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POLITICIZATION OF SALAFISM IN EGYPT

RAMAZAN YILDIRIM



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Translated by
GÜLGÜN KÖSE

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ABSTRACT

Uprisings rapidly spreading from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen in 2011 have become a landmark of a new period in the Arab world. Owing to the new process in Egypt, the most significant country of the Arab and African region, social groups have had a chance to do legal politics, established political parties and taken their place in the political arena. The Salafi movements, without a doubt, have received more attention than any other group. Salafi groups previously had kept their distance from active politics, concentrated on education, dawah (missionary works for Islam) and other social activities, and refused mechanisms such as democracy, elections and parliament as they considered them religiously unfavorable. This time, however, the Salafis have established political parties and made an active decision to be involved in politics in the public sphere. This study will dwell on the structures, opinions of Salafi groups prior to the Revolution and their political parties, political attitudes and opinions in the wake of the January 25 Revolution.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the movements called “Salafi movements” in the Arab world dates back to a century ago. Though small compared to the regions where they emerged, these movements with different characteristics had the chance to “become communities” particularly in Egypt. Salafi movements have begun to draw more attention since January 25, 2011 when grassroots movements reaching a peak in Egypt launched a new process called the “Arab spring” or “Arab revolutions.”

These movements have become strong political actors in many Arab countries notably Egypt in the wake of the Arab revolutions and they have been fed by some traditional religious structures defined as Salafi in Egypt. Dwelling on the history, founders and traditional opinions of these Salafi-religious movements will enable us to be closely acquainted with today’s political parties of the Salafi origin. As Salafism today does not have a homogenous structure in terms of opinions and actions like the Muslim Brotherhood, it is difficult to categorize these groups according to certain criteria. The principles of faith they defend and the cultural atmosphere

where they emerged are quite similar. However, it is possible to put these movements under four categories in terms of their views on social and political domain and their perceptions of politics and the society.¹

1. Traditional Salafism based on learning and dawah (invitation to Islam). These Salafi groups invite people to their principles, provide religious education and refuse all political participation. Focusing on Akaid (doctrines of religious faith), this Salafism tries to clear principles of akaid from bid’ah (innovation in religious matters) and hurafa (superstition). It considers other sects such as Mu’tazilah, Kharijism and Shiism as deviating from proper teachings. It keeps its distance from Ash’arism and Matudirism, casting out Sufi movements in particular. This Salafism is widespread in Saudi Arabia in particular with the mission for disseminating opinions and ideas of figures such as Abdulaziz bin Baz and Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani.

2. Salafism known for its harsh attitude towards politics and political parties. Supporting “obedience to rulers”, these Salafis oppose all kinds of political opposition and support political parties in power against other Islamist movements that desire to come to power by means of political parties. These groups are widespread in the Arab region notably in Saudi and Gulf countries. Their efficiency in the society has weakened in the wake of the Arab revolutions.

3. Salafism commonly called “jihadist.” These are the groups who declare regimes in the Arab world unbelievers, resort to violence against these regimes, and are held responsible for most of the attacks in the Islam world.

4. Salafism adopting a reformist line. This group adopts a more moderate attitude towards social and political issues. It not only defends Salafi beliefs and principles but also supports

1. Muhammed Ebu Ruman, *e’s-Selefiyyun ve’r-Rebiu’l-Arabi, (Merkezu Dnasati’l-Vahdeti’l-Arabiyye, Beirut:2013)*, p. 47-51.

active involvement in every domain in public life. This group argues that social and political change should be gradually and peacefully made. Salafis in this group failed to do active politics before the Arab revolutions due to lack of favorable environment; however, they joined politics by means of different political parties in Egypt in particular and Tunisia, Libya and Yemen in the wake of the revolutions.

TRADITIONAL SALAFI MOVEMENTS PRIOR TO THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

One of the leading institutions in terms of religious education in the Islamic world, Al-Azhar Institution, had a particular influence in Egyptian society. Some figures who teach in this institution also founded civilian groups. Some religious groups, which emerged since the beginning of the 1900s in Egypt, defined themselves as Salafi and influenced religious groups in existence to date. These Salafi movements are as follows:

Al-Gam'eyya Al-Shar'eyya

The full name of the group is “el-Cem'iyyetu's-Ser'iyye liteavuni'l-Amiline bi'l-Kitab ve's-Sünne” (Al-Gam'eyya Al-Shar'eyya for the Cooperation between the Workers in Al-Kittab and Sunna). The group was established by one of the al-Azhar scholars, Sheikh Mahmoud Khattab El-Sobki in 1912 as a reaction to discussion on issues such as the new reforms in education brought by the British colonialism; the increase of pro-Western tendencies and discourses; the role of religion in social life; the efficiency of women in the society among others. It is the first organized association in Egypt.² This movement drew attention of all other circles upon its establishment and was later

on considered among Salafi groups. The group heavily focused on social activities and paid attention to being an institutional group. The leader of the group, Mahmoud Khattab emphasized “Salafi doctrines”(selef akaidi) as a scholar from al-Azhar. He argued that the members of the group shall remain upon Salafi doctrines and shall not consider successor as the supporter of *fiṣq* (disobedience to God; sinfulness) and *bid'ah* (heresy, heretical doctrine. They will not be fanatical about any jurisprudential sects of Islam and will not support the superiority of one sect over another. All Sunni sects are reliable in terms of correctly understanding the Quran verses and tenets”³ The founder of the group al-Sobki stated that he did not consider it right to clearly get involved in politics and that he adopted the principle of “being concerned with politics but not involved in it.” The group has not been in conflict with political parties in power.

