THE CARNEGIE PAPERS

SALAFIS AND SUFIS IN EGYPT

Jonathan Brown

MIDDLE EAST | DECEMBER 2011

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Summary

As expected, Egypt's first parliamentary election after the overthrow of long-time leader Hosni Mubarak confirmed the popularity and organizational strength of the Muslim Brotherhood and Freedom and Justice Party, which won 77 of the 156 parliamentary seats contested in the first electoral round. Surprisingly, it also revealed the unexpected strength of the Salafi alliance, dominated by the al-Nour party, which secured 33 seats. Much to the discomfort of secular Egyptians and Western governments, Islamist parties now dominate the Egyptian political scene.

The spectrum of political Islam in Egypt is no longer limited to the Muslim Brotherhood and the parties that derived from it, such as the Brotherhood's official Freedom and Justice Party and the Wasat Party, a Brotherhood splinter group. Instead, it now includes several conservative Salafi parties, of which al-Nour is by far the most prominent, and two Sufi political parties, Tahrir Al-Misri and Sawt Al-Hurriyya, both of which fared badly in the first round of elections.

The spectrum of political Islam in Egypt is no longer limited to the Muslim Brotherhood and the parties that derived from it.

Although these groups share a common foundation in Islam, there the similarity ends. These Islamically motivated organizations have different approaches and beliefs and are taking distinctly divergent positions. Despite internal tensions, the Salafi parties united for the elections in a parliamentary alliance. They have also been engaged in a tense association with the Muslim Brotherhood, as the two Islamist camps seek to pool common resources while pursuing their own agendas. Meanwhile, Sufi parties and Sufi state institutions have positioned themselves alongside both secular parties and the surviving organs of the Egyptian political establishment.

Anxiety over Islamist victories and the emergence of the Salafis is clear in Egypt and in the United States. Most recently, Egypt's ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) announced on December 7 that the parliamentary elections do not reflect popular opinion and that the new parliament will not oversee the drafting of the new constitution—although the SCAF subsequently backtracked and, at present, the situation is unclear. U.S. lawmakers have warned that they will not fund a government run by a "terrorist organization."

Such responses suggest an effort to marginalize Egypt's new Islamist leaders. This approach will most likely prove unwise, as the democratic process,

political involvement, and electoral accountability will continue to moderate Salafi views and policies over the long term. Overturning their electoral gains will reverse this trend and further empower these groups by placing them back in the seat of opposition.

The Rise of Salafism in Egypt's Political Life

The popularity of the Salafi parties in Egypt is worrisome for secular Egyptians and policymakers in the United States and Europe. In the past, Salafis refrained from participating in political activity. The rise of these parties thus represents a sharp break with Mubarak-era Egypt, when most Salafis considered participation in politics to be religiously forbidden.

The term Salafism refers to an interpretation of Islam that seeks to restore Islamic faith and practice to the way they existed at the time of Muhammad and the early generations of his followers (known as the *Salaf*, or the Forefathers—hence the adjective Salafi). Since this early period represented the golden age of Islam in its pure form, Salafis believe it should be the example followed by all Muslims today.

Salafism emerged in a coherent form in the 1300s as a reaction to the rigid institutions and perceived corruption of Islamic faith and practice. It condemned the rigid adherence to specific schools of Islamic law, the elaborate religious science of scholastic theology, and both the popular religious practices of Sufism and the strict hierarchies of Sufi orders. Salafism blossomed in the eighteenth century in many parts of the Muslim world, including in the Arabian Peninsula, where a successful Salafi movement that came to be known as Wahhabism has persisted to this day.

Politically, Salafism has taken a somewhat ambiguous stance. Salafis subscribe to the classical Sunni Islam embodied in ninth- and tenth-century religious texts. These preach political quietism: Muslims *must not* rebel against their ruler no matter how unjust or impious he is, and the Muslim masses have no rights to political participation. However, these same texts also teach that, if a ruler ceases to be a Muslim, he can be opposed violently. Salafism thus draws a fine line between two completely contrasting policies. Salafis must be politically quietist even before the vilest ruler as long as he is technically a Muslim. Once he or the society in general ceases to be Muslim, however, violent opposition is allowed. The point at which someone ceases to be a Muslim is, in Salafism and Sunni Islam more generally, very difficult to reach. But once an ideologue makes this accusation, the line between quietism and violence has been crossed. This fine and subjectively determined line explains why most Salafis have been dogmatically politically quietist while a minority of Salafis, including the Wahhabi movement, has turned to armed struggle.

