American Foreign
Policy Council

EGYPT

QUICK FACTS

Population: 94,666,993 (July 2016 est.)

Area: 1,001,450 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Egyptian 99.6%, other 0.4%

Religions: Muslim (predominantly Sunni) 90%, Christian (majority Coptic Orthodox, other Christians include Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, Maronite, Orthodox, and Anglican) 10%

Government Type: presidential republic

GDP (official exchange rate): $342.8 billion (2015 est.)

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated January 2017)

OVERVIEW

Egypt has played a central role in the history and the development of Islamism. In 1928, an Egyptian teacher named Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood, the world's first modern Islamist movement, and the most prominent Islamist force in Egypt. The Brotherhood soon conceived an ideological framework that would go on to inspire most contemporary Islamists, and eventually became the main political opposition force against successive governments in Egypt. From the time of President Gamal Abdel Nasser through the era of President Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed but tolerated to varying extents.

Following the 1952 Free Officers Revolution in Egypt, during which a small group of military officers ousted King Farouk, the Brotherhood and the military-led government enjoyed a short period of cooperation. This ended with an attempt on Nasser's life in 1954, whereupon the organization was outlawed and a number of prominent Brotherhood members were imprisoned, including Hassan al-Banna's ideological descendant

Sayyid Qutb. In the late 1970s, the Muslim Brothers officially renounced violence at the insistence of President Anwar Sadat, temporarily easing their relationship with Egyptian authorities. The movement was granted enough space to expand its influence on civil society through social services and other outreach activities. This distinguished the Brotherhood at the time from jihadist groups, such Islamic Jihad (Al-Jihad), whose members assassinated President Sadat in 1981, bringing Hosni Mubarak to power. Mubarak cracked down on more radical Islamist currents such as the Islamic Jihad, and rhetorically justified the slow pace of democratic reforms by pointing to the security threat posed by extremists. The Muslim Brotherhood remained tolerated by the Mubarak regime (though still illegal), as Mubarak viewed the organization as a useful counter to the spread of those more radical ideologies.

Mubarak's ouster in 2011 marked a turning point for Islamists, with many Islamist groups establishing legal political parties to participate in post-uprising politics. In the parliamentary elections held between November 2011 and January 2012, Islamists won nearly three-quarters of all seats in the new Egyptian parliament. A Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohammed Morsi, was elected Egypt's president on June 30, 2012, in the country's first democratic presidential election. However, in the wake of mass protests against Morsi's increasingly authoritarian and incompetent government in late June and early July of 2013, the Egyptian military ousted Morsi and replaced him with an interim government tasked with drafting a new constitution, which was approved in a popular referendum in January 2014. Meanwhile, the government severely repressed the Muslim Brotherhood, imprisoning tens of thousands of its leaders and members. Since Morsi's overthrow, Egypt has contended with an upsurge of jihadist violence in the Sinai Peninsula, where the main militant group swore allegiance to the Islamic State terrorist group in November 2014.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Egyptian Islamism has always spanned a diverse ideological and operational spectrum, the entirety of which is reflected in the post-Mubarak era.

The most prominent Egyptian Islamist movement is the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*), founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. Its ideology states that a true "Islamic society" is one in which state institutions and the government follow the principles of the Qur'an, and in which laws follow *sharia*, or "Islamic law."[1] Al-Banna, a teacher from a modest background, was heavily influenced by Syrian-Egyptian thinker Mohammed Rashid Rida, who believed that a return to the Islam of the 7th and 8th century was the only way for Muslim societies to regain strength and to escape Western colonialism and cultural hegemony.[2] Al-Banna viewed Islam as an "all-embracing concept," meant to govern every aspect of life, and he constructed the Muslim Brotherhood to advance this totalitarian interpretation within Egypt from the grassroots up. Specifically, he sought to "reform" the individual through the Brotherhood's multi-year indoctrination process, those individuals would then form families, and the families would then spread the message within Egyptian society. Once Egyptian society was "Islamized," an Islamic state would emerge, and once this happened throughout the Muslim world, the states would unify under a new caliphate.

