

Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia: How the Political Opening is Changing Islamist Groups: EUMEF 17th New Faces Conference; Cairo, October 4-7, 2012

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EUMEF 17th New Faces Conference
Cairo, October 4–7, 2012

Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia: How the Political Opening is Changing Islamist Groups

Rachel Sternfeld and Steven Brooke

Dina Fakoussa (ed.)

About the EU-Middle East Forum

The EU-Middle East Forum (EUMEF) is a dialogue and networking program for young and mid-level professionals from North Africa as well as Turkey and Europe. The Forum was created in 2011, and it conceptualizes and organizes policy workshops like the New Faces Conferences and International Summer Schools. The forum tackles and analyzes different political, economic, and social issues and developments in the Arab region and Turkey, and it gives critical scrutiny to German and EU responses and policies. EUMEF is the follow-up project of the International Forum on Strategic Thinking (2006–2010) and the Forum European Foreign and Security Policy (1997–2005).

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Contents

17th New Faces Conference

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Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia: How the Political Opening is Changing Islamist Groups

Rachel Sternfeld and Steven Brooke

Dina Fakoussa (ed.)

3	Introduction
3	Main Findings of the Conference
4	Ideology
5	1. The Nation-State and Democracy
6	2. Non-Violence and Jihad
6	3. Secularism and Liberalism
7	Islamism in Practice
8	1. Pragmatism and Status Quo Policies
9	2. Media and the Internet: From Resistance to Censorship
9	3. Violence and Security
10	4. Non-Islamist Opposition
10	The International Context
10	1. The Muslim Brotherhood's Foreign Policy
11	2. Western Reactions to the Changes
11	3. Examples and Models
12	Other Countries
12	Notes

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Pluralism in Egypt and Tunisia: How the Political Opening is Changing Islamist Groups

Report by Rachel Sternfeld and Steven Brooke
Dina Fakoussa (ed.)

Introduction

In the years immediately following the uprisings of 2010–2011, Islamist movements seemed to be the winners of the transformation processes in the Middle East and North Africa. Increasingly, they managed to translate their popular standing into sweeping electoral successes. With the demise of the authoritarian rulers in Egypt and Tunisia, Islamists gained more freedom, allowing them to widen their scope of operation and to form political parties, becoming official actors in both countries' political landscapes. With their extremely successful performance in the first rounds of elections, Islamists became a focal point of attention. It seemed that, in the short and long-term, they would be forces to be reckoned with in Egyptian and Tunisian politics and society.

This reality was the motivation to use the seventeenth DGAP New Faces Conference to scrutinize and understand Islamist beliefs, goals, agendas, and actions. A particular focus was the extent to which the new pluralistic system and the shift from being in the opposition to being a governing party have resulted in changes in ideological stances or in the concretization of standpoints and principles. Islamists have evolved over the past decades, but always under authoritarian or semi-authoritarian systems. The unprecedented political openings have lent their evolutionary path new dynamics.

Certainty about the direction of Islamist movements and the genuineness of their espousal of liberal values and democratic principles can only be obtained if they are active in government and engaged in policy-making for a longer period of time. Hence the findings of the conference must be considered a snapshot of the situation in 2011–2012, which nevertheless offers insights into the causes and backgrounds of current developments.

The three-day conference aimed to investigate Islamist movements in Egypt and Tunisia in an interdisciplinary setting, to analyze the ways in which pluralism and political openings are affecting and changing these movements, and to pinpoint concrete policy measures and priorities. The implications of these developments for the democratic process and for stability in the two countries were also addressed.

This report summarizes a considerable portion of participants' contributions as well as discussions during the plenary sessions and working groups. The main points raised are clustered around the three thematic blocs of the conference: ideology, state-building and domestic policy, and the international context.

Main Findings of the Conference

- Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt broadly agree that the nation-state and democracy are politically legitimate systems, yet Islamism as a political project is, by definition, not liberal.
- Most Islamist groups seek to affect political change without violence; they are not jihadists. Unlike Al Qaeda, many domestic jihadist groups in Egypt denounced violence as a path to their political goals and formed political parties.
- Secularism is largely rejected by Islamists, including the Ennahda Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. Liberals and other non-Islamist groups in Egypt and Tunisia call for a civil state rather than a secular state.
- Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt generally embrace economic liberalism. They do not call for overturning the class system, but for “distributive justice” to reduce the severity with which socio-economic disparities impact the poor.

