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## **Hassan Al-Banna and His Modern Political Islam**

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**ABSTRACT:** Since the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, the movement has had a formidable political perspective combined with Islamic teachings. Regrettably, a critical aspect of political Islam rarely occurs or is inadequately addressed in Egyptian politics. The collapse of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had, of course, influenced the Islamist movements around the globe. It also highlighted the battle between modern political Islam and the state. Egypt, however, is the most influential Islamic country worldwide, but it is also an unacceptable state for Islamist movements and political Islam. Thus, this paper politically investigates to understand what Hassan al-Banna founds in modern political Islam? And it answers a fundamental question; why political Islam has failed in Egypt, albeit the Muslim Brotherhood has been practising politics for more than 90 years. The paper ascertained that modern political Islam had failed due to the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood, not the structure and context of modern political Islam ideology.

**KEYWORDS:** The Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, Egypt, Political Islam,

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Islam as a religion has been seen differently from one perspective to another. It has been reckoned the religion of peace, the religion of tolerance. And the core of the emergence of terrorist movements.<sup>1</sup> The war on Islam did not initiate with modern technology emergence that opened more sources for researchers to read about Islam. Notwithstanding, the war on Islam commenced on the first day Prophet Mohamed SAW preached. The dissidents of Islam utilised all known and obscure techniques to place a finite towards the expansion of Islam. Starting from Prophet Mohamed SAW, which his own community in Makkah had ostracised, even his companions were tortured and forced to banish Makkah to Madinah to cease the da'wa of Islam. In a paradox, the Islamic da'wa started Makkah eventually expanded to the global and was embraced by billions of inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Historically, the dissidents of Islam were not solely non-Muslims, but the Muslims themselves argued for the expansion of Islam. Nowadays, some Muslims believe that Islam conquered Europe and forced people to embrace Islam through war and oppression. Additionally, there are believed ideologies by Muslims that stand in discrepancy with Islam and its belief. For instance, communism and secularism. Both ideologies limit the role of Islam in society and seek a political state without religious interference.

On the contrary, Islam represents law and regulations for Muslims, known as *hudud*. It is seemingly believed that Muslims are destined to implement the *hudud*. Yet, the influence of communism and secularism on Muslims and society is vexatious in the eyes of clerics. Ideologically, the impact of communism in the Egyptian community in the early nineteenth designated a Western trajectory for Egyptians. At this juncture, Egyptians were culturally influenced by the French.<sup>3</sup> Despite British colonialism in Egypt, Britain did not vehemently fight the Egyptian culture "or" Islam. The existence of Britain had effectively considered the economic and political dynamic. The French culture was an intruder in Egypt's fashion, cinema and lifestyle. Still, the collapse of the Caliphate in Turkey and the influence of the Western culture in Egypt detached Egyptians into two sides. Some Egyptians strongly co-opt Western culture. On the other side, a juxtapose of conservatives encompassing clerics, social workers, and students had a stance against environmental transition. One of those conservatives is Hassan al-Banna, who believed in resisting British colonialism. During his childhood, he established small organisations to fight the new heresies in Egypt society. Similarly, he continued his social and religious activities while studying at Cairo University.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, al-Banna established the most influential Islamic movement globally, the Muslim Brotherhood MB – Ikhawnul Muslimin, in 1928.<sup>5</sup>

### **WHO IS HASSAN AL-BANNA?**

The Northern and Upper parts of Egypt had historically been distinguished with their culture and Egyptian traditions, where the Western cultures played no influential role. At an Egyptian village names al-Mahmoudiyah, in al-Buhayra, one of Egypt's northern Nile delta provinces, Hassan al-Banna was born to a cleric father in 1906. His family was religious and a well-to-do family.<sup>6</sup> Antithesis from the prevailing habits of al-Buharya, where most people were fellah and taught their children how to farm, al-Banna

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was sent to the school and Kuttab (a place where the children learn the Koran and Islamic teachings).<sup>7</sup> Al-Banna, however, did not graduate from Al-Azhar school. It was familiar for the conservative families to send their children to study at Al-Azhar – but al-Banna did not know that his governmental teachings would become an impediment. Historically, most Egyptian politicians and social and religious leaders studied at Al-Azhar, such as Saad Zaghloul, Mohamed Abdu, Taha Hussein, and Sheikh Keshk.

