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The Islamist Moment: From Islamic State to Civil Islam?

FAWAZ A. GERGES

FOR SCHOLARS INTERESTED IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, particularly religious-based movements, what is taking place in the Middle East is historical—an Islamist moment par excellence. Islamists or religio-political forces are poised to take ownership of the seats of power in a number of Arab countries in the coming years. They have already won majorities of parliamentary seats in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, and will probably make further gains in others after the dust settles on the Arab uprisings.

After decades of persecution, what is unfolding today clearly shows the weight of Islamists, most of whom are centrist and modernist and accept the rules and procedures of the democratic game, in shaping the future political trajectory of their societies. In contrast, the Salafis and Islamic ultraconservatives in general, who believe that Islam controls all social spheres and regulates the whole of human life, are a sizable minority.¹

¹Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969; 2d ed. 1993); Lisa Brynjar, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928–1942* (Ithaca, NY: Ithaca Press, 1998); Francois Burgat, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*, translated by William Dowell (Austin, TX: University of Texas Center for Middle East Studies, 1997); Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Sami

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In the last four decades, centrist Islamists skillfully positioned themselves as the credible alternative to the failed secular authoritarian order, an order that unwittingly facilitated the rise and expansion of the Islamist movement. They invested considerable capital in building social networks on the national and local levels, including non-government professional civil society associations, welfare organizations, and family ties. In contrast to their secular-minded opponents, Islamists have mastered the art of local politics and have built a formidable political machine that delivers the vote. Islamists's recent parliamentary victory was not surprising, because they had paid their dues and earned popular credibility and the trust of voters. They are cashing in on social investments that they had made in their local communities, though future returns on their investment will rest on their ability to govern effectively and competently.

Although Islamists did not trigger the large-scale popular uprisings, their decades-long resistance to autocratic rulers turned them into shadow governments in the peoples' eyes. A vote for the Islamists implied a clean break with the failed past and a belief (to be tested) that they could deliver the goods—jobs, economic stability, transparency, and inclusiveness. Thus, the political fortunes of Islamists will ultimately depend on whether they live up to their promises and meet the rising expectations of the Arab publics (the jury is not reassuring so far as the Egyptian and Tunisian cases show).

What does the rise to power of Islamists mean for the future of the Middle East and the region's international relations? What is the balance of social forces among Islamists? How will the Islamists's coming to power affect transition from authoritarianism to pluralism, including the institutionalization of political participation, civil-military relations, civil society, and the rights of minorities? To what extent will the Islamist moment transform the geostrategic architecture of the Middle East, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict and the cold war raging between the Saudi and Iranian camps? How have the Western powers, particularly the United States, responded to the rise of the Islamists? In other words, will parliamentarianism and the burden of governance have a moderating effect

Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Raymond William Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

on Islamist parties and transform them into interest- and constituency-driven parties like their Christian counterparts in Europe and religious-based groups in Indonesia and Turkey?

This paper lays out three big arguments. First, Islamist parties are slowly moving away from their traditional agenda of establishing an authoritarian Islamic state and imposing Islamic law, to a new focus that is centered on creating a “civil Islam” that permeates society and accepts political pluralism. Centrist Islamist parties like Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are slowly travelling down a similar path toward pluralism and parliamentarianism already traversed by the Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah in Indonesia and the AK Party and the Gulen Movement in Turkey.

Secondly, Islamist parties are increasingly becoming “service” parties concerned mainly with the provision of social services and local public goods. This constituent-oriented party is an acknowledgement that political legitimacy and the likelihood of reelection rests on the ability to supply public goods, particularly jobs and economic growth, and to demonstrate transparency. This factor introduces a huge degree of pragmatism in their policies. The example of Turkey, especially its economic success, has had a major impact on Arab Islamists, many of whom would like to emulate the Turkish success story. The Arab Islamists have, in other words, understood that “It is the economy stupid!” The Turkish model, with the religiously observant provincial bourgeoisie as its king-pin and a pattern of linkage with the business classes and market liberalism, also acts as a reminder that Islam and capitalism are mutually reinforcing and compatible.

Finally, despite their rhetoric, centrist Islamists continue to mellow in the arena of foreign policy and have shown a willingness to work with Western powers when their interests converge. This includes their posture toward Israel. The Islamists’s commitment to Palestine, rooted in popular pressure from their constituencies, will mean that while they will not renege on existing peace treaties, their relationship with Israel will remain frozen, in the absence of a just solution to the Israel–Palestine conflict that is endorsed by Hamas.

A GENERATIONAL SHIFT TOWARD PRAGMATISTS

It is too early to offer a definite judgment on how centrist Islamists will govern, and whether they will show tolerance toward others, although signs from Tunisia are more encouraging than Egypt’s. But in the last three decades, a pattern has emerged that allows scholars of religious activists to advance working hypotheses regarding the broad contours of Islamists’s

governance. To begin with, increasing evidence shows that the balance of social forces among Islamists has shifted toward pragmatists. It is a generational shift that favors technocrats and professionals, such as engineers, dentists, doctors, attorneys, and teachers, who are open-minded and reformist, less obsessed with dogmas, identity, and culture wars, and more willing to build governing coalitions with ideological opponents, whether they are non-Muslim, liberal, or secular. For example, Ennahda in Tunisia prefers to form alliances with liberals and leftists, not with the ultraconservative Salafis. Although after the revolution the Muslim Brothers endeavored to differentiate themselves from the Salafis and show moderation, they finally closed ranks with their ultraconservative counterparts as the struggle with the secular-leaning opposition intensified in 2013. One of the major strengths of these modernist Islamist parties, actors who accept the rules of the political game across the region, is that they consist of a growing generation of university graduates who have been joining Islamist parties since the 1970s. The demographics of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda show a preponderant representation of the 1970s and 1980s generation of university graduates and the middle class in general, as well as a shift that is uniformly toward the center. The unfolding sociopolitical struggle between governing Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia and non-Islamists should not obscure important sociological changes that have occurred within the Islamist movement.

With the exception of first-hand observation and field research, there exists no hard data on the demographics of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda, though a relative consensus exists that the rising elite among both parties favors members of the 1970s and 1980s generation. There is also tentative evidence showing that younger members of both parties are more forward-looking than their elders, and share many of the norms of their liberal-leaning counterparts. Nevertheless, evidence also exists that the social base of mainstream Islamists (their followers and supporters) is much more conservative and reactionary than the rising elite and young members, and that the Salafis are collecting new recruits, representing a small but critical segment. There are multiple reasons for why this generational shift has occurred among the Muslim Brothers and Ennahda. First, the movement has been baptized by blood and fire. Also, decades of persecution and imprisonment sapped the strength and will of the movement's founding fathers and forced them to steer the Islamist ship to calmer waters. They were compelled to do so after they had challenged the hegemony of authoritarian Arab rulers and gotten brutally repressed. The prison and exile years benefitted those quiet voices that called for

accommodation rather than confrontation with the secular regimes. Once released by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat from prison in the early 1970s, the Brotherhood co-opted a new generation of young university student leaders who have rejuvenated the movement and injected new blood in its veins. It is this generation that has served as a counterweight to the conservative Old Guard and has begun to tilt the balance in the social struggle toward centrism and pluralism, as opposed to liberalism or democracy.

In Egypt, the pragmatists are much more at ease with modernity and pluralistic politics than are their elders, who have resisted internal attempts to democratize the decision-making process and open up to the outside. The differences between the pragmatists and conservatives in sensibility, world-view, and education are striking. Insisting on absolute loyalty and secrecy, members of the Old Guard—such as Mahmoud Izzat, Secretary General and gatekeeper of the organization's finances; Mohammed Akif, the Brotherhood's former mufti and general guide; and Mohamed Badie, the present general guide—lack the intellectual and political imagination and vision to transform the Brotherhood into a transparent, modern political party.

In contrast, members of the 1970s and 1980s generation are more tolerant and accustomed to a more pluralistic political environment. These include Mohamed al-Beltagui, a medical doctor by profession and a Brotherhood lawmaker; Essam el-Arian, Vice President of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and a law and medical school graduate; Mohammed Morsi, former head of the Freedom and Justice Party, who won the presidency; Saad El-Katatni, speaker of Egypt's first democratically elected parliament in more than 60 years, who holds a PhD in botanical studies; and Abdel Moneim Abul-Fotouh, a pediatrician who holds a law degree and served for years on the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau, its highest executive body. Abul-Fotouh was expelled from the Brotherhood in 2011 because of his decision to run for president, despite the group's promise at the time that it would not run a candidate.

These pragmatists profess commitment to a relatively open society and representative government and possess an understanding of the functional role(s) of politics—supply of public goods. They are likely to dominate the movement during the next decade. Abul-Fotouh ran for the presidency as an independent candidate against the wishes of the Brotherhood leadership, who desperately attempted to torpedo his candidacy. Many young Brothers and reformists, who have emerged as an important social segment within the movement, voted for him in defiance of the Old Guard. Abul-Fotouh has already established a

new political party where hundreds of Muslim Brothers joined him en masse.²

A point of qualification is in order. Although ultraconservatives such as Mahmoud Izzat and Mohamed Badie are a dwindling minority, they exercise considerable influence and wield power behind the scenes. While demography and socialization are chipping away at the Old Guard, they are neither defeatist nor passive. In their effort to resist real change and stem the social tide of the pragmatists, ultraconservatives have co-opted members of the 1970s and 1980s generation to their camp and enthroned them as most-decisive players.

Khairat Al-Shater—a millionaire businessman and the Brotherhood's key strategist, financier, and deputy head until he resigned in April 2012 to run for president—is a case in point. Violating a previous pledge not to field a candidate for the presidential polls, this was a controversial move. The Brotherhood's decision to nominate two candidates for president, not just one (Shater and Mohammed Morsi, head of the FJP), also has thrown further light on Shater, a most influential voice within the Brotherhood, previously seen as a pragmatic voice of moderation. Shater, along with other candidates, was disqualified from running for the presidency by the election commission because of a past criminal conviction, even though the charges were widely viewed as trumped up by the Hosni Mubarak regime to punish him for his role as a leader of the Islamist opposition.³ Many invested their hopes in Shater to reform and moderate the organization, wrest it away from the Old Guard, and forge coalitions with secular-minded parties.⁴

Yet after the ouster of Mubarak, former members of the Brotherhood accused Shater of defending the group's traditional view of itself as a society within society that employs politics as just one tool to Islamize the country; he led an internal crackdown on young Brothers who sought to change the organization's insular and hierarchical culture. He also pushed for the expulsion of liberal-minded members such as Abul-Fotouh, who disagreed with the political decisions made by its ruling Guidance Council. Critics also accuse Shatter of exercising considerable influence on Egyptian internal

²David D. Kirkpatrick, "Keeper of Islamic Flame Rises as Egypt's New Decisive Voice," *The New York Times*, 12 March 2012; Fawaz A. Gerges, "The Irresistible Rise of the Muslim Brothers," *New Statesman*, 29 November 2011; Mohammed Basiouni Abdel Halim, "Generational Gap: The dimensions of the crisis amongst the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood and the group's leaders after the revolution," [in Arabic] *Ahram.org*, 9 April 2012; Al Nile, "Second Revolution of Rage ... Gap between the Young and Old Brothers," [in Arabic] accessed at www.nile.eg, 25 January 2012.

