Islamists and the Question of Political Opportunity in the 25th of January Revolution: From Movement Emergence to Movement Success?

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Abstract

Focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists in Egypt, the paper provides a framework combining two major models of research on social movements; namely, “Tarrow’s dimensions of Political Opportunity” and Diani’s “Inclusion Framework” respectively to answer the question of "when" and "how" Islamists’ have maximized their opportunities within the 25th of January revolution in Egypt. The analysis has demonstrated that Tarrow’s five dimensions; namely increasing access, shifting alignments, divided elites, influential allies, and repression could conspicuously account for the rise of the two Islamist groups within the Revolution. Based on the analysis, the MB's relative superiority in availing changes in opportunities significantly corresponded to the level of its success compared to Salafists due to the former's long history of political involvement and organizational capacity as a social movement; hence supporting Tarrow’s theorization. Drawing on Diani’s formulation of four configurations of opportunity structures (Realignment, Antisystem, Inclusion, and Revitalization), the paper has shown how the two Islamist groups demonstrated substantially effective mobilization strategies by adopting an 'inclusion' frame within a single period. Once the two Islamist groups started to seek their own ideological goals at the expense of the nationalistic goals of the revolution, they gave up their inclusion frame to engage in framing contests. The paper is divided into three sections, where the first section provides a literature review of social movement theory and the political opportunity structure; the second section focuses on Islamists’ actions during the 25th of January Revolution within temporal political opportunity structures and inclusion framework; and the third explores Islamists’ actions within framing contests.
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Introduction

The 25th of January Revolution1 in Egypt has generated massive scholarly research within social movement theory. Through this theoretical tradition, the concept of “political opportunity structure” could help explain the interplay of opportunity, mobilization, and political influence. To this end, I provide a framework combining two major models of research on social movements to answer the question of “why” and “how” social movements have materialized; namely, Tarrow’s dimensions of political opportunity and Diani’s ‘inclusion framework’ respectively as a potential explanatory model for Islamists’ actions within the 25th of January Revolution in Egypt. The paper thus represents an endeavor to explain how Islamists, focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists, could maximize their opportunities and augment their influence under certain historical circumstances (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004, 1485). The paper2 is divided into three sections; the first section provides a literature review of social movement theory and the political opportunity structure; the second section focuses on Islamists’ actions during the 25th of January Revolution within temporal political opportunity structures3 and the inclusion framework; and the third explores Islamists’ actions within framing contests.

Social Movement Theory

Social movements could be defined as informal groups who hold common beliefs toward attaining a social goal (Weissmann, 2008, 7). Such a goal could incorporate either the application or the prevention of a change in society’s composition and values. Many social movements work on behalf of the economically disenfranchised with the purpose of pursuing economic justice through sharing society’s wealth and prospects (Goldstone, 2004, 334-335). They have often been depicted as movements outside the polity or as challengers working toward goals they cannot realize through institutionalized political processes. They emerge as essentially spontaneous collective actions of individuals who are bound by relationships that are not demarcated by rules or procedures but solely by embracing a common stance toward society (Weissmann, 2008, 7). Though social movements have ostensibly appeared as a permanent constituent of Western civilization since the 1960s, their existence as a phenomenon harks back to earlier times as witnessed, for example, in the anti-slavery movement.

Contentious collective action is deemed to be the root of social movements, not because of the violent nature of movements, but because it is the principal and often the sole option that ordinary people have against powerful opponents or states (Tarrow, 1998, 3). This does not signify that such movements do nothing other than contend. They create organizations, develop ideologies, and establish and mobilize constituencies, and their members work on building collective identities. Though some movements are essentially apolitical and are more concerned with their own issues or

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1Researchers have demonstrated variations in the way they would refer to the 25th of January events in Egypt, where some regard it as a coup since the Military Council has taken control, and some believe it was too early at this stage to call it a revolution and thus would prefer to refer to the events as “uprisings”. I believe the term revolution could be applicable to the 25th of January events since it represents a sudden change in the location of sovereignty where Egyptian people have put an end to Mubarak’s regime, and since it has had a goal as shown from its motto “bread, freedom and social justice.”

2 The paper tries to analyze the actions of Islamists, notably the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists within the 25th of January Revolution, based on a presentation given in the Davo Congress, Germany, 2011. The last part of the conclusion was added following the results of the 2011 parliamentary elections.

3 Throughout the paper, the term “temporal” will be used to describe political opportunity structures based on my assumptions that such opportunities which have generated movement emergence to movement success did not last; leading to a potential movement decline.
those of their affiliates, they might still confront authorities, as these authorities are usually the ones accountable for law and order and for establishing the standards of society. Organizers resort to contention to use political opportunities, build collective identities, assemble people in associations, and mobilize them against stronger adversaries. A great deal of the history of movements represents a duo of tactics and counter-tactics between movement activists and those in power.

Before the 1980s, social movement actors were usually envisaged as outsiders who were barred from or marginalized in the political system (Goldstone, 2004, 337). The emergence of the middle class, elites, and students in what have become known as “new social movements” has somewhat changed the way social movement actors are viewed. New social movements as a concept does not represent a theory in the traditional sense, but stands as an approach placing more emphasis and importance on the individual as a main player posing the very question as to why social movements emerge (Weissmann, 2008, 8). The new approach critiques traditional politics and existing constitutions, and it recoups the existence of the individuals’ personal, collective, and public identities – thereby departing from class as an explanatory model along with the economic reductionism of vulgar Marxism.

