

# Political Islam in Europe and the Mediterranean:

Three contributions

Walid Phares, Lorenzo Vidino  
and Amr Hamzawy





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## CREDITS

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# Introduction

Political Islam is increasingly important to European politicians and policymakers. Europe's Muslims are growing in numbers, and some form and join political organisations that articulate Islamic values in the public sphere. Muslim countries that neighbour Europe across the Mediterranean and Black Seas are going through a period of rapid political change, as demonstrated by the anti-authoritarian uprisings in North African and the Middle East that began in December 2010. Although Political Islam was, in most cases, not at the origin of the protests, it may play a more important role in the region in future.

The Centre for European Studies (CES) has a long-term commitment to promoting debate on the role of religion in politics, and the role of political Islam in particular. The CES specifically contributes to discussions on how Europe's centre-right should approach Muslim, Islamic and Islamist political organisations. As one of its activities in this area, the CES organised, in cooperation with the Political Academy of the Austrian People's Party and International Republican Institute, 'The Atlantic Seminar: Understanding Political Islam' in Vienna in March 2010.

The present publication includes three edited papers from this seminar. These papers, by Walid Phares, Lorenzo Vidino and Amr Hamzawy, differ in their geographical coverage and in their focus on specific parts of the Muslim political spectrum. These papers also include different suggestions on how centre-right parties in Europe should respond to and engage with political Islam.

The paper by Walid Phares gives a general overview of Islamic politics in North Africa and the Middle East. It suggests that European centre-right politicians need to create partnerships with those Muslim and Islamic movements that embrace the greatest number of liberal democratic values, even if these movements are weak and least influential at present. Nevertheless, Europe and the West should maintain contacts with *all* Islamic and non-jihadist movements that do not promote terrorism.

Lorenzo Vidino's paper examines political Islam in Europe, looking in particular at one of its branches, the New European Brothers. Vidino advocates a cautious approach to the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, stressing the importance of local conditions. In individual European countries, centre-right politicians need to study the particular organisations of the Muslim Brotherhood and the situation in the particular Muslim community before deciding on whether to engage, or rather confront the particular Islamic political organisation.

Finally, Amr Hamzawy's paper offers insights into those Islamist movements in Egypt, Morocco and Yemen that participate in their countries' political systems. Hamzawy shows that the political practice of these participatory Islamic movements often differs from their religious platforms. In dealing with these Islamist movements, the West needs to make an effort to distinguish between their religious rhetoric on the one hand and their policies on the other hand. The West also needs to recognise the dynamic nature of these movements, which are increasingly adopting strategies of political participation while, at the same time, retaining a proselytising role in the religious sphere.

Irrespective of their differing recommendations, all three authors in this publication emphasise the need for:

- a tailored approach with regard to each Islamic political organisation, because political Islam includes elements with varying programmes and agendas;
- recognition of internal differentiation and disagreements within individual Muslim political organisations; and
- recognition that Islamic organisations change and evolve over time.



Walid Phares

# Political Islam in the Mediterranean Basin: Defining European Strategies

## Summary

This paper attempts to describe the phenomenon of political Islam in the Muslim-majority countries in the Mediterranean basin. It argues that the prevailing understanding of this concept is inspired by the West, while historical and geopolitical reality reveals the existence of several types of political parties and movements that are tied to Islam but have different ideological and political perspectives.

Three main types of political movements and parties compete in society and for government:

- traditional Islamic parties that claim historical affiliation with Muslim civilisation;
- the Islamists: Salafists (Sunni) and Khomeinists (Shia), and
- the networks of 'Muslim democrats'.

Of these, the first two types are organised as parties while the third is found mainly within non-governmental organisations and social cadres. This paper asserts that European and Western Christian Democratic and centre-right parties should develop strategies of engagement with this phenomenon. Interests that European and Western parties have in Islamic groups include national security, political development in the Mediterranean and social cohesion in the West.

Finally, this paper recommends a multi-pronged strategy that includes the following:

- partnering with the Muslim democrats;
- conducting a dialogue with Islamic traditional parties; and
- debating with the Islamists.

This brief warns about engagement without understanding the phenomenon of political Islam, and suggests replacing the concept of political Islam with more specific concepts that can be adapted to the realities of the three streams of Muslims in politics.

## **Introduction: Identifying the Ideology and Global Strategies of Moderate Political Movements within Political Islam**

Political Islam is on the ascendency in Europe, North Africa and the Levant. Astute European politicians, knowing they need a better understanding of Islam's political alter ego, its variants and the implications for European–Mediterranean

socio-political life, have immersed themselves in research in hopes that their newly acquired knowledge will equip them for effective outreach to moderate Muslim political movements in the European–Mediterranean region.

Political bodies of the EU intend to cultivate cooperative relationships with Muslim political groups that have demonstrated a commitment to democratic principles of government. EU lawmakers hope their research and bridge-building efforts will lead to a common understanding of political Islam and lay the foundation for a round table of European political parties, policymakers, prominent political thinkers, policy analysts and democratically inclined Muslim political organisers in the Mediterranean basin. They also hope to assist other like-minded EU and US legislative bodies in their own efforts to do the same.

### **Towards Understanding: the Right Questions**

These goals combine with a larger effort to define political Islam in general and moderate Muslim democratic movements in particular. With this in mind, Western policymakers will need to answer the following questions:

- Why has political Islam (Arabic: *al-Islam al-siyassi*) attracted the attention of European and Western policymakers?
- What do European leaders need to know and consider before they can claim to understand political Islam?
- What are the socio-political implications of political Islam's emergence as a force to be reckoned with in the

countries directly affected by it, and for EU and US governments as well?

- What are the obstacles to improved dialogue and closer relations between Western policymakers and political Islamic movements?
- How do political Islam's ideals stack up against those of European or American political parties and what is the likelihood that those who hold these two world views will be inclined to engage in constructive dialogue?

## Before Engagement

The European political establishment has long understood the importance of forging coalitions with other nations in the Mediterranean basin and elsewhere around the globe. The impetus behind the interest from Europe, the US and other liberal democracies in cooperative engagement with political Islam is not driven by historical precedent alone. Political Islam's rise in Europe, North Africa and the Levant adds strategic significance to the need for engagement as well. Western democracies' national and international security interests and the need to mitigate rapidly emerging urban crises in their own and other countries make understanding political Islam a matter of socio-political survival.

## The Engagement Imperative: Four Justifications

**Justification one: terrorism.** National security provides the most compelling justification for grasping political Islam. This is clear from the numerous ongoing acts of terrorism carried

out by self-described jihadist organisations, movements and individuals in several Western democracies. Consider that a portion of the 9/11 terrorists' preparation took place in Europe and the greater Middle East and that the terrorist strikes in New York, Washington, Madrid and London were planned and directed by jihadist ideologues who espoused the principles of political Islam, and the jihadi-inspired violence and urban clashes that have taken place on both sides of the Atlantic. With that in mind, uncovering possible connections between political Islam and terrorism becomes an urgent imperative.

**Justification two: international security.** A second compelling justification for European or Western engagement with political Islam is the fact of European military deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq and other potential theatres of operation such as Somalia, the Sahel and along international shipping routes in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The self-described jihadists or Islamists that Coalition and NATO forces have been confronting in South Central Asia (Afghanistan), Iraq and other theatres of operation have pledged their lives and fortunes to advance their radical agenda. Moreover, the indoctrination and recruitment methods Islamists use in these regions are enabled by the wealth of Islamist literature that portrays their insurgent military activities, Islamist agenda and terrorist objectives as facets of the jihadists' global agenda.

**Justification three: urban unrest in Europe.** Islamist indoctrination and the promotion of political agendas in Europe have in some cases fuelled urban clashes including the suburbs incidents in France and lower intensity incidents in other European cities. Acts of terrorism notwithstanding, confrontations with Islamists over appropriate levels of

shariah implementation, gender relations, educational content and social activities are prompting European citizens to exert ever-increasing pressure on governments to implement strategies that will prevent more and wider urban crises.

Many Europeans believe the promotion and spread of Islamist ideology in European and Western immigrant communities is a result of political Islam's influence. Many also believe political Islam threatens democratic societies because it promotes radicalisation, extremism, racism and xenophobia among some European nations. The recent unrest over France's ban on the burka, Switzerland's ban on visible minarets, the Danish cartoons and the treatment of Muslim European women by radicalised elements in their communities are only a few examples of political Islam's impact on European culture.

**Justification 4: socio-political partnerships.** A lot is riding on European policymakers' plans for European-Mediterranean basin cooperation. Unlike their partnerships with North America and their former Soviet neighbours, the trans-Mediterranean partnerships that European legislatures are working to establish with mostly Muslim and Arab societies in North Africa and the Levant are challenged by differences in the perceptions of democratic cultures.

In summary, there are at least four critical justifications for European and Western governments, politicians and academics to actively pursue a better understanding of political Islam, to accurately discern its *radical* and *moderate* elements and to distinguish between those that advocate violence and those that do not, and between groups that have immersed themselves in the radical stream and those that have demonstrated an appreciation for liberal

democratic ideals. Only then will European political parties be able to forecast political Islam's evolution and determine the most appropriate course of action.

## A Lexicon of Islam

Before one embarks on an analysis of political Islam, one needs to know the movement's vocabulary. European and Western politicians looking for ways to engage with Euro-Mediterranean political parties will need to tailor their terms based on the specific thing they are looking for. For instance, if one is trying to describe a political party or parties that link Islam to a political agenda, one should use 'Muslim political parties'. A party that uses some form of Islamist ideology should be described as an 'Islamist party'.

**Islam** (Arabic: *al-Islaam*). Transliterations: English/Western: *Islam*; French: *l'Islam*; Spanish: *el Islam*.

**Muslim.** A term of identification meaning a person who is Muslim (Arabic: *Muslem*) or plural, Muslims (Arabic: *Muslimuum*). A collective of Muslim people (e.g. a Muslim majority, Muslim culture etc.). A descriptive, identifying term as in 'he is Muslim' (Arabic: *innahu Muslem*) or 'the Muslims' (Arabic: *al-Muslimeen*) or 'a Muslim region' (Arabic: *mintaqat Islamiyya*). In this usage, Muslim refers to an individual or group dimension (such as spiritual, historical or sociological), not to their identity.

**Islamic** (Arabic: *Islamiyya*). A term used to emphasise the identity of an individual, a collective, an institution or a country. Examples: 'Islamic culture' (Arabic: *al-thaqafa al-Islamiyya*), 'Islamic identity' (Arabic: *al-hawiyya al-Islamiyya*),

‘Islamic constitution’ (Arabic: *al-dastur al-Islamee*), ‘Islamic law’ (Arabic: *al-qanun al-Islamee*), ‘Islamic civilisation’ (Arabic: *al-hadara al-Islamiyya*) etc. When used of an individual, this usage underscores that the subject is conscious of and in agreement with this identity. It is more than descriptive (‘Muslim’), and represents less than ideological commitment (‘Islamist’).

**Islamist.** A term that refers to an ideology with a specific meaning and all-encompassing political agenda. The term originated in Arabic political culture and was subsequently adopted and used by Western experts in the same sense. ‘Islamist’ translates almost as the same word, *Islamy*, but is pronounced with the stress placed on the final letter, as in *Islamyy*. In Arabic linguistics *Islamy* is the only term used for ‘Islamic’ and ‘Islamist’, hence the confusion among Western linguists. ‘Islamist’ refers to the essential qualities and identity of individual activists or movements that convey very specific doctrinal and ideological meanings. The ideology is Islamist; the movement is Islamist; the regime is Islamist; a country, people or culture can be Islamic or Muslim, but not Islamist.

**Political Islam** (Arabic: *al-Islaam al-siyassi*). A reference to the political dimension of the Islamic religion (Arabic: literally, of *al-Islaam*). It describes Islam as a global political phenomenon. ‘Political Islam’ carries with it a broader meaning than ‘Islamist’. Muslims can subscribe to political Islam and not be Islamist. Not all Muslims affiliate with political Islam. Political Islam may include Islamist parties and movements, but is not one and the same with them. The expression carries with it the idea that all things related to politics are political, including individuals who believe that Islamism belongs to political Islam.



## A Comparative Analysis of Muslim Political Movements

The majority of the members of the political parties in the Muslim Middle East are Muslims. The phrase 'Muslim political party' does not necessarily mean that Islamist ideology or the Muslim religion is a group's most significant distinction. The parties are simply those movements in the Muslim region which identify themselves with some facet of Muslim history. Secular political parties such as the Syrian and Iraqi Baath parties, the Socialist Progressive Party and Nasserite Movement of Lebanon, the Arab nationalist and patriotic parties of Jordan, Egypt and North Africa, and the Fatah movement of Palestine are organisations that operate in Muslim societies even if some of their members are not Muslims. Individuals within these parties accept the idea that the nation they belong to has been part of Islamic history in the same way that secular parties in the West accept the idea that they belong to or are products of Judeo-Christian civilisation and history.

### Islamic Parties

Islamic parties (Arabic: *al-ahzab al-Islamiyya*) are Muslim political groups that include 'Islamic' in their name, assert their historical affiliation with Islamic civilisation and refer to Islam as a religion of their country. Islamic parties are not necessarily Islamist. While they claim to represent the local Muslim population, creating an Islamist (Wahhabi or Khomeinist) regime is not necessarily their goal. Examples include the Islamic League of Pakistan (Arabic: *al-Tajammoh al-Islami*) in Lebanon, the ruling Lijan al Sha'biyya party in Libya, and al-Mu'tamar al-Watani in Sudan.

## Islamist Parties

Islamist parties (Arabic: *al-ahzab al-Islamiyun*) are organisations and parties that unambiguously subscribe to an Islamist Salafist or Islamist Khomeinist political agenda. Regardless of their standing in the country they operate in, their strategic choice of jihad, or ‘a way of struggle’, as the purpose for their participation in the political process places them in a category by themselves because their ideology and vision transcend the state and its political system and advocate a globalist future. Islamist parties are naturally Islamic and Muslim but the opposite is not necessarily true. Examples include the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and other Arab countries, the *Nahda* Movement in Tunisia, the National Islamic Front of Sudan and the *Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami* of Jordan.

## The Jihadist Movements

Jihadist movements (Arabic: *al-harakat al-jihadiyya*) are Islamist movements that have chosen the path of jihad and openly declare and practise their commitment to ‘the struggle’ in the here and now. All jihadist movements are Islamist, but not all Islamist parties and movements have chosen to follow all of the stages of jihadism. All Islamist parties acknowledge jihadism as a means of struggle but not all choose to practise it in all of its manifestations. The jihadists represent one of the stages of Islamist movements.

## The Western View

In the Western view of political Islam, there are two perspectives: One is broad and the other is narrow.

According to the broad perspective, political Islam encompasses all political parties operating within Muslim-majority countries south and east of the Mediterranean. The only exceptions would be those political parties that expressly espouse non-Islamic ideologies such as Marxism or Communism, or organisations that are non-Muslim, such as the Christian parties in Lebanon or Iraq. In the broad perspective, all other movements and political entities, including liberal, socialist, patriotic, nationalist, traditional Islamic and Islamist, would fall under 'political Islam' in the wider perspective.

The narrow perspective on political Islam, Islamist movements and political parties includes within political Islam the Salafi Sunni and Khomeinist Shia streams and the broad range of Islamist groups in each country. But this narrow perspective of political Islam would also include jihadist Islamists or Islamists who have chosen the path of violent insurrectionist jihad. According to this view, there are no fundamental differences between Islamists in general and jihadists in particular except that, for the present time, Islamists are carrying on the struggle through political activism.

From both the broad and narrow perspective, the concept of 'political Islam' does not accurately portray the nature of political parties and groups in Muslim majority countries. To begin with, political Islam is a Western notion that is based on the assumption that there is a political Islam and a non-political Islam. In reality, those who claim an Islamic/Islamist affiliation in their political platforms reject the concept of political Islam. Islamists argue that Islamic identity is *mutakamila* (or 'comprehensive' and 'integrated'). The Muslim Brotherhood (international) and Salafist groups

generally espouse the motto, *Islaam huwa al-hall* (Islam is the solution). They seek as their ultimate goal to establish a full-fledged Islamic system based on shariah law. They do reject the idea of pluralist systems that are only *influenced* by Islamic values and propound the view that the state itself is Islamic inasmuch as medieval European states were theologically 'Christian'. Neither do other movements and parties in the majority-Muslim countries of the Mediterranean basin identify themselves as part of political Islam. Those groups that define themselves as Marxists reject religious affiliation, whereas groups that define themselves as nationalists (Arabic: *qawmiyeen*) consider Islam to be one of the historical components of their doctrines but not the fundamental one. The problem with the notion of 'political Islam' is the linguistic link created between Islam as a religion and classical politics. The Islamists claim that Islam cannot be divided into categories, and the other movements reject the notion of being affiliated fundamentally with religion.

### The Appropriate Summa Divisio: a New Categorisation

How can European and Western political parties examine the actors within 'political Islam' and arrive at a better *summa divisio*? In fact, we propose a new categorisation based on individual ideology, self-perception, strategies and ultimate goals. The most appropriate division lies between political parties and movements in the Muslim-majority countries that wish to establish an Islamist state (not Islamic or Muslim) as their ultimate goal and those that do not. In actuality, the distinction is between the Islamists (including jihadists) and everyone else, both Muslims and minorities.

‘Everyone else’ encompasses a broad spectrum comparable to—but not identical with—the European, Latin American and Indian spectrums; it includes Marxists, Socialists, Liberals, Conservatives, nationalists, traditionalists, Muslims etc. ‘Everyone else’, in fact, comprises the numerical majority of civil societies’ organised politics.