Having paid attention to the new situation in Egypt in the wake of the January 25 Revolution, Al-Gam'eyya Al-Shar'eyya began to clearly take up a position as to political issues which kept silent in the past. For instance, the group announced in a press meeting that they will support Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood in the second round of the presidential elections by also stating the reasons behind their decision.⁴

This movement served as a central rallying point that gave birth to other religious movements in Egypt because it did not impose a particular political identity and treat equally sects within the scope of Sunnism. The movement aims to disseminate Islam culture and accurate religious principles to save and protect Muslims from fallacies; to offer Quran recitation courses; to build mosques; to meet social needs of those in need in the society; to build hospitals for the

2. Ahmed Zağlul Şellata, *el-Haletu's-Selefiyyetu'l-Muasira fi Mısır, (Mektebetu Mebdüli, Kabire: 2011), p. 201.*

3. http://alshareyah.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=115&Itemid=639

4. http://alshareyah.com/index.php?option=com_seyret&Itemid=386&task=videodirectlink&id=711

treatment of patients in need and to globally disseminate the principle of social solidarity with an Islamic point of view among others.⁵

Al-Sunna Al-Muhammadeyya Society

The “Cemaatu Ensari’s-Sünneti’l-Muhammediyye” (Al-Sunna Al-Muhammadeyya Society) was officially founded by Mohamed Hamed el-Fiqi from al-Azhar ulema in 1926. Keeping his distance to leading religious branches in Egypt since the beginning of 1910, Mohamed el-Fiqi shared his opinion with his inner circle that heresy and superstitions increased in the society and that the only way to fight against them is embracing the Sunnah (acts and remarks of Prophet Muhammad,) and began his works in this sense. Previously involved in “Al-Gam’eyya Al-Shar’eyya” movement, Mohamed el-Fiqi argued with the leading figures of the movement about “el-esmâ ve’s-sifat” (the names and attributes of Allah), one of the fundamental issues of *Ilm al-Kalam* (Knowledge of Theological Rhetoric) and decided to quit the movement due to dissension. He made announcements in masjids, coffeehouses and other crowded places and succeeded in gathering many people around him. At times tensions grew between his disciples and members from some religious branches due to disagreement on religious matters.

Mohamed el-Fiqi established an association in order to carry out his works in a coordinated way and to institutionalize according to his principles. He also criticized revolutionary protests against the British occupation in 1919 arguing that it is impossible to end the British occupation by means of street protests where women with no headscarves also took part. El Fiqi also claimed that absolute obedience to Allah and his Prophet Mohammad by means of this method is impossible. Emphasizing that saving Egypt

from the British occupation is only possible through embracing Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad and abandoning innovation and superstition, Mohamed al-Fiqi also opposed the slogan of the Egyptian revolution in 1919, “religion is for Allah and the nation for all.”⁶ Al-Sunna Al-Muhammadeyya Society, which has been significantly growing since its establishment, has 200 branches only in Egypt, and it controls 1750 mosques. In addition to Egypt, the society has members in many African countries such as Sudan, Chad and Somalia.

The main mission of Al-Sunna Al-Muhammadeyya Society includes to invite people to pure Tawhid (the doctrine of unity (oneness) of God) clear of shirk (the sin of practicing idolatry or polytheism) and to authentic Sunnah in line with Selef-i salih (Salafi deeds); to explain to people the principles of the Quran, and to abstain from all kinds of innovation and superstition among others. They argue that Islam is both the religion and the state. It is valid for any time and any place. It is necessary to rule by the rules and regulations of Allah in order to build a Muslim society. It is impertinence not to obey Sharia (Islamic laws) in earthly affairs. It is necessary to adopt an erudite politics and not to be in conflict in order to sustain the sharia of Allah in the world. “The Society believes that democratic order is an infidel order. This is because democracy grants people with the legislative power which belongs only to Allah. Islamic order has unique characteristics and it has nothing to do with modern western orders. Nevertheless, the Society believes that elections based on nominating candidates and voting, constitute a licit method. This is because it is licit to compete with democrats both in general and other elections in order to minimize shar (evil). But it is necessary to stick to the principles of the Sharia and ensure

5. Memduh e’ş-Şeyh, Selefyyun, (*Daru Abbari’l-Yevm, Kahire: 2011*), p. 68.

6. <http://www.ansaralsonna.com/web/pageother-659.html>

benevolence prevails over malignancy/evil.”⁷ The Society adheres to these principles in theory yet opposes to become political parties in practice, stressing that establishing the State of Islam is possible through disseminating the pure tawhid. The victory pledged by Allah and the return of the caliphate depend on the dissemination of tawhid. Strongly opposing to armed struggle against the parties in power, the Society consider such protests as “khawarijism” and argue that these will do nothing but increase instigation.

Al-Sunna Al-Muhammadeyya Society has not been officially involved in any political party since the Tahrir Revolution on January 25, 2011; the groups, however, clearly revealed its position in numerous issues concerning domestic and foreign policies of Egypt through communiqués. For instance, on August 22, 2011 it published a communiqué saluting protesters who overthrew Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, and congratulating their victory.⁸ They also published a communiqué stating that they will support the presidential candidate Hazem Salah Abu Ismail in presidential elections in Egypt.⁹ Nevertheless, the Supreme Election Commission vetoed the candidacy of Abu Ismail. The Society encouraged supporting all Islamist candidates without indicating a particular candidate in the first round of the presidential elections but published a communiqué calling on people to support Mohamed Morsi, candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood, in the second round of elections: “Following the announcement of the results of the first round, the Scholars Shura Council made a final evaluation and listened to Morsi, the winner of the first round, on his opinion about Sharia and Shiites. The Council decided to support Morsi upon his promise to do his best to implement Sharia in line with the Sunni Islam

and methods of the Society; to be a brother to all Muslim men and women without resorting to partisanship; to work for helping the oppressed; to raise the living standards of all Egyptians; to protect the poor and to be close to the people by taking the pulse of them.”¹⁰

One of the leading institutions in terms of religious education in the Islamic world, Al-Azhar Institution, had a particular influence in Egyptian society. Some figures who teach in this institution also founded civilian groups.