**Political Opportunity Structure**

Within social movement theory, the “political process” approach stresses the political, organizational, and compositional traits of social movements (Weissmann, 2008, 9). Researchers on social movements have posited that political activists do not craft history in circumstances they create, but they face constrictions and are offered opportunities constructed by the institutional arrangements and the dominant patterns of political power, which constitute the inexorable contexts of political action (Rootes, 1999, 1). Upon this understanding, political opportunity structure shapes the emergence, strategies, and success of social movement activities and collective actions. The notion of political opportunity structure has garnered considerable attention by theorists and researchers on political protests (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004, 1457). Researchers have posited that political opportunity structures operate “as ‘filters’ between the mobilization of the movement and its choice of strategies and its capacity to change the social environment” (Kitchelt, 1986, 59).

Analysts have shown variations in the level of activists’ cognition of changes in political opportunity (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004, 1463-4). Some hold doubts concerning the cognizance and will of political activists; others have claimed that activists are naturally overly positive about opportunities and do not essentially gauge with any rigidity the potential vistas for successfully mobilizing or engendering policy reform. A third group regards activists as more or less rational entrepreneurs awaiting signs from the state and society regarding what demands to make and how. According to this understanding, social movements seem to comprise coalitions of rational discerning organizers who are relatively responsive to political opportunity changes.

The notion of “framing” is deployed to conceptualize the political significance that social movements attribute (Snow & Benford, 1988, 198). Previous research has revealed that social movements frame or consign meaning to, and provide interpretation of, relevant events and situations in ways that are projected to mobilize potential advocates and constituents to garner support and to demobilize adversaries.

**Opportunities and Movement: Emergence or Success**

Within either of the aforesaid stances of the model, political opportunity structure is pivotal: the greater the opportunity, the more likely is a movement to emerge and grow; and the more the
movement grows and the more resources it can assemble, the more successful it will become (Goldstone, 2004, 346). Tarrow has posited that changes in political opportunities induce the initiation of new stages of contention (Tarrow, 1998, 7). He has identified five dimensions of changes in opportunity (Tarrow, 1998, 77-80). Those include: 1) increasing access, which posits that gaining partial access to participation (neither full access nor its absence) generates the greatest degree of opportunities; 2) shifting alignments, where the instability of political alignments fosters contention, as was the case in the Soviet Union; 3) divided elites, as conflicts within and among elites provide incentives for emerging movements; 4) influential allies, which could give protestors the confidence and models for collective action; 5) repression and facilitation, which could work independently or sometimes in close connection, so that the movement has the room to grow and to continue in its actions. Researchers have introduced some factors as more relevant to the emergence of movements, others to their success; some that work particularly with certain groups, and others as featured by all groups (Goldstone, 2004, 346).

Mario Diani draws on two of Tarrow’s dimensions of changes in opportunity and access, or “opportunities for autonomous action within the polity” and the “stability of political alignments” (Diani, 1996, 1056-1057). Within Diani’s formulation, the combination of these two variables generates four different configurations where each mirrors a distinct perception of the political environment and could most likely trigger a certain type of framing strategy. “Realignment frames” result from the presence of sufficient opportunities for independent action with the lessening capability of traditional alignments to contain collective identities and to construct political action, whereas “inclusion frames” are produced from the combination of high opportunities for autonomous action and stable political alignments. “Revitalization frames” occur when it is difficult for new political actors to emerge, so that challengers may only enter established political institutions with the aim of redirecting their goals and revitalizing their compositions from within. Finally, “antisystem frames” respond to crises of traditional alignments and the meager opportunities for autonomous action by challengers, thereby promoting a radical transformation of the polity.

Islamists Movements during the 25th of January Revolution in Egypt: From Emergence to Success

The above-mentioned dimensions of political opportunity could be applicable to crumbling authoritarian regimes (as the case of Egypt on the 25th January, 2011) where society starts to shift from a position in which social movements and protests are severely inhibited and perceived of as utterly illegitimate, towards a position in which social movements and protests are deemed as fairly legitimate aspirations toward increased access or more democratization (Goldstone, 2004, 348). The spontaneous grass roots movement of the 25th of January consisted of non-politicized Egyptians who chose to participate out of a feeling of social and political injustice. A second more influential and organizing echelon included a variety of political activists ranging from a significantly large contingent of Muslim Brotherhood members and Salafists to other independent groups such as 6 April, Khaled Said, Kifaya, and a number of youth members of parties such as the Wafd, Nasserists, and Leftists, along with some of the dissenting Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyya (Islamic Religious Society) members.4 For the purpose of the present paper, I have focused on the actions of the Islamist

movements, with a special focus on the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists and the political opportunity structure during the 25th of January Revolution.

Islamist Movements in Egypt

As a launching point, a definition of “Islamists” is a necessary prerequisite, for which I have adopted James Piscatori’s lucid and broad definition of Islamists as “Muslims who are committed to political action to implement what they regard as an Islamic agenda” (Reviewed in Martin &Barzegar, 2010, 27).

In Mubarak-era Egypt, Islamist movements could be divided into different groups. We consider first the Salafist movement, which generally shunned political participation as an abhorrence and considered Islamist involvement in parliamentary elections as sinful. For Salafists, the People’s Assembly was by and large unrefined and violated religious principles. The second trend is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan El-Banna. It started with cooperative and charitable community services, the building of mosques, Islamist schools and clubs, hospitals and trade unions. However, it also worked within the framework of a larger political vision (Zahid & Medley, 2006, 693), as manifested, for example, in its involvement in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war (Warburg, 2006, 1). A third trend represented by the Egyptian Jihad and Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyya developed from within the Muslim Brotherhood and then splintered into independent violent groups (Stacher, 2002, 415), denouncing the country’s rulers as heretics and advocating for the violent toppling of the government. A fourth trend in the Islamist fold was the Wasat (Centrist) party, established by former members of the MB. Though its founders applied for a permit a long time ago, they were only granted official approval on February 19, 2011, following the demise of Mubarak’s regime. Finally came the Sufi movements; Sufism can be defined as the mystical dimension of Islam that focuses on the importance of repairing the heart by turning it away from anything but God. In Egypt, Sufism claims more than 15 million followers representing around 78 Sufi orders, believed to be reflecting a socio-religious phenomenon rather than a political one. The next two sections will delineate the five Islamist movements prior to and during the 25th of January Revolution.

