Department of Political Sciences

Master's Degree in International Relations

Chair of Comparative History of Political Systems

Political Islam and State Relations:

A Comparative Study of The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan

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Introduction

The resurgence of Islamism, commonly referred to as "political Islam", is a crucial phenomenon in the political dynamics of the Arab world and the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa). Even though there are many doubts among scholars on how it can best be defined, the shortest (and most encompassing) definition denotes it as "Islam used to a political end".[1] Besides, this term includes all the movements, parties, and groups that, with their actions, aim to combine religion with politics and incorporate *Shariah*[2] into the legal system, by embracing the concept of *ijtihad*: the independent reasoning and reinterpretation of the Quran and Islamic traditions, and the need to reinterpret the Holy Scriptures and apply them to today's world.[3]

The conventional model of state-based political Islam is then illustrated through the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The Brotherhood is the prototypical modern Islamist movement and an example for many subsequent groups around the Muslim world.[4] Although it started primarily as a social and cultural association, it came to take on a more direct political role. By the 1950s, it had evolved into one of the most powerful opposition currents in the region.[5] Indeed, the movement transformed into a transnational organization, proliferating all over the Arab world.

This dissertation aims to develop a comparative analysis on the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan, two countries in which the movement has

[1] Are Knudsen, "Political Islam in the Middle East," 2003

[2] Commonly translated as Islamic law, the term *Shariah* – whose Arabic root refers to the idea of a "pathway" – refers in its broader sense to the moral and ethical system of the Islamic religion. There is no single, definitive account or source of *Shariah*. Like all legal systems, its practice relies heavily on precedent. For more information, see: Peter Mandaville, "Islam and Politics: History and Key Concepts," in *Islam and Politics* (Routledge, 2020).

[3] *Ibidem.*

[4] Peter Mandaville, "Introduction: Thinking about Islam and Politics in a Global Perspective," in *Islam and Politics* (Routledge, 2020), 1–26.

[5] Alison Pargeter, "Introduction," in *The Muslim Brotherhood: From Opposition to Power* (Saqi Books, 2013), 6–13.

grown differently, as in each nation, the groups were independent of each other, often following different policies adapted to their surroundings.[6] The research aims to answer three essential questions: How and why did the Muslim Brotherhood follow different paths in Egypt and Jordan? What factors have determined their different evolution? And, to what extent was the Arab Spring a turning point for the movement in both countries?

Beyond its academic significance, this inquiry may also possess political relevance in the contemporary world. Indeed, the discourse surrounding political Islam occupies a central position in the processes of stabilization and democratization in the MENA region within an environment characterized by geopolitical tensions, the emergence of new Islamist actors, and the persistent influence of international powers. A historical and comparative analysis will be employed to explain how the Brotherhood behaved differently in the two nations, with particular focus on the internal and external variables that interfered in their evolution, taking into examination the various internal (historical, political, social) and external (geopolitical, foreign interventions) factors that have influenced their trajectory and development. By addressing these topics, this contribution aims at providing more insight on whether some strongly ideological groups may become more moderate as they engage in pluralist practices,[7] or the milieu in which Islamist groups operate and propagate their ideologies is also a determining factor.[8]

While early studies on political Islam concentrated more on the ideological and theological dimension of the integration of Islamic principles into governance, more

[6] Barry Rubin, "Introduction," in *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1–4.
[7] Jillian Schwedler, "Moderation and the Dynamics of Political Change," in *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1–33.
[8] Mohammed Ayoob, "The Future of Political Islam: The Importance of External Variables," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 81, no. 5 (2005): 951–61, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3569069.

recent literature has investigated the pragmatic and contextual nature of Islamist movements, providing insights into the political engagement and strategic changes of Islamist actors. Essential to the study are the works of Carrie Wickham, for example, who highlights the complex motivations of Islamist actors and demonstrates that recent shifts in their rhetoric and behavior cannot be attributed to a single chain of cause and effect, arguing that such shifts bear the imprint of strategic and ideational processes of change occurring simultaneously.[9] Furthermore, Peter Mandaville argues that factors like international political alignment and diasporic communities shape Islamist thought and activism, with some reflections on how these disparate strategies and politics around political Islam are still relevant these days.[10] While there is ample material on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, its counterpart in Jordan has received less attention, particularly in the period following the Arab Spring. Hence, authors as Joas Wagemakers were essential to the study of this branch, as he contributes to the growing body of analysis on the Muslim Brotherhood by concentrating on one context in which the organization operates: the Kingdom of Jordan. His study focuses on how and why the Jordanian Islamist movement has moderated its views and positions on the state and political participation.[11] Additionally, the works of Jillian Schwedler are important as well, focusing on how political parties engage with democracy to broaden their appeal and secure institutional access while maintaining core ideological commitment.[12]

The thesis is divided into three chapters: the initial chapter will introduce the concept of political Islam, delineating its historical roots and predominant ideologies;

[9] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "Conceptualizing Islamist Movement Change," in *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 1–19.
[10] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 1–26.
[11] Joas Wagemakers, "Introduction," in *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1–22.
[12] Jillian Schwedler, *op. cit.*, 1–33.

theoretical approaches and future perspectives on this phenomenon will be discussed. The second chapter will analyze the case of Egypt, from the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood to its experience in power after the Arab Spring. It will examine the challenges encountered by Morsi and the consequences of the post-2013 repression, with particular attention to the role of the elite and the military. The third chapter will focus on the Jordanian branch, emphasizing its strategies of adaptation, its relationship with the monarchy, and its resilience in a political system that has limited its influence without eliminating it. The study will culminate in the formulation of conclusions and an analysis of the impact of the regime's decisions on the trajectory of political Islam in the region and the potential future of the Muslim Brotherhood. The objective of the research is to demonstrate that a singular model of interaction between political Islam and the state does not exist. Rather, the research posits that those institutional variables and the strategies of repression and co-optation play an important role in determining the future of these movements.

Chapter 1

Political Islam: a driving force

Political Islam, often referred to as Islamism, is a large and diverse movement with numerous interpretations, variants, and groups. Although it shares some basic ideological elements, its goal is to create a system of governance rooted in Islamic law, or *Shariah,* as the primary source of legislative jurisdiction and executive decision-making.[13] Political Islam aims to align the political, legal, and social structures of a state with the teachings of Islam, interpreting its principles as a framework for governance and public life. The overreaching objective is to merge religion with state authority. A more precise and analytically useful definition of Islamism describes it as a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives.[14]

1.1 Roots and sociopolitical background

Throughout history, Islamist leaders and parties, as well as ultra-sectarian and violent groups, showed that under the umbrella of the conceptual term of "Islamism" or "Political Islam," a great variety of ideologies and movements were gathered.[15] Even though the underlying idea was for all political movements to align their principles with the Quran, Hadith, and other sacred texts, each movement existed under a unique set of conditions

[13] Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele, "Introduction," in *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond*, ed. Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele (Springer, 2024), 1–21.
[14] Mohammed Ayoobs, *op. cit.*, 951–61.
[15]Bassam Tibi, "Political Islam and Governance the Quest for a Shari'a Order in the Context of Global Democracy: Examining the Assumption of Moderation," in *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe* (Routledge, 2014), 241–63.

about divergent political, social, and cultural norms within each state with its distinct purpose.[16]

From the early years of nation-states in Muslim-majority regions, Islamism has been a key component; even though its dominance has fluctuated, it has remained a constant in Muslim politics: examples include the authoritarian regimes of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, as well as the more liberal Ennahda Party in Tunisia and the Islamic Action Front in Jordan.[17] The political character of Islam already existed in the early Islamic period with the Prophet Muhammad establishing the first Islamic state in Medina, and the later introduction of Caliphs seen as religious but also political leaders. But Islam's focus on politics began to gain importance again in the 1920s, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the pan-Islamic caliphate system that for centuries had offered the Muslim population a sense of belonging.[18]

After the dissolution of the Empire, Britain and France extended their colonial control across the Arab region, and by 1922, the British Empire, the largest in history, controlled 22.6 percent of the world's total land area, encompassing colonies, protectorates, and commonwealth territories.[19] France controlled Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria, while Britain ruled over Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, the Gulf States, India, and Malaysia; together, these two countries held roughly 30 percent of the world's land area, and this

[16] Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, "Political Islam: A Rising Force in the Middle East," *Pakistan Horizon* 66, no. 4 (2013): 21–37, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24711513.
[17] Benham Heidenreuter, "A Critical Assessment on Political Islam and Political Islamism," in *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond*, ed. Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele (Springer, 2024), 45–59.
[18] Khaled Hroub, "Introduction," in *Political Islam: Ideology and Practice*, ed. Khaled Hroub (London: Saqi, 2012), 5–15.
[19] Fatemah Alzubairi, "On Imperialism, Colonialism, and Neo-Colonialism," in *Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism, and Anti-Terrorism Law in the Arab World* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 19–49.

massive spread of European colonialism created a general worldwide pattern of Western domination.[20]

When colonial powers established their control, political, social, economic, and cultural challenges emerged; they were caused by factors such as the growth of global capitalism, the creation of ex-novo nation-states, the dissatisfaction with the economic situation, and the blending of cultures and identities:[21] these shifts were determined by the wide interaction between Europe and the peoples of the Middle East.

In the aftermath of World War II, the occupying forces, being politically and economically exhausted, started withdrawing their military forces from their colonies. Although these powers maintained strong ties with local elites and access to market manipulation, they left a political vacuum in many parts of the world, which were left without a solid constitutional and governance foundation.[22] Indeed, the key issue in the post-Ottoman Arab world's struggle against colonialism was how convincingly regions could unite their people, and on what terms, against colonial rulers who often denied the existence of such a unified population. Finding answers to these challenges was never straightforward, and the role of anticolonial nationalism, national culture, and religion in this effort sparked intense debate throughout the area.[23]

Pan-Arab nationalism started developing in the Arab world in the 1930s, fueled principally by the struggle for Palestine. Arab nationalists mainly argued that the Arabs formed a unified country with key national characteristics such as a common language, a shared cultural history, and a collective memory of greatness throughout the Arab-Islamic

[20] Joel Benin and Joe Stark, "On the Modernity, Historical Specificity, and International Context of Political Islam," in *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report* (University of California Press, 1996), 3–25.
[21] *Ibidem.*
[22] Fatemah Alzubairi, *op. cit.*, 19-49.
[23] Ussama Makdisi, "Colonial Pluralism," in *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (University of California Press, 2019), 113–26.

empires, for instance, attempts to unify Arab states took place, most notably in 1958 when the United Arab Republic was created, a short-lived union of Egypt and Syria that terminated in 1961.[24] In these circumstances, rising nationalist movements such as Egypt's Wafd Party and Syria's Ba'ath Party played important roles in fighting colonial rule and advocating for independence. The Wafd Party was one of modern Egypt's most significant political forces, founded during the Great Revolution of 1919, a wide nationalist revolt involving almost all Egyptian society. With limited success, its leaders aimed to transform the surge of nationalist sentiment into a structured and long-lasting movement that served as a tool for organized mass activism and electoral mobilization designed to pressure the imperial powers to cede authority. [25]

Likewise, the Ba'ath Party, established in 1947 by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, united Arab nationalism and socialist beliefs, promoting Arab unity and rejecting colonial influences. The prominent Arab nationalist organization felt the same about the connection between nationalism and organic political unity[26]. For instance, the opening article of the party constitution promulgated in 1947 unequivocally declares: "The Arabs form one nation. This nation has the natural right to live in a single state. [As such] the Arab Fatherland constitutes an indivisible political and economic unity. No Arab country can live apart from the others."[27] Its philosophy, which sought to establish a pan-Arab state and promote social justice, land reform, and economic modernization, resonated

[24] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Historical Context of State Formation in the Middle East Structure and Agency," in *The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System*, ed. and Jasmine K. Gani (Routledge, 2019), 21–37.
[25] *Ivi,* "The Reemergence of the Wafd Party: Glimpses of the Liberal Opposition in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 01 (March 1984): 99–121, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020743800027628.
[26] Adeed Dawisha, "Defining Arab Nationalism," in *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 2–13.
[27] "The Constitution of the Arab Resurrection. (Ba'th) Socialist Party of Syria on JSTOR," 2024, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4323109.

extensively throughout the Arab world and it became an influential force in the post-colonial period, particularly after it won power in Syria in 1963 and Iraq in 1968.

Furthermore, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's president from 1954 to 1970, was a charismatic leader who strongly supported these ideas. His theory, Nasserism, fused Arab nationalism, pan-Arab unity, and socialism. Under his leadership, Egypt became the political and cultural hub of the Arab world, with Nasser's legacy shaping aspirations for Arab unity, opposing foreign influence, and redefining Arab identity. [28]

With Nasser's rise to power, Egypt was eager to embrace a more socialist ideology, including the nationalization of vital resources and land redistribution. This trend was opposed to Western power; in fact, Nasser and his colleagues opposed a defensive alliance with the West because they thought it contrary to the national interest of the Arab world.[29] In this environment, the MENA region was an object of interest for the two superpowers of the Cold War; this area caught attention because it was rich in resources, particularly in the energy sector. With the availability of oil, both the US and Russia tried to gain influence in the region, looking for allies, causing a schism among countries that were more inclined to assist the United States, such as Saudi Arabia and the Shah of Iran, or the Soviet Union, such as Egypt. Furthermore, the Baghdad Pact (1955) demonstrated this rift; it was a defensive deal for promoting shared political, military, and economic goals founded in 1955 by Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan, Iran, and its main purpose was to prevent communist incursions and foster peace in the Middle East.[30]

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[28] Adeed Dawisha, *op. cit*., 2-13

[29] Walter Z. Laqueur, "1955: The Arms Deal," in *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* (Routledge, 2021), 211–28.

[30] Bureau of Public Affairs Department of State. The Office of Electronic Information, "The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)," 2001-2009.state.gov, January 7, 2008, https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/98683.htm.

The Pact did not directly endanger Egyptian interests and Colonel Nasser's rule, but it certainly made it more difficult for him to carry out his plans for the Arab world.[31]

In the same year, this polarization took a back seat with the Bandung Conference (1955), in which twenty-nine African and Asian nations aimed to promote unity among emerging countries and create an alternative to the Cold War blocs. This crucial conference resulted in a type of anticolonial solidarity, as did the membership of some nations of the region in the Non-aligned Movement, in which countries were not explicitly associated with or against any major power bloc. It could also be shown that Nasser's road to the eminently respectable Bandung Conference in 1955 eventually led to the 1957 meeting in Cairo (the "solidarity conference" of the Afro-Asian peoples) which was anything but neutralist.[32] However, Egypt's neutrality, it was feared, would give way to positive neutralism (positive toward the Soviet Union), and this, in turn, would gradually lead toward open hostility to the West and a close alliance with the Soviet bloc.[33]

Nasser and Nehru stood at the apogee of non-alignment and positive neutrality, representing a "third way" between competing superpowers. Their policies demonstrated that charting an independent course had political and material benefits. Increasingly, non-aligned and aligned states borrowed their tactics to extract aid and support from their power-bloc sponsors.[34]

However, after independence, weak institutions and continued external interferences undermined long-term governance and stability. It was during this tumultuous period that political Islam began to rise in response to foreign dominance. Many Muslims sought to

[31] Walter Z. Laqueur, *op. cit*., 211–28.
[32] *Ibidem.*
[33] *Ibidem.*
[34] Roby C. Barrett, "1958 – the New Order and Reconsiderations," in *The Greater Middle East and the Cold War* (I.B. Tauris, 2007), 40–62.

reaffirm their national and cultural identities, and while nationalism addressed these concerns to some extent, Islamism also emerged as a movement critiquing the moral and cultural decline they attributed to Western influence on the Muslim world.

1.2 Key ideologies and leading theorists

The basic ideology of political Islam refers to religion that is generally viewed as a holistic, totalizing system whose prescriptions permeate every aspect of daily life.[35] Islamists, as it will be demonstrated, often differ in their methods and priorities: some advocate gradualist approaches, while others are more revolutionary.[36] Their efforts to transform society are at least partly motivated by the conviction that the West is attempting to destroy their society by destroying Islam. In this context, "the West" includes both Western Europe and the Soviet Union, who were seen as playing out their superpower competition in the Muslim world. Thus, whether the ruler was a king who cooperated with the Western bloc or a military ruler cooperating with the Eastern bloc, the effect on the Muslim world was the same: the gradual eclipse of Islam.[37] Eventually, Islamist ideology comprised the description of a problem (weakness of the *ummah*), a solution (Islamic state), and a call for action by different means (violent and non-violent).[38] With these premises, ideologists like Hassan al-Banna (1906–49), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi (1903–79), the creator of the Jama'at-i Islami (JI) party in Pakistan, and Sayyid Qutb, another prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood, engaged in the initial conceptualization of Political Islam

[35] Peter Mandaville, "State Formation and the Making of Islamism," in *Islam and Politics* (Routledge, 2020), 64–120.
[36] *Ibidem.*
[37] Tamara Sonn, "Islamic Fundamentalism and Political Islam," *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (December 21, 2005): 181–85, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2005.00125.x.
[38] Raymond Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, 21–37.

emphasizing the importance of Islamic nationalism, social morality, and justice in society.[39]

Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) was the founding father and first leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the largest and most important Islamic movement in the Arab Middle East, founded in 1928 and still active in Egypt and other Muslim countries from Jordan and Yemen to Nigeria and Indonesia.[40] He started operating in *Ismailiyah*, a town located on the Suez Canal that, at the time, was overrun with the signs of alien military, economic, and cultural domination.[41] This is one reason why Banna became increasingly skeptical of the shifts in morals and values in his country under Western domination. In his view, these changes represented a move away from "true Islam," which he believed had led to the decline of Muslim society and made it more vulnerable to the moral corruption brought by Westernization[42]. In response, he began his efforts by delivering lectures and teaching classes in his free time at local mosques, community halls, and coffeehouses, as his reputation as a powerful speaker grew, he was invited to speak in private homes to smaller, more intimate gatherings.

