeal to a broader constituency that was not, in the first instance, sympathetic to Islamist ideas.[42]

To suggest that the movement's agenda has become increasingly secularised is not, of course, to suggest that the movement itself is becoming so. The perceived piety and uprightness of its members are also clearly factors in the movement's support, especially when contrasted with the attitude of Egyptians toward other politicians who are often seen as self-serving and corrupt. Al-Banna had always intended that the movement's members not just preach a message but attract followers by the example they set. Yet this has also meant that supporters of the movement would prefer the messenger to the message — or at least to the full implications of the message — and this has been another major consequence of the Brotherhood's political activism. As one Egyptian observer noted, where the Brotherhood has really excelled in parliamentary contests is in choosing good local candidates whom local people know and trust.[43]

There has also been an international dimension to the Brotherhood's efforts to clarify its policy stances. After the 2005 elections the movement launched something of a charm offensive designed to reassure the West of its democratic commitment and moderate outlook. Khairat el-Shater's article in *The Guardian* newspaper ('No need to be afraid of us') was just one example.[44] Yet even if the Muslim Brotherhood might one day reassure the West about its commitment to democracy, any reconciliation of views on key international policy questions have proven much more difficult. The Muslim Brotherhood

condemned the terror attacks on 9/11 and has shown little sympathy for al-Qaedism (and vice versa). But on the issue used by the United States, in particular, as a benchmark for judging friends or foes in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there has been little or no change in the movement's stances. Hamas is formally a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, although in practice operates independently. The Brotherhood has defined acts of terrorism against Israel, including suicide bombing, as legitimate acts of resistance and it has opposed negotiations with Israel. Its official position today on Egypt's existing peace treaty with Israel is that it should be 'reviewed' as a 'step toward its cancellation'.[45]

One could, of course, note that it is one thing to publicly question the treaty (in part because of popular anti-Israeli sentiment); it would be another thing altogether to deal with the negative strategic and economic consequences of actually cancelling it. Indeed, occasionally, some representatives of the movement have sought to soften this position somewhat, only to be forced firmly back into line by the movement's leadership. In late 2007 prominent Muslim Brother Essam el-Erian was quoted as saying that should the movement reach office it would recognise Israel and respect the existing treaty (with some amendment). The report drew a sharp response from General Guide, Muhammed Akef, however, who declared there was nothing in the movement's dictionary called Israel.[46]

Between hegemony and democracy

Any ideological shift toward democratic participation among sections of the Muslim Brotherhood must be weighed against Egypt's political realities, not least the expectation that rapid democratisation would leave the Brotherhood in a pre-eminent, even a hegemonic, position politically. A key factor in this, as has been noted, is the absence of serious political competition. The Muslim Brotherhood is conscious of the fears of the political class and secular elites in this respect; it has made a point, for example, of not running candidates for every seat in professional syndicate or parliamentary elections. But it has also, on occasion, reinforced these fears.

While its cooperation with other opposition forces has undoubtedly increased it has remained fitful. Individual Muslim Brothers, for example, joined with other oppositionists in Kifaya; yet as the International Crisis Group has noted, the Muslim Brothers' subsequent organisation of separate, although relatively small-scale, demonstrations was probably prompted by a desire to prevent the opposition Kifaya movement from having a monopoly both on the street and with respect to the opposition reform agenda.[47] Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood's negotiations with the regime over aspects of its political activism (for example, over the size of its demonstrations), reinforce the impression of a movement that understands there are only two important political actors in Egypt.

Ideologically, too, the movement as a whole is yet to reconcile its traditional emphasis on the implementation of *shari'a* as the *sine qua non* of the movement's aims with its democratic pretensions. In recent years, the movement has argued that its goal with respect to political reform is a civil state with an Islamic frame of reference (*marja'iyya*). Ostensibly, this

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represents a move from a position where *shari'a* is the law, to a position where *shari'a* informs the law and the legislative process, as well as morality and ethics.

One interpretation of this would suggest that the Muslim Brotherhood's growing commitment to democracy has forced it to seek out arrangements that allow its religious principles to cohabit more happily with the idea of pluralism and a civil state. The idea of an Islamic frame of reference as the basis of a more inclusive political project is not new, having long been advocated by a number of liberal Islamic thinkers often labelled the 'Wasatiyya' (the centrists).[48] Alternately, the movement's emphasis on an Islamic *marja'iyya* may reflect more practical concerns; namely an effort to bypass Egyptian law which prohibits the formation of political parties based on religion. (Certainly this is the way the Egyptian state has viewed it, having now extended the prohibition to even those parties with a religious reference.)

