

**Framing Contests and Moderation of Islamist Groups: The  
Case of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat in Egypt**

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author.

## Abstract

Recently the large and well-developed body of social movement theory has been applied to Islamic activism, providing a wealth of new theoretical and empirical tools. Recent writings on an “Islamic Reformation,”<sup>1</sup> progressive Muslims, and a renaissance of liberal Islam, suggest a discernable shift in the rhetoric and practices of Islamist groups and social movement theory provides us with the necessary concepts to gain leverage over this new puzzle. This paper attempts to utilize the social movement theory concept of framing processes to investigate one possible source of moderation among Islamist groups, that of competitive intergroup framing. By investigating the contests inherent in group framing processes and attempting to place these in the larger context of democratic and Islamic frames we may begin to uncover a dialectic between increasingly moderate<sup>2</sup> groups and processes of intergroup frame contestation. Although many researchers have turned their attention to group moderation, most focus on political opportunity structures and rational-actor models. By looking at the framing processes of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat Party in Egypt, where we would most expect to see competitive frames, we can begin to investigate a possible correlation between these processes and changes in the respective groups’ strategies and rhetoric. Because the two groups have extensive interactions, have shared a large number of members in common,

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<sup>1</sup> These include Shadid, Anthony. (2001). Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Westview Press: Boulder Colorado. Browsers, Michaelle, and Charles Kurzman, eds. (2004). An Islamic Reformation? Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books. Robertson, B.A. ed. Shaping the Current Islamic Reformation. Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers. An early reference to this idea is found in Clash of Civilizations where Samuel Huntington predicted a similar transformation that would lead to, “disillusionment with political Islam, a reaction against it, and a search for alternative solutions” p121. Also see Gilles Kepel, “Islamism Reconsidered.” *Harvard International Review* 22(2).

<sup>2</sup> By moderate I mean accommodationist/contextualist, rather than non-accommodationist/legalist. This is the vocabulary used by Jillian Schwedler and Janine Astrid Clark in their examination of women activism in the Islah and IAF parties in Yemen and Jordan, respectively. Accommodationist refers to the group’s stance in relation to the regime, while contextualist concerns the group’s belief that Islamic law can and should be interpreted to fit the modern day context. See “Who left the window open? Women’s activism in Islamist parties.” 2003. *Comparative Politics*. 35(3): 293-312.

have had a very public exchange, and are competing with each other for public support and government recognition, framing contests are likely to be common.

The moderating impact of intergroup frame contests is a useful relationship to explore both because the effect of state actions has proven difficult to causally link with Islamist reaction and because the Egyptian government has been so inconsistent and unpredictable in its relations with Islamist groups. Given these sources of complication, an in-depth study of the framing contests between two Islamist groups and the perceived changes in their tactics and rhetoric may help scholars characterize the process of moderation (or radicalization) present in the Islamist movements in many countries. As such, this paper presents interparty framing as the mechanism that produces moderation in Islamist groups. Through this mechanism, we gain added leverage on the question of moderation by pinpointing a potential mechanism.

## **Introduction**

Many scholars of Islamist movements have suggested a recent shift away from militant apolitical activity toward an increase in political-process oriented groups and the entrance into the political arena by formerly apolitical groups.<sup>3</sup> This variation opens up a new possibility for research, but also demands new conceptualizations of what it means to be Islamist. What is it that allows such different groups to lay claim to a single label? Or more importantly for our purposes, how do they frame their activities and rhetoric,

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<sup>3</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Westview Press: Boulder Colorado. Safi, Omar, Ed. (2003). Progressive Muslims. Oxford: Oneworld Publications. Fuller, Graham. (2003). The Future of Political Islam. New York: Palgrave McMillan. Many authors insist that most radical groups have always been peripheral (Esposito, Islam and Politics xvi, Graham Fuller). Others see a notable decline in the appeal and power of radical groups (Takeyh and Gvosdev, *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet*, and B.A. Roberson, ed, *Shaping the Current Islamic Reformation*). Roy, Olivier. 1992. *L'Echec de l'Islam politique*. Paris: Editions du Seuil. Cited in Eickelman and Piscatori. Muslim Politics, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p135.

and the activities and rhetoric of other groups, to differentiate themselves within this label? What affect do such efforts at distinction have on the groups themselves? Do the frames groups use in contests with other groups help constitute their own identity? One way to address the impact of such variation is to investigate how different groups draw distinctions between themselves and other movements, especially along democratic and Islamic lines.

