

# The Emergence of Ex-Jihadi Political Parties in Post-Mubarak Egypt

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*Following the overthrow of Husni Mubarak, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad created two political parties. This article investigates these groups' organizational dynamics and internal dialogues in order to uncover the rationale of their political participation after the January 2011 uprising and its internal ideational legitimization. Based on interviews with leaders and members of these two groups and their political parties, this article argues that these formerly violent insurgent groups embraced nonviolent participation in democratic politics through an internal reassessment of the political opportunities afforded to them by Egypt's brief political opening.*

After decades of opposition to former president Husni Mubarak's authoritarian regime, two of Egypt's most famous armed Islamic movements, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group) and Egyptian Islamic Jihad (known officially as the Jihad Group, *Jama'at al-Jihad*), partially joined the political process in Egypt after the January 2011 uprising. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, which led a low-level insurgency in the 1990s, created the Building and Development Party, while an agglomeration of individuals formerly affiliated with Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which carried out various assassinations before some of its members helped form al-Qa'ida, created the Safety and Development Party, later renamed the Islamic Party. While the study of the political inclusion of mainstream and armed Islamist movements has been widely covered in the literature, the transformation of a former jihadi organization into a political party is rare.

The study of armed and mainstream Islamist movements' political participation has primarily explored groups' rationales for doing so and the ramifications of their ideological and behavioral evolution. This new case study in Egypt represents a third pattern, namely the participation of former militant groups in the political process after their partial or comprehensive rejection of armed violence. This development is a striking contrast with previous cases, which raises many questions regarding the groups' rationales, internal negotiations and legitimization, and impact on the construction of these groups' ideological outlook and political behavior.

This article covers the two-year period from the January 2011 uprising to the aftermath of the July 2013 military coup. It does not endeavor to uncover the long-term ramifications of this unprecedented participation in the political process. Instead, this article investigates these groups' rationales for this shift and then explores the internal debates and decision-making processes that legitimized political participation in the eyes of these groups' members and followers.

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In this article, I argue that al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad joined the political process primarily because of their interpretations of the new political opportunities available to them, and that this decision was not preceded by an acceptance of democracy or party politics in Islam. This research then explores these groups’ internal debates in order to demonstrate that this choice was not initially unanimous among either group’s leaders or members. A comparison between al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad shows that the former had institutional arrangements before 2011 that promoted debates within the organization. This facilitated the group’s internal democratization, which led it to fully endorse the decision to create a political party. Conversely, the 2011 uprising caused prior divisions between Egyptian Islamic Jihad leaders and members to widen, preventing the group from endorsing a unified position over the legitimacy of the political process. Finally, this article analyzes the internal legitimization of political participation inside al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and factions of Egyptian Islamic Jihad that endorsed the political process, arguing that these groups strived to reinterpret their original missions to demonstrate the continuity between their past commitments and the decision to create a political party after 2011.

This article is a qualitative research project based on intensive field research undertaken in Egypt between 2011 and 2013. I interviewed leaders of both al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, as well as the leaders of their respective political parties. These semi-structured interviews were supplemented with my participation in group meetings and informal discussions with many lower-ranking members to uncover unexplored internal dynamics and debates, as well as a comprehensive analysis of these groups’ own political literature.

### *THE STUDY OF THE PARTICIPATION OF MAINSTREAM AND ARMED ISLAMIST GROUPS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS*

The scholarship on Islamist movements’ political participation has primarily focused on mainstream Islamist groups whose roots are associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. This corpus generally draws inspiration from democratic transition and modernization theories to analyze the impact on these groups of the joining of the political process, referring notably to the inclusion of Christian political parties in European countries and to the institutionalization of left-wing revolutionary movements.<sup>1</sup> These studies strive to uncover the rationale of these groups’ participation in the political process in autocratic regimes and to analyze the potential ideological and behavioral repercussions of political participation on their subsequent evolution.<sup>2</sup>

The literature concerned with groups’ rationalization of political participation examines an intriguing paradox: Why would mainstream Islamist groups participate in political processes in authoritarian regimes, considering that their participation legitimizes the very regimes they theoretically oppose? The most commonly cited cases are in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen, where movements affiliated with the Muslim Brother-

1. See Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Adam Przeworski and John Sprague, *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

2. For an extensive review of the literature, see Jillian Schwedler. “Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis,” *World Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Apr. 2011), pp. 347–76.

hood have participated in legislative elections to varied degrees for decades. In these three cases, the literature is quite consistent as to these groups' rationale. Most studies generally argue that these groups exploited a phase of relative political liberalization to bolster their principal mission of *da'wa* (proselytizing).<sup>3</sup> They assert that joining the political process helped to protect these groups' preaching by providing legal cover and to sustain their central objective of Islamicizing society. Some scholars add that Islamist groups strive to present themselves as major nonthreatening alternatives to ruling regimes in the short term in order to eventually replace them in the long term.<sup>4</sup>

The ideological and behavioral significance of embracing political participation have also been widely debated. A prevailing theory is the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, which argues that the ideologies and behaviors of Islamist movements moderate after participating in the political process. This hypothesis examines whether joining the political system entails the adoption of democratic values or if it is merely a tool for furthering these groups' organizational interests.<sup>5</sup> Carrie Wickham argued that, in Egypt, the limited political opening of the Mubarak regime created incentives for participation and caused the core values and belief system of Muslim Brotherhood members to evolve.<sup>6</sup> In a subsequent study, Wickham added that this process alone did not necessarily lead to the ideological moderation of the Brotherhood, but rather that generational differences and internal factionalism were also important factors in the Brotherhood's behavioral and ideological evolution.<sup>7</sup> Wickham did not directly include group competition, which has been mentioned as a source of moderation by other scholars, especially in the case of competition over the framing of moderation.<sup>8</sup> This notion of cross-group dialogue and cooperation combined with political participation has been further considered in the case of Jordan, where Janine Clark argued that these factors can trigger the moderation of some positions previously endorsed by Islamist movements. Clark nonetheless mentioned that these positions are limited to those with no bearing on shari'a.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Jillian Schwedler asserted that most mechanisms concerned with the moderation of Islamist movements in the literature were still poorly detailed and she presented her own causal mechanisms to explain the moderation witnessed in Jordan and absent in Yemen. Schwedler argued that the opening of the political system has to be associated with organizational structures, decision-making processes based on consensus, and the ideological justification of new practices in tan-

3. Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 47.