³Kirkpatrick, "Keeper of Islamic Flame." Author interviews with young Muslim Brothers and nationalists.

⁴"Young brothers support Shater through the internet ..." [in Arabic] accessed at www.almasry-alyoum.com, 1 April 2012.

and external politics after the election of Morsi to the presidency. He is a powerful voice in presidential decision-making, a prominent liberal Islamist, whom I respect, told me.⁵

Critics within the Brotherhood and without are concerned about a campaign led by Shater to enforce a single, traditional Islamic vision. After the Brotherhood's political arm gained more than 40 percent of seats in the new Parliament, Shater publicly preached the virtues of an Islamic state, unsettling critics who aim to separate governing from religious interpretation. Shater argued that the Islamist landslide victory was an indisputable democratic mandate for an explicitly Islamic government: "The Islamic reference point regulates life in its entirety, politically, economically and socially; we don't have this separation (between religion and government)."⁶ In his first reported comments after his nomination as a presidential candidate, Shater pledged to introduce sharia law, as his "first and final" objective if elected, thus appealing to the Brotherhood's conservative wing and a broad section of Egyptian society that secured the Salafis a quarter of the seats in Parliament.⁷

In a lecture in Alexandria, Shater presented an ideal-type vision of the Brotherhood as fixed, constant, and unyielding: "No one can come and say, 'let's change the overall mission' No one can say, 'forget about obedience, discipline and structures' All of these are constants that represent the fundamental framework for our method, the method of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is not open for developing or change."⁸

Although Shater asserts that the Brotherhood's goals have remained fixed and unchangeable, this claim is contradicted by history and social reality. Far from puritanical, the Muslim Brothers' conduct does not differ from that of other political parties in subordinating ideology and theology to interests and politics, though they wrap their decisions in a religious garb. The religious rhetoric not only appeals to the Brotherhood base but also masks the real political agenda of the Islamist organization. The Muslim Brothers have been domesticated and nationalized, more concerned about the provision of social services and public goods than about building an

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Marwa Awad and Edmund Blair, "Supporters Hail Brotherhood Bid for Egypt Presidency," *Reuters*, 5 April 2012; "Shater Will Implement Sharia as a Solution and Contract of the People," [in Arabic] accessed at www.albawaba.com, 5 April 2012.

⁸Mohammed El-Tehami, "Al-Shater: The Leadership Is Not Our Goal: We Want a Government With An Islamic Reference," [in Arabic] accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 22 April 2011; Ahmed Ali, "Al-Shater: We Are Preparing for an Islamic Government....," [in Arabic] accessed at www.almasryalyoum.com, 22 April 2011.

Islamic state. Comparative literature and structural arguments from other cases, such as Indonesian and Turkish Islamists, and Christian Democrats in Europe, show a similar, not identical, journey and evolution from religious activism to political contestation.

THE ENNAHDA CASE

In Tunisia, Ennahda has undergone a more-rapid shift than the Brotherhood toward modernity and pluralism through the work of its more-youthful members. Souad Abderrahim is a notable example. She is a 47-year-old pharmaceutical executive who favors tailored suits and stiletto heels and prefers not to wear a veil. Her main political experience was as a student union leader and a spokesperson of Ennahda. As a mother of two children, Abderrahim found it necessary to speak out on behalf of Ennahda to curtail people's fears that the Party would curb women's rights or mix conservative religious norms with politics.

"If they put forward someone like me, who is liberal, who does not use the veil and runs a pharmacy, it's an assurance to everyone," Abderrahim told *The Times*. "We are not going to ban alcohol or tourism or force people to wear the veil or to go to prayers. These are personal affairs," she said.⁹ Interestingly, Abderrahim describes herself as "liberal, with an Islamic base," or an Islamic liberal, a testament to the emergence of a new grouping of Islamists at ease with modernity and liberalism. She has become an important voice in Tunisia, a moderate politician who holds a seat in the country's new Constituent Assembly, charged with creating a democratic political structure.¹⁰ Pragmatists within Ennahda are powerful drivers and agents of progressive change. The rise of Islamic liberalism in Tunisia will act as a counterweight against the Salafis, a small but potent minority, and safeguard democratic transition and consolidation.

Similarly, the moderate youth in Morocco have built a critical mass within the Party of Justice and Development. The ascendance of Abdelilah Benkirane to the Premier's office is a case in point. His inclusive and pluralist agenda has gained him popularity among the Islamist youth throughout the country. Moroccans of different social classes and education, men

⁹Olivia Williams, "Tunisia Elections: Ennahda Promise Moderate State as a Female Candidate Becomes Symbol of Arab Spring," *The Huffington Post*, 26 October 2011; Walid Ahmed Al-Farshishi, "Discussion with Souad Abderrahim, Ennahda candidate for parliamentary seat," [in Arabic] accessed at www.e-tunisia.net, 28 September 2011; "Souad Abderrahim: Ennahda does not require me to wear the hijab in respect of personal freedoms," [in Arabic] *Al Arabiya*, 28 October 2011.

¹⁰Elizabeth Bryant, "In Tunisia, Popular Ennahda Party Tests 'Moderate' Islam," *The Christian Century*, 28 November 2011, accessed at www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-11/tunisia-test-what-moderate-islam-looks, 8 July 2013.

and women, young and old, reportedly voted for Benkirane because of his “moderate trend” and strong desire to end corruption in the kingdom. According to a Moroccan youth: “I am far from Islamist ideology, but the Party for Justice and Development (PJD) is the only one which has presented a transparent election program without contradictions and false promises.” When another young Moroccan woman was asked why she voted for the PJD, she said: “The Islam of Benkirane is the Islam of all Moroccans. It will not require women to be covered. Moreover, I think we finally have an important role in society.”¹¹

TOLERATION AND PLURALISM?

Islamists’s worldview and evolution differ from one group and one country to another. Most mainstream Islamists of the Tunisian Ennahda Party and the Egyptian Brotherhood variety accept the concept of citizenship and the will of the people, as opposed to the sovereignty of God, as the foundation of legitimate authority. Most do not talk about establishing Islamic-based governments as stipulated by the original manifestos of these groups and instead, they call for *al-dawla al-madaniya*, or a civil state. Even the Old Guard among the Muslim Brothers no longer advocates building an Islamic state. They substitute “civil” for “Islamic” in an effort to avoid using the term “secular.” The concept of secularism has negative connotations among Arab Muslims in general, not just Islamists, because of its historical association with colonialism and Westernization. Secularism is seen by many Muslims as equating to irreligiosity, rather than religious neutrality.

Similarly, the theocratic model in Iran has failed to fulfill the aspirations of many Islamists, thus reinforcing the shift in discourse from “Islamic” to “civil,” though they have yet to flesh out what they mean by a “civil” state. The Arab Islamists have neither constructed a political theory of what they mean by a civil state nor what to do with power once they gain it. They suffer from a paucity of theoretical ideas. So far the Islamists’ year-long governance experience exposed a conceptual deficit, a poverty of policy programs, and an authoritarian streak reminiscent of their secular counterparts. Political Islam has failed on the level of both theory and practice. In the eyes of a critical segment of the lower and middle class

¹¹Benjamin Villanti, “Who Voted for the Islamists in Morocco?” Morocco World News, 30 November 2011, accessed at <http://morocroworldnews.com/2011/11/who-voted-for-the-islamists-in-morocco/17080>; Abdelatif Heyda, “Latest Statement for Mr Benkirane Over Formation of Majority Coalition,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.pjd.ma, 15 December 2011; “Benkirane: We Will Support Moderate Religious Discourse,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.hebapress.com, 20 January 2012. The Party for Justice and Development, “Hami al-Din: The Government is Committed in Its Reform Plan to Stamp Out Corruption,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.pjd.ma, 16 April 2012.

co-opted by the Islamists after the removal of President Hosni Mubarak, Mohammed Morsi and the Brothers have been tried and found wanting. They have failed to deliver the local public goods.

Nevertheless, after their impressive performance in Egypt's parliamentary elections, leaders of the Brotherhood's newly formed Freedom and Justice Party publicly stressed their commitment to pluralism and to the protection of individual rights.¹² They promised to accommodate different and diverse people into the constitution-drafting process. Two senior leaders, Mohammed Morsi (before his election as president) and Essam el-Arian, pledged to form a national unity government with other parties. Addressing assertions often made by their secular opponents, FJP leaders insisted that they "would hand over power if we lose" because the public mood would no longer tolerate dictatorship. El-Arian pledged that the FJP would not change the Egyptian constitution to make all legislation comply with sharia law.¹³ (While finalizing this paper in summer 2013, a majority of Egyptians feel let down by Morsi and the Muslim Brothers. Under Morsi's leadership, Egypt is as polarized as it was under Mubarak, a testament to the divide between his earlier rhetoric as a candidate and the cynical reality of the Islamists's governance).

Moreover, Shater's views on sharia versus those of Essam el-Arian suggest internal tensions and contradictions within the Brotherhood on this question. In contrast to Ennahda, the Muslim Brothers have not resolved this dichotomy and inconsistency, partly because of the influence that the Old Guard still exercises within the movement, as well as their conservative social base. Shater, and like-minded cohorts, appeal to their followers and supporters, who are socially and politically very conservative, and try to outbid the Salafis. But Shater's rhetoric does not alter the basic premise of this essay: the Muslim Brothers have evolved into a constituency-based movement driven more by political and economic calculus than ideology and religion. In a sense, they travel a journey similar to that of other religious-based groups worldwide, though the pace and speed and momentum differ according to the Egyptian social context.

¹²David D. Kirpatrick, "Egyptian Vote Forces Islamists to Confront Their Divide Over Rule by Religion," *The New York Times*, 3 December 2011. See also: "Dr Morsi: No to Dominating Parliament and the Sharia Should Be Left to the Individual," [in Arabic] accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 30 May 2011; Ahmed Haza, "Dr Essa, el-Arian: We will not impose a constitution without agreement first," [in Arabic] accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 3 March 2012; Fadwa al-Ajuz and Marwa Masaad, "Female FJP MPs: We will not push for the implementation of Sharia," [in Arabic] accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 08 March 2012.