Prior to the 25th of January Revolution

Before the 25th of January, Islamist movements were generally banned and often harassed. They could benefit, however, from the state-controlled social freedom granted to them by the former regime to establish a strong and popular presence on the ground. Throughout the last two decades, the Muslim Brotherhood implemented adaptive strategies to ward off state repression and preserve their organizational survival (El-Ghobashy, 2005, 391). They always expressed their willingness to accomplish their goals by working within Mubarak’s political system (Abed-Kotob, 1995, 328) – thereby distinguishing themselves from radical Islamists. Believing that the largest and most important step toward attaining their goals was to come to power, they spared no effort to maintain representation in professional syndicates and in the parliament. Still, despite the degree of freedom allowed to the MB, they were denied official recognition by the state. In comparison, the Wasat party, the MB’s off-shoot, had unsuccessfully applied four times over the previous 14 years for a license to legally establish their party. Mubarak’s regime allowed more space to the Salafists, who generally embraced a proselytizing anti-political stance, so as to gain some religious legitimacy to counter the anti-Mubarak religious rhetoric of the MB. For instance, Al-Jam’iyya Al-Shariyya, one

\footnote{Salafism is premised on resorting to the two sources of religion; the Qur'an and the Sunna.}
of the official Salafist organizations, advocated for organized collective action outside the political arena and thus survived since its founding in 1912 because it did not pose a threat to the prevailing regime. In the same vein, the Mubarak regime coexisted with Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyya following the latter’s ideological revisions and renunciation of violence. Similarly, successive political regimes have used the Sufi orders to bolster their legitimacy. Typically the regime was able to infiltrate the Sufis’ organizational structures to keep them under control.

Islamists and the 25th of January Revolution

With the 25th of January Revolution, Islamist movements shifted their activities in search of new roles and political gains, altering their positions on the political map.6

The Muslim Brotherhood was not among the groups that first issued the call for the 25th of January Revolution; it rejected participation on the assumption that the protests would fail like previous ones. It subsequently toned down its refusal and allowed its members to participate on an individual basis rather than as MB representatives. It was not long after the Police Day (25th January) demonstration mobilized a surprisingly large number of protestors that the MB decided to take part. The group thereby perceived opportunities not solely in terms of changes in the structure of the state but chiefly in terms of the conceived strength of the opposition itself, which had already been mobilized. The widespread participation in the protests changed the “balance of power” between the state, the opposition, and other interest groups (Kurzman, 1996, 154-155). For the first time since its establishment in 1928, the MB launched a political party, the Freedom and Justice Party, conceived of as the MB’s political arm. The party was able to run in the parliamentary elections like any other secular party but with a religious silhouette that guaranteed a huge following of the religious grassroots.

The Salafist movement, generally speaking, took a proselytizing stance against political participation and rebelling against the ruler.7 Prior to and during the very first days of the 25th of January Revolution, the Salafi movement adopted an antagonistic attitude toward the revolution. Sheikh Mostafa al-Adawi warned Muslims against participating in the protests because such events never occurred in the times of Prophet Mohamed or his companions and since they would lead to evils.8 The vocal Salafist preacher Mohamed Hassan delivered words of caution against the demonstrations, describing the protests as “subversive and leading to bloodshed.”9 Ironically enough, the same Mohamed Hassan later portrayed the revolution as “blessed” and described the demonstrating youth as “rightfully claiming just and legitimate rights.”10 Salafists did not adopt a unified stance toward the revolution, but rather bracketed off into three principal trends. One was primarily focused on the practice of proselytization and emphasized removal from politics while being tacitly supportive of policies that could help foster the establishment of an Islamic State. The second encouraged participation in Islamist political parties, not as a group but as individuals.

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6 See in the Appendix a list of Islamist parties in Egypt.
9 See Salafist preacher Mohamed Hassan’s speech on El-Rahma Satellite Channel, Cairo, Egypt, uploaded on January 22nd, 2011 at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULII2nNlUXo
10 See interview with Salafist Preacher Mohamed Hassan’s on Al-Arabiyya Satellite Channel, uploaded on February 1st, 2011 at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr-xGYc13QY&feature=related
Within this course, Sheikh Mohamed Hassan proposed that Salafists and Muslim Brothers found a strong coalition in the parliamentary elections. The third trend made further strides towards direct political involvement by calling for the creation of a Salafist political party, resulting in four new ones, namely, Al-Nour (Light), Al-Fadila (Virtue), Al-Asaala (Originality), and finally al-IslaH (Reform) party. Nader Bakkar, member of the Al-Nour party’s Highest Committee, justified their lack of participation on the 25th of January by asserting that Mubarak would have ordered the killing of protestors had they participated, under the guise that those who stirred the revolution were Muslims who wanted to rule the country.

Like others, Sufis participated in the revolution, but their appearance was not palpable compared to their Salafist and Muslim Brotherhood counterparts, partly owing to their lack of experience in politics. Subsequently some Sufi orders announced their intention to participate in the parliamentary elections, where they reckoned they could have made a strong representation since Egypt’s 15 million Sufis stand for the largest single voting community. The rising aversion between the Sufis and the Salafists, whom the Sufis accused of being responsible for the demolition of six Sufi shrines, could have been the major factor behind their decision to take part in parliamentary elections. Sufis’ fears of the MB and Salafist rising force have given the impetus for the establishment of parties such as the Egyptian Tahrir party. As Alaa Abul Azayem, the Azmiyya Order Sheikh, explained, the MB and Salafists posed a threat to religious tolerance and necessitated the creation of a Sufi party. Sufists further proclaimed that they would not support any Salafist candidate for the presidency.

