

The Constrained Institutionalization of Diverging Islamist Strategies: The Jihadis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Salafis between Two Aborted Egyptian Revolutions

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ABSTRACT

This research analyses the comparative institutionalization of the strategies of three major components of the Egyptian Islamist social movement family: the jihadis, the Muslim Brotherhood and the salafis. It uses historical institutionalism to amend rational choice paradigms and to investigate the constraints and opportunities posed by these actors' past trajectories on their subsequent strategic choices. This article argues that 1981 and 2011 were two critical junctures that have shaped these actors' ideational and organizational construction through path-dependent causal mechanisms regulating their mobilization and socialization processes. It contends that these mechanisms have shaped these groups' evolution and mediated the institutionalization of their strategies.

Introduction

The Arab uprisings have substantiated that most Islamist actors can endorse participatory democracy when authoritarian regimes liberalize the political process (al-Anani, 2012; Cesari, 2014; Drevon, 2015c; Torelli et al., 2012). The academic corpus on political participation nonetheless contends that the decision to join the political process is not simply a rational choice that eventually sustains these groups' domestication. The literature on Islamist participation instead argues that, although Islamist groups are responsive to political openings, they do not necessarily adapt their ideological world-views accordingly. The ongoing debate on the inclusion-moderation thesis, which posits that an actor's political participation can prompt ideological moderation, stresses that this is a partial and conditional process (Brown, 2012; Cesari, 2014; Clark, 2004; Hamid, 2014; Wickham, 2013). This corpus suggests that, regardless of Islamist groups' rationalities, strategic choices are not solely the outcome of external

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stimulus that would lead to the comprehensive renouncement of what had previously defined these groups.

Academic discussions of the inclusion-moderation thesis therefore underline the necessity to broaden its scope and investigate the institutionalization of Islamist groups' strategies more generally. The latter is defined as the development of shared norms and practices sustaining a group's long-term objectives. This article's analysis of the comparative institutionalization of Islamist strategies seeks to amend rational-choice paradigms and demonstrates that this process unfolds through complementary causal mechanisms restricting the range of available options overtime. Drawing on historical institutionalism, this research argues that these path-dependent mechanisms stem from the macro-level environment in which these groups are embedded. While these groups' evolution is not predetermined from the onset, these causal mechanisms trigger distinctive mobilization and socialization processes that delineate available opportunities and regulate the institutionalization of their strategies.

This article argues that the institutionalizations of the strategies of the jihadis, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the salafis were sequentially catalysed by two critical junctures situated in 1981 and 2011. It demonstrates that these two critical junctures, defined as substantial macro-level changes inducing new strategic decisions (Thelen, 1999), determined the trajectories these three actors followed afterwards. The localization of these junctures in 1981 and 2011 is justified because of their considerable impact on Egypt's political system (including constitutional and presidential transitions) and on these actors' interpretations of changing political opportunities. While the period stretching from 1981 to 2011 has witnessed other important political adjustments as well (including a relative closing of political opportunities in the 1990s and subsequent opening in the mid-2000s), the latter did not have the same significant ramifications. This article contends that the 1981 and 2011 critical junctures triggered specific mobilization and socialization processes that gradually entrenched these three actors' strategic choices and obstructed backtracking.

The assassination of President Sadat by *salafi* militants in 1981 imposed a clarification of the strategies the components of the Islamist social movement family (SMF) endorsed. Although the jihadis initially maintained their commitment to armed violence, strategic divergences over the nature of their respective endeavours (a popular revolution vs. a military coup) entailed distinctive mobilization and socialization patterns that subsequently regulated their reconsiderations of the rationale for violence. The MB's decision to pursue political reform and achieve organizational survival similarly informed the group's mobilization and socialization processes. They explain the development of valuable organizational resources and the expansion of a middle class constituency that could not easily be sacrificed when political opportunities shrank. Finally, the (non-*jihadi*) salafis' choice to focus on religious teaching and proselytizing and to distance themselves from the jihadis guided their informal modes of mobilization. These

mobilizing patterns subsequently limited their ability to establish strong organizational structures conducive to internal hierarchy and control. In combination with the absence of substantial political change before 2011, they account for the endurance of their strategic dissociation from politics before the uprising.

In 2011, the uprising (temporarily) shattered Egypt's authoritarian regime and generated unprecedented political opportunities. Egypt's new institutional configuration led to a broad legitimization of the political process and the rejection of violence by the components of the Islamist SMF, aside from the *salafi jihadi* trend, which maintained its opposition to party politics. Despite reaching a new consensus on political participation as a route towards political transition, pre-2011 developments critically affected the trajectories of the (ex)-jihadis, the MB and the salafis. Only the ex-jihadis of the Islamic Group (IG), who enjoyed the benefits of a cohesive organizational entity, managed to reach an internal consensus while internal JG divisions widened. The MB was plagued by decades-long construction as a hierarchical and survivalist movement, which hindered internal reforms, sparked internal splits, and informed its contested public political positions. Finally, the salafis built upon the Islamist momentum to gather an unprecedented share of the vote, but organizational weaknesses crippled them, as cohesive pre-2011 mobilizing structures were absent.

