

Egypt's Muslim Brothers won a major victory in the 2011-12 parliamentary elections, with 47.2% of the vote and 235 seats out of 498: the Salafists took around 30% of the vote and 123 seats. Yet the Brothers, despite their powerful political position, now face challenges: the consequences of entering politics; the difficulties that have resulted from their own political and intellectual development; their internal contradictions; and the pressure from Salafism ([1](#)).

The movement, founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928 in Egypt, has always made pragmatic alliances with regimes — those of King Farouk from 1936; the Free Officers who ousted him in 1952 (though from 1954 the Brothers turned against Gamal Abdel Nasser and were then severely repressed); and Anwar Sadat from 1970 (who used the Brothers against the Nasserists and the left).

Under Hosni Mubarak, from 1981, relations with the Brothers wavered between compromise, partial tolerance and selective repression. Though they never were given legal recognition, the Brothers, running as “independents”, managed to win 20% of the seats in the 2005 legislative elections but in December 2010 were stripped of all representation. Everybody knew about these tactical agreements and Mohamed Mahdi Akaf, their Supreme Guide from 2004 to 2009, acknowledged them; they showed the organisation's flexibility, but damaged its image as an opposition force.

The tradition of compromise continued after Mubarak's fall in February 2011, when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took power. Like the Brotherhood, the SCAF was ambiguous in the revolutionary period: both institutions are antidemocratic and forces of the past. However, the compromise did not last and could develop into a confrontation. In November 2011 the Brothers rejected a constitution drafted by Ali al-Salmi, then deputy prime minister, which would have given the army immunity in the future. They also refused to give the generals a major political role in the constitutional arrangement. Under popular pressure, the Brothers demanded a proper trial for Mubarak, while the SCAF favoured a “sentence” which would have concealed the actions of many members from public scrutiny.

The Brotherhood may now be tempted to follow the example of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), which accepted a system in which the generals played an important role before they were gently sent back to their barracks. But the Brotherhood might not be able to do this. The movement has been marked by its insistence on *da'wa* (call for religious

education) and its belief in the eventual establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. Its decision in 2011, for the first time in its history, to create a national political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), means that it must now abandon its comfortable opposition role, give up some of its universal claims and respond to the aspirations of voters over employment, education, health, corruption, and transport.

Hard choices ahead

This is no easy task since one section of activists and supporters cling to the old ways; this, along with a generational conflict, will only deepen the contradictions within the movement. It no longer has theoreticians able to address the new era: since the deaths of the Brotherhood's founder, al-Banna (an organiser rather than a thinker), and of the influential Sayyid Qutb there has only been Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who is now 86. He has become well-known for his preaching on Al-Jazeera, but has been very critical for some months of the Brothers' political tactics and their wish to take power.

Another problem is the revival of pluralism in Egypt, reflected within the Brotherhood, which now has a new guard, often more open, alongside the old one, and different Sufi and Salafist orientations ([2](#)). Yet the organisation has always preferred to deny any contradictions rather than engage in internal debate. One of the major divisive questions is that of sovereignty: does it belong to the people, or God? What does democracy really mean? While the younger Brotherhood generation affirm their support for democracy and citizenship, the old guard still believes in divine sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya*).

The contradictory declarations since the fall of Mubarak are not doublespeak but come from divisions between different factions deep within the movement, and could threaten its existence. They are a reminder of the evolution within Nasser's Arab Socialist Union (ASU) in the 1960s, which included different political forces from far left to far right. With Sadat's economic opening in the 1970s, the ASU split into new parties. Such divisions have existed within the Brotherhood for at least 15 years but, with the revolution, they became very public with the formation under Abou el-Ala Madi of the Wasat (Centre) Party, an Egyptian version of Turkey's AKP. This reflects the aspirations of a new generation, which entered politics in the 1970s after great repression under Nasser. It espouses democracy, women's empowerment and citizenship, and calls for a concept of Islam compatible with modernity. The Wasat represents the first formal split within the Brotherhood since 1928.

A second split occurred when Dr Muhammad Habib, the Brotherhood's deputy Supreme Guide, left and established the Renaissance Party (RP) in July 2011. Habib's party is close to Madi's Wasat: they belong to the same ideological "young" generation, though Habib is over 60. In 2009 Habib stood against Dr Muhammad Badie, the Supreme Guide, for that top position and lost, in a controversial election. Although Habib and Badie are of the same generation and joined the group at roughly the same time, they differ completely in their thoughts and political orientations: Habib calls for "civilisational Islam", while Badie belongs to the proselytising Brotherhood current known as Qutbism (after Sayyid Qutb, the radical ideologue and author of the influential *Crossroads*, who was hanged by the authorities in 1966).

A third split happened when Dr Abdel Moneim Abul Futouh, a member of the Guidance Bureau, decided to run for the 2012 presidential election without the Brotherhood's permission. He represents a strong, rebellious faction within the Brothers — a generation of "doves" who will campaign for him during the election.

To avoid disintegration, the Brothers must compromise with their factions and wings. This will require considerable political skill, which their current leader does not have. It also needs a vision of the future which the old guard does not have.

The Salafist challenge

The last challenge is "Salafisation" — even if the Salafists are themselves open to the influence of the Brotherhood and their vision of politics. Badie, like some of the old guard, has a Salafist background and when he was elected Supreme Guide in 2010, declared he would focus on *da' wa*.

Such allegiances allowed the Salafists to play a bigger role within the group. They contributed to the success of the movement in the Mubarak era, especially in parliamentary elections in rural areas, and provided support in Salafist mosques, charities and preachers' institutions. It is wrong to claim that the Salafists disassociated themselves from politics under Mubarak.

After the 2011 revolution they established their own political parties, and no longer accepted Brotherhood control. There are still Salafists within the Brotherhood who hesitate between remaining or joining a Salafist party, especially the faction that supports Sheikh Hazem Abu Ismail as presidential candidate. He epitomises an official divided between the Brotherhood and the Salafists. The departure of his supporters would lose the Brotherhood at least 20% of its support and many rural bases.

Another presidential candidate, Dr Muhammad Selim al-Awa, also has the support of Brotherhood activists, which means there may be three candidates who can hope to win Brotherhood and Salafist votes: Abul Futouh and the young generation; Abu Ismail and his Qutbist-Salafist generation; and al-Awa who also represents the old guard. This is why Badie declared that the Brotherhood would select a compromise candidate.

The main development may come from Salafist groups who have more pragmatic elements — especially within their party, al-Nour, which won 107 seats — while other groups such as the Construction and Development Party (the political arm of al-Jama'ah al-Islamiya) are closer to jihadism. Nour Party leaders such as Nader Bakar, Mohamed Nour and Yossari Hammad are closer to the Brotherhood's young generation, and this similarity between the FJP and al-Nour will shape both sides' future. Forced to adopt a more pragmatic policy, they may well disappoint their electoral grassroots — who voted for an “Islamic Caliphate”, “the liberation of Palestinian lands” and applying sharia law — and be unable to deal with their economic and social needs. They risk losing the momentum that took them to victory.

Source: Le Monde Diplomatique