Muslim Brotherhood cells spread rapidly throughout Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s. Amid episodic government crackdowns, the Brotherhood formed a violent "secret apparatus," which was implicated in multiple assassinations and terrorist attacks. Al-Banna was assassinated in February 1949, and while the Brotherhood initially cooperated with Egypt's military following the July 1952 Free Officers' revolution, the new regime cracked down on it severely following an attempt on President Gamal Abdel Nasser's life. During this period, the Brotherhood's chief ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, authored the famous Islamist manifesto *Milestones Along The Way* (*Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq*) while in prison in 1964. In *Milestones*, Qutb claims that all non-Muslim societies, and indeed those societies that are only Muslim in name but not in practice, are in a state of "ignorance" (*jahiliyya*). *Jahili* societies are those that do not strictly follow revelation, and Qutb called on Muslims to wage offensive *jihad* against *jahiliyya* until they established a united Islamic community worldwide. This was interpreted as a call to arms against the Egyptian state, and Qutb was executed in 1966.[3]

Following Nasser's death in 1970, his successor, Anwar al-Sadat, lifted restrictions on Islamist activism, viewing Islamists as useful counters to the leftists who challenged his authority. During this period, a wide variety of Islamist groups emerged on Egyptian campuses, and as the Egyptian government liberated Brotherhood leaders during the 1970s, the Brotherhood integrated many of these young Islamists as the organization rebuilt itself. The Brotherhood ultimately renounced violence, thereby distinguishing itself from other Islamist movements, such as the Islamic Group (*Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*), which recruited on university campuses, in Egyptian prisons, and in the country's poor urban and rural areas.

The Islamic Group was involved in a series of attacks during the 1980s and 1990s aimed at deposing Egypt's secular, autocratic government and replacing it with an Islamic theocracy. These attacks included the 1997 killing of Western tourists in Luxor, the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia in 1995, the Cairo bombings of 1993, and several other armed operations against Egyptian intellectuals and Coptic Christians. The movement's spiritual leader, Umar Abd al-Rahman, was connected to Ramzi Yusuf, the perpetrator of the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993.[4] Rahman and nine followers were subsequently arrested and convicted of plotting to blow up the United Nations headquarters in New York, the New York Federal Reserve Building, the George Washington Bridge, and the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels. In 1999, the Islamic Group declared a unilateral ceasefire in its longstanding struggle against Cairo. This declaration marked a major ideological shift and was accompanied by a steady drift away from the use of violence, which was completed in 2002. The Islamic Group's members have not claimed responsibility for any armed attack since.[5] Subsequent moves to diminish radicalism within the party drove a faction of the Islamic Group's more violent adherents to join al-Qaeda in 2006.[6] In the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections, the Islamic Group ran under the Building and Development Party and won thirteen seats in the lower house.[7] Members of the Islamic group have protested the Egyptian military's deposing of Morsi and the dissolution of his government, but in February 2014 the organization announced it was ready to engage with the interim government to end Egypt's political impasse.[8]

The third Islamist group that has played a major role in recent Egyptian history is the Islamic Jihad (*Al-Jihad*). Active since the 1970s, it was officially formed in 1980 as a result of the merger of two Islamist cells led by Karam Zuhdi and Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj. Faraj's famous manifesto, *The Absent Duty* (*Al-Farida al-Ghaiba*), outlined the new movement's ideology.[9] Like those affiliated with the Islamic Group, members of the Islamic Jihad represent a relative minority within Egypt's Islamist spectrum and are mostly former members of the Brotherhood. Some are believed to have fought alongside the Afghan *mujahideen* in the 1980s against the Soviet Union. The organization's stated objective was to overthrow the Egyptian "infidel" regime and establish an Islamic government in its place. The Islamic Jihad also sought to attack U.S. and Israeli interests in Egypt and abroad. The group is infamous for assassinating President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and for additional attacks on Egyptian government officials in the early 1990s. It is also believed to have attacked Egypt's embassy in Pakistan in 1995 and to have been involved in planning bombings against U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. In June 2001, the group merged with al-Qaeda to form a new entity, called *Gama'a Qa'idat al-Jihad*, headed by Osama bin Laden's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Over time, Egypt's Islamist landscape has evolved considerably. While the ideology of Egyptian Islamist groups remains radical and anti-democratic in nature, many of them have changed their tactics, favoring elections rather than revolution and/or violence as a means for achieving power.