4. Lisa Blyaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 148.

5. Glenn E. Robinson, "Can Islamists Be Democrats? The Case of Jordan," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 373–87.

6. Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jan. 2004), pp. 205–28.

7. Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood*.

8. Shana Marshall, "Framing Contests and Moderation of Islamist Groups: The Case of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat in Egypt" (paper, International Studies Association Convention, Honolulu, March 4, 2005).

9. Janine A. Clark, "The Conditions of Islamist Moderation: Unpacking Cross-Ideological Cooperation in Jordan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Nov. 2006), pp. 539–60.

dem with a movement's commitments to pursue moderation.<sup>10</sup> Schwedler asserted that the inclusion-moderation thesis is, however, less likely to play a role in the wake of the Arab Spring, since the emergence of conservative Islamist groups challenges mainstream Islamists' ideological moderation.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, some scholars have recently disputed the validity of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. They have argued that the behavioral moderation and ideological pragmatism of Brotherhood-related groups were not bolstered by political liberalization, but by exclusion and repression. They have demonstrated that these movements moderated their positions only after a closing of political opportunities, rather than during phases of political liberalization. In Tunisia, for instance, it is asserted that repression and marginalization in the early 1980s best account for the eventual moderation of the country's Brotherhood-affiliated party, the Ennahda Movement.<sup>12</sup> In a more extensive case study, Shadi Hamid has demonstrated that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood adopted political pragmatism and the language of democracy and human rights despite political repression and exclusion. Hamid explains this shift by the Brotherhood's need to seek legal protection, increase the cost of repression for the regime, and find allies among non-Islamist political parties with the common objective of defending democracy.<sup>13</sup>

The academic literature has also covered the political participation of Islamist groups that have not disarmed. Anisseh van Engeland and Rachael Rudolph have stressed that the decision to participate in the political process generally entails a commitment to governance and the compatibility of this commitment with these groups' political ideologies and programs.<sup>14</sup> Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Arie Perliger stressed that a combination of four factors is required: the democratization of the political system, amnesty offered to these groups' members, some level of repression, and an internal desire to reinforce these groups' social anchors and compete with other movements.<sup>15</sup> The most common cases of political participation refer to Hizbullah, since its first political inclusion in 1992, and Hamas, after its two electoral experiments in 1996 and 2006. In both cases, these groups' two main rationales were competition over resources and their distribution,<sup>16</sup> and the need to legitimize these groups' existence domestically and internationally.<sup>17</sup> Regarding Hamas, the decision to field

10. Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

11. Jillian Schwedler, "Islamists in Power? Inclusion, Moderation, and the Arab Uprisings," *Middle East Development Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1350006-1-18.

12. Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, "Moderation through Exclusion? The Journey of the Tunisian *Ennahda* from Fundamentalist to Conservative Party," *Democratization*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (2013), pp. 857-75.

13. Hamid, *Temptations of Power*.

14. Anisseh Van Engeland and Rachael M. Rudolph, *From Terrorism to Politics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2008).

15. Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur, and Arie Perliger, *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2008).

16. Robert Braithwaite, "The Electoral Terrorist: Terror Groups and Democratic Participation," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2013), pp. 53-74; Haim Malka, "Forcing Choices: Testing the Transformation of Hamas," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Autumn 2005), pp. 37-53.

17. Malka, "Forcing Choices;" Krista E. Wiegand, "Reformation of a Terrorist Group: Hezbollah as a Lebanese Political Party," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 32, No. 8 (2009), pp. 669-80.

candidates in 2006 additionally resulted from a combination of changing political opportunities, new political incentives, and internal organizational changes.<sup>18</sup>

The study of the ideological ramifications of militant groups' political participation has sustained the idea that the groups' ideologies can moderate as well. Joseph Alagha, for instance, argued that Hizbullah's decision to participate in the parliamentary election in 1992 represented a shift of focus to the primacy of its political program, as opposed to putting its religious and political ideologies first.<sup>19</sup> Regarding Hamas, Jeroen Gunning posited that political participation and inclusion can encourage the movement's transformation and asserted that, considering this group's cohesive decision-making, political participation would encourage pragmatism and the support of a utilitarian logic.<sup>20</sup> These perspectives are not unanimously shared, however. Benedetta Berti challenged the existence of a linear transition between armed violence and political participation, whereby a militant group relinquishes violence to become more moderate. Berti asserted instead that political participation and armed violence are not mutually exclusive.<sup>21</sup>

However, the literature on Islamists' political participation has been silent on the political inclusion of *formerly* armed Islamist groups. This discussion nonetheless brought forward many factors important to the analysis of the positions endorsed by former militants. The first factor is of an organizational nature. Internal dynamics are fundamental to understanding groups' political choices within changing circumstances because they shed light on internal debates and dialogues. The second main factor is ideological. Political participation does not occur in a vacuum and needs to be ideologically legitimate in the internal narratives of these groups. Islamist groups have a core identity and ideological worldview, and they generally attempt to reconcile their political participation in accordance with these factors. These processes are not unidirectional, however, and political participation can also shape the ideational visions held by political groups or within them.