That the movement's commitment to a civil state is not well established internally was demonstrated by the controversy over its draft program for a political party in late 2007. Needless to say, the decision to formulate a program was not made in any anticipation that the movement was about to be allowed to form a party. More likely, it was driven by a desire to underline a moderate image to broader Egyptian society (and perhaps the international community), at a time when the movement was facing serious repression from the state and was being accused of harbouring militant ambitions.[49] Given this, it is ironic that the Muslim Brotherhood's circulation of the final draft of the program to a limited number of

political figures and intellectuals outside the movement had precisely the opposite effect, alarming rather reassuring those who read it.

According to one well-placed observer, earlier drafts elaborated in further detail on the movement's previously stated commitment to a civil, democratic state.[50] While the final draft reaffirmed many of these points, endorsing, among other things, the separation of powers, political pluralism, and free and fair elections, on two points it tasted distinctly undemocratic: the program argued that women and non-Muslims were ineligible to hold Egypt's highest political offices, which contradicted previous statements acknowledging equal political rights; and it called for the creation of a council of religious scholars which could seemingly pass binding judgements on legislation and government policy, prompting claims the movement was advocating an Iranian-style theocratic state.

The details of the party program controversy have been discussed elsewhere.[51] What is significant for our purposes is that the draft program sparked an unprecedented public debate among Muslim Brothers, including what some observers described as a 'fatwa war' as the various sides sought religious backing for their respective positions.[52] Several prominent middle generation members such as Abd al-Mun'im abu al-Futuh, Gamal Heshmat and Essam el-Erian criticised both the draft itself and the drafting process, implying that there had been limited consultation within the movement. Indeed the regime's imprisonment of several of the more pragmatic Brothers, notably Khairat el-Shater, at a critical moment, arguably tipped the balance in favour of more conservative forces in the movement.[53] Criticism also came from younger

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generation members of the movement, often articulated through their blogs.

What the debate highlighted were two positions within the movement: a traditionalist one that saw the movement and its aims as, in effect, *above* politics; and a more pragmatic position that effectively saw the movement as an actor *within* politics. The former was reflected in the draft platform's advocacy of a council of scholars and the conservative attitude towards the leadership of the Muslim community consistent with the historical Islamist aim of building a state with specific institutions to enforce a particular interpretation of *shari'a*. The role of the movement, according to this attitude, was to stand firm on its principles as holders of God's indivisible truth. As Guidance Bureau member Dr Mahmoud Ghuzlan argued in an interview with the movement's Arabic language website:

> Our adversaries are seeking to keep us at a point between Islam and secularism, and this is a great danger. They want us to gradually concede some of our principles so we could become closer to them. Thank God our Brothers have upheld the constants and said here we are and these are our principles. We will not be the same as you are. Otherwise, why should you be present in the political arena?[54]

By contrast, the compromise advocated by more politically-minded members argued that existing constitutional arrangements were sufficient, in particular Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution that declares *shari'a* as the source of Egyptian laws, and the Egyptian Constitutional Court as the existing institution for the ultimate review of law. These critics

also argued that it was unnecessary for the movement to argue against a female or non-Muslim president given that neither a woman nor a non-Muslim was ever likely to be elected by Egypt's overwhelmingly traditional, Muslim voters.[55] Such compromise positions were probably informed by a desire to paper over internal fissures and to recover from the damage done to the movement's external image caused by the controversy. Nevertheless, such pragmatism is still significant because it reflects some recognition that the movement's goals can be pursued by political means, rather than requiring special religious ones (i.e., a council of ulema).

It is likely that there will be a further revision of the draft party program, although it is not clear when a new program might emerge. Some commentators initially suggested that the emerging consensus compromise within the movement seemed to be to drop the controversial proposal for the ulema council, while maintaining the movement's doctrinaire position on the unacceptability of a woman or a non-Muslim for a position of political leadership.[56] More recently, other observers have pointed to a closing of the ranks and a confirmation of existing traditionalist positions on these controversial matters.[57]

Movement or party?

