Ikhwanul Muslimin

1 author:

Muhammad Jeffery Hizwan Bin Said
Universiti Sains Malaysia
11 PUBLICATIONS   **0** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project Persepsi Mahasiswa Universiti Terbuka Malaysia (OUM) Terhadap Isu Palestin-Israel View project

Project Program Pengajian Tinggi Dalam Pemulihan Banduan: Satu Penilaian Dari Perspektif Banduan View project

IKHWANUL MUSLIMIN

TABLE OF CONTENT

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Ikhwanul Muslimin organization logo.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood

The Society of the Muslim Brothers[1] better known as the Muslim Brotherhood[2] or Ikhwanul Muslimin is a transnational Sunni Islamist organization founded in Egypt by Islamic scholar and schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna in 1928. The organization gained supporters throughout the Arab world and influenced other Islamist groups such as Hamas with its "model of political activism combined with Islamic charity work", and in 2012 sponsored the elected political party in Egypt after the January Revolution in 2011. However, it faced periodic government crackdowns for alleged terrorist activities, and as of 2015 is considered a terrorist organization by the governments of Bahrain, Egypt, Russia, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Interestingly, Ikhwanul Muslimin is just a Pan-Islamic, religious, and social movement. They preached Islam, taught the illiterate, and set up hospitals and business enterprises. The group spread to other Muslim countries but has its largest, or one of its largest, organizations in Egypt despite a succession of government crackdowns in 1948, 1954, and 1965, after plots, or alleged plots, of assassination and overthrow of President Gamal al-Nasser were uncovered (Zahid, 2012).

---

[1] Arabic: جماعة الإخوان المسلمين (Jamāʿat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn)
[2] Arabic: الإخوان المسلمون (al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn)

Ikhwanul Muslimin is now active in over 80 countries around the world. Each nation has an Organizational Conference, a Shura Council, and a General Masul (Leader) or "General Guide." The Supreme Guide is the leader of the International Ikhwanul Muslimin, and is based in Cairo, Egypt. It should be noted that when Hamas was created in 1987, it was formed out of the Palestinian Ikhwanul Muslimin. Ikhwanul Muslimin is the "vanguard" or tip-of-the-spear of the current Islamic Movement in the world. While there are other parallel movements, it is the strongest and most organized.

The strong foundation of Ikhwanul Muslimin caused people outside the Muslim World to take notice of the movement, which was classified as being fundamental and radical. However, the fact is far from the truth. Thus, this paper is prepared to evaluate the true nature of the organization by analyzing the root history of Ikhwanul Muslimin. This paper will also analyze the impact of Ikhwanul Muslimin to Egypt democracy process especially during the victory of Ikhwanul Muslimin candidate, Mohamed Morsi as the 5th President of Egypt.

2.0   IKHWANUL MUSLIMIN UNDER HASSAN AL-BANNA

Figure 2: Sheikh Hassan Ahmed Abdel Rahman Muhammed al-Banna
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hassan_al-Banna

Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Ikhwanul Muslimin, was the founder behind the construction of the most influential social movement not only in Egypt but also in the Arab world throughout the 20th century.

Born in 1906, al Banna was the son of a local religious leader, and attended *Dar al-ʿUlum*, Egypt's first modern institute of higher learning, where he was trained as a teacher. In 1928, he founded the Society of the Muslim Brothers, considered the oldest organization of Political Islam (Mitchell, 1993).

According to Rabi (1996), starting from an early age, Banna was constantly bothered by the troubles of the *Ummah* and sought solutions that would end the suffrage. He was greatly disturbed by the declining Islamic morals in Egyptian society and the disunity of the Muslims. Banna was greatly disappointed by the end of Caliphate in Turkey and blamed western influence. Thus, most if his ideas were centered about the unity of the Ummah under one state and community.

Banna developed most of his ideas in early years of his life. He was greatly influenced by Rashid Rida and a dedicated reader and a follower of Rida's magazine, Al-Manar. Like Rida, he argued about the decline of Islam in the Middle East. He was mostly disappointed with rise of secularism, westernization of Egyptian society and the breakdown of traditional Islamic morals in British controlled Egypt (Rabi, 1996).

His work with the Ikhwanul Muslimin began in Ismailia where he gave lectures in coffee shops, though he had been a member of various Islamic social and moral improvement organizations since childhood.

Through Islam, Al-Banna taught his companions to seek answers through local and indigenous moral, social, religious and political intellectual resources. His aim was to inspire them to imbibe and live up to Islam's morals and laws as the answer to the ways of the colonials.