- Islamists believe that men and women should enjoy relatively equal political rights and duties. Many, however, favor some limits on women's political roles, especially their right to be president.
- Women have a slightly greater public role in Ennahda than in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Yet neither party includes significant numbers of women in the party leadership.
- Islamists recognize non-Muslims as fellow citizens and, to a large extent, are tolerant of their freedom to practice their religion. Yet, as with women, many Islamists seek to restrict their right to become president.
- The behavior of Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt can best be characterized as pragmatic decision-making, rather than a systematic and single-minded effort to build Islamic theocracies. While these political forces have only just begun their tenure, there are signs that they may seek to adopt the authoritarian structures of their predecessors to sustain their newfound power.
- During and after the uprisings, the Muslim Brotherhood as well as Ennahda have been using new and traditional media to suit their purposes. There was consensus that the media is one arena in which the newly elected Islamist parties may be adopting the repressive behavior of their predecessors.
- Today, the Sinai Peninsula, a strategically important area, is increasing unstable and lawless. Marginalization of the populace, migration of jihadists to the area, and a rise in weapons trafficking are among the principle causes of this volatile situation.
- The Islamist governments in Egypt and Tunisia have not made any major modifications to the foreign policies of the authoritarian governments they replaced. For the time being, Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood appear willing to work with an international community that has long been suspicious of Islamists.
- The EU and its member states are seeking to promote democracy by providing financial support, as well as administrative and political advice, to politicians and activists in the new democratic structures of Egypt and Tunisia. The European donors, however, are being outspent by the wealthy Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia.
- The EU has stepped up its economic aid. Its response to the Arab Spring included the 'three Ms' – money, markets and mobility – the SPRING program, and direct funding for poorer regions in Tunisia. Economic aid has been complemented by programs to train new parliamentarians and engage with civil society activists. Germany, in addition to its contributions as an EU member state, is providing direct aid to Tunisia and Egypt.
- Egyptians and Tunisians should be wary of the Turkish model. When the AKP was elected, the opposition focused on protecting secularism from encroaching Islamism. This debate, however, focused on a false dichotomy and obscured the greater challenge to the state of genuine democratization. The AKP maintains the parameters of the state and hold on to decade-old policies because it considers that the best way to remain in power.
- Some liberals in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as much of the international community, fear that these countries will follow the Iranian or Algerian model, that the democratic experiment will fail and instability and extremism will dominate the political sphere. Egyptian Islamist and non-Islamist revolutionaries insist that their revolution is not an Islamic revolution and that they do not want to impose Khomeini's model of *velayat-e faqih* – rule of the Islamic jurist.
- International relations, however, are not limited to relations between Arab countries and between Arab countries and Western democracies. It is also necessary to look beyond these relationships as diversification of relations is very likely and can be considered part of an emancipation action from the West. This in turn will have serious implications for the role and influence of the West in the region.

Ideology

The Ennahda Party in Tunisia and the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt (the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood) won major victories in the relatively free and fair elections that followed the momentous events in these countries. These two mainstream movements comprise a large portion of the Islamist trend in their respective countries, yet they are not the totality of this trend.

Neither before nor after Mohammad Bouazizi sparked the region-wide uprising should Islamism be understood as a coherent, unified or monolithic movement. Instead, it can be understood better as a broad range of – often conflicting – political ideologies. The victories of Islamist candidates in Egypt and Tunisia's post-revolutionary parliamentary and presidential elections laid bare a series of tensions that had remained hidden under authoritarian rule. For one, Islamist candidates faced unexpected challenges from the right in the form of non-violent but fundamentalist Salafi groups that had spent decades laboring in the social and cultural arena and were latecomers to

politics. Once in power, Islamists were forced to deal with an awakened domestic opposition, including these Salafi groups as well as their violent counterparts, Salafi jihadis, in places such as the Sinai Peninsula.

The Salafi movement was not indigenous, but rather took root across the region during the 1970s and 1980s, as money from the Gulf began to enter other Arab states. With this financial influence, migration and commercial links to the Gulf increased. In Egypt, conference participants noted, Anwar Sadat encouraged the growth of the Salafi movement as both a counterweight to the politically ambitious Muslim Brotherhood as well as to leftist movements. While currently the Salafi in Egypt and Tunisia resemble a loose network of sheikhs and preachers more than a Brotherhood-style organized movement, the group was able to mobilize quickly after the revolutions. In Egypt, the group soon emerged as the second largest bloc in parliament.

The Salafi movement took shape as a rival to the Brotherhood, although the extent of the rivalry remained unclear. Speakers noted the existence of a strong intellectual Salafi trend inside the Brotherhood. More tangibly, in Egypt's spring 2012 referendum and in Tunisia's first post-Ben Ali parliamentary elections, Brotherhood and Salafi politicians found themselves on the same side. However, in other instances the groups clearly disagreed, such as when Hamas violently cracked down on a Salafi movement that emerged to challenge them, or when Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi ordered the military to mobilize against Salafi jihadi groups in the Sinai. This antagonism is also manifest in Egypt's and Tunisia's respective constitution-drafting processes, where Salafi parties push for stricter interpretations of sharia than their Brotherhood counterparts.