¹³Gerges, "The Irresistible Rise of the Muslim Brothers."

Ennahda in Tunisia is more consistent and unequivocal about respect for individual freedoms and its willingness to relinquish power if defeated at the ballot box. The Party announced that sharia should not be the source for all laws, and that the new constitution should simply acknowledge that Islam is the state religion, as the old constitution did. Ennahda's decision is designed to promote national unity, suggesting a shift toward pragmatism and moderation.¹⁴

After it gained a majority in the Tunisian Parliament at the end of 2011, Ennahda established a broad-based unity coalition to oversee the transition to pluralism. In contrast to the Brotherhood, which fielded its own candidate for president, Ennahda supported Moncef Marzouki, a liberal human rights activist, as president as part of the power-sharing deal. Said Ferjani, a rising leader within Ennahda, noted that history will judge his generation of Islamists not on its ability to gain power but rather on what it did with that power: "In this golden opportunity, I am not interested in control. I am interested in delivering the best charismatic system, a charismatic, democratic system. This is my dream."¹⁵

Although there is heated debate among Islamists and their liberal and leftist rivals over the formation of new constitutions and Ennahda's initial reluctance to confront the militant Salafis, the Tunisian constitution reflects a spirit of pluralism and toleration. Islamists have a vested interest in the institutionalization of the political process that will protect them against the whims of autocratic military rulers. As Ennahda's leader Rachid Ghannouchi put it in an interview in 2011: "Rulers benefit from violence more than their opponents do."¹⁶

Various Islamist leaders stress their commitment to building institutions and safeguarding individual freedoms and minorities, and the rule of law. Ennahda has made it clear that it will protect Tunisia's small Jewish minority, which faces considerable pressure from small conservative elements in society. Ennahda's senior leadership rejected calls from extremists (and even from Israel) that Tunisian Jews should leave the country. In an interview with the BBC's Wyre Davies, Ghannouchi said: "I have made a point of meeting here with the (Jewish) community's leaders In our party's rules and in the country's constitution, it is

¹⁴"Islam Will Not Be the Main Source of Legislation in the New Constitution of Tunisia," [in Arabic] *Al Arabiya*, 27 March 2012. Amina Abu Shehab, "Ennahda Distances Itself Away From Sharia," [in Arabic] *Al Arabiya*, 29 March 2012.

¹⁵Anthony Shadid, "Islamists' Ideas on Democracy and Faith Face Test in Tunisia," *The New York Times*, 17 February 2012.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

important to emphasize that all of our faiths and traditions are respected, equally.”¹⁷

In Egypt, the debate on minority rights is still unfolding, and is revealing a reactionary stance adopted by the Brotherhood. The Party announced that while it would not oppose Christians or women standing for president, it would support a Muslim male for the position.¹⁸ The Muslim Brothers not only cater to followers and constituencies who are much more vocal about Islamic identity, family, and the moralization and control of the public space, but also ward off constant pressure by the ultraconservative Salafis and poaching against their social base. When it comes to women, the Islamist organization still subscribes to male-dominated textualist interpretations of the sacred. Far from being deterred by such illiberal statements, female candidates, such as the famous Egyptian anchorwoman Bothaina Kamel, threw their hats in the presidential ring.¹⁹

THE END OF IDEOLOGY?

There is no credible reason to fear that Islamists will hijack and Islamize the political systems of the region. In the last three decades, the majority of religious activists have evolved, matured, and distanced themselves from maximalist goals, including utopian Islamic states. Compelled by the might of authoritarian secular rulers, Islamists had little choice but to do so. As realists, today, Islamists know that checks and balances exist and that the military would strike with an iron fist if they acted recklessly. More importantly, they know that their political fortune will ebb and flow depending on their ability to supply local public goods, such as employment, education, and health. The Algerian model, where the military carried out a violent coup against Islamists after they won a majority of votes in the early 1990s, has not been forgotten. Islamists will go to great lengths to avoid all-out confrontation with the armed forces.

The Brotherhood in Egypt retains an institutional memory of its disastrous confrontation with the army officers who seized power in 1952. As tensions increased between the ruling generals and the Muslim Brothers

¹⁷“Ennahda Rejects Calls for Jews to Migrate,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.aljazeera.net, 11 December 2011; Wyre Davies, “Tunisia’s Jews Shun ‘Migrate to Israel’ Idea,” BBC News, 31 January 2012, accessed at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16803100.

¹⁸“Copts can run for Presidency: Brotherhood,” OnIslam.net, 28 March 2011, accessed at www.onislam.net/english/news/africa/451617-copts-can-run-for-presidency-brotherhood.html. See also “Clashing Opinions Within Islamists: The Brotherhood: We Reject the Nomination of Christians and Women to the Presidency ... We defend our position on Copt’s rights,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.almasryalyoum.com, 14 March 2011.

¹⁹“It Takes a Courageous Woman to Run for President in Egypt: First Female Hopeful,” *AlArabiya*, 9 March 2012, accessed at <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/09/199643.html>.

in 2012, the generals reminded the Muslim Brothers of this bitter inheritance and warned against challenging the military's authority. In a threatening statement, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces called on the Brotherhood to "be aware of history's lessons [the 1954 clash between army officers and Muslim Brothers], to avoid past mistakes we do not want to see repeated, and to look to the future with the spirit of cooperation."²⁰ Ironically, secular-minded activists were much more anxious about an unholy alliance between the Muslim Brothers and the military than a confrontation between them. They fear a return to the same authoritarianism as under Mubarak, only now with a religious veneer. The secular-leaning opposition in Egypt accused President Morsi and the military of collusion to maintain the status quo and forestall real political change.²¹ What subsequently transpired was the reverse. Nationalists and secularists called on the military to topple the first democratically elected (Islamist) president in Egypt's modern history, which it did. Nevertheless, the likelihood of the Brotherhood taking up arms against the military like their Algerian counterparts in the early 1990s is minimal. The most influential Islamist group in the Arab world renounced the use of force and violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the lessons learned by the Brothers from their experience underground from the 1940s until the late 1960s is that violence is counterproductive and endangers the very survival of the movement. In particular, the old guard, including Badie, who have a vivid institutional memory of the underground years, will not fall into the trap of militarily confronting the state; they would not risk it all.

In Tunisia, Ennahda members still remember the brutality and persecution they endured at the hand of the Ben Ali regime. Similarly, in Morocco, memories of state-sanctioned repression are very fresh, as King Mohammed VI released several leading Islamists from prison in February 2012.²²

Moreover, Islamists, masters of local politics, recognize that voters want them to set right the economy and make a clean break with the past, rather than establishing Islamic emirates. Field research and studies show that many people support the centrist Islamists because they are seen as

²⁰Ali Ibrahim, "Last Tango in Egypt," *Al Arabiya News*, 28 March 2012; "Ex-Brotherhood Moderate Pins Presidential Hopes on Drawing Both Religious, Liberal Vote," *Associated Press*, 13 April 2012.

²¹Wael Abdel Fatah, "Morsi and the Army," [in Arabic] *Al Akhbar*, 25 October 2012. "In Egypt: Did the Army and the Brotherhood Form an Alliance?" [in Arabic] accessed at www.aawsat.com, 19 March 2011.

²²Zakia Abdennebi, "Morocco's King Pardons Jailed Islamist Leaders," *Reuters*, 5 February 2012, accessed at www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/05/us-morocco-king-pardon-idUSTRE81407320120205; "The Press considers the Royal Pardon for Salafists a Gift to Benkirane," [in Arabic] accessed at www.maghress.com, 6 February 2012.

trustworthy and credible and untainted by corruption, patronage, and elitism, as well as competent and capable of managing the economy and creating jobs (there is no credible data on the percentage of non-affiliated voters who backed Islamists at the polls, but the number was undoubtedly significant).²³ Although Islamists had had no prior governing experience, they have been involved in the provision of social services and public goods for decades. In my interviews with Islamist activists and professionals over the years, they have stressed the importance of bread-and-butter issues to their constituencies. They are fully cognizant of the need to supply goods and social services to the public, not theology, in an effort to gain hearts and minds.²⁴ Like their Indonesian and Turkish co-religionists, electoral engagement has already had a moderating influence on Islamist parties in the Arab world. In particular, the Arab Islamists have borrowed a page from Turkey's AKP, which has been characterized as a "service party."²⁵ Although the Arab Islamists do not aspire to copy the Turkish model, they view it positively and are keen to learn its secrets of combining economic growth and religious piety. Democratic participation and the desire for reelection induce moderation and compromise.

In Tunisia, for example, high hopes are pinned on Ennahda to boost the country's economy and end corruption. Knowing that its future depends on economic revival, Ennahda has invested considerable effort and energy in building an economic program. A Moroccan journalist pointed out that one of the main factors behind the growing popularity of the Party of Justice and Development is its attitude toward the economy. "[PJD] is working actively to reinvigorate the Moroccan economy with the objective of creating job opportunities. Thus, it can tackle properly the most ailing sector in Morocco: employment."²⁶

For more than four decades, Islamists labored to enter politics and gain legal status. They learned the art of compromise and pragmatism through hardship and persecution. Despite alarming statements by some Islamists,

²³Shadi Hamid, "The Rise of the Islamists: How Islamists Will Change Politics, and Vice Versa," May/June 2011, *Foreign Affairs*; Robin Wright, "The Islamists Are Coming," 7 November 2011, accessed at www.foreignpolicy.com, www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/07/the_islamists_are_coming.

²⁴Dalibor Roháč, "Religion as a commitment device: The Economics of Political Islam," working paper, Legatum Institute, Department of Political Economy, King's College London.

²⁵Hakan M. Yavuz, *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006). See also his *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁶Loubna Flah, "PJD's Political Ideology: Between Theory and Practice," Morocco World News, 14 February 2012, accessed at <http://moroccoworldnews.com/2012/02/pjds-political-ideology-between-theory-and-practice/27208>; "Benkirane Government Faces Dangerous Economic Obstacles," [in Arabic] accessed at www.maghress.com, 18 December 2011.

particularly by the Muslim Brothers, on balance, ideology takes a back seat to the interests and political well-being of their movements. More than ever, their message targets specific constituencies and interest groups, a sign of an ideological shift and maturity. Arab Islamists are traveling a path similar to that of the Christian Democrats and Euro-communists in Western Europe, who in the 20th century, subordinated ideology to economic interests and political constituencies.

