PLURALISM AND SOCIAL COHESION:
THE EFFECTS OF LEGITIMIZING NON-VIOLENT RADICALS

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ABSTRACT

The global Muslim population hosts a wide diversity of beliefs and sects, including some that are considered illiberal, non-normative, or even radical. Fear, inspired by the rise of violent extremism masked in the name of Islam, has led many to treat any and all non-normative Muslim communities with suspicion and disdain. These skeptics have criticized any effort to engage constructively with such communities by arguing that treating religious radicals—even those who are non-violent—as legitimate undermines social cohesion. This thesis challenges that argument by examining three contemporary case studies of radical but non-violent Muslim communities that were legitimized by their national government. By analyzing three criteria of social cohesion—treatment of outgroups, support for the government, and participation in pluralist environments—I will argue herein that these cases indicate that legitimizing non-violent radicals has a negligible impact on social cohesion.

In the first case, I will examine the Brixton Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre in London, where the Salafi congregants have worked closely with local authorities to prevent violent extremists from recruiting their youth. The case offers a unique example of a radical community that may actually have had a net positive impact on social cohesion and even assisted religious youth integrate into British society. In the second
case, I will look at Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, a chapter of an internationally renowned organization that works to build support for a caliphate from the grassroots level. This case will illustrate the tension between idealism and pragmatism for radical religious activists; while such activists may espouse certain divisive beliefs, their political and social interests often lead them to compromise on those values. Finally, I will examine the case of the Salafi communities of Egypt, with a specific focus on the Salafi Dawa and the political party al-Nour. This final case will underscore the diversity and internal struggles within non-violent radical populations and thereby challenge some of the key assumptions made by proponents of the social cohesion argument.

After presenting the relevant facts and data from each individual case study, I will synthesize my insights from all three to draw relevant conclusions about my central question. In the end, I will argue that “social cohesion” is an ineffective and weak metric by which to assess whether a government should or should not engage with a particular radical religious community. In a pluralistic society, diversity and conflict is natural and healthy. The primary red line should be the use or support of violence, not the acceptance of abstract liberal norms. In the end, I briefly propose an alternative model for imaging conflict and tension in a diverse society, which I label balanced social nonconvergence. By moving beyond the expectation that non-normative religious communities fall in line with the particular liberal norms, I will argue that it is possible to bring them into the mainstream and gradually moderate their more harmful elements.
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, radical religious ideologies that justify hatred and bloodshed have inspired increasing numbers of young Muslims to join the ranks of violent extremist organizations. In an effort to stem this tide, activists and government officials across the world have sought out Muslim leaders who can offer theological arguments against violence and in favor of secular liberalism. Many liberal Muslims are eager to express their vision of “true” Islam; one that is intrinsically compatible with human rights, democracy, secularism, gender equality, and non-violence. In theory, empowering this liberal or “moderate” Islam would change the public image of the religion and inspire a new generation of Muslims to embrace tolerance, pluralism, and secularism. In this process, though, liberal Muslims often seek to wrest their religion away from not only terrorists and violent extremists, but from the more conservative, illiberal, and intolerant elements as well.

Though the liberal Muslim community has made invaluable contributions to peace in recent years, the tacit goal of redefining Islam to excise conservatism and illiberalism may be wholly unrealistic. Conservative ideology remains deeply entrenched among a significant portion of the global Muslim population. In fact, a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that in the vast majority of countries surveyed, half or more of the Muslim population holds the exclusivist belief that there is only one true interpretation of Islam.¹ This significant conservative contingent will not be

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easily dissuaded from their definition of “true” Islam, particularly not by the most liberal segments of the Muslim population. The conservatives, however, cannot simply be ignored in the global struggle against extremism. It is crucial to recognize, as Marc Gopin points out, that “any strategy of conflict resolution in religious societies would have to be able to address the section of society that is the most conservative, because it is from there that the violence usually comes.”

In this thesis I will analyze the challenges of engaging with the most conservative sections of the Muslim population. I assume that religious conservatives who do not advocate for violence can serve as a uniquely compelling counterweight to their violent coreligionists. Rather than seeking to completely redefine all elements of an extremists’ ideology, as many liberal Muslim activists seek to do, conservatives can have the more modest goal of dissuading them from violent actions. Though many scholars share this assumption, as I will explain below, there is widespread skepticism about the relative value of working with conservatives. Foremost among these criticisms is the argument that legitimizing highly conservative Islam will ultimately harm society over the long term.

This criticism remains theoretical, as very little scholarly attention has been paid to analyzing concrete examples. This thesis will thus test this argument by highlighting three contemporary case studies wherein states granted greater social legitimacy to a highly conservative Muslim population. In each case, I will employ specific criteria to

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test the degree to which negative social effects correlated with the population under analysis. Through this analysis I will demonstrate that while these highly conservative Muslims often employed divisive and exclusionary rhetoric, many nonetheless willingly and actively participated in pluralistic, democratic environments where they contributed (modestly) to a stable and peaceful society.

To arrive at this conclusion, I will first unpack the existing literature underlying this theory and outline the specific criteria I will be utilizing in my analysis in Chapter 1. The next three chapters will focus on each of my case studies in turn. These cases cover a wide cultural spectrum, and progress from a local neighborhood community to a well-structured national organization to a loosely organized national community. Then, in Chapter 2, I will discuss the Salafi community in Brixton, London, which has been at the center of this debate. Then, in Chapter 3, I move to Indonesia, to analyze that country’s branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international non-violent organization dedicated to establishing a global caliphate. In Chapter 4, I examine the Salafi community in Egypt, both before and after the 2011 revolution. I will then synthesize my findings from each of these case studies in Chapter 5 in order to unpack the broader lessons learned. Finally, in my conclusion, I will offer a new model for understanding the role of radical religious traditions in a pluralistic society.
CHAPTER 1
RADICALISM AND SOCIAL COHESION

The argument that I will test in this thesis emerges out of the literature on countering violent extremism, or CVE. Though the specific meaning of the term is widely contested, it generally refers to “a realm of policy, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups.”¹ CVE programs generally do not target active terrorists, but rather the pool of sympathizers from which terrorists recruit new members.² Since most people who sympathize with terrorists or violent extremists are predisposed to hate and distrust secular liberals and government officials, it can be difficult to find the right people—committed to preventing violence and promoting peace—who can lead effective CVE programs. The right people will need to possess the credibility to influence would-be terrorists and the ability to actually reach them. Usually government agencies possess the financial and technical capacity to run effective programs, but lack credibility and reach.

Some states, however, have achieved marked success in turning convicted terrorists away from their extremist ideologies through “de-radicalization” programs


based in prisons. While these programs are complex and define success through a variety of factors, one noteworthy tactic that has emerged in some programs is the practice of recruiting former terrorists to convey the de-radicalizing message. In Indonesia, for example, counter-terrorism officials recruited Nasir Abas and Ali Imron—a former leader in the Jemaat Islamiyah (JI) and a participant in several terrorist acts respectively—to speak to imprisoned JI members and steer them away from JI ideology. Interestingly, though, these two had not completely renounced their old jihadist ideologies. Their ideological bent is precisely the reason why they had the “legitimacy and capacity to influence those inside and on the periphery of the extremist movement. Paradoxically, these same qualities would be undermined if they were to completely deny jihad fi sabililah [fighting for the cause of Allah].”

Though Indonesia’s program has been criticized as a flashy, low-cost effort with mixed outcomes, the idea of employing people with radical religious beliefs to credibly dissuade people from violence began to catch among some in the CVE community.

The theory behind working with people like Nasir Abas or Ali Imron is that individuals who share many of the same basic beliefs as violent extremists understand the strengths and weaknesses of the ideology, and can gradually guide potential extremists away from violent beliefs without pressuring them to renounce their entire belief system. Opponents of this idea, though, argue that any exposure to “radical” religious

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4 Sim, Leveraging Terrorist Dropouts, 10.
ideologies—even those that reject violence—will inevitably push people further down the path to violent behavior. This may be less of a problem in de-radicalization programs that target imprisoned terrorists, but it is a major risk for CVE programs that seek to influence people who have not yet turned to violence and are not trapped within a prison. According to Lorenzo Vidino, this debate can be summarized as a disagreement over whether non-violent conservatives act as “conveyor belts” or “firewalls” relative to violent extremism. As this debate lies at the heart of this thesis, I will briefly summarize the rationale behind both arguments.

Those who adopt the “firewall” argument argue that Islam is a highly diverse and complex religion, and there is no single track that moves from liberalism to conservativism to violence. According to Jaime Barlett and Carl Miller—UK researchers who conducted a study on the difference between violent and non-violent radicalization—“to be radical is to reject the status quo, but not necessarily in a violent or even problematic way. Some radicals conduct, support, or encourage terrorism, whilst many others do no such thing, and actively and often effectively agitate against it.” In other words, though many Muslims hold ideas that seem politically or socially radical,

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such as support for a religious government, they do not necessarily believe that their ideas should be imposed through force or violence. If adopting radical beliefs does not necessarily entail greater sympathy for terrorism, then there are likely to be individuals who share common beliefs with violent extremists, but staunchly oppose their use of force.

These individuals, it is argued, are best positioned to be a bulwark against further radicalization. Rather than try to reduce the importance of religion in the mind of an at-risk youth, non-violent radicals can offer constructive, highly religious alternatives to violence. According to one former religious radical, Mubin Shaikh, non-violent radicals “can be very effective at persuading radicalized youth to consider more constructive approaches to political change. Such cognitive openings are the first step toward changing a youth’s mind about why he or she is aggrieved, and what to do about it.”

This is only possible because they offer more religion, not less. Interventions led by non-violent radicals will not necessarily inspire youth to become secular liberals; in fact, it may reinforce their religious conservatism. However, non-violent radicals can act as a pressure valve, providing a religious channel for redirecting young people’s frustrations before they explode. Ultimately, for those who adopt the “firewall” argument, rejecting violence is a far greater priority than ensuring that everyone hold liberal values.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that all non-violent radicals are only a short step away from becoming violent radicals. These critics often

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imagine radicalization as a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are a few individuals who are actively committing violence. Underneath them are a larger group who, while not committing violence themselves, inspire others to do so. Beneath them are a radical milieu of potential recruits who sympathize with the goals or activists of the violent radicals. In this theory, all terrorists begin at some lower position on the pyramid and gradually move up to the top.\textsuperscript{9} Thus, while those at the bottom of the pyramid may not be actively engaged in violence or terrorism now, they are on the track to eventually do so. Though this theory of radicalization has been widely criticized as simplistic and rigidly linear\textsuperscript{10}, many experts continue to argue that there are direct links between terrorists and radical sympathizers who stop short of actual violence.

Apart from the fear that non-violent radicals will eventually become radical, there is also a general dislike in Western CVE and peacebuilding circles for most elements of Islamic conservatism. For many, “any form of Islam that is incompatible with liberal democratic values is necessarily oppressive and a grave threat to Western societies; they argue that Muslims must limit their faith to personal and otherworldly matters if they are to become good democratic citizens.”\textsuperscript{11} Regardless of whether or not they engage in violence, conservative Muslims impose restrictive rules on women, insist of the imposition of religious law, and spurn their national identity. Holding religious beliefs is


\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 9.

perfectly tolerable, liberal critics argue, as long as those beliefs do not undermine the liberal, democratic system.

This fear of illiberal ideology forms the backbone of the central assumption that I will challenge in this thesis, which emerges in a 2007 monograph published by the RAND Corporation entitled Building Moderate Muslim Networks. In discussing the possibility of engaging with Islamists (political Muslims), the authors write: “even if Islamists might be more effective in the short term in dissuading potential jihadists from committing acts of terrorism… official recognition and support would enhance their credibility and enable them to proselytize more effectively in the community. Over the long term, the social costs of the spread of the Salafi movement to the masses would be very high.” In short, regardless of the benefit to CVE efforts, there is some “cost” associated with giving official recognition to non-violent radicals (in this case, Islamists or Salafis).

The passage does not specify exactly what “social costs” would be incurred, but the literature on this debate offers a bit more insight. In later literature, Vidino, echoing RAND’s criticism, argues: “such partnerships’ long-term repercussions on social cohesion and integration would be much greater than the yet-to-be-proven short term gains that can be achieved in preventing acts of terrorism.” In other words, working with conservative Muslims disrupts the harmony and unity of the larger society by

12 Angel Rabasa et al., Building Moderate Muslim Networks (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007): 77.

strengthening an element that does not mesh properly. A report published by German security services reinforces this emphasis on cohesion and integration: “one has to critically ask whether their [Islamist organizations’] activities that are strongly directed at preserving an ‘Islamic identity’ intensify disintegration and contribute to the development of Islamist parallel societies and to a radicalization in the sense of an integration into political extremism.”14 Both these passages emphasize integration and cohesion, which are areas that can be undermined by religious identity, even without overt acts of violence. Thus, these concepts will be critical to my analysis, as developed below.

It is important to note first that there have been very few attempts to test RAND’s assumption with specific case studies. Vidino does identify two possible examples: France and the UK (which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2). Unfortunately, he offers very little critical analysis of these cases, and both are far more nuanced than he describes. In the case of France, authorities in the early 1990s began empowering local organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in the hope of reducing the general sense of disenfranchisement in the impoverished banlieues. Vidino concludes that not only did that strategy fail to change the prevailing attitudes among the poor, disaffected Muslim immigrants in the area, it put those Brotherhood-linked organizations in conflict with a local feminist group.15 Putting aside the relative efficacy of the strategy (which seemed to misdiagnose the problem in the banlieues), the fact that


a conservative religious organization and a left-wing feminist group were in conflict over social values is hardly compelling evidence of serious social harm. In this thesis, I will employ a far more skeptical and critical lens in order to muster compelling and concrete data in the cases of the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and Egypt. Before unpacking these cases, though, I will clarify the terms of my analysis.

Firstly, it is important to define which religious communities should be included. RAND and Vidino interchangeably use terms such as “Islamists” and “Salafis” to categorize those who hold religious beliefs that are far outside the political and social norm. Unfortunately, these terms offer more confusion than clarity. “Islamism” is a movement that fuses Islam into modern politics, whereas “Salafism” is a puritanical reformist movement that promotes a strict, literalist practice of Islam. When describing Muslims in the Western world, these terms (and others) are often employed as a catch-all to denote any and all forms of illiberal Islam. In the West—where liberal democracy is cherished and the majority of religious adherents are Christian—illiberal Islam is always far outside the mainstream. Vidino and RAND, writing exclusively on Muslims in Europe for a Western audience, do not consider that illiberal Islam is not always a fringe ideology in other countries. However, as my analysis extends beyond the Western world and into Muslim majority states like Indonesia and Egypt—where political Islam is actually widely popular—it is important to adopt a more intentional definition.
For my purposes, I will employ the term “non-violent radical,”\textsuperscript{16} which I will define using three key elements. First, borrowing from the work of Bartlett and Miller cited earlier, a non-violent radical must hold beliefs outside the status quo; there must be some belief or practice that sets them apart from mainstream society. After all, if their beliefs were shared by a significant portion of the population, there would be little point in assessing whether or not they undermine social cohesion. Second, they must reject (at least in principle) liberal democracy, a core issue frequently mentioned in the literature cited above. Finally, they must not advocate for the use of violence, as this analysis is intended to test whether non-violent radicals could function as a counter to violent radicals. Admittedly, as noted by Alex Schmid, the use of the term “non-violent” is misleading, as it emerges from a specific historical tradition (Ghandi, MLK, etc), to which these groups do not generally belong.\textsuperscript{17} To clarify, I will use the term here not to conflate these Islamic communities with non-violence, but to distinguish them from violent radicals.