Political acquiescence, however, does not mean that Salafis approve of the modern secular nation-state. Drawing directly on their medieval textual sources, they believe that the only valid system of rule for Muslims is based on Sharia law. As a result, the most prominent Salafi scholars of the modern period have forbidden involvement in democratic politics, including voting. Salafi scholars teach that Muslim societies must first relearn the basic, correct beliefs of Islam: the proper understanding of God and His attributes, correct prayer, and personal interaction. As the Quran states, "If you assist in God's cause, He will assist you." In other words, purification of belief and daily practice will eventually bring substantive change to society and the state. The decision of Egyptian Salafis to form political parties and enter the realm of electoral politics thus marks a significant departure from the typical Salafi position.

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Salafism entered Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century through the movement in the Levant. The Ansar al-Sunna (Helpers of the Prophetic Way), an organization established in Cairo in this period, became the major Salafi institution in Egypt. Later, increased contact with Saudi Arabia reinforced and accentuated Salafism in Egypt, through the influence of Saudi scholars as well as through the ideas and lifestyles that expatriate workers returning from Saudi Arabia brought with them, including gender and clothing norms.

Ansar al-Sunna centers opened and flourished under local direction in medium-sized cities like Damanhour and Mansoura in Egypt's Delta region. Alexandria, Egypt's second-largest city, became the most active Salafi hub. Salafism has also become very popular in several lower-middle-class neighborhoods in Cairo, where Salafi bookstores have proliferated and Salafi dress is common in the street. Salafism is relatively rare in Upper Egypt, where Sufi shrines and practices are predominant. However, the Upper Egypt cities of Luxor, Asyut, and Sohag served as bases for the formerly violent Gama'a Islamiyya, which launched terrorist attacks on civilians and tourists during the 1980s and 1990s. In 2002, however, the leaders of the group rejected violence. Post-renunciation, Gama'a Islamiyya's thoughts and practices are similar and often identical to mainstream Salafism, but the organization's unique experiences set it apart from the popular Salafi networks of the Delta region and Cairo.

Until recently, Salafism has been neither centralized nor hierarchical at the local or national level. It has revolved around the lessons and sermons of acclaimed Salafi scholars and preachers in the Delta. Some Salafi teachers (such as Yasir Burhami of Alexandria) are academic, focusing on teaching lessons on medieval texts of Islamic theology and law. Others (for example, Muhammad Hassan of Mansoura) are more appropriately considered preachers, focusing their efforts on educating large audiences through lectures on faith, practice, and Sharia observance.

Iconoclastic by nature, the Salafi movement has lacked authority over erratic or rambling scholars, in contrast to the guild-like control of mainstream Sunni law schools. Salafi scholars in Egypt have repeatedly caused controversy when they cite Prophetic teachings or Sharia positions directly without considering a wider public reaction. For example, in December 2010, the Salafi preacher Lutfi Amir issued a fatwa condemning Mohamed ElBaradei's criticisms of Mubarak and authorizing the government to jail or kill ElBaradei if he did not recant. This precipitated a lurid controversy in the Egyptian media, compounded by condemnation[1] from al-Azhar University, the state institution that trains Muslim clerics and whose head, the Shaykh al-Azhar, is a cabinet-level appointee. Amir was citing Prophetic teachings that all Sunni scholars acknowledge, but the more refined legal interpretations of al-Azhar's mainstream scholars disarm such texts by restricting their applicability to limited circumstances.

Egypt's Salafis lived a precarious existence under the Mubarak regime. The apolitical nature of their teachings put security services at ease and Salafi preachers and learning centers were generally left unmolested as long as they steered clear of any political topics. But any perceived link to the outlawed Gama'a Islamiyya meant almost certain harassment or imprisonment.

It is difficult to draw a clear line between Salafis and other religiously inclined Egyptian Muslims. Many Egyptians who listen to Salafi lectures in their cars or who watch Salafi satellite channels at home do not sport the Salafi long beard or wear distinctive clothing. They are average Egyptians whose religious temperament draws them to Salafi teachings. A Facebook group was recently started by a group of young, affluent Salafis eager to remind the public about the diversity within Salafism. Called the "Costa Salafis," after the Starbucks-like Costa Coffee chain, these Salafis are the movement's equivalent of Manhattan café socialists.