He believed that the solution to the decline of Muslim society lay in reviving "true Islam." This involved purifying the *ummah*'s (community) beliefs and practices, which, according to al-Banna, should be achieved through the gradual creation of an Islamic state that corrected doctrine, encouraged reform, and fully implemented *Shariah*. Al-Banna was also among the first to introduce the concept of *hakimiyya*, e.g., "sovereignty belongs

[39] Shahram Akbarzadeh, "The Paradox of Political Islam," in *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam* (Routledge, 2012), 1–8.
[40] Gudrun Krämer, "Hasan Al-Banna: The Pivot of His Universe," in *Hasan Al-Banna* (Oneworld Publications, 2014), 83–122.
[41] L. Carl Brown, "Al-Banna, Mawdudi and Qutb," in *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2000), 143–61.
[42] *Ibidem.*

to God."[43] This idea, later adopted by other theorists, is a fundamental principle of Islamic thought, emphasizing divine authority over human rule. It positions all political, social, and legal systems within the framework of Islamic teachings. Overall, these elements formed the core of his ideology, which blended anti-colonial resistance and rejection of Western cultural and political dominance with a call for renewed religious commitment and Islamic unity. He saw *da'wa* (inviting others to Islam) as a means to promote spiritual revival and societal change, aiming to build a united Islamic community capable of resisting foreign influence and reclaiming its independence and identity. His approach sought to maintain a deep respect for Islamic tradition while offering practical solutions for the socio-political challenges of his era.[44]

Hasan al-Banna was not an original thinker; instead, he was an activist who essentially "put to work" what Muslim reformers had advocated for decades, though he did so in his way.[45] In this regard, his views on issues such as the Islamic state were not articulated as systematically or thoroughly as those of some of his contemporaries. He emphasized the practical side of Islamism and, in this regard, is much better viewed as an instigator, organizer, and activist rather than as a theorist intellectual. It should be said at the outset that Hassan al-Banna's primary emphasis was never on the establishment of an Islamic state, nor did he view the government as the primary agent of Islamization, although later Muslim Brotherhood's thinkers certainly would go this route. Rather, Banna's vision foresaw a multi-stage program of education, social reform, and, eventually, Islamic governance.[46]

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[43] Andrea Mura, "A Genealogical Inquiry into Early Islamism: The Discourse of Hasan Al-Banna," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 17, no. 1 (February 2012): 61–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2012.644986
[44] L. Carl Brown, *op. cit*., 143-61.
[45] Gudrun Krämer, *op. cit*., 83–122.
[46] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 64-120.

If al-Banna is remembered as the outsider voice in Egypt about Arab nationalism, the same can be said of the Islamist ideologue Abul A'la al-Maududi (1903-1979) in India. Maududi's pragmatic inclination was evident when, at the time of the partition of India in 1947, he chose to remain in the part of the country that had later become Pakistan. He dedicated himself to the cause of reinforcing the heritage and status of India's Muslims, working for the proper Islamization of Pakistan and acting to ensure that the new country's status as an Islamic state was reflected in the adoption of a properly Islamic system and political order rather than in a more mundane sense of Muslim nationalism.[47]

In 1941, Maududi created Jamaat-e-Islami, a prominent Islamic political and social organization that focused on education, social welfare, and political activism and has been involved in both electoral politics and grassroots campaigns. The party promoted the idea of Islamic revivalism, calling for a return to a society based on Islamic values while opposing secularism and Western-style governance. It had branches in several countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, where it has played a significant role in political and social movements.[48]

The fundamental building block of Maududi's political theory was the idea that sovereignty belonged exclusively to God. No worldly political power, therefore, could be truly sovereign. Although the arrangements of a given social setting may invest certain individuals (kings, sultans, presidents) with political authority, they were never sovereign over the people,[49]and the nature and purpose of human political agency was to bring about a social order reflective of divine ordinance. In this regard, he envisioned democracy in his model of the Islamic state by proposing a "democratic caliphate" or "theo-democracy"

[47] L. Carl Brown, *op. cit*., 143-161.
[48] *Ibidem.*
[49] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 64-120.

(a democracy governed by divine law).[50] He introduced the idea that political authority would rest with the people but within the framework of divine law and where governance is guided by divine principles through consultation (*shura*), rejecting the concept of political parties, opposition, or elections as they are unnecessary in an ideal Islamic state.[51] Leaders in this system had to be both competent and pious, disqualifying those who actively sought power, as governance was a duty, not a privilege. Islam, according to this vision, encompassed all aspects of life, leaving no room for secular or religiously neutral institutions.[52] The divine will, in turn, was derived from the scripture revealed by God (Quran) and the traditions of his messenger Muhammad (Sunna).[53]

The third thinker addressed is the Egyptian intellectual and prominent leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), an essential figure to examine when considering political Islam. Qutb's ideological journey evolved from a form of revivalism, characterized by renewed interest in traditional beliefs, to a more radical ideology. This is the reason why he has become, lately, a source of inspiration for the more radical wing inside the wide group of Islamist parties across the regions.

A milestone in Qutb's intellectual undertaking to radical Islamism was the two years (1949–1950) he spent in the United States. Soon after his return, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood, and from that time until his execution in 1966, Qutb had a mission: to formulate in writing and implement in action what he believed to be God's plan for mankind[54]. Qutb's experience in the United States likely heightened his perception of a clash of civilizations—an embattled Islam facing a threatening West. It reinforced his

[50] Abdelwahab El-Affendi, "Umma, State and Movement: Events That Shaped the Modern Debate," in *Political Islam: Ideology and Practice*, ed. Khaled Hroub (London: Saqi, 2012), 16–32.
[51] L. Carl Brown, *op. cit*., 143-161.
[52] *Ibidem.*
[53] Benham Heidenreuter, *op. cit.*, 45-59.
[54] L. Carl Brown, *op. cit*., 143-161.

conviction that the Islamic way of life was humanity's only path to salvation from the depths of godless capitalism,[55] and to some extent, this may have accelerated his intellectual shift toward Islamist radicalism.[56]

This evolution of thought is evident in his emphasis on the need for a committed vanguard of Muslims to lead revolutionary change, as outlined in his seminal works, *Milestones* and *Shade of the Quran*. This vanguard would play a pivotal role in implementing Islamic principles and guiding societal transformation, serving as agents of both political and religious change. Within this framework, the concept of *jihad* (struggle) emerged as central. Qutb regarded it to protect believers, remove barriers obstructing the *da 'wa* (the call to Islam), and establish an Islamic system that liberates humanity from all forms of authority except that of God.[57]

Central to his ideology, then, is the principle of *Tawhid*—the oneness of God—which he highlighted as the foundation for organizing all aspects of human life according to divine guidance.[58] Like the other intellectuals, Qutb rejected the concept of human sovereignty, claiming that God alone had the authority to judge and legislate (*hakimiyya*). Moreover, a key aspect of his thought was his reinterpretation of the term *jahiliyya* (ignorance). The expression was originally used to describe the era before God's message was revealed to Muhammad, but Qutb expanded it to refer not to a historical period but to a condition that can arise at any time, indeed, in his view, even self-identified Muslims

[55] Adnan A. Musallam, "Qutb's Experiences and Impressions in America, 1948-1950, and His Return, 1950-1952," in *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* (Praegers Publishers, 2005), 112–36.
[56] *Ibidem*
[57] Ana Belén Soage, "Islamism and Modernity: The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 2 (June 2009): 189–203, https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760903119092.
[58] *Ibidem.*

who failed to follow God's comprehensive plan for life were living in a state of *jahiliyya*.[59]

In essence, Qutb's mature political theory as worked out in his many writings throughout the 1950s and 1960s, may be seen as a rigorously logical and consistent development of these three concepts: *jahiliyya, hakimiyya, and jihad*. As Brown explains:

> God's sovereignty (hakimiyya) is exclusive. Men are to obey God alone. Men are to obey only rulers who obey God. A ruler who obeys God faithfully follows God's mandate. That mandate is clear and comprehensive. It is available for mankind's guidance in the Shariah. To set aside that clear and comprehensible divine mandate is to lapse into jahiliyya. Rulers who so act are to be resisted. Resistance under these circumstances is a legitimate act of jihad. The rulers claim that being a Muslim ruling a Muslim state is null and void.[60]

Following this reasoning, Qutb appeared to be urging for the emergence of a new "Qur'anic generation", modeled on the example of the Prophet's companions, who were forced to rely on their direct experience and first-hand knowledge of revelation rather than on blind *taqlid* (emulation) of figures claiming religious authority.[61] Qutb's activism led to his arrest by the Egyptian government, and he was executed in 1966, yet his ideas are still relevant in modern Islamic political philosophy.

[59] L. Carl Brown, *op. cit*., 143-161.
[60] *Ibidem.*
[61] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 64-120.

It is important to recognize that while these three figures were prominent for their ideas and continue to influence many today, their thoughts have not remained static. Over time, especially in modern contexts, their ideologies have inspired the emergence of various movements. Additionally, political Islam includes a diverse spectrum of ideologies, with some closely aligned to these foundational concepts and others taking significantly different directions.

1.3 Political Islam in contemporary times

After colonial powers withdrew from the Middle East, Arab nationalists took over in several Arab countries in the 1950s and 1960s by promising the masses that they would catch up with the West, develop the economy, and liberate Palestine. Two decades later, none of these promises had been kept, and the countries were still unable to generate sufficient wealth to supply the people's needs.[62] Many people came to view it as a propaganda tool used to control societies and distract from the self-serving actions of ruling elites focused only on staying in power. By the 1970s, Islamism emerged as a popular alternative political ideology.[63]

Despite a century of continuous intellectual and political efforts, Arab nationalism achieved very little in uniting the "Arab nation", leading to many explanations from both its critics and supporters. Nationalist leaders opposed Western culture while, paradoxically, adopting its educational system; they promoted local culture but did so selectively, removing elements that they believed hindered national unity and strength.[64]

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[62] Lahouari Addi, "The Ideological Limitations of Radical Arab Nationalism," in *Radical Arab Nationalism and Political Islam*, trans. Anthony Roberts (Georgetown University Press, 2017), 125–65.
[63] Peter Wien, "Introduction: A Critique of Arab Nationalism," in *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (Routledge, 2017), 1–20.
[64] L. Carl Brown, "The Return of Islam?" in *Religion and State the Muslim Approach to Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 123–34.

In newly independent countries where mass participation and violent struggle were part of the fight against colonial powers, socialist ideas often emerged; these ideas focused on involving the poor in economic production and distribution. However, governments in these countries, whether democratic or authoritarian, struggled to drive rapid economic development because they lacked the strength and organization to mobilize their people effectively, making them "soft states".[65]

Another major issue was ignored: younger generations were being influenced by secular, modern, and centralized nationalist ideas, moving away from the traditions and values of their elders. These young people were promised equality and opportunities in the changing societies, but reality did not match these expectations[66]. Many graduates from new schools and universities struggled to find jobs or couldn't find any at all. Attempts at democratization, driven by populist ideals, failed; instead, power became concentrated in autocratic governments, military regimes, single-party elites, or lifelong rulers.[67] These rulers often pledged to establish democracy, promote economic progress, and resolve the Arab Israeli conflict in favor of the displaced Palestinians. However, as these promises went unfulfilled, Muslim nations fell deeper into economic and political instability, often categorized as "Third World" conditions, adding to the fact that Palestinians remained stateless and endured injustice. Some reformers began attributing these failures to the secular nature of their governments. [68]

It should be noted that the Cold War contributed to the growth of an anti-Israel sentiment, fueled also by the US actions. Already in 1955, the Israeli attack on Gaza

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[65] Fazlur Rahman, "Contemporary Modernism," in *Islam and Modernity Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 2017), 84–129.
[66] L. Carl Brown*, op. cit*., 123-134
[67] *Ibidem.*
[68] Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh, "Reflections on Arab Nationalism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 4 (October 1996): 367–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209608701135.

demonstrated Egypt's weakness. Colonel Nasser simply had to get arms and since the Western powers had refused them, or had supplied them in insufficient quantities, or had made the supply dependent on unacceptable conditions, Nasser was driven into the Soviet embrace, once again.[69] Moreover, the Israeli pre-emptive strike on Egypt at the start of the Six-Day War had a dramatic impact on US relations with the Arab world. Indeed, the Egyptian president openly charged that US carrier-based aircraft participated in the initial Israeli aerial attacks that gained command of the skies and thereby essentially won the war at its outset.[70]

The Six-Day War in 1967 marked a major setback for Arab Nationalism and Nasserist Pan-Arabism, which had already been weakened since the 1961 collapse of the Egypt-Syria union (United Arab Republic).[71] During the same period, other Muslim countries faced political turmoil and conflict. Indonesia's 1965 coup led to mass killings, Nigeria's 1966 coups and the secession of Biafra triggered a civil war, and Pakistan suffered internal instability culminating in the 1971 creation of Bangladesh after a war with India. Turkey and Iran also faced military interventions and unrest. Intra-Muslim conflicts, such as the Iraq-Iran war (1980–1988), border disputes, and the 1991 Gulf War, further deepened divisions within the Muslim world.[72] The demographic factor contributed to all these challenges: population growth and population transfer (rural to urban but also the millions of Muslims seeking their economic El Dorado in the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula or Europe) during these years reached unprecedented intensities.[73] The

[69] Walter Z. Laqueur, "1955: The Arms Deal," in *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* (Routledge, 2021), 211–28.
[70] Peter L. Hahn, "The Cold War and the Six Day War," in *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967–73*, ed. Nigel J. Ashton (Routledge, 2007).
[71] L. Carl Brown, *op. cit*., 123-134
[72] *Ibidem.*
[73] *Ibidem.*

millions of people coming into the Muslim world and the millions moving about the region increased exponentially the magnitude of all problems to be tackled. These massive physical, mental, and psychic changes taking place at an ever-increasing rate produced a systemic overload so extreme as to threaten complete breakdown.[74] During this period, economic and political expectations were rising rapidly, but actual living conditions failed to keep up. Members of the aspiring middle class, while better off than those in extreme poverty in rural areas, began to compare themselves to the political elite, shaping their sense of social identity around this gap. Within these features, political sociologists have shown that such unstable conditions often lead to "contentious politics," where oppositional social movements and unrest are likely to emerge.[75]

Many Arabs and Middle East specialists opt for the defeat of Arab armies against Israel in 1967 as the turning point for the subsequent rise of political Islam: during those six days in June Israeli forces routed the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and occupied the entire Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, and all of what had been Mandate Palestine up to the Jordan River. [76]

The defeat of Arab armies by Israel and the opening of the Egyptian economy to world markets during the "Open Door" policy under Sadat all provided Arabs with a sense of growing inefficacy over their political fate[77]. The Arabs may well have blundered into war with Israel that June, but once they were in the thick of it, they expected more than in 1948.[78] Most assumed that they had been strengthened, not weakened, by nearly two

[74] L. Carl Brown, *op. cit*., 123-134
[75]Peter Mandaville, "Islam in the System: The Evolution of Islamism as Political Strategy," in *Islam and Politics* (Routledge, 2020), 121–209.
[76] *Ibidem.*
[77] Martin Kramer, "Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity," in *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival the Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (Routledge, 2017), 19–50.
[78] *Ibidem.*

decades of Nasser and the Ba'th, social revolution, and the militarization of politics, all under the banner of Arab nationalism and the struggle against Israel. Instead, they got less: a truly ignominious defeat, delivered in six days.[79] In addition, while the world focused on the Cold War, the Arab world was embroiled in conflict with Israel, leading to political instability and violence. In this framework, many saw Islamism as the solution.

In popular opinion, Islamists entered the electoral arena with a strong reputation for opposing previous regimes, often at great personal cost, enduring frequent crackdowns and imprisonment. Many viewed them as less corrupt due to their religious principles and more capable of addressing basic needs through their extensive networks of charities and social services.

By the 1990s, as economic and political crises hit authoritarian regimes, some sought legitimacy by allowing Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in politics—such as in Jordan in 1989 and Egypt in 1990.[80] Additionally, the end of the Cold War fueled the resurgence of Islamic politics in regions where Islam had been heavily suppressed for decades.

But the political Islam's influence did not emerge overnight, nor did they suddenly appear on the political scene of multiple countries. It is important to note that these Islamist groups, initially largely repressed by the ruling governments, began to gain recognition through various activities in community organizing and charity work. Indeed, informal networks of voluntary associations and neighborhood groups became the new norm. If the state and the "modern economy" could not provide, then neighborhoods and urban quarters would become largely self-sufficient.[81] For instance, in Egypt, previously,

[79] Martin Kramer, *op. cit.*, 19–50.
[80] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit.*, 64-120.
[81] *Ibidem.*

university graduates could rely on government jobs through various job guarantee programs once they completed their studies, and the state provided free healthcare to all citizens. However, the reform process that began under Sadat aimed to develop the private sector after years of socialist policies under Nasser. When the international community, particularly the IMF, became involved after 1987, the economic reforms turned into a comprehensive structural adjustment program.[82] Egypt faced pressure to reduce its large public sector, which included privatizing some state-owned companies. This created a need for these types of networks and charity hubs.

These structures laid the foundation for the rise of political Islam. Indeed, its upsurge in the modern world is linked to the emergence of these types of networks, which began, for instance, in Egypt in the 1920s with groups like the Young Muslim Men's Association (YMMA) and the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*).[83]

Since the 1950s, Islamist groups have been a constant presence, and their expansion was fueled by reactions to colonial domination, cultural displacement, and the inability of secular and nationalist governments to solve socio-economic issues. Most of the population shared the belief that poverty, unemployment, and corruption were caused by the decline in moral values in society. [84] In this environment, Islamist movements demonstrated their ability to connect with communities through social services, governance, and anti-corruption initiatives. Although these movements promoted the unity of the Muslim community, they often still maintained nationalist tendencies. By the end of the 1980s, Islamic charities had proliferated and demonstrated considerable

[82] Jocelyne Cesari, "Political Islam: The Nexus of State, Religion, and Nation," in *What Is Political Islam?* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2018), 1–13.
[83]Basheer M Nafi, "Islam and Politics," in *The Islamists: A Contextual History of Political Islam* (Afro-Middle East Centre, 2017), 1–11.
[84] Lahouari Addi, *op. cit.*, 125-165.

efficacy, recognizing the potential to create an "Islamic sector" to provide essential welfare and charity services. For instance, when Cairo suffered a devastating earthquake in 1992, the Islamic relief services were on the scene and dispensing aid hours before the state was able to mobilize its emergency services – prompting one government official to voice concerns that the Islamists had created a "state within a state".[85]

The success of Islamist organizations began to attract considerable attention, especially after the Iranian revolution, which became a key example of political Islam in action. Led by Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolution overthrew the Pahlavi monarchy and established an Islamic government. This event symbolized the growing influence of political Islam in the Middle East. The revolution succeeded partly due to widespread dissatisfaction with the existing regime, which was viewed as corrupt and too closely tied to Western powers. It also reflected a broader shift in the region, where nationalism, which had once united many countries, was starting to decline.[86] In this context, political Islam was seen as a solution to identity crises and as a new force emerging after the decline of both colonialism and communism.