During al-Banna's childhood, he established an Islamic organisation with his peers. They mantled to dispatch letters for the malefactors advising them to cease their sins. By some means, this organisation was dissolved – but this did not cease al-Banna in his continuum da'wa or relinquish his reform plan of society.<sup>8</sup> His da'wa was a parallel between Islamic teachings and social life. At this juncture, Egyptian societies were full of brothels, gambling, and Western influence. For al-Banna, morphing the shape of society seems elusive, principally at the heart of the Egyptian capital, Cairo. Thus, after he completed his study at Dar al-Ulum Faculty, al-Banna was assigned to work as a teacher in Ismailia city, near the Suez Canal, where the French and English had advantaged over Egyptians.<sup>9</sup> This, conceivably, formed the core of the persistence of al-Banna to unite Egyptians against the Western's influence. Egypt, at this juncture, did not have a racial or nationalist issue – so al-Banna had to place Egyptians beneath a racial or nationalist motto rather than religious motivation. Paradoxically, Islam, particularly political Islam, was the sole solution that helped al-Banna cajole Egyptians to follow his new ideology. The political environment was very far from being a motivator and a key player in Islam. There was such divergence and disapproval in involving Islam in politics. Albeit Egypt was not considered a secularist or communist state – it somehow moved to liberalism with a shred of Al-Azhar influence on its schooling institutions after the collapse of the Caliphate in Turkey.

The da'wa of political Islam by al-Banna focused on promoting Islam as a *Religion and State*.<sup>10</sup> Islam has an elucidation for all social issues that placed Egyptians on the brink of collapse and led them to lose their Islamic identity. So far, al-Banna failed to recruit thousands or hundreds of Egyptians under his supervision at the beginning of da'wa. He propagated his ideology at social clubs, cafes and political meetings. Regrettably and despite his decorum, he beguiled solely six Egyptians to entrench the core of the *Ikhwanul Muslimin*.<sup>11</sup>

The character of al-Banna has remarkably bestowed by historians, politicians, and even his opponents eulogised his character. According to Salah Eisa, al-Banna bequeathed the manner and persistence from his father, and his character was coalesced by nationalism and religious spirit.<sup>12</sup> Even Gamal Abdel Nasser's wife, the second Egyptian president, stated that "Hassan al-Banna was a nationalist man, I had read all his books and history"<sup>13</sup> her statement shows how al-Banna's books played such an apparatus communication to enter the Egyptians' houses. Her husband, Abdul Nasser, was also a member of the MB and met al-Banna personally on different occasions. Abdul Nasser had also recognised al-Banna, such as the Companions of Prophet Mohamed SAW.<sup>14</sup>

The political influence of al-Banna on Egyptians had brought cohorts and, regrettably, dissidents. He managed to disseminate his ideology in each diameter of Egypt.<sup>15</sup> This, of course, built a coherent network connection among the MB members ubiquitously. So, the framework of al-Banna focused on educating and socialising Egyptians through Islamic teachings. However, the dissidents of al-Banna had set a clandestine plan to cease his infiltration. With the cooperation of the Iron Guard *Alharas Alhadidi*, the King's soldiers and Saadist Institutional Party, they assassinated al-Banna in 1949.<sup>16</sup>