This intra-Islamist competition is reverberating inside the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda. In Egypt, the Brotherhood had long been able to occupy a privileged position because it was seen as the sole moral and religious alternative to the authoritarian regime, and because members suffered tremendously under state repression. Participants also concurred that the repression helped the Brotherhood preserve organizational cohesion, uniting disparate Azhari, traditional, Salafi, and Qutbi strains of thought under one leadership. Without the repression, and in the face of the politicization of the Salafi movement, the Brotherhood both lost its internal cohesion and its external distinctiveness among Egyptian political actors. These debates have forced Islamist groups to clarify their positions, at the risk of fomenting internal conflict among different schools of thought.

1. The Nation-State and Democracy

Once, many Islamists rejected nation-states. They felt these institutions were Western inventions imposed on the Muslim world and other places as part of the colonial project. Such individuals privileged the Muslim *umma*, the community or nation of Muslims, above that of ethno-linguistic national units first imagined by the Europeans.

Islamists also rejected democracy on these grounds, arguing that such a system of government bred *hizbiyya* (partisanship). Institutions that led to the segmentation of the Muslim community were by definition illegitimate. In the 1930s, this view permeated not just Islamist groups in the region; most political actors were concerned about partisanship in their communities.

Today, however, most Islamists accept the modern nation-state as the political framework. Indeed, many scholars consider Islamism a form of nationalism. Further, political actors from across the spectrum have set aside their concern about the relationship between *hizbiyya* and democracy. In the 1990s, Ennahda, for example, published a treatise explaining the complementary nature of Islam and democracy. Following the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Salafi groups that had before spurned the political realm and formerly violent groups such as al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group) and Islamic Jihad formed political parties and competed in the 2011 parliamentary elections.

One of the most-discussed developments concerned the specific consequences that dealing with state structures after finding themselves in governing positions has had on the Islamists' internal structures and on their thinking. During the course of the conference, consensus emerged that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was fundamentally unprepared to confront the reality of the existing state structure. Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak's repression of the movement had forced the Brotherhood to deal concretely with circumstances, relegating abstract but necessary theorizing about the relation of the Brotherhood to the modern Leviathan state to the sidelines. Thus when the Egyptian Brotherhood assumed control in 2011 and 2012, they were unsure of their role in and relation to the state.

This inability to understand their role had profound organizational consequences. While a section of the Egyptian society has been concerned about the "Ikhwanization" of the Egyptian state, the Brotherhood has been preoccupied with compromising too much of its traditional mission for the sake of political affairs. Through its investment in the achievement of political power, the group has endangered its more basic and fundamental goal of

transforming society through charitable work, proselytization (*da'wah*), and education and culture (*tarbiyya*). Goals of societal reform have been seconded to political necessities. For instance, under Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood had been at the forefront of protests against Israeli attacks on Gaza and was supportive of strikes by professional syndicates (unions). In power, the Brotherhood refrained from protesting attacks on Gaza and stood in opposition to the doctors' strike.

When it came to the degree and inevitability of political engagement of the Egyptian Brotherhood, however, participants had different perspectives. According to some, this problem was situated at a distant horizon, perhaps when the movement suffered electoral defeat. In this view, the movement must take immediate steps to ensure that politics and *da'wah* remain separate so that a political defeat would not affect other areas of activity. Others, however, argued that the Brotherhood had been proceeding down the path of political engagement for decades, and had become so invested in the political process that the mission of *da'wah* had already withered away. Some participants forecast a similar path for the Egyptian Salafi movement based on their decision to participate in the electoral process.

When it came to examples from other countries, however, participants presented different findings. While the AK party in Turkey was identified by some as a case study in the “irresistibility” of power, in the Palestinian territories, Hamas was taking steps to counteract their own political role. Hamas' transition from a social to a political movement in 1987, and its emergence as a serious political player in the mid- to late-2000s, has caused stresses and fractures in the movement. In order to counteract a general demobilization of members when Hamas entered the state structure, the movement has encouraged the strict separation of *da'wah* from political work, and members are prevented from holding positions in both. The specter of Fatah, which began as a revolutionary movement and ended as a status quo political party, looms large. In Tunisia, however, it appears that no discussion of the relationship between movement, party, and government has emerged. Perhaps this is due to the long-term weakness of the Islamist movement under Ben Ali.

2. Non-Violence and Jihad

One point underlined at the conference was that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda are not broadly representative of Islamist actors, despite the power of images of 9/11 and other large-scale media events. The violent subset of Islamism is known as Jihadism. It can be defined as the

belief that armed action is sometimes the most effective and most legitimate way to affect political change. Jihadism, like all Islamist ideologies, is based on particular understandings and interpretations of Islamic texts. Some of the writings of Said Qutb, an Egyptian and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, are key texts for many of these groups. The Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group) in Egypt, one group influenced by his thinking, has produced its own literature denouncing democracy and espousing violence.

