Framing Political Islam: Syria's Muslim Brotherhood and the 2011 Uprising

Amir Abdul Reda

Abstract

What aspects of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's (a.k.a. the Ikhwan) cultural/ideological framing contributed to its failure to gather opponents of the Assad regime around its leadership during the 2011uprising? What does this reveal about why some Islamist political parties failed in situations of high political contention, such as the Syrian civil war? I argue that despite considerable evolution in the Syrian Brotherhood's cultural/ideological framing since its first uprising (1977-82), it failed to target three crucial aspects of the 2011 uprising: the military struggle, the masses, and the religious minorities. My research outlines how the movement's ideological shift toward non-violence and post-1982 reorientation toward democratic elections (ironically) prevented its members from playing a leadership role in what was mainly an armed struggle. At the same time, my research outlines how this evolution and its related changes attracted neither the masses, which remained oriented toward the traditional economic elites, nor the Sunni-oriented religious minorities. I argue that these three crucial aspects undermined the Ikhwan's efforts and illustrate how poor cultural/ideological framing can doom even those Islamist political parties with the strongest resource mobilization capacities and previously unmatched situations of political opportunity structures.

Amir Abdul Reda is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, where he specializes in comparative politics and political theory, while being a Junior Fellow at Massey College (2013-14; 2015-17). His research interests include Islamic politics (theory and empirics), research methods (qualitative and quantitative), idea systems and political culture, and political history.

Introduction

In June 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood won Egypt's first democratic presidential election and thereby became the first Islamist political party to acquire political power in that country.[1] Yet its rule was short lived, as the ensuing public unrest quickly reversed the electoral results and opened the way for the military coup of June 2013 and the Brotherhood's ouster from the post-revolutionary government.[2] Only a few regional Islamist parties have matched this experience, such as Tunisia's Ennahda, Palestine's Hamas, and Turkey's AK Partisi. Some have noted that the success of the Egyptian Ikhwan was accompanied by a move toward working within the rules of the country's political system laid down during the 1970s,[3] an approach that contrast sharply with the Syrian branch's two attempts to win power through uprisings.

In fact, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood has consistently failed to reproduce the political victories of its Egyptian counterpart, despite its attempts to ride the wave of popular anti-Ba'th sentiment in 1977-82 and again in 2011. Forced into exile after the 1982 failure, it concretely re-entered Syrian politics only in 2011 and on the side of the Syrian National Council umbrella group, which offered political representation to some of the country's many rebels.[4] Nevertheless, the ongoing civil war stemming from the 2001 uprising did not presage the politico-military victory that the Brotherhood and its acolytes in the council were hoping for, but rather yet another failure. Indeed, the domination of the Syrian rebel front by *takfīrī* (extremist) Islamist groups,[5] starting with the emergence of the Nusra Front in 2013 and that of ISIS in 2014, marginalized such moderate Islamist groups as the Muslim Brotherhood.[6] What can the Brotherhood's experience in the ongoing civil war reveal about why moderate Islamist groups fail and leave the door open for *takfīrī* ones to emerge? I argue that social movement theory can help us understand the ideological reasons why some Islamist groups fail to gather strong popular support for their cause while others succeed.

Research on the religious and secular social movements of the Middle East and North Africa has only recently started to use social movement theory, with the notable contributions of Quentin Wiktorowicz, Joel Beinin, and Frederic Vairel.[7] Even though such research has benefited from these new analytical tools, the Brotherhood and its endeavors in Syria have been ignored.[8] Applying these tools to the context of the Syrian uprising allows us to fill a gap in the literature that is becoming more and more salient in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, which continues to fundamentally reshape the Arab political scene.

