Andrew Clark: The Successes and Failures of Egyptian Secularism

Despite their many efforts, Egyptian secularists do not seem, at first glance, to have made much of an impact on the Egyptian political scene. Looking at the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections shows the dominance of more religiously oriented parties, and the discourse of more secular parties shows how much they wish to avoid the "secular" label. The last thirty years have seen the rise of Islamism, the altering of the constitution and educational curricula to make them more palatable to Islamist sensibilities, and the proliferation of religiously-based charitable and social organizations. The battle between the two branches of thought on how to reconcile Islam and contemporary norms and practices seems to have been won quite dramatically by those preaching a more religious solution.

This is all undoubtedly true, but it also misses some important ways in which more secular Egyptians have influenced the social and political debate over the last twenty years in particular, as well as some important trends within Islamist camps today. While Islamist groups have indeed grown to be the most socially and politically powerful in Egypt today, they have altered their discourse in ways that are at times quite dramatic. Democracy, for one, is something few of the major groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, accepted thirty years ago. Democracy was equated with atheism in part because it sought to replace the sovereignty of God with that of mankind. Now many of these same groups emphasize their commitment to democracy at nearly every opportunity. Indeed, their discourse on some issues has grown so similar to more liberal and secular groups that the party programs from the two camps often sound remarkably similar. That is not to imply that there are no differences, to be sure, but that

the rhetoric has in many ways converged, and that is not to be discounted.  It also points to one possible influence of secular thought over the past few decades.

There are also changes occurring today, especially among Islamist youth, which could see yet further convergence between religious and non-religious discourse.  Popular religious thinkers like Heba Raouf Ezzat, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, and Jasser 'Auda, among others, teach understandings of Islam that are far more compatible with a separation of religion and politics.  Heba Raouf even writes explicitly on Islamic forms of secularism.  To ignore these realities would be to miss some of the important ways in which secular political thought has influenced the current political environment, as well as ways it might do so in the future.

But first, it is worth asking why, aside from the difficulties in balancing the demands to be both authentic and contemporary, Egyptian secularists have not had much success in recent decades garnering popular support for their views.  For this we return to the beginning of the twentieth century and the decades that propelled the Wafd Party to power, and that also gave rise to the Muslim Brotherhood.  The Wafd Party, formed in 1919 by Sa'd Zaghloul, based its vision on a form of liberal nationalism that sought to free Egypt from British colonial authority and establish a largely secular democracy that included all groups of Egyptian society.  One of their slogans was "Religion is for God, and the country is for all," illustrating a view of religion as a largely private matter that should not divide the country.  The Wafd grew to become the dominant political party in Egypt's nascent democracy in the 1920s, and in 1924 the Wafd won over ninety percent of the seats in parliament.[1]  Zaghloul was named prime minister and immediately began negotiations with the British to secure independence.  But, not for the last time, Zaghloul and the Wafdists were to be disappointed, as was the nationalist public opinion on

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[1] Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, New York: Basic Books, 2009, p. 192.

which much of their support was based.  Within a year of his ascension to power, Zaghloul resigned after failing to achieve any significant concessions from Britain.[2]  The Wafd similarly failed in the early 1930s after another electoral victory returned them to power.

Despite their early public support, the Wafd "was continuously frustrated in its bid for power, and ultimately failed to achieve independence and to advance a viable solution to Egypt's growing social crises."[3]  In both 1936 and 1942 the Wafd signed agreements with the British that were far too accommodating and were deemed unacceptable by many Egyptians.  Combined with the instability and inefficacy of the democratic and constitutional system they championed, the Wafd lost most of their support and were easily discarded in 1952 by the new military rulers.  "The experiences of the 1930s left many Egyptians disenchanted with the party politics of liberal democracy,"[4] and it was with great relief that many Egyptians greeted the ascendance of a ruler, Gamal Abdel Nasser, not tied to party politics and more willing to confront the British.  The first experience with a form of liberal and secular democratic rule had not achieved its aims.