### *HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON AL-GAMA 'A AL-ISLAMIYYA AND EGYPTIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD BEFORE THE 2011 UPRISING*

Egyptian Islamic Jihad emerged in the 1970s as an agglomeration of loosely related cells whose objective was to infiltrate the army and stage a military coup.<sup>22</sup> They

18. Tavishi Bhasin and Maia Carter Hallward, "Hamas as a Political Party: Democratization in the Palestinian Territories," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2013), pp. 75–93; Jeroen Gunning, "Peace with Hamas? The Transforming Potential of Political Participation," *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (Mar. 2004), pp. 233–55.

19. Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

20. Gunning, "Peace with Hamas?"

21. Benedetta Berti, *Armed Political Organizations: From Conflict to Integration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

22. Important sources on Egyptian Islamic Jihad in Arabic and English include: Hani al-Siba'i, *Qisat Jama'at al-Jihad* [The Story of the Jihad Group] (Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad, 2002), <http://tawhed.ws/r/?i=2347> (accessed August 3, 2013); Muntasir al-Zayyat, *Ayman al-Zawahiri kama 'Arafatuh* [Ayman al-Zawahiri as I Knew Him] (Cairo: Dar Misr al-Mahrusa, 2002); Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Fursan taht Rayat al-Nabi* [Knights under the Prophet's Banner], second edition (As-Sahab, 2010); Muhammad Muru, *Tanzim al-Jihad: Afkaruh, Judhuruh, Siyasatuh* [The Jihad Organization: Its Thoughts, Roots, and Politics] (Giza: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1990);

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reached prominence in 1974, when a clandestine group led by Salih Sariyya orchestrated an assault against the Egyptian military academy to seize power. A few years later, in 1981, a Cairo-based network allied with al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya to take over the state through organizing of a coup combined with a popular uprising. The assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat succeeded, but the alliance failed to reach its intended objective of replacing the regime with an Islamic state and instead ended up with both organizations’ leadership jailed. Eventually, the temporary union with al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya disintegrated in prison, and Islamic Jihad divided further along personal lines. Two leading members, Sayyid Imam and Ayman al-Zawahiri, reorganized the group in Peshawar, Pakistan, and later launched a few armed operations in Egypt in the 1990s. Islamic Jihad eventually declared a unilateral ceasefire in Egypt in 1995, and the group scattered in reaction to harsh domestic and international security measures. In 2001, its commander-in-chief in Afghanistan, Ayman al-Zawahiri, allied with Usama Bin Ladin and formally joined al-Qa‘ida. Some members of the group were liberated from 2007 onwards after formally renouncing the use of violence.

The emergence of al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya contrasts substantially with Islamic Jihad. Al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya emerged in the south of Egypt as a student movement that gradually adopted a more revolutionary Salafi approach to Islam.<sup>23</sup> Initially, al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya focused on nonviolent preaching and did not endorse a specific political program. By the end of the 1970s, the Sadat regime’s crackdown on Islamic movements reinforced the group’s hostility to the regime and gradually legitimized its new commitment to armed violence. In 1981, al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya temporarily united with a network of Islamic Jihad cells in Cairo and attempted to change the regime with the assassination of President Sadat. The group failed to take over state institutions and most of its leaders and members were subsequently arrested. In prison, the group maintained its organizational structure and relied on the liberation of many members to reconstitute its local infrastructure after 1984. Eventually, the contentious conflict with the state that started at the end of the 1980s became aggravated with the dislocation of the group’s leadership and the prevalence of local violence. Violent contention reached a peak by the mid-1990s, before the unilateral declaration of a cease-fire in 1997.

Concerning the objectives of this research, the most critical phase of these groups’ histories pertains to the so-called ideological revisions (*muraaja‘at*) partially launched by their leaderships in the 2000s. The revisions were initiated by the historical leadership of al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya in 2001 with the authoring of four books designed to recant the theology of violence formerly endorsed by the group and to delegitimize armed jihad

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Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, second edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

23. For more on al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya, see Hisham Mubarak, *Al-Irhabiyyun Qadimun!: Dirasa Muqarana bayn Mawqif al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin, wa-Jama‘at al-Jihad min Qadiyyat al-‘Unf, 1928–1994* [The Terrorists Are Coming!: A Comparative Study of the Position of the Muslim Brothers and of the Jihad Groups on the Issue of Violence, 1928–94] (Cairo: Markaz al-Mahrusa li-l-Nashr wa-l-Khidmat al-Sahafiyya wa-l-Ma‘lumat, 1995); Salwa Muhammad al-‘Awwa, *Al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya al-Musallaha fi Misr, 1974–2004* [The Armed Islamic Group in Egypt, 1974–2004] (Cairo: Shorouk International Bookshop, 2006); Ashour, *De-Radicalization of Jihadists*; Stefan Malthaner, *Mobilizing the Faithful: Militant Islamist Groups and Their Constituencies* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2011).

in Muslim countries. They were followed, in 2007, by the publication of a similar work denouncing Islamist groups' armed violence in Muslim and Western countries by Sayyid Imam, who had commanded Islamic Jihad's forces in Afghanistan and was the group's most prominent religious leader until his resignation in 1994. The scope and content of these ideological revisions are quite similar. They do not reject armed jihad in Islam per se, but condition its application to render its application impractical. They notably condition jihad to its positive and negative utility (*maslaha* and *mafsada*, respectively), and forbid attacks against civilians, tourists, and indiscriminate Western targets.<sup>24</sup> These ideological revisions prompted the regime to liberate many prisoners affiliated with these two groups, including leaders and lower-ranking members, from 2007 onwards.