There is also no clear line of distinction between Salafis and the membership of the Muslim Brotherhood. The two groups share important teachings and an appreciable number of adherents. The Brotherhood emerged from the same reformist wave as modern Salafism, rejecting the byzantine complexities of Islamic law and theology as well as the superstitions of popular Sufism. While the Brotherhood took the path of modernized social and political activism, however, the vast majority of Salafis adhered to a traditional focus on honing belief and ritual practice.

A considerable number of Salafis, however, have also identified with the Brotherhood's agenda. In July, interviews with senior Brotherhood leaders suggested that they were sensitive to the large overlap with the Salafis as the elections approached. Some Salafis maintained that they could muster more votes on the ground than the Muslim Brotherhood. A former Muslim Brotherhood leader and now independent presidential candidate Abdel Moneim Abouel Fotouh publicly estimated that Salafis outnumber Muslim Brotherhood

members by twenty to one.[2] The surprisingly successful showing for the Salafi al-Nour party attests to the movement's popularity, but in key contests the Brotherhood candidates beat those of al-Nour. Most symbolically, a prominent al-Nour member and leading Salafi preacher Abd Al-Minam Shahhat was defeated in a run-off on his home turf of Alexandria in a contest with a Brotherhood opponent.

It is also important to note that while the vast majority of the faculty at Egypt's venerable al-Azhar University strongly rejects Salafism, the university does have many Salafi students, and some Salafi professors in the religious faculty. Two prominent Salafi figures, Yasir Burhami and Muhammad Zughbi, have degrees from the school. Muhammad Yusri of the al-Nour party proudly wears Azhar robes. The Azhar-Salafi overlap is most evident in the formation of the Committee for the Application of the Sharia, consisting of Azhar professors and prominent Salafis. This committee was formed in July to advocate an Islamic constitution for Egypt and to criticize al-Azhar's strong identification with Sufism.[3]

Salafism Since the Uprising

Prominent Salafi leaders initially condemned the Tahrir Square protests, which they considered an Islamically impermissible act of "rebellion" against the state. As the protests began on January 25, 2011, leading Salafi preacher Muhammad Hassan gave a sermon calling on Muslims not to let the country descend into chaos.[4] Major Salafi scholars from other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, clearly stated that the protests were considered a rebellion against the ruler and thus completely forbidden in Islam.

As the protests grew larger and more intense, and as security forces began attacking civilians, Salafis divided. Some of the more politically astute Salafi leaders made public appearances condemning the government's attacks on unarmed protesters. Others remained silent. Salafis in Damanhour spray-painted "No rebellion against the ruler" throughout town. The Egyptian Salafi scholar Mustafa Al-'Adawi spoke by phone on Egyptian state television on February 4 as the protests raged and called on those in Tahrir to return home so that Muslim blood would not be spilt. Those who died in a fight with other Muslims would not, he stated, die as martyrs.

Despite their initial hesitation and avowed apoliticism, Salafi groups soon threw themselves into politics with abandon.

Despite their initial hesitation and avowed apoliticism, Salafi groups soon threw themselves into politics with abandon. In their early activities, however, Salafis were hampered by a lack of centralized authority, political inexperience, and disastrous messaging that frightened many Egyptians and also led to exaggerated accounts in the media. These early experiences moved the Salafis toward increased centralization, organizing, and greater attention to

messaging, particularly once Salafis started forming political parties and competing in elections.

The months after the fall of Mubarak saw a long series of violent and divisive acts committed by or attributed to Salafis. This author's own research suggests that not all such acts were indeed committed by Salafis, or, in many cases, that events did not unfold as reported by the generally hostile press. There is no doubt, however, that Salafis were involved in many ugly incidents, including the demolishing of Sufi shrines in several locations, the May 7 clash between Muslims and Christians around the Virgin Mary Church in Imbaba, Cairo, and the Nur mosque incident in Abbasiyya, Cairo in April.

In the Virgin Mary Church incident, a Muslim crowd had gathered at the church to protest what they believed to be the Coptic Church's detention of a Christian woman who had converted to Islam—several such episodes had supposedly occurred earlier elsewhere.[5] In the resulting clash, the church was burned and a number of people killed and wounded. Witnesses reported that the attackers were Salafis, although a prominent Salafi leader denied their involvement.[6] Nevertheless, throughout the spring and summer, Salafis regularly marched from the Nur mosque after Friday prayers claiming support of other Coptic women who had supposedly been secluded in monasteries after converting to Islam.

