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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines how religion has influenced Egyptian politics from its very beginning until modern Egypt, which is represented by the rule of the presidents Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak and Mursi. The history of the religious groups that have played a major role in Egyptian politics, mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, will be studied too. When and how did religious groups first emerge, and what differentiate them from other groups in other Arab/Islamic countries? This paper studies the Muslim brotherhood and their role in Egypt's politics from Naser's regime till Mursi. It also examines the consequences of religious-based groups on repression policies by the state's institutions. It concludes that the state always prefers a secular and citizenship-based state while religious groups, mainly Islamists, prefer Islam-based state.*

**Keywords :** Islam, Muslim Brotherhood, Political Islam, Religion and politics, Egypt.

## **المخلص:**

يناقش هذا البحث أثر الدين على الحياة السياسية في مصر منذ عهد مصر القديم حتى التاريخ السياسي وما بعد ثورة يوليو من ناصر والسادات حتى عهد "مبارك" ولاحقاً الرئيس المصري "مرسى". يعتبر تاريخ الجماعات الدينية في مصر عاملاً مهماً في فهم السياسة الداخلية المصرية حيث يلعب دوراً أساسياً , ومثالاً على ذلك الإخوان المسلمين منذ القرن الماضي حتى الآن. يناقش هذا البحث دور جماعة الإخوان المسلمين وعملهم كمعارضة في أروقة الحياة السياسية المصرية. كيف بدأت الجماعات الدينية في مصر وبماذا تتميز؟ هذه الورقة تدرس الإخوان المسلمين كمثال لتلك الجماعات في مصر وتحاول الوقوف على علاقتها بالدين والدولة والنظام السياسي في مصر. تبحث الورقة أيضاً نتائج نشاطات المنظمات الدينية على سياسات القمع . تستنتج هذه الدراسة أنّ الدولة ونظامها يفضلان دوماً ان تكون الدولة على أساس علماني ودولة مواطنة، بينما تحاول الجماعات الدينية وخصوصاً الإسلامية صبغ الدولة دينياً، وهو ما ينعكس بنتائج سلبية على الحياة السياسية في مصر وما نتج عنها من ديكتاتوريات وأنظمة سلطوية.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الإسلام، الإخوان المسلمين، الإسلام السياسي، الدين والسياسة، مصر.

## **Introduction**

Religion has been a focal issue in Egypt's politics and among the Egyptians in general (see table 1). After the revival of the Muslim Brotherhood and their political capabilities to be a powerful part of the political scene, the issue of political Islam and religious-based associations became a debatable issue.

Ousting former president, Mursi and then ban on the Muslim Brotherhood, labeling it as a terrorist organization added more problems to the troubled issue. Egypt's politics have always been affected by religion and Egyptians are among the most religious people in the Arab World (Al-Arabiya n.d.). However, the question in this research paper is to what extent the exact effect of religion on politics and political parties. In conclusion, an idea would be formed about the real relation between politics and religion in Egypt and whether it's strengthens or weakens the government and the societal unity.

### **Egypt and religion: historical review**

Going through Egypt's Pharaonic history, the article "An overview of the Ancient Egyptian religion" by John Watson, describes the role of religion in ancient Egyptians' lives and how it affected every aspect of their daily life (Watson 2010). He examines religion and its relationship with kingship, or in other words, politics. It describes how Egyptians were very religious and in spite of having several gods they were always keen on obeying them, providing all sorts of worship. The Ancient Egyptians view of the king was "the single link between the divine and the profane, as well as the representative of the gods on Earth". This implies how religion and politics or kingship was closely related in ancient Egypt. Therefore, the king represented a very important symbol for the Egyptian religion and would lead all religious ceremonies. Religion was thus considered the main source for all the ruling decisions and had to be obeyed by the people who were keen on pleasing their king who in the end pleases their gods. The article also showed how the King chose the priests, who were highly symbolic of religion as they lived in the temples to serve the gods. The king usually chose them from his relatives.