Medresetu’s-Selefiyye (The Salafist School)

Student movements increased in the universities in Egypt since 1970 and a new movement called “Cemaatu’l- Islamiyye” emerged. Many members of the movement later joined the Muslim Brotherhood; however, a group led by some figures from Alexandria did not want to join the Brotherhood and decided to act independently. Influenced particularly by Salafi movements of Saudi origin, this group named themselves as “Medresetu’s-Selefiyye” (the Salafist School) since 1980.¹¹ Also called the Salafists of Alexandria, this movement quickly spread to many regions in Egypt. While their initial activities included preaching and irshad (act of showing the true path) during the Hosni Mubarak ruling, they had a chance to make society hear their voices by preaching on satellite television programmes with their own TV channels in the following years.¹²

7. Salahuddin Hasan, Haritatu’l-Teyyarati’s-Selefiyye fi Misr, <http://www.onislam.net/arabic/islamyoon/salafists/113039-2010-03-09%2014-32-04.html>

8. <http://www.ansaralsonna.com/web/play-5935.html>

9. <http://www.ansaralsonna.com/web/play-6533.html>

10. <http://www.ansaralsonna.com/web/play-6537.html>

11. Salahuddin Hasan, *es-Selefiyyun fi Misr, Misr, 2012*, p. 21

12. Ali Abdulal, “e’d-da’vetu’s-selefiyye bi’l-İskenderiyye”, *es-Selefiyyun fi Misr, (Müessesetu’l-Intişari’l-Arabi, Beyrut:2012)*, p. 36.

The leaders of the Salafist political parties, which engaged in politics and became significant figures in Egypt in the wake of the January 25 revolution, come from this movement. The following section will cover the political parties they established in the post-revolution period. In this section, their opinions and attitudes prior to the revolution will be analyzed. This movement based in Alexandria established a school entitled “Furkan li Ī’dadi’d-Duāt” (Furkan Training School for Inviters) in order to train those who will disseminate the views of the movement. They also publish a monthly journal entitled “savtu’d-da’ve” (the Voice of Dawah) to voice their opinions. During this period, they were accused of being “imported Salafists” due to their relations with prominent Salafist figures of Saudi origin such as Muhammad Ibn Saalih al-Uthaymeen and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz.

Though they were widespread and active in the society, Salafists of Alexandria do not have an organized structure contrary to other Islamist movements. They carried out their activities as an individual-based organization rather than an institution-based one. Furthermore, they do not adhere to principles such as bay’ah (an oath of allegiance to a leader) and confidentiality that other religious movements adopt, and they believe that it is possible to publicly carry out a work without bay’ah.

Members of the Salafist School, also known as the Salafist Dawah, pay special attention to Tawhid and aqaed claiming that the Quran and the Sunna are the sources for the Sahabah (companions of the prophet Muhammad) and tabiun (their immediate followers). They fight against bi’dahs and superstitions, arguing that those who follow their principles should study religious sciences. They focus on a four-phase method to gradually transform the society and create an Islamic society. The first phase is the elimination (purification). Within the scope of this phase, it is necessary to clear the Muslims’

beliefs of everything that is against the sharia, to convince them to adopt Salafi method in their lives, and the Muslim scholars should clear the religious books of weak and fabricated narrations, Isra’iliyyat¹³ and jurisprudential views that are incompatible with authentic hadiths. The second phase is tarbiyah (education). Those who pass this phase become true Salafis. Those, who complete their education by the religious book free of mistakes, invite and train other Muslims. In a society, where all citizens pass this phase, an Islamic state is established without any need to elections or reforms. In the third phase, entitled Mufasala (separation), Muslims declare that they sever the ties with the rulers who refuse to govern by the rules and regulations of Allah.

They argue that these rulers support batil (falsehood) warn them to give up batil and say that otherwise they will face an Islamist jihad by the followers of the Truth). All Muslims should take a side and tell whether they support the followers of the Truth or the ruling party. Those who support the ruling party will be considered as the followers of batil. The fourth phase is jihad. In this phase, followers of the Truth carry out jihad against rulers if they refuse to be committed to Islam and ignore their warnings. In such case, all parties are separated. Some in the society take the side of followers of the Truth while others support batil.¹⁴

Keeping its distance from all kinds of political activity prior to the January 25 Revolution, this movement argues that the political order in Egypt adopts a western system, i.e. democracy. This system is incompatible with certain principles of Islam. Furthermore, it is a product of western culture which is far from the principles of Islam. As a result, democracy

13. TN: Body of narratives originating from Jewish and Christian traditions.

14. Salahuddin Hasan, *Haritatu’-Teyyarati’s-Selefiyye fi Misr*, <http://www.onislam.net/arabic/islamyoon/salafists/113039-2010-03-09%2014-32-04.html>

is not an alternative to the principle of shura in Islam. In a case, where democracy is adopted, a non-Muslim or a woman or someone who is clearly against the religion may come to power, which is totally unacceptable. Salafists of Alexandria softened their opinions about democracy in line with following developments and somehow open the door for a democratic order. They argue that democracy can be employed as a method in order to implement Sharia as long as one does not accept any superstition or does not take part in a munkar (denied) deed.¹⁵

They saw no harm in supporting elections for student associations, trade unions, bar or chambers where the Muslim Brotherhood actively took part and succeeded during the Mubarak period because these institutions do not have any authority to draft laws. However, there was considerable disagreement among members as to parliamentary elections. The group, nevertheless, turned into a political party and became a prominent actor of Egyptian politics in the wake of the January 25 revolution.

A Cairo-centered movement called “Selefiyyetu’l-Harekiyye,” whose members are also among these Salafists of Alexandria origin and disagree with them on certain issues, can be also categorized under this group.¹⁶ This movement voices its opinions on rulers in a clearer and harsher way when compared to Alexandria school. They argue that it will not be enough only to consider the leaders, who do not rule by the rules and regulations of Allah, as infidel; it is necessary to clearly declare their infidelity. They believe that clothing, which is incompatible with Islam, and other behaviors, which are considered sin, in Islam societies belong to the Days of Ignorance. Adding anything to Sharia or deleting anything from it is infidelity. According to them, it is sinful to take part in parliaments because

parliaments resort to other provisions other than the sharia of the Allah and place their constitution before religion.