In this vein, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood increasingly disavowed *jihad* in favor of political participation. The process began with the release of a text entitled *Preachers, Not Judges* in 1969, which was likely written by multiple individuals but has been attributed to supreme guide Hassan al-Hudaybi. In this tract, al-Hudaybi developed a series of theological counterarguments to Qutb's radical views.[10] Under the influence of al-Hudaybi and his successor, Umar al-Tilmisani, the Brotherhood gradually distanced itself from armed action, gave an oath to Sadat not to use violence against his regime, and even named him a "martyr" after he was killed in 1981. Under Mubarak, the Brotherhood participated in most parliamentary elections, sometimes in partnership with legal parties, including non-

Islamist ones. However, it remained an illegal organization, and the government used its illegality as a pretext for cracking down on it whenever it appeared to be gaining strength, such as during the run-up to the 1995 elections and following the Brotherhood's success in the 2005 elections, when it won 88 of 444 contested seats.

The Brotherhood's ideological shift drew condemnation from other Islamist groups, most notably the Islamic Jihad and its commander Ayman al-Zawahiri, who severely criticized the Brotherhood's reorientation in a book entitled *The Bitter Harvest: The Muslim Brotherhood in Sixty Years* (*Al-Hasad al-Murr: Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi Sittin 'Aman*).[11] In it, al-Zawahiri condemned the Brotherhood's good relations with King Farouk and Presidents Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak:

> The Muslim Brotherhood, by recognizing the tyrants' legitimacy and sharing constitutional legitimacy with them, has become a tool in the tyrants' hands to strike *jihadist* groups in the name of [fighting] extremism and disobeying *sharia* [Islamic law]. There should be no doubt that we are proud to be outside of this "legitimacy of disbelief," which the Muslim Brotherhood has accepted and approved.

The Egyptian government's success in combating *jihadist* trends during the 1990s compelled some of these groups to offer theological arguments against political violence. One of the most prominent instances of this trend occurred within the Islamic Group. In July 1997, during a military tribunal, one of the group's activists, Muhammad al-Amin Abd al-Alim, read a statement signed by six other Islamist leaders that called on their affiliates to cease all armed operations in Egypt and abroad.[12] While it elicited considerable controversy within the movement, the statement heralded the beginning of the group's renunciation of violence. In March 1999, the group's leadership launched an "Initiative for Ceasing Violence" and declared a unilateral ceasefire. Ideologues and leaders were mostly successful in convincing their base to renounce armed struggle and support a non-violent approach by authoring a series of texts to provide the ideological justification for their rejection of violence. Leaders published four books in January 2002 under the title of *Correcting Conceptions* (*Silsilat Tashih al-Mafahim*), addressing the reasons behind the Islamic Group's ideological reorientation and explaining why jihad in Egypt had failed. Twelve other books followed, developing a critique of al-Qaeda's extreme ideology.[13]

In addition to ideological revisionism within these groups, the increasing interactions of radical Islamists with non-violent ones, as well as with non-Islamists, helped the process of embracing politics over violence to take root. This, surprisingly, occurred within Egypt's prison facilities, where inmates discussed their beliefs and tactics. The Muslim Brothers were the first to undergo such a process following the execution of Sayyid Qutb in 1966. Members of the movement began questioning the relevance of *jihad* as a way to combat the government, and many chose to reject violence. Another notable example of this dynamic was the interaction between the Islamic Group and the smaller, more radical Islamic Jihad that began in the 1990s and culminated in 2007, when the latter embraced non-violence to some degree. These efforts were led by the movement's former leader Sayyid Imam al-Sharif—also known as Abd al-Qadir Ibn Abd al-Aziz, or "Dr. Fadl." His *Document for the Right Guidance of Jihad in Egypt and the World* (*Tarshid al-'Amal al-Jihadi fi Misr wa-l-'Alam*) had an enormous impact within prisons and led numerous inmates to reject violent *jihad*.[14]

The state's use of repression and positive incentives vis-à-vis *jihadist* groups escalated following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In the case of the Islamic Group, the regime provided fighters with pensions, and the Interior Ministry offered other incentives such as business grants to reformed *jihadists*.[15] In addition, the heavy-handed approach of Egyptian security forces to radical movements encouraged the view that armed resistance was no longer a promising method for these elements to achieve their goals.