Institutionalizing Islamist Strategies

The academic consensus on Islamist groups' political participation states that joining the political process is a rational choice designed to assure organizational survival, even when elections are structurally unfair. Islamist actors use the political process to bolster their popular legitimacy, secure external allies, increase the cost of repression for their opponents, and protect their fundamental long-term objectives. This rationale is consistent in most movements affiliated to the MB in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen (Blaydes, 2010; Clark, 2004; Hamid, 2014; Schwedler, 2006; Wickham, 2004, 2013) and militant armed groups such as Hizbullah in Lebanon (Alagha, 2006) and Hamas in Palestine (Gunning, 2008).

This academic corpus is essential to rationalize Islamist groups' choices and invalidate essentially ideological considerations. The contextualization of political participation in specific circumstances confirms that these groups are rational actors faced with dilemmas comparable to non-Islamist movements. However, while this rational approach is generally endorsed in the study of the MB and armed militancy, overtly ideological lenses often persist in the study of *salafi* groups and movements. The reference to the prevailing political preference-based differentiation between three *salafi* tendencies (Wiktorowicz, 2006) frequently fails to contextualize these actors' political choices;¹ this reference tends to assume that political preferences are independent variables rather than contextualized choices.² For instance, presumed apolitical salafis would endorse prominent *salafi* scholar Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani's 'our politics

is to abandon politics', regardless of both al-Albani and these salafis' specific contexts. Non-contextualized considerations are therefore in a predicament to explain why previously apolitical salafis create political parties when external circumstances change, as in post-2011 Egypt. Islamist groups' political positions should rather be considered partially contingent on the structure of their domestic political systems, regardless of these groups' theoretical or theological positions on democracy.

Pragmatism and rational adjustment to changing circumstances do not suffice to comprehensively explain these groups' evolution, however. The academic literature suggests that political participation might unwittingly affect Islamist groups' behavioural and ideological evolution. The central contention of the inclusion-moderation thesis states that joining the political process can alter these groups' practices and ideological commitments through rewards and punishments, interaction with state institutions, and cooperation with external actors. A compelling theoretical framework accordingly posits that moderation occurs at the crossroad of changing political opportunity structures, cultural spheres and organizational dynamics (Schwedler, 2006). In the Egyptian MB, for example, new political opportunities to cooperate with non-Islamist actors cognitively affected the young generation that rose from the student movement of the 1970s (Brown, 2012; Wickham, 2013). These cognitive processes are arguably more durable when new political practices are internally legitimized (Schwedler, 2006), even though ideological change does not necessarily concern issues relevant to Islamic Law (Clark, 2004), minorities and religious norms (Cesari, 2014). Two recent challenges to the inclusion-moderation thesis nonetheless postulate that moderation occurred under repression rather than political inclusion (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013; Hamid, 2014), and that this concept is less relevant when conservative Islamist forces enter the fold (Schwedler, 2013).

This article investigates the institutionalization of Islamist groups' strategies beyond the inclusion-moderation thesis and rational choice models. This process is defined as the development of consensually shared norms and practices sustaining these groups' long-term objectives. While this research contends that Islamist groups are rational actors susceptible to changing external conditions, it maintains that rational choice paradigms do not suffice to investigate the development of their strategies overtime. These paradigms assume fixed political preferences and overlook these groups' organizational dynamics and learning processes. This article instead asserts that Islamist groups' political preferences change overtime through internal and external interactions, changing macro-level environments, and learning processes. This article additionally suggests that Islamist groups' are both influenced by a set of ideational commitments and norms and constrained by internal organizational dynamics.

This research adopts an actor-centred social movement approach drawing on historical institutionalism and path-dependency models. Historical institutionalism defines institutions 'as the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms

and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity' (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 938) and focuses on the study of 'contingency and unintended consequences of strategic action [with] a focus on the path dependency of institutional change' (Hay & Wincott, 1998: 952). This approach premises that contingent actions yield important ramifications that become impossible to reverse overtime, since the cost of exit or switching to another alternative is too high (Pierson, 2000). In the terminology of historical institutionalism, contingent actions create reproducible institutional patterns and chains characterized by deterministic properties and increasing returns (Mahoney, 2000, 2001). W. Brian Arthur (1994) and Paul Pierson (2000) argue that increasing returns include major set up or fixed costs inherent with early decisions, learning and coordination effects, and adaptive expectations. Historical institutionalism approaches accordingly posits, for instance, that the development of specific skills and norms (e.g. ideational or organizational) can preclude backtracking from a previous choice.