Even before the events of 2011, many former jihadist groups had denounced violence. This change took place in the early 2000s, partially as a result of pressure from autocrats afraid of American interventionism. These post-jihadist groups justified their renunciation of violence by citing historical narratives in which Muslims compromised, peacefully, with rulers to advance the good of the *umma*. Yet, this renunciation of violence is still many steps away from an acceptance of liberal democracy. Many post-jihadist groups continue to oppose the regimes in their countries, albeit through non-violent forms of resistance. Most members remain proud of their former efforts at violent resistance. In the wake of the so-called Arab Spring, one participant believed, post-jihadist groups in Egypt sought to distinguish themselves from the Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood through their strong opposition to liberalism.

3. Secularism and Liberalism

Tunisians and Egyptians continue to debate the extent to which secularism and liberalism are appropriate in their societies as they reshape their countries' political systems. Liberals and leftists, as well as secular conservatives, find themselves at odds with Islamists on the role religion should play in politics and society. This debate plays out in discussions on many topics, including the equality of women and the rights of religious minorities.

Secularism

Secularism is largely rejected by Islamists. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood stands firmly against the idea of a secular state. In Tunisia – a state once modelled on France and Kemalist Turkey and widely-recognized as the most secular in the Arab world – Ennahda's position on secularism is more opaque. The party's 74-page party platform, published in 2011, notes that Islam is part of the country's “cultural heritage,” but does not include the word “sharia” at all.

The generally negative connotation of the term “secularism,” according to one explanation, has led liberals and

other non-Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia to coin a new term, *al-dawla al-mediniyya* (the civil state). In Egypt, for example, liberal members of the constitutional assembly are pushing for the new Egyptian state to be defined as a civil state, while many Islamists want the new constitution to specify the Islamic nature of the Egyptian government. Participants raised the point that some non-Islamists, however, are concerned that by replacing secularism with the idea of a civil state, they are conceding ideological as well as rhetorical ground in the debate over the nature of the state, and the civil rights and liberties that will be protected in the future.

Economic Liberalism

The main Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt – Ennahda and the Freedom and Justice party – generally embrace economic liberalism while largely rejecting social liberalism. Many Islamists believe the implementation of “distributive justice” is the appropriate response to socio-economic disparity. Although few people in these countries are calling for the dismantling of the class system, Islamism is not inherently opposed to socialist ideology. Said Qutb advocated Islamic socialism in the 1960s, and there are trends in Iranian and Turkish Islamism which support socialist policies today.

Islamist support for social liberalism is more fraught. Today, dominant ideologies in Islamism present particular problems for the equality of women and non-Muslims in the social and political spheres. Other minorities and protected classes, for example ethnic minorities, are less central to these debates.

Women

The position of Islamists with respect to women has become increasingly liberal over the past thirty years. Now most groups, including Ennahda and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, think men and women should enjoy relatively equal political rights and duties. In a democratic political context, Islamists support the right of women to vote and most support the right of women to hold political office. A participant explained that there are still a few on the fringes who oppose the idea of women exercising *wilaya* (legal power) over men. This category of Islamists thus denies the right of women to hold any political position.

Women have a slightly greater public role in Ennahda than in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, yet neither party includes significant numbers of women in their leadership. Moreover, Ennahda sought to reverse some aspects of family law and other policies regarding women,

such as the prohibition of polygamy and the right to abortion that had previously made Tunisia one of the most progressive states in the region.

Freedom of Religion

The position of Islamists with respect to freedom of religious practice might best be described as minimally tolerant rather than liberal. There was consensus in this regard. In previous eras, a few Muslim thinkers had advocated a broader understanding of tolerance, in which other religions and other prophets could be seen as equally valid. They doubted whether human beings could know or attain truth, and thus accepted the premise that others from different religious traditions might also come close to the truth.

Today, most Islamists recognize that there are differences in religion and religiosity. Most Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia are willing to tolerate a certain level of plurality and recognize non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims as fellow citizens. The language surrounding religious plurality, however, is itself religious. The discourse refers to binaries of good versus evil and references *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Many Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt want to restrict the political rights of Christian and Jewish minorities, particularly their right to become president. Additionally, few feel it is legitimate for a Muslim to become an agnostic or convert to a different religion.