Banna formed Ikhwanul Muslimin in 1928, as a response and a protest to the declining state of Islam. He argued that the decline of Islam was due to the ineffective teachings of the scholars and their failure to preserve Islam in its purest state. Ihkwan included both political and social aspects. Banna Ikhwan was a salafi movement, a Sunni path, Sufi truth, a political organization and social idea.

According to al-Banna's accounts, six unnamed workers affiliated with various Suez Canal companies approached al-Banna in March 1928 with complaints about injustices suffered by Arabs and Muslims at the hand of foreign control. Their complaints resonated with his own concerns; al-Banna became their leader and the Muslim Brothers was created.

The organization was formed with six other people. Banna started the organization as a youth club by preaching at coffee house. Ikhwanul Muslimin gained much popularity in 1930s and extended its activities around Egypt. He established branches all over Egypt and formed the headquarters in Cairo. By 1936 the Ikhwan had around 800 members, and by 1938 it had over 200,000 members with 50 branches in Egypt. Ikhwanul Muslimin opened branches in Palestine and Jordan as well. The organization established mosques, schools, clubs, factories and welfares. By the end of 1930s Ikhwanul Muslimin stretched throughout the Middle East and had more than half a million active members.

A decade later, the organization had 500,000 active members and as many sympathizers in Egypt alone. Its appeal was not limited only to Egypt; its popularity had grown in several other countries. The organization's growth was particularly pronounced after al-Banna relocated their headquarters to Cairo in 1932. The most important factor contributing to this dramatic expansion was the organizational and ideological leadership provided by al-Banna. In less than twenty years Ikhwanul Muslimin became a huge political entity.

3.0 ANALYSIS OF EGYPT POLICIES UNDER PRESIDENT MORSI

Figure 3: Mohamed Morsi El Ayat, 5th President of Egypt (2012-2013).
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohamed_Morsi

Mohamed Morsi is an Egyptian politician who served as the fifth President of Egypt, from 30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013, when General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi removed Morsi from office in the 2013 Egyptian *coup d'état* after the June 2013 Egyptian protests.

President Morsi is the candidate of Ikhwanul Muslimin. After decade of political participation in Egypt, Ikhwan manage to get their candidate to win the presidential seat in 2012. The victory not only sent political shockwave throughout the Muslim World, but also in international politics as well (Viktor Kotsev, 2012).

When in power, Morsi, has pledged to establish a democratic, constitutional state based upon the rule of law and the will of the people. Some of his policies reflects by the objectives of the Ikhwanul Muslimin itself. One of the early action of Morsi towards Egypt's policies is when he named 21 advisers and aides that included three women and two Christians and a large number of Islamist-leaning figures. He also appointed new governors to the 27 regions of the country. The moves are consistent with the objectives

of Ikhwanul Muslimin which is to form an Islamic government in Egypt (Mazel, Zvi, 2012).

For Morsi to establish a functioning democratic system, he must not only persevere and be principled but also possess superb negotiating skills and clever strategies. His greatest ally in this tussle with military power will be the citizenry of Egypt. Since almost half of the voting population did not endorse his presidency, Morsi will have to redouble his efforts to reach out to all segments of society. Apart from women and Christians which the media has highlighted, he should also seek the support of other Islamic groups, secular and liberal Egyptians, and socialists. In a nutshell, his approach to politics and policies should be inclusive and all-embracing. By referring to Ikhwanul Muslimin, and projecting himself as the President of all Egyptians, Morsi has taken the first step in that direction.

Ikhwanul Muslimin is known as an organization with vision, ideology and philosophy. The policies introduced by Morsi including a reformed, de-bureaucratized, corruption free public sector will reflect those beliefs. With the policies, it will also give impacts to the people of Egypt. It will have to raise incomes of the lower echelons of society; emphasize public housing for the homeless; invest in small and medium sized enterprises; focus upon human resource development. People's cooperatives will have to be established which will help to break existing monopolies in the production and distribution of goods and services. Public entities will have to be reorganized to manage water and energy supply and distribution. Infrastructure development which benefits the poor directly will be given priority. In this and other areas, a socially responsible private sector channeling domestic and foreign capital in accordance with the nation's goals, will have a key role to play.