Running through this episode has been a tension that many mainstream Islamist movements face between preaching (*da'wa*) and politics. In theory, of course, and often in practice, such a tension should not exist. The goal of the Muslim Brotherhood's *da'wa* is to Islamise society, and in line with the

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movement's view of Islam as a comprehensive system, this includes the Islamisation of politics. From a practical perspective this is important, because as society is Islamised, it results in new cadre and supporters for the movement. As a recent International Crisis Group report on the Muslim Brotherhood noted, the movement's electoral success is interpreted within the movement as a direct result of its *da'wa* and part of a broader strategy of empowerment (*tamkin*) — a notion that Hasan al-Banna promoted as critical to the gradual, bottom up establishment of an Islamic system.[58]

Yet, as has been demonstrated in other countries such as Morocco, Jordan and Turkey, as Islamist movements engage in politics (even quasi-democratic politics) conflicting imperatives emerge. A 2006 Carnegie/Herbert Quandt-Stiftung study on Islamist movements and democracy noted, as members of a religious organisation Islamists will use 'the dogmatic, absolutist language of the preacher and focus on moral issues of good and evil'.[59] But, as political organisations, Islamist movements 'face an imperative to be flexible and pragmatic' to win the support of people outside their immediate Islamist constituency.[60] Moreover, political participation often takes on a life of its own, typically causing friction between those involved in politics and those committed to the movement's religious goals.

The result has often been a decision by mainstream Islamist movements to split political and *da'wa* activities. Even though this option is not available to the Muslim Brotherhood, given the legal prohibitions against forming a political party, there are strong and varied opinions on the subject

within the movement. For example, one Muslim Brother, Ali Abdel Fattah, noted to us that in politics it wasn't wise to forget *da'wa*. Part of *da'wa* was participation in politics; but *da'wa* must also inform politics because 'if you take principle away from politics the movement will lose popularity'. He worried that, were the Muslim Brotherhood to become a political party, it would soon be afflicted by the 'diseases' that afflict other Egyptian political parties. Party politicians sought authority, he argued, while the Muslim Brotherhood, by contrast, sought change. As he argued:

> Voting is not the only reflection of how strong you are. When I see more women wearing *hijab* and more men walking around holding the Qur'an I know I am popular and that I am having an effect.[61]

By contrast, others argued for a split. As prominent Muslim Brother, Gamal Heshmat, noted to us in an interview, *da'wa* and politics would have to be separated, because while politics should be based on Islamic principles, it had to be based on other principles too. He added, to succeed in politics, the movement needed good representatives, so there would be a need to focus on a member's political, as well as their religious, upbringing.[62] Such an attitude within the movement is not new. In the mid-1990s, a number of Muslim Brothers led by Abu al-Ela Madi and Essam Sultan broke from the Muslim Brotherhood to seek registration for a new political party, Hizb al-Wasat (literally the Centre Party). Al-Wasat represented many of the middle generation's ideas for a more overt, explicitly political activism, but also for a more inclusive project, illustrated by al-Wasat's self-description as a civil party with an Islamic reference and its

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initial inclusion of a token number of non-Muslim members.

Ultimately, the al-Wasat split was not serious. Today it is referred to within the Muslim Brotherhood almost dismissively, as an 'administrative problem'.[63] The regime refused to license al-Wasat and arrested its leaders, while the Muslim Brotherhood leadership officially condemned the new party; eventually many of those who had left returned. Madi has continued, unsuccessfully, to seek a licence for a party that today remains important intellectually, but irrelevant politically. Yet it is noteworthy that the Muslim Brotherhood has also adopted now the notion of an 'Islamic reference'. As one observer commented to us, this is probably a case of al-Wasat's being the first to publicly articulate an idea that already existed among members of the middle generation in the Brotherhood.[64] It has been Madi's middle generation contemporaries inside the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Abd al-Mun'im Abul Futuh, who have pushed most strongly the idea of a civil party with an Islamic reference.