The Nur mosque incident was more complicated. On April 15, Egyptians were shocked by news that the Muslim scholar assigned to give the Friday sermon, the venerable eighty-year old Azhari scholar and noted Sufi Hasan Al-Shafi had been manhandled by Salafi thugs and physically prevented from mounting the pulpit during Friday prayers. The imam of the mosque recounted how he had barricaded himself in his office for fear of his life as young Salafis threatened him and others present with death.[7] The Salafis usurped the pulpit and the Salafi scholar Umar Abd Al-Aziz then delivered the Friday sermon.

Based on this author's interviews with witnesses and people involved, the incident at the Nur mosque was not as dramatic or violent as reported. It stemmed not from a wanton attack by Salafis against a respected preacher, but from a long-standing struggle between the founder of the mosque and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, which controls all mosques in Egypt, about the choice of preachers for the Friday sermon. For several weeks before the incident, some Salafi leaders allied with the mosque's founder had successfully chosen the preacher. A Salafi preacher had thus been delivering the Friday prayer sermon during that time, calling for the independence of religious institutions from the government and urging Egypt to move toward the implementation of an ideal Islamic state.[8] The attempt by the government's designated imam to regain control triggered the incident, which revealed not only the lack of discipline and, to some extent, the thuggery of some Salafi youth, but also their political naiveté. More experienced political activists would have realized that the attempt to establish the independence of that one mosque by

manhandling a senior cleric was a lost cause destined to alienate the population at large. All mosques in Egypt are administered by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, and as long as that system exists, neither the founder of the Nur mosque nor the Salafis have the legal right to appoint preachers. Indeed, the Nur mosque incident terrified many Egyptians and further turned the al-Azhar religious establishment against Salafis.

Salafis suffered not only because of their own misguided and at times criminal steps, but also because of unfavorable and often inaccurate media reporting. As elation after Mubarak's ouster faded in early February 2011, tales of Salafi barbarism became a salient theme in the Egyptian press, especially in liberal-leaning papers like *AlMasry AlYoum*, or those associated with Mubarak regime stalwarts, like *Youm7*.

For example, after violent clashes between Muslim youth and Copts between September 29 and October 3 in the village of Marinab in Upper Egypt, major newspapers blamed Salafis. However, interviews conducted in Marinab just days later by a Dutch sociologist make it clear that local Muslims with no link to Salafism attacked the church.[9] Similarly, after protests by Copts in the Maspero area of Cairo over the Marinab incident triggered large-scale Muslim violence on October 9, an Al-Jazeera English anchor leapt to the conclusion that the Coptic Church blamed Salafis for the violence, although the network's own reporter on the ground denied this was the case.

Increasing Salafi Discipline and Party Politics

Salafi involvement in Egypt's political process and public life since the January revolution brought increased centralization and discipline and forced the movement to focus on public opinion and messaging. Salafi scholars, many now turned politicians, have begun treading the same pragmatic path as the Muslim Brotherhood. They have learned to either compromise on the call for Sharia rule, or to express their religious commitments in non-threatening ways.

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In the wake of the revolution, leading Salafi personalities such as Abd Al-Minam Shahhat were among the first public figures to declare their intention to form political parties, justifying this sudden departure from Salafi quietism by invoking the Sharia principle of "public interest." Their argument was that an Islamic state is the ideal, but in its absence it is imperative to participate in a secular system in order to prevent the return of an oppressive and corrupt government.[10]

Salafi political activities gathered steam in late spring, coalescing around the al-Nour party and the smaller Fadila and Asala parties. There was also support

for the Bana'wa Tanmiya party launched by Gama'a Islamiyya, which is not strictly speaking a Salafi party, but is generally seen as part of the same constellation of more radical Islamist organizations. Over the course of the summer, the Salafi parties squabbled with each other, with some joining forces but then separating again. Despite these disputes, however, Salafi parties eventually joined the broad Democratic Alliance along with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Wafd, al-Wasat party, and several liberal and left of center parties. These groups hoped that sharing parliamentary lists and coordinating candidates would ensure a parliamentary majority for parties that oppose the previous ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). But the Democratic Alliance soon unraveled as most liberal parties left the Alliance during the summer, followed in October by all Islamist parties other than the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. On October 23, al-Nour, Asala, and the Gama'a Islamiyya announced the formation of an official Salafi alliance (called the Islamist Alliance) and agreed to share parliamentary lists. Salafi parties began stressing the practical nature of politics, stating that now is not the time for ideology. They also recognized the importance of overtly respecting election laws by promising not to use religious symbols or places of worship in their election campaigns, in keeping with the ban imposed by the High Judicial Election Commission (whether or not they actually did so is currently being debated).