This Salafi school also severely criticizes other Salafi groups. They argue that some of other Salafi groups are lax about the concept of sin in Islam and limit infidelity with refuting or denying the religion. Therefore, they consider them as “Murjites of the era.” This group prioritizes action and rejects the establishment of a separate community in order not to split the Ummah (Islamic nation) in more sects. They encourage their followers to work together with other groups, which are active in the field, on the issues on which they agree. As a result, they do not reject, in principle, acting together with other groups and movements which desire to re-establish Islamic state or the Caliphate.¹⁷

SALAFIS: ONCE A COMMUNITY NOW A POLITICAL PARTY

The Arab revolutions, which sparked in Tunisia and then spread to Egypt, Libya and Syria, launched a new period for all political and intellectual movements in the Arab world. Among all these movements, Salafi movements come first on the list of religious groups who were caught unprepared for the new process but recovered after a while.

Salafi movements, which do not have clear attitude towards political and social incidents and which act in accordance with the fatwa from their leaders who live according to circumstances, came together under the umbrella of different political parties and engaged in politics which they previously opposed and at times considered as “non-religious.” These movements, which were previously considered under

15. Ali Abdulâl, *ibid.*, p. 55.

16. Abdulmün'im Münib, *Delilu’l-Harekati’l-İslamiyyeti’l-Misriyye*, (*Mektebetu Medbüli, Kahire: 2010*), p. 131.

17. Salahuddin Hasan, *ibid.*

“traditional/scholar” or “action and movement” categories, gained a “political and modern” characteristic. Before dwelling on the period when Salafis came together under the umbrella of political parties, it is necessary to analyze their attitudes towards incidents that provoked the January 25, 2011 Egyptian revolution, the beginning of their political adventure.

The January 25 Revolution and Salafi Movements

Grassroots movements on January 25, 2011 in Egypt influenced Salafi groups and considerably changed their traditional opinions on political and social incidents. When incidents took place and Mubarak had to leave office, Salafi movements in Egypt and other independent figures who are known for their Salafi identities although they do not belong to any Salafi group adopted different attitudes towards these incidents. These attitudes can be categorized as follows:

Those who supported and actively joined the protests:

Salafis of Cairo, or groups who were previously known as jihadist or protester Salafis, supported the January 25 revolution and actively joined the revolutionary process. Prominent figures of the Salafi School such as Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Maqsood, Sheikh Nes’et Ahmed and Sheikh Fevzi Said supported the revolutionary process joining the protests at Tahrir Square and influenced protesters by their speeches. These Salafi groups joined the protests in large cities of Egypt, notably Cairo and Alexandria. They at times carried out independent protests but preferred to act together with other liberal or nationalist opposition groups, who are against Mubarak, on certain issues. Launched by the Salafis of Cairo, this support campaign quickly turned into a platform upon the participation of Azhar scholars and Salafis of Alexandria. Entitled “Hey’etu’s-şer’iyye li himayeti’l-hukuk ve’l-hürriyati’l-meşrua”

(Committee to Protect the Law and to Support Legitimate Freedoms), this platform supported mass protests by distributing communiqués and warned authorities to meet legitimate demands of the people and not to make any amendments to the second article of the constitution,¹⁸ and warned protesters not to run riot and damage public properties during the protests.

Those who openly opposed the protests:

When Salafi grassroots, who were not indifferent to the political and social issues, took to the streets after mass protests broke out some Salafi leaders tried to prevent this in line with the principle of “Ulu’l-Amr itaat (obedience to the ruler).” Preachers such as Sheikh Mahmoud Misri, Sheikh Mustafa Adawi and Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Yacoub, most of whom belong to the group called “Jamaatu ensaru’s-sunnah,” opposed the revolutionary process and supported the status quo stating on TV that joining protests is illegitimate. These Salafi leaders, in their statements, read some verses and hadiths on instigation and advised protesters to leave the protest areas, to return back their homes, to visit masjids and pray and repent, to remain silent to prevent instigation and not to take part in protests. However, these leaders did not have influence on the society and failed to get sufficient support. The same Salafis published a communiqué after Mubarak announced the transfer of his authorities due to mass protests, and stated that protests and opposition to the leader are forbidden by the religion.

Those who adopted an indecisive attitude:

Salafists of Alexandria, who have a powerful and significant place among Salafis, opposed an organized leadership such as those of the Mus-

18. “Islam is the religion of the State. Its official language is Arabic. Islamic law (Sharia) is the principal source of legislation.”

lim Brotherhood while they organized inter se through social and cultural activities. Salafis of Alexandria acted according to the process provoking the revolution and the developments in the post-revolution process and tried to adopt an attitude in line with the results of the incidents, and they adopted a pragmatic attitude in this sense. As a response to the call through social media for the January 25 protests, one of the prominent leaders of the Salafis of Alexandria, Yasser Borhami, said that “we will not join the January 25 protests due to our commitment to our religion, responsibility towards our country, our sensitivity over country’s interests, our priority over the security of the country and citizens in this tough process that we have been going through and our effort to deter enemies who try to cause instigation.”¹⁹

People began looting when security forces withdrew during the protests in all squares of Egypt, notably in Tahrir square, and the Salafists of Alexandria condemned the protests making statements like other groups who took part in the revolutionary process. Realizing that a new process is ahead, the Salafists of Alexandria changed their political positions acting according to the developments, and argued that this results from the difference in judicial opinion and there is a margin of error in every judicial opinion. Salafists of Alexandria did not adopt a clear-cut attitude towards protests during the revolution but actively took part in subsequent debates such as constitutional debates in the post-revolution period and got engaged in politics.

Politicization of Salafi Movements

The group which was affected by the intellectual and political changes in the post-Arab revolution period the most was the salafis. Having kept its distance from intellectual and political issues, traditional Salafism found itself in the middle of politics, particularly due to the change in Egypt.