The appointment of the priests was considered both a political and religious process.

**Table 1 How Important Religion in Life. Source: WVS**

	Egypt		
	1999-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014
Important in life: Religion			
No answer	-	*	*
Very important	97%	95%	94%
Rather important	3%	4%	6%
Not very important	0%	0%	*
Not at all important	-	0%	0%
(N)	3,000	3,051	1,523

Watson's work shows the values of religion in the lives of ancient Egyptians and how it played an important role. This important start in the journey of explanation of the importance of religion for Egyptians has existed for thousands of years and thus is not a new phenomenon.

An important period of the Egyptian political history is that which includes the *Fatimid* and *Mamluks* empires. In the "Islam in the context of the secular state" by Abdullah Ahmed An-Na'im, he addresses these issues and the history of these empires and its relations to religion (Abdullah An-Na'im 1960). He argues that a secular state has more effective institution for development. However, he does so without claiming to have examined all the theoretical or practical implications of this hypothesis. He examines the state's institutions in relations to Shari'a in general, and not the religious practices in the private and personal lives. Although a secular state separates religion and the state, a secular state would not keep religious arguments away from the political area and formulation of public policy. Thus, the question is how to negotiate the overlapping of politics and religion while maintaining a secular state.

The research studies three main empires that have ruled Egypt, and that have been affected by religion in chronological order, starting by the *Fatimid* Empire. Since that time Islam has been the main religion in Egypt, that of the greatest popularity and thus the most influential on politics. The *Fatimid* Empire was totally based on religious affiliations. According to An-Na'im, "the founder, Ubayd Allah, legitimized his claim through descent from Muhammad (peace upon him) by way of his daughter Fatima as-Zahra, hence the name *Fatimid*" (Abdullah An-Na'im 1960) This shows how the main legitimacy of the *Fatimid* rule is

religiously based, specifically from Shi'a Islam. The rule of Egypt under the Fatimid dynasty consequently followed their religious affiliations in choosing the members of the ruling elite. "Fatimid advancement in state offices was based more on merit than on heredity. Members of other branches of Islam, like the Sunnis, were to be appointed to government posts. However, tolerance was extended even to non-Muslims such as Christians and Jews, who occupied high levels in government based on ability." (Abdullah An-Na'im 1960) When the Fatimid dynasty collapsed, it happened for religious reasons. When the governors of the Fatimid dynasty in North Africa and Egypt announced their conversion to the Sunni Islam, the dynasty collapsed. After the Fatimid dynasty ended in 1160, Egypt was seized by the *Ayoubi* dynasty.

The Mamluks dynasty gained its legitimacy from its service to Islam, which is obvious in the public symbols that they have emphasized as protecting the Muslim lands and increasing the role of religious institutions. "They only possessed force as means of control and used the religious symbolism of the Caliph for political gain" (Abdullah An-Na'im 1960). It emphasizes the role of religion on politics at that point of time in Egypt. It shows how religion and politics overlapped as the political legitimacy of those two empires was gained for religious reasons.

Studying the interaction between Islam and the state, Borthwick examined the Egyptian case in comparison to the Israeli (Borthwick 1979). The study focuses on Islamic figures that took part in politics as Gamal El Din Al Afghany. It approaches the applicability of the Islamic laws in the modern Egyptian state and the degree to which the state is considered secular or religious. Moreover, it devotes a large part to the stage of Nasser's rule in Egypt, i.e. after the revolution.