Islamism in Practice

Prior to the so-called Arab Spring, many Middle Eastern autocrats justified their continued rule as the only bulwark against the rise of Islamists to power. Such arguments were made to pacify non-Islamist domestic opposition as well as international benefactors. The mantra “one man, one vote, one time” suggested that the introduction of democracy in the Arab world would result in the election of Islamists who would subsequently establish theocratic authoritarian regimes. These imagined theocracies would, it was feared, suppress women and religious minorities. Additionally, the states might become refuges for and financiers of Islamist terror networks. However, the behavior of Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt since the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak is best characterized by pragmatic political decision-making, rather than systematic, single-minded efforts to build Islamic theocracies. Several participants shared the view that, despite this fact, the organizations’ pragmatic approaches to politics do not necessarily indicate a strong commitment to democratization.

1. Pragmatism and Status Quo

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Isma'iliyya, a city on the Suez Canal, in 1928. During the last years of the Egyptian monarchy, the organization was decidedly anti-colonial. The Brotherhood faced periods of both severe repression and relative tolerance during the presidencies of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak. The mid-1990s, partially in response to the success of Brotherhood candidates in the 1995 parliamentary elections, was a period of acute repression. Subsequently, the organization put more effort into *da'wah* (proselytization) in an attempt to slow state repression of members. Some members, discontent with the Muslim Brotherhood's lack of political engagement, left the movement and founded the Wasat Party in 2000. Muslim Brotherhood parliamentary candidates again enjoyed significant victories in the 2005 parliamentary election. In the wake of these successes, the organization was careful not to anger the Mubarak government in its interactions with domestic and international NGOs. Furthermore, the political platform they published in 2007 was rather vague.

One participant also gave an overview of the evolution of Islamism in Tunisia. The roots of the Ennahda party are somewhat more recent. In the 1970s, Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group), a precursor to Ennahda, was founded in Tunisia. After President Bourguiba legalized political organizations in 1981, Islamists founded an official political wing, the Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique (MTI). In 1988, one year after taking power, President Ben Ali banned political parties with religious platforms and the MTI changed its name to Harakat al-Nahda (the Renaissance Movement, also Ennahda), while maintaining its political platform. By the 1990s, the Tunisian government had imprisoned or exiled the movement's leaders, yet those exiled leaders continued their opposition to Ben Ali's regime and published a detailed party platform.

After the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak, Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood, respectively, toned down their language. In an effort to broaden their appeal and foster dialogue with liberal groups and other political parties, Ennahda stopped using the slogan "*Islam huwa al-hal*" (Islam is the solution) and, instead, maintained that "Islam is democracy" and "Islam is human rights." The Muslim Brotherhood, for their part, founded a political party, the Freedom and Justice Party. Once in office, President Mohamed Morsi promoted a number of ideas originally advocated by the reformist youth of the Muslim Brotherhood in the years before the revolution.

Other groups, including Salafis and post-jihadists, took advantage of the newly competitive political environments in Tunisia and Egypt and established their own political parties. Salafi organizations in both countries had long shunned the political sphere, a stance that imparted their candidates with an air of integrity and credibility and imbued the nascent political parties with legitimacy in the eyes of many voters. Additionally, those groups which had denounced their formerly violent practices in the 1990s remained non-violent in the aftermath of the revolutions, despite the opportunities to stockpile arms, recruit youth, and gather information on areas sensitive to attack. They instead registered as political parties; the Islamic Group won thirteen seats and al-Jihad affiliates won two seats in the now disbanded Egyptian parliament.

Participants were divided on the actual political behavior of the Salafis in Egypt. On the one hand, it was argued that they displayed a relatively high degree of political sophistication, especially in contrast to the Brotherhood at a similar stage. The Salafi decision to support former Brotherhood member Abdul Moneim Abu el-Fotouh as president was cited as evidence of this sophistication, showing that the Salafis recognized their own political inexperience. On the other hand, discussants noted that the Salafists' appeal was based largely on their previous political detachment and "authenticity." After abandoning this to participate in elections, they would likely become indistinguishable from the Brotherhood.

Status Quo Policies

One major theme that emerged from the discussions was the assessment that the Brotherhood in Egypt, Ennahda in Tunisia, and the AKP in Turkey had essentially pursued status-quo policies both domestically and internationally. This is most visible in the economic sphere. The rise of a business class within the Brotherhood leadership caused the group to become devoted to and invested in Mubarak-era neoliberal economic policies, and members were unwilling to sacrifice their privileged positions to pursue a revolutionary ideological project. Participants pointed out that similar neoliberal economic doctrines gained adherents among Islamist groups in Tunisia and Turkey, and noted how this had begun to provoke a backlash from traditional constituencies.