Nasser's rule was most certainly not liberal, as he prohibited political parties and largely ruled through his own power, but it was still largely secular.  Granted, he never adopted the hostility towards religion that characterized so many other socialist governments, and he often courted religious groups to legitimize his rule.  He even had ties to the Muslim Brotherhood early in his rise.  Yet his was nonetheless "a secular ideology that consciously sought to include Arab Christians as well as Muslims."[5]  Arabism was the identity of the era, not Islamism, and as a result Nasser's politics were not based on a religious reference.  Nasser did not ignore religion,

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[2] Ibid, p. 193.
[3] Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Reemergence of the Wafd Party: Glimpses of the Liberal Opposition in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 16.1, March 1984, p. 101.
[4] Rogan, p. 196.
[5] Scott W. Hibbard, *Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India, and the United States*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, p. 59.

and in fact he sought to strengthen the state's control over institutions of Islam, but his rule was never fundamentally based on or dedicated to religious ideals. The political elite in his era "remained wary of Islam, seeing it as an obstacle 'to the full realization of the nation-state.'"[6] Pan-Arabism and anti-imperialism succeeded as mobilizing tools in Nasser's hands, but that was not to last.

The defeat by Israel in 1967 launched a dramatic transformation in Egyptian politics, as "[t]he whole logic and symbolism of the nation-state, which had been developed as the only authentic language, was undercut and revealed as without substance in exactly those dimensions where it had most claimed to be powerful."[7] The response was not immediate, but it was forceful, and it began a reversal of much of what Nasser had built. It also frequently took a very religious character. Many Egyptian Islamists "argued that the Arabs had lost the war not because they were busy worshipping – as the radical [Nasserist] caricature would have it – but because they had lost their faith and bearings: Disconnected from a deeply held system of beliefs, the Arabs proved an easy prey."[8] It was, more religiously-minded Egyptians argued, because they had moved away from Islam as the cornerstone of their society and their belief systems that they had grown so weak and impotent. It was under Islam that they had achieved their greatest victories and strength as a community, these voices argued, and Islam "could do what no imported doctrine could hope to do – mobilize the believers, instill discipline, and inspire people to make sacrifices and, if necessary, die."[9] The second consecutive effort to import a political ideology developed in Europe had failed, they argued. Liberal democracy under the Wafd and

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[6] Ibid, p. 65.
[7] Ibid, p. 65.
[8] Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 61.
[9] Ibid, p. 62.

then socialism under Nasser had left Egyptians as weak in the face of their opponents as they had been before, and it was time to return to a system of organizing the community with deep roots in Egyptian history and culture. It was time to make Islam, however defined, the basis of the Egyptian social, economic, and political system.

Many Egyptians read the first sixty or seventy years of the twentieth century in this way. Islamist groups had been active in Egypt for as long as these more Western movements, and they had long denounced them as unsuited to Egypt and its Islamic heritage. With the failure of these two experiments, Islamist groups were emboldened, and their political strength grew as a result. This was, in part, due to the policies adopted by Anwar Sadat who, in his effort to undo the Nasserist experiment and solidify his rule against those Nasserists still holding high governmental office, mobilized Egyptian Islamists to battle the old guard of leftists. But these Islamist groups were eventually to turn on and assassinate Sadat in 1981. His outreach to Israel and the United States angered many Egyptians across the political spectrum. The simultaneous economic liberalization, another relatively Western principle transplanted to Egypt, only seemed to deepen the economic problems faced by the poor. This helped religious groups in particular tap into the dissatisfaction with his rule.[10] And with the authoritarian nature of his rule, political rights for the people hardly existed. In the end, Sadat's reign was to be remembered as economically corrupt, politically repressive, and overly Western in orientation.

Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, spent much of the first two decades of his rule battling those religious groups whose strength had grown under Sadat, and in the process he was forced to accommodate religion in order to break more moderate religious groups away from the violent ones. In the process, "ostensibly secular state leaders and other mainstream political

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[10] Hibbard, p. 73.

actors worked to normalize illiberal religious ideologies and helped to bring the ideas and activists associated with fundamentalist movements into the ideological mainstream."[11]  Yet at the same time, the Mubarak regime was very closely tied to the West, with huge military aid and cooperation underpinning the relationship with the United States in particular.  Mubarak often pursued political and economic policies aimed at pleasing his Western allies, and this further discredited his rule in the eyes of Egyptians demanding a return to a more "authentic" reference.  In the aftermath of Mubarak's downfall in February 2011, Egyptian Islamists emerged as the dominant social and political forces in the country.