Both the institutionalized Salafi groups and other Salafi groups based on charismatic figures began to get organized and establish political parties in the political arena which they previously ignored and refused to get engaged in. As described above, Salafi groups are not homogenous; therefore, they engaged in politics through establishing different political parties as they failed to come under the umbrella of one single political party. Each political party established by Salafis indeed represented the Salafi tendency they support. Salafis of Alexandria, who were rigid about democracy and political parties before and during the revolution, adamantly refused democracy in their statements. One of the official spokesmen of the movement, also called Salafi Dawah stated that “We say not only that democracy is forbidden by religion but also that democracy is infidelity”²⁰ and “Democracy is a branch of secularity which separates religion from life. Whether Islamists use democracy or not, democracy is unacceptable under Sharia.”

²¹Notwithstanding, all groups, Salafi groups in particular, established political parties when the constitutional referendum held in the post-revolution period in Egypt removed all the obstacles before establishing a political party. Salafis took part in parliamentary and senate elections in the wake of the January 25, 2011 revolution under the umbrella of three different political parties, and established new political parties, thus maintaining their differences. The political parties established by the Salafis in the wake of revolution are as follows:

Hizb Al-Nur (Al-Nour Party)

The political branch of the Salafis of Alexandria, al-Nour Party was established in the wake of the January 25, 2011 revolution. Salafis of Alexandria with different tendencies got engaged in political life by means of this political party. Since the establishment of the party, clash of ideas among Salafi lead-

19. <http://www.salafvoice.com/article.php?a=5115>

20. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kFirseQTQE&noredirect=1>

21. Nevaf b. Abdurrahman el Kadimi, *el-Islamiyyun ve rebii’s-Seurat*, (Merkezu’l-Arabi li’l-Ebhas ve dirasati’s-siyasiyye, Katar-2012), p. 47.

ers broke out. That Salafi leaders, who previously stated that democracy and political participation is illegitimate on religious grounds, seemed to change their opinions sparked off debates both within and outside the party. Salafi leaders and leaders of the al-Nour Party, on the one hand, had to defend themselves against those outside the party who accused them of being “contradictory, pragmatic, unprincipled” while they on the other hand dealt with the discussions on “legitimacy” within the party.

This movement served as a central rallying point that gave birth to other religious movements in Egypt because it did not impose a particular political identity and treat equally sects within the scope of Sunnism.

Despite all these discussions, the Nour Party has been effective in the suburbs and rural areas of Egypt for years and has become the greatest Salafist party relying on the Salafi discourse. The party joined the parliamentary elections held at the end of 2011 allying with two other Salafi parties; gained 123 seats in the parliament (24 % of the seats) and became the second largest party of Egypt. Following the elections, members of the parliament from other two Salafi parties that al-Nour Party allied with decided to do politics under the umbrella of their own parties; therefore, the seats of the Nour Party in the Parliament decreased to 108. The Party has always found itself in the middle of intra-party discussions. For instance, the congress was convened contrary to the efforts by the party leader, md Emad Abdel Ghaffour to postpone it, and Ghaffour became ineffective.²²

22. <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=786801&SecID=65&IssueID=0#.UmuKteJrPmQ>

The party allocated 15 seats for women on the electoral list after it decided to take part in parliamentary elections, which also sparked off serious discussions among Salafis. As a result, the party administration had to declare that women candidates will be at the end of the list, their photos will not be used on the propaganda posters, but the party will use a photo of rose instead.²³ Members of the new parliament gave contradictory statements and failed to develop a resolute and sustainable policy in the name of the party.

A reformist group, who call itself as “al-Nour Party Reform Front” argued that the party administration should sever its ties with “Salafi Dawah” thus contributing to the religious community-party discussions. These discussions gave birth to two different tendencies each of which chose a leader for itself. Although prominent figures of the Salafi Dawah intervened and tried to freeze problems, though temporally, the first founding leader of Al-Nour Party, Emad Abdel Ghaffour resigned from the party together with his team and established a new party entitled “Al-Watan Party.” Then, Younes Makhoun, who previously supported traditionalist against reformists, became the chairman of the party. The Salafi Dawah, on the other hand, stated that there is no other party than al-Nour Party who politically supports them; therefore, remained aloof towards the newly-established party.²⁴

Al Nour Party comprehensively explains its opinions on the problems of Egypt in its program. According to al Nour, the leading problems of Egypt in the post-revolution period are politics, economy and security related issues; however, it drew attention with its discourses on “identity and religion” in particular. Hereunder, the Party aims to establish a modern and developed state where

23. Ahmed Zağlûl, *el İslamiyyûn ve's-Sevra*, (Evrak li'n-Neşr ve't-Tez'î, Kahire:2012),p. 101.

24. <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=31122012&cid=ff819e94-715d-4175-84b1-85417419ed18>

tradition and modernity coexist. The identity of Egypt is an Arab-Islam identity. The second article of the Egyptian Constitution should be maintained and the Islamic Sharia, as the pillar of the political system in the Egypt, should determine the general framework of all political, economic, legal and social regulations. The principle that the Islamic Sharia is the fundamental source of the constitution also includes the religious freedoms of Copts living in Egypt.²⁵

The Nour Party supported Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, who resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood, in the first round of the presidential elections held in 2012 after the Supreme Election Commission vetoed the candidacy of Hazem Salah Abu Ismail. They supported Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood in the second round of the presidential elections.

Al Nour Party received criticism from liberals and Copts in Egypt both during constitution-drafting process and due to its statements. Having supported the military coup d'état on July 3, 2013, which toppled the first civil president Morsi who came to power through democratic means, the party has weakened its support.