European and Western political parties need to focus on the interests of the non-Islamists in the region while factoring in the smaller numbers of Islamists who have achieved influence and power within the political culture. Identifying non-Islamist partners within the political culture of majority-Muslim Mediterranean countries is daunting for most European parties, and particularly challenging for those that are right of centre, such as the Christian Democrats. (Difficult does not mean impossible, as I will argue later in this paper.) It is incumbent on European and Western political parties to understand, as a precondition to strategising on engagement, the fundamental differences, strategies and historical visions that exist among political groups in the Mediterranean Muslim-majority sphere.

## The Modern Evolution of Islamist Movements

The Sunni Salafi and Shia Khomeinist are the two primary ‘trees’ of Islamist movements and ideologies in the Muslim world in general and the Mediterranean basin in particular. The two subscribe to different eschatological visions of a future global Islamic state and disagree on both the historical interpretation of events and on proper methods and geopolitical priorities. However, both broad movements are intent on establishing a new regional order and both have spawned jihadist movements and organisations. The

Salafists aim at the re-establishment of a Caliphate and the Khomeinists want to erect an Imamate. Both are having a significant impact on European and Western nation states and the agendas of democratic political parties. This influence includes changes in geopolitics through the modification of state structures and borders south and east of the Mediterranean. It also includes changes inside European countries by attempting to establish areas under shariah law, geographically or legally. It is crucial to understand their doctrines and history and, in particular, their modern evolution.

## The Salafi Tree

The Salafi branch includes the three largest Islamist ideological families, among them the Wahhabis (Saudi Arabia), the Muslim Brotherhood (initially from Egypt) and the Deobandis (Indian sub-continent). The oldest family of Salafists, indeed of all Islamist schools of thought, is Wahhabism, which was founded by Mohammad Abd-al-Wahhab in Najd Province in Arabia in the late eighteenth century. The Wahhabist movement had already acquired increasing influence before it allied itself with a local Bedouin confederation of tribes led by al-Saud, which seized Hejaz<sup>1</sup> in the mid-1920s and established what could be deemed the first Wahhabi/Salafi regime in the region.

Founded in March 1928 in Egypt under the leadership of Hassan al-Banna, the *Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* (Muslim Brotherhood) began as an urban Islamist movement. The Muslim Brotherhood eventually became the primary Islamist

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1 A province in today's Saudi Arabia with Mecca and Medina at its centre.

movement in Egypt before it created branches in every Arab country and beyond.

The Deobandi movement began, as its name suggests, in Deoband, India, in May 1866 and influenced the thinking of Islamists on the Indian subcontinent and the rest of South Asia. The two main ideological Salafist families that have most impacted Islamist movements in the Mediterranean region have been and remain the MB/Wahhabi movements and the various offshoots and mutations that have developed since the 1920s.

The relationship of the Muslim Brotherhood with Arab regimes has been a story of struggle and adaptation. The Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates have clashed with the governments of Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Jordan over imposing higher levels of shariah and transforming these countries into Islamist states and obstructing the peace process with Israel. They have also been at odds with Saudi Arabia for more than 50 years. Decades of working in opposition to Arab regimes has taught the Muslim Brotherhood how to run underground organisations and penetrate institutions. Publicly disseminated Muslim Brotherhood literature and confiscated documents have made clear what this movement's long-term strategic goals are. Muslim Brotherhood activities are based on the principle of *istrategiyya al-marhaliyya* (transitional strategies) or the acquisition of as much political power as possible by political means. Their strategic communications and propaganda tools have historically mutated and adapted to regional and local circumstances. The overarching message of the Muslim Brotherhood, however, has remained constant while the organisation's pragmatic narratives have been adaptable to the specific circumstances of the countries in which they operate.

The Wahhabi school has been able to retain its power inside the Saudi Kingdom while it extends its doctrinal influence throughout the Arab world, North Africa and the Levant. With no shortage of petrodollars at their disposal, Wahhabi clerical circles have been able to support, and in many cases direct, the policy of religious, social, socio-cultural, socioeconomic, education and research institutions in the Middle East and North Africa. Combined Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi organisational and financial backing have provided Salafi Islamist movements and organisations throughout this region with abundant support, enabling the Islamists to survive and expand throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The Salafi Islamist network, as the ideological ‘mother ship’, has spawned numerous types of movements and political parties, from official Muslim Brotherhood branches and independent political parties to parties which dominate the political regimes in their countries. Please see Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. First-generation Muslim Brotherhood/Wahhabi offshoots

Country of Origin	Offshoot
Egypt	Muslim Brotherhood [Egyptian]
Sudan	National Islamic Front
Algeria	<i>Front de Salut Islamique</i>
Lebanon	<i>Harakat Tawhid Islami</i>



The second-generation jihadi movements began within the MB/Wahhabi network before they struck out on their own.

**Table 2. Second-generation Muslim Brotherhood/Wahhabi offshoots**

Country of Origin	Spawning Organisation	Offshoot
<b>Egypt</b>	Muslim Brotherhood	<i>Jama'a Islamiyya</i> , Islamic Jihad
<b>Algeria</b>	Muslim Brotherhood	<i>Groupement Islamique Armes</i> , <i>Group Salafiste de Combat et de Dawa</i>
<b>Lebanon</b>	Muslim Brotherhood	<i>Harakat Tawhid</i> , later transformed to <i>al Jama'a al-Islamiyya</i>
<b>Palestine</b>	Muslim Brotherhood	<i>Hamas</i> , Palestinian Jihad
<b>Turkey</b>	Muslim Brotherhood	<i>Rafah Party</i> , <i>Najmuddine Erbakan</i>

## The Shia Khomeinist Tree

In 1979, the Khomeini revolution in Iran installed an Islamic republic (*Jumhuriyya Islamiyya*) dominated by a Shia fundamentalist Islamist movement, 'Iran's Hezbollah'. The Islamist regime in Tehran developed the Sepah Pasdaran, or Islamic Revolutionary Guard, a political-military organisation, to defend the revolution. In 1981 the Pasdaran was tasked with helping Khomeinist-loyal militants in the Lebanese Shia community to launch Hezbollah, a Lebanon-based militant military organisation. Hezbollah evolved into the dominant Shia Islamist organisation in Lebanon and, in cooperation with the Iranian Pasdaran, extended Shia Islam's influence within the Arabic-speaking Shia communities in eastern Saudi Arabia, northern Yemen and central and southern Iraq. Other Shia Islamists in Iraq have been the Dawa Party, the

SCIRI Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Mahdi Army.

## Islamists and the Cold War

During the Cold War years between 1947 and 1990, Sunni Islamists (Salafists) adopted a common global strategy on the one hand and a variety of national policies on the other. The Muslim Brotherhood introduced different adaptations country by country within the various regimes' domestic policy institutions. In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood opposed the Baathist Party, launching a military uprising against the Alawi-based Assad regime in the early 1980s. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood oscillated between subversion from outside the country and discrete internal opposition, working within the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak presidential administrations. In Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood also adopted strategies of political survival while in Iraq, Algeria and Southern Yemen they opposed pro-Soviet leaders. Well entrenched inside the Saudi Kingdom, Wahhabis influenced the Saudi government in their regional and international relationships. Beyond their local and national survival agendas, Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi Islamists found common ground and cooperated on the following strategic initiatives:

1. the fight against Communists and Soviet influence,
2. an interim alliance with the West against the Soviet atheists,
3. the undermining of secular Arab regimes, and

4. the spreading of Islamist ideology while East and West were enmeshed in the Cold War.

During the decades of the Cold War, the Islamist Salafists waged an ideological campaign in the region and prepared the ground for the expansion of political movements and parties that eventually sprang up from the same roots. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the Islamists gave their support to the mujahedin resistance, leading many Salafist militants to volunteer for the fight. Eventually, a new international breed of jihadi emerged from the global anti-Soviet Afghan Salafist jihad. The anti-Communist jihadi rhetoric was based on the Islamists' world view, it was not a rallying cry to support Western causes.

Also in 1979, the Islamist Khomeinists seized power in Iran and positioned themselves against the US and, to a lesser degree, the Soviet Union. Iran's Islamist regime proceeded to establish its own system of alliances in the region separate from the Salafist Islamists.

### The Islamist-Jihadist Debates of the 1990s

At a conference in Khartoum in 1992, the collapse of the Soviet Union, signs of weakness within Arab secular regimes and the belief that jihadi forces had defeated Communism in the battlefields of Afghanistan led Sunni Salafist movements to conclude that the geopolitical tectonic plates had shifted in their favour and an updated Islamist strategy was needed. From late 1992 to early 1993, proponents of the region's two major Islamist streams were invited to Khartoum by National Islamic Front founder Dr Hassan Turabi for a series of meetings to discuss next steps. Proponents of both the

jihadi Islamist and the jihadist Salafist, or ‘jihad is a long-term struggle’, views convened in Khartoum for a series of deliberations that would prove to be a defining moment for both, culminating in a new post–Cold War global Islamist strategy.

The jihadist debate in Khartoum spawned two main approaches to Islamist action in the region. The more ‘Trotskyist’<sup>2</sup> jihadist Islamist stream (later affiliated with Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda) elected to wage jihad against every nation not under the banner of Islam, including the US. Their more deliberative counterparts in the ‘long-term struggle’ camp, which included classical Salafists, Wahhabis (MB) and their allies, opted for political engagement and legal advocacy to effect societal transformation until socio-political conditions were conducive to the establishment of Islamist-led states.

The Wahhabi–Muslim Brotherhood strategy, which espouses ideological and political expansion until a balance of power is achieved with so-called infidel forces, argues that several goals must be achieved in preparation for the advent of a Caliphate, namely:

1. reinforced military and technological capabilities within the *Ummah* (the global Muslim community);
2. greater influence in international forums;
3. broader and deeper influence in the West;
4. support for ‘jihadist Islamist struggles’ that are not perceived (by, for example, the Khartoum Conference) as

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2 In the sense of wanting a ‘revolution’ at once across the globe.

international terrorism or as aimed at Western or American interests (e.g. the struggles in the Southern Philippines, Sudan, Chechnya, Kashmir and Palestine); and

5. the use of regional and international Islamic organisations, such as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), to advance Islamist ideology.

The doctrine of 'direct jihad' argues that the time for military struggle (including terrorism) is now, an argument supported by the Afghan jihad's success against the Soviet military. The jihadist Salafists (Arabic: *al-jihad'iyyun al-Salafiyya*) distinguished themselves from the jihadist Islamists, not on the basis of ideology or long-term objectives, but on the basis of strategy. The jihadists' struggle involved urban and international terrorism while the Islamists pursued political Islamisation. Despite fundamental differences, the lines of demarcation between the two approaches are not always clear or rigid.

The amalgam of Islamist streams that emerged in the post-Cold War era was vast and complex. The primary division was between Salafists and Khomeinists. The Salafists separated into long-term (non-militarised) Islamist movements and the terror jihadists. Differences and commonalities in the Islamist web need to be understood by European and Western political parties.

### Political Islamist Movements with Long-Term Strategic Goals

The original Muslim Brotherhood and classical Wahhabi schools of thought have continued to inspire numerous

groups in the Mediterranean basin. Countries in the Arab world and greater Middle East, however, are home to a variety of different types of Islamist movements and parties. The following list illustrates this point:

**Morocco.** The Party for Justice and Development (PJD) emerged in 1997 out of the *al-Tawhid wa'l-Islah* Islamist movement that began in the 1960s. Since 2002, the group has become more involved in Morocco's social and economic problems and less theologically and ideologically oriented. In the 2007 Moroccan elections, PJD garnered 14% of the popular vote and captured 46 seats in Morocco's national Parliament, second in number only to the *Istiqlal* or Independence Party. The PJD adopted a policy of non-aggression towards the Moroccan monarchy, electing instead to pursue a strategy of adapting to the surrounding socio-political environment and embedding itself in Moroccan society. Nevertheless, the PJD's ideological agenda remains loyal to the long-term Islamist agenda.

**Algeria.** The Islamic Renaissance Movement (IRM; Arabic: *harakat al-nahda al-Islamiyya*) is perceived as a moderate Islamist party. Abdallah Djaballah founded the IRM in 1990 and served under its auspices in the Algerian Parliament. Djaballah was later expelled from the IRM and founded the National Reform Movement (NRM) in 1999. The IRM party won only three seats in the 2007 parliamentary elections. Abdallah Djaballah eventually left the NRM party over internal conflict.

The Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) was founded in 1990 under the name Movement for an Islamic Society (formerly called Hamas). The MSP supported the government's decision to end elections in 1992 and has

criticised terrorist acts by the Islamic Salvation Army (FIS). The MSP captured 52 seats in the 2007 Algerian parliamentary elections.

**Tunisia.** There are no legally recognised Islamist political parties in Tunisia.

**Jordan.** The Islamic Action Front (IAF) was founded on 7 December 1992 with an initial membership of 350 through the efforts of Ahmed Azaida, Dr Ishaq Farhan and Dr Abdul Latif Arabiyat. Abdul Latif Arabiyat is the group's current Secretary-General. The IAF is the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. The group won only six seats in the House of Deputies in the 2007 parliamentary elections, the group's lowest showing after the resumption of parliamentary life in Jordan in 1989.

**Yemen.** The Islah Party—also known as the Yemeni Congregation for Reform—was founded in 1990 and is part of the Joint Meeting Parties opposition coalition. The party won 46 seats in the parliamentary elections of 2003. The *Al-Haqq* or Truth Party is a Zaydi Islamist party. Founded in 1990, Al-Haqq is part of the Joint Meeting Parties opposition coalition. Al-Haqq has not won a seat in the Yemeni Parliament since 1993.

**Kuwait.** Political parties are illegal in Kuwait but there are major political groups including the Islamic Constitutional Movement (HADAS). Inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, HADAS has been pushing for the legalisation of political parties since its formation in 1991. The Islamic Salafi Alliance is affiliated with the Heritage Revival Society; the group believes in enforcing shariah law in Kuwait. The National Islamic Alliance is a hard-line political party in and

the main Islamist group for Shiites in Kuwait. The group is alleged to have links with Iran and Hezbollah. Two of the 50 elected members of the National Assembly of Kuwait belong to the National Islamic Alliance.

**Egypt.** The Muslim Brotherhood organisation is banned in Egypt; however, many of its members run as independent candidates for seats in the Egyptian Parliament. In the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections, the group is reported to have won one out of five seats by running its members as independent candidates.

**Libya.** There are no formal political parties in Libya. The Liyan Islamic Group (Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya al-Libya) is the local wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya.

**Syria.** There are no licensed Islamist parties in Syria. The Muslim Brotherhood was established in Syria in the 1940s. After the Baathist Party took over in 1963, the group was banned. When it tried to rebel in 1982, the military crushed the group at Hama. Since then, the Syrian government has continued to suppress the group.

**Sudan.** The National Islamic Front is the Muslim Brotherhood party in Sudan. It has ruled Sudan since its members overthrew the Sudanese government in 1989. Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir is the party's leader. Founded in 1945, the Ummah Party was the largest political party in Sudan before the Bashir coup d'état and is the political wing of the Islamic Ansar Movement.

**Post-Saddam Iraq.** Shia parties include the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) (previously known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq or SCIRI).



It was founded in 1982 during the Iran–Iraq war. The group has ties to Iran. Ammar al-Hakim is the group's current leader. The group took 7.7% of the vote in the 2009 provincial elections. It has been a member of the Iraqi National Alliance since that group's founding in 2005. The Al-Sadr movement is led by Muqtada al-Sadr and is the political wing of al-Sadr's armed militia. After his militia was defeated by the Iraqi army in Basra in 2008, al-Sadr retreated from public life. Among the Sunni parties are the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Led by current Vice-President Tariq al-Hashimi, the group had been a part of an alliance with the al-Tawafuq, or the Accord Front, but has since fallen apart.

## Answering Europe's Questions

From this summary of (what is perceived as) 'political Islam' in Europe and the West let us try to answer our questions:

### Question 1: Why has political Islam become so important?

This question has a two-part answer. First, some expert advice provided to European decision-makers presented political Islam as a large monolithic group of Islamic movements and parties comprising a majority of politically active citizens in Muslim-majority countries in the Mediterranean region, hence coining it as 'political Islam' instead of Islamic and Islamist parties and movements. As a result, the prevailing European (and Western, to a degree) perspective, regarded as incontrovertible, views political Islam as determinative of future political movements in the region. Our research reveals, however, that political Islam as

a movement is not organised around a single unifying political or ideological principle. Rather, regional political parties that identify themselves as religiously or sociologically Islamic are broadly diverse and in most cases hold opposing views. While it is correct to assume that these Islamic political parties will have a significant impact on the region's social, political and economic future, it is not accurate to characterise political Islam as a monolithic group of movements, ideological uniformity among Islamist political parties notwithstanding.

Second, unlike most other political forces in the region, the Islamist movements and parties are a tightly organised network that coordinates activities on a regional level. This strongly suggests that Islamist movements and parties in the region possess the ability, now, to organise as a regional political alliance for the purpose of pursuing transnational strategies such as coordinating campaigns of protest across the continent, indoctrination processes and unified pressures on Western and European foreign policies regarding specific issues such as the Arab Israeli conflict, Afghanistan and Islamophobia. Currently the Islamists are, relative to other political forces in the region, the best-coordinated force within political Islam.