### Modern Political Islam

Islamic history has witnessed the age of ignorance, modernisation, transformation – and secularisation. Muslims were subjected to majority and minority where they ruled India and established a Caliphate in Baghdad and Istanbul. Muslims were also subject to incarceration and oppression in Cairo under the Fatimid Caliphate. In their prevailing socio-politics, they found a State in Morocco while they left Al-Andalus to collapse at the hand of the inquisition. Professionally, the word – political Islam – did not emerge in the Islamic dictionary throughout Islamic history. It was effectively common in the manifestations of life that politics is a part of Islam. Both are inseparable – so Muslims were cognisant that the Caliph could impossibly bifurcate Islam from politics or vice versa. Historically, Muslims bequeathed the Islamic teachings by their ancestors, where the political discourse, parliament and democracy played no role. After the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in Turkey in 1924, the Islamic world had profoundly become a dichotomous antithesis of the previous Islamic Caliphates, when it was arbitrary for the collapsed Caliphate to be replaced by another Islamic Caliphate. For instance, the collapse of the Fatimid Caliphate was replaced by Ayyubid Caliphate without the oppression of the people and social/religious conflict with the clerics. With this, the cultural manifestations were intact. Identical to the Islamic teachings and Islamic Law, "*hudud*". Even language remained the same in contrast to what happened in Turkey after the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate. Conclusively, the transformation of the Turkish state had besmirched the Islamic manifestation and culture led by Kamal Ataturk.<sup>17</sup> However, Ataturk morphed Turkey into a secularist state and banned Azan in Arabic.<sup>18</sup> This whole transformation was a sign of a new era for Muslims to co-opt new ideologies rather than Islamic ideologies that took effective place since the Message was sent to Prophet Mohamed SAW until the collapse of the Caliphate in 1924.

As the collapse of the Caliphate had successfully obliterated all Islamic law in society, several political ideologies emerged among Muslims in the Middle East. Some ideologies had come in discrepancy with Islam, such as Secularism<sup>19</sup> and Communism.<sup>20</sup> Both ideologies reprimand the influence of religion on society and inhabitants. Communists believe that religion is utterly used for

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personal interest, and it has a serious change on society. The Soviet-Afghani war is vigorously an instance of how Muslims considered the war against soviet communists as a holy war.<sup>21</sup>

Still, other ideologies agree with the Islamic teachings and their importance in peoples' lives. For instance, political Islam has been crucially the *key* ideology that prompted Muslims to rejuvenate the Caliphate again but with a different concept. There are dozens of clerics and politicians who demanded Islamic teachings to become involved in the state law. Crucially, the founder of the modern political Islam ideology, al-Banna. His philosophical work had significantly revolved around Islam and politics as one constituent,<sup>22</sup> but he differentiated from the old school definition of Caliphate that placed the political ascendancy in one hand – and one ruler. Al-Banna believed in democracy and political discourse to establish an equal society. The man himself did not seek a holy place among his cohorts such as most of many other Islamic leaders, Ashaari Mohammad, the founder of Dar Al Arqam in Malaysia,<sup>23</sup> and Juhayman al-Utaybi in Saudi Arabia,<sup>24</sup> and Shukri Mostafa in Egypt.<sup>25</sup>

Despite modern political Islam was founded by al-Banna, yet it was developed by other Islamic organisations. The core and basis established by the MB school. Then, it was adopted by Abu-Ala Maududi, who followed the same political trajectory as al-Banna and instituted the Jamaat Islam Party on the Indian subcontinent.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, political Islam has also been adopted by the Shiites in Iran, who, of course, stand ideologically against Sunnis. Ironically, Shiites in Iran, led by Khomeini, have successfully developed the political Islam ideology and established a coherent system with censorship and rigorous regulations. Iran, however, has democracy and Presidential Elections. Still, the whole definition of ascendancy is placed in the hand of Khamenei, under *Wilayat Al faqih's* constraints.<sup>27</sup> Modern political Islam as an ideology has its own framework produced by al-Banna, who believed that democracy and political discourse are invariably a method to establish the so-called *Islamic State*. According to critics, al-Banna had drawn politically a trajectory to endorse his work theoretically and empirically.<sup>28</sup>