The theological renunciations of violence have been studied in the literature under the concept of group de-radicalization, defined as a group's ideological renunciation of violence combined with the disarming of its militant wings. Most of the scholarship on the theological renunciations of violence has been based on secondary sources and textual analysis. It is characterized by a specific insistence on the role of the Egyptian state's non-violent approach and by a relatively flimsy consideration of these groups' internal dynamics. Most studies have merely stressed the importance of internal group dialogue without uncovering internal organizational processes and divergence of opinions between these groups' leaders. These analyses generally have not covered the acceptance of the revisions by these groups' members and are generally quite gullible in the belief that these groups' nature has fundamentally changed despite the limited textual scope of the revisions.<sup>25</sup> The most comprehensive work on this topic has been a seminal study by Omar Ashour on the de-radicalization of jihadi movements in three North African countries, including Egypt. Ashour argued that this phenomenon was the outcome of a combination of credible leadership, repression, internal and external social interaction, and selective inducements. In Ashour's methodological approach, these four factors are a necessary condition to the renunciation to violence. State repression imposes a reassessment of the situation by these groups' leaderships. Their interactions with other groups and ideologies influence their belief system and, eventually, internal debates led by a credible leadership and sustained by selective inducements of the state facilitate the internal promotion of de-radicalization.<sup>26</sup>

24. Jerome Drevon, "Assessing Islamist Armed Groups' De-Radicalization in Egypt," *Peace Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2015), pp. 296–303.

25. Lisa Blaydes and Lawrence Rubin, "Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2008), pp. 461–79; Rohan Gunaratna and Mohamed Bin Ali, "De-Radicalization Initiatives in Egypt: A Preliminary Insight," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (2009), pp. 277–91; Daa Rashwan, "The Renunciation of Violence by Egyptian Jihadi Organizations" in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, eds. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008), pp. 113–32; Lawrence Rubin, "Non-Kinetic Approaches to Counter-Terrorism: A Case Study of Egypt and the Islamic Group," in *Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New Approaches to Counter-Terrorism*, eds. Lawrence Rubin, Rohan Gunaratna, and Jolene Anne R. Jerard (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 26–35.

26. Ashour, *De-Radicalization of Jihadists*; Omar Ashour, "Islamist De-Radicalization in Algeria: Successes and Failures," The Middle East Institute, Policy Brief No. 21 (Nov. 2008), [www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PB\\_21\\_Ashour.pdf](http://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PB_21_Ashour.pdf); Omar Ashour, "Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2011), pp. 377–97.

Despite the rich data it provided, Ashour's analysis was more fragile on its understanding of internal group dynamics. Ashour argued that internal dialogue led by a charismatic and credible leadership is sufficient to convince these groups' followers to renounce their ideological commitments, yet fails to explain why these groups' members accept the new direction chosen by their leaders. This gap leaves a few questions unexplored. One might wonder whether all members would accept new ideological positions presented by their leaders, and whether internal debate and these leaders' credibility would be sufficient to legitimize a new direction. This suggestion could signify that the tactical approval of these texts by group members can be questioned and leaves open the possible influence of other factors (including some type of rational choice, group identity, and group survival) on these members' decision to officially renounce violence.

Finally, the aforementioned combination of four factors is sufficient to explain why militant groups de-radicalize, following a top-down logic where the leaders make decisions and convince their followers. This unilateralism has to be questioned, and the extent to which these groups' leaders were also constrained by ideational and organizational factors, including by their constituencies' reception of new ideas, has to be investigated. These questions still need to be answered, and the following analysis of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's and Islamic Jihad's joining the political process is a timely opportunity to contribute to the study of the ideological revisions as well.

### *DEBATING AND LEGITIMIZING THE CREATION OF EX-JIHADI POLITICAL PARTIES AFTER THE 2011 UPRISING*

In January 2011, massive nonviolent protests against the Egyptian regime united millions of Egyptians in the streets of the country.<sup>27</sup> For more than two weeks, citizens of all political and socioeconomic backgrounds participated in massive demonstrations and occupied the iconic Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo. On February 11, President Husni Mubarak resigned, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took the responsibility to temporarily lead the country and assure a political transition. In the next few months, SCAF suspended the constitution and dissolved the two houses of parliament. A constitutional referendum was organized and a new temporary constitution was approved with 77.27% of the vote.

This popular uprising was unanticipated by most political forces, including al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad, which both initially failed to articulate a clear position on the protests.<sup>28</sup> Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya was divided at the leadership level between those who had been in exile prior to the uprising, those who had been released from prison after the ideological revisions of 2007, and those still imprisoned. The most critical division was between a relatively accommodating position vis-à-vis the Mubarak regime and a more hostile viewpoint. The two historical leaders of al-Gama'a

27. For recent analyses of these social protests, see Jeroen Gunning and Ilan Zvi Baron, *Why Occupy a Square? People, Protests and Movements in the Egyptian Revolution* (London: Hurst, 2013); Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi, eds., *The Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

28. Jérôme Drevon, "Democracy and Islamist Violence: Lessons from Post-Mubarak Egypt," *Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 5–6.



al-Islamiyya, Karam Zuhdi and Nagih Ibrahim, were initially reluctant to support the uprising, fearing a backlash if the uprising were to fail.<sup>29</sup> Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya members nonetheless joined the demonstrations individually, and prominent members like 'Abbud and Tariq al-Zumar, who had led one of its first cells, embraced the popular uprising from prison. Islamic Jihad was further divided at geographical, ideological, and organizational levels. Its detained and newly liberated leaders were unable to articulate a united stance on the uprising. Both members and leaders of Islamic Jihad participated in protests individually, but others endorsed a more passive stance.<sup>30</sup>

The aftermath of the January 25<sup>th</sup> uprising was unprecedented in the modern political history of Egypt. This period witnessed 30 months of relative liberalization marked by the political participation of most political forces situated across the ideological spectrum. New political parties were granted recognition by state authorities, including an array of Islamist parties.<sup>31</sup> The Wasat Party (officially *Hizb al-Wasat al-Jadid*, the New Center Party), which split from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1996, was recognized in February. In April, the Brotherhood itself formed the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP; in Arabic, *Hizb al-Hurriyya wa-l-'Adala*), which was officially recognized in June. Many political prisoners from al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Islamic Jihad, and other Salafi jihadi groups were gradually released by the military authorities, including two leading figures of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, 'Abbud and Tariq al-Zumar, and leading figures of Islamic Jihad, including Nabil Na'im and Muhammad al-Zawahiri (the younger brother of Ayman al-Zawahiri). Existing constraints on public activities were lifted, at least informally.

