

## **The Muslim Brotherhood 1928-2023: A Century Between Moderation and Radicalization**

### **Thesis Abstract**

The study "The Muslim Brotherhood 1928-2023: A Century Between Moderation and Radicalization" aims to analyze the evolution of the Sunni movement, The Muslim Brotherhood, including all relevant political parties founded or inspired by the parent group in Egypt in Sunni states of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, from the perspective of participation-moderation theory, and the repression-radicalization hypothesis. The work aims to verify whether the participation-moderation hypothesis can be confirmed in the Sunni Islamic space, via the Ikhwan al-Muslimin parties. Secondly, the research seeks to identify the factors that, in parallel with political participation, promote or inhibit the moderation of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Presenting a comprehensive up-to-date synthesis of the literature in the field, the study "The Muslim Brotherhood 1928-2023: A Century Between Moderation and Radicalization" attempts to explain the differences between Europe, on the one hand, and the Middle East, North Africa or the Persian Gulf, on the other hand, in the applicability of the theory. For this purpose, the study tracks the historical evolution of the following political formations associated with the al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin group in eleven Sunni states:

1. Freedom and Justice Party from Egypt. Hizb al-Ḥurriyyah wa al-‘Adala.
2. HAMAS. The Islamic Resistance Movement from Gaza. Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-‘Islāmiyyah.
3. Ennahda, or "Renaissance" from Tunisia.
4. Islamic Action Front from Jordan. Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami.
5. HADAS. The Islamic Constitutional Movement from Kuwait. Al-Haraka Al-Dosturiya Al-Islamiyah.
6. AKP. Justice and Development Party from Turkey. Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi.
7. Justice and Development Party from Morocco. Hizb Al-Adala wa at-Tanmia.
8. Muslim Brotherhood from Syria. Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun fi Suriya.
9. Movement of Society for Peace from Algeria. Harakat Mujtama' as-Salam.
10. National Islamic Front from Sudan. Al-Jabhah al-Islamiyah al-Qawmiyah.
11. Justice and Construction Party from Libya. Hizb Al-Adala Wal-Bina.

Utilizing systematic analysis of social documents, through the technique of content analysis (defined by Gunther as the systematic, impartial, and quantifiable study and analysis of communication, the aim being to measure an identified set of variables), the research aimed to collect and study the defining documents for each Ikhwan party in the selected eleven states, based on the following items representative of the tension between Islamism and liberal democracy:

1. Sharia as the only form of legislation (strong statement);
2. Sharia as a source of legislation (moderate statement);
3. Inferior status for religious minorities (Shiites, Christians, etc.);
4. The inferior status of women (mandatory veiling, lack of legal autonomy, absence of political or civil rights - divorce);
5. Islamization of education;
6. Punishment of sexual minorities;
7. Destruction of the state of Israel;
8. Jihad is a religious duty;
9. Imposition of Islamic one-party rule;
10. Rejection of secular state/imposition of theocracy;
11. Refusal of private sphere;
12. The West is a decadent enemy;
13. Islam is morally superior;
14. Imposition of the universal Caliphate

Among the research hypotheses, four factors were identified that could favor the moderation process, beyond the assumption of political participation. Thus, the study shows that there is a significant correlation between the control exerted by charismatic leaders with a long mandate at the helm of the group, and the way in which the Muslim Brotherhood avoids radicalization. Also, according to the research conclusions, parties rigidly controlled by the center in Cairo - profoundly conservative - seem less able to evolve sustainably towards moderation-modernization. Another conclusion is that the states with the strongest socialist-trade unionist and secular tradition in the Sunni space - Turkey and Tunisia - host the most stable and ideologically modern Islamist movements, which seems to suggest that the pre-existence of strong secular structures at the national level favors attempts at moderation. Finally, it highlights

the fact that in large countries, created for colonial reasons, with desert and mountain barriers, where multiple ethnic and confessional groups (Shiites, Sunnis, Bedouins, Alawites, Druze, Arabs, Berbers, Kurds) exist without real cohesion, the risk of civil conflicts transforming the Muslim Brotherhood into a militant formation (Syria, Libya, Sudan, Algeria) is higher than in the case of states with significant territorial and ethnic homogeneity (Tunisia, Kuwait). This may indicate that confessional, ethnic, and territorial homogeneity favors attempts at moderation.

The analysis highlights the fact that the major obstacle to the moderation of formations like the Ikhwan al-Muslimin - and Islamists in general - remains the hybrid, strong-hand regimes of the Middle East and North Africa. These regimes prefer to have the Muslim Brotherhood remain a systemic enemy - justifying the abolition of some public freedoms - rather than becoming a moderate political actor. The thesis discusses a specific cleavage in Sunni political environment: military vs. Islamists. It demonstrates that, unlike the West - where a clear separation between state and church was paired with an equally clear separation between the military and the state - national armies in the Sunni world were the only forces capable of ensuring the emergence of quasi-secular states in face of the popularity of Islamists between 1920-1960. For this reason, the armies in the Sunni space have been declared the guarantors of statehood and the Constitution, thereby gaining a legal justification to intervene in political life, via military coups, for the "protection of legality". Without this provision, it was considered that Islamists would come to power - including by electoral means - and abolish statehood in favor of a pan-Islamic Caliphate. Hence, the armies in the Sunni space have been formed and educated in a strong secular and anti-Islamist spirit.

Examining the history of the movement from 1928 to 2023, the thesis underlines that, alongside the electoral erosion which will significantly affect the Muslim Brotherhood parties in the long term, the Ikhwan al-Muslimin has undergone a major institutional transformation from 1990 to the present, a transformation that was not possible in the previous period (1928-1990). It has developed parties across the Sunni world, and these parties are generally integrated into the pluralist system. The forecast offered by the work suggests that, given a decline in popularity, these parties will continue to negotiate their ideology with the societies they serve, with the most likely trend being a slow continuation of the moderation process. Given that these parties will strive to survive on their own - as the original religious society from Egypt remains banned - we should expect to see an increasingly clear separation between national political formations and the central Ikhwan, which will cease to exert socio-political influence, evolving more clearly into a theological or "pseudo-sacerdotal" structure, with an increasingly ornamental role (a sui-generis Sunni Vatican). From this perspective, we believe that instead of witnessing the "end of the Muslim Brotherhood," in the context of a potential revitalization of pro-Islamic vote in new historical cycles, it is more likely that we will witness more consistent political performances by significantly moderate conservative Islamic parties separate from the original doctrine of Ikhwan al-Muslimin.