However, political Islam was not considered an appropriate ideology for all Islamist movements. Some Islamist movements had mostly abjured their influence in politics. Those Islamist movements had notably founded based on Islamic da'wa teachings inside the mosques, whilst it has enthusiastically rebuffed to play such a role in politics. One of those movements is Tablighi Jamaat.<sup>29</sup> Profoundly, Tablighi members are educated to preclude political discussion alongside religious discursive as its influence brings more divergence than convergence. So despite the vivid agenda against politics and – political Islam – Tablighi Jamaat had magnificently spread worldwide. It has the second-largest participation of Muslims worldwide in Dhakka after Hajj in Makkah. Other Islamist movements strenuously rebuff the ideology of political Islam. Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia is tangible evidence of the utter rejection of political Islam. But antithesis to Tablighi Jamaat, Wahabi's clerics write books that besmirch political Islam and its founders, al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. In such a contemporaneous, the MB members in Saudi Arabia are incarcerated. Even the sympathisers of the MB are rigorously incarcerated and tortured to death.<sup>30</sup>

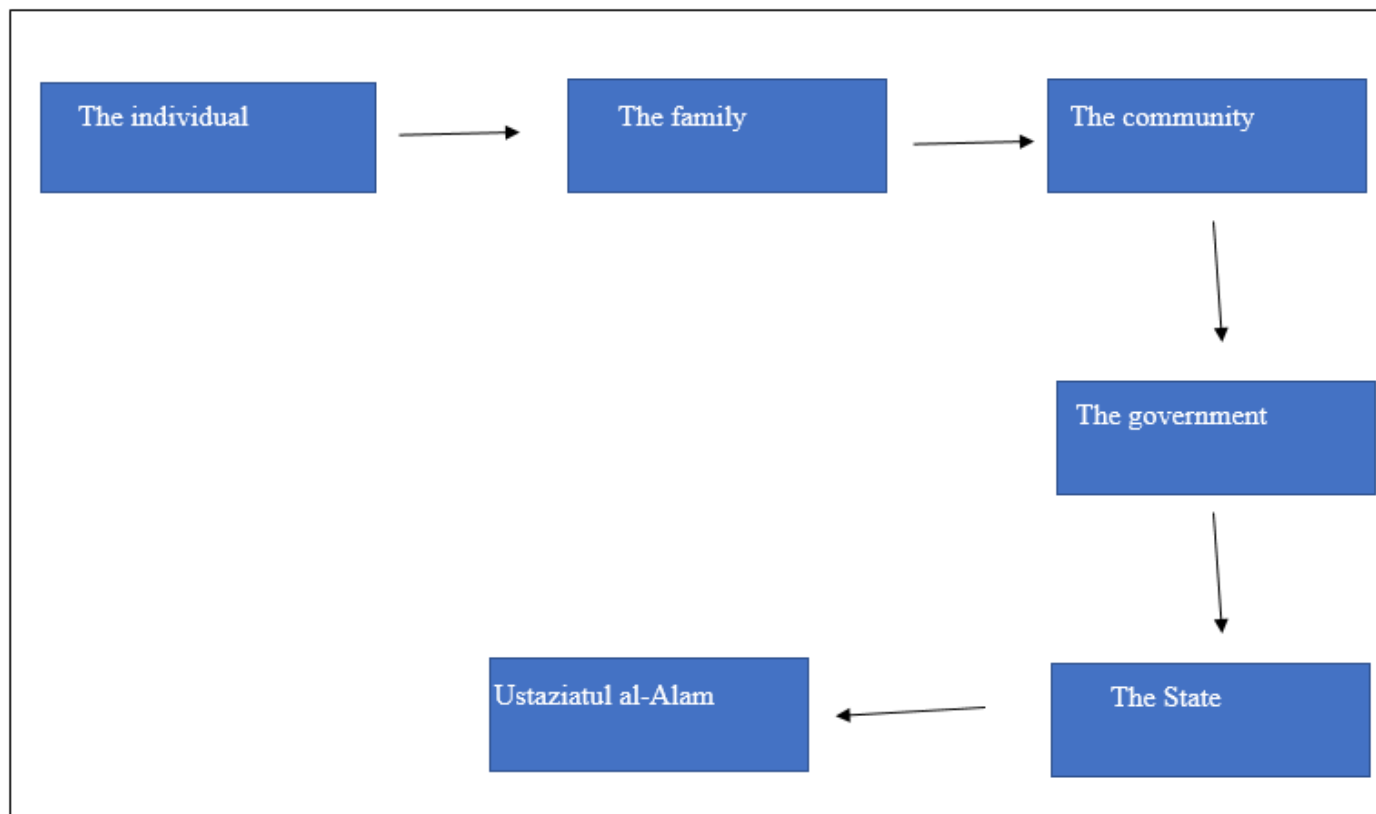
Conceivably the abomination of political Islam is due to the ideological structure and framework that empirically believe Islam has a solution and is undoubtedly inseparable from politics. So political Islam had distinctly propounded Muslims to implement the Islamic teachings in their daily life. They, apart and as a whole, involve Islamic teachings in law, rules, and social principles. Egypt, for instance, legalised special sharia law for Muslims. Even Malaysia has special Islamic law for Muslims that does not include other religions.<sup>31</sup> The question today delves into, is it arduous to separate Islam from the social law and implement positive law? Predominately, such a concept will fail miserably and augment another social issue – the *state*. Ostensibly, Islamist movements symbolise the catalyst key to morphing Islamic law into their plan. They insinuate that Islamic law does not effectuate God's instructions to the nation "*Ummah*". They seek more tangible and absolute transformation in society: they believe *hudud* is the sole method to bring justice, innovation and development. Therefore, they utilise political Islam and democracy to reach their global objective, such as the MB pursues to govern the world based on al-Banna's concept "*Ustziatul al-Alam*" to rule the world.<sup>32</sup> In the Islamist movement's accounts, holding the political power will spread Islam in the corrupted society by Western influence and simultaneously implement the *hudud*.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, not all Islamist movements profoundly understand political Islam or partially concur with one definition of political Islam. Some movements utilise violence, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan<sup>34</sup> and some beliefs in a non-violent approach like the MB.<sup>35</sup>