In the next few months, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad emulated more mainstream Islamist movements and created their own political platforms. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya created the Building and Development Party (BDP; in Arabic, *Hizb al-Bina' wa-l-Tanmiya*) as its official political party in June 2011. The religious outlook of the BDP initially hindered its official recognition, but the party was granted legal recognition after defending its case based on its interpretation of the second article of the constitution (which defined Islam as the religion of the state and the principles of shari'a as the principal source of legislation). Discussions among Islamic Jihad members led to the creation of the Safety and Development Party (SDP; in Arabic, *Hizb al-Salama wa-l-Tanmiya*), renamed the Islamic Party (IP; in Arabic *al-Hizb al-Islami*) at the end of 2012. This party did not satisfy the newly promulgated conditions for state recognition and had not been recognized by the authorities prior to the July 2013 military coup.<sup>32</sup> In contrast with the BDP, the IP cannot be considered an *official* party of a formerly armed Islamist group, considering broad differences of opinions over the legitimacy of the political process among Islamic Jihad members. This difference is reflected in the subordination of the BDP to al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's consultative council (*majlis al-shura*) and in the independence of the IP from any external structure.

29. Interview by the author with Nagih Ibrahim, September 10, 2012, Alexandria, Egypt.

30. Interview by the author with Usama Qasim, July 1, 2012, Zagazig, Egypt.

31. Khalil Al-Anani, "Islamist Parties Post-Arab Spring," *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Nov. 2012), pp. 466–72.

32. A post-uprising law requires parties to be able to prove having a minimum of 5,000 members in at least 10 Egyptian provinces. Leaders of the IP recognize that these conditions were not satisfied by the party. Interview by the author with Magdi Salim, April 16, 2013, Cairo.

The rationale for al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya’s and Egyptian Islamic Jihad’s political participation after 2011 is widely shared with other Islamist movements, both mainstream and armed. The decisions to participate in the political process were essentially based on each group’s interpretations of the new political opportunities available to them. In neither case was this choice preceded by an ideological acceptance of the political process or by an expressed willingness to engage in the day-to-day governing Egypt. The ideological revisions detailed in the previous section did not articulate a clear political vision for Egypt and were virtually silent on these groups’ potential political participation in the future.<sup>33</sup> Within either group, the issue of participation had only been seriously discussed once earlier, in 2005, when al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya leader ‘Abbud al-Zumar alluded to his potential candidature in the presidential elections and in a subsequent series of articles he coauthored with his cousin Tariq on the promotion of political reforms in Islamic countries.<sup>34</sup> Before the 2011 uprising, however, there was no concerted effort by either al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya or Egyptian Islamic Jihad to articulate a political program beyond their support for the application of Islamic law in the country.

In 2011, al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad were therefore in an ideological position analogous to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood before the 1984 election (in which the Brotherhood ran with the New Wafd Party). Prior to joining the political process in 1984, the Brotherhood engaged in its own process of ideological clarifications of its position on violence in Islamic countries and rejected the radicalism of Sayyid Qutb, a prominent Brotherhood intellectual who advocated violence against pro-Western Muslim states. This process resulted in the posthumous publication in 1977 of *Du‘at, La Qudat* (Preachers, Not Judges), a book written by a general guide of the Brotherhood, Hasan al-Hudaybi (who died 1973). This book endorsed a nonviolent approach to advancing Islamism in Muslim countries: promoting an Islamic mode of governance.<sup>35</sup> Despite multiple differences between Hudaybi’s book and the revisions of former militant groups later on, both advocate nonviolence and defend an aspiration to implement Islamic law without articulating a clear political program.

The main difference between the rationale for the participation of former militant groups and mainstream and armed Islamist groups pertains to organizational protection and legitimacy. The Brotherhood’s political participation in Egypt did not solely result from its interpretation of new political opportunities. While the Brotherhood was

33. Omar Ashour, “Post-Jihadism and the Ideological Revisions of Armed Islamists,” in *Contextualising Jihadi Thought*, eds. Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 139; Ewan Stein, “An Uncivil Partnership: Egypt’s Jama‘a Islamiyya and the State after the Jihad,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (2011), pp. 863–81.

34. “*Al-Badil al-Thalith bayn al-Istibdad wal-Istislah*” [“The Third Alternative between Depotism and Surrender”] was published in three instalments in the newspaper *Shorouk*, now available on the website of the Egyptian news aggregator, Masress: Tariq al-Zumar, “*Al-Fasl al-Awwal: Al-Muraja‘at allati Nad‘u Ilayha*” [“Part One: The Revisions We Are Calling For”], September 11, 2009, [www.masress.com/shorouk/110324](http://www.masress.com/shorouk/110324); Tariq al-Zumar, “*Al-Fasl al-Thani: Al-Bi‘a al-Lazima li-Najah al-Muraja‘at*” [“Part Two: The Necessary Environment for the Revisions’ Success “], September 11, 2009, [www.masress.com/shorouk/110328](http://www.masress.com/shorouk/110328); “*Al-Fasl al-Thalith*” [“Part Three”], [www.masress.com/shorouk/112942](http://www.masress.com/shorouk/112942), September 14, 2009.