The al-Nour party's website[11] is a model of pragmatism. It is—noticeably and indeed bizarrely—free of Islamist language and effectively accepts the existing structure of the Egyptian state and law. It highlights how social justice and political transparency are essential for preventing a return of the systematic corruption of the Mubarak era. The party calls for a civil state where all Egyptians live together without discrimination, "far from a theocracy that claims the government rules by God's will." It calls for the separation of legislative, judicial, and executive powers, with the justice system protected from political interference. The party seeks to guarantee a long list of freedoms and rights, including freedom of expression, the right to choose a leader and hold him accountable, and free health care and education. The party does insist in a somewhat vague way, however, that these rights exist within a basic Sharia framework.

Al-Nour presents a brief foreign policy doctrine, noting suggestively that Egypt allowed "unfriendly countries" to take advantage of the country in the past, and let even small states impinge upon its interests (almost certainly a reference to Israel). Al-Nour's foreign policy priorities focus on increased attention to Africa and the Nile basin as well as the greater Arab and Islamic world. The site calls for respecting existing treaties and prioritizes protecting the Egyptian people's true interests.

The platform is undoubtedly still very Islamic, but it expresses Sharia concerns indirectly. For example, it does not stress adherence to Islam in cultural matters, but states that Egypt's institutions must help reinforce the nation's Arab identity and its "majority religion." The role of Sharia in the state is

mentioned only in reference to Egypt's *existing* constitution, which states in Article 2 that Sharia is the main source of law. Again making no distinction to Egypt's current legal system, al-Nour remarks that Sharia law must protect the personal religious rights of Copts, whose personal status and family law are handled by their own religious systems. For all other matters, Egypt's national law governs all people.

Salafi parties have also acknowledged the essential role of women in electoral politics. Egyptian laws governing party formation require a party to nominate at least one woman for parliament, and initially parties like al-Nour stated that they would nominate female candidates as long as they were sufficiently religious.[12] The new Salafi alliance's rhetoric quickly became even more female-friendly, embracing the presence of female candidates generally. On December 12, al-Nour announced that it would allow female candidates to put their picture on campaign posters, replacing the symbol of a rose, which was used in the first round of elections. On its website, the al-Nour party emphasizes that women play an essential economic role in Egypt. The party also recalls the great women who surrounded the Prophet Muhammad and participated in early Islamic politics.[13] The party's social program includes a call to end violence against women and reduce instances in which women are the sole breadwinners in a family.[14] In early October, al-Nour held a Salafi women's conference in Alexandria. However, the Salafi vision of proper female involvement in political life is still fraught and a leading concern for Egyptians outside the Islamist bloc.

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Having a stake in political life has brought unprecedented discipline to the Salafi movement in Egypt. Immediately after the March 30 attack on Sufi shrines by Salafi vigilantes, for example, Alexandrian Salafi leader Abd Al-Minam Shahhat told newspapers that such criminal acts were completely impermissible for Salafis, who oppose the veneration of graves but do not advocate their destruction. This statement proliferated on Salafi websites, and attacks on Sufi shrines ceased.[15] In May, several leading Salafi preachers, including Muhammad Hassan and Muhammad Husayn Yaqub, formed the Consultative Council of Scholars (*Majlis Shura Al-Ulama*). Along with another Alexandrian Salafi scholar, Yasir Burhami, these figures have been highly influential in Salafi political activities, although they themselves are not candidates or officials in any party.[16] This centralization has led to increased control over messaging and public comments by Salafi scholars. They have been forced to take more responsibility for how their opinions are perceived by the general public and liberal opponents.

This trend has continued since the first round of parliamentary elections. Salafis had previously shown united support for the presidential candidacy of Hazim Salah Abu Ismail, a former Salafi Muslim Brother who since left the Brotherhood. Recent media appearances by Abu Ismail, during which he made

controversial statements about women's rights and Pharaonic artwork, however, led the al-Nour party to officially state that he has no link to the party. Similarly, public statements made by Shahhat during his run-off campaign led the al-Nour leadership to ban him and any non-official spokesperson from talking to the media.