With emphasis on Nasser's age, the research showed how religious acts, religious institutions as mosques and religious schools were made under the control of the state. Even Al-Azhar, the largest religious institution in Egypt and the whole Arab world, was controlled by the state. The article explains the reasons for this increased attention given to religious institutions. The main reason was the threat represented by the Muslim Brotherhood who has gained more popularity since the time of the revolution. "Abd El Nasser was now able to shape the religious policy of the Egyptian state himself. The policy was to bring all religious institutions under state control to have them espouse a version of Islam that would appeal to both the conservative masses who

had been influenced by the Muslim brotherhood and to the more modern, but still religious, middle class” (Borthwick, 1979)

As figure no1 indicated, there has been a very high degree of insulation of the government from input from religious organizations. The government may sometimes enlist or mobilize religious organizations after policies are adopted to sell them to the public at large. But typically, it does not consult with them in formulating policies.

Religion in Nasser’s time was a crucial part in decision-making at national and regional level. Nasr’s regime repressed religious organizations and banned political parties that were based on religions. Loyalty of the people to a ruling party or regime may change according to their religious believes. Having compared Egypt to Israel, Borthwick surprisingly announces that Israel has been attaching religion to its politics too. This draws another conclusion, that when religion is attached to politics, it’s manipulated to serve political goals and not the opposite.



**Figure 1 Religious Organizations Consultation in Egypt 1900-2014. Source: V-dem**

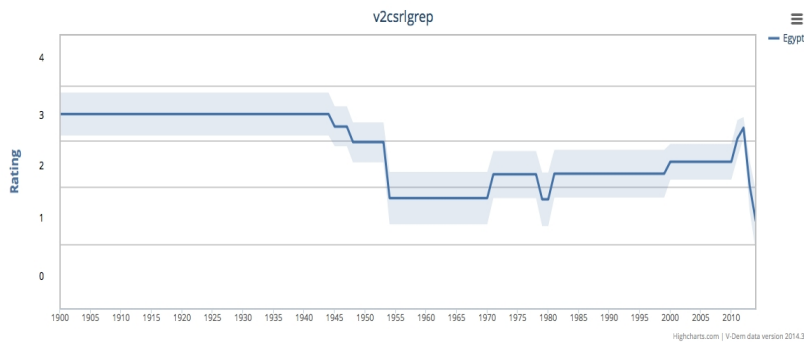
Egypt through Sadat’s reign was fully studied by Henry Jackson in his book “Sadat’s perils”. Jackson’s work examines the “*infatih*” policy, literally openness. He studies the effect of this policy on public opinion especially religious groups. Through his work, the relation between the state policies during Sadat’s time and religion is depicted.

As Henry argues, the *infatih* policies depended on a more Western orientation and engagement in trade and industry with the West. Sadat’s policies started to conflict with the Islamist fundamentalists who were calling for giving up these Westernized effects and relations to protect Islam. However, according to Jackson, Sadat didn’t care about such opposition and “moved steadily in the opposite direction, he resumed diplomatic relations with Washington in 1974 and signed the USSR friendship treaty in 1976 to announce the launch of his *infatih* policy to the West” (Jackson 1981)

At the same time when Sadat carried out these policies, the Islamists were also progressing their policies; mainly the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). MB represented threat to the Sadat's regime, as has been the case during Nasser's time. That's why Sadat tried to overcome their threatening effect by inviting some of their leaders to be part of the political institutions. The goal behind his initiative was to use the Islamists against the leftist parties who were more towards communism, who stood against the Sadat's policies. MB continued to issue a newspaper called "Al Daawa" which gained popularity reaching over 80,000 readers at that time. Conflicts between the religious groups and Sadat increased after the signing of the Camp David treaty with Israel.