In a similar fashion, a significant number of Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyya members, but not their leaders, participated in the 25th of January Revolution. For the most part they were dissenting members determined to express their deepest anger against the Egyptian system that had caused them to suffer in prison for so long. Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyya witnessed a revival with the toppling of Mubarak’s regime, and it joined forces with Jihad, with whom it had carried out the assassination of President Sadat. The new entity announced its plan to create a political party that would express its outlook of social justice and address the issues pertinent to its members. Structurally independent from Al-Jama’a, the Al-Bina’ wa-Tanmiya (Building and Development) party was featured as having an Islamic vision. Al-Jama’a also announced that it would be nominating candidates in the elections in most constituents in collaboration with other Islamist groups, probably through a unified list. Conceivably, the biggest challenge confronting Al-Jama’a was social in nature, since most of the group’s 12,000 members who were set free from prison after the 25th of January became unemployed and had no source of support.

11 Salafist Sheikh Mohamed Hassan has been quoted as saying, “if the Islamist groups and trends can overcome their differences, they will be able to create a powerful front capable of reviving the glories of the Islamic State and building a new nation based on constructive dialogue.”

12 For further information see Nesma Ali & Ashraf Mostafa’s article, Al-Tahrir news online, September 15th, 2011, could be accessed at: http://tahrirnews.com/1D8%A3%8D%AD%8A%F%8A%7%8A%AB-%D9%88%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%8%A6%8A%89/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%86%8D%8B%2%D9%84%8D%86%8A%7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%88%8D%85-%D9%8A%D8%8E%8D%87%8A%88%8D%A7%8D%8A%8B-%D9%84%8D%83%8D%A7%86%8D%AA-%D8%A7/}

Finally, the Wasat party – only licensed after the 25th of January Revolution – was expected to attract Islamist youth who were seeking a political party that would meet their aspiration for political involvement from a classical Islamist outlook, or those searching for a party that could dovetail authenticity and modernity in the same model of the Turkish Justice and Development (AKP) party.

All of these Islamist groups took advantage of the new political opportunity structure projected in Egypt within and after the 25th of January Revolution. In Tarrow’s words “the mobilization of resources external to the group” (Tarrow, 1998, 77) offered heaven-sent opportunities. The political frenzy and frailty of the state after the 25th of January raised Islamists’ hopes to attempt to metamorphose the new republic into an Islamic one, in compliance with the goals of the Islamist movement founders.

Apparently, however, Islamist groups (not individuals) did not stand on equal footing, for the MB and Salafists projected themselves as the key players. The two Islamist groups achieved greater focus based on deep convictions that they would assume a more prominent stature in the 2011 parliamentary elections and in the near future of Egypt compared to the other groups of Sufis, Wasat, and Jihadists. The question then is: when exactly did these movements seize such opportunities to maximize their influence during the revolution? And how have they presented themselves to other protestors as well as to Egyptians in order to assume such position?

When Did The Political Opportunity Become Accessible?

Applying Tarrow’s dimensions of changes in opportunity to emergence/success to the case of the MB and Salafists, we find that partial access was granted to the MBs after the 25th of January, after Egyptians had already been mobilized on Tahrir Square but were still under the threat of the regime. Thereby, the MBs appeared, in Eisinger’s words, “in systems characterized by a mix of open and closed factors” (reviewed in Tarrow, 1998, 77). The Salafist Sheikh Ahmed El-Naqqub has asserted that there had been attempts by the regime to squelch the “Tahrir” demonstrators but the appearance of around 10,000 well-organized MBs thwarted the regime’s scheme and led to the movement’s success.14 According to Mostafa El-Fiqi,15 the MBs were the ones who fought in the Battle of the Camel and who protected Egyptian youth. Due to the organizational capacity of the MB, they were able to arrange field protestors in order to rescue Egyptians from the pro-regime thugs. Accordingly, their contribution to the success of the revolution was not based on numbers since the majority was comprised of average Egyptians, but on their organizational strategies and ability to afford protection to the remaining protestors.16

The Salafists’ opportunity to emerge as a social movement crystallized once the security forces vanished in the course of the 25th of January Revolution. The leaders of Al-Da’wa Al-Salafiyya (Salafi Call) filled the vacuum by urging their followers to protect people and their properties and to sell cheap food items to the public in the face of the tremendous rise in prices.17 The Salafists’

15Mostafa El-Fiqi was a prominent member of the ruling party, the National Democratic Party, and is thus known to have belonged to the old regime.
17 Yasser Borhamy’s interview on Safa (Salafi) channel, uploaded on Feb. 16th, 2011, available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urVCBddRDig
emergence as a group was then more on the social level working on accessing grassroots rather than as political actors in the revolution.

The unexplainable and abrupt disappearance of the Egyptian security forces on 28th January was the most palpable manifestation of instability. Periods of regime crises or widespread political instability foster activists’ efforts toward countering formerly dominant groups or coalitions (Klandermans, Kriesi & Tarrow, 1988, 129). Accordingly, both formerly suppressed Islamist groups – the MBs and the Salafists – benefited from that opportunity for action, despite their relatively late participation. This fact relates to the third dimension of opportunity, namely the divided elites, since with the imminent fall of Mubarak and his governing elites and the differing political visions of the non-governing elites, the MB rose as the sole organized group and potential candidate for power. The Salafists, in comparison, still could not take advantage of the divided elites as they had yet to officially revise their self-induced prohibition of political involvement and articulate a new ideological stance.