### **Framing in Social Movement Theory**

New Social Movement Theory, developed in response to protest movements in the advanced post-industrial democracies, focuses on identity formation and ideational motivations and has been a major catalyst for bringing culture back into social movement studies. This call for culture has been particularly well received by those who study Islamic activism, not least because repressive state regimes present a strong challenge to rational-actor and opportunity structure explanations.<sup>4</sup>

Framing, a central component in ideational explanations of social movements, is the term used to describe the process of meaning construction whereby frames that “represent interpretative schemata that offer a language and cognitive tools for making sense of experiences and events in ‘the world out there’” are provided by movement leaders.<sup>5</sup> Of course these frames are intended to motivate action, not just facilitate understanding of events. Framing processes thus shape (and are shaped by) how potential and actual members understand their participation in terms of diagnosing

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<sup>4</sup> Wiktorowicz, Quintan. (2004). *Introduction* in Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press.

<sup>5</sup> McAdam, Doug. (2000). “Culture and Social Movements.” In Culture and Politics: A Reader. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

problems, proscribing solutions and motivating actions.<sup>6</sup> Above all, framing processes are treated here as intersubjective forces, so that through promoting frames to characterize another group, the group providing the frame is also saying something about itself.

Benford and Snow provide the following as the dynamic and contested elements of framing: (1) frame articulation, (2) frame amplification, (3) frame bridging, (4) frame extension, (5) frame transformation, (6) counterframing by opposition, (7) frame disputes within movements and (8) the dialectic between frames and events.<sup>7</sup> These concepts are especially useful in our comparison of the Brotherhood and the Wasat both because of their intense battle for public support and government authorization and because of the great amount of ideological overlap that necessitates the development of distinguishing frames.

Frame articulation and frame amplification are conceived by Benford and Snow as discursive processes, the former involves unifying events and experiences, while the latter involves accenting and highlighting selected issues, events or beliefs. Frame bridging, extension and transformation are strategic processes. Frame bridging links two formerly unconnected but ideologically congruent frames, extension is the process of appealing to potential adherents by adopting new issues and concerns, and transformation is the changing of old understandings and meanings. Counterframing, intramovement disputes and the dialectic between frames and events are contested processes. All these processes are encountered as part of both diagnostic and prognostic framing processes.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Benford, Robert, and David Snow. (2000). "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 26: 611-639.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

The next section will briefly address social movement theory in Islamic activism, paying particular attention to the treatment of framing. After this, we will move to a discussion of dynamic and contentious framing processes in extant studies of Islamic activism, and finally examine one case that concretely illustrates the process of dynamic and contentious framing processes.

### **Social Movement Theory in Islamic Activism**

The partnership between Islamic activism studies and social movement theory has proved fruitful to academics in both fields. Since the early investigations of mobilization in the Iranian Revolution, scholars have studied nearly every country in the region, from across the range of resource mobilization, political process model, opportunity structure and framing perspectives. Rational-actor explanations that seek to explain mobilization through political opportunity structures and political process models have been effective at explaining the initial recruitment phase of Islamic activism, but have proven less robust when explaining the sustained participation of individuals in the face of state repression. Many scholars offer framing and resonance of message to explain this continued participation, citing the power of religious calls to action.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the literature on Islamic activism that focuses on framing is concerned with the mobilizing impact of religious frames and why these resonate with different socioeconomic groups.<sup>10</sup> Part of this is an effort to bring culture back into Middle East studies in response to the dominance of structural explanations in the literature. Much of

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<sup>9</sup> Okruhlik, Gwenn. (2004). "Making Conversation Permissible: Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia." as well as the other essays in, Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Wiktorowicz, Quintan. 2005. Al-Muhajiroun and High-Risk Activism. Rowman and Littlefield.

this dominance is a reaction to orientalism and Middle East exceptionalism that insisted on a pathological, irrational and emotional explanation for militant Islamist activity, often theorized as a response to failed modernization projects.<sup>11</sup>

While Islamic frames have indeed mobilized many in the Middle East to violently confront the state or society for change, some scholars sense a distinct pluralist shift in the rhetoric and practices of many of the movements. Anthony Shadid, in his book *Legacy of the Prophet* sheds light on this development:

Increasingly this seems to be the future of Islamic activism, movements that are willing to exercise tolerance and adopt pluralism and compromise both tactics and ideals, a phenomenon that can range from full-blown participation in elections to the Center Party's [Wasat]<sup>12</sup> brand of activism. The transformation is a far cry from the blood-stained years of Islamic activism in the past. Yet it remains a trend that has gone largely unnoticed.<sup>13</sup>

The potential for framing disputes is thus increasing, as the diffusion of democratic norms enlarges the repertoire of available frames, and the presence of process-oriented groups drawing on new pluralist principles, becomes larger. Still, most of the social movement research that focuses on framing disputes, or frame dynamics and contestation more generally, are theoretical, and do not compare individual cases.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than just looking at these changes as a matter of evolution, reformation or maturation of Islamist thought, it may be useful to further develop the role of contestation

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<sup>11</sup> Wiktorowicz, Quintan. (2004). Introduction. Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press.

