Islamism after the Arab Spring:
Between the Islamic State and the nation-state

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In 2015, we returned to Doha for the 12th annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum. Co-convened annually by the Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World and the State of Qatar, the Forum is the premier international gathering of leaders in government, civil society, academia, business, religion, and the media to foster frank dialogue on important issues facing the United States and Muslim communities around the world.

The 2015 Forum included a variety of formats for constructive engagement, including televised and webcast plenary sessions to explore major developments, transitions, and crises, and working and action groups that brought together practitioners and experts to develop initiatives and policy recommendations.

This year, we convened a group to discuss how to improve countering violent extremism efforts in the United States. We also deliberated on strategic priorities for the United States and the Middle East, discussed the shifts within mainstream Islamist groups, and examined strategies for countering Islamic State propaganda. These deliberations were captured in papers to be shared with policymakers and the broader public. (For detailed proceedings of the Forum, including photographs, video coverage, and transcripts, please visit our website at http://www.brookings.edu/islamic-world.)

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We would like to take this opportunity to thank the State of Qatar for its support in convening the Forum with us. In particular, we are grateful to His Highness the Emir for his generosity in enabling us to come together for these three days of candid discussion. We would also like to thank the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, H.E. Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Khalid bin Mohammad Al Attiyah, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their support. We would especially like to recognize H.E. Mr. Rashid Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, the Minister's Assistant for Services and Follow-up, H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, the Minister's Assistant for International Cooperation Affairs, Ambassador Abdulla Fakhroo, the Permanent Committee for Organizing Conferences' Chief Executive Officer, and the Permanent Committee's entire staff for their support.

Sincerely,

William McCants
Fellow and Director
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Abstract

**Islamism after the Arab Spring:
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Conveners:
Shadi Hamid and William McCants

Five years after the start of the Arab uprisings, mainstream Islamist groups—which generally seek to operate within the confines of institutional politics—find themselves brutally repressed (Egypt), fallen from power (Tunisia), internally fractured (Jordan), or eclipsed by armed groups (Syria and Libya). Muslim Brotherhood and Brotherhood-inspired movements had enjoyed considerable staying power, becoming entrenched actors in their respective societies, settling into strategies of gradualist democratic contestation, focused on electoral participation and working within existing state structures. Yet, the twin shocks of the Arab Spring—the Egyptian coup of 2013 and the rise of ISIS—have challenged mainstream Islamist models of political change.

The first section of the paper analyzes how recent developments in the region are forcing a discussion of the various fault lines within Islamist movements in Muslim-majority countries. The second brings out the challenges faced by Islamist parties, which, once admitted into the halls of power, have had to play politics in circumscribed contexts and make difficult compromises while not alienating their conservative constituencies.

The third section considers how Islamist groups have made sense of ISIS's rise to prominence. The fourth takes a closer look at the state-centric approaches of Brotherhood-linked movements and how these are either coming under scrutiny or being challenged from various quarters, particularly by younger rank-and-file activists. We conclude by briefly considering to what extent Islamist movements will be able to "see beyond the state" in the years (and decades) to come.

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Table of contents

Introduction

An Islamic State (ISIS) recruitment video seems an unlikely place to find a poignant account of the Islamist experience after the Arab Spring. But the narrative of a young Egyptian man—a member of ISIS and a judge in one of its sharia courts—speaks to the bitterness and disappointment that many Islamists felt and still feel:

> Islamist groups [that participate in elections] do not possess the military power or the means to defend the gains they have achieved through elections. After they win, they are put in prison, they are killed in the squares, as if they had never even won, as if they had never done anything, as if they had not spent money, as if they had never campaigned for their candidates.[1]

Five years after the start of the Arab uprisings, mainstream Islamist groups[2]—which generally seek to operate within the confines of institutional politics—find themselves brutally repressed (Egypt), fallen from power (Tunisia), internally fractured (Jordan), or eclipsed by armed groups (Syria and Libya). Muslim Brotherhood and Brotherhood-inspired movements had enjoyed considerable staying power, becoming entrenched actors in their respective societies, settling into strategies of gradualist democratic contestation, focused on electoral participation and working within existing state structures. Yet, the twin shocks of the Arab Spring—the Egyptian coup of 2013 and the rise of ISIS—have challenged mainstream Islamist models of political change.

The case of Egypt has been perhaps most striking. The forced absence of Muslim Brotherhood leaders—who are either in prison, hiding or exile—has left the younger rank-and-file to lead from below, often favoring greater confrontation with the regime. The emergence of Islamist-associated groups and individuals espousing revolutionary action and "defensive violence" illustrates the diminishing appeal of traditional methods of challenging existing regimes. However, the use of violence is only one contentious point in a charged and unprecedented internal Islamist debate about the nature and means of political change. Three years after Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood was removed from power and banned, the organization—the most influential Islamist movement of the past century—has experienced an unprecedented split.[3] The word used by some Brotherhood members is *inqisam*, roughly translated as schism, capturing the extent of the growing internal disagreements over the relationship between movement (*haraka*) and party (*hizb*), the very nature of the Brotherhood's organizational structures, and what it means to be "revolutionary."

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1. "Video/Da'ish yad'u al-Misriyeen 'li-l-jihad'," YouTube video, posted by "GrimghostMediaArabic," December 29, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFsrJADJkqY.
2. This paper defines "mainstream" Islamist groups as movements and their affiliated political parties which operate within the confines of institutional politics, accept the notion of the Westphalian nation-state, and enjoy popular support. We are not making a normative judgment about the content of their beliefs. This includes the Muslim Brotherhood and other movements that use the Brotherhood as a frame of reference. Our definition assumes a distinct difference between mainstream Islamists and armed insurgent groups such as ISIS and al-Qaida.
3. Muslim Brotherhood activists and leaders, interviewed by Shadi Hamid, Istanbul, Turkey, April 26, 2016 – May 1, 2016.

This paper focuses on a number of distinct challenges and dilemmas emerging within mainstream Islamism, drawing on working group discussions convened by the Brookings Institution in June 2015, as well as subsequent follow-up meetings in 2016. The working group brought together young Islamist activists and politicians from seven different countries along with scholars of political Islam to discuss ideological and tactical shifts occurring within Islamist movements. Many discussions of political Islam draw primarily from official statements and party platforms as well as interviews with established, and usually older, leaders. Our discussions sought to reorient the debate by directly engaging the younger Islamist activists who are increasingly taking on critical roles in their respective organizations.

The first section of the paper analyzes how recent developments in the region are forcing a discussion of the various fault lines within Islamist movements in Muslim-majority countries. The second brings out the challenges faced by Islamist parties, which, once admitted into the halls of power, have had to play politics in circumscribed contexts and make difficult compromises while taking care not to alienate conservative constituencies. The third section considers how Islamist groups are making sense of ISIS's rise to prominence. The fourth takes a closer look at the state-centric approaches of Brotherhood-linked movements and how these are either coming under scrutiny or being challenged from various quarters, particularly by younger rank-and-file activists. We conclude by briefly considering to what extent Islamist movements will be able to "see beyond the state" in the years (and decades) to come.