To be sure, these efforts to dissuade violence did not always resonate with group members. The case of Islamic Jihad, for which deradicalization has only been partially successful, illustrates this point. While the group's leaders have publicly abandoned violence, some affiliated factions continue to advocate *jihad*, sometimes even leaving the movement to join other groups more closely aligned with their beliefs. One cell of Islamic Jihad, for example, joined al-Qaeda in the early 2000s and was likely involved in the wave of attacks that hit Egypt after 2003. The Islamic Group faced similar difficulties. In a 2010 interview, Nagih Ibrahim, one of its former ideologues, emphasized that although the group's formal rejection of violence had obviously helped limit the spread of violent Islamism in Egypt, such ideological revisions had had less impact on the younger generations, especially those sympathetic toward or active within hard-line *jihadist* groups such as al-Qaeda.[16]

By the same token, the Brotherhood's renunciation of violence was limited to the domestic sphere. The organization otherwise continued to praise terrorist acts conducted by its Palestinian off-shoot Hamas, as well as by the Iranian-backed Shi'ite militia Hezbollah. Several little-known violent groups, like the *jihadist* "Abdallah Azzam Brigades in Egypt" or the "Holy Warriors of Egypt,"[17] also emerged in the 2000s, spreading radical and extremist ideologies, conducting anti-regime activity, and accusing society and state institutions of "apostasy."[18] Another group calling itself "Monotheism and Holy War" (*Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*), which was connected to al-Qaeda, emerged during that period in the Sinai. It targeted the country's tourism sector in a wave of bombings that first hit the town of Taba in 2004 and then the resort towns of Sharm al-Sheikh and Dahab in 2005 and 2006.

The Sinai Peninsula, in particular, has been a hotbed for Islamic extremism for years. The Peninsula has been largely neglected by the state for decades, and clauses in the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty restrict Egyptian security operations in the Sinai, though the two sides negotiated massive Egyptian deployments to combat *jihadists* in recent years under one of the treaty's annexes. During the 2000s, however, the mix of state neglect and insufficient security control enabled groups to develop smuggling networks, plan attacks, and develop local support, and a number of militant groups have expressed the goal of creating an independent Islamic Emirate in the Peninsula.

When Mubarak was ousted following Egypt's 2011 "Arab Spring" uprising, Islamic extremist activities there took on a new intensity. On multiple occasions, armed fighters attacked Egyptian security forces, police stations, and the al Arish-Ashkelon pipeline exporting natural gas to Israel and Jordan. Other operations targeted Israeli patrols and soldiers.[19] New *jihadist* groups emerged, such as the "Supporters of Holy War" (*Ansar al-Jihad*),[20] while other existing groups like "Excommunication and Exodus" (*Takfir wa-l-Hijra*), established in 1965 by Muslim Brother Shukri Mustafa, have been reconstituted.[21] After the military ousted President Mohammed Morsi on July 3, 2013, violence has surged, mostly propelled by relatively small insurgent groups, the most prominent of which was *Ansar Beit al-Maqdis*, which swore allegiance to the Islamic State in November 2014 and renamed itself *Wilayat Sinai* (Sinai Province).[22] On August 7, 2013, the army launched an operation into the Sinai and killed sixty suspected terrorists, losing thirty from their own ranks, and it remains engaged against these groups at the time of this writing.[23] Overall, the Sinai region with its mountainous terrain, particularly in the areas of Rafah and Sheikh Zuwaid, provides vast hideouts for *jihadist* networks and has become increasingly unstable since the July 3 2013 coup. The Egyptian government's tight control over news regarding its operations in the Sinai make it difficult to assess the military's performance, though the continuation of attacks within the Sinai reflect the military's failure to restore security in the Peninsula thus far.

Islamism and Society

Since the 1950s, failures in governance, economic stagnation, and political exclusion have provided opportunities for reactionary Islamists to expand their influence in Egyptian society. Islamists have used their politicized interpretation of Islam as a source of legitimacy, and they have set up a number of informal institutions (charities, educational organizations, health services) to advance their ideology within various sectors.[24] While some extremist groups started to renounce violence in the 1970s, this rejection almost always catalyzed the emergence of violent groups that rejected the renunciations. As a result, radical discourse perpetuated within Islamist circles even when groups were technically non-violent. For example, the Brotherhood continued to read and teach Sayyid Qutb's works even while claiming to have disavowed them.

Meanwhile, political stagnation and poor economic conditions under Mubarak generated sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist groups, which offered social services, religious education, and preaching.[25] Salafists inherit their name from the Arabic term "*al-salaf al-salih*," meaning the "righteous ancestors," a phrase referring to the first generations of Muslims after the Prophet Mohammed's death who sought to emulate his practices and maintained a literalist reading of the Qur'an and the *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet). Salafists regard deviations from this literalist approach as *bida'a* (innovation), and therefore tantamount to *kufr* (apostasy). Under Mubarak, Salafists were strictly prohibited from political activities – in stark contrast to the Brotherhood, which was at times tolerated within formal politics and at other times repressed. Salafists therefore focused almost exclusively on social work and spiritual development, and were permitted to launch television networks dedicated to preaching. At the same time, the most prominent Salafist groups such as Salafist Call (*al-Dawa al-Salfiyya*) encouraged allegiance to the state, including at the height of the 2011 uprising, though some (typically younger) Salafists rejected this and joined the protests.