<sup>12</sup> The Wasat was founded in Egypt in 1996 by former members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Wasat, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, voices support for elections, alternations of power, dissent and coalitions with non-Islamic parties.

<sup>13</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Westview Press: Boulder Colorado; p7. See also many of the new texts on an "Islamic reformation"

<sup>14</sup> explicit discussion are almost entirely limited to writings by social movement theorists. Snow and Benford. See Benford, Robert, and David Snow. (2000). "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 26: 611-639.

of frames in shaping the divergent paths of conservative and moderate Islamist groups.<sup>15</sup> This process of moderation through contesting frames can be compared to Dankwart Rustow's "democratic habituation," or the concept of democratic learning in general. Applied to the realm of Islamist activism, conservative Islamists enter an ideational battle with their moderate counterparts (or the regime itself), wherein for instance, the desire to utilize democratic frames to support the freedom of conservative Islamists to participate, slowly morphs into the general principle of freedom of participation,<sup>16</sup> or where calls to protect Islamists from torture evolve into norms of human rights in general. Many scholars of Islamic activism have addressed the causes of moderation, citing strategic calculations, political openings, increased repression, political learning, and several other moderating catalysts.<sup>17</sup> This paper specifically addresses the contribution that intergroup framing processes may bring to such an explanation.

### **Contestation in the Literature on Framing in Islamic Activism**

Like much of the literature on social movements, Islamist activism studies often tend to reify frames and ignore their constitutive character that enables them to shape the movements themselves. Instead of being tools that movement leaders choose from to encourage mobilization, frames can themselves be forces that shape the movements that use them.

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<sup>15</sup> Again, conservatives and moderates are arranged according to two criteria: (1) accommodationist/non-accommodationist and (2) contextualist/legalist. These categories correspond to orientation toward regime and orientation toward interpretation of the Sunnah, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> John Stuart Mill (1859) and Habermas (1989) also address the potential for tolerance as a result of debate.

<sup>17</sup> see Schwedler, Jillian (2003). "Is Moderation a Myth? Islamists in Comparative Perspective." Presented at conference "The Roots of Islamic Radicalism" May 2003. Yale University. Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. "Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party." *Comparative Politics*. January 2004. p205-228. Also see essays in Wiktorowicz, Quintan, Ed (2004). Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Ed, Quintan Wiktorowicz, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Much of the contestation among Islamist groups today centers on the liberal or modern understanding of political Islam and its ramifications for such issues as participation in the political system and minority rights. Many scholars link this discourse with the acceptance of the superiority of liberal democratic principles by the international community and the diffusion of democratic norms.<sup>18</sup> Framing contests may lead to change in two ways: (1) through the increasing salience of democratic norms and appeals to these norms, and (2) through the process of contestation itself, as contacts increase between groups in increasingly liberalized political arenas.

For example, Ellen Lust-Okar's recent book, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, suggests that a major oversight has been made in the literature on opposition groups because scholars have failed to investigate how opposition groups may adjust their strategies in relation to what other competing groups do (or what they believe competing groups may do).<sup>19</sup> It takes less than an intellectual leap to suggest that the frames groups promote also have effects on what competing groups say and do.

In her paper "The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's *Wasat* Party," Carrie Rosefsky Wickham repeatedly makes use of framing analysis, although her stated focus is on the "democratic learning" that occurs as a result of intergroup interactions among Islamists. Although her focus is on the effect of pluralist institutions, and is thus primarily a structural argument, the actual interaction between Islamist groups as they vie for power on a pluralist stage has elements of framing contests and transformation. Specifically, democratic and participatory frames

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<sup>18</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. "Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's *Wasat* Party." *Comparative Politics*. January 2004. p210

<sup>19</sup> Lust-Okar, Ellen. 2005. *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents and Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

become central in rhetorical battles between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat Party, each trying to claim the primary path to real Islamist reform in Egypt.

In another article, “Interests, Ideas and Islamist Outreach in Egypt,” Wickham investigates a new “civic obligation” frame promoted by Islamist groups in Egypt to appeal to urban college-educated youth. Here Wickham suggests that, “A central goal of Islamist outreach was to instill graduates with a new ethic of civic obligation, one that emphasizes the duty of every Muslim to participate in the tasks of Islamic reform.”<sup>20</sup> The focus lies primarily in reforming the community and political institutions for the public good. As pluralist discourse becomes more a part of Islamist dialogue the civic obligation frame may actively compete with the frame based on individual piety, or apolitical Islam, for mobilization.