Domestically, neither the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt nor Ennahda in Tunisia have been able to create clear policies that flow naturally from their ideologies. Policymaking has been ad-hoc and simplistic. Participants pointed out that the general Islamist diagnosis as to why the prior regimes had failed was that they had been

secular. Specifically with regard to Tunisia, participants emphasized that Ennahda advanced hurried and ill-considered solutions to economic problems, later withdrawing those solutions that faced criticism. The Ennahda government also dismissed the governor of the central bank with no explanation and no clear plan for a successor. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood failed to articulate an economic strategy for the country, instead simply accepting the existing neoliberal policies pursued by Mubarak and criticizing alternatives proposed by liberal groups.

This focus on the status-quo policies of the Brotherhood spurred further discussions about the proper terminology for the events. Reviewing the continuity between Mubarak-era policies and those of the Morsi government, many participants expressed reluctance to speak of a “revolution.” In Tunisia, Ennahda was similarly criticized for merely changing the faces, and not the structure, of the existing regime. Others were more patient, arguing that it was still too early to tell, and that unraveling the militaristic, centralized, and authoritarian states of Mubarak and Ben Ali would be a lengthy process.

2. Media and the Internet: From Resistance to Censorship

There was consensus that the media is one arena in which the newly elected Islamist parties may be adopting the behavior of their predecessors. When the Islamists were marginalized by the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, the Internet was a tool of empowerment, because it enabled circumvention of state control. It was a means of coming together to fight a common enemy, be it Ben Ali or Mubarak.

In the years before the uprising, the Muslim Brotherhood had an active online presence. The organization officially went online in 2005 with Ikhwanweb, a consequence of the online activism of the Egyptian Movement for Change, popularly known as Kefaya. Over the next few years, a number of Muslim Brothers, many of whom were young reformists, began blogging and building connections with their Kefaya counterparts – presenting the Brotherhood as a non-threatening organization composed of regular Egyptians.

During the uprising and in the months that followed, the Muslim Brotherhood sought to establish themselves as a legitimate source of news. They are widely considered to be the force behind the Rassd News Network (RNN), a Facebook site that was a crucial source of information during the 18 days Egyptians spent in Tahrir Square. RNN has since expanded its operations to a number of countries in the Middle East. After Mubarak

fell, Ikhwanweb expanded its operations and bought 18 domain names related to Ikhwanbook, a Muslim Brotherhood version of Facebook. Additionally, the FJP took advantage of the internet during the elections and had representatives tweet vote counts. Their tallies were nearly identical to official accounts. These efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrate their desire to shape the public sphere. Together with major changes in various offices responsible for the state media and legal cases against outspoken critics of President Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated their commitment to amplify their voice in a public sphere previously dominated by the Mubarak state media.

Ennahda has also expanded its online presence since the fall of Ben Ali. Now that they are in power, censorship of the internet has been lifted, although Ennahda does monitor content shared on the web. Additionally, Tunisia continues to censor printed materials and art exhibitions, and has repeatedly arrested journalists for criticizing a proposed anti-blasphemy law and similar charges.

3. Violence and Security

Both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia have had connections to violent groups or actions in the past. In the interwar period, many political parties in Egypt, like their counterparts in Europe, had armed branches. The Muslim Brotherhood was no exception. Their secret apparatus was involved in the conflict in Palestine and possibly in some politically-motivated violence within Egypt as well. Additionally, radicalized former members of the Brotherhood likely assassinated President Anwar Al-Sadat. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of Al-Qaeda, was briefly a member as well. As for Ennahda, it is sometimes suggested that it was involved in an attempted coup against Ben Ali. This suspicion may have precipitated the major crackdown that sent many of the movement’s members to jail or into exile.

Today, the Sinai Peninsula, a strategically important area, is increasingly unstable and lawless. The marginalization of the local population, the immigration of jihadists to the area, and the rise in arms trafficking are among the principle causes of this volatile situation. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood had long maintained its support for Palestine. Since Morsi’s election however, the Egyptian army has closed tunnels that run under the border between the Gaza Strip and the Sinai. The efforts undertaken by Morsi’s administration to curb the activities of Hamas, the Palestinian outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1989, have been greater than any by the Mubarak regime.

4. Non-Islamist Opposition

The uprisings and the emergence of Islamists as major players in the political process have also had ramifications for other societal actors. In Egypt, the Coptic church long served as an interlocutor between the regime and the Coptic community. This position allowed the church to bolster its institutional power, making it a locus of political and social activity inside the Coptic community. After the so-called Arab Spring and the proliferation of political parties however, the church is struggling to maintain this control and preserve political structures that existed under Mubarak and his predecessors.

In Tunisia, one problem identified by participants is that civil society networks are overwhelmingly focused on abstract philosophical debates over secularism and the meaning of the civil state rather than articulating specific policies to engage the citizenry. The problem is similar within opposition parties. In both Egypt and Tunisia, the non-Islamist opposition has yet to offer a convincing ideational or policy-based counterproposal to Islamism, instead choosing to engage Islamists where they are most powerful: issues of identity. If these forces want to succeed in contests with Islamists, there was broad agreement that they must work on the levels of both ideas and organization.