In summary, European political parties must understand the advantageous position held by Islamist political groups in the region as well as the significant influence they wield with respect to Euro-Mediterranean political initiatives and relations.

## **Question 2: What information do we need in order to have an accurate understanding of political Islam?**

We must understand the following:

1. Political Islam is not a socially or politically monolithic group of movements, but a diverse association of groups with differing views.
2. Political Islam is embroiled in its own intellectual and political debate. Therefore, descriptions that assume ideological and political uniformity are unreliable. This view should be replaced with analyses of the various types of political movements and parties in the region.
3. The globally networked Islamist movement is ‘the system’ we must study and engage. European and Western political parties must be aware of the Islamist ‘nebula’ that encompasses the Islamists as well as other forces, and subsystems within the global Islamist nebula, with its countless branches and offshoots.

## **Question 3: What are the implications of this Islamist nebula’s influence in the domestic politics of countries in the European–Mediterranean basin, and for the EU and US?**

The rise of the Islamist movements in Arab and Muslim-majority countries in the Mediterranean region has a direct impact on the domestic politics of the European Union, the US, Canada, Australia and other liberal democracies.

Islamist movements enter European and other Western societies through immigrants who, once settled, establish indoctrination and recruitment bases in their host societies.

The most pressing concern for European and Western democracies is the ideological impact the most radical Islamists (i.e., the jihadists) are having within their host societies through the use of terrorism. Islamist ideology is the mechanism whereby jihadists extend their bases in the West.

The Islamists are among the most active, well-organised and focused emigrant-producing organisations in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries.

Dissident, liberal, democratic and secular groups that are also relocating to the West represent the Islamists' strongest opposition. The Muslim democrats and the Islamists encounter each other within Western democracies as well.

Ironically, the number of Islamists in the West is growing rapidly as they indoctrinate others in Islamist ideology, which is spreading at an equally brisk pace. The number of jihadists among the Islamists is exploding in Western countries, and dissident, liberal Muslim voices are becoming more outspoken in their opposition to it as a result.

**Question 4: What are the obstacles and opportunities for Western political groups as they seek to enter into dialogue and establish closer ties with parties and movements under the umbrella of political Islam that have shown a commitment to Western liberal democratic ideals? And, assuming they exist, how do 'moderate' elements within political Islam relate to**

## **Western liberal democratic principles and how willing will they be to engage in a dialogue with European and American political parties?**

The key issue here is whether Western political leaders and organisers understand the diversity of political and ideological opinion that exists within political Islam. Assuming that all political forces and movements that appear 'Islamic' should be lumped together under the banner of political Islam and addressed as one collective would lead to certain failure. Political Islam as it is typically thought of in the Western political community does not exist. Instead, there are multiple political forces within Muslim-majority countries which need to be engaged separately. If Western political parties can agree on a proper understanding of political Islam, they can then devise an effective strategy of engagement with democratically inclined Muslim political forces in the region.

Again, the greatest obstacle to effective Euro-Mediterranean political dialogue and partnerships in the region is the assumption of homogeneity within the Muslim political ethos.

## **Question 5: Can we identify and clearly define groups within political Islam that are moderate?**

Political parties and movements within political Islam belong to one of the following three streams:

1. Muslim/Islamic (but not Islamist) parties,
2. Islamist movements, and
3. Muslim reformist networks.

Moderate Islamic political parties and movements are, for the most part, from streams 1 and 2. They formally recognise international law, international organisations and human rights. Islamist groups, on the other hand, are able to adopt a 'moderate' position while they maintain their fundamentalist agenda. A comprehensive map of movements and parties can be established using these distinctions.

**Question 6: Do the 'moderate' movements and parties represent the seeds of a generally democratic movement within the politics of their countries and of the region?**

There are three types of moderates:

1. those who pretend to be moderate only until they achieve their strategic goals,
2. those who are moderates because they wish to maintain the status quo but not move towards reform, and
3. the reformists.

**Question 7: Does the current ideological profile of moderate Islamic political groups exhibit any of the characteristics of Christian Democracy as it is commonly understood among Western political groups? If so, what are these characteristics?**

Non-jihadist Islamist movements are often compared with fundamentalist Christian groups who ostensibly seek to establish a theocratic government, but only through

legitimate political activism. The difference, however, is that Islamists can mutate into jihadists at the discretion of their leaders and strategists.

The traditional Islamic/Muslim parties are similar in some respects to Christian Democrats, but they are not identical. The Islamic political agenda is to the right of European Christian Democrats' agenda.

While 'Muslim Democrats' may be comparable in some respects to various European Christian Democratic streams, they may also incorporate elements that are left of centre.

**Question 8: If parallels exist between moderate Muslim and Christian Democratic perspectives and if they are significant, can they be used to lay a foundation for European centre-right and Christian Democratic parties to enter into dialogue and cooperate with similar parties and movements within political Islam?**

The natural and immediate partners of the European centre-right, the Christian Democratic and People's parties are the liberal democrats in the region. The next category, closest to the European centre-right, are the traditional Muslim parties, if they will embrace a secular understanding with respect to the separation of religion and state. The most distant category is the Islamists. Thus European engagement with these three streams must be based on three tailored approaches.

## Recommendations

There are no 'Muslim Democratic' parties in the Mediterranean basin that correspond to European Christian Democratic or centre-right movements such as exist in Latin America and that existed in Eastern Europe after the Soviet Union's collapse. But since there are political forces, networks, cadres, intellectuals, legislators and politicians in the Mediterranean Muslim-majority countries who share the fundamental views of their European counterparts, our strategic recommendations are as follows:

1. Give priority to partnerships with networks of dispersed entities and cadres in the region that embrace the greatest number of liberal democratic values and long-term goals, with a view to building national organisations that will partner with Christian Democratic parties, People's parties and centre-right groups in Europe and their counterparts in other Western democracies. Choose to partner with groups whose values are most convergent with democratic values, even if those groups are the weakest, least organised and least influential at the present time.
2. Seek to establish dialogue with Muslim/Islamic traditional parties and politicians for the purpose of encouraging them to align more closely with international values and principles, in order to legitimate the formation of partnerships in the near future.
3. Invite non-jihadist Islamist groups to participate in forums where salient issues are debated and discussed in hopes that these forums will generate interest in gradual reform and change in their platforms, and will



promote interest in wider debates within these societies on democracy and pluralism.

4. Devise different engagement strategies for the three major streams within political Islam. Naturally, priority must be given to partnerships with like-minded Muslim democrats, while at the same time pursuing robust engagement with more traditional Islamic and non-jihadist Islamist movements.

Lorenzo Vidino

# Political Islam in Europe

## Summary

In most European countries, active organisations exist that trace their historical and ideological roots to the Muslim Brotherhood and other participationist, non-violent Islamist movements, although these organisations act, for the most part, independently of those movements. Thanks to their activism, ample resources and political skills, and despite their small numbers, these organisations have often achieved a disproportionate influence, both within the Muslim community and in their interactions with governments and media. They are aided in this by the poor organisation of competing Islamic trends. The first part of this report seeks to provide a general understanding of the history, evolution, methods and aims of these networks, which the report terms New European Brothers (NEBs). The second part of the report analyses the influence of the NEBs on voting patterns within European Muslim communities and outlines possible scenarios of a hypothetical engagement of NEB networks by European centre-right parties.

## Introduction

Political Islam, or Islamism, can be described as an ideology that rejects the view that Islam should be simply a faith and an individual matter, and instead promotes an interpretation that encompasses religion and politics, presenting Islam as a complete system (*nizam Islami*) regulating all aspects of private and public life. The

heterogeneity of the movement, which arguably embraces groups that employ horrifying violence to further a millenarian view of society as well as modern political organisations that participate in the democratic process and publicly reject violence, has made political Islam particularly difficult to grapple with. Clearly no single assessment can be applied to all, and any analysis must take into consideration the philosophical and tactical nuances that characterise such diverse forces.

Over the past few years, most of the debate related to political Islam in Europe has focused on the threat of terrorism and the issue of radicalisation among segments of the European Muslim population. While these problems are unquestionably extremely important, an analysis focusing solely on the security aspects of a phenomenon as complex, diverse and multilayered as political Islam in Europe is inevitably incomplete. With a necessary oversimplification, it is possible to divide Islamist tendencies in Europe into groups of violent rejectionists, non-violent rejectionists and participationists. Violent rejectionists are individuals and networks that, often linked to or inspired by al-Qaeda, reject participation in the democratic system and use violence to advance their goals. Non-violent rejectionists are groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, that openly reject the legitimacy of any system of government not based on Islamic law (shariah), but do not, at least publicly and openly, advocate the use of violence to further their goals.

While often the preferred subjects of headlines and public debates because of their violent actions and incendiary positions, violent and non-violent rejectionists represent a statistically insignificant force within European Muslim communities. Their appeal to even a small number of

European Muslims is a disturbing phenomenon that, as a result of its impact on security and social cohesion, should be studied and addressed with the appropriate repressive and preventive means. Yet in the grand scheme of things, rejectionist Islamist groups hardly constitute a mass movement, and their ideas influence only a small niche of European Muslims.

At the same time, little attention has been devoted to a third sub-group of what can be considered political Islam in Europe: participationists. Participationist Islamists are those individuals and groups that adhere to the strand of Islamism that advocates interaction with society at large, both at the micro-level through grassroots activism, and at the macro-level through participation in public life and the democratic process. In Europe, as in the rest of the world, these networks are significantly more powerful in terms of numbers, funds, appeal to fellow Muslims and political capabilities than those of the rejectionists. Yet despite their relevance, they are often less studied and talked about. This paper seeks to provide a modest contribution to overcoming this important knowledge deficit.

The presence of participationist Islamists has particular relevance for European policymakers. Over the past 20 years, once it was commonly understood that a significant number of Muslim immigrants had created a stable presence on the Continent, most governments started feeling the need to identify individuals and organisations that could be representatives of these new communities. European governments need to engage their Muslim communities for various reasons. Policymakers have therefore sought a counterpart in their efforts to extend the legal and financial benefits long granted to other religious groups, such as

offering religious teachings in public schools, building places of worship or appointing chaplains in public institutions. But the issue of finding representative and reliable interlocutors within the Muslim community has become more urgent in the post-9/11 environment, where integration and security issues have become a priority. It is now widely understood among European policymakers that it is crucial for the security of their countries to improve relations with their own Muslim population, and that to do so they must find counterparts who not only represent the Muslim community but who can also help governments decrease radicalisation and alienation within it.

The task of finding these partners has been an excruciatingly difficult one. Most Muslim communities, internally divided by ethnicity, national origin, language, sect and political opinions, have been unable to produce a common leadership. Most governments have found themselves dealing with a vast array of organisations who viciously fight each other to become the anointed representatives of the Muslim community and who are unwilling to share the position with their competitors. As one commentator stated, 'When government officials look for a responsible interlocutor, they find that the Muslim voice is a cacophony rather than a chorus' (Klausen 2005, 81)

The majority of Muslim organisations operating in Europe is not Islamist, but rather reflects the many splits that characterise the community. Some are secularist, and often staunchly so. Others represent minority religious trends, such as the Shiites or Ahmadiya, or sub-currents of Sunni Islam. Many unite Muslim communities on the basis of their ethnicity. The dynamics of the relationships among these diverse organisations are complex, ranging from occasional

cooperation to outright confrontation, though competition is the normal state of affairs. Europe is a new religious market for Islam, and organisations vie for influence both within the Muslim community and with European establishments. This panorama is ever-changing, as the importance and visibility of the organisations rise and fall, reflecting not necessarily the numbers of their adherents but rather the means they possess.

Indeed, the vast majority of European Muslims are not connected to any Muslim organisation. Separate studies conducted in several countries have consistently found that no more than 10–12% of Muslims are actively engaged in or even belong to Muslim organisations, indicating the presence of a silent majority who do not feel represented by any of the competing organisations (Maréchal 2003, 100; Godard and Taussig 2007, 35).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, while exact numbers and percentages cannot be determined, studies suggest that most European Muslims can be categorised as ‘cultural’ or ‘sociological’ Muslims (Maréchal 2003, 9–10). Sociological Muslims interpret their faith much as do most contemporary Europeans: they view their religious affiliation as purely cultural, a family tradition and a source of identity, but not as the centre of their lives. Some might be agnostics; others could be indifferent to religion or simply accept that Islam shapes some rites of passage (such as marriage) without exerting a general influence on their life.

But many religious and practising Muslims also remain independent of religious organisations. Many European

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3 A 2007 survey conducted in Denmark, for example, showed that only 5% of Danish Muslims went to a mosque or spoke with an imam at least once a month, and half seldom or never participated in religious ceremonies (Nilsson 2007). A 2008 survey of young Dutch Muslims of Moroccan descent revealed that 72% rarely or never visited a mosque (EenVandaag 2008).

Muslims, particularly among the second and third generation, have shaped new, individualised ways of living their faith; these hybrid forms often merge traditional elements of Islam with aspects of European life and are completely independent of any structure (Cesari 2001, 41–2). Others practise more orthodox forms of Islam and might regularly frequent a mosque of their choosing, but they do not recognise themselves in any of the Muslim organisations operating in Europe.

Given this ultra-fragmented environment, the two types of organisations that in most countries compete for the status of main government interlocutors are those backed by Muslim-majority governments and those linked to participationist Islamist movements. Neither has the general support that would even remotely qualify them to serve as sole representatives of the larger Muslim community; yet they alone have the organisational apparatus and control over a network of mosques that give them at least the appearance of possessing a nationwide following in most European countries. Other organisations, in fact, tend to be small, underfunded and operate only at the local level; they are therefore often unable to compete with the more sophisticated structures created by ‘embassy Islam’ and participationist Islamist movements.

‘Embassy Islam’ is the term often used to describe the networks established by the governments of a handful of Muslim-majority countries that have seen millions of their citizens migrate to Europe. Eager for political, financial and security reasons to maintain control over their expatriate communities, the governments of Turkey, Algeria, Morocco and, to a lesser extent, Tunisia and Egypt, have created institutions to serve the cultural, educational and religious

needs of their citizens living in Europe. Conceived (and perceived) as the *longae manus* of the government, such institutions generally preach what is widely considered a moderate interpretation of Islam and attempt to reinforce the believers' links to their homeland.

For many years several European governments have formally or informally relied on 'embassy Islam' for various aspects of the governance of Islam in Europe, from Islamic education in public schools to the administration of mosques. But as European governments have been seeking to foster a European form of Islam over the past few years, the idea of relying on such organisations has increasingly seemed inappropriate. Many of today's European Muslims are European citizens: how could they be represented by the employees or the ambassadors of a foreign country? Even though the moderate and often secularist interpretation of Islam generally espoused by these organisations is appreciated by most European governments, there is a growing understanding that only authentically European Muslim organisations that act independently of foreign influences can become valid representatives of Europe's Muslim communities.

This intrinsic unsuitability of 'embassy Islam' has led many policymakers to turn their attention to the other candidates. Given the deficiencies of their competition, participationist Islamist organisations are by default the main candidates to become the privileged interlocutors of European governments. Understanding their history, nature and aims is therefore crucial.



## The New European Brothers

A terminological preface is necessary before proceeding. In what follows, I will refer to the participationist Islamist organisations operating in Europe as New European Brothers (NEBs). The term requires some clarification. The word 'Brothers' indicates that these networks have connections to the Muslim Brotherhood, the world's oldest and most influential Islamist group. This in no way indicates that the organisations operating in Europe are linked by a dependant relationship to the Egyptian or any other Middle Eastern branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. 'New' indicates that these networks subscribe to the gradualist, participationist line adopted by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood around the 1970s, when it substituted participation in the secular regime for violent confrontation with it, seeking to slowly change society from the ground up rather than seizing power through violence. Finally, the word 'European' encapsulates the geographic peculiarity of participationist Islamist organisations operating in Europe. While drawing significantly from the intellectual heritage of the Muslim Brotherhood, these networks operate independently, having adapted their goals and *modus operandi* to their particular environment, understanding that blindly adopting aims and tactics crafted for Muslim-majority societies makes little sense.

In essence, there is no formal Muslim Brotherhood organisation in any European country. It is also technically incorrect to speak of organisations such as the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF), the Islamic Society of Germany (IGD) or the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) as Muslim Brotherhood organisations and their leaders as members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet taking a non-

formalistic approach, it is fair to say that in virtually all European countries there operate organisations and networks with historical, financial, personal, organisational and ideological ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic revivalist movements worldwide (Jamaat-e-Islami and Milli Görüş, for the South Asian and Turkish diaspora communities, respectively). These are what I refer to as NEBs. While most NEB organisations are united under a pan-European umbrella organisation, the Brussels-based Federation of Islamic in Organizations in Europe (FIOE), each operates independently, in constant contact with parallel organisations in other European countries and in the Middle East, but completely free to choose tactics and aims according to the circumstances of the country in which it operates.

Following a similar pattern in most European countries, NEB organisations started as small groups in the 1960s and 1970s, the fruit of the interaction between a small number of senior Islamist activists who had sought refuge in various European countries from the persecution they faced in their home countries and a larger number of Muslim students studying at European universities. The interaction of these charismatic refugees with many enthusiastic new sympathisers bore unforeseeable fruit. By the late 1970s the founders of such groups who had decided to stay in Europe understood the necessity of creating new organisations that could fulfil the needs of the growing Muslim population of Europe, and the small organisations they had formed soon developed beyond their most optimistic expectations. Thanks to their remarkable activism and abundant funding coming mainly from the Arab Gulf, they steadily founded scores of organisations, establishing branches for youth and women, magazines, propaganda committees, schools and think tanks.