Social movement theory combines three variables that focus on complementary aspects of a social movement's reality, namely, resource mobilization theory, political opportunity structures, and framing.[9] Resource mobilization theory addresses the movement's capacity to gather resources and mobilize the structures necessary to transform individualized discontent into organized contention.[10] The Brotherhood has been quite successful in this regard, as it has been able to do just that since the early years of Syrian independence and long before the 1977-82 uprising.[11] Furthermore, it retained this capacity while in exile and is a central actor in the civil war due to its pivotal role in the Syrian National Council.[12]

For a long time, the Brotherhood was by far the opposition's best organized and funded political group due to its historical legacy of opposition, its resilient and committed members, and its ability to bridge those gaps that had once starkly divided it.[13] Some have argued that "despite being scattered throughout the world since the 1980s, the movement seems to have retained much of its institutional and organizational capacities."[14] Indeed, the Brotherhood has proved its organizational skills by maneuvering through the country's changing political climate from its position in exile, both by negotiating with as well as coordinating against the Assad governments since the mid-1990s. As such, Ali Sadreddine Bayanouni's 1996 election as its leader was quickly followed by secret negotiations with the Hafez al-Assad government, whereas his son Bashar's assumption of power upon his father's death in 2000 triggered an era of detente that endured until the 2011 uprising.

While still in exile, the Brotherhood secured the release of hundreds of its imprisoned members; however, many remained in prison and the movement's political status was never completely normalized. At the same time, it played a leading role in creating a common voice for the numerous opposition movements by coordinating with them to create and announce the National Honor pact in 2001 and 2002, as well as the Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change in 2005. Nevertheless, one faulty step tarnished its reputation among the Syrians in 2006: Its alliance with former Syrian vice president-turned-defector Abdul Halim Khaddam in forming the National Salvation Front in exile, a step from which it backtracked in 2009. Following this, the movement sought to end its anti-regime activities while relying on Turkey's AKP, which was then on good terms both with the Ikhwan and Damascus, to mediate with Bashar's government. Only in 2011 did the Brotherhood re-adopt an oppositional stance when a concrete opportunity to do so arose.[15]

Political opportunity structures focus on the openings and constraints of the social context in which the social movement evolves as exogenous actors

both impose limitations and open opportunities for empowerment, regardless of the existing resources or discontent.[16] The ruling Ba'th party excluded the Ikhwan from the political system a long time ago, and yet provided it with an important political opportunity starting in 2011, when most of Syrian society scented regime weakness and an opportunity for change.[17] Indeed, the 2011 uprising, characterized by an all-out anti-Assad rebellion supported by France, the UK, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other international powers, was by far the movement's greatest opportunity for regime change.

Finally, "framing" refers to the movement's process of ideological construction in its attempt to build and disseminate the ideas that generate group identity, attract popular support, and justify mobilization and membership.[18] The social movement uses "frames," the very modem of the framing process, as tools to propagate those ideas in society and thus "represent interpretive schemata that offer a language and cognitive tools for making sense of experiences and events in the 'world out there.'"[19] As the Brotherhood was unable to gather opponents of the Assad regime around its leadership during 2011, despite high levels of resources for mobilization and considerable political opportunities, more attention ought to be given to how the group frames its ideology.

In this paper, I am most interested in how the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's cultural/ideological framing (hereinafter "framing") contributed to its inability to mobilize anti-regime opponents around its leadership. I ask what aspects of its framing contribute to the movement's ongoing failure in this regard. What does this reveal about the reasons why Islamist political parties fail in situations of high political contention, such as the Syrian civil war?

I argue that despite the considerable evolution in framing since the first uprising (1977-1982), the Brotherhood failed to target three crucial aspects of the 2011 uprising: the military struggle, the masses, and the religious minorities. My research outlines how its post-1982 ideological shift toward non-violence and democratic elections (ironically) prevented it from playing a leadership role in what was mainly an armed struggle. At the same time, my research outlines how changes in the group's framing neither seduced the masses, which remained oriented toward traditional economic elites, nor attracted the Sunni-oriented religious minorities. I argue that these three crucial aspects undermined the Ikhwan's efforts and illustrate how poor can doom even those Islamist political parties with the strongest resource mobilization capacities and previously unmatched situations of political opportunity structures.

I start by contextualizing the Muslim Brotherhood's 2011 uprising by describing the regime's characteristics from the first uprising to the current one, by discussing the narrative of grievances that led to both uprisings, and by analyzing the movement's failures in both cases. I then detail the evolution of its framing during the same period by outlining both new and resilient components. Finally, I focus on the Ikhwan's failure to mobilize the anti-Assad opposition around its leadership during the country's ongoing civil war and how its framing contributed to this failure.