The presence of Salafists in Egypt began in the early 20th century. The first Salafist association, the "Sharia Assembly," was created in 1912, even before the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood. Another group, named the "Supporters of the Sunna" (*Ansar Al-Sunna*), was founded by Sheikh Mohammed Hamid al-Fiqi in 1926. Its members were focused on protecting monotheism and fighting un-Islamic practices and beliefs.

Salafism became more visible in Egypt during the 1970s and 1980s, for two reasons. First, as previously mentioned, President Sadat permitted Islamists greater freedom during this period to counter the leftists domestically. Second, Egyptians working abroad in Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states returned home to Egypt. It was during this period that the organization "Salafist Call" was established. The Salafist Call is the preeminent Salafist organization in Egypt, and in the past has focused primarily on preaching and social service, but recently has shifted to focus on politics. In 1980, the Salafists institutionalized their activities, and the Salafist Call became active in education and charity. Yet the Egyptian state soon outlawed the movement, and regularly arrested its members.

Although few Egyptians openly identified as Salafists under the Mubarak regime, there were signs that their puritanical interpretation of Islam was gaining ground among the general public. This was, for instance, evidenced by the growing number of women wearing the *niqab*, (full veil) and men growing their beards. Beyond the traditional role of radical *imams* in mosques, satellite television channels also started to adopt explicitly Salafist rhetoric, and widened their audience in the process.[26] The phenomenon was worrisome to a number of secular Egyptians, especially as it related to the protection of women's and minority rights, which most Salafists reject.

Radical Islamists have openly targeted religious minorities for years in an attempt to provoke sectarian warfare in Egypt. Coptic Christians, a community that represents 10 percent of the population, has been a special target of Salafist bigotry, though anti-Christian (and anti-Semitic) ideas also pervade Brotherhood teachings. Militant Salafists commonly portray Christians as "infidels" who conspire against Islam, and have regularly called for violent attacks on them.[27] The rise of Islamists following Mubarak's ouster brought these attitudes to the fore, as radical preachers called minorities "heretics" and threatened to expel them if they did not pay the *jizya*, a tax levied on non-Muslims, in certain instances.[28]

Since the 2011 uprising, Salafists have engaged in a massive anti-Coptic hate campaign. As a result, many Egyptian Christians left the country during this period, fearing for their future under Islamist rule.[29] In 2012, several Salafists accused Copts of being "traitors" for voting against Islamists in the presidential polls.[30] Then following Morsi's ouster in July 2013, dozens of churches were torched nationwide. Unfortunately, these types of attacks have continued under the rule of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, despite the fact that he is not an Islamist and the Coptic Orthodox Church's close official relations with him.

Salafists have also targeted other sects of Islam, such as the Shi'a, Baha'i and Sufis, viewing them as un-Islamic because of their beliefs.[31] Before 2011, Salafists managed to ban the *dhikr* (a devotional act of Sufi orders) and continued to call for the prohibition of all Sufi ceremonies. In addition to labeling Sufis as "infidels," Salafists accuse them of encouraging sin and debauchery by mixing the sexes at shrines and during their rituals—a practice that Salafists consider improper. They have, for example, regularly pointed to the mosque of Ahmad al-Badawi in Tanta—where the founder of the Sufi *Ahmadiyya* order is buried—which does not enforce segregation between men and women, except during prayers, as one instance of un-Islamic behavior. Salafists also view ancient Egyptian monuments as idolatrous, and various Salafist groups threatened to cover the pyramids in wax following Mubarak's overthrow, when these groups appeared to be on the threshold of power.[32]

Finally, Salafists have increasingly targeted Egyptian women. Egyptian law requires that at least one candidate from each party be a woman. The Salafist Al-Nour party responded by running female candidates, but replacing their pictures with either a rose or a logo. On multiple occasions, Salafist leaders who have appeared on political talk shows insist either that they be separated from female hosts by a screen, or that the female hosts wear the veil. In 2011, the spokesman of the Salafist Daawa party, Abdel Moneim Alshahat, requested that host Iman al-Israf wear a headscarf during their interview. Al-Ishraf consented. After the interview he told her that she should: "wear the veil now voluntarily before you have to wear it by force."[33]

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

From the 1970s until the overthrow of Mubarak, the Egyptian state actively fought violent Islamists who acted locally, but tolerated other Islamist groups at certain points while repressing them at others. The Muslim Brotherhood in particular used moments of tolerance to build its nationwide organization and win parliamentary seats, and it frequently generated public sympathy when the regime then cracked down on it.