As stated above, some studies have also been done on the framing contests between regimes and Islamist groups.<sup>21</sup> In most of these cases the regimes promote frames of Islamist activity that emphasize political quietism through concentrating on individual piety.<sup>22</sup> Such frames can clearly be challenged by Islamist groups that promote active democratic participation.

In one study of contesting frames, Quintan Wiktorowicz highlights the ‘frame disputes’ between *Al-Qaeda* and the Saudi *ulema*<sup>23</sup>:

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<sup>20</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. (2004). “Interests, Ideas and Islamist Outreach in Egypt.” Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Ed, Quintan Wiktorowicz, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Eickelman, Dale and James Piscatori. (1996). Muslim Politics. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. And Wiktorowicz, Quintan. (2004). “Framing Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s Struggle for Sacred Authority.” *International Review of Social History*, supplement.

<sup>22</sup> Wiktorowicz, Quintan. (2004). “Introduction.” Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press.

<sup>23</sup> Here I treat the Saudi ulema as part of the Saudi regime, since it has traditionally offered little opposition to the royal family. However, the rise in ‘popular’ or non-official ulema in Saudi society indicates that religious scholars are beginning to re-evaluate their role in confronting the regime. See Okruhlik, Gwenn.

. . . . where each asserts a particular interpretation and the right to sacred authority. *Al-Qaeda* emphasizes the knowledge, character and logic of its scholars while attacking its detractors using the same criteria. *Al-Qaeda* supporters are framed as honorable, independent and scientific in their approach to interpreting Islam. Opponents, in contrast, are framed as ‘sheikhs of authority’ or ‘palace lackeys’ inextricably linked to corrupt Muslim governments. The framing strategy is designed to insert *Al-Qaeda* as sole mediator between the sacred texts and religious practice.<sup>24</sup>

Here the contest is between conservative Islamist forces and those that are appealing to ‘popular’ or ‘folk’ Islam in an attempt to frame other movements as affiliated with corrupt state-sponsored *ulema*, or to cash in on the credibility of certain folk leaders.<sup>25</sup> In this case, Osama Bin Laden.

In Jillian Schwedler’s study of the *Islah* (reform) party and the Islamic Action Front (IAF) party in Yemen and Jordan, respectively, the primary analytical concept is the “cultural field,” itself a realm of contested ideologies and narratives through which Islamists engage in discourses that have the potential to encourage moderation. As Schwedler points out, such interactive discourses have the effect of redrawing the boundaries for group activity, excluding them or bounding them within the circle of pluralist politics. Thus the political result of frame contestation is very real and has observable political effects. Schwedler also highlights how the Muslim Brotherhood of Jordan was able to challenge the legitimacy of certain moderate political groups despite their own continued support for pluralism. By framing the participation of others as undermining national unity they could simultaneously criticize some groups involved in

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2004. “Making Conversation Permissible: Islamism and Reform in Saudi Arabia.” In Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Wiktorowicz, Quintan. (2004). “Framing Jihad: Al-Qaeda’s Struggle for Sacred Authority.” *International Review of Social History*, supplement.

<sup>25</sup> Wiktorowicz, Quintan. (2004). Introduction. Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p18.

the electoral process, and still justify their own continued participation in the political process.<sup>26</sup>

Schwedler's study exhibits further elements of frame dynamics embodied in the disagreement over the legitimacy of electoral politics by Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood. The initial participation in elections was debated on the grounds of meshing political participation with Islamic principles. Participation in the next round of elections however, was contested because of the regimes' manipulation of earlier electoral results. Thus the process of framing evolved from one concerned with Islamic principles to one centered on those of free and fair elections.

In Schwedler's study the framing of such issues as women's groups is also a source of contestation. When moderate or secular parties claim sovereignty over women's issues, more conservative parties counter with the Islamic conception of the rights of women, mainly that they are equal socially and politically, and deserve to be provided for and protected by their male relatives. However, the field is still primarily framed in the liberal democratic conception of women's rights.

There is also evidence that intraparty conflicts can create openings and opportunities for moderation (or conversely) radicalization. Schwedler and Clark, in their 2003 article on women in Islamist parties, suggest that preoccupation with intraparty conflicts within the IAF in Jordan and the Islah in Yemen created an opportunity for women to assume places within these two parties.<sup>27</sup> Thus, there are many ways in which framing contests might produce moderation.

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<sup>26</sup> Schwedler, Jillian. Faith in Moderation. Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen. Forthcoming Cambridge University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Clark, Janine Astrid and Jillian Schwedler. 2003 "Who Opened the Window? Women's Activism in Islamist Parties." In *Comparative Politics*. 35(3): 293-312.