Next, I will seek to offer some clarity on the idea of official recognition or support. As the literature is vague on this matter, I will develop my analysis around the concept of “legitimization.” The literature cited above frequently mentions the cases of

\textsuperscript{16} According to Alex Schmid, there is a significant difference between “extremists” and “radicals”. Extremists “strive to create a homogeneous society based on rigid, dogmatic ideological tenets”, whereas radicals “accept diversity and believe in the power of reason rather than dogma.” See Schmid, \textit{Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation}, 9. His distinction, while valuable, does not map well onto the groups until analysis here. As I will demonstrate below, certain communities, like Salafis in Egypt, hold rigid dogmatic views while still tolerating some level of diversity in practice. Recognizing that neither term is neatly applicable, I will use the softer “radical”, which does not carry the same connotation of forceful suppression of dissent.

\textsuperscript{17} Schmid, \textit{Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?} 13.
France and the United Kingdom, so my analysis will be built around these examples. In both cases, the government identified specific groups as worthy of support or as valuable points of contact in a given community. The government did not provide direct funding support—though in at least one case government funds were allocated to support a nonprofit run by non-violent radicals—but instead treated these groups and their leaders as respectable partners.

The actions described above can be accurately termed “legitimization”, as defined by Robert Lamb in his report *Rethinking Legitimacy and Illegitimacy*. Lamb defines “legitimacy” as “a sense that something is right or good or that one has a moral obligation to support it,” and contrasts it with “illegitimacy” or “a sense that one must work to resist, undermine, or fight something.” He places these concepts on a sliding scale; a group is thus “legitimized” as it moves from being considered worthy of opposition to being considered worthy of support. For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on case studies wherein non-violent radicals moved up that scale toward legitimate in relation to the government. The cases do not entail groups that are seen as completely “legitimate” (i.e. worthy of support), but each of them is a clear example where a group became less worthy of opposition or more worthy of support (i.e., moving up the sliding scale).

Finally, I will define the specific criteria by which I will judge social costs. For many of the scholars cited above, the mere presence or growth of any non-violent radical community is a negative social cost. To avoid a circular argument, however, my analysis

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does not presume that the mere existence of non-violent radicalism is inherently negative. Instead, I define three criteria: 1) treatment of outgroups; 2) opposition to the state; and 3) participation in pluralist activities or environments. I have selected these criteria based on the available data in case study as well as the literature on “social cohesion” and “integration.”

The first criteria, treatment of outgroups, is a measure of the relative conflict between non-violent radicals and those outside their community. This criteria aligns with the definition of social cohesion as outlined by the Indices of Social Development designed by the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS). In a 2013 working paper entitled “Diversity, Inclusiveness and Social Cohesion”, ISS analysts argue that social cohesion encompasses “fair treatment toward the disadvantaged sections of society such as women and minorities.” Since all non-violent radicals in this study are inherently minority groups, I have adapted this definition to include all sections of society that fall outside their exclusive niche. I presume that antagonism directed towards outgroups undermines social cohesion and counts as a social cost.

The second criteria, opposition to the state, is based on the assumption that opposing an established government promotes divisiveness and inhibits a groups’ ability to integrate into the broader civil society. In the cases in the United Kingdom and Indonesia, where the state is democratically elected and stable, it is safe to assume that opposition to the existing state would put a non-violent radical group at odds with

majority. In the case of Egypt, where the previous and current governments (with the exception of the Morsi government) were not democratically elected this criteria becomes a bit muddled. I will address this tension in greater detail in Chapter 4, but it will remain a relevant lens for assessing the impact of official legitimization.

The final criteria, participation in pluralist environments, will measure the extent to which non-violent radical groups integrate into the wider social sphere. This measure derives from ISS’ working paper, which utilizes the concept of “intergroup cohesion” as a means to assess social cohesion. Intergroup cohesion refers to “the cooperation among different ethnic, linguistic, religious, or any identity-based groups in a society.”

As the authors of the report note, such cooperation is essential for “societies to manage latent conflict before it becomes violent.” If non-violent radicals resist cooperation with other identity groups, there is a greater danger that conflicts will ultimately devolve into violence, rather than being addressed through dialogue or other peaceful channels. This criteria also derives from the argument laid out by the German security services that non-violent radicals aim to develop parallel societies.

Each of the case studies analyzed in the subsequent chapters was selected based on the criteria I have outlined above. In each example, I will draw on secondary source literature and news articles to assess the degree to which each specific non-violent radical group can be seen to meet or defy the criteria of social costs after having been legitimimized by the state. Because my analysis relies heavily on qualitative analysis, I do not presume

20 Ibid., 13.

21 Ibid.
that my conclusions will forever close this debate. Instead, I intend only to challenge the
conventional wisdom by offering a critical assessment of contemporary events.
CHAPTER 2

SALAFISM IN LONDON

My analysis begins with the most paradigmatic case of legitimizing non-violent radicals: the cooperative partnership formed between the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and the Salafi communities in London in the mid-2000s. As noted in the previous chapter, this example is frequently cited by those who argue against such engagement. It is therefore essential that any counterargument critically examine this case study. This chapter will focus specifically on a single mosque and its associated community in Brixton, London. This mosque, and an organization known as STREET that was founded by its leadership, played a critical role in countering extremists alongside local police. Though it fits perfectly into the model outlined in the previous chapter, this case is limited in scope, focusing on a single community over the span of only a decade. The rapidly shifting position of the UK government relative to Salafism makes it difficult to assess the long-term effects of sustained legitimization. Nonetheless, it is still possible to evaluate the extent to which the Brixton community leveraged official support to impact the indicators of social cohesion.

The Brixton Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre was first established in the 1970s in the racially diverse district of Brixton in south London. The community consisted predominately of Afro-Caribbean converts, who initially practiced a wide spectrum of Islamic faith traditions. Over time, more and more of the congregation began to gravitate toward Salafi beliefs and principles, which put them at odds with congregants who identified with Sufi or Nation of Islam traditions. By the early 1990s, the community
found itself at a crossroads. The elders wished to curtail the influence of the Salafi members and maintain the mosque’s diversity, but the emboldened Salafi community, particularly the youth, pushed to excise certain “deviant” traditions. The elders were eventually forced to cede to their demands and ban Sufi and Nation of Islam adherents. Not long afterward, the community opted to transfer leadership primarily to Salafi members.¹ Since then, Salafism has been a defining feature of the mosque and congregation.

Salafism is a modern, puritanical reform movement within Islam that emphasizes a strict, literalist interpretation of Islamic scripture (Quran and hadith). Over the years, numerous and distinct communities have laid claim to the term, and thus it is impossible to precisely delineate a singular Salafi movement. All Salafis, however, share common theological tenets, particularly a strong commitment to the unity (tawheed) of God. To honor that belief, Salafis strictly follow the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad and the original Muslim community (as-salaf). While this is not an unusual belief among Muslims, Salafis maintain such a literal commitment to this practice that they reject any and all forms of subsequent religious or social innovation, including most theological and legal scholarship. Salafis are especially critical of traditions that appear syncretic, which includes most Sufi practices. Unsurprisingly, their rejection of innovation also extends to liberal concepts like democracy and secularism.²


² For more on the Salafi movement, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006); Yasir Qadhi, “On Salafi Islam,” *Muslim
Though the Brixton congregation is heterogeneous, Salafism is the defining tradition of the mosque. The mosque’s website makes consistent reference to following the examples of *as-salaf* and rejecting all forms of innovation, in line with Salafi ideology. The website even explicitly notes that this was the first “Salafi” mosque to be established in the UK.\(^3\) In the UK, the Salafi movement is a small subset of an already-small minority population (Muslims), and thus falls far outside the social mainstream. As for the Brixton mosque community itself, it is difficult to determine the exact sentiments in the congregation toward liberal democracy. On the one hand, the STREET program (founded and led by the mosque leadership) allegedly paid for a booklet of fatwas which condemn British law and participation in parliament as a “sin.”\(^4\) On the other hand, as will be described below, the Brixton Salafis are known for teaching disenfranchised youth the value of civic engagement. As a general principle, however, adhering to Salafi ideology puts one in opposition to the concept of liberal democracy. Finally, though there have been members of the Brixton congregation who have advocated for violence in the name of Islam, the leaders and programs under analysis here are fundamentally opposed to violence in all forms as indicated by their strident efforts to counter extremism and


gang culture. In all, the Brixton mosque and its community fit within the scope of “non-violent radicals” as defined in this thesis.

Prior to their engagement with the MPS, the Brixton Salafis had struggled to manage the influence of violent extremists within their congregation. In the mid-1990s, as the mosque leadership transitioned to the Salafis, a new preacher by the name of Abdullah el-Faisal began leading study circles and gathering students within the mosque. The elders quickly recognized the extreme nature of el-Faisal’s message, and barred him from leading discussions on mosque grounds. In November 1993, this tension came to a head when el-Faisal marched into the mosque and began to lead a lecture with forty of his students. Careful to avoid instigating a violent confrontation, the mosque management shut off the loudspeaker and eventually pressured el-Faisal to leave.\(^5\) This incident, however, was only the beginning. El-Faisal began to attract an increasingly wide circle of support among young Muslims in the broader community, particularly former drug dealers and criminals, by preaching that “their Islamic duty to perform jihad placed them above the petty constraints of man-made laws and its enforcers.”\(^6\)

Before long, the Brixton elders realized that they needed to develop a strategy to counter the extremist and criminal ideology of el-Faisal and others like him. These leaders began to take a more active role in reaching out and engaging with the youth who were most susceptible to these messages. One such Salafi leader explained:

> Once we understood clearly from trusted scholars in Saudi and Jordan that they [el-Faisal and others like him] were giving a false call to Islam we sought to discharge our clear


\(^6\) Ibid., 159.
Islamic duty… this means we would try and speak to everyone they spoke to. So, for instance, when we heard that Abu Hamza [another extremist preacher] had spoken to a group of students in say Leeds we would make it our business to go to the same student society and deliver the correct message within the next week or two.\footnote{Ibid., 157.}

Much like el-Faisal, many of the leaders of the Brixton community were intimately familiar with the local street culture, and knew how to appeal to the disaffected youth. As they became more and more involved in outreach to young people, their work gradually became more systematic and strategic.

Out of these efforts, a new organization emerged in 2006: the Strategy to Re-Empower and Educate Teenagers (STREET). STREET was originally set up to “provide alternative and safe environments for young Muslims to interact and comfortably express themselves among peers sharing ideas, aspirations and concerns.”\footnote{Baker,\textit{ Extremists in Our Midst}, 222.} STREET connected at-risk teens with experienced counselors and mentors from the Salafi community who provided a space where youth could engage in positive social behavior, like sports, while also receiving spiritual and religious guidance. The program was founded by Abdul Haqq Baker, chairman of the Brixton mosque from 1994-2009 and fierce opponent of el-Faisal. Through STREET and other such initiatives, the Brixton community quickly gained a serious reputation as an effective counterweight to violent extremism.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Brixton Salafis were not initially identified by the authorities as opponents of extremism. The mosque community first came to the attention of counter-terrorism officials when it was discovered that Zacarias Moussaoui, a co-conspirator in the 9/11 attacks, had been connected with the mosque in the 1990s.
Scrutiny grew even more intense after Richard Reid’s failed shoe bomb attack, as Reid had also been a member of the Brixton mosque. Though the mosque management took the initiative to reach out to police upon learning of Reid’s identity, the authorities treated them with intense suspicion. This distrust only exacerbated the tense relationship between the authorities and the minority population of Brixton, which has been marred by a long history of riots and heavy-handed police tactics.

In the years following 9/11, new counter-terrorism specialists emerged among the police forces. As these officials took a critical look at the groups on the street which were most effective at opposing extremism, they quickly realized that the Brixton mosque was making remarkable headway. According to one Metropolitan Police Counter-Terrorism Command officer, “we drew up a short list of ten mosques and centres where we had found expertise in understanding and refuting al-Qaida propaganda and recruitment in the capital and Brixton was number one.” Subsequently, these law enforcement began to look for ways to build on the Brixton Salafis’ positive efforts. Gradually, authorities developed a cooperative relationship with the Brixton leadership under the auspices of the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU).

The MCU emerged in 2002 as the brainchild of two officers in the Metropolitan Police Special Branch. Initially, the unit was created for the simple purpose of “discuss[ing] the al-Qaeda threat to Britain with representatives of mosques and Muslim

9 Ibid., 35.

organisations in and around London.”\textsuperscript{11} Over time, however, the unit developed into a bridge between Muslim communities and the authorities, particularly on the subjects of terrorism and violent extremism. The MCU prioritized trust-building and respect among the conservative Muslim communities, engaging with them on their own terms rather than forcing them to abide by liberal norms. For example, in keeping with conservative Islamic practice, MCU officers would follow strict rules of gender segregation when interacting with the congregation. This approach simultaneously earned them the trust and respect of their Muslim partners and the ire of non-Muslim skeptics.\textsuperscript{12}

MCU officers were willing to make these minor concessions because they believed that the Brixton mosque was worthy of their support. Confident in the positive impact of the Brixton Salafis, the MCU actively worked to cultivate greater government support for their efforts to counter extremism. Robert Lambert, former head of the MCU, recalls that the unit played a considerable role in assisting the STREET program with potential government funders.\textsuperscript{13} After a few years, the program was able to secure financial support through the UK government’s flagship counterterrorism strategy: CONTEST. Within that strategy, the government supports initiatives that stop people from becoming or supporting terrorists. Through this section of CONTEST, known as

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{11} Lambert, \textit{Countering al-Qaeda}, 35.
\item\textsuperscript{13} Lambert, \textit{Countering al-Qaeda}, 213.
\end{footnotes}
PREVENT, the government provided STREET with £326,990 in 2009-2010 and £191,310 in 2010-2011.\textsuperscript{14}

Though funding was cut in 2011 due to a significant shift in policy, for a brief time STREET was seen as a model of success. During this period of official support, the Home Office and other security agencies sent a number of British and European visitors to observe STREET’s work in the hopes that it could be a model for other such programs.\textsuperscript{15} These actions clearly demonstrate that during the period of roughly 2002-2011, the Brixton mosque and the STREET program were considered worthy of official support by the UK government. Thus, according to the definition outlined in the previous chapter, they were “legitimized.”