Cracks within Islamism?
Emergent splits and generational tension

The often turbulent experiences of Islamists over the past five years have demonstrated the unwillingness, or inability, of existing political systems in the Arab world to accommodate Islamist political participation—even, to an extent, in countries with "successful" transitions such as Tunisia.

Islamists, for their part, have struggled to reconcile their long-term political ambitions and more explicitly "Islamic" demands with the more mundane needs of governance and, perhaps more importantly, the need to appear unthreatening to ruling regimes. Such challenges lead to tension between "old guard" figures favoring gradualist reform and emergent activists advocating more "revolutionary" means of change. These discussions often occur along generational lines but not always. Past experiences with repression may be the more relevant variable here, with old guard leaders being more likely to have had formative experiences in prison or in exile (particularly in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria), while younger members are more likely to be shaped by the revolutionary contexts of the Arab Spring, which were generally characterized, at least at first, by cross-ideological cooperation between Islamists and non-Islamists.

A body of scholarship exploring generational divides within Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has contrasted the ideological traits of members of the "middle" generation who came of age in the 1970s, entering the Brotherhood through Islamic student associations, with those of previous and subsequent generations.[4] Khalil al-Anani has distinguished the four generations of Brotherhood members active in the 1960s, the '70s, '80s, and the '90s from the "blogger" generation that came of age in the 2000s.[5] Anani and Mohamed Abdelhalim describe this young generation as more open to differing ideas and ideologies—liberalism and socialism, for instance—given their interactions with street activists and over the Internet.[6] The failures and disappointments of the Arab Spring require us to further reassess the role of youth activism. Too often, youth, particularly in light of their disproportionate numbers in the Middle East, are treated as some kind of would-be panacea, when the reality is more complicated.

In the pre-2011 era, tensions within the Brotherhood were often described as being between "conservatives" and "reformists" or, alternatively, "traditionalists" and "reformists." Traditionalism here does not necessarily denote a commitment to some pre-modern Islamic tradition but rather to the "traditions" of the Brotherhood, with an emphasis on gradualism, hierarchy, and "listening and obeying." The most vocal among Brotherhood youth were prominent young thinkers and activists who had

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4. See, for example, Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Khalil al-Anani, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi Misr: Shaikhouka Tassaru' al-Zaman?* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Shuruq al-Duwaliyya, 2007).
5. Al-Anani.
6. Ibid; Muhammad 'Abdelhalim, "Fajwa jiliyya: Ab'ad al-azma bayn shabab al-ikhwan wa qiyadat al-jama'ah ba'd al-thawra," *Al Ghad*, April 8, 2012, http://www.adenalghad.net/news/9529/#.VVjVWyFVhBd.

more flexible and accepting of pluralism, women's rights, cross-ideological cooperation, and separating the movement's religious functions from its political ones. They included Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, Mustafa al-Naggar, Abdelrahman Ayyash, Islam Lotfy, and Ammar el-Beltagy, many of whom would soon part ways with the Brotherhood and claim their independence. Naggar, for example, founded one of Egypt's first "liberal" parties soon after Mubarak's fall. This gave the impression that Brotherhood youth were more progressive than the rest of the organization, when, in fact, these young thinkers represented only a minority—however vocal—within the Brotherhood's younger generation.[7]

The 2011 revolution, the Brotherhood's brief experience in government in 2012–2013, and the military coup which overthrew Mohammed Morsi were formative experiences for a new cadre of young activists. The coup and the subsequent Rabaa massacre, which took the lives of more than 1000 Brotherhood members and supporters, confirmed and consolidated changes that were already underway, scrambling the old divides between so-called traditionalists and reformists.[8] By the spring of 2016, the new disagreements had deepened, leading to what some Brotherhood activists described as a "schism" (*inqisam*) over a set of questions that were very much a product of the post-Arab Spring era, including the relationship between movement and party, whether to rethink hierarchical organizational (*tanzim*) structures, and what it really meant to be "revolutionary."[9]

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7. The authors would like to thank Jillian Schwedler for emphasizing this point.
8. For more on the effects of the coup and massacre on the Brotherhood, see Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam is Reshaping the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), especially pp. 101–147.
9. Muslim Brotherhood activists and leaders, interviewed by Shadi Hamid, Istanbul, Turkey, April 26, 2016 – May 1, 2016.

Revolution versus reform

It seems almost quaint today, but during the Mubarak era, the Brotherhood, as a rule, did not and would not talk about "revolution" (*thawra*). Traditionalists and reformists may have disagreed on various religious and social concerns, but they shared this same commitment to working within the system, however rigged against them it might have been. And this is what made the early experience of the Arab Spring so striking: the idea of revolution—even if its proponents weren't exactly sure what it meant—quickly and uncontroversially became a normal feature of political life.

Mainstream Islamism was more than just an ideology or a set of ideas; it was a philosophy of social and political change, based around the notion of *islah*, or reform. It began with reforming the individual. The reformed Muslim man would raise a good Muslim family. Good Muslim families would give rise to more virtuous communities, which would then give rise to more virtuous government, and so on. The individual, being and embodying the first step of reform, would seem to be important. Yet such an ambitious, if unhurried, program of reform required a strong organizational vision and that, in turn, required hierarchy and deference to leadership. It's this latter part that has become such a point of contention for youth activists in the post-Arab Spring environment.

In the tense days and weeks after the July 2013 coup, the Brotherhood senior leadership, approached the coup as a political event requiring political solutions. This isn't surprising: The traditional leadership of the Brotherhood learned to lead during a period of circumspect electoral participation from the 1980s through 2011. In contrast, a new generation of activists cut their teeth organizing demonstrations. For many, their formative political education was in the streets of Tahrir Square rather than in the halls of parliament or professional syndicates.

After first, second, and third-tier Brotherhood leaders were arrested or forced into hiding or exile, younger members were asked to take on greater responsibility, organizing local activities—including secret meetings of Brotherhood *usras* (families)—and leading protests. On the tactical level, this led to considerable improvisation, in contrast to the traditional top-down action that had defined the movement for decades. The confidence of these new leaders—who, by virtue of their age, hadn't been steeped in the organizational hierarchy for long—grew considerably. They felt less need to defer to a leadership-in-exile based in Doha or Istanbul when they were the ones carrying the burden inside of Egypt.

Even in less crisis-ridden contexts, such as Morocco, similar trends among Islamist groups are noticeable. Avi Spiegel notes in his excellent study of the country's two main Islamist organizations that "contrary to public perception, young Islamists in this competitive milieu increasingly attract one another not by selling organizational rigidity—firm lines of hierarchy and control—but rather by promising and preaching personal choice, autonomy and freedom, by offering the ability to carve out what young people want: their own individual identities."[10]

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10. Avi Spiegel, *Young Islam: The New Politics of Religion in Morocco and the Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 8.

This might all sound positive—youth empowered to forge their own identities and modes of social and political action. But, from a U.S. national security perspective (where the priority is "stability"), many of the Brotherhood youth who would have once been considered "reformists"—with their greater inclination toward pluralism and cross-ideological cooperation—were now the ones adopting a more distinctly confrontational and "revolutionary" discourse. This was one of the new divisions—reform versus revolution—even if, in practice, most Brotherhood members found themselves somewhere in between. Debates about who was (relatively) more progressive on divisive social issues, such as the role of sharia or women's rights, had now taken a back seat to questions over the means and nature of political change and whether change was even possible within the confines of the existing Egyptian state.