Sufi Political Parties

The rise of Sufi political parties since the January revolution has received relatively little attention, in part because Sufis are not seen as a particularly threatening political force. In the United States and Europe in particular, Sufis are seen as "moderate" Muslims, non-violent, harmless mystics more interested in spiritual than political matters. The poor showing of Sufi parties in elections so far may change as more rural areas cast their ballots.

Sufism is not a separate Islamic sect or school of Islamic jurisprudence. Rather, it is a different way of practicing religion that exists both among Sunnis and Shi'a and is widespread in much of the Muslim world. Sufi orders or "paths" (*tariqa*), with their group liturgies, the veneration of Sufi saints and their shrines, and the miracles sought (and ostensibly achieved) at their hands are unavoidable features of Muslim religious life and are an important feature of popular Islam.

Sufism should be understood as the default setting of Muslim religious life in Egypt. An Egyptian Sufi leader estimates that roughly 20 percent of Egypt's population is Sufi, but there are no exact figures, in part because many who might participate in some Sufi activities do not identify themselves as active Sufis. Similarly, the ubiquity of Sufism in Egyptian religious life means that participating in some aspect of Sufism is difficult to avoid.

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Sufism appears in Egyptian life most directly through the activities of Sufi orders, the largest of which are the Shadhiliyya (in its various branches), the Burhamiyya, the Rifa'iyya, and the Ahmadiyya. Sufi orders meet frequently at local mosques, the homes of devotees, or at specific Sufi lodges known as *zawiya*'s. Sufi lodges in towns and villages are modest, while major ones in cities like Cairo can be sizable complexes funded by devotees' donations and trusts. Lodges also often serve as mosques and are sometimes built in the same complex as a Sufi saint's grave.

Leadership within individual Sufi orders in Egypt revolves around the person of the *shaykh*, or the Sufi master whose spiritual guidance and embodied blessings (*baraka*) provide the direction and religious substance of the order's activities. The *shaykh* position is generally hereditary, passed from father to son, which means that Sufi *shaykh*s are often not professional religious scholars. Doctors, engineers, and businessmen, they nonetheless usually possess a firm command of Islamic law and theological teachings.

Egypt's Islamic religious establishment is strongly Sufi in character. Adherence to a Sufi order has long been standard for both professors and students in the al-Azhar mosque and university system. Although al-Azhar is not monolithic, its identity has been strongly associated with Sufism. The current Shaykh al-Azhar (rector of the school), Ahmad al-Tayyeb, is a hereditary Sufi *shaykh* from Upper Egypt who has recently expressed his support for the formation of a world Sufi league; the current Grand Mufti of Egypt and senior al-Azhar scholar Ali Gomaa is also a highly respected Sufi master.[17]

In addition to having links to the al-Azhar establishment, officially registered Sufi orders in Egypt select members of the Supreme Council of Sufi Orders (*Al-Majlis Al-A'la li'l-Turuq Al-Sufiyya*). This quasi-state leadership committee is responsible for managing Sufi affairs at a national level, such as the organization of the *mawlid* (celebrations of the birthdays of major Sufi saints) festivals. It currently consists of ten members elected by the orders under the leadership of a chief *shaykh*. Interestingly, in 2008 a controversy occurred within the Council that presaged the 2011 Tahrir uprising. After the death of the venerated chief *shaykh*, President Mubarak appointed a relatively junior Sufi *shaykh*, a member of the ruling NDP party, to the leadership position. A block of Sufi leaders objected, forming the unofficial Front for Sufi Reform (*Jabhat Al-Islah Al-Sufi*), rejecting political interference in a realm that they insisted had no political dimension at all.

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Despite these internal tensions, since the January uprising mainstream Sufis have become firm allies of both the transitional authorities and of liberals; they identify with the state-controlled religious establishment and are driven by a consuming fear of Salafis and Islamists in general.