Today the NEBs have become one of the Continent's most influential Islamic movements. Thanks to a combination of unrelenting activism, unrivalled access to funds, superior political mobilisation skills, remarkable flexibility in changing their positions according to the circumstances, and the poor organisation of competing trends, NEB networks have grown exponentially. Although their membership has remained fairly small, in most European countries the NEBs have shown an enormous ability to monopolise the Islamic discourse and overshadow most other Muslim organisations.

Moreover, the NEBs have positioned themselves at the forefront of the competition to be the main interlocutors of European establishments. Although circumstances vary from country to country, today, when European governments or media attempt to reach out to the Muslim community, it is quite likely that many, if not all, of the organisations or individuals that are engaged belong, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, to the NEB network. It is not uncommon to find exceptions to this situation, and things have changed in various countries over the past few years, but overall, it is apparent that no other Islamic movement has the visibility, political influence and access to European elites that the NEBs have obtained over the past 20 years. In light of these facts, it is fair to portray the competition for the representation of European Muslims as having produced the relative victory of a well-organised minority over other, less-organised minorities for the voice of a silent majority.

## The NEBs' Goals

The independence under which NEB organisations operate entails that each chooses its goals and priorities according to the circumstances. Despite these differences from country to country, it is nevertheless possible to identify some goals that are common to all NEB organisations. Foremost among them is the preservation (or creation) of a strong Islamic identity among European Muslims. The NEBs, like any religiously conservative movement, are concerned with maintaining the morality and piety of their communities, fearing that they could lose their Islamic identity and be absorbed by the non-Muslim majority. The NEBs therefore see themselves as the guides of European Muslim communities, self-appointed guardians of Islamic orthodoxy spreading their interpretation of Islam through their capillary networks. Yet unlike the Salafists and other Islamic trends that similarly seek to strengthen the Islamic identity of European Muslims, the NEBs do not advocate isolation from mainstream society. On the contrary, they urge Muslims to actively participate in it.

While concerned about the loss of Islamic identity such participation might trigger, the NEBs at the same time see the historically unprecedented large Muslim presence in Western Europe as an opportunity for themselves to 'play the role of the missing leadership of the Muslim nation with all its trends and groups' (al Qaradawi 2000). While in Muslim countries Islamist movements can exercise only limited influence, as they are kept in check by regimes that oppose them, no such obstacle prevents them from operating in the free and democratic West. Moreover, if the guarantees of Western political systems allow the NEBs to carry out their activities freely, the poor organisation of

competing Islamic currents operating in Europe puts them in an advantageous position. Finally, the masses of Muslim expatriates, disoriented by the impact of life in non-Muslim societies and often lacking the most basic knowledge about Islam, represent an ideally receptive audience for the movement's propaganda. The combination of these factors leads the NEB leadership to conclude that the Islamist movement can and should play a key role in the life of European Muslims. Europe is a sort of Islamic *tabula rasa*, a virgin territory where the socio-religious structures and limits of the Muslim world do not exist and where Islamists can overcome competition with their unparalleled means and organisational skills.

Parallel to their aim of becoming the leaders of European Muslim communities is the NEBs' desire to become the official or *de facto* representatives of the Muslim community of their countries when dealing with European establishments, the go-to organisations for elites seeking to engage European Muslims. The reasons for this second goal are functional to the first. Despite their unrelenting activism and ample resources, in fact, the NEBs have not been able to create a mass movement and attract the allegiance of large numbers of European Muslims. While concepts, issues and frameworks introduced by the NEBs have reached many of them, most European Muslims either actively resist the NEBs' influence or simply ignore it. The NEBs understand that a preferential relationship with European elites could provide them with the financial and political capital that would allow them to significantly expand their reach and influence inside the community.

By leveraging such relationships, in fact, the NEBs aim at being entrusted by European governments with

administering all aspects of Muslim life in each country. They would, ideally, become those whom governments task with preparing the curricula and selecting the teachers for Islamic education in public schools, appointing imams in public institutions such as the military, the police or prisons and receiving subsidies to administer various social services. This position would also allow them to be the *de facto* official Muslim voice in public debates and in the media, overshadowing competing forces. The powers and legitimacy bestowed upon them by European governments would allow them to exert significantly increased influence over the Muslim community. Making a clever political calculation, the NEBs are attempting to turn their leadership bid into a self-fulfilling prophecy, seeking to be recognised as representatives of the Muslim community in order to actually become it.

Moreover, their designation as official or unofficial representatives of the Muslim community would allow the NEBs to influence public debate and policymaking on any Islam-related issue, whether domestic or related to foreign policy. This position of primacy would allow them to be at the forefront when governments or the media seek out the 'Muslim perspective' on issues ranging from the *hijab* debate to the war in Afghanistan.

## Assessing the NEBs

The debate over the nature of the NEBs has been raging for the past few years, mirroring the discussion over the Islamist movement worldwide and splitting analysts between what we could term optimists and pessimists. Optimists argue that the NEBs make up a socially conservative force that,

unlike other movements with which they are often mistakenly lumped, encourages the integration of European Muslim communities, striving to offer a model in which European Muslims can live their faith fully and maintain a strong Islamic identity while becoming actively engaged citizens (Roy 2007, 94–8). The NEBs, argue the optimists, provide young Muslims with a positive affirmation of self-confidence, urging them to channel their energy and frustration into the political process rather than into violence or extremism. Moreover, the reins of the organisations created by Islamist activists in the 1960s and 1970s have been or are in the process of being taken over by a new generation of European-born leaders. These new leaders, argue the optimists, have shed some of the more extreme views of their predecessors and fully embrace Western values.

Pessimists, on the other hand, see a much more sinister nature in the aims of the NEBs. Thanks to their resources and the naiveté of most Europeans, argue the pessimists, the NEBs are engaged in a slow but steady social engineering program, aiming at Islamicising European Muslims and ultimately competing with European governments for their allegiance. In a nutshell, pessimists accuse the NEBs of being modern-day Trojan horses, engaged in a sort of stealth subversion aimed at weakening European society from within, patiently laying the foundations for its replacement with an Islamic order.<sup>4</sup> Pessimists also point to a constant discrepancy between the NEBs' internal and external discourses as a sign of their duplicitous nature. In the media and in dialogues with European governments, NEB leaders publicly avow the group's dedication to integration and democracy, tailoring their rhetoric to what they know their

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4 The expression 'Trojan horses' is used, for example, by British MP Michael Gove (2006, 84–113).

interlocutors want to hear. Yet when speaking Arabic, Urdu or Turkish before fellow Muslims, the NEBs often drop the veneer and foster an 'us versus them' mentality that is the antithesis of integration and tolerance. Even as NEB representatives speak about interfaith dialogue and integration on television, the movement's mosques preach hate and warn worshippers about the evils of Western society. In the words of Alain Chouet, former head of French foreign intelligence, 'Like every fascist movement on the trail of power, the Brotherhood has achieved perfect fluency in double-speak' (Chouet 2006).

Chouet's position seems to encapsulate the views expressed, whether publicly or privately, by most intelligence and security agencies throughout continental Europe. The Sûreté de l'État, Belgium's domestic intelligence agency, for example, described the activities of Muslim Brotherhood offshoots in that country this way:

The Sûreté de l'État has been following the activities of the Internationalist Muslim Brothers in Belgium since 1982. The Internationalist Muslim Brothers have possessed a clandestine structure in Belgium for more than 20 years. The identity of the members is secret; they operate in the greatest discretion. They seek to spread their ideology within Belgium's Muslim community and they aim in particular at young, second and third generation immigrants. In Belgium as in other European countries, they seek to take control of sport, religious and social associations, and they seek to establish themselves as privileged interlocutors of national and even European authorities in order to manage Islamic affairs. The Muslim Brothers estimate that national authorities will increasingly rely on the representatives of



the Islamic community for the management of Islam. Within this framework, they try to impose the designation of people influenced by their ideology in representative bodies. In order to do so they were very active in the electoral process for the members of the body for the management of Islam [in Belgium]. Another aspect of this strategy is to cause or maintain tensions in which they consider that a Muslim or a Muslim organisation is victim of Western values, hence the affair over the Muslim headscarf in public schools (Rapport 2002).<sup>5</sup>

The AIVD, the Netherlands' domestic intelligence agency, is even more specific in its analysis of the NEBs' tactics and aims:

Not all Muslim Brothers or their sympathisers are recognisable as such. They do not always reveal their religious loyalties and ultra-orthodox agenda to outsiders. Apparently co-operative and moderate in their attitude to Western society, they certainly have no violent intent. But they are trying to pave the way for ultra-orthodox Islam to play a greater role in the Western world by exercising religious influence over Muslim immigrant communities and by forging good relations with relevant opinion leaders: politicians, civil servants, mainstream social organisations, non-Islamic clerics, academics, journalists and so on. This policy of engagement has been more noticeable in recent years, and might possibly herald a certain liberalisation of the movement's ideas. It presents

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5 It could be argued that informal alliances at the local level between Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) officials and leaders of the UOIF, France's NEB organisation, constitute an example of such a phenomenon. Interestingly, in the United States in the late 1990s, Brotherhood-inspired networks worked with the Republican Party and were extremely active in supporting George W. Bush in the 2000 elections. These dynamics changed completely after the 9/11 attacks.

itself as a widely supported advocate and legitimate representative of the Islamic community. But the ultimate aim—although never stated openly—is to create, then implant and expand, an ultra-orthodox Muslim bloc inside Western Europe. (AIVD 2007, 51)

The Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, Germany's federal domestic intelligence agency, has a similarly negative take:

These 'legalistic' Islamist groups represent an especial threat to the internal cohesion of our society. Among other things, their wide range of Islamist-oriented educational and support activities, especially for children and adolescents from immigrant families, are used to promote the creation and proliferation of an Islamist milieu in Germany. These endeavours run counter to the efforts undertaken by the federal administration and the Länder to integrate immigrants. There is the risk that such milieus could also form the breeding ground for further radicalisation. (BfV 2005, 190)

The position of most continental European intelligence agencies (British authorities slightly differ in their assessment) on the NEBs is clear. But governments, lawmakers and bureaucrats at all levels are not bound by the assessment of their countries' intelligence agencies and not infrequently, in fact, espouse different ideas. Experts within and outside government who have opposing ideas often influence the policymakers' opinions, leading to a complex, often chaotic, situation in which institutions swing erratically between actions that reflect first the optimists' and then the pessimists' views. In essence, no European country has adopted a cohesive assessment followed by all branches of its government. There is no centrally issued white paper or

internal guidelines sent to all government officials detailing how NEB organisations should be identified, assessed and, eventually, engaged. This situation leads to huge inconsistencies in policies, not only from one country to another but also within each country, where positions diverge from ministry to ministry and even from office to office of the same body.

## Political Islam and the Muslim vote in Europe

Assessing the nature of a movement as large, heterogeneous and ever-evolving as the NEBs is a highly complex endeavour with enormous repercussions, not just for academics but most importantly, for policymakers. This paper has attempted to contribute to the debate by describing the NEBs as a tight-knit network of activists operating as rational actors within the democratic framework to obtain their socio/religious/political goals and as main candidates, thanks to their resources and activism, for the role of representatives of European Muslim communities.

One additional aspect that needs to be analysed is the relationship between the NEBs and electoral politics in Europe. Any commentary on the issue must inevitably start from two undeniable facts: 1) European Muslims have traditionally voted predominantly for parties of the left or centre-left; and 2) the NEBs have traditionally partnered, albeit with various degrees of intensity from country to country, with parties of the left or centre-left. What is contested is whether a causal relationship between the two facts exists: have European Muslims traditionally voted left or centre-left because of NEB relationships with those forces? In other terms, have European Muslims voted largely

for certain parties because local NEB organisations told them to, or would they have made that choice in any case?

Understandably, NEB leaders are likely to answer the first question in the affirmative in order to highlight the importance of their organisations and increase their appeal in the eyes of European policymakers. Yet there seems to be limited evidence to conclusively support the view that the NEBs can deliver the Muslim vote. Many question the existence of a monolithic 'Muslim vote'. Undoubtedly Muslims in Europe have traditionally voted for parties of the left. But that seems to be a tendency common to most immigrant groups. It is fair to say that Muslims, like any other group, do not necessarily vote as a predetermined block, blindly casting their ballots as their co-religionists do. Rather, their political preferences mirror the socio-political diversity of their communities. And it is likely that second- and third-generation European Muslims will further diversify their vote in the future.

The NEBs unquestionably possess significant mobilisation capabilities, particularly when compared with those of competing Muslim organisations. And in some cases, particularly at the local level, their efforts have indeed swayed significant sections of the electorate of Muslim background. But there is little evidence to support the claim that the NEBs can consistently affect significant sections of the Muslim community of any European country. More research is needed to show what factors influence Muslim electorates and what is the role of forces within the community, whether NEB organisations or any others, in the process. But it would be premature to believe that organisations that, according to polls conducted in several European countries, measure their support within the Muslim

community in the single digits can deliver large sections of the Muslim electorate.

Perhaps some indications that NEB organisations, despite their claims, have only limited leverage within European Muslim communities come from two political patterns witnessed throughout Europe. The first has to do with Muslim parties. Over the past 20 years there have been various attempts in several European countries to create political parties that, although in very different ways from one another, sought to present themselves as ‘Muslim parties’ and obtain the votes of the Muslim population in local or national elections. All these efforts have been little more than the improvised and poorly organised attempts of isolated individuals or small groupings which, with no exceptions, have completely failed to achieve any success and, in many cases, were dissolved after a few years. It is noteworthy that the NEBs have not been involved in any of these efforts. It can be argued that the NEBs, despite their public claims, know full well that they too would fail to attract widespread support and see the creation of their own political party as a trap that would call their bluff. An electoral fiasco, in fact, would provide the evidence of their lack of real traction in the community, severely undermining their representation bid with European elites. Fully understanding that forming their own party would be premature and unravel their claims, the NEBs have instead chosen to work within existing political structures, directly and indirectly influencing established political parties.

Another phenomenon potentially highlighting the NEBs’ limited political impact on European Muslims is the absence of Islamists among European Muslim members of parliament. In most European countries, in fact, small but

steadily increasing numbers of politicians of Muslim background have gained seats in national parliaments. It is remarkable that throughout the Continent, virtually none of them is affiliated with the NEBs or can be considered even ideologically close to Islamism. Some of them have actually made anti-Islamism their main personal and political battle (this is the case, for example, with Danish MP Naser Khader and Italian MP Souad Sbai), but most others can similarly be considered foreign to Islamist ideology. While it is true that these politicians might be able to rely on many votes coming from non-Muslims, the lack of elected Islamist parliamentarians in Europe is perhaps another sign that the NEBs' claim of leadership is largely overblown.

Yet if it is at least unclear whether the NEBs can actually direct the Muslim vote towards a candidate of their choosing, what is unquestionable is that they can severely damage the standing in the community of politicians and other public figures by accusing them of anti-Muslim sentiments and, more specifically, of Islamophobia. It is not uncommon, in fact, for NEB organisations to accuse not just those who unquestionably have racist views or those who criticise Islam of racism and Islamophobia, but also those who criticise the NEBs or refuse to work with them. Thanks to their remarkable propaganda machine, the NEBs are capable of spreading these accusations well beyond the limited circle of their affiliates, turning them into rumours with much broader circulation. Although the NEBs might not be able to direct Muslim voters towards one candidate or one party, it is arguable that they are capable of tarnishing the reputation of politicians who oppose them, regardless of the veracity of the charges, and consequently severely damage the chances of obtaining votes within the Muslim community.

The complex, ever-evolving and understudied dynamics do not lead to easy predictions of future patterns. As has been said, historically NEB organisations have for the most part partnered with parties of the left or centre-left. Many, including within NEB networks and the European left, have openly called this relationship a quintessential marriage of convenience, in which both sides have consciously ignored the many issues on which they have diametrically diverging views (particularly on social issues and the role of religion in public life) to focus on the few on which they agree (such as some aspects of foreign policy) and, most importantly, to obtain political gains.

Therefore, given their extreme political flexibility, there are reasons to believe that NEB organisations would not be opposed to establishing more or less stable forms of partnership with centre-right forces. Although limited, examples of informal NEB/centre-right cooperation already exist.<sup>6</sup> And it is fair to state that a quintessentially pragmatic movement like the NEB is likely to establish even closer relationships if it judges that by doing so it could better achieve its goals. Any overture from centre-right forces in any European country is likely to be evaluated by the local NEB organisation based on a very cold cost-benefit analysis. If it judges that it could achieve more of its goals by aligning itself with the centre-right, it will do so. If it believes that it would benefit more by partnering with the centre-left, it will do so. If it believes that it might obtain an even better outcome by flirting with both sides it will try to do that. The NEBs' deep commitment to their own ideology does not preclude them from adopting pragmatic political postures.

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6 The author thanks Andrew Clark, research intern at the Carnegie Middle East Center, for his help with this research.

It is at this point necessary to briefly examine the likely implications of a potential overture of the centre-right to the NEBs. Once again, it is difficult to generalise, and dynamics are likely to vary significantly from country to country. It can be argued that a centre-right/NEB partnership can bring the former many votes among NEB sympathisers and, in all likelihood, a better image among the more conservative cross-sections of the Muslim community (which can or cannot translate into actual votes). Yet there are three potentially negative implications to be considered. The first are purely moral and ethical. Do centre-right parties (or, for that matter, centre-left and left-wing forces) really want to partner with and legitimise forces that, while adopting rational and moderate views on some issues, nevertheless embrace positions on others that directly clash with core European values? The NEBs' stances on religious freedom, women's rights, homosexuality and political violence are directly at odds with basic human rights as understood throughout Europe.