This was, in large part, a response to nearly a century spent following more Western references in government, none of which had achieved for Egypt any serious economic growth, social stability, or political openness.  The legacy of more Western-oriented secular programs was one of weakness and, in the eyes of many Egyptians, humiliation.  While the Wafd preached political liberalism, they were often seen as representing those wealthy and powerful segments of society interested in reaching out to Europe.  Nasser, while reversing this economic policy, was a dictator who allowed no real political opposition and often repressed most strongly those religious groups upset with his rule.  Sadat and Mubarak, while trying to co-opt more mainstream Islamic sentiments by creating an Islamic façade around the state, nonetheless aligned with the West militarily and economically.  More secular models of governance, as represented by all of these political experiences, were too Western and too ineffective.  Their failure thus undermined the credibility of secular models associated with the West in the eyes of huge numbers of Egyptians.

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[11] Ibid, p. xiii.

Moreover, secular political models were associated with either economic exploitation or political oppression, not with the more liberal values with which they are associated in Europe or North America. Here is where the connection between liberalism and secularism is so important. While many secular thinkers argue that secularism is the only way to protect the liberal rights so many Egyptians seem to desire, the country's twentieth century experiences with secular rule do not always support that claim. From the beginning of the century to the end of the Mubarak era, there was hardly any rule of law; few, if any, political rights; and little real democracy. Parliamentary elections were usually shams, and the bodies they elected had very limited power. The rights of opposition movements, religious and non-religious, were rarely respected, and the regimes used all the powers of the state to repress criticisms of its rule. Secularism, in Egypt's experience, never protected the liberal political rights on which secularists base their advocacy for the principle.

Yet despite this tainted legacy of secularism and the concomitant predominance of religious discourse and organizations, secular political thought has remained influential in Egypt. Aside from the presence of traditional secular voices, secularism has to some degree helped shape the views of some Islamist groups and brought about some convergence between the Islamist and secular visions. This is particularly clear from the last decade or so when groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, inspired by their younger leaders and recognizing the need to keep up with political changes at large, "move[d] away from the idea of establishing an Islamic caliphate based on Qur'anic *shura*…toward acknowledging the rights of the Coptic minority, behaving like a political party, and speaking the language of citizenship and political equality."[12] Indeed, in 2000, 'Issam al-'Iryan, one of the groups younger and more liberal leaders, said that

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[12] Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Demcratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 185.

the call for an Islamic state was "a slogan that has passed its time….The language of agitation shifted to a large degree from state power to public morality, virtues, and international issues."[13] This softening of their explicitly religious demands for the political arena was a significant development, and it was in part motivated by a desire to reach out beyond the Muslim Brotherhood's more religious base and appeal to a broader segment of society. The result has been a softening of the religious discourse and a greater acceptance of views not so heavily based on Islam.

The Brotherhood's participation in the protest movements that drew so much attention from the early 2000s onwards was an important piece in that development. Kifaya, a largely nonreligious political movement aimed at democratization, helped launch a serious effort on the part of Egyptian civil society to push for political reform. Numerous other groups joined to help push the Mubarak regime to open up the country's politics and allow greater political rights and representation. This protest movement was based among "popular forces rather than traditional opposition parties" and it "embraced activists from multiple ideological orientations, including Nasserists...nationalists, communists, liberals, and those with an Islamist orientation."[14] These more-religiously oriented Egyptians were working with non-religious groups to push for shared political goals, and this experience helped change the political discourse of some Islamists, notably the Brotherhood: "[M]indful of not falling behind the new popular dissent and being in tune with the international discourse on democracy, the Muslim Brothers' younger leadership conceded to some aspects of democratic discourse."[15] Institutions like democracy were equated with Islamic principles like *shura*, and the discussion of equal rights was supported from an

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[13] Ibid, 145.
[14] Ibid, p. 183
[15] Ibid, p. 185.

Islamic reference as well. But the impetus behind these changes was the pursuit of political objectives that were not fundamentally religious and that were championed by groups across the Egyptian ideological spectrum. Groups like the Muslim Brotherhood were careful to advocate them from an Islamic reference, however, and this helped provide them with greater legitimacy in the eyes of many Egyptians.