The Brotherhood's greatest political success during these years came in 2005, when it fielded approximately 150 candidates in the parliamentary elections and won 88 of 444 contested seats, making it the largest opposition bloc. The regime viewed these gains as threatening, and it responded with a series of constitutional amendments in 2007 that limited the political participation of religious groups. The following year, these restrictions resulted in the rejection of more than 800 Muslim Brothers as candidates for local council elections. Additional constitutional changes further extended the "temporary" emergency law enforced after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. And the adoption of a new anti-terrorism law (Article 179) gave security forces extensive powers to crack down on Islamists. During the November 2010 parliamentary elections, the repression worsened: hundreds of Muslim Brothers were arrested, and the organization's parliamentary candidates lost the most forged elections in Egypt's contemporary history.[34]

While the fraudulence of the late 2010 parliamentary elections contributed to the January 2011 uprising, the Brotherhood and Salafist groups largely stayed on the sidelines during its earliest days. Salafist groups largely preached fealty to the state, while the Brotherhood feared that its participation in the protests would catalyze an even more severe crackdown. (Indeed, the Mubarak regime warned the Brotherhood prior to the protests that it would decapitate the organization if it got involved.) Moreover, the Brotherhood's leaders were skeptical of the mostly non-Islamist youth activists who called for the protests.[35] After massive protests on January 25, 2011, however, the Brotherhood endorsed the pivotal January 28th "Friday of Rage" protests, during which protesters overwhelmed the police and forced the military to take control of the streets. The Brotherhood attempted to negotiate with the regime on at least two occasions during the uprising, but faced criticism from its youth members and revolutionary groups for doing so, and ultimately called for Mubarak's overthrow on February 7, 2011, four days before Mubarak was forced from power.[36]

Following Mubarak's overthrow and the collapse of his ruling National Democratic Party, Egypt's Islamist groups were the only political forces capable of mobilizing their members nationwide. Non-Islamist groups, by contrast, had been weakened after decades of mostly working within the regime's legal constraints. So when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took control of the country on February 11, 2011 and opened Egypt's political arena, many of these Islamist groups quickly established legal political parties. In this vein, the Brotherhood announced in late April 2011 the creation of its "Freedom and Justice Party" (FJP), stating that its policies would be grounded in Islamic principles, but that the party would be nonconfessional and tolerant, including both women and Christians in its ranks. In June 2011, the FJP received official recognition as a political party, enabling it to run candidates in the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections.

In a surprising and unexpected move,[37] the Salafist Call too entered party politics, establishing the "Light Party" (*Hizb al-Nour*), led by Imad Abd al-Ghaffour, as did the Islamic Group with its "Building and Development Party" (*Hizb al-Bina' wa-l-Tanmia*). The new Salafist end of the political spectrum also included smaller movements such as the ultraconservative "*Al-Asala* Party" in Cairo, founded by Adil Abd al-Maqsoud Afifi. This marked a considerable historical departure for Salafist groups, which had always been apolitical. Members of the groups generally refused to work with un-Islamic state institutions, dismissing the concept of democracy as "alien."[38] But under the guidance of charismatic preachers, Salafist movements opted for participation because they saw it as an opportunity to implement *sharia* and feared that their failure to participate would lead to Egypt's secularization.[39] Salafists also sought to provide ideological justification for their entry into politics. One important concern for leaders was to make sure that its members did not view the decision to enter the political arena as an abandonment of religious principles. Their arguments hinged on pointing to the duty incumbent on Muslims to try and implement *sharia* law wherever possible. Given the contested political environment of post-Mubarak Egypt, this duty was now achievable, and the alternative (namely, a secular regime) would constitute negligence of that duty.