Aside from these moral questions, there are two practical political implications of a potential overture that need to be considered. First, what is the likely reaction of the unaffiliated Muslim majority? As has been noted, the majority of European Muslims either directly rejects or simply ignores the NEBs' positions and activities. How would they react to a perceived partnership of the NEBs with the centre-right? While the evidence is still limited, there are indications that segments of the European Muslim electorate are slowly moving to the right. Some are doing so following the normal path of all immigrant groups, segments of which tend to switch to centre-right parties as they become middle class and less dependent on social safety nets. Others, arguably few in number but quite vocal in their shift, are doing so because the left and centre-



left have established close relationships with the NEBs and other Islamist forces. What would be the reaction of these groups to an overture of the centre-right to the NEBs? Would the Muslim votes gained by the centre-right in its alliance with the NEBs be more than the Muslim votes lost because of it? The issue should be studied further.

Second, what is the likely reaction from the non-Muslim base? How would traditional centre-right voters react to forms of partnership with NEB organisations? In all likelihood, most of them would not abandon the centre-right and vote for other parties because of this partnership, as the issue is unquestionably a marginal one in the minds of most voters. Yet there are two potentially negative repercussions to be considered. First, it is likely that such partnership would occasionally be a source of public embarrassment, as it has been in many cases for the centre-left. It has been a quite common occurrence, in fact, that NEB activists have made controversial and/or radical statements, whether directly to the media or privately and subsequently uncovered by investigative journalists. The fact that such activists were close partners of political forces and, in some cases, direct recipients of public funding, has often been highlighted in media reports, causing understandable embarrassment for their political partners. A second repercussion is the likelihood that an overture of the centre-right towards the NEBs could be exploited by forces of the extreme right or various populist parties. In several European countries these forces have made issues of integration and Islamism the centrepieces of their campaigns, accusing established parties, whether on the centre-left or the centre-right, of failing to address them. Even an informal centre-right/NEB partnership would unquestionably provide additional ammunition to support this narrative.

To conclude, any position towards NEB organisations, be it a partnership, limited engagement, or full-fledged confrontation, should be taken only after 1) the acquisition of a substantial understanding of the history, tactics, positions, aims and role in the Muslim community of NEB organisations; 2) the acquisition of a substantial understanding of the internal dynamics of the country's Muslim community; 3) an analysis of the local political circumstances; and 4) a careful examination of the likely short-, mid-, and long-term implications.

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# The Dynamics of Participation: Islamists in Arab Politics

## Summary

This paper focuses on Islamist parties and movements in three Arab countries, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen. It describes political movements that have made a strategic choice to participate in their countries' political systems: the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development and the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah). The paper argues that these movements have evolved over time, replacing exclusionary religious rhetoric and an advocacy of violence with a resolve to respect the rules of the political game and to influence government policies through engagement with the ruling regimes, including parliamentary activities. In dealing with these Islamist movements, the West needs to adopt a case-by-case approach, making an effort to distinguish between their religious rhetoric on the one hand and their policies on the other hand.

## Introduction<sup>7</sup>

Islamist parties and movements that have made the strategic choice to acknowledge the legitimacy of the existing

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7 Social expenditure reached 42% of the annual budget of 2004/2005, and included an increase in the wages of workers in the health and education sectors.

constitutional framework and participate in the legal political process in Arab countries have gained great political importance in recent years. An analysis of the political role of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development (PJD) and the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah) sheds light on some interesting dynamics of Islamist participation in Arab politics. In sharp contrast to the dual-identity Islamists in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, where they are both political actors and militarised resistance movements at the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood, the PJD and Islah are Islamists who have adopted peaceful participation in politics as their only strategic option. In the case of Egypt, the ongoing confrontation between the ruling establishment and the Muslim Brotherhood has undermined the stability of Islamist political participation, but the PJD in Morocco and Islah in Yemen have been participating in a stable manner and trying to gradually inject more openness into the political system.

The ‘participation-comes-first’ Islamists are present in several Arab countries, and the major characteristic of their movements is their resolve to respect and play by the legal rules of the political game as well as to seek consensus in the conduct of public affairs. Participation-comes-first Islamists do not question the legitimacy of the nation state in which they operate, and they recognise the state’s political framework as the only legitimate space for their actions. They also do not challenge the competitive nature of politics and its pluralist imperative. This attitude, adopted as much in spirit as in form, has led to the decline of religiously based exclusionary rhetoric, whether directed at ruling establishments or liberal and leftist opposition actors. It has also gradually shifted Islamists away from ideological

diatribes and categorical judgments toward the formulation of practical political platforms and constructive attempts to influence public policy.

Some of these movements, most notably the PJD, have even succeeded in creating institutional separation between practicing Islamist *da'wa* (proselytising) activities and participating in politics. The PJD has transformed itself into a purely political organisation guided by an Islamist frame of reference and run by professional politicians, leaving *da'wa* to the religious movement that gave birth to it. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, however, has been legally prevented from forming an official political party; therefore, despite some organisational separation between its representatives in the Egyptian Parliament and the rest of the movement, it exists more as a single, unified organisation focused on both *da'wa* and politics.

But these Islamist parties and movements also face some serious challenges. For one, participation in politics has so far not met the Islamists' minimum expectations and has therefore failed to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of their constituencies. In essence, the participation-comes-first Islamists have opted, with only limited success, to transcend the restrained pluralism of the political systems in which they operate and achieve meaningful reform that redistributes power between the ruling establishments and the opposition. Constitutional and legal reform that expands the prerogatives and oversight powers of legislative and judicial institutions in the face of overly powerful executive organs has been a major demand on Islamist platforms. Yet Islamists have not succeeded in bringing about a healthy balance between the various branches of government. Most have failed in their attempts to overcome their historic

rivalries with the ruling establishments and to create pragmatic alliances with non-religious opposition forces. More troubling still is that the meagre outcome of the Islamist movements' participation has led their constituencies to question the validity of key choices. The separation between *da'wa* and political activities has come under attack, as has the pragmatic focus on social and economic concerns rather than on issues of religion and morality. Indeed, Islamists in these movements have been accused of watering down religious commitments in order to achieve greater political strength.

Such is the environment in which the Muslim Brotherhood, the PJD, and Islah have been operating in recent years. In this paper, I seek to answer three questions concerning the participation of these three movements in the politics of their countries:

1. What are the institutional and political conditions that have shaped the participation of these groups?
2. What are the issues that they have prioritised in their participation, especially in legislative institutions?
3. What has the impact of their participation been, internally on the party and externally on the wider political environment?

## The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

For decades, since its establishment, the Muslim Brotherhood has had an ambivalent position on political participation. While it largely ignored formal politics from the

1920s to the 1970s, it has been increasingly involved in Egyptian politics since then, with a gradually increasing number of representatives in the Egyptian Parliament. Yet internal debates have centred on how political efforts can and should advance the Brotherhood's broad agenda in Egypt's shifting political and social environment, and whether they can do so at all. The critical debate within the movement in recent decades has centred on how much (and in what ways) to stress political participation. Calls for a total withdrawal from politics are heard only in the margins of the movement, as well as among some critics. But if there is a broad internal consensus that the Brotherhood should remain partially engaged in politics, its leaders have nevertheless sharply debated how extensive political participation should be, what forms it should take and how political activity can be connected to the Brotherhood's long-term reform goals.

The debate over political participation has been complicated by the movement's difficult relations with other political actors, from the ruling regime to opposition parties and protest movements. Fearing repression by the regime, the Brotherhood has been careful to avoid signalling a determination to challenge the regime's grip on power or to present itself as an alternative, and has thus remained reluctant to commit to formal and electoral alliances with other opposition actors. One of the clearest signs of this understanding was the Brotherhood's self-limited participation in the 2005 parliamentary elections, when it fielded candidates in fewer than one-third of the electoral districts, thus sending the message that it did not seek to challenge the ruling National Democratic Party's two-third majority in the People's Assembly (*Nowab Ikhwan* 2007a).



Relations between the Brotherhood and other opposition parties have been less hostile but have nonetheless been characterised by a long-standing tradition of mutual mistrust, limiting their attempts to harmonise political positions and coordinate activities. Liberal and leftist parties as well as protest movements have remained deeply concerned by the Brotherhood's ambiguous positions on equal citizenship rights for Muslims and Copts, and women's rights and empowerment in society. Possible partners fretted about the negative impacts of shariah provisions on freedom of expression and pluralism and, ultimately, the contradictions between the Brotherhood's Islamic frame of reference and the constitutional pillars of Egyptian politics (Antar 2006, 14; *Ikhwan Online* 2005). Some opposition actors also doubt the Brotherhood's willingness to cooperate with them, accusing it of 'arrogant behaviour' and an 'inability to reach compromises' with others (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2003).

The Brotherhood too has had legitimate reasons to mistrust the attitudes of other opposition actors. Some legal parties—such as the leftist Unionist Party, al-Tajammu'—have maintained their rejectionist attitude towards Islamist participation in politics, and have thus allied themselves with the regime to limit the Brotherhood's political space. On several occasions, the leadership of al-Tajammu' has even endorsed repressive government measures against the Brotherhood and justified them on the grounds that they were targeting an undemocratic organisation. Other parties have been less openly hostile but have still distanced themselves from the Brotherhood during times of severe repression.

But if alliances have been limited, they have had some real effects on the Brotherhood's positions. Since 2002, the

Muslim Brotherhood's partial search for common ground with other opposition actors has resulted in the strengthening of the movement's platform on social, economic and political reform. In different official pronouncements and programmatic statements—for example the 2004 Reform Initiative and its 2005 electoral programme—the Brotherhood's platform has echoed that of liberal and leftist parties, calling for constitutional amendments, democratic reforms, government accountability and safeguards on personal freedoms.

### **Legislative priorities and activities: sketching a comprehensive Islamist agenda**

The Brotherhood's recent parliamentary activity must be seen against the backdrop of its growing parliamentary presence. Moving up from only one representative out of 444 in the 1995–2000 Parliament, and then 17 in the 2000–5 session, the Muslim Brotherhood now has 88 members in the 2005–10 Egyptian Parliament, second only to the ruling NDP. This growing parliamentary presence is one important reason for its increased parliamentary activity.

The nature of the Brotherhood parliamentary platform has also shifted throughout the last three decades: calls for the application of shariah and the promotion of religious and moral values that the movement prioritised until the 1990s have given way to issues of legal and political reform, socio-economic policies and human rights violations in the 2000–5 and 2005–10 assemblies. Although religious and shariah-based priorities remain key elements in the Brotherhood's parliamentary activities, their significance in shaping the movement's platform has gradually diminished. Other

elements have remained unchanged, such as the preoccupation with government accountability, anti-corruption measures and the group's vague stance with regard to women's rights and equality between Muslims and Copts in Egypt.

But, despite their increased size and more practical focus, it is important not to overstate what the Brotherhood's Assembly deputies can achieve. Although the bloc's nearly continuous presence in Parliament since the late 1970s has enabled its MPs to acquire extensive oversight tools as well as a collective ability to challenge the government, its impact on the legislative process has been minimal. The Brotherhood bloc's failure to pass legislation is ultimately linked to the ruling National Democratic Party's firm grip on the legislative process, as it has persistently secured a comfortable two-thirds majority in all assemblies since 1976. Even in the current Assembly, despite the significant growth of the Muslim Brotherhood's representation to almost one-fifth of the entire body, the NDP holds three-quarters of the seats and is virtually unchallenged in forming the cabinet and passing its draft legislation.

In this context of strong oversight performance and weak legislative impact, the Brotherhood's parliamentary activities in recent years have centred on five pillars: constitutional and legal amendments, political reform, social and economic legislation, religious and moral legislation and women's rights. The following section examines the parliamentary platform of the Brotherhood MPs in relation to these five pillars in both the 2000–5 and the current 2005–10 Assembly.

## Constitutional amendments

In general, the Brotherhood's parliamentary bloc has developed its own set of proposals for reforming Egypt's constitutional order while simultaneously advancing a critique of the constitutional amendments proposed by the regime. Indeed, the issue of constitutional amendments has occupied a prominent position in the debates and platforms of various political actors in Egypt since 2002.

In the run-up to the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections, President Mubarak proposed an amendment to Article 76 of the Constitution allowing multi-candidate presidential elections. In doing so, he appeared to be giving in to opposition demands to abandon the decades-old system of popular referenda designed merely to confirm the regime's candidate for the presidency. But the Brotherhood rejected the proposed amendment as insufficient, and later called for a boycott of the referendum, held in May 2005 to confirm the amendment, because it restricted the ability of independents and opposition parties to field presidential candidates. Specifically, political parties—and only those founded at least five years before the enactment of the amendment—who wish to put forth a presidential candidate must have at least 5% of the Assembly's seats. Independents in particular were required to have the support of 250 elected members of the People's Assembly, Shura Council (the upper house of the Egyptian Parliament) and local councils.

The Muslim Brotherhood continued its opposition to constitutional amendments proposed by the President and the NDP throughout the 2005–10 People's Assembly. The largest battle took place over a large set of presidentially

proposed amendments in 2006 and 2007: on 26 December 2006 President Hosni Mubarak called for the amendment of 34 constitutional articles to prohibit the establishment of religious parties and introduce more changes to laws governing presidential and legislative elections, without setting a term limit for the presidency. The 34 amendments were introduced and eventually approved, and the Brotherhood bloc focused its critique on the following elements, which it interpreted as limiting political freedoms and impeding its political activism:

- Amendments banning religiously based political parties and activities, which clearly limit the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in politics and prevent its transformation into a legal party. The Brotherhood views the ban as completely inconsistent with Article 2 of the existing text, which stipulates Islam as the religion of the state in Egypt and Islamic shariah as its major source of legislation.
- Further amendments to Article 76 on presidential elections, which upheld the requirement of independent candidates to gain the support of 250 elected members in the NDP-dominated People's Assembly, the Shura Council and local councils (the amendments did reduce the number of seats in Parliament required for a legal political party to field a presidential candidate from 5% to 3%) (Sabri 2006).
- An amendment laying the groundwork for a proportional system for legislative elections, which suggested that Egyptians would no longer vote for individuals but instead for party lists. In the Brotherhood's view, this amendment cemented its exclusion from regular

electoral politics, since it is not allowed to form a political party.

- An amendment to Article 88 that reduced judicial oversight of elections by forming special oversight committees comprised of both judges and former government officials. The Brotherhood charged that the new system would increase opportunities for election rigging and manipulation (Abu Bakr 2006).
- Amendments to Article 179, which would allow the enactment of a terrorism law. The Brotherhood joined other opposition critics to charge that the effect would be to allow the regime to replace the longstanding state of emergency with a new set of permanent legal tools designed to restrict political life. The constitutional amendments asserted the right of the Ministry of Interior to curb political and civic rights by restricting the press, subjecting journalists to potential imprisonment and allowing governmental bodies to observe and control the activities of political parties (Abu Bakr 2006).
- The absence, yet again, of any amendments to Article 77, thus leaving the number of presidential terms unlimited (Ibrahim and Zayna 2007).

### **Political Freedoms, Public Freedoms, Rule of Law and Human Rights**

The Muslim Brotherhood's stances on these constitutional amendments were specific manifestations of its more general pursuit of greater political freedom. Much of its ordinary parliamentary activity in both the 2000–5 and the

2005–10 People's Assembly followed along this line. For example, Brotherhood MPs opposed NDP-sponsored amendments designed to stifle the political freedom of religiously based parties and consolidate the regime's executive power.

In 2000, the Brotherhood bloc explicitly called for an end to the state of emergency, which has been in continuous effect since 1981. Indeed, with a few short respites, Egyptian governments have invoked a state of emergency for the last seven decades, given them legal justification to infringe upon the rights of Egyptian citizens (*Ikhwān Online* 2003a). But the Brotherhood's efforts were to no avail; the NDP used its crushing majority to extend the state of emergency for three years in 2003, two years in 2006, and then again in 2008 until May 2010 (Salih and Adil 2008).

Throughout the parliamentary sessions of the last 10 years, Brotherhood deputies have also questioned numerous senior government officials on prison torture, the interrogation of citizens and other actions taken by intelligence offices. MPs have stressed that Egypt's illegal violations of human rights provide an important pretext for international intervention in the country's internal affairs.

From 2005–10, the Muslim Brotherhood's platform and activities in Parliament have been extended to encompass judicial independence. As the government moved to bring some independent judicial voices to heel, the Brotherhood tried to push in the opposite direction, developing and endorsing proposals to remove tools of executive domination over the judiciary. After the ruling NDP presented a draft law extending executive control over the judiciary, the Brotherhood presented its own draft law aimed at ensuring

judicial neutrality and independence by making judges accountable only to the Judges Club. The NDP law, however, was passed in its original form in 2006 (Muhammad 2006; *Nowab Ikhwan* 2007b).

The Brotherhood's effort to guard civil freedoms has extended to proposed legislation on the Law of Criminal Procedures, where the Brotherhood sought to limit preventative detention and ensure strong punishment for those jailers and interrogators who torture prisoners. Again, this proposed legislation was rejected by the NDP majority (*Ikhwan Online* 2004a). And, finally, regarding freedom of expression and association: the Brotherhood parliamentary bloc tried in vain in April 2008 to prevent an NDP-sponsored law forbidding demonstrations in mosques and other houses of worship. It also tried in 2009 to abolish Article 190 of Law 58/1937, which forbids journalists from publishing the procedures and decisions of tribunals deemed destructive to the public order and citizens' morality (Shejata 2009).