Did that legitimization have any impact on social cohesion? With respect to the treatment of outgroups, the Brixton community has displayed a mixed record throughout its growth and evolution. Though the mosque was initially born of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious population, that diversity quickly gave way to homogeneity when the Salafi contingent began to pressure other faith traditions out. The exclusivist Salafi ideology created friction between the different faith traditions within the mosque. As one community member recalls: “when we started to hear the pure Salafi call we were struck by its simple truth and began to feel uncomfortable with talks of Sufi saints and talk of


Sufi masters.”16 As noted earlier, as these Salafis grew more influential in the community, they chose to leverage their influence to force Sufi and Nation of Islam practitioners out of the mosque. Such behavior clearly demonstrates a negative impact on a minority faith tradition.

Of course, this divisive behavior occurred in the early 1990s, long before the Brixton Salafis garnered government recognition and support. There is no indication that the community became more divisive in the 2000s after it was “legitimized,” or that it leveraged its position of influence to antagonize other identity groups. This is not to say that the Salafis in Brixton took a more conciliatory tone toward Sufis or others they deemed “deviant,” but exclusivist ideology was not a feature of their counter-extremism initiatives that received government support.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient information to definitely establish any trend with respect to this indicator. However, it is worth noting that the mosque’s current website extends an inclusive welcome: “the brothers and sisters that attend the Brixton Mosque comprise of many backgrounds, cultures and age groups, enriching the unique Brixton Mosque environment and experience. You will find us and the local community very friendly, open and welcoming.”17 Whether or not individual members of the community truly embody this welcoming attitude is beyond the scope of this analysis. Rather than attempt to assess the personal sentiments of Brixton congregants, the best

16 Lambert, Countering al-Qaeda, 169.

way to determine the community’s attitude toward outgroups is to examine the mosque’s institutional outreach.

Outside the Muslim community, the Brixton Salafis have struggled to establish good relations with their non-Muslim neighbors. In one pivotal incident in 1997, a female member of the mosque was robbed by a well-known non-Muslim in the area, and several of her co-religionists responded by entering his premises and instigating a conflict with the wider community. Though the Brixton leadership attempted to assuage tensions, the situation escalated and brought the Salafis into direct confrontation with the police.\(^{18}\) Incidents like this became more frequent throughout the mid-1990s, particularly thanks to the rising influence of violent extremists like al-Faisal and future terrorists like Zacarias Moussaoui. During this time period, the mosque leadership did not have strong control over its community, which made it difficult to cultivate a positive relationship with the wider non-Muslim population.

As the elders of the Brixton mosque increased their efforts to curtail local extremists, they realized that it was necessary to forge stronger ties to those outside the mosque. Efforts were made to increase the mosque’s engagement with non-Muslims. The leaders conducted sermons in English, encouraged members to invite non-Muslim friends and family to community dinners, and offered short lectures on topics relevant to the local community.\(^{19}\) In 2001, the Brixton Salafis began to meet with representatives of the local government to collaborate on issues such as women’s empowerment. These actions


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 28.
signaled that the Brixton leaders wanted to integrate into their local community, even while maintaining their religious identity.

The shift toward establishing positive community relations occurred irrespective of any official “legitimization.” The Brixton leaders were committed to making a difference in their neighborhood, which would only be possible if they were not seen as a threat by their non-Muslims neighbors. The Brixton Salafis sought to be a positive influence on the poor and marginalized members of their neighborhood, particularly the black youth who were struggling to resist the gang culture. Their efforts were not dissimilar to Christian groups who use religious faith to break people out of the cycle of violence; efforts which are generally lauded by the local authorities and the wider civil society. Lambert observes:

Again interviews and participant observations suggest that both local evangelical approaches to Christianity and Salafi approaches to Islam appealed especially to sections of the black youth community who had become involved in and wanted to escape from the pervasive influence of street gang—‘gangster’—culture where violent crime and the risks of death, injury and imprisonment were high. Islam in general and Salafi rendition of it in particular offered salvation, redemption and the opportunity to ‘wipe the slate clean’ in much the same way as evangelical Christianity.20

The Salafis’ particular appeal to such youth would prove to be an invaluable asset in helping them integrate into British civil society. As they began to receive more formal support from the police, these efforts only grew more robust. With the support of local authorities and trust of local authorities, Baker, the mosque chairman, was able to establish the STREET program in 2006.

20 Lambert, Countering al-Qaeda, 168.
Promoting citizenship and civic duty was a key element of STREET. Counselors would appeal to young people’s “London roots” to cultivate a sense of positive civic identity. Rather than pushing these youth to identify purely as Muslims, the program sought to provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to balance religious and civil responsibilities. As Alyas Karmani, co-director of the program, explains, “what they [referrals] become are observant British Muslims comfortable with the duality of being both British and Muslim.”

Cultivating this multi-part identity is a necessary prerequisite for these youth to participate constructively in civil society while still maintaining their religious commitments.

This is a message that Salafi counselors were uniquely qualified to offer, as they could credibly speak to both religious and civic issues and demonstrate through example that it is possible to be a good Muslim and a good citizen simultaneously. Any intervention that focuses solely on promoting citizenship without considering religious identity risks further marginalizing the youth who have been taught that Muslims should not integrate into an un-Islamic societies. Instead, “a contextual understanding of Islamic teachings on issues such as citizenship are considered by STREET mentors to be effective in inoculating a young Muslim, particularly converts or others with limited knowledge of their religion, against Islamist extremist

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ideologies and indoctrination.” In so doing, the STREET program gave marginalized Salafi youth a stake in society, thereby helping them integrate more constructively into the pluralist civil society.

The positive civic philosophy of STREET is particularly remarkable considering that the program emerged from a community and population that had long been marginalized by the authorities. Brixton was, after all, the site of major riots in 1981, which were caused, according to official investigations, by the indiscriminate use of “stop and search” by police against the black community. While efforts were made to improve the community in the wake of these riots, the black Muslims of Brixton were largely overlooked. As one member of the mosque congregation recalls, “we [the Muslims] became the outsiders… we were the poor relations. The council didn’t want to know. The police didn’t want to know us.”

Given this history, one would expect that the Salafis of Brixton would bear lingering hostility toward the police and the UK government.

Mutual suspicion and hostility did characterize the Salafis’ relationship with the police for some time. Fortunately, the MCU and some key mosque leaders were able to radically transform this relationship. According to Lambert, the Salafis’ “reluctance to engage with members of a police service who had previously only

22 Ibid., 3.
24 Lambert, Countering al-Qaeda, 191.
displayed suspicion and aggression towards them was gradually overcome by recourse to patient trust-building and a willingness to engage as partners—not to recruit them as informants.”25 These efforts were largely rewarded, and, “according to police, courtesy and respect (and not “contempt”) has been the defining characteristic of Salafi attitudes toward non-Muslim partners in this crucial endeavor.”26

As with the previous examples, this shift in attitudes was not entirely dependent on official legitimization. The Brixton Salafis were generally eager to cooperate with authorities, even long before any effort was made to earn their trust. For example, even though police viewed Abdul Haqq Baker as a Muslim fundamentalist akin to el-Faisal, he proactively contacted local police to warn them of extremism at the mosque long before MCU’s existence.27 Of course, official recognition and support enabled the police-community partnership to flourish and solidify. Throughout the mid to late-2000s, the Brixton Salafis’ further formalized their relationship with government officials, thereby demonstrating their support for the state.

The most formal relationship emerged in the STREET program. STREET worked directly with the MPS and the Youth Offender Services (YOS) to jointly identify, monitor, and respond to cases of at-risk youth. Through a system of

25 Ibid., 193.
27 Lambert, Countering al-Qaeda, 184; Baker, Extremists in Our Midst, 34.
collaboration and careful sharing of information on cases of at-risk youth, the authorities could benefit from expertise at STREET. At the same time, the STREET counselors were able to align their programs to the interests of the relevant government agencies. This kind of arrangement was only possible because they trusted and supported government officials. In short, rather than undermining or condemning the UK government, the Brixton Salafis treated the government as “legitimate.”

In reviewing the case of Brixton, it seems clear that the act of legitimizing the Brixton Islamic Cultural Centre and the associated STREET program did not demonstrably undermine social cohesion or the integration of Salafis into the London community. Despite clear conflicts with other Muslim traditions, there is little indication that the Brixton Salafis actively fostered conflict with or hate toward other identity groups. In fact, since the late 1990s the leaders made an active effort to enhance relations with their non-Muslim neighbors and improve the local community. Their efforts to steer at-risk youth away from gang activity, drugs, and religious extremism could only have heightened social cohesion. The STREET program even worked explicitly to give religious youth the tools to strengthen their civic identity. All this work proved useful to local law enforcement, who received consistent respect and support from the Brixton Salafis.

Admittedly, the Brixton Salafi community was not perfect, and individual members of the community did actively perpetuate conflict and hatred (e.g., al-Faisal). However, these members were outliers, and the community elders either
worked to steer them in a better direction, or excised them from the mosque. Despite these efforts, the Brixton Salafis have been repeatedly criticized, ostracized, and misrepresented. Other Muslim communities in the area treated Salafi ideology as strange and unwelcome, and criticized their dress and prayer habits. It is worth noting that though Salafis (in Brixton and around the world) have been highly critical of Sufi tradition, Sufi institutions—like the Sufi Muslim Council in the UK—have also harshly labelled all Salafis as dangerous extremists.

This widespread skepticism led to a major shift in government policy, which was summed up by Prime Minister David Cameron in a February 2011 speech. Cameron criticized the supposed “doctrine of state multiculturalism” under which different cultural communities lived separate and distinct lives instead of cohering under a singular British identity. This philosophy had significant ramifications for organizations supported by PREVENT, which were subjected to new ideological standards. Cameron explains:

Do they believe in universal human rights – including for women and people of other faiths?… Do they believe in democracy and the right of people to elect their own government? Do they encourage integration or separatism? These are the sorts of questions we need to ask. Fail these tests and the presumption should be not to engage with [these] organisations.


31 Ibid.
Under this new policy platform, the Home Office revoked funding for the STREET program (as well as other organizations). Even though STREET boasted a 0% recidivism rate for its youth interventions, it was viewed as harmful solely because of the conservative religious beliefs of its leaders.32

While some critics of the 2011 policy shift contend that counterterrorism should not be tied to issues of integration and cohesion, these two priorities are not mutually exclusive in the case of the Brixton Salafis.33 Programs like STREET, and much of the Brixton mosque’s other work, encourages social cohesion, even if it does so in a way that seems foreign to the conservative Cameron administration. The Salafis in Brixton actively fostered a greater sense of civic duty in the youth of their community, but they did so while simultaneously encouraging a non-Christian, non-Western brand of religiosity. Cameron’s brand of social cohesion demands conformity rather than coexistence, and is thus, ironically, intolerant of any foreign culture or belief system.

While the above analysis demonstrates conclusively that the Brixton community had a neutral, if not positive, impact on social cohesion, this effect was not necessarily related to official legitimization. The evidence suggests that many of the positive shifts in the leadership’s attitude toward the non-Muslim community and the authorities were well underway long before the existence of the MCU or other official police support. Official support did significantly enhance the capacity of the

32 Barclay, Strategy to Reach, Empower, and Educate Teenagers (STREET), 1.

Brixton leaders to impact their community and thereby facilitated the emergence and growth of STREET. However, this means that legitimizing the Brixton Salafis only enabled them to do more of what they were already doing, which happened to be generally positive for the local community.

Critics may argue that this particular example is not properly representative, as the Brixton Salafis do not embody the intolerant, anti-state attitude of most non-violent radicals. Robert Lambert, for example, rejects the “false allegations claiming that Street is itself some kind of non-violent extremist organization.” After all, Lambert and the MCU selected the Brixton community to receive official support precisely because it embodied positive civic values. My point here is not to contend that official recognition transformed a divisive community into a force for good, but instead to challenge the assumption that groups that hold non-normative (i.e., “radical”) religious values do not necessarily undermine social cohesion. The Brixton Salafis have been criticized explicitly by RAND, the Cameron administration, and other conservative pundits solely based on the assumption that their Salafi ideology is inherently harmful to social cohesion and integration. A close examination of this case, though, illustrates that it is possible to identify and strengthen pre-existing elements in certain non-violent radical communities that ultimately enhance social cohesion and integration.

CHAPTER 3

HIZB UT-TAHRIR INDONESIA

In May 2000, an organization known as Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) publicly emerged for the first time, as 5000 of its supporters swarmed an international conference in Jakarta.\(^1\) Though the group had been mobilizing secretly over the past two decades, a seismic shift in the Indonesian political landscape finally gave them the space to openly advocate for their vision of a global Islamic order. In this chapter, I will analyze HTI’s rise in the wake of President Suharto’s resignation in 1998. As a small but well-organized group with national reach, HTI has the capacity to impact social cohesion on a far wider scale than the Brixton mosque community. To make sense of this impact, I will take a critical look at HTI’s publications, public events, and rhetoric from 1998 to the present.

HTI is just one chapter of an international organization, Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is known for its mission to establish a new Islamic Caliphate. The organization emerged in Jerusalem in the 1950s under the leadership of a Palestinian scholar named Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani. Al-Nabhani developed a clear plan of action—unfolding over three stages—for restoring the Caliphate through social activism and proselytization. In the first stage, Hizb ut-Tahrir recruits and cultivates a small, dedicated cadre of members who firmly believe in its ideas and methods. During the second stage, these committed members are encouraged to interact with the wider Muslim community and persuade them to embrace the idea of a Caliphate. In this stage, members specifically target key stakeholders in their

community or government who have the influence necessary to effect real political reform. Finally, in the third stage, members leverage their influence and connections to assume political power and establish a caliphate that has a wide base of popular support.²

Though its methods depend on persuasion and grassroots mobilization rather than force, Hizb ut-Tahrir is frequently accused of supporting and inspiring terrorism with its conservative and revolutionary ideology. Critical scholar Zeyno Baran, for example, has labelled it “radical Sunni Islamism’s ideological vanguard.”³ Baran’s criticism is, in no small part, a reaction to Hizb ut-Tahrir’s opposition to liberal democracy. Al-Nabhan has fiercely criticized the West for promoting nationalism and thereby undermining the Ottoman rule that had united Muslims for centuries.⁴ He has framed his vision for Islamic governance as an alternative to globalization and the rising influence of Western and capitalist powers. Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir are taught to believe that capitalism, democracy, and liberalism are the primary causes of Muslim suffering in the world. Student recruits for the Indonesia chapter, for example, are required to pledge that they “believe that secular systems, either capitalist democratic or socialist communist, are sources of people’s deprivation and endanger the existence of Indonesia and other Muslim countries.”⁵

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² For more on these stages see Ken Ward, “Non-violent Extremists? Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia,” Australian Journal of International Affairs 63, no. 2 (June 2009): 155.