Historical institutionalism is opportune to revise rational choice paradigms, which centre on a set of fixed preferences to be maximized, and uncover the unintended consequences of specific actions (Hall & Taylor, 1996). Regarding Islamist political participation, this approach additionally challenges functionalist and intentionalist perspectives (Hall & Taylor, 1996: 952; Steinmo et al., 1992) and facilitates the study of additional factors such as collective group solidarity and loyalty, which are often critical to understand the perspective of group members.

Although historical institutionalism is designed to the study of state institutions, its analytical framework is relevant to social movement studies as well. Blee (2012) specifically argues that social movements' early days have a tremendous influence on the collective definition of what these movements can do and will consider doing in the future. Blee contends that early sequences of action shape the definition of the belonging to a social movement, the framing of its rationale, and internal relations to one another. As Gunning suggests in the study of Hamas, 'political entrepreneurs can re-interpret [their political theory or ideology] [...] but once formulated, it constrains what [they] can do with it' (Gunning, 2008: 56).

This article investigates Islamist groups' institutionalization at three disaggregated levels. It contends that these inter-related macro, meso and ideational levels enable and constrain the groups under consideration in specific manners. The macro-level refers to the political opportunity structures broadly defined by the social movement literature. An inclusive consensual definition describes them as the 'features of regimes and institutions that facilitate or inhibit a political actor's collective action and [...] changes in those features' (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009: 440). Regarding Islamist groups' political inclusion, Schwedler (2006) and Brown (2012) suggest that political opportunities vary substantially in semi-authoritarian regimes as a result of ongoing bargains between the authorities and

the opposition. More importantly, they argue that changing political opportunities inform Islamists groups' interpretations of available modes of mobilization and political participation. In this research, macro-level changes are triggered by critical junctures.

The second level, situated at the intermediate or meso-level, is group centred. Collective entities engaged in contentious politics are characterized by specific organizational dynamics regulating what can be possibly achieved. These groups develop explicit patterns of mobilization and socialization producing shared norms and values associated to their decision-making processes, collective group identities and ideational world-views. These norms mediate the ability of a group's leaders to interpret new political opportunities in a legitimate manner. In other words, although a group's leaders can change position through internal cognitive processes or external stimulus, organizational dynamics determine whether they can implement a new strategic direction while assuring organizational survival and preserving their members' loyalty. These norms are constructed organizationally and are therefore broader than the mere presence of a charismatic leadership usually considered in the literature.

The third analytical level is ideational. Most of the literature endorses a materialist standpoint, which assumes that ideational developments follow substantial material change (Brown, 2012; Hamid, 2014). This research conversely argues that, although social movement actors often use ideas instrumentally, they additionally constrain them. As Bellin (2008: 345–346) contends, religion and ideas can also be independent variables. In civil war studies, for example, Sanin & Wood (2014) argue that ideational commitments can preclude specific armed actions. Islamist groups therefore cannot be considered purely rational actors who merely adapt their ideational commitments to changing circumstances. Ideational and material developments have to be studied in parallel with individual and collective legitimization processes.

The Ramifications of Sadat's Assassination on the Strategies of the Jihadis, the MB and the Salafis

In October 1981, members of the IG (al-Jama'á al-Islamiyya, IG) and smaller jihadi cells assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. This operation was a hasty reaction to the arrest of more than a thousand political opponents a month earlier (Haykal, 1983). These groups' leaders argue that, although they planned to resort to armed violence to seize power in Egypt, they had not envisioned any action for the following three years.³ This unforeseen political assassination shaped the evolution of the Islamist SMF for the next three decades. This section explores the strategic choices its three main components endorsed as well as their institutionalization.

The main argument of this section is that the adoption of a specific strategy regulates a group's ideational and organizational construction overtime. The

decision to follow a certain route entails explicit mobilization and socialization processes that eventually limit the range of available opportunities and impede backtracking. By promoting modes of mobilization, recruitment patterns, and organizational norms conducive to a group's strategy, group leaders cannot easily rescind the latter. The increasing returns inherent with past developments (Pierson, 2000) are likely to preclude a strategic transformation, considering the costs. The rupture with a group's strategic direction can create internal dissent, erode the loyalty of its members, and eventually threaten organizational survival. These decisions are more susceptible to succeed when an external stimulus (such as the 2011 uprising) creates substantial incentives legitimizing or necessitating a turnover.