Hizb El-Benaa Wa El-Tanmia (Building and Development Party)

The group entitled "al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya" who has a particular place for Islamist groups in Egypt and who is held responsible for the assassination of Anwar Sadat, actively took part in the January 25 revolution and supported the new process. As they are known for their close relations with Salafi movements rather than the Muslim Brotherhood, they are mentioned among parties of "Salafi origin." After a process of self-criticism at the end of the 1990s, leaders of the "al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya" declared to the public that they renounce any kind of violence. Abbud al-Zumar, who was convicted for the assassination of Anwar

Sadat and released during the revolution process, his brother Tarek al-Zumar and other prominent figures of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Safwat Abdel Ghani, Ashraf Tawfek established the party with the slogan "construction, development, sharia, political freedom and social justice." The Building and Development Party together with al-Nour party and the Authenticity Party paved the way for the "Islamist bloc."²⁶ The party stated that they would support Aboul Fotouh in the first round of the presidential elections but they would not oppose their members who wanted to support Morsi. Arguing that revolution broke out because Allah answered the prayers of Egyptians who took to the streets with the slogan "people want the fall of the regime," and the order of oppression, tyranny and dictatorship came to an end, the founders of the Building and Development Party stated that they set out to fulfill their due responsibility to Egypt and contribute to the development of Egypt.

As underlined in the founding declaration of the party, the aim of the party is to first win the blessings of Allah, then to promote the interests of the country and citizens to ensure their well-being in the world and afterlife, and to prepare Egypt for being the leader of developed societies. The aims of the party also include to preserve Arab and Islam identity of Egypt and to remove obstacles before it; to stifle westernization initiatives and to struggle against the erosion of values and morality; to make the legal, constitutional and political reform which will encompass all political movements or social groups and to build a new Egypt based on equality, freedom, justice and pluralism which will protect the rights of all Egyptian citizens and guarantee the security of foreigners.²⁷

The Building and Development Party opposed the July 3 military coup d'état and took part in anti-coup protests around the country.

26. <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=518618&SecID=65&IssueID=0#.Um4k2OI5nmQ>

27. <http://albenaa-tanmea.com/Program.aspx>

25. http://www.alnourparty.com/page/program_culture

Opposing the military coup d'état, the party members took part in anti-coup protests. The Authenticity Party severely criticized the coup administration for abolishing the constitution which was approved by 65 percent popular vote.

Hizb Al-Fadyla (Virtue Party)

Established in 2011, the Virtue Party, the first political party with a Salafi identity, set out under the slogan "Virtue Party is the party which aims to promote justice and equality in line with the principles of Sharia and to recover Egypt's leading role in all areas." The founders of the party included Mahmoud Muhamed Badr, Muhamed Abdo Imam, Khaled Saeed and one of the leading figures of the Salafi movement Sheikh Farahat Ramadan. The party decided not to take part in the parliamentary elections on the grounds that it had not fully prepared for the elections held shortly after the party was established. The resignation of the party chairman, Adel Abd al-Maqsoud, former military member, on certain grounds and his initiatives for establishing a new party provoked intra-party discussions.

Adopting the slogan "altogether for the reform of Egypt," the Virtue Party stated that it will work for the reform of the society and civil institutions in line with the constitutional articles; recover Egypt's leading role in Arab Islam world with the help of the development project where all citizens will participate; ensure the justice and equality for all without any discrimination and guarantee equal distribution of wealth; guarantee rights and freedoms determined in the constitution for all individuals and pave

the way for the youth and support them.²⁸ The party clearly showed its position as to theological discussions on democracy stating in its program that democracy resembles to the principle of shura in Islam; both manifest the priority of people in governance as a political interpretation, the political power can be legitimate only by the choice and will of people.²⁹

Similar to other Salafi parties, the Virtue Party stated that all Egyptians should support Palestinians to establish a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The party supported Aboul Fotouh in the first round of the presidential race and Morsi in the second round of the elections. The party also opposed the July 3, 2013 military coup d'état and supported anti-coup protests.

Hizb el-asala (Authenticity Party)

Established by Adel Abd al-Maqsoud who resigned from the chairmanship of the Virtue Party and his friends in 2011, the Authenticity Party is another political party known for its Salafi tendency. Having worked at the Interior Ministry as an assistant to Habib el-Adly, then interior minister, Adel Abd al-Maqsoud together with some of his friends stated that other high-profile members of the Virtue Party "no longer adopt a moderate Salafi Islam method which respects the rule of law and remains within the boundaries of legitimacy and are in a conspiracy which is inclined to have excessively sharp opinions that will harm both Islamic activities and general interests," and severed the ties with the party.³⁰

The Authenticity Party adopts the principle of "a modern point of view with the principles of deep-rooted tradition." It argued that the January 25 revolution represents the dignified stance of the Egyptian people, Egypt was misgoverned, and corruption and probe had become wide-

28. <http://www.alfadyla.com/aboutus>

29. <http://www.alfadyla.com/program>

30. <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=452334#.Um5PFel5nmQ>

spread. The party underlined in the party program that Sharia is the principal source of legislation; justice for all in the society is guaranteed by the constitution, non-Muslims are free to abide by their private laws; the party in power will change by elections and all elected rulers including the president will be accountable to people.³¹

The party nominated Abdullah al-Ashal for presidential elections; however, Ashal withdrew from the elections on behalf of Morsi so that votes of Islamists would not be divided. As a result, the Authenticity Party supported Morsi in two rounds of the elections, therefore adopting a different policy from that of the other Salafi parties. Due to intra-party discussions, a new chairmanship election was held in 2013 and Ihab Sheeha was elected as the chairman receiving broad support from party members.

Opposing the military coup d'état, the party members took part in anti-coup protests. The Authenticity Party severely criticized the coup administration for abolishing the constitution which was approved by 65 percent popular vote. The party administration fiercely opposed the commission consisting of 50 persons appointed by the coup administration to draft a new constitution; supported the suspended constitution and criticized coup mongers for trying to gain legitimacy by suspending this constitution and commission members for thieving on behalf of coup mongers.³²

Sheikh Muhamed Abd al-Maqsoud—who is the brother of Adel Abd al-Maqsoud, the founder of the Authenticity Party, and known for his close ties with the party—talked to the protesters at the Rabia Square, which has become a symbol for anti-coup protests, and severely criticized coup mongers. His stance also influenced anti-coup policy of the party. The Authenticity Party joined “the National Alliance against the

Coup” which was established in the aftermath of the coup and organized anti-coup protesters supporting the elected President Morsi.