Although the fault lines became unmistakable after the Egyptian coup, it was already in evidence during Mohammed Morsi's short tenure in government. The Brotherhood proved inept at governing Egypt's divided society—one that they themselves had helped to polarize—either inclusively or effectively. But while the group's critics generally viewed the Morsi government as too aggressive and radical (hence the charges of "Brotherhood-ization"), younger Brotherhood members were more likely to see Morsi as overly cautious in exercising his presidential prerogatives and ultimately too accommodating of state institutions.[11]

Newly ensconced in the presidential palace, Morsi—described by those close to him as doing things "by the book"—insisted on slowly shifting the cumbersome state bureaucracy from within.[12] Even Morsi's more aggressive moves—such as forcing the retirement of military chiefs Hussein Tantawi and Sami Anan after 16 soldiers were killed in an August 5 attack in the Sinai—showed a measure of restraint.

Morsi was at the peak of his (short-lived) popularity, yet instead of implementing more sweeping reforms within the military, he held back and contented himself with promoting a younger generation of leaders in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), including General Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi, the head of military intelligence. Being the gradualists that they were, Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders remained careful and cautious. As a preaching or *da'wa*-oriented movement, they believed that regime elites, particularly those like Sissi who were already devout, would naturally gravitate toward the Brotherhood over time, once they witnessed the moral character of Brotherhood members with their own eyes.

The strategy didn't work, and perhaps any strategy based on the slow, prodding gradualism of the past couldn't succeed in an age of "revolution." At the same time, the gradualism that was at the very core of the Brotherhood's politics helped keep, at least up to a point, the revolutionary zeal of youth members in check. As one mid-level Brotherhood official admitted during our discussions: "Even though I opposed the peaceful policies which the senior leadership adopted in many instances…without these peaceful policies, they would not have been able to control the youth."

To the very last moment, senior Brotherhood leaders—as well as Morsi—insisted that Sissi would not turn against them.[13] Meanwhile, days before the Rabaa massacre of August 14, 2013, Brotherhood General Guide Mohamed Badie addressed throngs of Morsi supporters affirming "Our revolution is peaceful, and will remain peaceful…our peacefulness is stronger than their bullets."[14]

The Brotherhood's lack of preparedness for the challenges of governing—including its inability to counter or preempt the military's moves against it—provoked doubts within the membership, particularly

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11. See Shadi Hamid, "Morsy and the Muslims: Is Egypt's government getting more Islamist?" *Foreign Policy*, May 8, 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/08/morsy-and-the-muslims/.
12. Senior advisor to President Morsi, interviewed by Shadi Hamid, Cairo, Egypt, April 8, 2013.
13. Morsi government officials and Muslim Brotherhood members, interviewed by Shadi Hamid, Cairo, Egypt, July 2013.
14. Mohamad Elmasry, "Egypt's eliminationism policy redux," *Al Jazeera*, May 1, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/05/egypt-eliminationism-policy-redu-20145151839944753.html.

among youth activists, about the leadership's ability to steer the organization in the post-coup era. After the Rabaa massacre, it was only natural to ask "why." For the faithful, believing that God created man and simply left him to his own devices—even if that led to terrible evil—wasn't really an option. There had to be some meaning to all of it. This is the problem of theodicy, which involves answering, or at least trying to answer the question of why God allows evil in the world. Was the massacre punishment for having strayed from God's preferred path?[15]

The generational tension, theological self-doubt, and exogenous political shocks has led some in Egypt's Brotherhood and Brotherhood-inspired movements more generally to ask whether Islamist movements have gone off track. One Tunisian Ennahda member, in response to being asked whether Islamists may have "over-invested on the political side" given that "[Brotherhood founder] Hassan al-Banna's vision was much more comprehensive than politics," agreed, saying that the "evolution" of state and society "raises the question of our form." But that, as we will try to outline in the coming pages, doesn't make answering the question any easier. (Interestingly, Ennahda, which until May 2016 was a party-movement in one, announced that it would become "just" a political party).

A changing regional environment is another factor to take into account. Just as Islamist organizations were being pushed back, an anti-Brotherhood bloc of Gulf countries worked to strengthen the Sissi regime's grip with billions of dollars of economic support.[16] Saudi Arabia, which has long hoped to stem Brotherhood power in Egypt and elsewhere,[17] formally designated the Brotherhood a terrorist group in March 2014,[18] and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) followed suit in November 2014.[19] The Jordanian monarchy has also seized the current moment to sow division within its own Islamist opposition. There, the state detained senior Brotherhood figure Zaki Bani Irsheid on charges of "damaging relations with a foreign country," after Irsheid criticized the UAE on his Facebook page for designating the Brotherhood a terrorist organization.[20] This follows long-brewing divisions within the Jordanian Brotherhood, which surfaced in 2012 with the so-called Zamzam Initiative. The initiative, started by Brotherhood members, ran on a platform of constitutional reform and "renewing Islamist rhetoric as is compatible with being a broad civilizational framework for the *ummah* in all its components."[21] In March 2015, fugures associated with Zamzam along with other dissenters were expelled by the main Muslim Brotherhood's Shura Council after they applied for a license to be the recognized branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan.[22] Weeks later, the Jordanian government, under pressure from its Gulf allies and hoping for a more pliant Islamist opposition, officially recognized the breakaway movement over the "original" and larger Brotherhood.[23] In April 2016, the government shut down the Brotherhood's headquarters in Amman.[24]

15. Muslim Brotherhood member, interviewed by Shadi Hamid, London, England, February 3, 2015.
16. "Gulf support for Al-Sisi's Egypt said to be equivalent of the Marshall Plan," *Middle East Monitor*, April 12, 2014, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140412-gulf-support-for-al-sisi-s-egypt-said-to-be-equivalent-of-the-marshall-plan/.
17. For more on Saudi Arabia's history with the Muslim Brotherhood, see Stephane Lacroix, "Saudi Arabia's Muslim Brotherhood predicament," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/20/saudi-arabias-muslim-brotherhood-predicament/.
18. "Saudi Arabia designates Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist group," *The National*, March 7, 2014, http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-designates-muslim-brotherhood-as-terrorist-group.
19. Adam Taylor, "Why the U.A.E. is calling 2 American groups terrorists," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/11/17/why-the-u-a-e-is-calling-2-american-groups-terrorists/.
20. "Jordan jails Muslim Brotherhood leader for UAE criticism," *BBC*, Fenruary 15, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31479650.
21. Tareq Al-Naimat, "Zamzam and the Jordanian Brotherhood," *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 4, 2014, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/02/04/zamzam-and-jordanian-brotherhood/h03b.
22. Osama Al Sharif, "Unprecedented rift splits Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood," *Al Monitor*, March 2, 2015, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/jordan-muslim-brotherhood-revoke-membership-crisis.html.
23. Taylor Luck, "Opportunistic move against Muslim Brotherhood exposes Jordan to risks," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 19, 2015, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2015/0319/Opportunistic-move-against-Muslim-Brotherhood-exposes-Jordan-to-risks.
24. Taylor Luck, "Muslim Brotherhood is all but snuffed out. Can it reinvent itself?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 22, 2016, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2016/0622/Muslim-Brotherhood-is-all-but-snuffed-out.-Can-it-reinvent-itself.

