

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN EGYPT

Part 2 of a series on political Islam in Egypt

ASHRAF EL-SHERIF

The current turmoil in Egypt—including social strife, polarization, and violence—has cast shadows on the potential for Islamist integration as well as the regime’s ability to achieve political stability. Shifting external and internal dynamics of Islamist organizations indicate five possible scenarios for the future of the Muslim Brotherhood. Its path will have far-reaching implications for political Islam and democratization in Egypt.

Possible Future Scenarios

- The regime remains committed to the goal of eradicating the Brotherhood, even though it lacks the resources to effectively do so. The Brotherhood continues to face a ruthless crackdown by the regime, including arbitrary arrests, frozen assets, and violent confrontations.
- Through ongoing protests that rattle the regime and begin to generate greater popular support, the Brotherhood returns to Egyptian politics in triumph.
- Islamists and the regime negotiate a return to the political formula under former president Hosni Mubarak—limited political inclusion of the Brotherhood within certain regime-determined redlines.
- The Brotherhood splits into two main fragments: moderates who view conventional Brotherhood policy as too confrontational, and hardliners who view current policy as too compromising and also ideologically incorrect.
- The organization recognizes the failures of its current protests and withdraws from political activity, focusing on an internal ideological reinvention.

Implications for Egyptian Society

It is uncertain which of the five scenarios for the Brotherhood’s future will come to pass. The old state and the Brotherhood are currently committed, respectively, to the Brotherhood’s total eradication or its triumphant comeback. The unlikelihood that either of these scenarios will be fulfilled might force the regime and Islamists to be more open to other options, particularly reconciliation. Yet for the near to medium term, reconciliation, fragmentation, and reinvention remain unlikely.

The Brotherhood has proven to be more resilient than initially assumed, leaving political Islam as a force in Egyptian politics for the immediate future. The rise of post-Brotherhood politics would require the end of old-state authoritarian politics, economic development, and religious reform as well as the establishment of participatory democratic movements, none of which is currently foreseeable.

Current dynamics do not bode well for a future democratic Egypt. Any path for democratic political and social change has not been welcomed by the old state or the Islamists, who remain unwilling to engage with other actors or to foster renewed democratic thinking. This leaves political Islam, like the old state in Egypt, part of the ongoing problem rather than the solution.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashraf El-Sherif is a nonresident associate in the Democracy and Rule of Law Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

CONTACT

Christopher Dockrey
Government Affairs Manager
+1 202 939 2307
cdockrey@ceip.org

Clara Hogan
Media Manager
+1 202 939 2241
chogan@ceip.org

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance the cause of peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

© 2014 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. All rights reserved.

The Carnegie Endowment does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented here are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Carnegie, its staff, or its trustees.

CarnegieEndowment.org



@CarnegieEndow



facebook.com/
CarnegieEndowment