The International Context

The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and the changes they have precipitated will impact how these countries interact with other nations and international organizations. Many believed that for the time being, Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood appeared willing to work with an international community that has long been suspicious of Islamists. Additionally, there have not yet been any major breaks with the foreign policies of the authoritarian governments these Islamist parties replaced, for example with respect to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or Iran.

At the same time, the international community has already begun to change its relations with the new governments, particularly as regards financial aid. Most countries are offering financial and administrative support to the new governments and their citizens, and the European Union and its member states hope to encourage democracy building. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States are also offering large aid packages to Egypt and Tunisia.

Additionally, as the countries embark on a new project of state-building and endeavor to write constitutions, they are looking at examples from around the world. Turkey is perhaps the most prominent role model, in part because

the country has now experienced ten years of rule by an elected Islamist party – the Justice and Development Party (*Adelet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP). Iran, Algeria, Pakistan, and other countries that have experienced different forms of Islamist governments, are largely considered models to be avoided. In the case of Tunisia, the relevance of the French model is an important part of discourse on state-building.

1. Muslim Brotherhood Foreign Policy

The Muslim Brotherhood began courting Western governments years before the revolution. Their first major efforts began in 2005, after their success in the parliamentary elections. That year, the Brotherhood launched its English-language website (www.ikhwanweb.com) to demonstrate that the West has nothing to fear from the Islamist movement. In the years that followed, the Muslim Brotherhood increased the scope and frequency of its commentary on Egyptian foreign policy. Additionally, they sought to build relationships with Western NGOs; however, these connections were all informal and sanctioned by the Mubarak government so as not to antagonize the regime. In the post-revolutionary period, the movement continued to introduce itself to the world. President Morsi's first months in office included an ambitious international travel schedule. Freedom and Justice Party delegates also traveled to many countries around the world.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has long maintained its support for Palestine. The Egyptian organization has provided financial support to Hamas since its founding in 1989, but never had organizational power over its Palestinian outgrowth. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood customarily referred to Israel as “the Zionist entity” in their Arabic-language rhetoric and publications, thus denying the legal standing of its neighbor. In 2007, the Egyptian organization began issuing calls for a referendum on the Camp David Accords.

A noticeable change in the Brotherhood's rhetoric emerged following the election of Mohammad Morsi as president. For the first time, prominent voices expressed support for a two-state solution; by recognizing such plans as legitimate, the Brotherhood tacitly recognized the state of Israel. The probability that such statements will greatly influence the opinions of rank-and-file members is limited by the continued circulation of Brotherhood literature that refers to Israel as a Zionist entity.

Hamas was disappointed with the decisions President Morsi made with respect to the Sinai Peninsula and the border with the Gaza Strip. Under his rule, the Egyptian government made a much more concerted effort to close

the smuggling tunnels that run under the border than was undertaken in the Mubarak era. Moreover, some analysts suspect that General el-Sisi, who replaced General Tantawi as Defense Minister and Chairman of SCAF in August 2012, maintains close relationship with his Israeli counterparts. It is thus possible that Morsi's maneuvering to promote el-Sisi also strengthened the channels of communication between the Egyptian and Israeli militaries.

Similarly, it is unlikely that Egypt's relationship with Iran will shift greatly following the electoral success of candidates affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The organization has expressed its desire for 'normal' relations with Iran, and President Morsi travelled to the country in August. Yet his visit was part of a conference and not an official state visit. Notably, his speech there criticized Iran for its role in the continuing conflict in Syria, a position that is widely unpopular in Egypt and one that will likely slow any warming in relations between the two countries in the near future.

2. Western Reactions to the Changes

One survey of experts reported that following the 2011 uprisings, Turkey, followed by the Arab League, Saudi Arabia, and then the European Union, are the four most influential countries or organizations in the Middle East. The EU and its member states are seeking to promote democracy by providing financial support, as well as administrative and political advice, to politicians and activists in the new democratic contexts of Egypt and Tunisia. The European donors, however, are being outspent by the wealthy Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia.

The efforts of both the EU and Germany are more extensive in Tunisia than Egypt. This disparity is partially a result of Tunisia being the first country to bring down its former autocratic leader and the first to hold elections. The Egyptians, unlike the Tunisians, did not invite the EU to observe their elections. European involvement in Egypt is also more limited because of the charges brought against foreign NGO workers, including employees of a German organization in Egypt. Germany's particular ties to Tunisia pre-date the so-called Arab Spring; today there are 280 German companies operating in Tunisia but only 78 in Egypt.