By focusing on the contested processes of framing and the moderation of Islamist groups, framing takes on an explanatory role, rather than being an add-on to studies of political opportunity structures whereby frames become filler for rational actor explanations that have movement leaders justify their exploitation of certain opportunities by adjusting their frames accordingly. The very public process of frame contestation played out in the media and academic accounts brings to the fore important issues of interpretation and strategy according to Islam and democracy that may improve our understanding of the process of moderation.

### **Why compare the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat?**

In this paper frame contestation serves as a theoretical mechanism for change, to identify a potential process that leads Islamist groups to change their ideologies and tactics. To illustrate this I will look at the case of framing contests between the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat Party, a spinoff group of former Muslim Brotherhood members. A significant measure of ideological similarity between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat, along with their brief overlap in membership and their similar pool of potential adherents, means that competition between them will be especially intense. This case is particularly useful to illustrate our current hypothesis because of the high profile separation of the two groups that resulted in the creation of the Wasat, the well articulated divisions between the two groups along a number of lines including shari'a, political participation and internal group decision-making, and because of the willingness of members of both groups to discuss the lead up to and aftermath of the rift. The availability of media and academic accounts of members discussing both

groups also provides us with the necessary interview material to begin investigating whether or not the frames provided by opposition movements affect the way members view their own group and if these become self-fulfilling prophecies. Additionally, much of the groups' contention was very public, meaning that the exchange of words took on added significance as a recruiting tool and as a means of gaining support from the Egyptian public. It is likely that both groups would attempt to highlight what they saw as their own strengths. The intensity of this competition thus begs the question, "How might this affect the character of the groups?"

The creation of new groups from the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood is nothing new. Hamas, Gama'at Islamiyya, al-Jihad and numerous other groups, were all formed by former members of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. Scholarly accounts suggest that the government's repressive actions of 1995 led to the moderation of some of the younger Muslim Brothers and to the articulation of the doctrine of inclusion (women, Christians) and democracy, human rights) that separates the Wasat from the already moderate Muslim Brothers.<sup>28</sup> The desire of Wasat members to promote a formal written political platform and apply for legal party status is a furtherance of this new inclusive and participatory agenda.

Differences and debates between the Brotherhood and the Wasat do not, of course, take place in a political vacuum. It should be kept in mind that both groups are operating within a realm that is being continually reshaped by the regime, militant Islamist groups and other non-violent groups. The violence perpetrated by many groups in the 1990s created a climate wherein non-violent groups felt the squeeze from both the regime and

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<sup>28</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. "Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party." *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p415-432.

ordinary Egyptians. At the same time, the de-liberalization that in many ways characterizes the current regime also demands a less accommodationist role if groups are not to be associated with the corrupt regime. It is within this tense and confusing arena that groups must articulate their own goals and differentiate themselves from others.

### **The creation of the Wasat**

The Wasat was formed in 1996 when some of the younger and more moderate Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood left to form their own Islamist organization. However, because the Brotherhood was officially banned the government brought 53 of the potential Wasat membership to trial for attempting to revive the Brotherhood. The senior Wasat leadership was acquitted but many were sentenced to jail, and the Wasat has still not been legally recognized as a party, and operates under government surveillance as an NGO.

Both the Brotherhood and the Wasat party, like all Islamist movements, seek to implement Shari'a Law. But the Wasat advocates a reinterpretation of the historical application of the law to allow for principles of popular sovereignty, pluralism, and equal rights for women and minorities.<sup>29</sup> Long before the formation of the Wasat, scholars were commenting on the increasing pluralism of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the language of its leaders was rife with democratic reference. Some 15 years before the formation of the *Wasat*, one scholar noted, "Muslim Brotherhood leaders representing both the older and younger generations of Brethren speak often of liberty and/or democracy."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. (2004). "The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party." *Comparative Politics*. p205

<sup>30</sup> Abed-Kotob, Sana. (1995). "The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 27: 321-339.

The Muslim Brotherhood has a long and complex past oscillating between militancy under Sayyid Qutb to a position of loyal opposition during Sadat's presidency during which they cooperated with secular parties and exhibited acceptance of democracy and pluralism.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, many of the Brotherhood members who were interviewed by scholars in the years leading up to the split are the very same ones who later formed the Wasat party, so it is difficult in many cases to draw distinctions between the old guard and the more liberal elements, since the latter are more often cited because they had an interest in promoting their view of the Brotherhood's new direction.

The accommodationist strategy of the Brotherhood was well-documented in the years leading up to the split, and despite repeated manipulations of electoral rules by the government designed to prevent or nullify Brotherhood electoral gains, the Brotherhood only engaged in nonviolent protest and boycotts. More conservative Islamist groups have criticized them for these and other accommodationist strategies.<sup>32</sup> The popular success and moderate platform of the Brotherhood highlights the question of why some members would separate to form an even *more* moderate group. Examining the language of the Brotherhood and the Wasat party on issues of pluralism, political participation, and liberal concepts like the rights of women and minorities will give insight into the potential moderation spurred by the creation of, and competition from, the Wasat.