### How to establish a Muslim society?

To understand how al-Banna established the MB and successfully propagated his ideology in Egypt, it is compulsory for researchers to motivationally investigate the historical incidents that led al-Banna to raise a new ideological framework – political Islam. Conclusively, they will thoroughly understand how al-Banna procured stalwart cohorts who ensconced and believed in the same inclination as him. Ironically, understating Egyptian society during al-Banna's age is the sophisticated way to academically answer how al-Banna established his ideology – political Islam in society? During that time, Egypt was beneath British colonialism and was entirely influenced by Western cultures; even some movies had to speak some phrases in French to accentuate how culturalised and modernised the Egyptians were. Besides, Egypt had witnessed several demonstrations against the English, especially in 1919 and 1936. This all, unquestionably, aspired both the nationalism spirit and Islam to call for independence.<sup>36</sup> There were also Islamist organisations in Egypt during British colonialism prior to the MB emergence, for instance, Legitimacy Assembly that focused on the Islamic da'wa rather than political involvement. On the contrary, al-Banna appropriated the failure of al-Azhar and Islamist organisations in politics and established schools, social clubs and newspapers that served his political ideology – political Islam.

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Of course, establishing Islamic schools and community needs a popular ascendancy. According to Klofstad, talking in politics is one reason that leads the individual to obtain social dominance and political power.<sup>37</sup> The case of al-Banna palpably explains that his recruitment process undoubtedly succeeded, albeit with weak capabilities and government harassment. However, the emphasis on entrenching an Islamic society had mantled al-Banna to build pillars that made his da'wa comprehensible. Even after his death, the Islamic da'wa of al-Banna was appropriately bequeathed to his cohorts. Establishing a Muslim society under British colonialism and disenfranchisement was a political challenge for al-Banna. Thus, he did not seek the adequate transformation of society, such as the occurrence of the Turkish state under Ataturk, but he realised that to obtain the aggrandisement, he had sequentially to commence his da'wa from the individual to reach the whole world.<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 1:** This figure indicates how to establish an Islamic society by Hassan al-Banna.