It is not just on the economy that Morsi appears to have adopted a certain stance that reflected on the objectives of Ikhwanul Muslimin namely to freeing land from foreign power and uniting the Islamic countries. On an important foreign policy issue, namely, US military bases in the region and the upgrading of facilities for the US' 5th Fleet in

Bahrain, Morsi and the Ikhwan have been vocal in expressing their disagreement. And what is even more critical, the centers of power in the West will watch him closely on his position on Syria and on Egypt's relations with Iran. But more than anything else, it is on the question of Israel that Washington, its European allies, and Israel itself, will judge Morsi. Morsi has promised all of them that he will respect all international treaties that Egypt has entered into— which would of course include the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. However, they are not sure if Morsi will at some point in the future, succumb to pressure from the masses to review and rescind the Treaty, especially since Egyptian public opinion has never been in favour of the Treaty. Because Morsi presides over a democracy, he cannot — unlike Mubarak the dictator— afford to ignore popular sentiments. Besides, he himself had campaigned in the election as a staunch defender of the Palestinian cause. However, Morsi seems to stands on the beliefs of Ikhwanul Muslimin. One of the clear example is when on 22 November 2012, Morsi issued a declaration purporting to protect the work of the Constituent Assembly drafting the new constitution from judicial interference. In effect, this declaration immunized his actions from any legal challenge. The decree states that it only applies until a new constitution is ratified. he declaration also requires a retrial of those accused in the Mubarak-era killings of protesters, who had been acquitted, and extends the mandate of the Constituent Assembly by two months. Additionally, the declaration authorizes Morsi to take any measures necessary to protect the revolution. Liberal and secular groups walked out of the constitutional Constituent Assembly because they believed that it would impose strict Islamic practices, while members of the Ikhwanul Muslimin supported Morsi.

The move is clearly shown that Morsi is trying to preserve the influence of Ikhwanul Muslimin in the government of Egypt. This can also be seemed consistent with the objectives of Ikhwanul Muslimin to form absolute Islamic government.

However, on 30th June 2013, millions of people rallied across Egypt calling for President Morsi's resignation from office (BBC, 2013). Concurrently with these anti-Morsi demonstrations, his supporters held a sit-in in Rabaa Al-Adawiya square (Umar Farooq, 2013). As a result, On 1st July, the Egyptian Armed Forces issued a 48-hour ultimatum

that gave the country's political parties until 3rd July to meet the demands of the Egyptian people. President Morsi publicly rejected the Egyptian Army's 48-hour ultimatum and vowed to pursue his own plans for national reconciliation and resolving the political crisis.

At the end, on 3rd July, Egyptian army chief General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi announced a road map for the future, removing Morsi from office and appointed Adly Mansour, the head of the Constitutional Court, the Interim President of Egypt.

4.0   THE   IMPACTS   OF   IKHWANUL   MUSLIMIN   IN   EGYPT'S   DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

For decades, Islamist organizations had been in two minds over whether to join the mainstream electoral process or mobilize people as a non-state organization through civil society initiatives and social services in Egypt. They hoped the latter method through civil society initiatives and social services. They also hoped the latter method would help them secure support of the masses and put them in a position to replace the existing Western-inspired parliamentary system of governance with an Islamic caliphate in the future.

This ambiguity had its origins in Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Ikhwanul Muslimin, who was critical of Western concepts of justice and democracy. Strongly influenced by and opposed to the sweeping impact of British colonialism on Egyptian life and culture, unlike other Muslim groups in Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s, Ikhwanul Muslimin believed Islam was sufficient to counter foreign domination (Ayubi, 1991).

For al-Banna, Islam was "complete and all-embracing, governing all aspects of private and public life… Islam was but politics, society, economy, law and culture. " It was, therefore, deviation from Islam and the subsequent imitation of Western customs that weakened Egyptian society. Thus, the replacement of *shari'a* by manmade laws of the

West was not just cultural surrender but, more importantly, an act of heresy (Ayubi, 1991).

Nevertheless, al-Banna strongly believed in and advocated for Islamization from below, a process involving *da'wa* (preaching) that aimed at creating an Islamic government as the natural and gradual consequence of peaceful Islamization.

After an initially inclusive policy towards Ikhwanul Muslimin — as for example witnessed by the inclusion of Ahmed Hosni and Ahmed Hassan el-Bakoury into the Egyptian government — then-President Gamal Abdel Nasser led a crackdown against the group. This was related to the organization's refusal to disband its paramilitary wing, al-jihaz al-sirri, and an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Nasser's life by a allegedly Ikhwanul Muslimin members in 1954 (House, 2012).

Consequently, the group was formally banned, thousands of its activists were incarcerated and many were executed. By the late 1960s, Ikhwanul Muslimin realized incarcerated and many were executed. By the late 1960s, the Ikhwanul Muslimin realized that if it were to ever reemerge in the political scene, it could only be possible by abandoning its radical positions. The organization, therefore, turned to non-violent resistance which included societal reform and spreading Islamic education at the grassroots level.

