



# **Exploring Individual Motivation for Social Change: Mobilization of the Muslim Brotherhood's youth in pre-revolutionary Egypt**

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## **Abstract**

Islamist activism is on the rise across the Middle East and North Africa. In the light of the post-revolutionary elections in Egypt and Tunisia, Islamist parties are sweeping the polls supported by the overwhelming majority of voters. This dissertation investigates the dynamic of this support for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The explanation of individual activists' motivation behind this form of middle-class activism has been investigated by exploring individual beliefs, emotions and identities. Activists' motivational explanations and representation do not develop in a vacuum, outside of a specific context. Explaining the configuration of collective action therefore requires an analysis of a pattern of social characteristics using a spectrum of social movement theories. The long-term contentious relationship between the various Egyptian authoritarian regimes and the Muslim Brotherhood produced an Islamist resistance culture with a particular set of incitements for would be activists. Middle-class activists have primarily been motivated by the Brotherhood's ability to educate its followers through a multi-stage membership process. During this process youth activists have acquired a strengthened sense of individual purpose. They also possess organizational skills and have successfully ascended the social ladder, leading to a feeling of moral superiority and a degree of personal autonomy even within an authoritarian socio-political context. The social movement organization serves as a facilitator of structured dissent and its success depends ultimately on its ability to recognize the basic needs of a frustrated population. Sympathizers of a particular social movement organization in turn seek realistic forms of dissent which correspond to their system of values and practices.

**Jury:**

Donatella della Porta (Supervisor, EUI), Emin Poljarevic (Candidate), Abby Peterson (University of Gothenburg), László Bruszt (EUI – by videoconference), Jeroen Gunning (University of Durham – by videoconference).

**Bio:**

Emin Poljarevic holds an MA from the University of Uppsala (2006) and M.Res. from the European University Institute (2008). Previously he worked as a research assistant and project coordinator at the Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Uppsala University (2004-2007). During his PhD studies, he was a visiting assistant professor at the SAXO Institute, University of Copenhagen (2010/11). Poljarevic has presented papers at an extensive range of conferences, and has published several book chapters and articles. His research interests intersect between social movement studies, the study of state repression, and dynamics of social motivations. He is currently developing a postdoctoral research project intended to explore patterns of socio-political shifts in the Middle East and North Africa with special focus on Islamist social movement organizations.