The fulcrum of al-Banna's ideology of political Islam revolves around educating and socialising the individual. While the doctrine of political Islam seems inchoate as it failed dynamically to establish a vigorous government, it is, for some, a well-organised ideology, notably Islamists. Ideologically, the recruited individual in organisations is prepared through socialisation to become a stalwart member of his organisation and imperturbable. With this, the individual will play a vital role in his community and accordingly represent his organisation. However, al-Banna socialised his cohorts Islamically and prepared them to play a leading role in society.

For this reason, al-Banna recruited students, journalists, police and military officers. He wanted to encompass the diversity of the MB so that it conceivably helped him to dominate Egyptian society. And of course, the stalwart member of the MB who believes that politics and Islam are inseparable will assuredly recruit his family to become members of the MB.<sup>39</sup>

According to sociologists, family is the most salient agent during the socialisation process among the other three agents (school, peers and media).<sup>40</sup> Al-Banna understood that his focusing and developing the role of the family within his members would recruit stalwart members to his movements. Individuals learn from their family the fundamental teachings; for instance, they know the same language, religion, and culture as their parents. Essentially, the MB parents inculcate the Islamic ideology into their children to prepare them to become members in the future. At the same time, al-Banna established Islamic schools that teach a unique religious curriculum that also emphasises the Islamic ideology of the MB.<sup>41</sup> Rather than Al-Azhar schools that teach the Islamic teachings without political involvement, paradoxically, the MB schools socialise the children based on political perspectives alongside Islamic teachings. This does not solely develop the individual's mindset, but it qualifies them to become leaders. Besides family and Islamic schools, al-Banna established the usrah, where five members of the MB gather weekly to share their issues and religious affairs.<sup>42</sup> They also receive the instruction of the MB through usrah. With this coherent relationship and clandestine gathering, al-Banna believed that the MB would become undefeated. The MB had historically been deliquesced from the Egyptian political scene due to political deprivation and incarceration. However, the question here is, did al-Banna establish the Islamic society? If not, is there any Islamic movement that can supplant the MB?

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It is known that the MB had politically failed to gain power. Since 1928 hitherto and the MB was unable to establish an Islamic government. Its failure has periodically disappointed political Islam supporters. Alas, it led thousands of MB to disown the movement and join ISIS and al-Qaeda. So, this is the historical existence of the MB in politics. Regarding social presence, al-Banna had dominantly influenced Egyptian society through an Islamic perspective.<sup>43</sup> In fact, al-Banna was the culprit for banning brothels in Egypt. At this time, prostitution was legally allowed in Egypt. Islamically, prostitution and intercourse before marriage is a sin in all Islamic doctrines. In a tangible influence of his social dominance, al-Banna authorised the Egyptian government to ban the brothels for him to withdraw from the parliamentary elections. This shows how strongly al-Banna played an influential role in transforming Egyptian society. Theoretically and empirically, al-Banna established a small Islamic society and pursued to change a constituent of society. Yet, after his death, the MB failed to emerge in an influential position in the Egyptian political scene. Even in 2012, when the MB won the presidential seat, it failed to implement its political agenda.<sup>44</sup> The MB, undoubtedly, had not collapsed politically, but its existence in Egypt had been besmirched alongside its agenda – political Islam.<sup>45</sup> The Egyptian authority supplanted the MB and endorsed Hizbul Nur, the Salafi Party,<sup>46</sup> to represent political Islam in Egyptian society.

### Did Political Islam Fail?

It is understood Islam has historically governed and constrained Muslims by legitimising law, rules and social behaviours. Somehow, the failure of the Caliphate and the neglect of Islam in society had urged Muslims to defend Islam. Thus, the most reliable method for Muslims to defend Islam is to implement a new political ideology that believes Islam and politics are one constituent and should not bifurcate. The challenge is how Muslims will implement political Islam? The political tension in Egypt had nevertheless contributed to a conflict among all vital political players. The MB that represents political Islam had been deprived of its political rights.

Furthermore, election fraud took place during Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak eras. The Egyptian military refused to bring political players without a military background. Conclusively, Islamists and politicians without military knowledge had been cruelly incarcerated. However, is that ample reason for political Islam to fail? In fact, political Islam represented by Jamaat Islamia adopted violence to achieve its target and was utterly rebuffed by Egyptians rather than authority. Egyptians, perhaps, have been known for their abomination towards violence. Profoundly, political Islam represented by MB or *any* other Islamist movements in Egypt would be banned if they sought to obtain political power.