Dancing around and with the State: Between *haraka* and *hukuma*

In Tunisia, Ennahda's brief stint in power from December 2011 through the end of 2013, as part of a coalition with two secular parties, was a difficult and taxing experience. Throughout much of the 1990s and 2000s, Ennahda had effectively ceased to exist after Tunisian strongman Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali systematically dismantled the organization. Ennahda leaders found themselves in prison or in exile, scattered mostly in England, France, and Italy.

When Ben Ali fell in the first stirrings of the Arab Spring, Ennahda experienced a dizzying rise to power, claiming victory—and the Prime Ministership—in the country's first ever democratic elections. Looking back, they could claim some success. They had shown that power sharing between Islamists and secularists was possible, something that couldn't be said for most of its neighbors. Perhaps most important, a relatively liberal constitution was passed with broad consensus in early 2014.

Yet Tunisia's democratic transition could have easily fallen apart, and in the spring of 2013, it almost did. After the assassinations of two prominent leftists, polarization reached unprecedented levels. Much of the secular opposition called for dissolving either the democratically elected parliament or the democratically elected government, or both. The echoes of Egypt were hard to miss. Tunisia's own "Tamarrod" (Rebellion) modeled itself after Egypt's Tamarrod movement, which was instrumental in toppling

Morsi. The Salvation Front, drawing inspiration from Egypt's National Salvation Front, announced a campaign to sack local and national officials appointed by Ennahda.

With the transitional process at a standstill, Ennahda, to its credit, voluntarily stepped down from power after protracted negotiations. When one of the authors of this report spoke to Ennahda co-founder and leader Rached Ghannouchi in early 2015, well after the memory of Egypt had faded, the coup still loomed large in his recounting of events. As a result of events in Egypt, Ghannouchi said, "The opposition raised its ambitions and the ceiling of its demands to bring down the system with the power of the street…they even called their groups the same names as Egypt!"[25]

With the region seemingly in collapse all around it, Ennahda continued to move cautiously, declining to field a presidential candidate in the 2014 elections.[26] It has also cooperated with secular elites, gone out of its way to appeal to Western policymakers, and tempered its Islamic rhetoric to stay in the political game—a delicate balancing act that has angered some of the group's more conservative rank-and-file.[27] Some Islamists have accused Ennahda of losing its Islamism, a charge that will likely only intensify in light of Ennahda's May 2016 rebranding as a "Muslim Democratic" rather than Islamist party. (Ghannouchi himself made particularly strong statements, saying that "there is no justification for political Islam in Tunisia" given that

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25. Rached Ghannouchi, interviewed by Shadi Hamid, Tunis, Tunisia, February 13, 2015.
26. Nouri Verghese, "Why is Ennahda not fielding a presidential candidate in Tunisia?" *Middle East Eye*, October 24, 2014, http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/why-ennahda-not-fielding-presidential-candidate-tunisia-1768171354.
27. Shadi Hamid, "Tunisia field report: The Islamist balancing act," *Markaz*, The Brookings Institution, February 12, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/02/12-tunisia-islamists-ennahda-hamid.

political Islam as a term came about in response to "dictatorship" and "secular extremism," and that such conditions no longer hold in Tunisia in light of its successful democratic transition. The move also came as a response to the rise of ISIS and al-Qaida, which had, according to Ghannouchi, irrevocably "disfigured" the concept of political Islam).[28]

Responding to the criticism that the party has been too willing to compromise its identity, one Ennahda parliamentarian pushed back during our discussions, saying that "differences of experience create a totally different understanding of the state. We should not expect a political party to have the same discourse as the 1980s after being for three years in a coalition with secular parties." But just as Islamists in Tunisia moved toward the center (or at least where they thought the center was), secularists were *de-emphasizing* their secularism. As noted by Elizabeth Young, the 2014 Tunisian elections "were notable for the degree to which there was a *convergence* of discourse on religion and politics with the Islamist Ennahda de-emphasizing its religious character and the 'secular' Nidaa Tounes making a concerted effort to highlight its religious credentials during the electoral campaigns."[29] Such convergence may go a long ways towards creating an acceptable "consensus" discourse on religion and secularism employable by a larger cross-section of the political spectrum.

When Ennahda was defeated in the 2014 elections by Nidaa Tounes, it accepted a lone cabinet post (as well as three junior posts) in the government. Although rank-and-file activists were initially frustrated the party did not refuse to join altogether, the Ennahda leadership argued that something, in the end, was gained. The cabinet position was merely symbolic, but that was precisely the point: Any marginalization of Islamists would prove much more difficult with Ennahda inside rather than out. This cautious, defensive posture, though, was far from the call-to-arms that many in the movement's grassroots might hope for. Despite the discontent, Ennahda's leaders believe—almost as a matter of faith—that this is the path they must follow. The prominent Ennahda figure Said Ferjani emphasized that "this is a transition"—one that might last 15 to 20 years—and it is thus necessary to judge Ennahda's behavior with that in mind.[30] This, as Ferjani saw it, was an exceptional period and the goal was to solidify the transition, entrench consensual democratic norms, and guarantee basic freedoms, even if it meant undermining party unity or disappointing an increasingly impatient base.

A similar story of caution has played out in Kuwait. There, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) has pursued an approach of compromise with Kuwait's diverse opposition (including Salafis), gradualist commitment to reform, and non-confrontation with the regime. The ICM's accommodationist approach has been attributed to a desire to safeguard the country's stability in a turbulent region, a desire which has been heightened in the wake of the Arab Spring.[31] In 2015, former ICM MP Mubarak al-Duwailah posted a statement on the ICM website calling for political powers to "understand the sensitivity of the current stage" and overcome "traditional differences."[32] Perhaps for similar reasons, the bloc has also moderated

28. Frédéric Bobin, "Rached Ghannouchi : «Il n'y a plus de justification à l'islam politique en Tunisie»", *Le Monde*, May 19, 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2016/05/19/rached-ghannouchi-il-n-y-a-plus-de-justification-a-l-islam-politique-en-tunisie_4921904_3210.html#XyClwWhkxPlswsRk.99. For a preview of this move towards "Muslim democracy" and the intellectual pedigree which Ennahda lays claim to, see Sayida Ounissi, "Ennahda from within: Islamists or 'Muslim Democrats'?" in *Rethinking Political Islam*, The Brookings Institution, March 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2016/03/ennahda-islamists-muslim-democrats-ounissi.

29. Elizabeth Young, "Islam and Islamists in the 2014 Elections," Project on Middle East Political Science, March 12, 2015, http://pomeps.org/2015/03/12/islam-and-islamists-in-the-2014-tunisian-elections/.

30. Said Ferjani, interview with Shadi Hamid, Tunis, Tunisia, February 7, 2015.

31. Courtney Freer, "The rise of pragmatic Islamism in Kuwait's post-Arab Spring opposition movement," in *Rethinking Political Islam*, The Brookings Institution, August 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/08/~/media/507B34D14D53410A9BB71A97D433D940.ashx.

