

Political Participation in Contemporary Islamic Political Discourse:
The Cases of Jamal al-Banna, Tariq al-Bishri and Essam el-Eriyyan

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Since its foundation, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has shown a great interest in civil political engagement. However, only recently has the movement experienced success in this regard, with 88 MB members entering the Egyptian Parliament in 2005, an unprecedented political gain. The MB's engagement and recent gains raise new questions in the long-running debate about Islam and politics, with a majority arguing that Islam is a religion of politics and a minority claiming that Islam is non-political. In light of a general tendency to move beyond this over-simplistic dichotomy towards a more sophisticated and multi-layered understanding of the relationship between Islam and politics, we must view the MB's political gains in the light of these new "more complex apprehensions".

The MB is a religious and a political movement – not a political party – that participates openly in elections and civil politics. Because it uses Islamic rhetoric to gain power in the "nation-state" of Egypt – by no means a theocracy – its political participation appears to comply with the ongoing, complex, multi-layered relationship between Islam and politics. However, Islam, particularly political Islam, in Egypt cannot be reduced to the MB, their agenda, propaganda, ideology or political activities. Political Islam encompasses both Egypt's Islamic intellectuals and "practitioners".

To understand the ongoing and complex debate (among Muslims as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims) on Islam and politics and to explore the role of Egypt's Islamists, both in terms of political participation and the MB's political gains one must study the concept of political participation in Islam and, more precisely, in Contemporary Islamic Political Discourse (CIPD).

Accordingly, this research proposal seeks to examine how political participation is treated in the writings of three Egyptian Islamists. It analyses the works of three prominent contemporary Egyptian Islamic figures: Jamal al-Banna, Tariq al-Bishri and Essam el-Eriyyan. The main aim of this analysis is to examine the authors' views concerning political participation and the MB's recent political gains. This is to be done using Discourse Analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Research Interest:

Political Islam, Middle East Politics, Political Discourse, Egypt, Democracy.