Non-Islamist political parties, some of which had only recently been established and others whose growth was stunted during Mubarak's rule, fared poorly in the parliamentary elections of late 2011 and early 2012. By contrast, Islamists did extremely well: the FJP-led Democratic Alliance for Egypt won 47 percent of the seats, while the Light Part-dominated Islamic Bloc, which included the Islamic Group's Building and Development Party, won 24 percent. The Wasat Party, an offshoot of the Brotherhood, won another two percent of the parliament.[40] The Salafists' electoral gains were by far the most unanticipated development of the election.[41]

The most critical issue before the resulting parliament was selecting the members of the Constituent Assembly, as that body would draft Egypt's new constitution. Muslim Brotherhood leader Saad al-Katatny was appointed parliamentary speaker, Muslim Brothers became either the chairman or deputy chairman of 18 out of 19 total committees, and Salafist Ministers of Parliament had the chairmanships of three committees.[42] Though the Brotherhood and the Salafists certainly had their differences, both wanted a Constituent Assembly that was as Islamist as possible. The two groups collaborated to produce an Assembly that was roughly 65 percent Islamist. Non-Islamist Assembly members were alarmed by this turn of events, and responded by boycotting the Assembly. A court disbanded the Assembly just two weeks after it had been formed.

However, the Assembly was not the Brotherhood's last attempt to use its dominance in parliament to its advantage. The group did its best to undermine the SCAF's political legitimacy, including trying to use the parliament to declare no confidence in the SCAF-backed government. In response, the SCAF issued a statement that tacitly threatened with a major crackdown.[43]

In 2011, just before the collapse of Mubarak's regime, the Muslim Brotherhood had promised not to run a presidential candidate. The simmering tensions between the military and the Brotherhood, combined with the threat of a new crackdown, propelled the group into breaking that promise. Furthermore, former Muslim Brotherhood leader Abdel Moneim Abouel Fotouh had emerged as a dominant candidate in the presidential elections of May/June 2012. The Brotherhood had banished Abouel Fotouh from its ranks for declaring his intention to run for president, despite the group's orders not to do so. The Brotherhood was concerned that if it did not run its own approved candidate, its members would vote for a disgraced former member and cause chaos in the ranks.[44]

The Brotherhood's initial candidate was disqualified due to his incarceration during the Mubarak regime, as were several other leading candidates, for a variety of reasons.[45] The Brotherhood nominated FJP chairman Mohammed Morsi. The final list of candidates included thirteen people, including members of former governments. Hamdeen Sabbahi was a member of parliament during Nasser's time, Ahmed Shafiq was Mubarak's Prime Minister, and Amr Moussa was a former Foreign Minister. Morsi won with 24 percent of the vote,[46] and then won the run-off election against Shafik with 51.7 percent of the vote.

In June of 2012, a court disbanded the FJP-controlled parliament on the grounds that its election was unconstitutional, because the electoral format did not give political independents an equal opportunity to win. Also in June, the SCAF issued a constitutional declaration that protected the military from the president's oversight and granted itself legislative authority, to prevent Morsi from gaining power. In response, the Brotherhood and its allies occupied Cairo's Tahrir Square and threatened mass protests if Morsi did not become Egypt's president.

The constitutional declaration had significant impact. When Morsi was sworn in on June 30th, 2012, there was no parliament and no new constitution, and his exact powers were poorly defined.[47] On August 12, however, Morsi used a major attack in the Sinai that had taken place the previous week as a pretext for firing the SCAF's leaders, promoting director of military intelligence Abdel Fatah al-Sisi to defense minister, and issuing a new constitutional declaration granting himself legislative power until a new parliament was sworn in.[48]

This made Morsi Egypt's undisputed power holder, at least legally. But in November 2012, it appeared as though a second Constituent Assembly, which parliament had appointed before it was disbanded in June, was going to be nullified by the courts much as the first one had been. Morsi responded by issuing another constitutional declaration that protected the Constituent Assembly from the courts, but also placed his own edicts above any judicial oversight. It was effectively a total power grab, and when mass protests broke out, Morsi used the ensuing political crisis to ram a theocratic constitution through to ratification.[49]

While the new constitution passed by 64 percent through referendum,[50] the political crisis persisted for months, with increasingly violent protests against Morsi erupting with greater regularity. Meanwhile, the economy plummeted, lines for gas extended around city blocks, and power shortages created outages lasting many hours on end.[51] As a result, on June 30, 2013, millions of Egyptians took to the streets to demand Morsi's ouster. When Morsi refused to compromise, the military responded by ousting Morsi on July 3, 2013.