Historically, Islamists in Egypt have two different tendencies that differentiated and constrained them to create an understandable gap in politics. The first tendency is the fundamentalism focused on *hudud* and Islam Sharia. This tendency also believes in democracy and political discourse with other political dissidents, but its activities are entirely motivated by an Islamic perspective. The MB in Egypt, Nahda in Tunisia, and Justice and Development Party in Morocco represent this tendency. Ironically, most Islamist movements that tend to democracy were politically influenced by the MB in Egypt. The other tendency is more palpably seen in terrorism. Its focus revolves around anti-Western influence. So the sole option for them to attain their agenda is to utilise violence and terrorism. Of course, Boko Haram in Nigeria, which means anti-Western teachings, is evidence of how this tendency gravitates to terrorism rather than political discourse.<sup>47</sup>

Still, the failure of Islamist movements represented by the two mentioned tendencies has a mutual analogy of state dissatisfaction. In regard to the MB as a case study, it had persistently fought terrorist movements and played an influential role on many occasions. The MB had politically and religiously used by Sadat to cease the influence of communism and socialism in universities. But when the MB members sought to establish their political agenda – political Islam – they were dispatched behind bars. Even during Mubarak's presidency, the term of political emancipation had a finite against generally Islamists. So far, why has the state stood against the MB, despite its democratic agenda? The likelihood of the failure of the MB is due to the military influence on Egypt's politico economy. The military power since 1954 hitherto had built an economic empire that denied its discursive under the parliament dome.<sup>48</sup> Conclusively, the military will not allow the MB to lead Egypt and confiscate their economic empire. Arguably, if the MB had been practising politics for decades, how did it fail to understand its political dissident – the military? And what are their arguments? In fact, the state had never considered the MB role in society as a religious role. Thus, the failure of political Islam will not influence Islam, yet Islam will be endorsed by Al-Azhar clerics who are predominantly slanted to the government side. Therefore, the victory of the MB in the Presidential Election in 2013 had the same synthesis between political Islam and religious influence. The MB expected encouragement from Egyptian inhabitants to firmly stand behind the Islamic project against Mubarak's antecedent regime. Regrettably, with the help of Mubarak's administration and the military, the MB faced a military coup that consigned them to retrograde. Their collapse is inevitably strong evidence that political Islam is inchoate. On the contrary, it heralded the irrefutable concept of the military that Egypt could not be governed by a second ruler but by a man with a military background. Ultimately, political Islam failed due to the MB's unstable and ambiguously equivocal plan, especially after al-Banna's death, the MB appeared unrealised in what they desired from politics. Thus far, the MB did not collapse in Egypt solely; unfortunately, political Islam had failed in Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen.

### CONCLUSION

The understanding of political Islam has long discursive arguments regarding its theoretical framework. Islamist movements had constantly acted peacefully and violently to implement the political Islam ideology. It has, hitherto, succeeded in many countries, and its failure echoes in different places. The MB, however, was the core of political Islam in Egypt and the globe, but it could not arguably achieve its political agenda for more than 90 years. Of course, the MB had been victimised by oppression and political deprivation, but politically playing as a victim will lead the player to lose sympathy and decrease its influence. Profoundly, people tend to ascendancy and abnegate political excuses. The failure of the MB has also highlighted political and religious issues among researchers; if the MB is not yet prepared to establish an Islamic government such as Iran, why does it seek power?

The MB needs a strenuous ideology that combines with empirical work. Instead, the political Islam ideology will be considered a theory that cannot make an absolute change in a society like communism. As a result, the MB political methodology is uncannily obscured and ineffective. The MB was nevertheless pervaded to understand that the Egyptian military would not allow them to govern Egypt based on an Islamic perspective and ostracise the military influence in politics. Political Islam did not fail because of its ideological structure; it failed because the MB that proved its political experience to govern rather than playing the opposition role is ineffective and impractical.

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