The secular-leaning opposition, on the other hand, dismisses the apparent change in the Islamists's worldview and conduct as misleading because, in their opinion, ideology is a constant factor in the Islamist universe, implying that they are frozen in time and space. For example, claiming that the Islamists are double-tongued and cannot be trusted, Aziz Al-Azmeh, an Arab secular critic, pointed to a secretly released video in which Ghannouchi, Ennahda's leader, urges the Salafis to be strategically patient until the Islamists wrestle control of state institutions away from secularists. In a lecture delivered at the London School of Economics and Political Science LSE's Middle East Centre, "Freethinking, Secularism and the Arab Spring," Al-Azmeh refers to a video showing Ghannouchi having an informal mentoring session with members of Tunisian Islamic associations, in which he outlines his strategy for a gradual consolidation of Islamist power, recounting the free advice he has dispensed to Ennahda's more-radical rivals, the Salafis, whom he depicts as overzealous kindred with considerable potential. "Do not rush things. I tell the Salafi youth," he says. "We all went through the same and we suffered. Now you want to have a TV, radio, schools and invite the preachers. Why are you rushing things?" The real threat to the country's post-Ben Ali future, Ghannouchi explains, is the electoral victory of the secularists and the control that they still exercise over state institutions, including the military, the media, schools, and bureaucracy.²⁷

In an analysis of the evolution of Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe, Stathis Kalyvas reminds readers that these parties emerged from the illiberal and often-intolerant Catholic movement, a counter-revolutionary reaction against liberalism. The Catholic movement was built on an ideology of opposition to the liberal state, a project that was "fundamentalist" and "openly theocratic."²⁸ Today, however, Christian Democratic parties do not retain traces of illiberalism, intolerance, or

²⁷Monther Al-Bodyafi, "Ghannouchi Confesses to Presence of Video and MPs Call for Removing Ennahda," *Al-Arabiya.net*, 12 October 2012, accessed at <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/12/243356.html>.

²⁸Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 258.

subservience to the Church; rather, they have become anchored in democratic political discourse and practice. According to Kalyvas, this transformation occurred because voters became the “paramount source of support and legitimacy,” and not necessarily because of secularization, integration, or acceptance of democracy; it was the result of “the choices made by the new parties in response to endogenous constraints that were built in the process of their formation.”²⁹ Like religious- and ideological-oriented parties in Western Europe, Islamists will probably be transformed by political engagement and governance. Their desire for reelection exercises a moderating influence on Islamist parties throughout the region.³⁰

Obeida Nahas, a founding member of both the Syrian National Council and the National Action Group against the Assad regime, said that he and his allies are religious conservatives rather than Islamists, not unlike Turkey’s governing party, which they call an inspiration but not a model. The age of ideology is dead, Nahas told *The New York Times*. Instead, he said, the generation that fomented the Arab Spring wants a limited, non-ideological state that treats all its citizens equally.³¹

The gradual transformation of modernist Islamists is consistent with what various scholars have been arguing about the more-gradual, inexorable, and perhaps structural trends that come with “parliamentarization.” According to the “moderation thesis” discussed by Jillian Schwedler in her book on Jordan and Yemen, and the longer theoretical lineage of argument covered previously by Kalyvas and other authors, history has shown that the shift from movement activism to parliamentary seat-holding leads to compromise, moderation, and corruption. Schwedler’s moderation thesis contrasts the evolution of Yemen’s Islah Party with Jordan’s Islamic Action Front (IAF). She shows that Islah’s fragmented and hierarchical structure left it somewhat paralyzed, and therefore, prevented it from being able to cooperate and engage with leftist and liberal groups. In contrast, the IAF’s unified and democratic internal structure allowed it to engage in “sustained cooperative bodies with Leftists and liberals.” Schwedler’s arguments suggest that Islamist parties that were in a position capable of engaging openly with other groups in society, dramatically changed, and evolved from

²⁹Ibid, 261.

³⁰George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and the American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

³¹Neil MacFarquhar, “Trying to Mold a Post-Assad Syria From Abroad,” *The New York Times*, 5 May 2012.

“closed” and “rigid” worldviews toward a more-moderate discourse and practice.³²

Egypt is a complex case that does not neatly fit into a simple thesis or a model. Non-Islamists criticize leaders of the Brotherhood for being too opportunistic and Machiavellian, too willing to align themselves first with the Mubarak regime and then with the new ruling generals to advance their interests and increase their influence. In a similar vein, militants such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, current emir of al Qaeda, accuse the Brotherhood of sacrificing theological and ideological purity on the altar of a bankrupt political agenda. In his book *Al-Hasad al-Mur*, or *The Bitter Harvest* (1991), Al-Zawahiri lists the shortcomings of the Brothers who, in his opinion, made far too many concessions to the “iniquitous” political order. In another undated two-hour videotape posted on militant forums at the end of October 2012, Al-Zawahiri calls upon ultraconservative Salafi clerics in Egypt to exert pressure on the Muslim Brothers to ensure clear mention of Islamic shariah law in the new constitution, a call that reveals Al-Zawahiri’s mistrust of the Brothers when it comes to implementing the shariah. In turn, Salafis have been pushing the Muslim Brotherhood to make the role of shariah explicit. The secular-leaning opposition, on the other hand, criticized the Islamist groups for inserting language that can be used to curb freedom of expression and the rights of women and minorities.³³

Indeed, the political ascendancy of the Islamists does not signal the complete end of ideology. The Shater case shows that far from fully shedding their ideological luggage, influential segments of the Muslim Brothers utilize identity politics to appeal to core supporters who are deeply conservative and to fend off pressure from their rival co-religionists—the Salafis. The Muslim Brothers, together with other Arab Islamists, will pursue both ideology and interests to maximize and increase their influence. After Shater was disqualified from running for president, the Brotherhood’s “reserve” candidate, Mohammed Morsi, said that if he wins, he will be president of all Egyptians. Yet he hastily added that it is now time to put into practice the group’s slogan, “Islam is the solution,” a statement that reflects the importance of ideology and values in appealing to the conservative base. Fundamental transformations, such as the one that the

³²Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3, 16.

³³Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Al-Hasad al-Mur: al-Ikhwan al-Muslimonn Fee Sitoon* (The Bitter Harvest: The Muslim Brotherhood in Sixty Years), translated by Mandi Fahmy (Dar al-Bayariq; no date); “Al-Qaeda leader urges kidnapping of Westerners,” *Associated Press*, 27 October 2012.

Brotherhood is undergoing, take time, struggle, and periodic instances of backpedaling are likely to occur, in part to appease the more hard-line constituency that the group cannot afford to completely alienate.³⁴

A year after his election, Morsi's record as President is poor in economic and foreign policies and ideologically rigid and reactionary on women's rights and freedom of expression. Although fears of an Islamist takeover have not materialized, Morsi acted more like a status quo president than a revolutionary, a criticism that attests to the moderation thesis. Despite the lip service they pay to ideology, the Muslim Brothers have been domesticated and co-opted by political and electoral engagement. They are more concerned about monopolizing and exercising power than about pursuing the common good, an inclusive and progressive economic and political vision. They have been exposed to lack managerial and administrative experiences, original ideas, and skilled human capital, thus damaging their credibility in the eyes of the public. In particular, Morsi mastered the art of making enemies and blunders, the wrong man to lead Egypt at a critical revolutionary moment. He did not have the sensibility nor the vision to rise up to the historic challenge facing the most populous state in the Arab world and the production of its cultural capital. He alienated not only the secular-leaning opposition but millions of ordinary Egyptians who had voted for him and pinned high hopes on him. The Islamists' muddled style of governance was not surprising because they did not have the experience or the political acumen to work closely with different political forces to tackle Egypt's structural challenges. More than a year after they won commanding parliamentary and presidential victories, the Islamists proved to be as incompetent as the old secular regime at managing the economy and society. Morsi did indeed inherit a country that was politically polarized and financially bankrupt. These problems, however, grew under his watch; social and economic conditions worsened and political divisions deepened. Far from improving the economy, the Islamists's lack of original ideas have exacerbated a structural crisis and caused more hardship and suffering among the poor and the dwindling middle class. What lessons will Islamists take from their brief moment in power? Will they readjust, learn and adapt, or will they draw the wrong conclusions and blame it all on conspiracy by internal and external enemies? The ability of the Islamists to recover from this strategic debacle will depend on lessons learned and a critical assessment of their limited experience while in power.

³⁴"Presidential Candidate Moussa said Egypt is in Crisis," *Associated Press*, 22 April 2012.

Although the Islamists will remain key players in the countries most affected by the large-scale Arab popular uprisings and the Middle East at large, their brand has been damaged. As the former deputy supreme leader of the Brotherhood (second-in-command), Mohammed Habib, put it, the Brotherhood has lost not only the presidency but also its moral case, its claim that it stands above the political fray and that it knows what it takes to resolve the country's economic and institutional challenges.^{35,36}

THE NEW CAPITALISTS

As to their economic agenda, Islamists do not display a distinctive "Islamic" economic model. This is unsurprising, as an Islamic economic model does not exist. Islamists suffer from a paucity of original ideas on the economy, and have not even developed a blueprint to for tackling the structural socio-economic crisis in Arab societies. Nevertheless, what distinguishes centrist religious-based groups from their leftist and nationalist counterparts is a friendly sensibility toward business activities, including wealth accumulation and free-market economics. Islamism is a bourgeois movement consisting mostly of middle class professionals, businessmen, shopkeepers, petty merchants, and traders.

If there is a slogan that best describes Islamists's economic attitude, it would be "Islam is good for business." Many Arab Islamists admire and wish to imitate the example of Turkey, even though they know little about the complexity of the country's economy and lack Turkey's strategic economic model. What impresses them is Turkey's economic dynamism, especially the dynamism of the religiously observant provincial bourgeoisie, who have turned Anatolian towns such as Kayseri, Konya, and Gaziantep into industrial powerhouses driving the growth of the Turkish economy.

For example, the Muslim Brothers have assured the Western powers of their commitment to free-market capitalism. The architect of the Brothers' economic policy, the millionaire businessman Khairat al-Shater, has silenced voices within the organization that call for a more-egalitarian, socialist approach. Although he does not hold elected office, in April 2012 he met the International Monetary Fund (IMF) team, which is negotiating a \$3.2 billion loan facility with the Egyptian government. The IMF has said that it wants broad political backing for the deal. After the Brotherhood confirmed Shater as a presidential candidate (the election commission

³⁵David D. Kirkpatrick, Kareem Fahim and Ben Hubbard, "Egypt's Army Issues Ultimatum to Morsi," *The New York Times*, 1 July 2013.