This section is concerned with the diversified responses of the Islamist SMF to the assassination of Sadat. SMF refers to a 'nationally based, historical configuration of movements that – though they have different specific goals, immediate fields of struggle, and strategic preferences – share a common worldview, have organizational overlaps, and occasionally ally for joint campaigns' (della Porta & Rucht, 1995: 233). The Islamist SMF was relatively homogeneous before 1981: the prevailing macro-level environment of the 1970s blurred internal differentiations. The growing importance of Islam was fuelled by the perceived failures of pan-Arabism and socialism. It was regionally promoted by the Gulf countries and facilitated at a national-level by Sadat's new presidency (Cook, 2011). This environment was a fertile ground for the growth of the Islamist SMF. This setting produced flourishing Islamist student movements (Al-Arian, 2014), a growing parallel Islamist sector (Wickham, 2002) and noticeable *salafi* ascendancy. The restoration of Islamic Law became an official endeavour of the Azhari clergy, parliamentary commissions, and broad sectors of civil society (Zeghal, 1996). Subsequent members of *jihadi* groups organized summer camps where they invited mainstream preachers, MB leaders and Azhari scholars.⁴ Many leaders of what later crystallized as *jama'at al-jihad* (the Jihad Group, aka Egyptian Islamic Jihad: JG thereafter), were trained in mainstream *salafi* institutions such as *ansar al-sunna*.⁵ Even though the components of the Islamist SMF already leant towards specific political approaches, internal boundaries were not well defined.

The assassination of Sadat was a critical juncture that re-defined Egypt's political system until the 2011 uprising. Contrary to shared expectations, the accession of Hosni Mubarak to the presidency did not bring about severe repression of Islamist groups and movements: Mubarak's regime followed a semi-authoritarian trajectory for the next three decades. New state policies paved the way for the organization of relatively competitive legislative elections (Blaydes, 2010), *laissez-faire vis-à-vis* the growth of the parallel Islamist sector (Wickham, 2002), and the informally sanctioned participation of the MB in various institutional bodies (including professional and student syndicates). This does not mean that state policies were unalterable since semi-authoritarian regimes are characterized by unstable political compromises (Brown, 2012). It does imply,

however, that the regime allowed some level of political opposition and participation. Even though MB members and leaders periodically suffered from state repression, the most severe policing of protest primarily affected the jihadis.⁶

The localization of the first critical juncture in 1981 is aligned with an important argument of the social movement literature suggesting that political opportunities are not solely material and objective, but also constructed by social movement actors (Goodwin & Jasper, 2004). Notwithstanding the institutional changes Mubarak's new presidency instituted, the assassination of Sadat crystallized Islamist actors' concerns stemming from their perceived association with proponents of violence and accentuated the necessary adoption of a different route. These concerns critically affected the Islamist SMF for the next three decades and were further reinforced during the wave of violence affecting Egypt in the-1990s and in the light of the international repercussions of 9/11.

The post-1981 political environment required the clarification of the positions of the Islamist SMF's internal components. Against the backdrop of the lessons gained from Sadat's assassination, this setting framed the long-term strategies of the jihadis, the MB and the salafis. The jihadis, represented by the IG and the emerging JG, acknowledged that their attempt to seize power was precipitated and that they needed, respectively, a stronger popular constituency and safe space outside Egypt. The MB was reinforced in its rejection of violence and in the conviction that the group had to engage politically and ensure organizational survival. Mainstream salafis decided to distance themselves from the proponents of violence and to focus on religious proselytizing and teaching. These decisions stemmed from the new political environment and these actors' understandings of the consequences of Sadat's assassination.

Strategic objectives informed the jihadis' evolution after 1981 and mediated their organizational dynamics. The IG's commitment to a popular revolution facilitated the reconstruction of the group's infrastructures through low-risk activism mobilization patterns. Non-violent mobilization⁷ helped to expand the IG's outreach and to socialize the new generation with the group's core literature edited in prison (Mubarak, 1995).⁸ It nurtured a culture of consensus and subordination to the leadership, which proved critical when the IG leadership subsequently renounced armed jihad. Conversely, the JG's commitment to a military coup and the absence of pre-1981 ties between its leaders exacerbated internal divisions. This setting precluded low-risk activism mobilization patterns in Egypt's relatively open environment. Group leaders could only recruit among acquaintances and friends.⁹ They consequently failed to establish a consensual hierarchy and stimulate the development of binding organizational norms.

Established ideational commitments and organizational dynamics constrained these groups' reconsideration of the benefits of violence overtime. The IG's strong organizational norms and collective group identity helped to preserve internal consensus and dialogue when group leaders realized that armed violence led to a deadlock. They facilitated internal discussions and eventually

paved the way to the 1997 cease-fire and the post-2001 theological renunciation of jihad in Muslim countries. The group's long-term commitment to an Islamic state and to the excommunication of unjust Muslim leaders not applying Islamic Law nonetheless hindered the legitimization of Mubarak's regime.¹⁰ In the JG, the absence of organizational norms prevented a consensual renunciation to the applicability of jihad (Drevon, 2015a). While many leaders and members similarly recognized the negative consequences of armed jihad in Muslim countries, only a few factions and individuals endorsed a document published by a former JG leader in 2007.