Another religious group called the neo-Islamists emerged. According to Sadat's regime, the groups is more radical than the MB. The neo-Islamists were different from the Muslim brotherhood in justifying the use of violence, and they validated it from the Jihad concept. There was also a group of the Takfir and hijra founded in 1971, they were armed fundamentalists who wanted to establish an Islamic state, claiming that they are following the rules set by God and Prophet Muhammad (peace upon him). What made the relations between these religious groups and the government worse was the act performed by the neo-Islamists. They attacked the Heliopolis military academy in Cairo and killed over thirty Egyptian soldiers. Consequently, many of the members of those armed groups were imprisoned and it was in 1977 that Sadat announced the punishment of death or hard labor for anyone convicted of belonging to those secret army organizations. The peak of the conflict occurred in 1981 when "Sadat was assassinated during the annual victory parade in Cairo. A fatwa approving the assassination had been obtained" (Jackson, 1981). Repression of religious groups was high in Egypt from Nasr's time until today. Egypt has never experienced totally free religious organizations (Civil society of political). They were all the time monitored and repressed. As figure 2 illustrates, Egypt's civil society organizations suffered from a severe restrictions and repression. As the graph explain that since the 1952 revolution, repression against religious organization increased consistently until 2011 and dropped for a year then increased sharply after 2013. As V-Dem explains, the government arrested, tries and imprisoned leaders and participants in oppositional religious organizations who have acted lawfully. They disturbed their gathering and prevented them from acting according to the law. The government used material sanctions

(fines, firings, denial of social services) to deter oppositional religious organizations from acting or expressing themselves.



*Figure 2 Religious Organization Repressions in Egypt. Source: V-dem 2015*

Other scholars such as Hesham Al-Awadi examined the reasons behind the change of Mubarak's policy towards the Islamists especially the Muslim brotherhood. He studies the sources of legitimacy for Islamists nowadays in the Egyptian society (Al-Awadi 2005).

He examines how the Islamists have been tolerated by the state since Mubarak's rule. After the age of being blacklisted during Sadat and Nasr's time for their violent acts, President Mubarak tolerated them. Islamists gained more autonomy and social space in universities, voluntary and charity organizations. The Islamists made use of this space and they started developing these organizations, offering their services in order to build their own legitimacy among people. The public services they offered were far more than the state's institutions can offer. The quality of such services was so high that the states cannot handle its costs. Consequently, Islamists gained their legitimacy from the people themselves. The informal institutions the MB created either competed or substituted the formal institutions, which made them a favorable part in the society. It is an informal/ societal legitimacy as its source wasn't the state. This resulted in a systematic repression campaigns against the MB and the Islamist activist by the state institutions.

The acts of the MB during Mubarak's era were analyzed and it shows exactly the services they offered to people to achieve the informal legitimacy. According to the Al-Awaadi, there are three components serving in the strength of the Muslim brotherhood: The informal

legitimacy they gained from services offered, having an organized network, organized use of the legitimacy. As for the building up of their legitimacy, this was done informally through a change in the Muslim brothers' policy.

As pictured in the article,

*“In the 1970s we used to have beards and wear julbab, our discourse was directly Islamic. We focused on issues like Islamic dress and spreading Islamic awareness through books and exhibitions” (Al-Awadi, 2005) So this is simply how they behaved and appeared in society before Mubarak’s rule. On the other hand after the change in policies and relations between the Muslim brotherhood and the state, “In the 1980s hardly any Muslim brotherhood member had beards and all wore Western clothes and suits. We focused on issues related to democracy and on serving the needs of the students by providing them with cheap reference books and revision manuals, this was part of our positive development services” (Al-Awadi, 2005)*

All this shows how the Muslim brotherhood succeeded in achieving their informal legitimacy despite the state’s denial for their existence. The Muslim brotherhood focused more on university students, professionals, teachers and professors. They succeeded in mobilizing and uniting professionals in different agencies. For instance, when university professors complaint of low salaries and inability to match their needs, the Muslim brotherhood managed to mobilize efforts and convince Fathi Sorour, Vice president of Cairo University to increase salaries. This was considered a great achievement and increased the popularity of the Muslim brotherhood among professionals.