### **Areas of Contestation: Conceptions of Truth and Participation**

Much of the language utilized by leaders of both the Brotherhood and the *Wasat* focuses on their different conceptions of the truth and centers on the Islamic concept of

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<sup>31</sup> Esposito, John. 1991. *Islam and Politics*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press. p228-9.

<sup>32</sup> Abed-Kotob, Sana. (1995). "The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 27: 332

*ijtihad*, or human reasoning. Some Islamists believe the door of *ijtihad* is still open, this enables Muslims to adapt Islamic principles to modern situations. Others believe that the classical texts of Islam already provide a comprehensive guide to life that is eternal and needs no modern adaptation.<sup>33</sup>

Abu Ayla Madi, a student leader who helped the Brotherhood make inroads in parliament, professional syndicates, and university faculty clubs and left to form the Wasat party, said that in his later years with the Brotherhood he had begun to recognize that, “we don’t monopolize the Truth” and “we have a human understanding of Islam.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, fellow Wasat member Esam Sultan said,

. . . . [N]o one in the *Wasat* party is able to say that the program of the *Wasat* party, this is Islam. But I can say that the program of the *Wasat* party is my understanding of Islam . . . . It is possible for you to agree or disagree with me about it.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast, the late Mustafa Mashour, a former supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, has suggested that the Brotherhood could know the real will of God, and thus its authority and interpretation is unquestionable.<sup>36</sup> Because of this, the possibility of evolving ideas, or allowing for alternative interpretations is inconceivable. Thus the frame articulation of two different conceptions of truth brings into sharp relief the more accommodating ideas of the Wasat.

The two groups’ public expressions of their understanding of Shari’a Law can be partly subsumed under their differences concerning the existence of multiple truths, and

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<sup>33</sup> Again, Jillian Schwedler and Janine Astrid Clark provide a nice vocabulary for capturing this distinction, with the terms “legalists” and “contextualists.” The former term describes those who demand a strict application of the Sunnah, while the latter believes in the necessity of adapting the Sunnah to fit the demands of a modern society.

<sup>34</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. (2004). “The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt’s Wasat Party.” *Comparative Politics*. p220.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p220.

<sup>36</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p260

is a primary source of their differentiation. Shari'a Law is codified in the classical texts, and its application in Muslim societies is the primary goal of Islamist movements.

Although many interpretations of Shari'a could make it compatible with liberal democratic principles, the historical application of Shari'a, and the body of law that has been produced by this, is fundamentally at odds with many democratic principles, including equal rights for women and minorities.<sup>37</sup> Thus many Islamic activists have reinterpreted the classical texts to accommodate democratic principles like pluralism and human rights.

Muslim Brotherhood members speak not of reinterpreting the Shari'a, but instead focus on its inviolability. Thus all political reforms must still adhere to the strictures of Shari'a law. In an official Muslim Brotherhood document it is stated that the application of such principles as women's rights must still, "not lead to the violation of ethical rules laid down by the Shari'a and made binding by it."<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, in a separate interview with another scholar, late Brotherhood member and former supreme guide Hodeibi asserted that, although the ummah (the community of believers) is a source of authority, the Shari'a is supreme:

. . . . the Muslim Nation (ummah) is obliged to submit to Allah alone and to sanctify the laws of the glorious Qur'an and the blessed Sunnah, and believes that man does not have the right to rule except that which was revealed by Allah in the form of Shari'a. In that sense, it cannot nominate anyone to act on its behalf if he is willing to rule in accordance with the Law of Allah, and ready to train it [the nation] on the requirements of the principles of religion.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. (2004). "The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party." *Comparative Politics*. p205 Wickham points out that the one notable exception to this is Turkey's Justice and Development Party, which has pledged to stick with Turkey's secular laws.

<sup>38</sup> Taken from a Muslim Brotherhood document of 1994, "The Role of Women in Islamic Society." Available online at Islamic-world.net.

<sup>39</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. *The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party*. *Comparative Politics*. January 2004, p208.

In contrast, Wasat members, like most progressive Islamist groups, insist on a fundamental distinction between principles and laws: although the Quran sets down principles, the laws derived from those must come from the people. By insisting on the dichotomy of principles and laws, the Wasat emphasizes further the Brotherhood's narrow conception of truth.