### Social and Economic Legislation

The Brotherhood's recent development is not limited merely to constitutional and political issues, however. The Muslim Brotherhood has used its parliamentary presence to call attention to the government's socioeconomic shortcomings, including its allegedly exclusive representation of the interests of business elites, negligence of the needs of lower-income classes and the overall failure to address the country's serious development problems. Brotherhood deputies have repeatedly blamed the government for inflation, unemployment, rising prices, corruption and the drop in the values of salaries.



Between 2000 and 2005, for a variety of reasons, the Brotherhood bloc voted against all annual budgets submitted by the government to the People's Assembly, asserting that despite the government's increased social expenditures,<sup>8</sup> the quality of health and education services had not actually improved and economic burdens continued to afflict lower-income households. According to the Brotherhood bloc, greater public expenditure should have been allocated in each budget to long-term investments in an attempt to create jobs and increase economic growth.

Throughout this period, the Brotherhood bloc also pursued issues of administrative corruption, bribes and the private exploitation of public property, both by way of inquiries and interpellations, as well by using the Central Auditing Organization's (CAO) annual reports.<sup>9</sup> The CAO report in 2002 revealed 72,000 cases of government financial corruption,<sup>10</sup> and Brotherhood MPs claimed in 2004 that corruption had been costing Egypt more than 100 billion Egyptian pounds yearly.<sup>11</sup>

In 2004, Brotherhood deputies severely criticised the government's privatisation and trade liberalisation policies,

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8 In November 2003, the CAO became subject to the supervision of the President of the Republic, a development which MP Hamdi Hasan criticised.

9 Of these, 49,000 cases were concentrated in the oil sector, the Ministry of Culture, municipalities and the housing sector (Ikhwan Online 2003b, 2004b).

10 The 100 billion Egyptian pounds was the cumulative sum of assets lost in financial corruption cases and illegal money making (drug trafficking, money laundering, bribes etc.). Based on the CAO report, several MPs criticised the government for the unnecessary spending of 521 million Egyptian pounds to buy cars for ministers and finance their travels with research committees. They claimed that the amount spent could have been used to raise the salaries of state employees by more than 20% (Ikhwan Online 2003b; Shalabi 2009).

11 In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood focused mostly on this issue in the 1979 assembly, when Brotherhood deputies proposed a series of laws in this respect.

which they argued were leading to sharp price increases in basic goods such as steel, construction materials and food, while wages and salaries were failing to rise at the same rate. In March 2004, the Brotherhood bloc pressured the government in an intense public debate to discuss the enforcement of a monopoly law, which it reasoned would revive the Egyptian industrial sector, improve the quality of Egyptian manufactured goods and stabilise prices (Sabia<sup>4</sup> 2004). The Brotherhood claimed a rare legislative success in this regard with the passing of the Law to Protect Competition and Forbid Monopoly in February 2005, which forbids a variety of monopolistic practices (Zayid 2008).

With its increased representation in the 2005–10 Parliament, the Brotherhood has continued with similar efforts. Its deputies have again voted against the annual budget. Furthermore, they have criticised the Planning and Budget Committee for its lack of transparency and proposed the reallocation of public funds from various sectors—such as subsidies for exports, energy and media budgets—to education and public health. Brotherhood MPs reiterated their proposals to cut the budget deficit, improve the quality of health and education services, increase public investment in order to create jobs and monitor privatisation projects (Nowab Ikhwan 2008b).

The Brotherhood bloc has continued its anti-corruption campaign through the 2005–10 Parliament as well, claiming that successful curbs on corruption would improve the country's investment climate and alleviate some of the negative impacts of privatisation on the lower and middle classes. For example, in 2007 Brotherhood deputies accused the government of allowing some companies to gain a monopoly over nutritional goods by failing to control

prices (Adil 2009), and in January 2008, MP Sa'd al-Husayni proposed a draft law to amend the Competition and Monopoly Law of 2005 in order to apply stricter penalties on monopolists (*Nowab Ikhwan* 2008a).

## Moral and Religious Legislation

While the Brotherhood has worked hard to pursue this new comprehensive agenda, it has attempted to do so without abandoning its longstanding emphasis on religion, morality and the family. The Brotherhood has tried to portray its religious agenda as compatible with—and even a full expression of—its comprehensive reform program. Some of the religious issues it has raised—such as the right of veiled women to be hired by government-funded television channels—have been linked to freedom of expression and religious belief. On other issues, such as torture and the rights of the press, the Brotherhood has used its religious and moral priorities to defend political freedoms and human rights.

In terms of legislative proposals, Brotherhood deputies presented legislation in 2002 to adjust laws to the framework of shariah<sup>12</sup> and to forbid critics of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad from entering Egypt. In 2003, this type of legislative initiative continued with measures to forbid alcohol in Egypt and ban art that makes obvious reference to sexuality, for example, movies that include intimate scenes and concerts with female singers. The Brotherhood parliamentary bloc also proposed draft legislation aiming to

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12 Radi claimed that the intelligence apparatus was interfering in the appointment of mosque preachers as well as the preparation of Friday speeches. See al-Dasuqi (2007).

strengthen articles of the criminal law that condemn and punish acts of adultery, the purchase and consumption of alcohol and gambling.

The Brotherhood bloc also proposed laws and amendments to preserve the independence of al-Azhar, including a draft law repeatedly proposed from 2000–5 which would have required the election of the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar and the Board of Religious Scholars, rather than their appointment by the government (*Nowab Ikhwan* 2006).

During the People's Assembly of 2005–10, Brotherhood deputies have continued to raise similar issues pertaining to morality and the application of shariah. MP Muhsin Radi questioned the Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments in 2007 on his policy of allowing the security services to control mosques and limit the proselytising activities of preachers.<sup>13</sup> And just as the Brotherhood has tried to connect its religious agenda to issues of political reform, they have also tried to introduce Islamic principles into their economic program to demonstrate their relevance to Egypt's economic problems. As a result, Islamic banking has become an element of the Brotherhood's parliamentary activities to promote Islamic morals, particularly in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

The Brotherhood's current parliamentary bloc has also been active on more traditional moral and religious issues, including its 2008 and 2009 efforts to amend the government-sponsored Law of the Child, based on claims that certain provisions of the law were contradictory to shariah (al-Dasuqi 2008).

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13 Live dialogue with Zayid 'Ali al-Shami (Islam Online 2000).

## Women's Issues

The Brotherhood's attempt to combine a broad reform agenda with a specifically religious vision seems to have caused confusion and ambivalence toward issues related to gender and the family. Throughout the 2000–5 and the 2005–10 Assembly, Brotherhood parliamentarians failed to develop a clear, policy-oriented platform regarding women's rights and political participation. To a great extent, Brotherhood deputies have viewed women's issues through their usual moral and religious lenses and thus treated them exclusively based on their 'compatibility with shariah provisions'. As a result, the Brotherhood bloc has been primarily preoccupied with either defending the religious rights of Muslim women—such as the right to veil—or protesting against government-introduced legislation 'incompatible' with shariah provisions. They have generally resisted calls for a greater role for women in public life but have grounded their opposition in fairly cautious terms.

Despite the failure to present a fully alternative vision, the Brotherhood bloc has nonetheless made some initial forays into developing a more positive (and not merely defensive) agenda aimed at addressing the needs of women, albeit through a vision that might strike some as paternalistic. In the current Assembly, the Brotherhood bloc has actively participated in parliamentary debates on the aforementioned Law of the Child (Law 126/2008), several aspects of which touch on women's rights. The draft, which sought to reinforce the ban on female circumcision and place even harsher restrictions on the practice, faced severe criticism from Brotherhood deputies who maintained that it violates Islamic teachings and attempts to impose Western values and morality on Egyptians (Ali 2008).

The Brotherhood bloc has also dealt with legislation on the representation of women in politics. Most notably, the Muslim Brotherhood rejected the Law of Women's Quota passed in the Assembly in June 2009. Among other changes, this law added 64 new seats to the People's Assembly reserved specifically for women, thus increasing the total number of seats in the Assembly from 454 to 518. The Brotherhood deputies considered the amendment a response to external pressures and warned that this change would open the door for other 'social groups' to make similar demands, hinting at Egypt's Christian community (Hasan 2009).

Yet while the remarkably active Muslim Brotherhood bloc has dealt with these moral and religious issues from 2000 to 2010, social, economic and political legislation has been at the core of its platform and activities, both in terms of oversight and legislative attempts. The prioritisation of these issues has often come at the cost of the Brotherhood's moral and religious platform, which enjoyed a formative role in the movement's parliamentary participation before 2000. Indeed, the Brotherhood's moral and religious platform has been reduced to illiberal stances on women's issues and scattered calls for the application of shariah provisions. The relative marginalisation of the Brotherhood's moral and religious platform in Parliament has posed a serious challenge for the movement: how can it pursue social, economic and political reform in Parliament while still sustaining its 'Islamic' credentials geared toward its religious constituencies? While the Brotherhood has been blocked from forming a political party, one strategy for dealing with the tension between its broad political and specific religious agenda has been to formalise political operations under a functionally separate institutional structure. And indeed, in

recent years, it is possible to detect a functional separation between the parliamentary bloc, which addresses reform issues, and the leadership of the movement—the General Guide and the Guidance Office—which prioritises moral and religious concerns in official pronouncements, media statements and other activities.

Yet a second and equally serious challenge has emerged from the limited outcome of the Brotherhood's participation in Parliament. In the eyes of many Brotherhood constituents and activists, the movement's pursuit of reform issues in Parliament has simply not paid off; the de-emphasis of moral and religious issues has proven to be in vain and unfruitful. And the Brotherhood's participation in Parliament, they argue, has not opened Egypt's political sphere. Increasingly, the Brotherhood's leadership has felt the need to account for this negative conclusion and offer explanations for its priorities to the rank and file. Discussion and debate surrounding this issue in recent years have thrown the value of political participation as a strategic objective into question, especially in comparison with the success of wider social and religious activities. One of the outcomes of this growing tension has been a changing balance of power within the movement's leadership between advocates of political participation and those concerned with the Brotherhood's social and religious role.

There has been a growing recognition by many in the Brotherhood's leadership that the movement is under siege and will remain so for the foreseeable future. The dominant view within the movement is that the Brotherhood should focus its energies on sustaining the movement's organisational solidarity in the face of repression by the regime rather than invest effort in futile political participation.

Indeed, the newly elected General Guide, Muhammad Badi', is known for his interest in the movement's internal solidarity and its activities in the social and religious spheres. And while he said in his acceptance speech that the Brotherhood should continue its parliamentary work to bring about reform in Egypt, he also asserted that true reform begins at the level of individual souls, spreading through families and society in order to eventually affect the country's political situation; a clear indication of his inclination to re-prioritise social and religious activism (*Ikhwan Web* 2010). The future political participation of the Muslim Brotherhood is therefore uncertain.

## The Moroccan Party for Justice and Development

Much like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development has seen its participation in politics restricted by a variety of factors, including repression by the ruling regime. But unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, the PJD is also limited by the presence of the more popular al-'Adl wal-Ihsan (Justice and Charity) movement, which boycotts formal politics. The PJD must therefore balance its political work with the need to preserve the loyalty of its religious constituents.

The greater challenge, however, is the variety of institutional conditions aimed at limiting the ability of the PJD to influence the political process in Morocco. While the country has had a long history of a multiparty legislature and vigorous political debate in which the opposition is an active participant, the opposition's overall impact is often overrated. While all members of the lower legislative



chamber are directly elected by the people, the upper chamber, which is closely tied to the ruling regime, has extensive prerogatives to counterbalance the lower house. The constitution also gives the royal court the power to block laws that it finds controversial. More importantly, it grants the king extensive powers unmatched by either the executive branch or Parliament. The king is the military's supreme commander and the country's religious leader. He also appoints all prefects of economic regions, secretaries of state in each ministry, directors of public agencies and enterprises, judges and half of the members of the High Constitutional Council, including its president. None of these decisions is subject to review by any other entity.

The country also has a weak judiciary, powerful security services and an election law that precludes any one party from gaining a meaningful majority in Parliament. The Interior Ministry runs the election process, drawing the electoral districts, registering voters and examining and announcing the results. And a 2006 political party law states that religion cannot be the founding principle of a political party, which makes Islamist parties particularly vulnerable. All of these institutional realities limit the power of the PJD.

The PJD is further limited in its political work by the nature of the overall Islamist movement in Morocco. While historically Islamism has had a relatively limited appeal in Morocco compared with its popularity in other Arab countries, its appeal has been on the rise in the last decade, in part because of recent political opportunities and in part because of the pronounced lack of an effective secular opposition. And unlike other countries in the Arab world, Morocco's Islamist movement is quite fragmented. It includes two main groups—al-Tawhid wal-Islah (Unity and

Reform) and al-‘Adl wal-Ihsan—as well as scores of smaller organisations. The PJD is the political wing of al-Tawhid, the more moderate movement that long ago abandoned violence and sought to present itself to the ruling establishment as a responsible and moderate actor that accepts the legitimacy of the existing system.

Al-‘Adl has had a very different experience from that of al-Tawhid. Its main goal is the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate, and on this basis it refuses to participate in the formal political process. Al-‘Adl emphasises spiritual education on the individual and collective levels. It seeks to present itself as a major actor in Moroccan society but at the same time refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the current political system. Al-‘Adl’s presence and more hard-line nature present an additional constraint on the PJD’s political work because it must take care not to lose the support of its more religious constituents.

Since its formation in 1998, there has been a great deal of antagonism between the PJD and the secular and traditional parties in Parliament. These forces, especially leftist parties, spearheaded the anti-PJD media campaign after the 2003 terrorist attacks. This reflected the persistent unease between the PJD and other opposition forces, which may be explained by the sudden emergence of the PJD as a dominant force in the Moroccan political scene at the expense of many of these other parties. Yet regardless of the root causes, the reality is that collaborative legislative work is more difficult when there is a great deal of mistrust between major parliamentary actors.

Following the 2007 parliamentary elections, a new group called the Movement for All Democrats (MTD) was formed,

and it intended to serve as another safeguard against the influence of the PJD in Parliament, arguing that Islamists do not believe in the group's 'modern, civilized project' (*al-Sabah* 2008). And the Party for Authenticity and Modernity, seen as the king's party, has continued its own aggressive strategy to isolate the PJD (*Islam Online* 2008).

The legislative performance of the PJD has without doubt been hindered by these troubled relations with other political actors, but there is another more fundamental predicament that even in the context of good relations with other political actors would invariably hinder the PJD's various legislative initiatives. A more objective view of the PJD's legislative record has to take into account the fact that the party's shortcomings are directly correlated with the domination of the ruling establishment over the legislative process. The Moroccan monarchy maintains a comfortable and loyal majority in Parliament, which in turn prevents the activation of legislative oversight instruments and a genuine separation and balance between the various branches of government.

### **PJD Priorities and Activities in Parliament**

Yet despite these impediments, the PJD has steadily increased its parliamentary presence in recent years, winning 46 out of 325 seats in the 2007 elections, up from 42 in 2002 and 9 in 1997. And PJD Members of Parliament have become particularly active in recent years, focusing their legislative efforts on significant social and economic issues, such as corruption, unemployment and poverty.

While on occasion PJD party members have put religious issues at the forefront of their legislative debates, since 2002

the party has become less preoccupied with debates on religious and ideological issues than other Islamist political movements in the Arab world. As a result, the party has evolved into a venue for serious debates on public policy measures needed to address Morocco's social and economic problems. In fact, the PJD contributed to a remarkable breakthrough in 2005 with the endorsement of a new, more liberal version of the *mudawwana* (the code regulating marriage and family life in the country). The revision of the *mudawwana* greatly improved women's social status and was opposed by more conservative Islamist elements. The party's leadership defended its position by arguing that the code had been adopted through a democratic process and therefore had to be respected. Furthermore, instead of referring to shariah—or to an Islamic frame of reference (*marji'iya islamiyya*)—in their 2007 electoral platform, the PJD instead mentioned the 'protection of Morocco's Islamic identity' as its main religious based priority. All these measures signal a de-emphasis of religion in the party's platform.

Moreover, the PJD has made tremendous efforts to present an exemplary bloc in Parliament. The party regularly circulates attendance sheets to make sure that its deputies attend their parliamentary sessions and committee hearings. It also frequently demands that Parliament deal seriously with the issue of member absenteeism. PJD Members of Parliament are known for submitting the greatest number of written and oral questions. And MPs have professional support units made up of experts who can provide specialised advice on technical matters pertaining to various pieces of public policy legislation.

What has really defined the PJD's parliamentary experience is its MPs' emphasis on transparency in the Parliament and strong support of anti-corruption initiatives, in addition to the constant demand for accountability and better accessibility to the executive. Being able to hold government officials to account is critical for the PJD because it presents an opportunity to advance some of the constitutional reforms that the party often emphasises in its political programme. Indeed, there are three main pillars in the PJD's vision for constitutional reform: (1) institute all necessary mechanisms to secure the independence of the judiciary; (2) expand the supervisory and legislative prerogatives of the House of Representatives, the lower chamber in Parliament, and review those of the House of Councillors, the higher chamber; and (3) ensure that the executive branch is accountable to Parliament.