Having an organized network was one of the main strengths for the Muslim brotherhood according to the article. Being denied public appearance by the state, the Muslim brotherhood had to efficiently managed their organization to be able to deliver their services to people all over Egypt. Their organization was therefore formed of several departments ranging from finance to media, politics and even religious fatwas. Every department had two levels of management: a regional one through the different governorates and a central one in Cairo. Networking and communication between the regional and central management levels was very effective and done through regular meetings. The role of the Muslim brotherhood didn’t stop at social services but their interference in politics came along when they started to use their informal legitimacy for that. For example, during the Gulf



war in 1991, MB started to use their legitimacy to affect public opinion. In 1990 they boycotted the parliamentary elections as a protest against the interference and fraud in the electoral process and preparations by the government. “The presence of the Muslim brotherhood was not entirely innocent but was in fact intended to serve a higher political agenda” (Al-Awadi, 2005)

Due to the increased popularity and activities of the MB and other Islamist groups, state policy changed against them. After their opposition to the state and increased legitimacy from the public, the government began to arrest hundreds of the Muslim Brothers in 1995 and many of them were tried (Figure 2). Instead of the autonomy and freedom given by the state to university campuses, more control and interference from the security systems occurred. Moreover, Student Union elections were under control of the university administration to prevent the victory of any members of the Muslim brotherhood. The government started efforts to weaken the services provided by the MB, which provided sources of legitimacy. “This was seen in the case of the health care project; the funding of this project had been hindered and greatly decreased” (Al-Awadi, 2005). Moreover, the surrounding events in other Arab countries, Algeria mainly, affected the decisions Egyptian system. When the Islamists in Algeria succeeded in the elections of 1992, this resulted in an increased fear in the Egyptian government of the increased popularity of Islamists in Egypt; It provoked greater actions against the Egyptian Islamists.

As Makram Muhammad Ahmed the editor of al-Musawer magazine, “The brothers are considered the greatest political threat to the regime. This is because they are popular and organized. If they were to contest elections, they could easily win the National Democratic party. The government is afraid that what happened in Algeria in 1992 could happen again in Egypt.” (Al-Awadi, 2005)

When studying the role of religion in Egyptian politics and their relation, the role of the Al-Azhar cannot be ignored. Al-Azhar is the oldest and most famous of all Islamic academic institutes and universities. The role of the Al-Azhar has been in the opposite side of the MB. While the Muslim Brotherhood was taking sides against the government, Al-Azhar has always supported the government and its decisions. Moreover, Al-Azhar assisted the state in its struggle against the Muslim Brotherhood. The pressure by the government on the Al-Azhar scholars to support gov. position often led to resistance and even resignation of many of them. In 1961, the government made some

reforms at Al-Azhar and added secular faculties. Al-Azhar has always supported the government as in 1956 after the defeat from Israel the Azhar Sheikh Jad Al-Haq produced a fatwa opposing peace with Israel. On the other hand in 1978 when Camp David was signed, Al-Azhar provided President Sadat with a Fatwa to go for peace and sign Camp David agreement. The support of Al-Azhar for the state continued under Mubarak and the government's started to have more control over the administration. "The government now has the power to appoint the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, a right exercised as recently as May 1996 when it promoted Muhammad al-Sayyid Tantawi, after the death of Jad al-Haq"(Barracrough 1998). By the year 2002, the government provided Al-Azhar more control over the private mosques where the recruitment of Islamists for organizations like the Muslim brotherhood occurs. According to the Barracrough, the increased authority of Al-Azhar did not stop at that stage but also Al-Azhar was given more space in state-owned media (see figure 3). The state provided Al-Azhar greater control and authority to censor publications in order to be able to limit the publications of the Islamist groups.