⁵ Claudia Nef, “Promoting the Caliphate on Campus: Debates and Advocates of Hizbut Tahrir Student Activists in Indonesia,” in Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary
Despite its highly illiberal ideology, Hizb ut-Tahrir rejects the use of violence during the two initial stages of its movement toward a caliphate. Instead, activists rely on argumentation and persuasion to build real and lasting support at the grassroots level. Violence only becomes permissible during the final stage, when “the Caliphate state might have to engage in a violent conflict against Western powers that the power believe will try to hinder its growth.” At this point, Hizb ut-Tahrir’s doctrine does sanction violence against those who oppose its mission. However, the third stage is still a distant reality in most countries where the group is active, including Indonesia. Thus, from a practical standpoint, Hizb ut-Tahrir (and HTI specifically) rejects violent tactics. As HTI spokesman Muhammad Ismail Yusanto firmly articulated to the press: “we are not proposing revolution in the sense of using violence. We suggest a gradual approach in which Indonesia eventually accepts syariah law as the law of the land.” Thus, regardless of the organization’s abstract support for violence against the West (at some undetermined future point), its members are wholly committed to non-violent tactics.

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Despite its grassroots tactics, Hizb ut-Tahrir adopts a minimalist approach to membership. The group is built around a small number of well-trained, trustworthy members who are required to engage regularly in the organization’s various activities. These members recruit a wider pool of sympathizers who can be mobilized for events as needed. Hizb ut-Tahrir is not a numerically significant movement in any of the countries it operates in. In Indonesia, HTI has flourished in the conservative atmosphere of the past few decades, yet it still only draws a few thousand supporters to its rallies (despite the large population of Indonesia). At the same time, while political Islam has grown increasingly influential in the post-Suharto era, Islamist political parties that advance ideas similar to HTI can still only claim the support of about 10 percent of Indonesian voters. Thus, while HTI has managed to significantly impact the social and political landscape, it is far from being a dominant or majority group either ideologically or numerically. In sum, as a small chapter of a non-violent, anti-democratic organization, HTI fits within the definition of a “non-violent radical” group.

HTI itself originated in 1982, when a prominent Indonesian scholar, Abdullah Bin Nuh, invited Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi to teach in his pesantren (religious school) in the city of Bogor. Al-Baghdadi, a leader in the Australian chapter of Hizb ut-Tahrir, had impressed Bin Nuh with his philosophy on the importance of establishing a global Islamic political system. Over the next few years, al-Baghdadi taught that philosophy in

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8 For more on Indonesia’s conservative shift, see Martin van Bruinessen, ed., Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the “Conservative Turn” (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 2013).

the Bogor pesantren, and his ideas were soon carried through word of mouth to local university campuses.\textsuperscript{10} Gradually, using these university networks, al-Baghdadi began to recruit students to join the nascent Indonesia chapter of Hizb ut-Tahrir. However, due to the government’s restrictive policies, HTI operated in secret during those early years, leading low-key study circles and producing some written material.\textsuperscript{11} These early member laid the groundwork for HTI’s eventual emergence while assiduously avoiding the use of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s infamous name.

During these early years, HTI suffered under the government’s unflinching restrictions on Islamic organizations. Under Suharto’s rule, all organizations were officially required to adhere to the state ideology of \textit{Pancasila}.\textsuperscript{12} This ideology is built on five foundational principles—belief in the one and only God; just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by inner wisdom, social justice for all people—can best be described as “a nonsectarian affirmation of religious values in a secular framework.”\textsuperscript{13} By simultaneously employing religious language while divorcing it from any specific history or tradition, \textit{Pancasila} united religious and secular ideals under the umbrella of nationalism. Groups like HTI, however, rejected \textit{Pancasila}’s watered-down version of Islam, and were therefore forced to remain underground. Thus, prior to 1998,


\textsuperscript{11} Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara,” 603.


\textsuperscript{13} Barton, “Indonesia,” 480.
HTI was decidedly treated as “illegitimate” by the regime; worthy of opposition and even repression.

This repressive atmosphere changed almost overnight when Suharto resigned in 1998. In reaction to Suharto’s years of tight-fisted control, his successors opened the political and social sphere to allow for greater freedom of expression and political mobilization. In this open space, “emboldened radical movements could publish long-banned texts, form militia units, and take to the streets espousing causes that would, a few years previously, have landed their leaders in jail.”¹⁴ After cautiously waiting for two years, HTI exploited this opening and began mobilizing publicly in 2000. Despite this brief delay, there can be little doubt that Suharto’s resignation ushered in a radical change for HTI, which could now propagate its ideas and openly embrace the Hizb ut-Tahrir name without fear of government repression. Though this political opening was not aimed at HTI or any other Islamic group, it does represent a clear shift in official policy wherein HTI was treated neutrally, instead of as “illegitimate.”

How did this tacit but significant “legitimization” affect HTI and its tactics? Without direct opposition, HTI quickly moved out of the shadows to disseminate its ideas as broadly as possible. This change reflected the core mission of Hizb ut-Tahrir; influence public opinion in order to pave the way for a caliphate. Members organized rallies, spread their publications through mosques, and created student groups. As these actions would only have been possible in the absence of government opposition, my

analysis will focus on how these tactics have impacted social cohesion over the past 15 years.

Rallies, demonstrations, and other large public events have been a mainstay of HTI since its first public appearance in 2000. The organization has proven its ability to mobilize impressive numbers of members in support of popular causes, including rallying 50,000 people to march through the streets of Jakarta in 2004 to mark the 80th anniversary of the abolition of the caliphate system. These types of events generally function to advance HTI’s political agenda—condemning the liberal, capitalist system in place and advocating for the establishment of a new caliphate. Despite this anti-democracy agenda, the tactic of utilizing public demonstrations illustrates a willingness among HTI members to employ democratic methods to advance their goals. Contrary to its seemingly revolutionary nature, HTI’s method of political reform depends on influencing and mobilizing the masses to advocate for change within the existing democratic system. These rallies and other such events are generally non-violent and are intended only to display popular support for their causes and create a platform to disseminate their views.

Despite the civil atmosphere of most of HTI’s events, some activists affiliated with the organization have been associated with violent, disruptive behavior. In 2012, for example, a cadre of HTI supporters joined supporters of al-Qaeda and the militant Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) in throwing rocks and bricks at the US embassy to protest the

movie “The Innocence of Muslims.”\textsuperscript{16} Though these protestors were not officially organized or endorsed by HTI, their actions illustrate that not all of HTI’s members respect the non-violent party line. Furthermore, while the events under HTI’s control do not employ violent tactics, they have been known to give a platform to individuals who support violence. The leader of the terrorist network Jamaah Islamiyah, for example, has been invited to rallies and conferences.\textsuperscript{17} While it is important to acknowledge the ways in which HTI’s public face is often marred by association with violent radicals, their official events are not explicitly aimed at fostering animosity toward other faith groups or encouraging disruptive actions.

While their public events may largely eschew antagonistic tactics, the same cannot be said for HTI’s publications. Even before its first public appearance, HTI has been pushing an intolerant agenda through regular publications, including a weekly pamphlet, \textit{al-Islam}, a monthly journal, \textit{Al-Wai’e} (the Reality), and a variety of other books. These publications, which are intended for mass distribution, are one of the primary means through which HTI interacts with the broader populace. They allow the organization to reach beyond its small membership to engage a sizable audience; to date, more than a hundred thousand copies of \textit{al-Wai’e} have been sold across Indonesia and Australia.\textsuperscript{18} Countless copies of the bulletin, \textit{al-Islam}, are distributed by members each


\textsuperscript{17} Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara,” 608.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 607.
week in mosques following Friday prayers.\textsuperscript{19} Using this impersonal platform, HTI has disseminated a significant amount of vitriolic and intolerant content.

The worst of HTI’s rhetoric is directed at identity groups or populations outside Indonesia. One edition of \textit{al-Islam}, for example, boasts the title “Kobarkan Perang Melawan Yahudi” or “Inflame war against the Jews.”\textsuperscript{20} A similar article in \textit{Al-Wai’e} uses Quranic verses to argue that God promised that Jews would be despised, destroyed, and made homeless.\textsuperscript{21} Though terrible, it is important to acknowledge that these pieces are not necessarily intended to inspire their audience to turn against the minute Indonesian Jewish population. For HTI, Judaism is one of many symbols of distant foreign powers (e.g., America). HTI is less concerned with fostering social conflict within the country than it is with constructing distant enemies that can be blamed for any number of domestic problems. In HTI’s ideology, the Islamic world is locked in a perpetual struggle against other civilizations that will ultimately end when there is only a single, Islamic society.\textsuperscript{22} Such ideas clearly nurture xenophobia and promote animosity toward any identity group that appears foreign or un-Islamic. However, in a country where more than 10\% of the population is non-Muslim, it is noteworthy that so much of the fear and anger is directed toward distant strawmen, rather than outgroups within Indonesia.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 606.

\textsuperscript{20} Muhammad Iqbal Ahnaf, \textit{The Image of the Other as Enemy: Radical Discourse in Indonesia} (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2006), 25.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 35.
Though HTI’s publications and ideology primarily focus on directing anger and blame toward far enemies outside Indonesia, the organization has set at least one major minority group within the country in its crosshairs. Though less public than its other missions, HTI has leveraged its influence within the government and led major rallies to push for a ban on the Ahmadi community. The Ahmadiyyah—a modern movement within Islam that follows the teachings of 19th century prophet Mirza Ghulam Ahmad—is a popular target of conservative Muslims around the world, as their unorthodox Islamic beliefs and practices are viewed as sacrilegious. Though the government has not banned the Ahmad religion outright, in recent years it has restricted the community’s activities and ability to recruit new converts. At the same time, the Ahmadi community—which numbers around 500,000 in Indonesia—has suffered from a series of high-profile violent attacks on their members and houses of worship. Although, it would be an exaggeration to say that without HTI, there would be no such discrimination, there is little doubt that

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25 The fact that the Ahmadiyyah identify with Islam makes them seem more threatening than religious groups that have a clear and distinct identity. The Ahmadi belief, for example, that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is the Mahdi is particularly blasphemous for non-Ahmadi Muslims because it employs Islamic language and tradition in a way that appear unquestionably deviant and innovative (bid’a).


the group has been involved in “amplifying the Ahmadiyyah issue and making it known to the laymen in Indonesia.”

Despite these clear instances of propagating hatred against outgroups and minorities, HTI’s leaders frequently attempt to moderate or qualify their opposition to non-Muslims. HTI ideologues stress that, under the future global caliphate, Christians and Jews, as “people of the book,” will be allowed to coexist peacefully. This may appear to be a minimal compensation in light of HTI’s call to “Inflame wars against the Jews,” but it demonstrates a desire among the leadership to appear tolerant and inclusive. In 2008, for example, HTI spokesman Yusanto remarked to the press that it was Islam’s acceptance of non-Muslims that allowed Boutros Boutros-Ghali, an Egyptian Copt, to rise to become Secretary General of the United Nations. Similarly, HTI activist Abu Haris al-Amin noted during one public seminar that positive social change could not be brought about by violently destroying non-Islamic facilities or symbols. Clearly, there is incentive or reason for HTI to reign in its more extreme rhetoric. It seems most likely that HTI is reluctant to foster conflict with Christians and other non-Muslim communities who have a significant population in Indonesia, as that would impede their ability to win support from Indonesian moderates.

In fact, with the clear exception of the Ahmadiyyah, HTI’s actions toward minorities and outgroups in Indonesia demonstrate a clear desire to win support rather

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28 Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara,” 618.
30 Ahnaf, The Image of the Other as Enemy, 42.
than foster strife. In the Indonesian province of Papua, for example, HTI has been notably successful in its outreach to native Papuans, who largely subscribe to an indigenous belief system. Rather than attacking or persecuting this population, as the Indonesian government has done, HTI has worked to elevate the social and political issues in Papua to a national scale. In 2008, for example, the Papuan branch of HTI led demonstrations in the provincial capital to protest rising fuel prices and assert that the natural resources of Papua belong to its people, not the government.\footnote{Indonesia: Communal Tensions in Papua (Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2008), 17, accessed August 15, 2015, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/154_indonesia_communal_tensions_in_papua.pdf.} Though HTI has pursued this political issue under the guise of supporting the Muslim population of Papua, they have chosen to adopt a proactive rather than destructive approach that, practically speaking, benefits all citizens of the province.

Similarly, HTI has adopted an inclusive and constructive approach to working with women, another marginalized community in the highly conservative Indonesian society. Though HTI’s female supporters are not an “outgroup,” they are a group that is often sidelined. HTI’s inclusive attitude toward gender is therefore highly informative. Many of their female members are not simply passive supporters of HTI, they are actively involved in the organization’s public activities. Unlike other conservative Islamic groups, HTI has established a permanent women’s chapter, which allows female members to lead activities targeted specifically toward women.\footnote{Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara,” 612.} In 2004, for example, hundreds of mothers and young women led peaceful demonstrations on Mothers’ Day in

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\footnote{Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara,” 612.}
cities across Indonesia to demand that the government enhance the social role of mothers.\textsuperscript{33} Women have been crucial supporters of HTI’s moral agenda on issues such as pornography and violent television programs. In fact, women have become such an integral part of HTI that a major section of the organization’s website is designated for their work.\textsuperscript{34}

It is not only women who have been co-opted to support common causes with HTI, but youth as well (another often marginalized community). HTI has long maintained an active presence on university campuses, where its members are often critically involved in other major campus organizations, like student council or sports teams.\textsuperscript{35} Through this outreach, HTI is not only able to recruit new members, but build support from a wide variety of other key university organizations and leaders. In her study of HTI student groups at Gadjah Mada University, Claudia Nef found that when HTI holds public events, it often recruits representatives from other organizations or even works through a front organization.\textsuperscript{36} While such tactics may seem secretive and subversive, they are generally intended to make HTI’s controversial agenda more palatable to a diverse audience. Such a strategy illustrates HTI’s priority to win support over adhering to rigid dogma. As an organization whose primary mission requires radically changing


\textsuperscript{35} Nef, “Promoting the Caliphate on Campus,” 202.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 200.
the hearts and minds of the masses, it is imperative that its members focus on seeking out ways to positively cooperate with others.

One of the primary reasons that HTI has achieved such a lasting influence in Indonesia is that its core messages resonate strongly even among those who do not embrace all its conservative Islamic values. In particular, HTI is able to tap into the frustrations of middle-class Indonesians who feel that the major economic and political reforms of 1998 did not bring immediate, tangible improvements. HTI’s focus on the fundamental flaws of the global, secular, capitalist system offers a compelling explanation for this stagnation. For the people who feel disenchanted with the current system, whether or not they are religious, HTI offers an appealing alternative: the caliphate. Recognizing the broad appeal of this alternative, HTI activists frame their mission as “[selling] the dream of the caliphate as an alternative mode of governance that would yield a better life for all, both Muslims and non-Muslims.”37 HTI is not trapped within an isolated, insular community of like-minded coreligionists, but directly engaged with the broad body politic.

HTI taps into this populist sentiment by propagated an idealized narrative of a golden age of Islamic governance, which was eventually corrupted by modern ideas like democracy, secularism, and the nation-state. These ideas, activists argue, were imposed by the West to divide the global Muslim populace and defame religious law. Of course, these “Western” values now form the very basis of the modern Indonesian state. Consequently, “while HTI is not a direct threat to the Indonesian government due to its

37 Ibid., 193.
avowedly non-violent political position, its vision of reviving the Islamic Caliphate is in direct contradiction to the Indonesian state ideology, the Pancasila.”