Hizb el-Watan (al-Watan Party)

Disaccord among Salafi groups of Egypt, notably those of Alexandria, also influenced al-Nour Party and intra-party debates resulted in resignations. The founding leader of the Nour Party, Emad Abdel Ghaffour, became the leader of reformists within the party and had to leave the party. Supporting the policy of liberalization of the party administration from the administration of Salafi groups, Ghaffour established al-Watan Party at the beginning of 2013. Ghaffour tried to find a compromise between other Salafi parties and the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Freedom and Justice Party, and he was appointed vice president by Morsi. He served as the vice president until the military coup, rejected the coup administration and supported anti-coup protests in the name of its political party.

That the leader of al-Nour Party, Younes Makhoun, supported coup mongers and joined the coup coalition with representative of liberals, Mohamed Baradei as Copts had already caused ruptures in the party base. Therefore, the newly-established al-Watan Party seemed to come to the fore as the representative of Salafis. This is because many Salafi groups who used to support al-Nour Party actively took part in anti-coup protests. Furthermore, the new constitution-making commission appointed by the coup administration stated that in the new constitution they would remove the previously added articles following pressure from Salafi groups, which disturbed party grassroots. Al-Watan Party drawing attention from Salafi groups, notably al-Nour Party members, supported the constitutional situation in the post-coup period and opposed the practices imposed by the coup administration.³³

31. <http://www.alasalah.org/files/alasalah%20party.pdf>

32. <http://www.alasalah.org/show-266.html>

33. <https://www.facebook.com/watanpartyeg>

CONCLUSION & EVALUATION

The oldest religious-civil groups, “Al-Gam’eyya Al-Shar’eyya” and “Al-Sunna Al-Muhammadeyya Society” constituted a source for current religious movements and groups in Egypt. All movements from the Muslim Brotherhood to other Salafi-oriented groups come from these aforementioned two groups. Founders and leaders of the both groups are from al-Azhar ulama (scholars). Both opposed the traditional religious communities widespread in Egypt which influence a large section of the society. They fought against bid’ah and superstitions considered related with these Sufi movements. Both groups agreed on clearing religion of bid’ah and superstitions and fighting against customs such as appealing to mausoleums, offering sacrifices to them and praying in them. However, they differed in their attitudes towards religious communities. Al-Gam’eyya Al-Shar’eyya rejects all religious communities but welcomes those among them which follow the Sunna. As a consequence, it established a closer relation with the members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Sunna Al-Muhammadeyya Society, on the other hand, struggles in principle against all Sufi groups and religious communities; therefore, it established close ties with Salafi movements, and a high majority of current Salafi movements come from this Society.

Salafi groups got organized in a short period of time in the wake of the January 25 revolution under the umbrella of al-Nour Party and took part in parliamentary and senate elections. They attained a tremendous success disturbing political balances in the Middle East and became an alternative political power to the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁴ In a nutshell, Salafi groups—who kept

their distance from political activities from the very beginning, considered democracy and elections illegitimate under Islam, argued that they mainly differ from the Muslim Brotherhood in that the Brotherhood welcomes democracy and parliament—were drafted into a sphere for which they are not prepared. Salafi movements staggering from their theories on politics to political practices not only failed to find a resolution, on theoretical level, to political, social and economic problems in the country but also could not escape from disagreements on these problems. They proved through their statements and activities during short-term parliamentary studies that they are unprepared for politics.

Salafi groups took part in the Constitution-making Commission established in 2012 and struggled for the inclusion of certain articles in the Constitution which entered into force by a referendum on December 25, 2012 but suspended by a military coup d’état on July 3, 2013. The second article which was directly included in the new Constitution, “Islam is the religion of the State. Its official language is Arabic. Islamic law (Sharia) is the principal source of legislation”³⁵ provoked heated debates. Salafi groups insisted that this article is obscure and open to different interpretation; therefore, a new article should be added to explain this article, and fiercely struggled against the representatives of liberal, left and Coptic groups in the commission. When these groups left the commission, the additional article no 219 was added to the new constitution upon considerable pressure from Salafi groups. This article interprets the second article as “the principles of the Islamic Sharia include its general sources, the principles and maxims of its theoretical and practical jurisprudence, and its reliable and authoritative sources in Sunni legal and theological reasoning.” The political representa-

34. Abdulmün’im Münib, *Delilu’l-Harekati’l-İslamiyyeti’l-Mısıryye*, (Mektebetu Medbüli, Cairo:2010), p. 49-55.

35. *Dusturu Cumhuriyeti Mısır el Arabiyye*, Metabiu’l-Hey’eti’l-Amme li’l-İsti’lâm’at, Cairo-2012.

tive of these Salafi groups, al-Nour Party took the side of military junta together with liberal and Coptic groups who left the constitutional commission, and adopted an unprincipled policy by supporting the coup.

The transformation of religious groups into political parties in the Arab Islam world does not only concern Salafi groups but also other Islamist groups. Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Nahda, which had a chance to do legal politics in the wake of Arab revolutions, developed a strong literature and clear point of view by means of theoretical discussions on democracy and parliament; therefore, they proved to enjoy a more adventurous position than Salafi groups as far as policy making in practice is concerned. Salafi movements, on the other hand, have difficulty in bridging the gap between “fatwa” and “policy”, and base every political attitude on religious references. As a result, their statements, in the name of the party identity, on social, economic and other issues, which require a political stance in active politics, were criticized in the name of religious congregation identity. For instance statements, which were made on behalf of the party such as the role of women in social life, whether women can take part in party activities or whether they can be nominated, whether it is possible to take loan with interest from international monetary funds, were criticized in statements on behalf of religious community.