In addition to these discussions of Islamic principles, democratic principles are also of central importance to the contention between the two groups. Much of the rhetoric of the Wasat party has focused on the possible bridging of democracy and Shari'a Law. Unlike the Brotherhood, the Wasat party frames the duty of modern Islamists as one of synthesizing democracy with Shari'a Law, the latter of which to them has two parts, one that is the result of medieval thinking and is "outdated" and "backward" and the other, the "enduring Islamic principles" which can easily integrate democratic ideals like popular sovereignty and pluralism.<sup>40</sup> Wasat members are eager to draw the distinction between the Brotherhood and themselves on these matters.

As Wasat member Esam Sultan stated:

The truth is that the most important, the clearest difference between the Wasat Party and the Muslim Brotherhood is faith in these matters – faith in pluralism, faith in democracy, faith in freedom, faith in freedom of opinion, freedom of thought, freedom of creativity, relations with other currents.<sup>41</sup>

And yet, Sultan is careful not to utilize distinctly Western terminology. While individuals may make reference to democracy, the official party platform does not. And instead of "liberal" Wasat members refer to themselves as "moderate" "centrist" or

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Interview conducted by Anthony Shadid with Esam Sultan in (2001). *The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

“open-minded,”<sup>42</sup> a framing strategy that inoculates them against being framed as “liberal” or “pro-Western” by the Brotherhood.

We also see the Brotherhood responding directly to the activities and policies of the Wasat. The Wasat inclusion of a Coptic Christian as one of its leaders was followed later in the year by a Brotherhood statement that Christians in Egypt, “have the same rights and responsibilities as Muslims as well as the same civil and political rights.”<sup>43</sup> For an Islamist group, this was quite an unusual statement.

The principle of participation in the political process is also a source of contention between Islamist groups generally, and the Brotherhood and Wasat are no exception. We find a division between groups focused on political participation and restructuring state institutions and those who avoid entanglement with the regime, instead focusing on change at the societal level. Many of the frames offered by Brotherhood and Wasat members point to this difference, the Brotherhood criticizing the Wasat for engaging with the corrupt regime, and the Wasat criticizing the Brotherhood for avoiding the arena where meaningful change can take place.

While Wasat members promote political participation as a form of empowerment, Brotherhood members frame their own election campaigns in an evangelical and pedagogical light, claiming not only that it allowed the Brotherhood to spread the word of God and inform the masses about the totality of Islam as not only a religion but a way of life,<sup>44</sup> but also to perform a watchdog role to uncover government corruption and

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<sup>42</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt’s Wasat Party. *Comparative Politics*. January 2004, p222

<sup>43</sup> Takeyh, Ray and Nikolas Gvosdev. 2004. *The Receding Shadow of the Prophet*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, p69.

<sup>44</sup> Abed-Kotob, Sana. (1995). “The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 27: p331

deviations from Islam.<sup>45</sup> Although these are clearly important outcomes of gaining access to the political process, it is not the process itself or characteristic of democracy that is upheld.

Often, groups that do not engage in the political process will criticize those that do on the grounds that they are empowering the corrupt regime through their participation.<sup>46</sup> The framing of strategic interaction with the regime and the legitimacy of exploiting political opportunities is telling. Hodeibi, of the Brotherhood insisted that,

I've said many times, we entered elections under the slogan 'Islam is the solution.' How can it be said that we participate in the existing system when we are trying to change it in the preferred manner – by changing institutions with institutions?"<sup>47</sup>

The Wasat party has criticized the Brotherhood for this rhetoric, and frames their style of participation in negative terms as “antisystem” and promoting a “culture of confrontation” with the regime that is ultimately self-defeating. The Wasat party frames its own participation as attempts to “assist the building of a democratic civil society.”<sup>48</sup> Their focus here is on working with the state, not confronting it. Madi frames the Wasat moderation as a “choice” rather than an evolution, suggesting a specific moment of departure, and considers the Wasat party an “opposition force” not a “resistance movement,” emphasizing its own legal status in contrast to the Brotherhood’s underground style.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> There is a tradition inscribed in the Sunna that demands that Muslims not utilize or participate in any state institutions under a corrupt, non-Islamic regime.

<sup>47</sup> Abed-Kotob, Sana. (1995). “The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 27: p330.