35. Barbara H.E. Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009).

motivated by the possibility of expanding its preaching through being in parliament, the group was also keen to benefit from the legal protection associated with political participation. As for militant groups, political participation has usually been considered a strategic means to achieve internal legitimacy and protect the sanctity of their weapons, as the first section of this article argued. Al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad were not affected by the same factors in 2011 as the Brotherhood had been in the 1980s. These formerly armed groups were in an organizational limbo, having neither a substantial constituency nor a military wing to legitimize. These groups’ members were scattered and isolated, and their networks on the ground had virtually been decimated. Their decision to participate in the political process was therefore primarily informed by their interpretations of the new opportunities available to them, rather than by the need to protect or legitimize existent networks and institutions.

The second argument of this analysis concerns the internal legitimization of political participation among armed Islamist groups’ members and supporters. Before 2011, al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad had long opposed the Muslim Brotherhood’s participation in Egyptian legislative elections on theological grounds. Publications of the two armed Islamist groups explicitly denied the legitimacy of democracy in Islam, considering it akin to disbelief (*kufur*). The nature of this opposition was not merely a condemnation of political participation under autocratic regimes, but an unconditional rejection based in theology.<sup>36</sup> So how did al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Islamic Jihad internally justify the adoption of a position apparently inconsistent with their long-held theological position on democracy?

Leaders of al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and of Islamic Jihad reinterpreted their past commitments in the light of post-2011 political opportunities in order to demonstrate the continuity between their groups’ original identities and their willingness to form political parties. In framing studies, this process is defined as frame transformation, whereby a movement reinterprets its self-understanding to generate new meanings.<sup>37</sup> This process was necessary to convince these groups’ members and followers that joining the political process was not a departure from their principles, but a legitimate reinterpretation of what it means to be al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya or Islamic Jihad.

Interviews with leaders and lower-ranking members of al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya revealed a ubiquitous emphasis on the group’s core *da‘wi* (missionary) identity to legitimize political participation. Al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya leaders and members consistently argued that this group was initially created to preach Islam, insisting that they

36. For more on the groups’ hostility to democracy, see al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya, *Al-Ta’ifa al-Mumtani‘ ‘an Shari‘a min Shara’i al-Islam* [The Sect Abstaining from Islamic Law] (n.p., 1991); Jama‘at al-Jihad, *Al-Radd ‘ala al-Shubha Khatira li-l-Shaykh al-Albani bi-Sha’n al-Sukut ‘an al-Hukkam al-Murtaddin* [The Response to the Dangerous Sophistry of Shaykh al-Albani Concerning the Silence on Apostate Rulers], second ed. (n.p., n.d.); Jama‘at al-Jihad, *Nash al-Umma bi-Ijtinab Fatwa al-Shaykh Ibn Baz bi-Jawaz Dukhul Majlis al-Umma* [Advice to the Islamic Nation to Ignore the Fatwa of Shaykh Ibn Baz on the Permissibility to Enter the People’s Assembly] (n.p., n.d.).

37. Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26 (Aug. 2000), p. 625; David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Aug. 1986), pp. 473–76.

never intended to use violence against the state.<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding the validity of this claim, they declared that the group had been forced to resort to armed jihad as a means of self-defense against oppression and to assure their survival. Regarding the group's former opposition to political participation, two al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya leaders — its second-in-command, Usama Hafiz, and its mufti, Shaykh 'Abd al-Akhir Hamad — asserted that their hostility to party politics in the 1980s and 1990s had been due to the absence of free and fair elections, and the need to deny the regime legitimacy.<sup>39</sup> They argued that they had opposed the Muslim Brotherhood's political participation and blamed them for helping to reinforce the international credibility of the regime. Even in 2012, after al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya had formed the BDP, Hamad maintained that he still opposed the Western conception of democracy as un-Islamic. However, he added that he did not perceive a contradiction between this theological position on democracy and the group's participation in the political process. Like other members of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, Hamad emphasized the essential *da'wi* identity of the group, and maintained that violence was merely a response to persecution.

While it is true that al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya had been a preaching movement before it ever justified violence, this was not the case for Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which adopted the ideology of armed jihad in its early days. This difference could have obstructed a similar process of frame transformation. Instead, prominent leaders of Islamic Jihad recognized that the revolution triggered their decision to join the political process and inspired the idea to create a political party.<sup>40</sup> In contrast with al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, however, Islamic Jihad members did not claim that they turned to armed jihad in self-defense, but contextualized its use. Indeed, many Islamic Jihad leaders maintained their opposition to their colleague Sayyid Imam's ideological revisions and upheld the legitimacy of jihad against autocratic regimes (even if they did not view it as necessarily practical). Yet they asserted that while jihad should be undertaken against autocratic regimes with weapons, violence becomes illegitimate after a political opening. 'Abd al-Ra'uf Amir al-Gaysh, a senior member of the what was then known as the SDP, who participated in Islamic Jihad campaigns dating back to 1974, affirmed in 2012 that he still believes in the legitimacy of jihad to create a state governed by shari'a in Egypt. However, he stressed that while jihad in the past would have been best implemented by a military coup, jihad in the postrevolutionary era should be waged in parliament as guns had been replaced by political parties.<sup>41</sup> Other senior members of Islamic Jihad and of the Islamic Party, including Usama Qasim, Salih Jahin, and the party's second-in-command, Magdi Salim, similarly argued that the opening of political opportunities was crucial in the decision to create a party in Egypt.<sup>42</sup> They supported Amir al-Gaysh's position, and explained that different state policies require different answers. They af-

38. Interview by the author with 'Abd al-Akhir Hamad, September 6, 2012, Cairo; interview by the author with Usama Hafiz, April 18, 2013, Cairo; interview by the author with al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya leader Rifa'i Taha, March 20, 2013, Cairo.

39. Interview, Usama Hafiz, September 2012, Cairo; Interview, Hamad, April 2013, Cairo.

40. Interview by the author with Salih Jahin, April 13, 2013, Cairo; interview, Usama Qasim, July 2012, Zagazig; interview, Magdi Salim, April 2013, Cairo.