32. Al-Duwaila: "'Ala al-quwwa al-siyasiyya an tafham anna hassasiyyat al-marhala tatatallabu al-ta'ali 'an al-khilafaat al-taqlidi-yya," Islamic Constitutional Movement, January 11, 2015, http://www.icmkw.org/site/pages/topics/alduilx_-yl649-alqu649-alsiasi629-623n-tfx_m-623n-xhsasi629-almrxhl629-ttt_lb-altyali-yn-alxlafat-altqlidi629.php?p=60#.VTOHgxfndKo.

its calls for Islamizing reforms: for instance, in 2014, it throttled back on its insistence to deem sharia the sole source of law in the Kuwaiti constitution.[33]

While the ICM has avoided the unfortunate fate of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, it has not escaped region-wide anti-Islamist blowback after the Egyptian coup. The Islamist and opposition dominated parliament was dissolved twice in 2013. In 2014, Kuwaiti newspaper columns and television programs raised suspicions over the ICM's activities following the wave of anti-Brotherhood sentiment sweeping Gulf capitals.[34] A lawsuit to ban al-Islah (the ICM's antecedent movement)[35] and rumors that the government wishes to "purify" the state from the Brotherhood[36] reflect the narrowing post-coup political space in the Gulf.

Whether in Tunisia, Kuwait, or in Morocco, mainstream Islamist movements have been careful to avoid provoking the wrath of ruling elites, and in so doing, find themselves *also* trying not to alienate their conservative base.

Traditionally, one of the first sites where emotive forces—those of anger, frustration, and a desire for a more unapologetic assertiveness—find expression has been the *haraka*, the broad-based social movement, rather than the *hizb*, or party. Most Brotherhood-inspired movements basically have some combination of haraka and hizb (even if the division of labor isn't always explicit). Islamists are Islamists because religious commitment factors prominently in their individual and collective decision-making. In the wake of the "end of politics" heralded by the Egyptian coup and the subsequent crackdown on and decidedly cautious posturing by many Broth-

erhood affiliates, the haraka has attracted renewed attention by both Islamist movements and those who research them as a locus for rawer, religiously-inspired feeling. A related question is whether the haraka should be separated more completely from the hizb to allow the hizb to focus on the messy give-and-take of everyday politics, where the haraka steps back and serves as the more unsullied conscience of a big-tent Islamic revival.

Spirituality, religious community, and the expression of moral and metaphysical principles can be seen as "goods" demanded by society. This is especially the case in conservative societies such as those in the Middle East. These religious goods are demanded, but a problem arises when the state attempts to provide or manage the production of these goods—and taints them in the process. In nearly every Arab country, whether secular, "Islamic," or somewhere in between, the religious establishment has basically acted as an instrument of the state. This is particularly dangerous when state-appointed clerics are called upon to justify acts of mass killing of political opponents, as they did with the Rabaa massacre in Egypt.[37]

In relatively more tolerant and pluralistic—but still autocratic—environments, the question of how to relate to the state and the state's appropriation of religion is a challenging one. Islamists who choose to engage with established political institutions in semi-authoritarian contexts face accusations of regime subservience. Morocco's Justice and Development Party (PJD), which already suffers from a legitimacy problem among some more conservative and oppositional Islamists, has been criticized as being basically a subsidiary of the monarchy. The monarchy allows the PJD's existence—and even some measure

33. "Kuwait's Opposition: A reawakening," *The Economist*, April 17, 2014, http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2014/04/kuwaits-opposition.
34. Elizabeth Dickinson, "Saudi action puts Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait on the spot," *Al Monitor*, March 10, 2014, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/muslim-brotherhood-kuwait-saudi-terror.html.
35. "Kuwait to ban Muslim Brotherhood," *Middle East Monitor*, March 16, 2014, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140412-kuwait-to-ban-muslim-brotherhood/.
36. "Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon fi al-Kuwayt…Rihla al-tafahum wa al-sadaam ma' al-sulta" Bawwabat al-Harakat al-Islamiyya, November 15, 2014, http://www.islamist-movements.com/2800.
37. Shadi Hamid, "Rethinking the U.S.-Egypt relationship: How repression is undermining Egyptian stability and what the United States can do," The Brookings Institution, November 3, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2015/11/03-us-egypt-relationship-hamid.

of power—in return for the PJD's deference to the monarchy's still dominant position in Moroccan politics, particularly when it comes to the religious legitimacy of the king. The king's status is enshrined in the constitution as *amir al-muʾmineen*, or the commander of the faithful, a title with a long pedigree in Islamic history and tradition.

Formed in 1997, the PJD is the leading party, Islamist or otherwise, in Morocco.[38] Claiming either to draw inspiration from the Turkish AKP or to have inspired the AKP itself,[39] the PJD has pursued a model of cooperation with the regime. Some scholars have described the relationship as one of "anticipatory obedience."[40] To avoid any perceptions of challenging the monarchy's religious legitimacy, the PJD, like Ennahda, has adopted political platforms with a strong technocratic bent, focusing on issues such as corruption, poverty, and unemployment. In the 2011 elections, the party's campaign materials deemphasized its Islamic frame of reference.[41] After winning a plurality of 27 percent of parliamentary seats, a coalition government headed by PJD General Secretary Abdelilah Benkirane was formed in 2012 with the monarchy's behind-the-scenes input and imprimatur.[42] But after the Egyptian coup the following year, PJD was reminded of the fragile nature of Islamist participation. King Hassan was quick to publicly show his support for Egypt's interim president Adly Mansour. Meanwhile PJD's secular coalition partner, the pro-palace Istiqlal Party, withdrew from the PJD-led coalition and called for Benkirane's resignation.[43]

The rhetoric of PJD leaders emphasizes the party's embrace of the monarchy, not just as a political institution, but as one with inherent religious claims. Benkirane, sometimes described as a "monarchist," has repeatedly emphasized his strong relationship with the king, even going so far as to say he would be "ready" to rethink his own religious opinions should they contrast with those of the king.[44]

While the PJD needs to nurture its relationship with a powerful monarchy, it must, at the same time, compete with others on its right-flank for the support of the Islamist faithful. Chief among them is Al Adl Wal Ihsan (Justice and Spirituality), a social movement that boycotts electoral participation and doesn't recognize the king's religious legitimacy.[45] Although the PJD leads the current government, its activities are constrained by Morocco's tiered political system that grants veto powers to the king and his "shadow government" of royal court advisors.[46] Yet PJD's accommodationist posture towards the state has ensured its survival in a system that continues to impose clear limits on dissent. This, however, raises the question of whether survival is enough, and for how long? Can Islamist parties, once integrated into the state's governing structure (as in Tunisia and Morocco) still credibly provide religious "goods" to their constituencies without betraying the religious ideals of the harakas from which they emerged?

38. Abdeslam Maghraoui, "Morocco: The King's Islamists," in *The Islamists are Coming*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/islamists/morocco-the-king%E2%80%99s-islamists.

39. Betty Chemier and Eduardo Zachary Albrecht, "The PJD in Morocco: Strengths and Weaknesses," *Fair Observer*, September 5th, 2014, http://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/the-pjd-in-morocco-strengths-and-weaknesses-57321/.