³⁶Asma Alsharif and Tom Perry, "Egypt army gives Mursi 48 hours to compromise in crisis," *Reuters*, 1 July 2013.

subsequently disqualified him), the group intensified its contacts with the Western powers, with Shater meeting and reassuring U.S. diplomats and economists visiting Cairo.³⁷

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Shater said economic development would be the most pressing priority for his administration and would be based on structural reforms and growth.³⁸ “They [the Brothers] tightened the screws on anyone who had different ideas about economics,” said Mohamed Habib, a former deputy Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood.³⁹

Although centrist-Islamists are generally for a free-market economy and have always been, they are likely to seek religious legitimation for their economic policies. For example, Islamist parties have publicly vowed to promote social justice and have stressed their long record of social work among the poor. Most have chosen names like “Justice and Development” or “Freedom and Justice,” choices that show their concerns, if not their priorities. In this sense, some Islamist-specific economic measures and ideas will be introduced to complement free-market capitalism.⁴⁰ The Muslim Brothers, along with the Salafis, who are less enamored of free market than the Brothers, have already called for the introduction of an index of companies that comply with Sharia law, as part of a wider move toward an “Islamic” economy. Designed to appeal to their base and to attract investments from the Gulf Arab region, where a shariah-compliant economic system exists, the idea does not alter the basics of Islamists’s preference for free-market capitalism.⁴¹

Similarly, according to one of the architects of Ennahda’s economic programme, Ridha Chkoundali, “The banking system will be diversified and the Tunisian financial market will therefore be made up of traditional and Islamic banks As a result, there will be more competition between the banks.”⁴² In Morocco as well, sensing the importance of addressing economic issues after being designated Prime Minister, Abdelilah

³⁷Ramadan Al Sherbini. “Brotherhood Courts the West,” *Gulf News*, 5 April 2012.

³⁸Anas Ziki, “Al-Shater: We Are Competing for President Because of a Plot to Make Us Fail,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.aljazeera.net, 12 April 2012.

³⁹Kirkpatrick, “Keeper of Islamic Flame.”

⁴⁰Hani al-Waziri, “Al Masri Al Youm Publishes Details of the ‘Brotherhood’s Renaissance’ Plans: Economic Restructuring According to Islamic Principles ... and 100 National Projects,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.almasry-alyoum.com, 26 April 2012; Khamis Ben Barik, “Tunisia prepares a complete draft budget plan,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.aljazeera.net, 20 March 2012; *Maghress*, “Benkirane confirms his government intends to push reforms that will cut economic rent,” [in Arabic] www.maghress.com, accessed 15 March 2012.

⁴¹Heba Saleh, “Egyptian Officials Look to Set Up Islamist Index,” *Financial Times*, 1 February 2012.

⁴²*Ibid.*

Benkirane stated: “We will do everything to encourage foreign and domestic investment to create a climate of prosperity.”⁴³

There is nothing in Islamists’s current statements and ideas that show them to be socialist oriented, though most readily accept the Keynesian model—active state intervention in the economy. Like the old regimes, Islamists do not see any contradiction between their belief in free-market economics and state intervention. In particular, the Salafis are most attracted to the idea of state intervention in the economy and forcefully call for adopting distributive measures to address rampant poverty in society, especially among their poor urban and rural base. With minor variations, the dominant Islamist approach to the economy is free-market capitalism. In Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, the Brotherhood, Ennahda, and Justice and Development Party, respectively, have sufficient interests to deal with global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Given that Islamists’s major goal is the provision of social services and local public goods, they do not have the luxury or ideological commitment to be insular, because their countries do not have access to huge rents and raw resources, especially petroleum, and they lack patronage networks.

Nevertheless, the greatest challenge facing these Islamists is to deliver critical economic improvements in the short term while devising a long-term comprehensive reform agenda that lays the foundation of a productive economy. Given dismal socio-economic conditions in transitioning Arab countries—abject poverty, double-digit unemployment, the absence of a competitive private sector, and rising expectations—the new governments will be hard pressed to focus on distributive policies and urgent short-term needs. Like other political groups, Islamists have their sights on the electoral map and want to be reelected. Will they have the time, space, and vision to invest in innovation, technology, and knowledge economy in order to engineer sustainable development, or will they succumb to instrumentalist political temptation by pursuing short-term electoral gains? A year after gaining power, although the Islamists inherited a broken country, their mismanagement of the economy laid bare their celebrated claim that they are skilled managers, administrators and merchants and that they will better the living standards of ordinary people. In a year the Islamists appear to have seriously damaged their brand. The question is, will they manage to recover and put things right, or will the public punish them for their

⁴³“Morocco Embraces Democracy as King Mohammed VI Appoints New Cabinet,” Morocco News Agency, 3 January 2012, accessed at <http://morocconewsagency.com/democracy-embraces-morocco-king-mohammed-appoints-new-cabinet-1-3-12.html>.

incompetence and failure to deliver jobs and services? If the thesis of this essay is correct—that Islamist parties are increasingly becoming “service” parties concerned mainly with the provision of social services and local public goods—Islamists then are in real trouble.

MINORITIES AND THE MORALIZATION AND CONTROL OF THE PUBLIC SPACE

Liberals, secularists, and women in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and elsewhere are wary of the Islamists’s surge. They argue that while Islamist leaders sound moderate, they harbor an ultra-conservative religious agenda, an agenda that might roll back precious human rights. Particularly alarming to liberals is the Islamists’s desire to impose their own rigid interpretation of family and sexuality, as well as the control and moralization of public space and of cultural production. Since gaining majorities in these countries’ Parliaments, mainstream Islamist groups have been forced to outline their stances on a wide range of issues, especially with regard to Islamic law, personal freedoms, women and minority rights, and tourism. Critics assert that the Muslim Brotherhood, Ennahda Party, Morocco’s Justice, and Development Party, and the Salafis exhibit illiberal tendencies that threaten individual freedoms and the rights of minorities.⁴⁴

For many women, the main issue lies in the degree of equality they will enjoy in society in the post-authoritarian political system. On the whole, Islamist parties, particularly the Salafis and the conservative wing of the Brotherhood, remain prisoners of regressive dogmas on women. Conservative Islamists deploy scriptural interpretations selectively and claim that women and religious minorities cannot be fully equal before the law, and so cannot hold the office of president or even magistrate. However, this anti-democratic position is contested by pragmatists and younger, progressive Islamists, and there are important variations and differences among Islamists in various countries.

In Tunisia, Ennahda officials have repeatedly pledged to promote equal opportunities in employment and education for women, as well as freedom to choose or reject Islamic dress. Long before the Arab popular uprisings,

⁴⁴Maryam Mahmoud, “Islamist-Secularist’ Struggle over Constitution drafting,” www.almasry-alyoum.com, [in Arabic], 18 March 2012; Sousan Zahdi Shaheen, “It is an Islamic Spring and a Liberal Autumn,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.ANNTV.tv, 5 December 2011; “Egypt: Liberal MPs Threaten to Withdraw in Protest and Resign if the Brotherhood Took Over the Drafting Process of the Constitution,” accessed at www.al-mokhtassar.com, [in Arabic], 19 March 2012; “Confrontation Between the Liberals and Islamists in the Tunisian University Campus,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.magharebia.com, 5 December 2011; “Women’s Rights Between the Moderates and Extremists,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.al-Watan.com.sa, 2 December 2011.

Rachid Ghannouchi, Ennahda's leader, supported affirmative action to increase women's participation in Parliament, breaking with the policies of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt.⁴⁵ Ennahda has the largest number of women parliamentarians, and supported a quota for women in Parliament. According to the tolls, out of the 49 seats won by women, 42 went to Ennahda.⁴⁶

However, Tunisia's female activists have accused Ennahda of misleading the public and giving "false promises." This tension became clear after a female member of Ennahda, Souad Abderrahim, challenged a law that protected women who have children outside marriage and called for its abrogation.⁴⁷ "Such a law gives those women a legitimacy that encourages women to do the same thing. We should work on reforming them instead," said Abderrahim.⁴⁸ While raising concerns that the Ennahda Party may curtail women's rights, another member of Ennahda, Interior Minister Ali Larayedh, noted that "the Party will not change laws related to inheritance and polygamy because these laws are tailored for the Tunisian society."⁴⁹ These statements have not allayed the fears of women and liberals. Consequently, a number of female activists have formed the "October 24 Front" to defend women's rights and freedoms through monitoring the performance of Ennahda and other parties and scrutinizing the drafting of the new constitution.⁵⁰

The question of women's rights in Tunisia has recently become more apparent after a dispute over whether women should be allowed to wear the niqab (full face-covering veil) in universities. After being suppressed and silenced during the Ben Ali regime, Salafis have emerged into public spaces, favoring long beards and veils and demanding the application of sharia law. Fearing the loss of individual liberties and going on the offensive, secularists challenged Salafis on the streets and in universities. At times, the war of words between the supporters of the two camps turned into violent clashes. Pressed in the middle of this fierce struggle between secular

⁴⁵Anthony Shadid, "Islamists' Ideas on Democracy and Faith Face Test in Tunisia," *The New York Times*, 17 February 2012.

⁴⁶"Ennahda Extends Its Hand to Other Tunisian Parties and Confirms Its Support for Women's Rights," [in Arabic] accessed at www.al-Seyassah.com, 2 October 2011.

⁴⁷Amal al-Hilali, "Ennahda Candidate Refuses to Ratify Law That Protects Single Mothers in Tunisia," [in Arabic] *Al Arabiya*, 10 November 2011.

⁴⁸Al-Hilali, "Ennahda members make conflicting statements about women's rights in Tunisia," *Al Arabiya*, 13 November 2011, accessed at www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/10/30/174493.html.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Olfa al-Ojaili, quoted in Amal al-Hilali, "Tunisia Women's Rights: Ennahda Wore a Robe of Democracy and Freedom, Only to Remove it After Winning Elections," [in Arabic] *Al Arabiya*, 29 October 2011.

fundamentalists and Salafi fundamentalists, Ennahda has been paralyzed, unable or unwilling to act decisively to resolve the crisis.⁵¹

In August 2012, in an alarming move that illustrates the considerable pressure from its conservative constituencies, Ennahda's representatives in the Constituent Assembly introduced an article to the draft constitution stating that women were "complimentary" to men, altering the 1956 statement that women were equal. Passed by the Islamist majority in the Assembly, this draft raised a storm of protests and demonstrations.⁵²

In Egypt, the Salafis, who won 20 percent of the seats in the new Parliament, oppose women playing leadership roles in the work place or in the political space. Moreover, they favor regulating women's dress and imposing Islamic standards of modesty in the public sphere.⁵³ Similarly, women are still excluded from leadership or policymaking positions within the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵⁴ While the "blue bra girl" image, which shows a mob of military police with riot shields and batons viciously attacking a defenseless female protester near Tahrir Square—her clothes ripped off, exposing her blue bra—and the case of virginity tests suggest that the barrier of fear and taboo is gone, and that women have become more outspoken since the revolution, female representation in the political arena has dwindled. The constitutional committee in Egypt (subsequently disbanded by the court) included no women. In the March 2012 parliamentary elections, women won only 9 of the roughly 500 seats.⁵⁵ As Iman Bibars, the head of the Association for Development and Enhancement of Women in Egypt, noted: "The revolution gave us a voice and we cannot hide that But I think the product after the revolution is against women I was shocked the fundamentalists took over and I did not foresee a male gender constitution."⁵⁶

The predicament of women is no different in other countries where Islamists have made similar gains. In Jordan, the appointment of a

⁵¹Paul Schemm, "Tunisian Islamists Spark Fear of Culture War," *Associated Press*, 9 March 2012, accessed at www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hHwuvWlflWu913RVROWajjzSveQ?docId=fff8f96475424f47ad909a791c4ee678.