The Sufi orders associated with the Front for Reform in particular quickly aligned with liberals and revolutionary youth groups. They also participated in March in the launch of the first Sufi political party, the Egyptian Liberation Party (*Tahrir al-Misri*). The summer of 2011 witnessed a resounding controversy over whether Egypt's constitution should be drafted before the parliament was elected or vice versa. Islamists of all stripes favored elections first in the hopes that victory at the polls would allow them to shape the new state. Secularists, liberals, and Islamists disenchanted with their leaders' agendas supported the idea of letting an elite decide on the constitution first (with secularism entrenched). From late April 2011 through the summer, Front-associated Sufi orders protested along with liberals and the diverse youth leadership of the ecumenical Front for National Change in favor of the "constitution first" position, citing their fear of Islamist ambitions.[18]

The strong hierarchy of Sufism in Egypt seems intact after the January revolution. The Supreme Sufi Council still carries weight with followers and other

organizations, and it has remained loyal to both the transitional government and the al-Azhar establishment. Although the Front for Sufi Reform continues to argue for a reform of the Supreme Sufi Council to make it independent of the state, the Front's leaders still exhibit deference to the al-Azhar establishment. Strong hierarchy and a commanding fear of the Muslim Brotherhood and, more acutely, the Salafis, have limited independent Sufi political activity. In August, the Mubarak appointee heading the Supreme Sufi Council, Abd Al-Hadi Al-Qasabi, voiced his firm support for the SCAF and called on Egyptian Muslims to unite behind al-Azhar and its Shaykh, citing the frequent claim that al-Azhar is the global authority for Sunni Islam.[19] Despite having affirmed the rights of individuals to political participation, Al-Qasabi originally denounced the formation of Sufi political parties—although this may have been tied to the fact that the first Sufi party was formed by his opponents within the Sufi leadership. In October, Al-Qasabi embraced Sufi parties and committed himself to supporting their campaigns. The fact that Al-Qasabi made this announcement under a banner declaring Sufis' commitment to Sharia suggests an awareness of the rising Islamist tide and popular suspicion of the transitional government.[20] Unlike Salafi parties, who denounce the SCAF's heavy hand and reject the political participation of any Mubarak-era politicians, some Sufi parties seem to be attracting former NDP members.[21]

Conclusion: Salafis and Sufis in Egypt's Future

Islam plays an undeniably important role in Egyptian life, and the vast majority of Egyptians approve of it. Gallup polls have shown that 44 percent of Egyptian women and 50 percent of men believe that Sharia should be the *only* source of law. This might alarm observers. But, unlike Western reactions when the word "Sharia" is invoked, the overwhelming majority of Egyptians associate the term with laudable ideals like social, political, and gender justice.[22]

Western observers often associate Sufism with an acceptable, moderate, and even enjoyable understanding of Islam. Indeed, Sufism in Egypt is deeply connected with popular religion and beloved religious festivals. Politically, Sufi groups are either allied with liberal parties or with Egypt's moderate, pro-government religious establishment. It is unlikely, however, that the ubiquity of Sufism in Egyptian life would ever translate into political influence. Sufism and Sufi organizations are either too much a part of Egyptian life to stand out as an identifying political motivator or too subservient to the state religious establishment to push for any dramatic change. Indeed, in the wake of the first round of elections, Sufi parties have been clearly associated with old-regime elements.

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Salafism, however, has leapt into salience since the revolution as one of the most effective mobilizers. Salafi political parties have been the most energetic, albeit controversial, parties on the scene. They now have a real stake in the democratic process.

This development has caused great alarm in Egypt and among outside observers. Salafis' austere and uncompromising understanding of Islamic law and worship frightens many and raises palpable concerns about an Iranian-style theocracy. Such concerns might lead some to conclude that opposing or repressing Salafi political ambitions would be a prudent course.

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Political suppression of Salafis would most likely prove unwise. Echoing the experience of Islamists in Turkey, and of Salafis in Kuwait, real involvement in an open democratic system leads to significant mitigation in Salafi positions. The need to mollify public concerns, engage women in the electoral process, and centralize political messaging has resulted in both a rapid maturation and moderating discipline within Salafi ranks. Furthermore, the Egyptian media, and the foreign media who cite them, have demonstrated a tendency to paint Salafis inaccurately as the bête noire of the new Egypt. As one leading former Brotherhood member observed, "The Salafis are the new ghoul that the regime and its NDP remnants are using to scare people after the Brotherhood proved not scary enough." Recent announcements, however, suggest that having a stake in Egypt's political future continues to moderate Salafi stances, including announcements by the head of the al-Nour party that it will not require women to wear headscarves, nor close the beaches.

Notes

1 Both the Ansar al-Sunna and the prominent Salafi website www.anasalafy.com dis-associated themselves and Salafism from Amir's supposed fatwa. See www.anasalafy.com/play.php?catsmktba=23237; www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/12/27/131164.html.