41. Interviews by the author with 'Abd al-Ra'uf Amir al-Gaysh, June 30 and July 7, 2012, Cairo.

42. Interview, Salih Jahin, April 2013, Cairo; interview, Usama Qasim, July 2012, Zagazig; interview, Magdi Salim, April 2013, Cairo.

firmed that the 2011 uprising necessitated the revision of their former positions. They rejected the legitimacy of violence and considered electoral competition to be the best way to achieve their ends. Islamic Jihad, or many of its members at least, therefore undertook a frame transformation similar to that of al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya: from armed violence to political participation. In so doing, they reinterpreted their movement’s past history in light of the major changes taking place in Egypt in order to create a continuity between the group’s original ideology and this more strategic path.

The remaining question of this comparative case study concerns these groups’ internal debates on joining the political process. As with any strategic decision, the motion to create a political party was not initially unanimously accepted in either al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya or Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Prominent leaders of the former, including Usama Hafiz and ‘Asim ‘Abd al-Magid, preferred to focus on reconstituting the group after years of state repression. Hafiz notably stressed in an interview that many al-Gama‘a al-Islamiyya members and leaders had just left prison, adding that the group lacked a strong internal infrastructure and needed more cadres. Out of fear for possible negative repercussions against the group, Hafiz opposed political participation.<sup>43</sup> Other leaders advocated isolation from politics and a sole focus on *da‘wa*.

Internal divisions in Islamic Jihad were more pronounced. According to my observations of group meetings and interviews, Islamic Jihad’s members and leaders broke along three lines.<sup>44</sup> One faction accepted the legitimacy of the political process and created the SDP (which became the IP). The party’s founders represented multiple generations of Islamic Jihad members, including militants who had been active in the mid-1970s as well as more recent recruits from the mid-1990s. A second faction — led by Muhammad al-Zawahiri, Murgan Salim, and Ahmad ‘Ashush — spoke in the name of the so-called Salafi jihadi current (*al-tayyar al-Salafi al-jihadi*) after their liberation from prison after the 2011 uprising and thoroughly opposed the political process.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the remaining faction is not cohesive and includes Islamic Jihad members and leaders who oppose the political process and who do not consider themselves Salafi jihadi. Their activities after the uprising varied, from nonviolent preaching to mobilizing in support of Islamist rebels in the Syrian Civil War.<sup>46</sup>

Considering the wide range of opinions held by members and leaders of Gama‘a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad on joining the political process, why did the former successfully create a political party based on a collective agreement while the latter failed to do so? The previous comparative analysis of frame transformation can

43. Interview, Usama Hafiz, April 2013, Cairo.

44. Interview by the author with local Islamic Jihad leader and Islamic Party member Hisham Abaza, July 1, 2012, Cairo; interview, Salih Jahin, April 2013, Cairo; interview, Usama Qasim, July 2012, Zagazig.

45. For examples, see Ahmad Fu‘ad ‘Ashush, *Al-Hujja wa-l-Burhan ‘ala Hurmat Dukhul al-Barlaman* [Evidence and Proof of the Taboo of Entering Parliament] (Al-Faroq Foundation, 2012); Abu Ayman al-Misri [Muhammad al-Zawahiri], *Su‘al wa-Jawab: Hukm Dukhul al-Ahzab li-Maslahat Tatbiq al-Shari‘a (wa-l-Tarashshuh li-Ri‘asat al-Jumhuriyya* [Question and Answer: A Ruling on the Entering of Parties for the Benefit of Applying Shari‘a (and the Nomination of the President)] (Mu‘assasat al-Ma’sada al-I‘lamiyya, 2012).

46. Interview by the author with a former member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad–associated group Vanguard of Conquest (*Tala‘i‘ al-Fath*), July 30, 2012, Cairo. He is involved with the armed opposition in Syria and his name is withheld for security reasons.

certainly dispel a solely ideational explanation informed by these groups' divergent founding missions.<sup>47</sup> However, having been a jihadi group from the outset is not sufficient to explain this failure decades later, especially since a few prominent opponents of the theological revisions of Sayyid Imam such as Magdi Salim and Usama Qasim justified joining the political process based on their understanding of the post-2011 setting.

This comparative discrepancy is explained by these groups' organizational dynamics and is inherent to their internal decision-making processes. Militant groups are characterized by formal and informal institutional arrangements over their decision-making processes.<sup>48</sup> Their internal disparities shape diverging organizational cultures that mediate group discussions over new strategic choices. According to my fieldwork and interviews, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya has forged a culture of internal consensus in its decision making-process, despite some strong differences of opinion between its leaders over time. This culture of consensus has helped to solve internal arguments over the use of violence, negotiations with the state, and collaboration with al-Qa'ida in the late 1990s. Conversely, Egyptian Islamic Jihad failed to create similar decision-making processes over time. This group repeatedly became divided over an array of issues, ranging from personal conflicts between its leaders to strident ideological differences. While the study of the organizational origins of this divide between al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya and Egyptian Islamic Jihad is not the subject of this research, an understanding based on theoretical work by Paul Staniland might trace their divergence back to the 1970s.<sup>49</sup> Such a theory might argue that the roots of these organizational differences lie in the strong ties between al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya leaders before their contentious conflict with the state, which contrasts with the early divisions in Islamic Jihad-related cells.

The unified nature of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's decision-making process facilitated the democratization of its internal structures after the 2011 uprising. As previously noted, this group was divided along several lines in 2011, notably between accommodating and taking a hostile stance on the former regime. The group's mufti, Shaykh 'Abd al-Akhir Hammad, argued that remedies to this internal discord were the conducting of internal elections for a new general assembly (*al-jam'iyya al-'umumiyya*) and a new consultative council. In contrast to the democratization of the Muslim Brotherhood under state repression in the 1990s, al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya managed to democratize its internal decision-making process during the post-2011 political opening. In each case, internal pressure arguably played a significant role in convincing the group's leaders of the necessity to undertake internal reforms to assure the group's survival and preclude internal ruptures and splinters.