With the onset of the Arab Spring, political Islam underwent significant changes, with Islamist movements becoming more present in several countries. The uprisings, which started in late 2010 and spread throughout the Arab world, demanded more political freedom, social justice, and economic reform. Islamist parties seized the opportunity to engage more actively in the political process, capitalizing on their organizational strength and widespread grassroots support. The Islamists' dream of ruling materialized around 2012 in the context of the Arab Spring, first in Tunisia, then in Libya, and for a short

[85] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 121-209.
[86] Beverly Milton-Edwards*, op. cit*., 243-255.

period of one year, in Egypt. [87] Islamists understood more than before that the young generations needed economic benefits, individual freedom and the need for legitimation through elections. In contrast to the globalist Islamists, the "Islamo-liberals" accepted borders and the national states. Except for al-Qaeda and similar groups, most Islamist movements have been shifting from jihadism to institutionalism, however, without abandoning secrecy as a structure of their organization. In this context, *Shariah* constitutionalism replaces violent *jihad*.[88] For instance, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, won the country's first free elections, with Mohamed Morsi becoming president in 2012. By the same token, Tunisia saw the Ennahda Party gaining importance and emerging as a key player in the post-revolutionary political landscape[89]. These movements sought to balance Islamic principles with democratic governance, inaugurating a new era for political Islam in the region.

The Arab Spring led to the dissolution of authoritarian regimes in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Islamist groups were often among the most organized political forces in the region, thanks to grassroots networks they had established over decades of opposing authoritarian rule. This expertise gave them the skills to take advantage of the newly opened political space. When, after the uprisings, many countries held their first free elections in decades, Islamist parties exploited this opportunity and gained significant seats in parliament, with some even taking control of the government. This marked a shift toward a larger role for political Islam in the region. However, the rise of political Islam after the Arab Spring also faced major challenges, including internal

[87] Bassam Tibi, *op. cit*., 241–63.
[88] *Ibidem.*
[89] *Ibidem.*

divisions, ideological conflicts, and tensions between Islamist and secular forces. In many cases, Islamist-led governments were short-lived, with military coups or popular uprisings pushing back against their agenda.

Overall, despite these challenges, the Arab Spring was a crucial moment for political Islam, giving Islamist movements a platform to shape the political conversation in the MENA region. The aftermath showed both the potential and limitations of political Islam in a rapidly changing environment. While some Islamist parties tried to adapt to democratic norms, others struggled with the realities of governing, leading to internal splits and external opposition, making even more visible the ongoing challenge for political Islam (e.g. finding a balance between Islamic values and the demands of modern, diverse societies)[90]. In a way, Islamism represented the opposite of the old, unpopular political order and gave many people hope for a different future. However, the slow pace of change under Islamist-led governments led many, especially in Egypt, to question their earlier support.[91] It is also evident that social spaces and voluntary, often informal, networks emerged as important politicized spaces for the contestation of policy, morality, and the social order.[92]

In post-revolutionary Tunisia and Egypt, Islamist parties were able to capitalize early on their comparative advantage in terms of political organization, their ability to successfully represent themselves as consistent (and often oppressed) critics of the previous status quo, and their claim – by proximity to religious values – to be free of corruption and unethical politics. However, since 2013, there has been the advent of a new regional geopolitics around political Islam.[93] More specifically, one bloc of countries

[90] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 121-209.
[91] *Ibidem.*
[92] *Ibidem.*
[93] *Ibidem.*

– composed of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt – have sought to portray groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood as terrorists equivalent to ISIS and Al-Qaeda and to systematically eradicate Islamism as a force in Arab societies. On the other side is a group led by Turkey's AKP and Qatar that broadly aligns itself with Islamist forces. In other words, beyond the question of whether Islamists have domestic space in which to operate, their political fortunes soon would also be a function of broader regional political cleavages and rivalries.[94]

1.4 Evolution and future perspectives

All Islamists share the belief that Islam is the perfect religion and the sole foundation for a harmonious society, considering themselves as reformers.[95] However, they can be divided into two distinct groups: those who support a peaceful approach to social transformation through *da'wah*, tending to use institutions and elections for legitimacy, and those who believe that only violent revolution can achieve their objectives. This extremist faction relies on covert cells and violent actions to pursue their goals.

Traditionalists identify standard Islamic legal codes with *Shariah,* they equate those codes with God's eternal and unchanging will for humanity as revealed in the Quran and the Sunna (the example set by the Prophet Muhammad and transmitted by chains of authority in non-Qur'anic reports called *Hadith*)[96]. The most famous Islamist groups that have adopted violent tactics to achieve their goals are, for instance, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS).[97] These radical or anti-system parties can be defined as organizations that oppose the regime on principle and consider several aspects of the ruling regime as

[94] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 121-209.
[95] Tamara Sonn, *op. cit*., 181-185.
[96] *Ibidem.*
[97] Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele, *op. cit*., 1-21.

illegitimate. While they usually tend to have weak democratic credentials, they may be advocates of democratization in authoritarian regimes.[98] The term used to refer to these groups is "fundamentalism," which concerns the conviction that scriptures are the authoritative source not only of doctrine but also of scientific and historical knowledge and the concomitant rejection of historical or scientific data that conflicts with the contents of scripture[99]. Fundamentalists also hold that living under secular law is fundamentally incompatible with a truly Islamic way of life, trusting in divine rewards for adhering to the governance model established by the Prophet Muhammad and in punishment for those who deviate.[100] Many jihadi Islamists draw their ideological inspiration from Sayyid Qutb. The most extreme contemporary examples of jihadist political Islam are the Egyptian Islamic Jihad led by Ayman al-Zawahiri and Gama'a Islamiyya led by imprisoned cleric Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman.[101]

On the other hand, progressive Islamists often distinguish between *Shariah* and *Fiqh*, the term used to describe the changing human interpretations of God's revealed will. They believe that the *Shariah* cannot be changed, but human interpretations of it can and must be changed to deal effectively with changing conditions throughout human history.[102] Instead, progressives view cooperation with people of other faiths as part of the Qur'an's vision for religious diversity and aim to reform society by integrating Islamic principles into governance to foster justice, harmony, and prosperity. Unlike the radicals, they have sought to make progress toward an Islamic political order via political

[98] Günes Murat Tezcür, "The Moderation Theory Revisited," *Party Politics* 16, no. 1 (August 3, 2009): 69–88, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809339536.
[99] Tamara Sonn, *op. cit*., 181-185.
[100] *Ibidem.*
[101] *Ibidem.*
[102] Peter Mandaville, "Radical Islamism and Jihad: Beyond the Nation-State," in *Islam and Politics* (Routledge, 2020), 343–88.

(electoral, legislative, power-sharing) or social (civil society, informal networking) means.[103] Progressive Islamists advocate updating Islamic law to address modern realities. They emphasize *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to reinterpret the foundational texts of Islamic law considering contemporary society. [104] Observers have variously described this group as "new Islamists" or "moderate Islamists". The term "new" serves as shorthand for Islamists who have embraced the legitimacy of procedural democracy, even though their commitment to a more comprehensive understanding of democracy remains uncertain in some cases[105].

While some of these groups originate from and, in some cases, maintain ties to traditional "old" Islamist parties, the driving force behind this new spirit of active engagement largely comes from the younger generation. This evolution has occasionally resulted in alliances and coalitions with non-Islamist parties that share a commitment to democratic reform, indeed, whereas first-generation Islamists might have dismissed such cooperation as politically untenable, the new Islamists have adopted a pragmatic stance, recognizing that actively shaping the push for reform is far more impactful than remaining on the sidelines.[106] Nevertheless, it needs to be said that the jihadists are the minority of Islamists, while the majority accept the mainstream Islamic rejection of violence except in self-defense or as a last resort, as well as the Islamic prohibition of violence against non-combatants.

This scenario invites to examine the debates and contestations between the two groups, placing them within the broader context of Islam's engagement with modernity. The disagreements between reformists and traditionalists over the definition of "true

[103] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit.*, 343-88.
[104] *Ivi, op. cit*., 121-209.
[105] *Ibidem.*
[106] *Ibidem.*

Islam" are widely recognized as key examples of this encounter. These disputes have taken on diverse forms across different socio-political contexts in the Muslim world, leading to varied expressions of modernity. Notably, there is a complex interplay of factors and specific socio-historical contexts that shaped how Islam negotiated with modernity. This engagement has involved both ideological and structural transformations, with one defining characteristic being a rational and gradual shift in the interpretation of Islamic thought.[107] For example, in their early stages, the Muslim Brotherhood also participated in jihadist actions, but these efforts failed to produce the desired outcomes, eventually leading them to abandon violence.

The first decade of the new century after 9/11, 2001 was determined by the jihadism of al-Qaeda. This organization has become a competitor to the Muslim Brotherhood. Today, although both Islamist organizations operate as transnational political movements, they have taken very different approaches to achieving their goals. Unlike the quieter and more discreet Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda gained global attention through dramatic headlines in a world dominated by mass media[108]. However, from the perspective of Islamism's political objectives, al-Qaeda's record of violence proved ineffective. Terrorism failed to deliver political power, as jihadist actions did not translate into tangible political success. This realization led many Islamists to conclude that pursuing a peaceful path of institutional participation offered a more promising strategy. In this context, Turkey's AKP stands out as the most successful model.[109] Confronted with this issue, the Islamist movement is divided into two tendencies: one, in the majority, seeks to use institutions and elections to rule the state; and the other, an

[107] R. Santhosh, "Contextualizing Islamic Contestations: Reformism, Traditionalism and Modernity among Muslims of Kerala," *Indian Anthropologist* 43, no. 2 (2013): 25–42, https://doi.org/10.2307/43858415.
[108] *Ibidem.*
[109] Bassam Tibi, *op. cit*., 241-263.

extremist minority, opts for clandestine cells and violent action. Even though the international media focus more on violent extremist groups like al-Qaeda or ISIS[110], Islamism is steadily changing to find a way to deal with politics without violence, searching a path toward what can be said as post-Islamism, e.g. the orientation in which grassroots politics in the Muslim world today is less concerned with the establishment of *Shariah* law than with fundamental struggles for dignity, government accountability and livelihoods.[111]

The idea that adopting a more moderate political stance is more favorably received than resorting to violence aligns with the moderation hypothesis[112]. As Schwedler explains:

> Yet the relationship between inclusion and moderation is more complicated than typically portrayed, and two distinct propositions – that exclusion increases radicalism and inclusion increases moderation – are frequently conflated. Inclusion and exclusion are often posited as a continuum, with moderation greatest in democratic, pluralist, and politically inclusive societies, and radicalism greatest in exclusive, repressive, and authoritarian societies. If increased inclusion means decreased radical- ism, then inclusion is preferable on both normative and practical grounds.[113]

[110] Lahouari Addi, "Islamism and Democracy," in *Radical Arab Nationalism and Political Islam*, trans. Anthony Roberts (171-212: Georgetown University Press, 2017).
[111] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 121-209
[112]Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (April 2011): 347–76, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0043887111000050.
[113] *Ivi, op. cit.*, 1–33.

Indeed, participation in elections exposes a party's formerly clandestine networks to state authorities and renders the party vulnerable. As a result, the higher the party's electoral organizational capacity, the more timid its policies are.[114] In this context, as Islamism evolved toward a more moderate trajectory, it is intriguing to examine how Islamist parties managed to become increasingly prominent on the political stage across many the MENA region during the early years of the twenty-first century, viewed that parties showing "radical" positions had a strong incentive to moderate their positions once they operate as vote-seeking electoral parties with centrist and accommodative platforms.[115]

The success of Islamists in the wake of the 2010–11 Arab Uprising seemed initially to confirm the dominance of political Islam as a sociopolitical force in the Middle East. Moreover, combined with the rise of Turkey's AKP and the routinized participation of Islamist parties in electoral politics across the Arab world, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, there seems to be strong evidence that religiously based parties have become a firm fixture in Muslim politics.

In all this discourse, there is a growing consensus that Islamists in their moderate version, may have reached an accommodation with at least the procedural aspects of democracy – that is, participating in and respecting the results of elections – and that political Islam would likely grow in significance as these groups find ever more opportunities to compete for political support. Moreover, the emergence of Islamist political parties in countries like Tunisia and Egypt demonstrates the ongoing potential for Islamic movements to influence democratic processes. The new Islamist discourse is the sign of a growing awareness of a contradiction between the goal of building a peaceful society and the violence used to implement this task. For instance, young members of the

[114] Günes Murat Tezcür, *op. cit*., 69-88.
[115] *Ibidem.*

Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt took up this task, breaking with their organization to advocate the compatibility of Islam with democratic values. Aware of the dilemma of the ideology of their elders (condemnation of violence when their discourse logically led to violence), they created in 1996 a party named the al-Wasat Party, an ideological halfway house between secular thought and the heritage of the organization's founder, Hassan al-Banna.[116] Their originality lies in their open determination to break with the goal of an Islamic state, substituting for it a civic state with Islamic references. Furthermore, this shift is already evident not only in Egypt but also in other Arab countries where Islamists participate in elections. Here, leaders explain to party members that the implementation of *Shariah* is the final goal but, in the meantime, a compromise with the secular section of society is necessary.[117]

Ultimately, while there have been changes, and where whole groups have moved away from the violent ideology that most characterize jihadists, the backlash against Islamists in Egypt (and to a lesser degree in Tunisia), along with the strong anti-Islamist position adopted by countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, suggest that political Islam of the kind represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and groups like it continues to face significant challenges.[118] Indeed, Islamism trapped itself between religion and politics in its attempt to build a state that would serve as coercive support to the faith, supposed to be self-sufficient, to eliminate inequalities and conflicts within society. On one hand, Islamists want a modern state to serve people, and on the other hand, they disavow that the state wields complete sovereignty for fear that it will modify *Shariah*.

[116] Lahouari Addi, "Islamism as Cultural Representation and Ideological Will," in *Radical Arab Nationalism and Political Islam* (Georgetown University Press, 2017), 124–67.
[117] *Ibidem.*
[118] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 389–420.

This incoherence is linked to the fundamental contradiction that runs through Arab societies that dream of a modern state while refusing the ideology of the modern state.[119]

It should also be noted that Islamist groups have always been part of the opposition to the existing government to change the system in their country, whether they were more extremist or more moderate, they are all to some extent engaged in a "war of ideas" against the socio-political and cultural system in which they operate.[120] This taps right at the heart of long-standing debates about what constitutes political extremism and political activism within a democratic state.

1.5 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this chapter has been useful in providing a general overview of political Islam, starting with its theoretical foundations, traversing the crucial historical moments that marked its rise, and exploring its actual configurations. It has shown how political Islam is subject to variations and transformations depending on the context in which it develops and its historical evolution. While there is a basic ideology, it is often shaped by the specifics of the context in which it is embedded. Based on the description of this broad phenomenon, one of the most representative groups of Islamism, the Muslim Brotherhood, will be analyzed to see how it has developed differently in two countries where this organization has played a significant role: Egypt and Jordan. The focus will be on how these developments manifested themselves at a crucial historical moment for the entire MENA region, namely the Arab Spring.

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[119] Lahouari Addi, *op. cit*., 171-212.
[120] Elisa Orofino and William Allchorn, "Non-Violent Extremism: A Firewall or Conveyor Belt to Violent Extremism in the 21st Century?" in *Routledge Handbook of Non-Violent Extremism: Groups, Perspectives and New Debates*, ed. Elisa Orofino and William Allchorn (Routledge, 2023).

Chapter 2

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

The Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928, is the flagship organization of Sunni revivalist Islam. It has been in existence longer than any other contemporary Islamist group in the Arab world.[1] Al-Banna, the first General Guide (*Murshid al- 'Amm*) of the organization, is considered by his followers as an example of the combination of religious conviction with moral courage and public engagement. [2] The group believed that returning to Islam was the key to the country's moral and social rebirth, as well as the only viable strategy to free it from foreign influence, indeed, the Brotherhood propagated a vision of Islam as *din wa da'wa* (religion and state), that was, not only a guide to private belief and ritual but a comprehensive system of values and governance intrinsically different from, and superior to, the secular political systems of the West.[3]

Since its founding in 1927, the Muslim Brothers' relationship with Egyptian regimes has taken a cyclical turn, beginning with accommodation or collaboration and ending with enmity. This repetitive trend explained how King Faruq accommodated the *Ikhwan* (Brotherhood) from 1942 to 1947 and repressed them until 1952, how Nasser accommodated them from 1952 to 1954 and repressed them until 1970, and how Sadat accommodated them in the early 1970s and repressed them from 1978 until his assassination in 1981.[4]

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[1] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *op. cit.,* 20–45.
[2] Barbara Zollner, "The Muslim Brotherhood during the Years 1949–73," in *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan Al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (Routledge, 2009), 9–50.
[3] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *op. cit*., 20–45.
[4] Hesham Al-Awadi, "The Regime and the Social Contract," in *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Legitimacy Power and Political Islam in Egypt under Mubarak* (I.B. Tauris, 2014).

2.1 Historical origins and development

As previously stated, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded as a social welfare society to promote Islamic revival; however, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, several social, economic, and political variables influenced the Brotherhood's transformation from a group primarily concerned with educational reform to a religious-political force. In this process, it is important to note that the failure of the liberal political system contributed significantly to the Society's intellectual and organizational development[5], positioning the Brotherhood as the primary oppositional force in the common political scene: the Islamist organization in its early years was a classic case of an "anti-system" group situated outside, and against, the established political order.[6]

Retracing history, the British Empire concluded its protectorate in 1922, with the coronation of Fuad as king of Egypt on March 15 of that year. However, it should be acknowledged that Egypt continued to be influenced by Britain, which safeguarded its interests through the presence of a High Commissioner and the army. Besides, King Fuad's autocratic inclinations led him to modify the constitution in 1923 to extend his powers.[7] These were the main reasons why the 1922 Declaration was a compromise between two rival sets of interests: the king that wanted a lot of power and the external force like Great Britain that, despite the independence, wanted to maintain a certain degree of influence. In this environment, the common people of Egypt got the worst of both worlds: on the one hand, they lost the protection from arbitrary oppression that the British occupation had, until 1922, to a greater or lesser extent provided; on the other

[5] Barbara Zollner, *op. cit*., 9–50.
[6] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *op. cit*., 20–45.
[7] Martin Francis, "Faruq, King of Egypt," in *Empire, Celebrity and Excess King Farouk of Egypt and British Culture 1936-1965* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 15–22.

hand, the presence of British troops underwrote a regime of 'law and order' which, in practice, meant a prohibition of revolutionary social changes.[8]

When King Fuad died on 29 April 1936, his son Faruq succeeded him in 1937. In the meantime, his powers were transferred to a Regency Council, presided over by his uncle, Prince Mohamed Ali. It was during the Regency that the Anglo-Egyptian Defense Treaty of August 1936, a response to nationalist pressure, placed continued British military occupation on a more internationally acceptable legal footing.[9] The treaty restricted the number of troops during peacetime, but their presence in the Suez Canal zone remained a thorn in the side of many Egyptians,[10] making the British an ongoing presence.