The influential allies dimension has shown to be specifically important in nondemocratic systems where new movements do not have access to many internal resources (Tarrow, 1998, 80). Comparing the two Islamist groups, we could find that the MB, with its long history of coalitions, was more likely to seek allies. Post 25th of January, the MB started to communicate with other political and social forces, which conspicuously included Coptic youth movements in Cairo and Qena and resulted in a coalition of Coptic and Muslim youth. The Brotherhood also reversed its negative stance toward the candidacy of women or Copts for Egypt’s presidency. It opened up lines of communication with other Islamist groups, including the Jihad, the Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyya, as well as to Salafists and Sufis, with the aim of establishing common ground or a concerted vision that would embrace their collective political weight. The MB also attempted to broaden its appeal to the youth and to form people’s committees in towns and villages in the provinces to prepare for parliamentary elections. The two groups – MBs and Salafists – meanwhile reached understandings regarding a number of issues, notably concerning the constitutional referendum of March 2011 and political participation and coordination in the 2011 elections. The coalition seemed to have particularly worried secularists and liberals in Egypt. They waged war on the less politically experienced Salafists, occasionally rocking the Islamist coalition.

The MB had more adequately learnt to make use of and adapt to repression compared to the Salafists, and had thus devised successful survival tactics over its long history (Munson, 2002, 20). Particularly since the 1990s, the MB had to cope with constant security crackdowns due to its illegal status (El-Ghobashy, 2005, 377), eliciting a great deal of sympathy for its cause. The regime’s long-standing repression of the MBs had helped produce, in Tarrow’s words, “a more effective organization of opponents” (1998, 84-85). For the MB, the 25th of January Revolution was a golden political opportunity to make use of its organized structure to rally forces and assume a front seat.

**How Have Islamists Framed Themselves?**

Diani’s inclusion framework helps to explain how the two Islamist groups have framed themselves to other protestors as well as to Egyptians at large. Diani underscores “new political actors’ aspirations to be recognized as legitimate members of a polity, in which definitions of the major actors are not altered” where they “emphasize their continuity with established political actors” rather than introduce new, different divisions in the polity (Diani, 1996, 1057).
In the first few days of the revolution, the MB did not boost its presence or slogans as an organization in Tahrir Square, and the scene was undoubtedly Egyptian with only the Egyptian flag raised. The Muslim Brotherhood in fact did not attempt to be at the forefront and their activities mainly revolved around organizational procedures, such as searching people who entered Tahrir Square, facilitating the provision of food and blankets for the demonstrators, or providing medication in case of injuries. They, accordingly, prioritized inclusion in lieu of their “Islam is the Solution” slogan and their “Islamic State” goal in order to emphasize their continuity with established political actors (such as the Youth Coalition) rather than their willingness to introduce any divisions within the revolution. With the string of killings and violent confrontations with peaceful protestors, which reached its peak on 28th January, the MB has managed to aggrandize the opportunity for inclusion by posing as the guardians of the revolution. The MBs then with their organized front seized the opportunity of the regime’s imminent fall to rally their forces and lead the other seemingly unorganized ones toward movement success.

Compared to the MBs who embraced an inclusion framework from a political standpoint, the Salafists framed themselves on both social and religious grounds. With the proliferating state of instability in Egypt after 28th January, Salafists spread in the streets to protect people against regime thugs. Abdel Moneim El-Shahat, official speaker of Al-Da’wa Al-Salafiyya stated that: “for 12 hours, only the Salafists were there in the streets (forming popular defense groups) from Saturday (28th January) at 8:00 a.m. until the military forces urged people to form popular defense groups at 8:00 p.m.”18 Within such a state of chaos and instability resulting in the absence of certain commodities and the rise of prices of others, members of Al-Da’wa Al-Salafiyya also worked on providing commodities at cheap prices and providing gas for citizens.

Religious inclusion was reflected in the large number of lectures held by the Salafists following the 25th of January mainly in mosques, which, according to Munson, not only maintain a public space in a material sense, but also in the ideological sense (2002, 27). One illustration of this type of discourse was the renowned Salafi Preacher Mohamed Hassan’s powerful lecture at Al-Nour mosque after the revolution: he combined religious and nationalist imagery in telling the youth that victory at this stage was to acknowledge Allah and to support their country.19 Seminars and conferences replicating this type of discourse were also held in youth centers in Cairo and Alexandria, as well as in the capitals of other governorates.

Islamic and Framing Contests

Until March 2011, the two groups adhered to the inclusion framework since all activists were working with one overarching goal: the demise of the former Egyptian regime and the subsequent fall of the people’s assembly, the Shura Council, as well as local councils and state security. Once these goals were achieved, framing contests emerged. A framing contest can be defined as “a

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18 A number of videos on YouTube show the social activities provided by Salafists during the revolution, including forming lijaan sha’biyya to protect people or prisons (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLi1yzNiKHQ), providing commodities at low prices (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuqelUVNHq0q&feature=related), providing gas for citizens (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNnMeNZizl0), and returning stolen public and private properties to the army (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=346wxtGrO6M&NR=1). Such actions of societal services on the part of Salafists have been established much earlier in the history of Egypt as during the British Imperialism when Sheikh Mahmoud El-Sobki, founder of the Salafi jam’iyya shar’iyya (Legitimate Society) has called for boycotting British textile and commodities and has called for setting textile labs to produce Egyptian textile as an alternative.