40. Holger Albrecht and Eva Wegner, "Autocrats and Islamists: Contenders and Containment in Egypt and Morocco," *Journal of North African Studies* 11 (June 2006), 132–133.

41. Avi Spiegel, "Succeeding by surviving: Examining the durability of political Islam in Morocco," in *Rethinking Political Islam*, The Brookings Institution, August 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/08/~/media/A02C6E64675D44E-3BAF9BA97E3D19DF7.ashx.

42. Maghraoui.

43. Mohammed Masbah, "What Will Egypt Mean for Morocco," *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 28, 2013, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=52780.

44. "Despite Ups and Downs, I have a Good Relationship with the King: Benikrane," *Morocco World News*, March 20, 2015, http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2015/03/154463/despite-ups-and-downs-i-have-a-good-relationship-with-the-king-benkirane/.

45. Nathan Brown and Amr Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), 85.

46. Samia Errazzouki, "From Opposition to Puppet: Morocco's Party of Justice and Development," *Jadaliyya*, November 24, 2012, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8590/from-opposition-to-puppet_morocco%E2%80%99s-party-of-justi.

ISIS and Islamists

What is clear is that younger generations of Islamists, particularly in countries experiencing civil conflict, are questioning the wisdom of continuously playing defense. Their disgruntlement has led to a willingness to consider alternative routes to power projection and "purity," the most extreme version of which has been the Islamic State (ISIS), which includes the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood in its category of unbelievers. Of course, few Brotherhood-style Islamists welcome the emergence of ISIS as an organization, but how they deal with the consequences of its arrival on the scene provides analysts with an opportunity to glean further insights. It's more complicated than it might seem, and this is precisely why ISIS should not be solely viewed as a security or territorial threat, but also as an ideological one, challenging the very premises of mainstream Islamists and their traditional methods of political change.

In our discussions in Doha, one Brotherhood activist, now in exile, frankly shared his own thought process in the heat of the moment as the mass killings of 2013 unfolded:

> ISIS is spreading because they represent a model of power. At Rabaa when we see people are being killed by airplanes or tanks [or] we see officer[s] shooting people…At that moment if I had a weapon I would have done like ISIS,

even though I am peaceful [and] not violent in general. It is a natural response. ISIS is a natural response to repression.

We were struck his willingness to share this, so we pushed him to elaborate. One of us asked him, "So, you felt that feeling for a moment, but, still, you were able to pull back. What makes you different that you were able to pull back?"

He told us that he thought "about the bigger picture…[The Brotherhood notion of non-violence] made a big difference on a subconscious level. Always, nonviolence was in the back of my mind." Ultimately, he, like all Brotherhood members, was a product of the organization—its tiered membership, its educational curriculum, and its religious teachings—and this imposed constraints on how far he was willing and able to go when it came to questions of violence.[47] (Official Brotherhood English-language statements on ISIS seem muddled, at times flirting with the idea that ISIS could be a conspiracy,[48] or others that strongly condemn the organization's actions and methods).[49]

Overall, the Egyptian Brotherhood's rhetoric about nonviolence against fellow Muslims—which might be described more accurately as an "ethos"—clearly has had a tempering effect, making it much more difficult for members to embrace the use of ISIS-

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47. As the Brotherhood's founder Hassan al-Banna once warned: "If anyone of you wishes to pick a fruit before it is ripe and to pick a flower before it blossoms, I shall never agree with them."
48. "Egypt Muslim Brotherhood: War on Terror Truth and Myth," *Ikhwanweb*, September 21, 2014, http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31816&ref=search.php.
49. "Syria Muslim Brotherhood Leader: We Disagree with ISIS in Principle, Approach," *Ikhwanweb*, September 4, 2014, http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=31783.

style violence and terrorism. Even when certain kinds of "retaliatory" or "defensive" violence—including the targeting of security personnel and burning of police cars—have been accepted by some Brotherhood members as Islamically-justified or legitimate in theory, this has not necessarily meant that those doing the theorizing were actually able or willing to translate their new beliefs into action. Otherwise Egypt, by now, would have seen considerably more violence. This is not just evident in Egypt, but also in contexts of outright civil war, such as Syria, Yemen, and Libya, where the Brotherhood, even when it tries, is simply not "good" at violence. This has never been the movement's comparative advantage, and the use of violence rests uneasily with an organizational ethos steeped in gradualism and playing the long game. (The one notable exception to this is Hamas, effectively the Palestinian Brotherhood, which has established itself as the primary, and most effective, armed force in the Palestinian territories). As Raphaël Lefèvre argues, debates over the use of violence in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood have been contentious.[50] The experiment of funding and supporting allied militias in Syria—"The Shields"—was quick to fail, demonstrating the difficulty the Brotherhood has in shifting from its traditional strengths to something it doesn't do particularly well.

If slow, plodding gradualism, nonviolence, and stoicism in the face of persecution are part of the Brotherhood "ethos," it raises the question of how such an ethos becomes undone or overridden in the case of individual members. One consideration is how long an individual has been in the Brotherhood. We would hypothesize that the less time recent recruits have spent inculcated in an organization's ethos, the more likely they are to consider options that run counter to the core tenets of the organization, which is one reason why younger Brotherhood members have shown more openness to violent responses to regime repression.

Other considerations may include the duration of civil conflict and, relatedly, how long basic organizational structures cease to operate in parts of the country, due to the ongoing conflict. For instance, the idea of violence may seem satisfying in the short-term but is neither practical nor sustainable in the long-term. Nevertheless, as the memory of Brotherhood teachings recede (in the absence of organizational presence or hierarchy) and as patience wears thin, it may become more difficult for individuals to keep long time horizons at the forefront of their calculations.

While Islamist participants opposed and expressed disgust toward ISIS and its takfirist ideology, some, particularly in our 2015 discussions, were intrigued by and even sympathetic to its goal of erasing the borders separating Arab countries. One Egyptian Brotherhood member remarked that "many Arab youth, even those who were not Islamist in the first place, did not mind the disappearance of borders that would divide countries." One participant mentioned how a Saudi friend freely admitted, "I love what ISIS is doing in Iraq, we hate what they are doing in Syria. They are fighting Safavids [Shiites] in Iraq, but causing *fitna* (civil disturbance) in Syria."

In some respects, these are not particularly novel revelations. There is widespread sentiment—and not just among Islamists—that the borders in place in today's Middle East are unnatural products of colonialism, and that Sunnis must be ever assertive in the face of an expansionist Shiite "crescent." As one Jordanian Brotherhood member reminded us

> Hassan al-Banna launched the Muslim Brotherhood after the fall of the caliphate. He thought this would be a good alternative to the caliphate in this transition…Does this mean that Islamist movements accepted or had to accept these borders? We do not accept these borders, but we will work within them.

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50. Raphaël Lefèvre, "Islamism within a civil war: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's struggle for survival" in *Rethinking Political Islam*, The Brookings Institution, August 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/08/~/media/633D7B75C AFC462BB16A31058C428346.ashx.