The strategy of the second main actor, the MB, combined political participation with organizational survival. This strategy, which built upon the group's endorsement of political reformism in the 1970s,¹¹ regulated the MB's mobilization and socialization processes. The choice to endorse political participation fostered the inclusion and internal promotion of student leaders from the 1970s, who subsequently filled in the MB's position in the parallel Islamic sector (especially the professional syndicates) (Wickham, 2013). This approach informed the group's reaching out to a middle class constituency (Clark, 2004; Masoud, 2014) and the reluctance to develop an explicit religious corpus, which might seem paradoxical for an Islamist group. The group has rather strived to gather traditionalists, Sufis, modernists and salafis (El Hedaybi, 2012) by committing to the *wasatiyya*¹² and referring to the ideational resources authored by mainstream religious scholars (Baker, 2009). Interviews with MB current and former members and recent academic studies (Kandil, 2014) substantiate that the religious creed was rarely ever part of the group's socialization process, in contrast with the entrenchment of strong organizational norms. The MB successfully produced a strong community where material benefits and ideational incentives align (Wickham, 2002) to survive repression and preclude dissent.¹³

The MB's commitment to political reform was a major investment that precluded any backtracking when the regime attempted to subjugate political opposition. Years of participation in Egypt's political process had equipped the group with extensive organizational resources that could not be easily sacrificed. The group had nurtured a generation of skilled cadres and mobilized a robust middle class constituency that could not simply accept renouncing the group's *raison d'être*. The MB had a vested interest in the pursuit of political reform, regardless of the costs. Shrinking political opportunities in the 1990s were therefore met with a growing sense of pragmatism and moderation tailored to gather internal and external allies and increase the cost of repression for the regime (Hamid, 2014). A disengagement and retreat to preaching would have compelled the MB to give up on past achievements. It was not a step that the group was willing to take.

Finally, non-*jihadi* salafis, which do not represent a cohesive group or movement contrary to the jihadis and the MB, chose another route after 1981. Considering the partially shared theological corpus with the jihadis, mainstream

salafis decided to eschew political activism and to focus on preaching and religious education in order to dissociate themselves from the jihadis.¹⁴ They developed formal and informal networks and institutions around sheikhs, mosques and neighbourhoods (Gauvain, 2010; Utvik, 2014). The most organized group emerged in Alexandria (Faid, 2014), around *al-da'wa al-salafiyya*, while lower level of institutionalization characterized Cairo-based salafis. Salafi networks and institutions were divided over Mubarak's legitimacy (Gauvain, 2010, 2011; Lacroix, 2012; Lacroix & Chalata, 2015), but even the preachers who excommunicated Mubarak's regime maintained the jihadis at arm's length. The absence of competitive political opportunities and the necessity to dissociate from the jihadis sustained the disengagement from the political activism of the 1970s, emphasizing instead religious purity, especially for the most organized *salafi* movement (Gauvain, 2012).¹⁵

The informal modes of mobilization of Egyptian salafism and the absence of structural political change before 2011 explain (non-*jihadi*) *salafi* strategic continuity until the uprising. Informal mobilization around preachers and mosques hindered the development of strong organizational norms and prevented the gathering of an easily mobilized constituency akin to the MB's. In addition, the absence of structural change meant that the salafis did not have any incentive to join the political process and re-articulated the opposition to party politics and democracy widely shared by their scholars and leaders. At the same time, salafism cannot simply be considered 'essentially' apolitical before 2011. Cairo-based salafis (the so-called *haraki* or activist salafis) were engaged in political activism and occasionally expressed antagonistic political positions vis-a-vis the regime. For its part, Alexandria's salafis' roots in student activism in the 1970s confirm that they were not necessarily inimical to politics per se.

An Unprecedented Upeaval: Strategic Reconsiderations after the 2011 Uprising

The second critical juncture in the construction of the Islamist SMF occurred in January 2011, when a popular uprising triggered a considerable opening of political opportunities (Gunning & Baron, 2013). This section investigates the responses of the jihadis, the MB, and the salafis in line with the path-dependent approach developed throughout this research. The following analysis contends that, although these actors broadly legitimized similar political strategies, their respective historical legacies mediated their strategic implementations differently. This analysis therefore substantiates the relevance of historical institutionalism in the analysis of the impact of a group's historical legacy on its subsequent trajectory.