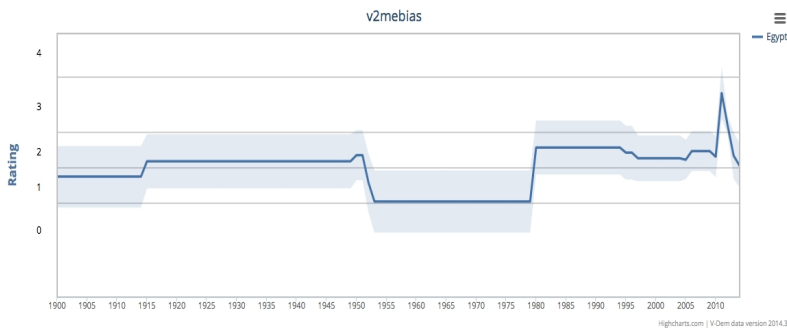


Figure 3 Media Bias against opposition and MB in Egypt. Source: V-Dem 2015

The issue of religion and politics and their overlap is one of the most debatable topics among intellectuals and academics, not only in Egypt but also in the whole world. As of 2012, there has been intensive debate on whether Egypt must integrate religion into constitution, and therefore, be part of daily life, or should religion be away from state's politics.

## Discussion

The relationship between religion and politics has always been a critical issue addressed not only in Egypt but also in the whole world. Questions of whether religion should interfere with politics or not, and

whether states should be secular or religious have been debatable. Different opinions arise when specifically discussing Egypt; some support a secular state while others prefer a religious one.

According to the research on the history of religion and politics in Egypt, Egyptians have always been a religious population. Religion and politics have a two-ways influence where both of them influence the other. Religion has affected many aspects of their lives and even interfered with politics since the time of the Pharaohs. Politics has greatly affected religion throughout Egyptian history, and it has always been an important factor in the selection of the ruler, setting the laws to be followed and even creating disturbances in the political system through conflicts on who will rule sometimes in the past leading to wars.

Different religions have existed in Egypt since its ancient times, starting by the multiple gods that ancient Egyptians had until the Monotheistic religions. All these religions affected the politics of Egypt at the times of their existence. Starting by the Pharaonic times, ancient Egyptians had their own gods that they worshipped. The choice of the king depended mainly on the gods, as the king had to be someone very close to their gods to keep them connected to the gods. Due to the importance of religion in Ancient Egyptians' lives, they considered the crowned king a living god. "At his crowning, a new king was transformed into a living god" (Baines, Lesko & Silverman, 1991) The fact that Egyptians looked up to their king as a god was to increase the obedience to their ruler and to show any of his orders as conveyed from their gods, thus have to be obeyed. Even if they had wrong beliefs about multiple gods, they still had a concept of a religion that affected their lives greatly.

Later on at the time when Christianity started to appear and spread in Egypt, the Roman Empire was dominating the rule in Egypt. A conflict rose between the empire and Christianity. The conflict was between the political system represented by the empire and the religion represented by the Christianity. The Roman Empire realized that Christianity is a threat to its state's. Therefore, as elsewhere, they persecuted many Christians in Egypt. They burned all Christian books and demolished the churches. This was a result of the mixing between religion and politics and the belief that if Christianity would revive it would take over the rule in Egypt and get rid of the Romans. It was only when the Byzantine empire took control over Egypt that Christianity became the major religion in Egypt. And as the article "Egypt under the Rome and

Byzantium empire” shows, religion was severely attached to politics during that time as follows, “After the fall of Rome, the Byzantine Empire became the center of both political and religious power.” (U.S library of Congress, 2001) This relation between politics and religion even affected Christian Egyptians in their response to Islamic expansions into Egypt They didn’t resist the new Islamic state as the existing political regime in Egypt, which was the Byzantine empire, had continuously persecuted the Egyptian Christians which increased their animosity towards the empire.

Islam’s arrival to Egypt started new era of abusing religion for the sake of power and seeking religious legitimacy among the public.