The military coup d'état on July 3, 2013 provided Salafi movements with an opportunity to observe what kind of means they will adopt about their societies in the countries they do politics, what kind of a foreign policy they will adopt and what kind of a relation they will establish with other political parties from other Islamist movements. That Morsi cancelled the decree law which limits his authorities, and forced many members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which governed the country in

the wake of the January 25 revolution, including its president into retirement short after he was elected the president provoked the opposition groups who lost their hope in elections to take to the streets. These circles, which previously argued that Morsi failed to get rid of the military tutelage, preferred to show their opposition by taking to the streets rather than supporting this decision that Morsi made for civil politics. The opposition organized under the umbrella of the “Tamarod Movement” carried out protests on June 30, 2013, brought the country to brink of a new chaos, received support from the military, thus providing a legitimate basis for military coup against civil politics.

While it differentiates itself from the Muslim Brotherhood as a religious community according to the answer it gave to “what kind of a religious,” the Nour Party will understand that as a political party it will not succeed with this answer and will have to adopt policies to develop real solutions to the real problems of the country.

Leaders of the Nour Party supporting the military coup announced that they accept the road map prepared by the army and sided with the Tamarod Movement which they were not actively involved in before. Because Makhoun, the leader of al-Nour Party, supported Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the junta leader who carried out the July 3, 2013 Military coup overthrowing the first civil president of Egypt and accused him of treason by anti-coup groups. Though they were on the same page with coup mongers in the name of Salafi groups, the leaders of the Nour Party was accused by the circles who supported the coup of being the “sleeper cells of the Muslim Brotherhood” as

they opposed the prime ministry of Mohamed Baradei. Al-Nour Party constantly changed its position according to the course of events and seemed pragmatic but considered unreliable both by coup mongers and anti-coup groups, which harmed the massive support it received from Salafi groups.

Salafi groups explain their differences with the Muslim Brotherhood in “da’wah methods and procedures.” When they realize that this difference does not mean anything after they become politicized, they, as a political party, will develop a policy to answer “what kind of an Egypt” rather than “what kind of a pious”. While it differentiates itself from the Muslim Brotherhood as a religious community according to the answer it gave to “what kind of a religious,” the Nour Party will understand that as a political party it will not succeed with this answer and will have to adopt policies to develop real solutions to the real problems of the country. However, leaders of the Nour Party, the greatest representative of Salafi groups in politics, failed to grasp the role of civil politics in the solution of leading problems of the country; therefore, could not seize the chance to become a political party that will develop policies for resolution.

The Egypt Salafism has been quickly politicized in the wake of the January 25 Revolution and distinguished itself from the Muslim Brotherhood in the political arena though it is also under the umbrella of religious communities. As a result, they did not vote for the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood but Fotouh in the first rounds of the presidential elections as an indication that they want to get engaged in politics free from the “tutelage of the Muslim Brotherhood.” They refused to take part in the Tamarod movement considering the religious sensitivities of their supporters, yet had difficulty in explaining why they support the junta in the wake of the military coup rather than paying regard to these sensitivities.

The support of al-Nour Party, which represented Salafi movements in the political arena, for the military coup d’état was not sufficient to safeguard the gains that all Salafi groups obtained during the Mubarak period, and the coup administration limited political freedoms through extraordinary policies and imposed certain religious bans. These bans affected Salafi groups the most. This was because the junta administration shut down the five satellite channels of Salafi groups, contrary to other religious communities including the Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, the administration also limited the activities in certain masjids and mosques at the helm of Salafi groups. These places are under the influence of Salafi groups and each has become a means of religious activities supported by the society since Mubarak ruling.

Article 219, which eliminated ambiguities in Article 2 of the first civil Constitution of Egypt prepared and adopted by referendum during the Morsi ruling, was considered as a victory of all Salafi groups. This significant article for Salafi groups was removed from the draft made by the Constitution-making Commission established in the wake of the military coup and the interpretation of Article 2 was left to the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court.³⁶ One of the wise men of the Nour Party and one of the leaders of Salafi Daw’ah movement, Yasser al-Burhami tried to calm down Salafi groups stating that Article 219 is not a holy article that should definitely be in the constitution.³⁷ However, Salafi circles considered it as a double standard.

Discussions on the concept of “national” after the military coup gave birth to approaches entitled national and non-national. These discussions also influenced Salafi circles and

36. www.dostorasly.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=29112013&id=12ec4298-2274-463f-b552-1237f7067104

37. www.masrawy.com/news/egypt/politics/2013/november/29/5770865.aspx

showed that they remained in between of being an Egypt-centered movement and being Egyptian affiliates of religious groups in other countries. Some Salafi groups who are identified with the policies of Saudi and other Gulf countries on Egypt will be accused of not being national in the near term. Salafi groups faced the reality that they are internal actors of a foreign power due to the shadow of “Saudi and petrodollar” over Salafi groups and their financing of the coup process where al-Nour Party also took part. In this sense, the coup polarized Salafi circles into two competing positions as coup mongers and anti-coup groups. Discussions among Salafi groups will push them to use

a political language and they will meet on a political ground rather than one based on religion, religiousness, religious understanding.

Therefore, Salafi groups who have a good command of Islamic jurisprudence and theology will have to develop a new discourse in order to survive in the politicization process where they are unprepared and inexperienced. This new discourse should focus on cooperation with other political actors to build civil politics, ensure fair trial, increase income levels, and end corruption and probe. The new Salafism with a new discourse is a candidate for representing conservative wing of Islamist movement that began to make its presence felt in political arena.

Uprisings rapidly spreading from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen in 2011 have become a landmark of a new period in the Arab world. Owing to the new process in Egypt, the most significant country of the Arab and African region, social groups have had a chance to do legal politics, established political parties and taken their place in the political arena. The Salafi movements, without a doubt, have received more attention than any other group. Salafi groups previously had kept their distance from active politics, concentrated on education, dawah (missionary works for Islam) and other social activities, and refused mechanisms such as democracy, elections and parliament as they considered them religiously unfavorable. This time, however, the Salafis have established political parties and made an active decision to be involved in politics in the public sphere. This study will dwell on the structures, opinions of Salafi groups prior to the Revolution and their political parties, political attitudes and opinions in the wake of the January 25 Revolution.



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