2 "Salafis outnumber Muslim Brothers 20-to-1, says presidential hopeful," *AlMasry AlYoum*, July 3, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/473935.

3 "Azhariyyun wa Salafiyyun yu'assisun hay'a li-tatbiq al-sharia wa wad' dustur Islami," *AlMasry alYoum*, July 4, 2011.

4 The sermon can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXud_8dcfsc.

5 For other instances of Salafis protesting supposed Coptic detention of converts to Islam, see "Salafis Call for Islamic State, Prosecution of Coptic Pope," *AlMasry AlYoum*, April 29, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/node/417434; and "Salafis Protest for Release of Alleged Convert to Islam," *AlMasry AlYoum*, April 19, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/406490.

6 "190 to be tried by military for Imbaba violence, Salafi leader blames thugs," *AlMasry AlYoum*, May 8, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/428140.

7 "Muzaharat al-arbi'a li'l-tandid bi-i'tida' salafiyyin 'ala 'alim azhari," April 17, 2011, www.masrawy.com/news/egypt/politics/2011/april/17/demo_azhar.aspx.

8 See, "Khutbah on Khilafah: Sh. Abdul Aziz in Egypt," www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgQoVyjbz0A.

9 This report comes from Cornelis Hulsman. See http://asenseofbelonging.wordpress.com/2011/10/02/burning-the-church-dome-awr-investigations-in-edfu.

10 See www.alnourparty.org/page/answer. One of the fiercest opponents of a secular political system that does not rule by Sharia, Yasir Burhami sees Salafi political involvement as essential, even if not ideal, to prevent secularists from having free rein. See http://ar.islamway.com/lesson/111290. For more on Salafi discourse on moving into politics, see "Inqisam salafi hawla al-indimam li'l-ahzab wa al-musharaka fi al-intikhabat," *AlMasry AlYoum*, May 22, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/node/447571.

11 The material cited in the following paragraphs can be found at the al-Nour party's website under the following links: www.alnourparty.org/page/program_foreign_policy, http://www.alnourparty.org/page/program_culture and www.alnourparty.org/page/program_social.

12 "Inqisamat salafiyya qabla sa'at min fath bab al-tarashshuh li-majlis al-sha'b," *AlMasry AlYoum*, October 12, 2011, www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=313731&IssueID=2286.

13 See www.alnourparty.org/page/answer.

14 See www.alnourparty.org/page/program_social.

15 "Al-Da'wa al-salafiyya tanfi hadm adrihat qalyub," *AlMasry AlYoum*, March 31, 2011, http://youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=381250. This was also published on Salafi websites. See www.salafonline.net/frontend/newsdetails.aspx?ftid=11&nid=65.

16 See www.almasryalyoum.com/node/447571.

17 Shaykh Ahmad al-Tayyeb has announced his support for a world Sufi league; www.israinternational.com/world-nexus/424-al-azhar-to-form-world-union-of-sufi-scholars-to-defend-islamic-tasawwuf-a-sunni-belief.html.

18 "Sufi Protest to Demand Constitution Before Elections," *AlMasry AlYoum*, June 26, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/471817; www.egyptian-news.com/2011/07/blog-post_9214.html. Another Sufi party formed under the rubric of the Front for Sufi Reform is the Voice of Freedom (*Sawt al-Hurriyya*) Party, formed October 12, 2011 by the head of the Rifa'iyya order. Stating its commitment to social welfare and eschewing Islamist politics, it has already established list-sharing with the liberal Egyptian Bloc (*Kutla al-Misriyya*). See www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=313731&IssueID=2286l; "Ghadan… shaykh al-rifa'iyyin yu'linu ta'sis hizb sawt al-hurriyya," *Youm7*, April 18, 2011, www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=394084.

19 "Al-Majlis al-a'la li'l-turuq al-sufiyya tarfud milyuniyyat 12 aghustus," *Youm7*, August 9, 2011, www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=470506.

20 "Ahzam al-sufiyya tushakkilu lajna li-da'm murashshihiha," *AlMasry AlYoum*, November 8, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/node/512913.

21 "Salafi, Sufi mosques being used for election campaigning," *AlMasry AlYoum*, November 11, 2011, www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/513618.

22 Dalia Mogahed, What Egyptian Women (and Men) Want, Survey Data/Slide Show, foreignpolicy.com, March 10, 2011, www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/10/what_egyptian_women_and_men_want?page=0,3.

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