HTI authors have even explicitly called for the abolition of the Jakarta Charter, which excluded explicit reference to Islamic law from the constitution and laid the foundation for the state philosophy of Pancasila.

What does this mean for HTI’s relationship with the democratically-elected government of Indonesia? The organization has found itself in a precarious position, where it must continue to tap into popular resentment to continue to grow, but it is reluctant to anger the political establishment lest it incur a repressive response. On the one hand, activists’ rigid support for Islamic law and populist critiques of the social and political system galvanize popular support. On the other hand, HTI has not yet won over enough people to move to the final stage of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s strategy and overthrow the system. At the current moment, it would be disadvantageous to incur the wrath of the government and risk official repression. Thus, though HTI may occasionally make bold assertions—like “the absence of Islamic law and Muslim authority makes it mandatory for Muslims to declare war on their ruler”—its activists rarely do more than publish theological condemnations.

HTI offers a means and language for middle class Indonesians to vent their criticisms and frustrations with the government without inspiring any action more drastic than holding a non-violent protest.


40 Ahnaf, The Image of the Other as Enemy, 9.
In its divisive discourse, HTI appears, at first glance, to have a negative impact on social cohesion. HTI’s publications condemn outgroups and the principles undergirding Indonesia’s democracy. At the same time, however, the vast majority of its vitriol is directed outside Indonesia to distant strawmen (e.g., America, Jews), thereby uniting Indonesians around common enemies without stirring up internal strife. In fact, the group has been careful to qualify and constrain its use of antagonistic rhetoric when it comes to Muslims, the second largest religious group in the country. Similarly, though its ideological agenda directly undermines the principles on which Indonesia was founded, it has done little more than tap into popular, pre-existing frustrations and offer people a non-violent means to express their discontent.

HTI’s occasionally bold and incendiary rhetoric is not generally lived out in its tepid actions. Other Islamist activists have even accused HTI of “not doing anything to really change society, but rather just dreaming of the caliphate.” While it is clear from the examples cited above that HTI has been directly involved in shaping major political debates and drawing attention to certain significant issues (for better and for worse), it has rarely leveraged its influence to try to effect meaningful policy change. In fact, though HTI acts like a political party at times, it is not officially registered as such and does not participate in elections. Thus, it strikes an odd balance between political engagement and quietist withdrawal.

41 Nef, “Promoting the Caliphate on Campus,” 196.

When HTI has tried to turn its rhetoric into action, it has inclusively engaged women, promoted constructive action on political issues in Papua, and encouraged students to engage with their university community. Such positive tactics do not negate the organization’s intolerant actions, including its anti-Ahmadi advocacy. However, by encouraging its members to engage with the existing political system, even on the Ahmadi issue, HTI may actually function as a moderating force for conservative Indonesians to channel their frustrations in a less disruptive and destructive manner.

There is some indication that the organization’s non-violent methods have even functioned as a moderating force for would-be terrorists. It is important to acknowledge that despite the widespread fear that HTI funnels individuals to more violent groups like the Jemaah Islamiyah, there is little substantiating evidence to back up that belief. One examination of 150 police interrogation reports of terrorist detainees found no former members of HTI in any reports.43 Some analysts have argued that HTI may actually function as a reverse conveyor belt for violent extremism by offering a more appealing alternative for those who are frustrated with the current system but reluctant to join terrorist outfits. According to scholar Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, a significant number of Muslim activists have left violent groups like Lashkar Jihad, Majlis Mujahidin Indonesia, and the Islamic Defenders Front in order to join HTI.44 Furthermore, “by not defending bombing that targets infidels and alleging that terrorist acts serve the West’s


44 Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara,” 616.
anti-Islamic campaign, HTI is… oddly enough helping to delegitimize Muslim terrorists by portraying them as misguided or, worse, possible Western stooges.”

Unlike the Brixton Salafis in Chapter 2, HTI has not leveraged its public influence—gained from legitimization—to actively promote greater social cohesion. The organization vilifies certain identity groups and is highly critical of the Indonesian state. At the same time, however, HTI is careful not to instigate too much conflict; it wants to cultivate support for its political ideology, not spark an uprising. This strategic restraint, of both rhetoric and public action, has potentially had a positive impact on Indonesia as a whole. This highly diverse and divided society has witnessed a rise of Islamic conservatism in recent years that could threaten to unravel the delicate social fabric. HTI has certainly been responsible for promoting such conservatism, but it has also given many Indonesians a way to express their beliefs or anger in moderation.

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CHAPTER 4
EGYPT AND AL-DAWA AL-SALAFIYYA

The final case study focuses on a significantly larger and more dynamic population than in either of the two previous cases: the Salafi movement in Egypt. Of the three, this case is the least clear-cut, as Salafism in Egypt manifests in numerous, disjointed forms and has had a turbulent and confusing relationship with the government over recent years. Given the evolving and amorphous nature of their population, I will draw on examples from the wider Salafi community while focusing my analysis as much as possible on the largest and most influential non-violent Salafi group: al-Dawa al-Salafiyya, otherwise known as the Salafi Call. Like Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, the Salafi Call and wider Egyptian Salafi community have never been deemed worthy of official support. Thus, I will focus on a period in which the government reduced opposition to Salafis and allowed them to thrive or operate freely. My analysis will thus begin in the era of President Mubarak, who leveraged Salafis as a counterweight to the Muslim Brotherhood, and continue through the post-revolutionary period in 2012, when Salafis took advantage of the open political environment to expand their influence.

Salafism has deep roots in Egypt, beginning with Rashid Rida and the Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadyyah in the early 1900s, and evolving steadily into the modern Salafi movement over the course of the last century. In the 1960s and 70s, Egyptian scholars living in Saudi Arabia ushered in a new wave of Salafi thought, popularly known as al-Sahwa (or “the Awakening”). This Salafi movement was largely apolitical and focused reforming religious traditions and practicing *da’wa* (“outreach” or
“proselytism”). Despite their apolitical theology, Salafis were unwelcome during the secular reign of Egyptian presidents Nasser and Sadat. In response, some frustrated Salafis lashed out against the repressive establishment by joining violent outfits like the Gama’a Islamiyah. However, the vast majority of Egypt’s Salafis simply retreated into small enclave communities where they focused on spreading their religious practice among predominately poor, rural Egyptians. Though the movement continued to grow, the Salafi community remained largely disorganized.

In the 1970s, the Salafi community witnessed a significant step toward organization when a group of university students broke away from the Gama’a Islamiyah to form a new movement known as al-Dawa al-Salafiyya (the Salafi Call). Critical of the decision by Gama’a Islamiyah leaders to align with the Muslim Brotherhood, the leaders of the Salafi Call decided to focus their efforts on religious education. The group, based largely in Alexandria, began distributing leaflets, organizing camps, hosting Islamic lectures, and other types of da’wa activities.¹ Eventually, the organization coalesced around an “Executive Council” and began publishing an official monthly magazine, known as Sawt al-Da’wa (“Voice of the Call”). Throughout the next few decades, the Salafi Call spread its activities across the country, and grew to become the most powerful Salafi group in Egypt.² While the Call does not itself represent the full range of Egyptian Salafism, it functions as a critical focal point.


For the purposes of this analysis, it is important first to determine if Egyptian Salafis, particularly the Salafi Call, can be considered “non-violent radicals.” As noted in Chapter 2, the global Salafî movement is generally adopts a critical attitude toward democracy and liberalism, and the Egyptian community is no exception. One senior leader in the Salafi Call, Abdel-Moniem al-Shahat, infamously described democracy as *haram* and *kufr* (forbidden and blasphemous).³ Of course, some leaders within the Salafi Call adjusted their opinions on democracy in 2012, when the organization began to affiliate with the Salafi political party, Al-Nour. Though the support for Al-Nour indicated a shift in support for democracy, the party adopted a highly religious agenda that clearly demonstrated its opposition to liberal democracy.

As for the opposition to violence, it is important to note that for the vast majority of Salafis in Egypt, the primary (and often sole) method for achieving any sort of social or political change is *da’wa*. Such Salafis, including the Salafi Call, reject the use of violence.⁴ For members of the Call, the commitment to non-violence was born from tragedy when, in 1977, a new jihadi group kidnapped and murdered the Minister of Religious Endowments. Salafi students quickly voiced their condemnation of this brutal act, and, since then, the Call has consistently denounced violence.⁵ Their apolitical agenda is, instead, focused primarily on promoting stringent religious practices and

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³ Al-Anani and Malik, “Pious Way to Politics,” 63.


⁵ Ibid., 9.
encouraging the spread of their ideology. Though some individual Salafis do engage in violence, my analysis will remain limited to the groups and leaders who are non-violent.

Finally, it is difficult to determine precisely the extent to which Egyptian Salafis are a fringe community. No specific census data exists to approximate their numbers. Furthermore, since Salafism is not a defined sect or specific school of thought, many Salafis identify simply as “Muslims” or “Sunni,” and do not recognize that their specific beliefs or practices set them apart from other Sunni Muslims. Though many Salafis adopt very distinctive dress or facial hair, others blend in perfectly with non-Salafi Egyptians.  

One inexact metric for assessing the size of the Salafi community is to examine the share of votes won by the Salafi al-Nour party in the 2011 parliamentary elections. Surprisingly successful, al-Nour secured 25% of the vote, the second largest share. Given that many Salafis are apolitical, and thus abstained from voting, and that some non-Salafis identified with al-Nour’s platform, this figure cannot be considered a definitive measure of the Salafi population. Nonetheless, it does suggest that Salafis are a significantly large community, but not yet a dominant or majority population. Though Egypt’s Salafi population appears to be growing over time, they are still only a fraction of Egypt’s broader Muslim population.

As described above, Egypt’s Salafis, particularly those in the Salafi Call, fit within the parameters of “non-violent radical.” Most significantly for this analysis, it is

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worth noting that Egypt’s Salafi population has been described as a threat to social cohesion because of their conservative and independent tendencies. In May 2014, Egyptian president Sisi used this precise rhetoric to describe the Salafi political parties, remarking that “they [the Salafis] consider themselves a different category of people. This is why we are unable to live together.” As the success of al-Nour in 2011 thrust Salafis into the international spotlight, they have been regularly identified as non-violent but still dangerously radical. Given these obvious parallels to the central question of this analysis, this case study is crucial to examine closely.

Egypt’s ruling authorities, from Nasser to Mubarak, have all been concerned with the rising influence of conservative Islam, and have thus been generally hostile to the Salafi movement. Even more than Salafism, however, these leaders were concerned about the threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood, which drew on the language of religious piety to undermine the liberal, capitalist establishment. Though they kept away from politics, Salafis are able to tap into much the same religious fervor, and therefore

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10 The Muslim Brotherhood is a religious organization founded in Egypt in 1928 by a teacher named Hassan al-Banna. Throughout its history, the Brotherhood has been primarily concerned with leading social reform through religion at a grassroots level. Officially abolished in the 1950s by President Nasser, the Brotherhood has survived and even thrived underground for decades. Though it was unable to officially organize a political party until 2011, the Brotherhood has been widely recognized as one of the major political opposition forces against Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak. The Brotherhood advocates for the inclusion of religious principles in politics. However, its ideology is markedly distinct from the Salafis, who are more concerned with doctrinal purity than implementing gradual social reform. Thus, the Salafis and the Brotherhood have often been at odds, despite their mutual commitment to conservative Islam.
constitute a nearly equal ideological danger. Thus, when the Salafi Call began to institutionalize its mission by disseminating its publications, forming an Executive Council, and establishing al-Furqan Institute for Preparing Preachers (in 1986), they earned the ire of the Mubarak regime. Though for a time, the Call was allowed to engage in its da’wa activities, in 1994 the government shut down the magazine (Sawt al-Dawa) and al-Furqan Institute for unspecified reasons.11 These efforts at repression illustrate that, for a time, Mubarak viewed the Salafi community as worthy of opposition.

This type of unprovoked crackdown was not unusual. The purpose of these restrictions was not to ban Salafism entirely, but rather to prevent the Salafis from organizing into a viable political force. Under the Mubarak regime, “[Salafis] enjoy[ed] relative freedom to organize religious sessions in mosques, mainly in lower middle class areas, [but] they are barred from more structured mobilization, such as establishing religious institutions or charity organizations.”12 Thus, even when the government closed al-Furqan Institute, it allowed the Salafi Call to continue proselytizing on university campuses. In part, this concession was likely a tactic to prevent the Salafi community from turning to violent, anti-state activities. However, it was also an indication that the Mubarak regime saw something valuable in the Salafis’ religious activity.

For Mubarak, Salafism represented a more tolerable version of conservative Islam than the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood’s political agenda made it a viable threat


to the regime, whereas the Salafis’ apolitical piety movement was only a minor annoyance. Given the fundamental similarities between Salafi and Brotherhood religiosity, the movements were in somewhat of a competition for followers. Thus, in order to “diminish the political and social appeal of the [Brotherhood], the regime gave more space and venues for the Salafis to spread their views and expand their social network.”

Mubarak hoped that the political quietism of the Salafi movement, including the Salafi Call, would become influential among those conservative Muslims who would otherwise sympathize with the Brotherhood. This was a particularly valuable given the fact that the Salafis and the Brotherhood both had a significant presence in poor, rural areas where they were more effective at providing social services than the state. Consequently, though Mubarak would never go so far as to support the Salafi movement, he would intermittently tolerate their religious activities and allow them to thrive more than their Islamist counterparts.

As a result of Mubarak’s leniency, Salafism was able to thrive in Egypt over 1990s and 2000s. Salafi influences spread to Egypt’s most prominent religious education institution—al-Azhar—which began to offer its stamp of approval to cassettes and DVDs of Salafi sermons. Salafi media began increasingly prolific in Egypt, including multiple Salafi TV stations which were given official license to operate in 2006.

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Salafism was still a weak political threat, it was increasingly a potent social movement. To dampen the negative impact of this rising movement and co-opt the rising religious fervor, Mubarak filled state institutions with conservative clergy, judges and bureaucrats. Though he did not lessen his distaste for Salafis, Mubarak gave them enough latitude to expand their influence.

The shift in the state’s treatment of Salafism can be considered a step toward legitimization. Mubarak’s regime saw the Salafis as worthy of at least marginal support, if only to bolster opposition to the Brotherhood. Even with sporadic toleration, the Salafis managed to flourish and grow in influence, precisely the supposed effect of legitimization. Thus, while the Salafi movement was repressed under the Mubarak regime, the regime’s moments of strategic leniency constitute legitimization. This narrative, however, becomes complicated by the 2011 revolution that completely upended the official treatment of conservative Islam.

Despite the Mubarak regime’s repressive policies, Salafi communities were initially reluctant to participate in the 2011 uprisings. In part, many were worried that taking a stand against Mubarak would ultimately invite further repression and reprisals. However, their reluctance also stemmed from their quietist political philosophy. Inciting rebellion against a Muslim ruler is forbidden in Islam, and many Salafi scholars extend that protection even to Muslim rulers who do not govern by Islamic law (e.g., Mubarak).