At stake in the debate over movement versus party (and *da'wa* versus politics) are not just matters of ideology. The debate touches on three issues of direct relevance to our discussion here: membership; internal democracy; and the management of internal debates and divisions. As al-Wasat, head Madi, noted to us, as an Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood restricts its membership to 'special Muslims' (and male ones at that); as a political party, it would face an imperative to open up membership to all Egyptian citizens.[65] In 2007 General Guide Muhammed Akef claimed that membership in any eventual Muslim

Brotherhood party would be open to anyone, including non-Muslims, who agreed with its conservative values.[66] Likewise, Gamal Heshmat noted to us that a party could not refuse the desire of any Egyptian to join it, whatever their religion.[67]

The formation of a political party would also bring into sharper focus questions about the level of internal democracy within the Muslim Brotherhood. The movement has a reputation for being highly centralised and disciplined — although representatives often bristle at such descriptions and point to the consensual nature of decision-making. As a recent International Crisis Group report noted, the movement does maintain a formal consultative council (*majlis ash-shura*) elected by members; in practice, however, control lies in the hands of a few senior members of the movement.[68] Or as Joshua Stacher, a close observer of the movement argued to us, many of the positions in the movement are elected; the question is who gets to vote and for whom?[69] The movement has argued — somewhat conveniently — that, if its internal democratic processes do not always work, a key reason is the regime's refusal to allow the movement to convene large meetings.[70] Certainly, repeated confrontations with the state and the movement's illegal but tolerated status have, at the very least, strengthened the imperative toward unity and reinforced the lack of transparency with respect to decision-making.

Closely related to the question of internal democracy is the issue of how the movement manages internal debates and the regeneration of its leadership and ideas. Characterising the Muslim Brotherhood's internal divisions is not easy; differences cut across ideological, generational and organisational lines. For

example, Dr Ibrahim al-Za'afrani, a member of the Brotherhood's Shura Council, referred in a recent interview to the movement being divided between two schools of thought: one that followed the ideas of the movement's third General Guide, Omar Tilmisani, emphasising openness and engagement with society; and another more closed school that followed the idea of the movement's fifth guide, Mustafa Mashour, focused more on disciplined organisation and unity.[71] Amr el-Choubaki meanwhile has pointed to a division between reformist and conservative elements in the movement, with the conservatives dominant. Of this latter group, however, which he argues comprises some 80% of members, he points to a further division between more worldly and politically active conservatives and those more focused on religion, with little experience of the movement's political activism.[72]

Ultimately, change, if it comes, comes slowly to the Brotherhood. Here one key factor continues to be the leading role still played in the organisation by individuals whose formative experience was of the confrontation with Nasser in the 1960s (the so-called 'prison generation') which has produced a cautiousness and overriding concern for survival at the expense of greater dynamism.[73] For example, one element in the al-Wasat split was the frustration of some middle generation members with what they saw as the movement's stagnation in the 1990s.[74] As noted previously, the movement's ultimate conservatism was also demonstrated in the 2007 draft of the party program. This is not to suggest that more reform minded or pragmatic currents within the Brotherhood are unimportant. At the very least, they enable the movement to present itself more favourably both domestically and

internationally. This provides members like el-Erian and Abul Futtoh with influence within the movement as well. Nevertheless, while these figures play prominent public roles, they seem to have less impact internally, illustrated by the way the movement was able to silence their public criticism of the 2007 party program.[75]

Nevertheless, a second and arguably more important factor in the movement's conservatism is the political situation in Egypt. As we have already noted, in its recent campaign of arrests the regime seems to have targeted precisely the movement's more reformist or pragmatic figures. The result has been a strengthening of traditionalists reflected, for example, in the election of five largely conservative members to the Guidance Bureau to replace those arrested by the regime.[76] Indeed, a number of commentators have suggested that the regime's latest assault on the Brotherhood has prompted a serious questioning of the benefits of political activism and participation within the movement.[77] While this might lead to more politically pragmatic members of the movement leaving, the lack of political opportunities creates an obstacle to this. Any new breakaway party would face little prospect of being licensed by the regime (as the al-Wasat example illustrated); but staying within the Muslim Brotherhood basically means toeing the movement's line to preserve unity in difficult times.

New generations

Today a new, potential source of dynamism is evident among some segments of the movement's youngest generation. Their formative experience has been of a period when

the Muslim Brotherhood has both made advances (most notably the 2005 parliamentary success) but also suffered reverses (the repression the movement has faced since, repression some of these younger activists have experienced firsthand). More at home with modern media, one manifestation of this generation's activism has been blogging.[78] Regime repression was a major spur. Two prominent Muslim Brother bloggers, Abdel-Moneim Mahmoud (ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com) and Magdy Saad (yallameshmohem.blogspot.com) began blogging after they were arrested by security forces. They initially sought to use the internet to focus media attention on their own experiences and on the behaviour of regime security forces more generally.[79] A number of blogs were also started to highlight the military trials of prominent Muslim Brothers in 2007, some written by their children.