It was during the Second World War that Faruq's reign (and reputation) took a turn for the worse and anti-British sentiment peaked.[11] Egypt proclaimed its neutrality in 1939 but still complied with its obligations under the 1936 Treaty, placing its resources and communications at Britain's disposal and accepting the imposition of martial law.[12]

In this regard, the inability of the king and the government to withstand British intervention led to widespread disillusionment with the democratic movement and the parliamentary system. Therefore, students, youth sections, and universities were a major focus of discontent. For instance, student support was mainly divided between the Wafd party and the Brotherhood[13], with the latter already establishing a strong presence in the social sphere, providing extensive support to the Egyptian population through a well-

[8] John Marlowe, "An Assessment of the British Occupation," in *Anglo - Egyptian Relations 1800-1956* (Routledge, 2023), 251–59.
[9] Martin Francis, *op. cit*., 15–22.
[10] Barbara Zollner, *op. cit*., 9–50.
[11] *Ibidem.*
[12] Martin Francis, *op. cit*., 15–22.
[13] Derek Hopwood, "The End of the Old Regime: 1945–1952," in *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945–1990* (Routledge, 2002).

organized social service network that addressed the needs of those neglected by the regime.

When Britain terminated the mandate in May 1948, Egypt addressed the situation, and deployed troops into Palestine intending to remove Jewish settlers. While the King and public opinion expressed support, the army faced challenges due to a lack of preparation and a lack of a coordinated plan with other Arab states. This series of events marked the beginning of a period of challenges in Egypt's relationship with Israel, which has led to significant challenges, including four wars, a substantial military budget, a shift in political dynamics, and a lasting psychological impact.[14] In the context of this political unrest, there was an increase in the involvement of the Muslim Brothers in political affairs, coinciding with the withdrawal of British forces and the participation in the nationwide strike in Palestine. Meanwhile, the appeal of Communism was somewhat limited, and its opponents viewed it as a European anti-Islamic movement. Nevertheless, on the 23rd of July 1952, a group of junior military officers, namely the Free Officers, led by Gamal Abdul Nasser, organized a coup d'etat to depose King Farouq.[15] The Free Officers' movement was a kind of national front within the military in which all the opposition trends were represented: Communists, Muslim Brothers, and Wafdists[16]. It is worth noting that Nasser demonstrated a remarkable ability to assemble a group of officers who shared a common vision for the future of Egypt. Through this collaborative effort, Nasser consolidated power in a way that benefited the nation.[17] Even though it appeared at first that the Free Officers were collaborating with other parties, such as the

[14] Derek Hopwood, *op. cit*., "The End of the Old Regime: 1945–1952."
[15] Martin Francis, *op. cit*., 15–22.
[16] Selma Botman, "Egyptian Communists and the Free Officers: 1950-54," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, no. 3 (1986): 350–66, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4283127.
[17] *Ibidem.*

Muslim Brothers, Nasser was suspicious of that party's political power as early as 1953, his dislike for and punishment of their adherents were consistent themes throughout his regime. In January 1953, a proclamation dissolved all political parties and confiscated their finances, effectively putting a stop to all existent political movements inside the formal system, [18] above all for the Brotherhood, when, in 1954, a member of the group tried to assassinate Nasser.

If the president was willing to eliminate all other Egyptian political parties, it could be said the same as the desired total expulsion of foreign influence from Egypt. One approach to achieving this, as suggested by President Nasser, was through the nationalization of the Suez Canal. The crisis began in 1956 when he nationalized the canal, which had been under the control of British and French interests, to reduce foreign involvement in Egyptian matters[19]. This decision, as well as Egypt's participation in the 1955 Bandung Conference, was part of Nasser's policies to maintain a neutral position in the complex global landscape of the Cold War era. While these policies might initially appear to aim for Egypt's isolation, it is crucial to understand that they were not purely isolationist. Instead, they represented an emerging Arab nationalism, driven by a search for strategic autonomy. This attitude led Egypt to join the Non-Aligned Movement, maintaining a neutral position between the Eastern and Western blocs while actively engaging with the global community. The participants at the Bandung Conference and its successors rejected the possibility of Western imperial control returning to Asia and Africa while concurrently embracing a program of postcolonial modernity, economic,

[18] Anthony McDermott, "Nasser," in *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak: A Flawed Revolution* (Routledge, 2013), 15–38.
[19] Amin Hewedy, "Nasser and the Crisis of 1956," *Suez 1956*, February 21, 1991, 161–72, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198202417.003.0009.

political, and cultural in scope, at national and intercontinental levels.[20] Indeed, the symbolic meaning of the Bandung conference can be explained as a collective crowning ceremony of post-colonial Asia and Africa, represented by the twenty-nine delegations, in turn, representing some 1.4 billion people worldwide. It is there that, Nehru, Nasser, and Zhou Enlai easily won the popularity poll; they were the biggest crowd-pullers and crowd-pleasers. No doubt, part of their charisma can be explained by the fact that these very men embodied the power and the spirit of a nationalist or revolutionary struggle.[21] On one hand, Nasser's approach is understood as a rejection of the blocs of the Cold War; on the other hand, it could be said that it is characterized by an active participation in the movements of global solidarity. This equilibrium between nationalism and anticolonial internationalism seems to have characterized most of the foreign policy and the role of Egypt under Nasser in the global scene.

Regarding the complex relationship with Israel, it is important to note that Nasser's presidency coincided with the Six-Day War. Two of Nasser's decisions, particularly his demand that the UN remove its forces from Sinai and his announcement on May 23rd that the Straits of Tiran would be closed, [22] played a significant role in the unfolding events. The first decision opened the door for an invasion, while the second led Israel to feel surrounded. From a strategic military perspective, the build-up to the fighting allowed Israel to prepare for approximately three weeks.[23] The problem, and the subsequent general discontent was that the defeat was delivered in only six days. Nasser died in 1970, but despite leaving Egypt vanquished, he remained and continues to be Egypt's hero, as

[20] Christopher J. Lee, "The Bandung Conference," in *The Oxford Handbook of History and International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 690–704.
[21] Naoko Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225–52, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24494187.
[22] Anthony McDermott, *op. cit*., 15–38.
[23] *Ibidem.*

seen by the huge outpouring of sadness and the millions of people who attended his funeral in Cairo. Egyptians needed heroes, and they responded to Nasser in ways they haven't to any presidents since.[24]

Sadat, one of the original leaders of the 1952 Revolution, succeeded President Nasser upon his death in September 1970.[25] Despite proclamations of loyalty to Nasser's ideological line, President Sadat began a gradual shift on several major issues right from the start:[26] its political orientation consisted of a progressive alliance with the West, in perspective to a gradual improvement in the Egyptian economy. Starting from internal changes, he created a new party system, in which there were three parties (Minabar) (left, center, and right). This action allowed Sadat to break with the past and provide the West, from which he sought aid and investment, with evidence of liberalization.[27]

Egypt's dramatic turn to the United States, and consequent repeal of the Soviet Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, was encouraged not only by Washington's assistance in re-gaining Egyptian territory in Sinai but also by the $700 million to $800 million in economic aid that Egypt has so far received from the United States annually.[28] The Sadat regime, therefore endorsed the IMF proposals for restructuring the Egyptian economy, including a measure to reduce government subsidy payments.[29] Thus, by January 1977, Sadat had changed the balance of Egyptian politics, set his country on a new economic and social course, sought and achieved a degree of

[24] Anthony McDermott, *op. cit*., 15–38.
[25] Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "An Islamic Alternative in Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood and Sadat," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 1/2 (1982): 75–93, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41857618.
[26] *Ibidem.*
[27] Melvin A. Friedlander, "Introduction," in *Sadat and Begin the: Domestic Politics of Peacemaking* (Routledge, 2019), 1–9.
[28] Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "The Egypt of Anwar Sadat," *Current History* 72, no. 423 (1977): 19–38, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45314314.
[29] Melvin A. Friedlander, *op. cit*., 1–9.

psychological redemption by going to war against Israel, and established himself as the dominant force in Egyptian and Arab politics.[30]

A year after he came to power, Sadat reformed the Constitution, stressed the supremacy of law, and declared Egypt the "State of Law". He promised a new period of judicial autonomy and declared an end to the imprisoning of people because of their political and religious persuasions.[31] He released the Muslim Brothers from prison and allowed the movement to reclaim its headquarters, reconvene its public meetings, and resume its press publication. [32] At the same time, he prohibited the group from becoming a legal political group. However, considering their experience with Nasser, which had led to the elimination of their entire political, social, and economic existence, the Brothers decided not to rely on the regime's or the president's tacit tolerance, unless such tolerance was established by a formal recognition.[33]

Sadat's regime is best noted for establishing relations with Israel following the Yom Kippur War; on February 4, 1971, he proposed a new peace initiative.[34] He stated that if Israel withdrew its forces from Sinai from the Suez Canal to the Passes, he would reopen the Canal, resume diplomatic relations with the United States, and sign a peace treaty with Israel with the assistance of the UN Secretary-General's representative.[35] Sadat was the first president to visit Israel in 1977, and he negotiated the Camp David Accords (1978), which were considered a good framework for resolving global issues. This garnered him and Menachem Begin, Israel's Prime Minister, the Nobel Peace Prize,

[30] Melvin A. Friedlander, *op. cit*., 1–9.
[31] Hesham Al-Awadi, *op. cit*., chapter "The Regime and the Social Contract."
[32] *Ibidem.*
[33] *Ibidem.*
[34] Joseph Finklestone, "Sadat Starts a New Revolution," in *Anwar Sadat: Visionary Who Dared* (Routledge, 2013).
[35] *Ibidem.*

making Sadat the first Muslim recipient. Despite his worldwide success, Arabs viewed it negatively, particularly through the lens of the Brotherhood. To make matters worse, Sadat's announcement of his plans to reduce state subsidies on bread prompted the famous riots of 1977;[36] economic conditions were deteriorating, and the President was assassinated by the Egyptian Jihad because of this unhappiness and the spread of extremist groups.

When Mubarak replaced Sadat, he planned to continue with the programs that the former president had implemented. He maintained Egypt's tight relationships with the United States, but he wanted to establish himself as a more independent leader than his predecessor. One manifestation of this desire was his refusal to accept American aid amounting to about US$500 million in 1983 to develop Egypt's Ra's Banas naval military base.[37] Regarding Israel, the president emphasized his commitment to the Camp David peace plan, but at the same time made sure that this peace did not translate into a complete normalization of social or economic relations.[38]

To ease the tensions that had been created by Sadat's policies in September 1981, as well as consolidate the legitimacy of the new regime, Mubarak set out to create a broad national front against the threat posed by Islamist extremists by only tolerating the moderate Muslim Brothers and other political forces. Therefore, social spaces, such as syndicates, university campuses, charitable and voluntary organizations, and so on, were given a considerable degree of autonomy.[39]

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[36] Hesham Al-Awadi, *op. cit*., chapter "The Regime and the Social Contract."
[37] *Ivi,* "Mubarak in Pursuit of Legitimacy," in *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Legitimacy: Power and Political Islam in Egypt under Mubarak* (I.B. Tauris, 2014).
[38] *Ibidem.*
[39] *Ibidem.*

In the interest of enhancing the credibility of the elections — and, by extension, the expected results — Mubarak made efforts to accommodate the political opposition and permitted the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in the 1984 elections in alliance with the New Wafd Party. Although the Brothers were not a recognized political party, the regime did not intervene to prevent their alliance, despite the 1983 election law banning alliances between non-recognized political parties.[40] As expected, the elections ended with the victory of the National Democratic Party (NDP), that was the party of Mubarak, which secured a majority of 390 out of 448 seats (87 percent), leaving the rest of the 58 seats to the opposition, that consisted only of the New Wafd Party, in alliance with the Muslim Brothers.[41] However, because of the economic crisis and other problems in the mid-1980s, the regime was unable to deliver its promises, and in contrast to the earlier periods when public hopes had been quite high, the later years saw increasing frustration and dissension.

In 1995, there were reports of an alleged assassination attempt on President Mubarak that some attribute to members of Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Even if the evidence related to this attempt is controversial, the regime took steps to intensify its crackdown against all Islamist groups. Despite this, the Muslim Brotherhood continued to participate indirectly in elections, gaining 17 seats in parliament in 2000 and 88 seats in 2005, when they stood as independent candidates, given the formal illegality of their party.[42] In 2011, when the ruling party won more than 90 percent of seats in parliament, and later, it was discovered that the elections had been manipulated, the Muslim Brotherhood withdrew from the ballot. Even with its

[40] Hesham Al-Awadi, *op. cit*., chapter "The Regime and the Social Contract."
[41] *Ibidem.*
[42] Mona Farag, "New Political Party, New Circumstances," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2012): 214–29, https://doi.org/10.2307/48599887.

withdrawal, the movement was well-known for addressing society's needs, indeed, the legitimacy of the Islamists resulted from societal support rather than from official state recognition[43], which was not granted. Protests began on January 25, with people wanting the end of corruption and unemployment and calling for the end of Mubarak's 30-year autocratic regime. As a result, the president resigned on February 11.

2.2 The Arab Spring: a revolutionary opportunity

For the Middle East's millennial generation, 2011 was most likely the most memorable year in the region. Four long-serving dictators were deposed: Tunisia's Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali (1987–2011), Egypt's Hosni Mubarak (1981–2011), Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh (1990–2011), and Libya's Muammar Ghaddafi (1967-2011).[44] The causes for the upsurge were mostly related to issues such as a lack of democracy, human rights violations, widespread corruption, serious economic decline, rising unemployment, abject poverty, increasing food prices, and many other factors that contributed[45], such as increasing population with a large percentage of educated young people dissatisfied with the centralized systems and the marginalized population outside capital cities.[46] Egyptians were literally "hungry" for change; a demand louder than all others was for bread, freedom, and [human] dignity.[47] In some countries, protests were aimed at the displacement of the regime, whereas in others, demonstrations demanded the

[43] Hesham Al-Awadi, *op. cit*., chapter "Mubarak and the Islamists: Why Did the 'Honeymoon' End?"
[44] Kingshuk Chatterjee, "After Summer May Come the Fall: The Enduring Dilemma of Popular Sovereignty in the Middle East," in *Arab Spring and Its Legacies*, ed. Mujib Alam and Sujata Ashwarya (Routledge, 2024), 1–19.
[45] Priyamvada A. Sawant, "Democratic Upsurge in the Arab World and India," in *Arab Spring and Its Legacies*, ed. Sujata Ashwarya and Mujib Alam (Routledge, 2024), 22–41.
[46] *Ibidem.*
[47] Lucia Ardovini, "The Freedom and Justice Party in Power: Islam Is (Not) the Solution?" in *Surviving Repression: The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the 2013 Coup* (Manchester University Press, 2022), 19–48.

improvement of living conditions while leaving the principal foundations of the state unchallenged.[48]

On December 17, 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi, 26, who sold fruit and vegetables illegally in Sidi Bouzid because he could not find a job, doused himself in petrol and set himself alight when police confiscated his products because he did not have the necessary permit.[49] His actions echoed strongly among Tunisians, sparking widespread protests against corruption, unemployment, and police brutality. On January 14, 2011, after three weeks of protests, dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled to Malta, thereby ending his twenty-four-year rule.[50] When he was ousted, a hundred young Egyptian activists appeared before the Tunisian embassy in Cairo, showing their support for the Tunisian people. The activists were already looking ahead: They hoped to use Tunisia's successful uprising to build momentum for a mass anti-Mubarak protest in downtown Cairo's Tahrir Square.[51]

On January 25, the first protests in Egypt started: people gathered in Tahrir Square, the city's center. The area remained in turmoil for 18 days, and after that, on February 11, Hosni Mubarak stepped down, marking the end of nearly three decades of iron-fisted control. [52] The day in which manifestations began was the National Police Day in Egypt, remembering the anniversary of a 1952 fight in which forty-one Egyptian policemen were killed in a fight against a British force along the Suez Canal. Mubarak made it a national holiday in 2009, but Egyptian youth activists saw it as a publicity stunt to hide the regime's

[48] Erzsébet N. Rózsa, "The Arab Spring: Its Impact on the Region and on the Middle East," 2012, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/09609.pdf.
[49] BBC, "Tunisia Suicide Protester Mohammed Bouazizi Dies," *BBC News*, January 5, 2011, sec. Africa, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12120228.
[50] Eric Trager, "Late to Revolution," in *Arab Fall: How the Muslim Brotherhood Won and Lost Egypt in 891 Days* (Georgetown University Press, 2016), 13-36.
[51] *Ivi*, "After Tunisia, Is Egypt Next?," The Atlantic (January 17, 2011), https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/01/after-tunisia-is-egypt-next/69656/.
[52] Priyamvada A. Sawant, *op. cit.*, 22–41.

police brutality. [53] The physical presence in space-time, the close interactions, and the collective responses to police brutality and state violence united protesters, embodying the sensorial experience of "We the People",[54] recalling the idea of a united people that view themselves as a collective actor, able to call for its rights and against injustice.