One such example is the Brotherhood's current discourse on the "civil state." The "civil state" is something on which many segments of the political spectrum agree, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood and the more secular parties. Though defined somewhat differently by these groups, it is something that they can agree on at least nominally. And the Brotherhood's adoption of the term is a shift from its previous emphasis on a more religious state. They define a "civil state" as a non-military, non-theocratic state, though it is based on an Islamic reference.[16] The focus of the state's activity is not on religious issues, but rather on those more "civil" issues that define so much of the work of governing. And that, they claim, is the natural character of an Islamic state, which is not ruled by a body of religious scholars but rather laymen tasked with practical political decisions. The Brotherhood seems then to have moved away from the emphasis on an explicitly Islamic state, though they are careful to ensure that the "civil state" is compatible with, and indeed inspired by, Islam. The degree to which Islam would play a central role in the Islamist view of the civil state is unclear, but the fact that they are calling for a civil state and not an Islamic state is an important step in finding some middle ground with other, non-Islamist Egyptians.

The Brotherhood received help in this justification of democracy and other political practices from outside their ranks. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a very popular and respected religious

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[16] "*barnamij hizb al-hurriya wa al-'adala*," (The Program of the Freedom and Justice Party), Freedom and Justice Party, http://www.hurryh.com/Party_Program.aspx.

thinker whose ideas have currency within the Brotherhood, was one of the most important religious scholars who used an Islamic framework to legitimize democracy. Recognizing the foreign roots of modern democracy, Qaradawi nonetheless asserted that democratic principles were not only compatible with Islam but fundamentally rooted in Islam:

> "There is no Islamic legal impediment to acquiring an idea or a practical solution from non-Muslims….[W]e have the right to borrow from others whatever ideas, methods, and systems might be beneficial to us as long as they do not contradict the clear dictates of the fundamental texts or the established principles of shari'a."[17]

And not only is democracy compatible with Islam, but "Islam antedates democracy in establishing the basic principles on which the essence of democracy rests."[18] The term "democracy" may be imported from Europe in particular, but Qaradawi urges Muslims to focus "not on a thing's names or titles but rather its contents,"[19] in which case they will see that democracy is entirely compatible with basic Islamic political values.

Islam clearly rejects and condemns tyrannical rulers, whom the Prophet asserts will "plunge into hellfire like moths," and at the same time it requires rulers to follow the "principle of consultation."[20] While some Muslim scholars argue that the ruler is not obligated to follow the advice of those who consult on matters of the state, Qaradawi asserts that "the view that affirms the [ruler's] *obligation* to follow advice should be preferred in view of the history of despotism in our community."[21] Here Qaradawi is agreeing with those secularist thinkers who

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[17] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "Islam and Democracy," *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from al-Banna to Bin Laden*, Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 237.
[18] Ibid, p. 236.
[19] Ibid, p. 244.
[20] Ibid, pp. 234-235
[21] Ibid, p. 245.

argue that Islamic communities have witnessed an unfortunate history of despotic rule, but Qaradawi responds that the correct reaction is not to separate Islam from government but rather to follow Islam properly and adopt those practices that best ensure Islamic principles. In this case, that is democracy.

Anticipating those criticisms from Islamists who fear that democracy contradicts God's sovereignty, Qaradawi argues, "The call for democracy does not…entail the rule by the people as a *substitute* for God's rule."[22] Muslim democrats do not seek to replace God's rulings, but rather to implement them. One of God's areas of sovereignty is in legislation and manifests itself in the revelation brought by Muhammad, "whereby He has set forth the law, instituted legal obligations, and made things permissible and forbidden."[23] As a result, "[t]he Muslim who calls for democracy seeks it as a form of governance that embodies the political principles of Islam."[24] Democracy, in this way, is a means of translating God's commands into political practice, while avoiding the troubling history of despotic rulers claiming to speak in God's name. And because Islam affirms "the principle of numerical majority [which says that] the opinion of two is more likely to be correct than the view of a single person,"[25] it is the best means of achieving those Islamic political principles.

Having laid out the basic compatibility between Islam and democracy, and then argued that democracy is the best means of realizing the political principles enjoined by Islam, Qaradawi turns to the issue of identity and the tension between Islamic and Western references. It is worth quoting his point at length:

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[22] Ibid, p. 240.
[23] Ibid, p. 239.
[24] Ibid, p. 239.
[25] Ibid, p. 241.