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Egyptian Salafis thus either remained silent or voiced their support for the Mubarak regime, at least during the initial stages of the protests.

It is worth noting that some Egyptian Salafi leaders expressed their concerns not only about the impact of the protests on the state, but also about their impact on the country’s overall stability. A prominent Salafi preacher named Muhammad Hassan, for example, called on Muslims not to let the country descend into chaos as protest began in January.\textsuperscript{17} Another scholar, Mustafa al-‘Adawi spoke on state television to urge protestors in Tahrir Square to return home before more Muslim blood would be spilt.\textsuperscript{18} Drawing on the language of peace and stability, these Salafi leaders clearly sought to reduce social divisions and conflict.

Once the revolution led to Mubarak’s successful ouster, however, Salafi groups gained almost immediate benefits. Al-Nour party, established in June 2011, quickly became the centerpiece of the new Salafi political movement. Though initially their affiliation with the Salafi Call was limited, as the party grew larger, the Call began to exert greater control over its structure and platform.\textsuperscript{19} As noted above, al-Nour took the new political landscape by storm, winning a quarter of the votes in the parliamentary elections. It was, however, not the only Salafi group to take advantage of this spotlight. Smaller Salafi parties, including al-Asala and al-Fadhila emerged alongside al-Nour. On the heels of these parties then came the populist Salafi preacher Hazem Salah Abu Ismail,

\textsuperscript{17} Brown, \textit{Salafis and Sufis in Egypt}, 6.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 6.

\textsuperscript{19} El-Sherif, \textit{Egypt’s Salafists at a Crossroads}, 12.
who ran a strong campaign for president until he was disqualified in April 2012 because of his mother’s US citizenship.\textsuperscript{20}

For a brief period, Salafis across Egypt benefitted from the political apathy of the transitional government that was led by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF). The leaders of al-Nour and the Salafi Call expected that their political movement would receive even greater support under the Brotherhood-led presidency of Muhammad Morsi. However, Morsi made no such concessions to the Salafis, and even worked to reduce their political sway.\textsuperscript{21} Consequently, the leaders of al-Nour were more than willing to support the SCAF-led ouster of Morsi that ultimately installed Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in power. At the announcement of Morsi’s departure, Sisi was even joined on stage by Al-Nour chairman Younes Makhyoun.\textsuperscript{22} This mutually beneficial partnership, however, quickly disintegrated.

Though Sisi benefitted from Salafi opposition to the Brotherhood, he has since taken severe measures to restrict Salafi influence. In 2014, the Ministry of Religious Endowments began to emphasize long-ignored laws that allow the state to exercise oversight of Egypt’s mosques, which would adversely affect many credentialed Salafi preachers.\textsuperscript{23} The next year, the Ministry of Education announced that it would be

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{21}] For more details, see Awad, “The Salafi Dawa of Alexandria,” 26.
\item [\textsuperscript{23}] Awad, “The Salafi Dawa of Alexandria,” 34.
\end{itemize}
removing content—including several major Islamic figures—from the national curriculum, drawing the ire of the Salafi Call and al-Nour. Such regulations indicate that Sisi intends to reassert control over the religious sphere in order to curtail the spread of conservative Islamic ideology. The legitimacy gained from state neutrality is quickly evaporating for Salafis. However, it is still possible to critically examine how the Salafi community impacted social cohesion under Mubarak’s intermittent support and in the wake of the revolution.

Over the past few decades, Egyptian Salafis have not generally fostered positive relationships with outgroups. In their da’wa efforts, many Salafi activists are intensely focused on reforming religious practices in Egypt and ending certain syncretic traditions that are popular among non-Salafis. In particular, Salafis have condemned Sufi traditions like visiting the shrines of saints or celebrating the birthday of the Prophet. This intense focus on correcting deviant behavior has led many Salafis to fear certain identity groups. Mokhtar Awad, in his profile of the Salafi Call, notes that “the [Call] also holds a paranoid fear that secularists allied with the Coptic Church wish to eradicate Egypt’s Islamic identity and Sharia law.” This fear and hostility generates serious friction with religious minorities in Egypt.


Coptic Christians are perhaps the most common victims of Salafi critique. As the most significant non-Muslim minority community in Egypt, Copts have come to represent a challenge to complete Islamic dominance in the social and political spheres. They are therefore frequent targets of Salafi attacks, as when Salafi Sheikh Mahmoud Amer issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims from voting for Coptic candidates. The general animosity and distrust directed toward Copts has inspired some outlandish and destructive beliefs among Salafis. Richard Gauvain, for example, in his ethnographic study of contemporary Egyptian Salafis, writes:

In Salafi circles, the rumour that Christians are storing weapons in their churches ready for the day when, with Western help, they can overthrow the Muslim people is now so widespread that for a person within these circles to question it would only be to show deplorable naivety.

This idea may seem so conspiratorial as to be laughable, but this kind of misunderstanding defines a significant amount of Coptic-Salafi relations.

Tragically, this conflict does not remain at the level of mere rhetoric, as numerous Salafi individuals have been involved in attacks on Copts. In the vacuum left by the fall of Mubarak, numerous attacks were committed against Copts, many of which were blamed on Salafis. In one incident in Imbaba, Cairo, a Muslim mob gathered to protest the Coptic Church’s detention of a Christian women who converted to Islam and ultimately ended up burning the Virgin Mary Church and leaving several dead and wounded. Though Salafi leaders denied any involvement, witnesses report that the


attackers were Salafi. Unfortunately, this type of incident was common in the post-revolution period. Of course, it is difficult to determine with complete accuracy whether the violent thugs involved were indeed Salafis, and impossible to assess whether their actions are a result of their Salafi belief or some general misanthropy. However, reports on the Imbaba incident point to two local Salafi preachers—Muftah Muhammad Fadl and Ashraf Abu Anas—who provoked their audiences to “save this new Muslim.”

It is important to note that there is no substantial evidence to prove that non-violent Salafi groups like the Salafi Call were directly involved in any such attacks. However, the Call has not been immune to employing divisive, anti-Copt rhetoric. In interviews with leaders of the Call, Awad found that while they “denied any connection to these attacks, [they] were unapologetic about their distinctively polarizing rhetoric about Copts and other minorities.” This intolerant rhetoric has only become more prolific as the Call has emerged from the underground in the permissive atmosphere of the 2000s and in the post-revolution era.

At the same time, however, as Salafi communities have been pushed into the public eye, many leaders have increasingly rejected anti-Copt attitudes. Prominent Salafi preachers condemned the attacks in Imbaba and some even made active efforts to promote reconciliation with local Christians. Popular Salafi cleric Muhammad Hassan, whose pre-revolution sermons were filled with anti-Christian rhetoric, joined a Muslim
delegation whose purpose was to ease religious tensions in the town of Sul after clashes forced Christians from their homes. Hassan was not alone in his pro-reconciliation stance. After the destruction of a church in Giza in March 2011, for example, local Salafis issued a public statement urging Muslims not to hinder the rebuilding of the church. Many Salafi leaders began to realize that along with political freedom came a heightened level of responsibility to maintain positive relations with their non-Muslim neighbors.

As long as the Salafi communities remained isolated in rural enclaves across the country, it was in the best interest of their preachers and leaders to draw on divisive discourse that would stir up passion among their base. However, as more Salafi groups and figures began to stand on the national stage, they began to realize that such negative language would only undermine their influence. Gauvain, in his study of Salafi communities, notes that while the revolution inspired some Salafis to openly clash with Christians, it also decreased the insular, intolerant rhetoric employed by a new generation of politically-savvy Salafi leaders. This rhetorical shift among key leadership has significant ramifications for the wider Salafi interactions with outgroups. Attacks against Sufi shrines ceased, for example, when prominent Alexandrian Salafi Abd al-Minam

34 Gauvain, Salafi Ritual Purity, 258.
Shahhat who labeled such attacks criminal and completely impermissible in a local newspaper.  

Does this apparent shift in attitude demonstrate an increasing tolerance and acceptance of outgroups? Perhaps, but it more likely arises from the temptation of political success. While stuck beneath the heavy hand of the government, Salafis had no incentive to organize and move beyond their withdrawn enclaves. Of course, even after the revolution a significant portion of the Salafi community still opted to remain detached from the rest of society. However, “for many Salafis… the less of a sham parliamentary democracy is, the more necessary it becomes to take part in the electoral process.”

Participation in the electoral process comes with certain costs. As Salafis moved from the fringe to the center, they had to accept the fact that they would not be able to participate solely “on normative Egyptian Salafi terms; certain compromises would have to be made.” Specifically, they would have to moderate their rhetoric so that they could appeal to a wider conservative audience and avoid being labeled as extremists.

Recognizing that full political participation would require a level of ideological sacrifice on the part of Salafi political parties, some scholars have concluded that the formation of al-Nour and other such parties represents a conscious tactical shift toward integration. Cengiz Gunay compares this shift to the Muslim Brotherhood’s gradual


reconciliation with the bourgeois centrists in the 1970s. He goes on to clarify that “this decision to participate does not entail a departure from the utopian dream of restoring pristine Islam, but it points at the conviction that this dream can be only achieved through integration with the system.” 38 This integration has meant different things to different Salafi groups, and not all have accepted the more liberal implications. However, there are clear signs that many pragmatic Salafis are adopting a more inclusive attitude in the hopes of selling themselves as a reasonable political option.

At the forefront of this wave of pragmatism is al-Nour, which has proven willing and eager to sacrifice ideological rigidity in order to engage more effectively in a pluralist political system. The party’s website highlights the importance of freedom of expression and calls for a state where Egyptians can live alongside one another free of discrimination and “far from a theocracy that claims the government rules by God’s will.” 39 Its leaders recognize that implementing any sort of Islamic reform will not be possible without electoral victories, which can only be achieved if the party can erase the common anti-Salafi stigma. Yet, these concessions are ultimately not a complete departure from Salafi theology. Most Salafis have a strong utopian idealism that is predicated on the belief that under an Islamic system all people would be freer and better-off. The ideals of freedom and equality for all have a grounding in the Salafi worldview, as long as they are under an Islamic banner.

38 Gunay, Egypt, 6.

39 Brown, Salafis and Sufis in Egypt, 9.
This Salafi egalitarianism has inspired a degree of unexpected inclusivity from al-Nour and the Salafi Call. Though the Call has long been uniquely inclusive of youth and women compared to other Salafi groups, al-Nour has since taken that openness to a new level by demonstrating clear support for traditionally excluded communities. In 2011, the party’s head, Imad Abd al-Ghafur, “stated that Copts and women should be allowed to run for any political office, even the presidency, because the Egyptian Constitution treats them as equals of Muslim men.” Taking that tolerance one step further, al-Nour has since announced that it will include women and Copts in its electoral lists. Admittedly, this change in policy only came into effect as the result of a law mandating the inclusion of a certain quota of Copts in every political party at the national level. However, this change illustrates that leaders of al-Nour would rather compromise on their exclusivity than return to their isolated enclaves.

As a result of this gradual (and somewhat forced) shift toward inclusion, Salafi organizations have begun interacting and cooperating more closely with Copts. In discussing the inclusion of Copts on al-Nour’s list, Nader al-Sirafi, head of the Copts 38 party, noted that “his group maintained a working relationship with [al-Nour] and that,


allegedly, collaboration with the group had been blessed by the Coptic Church."\(^{44}\) Other organizations, including the Faith Protectors Association (a Christian group), have also expressed their willingness to partner with al-Nour.\(^{45}\) Such relationships may only be political posturing, but they break the paradigm of mutual distrust and suspicion between Salafis and Copts.

On the far end of this radical Salafi embrace of pluralism is the Salafi People’s Party. The party was founded in 2012 by the Salafi Front, a breakaway faction of the Salafi Call committed to opposing military rule. The People’s Party declared its mission as “upholding Egypt’s identity as an Islamic country, while upholding the rights of non-Muslims and freedom of religion.”\(^{46}\) While the party is adamant about its commitment to implementing sharia, it has emphasized a populist message that resonates across identity lines. Khaled Saeed, spokesman for the Salafi Front, argues that “the principles of social justice are not exclusive to certain political groups… [and] Islam is an inclusive religion which allows for policies favoring all social groups.”\(^{47}\) As a result of this inclusive, populist message, the People’s Party has been embraced by Coptic groups, including the Copts and the Coalition of Egyptian Copts.\(^{48}\)

\(^{44}\) Olidort, “The al-Nour Party.”

\(^{45}\) Fouad, “Egyptian Christians weigh joining Nour Party list.”


Further integrating into the wider Egyptian society, though, does not necessarily require that Salafis embrace minority communities entirely. Al-Nour and the Salafi Call are attempting to position themselves as a mainstream conservative movement, and Egypt’s conservatives still maintain a fairly exclusivist and somewhat intolerant view of minority identity groups, including Copts or Sufis. In fact, al-Nour’s success is partially due to the fact that in their dismissive attitude toward non-Muslims, feminists, and secularists “Salafis find themselves in agreement with a large number of working- and middle-class Egyptians, both male and female.” Thus, it is important to recognize that there is a limit to the moderating effect of integration. Salafis only need to moderate their rhetoric to a certain extent in order to fit in with the Egyptian mainstream. This fact is essential to note when considering the impact of Salafis on social cohesion; Salafis are not the only Egyptians which are fostering tensions with other identity groups. Though some Salafi groups have become more inclusive of outgroups, they remain on the conservative end of Egyptian society.

Along with the increased cooperation with non-Salafis, the move toward integration and political participation also required greater support for the state. As noted above, Salafis in Egypt have historically been apolitical, careful to avoid criticizing the ruling regime. Though most Salafis were content, on principle, to support any Muslim ruler, they had very little stake in the political system. Focused more on da’wa activities, Egyptian Salafis made little effort to engage with politics. During the revolution, though,

48 Rashwan, “Egypt’s Salafist Front launches ‘People Party.’”

49 Gauvain, “Salafism in Modern Egypt,” 819.
this indifference began to transition into actual support, as Salafi leaders urged protestors to return home and stop challenging the regime.

The Egyptian revolution poses a serious conceptual challenge to any analysis of social cohesion. Did the Salafi support for Mubarak, despite clear popular opposition to his rule, enhance or impede social cohesion? On the one hand, Salafis urged Egyptians to remain unified and reject violence at a time when the populace was bitterly divided. On the other hand, they endorsed a corrupt and repressive state at a time when a significant portion of the population justifiably rose up to demand the right to self-determination. Certainly cohesion should not have to be preserved at the expense of basic rights.

Because most proponents of social cohesion, including RAND, tend to focus their analysis on Western countries, it is tacitly assumed that supporting civil liberties and supporting a unified, well-integrated populace go hand in hand. In a state without a representative government, however, that assumption no longer holds.