Already beforehand, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was Egypt's largest and best-organized opposition group, focused on building relationships among other sectors of society through its involvement in professional syndicates and spreading its Islamist message through the social services it provided in Egypt's neediest areas.[55] It also appealed to the public by occasionally organizing anti-Western protests, which was a useful tactic for criticizing the Mubarak regime's cooperation with the United States and Israel without challenging the regime's political legitimacy directly. [56] However, on the eve of the protests, the organization was concerned that directly challenging the Mubarak dictatorship might result in more repression. It released three announcements in rising tones between January 15 and January 23. The first statement congratulated the Tunisian people for the successful ousting of Ben Ali and called on Arab regimes to listen to the voice of wisdom from their people calling for reform; the second statement, issued January 19, included a ten-point roadmap for reform to be enacted immediately; the third condemned the interrogation and threats faced by Brotherhood's leaders being pressured to boycott the protests, and called for dialogue.[57] While these official statements remained ambiguous about the degree of the group's participation, the turnout on January 25

[53] Eric Trager, *op. cit*., 13-36.
[54] Dalia Wahdan, "Singing the Revolt in Tahrir Square: Euphoria, Utopia and Revolution," in *The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest: The Arab Spring and Beyond*, ed. Pnina Werbner, Martin Webb, and Kathryn Spellman-Poots (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 53–66.
[55] Eric Trager, *op. cit*., 13-36.
[56] *Ibidem.*
[57] Ibrahim El Houdaiby, "Islamism in and after Egypt's Revolution," in *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond*, ed. Bahgat Korany (The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 125–52.

exceeded expectations, and thereby, in a statement on January 26, the Brotherhood asserted that its members were participating in their personal capacity and that the regime should comply with people's will.[58]

While the senior leadership was skeptical about the outcome of the protests and feared repercussions, the Brotherhood's activist youth were more eager to participate in anti-regime protests and to tackle Mubarak's deep state head-on. This created immense internal frustration, especially when the Guidance Bureau denied the youths' plea to let them participate in the protests.[59]

Thereafter, the crackdown intensified with each new election. Thirty Brotherhood members were arrested before the 2007 elections for the Shura Council (Egypt's upper parliamentary house), seven hundred Muslim Brothers were arrested before the 2008 local council elections[60], and over one thousand Muslim Brothers, including sixteen top leaders and eight candidates, were arrested as the November 2010 parliamentary elections approached. The Brotherhood thus had good reason to fear that it would end up "paying the bill" for any revolutionary activity and responded to the Tunisian Revolution very carefully.[61] Beyond the fear of greater repression, the Brotherhood hesitated to join the January 25 anti-Mubarak demonstrations for another reason: it didn't trust the youth activists. To some extent, this reflected some Brotherhood leader's fear that cooperating with non-Islamists would undermine the organization's pursuit of an Islamic state in Egypt.[62] However, as Egyptian youth flooded into Tahrir Square to demand change, the

[58] Ibrahim El Houdaiby, *op. cit*., 125–52.
[59] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit.,*19–48.
[60] Eric Trager, *op. cit.*, 13-36.
[61] *Ibidem.*
[62] *Ibidem.*

Brotherhood was left looking like an organization that was not only behind the times but that had become as much a part of the furniture as the regime itself.[63]

When the uprisings gained prominence, the Brotherhood endorsed the protests scheduled for Friday, January 28, and joined the demonstrations in an official capacity. The movement was still reticent about putting itself at the forefront of the protests, preferring to send its members out to join the demonstrations but not taking any official leadership role. As the Deputy to the Supreme Guide, Rashad al-Bayoumi explained:

> We are keeping a low profile as an organization. We are not marching with our slogans. We don't want this revolution to be portrayed as a revolution of the Muslim Brothers, as an Islamic revolution.[64]

Despite initially keeping a modest profile, the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in the demonstrations on January 28, 2011, and following marches throughout February fueled the revolt. The Brotherhood played a critical role in the events at Tahrir Square by organizing attempts to defend demonstrators, providing needed supplies, and distributing meals, all of which contributed to the revolutionary movement's momentum. All of this stemmed from its historical experiences: they brought their historical experience of successfully managing protests to the streets, taking on the role of organizers and protectors of those stationed in squares across the country.[65] There was a shared consensus among activists, that recognized the organizational skills of the group as essential to the success of the uprising, not only by giving a practical organization and defined plan

[63] Alison Pargeter, "The Arab Spring: From Opposition to Power," in *The Muslim Brotherhood: From Opposition to Power* (Saqi Books, 2013), 211–44.
[64] *Ibidem.*
[65] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit.*, 19–48.

during the protests, but also providing cars, microphones, flags,[66] not to be mentioned food and blankets during the occupation of the square.

Even if it might not have wanted to lead the revolution, the Brotherhood ensured that it put itself right at the heart of it, and did so by quietly taking on the role of arch organizer.[67] Having woken up to what was unfolding around them, and feeling more secure in their support base, the Brothers finally started speaking the same language as their fellow protestors, insisting that change could only be achieved if Mubarak's 'autocratic' regime be deposed.[68]

2.3 Challenges in governance and opposition

The removal of long-standing dictator Hosni Mubarak was followed by a power vacuum that opened unprecedented political opportunities, taking by surprise even those who had filled the country's streets.[69] Yet, contrary to the Tunisian case, the deep state, represented by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), succeeded in maintaining control of the transition.[70] As a first step, on February 13, the SCAF dissolved parliament and suspended the constitution with the explicit aim of creating a conducive climate for the establishment of a new political government. While leaving in place the cabinet appointed by Mubarak on January 29, Defense Minister Marshal Mohamed Hussayn al-Tantawi, acting as head of state, the SCAF followed the roadmap and created an eight-member committee to alter the 1971 constitution to make it more suited to the transition.[71] The

[66] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit.*, 19–48.
[67] Alison Pargeter, *op. cit*., 211–44.
[68] *Ibidem.*
[69] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit.*, 19–48.
[70] Valeria Resta, "Charting Different Transitions: Tunisia and Egypt Compared," in *Tunisia and Egypt after the Arab Spring: Party Politics in Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Routledge, 2023), 12–31.
[71] Valeria Resta, *op. cit*., 12–31.

amendments presented on February 16 were approved by a popular referendum on March 19, 2011, with 77 percent of votes, even though the turnout was as low as 41 percent, signaling mounting dissatisfaction toward SCAF's management of the transition. In stark opposition to the proposed amendments stood the Revolutionary Youth Coalition, formed on February 1, as the stakeholder of the young revolutionaries. The opposition group included the 6 April Youth movement, Justice and Freedom, Muslim Brotherhood youth, ElBaradei's campaign, The Popular Democratic Movement for Change (HASHD), the Democratic Front, and the administrators of the renown Khaled Saeed Facebook group.[72] Nevertheless, the Muslim Brotherhood maintained a more cautious stance, seizing the opportunity to engage with the SCAF, notably by participating in the committee of legal experts tasked with drafting constitutional amendments. Brotherhood member Sobhi Saleh was among the committee members, allowing the organization to influence the transition process. The committee proposed a series of amendments to regulate both presidential and parliamentary elections. The most crucial element for the Brotherhood in this respect, however, was that it could have a say in when the country's new constitution was to be drafted.[73]

Yet, as political tensions grew, the Brotherhood found ways to expand its influence, clashing with the SCAF over its attempts to limit its presence in parliament. It was in that year that the Brotherhood decided to create the FJP (*hizb al-hurriya wa al-'adala*), a political party founded on 30 April 2011, officially marking the Brotherhood's break from illegality and setting a milestone in its history. The party represented more than just the movement's means to compete in the upcoming parliamentary elections and

[72] Valeria Resta, *op. cit*., 12–31.
[73] Alison Pargeter, *op. cit*., 211–44.

embodied the peak of its troubled politicization process that had begun in 1939.[74] In 2012, the Brotherhood Freedom and Justice Party won half of the seats of the lower house, and Islamists took 84 percent in the Shura Council[75]. When the presidential election started, and right before the runoff, the Supreme Constitutional Court dissolved the Parliament due to electoral irregularities and the SCAF passed the infamous Supplementary Constitutional Declaration that revised the Constitution on June 18, 2012, shielding the armed forces from civilian presidents' oversight or accountability and conceding the army's veto power over the act of declaring war and limited the power of the future President.[76]

Culminating in Mohamed Morsi's election as president in June 2012, who had been incarcerated in jail before the uprising, he eventually emerged as the first elected civil president in the history of modern Egypt,[77] and his victory embodied the Brotherhood's evolution from decades of illegality to political legitimacy. Many saw the group's destitution as deeply symbolic, as Morsi's election was widely perceived as the peak of an "Islamic wave" that was quickly spreading across the region in the wake of the removal of long-standing dictators.[78] Even though Morsi's victory was a watershed event,[79] the fact that he belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood raised some concerns as the people feared that the newly elected president wanted to "Islamize" the entire state. Moreover, Morsi's presidency was characterized by a lack of trust in other parties and institutions, coupled with efforts to increasingly infiltrate various bodies with members

[74] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit*., 19–48.
[75] Dalia Wahdan, *op. cit*., 53–66.
[76] Arshad, "Role of Mohammed Morsi's Presidency in Political Transition," in *Democratic Backsliding in Post-Mubarak Egypt* (Routledge, 2014), 132–74.
[77] Dalia Wahdan, op. cit., 53–66.
[78] Lucia Ardovini, "Introduction," in *Surviving Repression: The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the 2013 Coup* (Manchester University Press, 2022), 1–18.
[79] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "The Muslim Brotherhood in (Egypt's) Transition," in *The Muslim Brotherhood Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 247–88.

of the Muslim Brotherhood, starting from replacing the SCAF addendum and ordering the retirement of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and Lieutenant General Sami Anan, the two most senior members of the SCAF, and he nominated Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as Defense Minister.[80]

Furthermore, Morsi asserted his authority by issuing Presidential Decrees and a Constitutional Declaration aimed at regaining the president's power, which had been delegated to the SCAF by the supplementary constitutional decree. Therefore, despite the extra-constitutional methods, Morsi's decisions facilitated him to obtain executive and legislative powers and to play a decisive role in promulgating the new constitution. The decrees put Morsi above judicial review until a new constitution was adopted and parliamentary elections were held.[81] This action, of course, did not go unnoticed; on the contrary, it amplified existing doubts, eventually leading to mass protests against the alleged authoritarianism.

In the debate over Egypt's new constitution, the two sides of the Brotherhood's "double dilemma" came together. On the one hand, the Constituent Assembly was at risk of being dissolved—and any document it produced annulled—by a hostile judiciary; on the other, the Assembly, dominated by Islamists, was deemed unrepresentative by secular parties and civil society groups, who vowed to reject any draft constitution that restricted civil rights in the name of religion,[82] however in 2012, the new constitution was presented to the referendum and it was passed, with nearly two-thirds of voters supporting it in a referendum in which less than one-third of eligible voters cast ballots.[83] In the end, the

[80] Arshad, *op. cit*., pp. 132–74.
[81] *Ibidem.*
[82] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *op. cit.*, pp. 247–88.
[83] Nathan J. Brown, "Constitutional Revolutions and the Public Sphere," in *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 296–312.

constitution maintained the wording of the previous constitution, and it stipulated in Article 2:

> Islam is the religion of the state, and Arabic is its official language. The principles of Islamic Sharia are the principal source of legislation.[84]

Furthermore, there was a crucial change from the long-standing presidential dominance in Egypt, as Article 133 of the Constitution explained:

> The President of the Republic is elected for a period of four calendar years, commencing on the day the term of his predecessor ends. The President may only be re-elected once […].[85]

The legislature was composed of a House of Representatives and a Shura Council, with more power given to the former than the latter. The judiciary was altered in important ways, and there was some worry that it had been weakened by lowering the numbers of the Supreme Constitutional Court and defining more carefully its ability to become involved in electoral matters.[86] Most importantly, Egypt's new constitution, amidst much controversy, gave the military greater institutional autonomy and formalized its hitherto informal political role in the state and society.

Morsi issued a decree requiring the early retirement of thousands of judges, giving the impression that he planned to stack the judiciary with Islamists. It failed to strengthen

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[84]Egypt, *Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt*, art. 2, 2012, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2012.
[85] *Ivi*, Article 133.
[86] Anthony F. Lang, "From Revolutions to Constitutions: The Case of Egypt," *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (March 2013): 345–63, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12021.

freedom of speech, justice, economic and social dignity, and to terminate police repression and state of emergency.[87] Besides, during his presidency, the non-Islamists made several demands, such as an extensive negotiation before the constitution could be drafted, a civilian presidential council, a committee to modify the constitution, and new instructions for Parliament and Presidential elections. However, their demands were not considered by the Islamist-led majoritarian Parliament. Thus, the Islamist and non-Islamist groups were irreconcilably divided.[88]

At the beginning of 2013, the situation had not calmed down; disagreements with the opposition, as well as with the judiciary and military, persisted. To make matters worse, the economic crisis deepened, significantly increasing unemployment rates. This led to the outbreak of protests. The main protests were run by the *Tamarrod* movement, which mainly represented the opposition. Possibly with the help of the Interior Ministry, *Tamarrod's* organizers started a petition that reached 22 million signatures by the end of June, and the mass demonstrations they organized for June 30 proved to be a colossal showdown. Millions of people took to the streets of the major cities demanding Morsi's resignation and, if necessary, the intervention of the military to depose him[89]. The following day, on July 1st, Defense Minister al-Sisi issued an ultimatum to the incumbent president, giving him 48 hours to respond to the people's requests. The next day, in a broadcast statement, Morsi rejected the ultimatum, saying that legitimacy is the only option for protecting the country, preventing bloodshed, and moving to a new chapter.[90]

[87] Arshad, *op. cit.*, 132–74.
[88] *Ibidem.*
[89] Khalil al-Anani, "Upended Path: The Rise and Fall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Middle East Journal* 69, no. 4 (2015): 527–43, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43698286.
[90] Valeria Resta, *op. cit*., 12–31.

Nevertheless, the army's loyalty to Morsi's rule was evident in November and December of 2012 during the nationwide protests that erupted against Morsi's ill-advised constitutional decree. In essence, the military did what it had done for decades under Mubarak: it served its patron to preserve its interests. However, Morsi's disastrous performance as president and the widespread popular indignation at him and the Brotherhood, reaching its zenith by June 2013, propelled the military to abrogate the alliance and put an end to his rule.[91] Just over one year after his election, Morsi was ousted by a military coup, and el-Sisi took his place. Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has been in office since 2014.[92]

2.4 Post-Arab Spring: repression and survival strategies

The Muslim Brotherhood was designated as a terrorist organization, and all its assets were confiscated; most of the group leaders were arrested and ruthlessly sentenced; hundreds of political Islam activists and supporters were killed, and tens of thousands were sent to jail.[93] As a result, a large wave of Islamist exodus took place, and several political organizations in exile started to form.[94] Under these circumstances, this wave of repression and displacement was accompanied by other challenges for the organization, such as questions of identity and belonging and the task of rebuilding a fragmented group. Even though the Brotherhood was somehow accustomed to moments of repression by the state, this time was different; the organization suffered from an indiscriminate type of

[91] Nael Shama, "Egypt's Post-Mubarak Foreign Policy," in *Egyptian Foreign Policy from Mubarak to Morsi* (Routledge, 2013), 210–38.
[92] Priyamvada A. Sawant, *op. cit*., 22–41.
[93] Mohammad Affan, "Political Islam in Exile: Transformation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the Military Coup of 2013," in *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe*, ed. Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele (Springer, 2024), 247–61.
[94] *Ibidem.*

repression, that regarded not only the leaders but also its supporters; additionally, the crackdown occurred just after the Brotherhood governed Egypt for the first time, a test that exposed the ineptitude and lack of political vision of its leadership.[95]

In a few months, over 10,000 members were detained, including the entire leadership of the Brotherhood (with only a handful escaping to Gaza, Doha, Istanbul, and London). On December 25, 2013, for the first time in its turbulent history, the Brotherhood was designated a terrorist organization.[96] The issue was not on its ideology but better on what emerged after the crackdown: many Egyptians have begun to view them as an ideological clique with an unorthodox (perhaps even distorted) version of Islam.[97] The regime's repression strategies were mostly based on their understanding of the movement as a heavy, top-down hierarchical organization and on the belief that, if this pyramidal set-up was incapacitated, it would inevitably lead to the disintegration of the Brotherhood as a whole.[98] Furthermore, on 14th and 15th August 2013, troopers from the Ministry of Interior and the Egyptian Armed Forces killed hundreds of Morsi's supporters in Rab'a, including women and children.[99] The so-called "clearing of Rab'a" was followed by a wave of repression Egypt had not seen since the days of Nasser. Between August 2013 and January 2016, the movement entered a phase of radicalization that manifested in its structure, ideology, and mode of activism, [100] this violence practiced by Brotherhood members and supporters was defensive and spontaneous in response to the attacks of the security forces.[101] Overall, the massacre of Raba'a was huge, and

[95] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit*., 1–18.
[96] Hazem Kandil, "The Slow Rise and Rapid Fall from Power," in *Inside the Brotherhood* (Polity, 2014), 118-195.
[97] *Ibidem.*
[98] Lucia Ardovini, "Lessons Learnt? Stagnation vs Adaptation," in *Surviving Repression: The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the 2013 Coup* (Manchester University Press, 2022), 96–116.
[99] Mohammad Affan, *op. cit*., 247–61.
[100] *Ibidem.*
[101] *Ibidem.*

beyond the victims, thousands were imprisoned, killed, and tortured, and had to flee the country or go into hiding.

Because of this forced and huge exile, many of the group's leaders, as well as thousands of their grassroots members, fled to many countries such as Qatar, Sudan, Malaysia, and Turkey. For instance, the strong outright support the Brotherhood had from the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the ruling AK party provided a precious opportunity for the increasingly besieged group.[102] Indeed, the Turkish government emerged as one of the biggest opponents of the military intervention in Egypt by condemning the removal of Morsi at the risk of burning its bridges with the government in Egypt. It sided with the Muslim Brotherhood, saw Morsi as the legitimate leader, and urged the world to condemn the event in the same way.

On the surface, the movement has been relatively successful in rebuilding abroad, mostly relying on the replication of the *Tanzim's* (organization) structure and the creation of Guidance Offices outside of Egypt.[103] Indeed, many members found a safe refuge in Turkey and established four TV channels that act as their main repertoire of action in Istanbul.[104] Beyond Facebook and online portals such as Ikhwanweb, pro-Brotherhood satellite television stations such as Rabea TV, Mekammelyn, Al Sharq, Misr al'n and al-Watan were crucial outlets through which to transmit ideas, keep lines of communication open, and connect the leadership with grassroots members.[105]

[102] Mohammad Affan, *op. cit*., 247–61.
[103] Lucia Ardovini, "The Tanzim, Shattered," in *Surviving Repression: The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the 2013 Coup* (Manchester University Press, 2022), 69–95.
[104] Shaimaa Magued, "The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Transnational Advocacy in Turkey: A New Means of Political Participation," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 3 (May 2, 2017): 480–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2017.1320975.
[105] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit.*, 96–116.