19 For the whole lecture See Sheikh Mohamed Hassan, El-Rahma Satellite channel, uploaded on October 26th, 2011, accessed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul1uMvflUoQ
struggle among various actors to determine whose definition of the situation will prevail” (Klandermans, 1992, 100). The Egyptian Constitutional Referendum of March 19, 2011, provided an evident example of framing contests, once a constitutional reform committee appointed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) overviews the existing constitution and finally announced proposed revisions to it. Accordingly, the proposed amendments were to be approved or defeated as a package. Islamists, notably the MB and Salafists, were the major proponents of the constitutional amendments as they felt the amendments were suitable for the time being and that article 2 of the constitution, which stipulated that Islam be the religion of the state and that the principal source of legislation be Islamic jurisprudence, might be removed or changed if the proposed changes were not approved. More importantly, they believed that they would benefit most from early elections since they had already established the largest grassroots support compared to smaller and newly founded parties. The two Islamist groups thus engaged in framing contests with the government (represented by the SCAF) and other actors (such as Liberals) to urge people to vote in favor of the amendments. To that end, the Muslim Brotherhood’s leaders held meetings across Egypt and daily conferences encouraging people to vote “yes.” Mohamed Mursi, the Official Spokesperson of the group, hailed the amendments as the sole option to move from the existing transitional stage to stability, and to allow the military forces to return to their normal tasks of maintaining security. Concurrently, the MB’s conference on constitutional amendments declared that the group was encouraging people to vote yes to the amendments as a first step toward the right path for stability.

The Muslim Brotherhood’s official website also posted an article titled “A Suspect Campaign to Encourage Rejection of the Amendments,” accusing those opposing the amendments of receiving American funding and deluding the public.

In a parallel fashion but deploying different strategies, the Salafists campaigned for the constitutional amendments. One Salafi activist, Khaled Harbi, urgently called on Islamists to use the Muslim’s Friday prayer on 18th of March (the day before the referendum) to amass more than 10 million votes for the constitution. Accordingly, a number of Sheikhs used Friday’s prayers in mosques all over Egypt to contend that a yes vote was a religious duty. In the “battle for the ballot

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21 The constitutional amendments committees have stated though that article 2 of the constitution will not be changed even if the proposed amendments are not approved.

22 See Mohamed Morsi’s interview on Misr an-nahaarda program, Egypt’s Satellite Channel, uploaded on March 13th, 2011, accessible at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkI20K0Nto0

23 For more detail see IkhwanTube (The MB official YouTube), uploaded on March 12th, 2011, accessed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDaRJvTGMaI

24 The Website has been immediately removed by the MB following a massive attack by its readers. See International Quranic Center [ahl al-Quran: (Folks of the Quran)], March 17th, 2011, accessed at: http://www.ahl-alquran.com/arabic/show_news.php?main_id=16080

boxes” the prominent Salafi preacher Hussein Yacoub urged Muslims to say yes to the amendments because it meant yes to religion.  

The two groups thus framed the same event with different discourses: for the MB, saying yes was for state stability and reform, whereas for the Salafists, it was equivalent to religious duty.

Interestingly enough, the two groups also seemed to have grasped the pivotal role of internet resources, especially Facebook, during the revolution. They waged numerous campaigns on Facebook, the most important of which were: the “Yes to Constitutional Amendments,” “We Will Vote Yes,” and “Yes with All Confidence and Trust in God.” Such approaches undoubtedly affected the referendum results: out of around 14 million voters, 77.2 percent said yes to the amendments.

Islamists once again engaged in framing contests with the SCAF when the latter announced the supra-constitutional principles to guide the making of a new constitution. The Islamists rejected them as an attempt to hijack the will of Egyptian people. Apparently they expected a majority in the forthcoming parliamentary elections that would undertake the drafting of the constitution. Again they deployed a political rhetoric infused with religion as shown in the Salafi leader Yasser Barhami’s words, “nothing is above us but Allah.” Islamists gave the SCAF a grace period to rescind its directive, warning in case of non-compliance to summon the Egyptian people to Tahrir Square on Friday, 29th July.

29th of July and Framing Resonance

29th of July, the so-called ‘Friday of Unity’, was more of a demonstration of power on the part of the two Islamist groups than of any unity. Relations of power among framing contestants are held as crucial conditions impacting the chances of successful framing (Marullo, Pagnucco & Smith, 1996, 3). At least around two million protestors participated, but this time the voice of Islamists raising religious slogans and calling for the implementation of Shari’a led to the withdrawal of more than 22 parties, movements, and coalitions.

Had the Islamists actually succeeded in demonstrating their power and become really “resonant?” Within framing contests some frames could be more successful or “resonate” than others, depending on their credibility and salience (Benford & Snow, 2000, 619-20). For a better understanding of Islamist resonance, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 Egyptians.

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27 See http://www.facebook.com/pages/%D9%86%D8%B9%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9/205045192854861;
28 For further information see Ahmed Sabry, Al-Ahram Online, July 19th, 2011, accessible at: http://gate.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/35/96106/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%88%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1/%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%B3/%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85.aspx
29 That was not the only so called ‘Islamist’ demonstration in Egypt post 25th of January. On November 9th, 2012 known as the Shari’a Friday more than 10,000 conservative Muslim protestors have demonstrated for a Shari’a-based constitution.
during the week following the 29th of July, 2011, to assess their immediate reactions to the two Islamist groups’ framing on that day. The salience of the frame (which is described as frame amplification) could be indicated by whether participants had seen Egypt’s Friday of Unity as “Islamic” or “Egyptian.” Out of the 24 who have responded to that question, 21 saw the demonstration as Islamic whereas only three could see it as Egyptian. Ironically though, such a level of salience or amplification did not work in favor of Islamists. Responding to a follow-up question, 22 out of 28 participants stated that Egypt’s Friday of Unity demonstrated lack of unity rather than unity.30 Most participants who could refer to the salience of Islamists on 29th July were not in favor of their tactics, as shown by repeated comments from them: “they mobilize and make use of the simple and uneducated people by raising Islamic slogans.”

This in fact could reveal that the salience demonstrated by Islamists’ framing on 29th July did not actually succeed in affecting all targets of mobilization and may cast doubts about their credibility on cultural grounds.