Following the uprisings, the EU is providing economic aid through various initiatives. Integrating the 'three Ms' – money, markets and mobility – into the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is an effort to spur growth in the Arab economies by increasing economic linkages to Europe. The EU's economic aid is complemented by the provision of political and technical support. The EU is

also supporting civil society organizations and endeavoring to engage with grassroots political activists. The goal of this program is to encourage citizens to scrutinize their government and hold it accountable. Finally, the more-for-more principle of the ENP aims to make economic and political aid contingent on the provision of civil rights and liberties: as countries increase (or decrease) the freedoms they guarantee for their citizens, the EU will adjust its aid accordingly.

Germany, in addition to its contributions as an EU member state, is providing direct aid to Tunisia and to Egypt. Germany's bilateral efforts may however be redundant. Furthermore, given that many areas are in need of support or reform, the burden on the states applying for aid increases, as the number of proposals to be submitted increases with each area of possible engagement. Yet Germany's efforts were considered helpful to fill institutional and policy gaps that resulted from uneven implementation of EU policies and poor coordination both among European organizations and between European and other donor nations. Also, Germany as a leader of the EU can influence EU policy. When, for example, Germany accepts Tunisia as a partner, the EU and other member states are more likely to extend aid as well.

3. Examples and Models

Since the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak, Turkey has been discussed as a model Tunisia and Egypt might choose to follow. In the interwar period, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish state, built a secular state safeguarded by the military. Then, in 2002, the AKP, an Islamist party, came to power. Strong institutional checks and balances in many ways curb the powers of the Islamists, but because the Turkish constitution is semi-authoritarian, the AKP has taken on a wide variety of powers over the past ten years. One example mentioned was violations of freedom of the press in the face of unwanted criticism. Despite their rise to power, the Turkish Islamists did not reform policies they had criticized prior to their political success. The AKP was once highly critical of preventing women from wearing headscarves on university campuses, yet in the past ten years they made no substantive changes to this policy.

Turkish participants warned their Egyptian and Tunisian colleagues against taking their country as a role model. Some participants argued that the much-discussed conflict between secularism and religion in Turkey was a red herring. In reality, the Turkish state privileges Sunni Hanafi Islam and takes an active role in its propagation and management. Any attempt to apply

Turkey's lessons must, according to discussants, reflect on this reality. Similarly, Turkish politics are not centered on the secular-religious conflict, but are multipolar, comprising myriad groups who align and re-align around multiple conflict points.

For opponents of Islamist parties, Turkey also offers an instructive case. A number of civil society actors have emerged there, often from the Islamists' own constituencies, to press demands against the government. These groups cannot be captured in the traditional secular-Islamist vocabulary, but instead coalesce around issues of women's rights, transparency, foreign policy, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, among others.

The Turkish case also reveals the role of the West in shaping the discourse concerning Islamist parties. Turkey became the poster child for "moderate Islam" in the American foreign policy establishment after 2001, based on its support for the invasion of Afghanistan and its staunch membership in NATO. Although Turkey and the U.S. fell out over Turkish refusal to participate in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq as well as Turkish policies of accommodation towards Iran and Syria, Turkey's role in the Arab uprising has reestablished its image in the eyes of the West. These shifting positions, however, reveal a key truth, one participant argued: the trumpeting of the Turkish model for Arab countries has essentially become code for hegemonic actors seeking to reinforce existing balances of power and economic arrangements. As the prior discussions had made clear, Islamist groups in Egypt and Tunisia have seemingly acceded to these conditions.

Other Countries

Post-"Arab Spring" discourse presents Iran, Algeria, and Pakistan as the Islamist state models to be avoided. Liberals in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as much of the international community, fear that these countries will follow the Iranian or Algerian model, that the democratic experiment will fail and instead instability and extremism will dominate the political sphere. Egyptian Islamists and non-Islamist revolutionaries insist that their revolution is not an Islamic revolution and that they do not want to impose Khomeini's model of *velayat-e faqih* – the rule of the Islamic jurist. The Pakistani model is raised as a warning by those focused on transnational security issues. Officially, Pakistan works to arrest and expel Taliban members in their territory, yet unofficially there are ties between the government and the organization. The unrest in the Sinai Peninsula is giving rise to fears that a similar scenario could emerge in Egypt.

Thanks to its colonial history, the French model of *laïcité* has long played a role in Tunisian political development. Now many Tunisians are asking whether France is really the most appropriate model for their new constitution. This discussion is particularly strong with respect to the debate over the inclusion of secularism in the new constitution. The French constitution includes a very strict interpretation of secularism. There was agreement that the constitutions of many other well-functioning democracies, including Ireland, Greece, and the United States, offer alternative approaches to the relationship between religion and the state that may prove to be valuable alternatives.

Note

The conference was held under the Chatham House Rule.

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