⁵²Sami Zubaida, "Women, Democracy and Dictatorship and the Arab Uprisings" in Fawaz A. Gerges (ed.), *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵³David Kirkpatrick, "Egypt's Women Find Power Still Hinges on Men," *The New York Times*, 9 January 2012, accessed at www.nytimes.com/2012/01/10/world/middleeast/egyptian-women-confront-restrictions-of-patriarchy.html.

⁵⁴Zubaida, "Women, Democracy and Dictatorship in the Arab Uprisings."

⁵⁵Rana F. Sweis, "Arab Spring Fails to Allay Women's Anxieties," *The New York Times*, 7 March 2012, accessed at www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/world/middleeast/arab-spring-fails-to-allay-womens-anxieties.html?pagewanted=all.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

committee to review election laws and make amendments to the Constitution did not fulfill a promise to include the word “gender” in Article 6 of the Constitution. That article would have guaranteed the equality of all Jordanians before the law. In Kuwait, the victory of the Islamist-based opposition in parliamentary elections led to an all-male chamber. The four women who won seats in the 2009 elections lost them in the last round.⁵⁷

In addition to women’s rights, the control and moralization of public space and cultural production are hotly debated in Arab countries that have experienced significant change during the Arab revolutions. In Egypt, in particular, where tourism plays an important role in the country’s economy (generating more than 12 percent of hard foreign currency), alcohol consumption, bikinis, and mixed bathing at beaches are being reassessed. As with women’s rights, mainstream Islamists have sent mixed signals to the public about their views on the control and moralization of public space. For example, Mohammed Morsi, the leader of the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party before his election to the presidency, told the public before his election to the presidency that his party did not plan to ban alcohol in hotels and at tourist resorts or prevent Egyptians from drinking liquor in their homes.⁵⁸ However, more-conservative members of the Brotherhood have expressed opposing views. On that, Nader Baker, the spokesperson for the Salafist Nour Party, said that his group would build a chain of hotels that would function in compliance with Sharia law, while banning beach tourism, which, in his opinion, “induces vice.”⁵⁹

What to make of the contradictory statements by Islamists on women’s rights and enforcing the moralization of public sphere? On the one hand, the Salafis, along with conservatives among centrist Islamists, seek to impose a regressive interpretation of morality on society at large. On the other hand, reformists and pragmatists are caught in the middle of a fierce debate and are undergoing a huge learning process, as they attempt to reach consensus on controversial questions that touch on their very identity. For

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸“Egypt’s Islamists offer controversial vision for ‘halal’ tourism,” *Al Arabiya*, 13 December 2011, accessed at www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/13/182316.html; Members of the Salafist party support the idea of halal tourism: Essmat Saad, “Al Nour Tells Tourism Sector That it Supports and Will Promote Halal Tourism,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.EGYNews.net, 8 January 2012; Egypt Has Been Criticized for Potentially Pushing for Halal Tourism; Sabri Ghaym, “Halal Tourism... Will female tourists be asked to cover up and wear the hijab?” [in Arabic] accessed at www.almasry-alyoum.com, 21 March 2012.

⁵⁹“Unlike Muslim Brotherhood, Nour Party promises blanket ban on alcohol and beach tourism in event it takes power following polls,” *Ahram Online*, 13 December 2011, accessed at <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/29141.aspx>; Ahmed Tolba, “Egyptian court sends Christian student to jail for insulting Islam,” *Al Arabiya*, 4 April 2012, accessed at <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/04/04/205477.html>.

example, the Ennahda Party struggles to walk a fine line between the Salafis and the secularists and to avoid alienating and estranging either camp. In contrast, the Muslim Brothers and the Salafis in Egypt have displayed conflicting messages about their views on the control and moralization of public space.

Nevertheless, a clear divide has emerged between centrist Islamists and the Salafis, a divide that will deepen and widen as Islamists come to terms with the responsibilities of governance and are forced to clarify their positions. Of all religious-based groups, Ennahda has exhibited the most progressive stance on women's rights and the question of the control and moralization of public space, even though it has refrained from publicly confronting the Salafis. Its leaders prefer to unite all Tunisians and set an example for neighboring Arab states. Mustapha Ben Jaafar, Speaker of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly and leader of Ettakatol (a center-left party), was appointed to be in charge of the commission to draft the constitution.⁶⁰

The Brotherhood has been slower than its Tunisian counterpart in fully embracing the equality of all citizens before the law regardless of sex, religion, and ethnicity. This nuance may be explained by the different historical experiences of Egyptian and Tunisian Islamists, as well as the influence that the Old Guard like al-Badi and even Shater still exercise within the 86-year-old Brotherhood. Moreover, unlike Tunisia, in the last four decades, Egyptian social space has been Islamized from the bottom up, altering tastes, sensibilities, norms, and mores. Ironically, Sadat, and Mubarak to a lesser extent, played a key role in transforming the sociological landscape in a deeply conservative, pious way. Islamists are the main beneficiary. When it comes to women's issues and the moralization of the public space, they speak the converted. Finally, the enveloping context of political instability in Egypt, versus relative stability in Tunisia, has created a polarizing atmosphere that prevents Egyptian Islamists from seriously engaging with these issues.

FOREIGN POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Despite the importance of culture, particularly identity and religion, in the Islamists's worldview, their international relations will most likely be realist and guarded, based more on the interests of their movement and the geostrategic balance of power than on ideology. Seeking to allay the fears of the West, particularly the United States, Islamists have already sent

⁶⁰Following an International Call Over Drafting a New Constitution: Forming a Joint Committee..." [in Arabic] accessed at www.attounissia.com, 23 March 2012; *Monitor's* Editorial Board, "Islam's defining moment with democracy," *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 March 2012.

reassurances that they will not pursue confrontational policies toward Israel and the Western powers. In particular, the Brotherhood's leadership has gone on a charm offensive to convince American policymakers that they have nothing to fear from their party coming to power. The Brothers' message has found receptive ears among both senior American Democratic and Republican officials.

Context is important. For many decades, Western governments accepted the old dominant narrative that religious-based movements such as the Islamists were absolutist and regressive in nature, possessing no capacity or will to evolve and accommodate themselves to changes in society at large; they could not shed their ideological inheritance and hostility toward the West as well. As a result, America and its European allies shunned engagement with mainstream Islamists, believing in a binary model of the Middle East, in which religious fundamentalists were seen as the only alternative to pro-Western autocrats. There existed an implicit assumption among Western officials that there was no third way, no public opinion, only an "Arab street"—code for the notion that Muslims, if allowed to vote, would make the wrong choices, and that democratic forces, untried and unknown, would not be as accommodating to U.S. interests in the region as the autocrats. The late Jeane Kirkpatrick, who served as U.S. ambassador to the UN, famously quipped about Arabs and democracy: "The Arab world is the only part of the world where I've been shaken in my conviction that if you let the people decide, they will make fundamentally rational decisions."⁶¹

The September 11 attacks reinforced the apprehensions of the U.S. foreign policy establishment about all Islamists and the alternative to pro-Western authoritarian rulers. Since September 11, fear of Islamism in general, not just of al Qaeda, has taken hold of the Western imagination. Pro-American, Arab autocrats, such as Hosni Mubarak, used and abused the Islamist threat as a scare tactic, in order to avoid being pressured by their superpower patron to open up the closed political system. They exploited this imaginary fear by portraying themselves as partners in the fight against "extremists," such as the Muslim Brothers. Until his last day in power, when millions of Egyptians called for his departure, Mubarak used the menace of the Brotherhood to warn the United States of what lay ahead if he should go. As the political crisis reached a climax at the end of January, Barack Obama telephoned Mubarak and tried to find a way for

⁶¹Cited by Martin Sieff, "New Challenge for West: Islamic Fundamentalism," *The Washington Times*, 16 February 1992; Fawaz A. Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

him to leave the scene gracefully. A White House official summarized the response as: “Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brotherhood, Muslim Brotherhood.”⁶²

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledged as much in a November 2011 speech about Washington’s response to the Arab uprisings that toppled several U.S. clients. “For years, dictators told their people they had to accept the autocrats they knew to avoid the extremists they feared Too often, we accepted that narrative ourselves.”⁶³

Immediately after the ouster of Mubarak, the U.S. government used its connections (and substantive military aid) to the ruling generals to demand assurances that the Muslim Brotherhood’s role would be limited in any future government, as well as continuity in relations with Israel. In July 2011, the U.S. House Appropriations Committee earmarked \$1.55 billion to Egypt on the condition that such aid should, in part, be used for “border security programs and activities in the Sinai” in order to ensure Israel’s security concerns. The House Appropriations Committee directed that the U.S. Secretary of State certify that the government of Egypt “is not controlled by a foreign terrorist organization, or its affiliates or supporters, is implementing the Egypt–Israel Peace Treaty, and is taking steps to detect and destroy the smuggling network and tunnels between Egypt and the Gaza strip.” This was a humiliating demand made on a supposedly democratically elected government in Cairo. For example, when the Egyptian authorities acceded in May 2011 to the demand by the Egyptian public to open the Rafah crossing and ease the blockade on Gaza, the crossing was closed again within just three days because of U.S. and Israeli pressure. The status of the Rafah crossing is not currently very different from what it was in the Mubarak era.⁶⁴

However, as Islamists won a majority of seats in the new Parliaments in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, the Obama administration reversed two decades of mistrust and hostility toward mainstream Islamists and acknowledged the new political reality in the region, though the administration of George W. Bush had limited contacts with the Muslim Brothers. This can be exemplified by recent visits by Western officials, particularly from the United States, to the Brotherhood headquarters in

⁶²Ryan Lizza, “The Consequentialist: How the Arab Spring Remade Obama’s Foreign Policy,” *The New Yorker*, 2 May 2011; Juan Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Edward Djerejian, *Danger and Opportunity: An American Ambassador’s Journey Through the Middle East* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008).

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Esam Al-Amin, “Back to Tahrir Square, The Tom and Jerry Show,” 24 November 2011, *Counterpunch*, accessed at www.counterpunch.org/2011/11/24/back-to-tahrir-square/.