Yet blogging has not just been a reaction to a paternalistic state; it has also been a response to paternalism within the movement as well, providing a vehicle for internal criticism, including over the draft party program.[80] In some respects these bloggers have used the internet in the same way that middle generation members once used electoral politics as an outlet for their ideas and activism. Like the middle generation they represent both an opportunity and a threat for the movement: an opportunity because they are articulate, technically proficient and able to present a favourable image of the movement to the outside world; but also a threat because the price for giving these elements of the younger generation a voice will be accepting at least some of their demands for change.

The effectiveness of these bloggers is higher than the relatively low levels of internet penetration in Egypt would suggest, given that posts and debates from some of their blogs have found their way into the mainstream media. This may well have played a role in what appears to have been an effort by the Muslim Brotherhood leadership to rein in young dissenters when blogging criticism of the party program and other aspects of the movement came to an abrupt close at the end of 2007.[81] Once again, the willingness of the movement's young internal critics to desist from the criticism of the Brotherhood related in part to the ongoing assault on the movement by the regime.

Muslim Brother bloggers are by no means a homogeneous group. Not all have been uniformly critical of the movement, nor can we characterise here the various intellectual perspectives they represent. Nevertheless, the views of one of the more prominent bloggers, Ibrahim al-Hudaibi, provide some interesting insights.[82] Al-Hudaibi, who is a graduate of the American University in Cairo and a grandson and great grandson of two former General Guides of the Muslim Brotherhood, is neither the most critical of the Muslim Brother bloggers nor an apologist for the senior leadership of the movement. In his interview with us he noted that his aspirations lay on the intellectual side of the movement rather than the activist side, although he has also served as an English language translator for the General Guide and has managed the movement's English language website.

Al-Hudaibi saw urgency in the need for democratic reform in Egypt, the absence of which was 'killing us slowly'. Yet he was also

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thoughtful about what democracy meant in an Egyptian context and vis-à-vis the movement's ideals. He conceded that some Islamists saw democracy as being 'against God' because it vested sovereignty in the people. For him, however, the real issue was how you could have democracy in a way that makes society work together, rather than inducing conflict. He argued that the critical issue in Western societies was not their democratic political process but the values that underpinned them. Secularism, liberalism and capitalism characterised Western society, hence the criteria for success were primarily material. By contrast Islam could 'fill in the spaces between a democratic structure and process', to provide different criteria for success where people did not do what was best for them but what was best for society; that is, Islam would provide ethical, moral and legal principles within a democratic political framework.

In this context, al-Hudaibi noted the importance of people being free to choose. He said that initially his contemplation of democracy had raised for him the question of 'What if people chose something other than Islam?' But, he had then realised this was the wrong question. If people were not freely choosing Islam as the basis for their moral, ethical and legal principles, then he and the movement were not doing their task. In this respect, politics was 'just one field of activity' for the movement. In relating this to the oft-stated concern of the movement with the influx of Western ideas and values, he noted that 'we take a lot from the West — technology etc'. But he had no difficulty dealing with the West because he was 'confident of [his] identity'; he was able to learn and take what he needed and reject what he didn't. By contrast, he argued, if you lacked a strong sense of your identity you took one of two equally wrong postures: like some youth in Egypt, you adopted everything Western good or bad; or, like some radical Muslims, you rejected everything.

It should be remarked that the bloggers, collectively, are by no means representative of the younger generations of the movement. One observer of the phenomenon notes, that by the bloggers' own estimates, they represent no more than 15% of Muslim Brotherhood youth, with much of the remainder, particularly in provincial parts of Egypt, associated with more fundamentalist, salafist thought.[83] Others have also pointed to the rising interest in salafism as a reflection of growing disillusionment among youth with the limited opportunities available in politics.[84]

The energies of the movement's youth are not always directed toward reflective ends. In late 2006, a group of Muslim Brother students held a martial arts demonstration in militia-like formations at al-Azhar University. Against a background of months of political confrontation between the students and the university administration over student union elections, the demonstration was seen as a blatant attempt by the youth to intimidate both the university and other students. The timing of the demonstration was also provocative, given the highly charged atmosphere created in mid-2006 by the war between Israel and Lebanon. The demonstration became a political gift for the regime. Once again, it alleged that the movement was making secret military preparations and stepped up its campaign of arrests of key movement leaders.