The January 2011 uprising is a critical juncture that transformed the political opportunities available to the Islamist SMF. The Egyptian uprising precipitated the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak and paved the way to the

organization of free and fair presidential and legislative elections: the Islamist SMF temporarily secured an unprecedented opportunity to be associated to the governance of the country. Previously proscribed political parties with a religious frame of reference therefore proliferated over the following few months, including *al-wasat* (the Centre Party) and *hizb al-hurriyya wal-`adala* (Freedom and Justice Party, created by the MB). The macro-level environment that had regulated the construction of the Islamist SMF for the past three decades was profoundly transformed.

The post-2011 political transformation instigated a reassessment of the political strategies the Islamist SMF pursued. While the MB and its former members had endorsed political participation before 2011,¹⁶ the majority of former jihadis and salafis turned to party politics only after the uprising. To the notable exception of self-proclaimed *salafi jihadi* spokesmen, most of the salafis championed the necessity to support the candidates and projects they believed were most closely aligned with Islam (Faid, 2014). The four main *salafi* political parties (*hizb al-nour*, *hizb al-`asala*, *hizb al-fadila* and *hizb al-watan*: the Light, Authenticity, Virtue, and Homeland parties), mainstream *salafi* institutions (e.g. *ansar al-sunna*), and the prominent preachers who created *majliss al-shura al-`ulama* (i.e. the consultative council of the [*salafi*] scholars) articulated this new position consensually. Although the salafis did not necessarily legitimize popular sovereignty in Islam, they pragmatically argued that political participation yields more *maslaha* (interest) than *mafsada* (harm).

The legitimization of domestic violence similarly dissipated, although it should be noted that before 2011 only a few remaining jihadis theoretically legitimized the use of violence.¹⁷ This situation subsequently changed since virtually everyone, including opponents of the theological revisions of the legitimacy of violence in Muslim countries, recognized that armed jihad had henceforth become inapplicable (Drevon, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). The spokespersons and followers of the *salafi jihadi* trend, whose endorsement of violence against nominally Muslim leaders is the *raison d'être*, supported the same position.¹⁸ No notable component of the Islamist SMF remained theoretically committed to armed violence after 2011.¹⁹

Although Egypt's new macro-level environment generated endorsements of political participation and rejection of domestic violence, the implementation of the strategic decisions of the three main components of the Islamist SMF varied considerably. These actors' historical legacies mediated the range of possible actions by presenting specific constraints and opportunities.

The MB faced unprecedented organizational challenges, paradoxically sparked by the political opening. The strong hierarchical norms and discipline organizational survival required in a semi-authoritarian regime lost their justifications. The new generation and the reformists, who previously abided by the established organizational consensus, therefore demanded internal reforms. The young generation's significant contribution to the Egyptian uprising notably

legitimized the demand for a bigger say in the group's decision-making processes. Leading reformists, such as Aboul Fotouh, also believed that they should be allowed to articulate their own political projects since the new political environment did not justify the same level of organizational cohesion. The MB central leadership's reluctance to accommodate new demands sparked the gradual departure of these sub-groups. The central leadership's internalization of strong hierarchical norms and the so-called prison mentality of the Qutbi faction (Wickham, 2014) contextualize their reluctance to undertake organizational reforms. They also explain the group's political positions, epitomized by the accommodation of the strongest player (the military authorities) while avoiding concessions to arguably weaker actors (other political forces). Although the MB and breakaway factions endorsed political participation, the group's inability to change course from a semi-clandestine to an inclusive one eventually triggered its downfall.

The most salient developments affected the *salafi* field. The 2011 uprising undermined previous differentiations between mainstream salafis, activists salafis, and (former) jihadis. The opening of political opportunities and the legitimization of political participation in the Islamist SMF blurred internal boundaries at a political and social movement level. The reconfiguration of the *salafi* field can nonetheless only be understood in the light of pre-2011 developments.

The main (and ephemeral) post-2011 *salafi* success story is attributed to *hizb al-nour* (HN). The structured *salafi* movement of Alexandria that formed HN captured the *salafi* and non-MB Islamist vote through pre-2011 resources conducive to popular mobilization (Lacroix, 2012). Tarek Masoud (2014) argues that the Islamists in general benefited from a competitive advantage against the left that facilitated their rise as a (seemingly) redistributing political force and their use of broad social networks to mobilize a sizeable share of the electorate. Extensive resources notably helped HN to overshadow other *salafi* parties, which failed to reach out beyond their Cairo-based networks as electoral outcomes demonstrated. Pre-2011 developments nonetheless signified that the *salafi* vote diverged from the MB's, which at least enjoyed the entrenched loyalty of its core mobilizable supporters. HN's successful mobilization of self-identified salafis and non-MB supporters did not necessarily entail a long-term commitment to the party. In addition, the absence of an organizational structure and culture akin to the MB's later exacerbated internal tensions between the leaders of *al-da'wa al-salafiyya* and HN when their political preferences started to diverge (Lacroix, 2012). The former's attempt to reassert itself over the latter sparked the departure of the HN leadership, and the formation of *hizb al-watan*. HN's ungrounded constituency and unpopular political decisions, in addition to the party's opposition to what it considered an overbearing MB, eventually account for its support to the July 2013 military coup.