Two Uprisings, Two Failures: 1977-1982 and 2011

The Arab Socialist Renaissance Party, better known through the Arabic word *ba'th* (renaissance), was – and still claims to be – based on an ideology consisting of a mix of Arab nationalism, socialism, and secularism.[20] Despite its inherent socialist and secular aspects, it led Syria down the neoliberal path under Hafez al-Assad, starting in the 1970s,[21] and allied the country with the region's Shia powers (e.g., Hezbollah and Iran), thereby becoming an important component of what has often been called the "Shia crescent."[22] The party became an important actor of Syrian politics in the 1950s and remained so, despite the country's political turbulence, until Hafez al-Assad assumed power in 1970 and eventually stabilized the country.[23]

Al-Assad's regime rested on an intricate dynamic of social support that incorporated specific social strata at each level of political power. His son Bashar, who inherited this structure in 2001, modified it somewhat to accommodate the economic impetus of his time. Hafez al-Assad's regime largely rested upon the Ba'th party for the ruling political class and upon the working class and rural populations for its traditional social base, despite the liberalization policies that began in the 1970s.[24] At this time, the regime incorporated an array of interests located within the army, the minorities, some sections of the key social forces, the bourgeoisie, the salaried middle class, the peasantry, and the working class. It also allowed for a cross-class, urban-rural social basis.[25]

Bashar reconfigured the regime's social base by his liberalization policies of the 2000s, a development that opened the doors of the ruling political class to the "wheeler-dealers" and included elements of the middle and upper bourgeoisie in the social base.[26] This new approach stemmed from the regime's need to find a societal source of support for the state's neoliberal reforms by gradually incorporating into its power dynamic those social classes that could take advantage of the ongoing liberalization policies.[27] Yet at the same time he had to balance the newcomers' interests with those of the traditional ruling

political elite and the traditional social base, which were not entirely ousted from the dynamics of power and politics.[28] Despite the efforts deployed by Hafiz and Bashar to strengthen and maintain a social base, both father and son would witness uprisings in 1977-82 and 2011.

The first uprising took place in the context of a major regime legitimacy crisis that emerged out of the socio-economic influences of the first *infitāḥ* (economic liberalization) policies implemented during the 1970s. Motivated by the regime's need for continued access to rent payments in order to co-opt those political and economic elites that would benefit from the political status quo and allow the regime to survive,[29] Hafez al-Assad presided over these policies. The result was the incorporation of a new and flourishing private sector into the political sphere due to the involvement of both state and military officials in its midst.[30] Benefiting from the ensuing wealth while enjoying political cover, a dynamic of "embourgeoisement of the political elite" and a flourishing of the "private bourgeoisie" occurred and led to an attempt by this nascent bourgeoise to translate economic power into political influence.[31]

The creation of this new class of private bourgeoisie, which would become more and more central to the social base of both Assad regimes, bridged the gaps between the state and the private sector and generated the very corruption and rising inequality that generated the first Brotherhood-led social uprising.[32] Inflation was rising, and yet incomes for salaried employees, workers, and the small peasantry – the very social classes constituting the regime's traditional social base – remained stagnant. Moreover, the emergent state and private bourgeoisies were benefiting financially from these inequalities and thus seeking their consolidation and perpetuation, something that clashed directly with the aspirations of the regime's traditional social base.[33] According to Raymond Hinnebusch:

> Even as the regime was establishing new roots in a new dominant social class, its link to its mass constituency was eroding, while those marginalized – largely from the Sunni urban classes – by the regime's mixture of statism, rural and sectarian favouritism, corruption and inequalities, turned to political Islam as an alternative ideology contesting the very legitimacy of the Ba'thist state.[34]

Thus the roots of the Ikhwan's first uprising can be found in the socio-economic disturbances that accompanied the regime's economic policies as it sought to expand its social base.