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's internal democratization did not materialize in Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The latter group's leaders asserted that, while some tried to reach out to one another, they repeatedly failed to unite on a common program. Instead of unifying their ranks, Islamic Jihad leaders were busy debating one another and disputing who legitimately carried the group's banner: the Islamic Party or the Salafi jihadi

47. Even though this argument has sometimes been stressed by al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya members, who argue that Islamic Jihad lost its *raison d'être* after the uprising.

48. Theodore McLauchlin and Wendy Pearlman, "Out-Group Conflict, In-Group Unity? Exploring the Effect of Repression on Intramovement Cooperation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Feb. 2012), p. 41–66.

49. Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

current. In personal discussions and interviews, some IP leaders questioned the sanity of Sayyid Imam, but boasted that they never read his theological revisions.<sup>50</sup> Others blamed the Salafi jihadi current for the hijacking the legacy of Islamic Jihad, accusing them of being upstarts from the young guard and lacking legitimacy to represent the group.<sup>51</sup> In turn, the younger generation argued that IP leaders were not truly from Islamic Jihad in the first place, and were hijacking its name.

The participation of the BDP and of the IP in the post-2011 political process abruptly ended in July 2013, when the Egyptian military staged a coup against President Mohamed Morsi. These parties' short-lived political experience is therefore insufficient to draw significant lessons on its possible ideological or behavioral repercussions. The main assertion is that both political parties showed some signs of political pragmatism. For instance, the BDP supported the candidacy of liberal Islamist candidate 'Abd al-Mun'im Abu al-Futuh in the 2012 presidential election and refused to lend support to the Salafi candidate Hazim Abu Isma'il, even though the latter asserted that he would apply Islamic law in Egypt. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya leaders argued that they favored Abu al-Futuh's more conciliatory platform, condemning both Abu Isma'il and the calls for violence by his supporters before his exclusion from the political process due to his mother's American citizenship.<sup>52</sup>

After the military coup, both parties tried to mediate between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military, and opposed the use of violence by either side. The post-coup setting has been nonetheless more difficult to assess. Many members and leaders of these two groups were arrested or left Egypt. The BDP and the IP joined an alliance of political parties supporting the reinstatement of Morsi's presidency, the National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy (*al-Tahaluf al-Watani li-Da'm al-Shar'iyya*, sometimes referred to as the Anti-Coup Alliance). Dissenting views surfaced among al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's leaders over the appropriate position to adopt, but the group managed to preserve its internal unity. On the other hand, the IP articulated vague support for Morsi and, according to my fieldwork, its members and leaders preferred to stay under the radar for fear of arrest. Interviews of IP leaders revealed a shared desire to campaign for external political pressure on the military by the European Union in order promote national reconciliation. For a group that fought to curtail the influence of Egyptian military for decades, this was quite noteworthy.

## CONCLUSION

The decision of al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group) and Egyptian Islamic Jihad (also called the Jihad Group or the Jihad Organization) to participate in the political process after the 2011 uprising was mostly based on these groups' understanding of the new political opportunities available to them after the resignation of President Husni Mubarak. This decision was neither preceded by a pre-2011 political program, nor by either group deeming party politics or democracy to be legal in Islamic law. The participation of both groups was therefore primarily informed by the nationwide change in Egypt.

50. Interview, Usama Qasim, July 2012, Zagazig; interview, Magdi Salim, April 2013, Cairo.

51. Interviews, 'Abd al-Ra'uf Amir al-Gaysh, June/July 2012, Cairo.

52. Interview, Usama Hafiz, April 2013, Cairo.

This analysis of these groups' entry into the political process demonstrates the importance of their internal dynamics and of the debates over justifying these decisions among their members and sympathizers. In both cases, the leaderships of these groups strived to demonstrate the continuity between their original historic collective identities and the decisions to create political parties. They reinterpreted their self-understanding to demonstrate that these decisions did not imply rejecting their past commitments, but rather were legitimate reinterpretations of them. In this regard, the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's historic *da'wi* (missionary) identity was not necessarily more conducive to reinterpretation than the Islamic Jihad's identity as a jihadi organization. In both cases, leaders managed to reinterpret their pasts in order to justify their new decisions, hence corroborating the flexibility of former militant groups' political understandings.

This analysis of the acceptance of the legitimacy of the political process confirms that, more than theology and internal discursive processes, the most important factor in the maintenance of internal unity and consensus inheres with the preexistence of a centralized decision-making process. Prior to the 2011 uprising, formal and informal institutional arrangements enabled al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya to democratize its decision-making process, while Islamic Jihad members and leaders struggled over the direction of the group as it splintered into different organizations. This comparison indicates that the democratization of militant groups is contingent on their internal organizational makeup more than on external environmental stimulus. Moreover, it is important to note that this internal setting cannot be reduced merely to charismatic leadership, but includes broader institutional arrangements and their internal legitimacy.

This analysis will have to leave it to future studies to investigate the long-term implications of these two groups' entrance into the political process. At the time of publication, the narrow time frame is still not sufficient to adequately assess these groups' ideological and behavioral transformation, even though their positions between 2011 and 2013 reveal a noticeable degree of pragmatism. Their reaction to the military coup and to the unprecedented wave of repression that followed tend to suggest that their rejection of violence was not a mere tactical move. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya's endorsement of a nonviolent opposition to the regime is firm, including after the August 2015 death of one of its leaders, 'Isam Dirbala, in an Egyptian prison. A reopening of the political process in Egypt, though seemingly improbable at this time, would likely entrench political pragmatism in the groups' ideological commitments. This case study therefore serves as an important precedent for Islamist armed groups elsewhere, especially in war-torn Syria.