The second *salafi* success story is sheikh Hazem Abu Ismail. A popular satellite TV *salafi* preacher, Abu Ismail exploited the Islamist momentum by positioning

himself as a revolutionary, anti-military, and Islamist figure. His new position epitomized the erosion of pre-2011 distinctions between quietist, political and *jihadi* salafism (Wiktorowicz, 2006). While Abu Ismail is a mainstream *salafi* preacher with family roots in the MB,²¹ his post-2011 revolutionary attitude and ambiguous positions on armed jihad fuelled the support of *salafi* revolutionaries and *salafi* jihadis.²² His promising presidential candidacy was only interrupted on legal grounds.²³ Interviews with cadres from other *salafi* parties nonetheless exposed their unwillingness to support him considering his rudimentary political project.²⁴ In addition, Abu Ismail and his supporters did not manage to capitalize on public support to build their own political party. While they exploited their status of institutional outsiders to gather popular support, the absence of existing mobilizing structures was a fatal impediment to political party institutionalization (Lacroix & Chalata, 2015).

The third main component of the Islamist SMF, the (ex) jihadis, also joined the political process. The two former *jihadi* groups were similarly affected by the broad legitimization of the political process in the SMF and, in both cases, pre-2011 organizational developments critically regulated post-uprising routes (Drevon, 2015c). The comparison between the IG and the JG demonstrates that, although differences of opinion regarding the political process existed in both groups, only the IG managed to consensually resolve internal arguments. The existence of pre-existing organizational arrangements and a strong collective group identity notably facilitated the IG's reconstruction and internal democratization. They paved the way to the creation of *hizb al-bina wal-tanmiyyah* (Construction and Development Party), while JG's internal divisions widened and led to the creation of an internally contested *hizb al-islami* (Islamic Party). Considering their limited organizational resources, these two parties did not manage to reach beyond their limited constituency before the 2013 military coup.²⁵

A few remaining JG leaders led the so-called *salafi jihadi* trend after 2011. According to field research, they gathered thousands of previously unaffiliated youths socialized individually with *salafi jihadi* ideas (Drevon, 2016). These self-proclaimed *salafi jihadi* spokespersons presented a univocal opposition to the political process that sets them on the margin of the Islamist SMF. They created loosely defined movements, including *ansar al-shari'a* (supporters of Islamic Law) and *al-haraka al-islamiyya li-tatbiq shar' Allah* (the Islamic movement for the application of God's Law), which faced the staunch competition of the nebulous group around Abu Ismail. Individual modes of socialization with *salafi jihadi* frames, combined with a competitive post-2011 *salafi* field, impeded the unification of a cohesive *salafi jihadi* movement. The latter therefore splintered repeatedly over secondary issues, including the position on President Mohamed Morsi and on the warring Syrian Islamist armed groups (Drevon, 2014).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that Islamist groups' strategies cannot be solely understood as a succession of rational choices and pragmatic adaptation to changing circumstances. Islamist groups are rational actors whose political preferences and trajectories are mediated by organizational constraints and opportunities that regulate their strategic choices overtime. The investigation of these groups' strategic institutionalization is therefore critical to the study of these groups' evolution beyond rational choice paradigms and the inclusion-moderation thesis.

This article has built upon historical institutionalism to demonstrate that an Islamist group's strategic choices at a critical juncture regulate its subsequent evolution. While this research does not argue that a group's evolution is mechanically determined from its inception, it contends that strategic choices entail mobilization and socialization patterns associated with increasing costs that become difficult to overcome overtime. This institutional approach also posits that these patterns organizationally constrict these groups' agencies. For instance, an Islamist group's leadership can shift position and be unable to implement a new strategic direction without threatening the group's organizational survival. A group's strategic choices are therefore associated with mobilization and socialization patterns that entrench them and potentially obstruct new strategic directions.

This research emphasized the salience of structural change in triggering new strategic choices. The two macro-level junctures of 1981 and 2011 determined the strategies available to the Islamist SMF by presenting a new macro-level configuration. It does not mean that social movement actors cannot occasionally create their own political opportunities, but that these junctures create, over time, a relatively stable strategic setting informing these groups' strategies. The structural emphasis on the macro-level within an historical institutionalism approach accordingly suggests that macro-level transitions generate new strategies whose successful implementation is contingent on pre-transition developments.