Based on previous research, “consistency” has been utilized as a way of measuring the credibility of the frame. To this end, I asked participants how the MB and Salafists appeared since the beginning of the 25th of January Revolution until the 29th of July. Interestingly enough, 20 out of the 27 participants who responded to this question stated that the MB first appeared as Egyptians at the beginning and gradually displayed their Islamist identity, whereas only 7 stated that the MB appeared as Islamists from the beginning of the revolution. An oft-repeated comment worth mentioning was the importance of differentiating between the MB as an organization and the MB youth: “there is a difference between the MB leaders and youth, so we can never put them all in one category and treat them in the same way. This is due to the fact that the MB youth took part in organizing for the 25th, but the leaders did not participate until the 28th of January.”

On the other hand, 22 out of the 24 who responded to this question stated that Salafists adopted Islamist slogans since the inception of the revolution, while only two claimed that they adopted nationalist slogans in the beginning of the movement. Similarly, some respondents have differentiated between individual Salafists who have participated as such in the revolution and Salafists as a social movement. One of the participants commented: “some individual Salafists adopted nationalist slogans at the beginning of the revolution. I saw a lot of them during the full 18 days on Tahrir square, and they did not take any part as a group except later.”

Based on participants’ responses,31 MBs demonstrated greater inconsistency because they ostensibly framed themselves first as Egyptian nationalists but then gradually adopted a clear Islamist identity. In fact, the two recurring comments could support my very first hypothesis in the paper regarding the two Islamist groups’ “late” participation in the revolution in line with the dimensions of political opportunity structure. A prominent example of the respective groups’ credibility deficit is investigated in the results of internal incoherence among those imagined to be the rank and file. No sooner had the group announced that it would not field a presidential candidate than the prominent Abdel Moneim AbulFutuh, who was a member of the MB’s executive council, announced that he would run for the presidency, ostensibly challenging the group’s

30 Five participants in the interview have stated that Egypt’s Friday of Unity has shown unity, and one participant was neutral.
31 The survey analysis is based on semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher during the week following July 29th.
leadership. Abul Futuh’s announcement stirred up strong speculation both within the group and in political circles about his breaching the leadership’s decision not to run for the presidency, and in June he was dismissed from the MB guidance council. Apparently, the MB leadership was attempting to convey a message of reassurance to other political forces and to the masses that it was firmly conforming to its commitment not to nominate a presidential candidate. From another angle, the leadership was noticeably sending an implied message of warning to the rest of the members.

Another type of internal rift seemed to exist among differing Salafi trends which, as noted earlier, had conflicting stances toward the 25th of January Revolution.32 These were then revisited in their differing attitudes toward demolishing statues and Sufi shrines. The renowned Salafi preacher Mohamed Hassan issued visibly contradictory directives.33 And in the famous “battle for the ballot boxes” when Yacoub equated yes to the amendments with yes to religion, he added that opponents should leave the country. Yacoub later withdrew his statement, saying that he was only joking.34 Remarkably, due to Salafists’ previous detachment from politics, they seemed to be utterly deprived of a political or strategic vision for the nature of the revolution or the political environment. This could explain why the government did not invite them, unlike their Muslim Brotherhood counterparts, to be part of the post-revolution dialogue.

Conclusion

The successful emergence of Islamists, particularly the MB and Salafists, during the 25th of January Revolution could be described in light of the combination of two research models pertaining to political opportunity in order to answer the question of “when” and “how”; namely those composing Tarrow’s dimensions of political opportunity and Diani’s inclusion framework. Tarrow’s dimensions of political opportunity highlight the interplay of partial access, repression, shifting alignments, divided elites, and influential allies that brought the two Islamist groups to power. Islamists took advantage of the opportunities associated with changes in the structure of the state and, more importantly, in terms of the visible strength of an opposition that had already been mobilized. Within an inclusion frame of political opportunity, the two Islamist groups temporarily gave up their ideological aspirations and provisionally forsook their “Islam is the Solution” slogan in order to jump on the bandwagon when they sensed that success was at hand. The MB sought political inclusion on the basis of its long-established palpable presence in the political arena and its anti-British and anti-Zionist credentials (Esposito, 1998, 138). In this context, the MB instituted itself as a social movement operating as a political party (Pargeter, 2010, 9). Combining both political and proselytizing experience, the group appeared as the sole Islamist option on the political map, as compared to the other groups (including Salafists) that seemed to have no electoral platform or vision for an Islamic tactic to government.

The Salafists, on the other hand, made use of their social and religious access to grassroots in their bid for self-framing. They had benefited from the relatively generous space allotted to them as a proselytizing anti-political group to spread widely throughout different sectors of the Egyptian

33 Mohamed Hassan has called for demolishing statues in one sermon and has denied saying that in a telephone interview. See Hassan’s video, El-Rahma Satellite Channel, uploaded on February 24th, 2011 at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPzaZVHGLm8
society. They also benefitted from their satellite channels, which attracted huge audiences. According to Khaled Said, official speaker of Salafi Front, “if Salafists want to create 20 parties, it will not be difficult for them to do so, as they have a huge popularity among grassroots compared to other political forces.” No matter how large Salafists’ actual support among grassroots in Egypt really is, Said’s words shed light on their confidence in the large support associated with religious and social inclusion.