This crystallized into some sort of marriage or understanding between Islam and democracy, in that the Ikhwanul Muslimin realized it was possible to push for their Islamic agendas by becoming a part of the existing political system.

Ikhwanul Muslimin, under the leadership of their third mentor Umar al-Tilmisani, joined the political process. Al-Tilmisani paved the way for the organization's participation in the 1984 elections in alliance with the neo-Wafd, and in 1987 they formed a coalition with the Workers' Party (Hamzawy, Amr, & Michelle Dunne, 2008).

Egypt's Ikhwanul Muslimin undertook widespread reforms in order to widen their social base and enter the electoral process. They were, however, bitterly criticized by more radical Islamist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, which asserted that proponents of political Islam would be treated as outcasts within a democratic setup, and that it was only through violent struggle that Islam could find its rightful place in society.

Later on, Ikwhanul Muslimin were victorious on three occasions: they won the parliamentary elections in 2011-2012; the presidential elections in 2012; and when they sought a two-round referendum for the 2012 constitution drafted by an Islamist-dominated constituent assembly, they once again polled a staggering 63.8% of the popular vote (al-Jazeera, 2012).

But with successive humiliation at the hands of Egypt's judiciary and the military, ranging from the dissolution of parliament to an unabashed *coup-d'état*, Ikhwanul Muslimin is under mounting pressure from fellow Muslim organizations to give up its experiment with democracy.

For example, Ansar al-Sharia of Libya said the Ikhwanul Muslimin of Egypt was wrong by participating in elections to gain power and criticized its failure to implement shari'a. The Somali Islamist group al-Shabab voiced similar criticism.

However, Ikhwanul Muslimin commits itself to attaining the Islamic objectives through coercion, it is likely to become more exclusive and intolerant. And the struggle is reflected in a democratic process.

5.0   CONCLUSIONS

As a Pan-Islamic, religious and social movement, Ikhwanul Muslimin is just an ordinary organization. They preached the beauty of Islam and they condemn any act of terrorism. Under the wing of Hassan al-Banna, the organization actively contribute in social work to improve the socio-economic of the people of Egypt regardless of their race or religion.

From there, Ikhwanul Muslimin of Egypt is has changed its position on democratic participation through the course of its development, from its establishment until present time. The largest change that took place occurred in the early 1980s, when the organization publicly announced its goal to become a political party, and later when it obtained seats of parliament. The reasons for this change include societal pressure, international pressure, the group's increase of passion under political suppression, and its realization that the best way to achieve its goals is to join the political system itself. Based on the analysis of the previous patterns of Ikhwanul Muslimin's stance on political and democratic participation, it is fair to assume that this increasing political activism will only continue to expand in the near future even with the ousted of President Morsi from Egypt political scene.

(2924 WORDS)

REFERENCES

al-Jazeera (1 February 2012). *Interactive: Full Egypt election results*. Al-Jazeera.com. Retrieved from: http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/01/20121248225832718.html

Ayubi, Nazih N. (1991*). Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab world*. London: Routledge

BBC News (1 July, 2013). "*Egypt crisis: Mass protests over Morsi grip cities"*. Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23115821

Hamzawy, Amr, and Michelle Dunne. (2008) *"The Ups and Downs of Political Reform in Egypt." Beyond the Facade: Political Reform in the Arab World.* Cairo: The American University in Cairo

House, Karen Elliott (2012). *On Saudi Arabia: Its People, past, Religion, Fault Lines and Future*. Knopf.

Mazel, Zvi (23 August 2012). *"Analysis: Brotherhood taking total control of Egypt"*. The Jerusalem Post. Retrieved from: http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?ID=282258

Mitchell, Richard P. (1993). *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. New York: Oxford

Rabi, Ibrahim A. (1996). "*Hasan al-Banna and the Foundation of the Ikhwan: Intellectual Underpinnings." Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World. 1st ed.* New York: State University of New York.

Umar Farooq (30 June 2013). "*Seeking New Leadership, Millions of Egyptians Take to the Streets"*. The Atlantic. Retrieved from:

https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/06/seeking-new-leadership-millions-of-egyptians-take-to-the-streets/277419/

Viktor Kotsev (14 August 2012). "*A Brotherhood coup in Egypt*". Asia Times. Retrieved from: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/NH15Ak04.html

Zahid, Mohammed (2012). *The Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's Succession Crisis: The Politics of Liberalisation and Reform in the Middle East*. Cairo: Tauris