The post-2013 military coup is a third critical juncture for the Islamist SMF. The forced removal of President Mohamed Morsi and the severe repression of the political opposition mark a new unparalleled phase in Egypt's recent history. The ex-jihadis have upheld their commitment to political reform, despite the closing of political opportunities, and have not turned away from party politics. The MB has faced with the most serious organizational crisis in its history, reflected in its loss of control over many of its followers and in flourishing debates over the legitimacy of violence. The main *salafi* party, HN, has followed its post-2011 path despite a new unfavourable political setting.

Notes

1. The three *salafi* trends are the scientific or scholastic, the activist and the jihadi salafis, respectively, focusing on the study of the religious creed, political activism and armed struggle against nominally Muslim regimes.
2. Although Wiktorowicz (2006) contextualizes the emergence of the three *salafi* trends, many scholars who subsequently used these categories to describe *salafi* actors have failed to situate the latter's political preferences.
3. Hamad, 'A. [IG's mufti], 2012, Personal communication with the author, 6 September; Qassem, O. [a JG leader], 2012, Personal communication with the author, 1 July; Taha, R. [former leader of the external IG leadership], 2013, Personal communication with the author, 20 March.
4. Hamad, 'A. [IG's mufti], 2012, Personal communication with the author, 6 September.
5. Although many scholars argue that this group emerged from within the MB, interviews with many of its leaders and members reveal that they were often members of *ansar al-sunna*. Amir al-Jaysh, A. [a JG leader], 2012, Personal communication with the author, 8 June; Faraj, A. [a JG leader], Personal communication with the author, 11 June; Qassem, O. [a JG leader], 2012, Personal communication with the author, 1 July.
6. While many MB leaders and members served time in jail, they were not the subject to the harsh torture, death penalty and summary executions regularly faced by the jihadis.
7. Although the IG was involved in violent contention by the end of the 1980s, the group's mobilization in the previous years did not entail the direct use of violence against the state.
8. Farghali, M (2014) [former IG member], Personal communication with the author, 4 February. See also the numerous autobiographies authored by former IG members (e.g. Bari, 2002; Farghali, 2012).
9. Amir al-Jaysh, 'A. [a JG leader], 2013, Personal communication with the author, 4 December; Faraj, A. [a JG leader], Personal communication with the author, 11 June.
10. According to IG's mufti Hamad, the two main IG leaders eventually legitimized Mubarak's regime and recognized that Mubarak could be considered Muslim, but failed to reach a consensus with the group's collective leadership.
11. Even though the MB started as a reformist movement, the repression suffered by the group under Nasser radicalized many of its members in the 1950s (notably prominent MB individual Sayyid Qutb). The MB officially renounced Qutb's positions in a retrospective book authored by Hassan al-Hudaybi, the MB general guide in the 1970s (see also Zollner, 2009).
12. *Wasatiyya* means centrism. It refers to the self-defined middle way in Islamic political thought.
13. Many former MB members consensually argue that leaving the group was comparable to the abandonment of a family and a community, rather than to the departure of a political party. They argue that their lives, friends and acquaintances were centred around their belonging to the MB. Cf note 17.
14. A leading member of *al-da'wa al-salafiyya* in Alexandria (2014), Personal communication with the author, 15 January.
15. Ibid.
16. Before 2011, the main Islamic alternative to the MB was *hizb al-wasat* (the Centre Party), which was created by MB dissidents (Stacher, 2002; Wickham, 2004).

17. The jihadis used to be mainly represented by the IG and the JG until the theological renunciations of violence undertaken by the IG after 2011 and some JG factions after 2007. Remaining jihadis included reluctant JG factions and the *salafi jihadi* trend, which emerged in the periphery.
18. This position was confirmed informally by numerous *salafi* jihadis close to *salafi jihadi* spokespersons.
19. This does not mean that Islamists were not individually involved in violent contention between 2011 and 2013, but that armed violence was no longer an official political strategy. In addition, Sinai-based groups are not included in this analysis considering their specificities.
21. His father Saleh was a notable MB member of parliament who thoroughly advocated for the implementation of Islamic Law in Egypt.
22. *Salafi* revolutionaries and jihadists only partially coincide. The former refers to the salafis advocating for revolutionary change in Egypt, while the latter further legitimize armed violence against domestic Muslim regimes.
23. Some polls created Abu Ismail with more than 20 per cent of the intentions. His candidature was rejected on constitutional grounds, considering the foreign (American) nationality held by his mother.
24. Hafez, O. [IG's leader], 2013, Personal communication with the author, 18 April.
25. The Islamic Party, which did not participate in the legislative elections, merely gathered former JG members. The Construction and Development party conversely participated in the legislative elections and obtained most of its votes in its historical strongholds.

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