Despite a once peaceful opposition between the Baʿth Party and the Brotherhood, the party's 1963 takeover of Syria and especially Hafiz al-

Assad's ascent to power in 1970 marked the beginning of a cycle of mutual violence that culminated in the bloody 1982 entanglement in Hama and the Ikhwan's complete military defeat.[35] The entire incident was so disastrous for the Ikhwan that Adnan Saadedine, at that time one of the organization's leaders, described those years in his memoirs as ones of "horrible massacres," of "executions, assassinations and targeted killings."[36]

During this period, the Brotherhood and other Islamic militants launched many sustained and violent challenges – assassinations, sabotage, strikes, localized mass rebellions – that the regime survived only with great difficulty and through massive repression. The regime's own internal division between the liberals, who wished to defuse tensions through political liberalization, and the hardliners, who simply wanted to quell the uprising, waited until 1980 to employ violence. At the same time, Damascus seemed weak enough during the closing years of the 1970s that both secular and Islamist political forces began to think that it could be brought down or transformed through rebellion. Buoyed by Iran's successful Islamic revolution, Syria's Islamic opposition began to increase its radical anti-state measures as the regime was felt to be increasingly isolated. The ensuing demonstrations and attacks finally evolved into guerrilla warfare at the time when society was pressuring the regime to liberalize and abandon its authoritarian and arbitrary measures.[37]

The Brotherhood's prospects were positive as the insurrection started in 1977. Moreover, the partial adhesion of leftist and liberal middle class elements to an Islamic-led opposition made the prospects of a generalized anti-government movement under an Islamic umbrella, resembling events in Iran, more realistic than ever.[38] Indeed, "the Islamic movement faithfully reflected the interests and values of the roughly half of society effectively excluded by the Ba'ath state."[39] Nevertheless, now under threat, the regime's hardliners started implementing drastic measures that overshadowed the more liberal members. The 1980 assassination attempt on Hafez al-Assad, the ideal pretext for massacring the Brotherhood's members and militants, culminated in the "showdown of Hama" in February 1982[40] that left the movement completely crippled and in exile. In fact, it only recovered from this situation very recently.

During the first uprising, the Brotherhood led the Islamic front that was, at some point, supported by a very large portion of the political and popular spectrum of society. And yet it could not channel that support toward the ensuing military confrontations. Indeed, the regime survived due to its sectarian bases: The Alawis, who made up its core, co-opted both Sunnis and the rural

classes into the state's bureaucracy.[41] This "salaried middle class and peasant base of the regime" remained intact, despite the Brotherhood's attacks and attempts to overthrow the regime.[42] At the same time, the regime's co-optation of many Sunnis made it impossible for the movement to mobilize the Sunni majority and thereby split the state's institutions – something that, according to some scholars, would have allowed the Ikhwan to win.[43] In other words, the Brotherhood was defeated by its inability to attract strong societal support for its cause and the regime's ability to retain its own social base. Despite some differences in outcomes, the second uprising would also fail for very similarly interrelated reasons.

This second uprising, which started in 2011, shares important similarities and differences with the first one: relatively similar socio-economic roots and a regional context prone to political unrest. However, it was marked by such important factors as frustration over the aborted reforms and the revolt's regional nature, both of which had been absent in 1982.

Societal unrest found its roots in the regime's reconfigured system of authoritarian governance caused by Bashar al-Assad's acceleration of his father's 1970s liberalization and privatization policies.[44] In fact, the necessity of access to new forms of rent necessary for the regime's survival, which dictated the initial liberalization policies, pushed Bashar to further reform the economy. His liberalization policies, which led to the creation of a "social market economy,"[45] started to create discontent among the social classes excluded by the regime. Their subsequent acceleration and moving of society further away from the traditional social base had certain consequences, namely, the "lowering of interest rates, the opening of private commercial banks, the unification of the exchange rate, the cancellation of subventions on primary goods – specifically fuels and cements – and the opening of Damascus' stock exchange in 2009."[46]

The subsequent privatization forced the regime to remove the state's economic assistance, from which the peasants and workers benefited, in order to open up new economic opportunities for the middle and higher bourgeoisies. Caroline Donati argues that: "The 2011 uprising can be understood, in part, as the ultimate expression of resistance by Syrians to the economic and social costs of reconfiguring authoritarian governance in Syria: it has involved populations that have been excluded from new patterns of predation and redistribution."[47]