New ideas for economic reform were explored in depth and evaluated critically in the party's 2007 electoral platform, which is notable for its level of detail on economic and public policy measures. The program begins by outlining the most urgent problems facing the Moroccan economy and follows by prescribing a very specific road map for economic recovery. It also includes development index data comparing Morocco's performance with that of other Arab and developing countries to show how far Morocco lags behind other countries' performance indicators, especially in terms of literacy, poverty reduction, youth employment and healthcare. Moreover, there are no signs in the electoral program that the PJD intends to demolish the current system or revolutionise the economic model by introducing laws and regulations that make it more Islamic. In fact, shariah does not appear at all in the economic policy section.

Interestingly enough, the prescriptions in the platform begin by outlining concrete policies to lift the state of research and development in the education sector, making it integral to economic development. Among the proposals are the following: increasing governmental investment in new and technologically advanced research centres, reforming universities, providing incentives for private investment in research, emphasising science and social studies in school curricula and improving communication networks among researchers and specialists in similar fields of study.

In terms of social welfare policies and taxes, the PJD favours a generous redistribution of wealth to combat poverty, deal with the negative consequences of unemployment and cover the costs of a universal health care system. The PJD's program endorses a progressive tax code that encourages innovation, does not punish productivity and is sensitive to international competitiveness needs. The PJD also supports minimum wage laws, subsidising agricultural and making public and private loans more accessible.

But despite the spate of policy activity, the PJD has largely been unsuccessful in shaping or influencing the legislative process. This lack of real progress is in part the result of the mistrust that exists between the PJD and other influential forces in Parliament, but primarily the consequence of the virtual powerlessness of the Parliament in Morocco's semi-authoritarian environment.

## The Impacts of PJD Participation in the Political Process

In and of itself, the participation of the PJD in the political process has not led to the realisation of a healthy democratic order in Morocco, nor has it brought Morocco closer to that order. An objective assessment reveals that the limited role of Islamists and the trivial consequences of their participation merely reflect the inherent weaknesses of democratic instruments, such as electoral regimes and legislative institutions, in the Moroccan political setting. But while PJD's political participation has had only a limited impact on Moroccan politics, it has had significant impact on the PJD internally.

The close ties between al-Tawhid and its political wing—the PJD—have frequently come under harsh criticism from Moroccan officials. Critics charge that the party participates in politics according to the dictates of the constitution (which bars the use of religion for political purposes) and at the same time maintains links with al-Tawhid, a religious and proselytising movement. Certainly, many al-Tawhid and PJD members see a need to address the question once and for all in order to silence critics and to preserve al-Tawhid's social and religious character, which they feel has been compromised by the party's political engagement (for more, see Tamam 2007, 99). While many members have defended pursuing both political and religious activity and maintaining the institutional separation between the party and the movement, others have been more concerned about the distraction that political involvement produces. Farid al-Ansari, a former member of al-Tawhid, resigned from the movement in 2000 because of this very issue. In 2007, he authored a book (in Arabic) titled *The Six Mistakes of the Islamist Movement in Morocco*, in which he argued that

involvement in politics is one the biggest mistakes committed by the movement's leadership (see the review by Adnan and Likhlahfah 2007).

Yet there is plenty of evidence that confirms that the movement and the party are institutionally independent. Al-Tawhid's activities are tailored for *da'wa* purposes, whereas the political component of the movement's agenda is entirely handled by the PJD. It bears noticing that the manner with which the movement reaches out to other Islamist groups, such as al-'Adl wal-Ihsan, is also different from the party's approach. For instance, al-Tawhid often voices public support for al-'Adl when the government cracks down on it. The party, in contrast, is typically more careful in its response to such confrontations in order to avoid provoking confrontations with the regime.

Separation between the movement and the party on the level of membership, however, remains a major issue. The movement's members constitute the vast majority of the party's overall membership and leadership. To a great extent, the party's ability to attract constituencies that do not necessarily share al-Tawhid's religious predispositions will depend on its electoral and parliamentary performance. Sustained success in the elections and effectiveness in Parliament may enable the PJD to reach out to new constituencies. Yet, exactly in relation to these two benchmarks, the PJD's experience in recent years has stopped short of demonstrating an upward trend.

As mentioned earlier, the PJD has remained an inconsequential force in terms of shaping government policy, despite spending much effort engaging in parliamentary challenges. It can credit no major pieces of legislation to its



name and has continued to struggle to find common ground with other opposition groups in Parliament. This, many analysts contend, has been one of the major causes of its underperformance in the 2007 legislative elections, a result which surprised many observers. Prior to the elections, expectations were high regarding the Islamists' potential gains, especially against the background of Western and domestic polls predicting an unstoppable rise of the PJD. During the final phase of the election campaign, the party leadership expressed high optimism, stating publicly that 70 to 80 seats were within reach and that the party would be the strongest bloc in the Parliament. The fact that the PJD added only four additional seats in 2007—from 42 in 2002 to 46—stunned the PJD leadership and pundits alike. The disappointing electoral performances continued in the subsequent elections in 2008 and 2009.

It appears that the inability of the Parliament to play an active role in policy implementation has resulted in a growing disenchantment with parliamentary politics that has dimmed prospects for broader participation in the political process. While the process of political opening has continued in recent years, and the political sphere has become more diverse, the two central impediments to democratic transition in Morocco—the concentration of power in royal hands and the absence of credible checks and balances—have yet to be addressed. As a result, wide segments of the population have come to see the Parliament as a failed institution that can do little to solve their pressing social and economic problems. Even the fresh and untainted PJD has suffered from popular mistrust. Although the party has managed in recent years to develop stable and increasingly well-organised constituencies in urban centres, especially among the younger segments of the Moroccan

population, its popular appeal has remained limited. Instead, the followers of al-‘Adl have advanced to the forefront of the Islamist movement in Morocco, focusing their activism on proselytising and the provision of social services. With their rejectionist attitude toward the monarchy and their claim that the whole political system is corrupt and therefore cannot be reformed gradually, al-‘Adl’s leaders have systematically condemned the PJD for its participation in parliamentary politics and accused the party leadership of being submissive to the monarchy.

As a result, the PJD is increasingly finding itself in a new position in which it has to justify its continued commitment to political participation and take into account the high cost and low return of this course. Based on the current discourse observed in the PJD, there appear to be two main responses to these challenges. The first suggests that participation allows the PJD to use various institutional instruments and methods to protect itself from repression by the ruling establishment. In addition, participation allows the party to maintain a public presence, which in and of itself helps it maintain cohesion within its ranks and lively rapport with its constituents. The second response suggests that through participation, the PJD can maintain an active public role in the struggle for gradual and meaningful political reform in Morocco. Remarkably, it is evident that the first response has produced more traction in times of tension with the monarchy, whereas the second has become more relevant in times of relative stability in that relationship.

Moreover, the PJD is struggling to redefine a sustainable and practical balance between the pragmatic demands of participation and those dictated by the Islamist frame of reference. Given the restricted political environment in

Morocco and various conditions imposed by the ruling establishment, the PJD has adopted moderate positions on a number of social and political matters. At the same time, it has had to be careful not to alienate wide segments of its constituency drawn to it because of its religious frame of reference. The task of finding the balance between pragmatism and ideological commitment is doubtless becoming progressively more difficult, especially in light of growing popular disenchantment with the political process and the increased significance of strong rejectionist Islamist currents. The PJD has plunged into exhaustive debates about the movement's priorities with the costly consequence of losing its sense of strategic orientation.

But despite these challenges, the PJD has become well-entrenched in the Moroccan political process, and its 2002 gains were not just a temporary breakthrough. Furthermore, the extent of its political organisation and its progressive agenda has been acknowledged by both media and political observers. Yet, even if the PJD's popularity grows in the coming years, the challenges posed by the concentration of power in royal hands, the electoral system and the state-sponsored gerrymandering are likely to persist and result in containment of the PJD's political role.

## The Yemeni Congregation for Reform: Islah

Within the spectrum of Islamist parties and movements in the Arab world that participate in legal politics, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Islah) represents a unique case. First, unlike most Islamist parties and movements, Islah did not enter the political scene as part of the opposition. Rather, it began its participation in 1990 as an ally of the

ruling General People's Congress (GPC), before turning against it and becoming the leading opposition party by the end of the decade. Second, compared with other Islamist parties and movements operating in the Arab world, Islah lacks a clear ideological and programmatic narrative as well as an ideologically motivated membership. Much of Islah is composed of traditional and tribal groups that share only a loose commitment to the objective of Islamising state and society in Yemen.

Islah is one of the numerous political parties that were formed shortly after the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990. After its formation, Islah remained an ally of the GPC and cooperated with its effort to marginalise the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the former ruling party of South Yemen. The late Sheikh 'Abdullah al-Ahmar, the former head of the Hashid Tribal Confederation and a man who enjoyed good relations with the GPC and President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih (president of North Yemen from 1978 to 1990 and of Unified Yemen since 1990), played a leading role in establishing Islah in 1990. Al-Ahmar convinced the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood, other Islamist elements and a number of influential tribal personalities to join together and establish Islah. Thus, Islah emerged as an alliance of three distinct groups: the tribal forces headed by al-Ahmar; the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood, which has provided the party's organisational and political backbone; and a number of conservative businessmen (al-Zahiri 2004).

Given Islah's origin as an alliance of a rather motley array of groups, it is not surprising that the party's ideology has remained vague and its platform ambiguous. Throughout the 1990s, Islah could be best described as a conservative party that promoted tribal and religious values. It believed in

Islamic shariah as the sole source of legislation and the foundation of a comprehensive vision to reform Yemeni state and society. Over time, however, the party has opened up to democratic ideas. Today, Islah accepts democracy as compatible with the Islamic concept of *shura* (consultation) and rejects all forms of dictatorship. It recognises the right of secular parties and movements, such as the YSP, to participate in Yemeni political life. Islah bases its own participation on respect for the constitution and for the pluralist rules of the political game it enshrines (Phillips 2007).

While Islah's ideology and platform have been weak from the outset, the tribal character of the party has been quite influential. After the 1962–7 civil war and then unification in 1990, tribes emerged as powerful stakeholders in political life. They became more effective at providing security and social services in their areas, and the legitimacy of the state in those areas diminished as a result. In today's Yemen, the tribe is the main point of reference for its members and collectively represents their interests, and the state and its resources are often used to achieve the parochial goals of the tribe. The pervasive tribalism also means that political life revolves to a significant extent around tribal personalities rather than being shaped by ideology. The strength of tribalism in Yemen and the weakness of both modern state institutions and a common national identity have affected Islah and its place in Yemeni politics.

The growing role of tribal leaders in Islah has added to the ambiguities and confusions inside the party. Tribal leaders are known for changing their stands and shifting their loyalties across the political spectrum to secure tribal interests. Moreover, some leaders of the same tribe or clan are found in the GPC, while others belong to Islah, a

conscious effort to adapt to changing political circumstances and to lessen the impact of either of the two parties on the tribes. The divided loyalties and shifting stands of tribal leaders have helped undermine Islah's ability to develop a clear ideological and programmatic vision.

Islah's Islamists, the second of its major pillars of support, have never acquired the muscle of the tribal constituencies, but have always played a major role within the party. This is particularly true of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood component of Islah, which is the largest in terms of members and, above all, the most efficient in organisational and political capabilities. Within Islah, the Muslim Brotherhood has developed a clear yet elaborate approach to political participation on the basis of its endorsement of democratic procedures. In its eyes, political participation complements social and religious activism, since Islam presents a holistic approach to various aspects of life, including politics. Thus, political activism is understood and framed as part of *da'wa*, the preaching of Islam. The movement bolstered its democratic credentials in the 1990s when it came to accept political pluralism, acknowledging the right of other parties to propagate non-religious ideologies and platforms.<sup>14</sup> It also rejects the idea of establishing an Islamic state, considering the concept of a theocratic state problematic.

There are other Islamist elements within Islah in addition to the Muslim Brotherhood. Some party figures are close to Salafi groups. Salafism, which was introduced to Yemen in the last three decades and is influenced by Saudi Wahhabism, has a different concept of politics than the

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<sup>14</sup> This section draws on an earlier work (Hamzawy and Ottaway 2009).

Muslim Brotherhood. Salafis are sceptical of political participation and denounce democratic procedures as un-Islamic. Yet parliamentary and local elections in Yemen have demonstrated that some Salafis and their followers still vote for Islah candidates as the best available option.

Aside from its internal fragmentation, Islah is further distinguished from other Arab Islamist movements by its origins as a member of the governing coalition. Most Islamist parties and movements that participate in party politics in the Arab world do so from the opposition benches. Islah represents a different experience altogether, moving from being an ally of the ruling GPC to becoming an opposition party. However, this move has been far from complete because of Islah's unwillingness to break with the GPC at all levels, and because influential leaders within Islah have remained critical of its alliance with the opposition. The result is a party that regularly goes back and forth between the government and the opposition on key political issues, further affecting the party's ability to formulate a clear vision and platform.

In 1990, after the unification of North and South Yemen, Islah entered the political fray to support the leadership of the former northern regime against the southern Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). The GPC-Islah alliance developed into an electoral and parliamentary coalition in 1993, which was initially strengthened after the north's victory in the 1994 civil war. Yet the defeat of the YSP in the civil war also created a new dynamic in Yemeni politics, because the strengthened GPC could dispense with its alliance with Islah. In the lead-up to the 1997 parliamentary elections, there were incipient signs of disagreements between the GPC and Islah about their platforms, candidates and mechanisms for sharing

power in the south. The GPC was also fearful of the well-organised and popular Muslim Brotherhood component inside Islah, anticipating it would reach out to and organise constituencies in the South. After the GPC General Secretary announced that his party wanted to achieve a 'comfortable majority' in the next Parliament, which many Islah members understood to mean a majority without any coalition partners, Islah began to align itself more closely to opposition parties such as the YSP and the Nasserites. They warned of a GPC conspiracy against democracy and temporarily thought of joining the socialist and Nasserite boycott of the elections, though they eventually decided to participate.

The results of the elections gave Islah the second highest number of seats in the Parliament, though it joined with neither the GPC in a coalition government nor with the opposition camp. It preferred to play the game of accommodating the regime rather than completely severing ties. Islah's leaders, especially Sheikh al-Ahmar, still viewed the GPC and President Salih as strategic allies.

The 1997 parliamentary elections thus unleashed a period of great ambiguity in the relations between Islah and both the ruling GPC and the opposition parties. In the presidential elections of 1999, Islah named President Salih as its candidate. For the 2003 elections, however, Islah joined with the opposition in denouncing President Salih and the GPC. Since 2003, Islah's practice of switching sides between the GPC and the opposition has continued, highlighted by the 2006 presidential elections, in which Sheikh al-Ahmar personally endorsed President Salih while the party as a whole endorsed an opposition candidate.



Several factors explain why Islah has never opted to break completely with the GPC. First, Islah does not see itself as an alternative to the GPC. Its Islamist platform and its move toward the opposition in recent years have not led the party to reconsider the objective of reforming state and society through consultation and coordination with the ruling GPC (Phillips 2008, 165). Second, channels of communication between the two parties have always remained open, even in periods of heated electoral competition at the local and national levels. Third, key figures in Islah's leadership, especially Sheikh al-Ahmar, have maintained enduring relationships with President Salih and periodically assured him that Islah aims neither to replace the GPC nor to challenge the power of the President (Saif 2005).

Although far from being complete and unquestioned among its ranks and files, Islah's gradual shift toward the opposition has helped the party to mature as a political force. Islah has abandoned the more simplistic slogans and arguments of the 1990–7 period, such as 'Islam is the solution' and the denunciation of secularism. It has become more pragmatic and accommodating in its attitude toward non-religious opposition parties, in particular the YSP. Islah's policy platform has also come to focus increasingly on pushing for political and socio-economic reforms, fair representation for Yemeni parties in state institutions and active participation of the opposition in decision-making and in fighting corruption.

It has presented itself, like other Islamist parties and movements in the Arab world, as a party pressing for political change from within an authoritarian political system, using peaceful methods. Islah has underscored its commitment to democratic mechanisms by regular

participation in national and local elections, and acceptance of their results despite regime manipulation. Like other Arab Islamists, this participatory vision has been religiously legitimated by equating democracy with the Islamic concept of *shura*.

### Islah in Parliament: Priorities and Activities

Islah presented its opposition platform most skilfully in the lead-up to the 2003 elections. In line with other opposition Islamist parties and movements in the Arab world, Islah's platform called for gradual, peaceful democratic reforms and for the fair distribution of political power between the GPC and other parties. Rather than focus on shariah and religious issues, Islah called for political change, better governance and tighter measures against corruption. This was a transition from the group's earlier, pre-1997 emphasis on religious issues. Before the 1994 civil war, the Islamist platform of Islah was effectively used to discredit the socialist agenda of the YSP. And after the north's victory, President Salih rewarded Islah for its support by accepting its demand to enshrine shariah in the Constitution. The amended Article 3, making shariah the source of all legislation, was the clearest sign of Islah's adherence to an Islamist platform.

After the elections of 1997, however, Islah's legislative priorities and performance changed, as a result of the party's changed position in Yemeni politics after joining the opposition. Contrary to its earlier initiatives, Islah's parliamentary bloc has devoted less attention to legislation related to religious and moral issues. Islah has acted only when the GPC has proposed laws that contradict some shariah provisions, trying to block them. Instead, Islah has

used its participation in Parliament to underscore its commitment to democratic mechanisms and its recognition of the legitimacy of the existing legal framework, while also calling for the introduction of political and economic reforms. Islah's recent legislative priorities have focused on constitutional amendments aimed at a fairer distribution of power between the government and the opposition, reforms in electoral laws and laws pertaining to political rights, improving Parliament's oversight capabilities and reducing governmental corruption.