As for the Fatimid Empire, it gained legitimacy because its leaders claimed relations to the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter. This is what made it rise and gain control of many parts of the Arab world including Egypt. However because this Fatimid Empire was based on the Shite’s Islam of Islam, it fell when tension with Sunni Egyptians increased. Similarly, the Abbasid empire which gained its legitimacy from its founder Abbas Ibn Abd El Muttalib who was Prophet Muhammad’s youngest uncle. Undoubtedly, this was the case with the Mamluks’ empire, which gained control and legitimacy from the impression that the Mamluk kings were serving Islam. This way, religion has been affecting politics in Egypt, whether it refers to the Christianity or Islam; The fact that religion controls every aspect of Egyptians’ lives made it gain control over politics affecting it and being greatly affected by it. The more top leaders shows religious symbols, such as praying in public, quoting Quran or speaking at mosques.

It’s important to note that since the time Islam’s arrival to Egypt, it became the religion of the majority of the population. That way, it became the most active religion when it comes to its effect on politics and the state regulations. As mentioned before, Islam was the religion that legitimized the rule of empires in Egypt as the Fatimid, the Abbasid and the Mamluk empires. However, the role of Islam in the Egyptian politics even got stronger and more active after the fall of these empires and especially after the 1952 revolution. Islamist groups started to appear in the Egyptian society and play an important role in politics. A part of these Islamists preferred participating in the political system and stay on good terms with the ruling elite. On the other hand, another segment stayed in continuous disagreements with the state and wished to get over it. Although the methods of Islamists differed in their participation in politics, they all had one target which is the

formation of an Islamic state that applies Islamic shari'a and changing the current Westernized state. Sayyid Qutb was one of the main thinkers and fathers of the Islamists in Egypt who "formulated the theory of opposition to the independent nationalist state still used today by militants all over the Sunni Muslim world" (Kepel, 1995) The ideas of Sayyid Qutb depicts the current state as in Pre-Islamic era, "*Jahiliyya*" because it does not apply Shari'a. His ideas incite violence and claims that Muslims must fight such state.

The difference in strategies divided Islamists into two parties, the first one which is the traditional, working on applying Shari'a and Islamic rules without taking over the state. The second group, however, is younger, and its members are university students and professionals who have new ideas and tend to be more violent. From the second group, a subgroup of militants emerged which believes in violence to correct wrongdoings. The militants is subdivided into two other subgroups, the first is the "society of Muslims" founded by Shukri Mustapha an agronomist who called for leaving the country, moving out of Cairo to areas where they can work on social structuring, so that they can come back to Cairo, conquer it and return to apply Shari'a. The other subgroup of the militants is one of completely a different ideology as they disagree on the notion leaving the city and getting involved in social work which they see as useless. What this subgroup believes in, on the contrary, is *jihad* as they see that the only way to achieve an Islamic state is to strike and fight the already established "impious" state. This would be done through the assassination of Mubarak, whom they call the Pharaoh and view as a symbol of control. This is what they've actually done during the time of Sadat, as they assassinated him, but their mission wasn't completed as Mubarak took over and no chance was left for the militants to supplant the state and let the whole population follow them.

The position of these Islamists in the Egyptian society was not the same for all of them. Some of the group members graduated from universities and worked in different fields, medicine, law, and journalism becoming part of the middle class of the Egyptian society. Other members immigrated to the Arabian Peninsula, especially Saudi Arabia, where they worked and became rich, when they came back they were influenced by the conservative society of Saudi Arabia and tried to spread their ideas of conservatism by preaching for morals and Islamization. However, by the year 1993, these groups didn't stop at the social activity they initiated, rather they started taking a role in

politics and some of them gained power from their relations with the ruling state elites. The state thought it would be a good idea to make use of these conservative Islamists, the preachers and *Ulama* (religious scholars), to strengthen their legitimacy among the Egyptian population. Especially considering that religion in Egypt is deeply rooted and affects every aspect of the peoples' lives. However, this policy was not a success. The violence continued against Egyptians and foreigners. As a result, the Egyptian regime cracked them down, executing hundreds of them through the 1980s and 1990s.