Cairo.⁶⁵ It had little choice. In a marked historic shift of U.S. foreign policy, Hillary Clinton said that the United States would work with the ascendant Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt if they played by the rules of the political game. Ever since, a stream of U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, have visited leaders of the Brothers. In April 2012, a Brotherhood team visited Washington and met with White House officials, policy experts, and others, apparently to dispel increasing worries about the group's agenda.⁶⁶

After the Brotherhood fielded Shater for president and provoked a storm of protests at home, the group redoubled its efforts in a bid to promote his presidential nomination and allay the West's fears. Shater assured a visiting U.S. Republican Party delegation about his commitments to human rights, women's rights, and maintaining peace with Israel. To drive the message home to U.S. officials, a Brotherhood delegation to Washington stressed the group's priorities as developmental issues and downplayed foreign policy.⁶⁷

While the Brotherhood's rhetoric on Israel and U.S. foreign policy does not differ much from that of its nationalist and leftist counterparts, it has nevertheless gone out of its way to entertain a significant degree of moderation when dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. The truth is that Egyptians of all persuasions feel that their country must reclaim its leadership role in the Arab arena and resist Israel's oppression of the Palestinians. As a result, Egyptians are questioning the utility of the Camp David Accords with Israel. However, few Egyptians call for the abrogation of the Accords. More than 70 percent of Egyptians who were recently polled by the New York-based International Peace Institute stated their preference for maintaining the agreement with Israel. This finding is corroborated by polling conducted by Egypt's leading Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.⁶⁸

Even the Salafis, not known for their diplomatic skills, said that they would not take unilateral reckless actions and that they would submit any decision to revise the peace treaty with Israel to a referendum by the people. Islamists have their finger on the pulse of public opinion and will not swim against the popular current. Their stance on the Camp David treaty is

⁶⁵Hani Ezzat, "US Delegation Visits Brotherhood Headquarters to Talk About Latest Developments in Egypt," [in Arabic] accessed at www.ahram.org, 19 October 2011; Ahmed Dawood, "Carter Visits the Headquarters of the Brotherhood and Freedom and Justice Party," [in Arabic] accessed at www.masress.com, 12 January 2012.

⁶⁶Al Sherbini, "Brotherhood Courts the West."

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸"Public Opinion in Egypt," International Peace Institute, 19 September 2011, accessed at www.ipacademy.org/images/pdfs/egyptpoll-september2011.pdf.

another sign of subordination of ideology to interest. Religious-based parties are becoming more constituency driven and are gradually shedding some of their ideological luggage. In a tone similar to that of the Brotherhood, Tunisia's Ghannouchi has addressed Israel's supporters in the United States, while also telling the Western powers that they have nothing to fear from the rise of the Islamists to power.⁶⁹

Western diplomats and politicians have taken note of these critical changes and concessions made by Islamists. "Very impressive," said Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, who met with Shater along with a group of mostly Republican lawmakers in March 2012.⁷⁰ However, it would be misleading to suggest that relations between Islamists and the Western powers will be smooth and friendly. Regardless of their orientation, Islamists are deeply suspicious of the West's designs on the region and will pursue independent foreign policies, some of which are assertive. This does not imply that the Islamists will engage in reckless military ventures that risk their hard-won political gains at home. Although realist and cautious, the Islamists will go to great lengths to show a foreign policy style different from that of the old pro-Western Arab rulers. It will take many years to overcome the bitter legacy that exists between the constituency of Islamists and the Western powers, particularly the United States, a legacy whose root causes go back to the post-World War I peace settlement and colonialism.

There is a real danger that by underestimating the importance of Palestine for the newly revitalized Arab civil societies, the United States, along with its European allies, might find themselves in confrontation with the Arab peoples. As the Arab revolutions establish a new order, Palestine, far from fading away, will come to play a more-important part in Arab politics. As constituency-driven movements, Islamists will prioritize the Palestinian cause because their constituencies demand a tougher line on Israel to force it to withdraw from the occupied territories. For example, in their first meeting with Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, after they had won more than 40 percent of the seats in Egypt's parliamentary elections, leaders of the Freedom and Justice Movement called on the United States to pursue a more-balanced approach toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and stressed the significance of Palestine in the U.S.-Egyptian

⁶⁹Lee Smith, "A Tunisian Islamist Looks to the Future," *Weekly Standard*, 1 December 2011; "Tunisia's Ghannouchi reassures Israel amid security fears," *Arabs Today*, 7 December 2011; "Ghannouchi: We will not condemn Israel and we will allow freedom of belief," [in Arabic] accessed at www.alfajrnews.net, 7 December 2011.

⁷⁰Kirkpatrick, "Keeper of Islamic Flame."

relationship. In his first speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2012, Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi urged the United States to “reconsider” its policies in the region, favoring people’s choices as reflected by the Arab uprisings instead of dictatorial regimes, because that proved to be “not in its best interest.”⁷¹ Morsi said that the first issue which the world must exert all its efforts in resolving is the Palestinian cause. He demanded that the UN grant membership to the Palestinians, with or without a peace agreement with Israel. “The fruits of dignity and freedom must not remain far from the Palestinian people,” he said, adding that it was ‘shameful’ that UN resolutions aiding the Palestinians are not enforced.”⁷²

The likelihood of an escalation of tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors should not be overlooked. The status quo will be difficult to maintain, and it will strain relations between the United States and the rising Islamists. Nevertheless, Islamists are making a concerted effort to engage the Western powers and chart a new relationship based on mutual interests and respect. In Syria and Libya, Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood and Libyan Islamic Movement, welcomed Western military intervention there, signaling a sea change in their attitudes. As the Syrian crisis rages, Syrian Brotherhood leaders said that they had spoken with officials from the Obama administration, but that the United States remained wary about who might triumph in Syria, particularly groups of the al Qaeda variety.⁷³

The secular-leaning opposition criticized the Islamists’s stance on Israel as another example of their double-talk and willingness to sacrifice Palestine on the altar of the movement’s political ambitions. The shift in Islamists’s attitudes toward the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Western powers would have been unthinkable before the eruption of the Arab popular uprisings. That goes to show that significant developments, such as revolts and revolutions, do serve as catalysts that change deeply entrenched attitudes. More importantly, this shift is another indication that the burden of governance will have a moderating influence on the conduct and behavior of Islamist parties domestically and internationally.

⁷¹Sarah El Deeb, “US Raises Outreach to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood,” *Associated Press*, 11 January 2012. Rehab Abdelminhem, “Morsi: Meets Burns and Patterson ... and asks to change Obama’s politics in relation to the people of the Arab Spring,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.ahram.org, 12 January 2012; Osama Abdel Islam, “Dr Birr urges America to abandon its discrimination against Muslims,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 24 January 2012.

⁷²“In UN speech, Mohammed Morsi assumes major role in Middle East,” *The Boston Globe*, 27 September 2012.

⁷³MacFarquhar, “Trying to Mold a Post-Assad Syria From Abroad.”

MODERATING INFLUENCE ON HAMAS

For example, the coming to power of Islamists has had a moderating influence on Hamas, an ambitious group that aims to consolidate its political hegemony in Palestine. Hamas officials acknowledge learning important lessons from the Arab revolts—being more tolerant of others and aware of the obsolescence of one-party rule. For Hamas, in particular, the electoral victory of Islamist parties could be seen as a game-changer. The Islamist movement in Palestine no longer sees itself as a besieged island in a sea of hostility. Hamas leaders now feel that they have strategic depth. “This is an Islamic area, and once people are given a fair chance to vote for their real representatives, they vote for the Islamists,” said Mahmoud Zahar, a senior Hamas leader in Gaza.⁷⁴

Impressed by the electoral victory of Islamist parties in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, Hamas’s leader, Khalid Mashaal, argued that “we need to learn from these experiences in dealing with other parties and social groups, and that one-party rule is outdated.”⁷⁵ As a consequence, at the end of 2011, Mashaal and his team held talks with Mahmoud Abbas and other Fatah officials in an effort to implement the reconciliation pact reached in early 2011 and to end the political separation between their two rival groups. Hamas leaders say they are ready to merge with Fatah and suspend armed resistance against Israel.⁷⁶ This is consistent with Hamas’s evolving position on Israel, meaning that it accepts a peace settlement based on a two-state solution, although it has not institutionalized its decision. In an important geostrategic shift, Hamas has recently aligned itself with the pro-Western Saudi–Qatari–Turkish camp after almost a decade of alignment with the Iranian–Syrian resistance axis, a product of the Arab revolts that have shaken the very foundation of the regional order.

Internally, Hamas has also shown signs of pragmatism and tolerance by ceasing to enforce strict religious rules regarding individual freedoms and behavior, such as bans on women smoking water pipes in public and male coiffeurs styling women’s hair and veiling. Hamas leaders acknowledge that “mistakes” were made and pledge to correct them. In a memo to Gaza activists, Mashaal’s political bureau cautioned that restrictive measures are

⁷⁴Joel Greenberg, “Hamas adjusts to Arab spring,” *The Washington Post*, 22 December 2011; Mohammed Al-Sirjawi, “Haniyeh in Al-Azhar Mosque ... Results and Implications,” [in Arabic], accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 25 February 2012; Said Ahmed al-Khidr, “Mashaal: Hamas Is Unwavering in Its Support for the Revolutions,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.aljazeera.net, 7 March 2012.

⁷⁵Karin Laub and Mohammed Daraghme, “Hamas in Gaza Says It’s Learning From Arab Spring,” *Associated Press*, 11 December 2011.

⁷⁶“Mashaal: Reconciliation Is Our Choice and Destiny,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.aljazeera.net, 27 December 2011.

tarnishing the movement's image. People in Gaza already feel a change in atmosphere, according to human rights activists and even political rivals of Hamas.⁷⁷

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

There is nothing unique and alarming about the tensions and contradictions inherent in the pronouncements by Islamists on questions of the moralization and control of the public space, minorities, the economy, and international relations. As the previous analysis has shown, mainstream Islamism is in a state of flux, a muddled state of mind, and it is far from a monolith. More accurately, it is a movement with many faces and voices and ideological persuasions.⁷⁸

Having recently resurfaced above ground after decades of persecution and proscription, Islamists are blinded by the sunshine and by ambition. The Brotherhood is a case in point. Immediately after the toppling of Mubarak, the Brotherhood pledged that it would not use its well-established political machine and popularity to dominate the first elected government in post-revolutionary Egypt. In 2011, the group said it would only field candidates in a limited number of constituencies in parliamentary elections—30 percent. But the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice party ended up posting candidates—sometimes more than one—in almost all of Egypt's parliamentary constituencies. Liberal and secular-minded activists were also outraged when politicians and intellectuals from the Brotherhood and Salafist political parties dominated a constituent assembly tasked with drafting Egypt's new constitution, reversing an earlier pledge to have an inclusive assembly. The Brotherhood's decision to field one of its own members for president marked the latest reversal of the group's previous commitments and raised serious questions about its credibility and its ambition to monopolize power.⁷⁹

After Shater's nomination, hundreds of young Brothers defected en masse to protest the group's policy U-turn and accused it of committing a "strategic blunder" that would deepen the rift between the Brotherhood and other political forces. After formally submitting his resignation, a leading member of the Brotherhood condemned his group's decision as "suicidal"

⁷⁷Laub and Daraghme, " Hamas in Gaza Says It's Learning From Arab Spring"; Greenberg, " Hamas adjusts to Arab spring."