This complication poses a serious challenge to the fundamental principles of this analysis. Social cohesion may not, in fact, be the ultimate indicator of whether tolerating non-violent radicals is detrimental to society. After all, there are times when it is necessary to take radical, divisive action in the service of greater interests, such as securing freedom and democracy. This problem will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 5. For now, it is important only to note that at the start of the revolution many Egyptian Salafis sought to promote unity at the expense of liberal democracy. While this stance may not be praiseworthy, it undermines the assumption that Salafis are fundamentally divisive.
Beginning in 2013, many of the more successful Salafi political groups sought to unite Egyptians once again around a divisive political leader: Abdel Fatteh el-Sisi. As described above, a number of key Salafi leaders sided with Sisi in the ouster of President Muhammad Morsi. Forced to side with either the powerful military establishment or the weakening Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, the organized Salafi parties opted for the former. Worried that the Sisi regime might conflate the Salafis with the Brotherhood and return to a Mubarak-era level of repression, groups like al-Nour and the Salafi Call tried to frame themselves as valuable allies. According to Jacob Olidort, for example, al-Nour has tried “to position itself as a partner in the Sisi regime’s fight on the domestic and regional threats posed by terrorist groups.” In one particularly extreme and ironic instance, members of the Salafi Call worked closely with military intelligence to put down a growing rebellion in Mersa Metruh led by the Call’s own representative, Sheikh Ali Ghalab. Despite these efforts, Sisi has only increased restrictions on Salafi activities, as described earlier in this chapter.

Unsurprisingly, support for Sisi has not had inspired greater social unity. Instead, the Salafi community has only become more bitterly divided. Even within al-Nour and the Salafi Call, the relationship with Sisi has caused a severe fissure. One internal opinion poll found that 60 percent of the members of the Salafi Call disagreed with the party’s position on the ouster of Morsi. Many members defected and opted for one of three new

50 Olidort, “The al-Nour Party.”
52 El-Sherif, Egypt’s Salafists at a Crossroads, 18.
paths: return to apolitical life, join the masses rallying around the Muslim Brotherhood, or adopt a violent anti-regime stance. Though Sisi’s efforts to delegitimize Salafism have made it ostensibly taboo for Salafis to support his regime, for organizations like al-Nour and the Salafi Call that have already begun the process of integration, the cost of returning to the fringes is too high.

For better or worse, Salafism became increasingly integrated into Egyptian society as it began to encounter less government resistance. Hundreds of Salafi charities, schools, and mosques have emerged in recent years and popular television channels, websites, and other forms of media unite Salafis across the social and economic spectrum. Having left the comfort of insular, isolated communities, Salafis are now a major part of the mainstream social and political system. Despite the loss of internal support, al-Nour remains a significant national party that has formed close ties with the government as well as a variety of parties across the ideological continuum. This integration even filters down to the interpersonal level. As Khalil al-Anani and Maszlee Malik note, “unlike liberal and secular forces, Salafi parties have been remarkably successful at outreach. They capitalize on social networks involving kinship, friendship, schools, and universities to communicate with ordinary Egyptians.”

This level of interaction is a notable departure from the era when Salafi were treated as completely illegitimate. Within their isolated enclaves, Salafis had little exposure to differing worldviews and could escape public scrutiny. Living within echo

54 Al-Anani and Malik, “Pious Way to Politics,” 64.
chambers, these isolated Salafis simply reinforced one another’s intolerant beliefs to the point where it would be considered dogma that Christians are conspiring against their Muslim neighbors. In the chaotic aftermath of the revolution, this intolerance spilled out beyond Salafi neighborhoods and inspired violent clashes with Copts and others. However, as Salafis increasingly intermingle with a diverse society on the national stage, this type of paranoid hatred no longer resonates as strongly.

Some scholars argue that an unfortunate side effect of the mainstreaming of Egyptian Salafis is that they have pulled the social and political discourse further to the right. It is impossible to know for certain whether the rising popularity of Salafism is the cause of increasing Egyptian conservatism or a symptom of it. More than likely it is a bit of both. Clearly, the Salafi foray into the public sphere has helped to drag long-simmering religious conflicts to the surface. Many such conflicts, however, are positively transformed through this process. As described above, certain Salafi leaders and groups have developed a remarkably more open-minded attitude toward Christians, women, and democracy than would otherwise have been possible.

What, then, has been the net effect of Salafis on social cohesion in Egypt over the course of their legitimation in the Mubarak era up through the revolution? Clearly, the Salafi community has been, on the whole, an incubator of intolerant rhetoric toward non-Muslims and other outgroups. This attitude has inspired violent conflict in some cases, but largely only serves to foster paranoia and distrust among receptive Muslim audiences.

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With looser restrictions on their activities, Salafis have increased their outreach and media presence, and expanded the potential audience for these divisive ideas. Meanwhile, though Egyptian Salafis have largely taken a neutral, if not supportive, attitude toward the state, this has likely not inspired greater social cohesion given the popular animosity toward every recent president—Mubarak, Morsi, and Sisi.

Despite these realities, the move toward greater integration, spearheaded by the Salafi Call and al-Nour, seems to be moderating Salafi divisiveness. These organizations have embraced the prospect of participating on the national stage, even if it required working cooperatively with their ideological opponents. This process has fostered a greater commitment to social harmony among many Salafis, who have learned that they can only win a limited amount of grassroots support by stirring up hatred against perceived enemies. Public scrutiny has forced Salafi leaders to rein in their rhetoric and focus on building support for their Islamic agenda. While, in the words of Ashraf El-Sherif, “Salafis have not engaged in substantial intellectual revisionism,” they have at least attempted dampen their more extreme elements. In a country where religion has long played a socially-divisive role, Salafis have both instigated further tensions and moderated pre-existing intolerance.
CHAPTER 5
THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL COHESION

Each of the foregoing case studies offers a distinct and unique example of the social impact of legitimizing non-violent radicals. Though the communities and organizations analyzed above all share some key common traits, it is clear that each is a product of radically different environments. Each emerged from a unique milieu of surrounding identity groups and political systems. Thus, any effort to draw comparisons or determine meaningful trends must be careful not to gloss over these key differences. In this chapter, I will synthesize key lessons from across the three case studies while confronting crucial differences between them. My purpose here is not to define universal rules, but only to challenge certain prevailing assumptions about non-violent radicals.

First, it is important to note that one critical assumption about legitimization appears to hold true across all three of these cases. In their critique of engaging with non-violent radicals, the authors of Building Moderate Muslim Networks argue that “official recognition and support would enhance their credibility and enable them to proselytize more effectively in the community.”¹ In other words, legitimization improves their capacity to influence their surrounding communities. This line of logic is essential to discussing impact on social cohesion. Assuming that non-violent radicals have an intrinsically negative impact on social cohesion, then legitimizing their community and allowing them to spread their views more effectively would necessarily magnify their harmful impact.

¹ Rabasa et al., Building Moderate Muslim Networks, 77.
This key assumption holds true, broadly speaking, across each case study. In Brixton, the Salafi community was able to leverage official support to establish the STREET program and conduct outreach more efficiently to the youth population. In Indonesia, HTI was able to significantly escalate its public activities—leading rallies, handing out bulletins, organizing student groups—thanks to the decrease in official repression. Finally, in Egypt, the Salafi community expanded dramatically as Mubarak’s regime loosened restrictions—establishing charities, running tv stations—and their influence was magnified even further in the political vacuum left by the revolution. In each case, greater official support or recognition (or at least the lessening of government opposition) led to more effective outreach and proselytization.

Though this logical premise seems to hold, it remains to be determined whether this enhanced outreach necessarily had the negative impact that critics assume. Throughout my analysis, I have drawn on three major criteria for assessing whether these non-violent radicals have had any impact on social cohesion and to what extent they have integrated into the broader society. I will return now to this criteria in order to determine what, if any, trends can be established from these cases. The first criteria is the treatment of outgroups, which includes any identity groups that do not belong within their exclusivist niche, particularly minority communities. The second criteria is the participation in pluralist activities or environments, which is meant to test the extent to which non-violent radicals willingly work alongside others in the broader social sphere. The final criteria is opposition to the state; as the government is a major unifying institution in most countries, anti-state sentiment can foster serious social divisions.
Regarding the first criteria, it seems clear that each of the non-violent radical communities bore some intrinsic hostility toward outgroups. This fact is not surprising given the definitional characteristics of non-violent radicals (i.e., existing outside the mainstream, critical of liberal ideals, etc). Exclusivist identity groups, like Salafis, often define themselves in deliberate opposition to other identity groups. Thus, in the case of Brixton, as the community began to cohere around Salafi beliefs and traditions, many members felt the need to excise “deviant” beliefs from the congregation. As Shia and Nation of Islam members were increasingly driven out of the mosque, the community became more homogenous and insular. This inter-group tension did not necessarily increase with the support of the government, but official legitimization gave the Brixton community an expanded platform through which they could disseminate their intolerant views. While the Salafis in Brixton do not appear to have leveraged that opportunity, the same cannot be said in the other two cases.

In both Egypt and Indonesia, the groups under analysis carried their intrinsic dislike for outgroups into the public sphere. Though information about HTI prior to 1998 is scarce, it seems safe to assume that their opposition to Jews, America, and the Ahmadiyyah are not merely a byproduct of their public mobilization. Hizb ut-Tahrir’s ideology is inherently critical of Western powers and anything else that does not fit within their pre-modern vision of a caliphate (e.g., the Ahmadis). Once they had the freedom to broadcast their views publicly, HTI openly expressed divisive and negative opinions of these outgroups. Similarly, many Salafis in Egypt—who have maintained a consistently distrustful and paranoid view of the Copts over the past 30+ years—took
advantage of reduced government opposition to amplify their distaste for other religious groups. With less and less government opposition, both HTI and the Egyptian Salafis have benefitted from an ever-wider audience who could be exposed to their intolerant ideologies.

While it is indisputable that many members of these non-violent radical communities continued to espouse divisive rhetoric, there also seems to be a significant transformation when these groups leave isolation. With greater government recognition, non-violent radicals in each case were all able to leave their insular communities and join the public sphere. Intolerant discourse can often be more of a liability than an asset for communities seeking influence beyond their coreligionists. Thus, in each of the case studies, legitimization strengthened a tolerant or conciliatory segment of the non-violent radical population. For the most part, this segment consisted of key community leaders, who had to pick their battles carefully and thus avoid excessive social conflict.

These key leaders have significant sway over the direction of their community. In Brixton, Abdul Haqq Baker, the mosque chairman, and his counterparts pushed the community to improve relations with its neighbors. After some initial outreach initiatives, the local council realized that engaging with the mosque was to its advantage, and with that recognition, both sides worked towards building a stronger bond. The council’s willingness to treat the Brixton mosque as legitimate provided an opening for cooperation that the mosque leadership seized upon. In Egypt, Salafi leader Muhammad Hassan—who began moderating his views toward Christians in the wake of the revolution—led a

2 Baker, Extremists in Our Midst, 29.
similar push in his efforts to reconcile with local Copts. Similarly, HTI spokesman Yusanto has used his public platform to laud the contributions of non-Muslims.³

Though this shift among the leadership has strong ripple effects among the community, it does not necessarily translate to all individuals. Egyptian Salafis have fractured repeatedly over such differences between the leaders and the masses. Even before al-Nour’s compromising support for President Sisi, a sizable contingent within the Salafi Call were resistant to the idea of civic participation. Many Egyptian Salafis wished to remain in their isolated enclaves, spreading their faith through da’wa and maintaining a healthy distance from the Copts. The possibility for greater social and political strength that emerged with greater legitimacy did not necessarily hold much sway for these Salafis who were fairly stuck in their old ways. In a similar fashion, the rank of file of HTI does not appear to have fallen in line behind the softer discourse of Yusanto. There is clearly a limit to how much non-violent radicals are willing to tone down their beliefs.

Of course, it is essential to note that in some countries, non-violent radicals do not have to significantly curtail their intolerance and conservatism in order to fit in with mainstream society. In both Indonesia and Egypt, exclusivist, conservative Islam is not an uncommon ideology. According to a 2013 Pew study, 72% and 74% of Muslims in Indonesia and Egypt respectively favor making sharia the official law in their country.⁴ Another Pew study in 2012, meanwhile, found similar levels of high support (72% in


Indonesia and 78% in Egypt) for the idea that there is only a single interpretation of Islam. This conservative backdrop is highly significant, because it sets a different standard for moderation than would be found in the West. A Salafi in Egypt can advocate against Western secularism and condemn all other religions as deviant yet still be in accord with mainstream social norms. In the UK, where the basic values of conservative Islam do not resonate with the average person, it takes a much more drastic leap toward liberalization to appear “mainstream.”

This distinction is critical for two key reasons. First, it offers some context to the differences that appear between the case of the Salafis in Brixton and the other two case studies. The Brixton Salafis deviate dramatically from typical Salafi beliefs—they do not condemn democracy, they encourage civic participation, and they cooperate with non-Muslims—and yet they are still condemned as irredeemably illiberal. In Egypt and Indonesia, by contrast, the threshold for “too conservative” is significantly higher, allowing Salafis and HTI activists to reject basic rights for religious minorities or women without alienating a sizable portion of the populace. This is not to say that the UK is just categorically less conservative than Egypt or Indonesia. However, at the very least, the Islamic conservatism is less welcome than it would be in a Muslim-majority country.

The second key lesson is that open civic participation in a country like Egypt or Indonesia requires less of an ideological sacrifice than it would in a more liberal society. Egyptian Salafis or HTI activists can move into the public sphere and reasonably expect that their ideology might resonate among a wide swath of people. Many scholars, as I

have noted before, argue that this is actually part of a vicious cycle. According to this argument, the mainstream society in these countries is more conservative precisely because radicals (whether violent or non-violent) have pushed the public discourse further and further to the right. Expert on Indonesian Islam, Martin van Bruinessen, for example, claims that there has been a marked “conservative turn” among Indonesian Muslims since at least 2005, which he blames on HTI and other such religious organizations. Similar arguments have been made about Egyptian religion in the past few years, with some scholars blaming Salafism for the shift.

There is insufficient data to demonstrate with any certainty whether or not Salafis or groups like HTI have been responsible for moving religious discourse further to the right. However, it is likely that these communities’ clear focus on outreach and proselytism has had a broader social impact. While this may be cause for concern among liberals, and may constitute another reason why non-violent radicals should not be treated as legitimate, it complicates the idea that non-violent radicals do not integrate well into mainstream society. While even among conservative Egyptians or Indonesians, these radicals are still fringe elements and must moderate their views to some extent to fit in, their efforts at moderation may seem negligible to analysts looking from a liberal, Western perspective. Salafis in Egypt do not have to make the same compromises as the Salafis in the UK in order to fit in.