Following the Turkish support of the Muslim Brotherhood against the regime, the Egyptian media launched a press campaign against Turkey. They considered Erdoğan's hostile tone against Egypt as an attempt to boost Turkey's regional role after it was undermined by the deterioration of Turkish relations with Syria and Iraq.[106] Even though cutting all ties with the government in Egypt was a costly action, the Muslim Brotherhood was the closest to the AKP in terms of their Sunni Islamist religious, political, and social preferences, which was the main reason why the Turkish government continued to see Morsi as the legitimate leader and pushed international actors to cut off their relations with Sisi.[107]

If from one side countries such as Turkey were a major hub for the reformation and the transnational advocacy of the Brotherhood, there was another bloc constituted by US-backed status-quo powers, represented by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. [108] On November 15, 2014, the UAE labeled the Brotherhood's local branches as terrorists. In contrast, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait, despite their economic ties and shared interests with the region's leading authoritarian power, chose not to adopt harsh measures against the Brotherhood at home.[109]

It needs to be said that, even under the Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak regimes, the Muslim Brotherhood maintained a political presence through indirect means despite state repression. They flexibly adapted to state politics by choosing alternative channels without having to resort to violence. Through these grassroots, they emerged as a political

[106] Shaimaa Magued, *op. cit*., 480–97.
[107] Buğra Süsler, *op. cit*., 139–70.
[108] Victor J. Willi, "The Beginning of the Fourth Ordeal (2013–2018)Pp 305-387," in *The Four Ordeal: A History of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 1968–2018* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 305–81, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108902649.
[109] May Darwich, "Creating the Enemy, Constructing the Threat: The Diffusion of Repression against the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East," *Democratization* 24, no. 7 (April 3, 2017): 1289–1306, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1307824.

rival to the state, sustained their ideology among their supporters in the peripheries, and mobilized a wider constituency among the needy people and the lower middle classes. As a result, they built long-term political experience through interaction with different ideological and political groups and strengthened their organizational structure and mobilizing capacity among the public.[110] Having said that, one of the movement's key features has been its ability to capitalize on its status as an illegal organization by turning repression into a marker of its identity. In exile, the Muslim Brotherhood tried to utilize the opportunity of being away from the regime's oppression and pursued its anti-coup activities through political initiatives, media campaigns, human rights advocacy, and research work. However, after almost a decade, the outcome of the Brotherhood's exile activism proved to be modest: on the one hand, the Egyptian regime managed to upgrade its repressive capacities and to co-opt the host governments to neutralize the threat imposed by the exile opposition. On the other hand, ideological and leadership disagreements and organizational defections paralyzed the Brotherhood and forced it to disengage from its struggle against the Egyptian regime and opt for a "wait-and-see" strategy. [111] Once again, while these trends and dynamics are not necessarily new in the long history of the Brotherhood, it is their scale and momentum that is potentially revolutionary. The unfamiliarity of the wave of repression the movement is currently facing, combined with the unprecedented dimension of exile, is drastically altering how the Brotherhood historically responded to repression.[112]

[110] Shaimaa Magued, *op. cit*., 480–97.
[111] Mohammad Affan, *op. cit*., 247–61.
[112] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit.*, 96–116.

2.5 Concluding remarks

The Muslim Brotherhood emerged initially as a reaction to the failure of nationalist and socialist efforts to resist foreign domination, and it grew stronger in response to the authoritarian regimes that followed, dominated by dictators and the army. Despite decades of operating under an illegal status, the movement not only survived but thrived by providing essential services and garnering popular backing. The Brotherhood's influence and ability to deliver unmatched support made it a "state within a state," ultimately allowing it to build a strong popular base.[113] The Muslim Brothers had their chance, with Mohamed Morsi as president, to rule the country, however, after the protests of 2011, and with the extraordinary political openness that followed the uprising, not only has the Brotherhood struggled to adapt to the fast-changing environment, but it has also failed to achieve its objectives. The group moved abruptly from being an opposition movement for almost eight decades, to becoming Egypt's ruler without the ability to adjust its ideology and behavior to this drastic change. [114]

In a broader context, even if it is common to try to explain the relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the state through the lens of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis[115], in this context the theory is not completely applicable: throughout the history of the organization not necessarily an actual moderation of its ideology was given by the inclusion in the political scene, for instance, it was the exclusion rather than inclusion of the Brotherhood under Mubarak that led to significant changes in its

[113] Lucia Ardovini, *op. cit.*, 1–18.
[114] Khalil Al-Anani, "The Inclusion-Moderation Thesis: Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, August 28, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1332.
[115] The inclusion-moderation hypothesis concerning political Islam is the idea that political groups and individuals may become more moderate because of their inclusion in pluralist political processes. For more information see: Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (2011): 347–76, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23018789.

ideology, discourse, and behavior.[116] Over the past few decades, the Brotherhood avoided revolt or rebellion against Egypt's autocratic regimes despite repression and exclusion: the organization enhanced its stance on political pluralism, individual freedoms, and women's and Christian political rights to broaden its support, improved its relationship with other political factions, and enhance its political gains. On the contrary, during its stay in power, the demands and rights of the non-Islamist part of the population were not taken into consideration.

In conclusion, the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is an emblematic example of the volatile relationship between political Islam and the state. The link to authoritarian rule is an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to understanding the Brotherhood's trajectory, while its brief stint in government during Mohamed Morsi's presidency seemed to indicate a possible rapprochement between political Islam and state institutions, the subsequent 2013 coup and repression under al-Sisi marked a return to an intransigent authoritarian model. This cycle of political openness and closure points out the challenging relationship between Islamist movements and authoritarian regimes, where political tolerance is often seen as secondary to the interests of the ruling power.

The next chapter will delve into the case of Jordan, where the political and geopolitical landscape presents some differences compared to Egypt. In Jordan, the Brotherhood operated within a different environment, characterized by a monarchical regime that, while authoritarian, employed distinct strategies of co-optation and control. Analyzing this case could provide insight into how variations in regime type and geopolitical context can influence the dynamic between Islamist movements and the state.

[116] Khalil Al-Anani, *op. cit*., 1-15.

Chapter 3

The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan

The case of the Royal Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan portrays another form of Islamist participation in the political system. Unlike the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which, thanks to its activism, largely challenged the legitimacy of the state order, the Jordanian branch of the Brotherhood has enjoyed a considerably more cooperative and mutually supportive relationship with the regime for the greater part of its existence.[1] Hence, in Egypt and Syria, the Brotherhood has suffered from military or political repression, whereas in Jordan, it has mostly enjoyed a legalized and recognized status. Indeed, many studies have shown that the organization, to achieve political admission, has accepted the monarchy in its country, has shunned the use of violence, did not seek the revolutionary overthrow of governments, and was willing to work within the system.[2] As its parent organization in Egypt, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood aimed to establish an Islamic society governed by the principle of *Sharia*. Additionally, the group followed a pragmatic approach, cooperating for most of its activities with the Hashemite monarchy and concentrating on helping the Palestinian cause in support of refugees.

3.1 Historical emergence and development

Since the 16th century, Jordan had been part of the Ottoman Empire, administered as a province of Syria. When the First World War broke out in 1914, taking advantage of the fact that the Empire was already in collusion with the Central Powers, Germany and

[1] Peter Mandaville, "Islam in the System: The Evolution of Islamism as Political Strategy," in *Islam and Politics* (Routledge, 2014), 178–83.
[2] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.,* 1–22.

Austria-Hungary, Hussein the Sharif of Mecca led a revolt (1916-1918), in which Arabs rebelled against the Ottomans with the help of Britain in exchange for a promise of sovereignty for the Arab people. Britain provided advice, weaponry, and financial support to what came to be known as the Arab Revolt.[3] Thereafter, Britain established the state of Transjordan in 1921 and designated the Hashemite Hijazi Amir Abdullah as its ruler,[4] deciding to rely on the ascendance of the prophet Hashemite, the direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Although Abdullah I nominally ruled the country, the British, through the Anglo-Jordanian Agreement in 1928,[5] were propping up his leadership and steering it in the direction they wanted. Indeed, the treaty expressed the total dependence of Transjordan and Emir Abdullah upon the British, as Article 5 stated:

> His Highness the Amir agrees to be guided by the advice of His Britannic Majesty tendered through the High Commissioner for Tran-Jordan in all matters concerning foreign relations of Trans-Jordan, as well as in all important matters affecting the international and financial obligations […].[6]

The emirate remained under the control of the British Empire until 1946, when Jordan obtained independence thanks to another treaty in which Abdullah I was declared King of Jordan. However, the pact continued to give Britain a certain number of rights over the kingdom; indeed, it was not until 1957 that those ties were officially broken.

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[3]Clea Lutz Hupp, "A Kingdom of Dreams," in *The United States and Jordan* (I.B. Tauris, 2014), 17–37.
[4] Michael Robbins and Lawrence Rubin, "The Rise of Official Islam in Jordan," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 1 (March 2013): 59–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2012.752359.
[5] Joas Wagemakers, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Behavior in the Jordanian Context," in *In the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 84–120.
[6] United Kingdom and Transjordan, "Anglo-Transjordan Treaty," Article 5 (1928).

When the Kingdom of Jordan had just been created, King Abdullah I needed some support to build a nation and gather consensus. He relied on several conservative actors, including tribal leaders, minorities, and religious groups[7]. Thus, he decided to support Islam and sustain the founding of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, formally established by Abdul Latif Abu Qura on 19 November 1945. The king granted the movement legal status in January 1946 as a charitable society, also enabling the group to extend its influence during the initial period of state formation.[8] The Hashemite family's Medina origins and lineage reaching to the Prophet Muhammad was the main motive for cooperation between the two sides, with the Brotherhood recognizing its legitimacy.[9] Indeed, the organization worked with King Abdullah I despite his relationships with Western states and the military support he received from Britain, not even ties with the Zionists, and his engagement in peace talks with Israel in 1949-1950 prevented the group from withdrawing its support.[10] Within this framework, the organization supported the king's decision to annex the West Bank in 1950 and took sides with the regime against Arab nationalism and leftist movements, which influenced the Middle East under the charismatic leadership of the Egyptian leader Nasser between the 1950s and 1960s and threatened the Jordan monarchy. [11]

To counter secular ideologies that were circulating in those years, such as communism and nationalism, Abdullah allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to operate

[7] Jillian Schwedler, "Jordan: The Quiescent Opposition," *Wilson Center*, January 30, 2025, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/jordan-the-quiescent-opposition?utm_source.
[8] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Islamists, the State, and Cooperation in Jordan," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1999): 1–17, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41858304.
[9] Ronen Yitzhak, "The Question of the Legitimacy of the Hashemite Regime in Jordan: The Islamic Radical Organizations, the Western Territories and Israel," *Oriente Moderno* 100, no. 1 (June 18, 2020): 75–92, https://doi.org/10.1163/22138617-12340228.
[10] *Ibidem.*
[11] Nigar Nese Kemiksiz, "Arab Spring and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood Organization," *Open Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 02 (2022): 144–61, https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2022.122009.

openly, benefit from financial aid, and obtain jobs in the government,[12] reiterating its support for the Islamist organization. This initial cooperative relationship was then followed by a continuous parliamentary presence and state acceptance; on their side, the Muslim Brothers accepted the monarchy, proclaimed no use of violence, promised no revolutionary overthrow of the government, and guaranteed collaboration within the system to achieve its goals.

Abdullah I was succeeded in 1952 by King Talal, his son, and then, after his abdication, by his grandson Hussein in 1953.[13] The positive relationship with the Brotherhood continued since the group advocated greater religious awareness and practice, but in a framework that did not challenge the royal regime at all,[14] the organization worked primarily at the social level as a charitable and *da'wa* organization.

There were many situations in which the Brothers not only valued positively but also supported the kingdom of Hussein: for instance, when the king was willing to adhere to the Baghdad Pact to limit Soviet influence, he decided in 1955 not to sign it. This was a major dilemma for the young monarch, as his willingness to join was dampened by, at one level fear of domestic backlash and, at another level, of the opposition to the Pact from both the Arab nationalists led by Gamal Abdul Nasser, and Arab traditionalists led by Saudi Arabia.[15]

Even though, during his reign, a group of Nasserist Jordanian soldiers staged a coup d'etat to overthrow the regime, the coup was foiled by supporters of the monarchy, and King Hussein, emerging much stronger, was able to use it to his advantage and

[12] Ronen Yitzhak, *op. cit*., 75–92.
[13] Pénélope Larzillière, "The Jordanian Regime," in *Activism in Jordan* (Zed Books Ltd, 2016), 11–29.
[14] Peter Mandaville, *op. cit*., 178–83.
[15] Muddassir Quamar, "King Hussein (1935–99)," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, ed. P.R. Kumaraswamy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 233–42, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9166-8_14.

established a long period of political repression. In 1953, a law was passed specifically banning communists, and in 1957, political parties were dissolved, and martial law was imposed until November 1958.[16] As in the past, the Muslim Brothers, who were disappointed by this repression and its implications for their hopes of political inclusion, nevertheless had fewer positive feelings towards Nasser, and they still supported the regime in this circumstance. Those were the years in which the pro-Palestinian, anti-Western, and pan-Arabist message coming from Nasser's Egypt was popular in Jordan, and this was especially challenging, given that even though the king tried to make himself more independent, he was still seen under the influence of the West, also due to the economic and military aid the Jordan was receiving from The United States since 1951 and 1957, respectively.[17]

An issue in which the king and the Brotherhood did not agree was the Palestinian question. Tracing back the history, after the independence, Jordan emerged from the first Arab-Israeli War (1948– 1949) in control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which became part of Transjordan in 1949 and was even annexed by the kingdom in 1950.[18] Indeed, in November 1947, the two sides again agreed to partition of Palestine, ignoring the intention to establish an independent Arab state.[19] When the state of Israel was created in 1948, many Palestinians fled to Jordan, and by 1949, the West Bank had a population of 740,000, with 280,000 refugees, while the East Bank had a population of 470,000, with 70,000 refugees. Overall, Jordan had a total community of 1.2 million

[16] Pénélope Larzillière, *op. cit.*, 11–29.
[17] Jeremy M. Sharp, "Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations" (Congressional Research Service, 2024).
[18] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 84–120.
[19] Ronen Yitzhak, "King Abdullah I," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 215–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9166-8_13.

people, with two-thirds of them being Palestinians.[20] At first, the regime took advantage of the annexation, using images of the holy places in Jerusalem and the West Bank as symbols to legitimize the state and characterize the nation,[21] but later, the foundation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 and its increasing attempt to take control of the Palestinian affairs within the League of Arab States became a problem for Jordan, leading to rising tensions between King Hussein and PLO leader Yasser Arafat.[22]

In 1967, Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel in the Six-day War, and even more Palestinians fled to the kingdom; the flow of refugees was perceived as a problem when Palestinian militant organizations set up shops in the kingdom and thereby not only invited Israeli attacks on Jordanian soil but also became increasingly assertive towards the regime, going so far as to claim authority over parts of the country. This, in turn, led to a Jordanian crackdown on Palestinian militants in what has become known as the Black September in 1970. On September 16, the Jordanian army entered the Palestinian refugee camps in Amman, and a pitched battle between the armed Palestinian *Fedayeen*[23] and Jordanian security forces broke out. Eventually, the Palestinian *Fedayeen* were defeated, and the PLO was forced to move out of Jordan and take refuge in Lebanon.[24] The operation resulted in 3,400–7,000 deaths (some estimates put the figure as high as 20,000).[25] Such a fault line had a huge impact, not only on Jordanian society but also on the Islamist movement.[26] Indeed, even if the Muslim Brotherhood was not on the side of

[20] Jalal Al Husseini, "Palestinians in Jordan, 1948-1967," Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/6586/palestinians-jordan-1948-1967.
[21] Michael Robbins and Lawrence Rubin, *op. cit*., 59–74.
[22] Muddassir Quamar, *op. cit*., 233–42.
[23] Term used in Islamic culture to describe a devotee of a religious or national group willing to engage in self-immolation to attain a group goal. For more information see: https://www.britannica.com/topic/fedayee
[24] Muddassir Quamar, *op. cit*., 233–42.
[25] Pénélope Larzillière, *op. cit*., 11–29.
[26] Daniel Atzori, "Articulations of Islamism in Jordan," in *Islamism and Globalization in Jordan* (Routledge, 2015), 54–81.

the PLO, because of his secular and nationalist character, the group supported the cause from an Islamist perspective, indeed, the organization positioned itself in two ways: as a charity network and as a champion of the Palestinian cause but redefined in religious terms. These two fields of action had the advantage of not making them enemies of Jordan, unlike the nationalists and the left.[27]

Until 1989, the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime alternated between antagonistic interactions as well as mutually beneficial contacts based on mutual support, due to the state's desire to form an alliance with the primary religious actor in civil society.[28] When the Brotherhood and its Islamist allies participated in the elections of 1989, the year in which there was the return of parliamentary life to the country after a decades-long break, they were quite successful, winning 34 out of 80 seats.[29] This sort of openness was due to the fact that in those years, Jordan experienced a severe economic crisis. Consequently, the regime turned to the International Monetary Fund for emergency financial support. Still, the austerity programs that followed required the government to lift subsidies and led almost immediately to riots as Jordanians protested the sudden dramatic rise in prices for basic foods and commodities.[30] This is why, under the pressure of popular protests and economic problems, Hussein reintroduced parliamentary elections after 30 years of absence, the process towards democratization came as a testing phase for the ability of the Jordanian political system to coexist with the

[27] Pénélope Larzillière, *op. cit*., 11–29.
[28] Michael Robbins and Lawrence Rubin, *op. cit.*, 59–74.
[29] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit*., 84–120.
[30] Ryan R. Curtis, "The Hirak and Changes in Political Activism," in *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics beyond the State* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 65–89.

manifestations of political pluralism, especially with the Muslim Brotherhood and their success in the elections. [31]

In 1992, the king passed the Political Parties Law, in which one of the pre-requites for being a party was not to be a member of any other party or any other non-Jordanian political partisan organization.[32] The Brotherhood, being a transnational movement with its roots in Egypt, decided to found the Islamist Action Front (IAF) party, which then occupied the country's first political and legal opposition bloc, and its popularity exceeded that of other political parties in the majority of the parliamentary, student, and union elections.[33] However, in 1993, King Hussein passed a new electoral law that introduced a shift in the electoral system from the block vote[34] to the single, non-transferable vote. This system maintained the multimember districts that had been used for block vote, but it limited each voter to selecting one candidate on the ballot.[35] This law reduced the Islamist presence in the National Assembly in the elections, and the IAF contested the elections for the first time. This law was accompanied by a series of other measures against the Islamists, such as an exclusion from government contracts and the curtailment of their university activities. In this context, the limited democratic openings of the early 1990s were virtually frozen by mid-decade, with many of the earlier gains

[31] Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh, "Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian State: Containment or Fragmentation Bets (1999–2018)?," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 6, no. 1 (December 12, 2019): 62–80, https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891119891035.

[32] Government of Jordan, "Political Parties Law" (1992), http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/pol_parties1-14.html.

[33] Mohammad Abu Rumman, "Islamists in Jordan: The Long Journey of the Muslim Brotherhood's Changes," in *Islamism and Revolution across The Middle East*, ed. Khalil al-Anani (I.B. Tauris, 2021), 81–100.

[34] Each constituency elects more than one representative, and voters can cast as many votes as there are available seats. Political parties will stand multiple candidates in the hope of winning all the seats available. The candidates with the most votes win, even if they have not managed to secure a majority of the votes. For more information, see:https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems/types-of-voting-system/first-past-the-post/block-vote/.