Another important component leading to the current uprising can be found in the aborted political reforms instigated by Bashar upon his assumption of power in 2001, the so-called Damascus Spring. Despite the promising open-

ing, analysts noted that he remained exceptionally strict and a difficult interlocutor for the political opposition in terms of the pace of reform, the Middle East peace process, and Syria's relationship with Lebanon. He was said to remain close to his father's orientations and sometimes went even further. This reality, in addition to the volatile regional climate, contributed to the 2009 abortion of the reforms. Indeed, the tumultuous events spanning the Palestinian intifada (2000) to the Israeli-Lebanese war (2006), not to mention the Bush administration's invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq (2003), led to what was seen as a reconsideration of the overtures started in the early 2000s. In the words of an anti-regime Syrian: "Bush and Sharon succeeded in transforming the Damascus Spring into a Winter."[48]

A final important piece that explains the current uprising and distinguishes it from the 1982 revolt is the Arab Spring and its repercussions on Syrian society. The 2011 revolt was influenced by this regional revolt, which made the Brotherhood just one actor among many others throughout the Arab world. At the same time, many regional players sought to influence what was going on in the neighboring countries and therefore had a serious impact upon the on-the-ground realities of what had often started out as genuine grassroots movements. As such, demonstrations inspired by Tunisia and Egypt gradually turned into a full-fledged anti-Assad rebellion and Syrian social movements started organizing both inside and outside the country.

Early on, the Brotherhood was easily accepted by many of the country's emerging secular and Islamist groups due to the considerable ideological changes it had undergone. Years of experience in organizing political opposition consequently allowed the Ikhwan to emerge as the opposition's overall leader[49] under an umbrella organization known as the Syrian National Council. Based in Istanbul, it was one of the most important early opposition centers of the civil war.[50] At the same time, Saudi Arabia and Turkey started supporting the anti-Assad rebellion, while Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia moved toward supporting Assad.[51] These external factors strongly influenced the rebellion's later development and its transformation to such an extent that the more extreme groups gradually sidelined the more moderate ones.

The opposition's early military victories and important territorial gains gave rise to hopes of a quick military resolution; however, these hopes were shattered in the summer of 2013 when Assad's forces launched a series of successful counterattacks.[52] Many countries and international organizations had been preparing for his fall by December 2012,[53] for the regime was completely losing its social base within the Sunni community despite retaining important support from the minorities.[54] Yet Assad had managed to overcome

this threat by the end of the summer, at which time the rebellion was discredited internationally by the rising strength of Islamist *takfīrī* groups (e.g., the Nusra Front) relative to that of the secularists and Islamist democrats.[55] Pro-democracy groups such as the Brotherhood-led Syrian National Coalition were the most important losers of this subsequent *takfirization*, as *takfīrī* groups were turning the anti-Assad fighting to their advantage and dwarfing the other rebel groups on the ground.

In this context, the Brotherhood lost its leadership position despite being the best organized and financed opposition party not directly participating in the armed struggle.[56] It failed to concretely lead the opposition because it did not mobilize other regime opponents around its leadership, despite the many changes implemented in its framing after the failed rebellion of 1982. I argue that important reasons for its failure can be found in the evolution of its framing from 1982 to 2011, as it failed to target crucial aspects of the second uprising.

Evolution of the Brotherhood's Framing

The movement's framing comprises two important and relatively unchanging concepts: the core orientation toward Syria's Sunni community and furthering an anti-populist form of political Islam. These coexist with evolving conceptions of the ideal state and how to attain it as well as the concerns that evolved in parallel with the gradual reunification of the Brotherhood's two factions that appeared after 1982 rebellion. Up until the 2000s, the members had focused on an Islamic revolution influenced by Qutbist ideals and the creation of an Islamic state. During the 2000s, they patched up their differences and committed themselves to the Turkish example of direct participatory democracy in a secular state. The Aleppo faction had abandoned the use of violence to attain its political goals after 1982; the Hama clan only did so in the 2000s. I will start by outlining those aspects of the framing that have remained in place from 1982 to 2011, namely, the focus on the country's Sunnis as well as the traditional members of the urban middle classes and the bourgeoisie, and will then discuss those that have changed, namely, the nature of the envisaged future state and the means proposed to attain it.