In the wake of the coup, the Brotherhood gathered is members and allies in northern Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiya Square and Giza's al-Nahda Square. Protesters denounced the interim government installed to replace Morsi as illegitimate. After negotiations between the new government and the Brotherhood broke down, security forces violently cleared these protests on August 14, 2013, killing at least 800 civilians, according to Human Rights Watch.[52]

After the clearing of Rabaa, the government arrested tens of thousands of Brotherhood leaders and supporters. Then, following a massive terrorist incident in al-Mansoura in December 2013, the government labeled the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group.[53] Ultimately the government's crackdown on the Brotherhood appears to have been successful: with its leaders in prison, exile, or hiding, the organization has been decapitated, rendering it incapable of executing a nationwide strategy within Egypt. Meanwhile, the Brotherhood faces a significant internal crisis pitting younger members, who want to fight the current government with violence, against older leaders, who fear that Brotherhood violence will legitimate the regime's crackdown. The Brotherhood youth's wing appears to have won internal elections that were held in 2014, which explains the Brotherhood's January 2015 statement calling for *jihad* and martyrdom in fighting the regime. But the "old guard" has rejected these elections, creating a rift that has not been resolved at the time of this writing. While deputy supreme guide Mahmoud Ezzat, who heads the group's "old guard" faction, called for reunifying the organization (presumably under his leadership), the Brotherhood's youth-oriented "revolutionary" faction appeared to consolidate its power with new elections in late 2015, after which some of its older members resigned from their leadership posts.[54]

Due to these internal disagreements as well as the Egyptian government's repression, the Brotherhood no longer represents a significant threat to the current regime. The regime has sought to prevent the Brotherhood's possible reemergence by shutting down its social services and implementing strict restrictions on mosque preaching. In this vein, in mid-2016, the Egyptian government mandated that *imams* read government-approved sermons in Friday prayers. This edict was also intended to constrain Salafist preachers, despite the fact that the leading Salafist party – the Light Party – supported Morsi's overthrow and is the only Islamist group still participating in Egyptian politics.

In the Brotherhood's absence, however, other Islamist groups have emerged. Islamist youths who appear to have been affiliated with the Brotherhood have formed a variety of low-level insurgency groups, such as the Molotov Movement and Revolutionary Punishment, which focus their attacks on state infrastructure and security forces. At the same time, Sinai-based *jihadists* used the coup as a pretext for escalating their attacks on security forces. These groups also benefitted from the regional environment: state breakdown in Libya made weapons more available and therefore cheaper to acquire. These groups also aligned to varying extents with groups in Gaza, such as Hamas, in trying to destabilize the Egyptian government.

The most significant *jihadist* group is Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, (Supporters of Jerusalem). Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis started its violent operations immediately following Mubarak's ouster in 2011, targeting Israel and Israeli interests in Egypt, such as the al Arish-Ashkelon natural gas pipeline, which has been bombed repeatedly since 2011. Since the 2013 coup, however, the Egyptian military has been the organization's primary target and, as previously mentioned, the Egyptian military has been actively fighting ABM since September 2013.[55] Another *jihadist* group is Ajnad Misr ("Soldiers of Egypt"), which emerged in late January 2014, saying that it was targeting "criminal" elements of the regime. As of early February 2014, the group has claimed responsibility for seven attacks in Cairo.[56] Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis has referred to Ajnad Misr as "brothers" and suggested that the two organizations have cooperated on attacks in the past, but neither the extent nor the nature of the collaboration is currently known. Meanwhile, Brotherhood sympathizers have formed smaller militant organizations, such as Revolutionary Punishment and *Hasm*, which have orchestrated numerous attacks against security forces.[57]

While the rise of *jihadist* groups within Egypt since Morsi's ouster bodes ill for the country's long-term stability, Islamists overall exert less influence in Egypt today than they have in nearly five decades. The Brotherhood's rapid failure in power, combined with a broad anti-Brotherhood media campaign within Egypt, badly damaged the organization's image. And despite the attempts of some Brotherhood leaders to exert influence from exile in Istanbul, London, and elsewhere, they are increasingly detached from events on the ground. Moreover, the government's severe repression of the organization has deterred other Islamist organizations from escalating their activities, and many of the Brotherhood's initial allies in the "Coalition for Legitimacy" have either been imprisoned or resigned from the coalition. For this reason, those Islamists who have not joined *jihadist* movements have deferred their political ambitions until the current regime falls, whenever that might be.

ENDNOTES

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