⁷⁸Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

⁷⁹Matt Bradley and Amina Ismail, " Egypt's Brotherhood Names Presidential Candidate," *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 March 2012; Marwa Awad and Sherine El Madany, " In U-turn, Egypt's Brotherhood Names Presidential Candidate," *Reuters*, 31 March 2012.

and publicly criticized its erratic and shortsighted conduct since the beginning of the revolution. “The Brothers have fallen into a trap,” said Mohammad Al Beltagui, a Brotherhood lawmaker. “It is unfair for both the nation and the Brothers that the Brotherhood solely shoulders all national responsibilities under these critical circumstances.”⁸⁰

On a deeper level, Shater’s nomination reflected the growing fissures within the Brotherhood between religious pragmatists and conservatives. The top leadership split almost 50/50 for and against Shater’s nomination, a testament to the extent of divisions among senior Muslim Brothers. The leadership was worried that its disgruntled ranks might support other top Islamic candidates, including Abul-Fotouh, a progressive, and Salah Abu Ismail, an ultraconservative lawyer-turned-preacher, who was subsequently disqualified, together with Shater. Equally important, the Brothers said that they fielded a presidential candidate because they felt frustrated at determined attempts by the establishment, including the ruling generals and secularists, to prevent them from carrying out their mandate after they had won a majority of seats in Parliament. “We have witnessed obstacles standing in the way of Parliament to take decisions to achieve the demands of the revolution,” said Mohammed Morsi, head of the Freedom and Justice Party (and later the president). “We have therefore chosen the path of the presidency not because we are greedy for power but because we have a majority in Parliament which is unable to fulfill its duties in Parliament,” he said, announcing the decision to back Shater.⁸¹ But many members, especially young Brothers, complained that the group’s Old Guard does not practice democracy internally as it promises to lead the country toward pluralism.⁸²

As can be seen, centrist Islamists are finding their voice and way awkwardly and evasively. They are learning by trial and error. In particular, the Brotherhood has already alienated political groups from the left to the right. Lacking imagination and confidence, time and again, the Old Guard

⁸⁰Al Sherbini, “Brotherhood Courts the West”; Hassanian Karoum, “After Shater’s Nomination for President,” [in Arabic] *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 31 March 2012; Ali Hassan, “Resignation of Al-Hilbawi in Protest of Shater’s Nomination ... and Daughter Describes the Nomination of Her Father as a ‘Disaster,’” [in Arabic], accessed at www.massress.com, 1 April 2012; Walid Hijam, “Protesting Against Shater’s Nomination ... Young Brother Burns His Membership Documents in Freedom and Justice Party,” [in Arabic] accessed at www.masress.com, 2 April 2012.

⁸¹Awad and El Madany, “In U-Turn, Egypt’s Brotherhood Names Presidential Candidate”; Ahmed Morsi, “Shater Is the Presidential Candidate for the FJP in Agreement With the Brotherhood,” [in Arabic], accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 31 March 2012; Ala’ Mohammed Abdel Nabi, “Shater’s nomination,” [in Arabic], accessed at www.ikhwanonline.com, 1 April 2012.

⁸²Jeffrey Fleishman, “Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood Chooses Presidential Candidate,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 1 April 2012.

has proved to be its own worst enemy, forcing decisions on the rank and file and demanding loyalty. The first elected Islamist President in Egyptian modern history, Morsi, not only did not challenge the Old Guard but also allowed his Brotherhood group to have its way—from drafting the constitution to severing diplomatic relations with the Assad government in Syria. Instead of delivering on his promises, such as more jobs, greater inclusiveness and al-nahda, or renaissance, Morsi and the Brothers went to great lengths to monopolise power and to entrench their supporters in state institutions. There exists a widespread belief among Egyptians of all walks of life that Morsi subordinated the presidency to the Muslim Brotherhood, a fatal error, to a proud nation that calls Egypt Umm al-Dunya (the mother of the world). Morsi's performance has inflicted inculpable harm on the standing and image of the Brotherhood and the Islamists throughout the region. The Islamists, particularly conservatives, are testing the limits of their newfound power, falling into the trap of blind political ambition. Although the Brotherhood won the presidency by the thinnest electoral margin, overreach has cost it critical public support and deepened the divide within the organization.⁸³

The failure of the Islamists does not come as a surprise. The Islamists spent more of their existence underground legally proscribed and persecuted. Years in incarceration and in hiding have left deep scars on the Islamists's psychology and sensibility and how they view the political and the world. A self-enclosed movement is obsessed with secrecy and blind loyalty to senior leaders and is suspicious of the other. The Muslim Brothers have not fully reconciled with the existing order which they view as intrinsically hostile to their movement. Although over the years the Muslim Brothers made halfhearted efforts at coordination with other political groups, they kept all their cards to their chest and did not build coalitions with them. Even after they won the presidency, the Islamist-led government of Mohammed Morsi was neither inclusive and tolerant nor competent. Moreover, the Muslim Brothers and other Islamists made a catastrophic mistake by not developing a repertoire of ideas about governance, particularly the political economy. In the past decade when this writer (and others) pressed Islamists about their political-economic programs, they retorted by saying that was a loaded question designed to expose them to public criticism; they would release their programs once they were

⁸³ Abdelwahab El Affendi, "The Islamism Debate Revisited: In Search of 'Islamist Democrats'"; Michelle Pace, *The EU, US and Political Islam: Strategies for Engagement* (London: Palgrave, 2010), accessed at <http://www.alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=today%5C02qpt699.htm&arc=data%5C2012%5C04%5C04-02%5C02qpt699.htm>.

allowed to participate in the political process. The Islamist movement suffers from a paucity of original ideas, a huge body with a tiny brain. Despite the turmoil in which the Islamists find themselves after resurfacing above ground and gaining power, they are being baptized by blood and fire. They are forced to flash out their views on governance and foreign relations and resolve the tensions and contradictions between their rhetoric and policies.

Moreover, it will take great effort to build trust between the Islamists and the secular-leaning oppositional groups, and for the dust to settle on the culture wars raging in the Arab streets. For example, liberals and leftists have pulled out of a panel drafting Egypt's new constitution, accusing Islamists of monopolizing the process to deliver its post-revolution charter. With the current make-up of the panel dominated by Islamists, "the constitution will be drafted by political Islam We refuse to betray the trust of the people," the head of the liberal Free Egyptians party, Ahmed Said, told reporters.⁸⁴ Far from bridging the divide that emerged in the mid-1950s, the Islamists's year-long experience in power deepened and widened the rift with secular nationalists and leftists culminating with the latter calling on the armed forces to oust Morsi, a legitimately elected president. The Egyptian military's ouster of Morsi has invested this historic rivalry with cultural and civilization-based overtones. Writing in the Arabic-based newspaper *Al Hayat*, Adonis, a prominent secular poet and a vehement critic of the Islamists, argues that the struggle between Islamists and secular-leaning nationalists is more cultural and civilizational than political or ideological; it is organically linked to the struggle over the future of Arab identity.

In this regard and despite major differences, Indonesia is an instructive case. After its 1998 revolt, Indonesia suffered from social and political unrest. Many Indonesians, like their Arab counterparts today, feared that the rise of a radical Islamist current would hijack the revolution and turn the country into a theocracy. Yet Indonesia survived the short Islamist surge and built pluralistic institutions. In his book, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, Robert Hefner points out that Indonesians realized that authoritarian solutions were untenable, and that the country needed to evolve toward its own form of pluralism and tolerance. It is no wonder that in Indonesia, the share of votes obtained by Islamist parties has considerably declined since the elections in 1999—from 39.2 percent in 1999 and 38.4 percent in 2004, to 29.2 percent in

⁸⁴"Egypt Secularists Pull Out of Constituent Assembly," *Agence France Presse*, 28 May 2012.

2009.⁸⁵ If Arab Islamist parties fail to deliver on their electoral promises, they will most likely face a similar sorry fate.

The question is not whether Islamists are liberal or born-again democrats (they are neither). Their worldview and sensibility ensure that they will most likely preside over conservative, illiberal democracies. Like other religious-based groups elsewhere, the Islamists will struggle to find their own model and learn the art of compromise and inclusiveness. Nevertheless, Islamists, including the ultra-conservatives, have stressed a commitment to institutionalize democracy and to accept its parameters and rules. Notwithstanding the blunders of the Islamists while in power, there is no reason to question their commitment to the institutionalization of democracy, because, not unlike their Turkish co-religionists, they aim to protect the Islamist movement from the arbitrary power of the military. That is good news because liberalism does not precede democracy; it is the other way around. Once institutions and democratic political practices are enshrined, then the debate on individual rights, minorities, and individual freedoms could be managed through freedom of expression and change of majorities in parliament. In Egypt, the military is back and there is a real danger that the Islamists would be suppressed and excluded, once again, from the political space. The setback in Egypt does not bode well for the democratic transition. One point is clear: there will be no institutionalization of democracy without the Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brothers, the biggest and oldest mainstream religiously based movement in the Arab arena.⁸⁶

The more-urgent question facing the Islamists as they exercise power in their respective countries is will they be able to deliver? Given the magnitude of the problems that Arab societies face and the lack of clearly articulated blueprints to address abject poverty, create jobs, and jump-start the economy, the odds are against them. And if they do fail to deliver the goods, the voters will turn against them with a vengeance. The Islamist moment might then turn out to be fleeting as the Egyptian case shows. Despite the fears and dangers inherent in the setback in Egypt, it is doubtful whether policy success or failure will impede the institutionalization of political participation or arrest the moderating influence on Islamist parties. One of the major conclusions of this paper is that there are

⁸⁵Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also John T. Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁸⁶Olivier Roy, "A New Generation of Political Islamists Steps Forward," *The Washington Post*, 21 January 2012.

structural, historical causes behind the changes in the Islamists's conduct, changes that have been expedited by their electoral participation and political empowerment after the Arab uprisings. Islamist parties are not born-again democrats or liberal, but they have much more to gain by safeguarding "parliamentarization" and remaining fully engaged in the political process. The rise and fall of the Islamist-led government in Egypt might motivate the Islamists there and elsewhere to democratize further and make an iron-clad commitment to "parliamentarization".*

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