All factions shared the movement's overall Sunni orientation, which remained consistent from 1982 to 2011. At the time of the 1982 uprising, the Brotherhood strongly resembled the Sunni Islamist movements of that time and how they targeted their own indigenous Sunni communities.[57] Indeed, the Ikhwan's political aims and framing in that timeframe were specifically sec-

tarian, for they grew against the underlying Alawi control of Hafez al-Assad's regime that they often targeted as "anti-Sunni" and "pro-Alawi."[58] The regime's sectarian nature was seen as a threat to the Sunnis, whom the Brotherhood specifically targeted and whose interests it sought to defend against what came to be seen as the Alawi sect itself.[59]

The Brotherhood's consistent advocacy of conservative Sunni religious values is yet another reason why its followers and target populations remained predominantly Sunni from 1982 to 2011.[60] This opposition to the Alawi regime and, to a certain extent, the Alawi sect in general, as well as the advocacy of conservative Sunni religious values, are further complemented by the fact that the group had always self-identified with the Sunni sect from 1982 to 2011.[61] Even in terms of its framing's economic aspect, the group remained oriented toward Sunnis despite its focus on specific social classes that were not entirely constituted by members of this sect.

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood always oriented its framing toward the traditional holders of economic power, such as the traditional urban middle class and bourgeoisie, an orientation that contrasted sharply with that of the Egyptian branch.[62] Some have noted that the Syrian branch "distinguished itself by being closely associated with the business social class and important landowners."[63] In many ways, its framing went even further in its defense of the traditional bourgeois and middle classes in that it offered nothing more than what has been called an "anti-populist version of Islamic ideology."[64] In fact, it represented anti-statist interests and the class worldview surrounding the *sūq* (market) by advocating a relatively liberal economic policy that considered free enterprise and capitalism as key elements against the Ba'th Party's socialist orientation.[65]

This confrontation over economic advocacies persisted despite the liberalization policies of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad from the 1970s to the 2000s. Even the growing number of students who enjoyed its social support did not enable the Brotherhood to modify the economic aspects of its framing.[66] At the same time, ever since 1982 the movement had persistently drawn its support from the traditional bourgeoisie and the middle class, notwithstanding the growing number of youth in its ranks.[67] Despite these realities, the Brotherhood's framing had changed deeply in many important aspects due to a dynamic that paralleled its gradual homogenization from 1982 to the 2000s.

Moreover, many important aspects had been considerably altered in relation to the power politics of its internal factions. Up until the 2000s, the Ikhwan had been divided between moderate and radical factions, something that con-

sistently spawned splinter groups. But all of the ended as it became far more homogeneous. Paralleling this homogenization is the contemporaneous shift in its framing, which is noticeable in two important political aspects: the nature of the envisioned state and how to attain it. Before analyzing this particular shift, however, it is important to discuss pre-1982 conceptions of the ideal state and how various groups thought they could realize it.

During the pre-1982 period, the Brotherhood was relatively liberal and reflected the liberal Islamic intentions of Syria's Sunni population. It advocated for an Islamic state – first as a civil state with Islam enshrined as the state religion in the constitution,[68] and later on as requiring only the head of state to be a Muslim – and for using peaceful means to establish it.[69] But this changed when Hafez al-Assad's policies, both at home and in the Lebanese war, were perceived as sectarian in nature, a perception that elevated both sectarian tensions and sentiments within Syria while progressively radicalizing both the Sunnis and the Brotherhood in the timeframe surrounding the events of 1982.[70] While many of its radical offshoots emerged during 1979-80,[71] moderates mostly from the Damascene region had started breaking off from the organization by the early 1970s and left the leadership to more radical elements.[72] Originating mostly from Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia, this "Northern Axis" of radicals would lead the Brotherhood during the disastrous military confrontation with the Ba'th regime during 1982.[73]

The 1975 transfer of leadership to Adnan Saadedine al-Hamaoui concretized the movement's transition from a relatively liberal ideology toward Qutbism, for he led it into the military confrontation with the regime.[74] Coming to power along with Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni and Said Hawa in what has been described as an internal leadership "coup," these three men were behind the 1980 publication of the "Statement on the Islamic Revolution in Syria and Its Method," which elaborated upon their attempt to launch a Qutbist Islamic revolution that, noted by some, resembled the Iranian model.[75]