[35] Abla Amawi, "The 1993 Elections in Jordan," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1994): 15–27, https://doi.org/10.2307/41858984.

disappearing entirely.[36] Furthermore, the signing of the Wadi Araba peace treaty with Israel in 1994 and the Jordanian government's refusal to amend the electoral law resulted in the deterioration of the Brotherhood's relations with the regime and led to Islamists' decision to boycott the 1997 elections, where they were joined by the nationalist and left-wing parties.[37]

Since 1999, after the death of King Hussein and the accession to the throne of King Abdullah II, the relationship between the two sides, the Brotherhood, and the regime, entered a phase of ambiguity and uncertainty, punctuated by numerous crises and limited periods of openness, [38] exacerbated by king's power to rule by decree and bypass parliament. Furthermore, the events of September 11, 2001, the transformation of the American role in the region towards promoting political and economic reform, the support of democratic transition processes tighten the relationship between the two parts.[39] Over the years, the opposition became stronger, and in 2005, new repressive legislation specifically targeting the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front was passed, banning the use of mosques as political spaces and restricting the activities of professional associations.[40]

Even though the Brotherhood and the monarchy built a relationship that has been cooperative for most of the time, the group has not been completely co-opted by the regime, with the latter granting space to the group to pursue its agenda only as long as its activities did not challenge the system.[41]

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[36] Jillian Schwedler, *op. cit.*, 1–33.
[37] Juan José Escobar Stemmann, "The Crossroads of Muslim Brothers in Jordan," in *The Muslim Brotherhood*, ed. Barry Rubin (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 58–72.
[38] Mohammad Abu Rumman, *op. cit.*, 81–100.
[39] Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh, *op. cit*., 62–80.
[40] Pénélope Larzillière, *op. cit*., 11–29.
[41] Jillian Schwedler, "Political Liberalization as a Mechanism of Control," in *Faith in Moderation Islamist: Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 34–76.

3.2 Arab Spring: protests and reforms

The revolts of 2011 were not about Islam, Islamic rule, or democratic rule; they were about improving people's socio-economic conditions, political reform, dignity, and freedom, and fighting corruption. [42] These anti-government protests ousted dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya and soon challenged longtime rulers in Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria;[43] and while the so-called Arab Spring brought confusion in most of the Middle East, Jordan was no exception. The monarchy was facing many challenges, such as economic difficulties, rising unemployment, and poverty. Furthermore, the idea that the country could become a possible refuge for Palestinians, the war in Iraq, and the resulting influx of Iraqi refugees after 2003 contributed to the various concerns about the steadiness of the state.[44]

On January 14, thousands of people took to the streets in Amman and in other Jordan cities, calling for political and economic reform, the eradication of corruption[45], and the resignation of Prime Minister Samir Rifa.[46] After this major event people started to organize regular demonstrations, rallies, and public meetings in major cities every Friday after prayers of the first two years of the Arab Spring,[47] repeating their demands of amending major constitutional articles, especially those related to the king's power to dissolve parliament (Article 34); appoint the prime minister (Article 35), and appoint

[42]Abdelmahdi Alsoudi, "The Impact of Arab Spring on the Political Future of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East: Jordan as a Case Study," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 04, no. 01 (March 2014): 01-29, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.41.01.
[43] Ryan R. Curtis, "The Arab Spring Protests in Jordan," in *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 19–42.
[44] *Ivi,* "Jordan and the Arab Spring," in *The Arab Spring: The Hope and Reality of the Uprisings*, ed. Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch (Routledge, 2018), 132–46.
[45] Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh, *op. cit*., 62–80.
[46]Al Jazeera, "Jordanians March against Inflation," Al Jazeera, January 14, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2011/1/14/jordanians-march-against-inflation?utm_source.
[47] Ryan R. Curtis, *op. cit.*, 132–46.

members of the Upper House (Article 36).[48] In February 2011, the king dismissed Rifai's government and appointed Marouf al-Bakhit as the new prime minister.[49] This move, however, did not succeed in placating the protests, and new forms of activism emerged in Jordan: the youth-led protest groups collectively known as the Jordanian Popular Movement (al-Hirak al-Sha'bi al-Urduni) and the Jordanian Youth Movement (al-Hirak al-Shababi al-Urduni), both usually referred to simply as the *Hirak*.[50]

The former referred to all the grassroots activism that emerged across Jordan, starting especially with labor movements, while the latter referred more specifically to the proliferation of youth-based local and regional protest movements. The rise of the *Hirak* phenomenon was perhaps the most unique feature of Jordan's Arab Spring experience;[51] Jordan saw the rise of extensive levels of youth activism, both in the streets and in cyberspace, from blogs to Twitter to Facebook groups. All this political turmoil and rising movement, culminated in the March 24 protest movement, the major mass demonstration that happened in Jordan in 2011: More than 1,000 pro-democracy demonstrators set up a tent camp in the center of Amman on Thursday in conscious imitation of Tahrir Square in Cairo, saying they would stay put until they saw real change.[52] The group, which took the name "March 24 Movement" after the date they began camping out, said it wanted an end to corruption and autocracy as well as an increase in economic equality.[53] Protesters were decidedly patriotic; their chants were pro-democracy, pro-reform, and pro-Jordan. The traditional red-and-white-checked

[48] Abdelmahdi Alsoudi, op. cit., 01-29.
[49] Ryan R. Curtis, *op. cit.*, 132–46.
[50] Ryan R. Curtis, "The Hirak and Changes in Political Activism," in *Jordan and the Arab Uprisings: Regime Survival and Politics beyond the State* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 65–89.
[51] *Ibidem.*
[52] Ranya Kadri and Ethan Bronner, "Jordan Protesters Build a Tent Camp in Amman," *The New York Times*, March 25, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/25/world/middleeast/25jordan.html.
[53] Ranya Kadri and Ethan Bronner, *op. cit.*, "Jordan Protesters Build a Tent Camp in Amman."

keffiyehs[54], often seen as a symbol of Transjordanian identity, were ubiquitous in the crowd, as were patriotic songs.[55]

On 7th November 2011, the IAF and the Muslim Brothers officially joined the uprising with other opposition political parties and groups. The group did not participate in the initial phase of the uprising in Jordan which was dominated largely by several groups of youth protesters, but once they realized the success of the uprising in neighboring Arab countries, they not only started to participate in the protests but also took over the leadership of the movement, which became known locally as "the mobilization" or (*al-Herrak*). [56] Amid this political unrest, the king reacted by forming a royal committee to review the Constitution and recommend necessary constitutional amendments to achieve the desired political reform and the development of political life in the country: the constitutional amendments included 42 articles, about one-third of the 131 articles of the Constitution.[57] However, the committee was dominated by conservatives and came up with little in terms of reformation. Perhaps the greatest achievement from this exercise was the creation, for the first time in Jordan, of a Constitutional Court.[58] Even though there were some changes, the powers of the king were not diminished, indeed, he still had the authority to appoint the prime minister and dissolve the parliament.

Furthermore, it was the rise in oil, electricity, and natural gas prices, which previous governments had managed to avoid, that spurred protests once again, with a huge demonstration of Jordan's Arab Spring occurring in October and November 2012,

[54] Head scarves often worn by men.
[55] Ryan R. Curtis, *op. cit.*, 19–42.
[56] Abdelmahdi Alsoudi, *op. cit.*, 01-29.
[57] Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh, *op. cit*., 62–80.
[58] Hafez Ghanem, "Spring, but No Flowers," in *The Arab Spring Five Years Later* (Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 7–27.

now spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood;[59] for the first time the slogan was changed "*al-sha'b yuridu isqat al-nizam*" (the people want the downfall of the regime), even though the Brotherhood preferred the previous alternative, "*al-sha'b yuridu islah al-nizam*" (the people want the reform of the regime).[60]

In the post-2011 period, opposition activists in Jordan were usually broken up into three groups: Islamists, traditional leftists, and newly formed, often politically independent youth groups. These groups cooperated to varying degrees, but the Muslim Brotherhood, being the largest political organization in the country, came to dominate the protests once it fully committed its resources.[61]

Although, King Abdullah II was able to implement gradual reforms to steer his country toward full democracy while avoiding the huge human and economic costs caused by the turmoil and instability experienced in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen.[62] The new electoral law prepared in June 2012 revealed a mixed system that partly increased the representation of the political parties but preserved a one-person one-vote system that the opposition demanded to annul for years. The Jordan Brotherhood didn't find the changes in the electoral law sufficient, demanded the chairs reserved for party candidates to be increased to 50%, and announced that it would boycott the elections if the necessary changes were not made.[63] Several Muslim Brotherhood leaders made no secret of their view that the uprising has shifted the internal balance of political power to their advantage, as one Brotherhood member declared:

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[59] Pénélope Larzillière, *op. cit.*, 11–29.
[60] Joas Wagemakers, "Between Exclusivism and Inclusivism: The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's Divided Reponses to the 'Arab Spring,'" *Middle East Law and Governance* 12, no. 1 (April 24, 2020): 35–60, https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-01201003.
[61] Marty Harris, "Jordan's Youth after the Arab Spring," *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, 2025, https://doi.org/10.2307/resrep10167.
[62] Hafez Ghanem, *op. cit.*, 7–27.
[63] Nigar Nese Kemiksiz, *op. cit.*, 144-61.

> "We use the parliamentary elections results in other Arab countries to say to our government look, when the elections are fair, the Islamists will win."[64]

Between 2012 and 2013, it became clear that the revolutions in several countries were not going to succeed (Syria), were not going to be as positive as was first expected (Libya), or were even reversed (Egypt), perceptions of the "Arab Spring" changed, some members of the organization decided to take a more inclusive approach. [65] Aware of the dangers of provoking the state without achieving results, these members called for a more accommodationist attitude toward the regime. Opposition groups began to pull back. Even Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood distanced itself from the November riots. They made clear repeatedly that they were for reform and a constitutional monarchy but not for the calls heard in some of these riots for regime change. Other opposition groups also seemed shocked by the vehemence on display in many of the riots, and they, too, backed off and tempered their use of language. Reform, not revolution, would be the watchword.[66] Indeed, despite the inadequacy of political reform, and even though political criticism persisted, and the monarchy and the king himself were no longer spared, demands tended to focus on economic and social aspects. Despite the slow pace and limited nature of political reform and the lack of socio-economic improvements, protests since November 2012 have been smaller and more disjointed. Any momentum for change that might have existed had well and truly diminished. [67]

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[64] Abdelmahdi Alsoudi, *op. cit.*, 01-29.
[65] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 35–60.
[66] Ryan R. Curtis, *op. cit.*, 19–42.
[67] Marty Harris, *op. cit*., "Jordan's Youth after the Arab Spring."

The Jordan Arab Spring failed for many reasons, but one of them was that the uprising was not united; rather, it was fragmented.[68] The government succeeded in weakening the uprising by playing protesters against each other in a way that led to the disappearance of the uprising's dangers to the regime and the country. This strategy practically brought the uprising to a complete halt. In addition, the king tried to accommodate the demands of the protesters, dismissing five governments in two years, creating a constitutional court to oversee legislation and other independent bodies to monitor elections and fight corruption, amending the electoral law to include 27 seats for the nationalists, and continuing his policy of political and economic reform.[69] His willingness to listen to the protesters and try to contain the uprisings was there; the problem was that he stopped short of limiting any of his executive powers.

In 2011 and 2012, many groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, professional associations, and leftist parties, played a key role through their peaceful demonstrations. During the protests, the organization came to understand that the struggle was not solely about the Muslim brothers and the regime but rather about a whole nation seeking freedom. This conviction led to a strengthening of its existing alliances with leftist and communist groups, as well as the formation of relations with new opposition groups.[70]

However, there was a shift in this cooperation in 2012, and it ultimately came to an end in 2013. The ongoing crisis in Syria brought ideological differences between the Brotherhood and leftist and communist parties to the forefront, and in June 2013, the IAF decided to freeze its own membership in the Higher Coordination Committee of the

[68] Abdelmahdi Alsoudi, *op. cit.*, 01-29.
[69] *Ivi*, "The Impact of Arab Spring on the Political Future of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East: Jordan as a Case Study," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 04, no. 01 (March 2014): 01-29, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.41.01.
[70] Neven Bondokji, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan: Time to Reform," *The Brookings Institution*, 2015.

Jordanian Opposition Parties. While this severed alliance was not directly responsible for the waning of the protest movement, it did perhaps undermine the opposition parties' strength and collective political will.[71] As a consequence, the protests largely diminished. Political parties in Jordan were understandably hesitant to follow the course of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and especially Syria, fearing a similar descent into turmoil.[72]

3.3 State relations and internal fragmentation

The Brotherhood's influence in Jordanian politics has persisted despite a long history of divisions inside the group; prominent examples include debates on whether to boycott elections or embrace democracy in the mid-1980s, the movement's relationship with the Palestinian organization Hamas in the mid-2000s, and its position on constitutional monarchy in Jordan, especially in 2008 and 2011. As these issues came up, a well-documented conflict between reformers and hard-liners within the Brotherhood and the IAF intensified.[73] And it was the radical position of the Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab Spring, especially its refusal of the government's proposals to participate in the political process, that damaged its traditionally good relationship with the regime in Jordan and created internal conflict among its leadership. [74] Indeed, after the uprisings, the Brotherhood was increasingly identified by the kingdom as part of the problem of the Arab Spring, not its solution. Moreover, the disagreement between the Muslim Brotherhood and the political system increased when Jordan's political position seemed to be in support of Israel and the condemnation of Hamas in Israeli aggression on the

[71] Neven Bondokji, *op. cit.*, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan: Time to Reform."
[72] *Ibidem.*
[73] Mohammad Abu Rumman and Neven Bondokji, "How and Why Has the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan Changed since 2011?" *The Middle East Journal* 74, no. 1 (May 1, 2020): 30–52, https://doi.org/10.3751/74.1.12.
[74] Abdelmahdi Alsoudi, *op. cit.*, 01-29.

Gaza Strip in 2008, 2012, and 2014. These positions were accompanied by strong criticisms of the Muslim Brotherhood to the regime in support of Hamas and the resistance.[75] In March 2016, the regime informed the Muslim Brotherhood that it would not be permitted to hold internal elections for its leadership posts. Weeks later, in April, security forces began closing Brotherhood offices, first the Amman headquarters and later regional offices in Mafraq, Madaba, and other cities,[76] leading to a complete fall of the original group.

What happened inside the Brotherhood was not new; the pre-existing divisions deteriorated after the Arab Spring and led to the total fragmentation of the organization. The division lies at the root of the split between radicals and moderates in the organization, who were lately called "hawks" (*suqur*) and "doves" (*hama'im*). They indicate a generally confrontational or radical attitude (hawks) versus a more accommodationist or pragmatic one (doves).[77] The most radical or hawkish Islamists are often associated with a greater focus on Islamist ideology and ideological rigidity, they are sometimes also seen as closely aligned with the radical ideas of Egyptian Muslim Brother Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), particularly his idea that modern-day Muslim societies live in a state of pre-Islamic ignorance (*jahiliyya*) that should be countered by setting up an Islamic state, which may imply a reluctance (or even a refusal) to accept existing regimes.[78] Doves, on the other hand, are seen as influenced by more "moderate" Islamist scholars, advocating a more cooperative attitude.[79] Moreover, the division is

[75] Mohammed Torki Bani Salameh, *op. cit*., 62–80.
[76] Ryan R. Curtis, *op. cit.*, 65–89.
[77] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 35–60.
[78] *Ibidem.*
[79] *Ibidem.*

about political considerations—namely, how accommodationist the Brotherhood should be vis-à- vis the Jordanian government.[80]

The most prominent issue of internal debate was the factions' stances on democracy. While the doves began incorporating the concept of democracy into the Brotherhood's discourse and created, along with other Islamists, the term "shuracracy," to emphasize a certain unity between democracy and the *Shura* (consultation),[81] acknowledging the need to accept the democratic game and what came along with it, such as pluralism, the rotation of power, and general freedoms. The hawks hesitated in this regard, attempting to restrict the participation of the group, its objectives in the electoral process, and their roles in the House of Representatives.[82] During the movement's primaries in 2007, the party leadership decided to choose to field doves as candidates for election. However, the IAF was able to win only six seats. [83] The outcome seriously destabilized the party doves and Islamists consequently changed track and boycotted the parliamentary elections in late 2010, then, they showed their support for the movements in Tunisia and Egypt, calling for a true constitutional monarchy in 2011 and 2012.[84]

As these issues came up, a well-documented conflict between reformers and hard-liners within the Brotherhood and the IAF intensified concerns about the ethnic background of the organization's members – Palestinian Jordanian or East-Jordanian, respectively – and what the group should focus on first and foremost: the Palestinian question or internal Jordanian affairs.[85] Historically, the hawks were generally of

[80] David Patel et. al., "The Communal Fracturing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood," 2018, https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/middle-east-briefs/pdfs/101-200/meb113.pdf?.
[81] Mohammad Abu Rumman, *op. cit.*, 81–100.
[82] *Ibidem.*
[83] Abdulgani Bozkurt and Muhammed Ünalmış, "Partnership and Rescue Party and the Transformation of Political Opposition in Jordan," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (January 30, 2022): 136, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020136.
[84] Pénélope Larzillière, *op. cit.*, 11–29.
[85] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 35–60.

Palestinian origin and advocated a pro-Palestinian agenda more focused on the transnational character of the Sunni Islamist organization, reiterating its support for Hamas and the Palestinian cause.[86] Whereas the doves were largely non-East Bank members who sought to reform the political system in Jordan and to drive the Brotherhood away from Hamas in favor of a more nationalist agenda.[87]

Another point of divergence was the relationship with the state, with radicals being more committed to the concept of the *Ummah*, the unified Islamic community, and placing a higher priority on pan-Islamic solidarity over national governance. This approach was more resistant to political integration, given that the Hashemite regime was not governed by *Sharia* law. Whereas moderates accepted the Jordanian nation-state to gradually implement Islamic law; the best example of this phenomenon is the IAF, which participated in elections, accepted Hashemite rule, and promoted Islamic governance through legal reforms. While often citing existing constitutional guarantees that they want to see realized in practice, they nevertheless both challenge the regime.[88]

Hence, the question of the Muslim Brotherhood's political participation, particularly its involvement in parliament, was the subject of debate, but, if its participation was overwhelmingly accepted, partly because al-Banna had already participated in elections himself, [89] the issue assumed even greater significance when the topic shifted to the Brotherhood's potential role in the government. Indeed, during his reign, King Hussein appointed several members of the Muslim Brotherhood to significant

[86] *Ivi*, "Ideological Divisions on the State," in *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 123–54.
[87] Hassan Barari, "Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan: Hamas in Ascendance," *The Washington Institute*, 2009, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/muslim-brotherhood-jordan-hamas-ascendance.
[88] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 123–54.
[89] *Ivi*, "Ideological Divisions on Political Participation," in *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 155–93.

government positions, particularly in the field of education reform.[90] In this context, the discourse surrounding the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in government was further complicated by the presence of two divergent positions. On one side, some hard-liners asserted that the government's legitimacy was contingent on its adherence to *Sharia* law. On the other side, moderates viewed the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a pragmatic move, recognizing its potential to enhance the Islamist experience in governance and to utilize the state apparatus to promote religious beliefs.