No less than the former prime minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu, wrote as recently as 2013 that "the future cannot be built with recently created concepts of state that are based on nationalist ideologies wherein everyone accuses everyone else and that first appeared with the Sykes-Picot maps, then with colonial administration, and then on artificially drawn maps. We will shatter the state of mind that Sykes-Picot created for us."[51] As a former member of the Jordanian Brotherhood put it to us: "The Muslim Brotherhood knows what they don't want, but they don't know what they do want." This is one reason why Islamist movements, suffering in recent decades from a dearth of intellectuals, ideologues, and theorists, have struggled to see beyond the nation-state, even as they acknowledge that the state, in its current form, is far from ideal.

Another type of reaction to ISIS is more philosophical, having to do with what the state should represent, where its jurisdiction begins and ends, and what sort of voice Islam should have in the process of coming to a workable consensus over foundational questions of religion and state. It is perhaps here where the rise of ISIS—and the ideological, theological, and political challenge it represents to mainstream Islamists—offers a window into unresolved debates over the ordering of society. Even as mainstream Islamism made its peace with the state, a growing number of Islamists in the post-Arab Spring era have begun to challenge what they see as overly-accommodating and uncreative approaches to the state—a state, which they see as being overly centralized, and, in its very constitution, unable to tolerate dissent or alternative approaches to social organization. As one Jordanian Islamist put it to us:

> If we go back to the Ottoman [Empire] it was different; the state was different back then than it is now. The state interferes with everything. Back then we used to talk about the *ummah*.

This is a reference to the limited ability of the Ottoman state—and pre-modern states more generally—to exert direct sovereignty over all their territories from a far-flung capital. Given this reality, a natural system of suzerainty between the sultan in Istanbul and vassal administrators in the provinces emerged. From statements such as the one above, at least some young Islamists appear to have a kind of libertarian streak, and are highly suspicious of an overbearing state with the ability to "interfere with everything," especially religion. The historian Timothy Mitchell discusses this problem of the state in a series of essays on the roots of modern Egypt, noting that

> The idea of the nation required people not only to expand their sense of community in new ways, but in equally novel ways to constrict it. People's sense of religious community or tribal cognation, their networks of trade and migration, communities of learning and law, and patterns of imperial power and allegiance were in many places much more diverse than the narrow boundaries of modern nation-states.[52]

ISIS, of course, claims to have revived some of this lost, pre-modern community through its capture of territory and its application of Islamic law. Indeed, ISIS's "state" structures are fairly intricate and well-developed, undermining the claim that mainstream or centrist (*wasati*) Islamism is the only way to get practical results. ISIS has molded Islamic scripture to create an elaborate legal system through which it justifies its claims to territory and resources, economic activities, wartime policies, and the onerous obligations it places on its population.[53] It also has provided a modicum of law and order and guaranteed a set of (limited) legal "rights" for those

51. Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Büyük Restorasyon: Kadim'den Küreselleşmeye Yeni Siyaset Anlayışımız," Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 15, 2013, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-diyarbakir-dicle-universitesinde-verdi-gi-_buyuk-restorasyon_-kadim_den-kuresellesmeye-yeni.tr.mfa. As quoted in Michael Reynolds, "The Key to the Future Lies in the Past: The Worldview of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu," *Current Trends in Islamist Thought* 19 (September 2015), 5–62.

52. Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 179–180.

53. Mara Revkin, "Experts weigh in (part 5): How does ISIS approach Islamic scripture?" *Markaz*, The Brookings Institution, May 13, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/05/12-isis-approach-to-scripture-revkin.

living within its territory.[54] This state-ness, even if in the service of supposedly pre- or anti-modern objectives, and the group's desire to reshape, direct, and, most of all, dominate society suggests quite modern proclivities, where central authority and control take precedence over autonomous or self-regulating social institutions. It in no way sits comfortably with the vision for a self-limiting state over which many mainstream Islamists wax nostalgic.

In at least one crucial way, however, ISIS is very much at odds with modern norms—namely, in how it categorizes its population. As the anthropologist Saba Mahmood writes

> One of the fundamental features of the modern nation-state is that it requires the citizen to set aside his or her loyalty to other forms of belonging—whether that be religious, communal, ethnic, and so on—in favor of pledging his or her allegiance to the nation-state…this is the basic fundamental requirement on the basis of which civil and political equality can be extended. This promise to civil and political equality that the modern nation-state makes possible is itself predicated on the idea that the state will be indifferent to religious, ethnic, or racial belonging of the citizen. In other words, everyone will be equal in the eyes of the law, and will not be treated differently based on [the communal loyalties of individuals].[55]

ISIS does not refer to those living within its territory as "citizens" (*muwatinoon*), but rather as "sub-

jects" (*ra'aya*)—precisely the same term used by pre-modern empires such as the Ottomans or the Mamluks. Before it became associated with empire, the original meaning of *ra'aya* was that of flocks over which shepherds keep a watchful eye. This is telling, because as the word implies, ISIS treats its population based on how its constituent members have been categorized religiously. As Mara Revkin notes, ISIS conceives of its subjects not as individuals in a direct, vertical relationship with the state, but as members of different religious communities ("flocks"), which are then subject to different treatment.[56] Groups living within its territory can also be branded as threats to the flock to be fought against or even marked for extermination, such as in the case of genocidal acts against the Yazidis.[57]

Ovamir Anjum, a scholar of Islamic political theory, argues that it is more accurate to view the frame of reference for pre-modern Muslim religious thinking as concerned not with "politics," i.e. the livelihood of the metropolitan *polis*, but instead concerned with "ummatics," or the welfare of the *ummah*, which has physical as well as metaphysical dimensions.[58] Viewed through this lens, the appeal of ISIS's claim to be fighting on behalf of Muslims everywhere—rather than for the security of a single, territorially-defined homeland—becomes more obvious. (ISIS's transnational call for *hijra* to "*dar al-Islam*" has attracted more than 30,000 foreign fighters to date).[59]

This is not to suggest that certain strands of mainstream Islamism (or even Muslims more generally) share ISIS's imperial vision for how

54. For more on ISIS' legal system and its approach to governance, see Ibid; Andrew F. March and Mara Revkin, "Caliphate of Law: ISIS' Ground Rules," *Foreign Affairs*, April 15, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2015-04-15/caliphate-law; Mohammad Fadel, "Experts weigh in (part 4): How does ISIS approach Islamic scripture?"*Markaz*, The Brookings Institution, May 7, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/05/07-fadel-isis-approach-to-scripture.
55. Saba Mahmood, "Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report," *New Books in Islamic Studies*, Podcast audio, December 12, 2015, http://newbooksnetwork.com/saba-mahmood-religious-difference-in-a-secular-age-a-minority-report/.
56. Such as granting Jews and Christians *dhimmi* status. See Revkin, "Caliphate of Law: ISIS' Ground Rules."
57. Michelle Boorstein, "A desperate call for help for Iraq's Yazidis and other religious minorities," *The Washington Post*, August 15, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/a-desperate-call-for-help-for-iraqs-yazidis-and-other-religious-minorites/2016/03/21/8954c004-ef9a-11e5-a61f-e9c95c06edca_story.html.
58. Ovamir Anjum, *Politics, Law and Community in Islamic Thought: The Taymiyyan Moment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
59. Ashley Kirk, "Iraq and Syria: How many foreign fighters are fighting for Isil?" *The Telegraph*, March 24, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isil/.

society ought to be organized, but only to make the observation that there exists a thread of commonality insofar as some Muslims—and not just ISIS and its ilk—might prefer, in an ideal world, that Muslims be free to pledge their ultimate loyalty to the *ummah*, rather than to any one specific state. It is possible then for the overwhelming majority of Muslims to oppose ISIS, as available survey data makes clear, while at the same time acknowledging that ISIS draws on, and draws strength from, ideas that have broader resonance among Muslim-majority populations.