Even though the general concepts to which they committed the Brotherhood in the "Statement" and its "Method" were relatively liberal and pluralistic,[76] their concrete actions oriented the movement toward confrontational and violent deeds. This was paralleled by the emergence of far more radical splinter groups, such as the Kataeb Mohammad led by Marwan Hadid or the Syrian branch of the Hizb ul-Tahrir founded by Abdul Rahman Abou Ghoda, which engaged in very violent acts.[77] Despite its heterogeneity, one can note that overall the Brotherhood went from practicing a relatively peaceful opposition to, by 1982, being transformed into one that had adopted military vio-

lence and armed struggle as the main means of launching a Qutbist Islamic revolution.[78] At the same time, its sectarian aspect was being developed in parallel with a militant Islamic ideology and the belief that toppling the secular Ba'thist regime via an Islamic revolution had become a necessity.[79]

After 1982, the Brotherhood reconfigured itself into the "Hama clan" and the more liberal "Aleppo faction," both of which would coexist with difficulty in the shadow of what had happened in Hama.[80] In between them existed various ideological/cultural framings as to how they should attain their political goals along with many other differences – so much so, in fact, that some members spoke of two distinct organizations.[81] They even followed different ideological lines: One revolved around Riyadh and was open to talking with Hafez al-Assad, whereas the other one revolved around Baghdad and adopted a rather confrontational stance.[82] For instance, in 1988 Adnan Saadedine, a leader of the second clan, restated his view of "negotiations" and "appeasements" with the regime as being something that "does not work," while calling al-Assad an "enemy" that is like "a cancer whose only cure is eradication."[83] Despite such confrontational stances, during the 2000s the Hama clan gave up the military struggle in order to attain some anti-regime political goals, something that the Aleppo faction had done in 1982.[84] Both factions reunited during the 2000s by officially committing themselves to a Turkish-model secular state, which they combined with advocating direct participatory democracy as a way to attain it.[85]

In summary, the Brotherhood's ideological/cultural framing has evolved significantly since 1982, and many past mistakes were dealt with so that the movement could improve its performance when political opportunities arose, notably the 2011 uprising.

The Failure of the Brotherhood's Framing

Despite these important above-mentioned shifts, the organization could not create social support for itself and mobilize the anti-regime opposition around its leadership due to its inappropriate approach to the current uprising's three crucial components: the military struggle, the masses, and the religious minorities.

The organization's rejection of violence and anti-regime militarization prevented it from *playing* a leadership role in the 2011 uprising and thus distanced it from the Free Syrian Army and the armed struggle. On the one hand, this position allowed the Ikhwan to avoid being placed under the spotlight of the military struggle in the same negative manner as had been the case in its

first uprising, and proved their definitive ideological change to both the Syrians and the international community. On the other hand, this position also caused it to be absent from the military struggle against Bashar al-Assad's forces, which gradually became by far the most important aspect of the 2011 uprising. Yet there are hints that the movement has started to realize the need to connect with the growing military struggle in a more concrete manner and thereby correct its tactical mistake.

Overt precautions in this regard enabled the Brotherhood to claim that it did not have fighting elements on the ground in Syria, even though it suggested that a number of militiamen were sympathizers and even though rumors emerged about its having established its own militia.[86] Although the movement's lengthy exile and absence from the military struggle had crippled its capacity to mobilize the opposition around its leadership, apparently the movement did try to build close ties – and even co-opt – some militia groups.[87] Yet their absence from the fighting and the military scene caused the Ikhwan's leadership to suffer, for their organization was not leading the fight against the regime, despite its significant contributions to the political struggle.

The Brotherhood's actions hint that it was preparing for an "Egyptian scenario": The regime's collapse would give the Ikhwan the opportunity to assume power through the ballot box due to its preferential status in the political opposition and absence from controversial military actions. Indeed, the movement has been an important actor within the Syrian National Council ever since the latter's formation because it is the opposition's best financed and organized political group. Notwithstanding its strong influence on the council, the movement's leadership has always asserted that it does not control the coalition.[88] In 2016, it became clearer than ever that this scenario would not occur, whereas Assad's survival shattered the Brotherhood's hopes of a political context within which it could assume power through elections. Given these realities, the Brotherhood's framing focused on the political struggle, a minor aspect of the Syrian uprising, and thus neglected the major aspect: the military struggle. This decision limited the group's ability to mobilize the opposition, a situation that is further complemented by economic aspects of the group's framing.