All these tensions led to the total fragmentation of the organization, reformers pushed for organizational changes within the Brotherhood, eventually ending with the creation of three new movements.

3.4 Post-Arab Spring: the rise of new movements

Taking a step back to understand how the divisions within the organization have evolved, in 2012, when the monarch framed parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood boycotted them, displaying a combative stance by continuing the demonstrations, causing it to drift apart from its allies who were more willing to compromise, and became isolated.[91] In addition, even the elections did not receive a significant level of support from the population, and the outcome was not particularly encouraging. The turnout among eligible voters was 39 percent, which was a matter of concern for the regime's reform measures. [92]

The Muslim Brothers adopted an antagonistic position with respect to King Abdullah II, asking for more political and constitutional reforms, which is why the

[90] Jillian Schwedler, *op. cit*., 34–76.
[91] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 35–60.
[92] *Ivi*, "Things Fall Apart: The Disintegration of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood," *Religions* 12, no. 12 (December 1, 2021): 1066, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121066.

regime, fearing an ascendence of the Brotherhood, like in Egypt or Tunisia, started to limit its political space.[93] In 2014, the government improved the restrictions on the group, limiting their movement and their access to the media. This became more apparent in the latter part of 2014 when the regional swing against the wider Brotherhood movement, which had emanated from Egypt in 2013, was manifested also in Jordanian policy. Jordan, along with Egypt and the Gulf states, wanted to build a counter-axis to the powerful radical Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood alliances that had emerged in the wake of the Arab Spring.[94] The country, in its choice, was influenced by two important external allies: while in the beginning, the USA encouraged the king to carry out gradual but real reforms, Saudi Arabia gave Jordan the message that it could only make limited political reforms in return for its financial support. Besides, to reduce the USA's pressure and obtain financial support from Gulf countries, the Jordanian administration had to "demonize" the Muslim Brotherhood.[95]

It is worth noting that the political limitations placed on the Brotherhood at this time resulted in several divisions within the organization, which subsequently led to the formation of other movements. In late 2012, a group of the Muslim Brotherhood launched the "National Initiative for Building" which became known as the Zamzam Initiative, named after the Zamzam Hotel in Amman, where the members met.[96] This proposal was to be a collective national initiative (*mubadara watani- yya jami'a*) that accommodates all Jordanian abilities and energy dedicated to the country; this was to be achieved through public, peaceful, and civilized means, far from regional, Islamic legal (*madhhabi*) or

[93] Nigar Nese Kemiksiz, *op. cit.*, 144–61.
[94] Beverley Milton-Edwards, "Jordan – Hashemites and the Brethren," in *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Arab Spring and Its Future Face* (Routledge, 2015), 86–110.
[95] Nigar Nese Kemiksiz, *op. cit.*, 144–61.
[96] David Patel et al., *op. cit*., "The Communal Fracturing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood."

religious violence, extremism, and clannishness.[97] The Zamzam initiative was, in other words, precisely the ideational coalition that the Brotherhood had never wanted to enter and, as such, constituted the inclusivist antithesis to the exclusivist approach of the organization.[98] Not surprisingly, the original group was highly skeptical of the initiative. Some members felt that Zamzam was an unwanted force intruding on Brotherhood affairs, partly because of these tensions but also because of existing divisions and disagreements, and hundreds of members submitted their resignations to the organization in 2015. [99] The impression that Zamzam was an attempt by "doves" to split off from the Muslim Brotherhood was also regularly expressed in the media.[100] Although the founding members of the initiative always claimed that it was a non-partisan group, Zamzam ended up founding the National Congress Party in 2016.

In December 2015, Lt. Muath al Kasasbeh was on a bombing run over Syria when he was forced to eject and was immediately captured by ISIS fighters;[101] in February 2015, when ISIS released the video in which they burned the Jordanian pilot, the monarchy completely changed the attitude toward the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups. Due to this event and to the high repression employed by the Jordanian regime, the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood was founded, a different organization presented as more moderate and keener on cooperating with the monarchy. The Association of the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood, or the "Permitted Muslim Brotherhood", quickly set up a temporary leadership to act as the new and officially

[97] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 35–60.
[98] *Ibidem.*
[99] *Ibidem.*
[100] *Ivi*, *op. cit.*, "Things Fall Apart: The Disintegration of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood."
[101] Cassandra Vinograd, "Burned Alive: ISIS Video Purports to Show Murder of Jordanian Pilot," *NBC News*, February 4, 2015, https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/burned-alive-isis-video-purports-show-murder-jordanian-pilot-n299361.

recognized association in Jordan. Moreover, with countries like Egypt outlawing the Muslim Brotherhood altogether in the context of the declining "Arab Spring", the Permitted Brotherhood claimed that it was safer to cut ties[102] with the mother organization in Cairo. The decision from the government to recognize the Permitted Brotherhood allowed this new group to use the power of the state to take over the assets of the original Brotherhood (its headquarters in Amman, its buildings, and its land) and helped the regime, which likely saw this as an easy way to get rid of the critical Muslim Brotherhood.[103] This resulted in two entities operating in Jordan, engaged in a legal fight over the movement's financial assets and resources: the original Muslim Brotherhood, registered as a charity and social organization in 1946 but operating with the IAF as its political arm, and the recently licensed Muslim Brotherhood Society.

The founding of new groups did not end in 2016; some reformers left the Brotherhood to create the Partnership and Rescue Party (PRP), which was officially registered the following year.[104] It was turned into a political party in 2017. It was established by East Bankers and formed an Islamist opposition that was not mainly preoccupied with the Palestinian issue or the role of Hamas, but more on national issues.[105]

In November 2014, Jordanian intelligence reportedly dismantled a clandestine network of the Brotherhood believed to be involved in the smuggling of arms to their associates in the West Bank. The kingdom's General Intelligence Directorate believed

[102] Ryan R. Curtis, *op. cit*., 65–89.
[103] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, "Things Fall Apart: The Disintegration of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood."
[104] Mohammad Abu Rumman, *op. cit.*, 81–100.
[105] László Csicsmann, "Political Reform as Regime Survival Strategy in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan after the Arab Uprisings," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, December 1, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754241304518.

the Brotherhood wanted to create a military branch for their activities within the country. In 2016, the Jordanian government declared the organization illegal, leading to the closure of its offices.

However, this did not mean that the Brotherhood had disappeared since its Islamist influence was present in the Islamist parties that still participated in the elections. Yet despite being divided into different versions of the Muslim Brotherhood, all of Jordan's major Islamist movements (aside from the Salafis) returned to the ballot box in 2016, the IAF competed in twenty out of twenty-three districts, winning seats in all five districts in the capital, for a total of ten seats overall. The other Islamist movements managed to gain five seats each, so even divided into three movements, all were represented under the dome of parliament.[106]

While Islamist parties were relatively quiet for some time, there has been a notable shift in recent events. In 2024, Jordan's leading Islamist opposition party, the IAF, performed well in the parliamentary elections, winning 31 out of 138 seats in the kingdom's parliament. This represents a significant increase in representation, especially in the context of legislative elections marked by concerns over the ongoing Gaza war.[107] The result is historic for the Islamists and their largest representation since they gained 22 out of the 80 seats in Parliament in 1989. The IAF had 10 seats in the previous Parliament elected in 2020 and 16 seats in the 2016 legislature.[108] The election result was the Islamists' best in 35 years. The IAF's focus on the Gaza conflict was part of the reason

[106] Ryan R. Curtis, *op. cit.*, 65–89.
[107] News Wires, "Jordan's Islamist Party Tops Election Overshadowed by Anger over Gaza War," France 24 (September 11, 2024), https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240911-islamists-top-jordan-election-held-in-shadow-of-gaza-war.
[108] Al Jazeera, "Jordan's Islamist Opposition Party Tops Parliamentary Elections," Al Jazeera, September 11,2024,https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/11/jordans-islamist-opposition-party-tops-parliamentary-elections.

for the success, but the party also managed to attract votes from other groups beyond its conservative Muslim base.[109] They regularly organized protests and recent incursions into the occupied West Bank. Perhaps, given the anger in Jordan about the civilian impact of Israel's military campaign against the Hamas militant group in Gaza and the fact that around half of Jordanian's population has Palestinian roots, it should not have come as a surprise that the IAF did particularly well in Jordan's parliamentary elections.[110]

3.5 Concluding remarks

The Jordan Muslim Brotherhood, which was initially focused on charitable and religious activities, began to adopt a more political stance from the 1950s onward. This shift in focus was driven by a deep concern over the Palestinian issue and the influence of Western countries in the region. This led to some disagreements with the reign, but through a combination of pro-Hashemite tendencies, shared anti-Nasserist sentiments, and a realization that the stability of Jordan ought to be preserved, it repeatedly sided with the regime in times of trouble.[111] On its side, the monarchy permitted this sort of cooperation, and the space the regime has given the organization has often led to moderation. Through this collaboration, the king was able to deflate the radical opposition and gain the ability to closely monitor legal opposition groups. Those groups benefit from the freedom to put forth alternative political agendas and the possibility of winning seats in parliament. [112]

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[109] Cathrin Schaer, "How Dangerous Is the Islamist Victory in Jordan's Elections?," *Dw.com*, September 17, 2024, https://www.dw.com/en/does-an-islamist-victory-in-jordans-elections-spell-danger-for-the-region/a-70240899.
[110] Cathrin Schaer, *op. cit*., "How Dangerous Is the Islamist Victory in Jordan's Elections?"
[111] Joas Wagemakers, "Conclusion," in *The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 232–45.
[112] Jillian Schwedler, *op. cit.*, 1–33.

When it comes to measuring the Jordanian case through the lens of the inclusion-moderation theory, considering the increase in moderation as a result of political inclusion has proved exceptionally difficult. In terms of the most common definition of moderation – working within a political system rather than trying to overthrow it – groups lacking a history of using political violence against a regime cannot necessarily be counted among those who have moderated because of their inclusion.[113] In the past few decades, however, the organization was repressed, sometimes causing a greater radicalization in its behavior in the form of electoral boycotts and the election of less accommodating members to the group's decision-making bodies. However, the periods of repression have not caused it to radicalize ideologically.[114] As Wagemakers explains:

> The reason why the Jordanian Brotherhood has moderated with regard to its ideology and its behavior throughout the seventy-year history is not so much related to rewards the regime has given the group (in the form of greater liberalization, for instance), but to three other factors: Islamic political thought, the organization's long history of political inclusion in Jordan and the Brotherhood's ideological divisions. [115]

This means that the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood has built on a long and highly diverse tradition of Islamic political thought, stretching back to early Islam but relying also on modern reformist scholars. Moreover, even though there were periods of repression, the

[113] Jillian Schwedler, *op. cit.*, 1–33.
[114] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit.*, 232–45.
[115] *Ibidem.*

relationship of loyal opposition that was created brought the Brotherhood to rely on a long-standing relationship with the regime.[116]

Ultimately, the divisions inside the movement not only served to weaken the Brotherhood but also rendered the organization more susceptible to regime pressure. This pressure was most acutely felt during and following the uprising that transpired in 2011. Consequently, the Brotherhood found itself compelled to assume a role in the resolution of these issues, thereby emerging as a prominent political entity in the aftermath of the rebellions (as the parent organization in Egypt), however, this was not the case for the Jordanian branch.[117]

[116] Jillian Schwedler, *op. cit.*, 1–33.
[117] Joas Wagemakers, *op. cit*., 232–45.

Conclusion

This dissertation investigates how the Muslim Brotherhood behaved differently depending on the context in which it evolved, namely Egypt and Jordan, resulting in a collection of national groups with differing outlooks, in which there were different opinions among the various factions about how best to advance their mission, but always a shared rejection of global jihad and an embrace of elections and other features of democracy.[1]

Taking into example the two countries, the political evolution of the Egyptian organization was marked by periods of both parliamentary inclusion and repression; these phases culminated in a brief period of power following the Arab Spring and the later expulsion by the military regime. Hence, the organization's political development was an interesting case study in the Egyptian system's volatility, characterized by persistent instability and frequent regime change. In contrast, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood used peaceful methods and participated in elections through its political wing, the Islamic Action Front.[2] The movement's approach has been to endorse a strategy of adaptation and cooperation with the Hashemite monarchy, which has allowed it to maintain a political role that was much more stable but always limited. Even during the Arab Spring, the Jordanian branch chose a more moderate approach, avoiding direct clashes with the regime and trying to preserve its political space. A key element of its strategy was a willingness to maintain its position as a group that enjoyed certain benefits and privileges. This comparison indicates that despite the presence of a unifying ideological foundation,

[1] Robert S Leiken and Steven Brooke, "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2007): 107–21, https://doi.org/10.2307/20032287.
[2] Barry Rubin, "Comparing Three Muslim Brotherhoods: Syria, Jordan, Egypt.," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2007), https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/meria/meria_200706/meria_200706_8_rubin.pdf.

the strategic approach and political trajectory of the groups were shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external variables; everything significantly influenced the Brotherhood's capacity to act.

In this study, the inclusion-moderation hypothesis proved instrumental: central to this theory is the idea that when allowed to participate in pluralist, democratic processes, political actors will, through some combination of experience, constraint, and learning, come to see the logic of continued participation[3] and, consequently, moderate. While the theory presents a positive perspective on the inclusion of all parties in electoral competition, it raises numerous concerns, including whether such transformations are unavoidable or deliberate, and whether inclusion might result in the dominance of radical ideologies within the political system.[4] However, this theory, as related to the cases of Egypt and Jordan, has proven to be problematic. In both instances, the inclusion did not result in the desired outcome of true and stable moderation or durable integration into the political system. For instance, while the Muslim Brotherhood was initially included in the Egyptian political process, it was subsequently subjected to brutal repression. Similarly, in Jordan, the monarchy allowed the group to participate in the political arena, albeit in a highly restricted capacity, to maintain its power and stability. Moreover, the adoption of a moderate stance in Jordan has been more of a survival strategy than a genuine ideological transformation. In both cases, the inclusion of these groups did not result in their lasting legitimization. In Egypt, political opposition and the military had never accepted the Islamist government; in Jordan, the monarchy viewed the Brotherhood as a potential threat, tolerating it only when it was convenient. Moreover, political parties do

[3] Jillian Schwedler, "Justification and Moderation," *Cambridge University Press,* June 19, 2006, 149–91, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511550829.008.
[4] Sultan Tepe, "The Inclusion-Moderation Thesis: An Overview," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, September 30, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.788.

not function as unitary entities; the elite can moderate positions at the center while maintaining an unmoderated stance at the periphery or vice versa. Additionally, there may be varying degrees of moderation across party factions. Party change is not necessarily an all-encompassing process and may comprise simultaneous moderation and immoderation processes in ideology and/or behavior. [5] In summary, the political inclusion of these groups does not guarantee their moderation and stability. Instead, the discourse surrounding these movements is more intricate. Besides, the application of inclusion-moderation thesis necessitates a thorough examination of the electoral context, intraparty dynamics, the specific ideological tenets and theological commitments of a given party, and the overall tendencies of constituencies.[6]

It is therefore necessary to emphasize how much in the evolution of both organizations there have been internal variables, such as the internal fragmentation of the group, the degree of repression by the state, the more or less important role during the Arab Spring, and also external variables, such as the relationship with Israel, pressure from Middle Eastern powers such as the Gulf states or the United States, thereby illustrating the fundamental relationship between Islamist movements and the state. This phenomenon elucidates the rationale behind the two distinct evolutionary paths observed in the countries, despite the common origins of the Jordan group with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The group in Egypt experienced a period of significant growth and subsequent dramatic decline, ultimately leading to its complete repression. In contrast, the group maintained a more stable presence in Jordan, albeit under control.

[5] Manfred Brocker and Mirjam Künkler, "Religious Parties," *Party Politics* 19, no. 2 (March 2013): 171–86, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068812473673.
[6] Sultan Tepe, *op. cit*., "The Inclusion-Moderation Thesis: An Overview."

Nevertheless, the future of political Islam in the region is determined by the internal dynamics of each state and the integration of Islamist movements into the political process. This is particularly challenging in the Egyptian context, where they have been significantly repressed. In Jordan, however, Islamists experienced a different evolution: while these movements were repressed, they were not expelled, and the political parties founded by the Muslim Brotherhood have remained active.

It is important to acknowledge that the ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict has the potential to influence the situation, particularly considering the growing concern among Arab populations.[7] As discussed in the third chapter, a significant portion of the Jordanian population shares Palestinian heritage. Indeed, the Brotherhood has long supported the cause, and Hamas, a movement offshoot, has been the vocal defender of the Palestinian people.

President Trump's recent plan to move over two million Palestinians from Gaza to Jordan and Egypt has put renewed attention on the role of Islamists in both countries in the Palestinian issue.[8] It is possible that this could potentially strengthen the Islamist movement in both nations, as it was already seen with the IAF, who used the issue to broaden its base of support and increase its presence in parliament in the 2024 elections. In Egypt as well, the Muslim Brotherhood may find new spaces for mobilization, taking advantage of the popular discontent towards policies that are contrary to the interests of Palestinians. These examples highlight the significant impact of the issue on the political

[7] Al Jazeera, "Jordan's Islamist Opposition Party Tops Parliamentary Elections," Al Jazeera, September 11, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/11/jordans-islamist-opposition-party-tops-parliamentary-elections.

[8] Jason Burke, "'Worst Nightmare': Egypt and Jordan Put in Impossible Bind by Trump Gaza Plan," the Guardian (The Guardian, February 6, 2025), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/06/egypt-jordan-trump-gaza-plan

dynamics of these countries and the potential influence it may have on the role and consensus of these movement in both countries.

In conclusion, this dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the relationships between Islamist groups and states. It is critical to note that there is no single, universally applicable technique but rather a variety of strategies for adaptation according to each state's relationship, political context, and geopolitical challenges. Therefore, it is essential to examine the future of political Islam and its potential impact on regional and global stability, given that it continues to play a significant role in global dynamics, influencing not only the internal agendas of the MENA region but also their international relations.

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