Yet in contrast to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development, Islah's recent parliamentary activity has come against the backdrop of a decreasing number of seats in Parliament. In the current session, which started in 2003, Islah has only 45 out of 301 seats, compared with 53 in the previous session (1997–2003) and 62 before that (1993–7).

### **Constitutional Amendments and Political Reform**

The Islah parliamentary bloc voted in 2000 for two government-sponsored constitutional amendments that extended Parliament's term from four to six years and the President's term from five to seven years, hoping that the longer terms would make it easier to introduce political and economic reforms. It has also pressured the GPC on election laws, demanding that governors be directly elected rather than appointed by the government. In 2006, the GPC and several opposition parties, including Islah, signed an 'Agreement of Principles' aimed at organising the presidential and local council elections of September 2006. The agreement changed the composition of the Supreme

Commission for Elections and Referenda by further balancing GPC and opposition representation on the commission. It also stipulated that the sub-electoral committees, which were responsible for the validation of voters lists and the supervision of the electoral process, would comprise 54% GPC-appointed members and 46% opposition-appointed members. But Islah soon became disillusioned with the committees and charged them with violating the agreement and favouring the GPC.

In 2008, Islah MPs proposed a new law to ensure the judiciary's independence and reinforce the separation of executive and judicial authority. Also in 2008, the Islah bloc proposed a law to grant and protect free access to information, which was endorsed by other opposition MPs and widely supported by civil society organisations. But despite Islah's efforts, all three measures were struck down by the GPC majority in Parliament.

## Social and Economic Legislation

Islah MPs have also devoted significant attention to social and economic issues. In its electoral platforms of 1997 and 2003, as well as in several other declarations, Islah repeatedly criticised the government's failure to improve the living conditions of Yemenis by introducing just and effective social and economic policies. Like their Islamist colleagues elsewhere in the Arab world, Islah MPs have gradually mastered the technique of supporting their criticism of the government's failure with numbers demonstrating social and economic hardship—for example, more than 45% of the Yemeni population live on \$2 a day, 18% live on \$1 a day and the unemployment rate runs as high as 35%. Islah has

opposed the government's annual budgets since 1997 and tried to block various laws concerning social and economic issues, including a new income tax law in 2005, a law on wages and salaries in 2007 and different privatisation measures in 2009 allowing foreign investors to own real estate in Yemen.

However, Islah has confined its parliamentary activism on social and economic policies to criticism of the government and largely failed to increase effective parliamentary oversight powers or develop alternative policies of its own (Yemeni Congregation for Reform 2009). Failure to develop alternative, concrete policy measures in the socioeconomic realm brings Islah closer to the majority of Islamist parties and movements that participate in Arab politics. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development, along with other Arab Islamist groups, have all been heavily criticised for their inability to develop concrete policy platforms.

## Religious Legislation

With regard to religious issues, 41 out of the 119 parliamentary questions that Islah MPs addressed to the government between 2003 and 2009 raised issues pertaining to Islamic teachings and morality. These issues varied from selling alcoholic beverages in some provinces and showing 'indecent movies' in hotels, to closing religious schools. With regard to religious legislation, however, Islah MPs have succeeded in recent years in amending only two bills based on their Islamist platform. In 2005, the Islah bloc cooperated with the GPC majority to make shariah part of the curriculum of the state police academy, amending law

10/2001 (Yemeni Congregation for Reform 2009). And in 2009, most Islah MPs were among the parliamentary majority that rejected government-proposed amendments to raise the eligible age of marriage for women from 15 to 18 years. In the end, the age was raised to 17 (phone interview with Raji Badi, 12 February 2009; see also Yemeni Parliament 2009; Abd al-Rab 2005).

Islah's advocacy of religious issues is fraught with difficulty, however, as illustrated quite clearly by the incident of the 'Virtue Councils'. In May 2008, President Salih asked religious scholars to form these Virtue Councils to ensure social compliance with Islamic teachings, and two prominent figures in Islah were included in the group of scholars. After several meetings, the councils called for a ban on alcohol consumption, a prohibition on women working for private companies and the supervision of beaches and public places, among other measures. Several opposition parties and civil society organisations responded by strongly criticising Islah for its participation in the councils, which they feared were an encroachment on individual freedoms in the name of religion. The public criticism forced Islah to distance itself from the councils, stating that it did not approve or disapprove of them and took no party line regarding their pronouncements. While Islah thus demonstrated a degree of practical separation between its political activity and religious principles, the incident nevertheless illustrated the challenge Islah faces in determining the place of Islam in its political platform as it tries to satisfy its various constituencies.

Overall, Islah's impact on the legislative process has been rather limited since the party moved to the opposition side in 1997. Islah's efforts since 1997 to push for democratically

inspired constitutional and legal amendments and to strengthen parliamentary oversight of the government's policies have largely failed because of the uncontested dominance of the GPC in Parliament. Although Islah's long-standing ambivalence toward President Salih and the GPC and its own internal divisions have hindered the party's parliamentary activism, more than anything it has been the concentration of power in the hands of the President and the ruling party that has greatly curbed Islah's legislative success. At this level, the experience of Yemeni Islamists corresponds to the wider regional pattern of Islamist parties and movements, which have proven ineffective opposition groups in parliaments controlled by authoritarian regimes.

In spite of its limited impact in Parliament, Islah has continued to contest elections at the national and local level and to play politics by the rules, upholding its commitment to peaceful participation in political life. Islah's emerging acceptance of democratic procedures and pluralism during the 1990s has evolved so that today they are an uncontested pillar of the party's ideology and role. Indeed, its experience with other opposition parties has demonstrated Islah's willingness to cooperate with ideologically and programmatically different parties and to develop a joint electoral and parliamentary platform to push for reforms in Yemen.

Yet Islah has had to overcome various obstacles to participate in politics. Operating in an authoritarian regime, in which the president and his party dominate political life and checks and balances lose their meaning, has forced Islah, since its move toward the opposition in 1997, to sustain its ties with the regime in order to have some influence over key political decisions. Islah has also had to

overcome its own mixed constituency and its internal divisions to take part in politics. The tribal, Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi elements of Islah have prevented the party from developing a clear ideology and platform. The result has been continued ambiguities in Islah regarding its ideology and platform and wide-spread scepticism on the outside as to where the party really stands.

These characteristics have made the experience of Islah different from those of other Islamist parties and movements in the Arab world, though not completely. Of course, most other Arab Islamists who participate in politics have managed to sort out much of their initial ideological ambiguities and to articulate clear parliamentary platforms. So far, Islah has not. Still, Islah, like other Islamists, has had to account to its supporters for achieving only limited reforms and, as a result, to justify its continued commitment to reform. Like Islamists elsewhere, Islah has justified itself through a mixed narrative. First, economic and political reforms are framed as long-term and gradual processes of change, requiring patience on the part of their advocates. Second, peaceful participation is presented as the best available option to challenge the authoritarian regime while assuring peace within Yemeni society. This last argument resonates well in a country like Yemen, which went through long periods of instability in the past and seems to be entering another one now. In fact, the growing security and instability threats in the north and south of Yemen have been used effectively by Islah to justify its participation in legal politics and its ongoing contacts with the regime as essential in preserving Yemen from state failure or disintegration. Yet despite these arguments in favour of continued political participation, the debate continues within Islah, just as it does with other politically active Islamist groups.



## Conclusions<sup>15</sup>

The examples of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development, and the Yemeni Congregation for Reform illustrate several critical issues facing contemporary Islamist movements that have chosen to participate in parliamentary politics. Commitment to democracy is not an easy choice for these parties. It involves some thorny ideological issues as well as some major tactical choices. On the ideological level, there is a fundamental tension within Islamist parties and movements between the notion that law must be based on God's word, thus conforming to shariah, and the idea that in a democratic political system laws are made on the basis of majority rule by parliaments freely elected by people. A party cannot call itself Islamist and retain the support of devoutly Muslim followers if it renounces shariah as the basis of legislation. At the same time a party cannot call itself democratic without recognising majority rule as binding.

The result of this tension is that the political thought of participating Islamists has a number of gray areas concerning the place of Islamic law in legislation, the limits of political pluralism, the civil and political rights of individuals versus the good of the community and the position of women and minorities. As a result, a constant ideological and political struggle continues within all parties and movements between hard-liners, who insist that shariah must be the standard against which the legitimacy of all laws must be judged, and moderates, who are willing to accept laws that are passed according to democratic procedures and fall within the rather vague boundaries of an Islamic 'framework'. It is the outcome of the internal struggles between hard-liners and conformists that will

determine whether Islamist parties remain committed to democracy.

Some parties and movements try to solve the conundrum by setting up a political party separate from the religious movement. Separation allows the religious movement to deal with absolute values, while the party plunges into the pragmatic world of political compromise. This is the case in both Morocco and Yemen. But in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood continues to be a banned organisation, and therefore setting up a political party has never been a realistic option.

But separating the religious and political components creates a new set of challenges. The party can lose the support of the members of the religious movement if it strays too far. Even worse, members' allegiance can be transferred to other religious movements that do not dirty their hands with political participation. This is a serious problem for the PJD in Morocco, which risks losing its followers to al-'Adl if it strays too far from doctrine to make political compromises.

Another difficult issue for Islamist parties and movements is political pluralism. They all accept political pluralism—they could not participate in electoral politics otherwise. But they are not sure where the limits of pluralism are. It is difficult for a religiously based party or movement to recognise the legitimacy of all points of view. Throughout the last two decades, participating Islamists have gone a long way in accepting a diversity of views in the political arena. But with regard to moral, social and cultural issues, they still lag behind. As recently as 2007, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood published a draft party program that stipulated

that Copts (and women) could not be elected to the presidency. While the clause was removed from a later draft because of internal and external outrage, the episode is very revealing of the extent to which pluralism remains a contested issue.

In addition to the ideological dilemmas, political participation in states where governments are not fully democratic and are fearful of Islamists poses a number of tactical dilemmas for participating Islamist groups. Two main questions are constantly revisited: whether to actually participate in a given election when the playing field continues to be uneven; and how many candidates to put forward in an attempt to gain enough seats to be effective in parliament without winning so many as to trigger repressive measures on the part of the government.

On the one hand, by participating under conditions that ensure poor results, Islamist groups risk undermining their standing because poor results will project an image of weakness. They also risk alienating further those supporters who are already sceptical about participation on ideological grounds and who find in the obstacles further proof that participation is a losing strategy. On the other hand, by participating despite the obstacles put in their way, Islamists can show they are truly committed to democratic procedures and processes, and that they are not just fair-weather democrats who only play when they can win.

By the same token, the refusal by Islamists to participate in a specific election reassures those followers who are critical of participation, but it also opens the door to questions about the party's commitment to democracy—an accusation often made by governments. Furthermore,

boycotting elections condemns Islamists to powerlessness: a party that has renounced violence but refuses to take part in the political process has no means to exercise direct political influence.

The second tactical dilemma facing participating Islamists is deciding the number of candidates to present for election. Islamist parties cannot afford to win too many seats. In Algeria in 1991, the predicted victory of the FIS led to the cancellation of elections and a military takeover. And in Palestine in 2006, Hamas's surprise victory triggered a chain reaction of negative repercussions culminating in an ongoing confrontation between Fatah and Hamas. As a result, participating Islamists have become quite cautious, deliberately limiting the number of candidates. In Morocco, in 2002, the PJD ran candidates in just over half of the 91 election districts. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood also limited the number of its candidates in the 2005 parliamentary elections, fielding independent candidates in 144 out of 444 districts. Yet it is not clear that such self-imposed limits by Islamist parties and movements have had the desired effect of calming fears of a possible Islamist takeover. Indeed, the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood and the PJD exercised self-restraint in the past did not keep the respective governments from increasing obstacles to their participation in subsequent elections. As a result, the Moroccan PJD did not limit the number of its candidates in the last parliamentary elections in 2007, fielding candidates in 94 out of 95 electoral districts. But its gains were minimal, as it only added only four seats to its parliamentary bloc.

The experiences of these groups suggest that participation leads some but not all Islamist movements to moderate their positions. The outcome depends to a large extent on the

political environment and on the conditions under which Islamists participate. Movements that operate under normal conditions tend to become more moderate, those participating under siege conditions do not. Operating under normal conditions in the Arab world does not mean operating under democratic conditions, but rather under the same conditions that affect all opposition actors in that country.

Participation under normal conditions appears to strengthen Islamists' determination to be part of the legal political process of their countries, and to focus less on ideological issues and more on the practical challenges of sustaining their base. Once in parliament, Islamists are forced to focus on the issues with which parliament is occupied, while ideology plays a secondary role. In the case of the PJD in Morocco, participation in legal politics led to moderation—for which the party paid with disappointing electoral results in the 2007 elections.

Participating Islamists in Egypt and Yemen have faced especially difficult situations. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood provides a particularly interesting case of how thwarted participation can lead to ideological regression. The Muslim Brotherhood's gains under the reformers' leadership led to more systematic government repression. These actions caused an unintended change in the movement's internal balance of power. The reformers were discredited, and the influence of the hard-liners increased, as shown by the program for the political party it aspired to form. The draft platform published in 2007 showed the Brotherhood was retreating to old positions. Two elements were particularly revealing: the proposal to place a council of religious scholars above the Parliament to ensure the conformity of all laws with shariah, and the exclusion of

women and non-Muslims from the presidency. While internal and external criticism caused the Brotherhood to reverse its position, it is nevertheless clear that the hard-liners have gained more power in the movement.

Far from sweeping to victory and domination, as their adversaries feared, Islamist movements that have chosen political participation have had a limited impact on their countries. The poor results of political participation confront Islamists with three major challenges, which are already being discussed in some of their parties and movements. The response to these challenges will determine the future course of participating Islamists.

The first challenge is to convince their followers that participation remains the only option. Two arguments are being used for this purpose: even small gains help protect the movements from government machinations and maintain their constituencies; and participation is necessary to assuage the suspicions of Islamist parties on the part of the government and other opposition parties. The second challenge participating Islamists face is to develop a balance between the requirements of participation and the demands of ideological commitment. The third challenge is to rethink the relationship between the religious and political components and thus to devise the best possible structures for organising the movements. This debate is driven in part by conditions. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, has no options but to combine political and religious work in one organisation, since the government does not allow it to form a political party.

In conclusion, there are no easy answers to the questions always asked about participating Islamist parties and

movements: 'Are they truly committed to democracy? Will participation increase their commitments?' The evidence leads to a very unsatisfactory answer, 'It depends'. It is the balance of power among different groups within the Islamist movements, which is determined by the politics of the country as well as the internal politics of the organisation, that will decide whether a party or movement will remain committed to democratic participation.

## Policy Recommendations

### **Treat Islamists based on a case-by-case approach:**

While there are many similarities between Islamist parties across the Arab world, there are also a number of differences that must be taken into consideration in any careful analysis. The Yemeni Congregation for Reform, for example, is far more internally divided than either the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development or the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, in part because of its unique history and in part because of the nature of Yemeni society. Similarly, the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development operates in one of the more open political environments in the Arab world yet must also deal with the more fragmentary composition of the Moroccan Islamist spectrum. Both groups' activities must be understood in the context of their circumstances, on a case-by-case basis.

**While it is important to understanding their rhetoric and discourse, an analysis of parliamentary platforms and activities is more significant:** The best example of how these Islamist parties would operate in a more open environment is found in their political platforms. To be

sure, the political rhetoric is important, but it is not sufficient. Because the parliamentary platforms are examples of how they truly act once in government, they offer a better indication of how the parties would respond to the variety of pressures associated with governing. For instance, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood campaigned in 2005 on the slogan 'Islam is the Solution', but its parliamentary platform and activities are much more varied and nuanced, with emphasis on political freedoms and economic development. Religious issues have been pushed aside somewhat in favour of more practical political issues in recent years; in other words, while the Brotherhood still uses religious rhetoric, its actual political activities are somewhat more pragmatic.

**The impacts of the political environment on different Islamist movements needs to be understood:** Like all other political parties, Islamist groups do not function in isolation from their larger political contexts, and thus these contexts must be considered in any analysis of the parties and their activities. The PJD, for example, is limited both by the continued concentration of real power in the hands of the Moroccan monarchy and by the existence of a more hard-line Islamist group that rejects political participation. If the PJD compromises its religious principles too much, it risks losing supporters to its more stringent competitor, but if it does not compromise enough, then the monarchy has more ammunition for its claims that the PJD is a non-democratic party focused only on its parochial, religious goals. Other Islamist groups are similarly constrained by the limited political space available to them and their tense relations with other political parties, which together dramatically impede their political efforts.



**Islamist movements, like all political parties, are not unchanging, monolithic entities:** While many Islamist political leaders go to great lengths to present their parties as in agreement on major issues, in reality there is quite a bit of internal dissent on policies and political strategies. Some leaders, particularly in the PJD and the Muslim Brotherhood, believe too much emphasis on political participation in such closed political environments is merely a distraction from more important socio-religious work. Another common dispute concerns the degree of compromise the parties should make in order to maintain their religious principles while simultaneously respecting the democratic process. These internal disagreements are important and help signal how the parties may develop in the future. And they will develop, because Islamist parties are not stagnant, unchanging groups that advocate the same positions over many decades. Indeed, partially as a result of their internal debates, Islamist parties have moved away from their early focus on religious issues to offer much more practical political proposals in recent years.

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