The second variable of its failure to mobilize the opposition around its leadership is its advocacy of economic policies that harm the masses. Its ideological/cultural framing did not resonate with the workers, peasants, and other groups because it focuses on the economic interests of the traditional economic elite: the bourgeoisie and urban middle class.[89] This partly explains

why the masses never rallied around its leadership, for it offered them nothing more than an "anti-populist" form of political Islam.[90] As such, the Ikhwan did not benefit from Bashar al-Assad's loss of a large part of his social base among the largely Sunni masses[91] that constitute the most important component of the Syrian rebellion; in fact, these people have mostly mobilized around non-Brotherhood opposition groups, such as the many *takfīrī* groups.[92] As such, the Brotherhood's enviable organized and financial status was not complemented by a strong connection with the Syrian masses on the ground, another reality that prevented it from gathering the opposition around its leadership. Moreover, its limited ability to attract more youth and students throughout its existence[93] also hindered its efforts in this regard.

The third variable is found in the Brotherhood's neglect of the country's religious minorities. Its framing focuses on the Sunni population and thus has little – if anything – to offer the minorities, none of which have really attracted by this Islamist organization.[94] Despite its modified framing, the Brotherhood remains an Islamist political group that advocates for a conservative Sunni ideology and the values that come with it.[95] It is, therefore, hardly surprising that non-Sunni Syrians are excluded from the group's advocacy policies and membership and, as a result, have remained very wary of the rebellion andlargely faithful supporters of the Assad regime. This wariness is, in particular, reminiscent of a general trend among minorities groups: their constant difficulties when it comes to approaching Islamist groups in general.[96] Thus, despite the movement's many changes and confirmations of such changes by prominent Syrian secularist opposition figures, the minorities still fear the Brotherhood as an Islamist group and so remain faithful to the Assad regime.[97] Moreover, these remaining fears and the movement's continued neglect of them in general limit the organization's capacity to attract more than a quarter of the country's population around the opposition and its own leadership.

Conclusion

The failure of the 1982 uprising led to change in the Ikhwan's ranks and caused a redefinition of various aspects within the group's ideological/cultural framing – coexisting with unchanging ones – that were implemented in Syria starting in 2011 in an attempt to mobilize the opposition around the group's leadership. Despite various important changes, the Brotherhood's attempts to assume the leadership of the divided anti-Assad camp have been considerably hampered by the limitations inherent in its own framing. Its two unsuccessful

uprisings suggest that those Islamist political parties which find themselves in a situation of high political opportunity and have strong resource mobilization capacities are unable to achieve concrete political success if they lack a successful ideological/cultural framing.

This study has focused on the limitations inherent in the Brotherhood's cultural/ideological framing, even though external limitations ought to be acknowledged as well. Two specific external variables limited the group's efficacy to mobilize the opposition around its leadership during the 2011 uprising. First, as a political organization it has remained in exile ever since the failed 1982 uprising and, therefore, its leadership and infrastructures are not present on the ground in Syria. This latter reality means that the Brotherhood cannot directly use its framing to attract other rebel groups. Thus, it must do so indirectly from its various locations abroad.[98]

Second, there is a certain degree of inter-group competition for the important political opportunity represented by the Syrian civil war. Despite the Brotherhood's superior resource mobilization capacities,[99] new actors have emerged since the uprising's beginning and have slowly eroded the leadership's central importance on the political scene, both inside and outside Syria. Inside the country, the *takfīrī* groups are the ones best prepared to exploit these political opportunities, as shown by the fact that ISIS and al-Nusra are now the strongest rebel groups on the ground and have devised their own very strong cultural/ideological framings, particularly in the case of ISIS.[100]

Therefore the Brotherhood's framing, which is based abroad, faces important competition from the framings of the various on-the-ground *takfīrī* groups within a context of infighting among rebel groups that are also fighting Assad's forces and their own international allies.[101] An important next step in understanding the Syrian civil war should encompass an analysis of *takfīrī* Islamist movements, most specifically ISIS and al-Nusra, under the scope of social movement theories.

Endnotes

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