

## **At the Tipping Point?: al-Azhar's Growing Crisis of Moral Authority**

Masooda Bano, Oxford Department of International Development and Brasenose College,  
Oxford University.

### **Abstract**

Routinely required to lend religious legitimacy to contentious state policies, al-Azhar's moral authority has been under pressure since its nationalization in 1961. This paper outlines how Shaykh Ahmad al-Tayyib's alliance with President al-Sisi has, however, exposed al-Azhar's moral authority to unprecedented risks. This is for three reasons. First, the oppression tactics used by al-Sisi government to quell Muslim Brotherhood have been more extreme than those used by the previous regimes. Second, the al-Azhari establishment's defence of these violent tactics has been more unqualified than was the case in the past. Third, current state led reforms of al-Azhar's curriculum are more controversial than those executed in the past. These recent developments, however, should not be interpreted as a complete break from the past; they, rather, are a natural outcome of the incremental shifts that have been occurring within al-Azhar since its nationalization over fifty years ago.