Under the rule of the three presidents (Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak), Islamists have been active and influenced the state's policies. The fear that the increasing activity of Islamists would increase their legitimacy and make them gain control on the Egyptian state forced each of these presidents take measures against Islamists. Starting from Nasser's time, which brought the religious institutions under the state control, establishing the Awqaf institution, which is responsible for controlling all mosques, and any other religious institution. There were major changes in the courts system: they were all reformed, unifying state judicial system instead of having multiple types of courts. This unified system started using the Islamic Shari'a as the basis for its laws. The state made some reforms for Al-Azhar by appointing a minister for Al-Azhar affairs to heighten control by the state.

The debate over the nature of the Egyptian state after the revolution of 2011 was an extension to the long and historical one. This is illustrated in the increased coverage about the case of religion and politics and the relation between them in Egypt. The MB, along with other Islamic groups, have been playing a great role in politics. In 2012's election, the MB won the presidential election and Mohammad Mursi became the first democratically elected president. Even in lieu of the recent military coup took place on July 3, 2013; there is a huge division between the religious and secular factions. There has been a division among Islamists themselves too. Al-Nour party, which gathers the Salfies in Egypt, stood against the MB in 2013 elections, supporting the military candidate, Al-Sisi.

Due to this recent increased role of Islamists in Egyptian politics, other groups started reflecting their opinions, refusing the current circumstances. Such groups that placed the Christians, who felt insecure, looking for a greater and important role in sharing power. Moreover, groups like Baha'i people started talking about their rights and calling for their beliefs to be recognized as a religion in Egypt. But

why are all these groups suddenly appearing and calling for their rights? Why do they think that they would or would not be given certain rights for believing in a certain religion or even for not having a religion at all?

Finally, Egyptians see their state as religious-based institutions and not citizenship-based state. They relate their political rights and social rights to belonging to a certain religious group. What the media is reporting, the mobilization campaigns and unlimited incitement by religious-based satellite TV channels cracked the generalized-trust among the Egyptians based on the religion they belong. The killing of the Shiite in Egypt was mobilized by TV channels weeks before. The problem of mixing politics and religion goes far beyond the concerns elections or sharing power.

### **Conclusion**

This paper discusses the relationship between religion, politics and the Islamist groups. It goes through historical eras until recent times. The findings of this paper conclude that the previous and current debate on the nature of the state in Egypt will continue. It is part of the societal and political scene of the political atmosphere. Moreover, it emphasizes the fact that the more the Islamist increases their mobilization and pressure to pursue islamization of the state, the higher the tension between Christians and Muslims. It also shows that Christians would increase their pressure to share power and have a consistent share of the decision-making process in public policy, politics and polity. The paper discusses how the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists groups were part of the political scene as a factor played a major role in increasing the repression against the Egyptians in the second half of the last decade. They misused Islamic teachings to incite violence against the regime that took their position as a pretext to crack all political parties, creating a single-party system where dictatorship started in Egypt. If the Muslim Brotherhood engaged in politics without violence, Egypt would have developed a strong opposition from the late 1950s. In conclusion, religion and politics in Egypt are too close and influenced by each other than cannot be separated without abandoning religion-based political parties. Findings shows that repression of religion-based civil society increased as the Muslim Brotherhood started to be more active in charity and voluntary organizations. It shows how media been used against the MB during Naser, Sadat and Mubarak regime. It illustrates how media has been used against opposition in general and Islamists

too. Media has been a powerful tool in the hand of the Egyptian regimes against religious-based organizations and parties.

This paper concludes that there was a two layers hidden conflict between the regime and the MB. The regime attempts to take over the religious institutions formally, appointing the leaders, judges, teachers and preaches while the MB work informally by reaching the public using charity organizations, donations, competitive and substitutive informal institutions. Doing this, it create a balance between both of the party, allowing the hidden conflict/ fight over popularity and power to continue and be self-sustainable while religion is the main tool of the conflict.



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