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This distinction helps to explain why non-violent radicals in each case study have shown an increased willingness to participate in pluralist environments when they have been treated as more legitimate. Egyptian Salafi parties like al-Nour and the People’s Party have embraced Coptic candidates (albeit reluctantly), and formed unlikely alliances with secular parties and communities. HTI, meanwhile, has been well known for leading activities that bring together a diverse range ideological viewpoints, from terrorists to liberal Muslims. The organization deliberately invites political and religious figures who disagree with their ideology to seminars and conferences in order to debate them on key issues and hopefully win over a wider audience. For both HTI and Egyptian Salafis, this participation is likely motivated by a desire to build increased support among a right-leaning populace. For the Brixton Salafis, though, open participation is less a strategy for winning recruits than it is for ensuring that they are not marginalized and repressed further by government forces.

For each of the communities under analysis here, the decision to participate in the public sphere is colored by firsthand experiences of government marginalization or repression. For the Brixton Salafis, this took the form of years of being overlooked by the police and treated as suspects by counterterrorism officials. For Egyptian Salafis, this taken the form of periodic government crackdowns on their institutions or activities. And for HTI, Suharto’s strict control over ideology forced activists to remain underground. In every case, remaining in the shadows can become risky, as it enables the government to marginalize them further with little worry about public scrutiny. Engaging in visible

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8 Osman, “Reviving the Caliphate in the Nusantara,” 608.
public activity and forming functional relationships with other segments of civil society offers some protection against government reprisals. If a community or group can make itself appear less radical and more mainstream, than it is harder for the government to justify taking action against them. This is an important consideration, even for the groups that have at one point received support from their governments; as the Salafis in both the UK and Egypt have learned, changes in government leadership can have immediate negative effects.

This tension is also central to the relationship between non-violent radicals and their respective governments. On the one hand, most of the non-violent radicals share some ideological opposition to their government. While the Brixton Salafis seem, at worst, indifferent to the UK political system, the Egyptian Salafis and HTI outright condemn the secular democratic system in place in their respective countries. On the other hand, however, the tumultuous history with government forces makes all these communities reticent to engage in overt criticism. This is particularly true for communities that have benefitted from government legitimization. Once they have experienced the advantages of government support or neutrality, they are unwilling to return to the era of repression.

For this reason, the non-violent radicals in this study do not engage in the level of hostility toward the government that one might expect. The Salafis in Brixton worked closely with government agencies and law enforcement while teaching the youth in STREET the importance of civic engagement. The Salafis in Egypt, meanwhile, condemned the anti-Mubarak protesters and later avowed some support for the Sisi
regime. Though their support has always been qualified and tepid, they have nonetheless been supportive instead of overtly confrontational. HTI has been the most openly critical of the three, frequently attacking the Indonesian government and its liberal philosophy. However, its opposition has remained at the level of abstract discourse and has not effectively translated into concrete action. Even though HTI has a strong network of support, which it can mobilize for rallies, seminars, and other such events, it has not turned that force against the Indonesian government.

Of course, it is crucial to acknowledge that even though these non-violent radicals have not turned against their host governments, their rhetoric still sows the seeds of dissent. HTI’s criticism of the Jakarta Charter, their opposition to Pancasila, and the mission of establishing a caliphate all undermine support for the existing Indonesian political system. Though HTI is tepid in its own actions, it has helped to foster dissent and popularize the idea that the current liberal, capitalist system is responsible for people’s economic struggles. Egypt’s Salafis have similarly undermined essential political values by decrying political mobilization and advancing an apolitical philosophy. Finally, though the Brixton Salafis seem to clearly support the political system, many critics have pointed out that their religious beliefs run contrary to the foundational principles of democracy. Though this criticism seems ill-founded, given a close examination of their work (see Chapter 2), it still raises a crucial question: does allowing an illiberal ideology to spread more easily undermine liberal democracy?

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9 Gilligan, “How our taxes are still helping the extremists.”
As discussed above, legitimization does allow non-violent radicals to spread their philosophy and beliefs more easily among a wider audience. HTI, for instance, can disseminate its pro-caliphate, anti-Pancasila ideology more effectively in the absence of government restrictions on their activities. It is impossible to gauge with any accuracy how this proliferation of ideas impacts public opinion on a large scale. However, it suggests an interesting paradox: legitimization may simultaneously decrease non-violent radicals’ anti-government rhetoric while increasing its overall spread. This paradox points to a key tension underlying this entire analysis: bringing a radical group into the mainstream generally functions to decrease their radical-ness, but it also exposes many more people to their ideology and may shift the overall public discourse in their favor.

What is the significance of this analysis? Through these three case studies, it is possible shed some valuable light on the question: does legitimizing non-violent radical groups undermine social cohesion? If the answer to this question is affirmative, there is a concrete rationale for avoiding any sort of engagement with such radicals, whether in countering extremism or in civic participation. If not, then such engagement may, in fact, have positive social effects; even if it does not meaningfully enhance social cohesion, it may benefit society by providing a non-violent alternative to terrorism. In light of the diversity of these case studies, however, there is no singular answer to this question. Instead, we find a spectrum of possibilities.

On one end of the spectrum are those non-violent radicals who actually function to enhance social cohesion. This includes the Salafis in Brixton and some members of the Egyptian Salafi community like the People’s Party. These non-violent radicals actively
helped to build bridges between the isolated Salafi communities and other identity groups in the wider society. Though they may have perpetuated some hostility toward outgroups, both the British and Egyptian Salafis (at least some of them) fully engaged with the diverse political and social system and worked to promote cooperation rather than division. As such, they took advantage of government legitimization in order to promote integration of an otherwise marginalize community.

On the other end of the spectrum are those non-violent radicals who had a neutral or mixed impact on social cohesion. HTI and the majority of Egyptian Salafis fall closer to this end of the spectrum. These groups leverage government indifference to spread a generally intolerant and exclusivist ideology and foster dissent against the political system. However, they are also eager to participate in the mainstream, and therefore frequently compromise on the most divisive elements of their agenda. As they integrate into the public sphere, the leadership of these groups tends to downplay the attacks on outgroups and step back from political criticism. These groups would have maintained their same divisive ideology regardless of the government support or opposition, but it seems to be the case that legitimization offers an incentive to become slightly more moderate, even if it does expand their audience.

Seeing the range of possibilities within the three case studies, it seems clear that there is no single formula when it comes to non-violent radicals. What is clear, however, is that the idea that legitimizing them is necessarily harmful to social cohesion does not have solid grounding. Even if the impact on social cohesion is merely neutral or simply negligible, it is not enough to support this criticism. And though there do appear to be
some non-violent radical groups that actually strengthen social cohesion, this is not a consistent trend across the three case studies. Importantly, this is not to say, as Lorenzo Vidino has argued, that there is insufficient evidence to draw any conclusions. Instead, the presence of such a diversity of possibilities is an extremely valuable insight in and of itself, as it suggests that a more greater degree of nuance is necessary when looking at which groups are more or less worthy of government support or opposition.

Of course, before determining which segments of society are worthy of opposition, it is important to reconsider the criteria by which we assess social harm. Throughout this essay, I have focused on two, widely used concepts: integration and social cohesion. Unfortunately, as these case studies have shown, these terms may not be the most appropriate or accurate measure of a groups’ positive or negative impact. Integration, for example, only makes sense in a context where a group enters into a new cultural context from without. In London, for example, one could argue that certain Muslim immigrant communities need to more effectively integrate into British society. However, in the cases cited here (including the Brixton Salafis), all of the non-violent radicals come from communities and traditions that have been established in the context for generations. In Indonesia and Egypt, the non-violent radical communities are actually quite successful at integrating, because they have helped to shape the broader society to accept similar conservative religious values.

Social cohesion is a slightly more fitting concept to assess the positive or negative impact of a particular community or group. After all, in each case study non-violent

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10 Vidino, “The Role of Non-Violent Islamists in Europe.”
radicals have proven to foster tension with other identity groups, and thus make society more fractured and divided. However, the term lacks precision and is often used unevenly across different communities. What exactly does it mean for society to be cohesive?

Cohesion goes beyond the absence of violent conflict, and presumes some degree of society-wide commitment to certain common values, principles, or ideology. The criteria I have used throughout this essay are intended to assess cleavages in this kind of ideological unity. While the basic criteria are sound, it remains debatable to what extent cohesion and uniformity is ideal. At what point, exactly, do ideological differences become unacceptable? Without a clearly agreed-upon answer to that question, “social cohesion” can easily become a tool for discrimination.

Muslims, and particularly conservative Muslims, frequently receive the brunt of this kind of discrimination. Under the guise of concern about “social cohesion,” leaders like David Cameron and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi determine that the values of certain religious communities are beyond the pale. In this effort, they lump together violent and non-violent radicals based on their shared commitment to certain religious values, rather than distinguishing them based on their support for violence. Though the intended purpose behind such an approach is to attack violent extremism from its very roots, it has largely served to fuel greater conflict:

Authorities in various European countries have pointed out that linking well-intended integration and social cohesion initiatives with counterterrorism efforts immediately taints the former, as the Muslim community feels stigmatized and believes itself to be
perceived by the government as a security threat. These sentiments further alienate some members of the Muslim community, possibly fueling a turn to radicalization.11

In Europe, the minority Muslim communities are arbitrarily identified as harmful to “social cohesion” because they hold certain values that are not completely uniform with the “norm.” In certain parts of the Muslim world, as well, specific religious communities (whether Salafis or Ahmadis) are identified as holding beliefs that are simply too deviant or divisive. However, this attitude ignores the reality that there is no true “norm” in a diverse society. Even the most conservative Muslims are just one of many communities that engage in a healthy level of deviation from mainstream values or ideology.

This, of course, raises the critical question: at what point is it necessary, for the good of society as a whole, to consider an identity group as illegitimate, or worthy of opposition? Up to a certain point, a degree of disagreement and even conflict is both natural and healthy. In the case of Egypt, for example, a sizable portion of the population rejected the fundamental principles of the Mubarak regime and rose up in conflict with the government (and the government’s supporters). Regardless of the ultimate outcome of the Egyptian revolution, few would disagree that standing up against a tyrannical regime is sometimes necessary for the betterment of a country and its people. Yet, is there a meaningful distinction between the revolutionary attitude of Egypt’s liberal youth and that of Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia, which also sees the need to rise up from the grassroots against a supposedly repressive system? Both created social cleavages, both have dredged to the surface conflict with minority groups, and both are a product of a grassroots

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movement expressing valid concerns with their government. Purely judging on the basis of social cohesion, there is little difference between the two.

The concept of social cohesion is not sufficiently precise as to help us make meaningful distinctions among those sections of society that deviate from the “norm”. Simply holding “radical” views should not be the sole determinant of whether a group should be treated as illegitimate. Instead, I argue, drawing on the work of Amitai Etzioni, “the true fault line facing the world runs [between]…those who see violence as a major and legitimate tool, and those who view the use of force as abhorrent and instead rely largely on normative appeals.”¹² First and foremost, we must differentiate between those who adopt violent tactics to advance their beliefs (whether those beliefs are violent or not) and those who rely solely on persuasion. The line between violence and non-violence is far more significant than the line between normative and radical.

It is important to accept the reality that it is not possible for a state to steer socio-cultural norms in a way that is convenient. David Cameron may decide that his government should only support those communities that embrace democracy, pluralism, and (his definition of) women’s rights, but he has no power to stop the spread of ideologies that oppose these values. Drawing such an ideological line in the sand makes society rigid and brittle; it cannot accommodate for changes in norms and traditions, and more easily “breaks” into violence. Focusing less on countering non-violent radicalism allows society to be more elastic; more capable of taking an illiberal turn and then snapping back non-violently.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper I have challenged the idea that legitimizing non-violent radical Islamic groups negatively impacts social cohesion. This idea, advanced by RAND and numerous contemporary political leaders, has been used as a key rationale for cracking down on the activities of certain groups that seek to spread their religious ideology solely through persuasive tactics. While acknowledging the harmful effect some of these groups have had in stirring up intolerance toward outgroups or the state, I have demonstrated that the logic behind RAND’s critique is not sufficiently grounded in lived reality. Religious communities are dynamic, and adapt in unexpected ways to their evolving relationship with the state. Most significantly, though, this close assessment of the cases in the United Kingdom, Egypt and Indonesia has challenged the relevance of “social cohesion” as an analytic tool.

In lieu of valorizing “social cohesion,” I propose that a better ideal for a pluralistic society is to achieve balanced social nonconvergence. In this framework, ideologies and traditions that are fundamentally distinct and even contradictory exist within a shared social space while violence remains taboo. It is important to acknowledge the reality that the varying beliefs and traditions that are held sacred by differing cultures and groups will not neatly converge in a single, cohesive system. Yet, despite the unavoidable fact that society as a whole rejects convergence, it is important to maintain some balance against harmful eruptions of conflict. Violence should always remain an unacceptable tactic for advancing an ideology.
In practice, *balanced social nonconvergence* can take infinite forms depending on the particular context. In the UK, the highest priority should be given to keeping violent extremism in check, even if that means endorsing the STREET program and the methods of the Brixton Salafis. They should not be excluded from receiving government funds merely on the grounds that their ideologies diverge from some imagined “norm”. In Indonesia, HTI should be allowed to continue to organize its events and disseminate its publications, while those who oppose their views should be encouraged to mobilize and challenge HTI on issues like the treatment of the Ahmadi community. Any HTI member, though, who rejects the organization’s philosophy and utilizes or advocates for violence, should be dealt with as a violent criminal. In Egypt, the Salafi community should be better understood as a multi-faceted and diverse population, with some members and organizations contributing constructively to the political arena, while others foster sectarian conflict. Those who are more willing to respect other faith traditions should be encouraged to influence their less tolerant coreligionists.

It has long since been time to move beyond the practice of conflating liberalism with peace and illiberalism with violence and instead respect the complexity of thought within religious (and non-religious) communities. As Etzioni argues, “if we are seeking to engage those who hold beliefs other than our own in a normative dialogue, we had best cease treating all people of a given faith… as if they were all of one kind.”\(^1\) Even among those who embrace a shared set of non-normative values (Salafis, Jihadi-Salafis, Islamists, etc.) there is a tremendous and nuanced diversity that causes many groups to

\(^1\) Etzioni, “The Global Importance of Illiberal Moderates,” 383.
simultaneously reject extremist violence, advocate for imposing Islamic law, and still disagree among themselves about how to treat non-Muslims. Skeptics at RAND and elsewhere question whether pro-democracy Islamists are still “true Islamists,” but their assumption that there is such a thing as “true Islamism” ignores the important reality that traditions evolve and diversify. We must be willing to acknowledge that diversity or risk alienating groups of people who could be persuaded to endorse pluralism or endorse violence.

Though the framework I have briefly outlined here may not be perfect, it is essential to challenge the misguided thinking that has directed so much hatred toward specific religious groups. I do not contend that Salafis, Hizb ut-Tahrir, or their ideological counterparts are harmless, inclusive, or generally a social boon. As I have illustrated throughout my analysis, they have perpetuated a significant amount of intolerance and close-mindedness. The best way to mitigate this negative impact, though, is not to adopt a selectively-applied standard of “integration” or “social cohesion.” Instead, the most productive approach is to quit treating them as “illegitimate” and allow their ideologies to become part of a nonconvergent milieu where violence is kept in check.

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2 Rabasa et al., Building Moderate Muslim Networks, 77.
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