All of this raises the question: If a group were to exist holding the same objectives as ISIS (i.e. erasing borders, aggressively implementing sharia, creating a functioning state based not around citizenship but religious affiliation), but stripped of all the wanton brutality and terrorism that invites military intervention and makes ISIS's project untenable in the long-run, how would mainstream Islamists—as well as others—respond to it? Is violence and terror, then, what makes ISIS and other extremist groups "extreme" in the eyes of international observers or is it in fact something deeper, having more to do with an unabashedly pre-modern politico-religious vision?

A third way after ISIS and Sissi?

One question that came up repeatedly in our discussions was the extent to which mainstream Islamist groups in the Middle East and North Africa are wedded to electoral politics. When asked whether it might be better to de-emphasize or suspend electoral politics, most participants were either confused or disagreed quite strongly. If we abandon elections, they asked, how do we achieve our political goals? In Egypt, where the Brotherhood has been banned outright, some younger activists feel that little political change can come about so long as Sissi remains in power (which could be a long time). Politics, then, is essentially in a state of suspension.

It is understandable that younger Islamists would see elections as something more than a means of political change. It's a part of their identity. They came of age in a time when elections and democracy, as ideas, became uncontested. For a time, this reliance on elections and electoral mobilization seemed to work. In some countries, such as Turkey, they have worked quite well. As one young AKP member put it to us, "without elections we are nothing."

The degree to which Islamists in the Middle East equate "winning" with specifically electoral success is striking, particularly when compared to Islamists elsewhere. As one scholar of Islamist movements who participated in the discussions said: "The freest countries in the world have no Islamist parties participating in elections. Senegal and Mali are very pious places and Islamic move-ments are very active in politics, but not in terms of running in elections but as pressure groups that exert influence."

In Mali and Senegal, he explained, pressure groups work by "looking for policy changes, [organizing into] lobbying groups, doing United Way-type activities. There are examples where the system is open but Islamists are choosing a different path." Mamadou Diouf, a scholar of West African history, has written on "Senegalese exceptionalism," which lies in stark contrast to both the emergent egalitarianism of young Arab Islamists and the rigid hierarchical notions of their older leaders. There, an entirely different conception prevails, where "the Sufi orders' role of social moderator…[and] peace-makers in the public arena, is deemed necessary."[60] Claiming to transcend mundane political squabbles, one Senegalese Sufi sheikh terms their role as "firefighters of the political arena," maintaining peace by mediating between the imperatives of religion and the interests of the state.[61]

Another case highlighted by a scholar of Islamist movements in Southeast Asia is Indonesia, where "one reason why Muslim civil society was allowed to flourish [was that] the regime made it clear that as long as you do not threaten power, you will be allowed to flourish…[with] a diverse range of Islamic parties engaging." In both Senegal and Indonesia, a sort of *modus vivendi* was reached between those in charge of the levers of state power and those of an Islamic persuasion who make up a substantial por-

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60. Mamadou Diouf, *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 47.
61. Ibid.

tion of civil society. The basic bargain seemed to be: give Islamically-inspired groups free range of movement in local preaching and advocacy, and the state can rest assured that religion won't be a thorn in power's side—a sort of grand trust-building measure. Similarly, in Morocco, the PJD accepted the confines of a system in which the monarchy has veto power over all major decisions. In return, the PJD is allowed to legally exist, participate, and even enjoy a bit of power.[62]

It is interesting to think about how, over the long-term, this bargain might create a level of trust that can be capitalized upon to better negotiate the desires of Islamists and the prerogatives of the state. But as of yet, there aren't successful models of, say, a dominant monarchy, such as Morocco, transitioning into a constitutional monarchy. Or, as one of the participants in our discussions framed it, "just as the king gives, he can also take away."

Morocco is, in fact, another case of *winning without winning*, of being validated but also trapped by the state. Several participants asked a PJD parliamentarian who was present: yes, you've survived, you've persevered where so many of your counterparts have faced repression. But is survival enough? Is having some influence—but with clear limits—enough? And, if not, what's next? To answer that question requires not just a theory of change, but also a theory of the state.

The scholar of Islamic law Wael Hallaq writes that, for many Islamists (and Muslims more broadly), there is a "certain measure of dissonance between their moral and cultural aspirations, on the one hand, and the moral realities of a modern world, on the other—realities with which they must live but were not of their own making."[63] In an ideal world, this—whatever *this* is—isn't what they would have wanted, or perhaps even imagined. For these reasons among others, mainstream Islamists are, in a sense, stuck somewhere in between, contending with competing challenges: maintaining unity despite disagreement; the corrupting allure of power; the difficulty (or impossibility) of separating between the "religious" and the "political"; the imperatives of faith and the afterlife in tension with the "un-Islamic" compromises of normal politics. Younger generations of Islamists do not have the answers, but they are beginning to ask a set of challenging questions that they hadn't thought to ask before. This, too, is yet another legacy of the Arab Spring and its rapid demise.

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62. Shadi Hamid, "What does it mean for Islamists to 'win'?" *Markaz*, The Brookings Institution, January 14, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2016/01/14-islamists-win-hamid.

63. Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 3.

About the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World

The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World is a research initiative housed in the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The Project's mission is to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public on the changing dynamics in Muslim-majority countries and to advance relations between Americans and Muslim societies around the world.

To fulfill this mission, the Project sponsors a range of activities, research projects, and publications designed to educate, encourage frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships between the United States and Muslim communities all over the world. The broader goals of the Project include:

- Exploring the multi-faceted nature of the United States' relationship with Muslim-majority states, including issues related to mutual misperceptions;
- Analyzing the social, economic, and political dynamics underway in Muslim societies;
- Identifying areas for shared endeavors between the United States and Muslim communities around the world on issues of common concern.

To achieve these goals, the Project has several interlocking components:

- The U.S.-Islamic World Forum, which brings together leaders in politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from the United States and from Muslim societies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The Forum also serves as a focal point for the Project's ongoing research and initiatives, providing the foundation for a range of complementary activities designed to enhance dialogue and impact;
- An Analysis Paper Series that provides high-quality research and publications on key questions facing Muslim states and communities;
- Workshops, symposia, and public and private discussions with key stakeholders focused on critical issues affecting the relationship;
- Special initiatives in targeted areas of demand. In the past these have included Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, and Religion and Diplomacy.

The Project's Steering Committee consists of Martin Indyk, Executive Vice President; Bruce Jones, Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy Studies; Tamara Cofman Wittes, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Middle East Policy; William McCants, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow in the Center; Bruce Riedel, Senior Fellow in the Center; and Shibley Telhami, Nonresident Senior Fellow of the Project and Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland.

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- The Future of Counterterrorism
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