"I am not fond of using foreign terms, such as democracy, to express Islamic ideas. I prefer to use Islamic terms to express Islamic values and concepts, for this is more appropriate in expressing our distinct identity. Yet, if a particular term becomes widespread in popular usage, we can hardly shut our ears to it. Rather, we ought to understand how it is used so we don't misunderstand it, or take it to mean something other than what those using it mean by that term. In so doing, our view of the term in question would be sound, irrespective of its foreign origins."[26]

This is, in one sense, the very crux of the debate. Qaradawi is addressing that very issue of balancing identity and cultural authenticity with norms and practices not originally Islamic in origin. He argues that it is entirely consistent with Islam for Muslims to adopt political structures that did not arise out of an Islamic framework if those structures are beneficial for Muslims, compatible with Islam, and indeed offer the best means of realizing Islamic political principles. In such a situation, Islam not only permits but encourages Muslims to adopt such political structures. Muslims should not isolate themselves from those ideas that are increasingly common around the world, but it is their duty to understand those ideas and judge their substance based on the principles of Islam. If an idea is compatible with Islam, and if it helps Muslims achieve something valuable, then Muslims are entirely justified in adopting it as a principle of their own, even if its origins are foreign. This is the case with democracy, Qaradawi argues, and Egyptian Muslims are not only allowed to adopt it, but rather they are encouraged to do so as it would best realize both their worldly interests and the principles at the core of their faith.

Qaradawi's vision coincides with the arguments of many religious thinkers, popular particularly among religious Egyptian youth, who call for a greater separation of religion from politics and a focus on making religion a concern for society rather than the state. Here the point

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[26] Ibid, p. 244.

that Islamist discourse has shifted from political issues to issues of public morality is particularly relevant.  Heba Raouf Ezzat is one of the most interesting thinkers presenting such a vision. Indeed she quite openly calls for a form of "Islamically democratic secularism" that shifts the focus from politics to civil society.  Traditional definitions of secularism focusing on separating religion from politics to protect the state are obsolete and not particularly relevant in the Arab world, Ezzat argues.[27]  Instead Ezzat bases her argument on the fact that the nation state, under pressure from globalization, is losing some of its control over society.  The nation state in the Arab world, at the time she wrote her piece, also controlled many religious institutions and exerted huge amounts of control over society.  What was needed, she believed, was a form of Islamic activity that was separate from the state and located in civil society that could push back against the oppressive nature of the state and make religion more social and less political.

She makes clear her apprehension over the dominant religious role played by the state: "The major concern here is to explain how the centrality of the state, with its law and power politics, sets the agenda of debate in Muslim societies, restricting the Muslim mind to a narrow horizon of concerns that do not do justice to the rich complexity of Islam."[28]  She subsequently calls for a "new version of Islamic secularism that will protect religion and the *umma* against the state,"[29] something that is quite similar to many arguments made for secularism by thinkers discussed in the second chapter.  Like those thinkers, Ezzat points to the example of a religious state, Saudi Arabia, in arguing that the state in general should not have control over morals based

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[27] Ezzat and Abdalla, p. 48.
[28] Ibid, p. 51.
[29] Ibid, p. 52.

in religion.[30]  State institutions "nationalized Islam and produced an Islam that is against the real Islam.  Change must start with a separation of these state institutions from religion and a revival of religion's social aims and its civil and moral reference point."[31]  Rather than harm religion, these steps will "save religion from the hands of the state."[32]  Indeed, saving society from the despotic and all-powerful state in other ways is an important point emphasized by Ezzat.  Such a process is already underway with the effects of globalization on the state and the weakening of its traditional areas of control, and this only makes it more necessary to reframe Islamic values in the context of civil society.  "Islamic secularism," she argues, "in retrieving from the state apparatus many functions such as moral guidance and education, local politics and civil activism, would redefine the public roles of religion as a force of empowerment and liberation."[33]  Islam would, in such a situation, remain a very powerful force in society, but would be largely separated from the state.  This would be good both for the state and for Islam, and it would be both Islamic and secular.  By emphasizing civil society and the retreating role of the state, as well as the dangers to religion of too much state control, Ezzat succeeds in promoting a brand of Islam that is both committed to reviving Islam in society but also separating it from the state.  From an Islamic framework she has done what many other secular thinkers tried to do, and her religious framework has gained her a following among many younger, more religious Egyptians.

'Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, another religious thinker, made a similar argument about focusing religious effort on civil society rather than on the state, and in so doing argued that the religious character of the state has little to do with the religious character of society.  The old

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[30] Heba Raouf Ezzat, "*tafkik al-'almaniyya min al-muwajihah li al-ishtibak li ma ba'd al-dawla*," (A Deconstruction of Secularism From Confrontation to an Engagement With What Is Beyond the State), al-Mihwar, Issue 23/24, 2004, p. 23.
[31] Ibid, p. 23.
[32] Ibid, pp. 23-24.
[33] Ezzat and Abdalla, p. 52.

definition of secularism as the separation of religion from the state is no longer appropriate, he argues, because the role of the state has changed so dramatically. The state used to be small, and it did not have control over things like "security, education, and a media apparatus," and "many aspects of life remained outside of the state's control."[34] Now, however, the state controls much more, including the market and the media, religion, and most elements of an individual's public and private life.[35] Al-Masiri's most important point is that this state control over religion has not necessarily led to any greater religiosity on the part of the people. Many Muslims who pray and pay the *zakat*, or Islamic charitable tax, are nonetheless secularized because they embrace secular materialism and consumption rather than more religious mores. "Islamic states," he argues, "in which the constitution is Islamic *shari'a* simultaneously have degrees of secularism that are greater than those states where the constitution is not Islamic, and where most of the people are still immune from the tools of secularism."[36] He is arguing that many Muslims are more secular than non-Muslims because those Muslims have embraced non-religious references to guide their social behavior. And the religious character of the state has little influence on the religious behavior of the people. Al-Masiri is not, in this instance, arguing for secularism as strongly as Heba Raouf, but his fundamental point that the religious nature of the state is less important than the way religion is embraced by the society is nonetheless a secular argument, as it separates the two domains and emphasizes religion in society and not politics.

It is through thinkers like Heba Raouf Ezzat and 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri that understandings of secularism compatible with an Islamic reference have gained some support

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[34] 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, "*bayn al-'almaniyya al-juz'iyya wa al-'almaniyya al-shamiliyya*," (Between Partial Secularism and Complete Secularism), al-Jazeera, February 8, 2007, http://www.aljazeera.net/pointofview/pages/59bd8710-0862-400e-9209-f6ecd4456b9a.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

among religious youths. Indeed, Jasser Auda, another religious thinker whose emphasis on morals and the larger aims of Islam is more compatible with secular politics, noted that thinkers such as Ezzat and al-Masiri are "subject to a lot of interest within the youth circles, especially Islamist youth."[37] It is a mistake, therefore, to neglect the influence of secular thought and to argue that the victory of Islamists in the recent elections reveals that secularism is dead in Egypt. Even the low support for liberal and secular parties in Egypt must be seen in light of the organizational weakness of these parties before the revolution and their inability after the revolution to develop strong grassroots networks around the country on the scale of their Islamist counterparts. There is little doubt that religious groups are still far more popular around the country than secular groups, but the gap might be narrower than it at first appears based on this one election.

There are therefore many reasons not to discount the contributions of secular political thought to the larger political environment in Egypt. Previous generations of secular thinkers struggled to balance the demands to be both culturally authentic and responsive to changing social and political conditions, yet such traditional secular programs managed to garner around a quarter of the seats in the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections. That is obviously quite small compared to the percentage of seats won by Islamist parties, but it is still representative of a large number of Egyptians. Moreover, secular thought has influenced the development of Islamist thought, to the point that many Islamists are receptive to ideas derived from more secular contexts, and many religious thinkers are even developing their own forms of secularism, based on an Islamic framework, in an attempt to protect Islam from manipulation by the state. These developments are significant, and while no one knows where such trends will lead, it is

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[37] Personal email from Jasser Auda to Author, March 3, 2012.

important to recognize the role secular political thought has played in shaping various aspects of

contemporary Egyptian political discourse.