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A sympathetic explanation of the al-Azhar militias episode is that it was an ill judged effort by inexperienced young activists against the background of repeated efforts by the university to limit their options for legitimate, peaceful expression. There is little evidence to suggest that the display was coordinated with the central leadership; in fact, quite the contrary given the public relations disaster it became. Nevertheless, the incident *did* demonstrate a consciousness on the part of the students of the latent power of a movement that could put more people on the Egyptian streets than any other organisation, save the military. It may have also reflected their frustration that this power was not being used, in this case to protect student members from the university administration. In fact, this was precisely one of the criticisms levelled by one Muslim Brother blogger in the aftermath of the al-Azhar episode.[85]

Since the al-Azhar episode young Islamists have watched, and in some cases experienced, the regime's efforts to beat the Brotherhood into submission. They have also watched their own movement responding cautiously to this bout of repression. While this might indeed be the wise course for the movement (born of long and at times bitter experience), the danger is that it will generate further dissatisfaction among youth already frustrated by their inability to be heard. It is not yet clear where this frustration might lead: one possible direction that commentators have already pointed to is a withdrawal from politics and political activism. While this need not necessarily lead to more violent forms of activism, there is a real risk that if they cut themselves off from society, some of these young activists could set off on a path well trodden by previous generations of militant Islamists in Egypt.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood has consistently adhered to a non-violent strategy aimed at the gradual, but total Islamisation of Egyptian society. Participation in Egypt's heavily constrained political system has been an important element in this strategy. By and large the movement has abided by the limitations imposed on it by the regime, although it has also sought to challenge them by advocating the democratisation of Egyptian politics. This has raised questions for the movement, as critics, political counterparts and prospective constituents have sought clarification of the movement's stances. This has not been an easy process for the movement to manage or control: intellectually, it still struggles to reconcile key articles of ideological faith, not least its commitment to *shari'a*, with democratic principles. This echoes the political challenge the movement faces in retaining the support of its core supporters, while reassuring and reaching out to a broader constituency, much less inspired by, and often fearful of, its religious agenda.

But if critics and contemporaries are asking democratic questions of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian political system also provides the movement with few incentives to answer them. Debates within the Brotherhood over how to transform the movement into a political party, or to separate preaching from political activism, or to reconcile its goal of a *shari'a* led state with a civil one, will remain moot while the regime blocks the opportunity to put these questions to a

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real test. This is not an easy proposition, given the lack of serious competition or countervailing force, beyond the regime. Nevertheless, there are forces for pragmatism within the movement, including among its newer generations. By directly targeting these pragmatic elements in recent arrests, the regime will only strengthen the Brotherhood's already strong conservative and fundamentalist inclinations. It also strengthens suspicions that what President Mubarak fears more than militant Islamists are pragmatic ones.

Notes

[1] Our Mission in *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna (a selection from the Majmu'at rasai'l al-imam al-shahid Hasan al-Banna,* translated and annotated by Charles Wendell) Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978.

[2] Khayrat el-Shater, No need to be afraid of us. *The Guardian*, 28 January 2006.

[3] As Richard Mitchell notes there was some confusion about the actual date of the Society's founding; by some accounts it was April-May 1929. See Richard P. Mitchell, *The society of the Muslim Brothers.* London, Oxford University Press, 1993, p 8, footnote 19.

[4] Anthony Bubalo and Greg Fealy, *Between the global and the local: Islamism, the Middle East and Indonesia.* The Brookings Project on U.S. Policy towards the Islamic World. Washington, Brookings Institution, 9 October 2005, p 4.

[5] Interview with Gamal Heshmat, Cairo, 4 October, 2006.

[6] See Raymond A. Hinnebusch Jr., *Egyptian politics under Sadat: the post-populist development of an authoritarian-modernizing state.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p 2.

[7] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: religion activism and political change in Egypt.* New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, p 23.

[8] See Daniel Brumberg. *Liberalization versus democracy: understanding Arab political reform.* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2003: www.ceip.org/files/Publications/wp37.asp?from=pub date.

[9] Condoleezza Rice, Remarks at the American University in Cairo. 20 June, 2005.

[10] Interview with Hisham Kassem, Editor, Masri al-Youm, Cairo, 2005.

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