Once the two Islamist groups started to seek their own ideological goals at the expense of the nationalist goals of the revolution, they gave up their inclusion frame to engage in framing contests with other groups. The question of whether the constitution or the elections should come first was a divisive one. The prominent MB member Mohamed El-Beltagy explained that the considerable decline in the number of demonstrators on 1st of July, 2011, could be partially due to the MB’s shunning of protest when “the constitution first” rose as one of the major protestor demands. By contrast, the group made a last minute decision to participate on 8th of July when in place of “the constitution first” the mobilizing banner became “the revolution first.” The constitution issue could provide a tangible example of intra-movement framing contests evolving from dissimilar visions of reality, and the MB’s actions illustrated how social movement organizations seek to resolve such contests so as to create “an accepted version of reality” (Benford, 1993, 679), hence collective identity. Apparently, however, collective identity for Islamists was simply a means to maximize their gains. For instance, the MB’s Freedom and Justice Party subsequently adopted “naHmul al-khayr li-miSr” (i.e. for the good of Egypt), a slogan for its Democratic Coalition encompassing more than 40 parties and coalitions, instead of its antiquated “Islam is the Solution”, only after previously resisting such a change. Ahmed Abu Baraka, the MB’s political consultant, insisted that the group still cling to its historical ‘Islam is the Solution’ slogan. But its priority fiqh (i.e. first things come first), was to obtain a majority in parliamentary elections. Ironically, within the same fiqh and the same goal, the group did not participate in the demonstrations on 28th October, 2011, referred to as the Friday of the One Demand. As Mahmoud Ghazlan, the MB spokesperson, explained, “within the priority fiqh, we are focusing more on the parliamentary elections which should be our priority now.” Ideological conflicts were also suspended among other Islamist groups. For instance, Said Abdel Azim, vice president of the Salafi Call organization, and the Sheikh of Sufi Refa’i Order attempted to improve relations between the two long-standing enemies, Salafists and Sufis. In the words of Nader Bakkar of the Salafi Al-Nour party, “we have one goal, namely the victory of Islamic Shari’a.”

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35 For further information, see Onislam’s article online, September 15th, 2011, accessed at: http://www.onislam.net/arabic/newsanalysis/special-folders-pages/new-egypt/egypt-after-the-january-25/134408-qq.html. Since we do not have reliable survey figures of Salafists’ penetration, our analysis is based on informal estimations, making their validity uncertain.

36 For further information see Mohamed El-Beltagy’s interview, Al-tashinamasaa (The 10:00 p.m. program), Dream 2 Channel, July 9th, 2011, 11:00 p.m., Cairo, Egypt.

37 This is based on a telephone interview on Al-Jazeera Mubashir Misr, Friday October 28th, 2011 at 14:25, Cairo, Egypt. Interestingly enough, within the collective identity spirit embraced by the MB in pursuance of the Fiqh Priority, the group has accepted to forsake its long standing “Islam is the Solution” slogan in order to attain its current objective; namely, get to parliamentary elections. The group has however chosen to forsake such collective identity when it has decided not to participate in the Friday of the One Demand in pursuance of the Fiqh Priority in order to attain the same objective.

Thus, if collective identities play a pivotal role in mobilizing and maintaining participation, for Islamists they are a means to make the best of the situation. Within the Democratic Alliance led by the MB’s FJP, the party would not accept to be allotted less than 40% of the votes in the parliamentary elections; otherwise it would forsake the coalition. Conspicuously discontented with their allotted shares in the new parliament, other Islamist parties led by the Salafi Al-Nour have abandoned the Democratic Alliance in favor of an Islamist one (Al-Ilal Al-Islamiyy), which was announced by the Salafi party on 29th September, 2011. This Islamic alliance included other Salafi parties, such as Al-Asala, Al-Bina’ wa-t-Tanmiyya, in addition to Al-TawHii Al-‘Arabiyy (Arab Unification Party) in order to be stronger in confronting the liberal bloc. Such disjoining however would not prevent the two Islamist sides from cooperating to defeat liberals and seculars. In order to achieve this target, and prior to the first round of parliamentary elections, the MB’s FJP, Salafists, and other Islamist groups published a “Charter of Honor” to support all Islamist candidates in the elections at a time when the revolutionary youth voice had been fragmented among different parties. Islamists’ persevering efforts crystallized in their landslide victory in the parliamentary elections of 2011, with the FJP reaping 232 seats (46%) and the Salafi Al-Nour 113 seats (23%), totaling around 70% of the new 498-seat Egyptian parliament. With FJP Secretary-General Saad El-Katatani nominated as Speaker of Parliament and Al-Nour’s Ashraf Thabet as one of the two deputies, an unprecedented presence of Islamists in the public political life did not escape notice. The MB’s significant success has perhaps not grabbed as much attention as the Salafists owing to the former’s long history of presence in the Egyptian political and social map, as they were given 88 out of the 444 seats of the 2005 Egyptian parliament. Still, the Salafists’ unexpected victory could be largely explained in light of their religious and social inclusion.

To recapitulate, the paper has provided a framework combining Tarrow's dimensions of changes in opportunity and Diani's inclusion framework as an explanatory model for Islamists’ actions, focusing on the MB and Salafists within the 25th of January Revolution in Egypt. The analysis has demonstrated that Tarrow's five dimensions – increasing access, shifting alignments, divided elites, influential allies, and repression – could account for the rise of the two Islamist groups during the revolution. Within the analysis, the MB's relative superiority in availing changes in opportunities significantly corresponded to the level of its success then compared to Salafists due to the former’s long history of political involvement and organizational capacity as a social movement, hence supporting Tarrow's theorization. Drawing on Diani's formulation of four configurations of opportunity structures (realignment, antisystem, inclusion, and revitalization), the paper has shown how the two Islamist groups have substantially demonstrated effective mobilization strategies by adopting an inclusion frame within a single period, which invites further research to draw comparisons of mobilization dynamics across time.

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39 This is based on an interview with Saad El-Katatny, FJP Secretary-General. See Shaaban, Mohamed & Alam Ad-din, Omar, Rosalyoussef, on September 26th, 2011. For further detail see http://www.rosaonline.net/Daily/News.asp?id=125819
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