<sup>48</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p260

<sup>49</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p265

The choice by the Wasat to participate also reflects their ideas of democratic practices within the Islamist group itself. This provides a particularly poignant disagreement between the two groups, one that can be construed in both ideological and strategic terms. By highlighting the Brotherhood's rigid internal structure, Wasat members can discourage potential adherents who might find a more open forum for their own ideas within the Wasat. One Wasat member remarked:

The Brotherhood taught us the government was corrupt and needed to be brought down, but we found through our experience that decisions were taken by a small group of people in the Brotherhood . . . it was something that made us very uneasy with the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>50</sup>

### **Emphasizing Differences**

The Brotherhood and the Wasat often cite each other as a foil on many issues. In interviews conducted with various Wasat party members, author Anthony Shadid noted that Wasat members often frame their practices in relation to those of the Brotherhood, promoting a sharp distinction:

[Members] say they would prefer to work within a democracy than dream of revolution, recognize the system rather than fight it, and seek coalitions with other parties, even secular ones, rather than go it alone. They call the Brotherhood's clandestine style old-fashioned; its obsession with iron discipline and unity, they say, is better fit for another generation.<sup>51</sup>

Displaying a similar contempt for the Brotherhood's methods, when Shadid asked one member for permission to use his phone during an interview he replied, in what Shadid interpreted as a direct reference to the Brotherhood, "There's nothing secret here.

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<sup>50</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. "Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party." *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p419.

<sup>51</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p69

We're above ground.” ‘Abd al-Karim, another Wasat member, expressed a similar disdain for underground operations:

Even members who weren't necessarily sympathetic to the Islamic cause supported us. We never identified ourselves as the Muslim Brothers. We held all of our meetings in public in the syndicate headquarters, as opposed to the Muslim Brother veterans who were accustomed to conducting business underground.<sup>52</sup>

Party formation is a source of much of the contention between the two groups, and they frame it in very distinct and different ways. Both the Wasat and the Brotherhood acknowledge the need for some form of participation, but the Wasat strand of activism involves party formation and direct involvement with the system, while the Brotherhood stresses a more society-oriented approach and participation without becoming a legally recognized party. Joshua Stacher, in a 2002 article, suggests that younger Brotherhood members' (those who would later form the Wasat) increasing links with outside organizations meant that confrontation with the older leadership was inevitable. As the Brotherhood members reaped the benefits of their outreach programs they realized that the organization of a political party offered potential benefits.<sup>53</sup>

The decision to form a party was framed by some Wasat members as a necessary step to avoid the state repression that devastated the group by removing the most prominent and promising members. The “persecution” mentality that many Wasat members attribute to the Muslim Brotherhood was fed by these crackdowns, and many in the Brotherhood still cling to such characterizations of group-regime relations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p419.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*

<sup>54</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). *The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p70

Party formation thus becomes a central issue for group differentiation and frame contestation. One Brotherhood member characterized the split as primarily over the issue of party formation:

Basically, it comes down to who has the right to decide to make a political party – to make the steps to go to the PPC. Who has the power to enlist the 50 or 60 people, who are members of the Brotherhood, to make a party? This is difficult. And the other item is the relationship with the government. If their step is some sort of harassment against the government or if the government thinks that it should take intense action against the Brotherhood if they want to try and make a party. So how to consider the reaction of the government. These are the two big items that governed this split.<sup>55</sup>

Another Brotherhood member hinted at the future formation of a party, but suggested that party formation was really just an instrument that Wasat members utilized to gain a greater decision-making role for themselves:

The decision-making process is institutionalized in the Brotherhood. It takes time to consult and some of our former colleagues were urged to bypass this procedure and to form a party early.<sup>56</sup>

Hodeibi disapproved of the formation of the Wasat party, and curtly insisted to Shadid that the Brotherhood has nothing to do with the Wasat and if they wanted information on the Wasat, they would have to go to them, not the Brotherhood,<sup>57</sup> and in other interviews dismissed the Wasat altogether and insisted that Madi had no supporters.<sup>58</sup> Despite this dismissal the Brotherhood viewed the formation of the Wasat party at times as a direct threat to itself and at other times as mere window dressing, or “decoration.”<sup>59</sup> In Arabic newspapers members of the two groups traded accusations.

Brotherhood members framed the Wasat members as publicity hungry upstarts, while the

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<sup>55</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p420.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p419.

<sup>57</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). *The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p262

<sup>58</sup> “A Delicate Balance.” *The World Press Review*. February 1997.

<sup>59</sup> ibid, p255

*Wasat* members insisted the Brotherhood was an organization out of touch with modern political realities.<sup>60</sup> One analyst pointed out the use of antiquated concepts by the Brotherhood,

The Muslim Brotherhood maintains concepts like dar al-Islam and dar al-Harb. The simplicity about the West and the Muslim world, which carries with it an ‘us/them’ duality. This is a very simple and very conservative way of thinking about the world.<sup>61</sup>

The frame of modern-Western versus old guard-obsolete is often an underlying principle of the group characterizations of each other.

The two groups have fundamentally different views of strategies and movement values, sometimes reflecting the periods in which their members matured politically. By consistently framing the Muslim Brotherhood as hopelessly stuck in a past when it was pitted in a sometimes violent struggle with the Egyptian government, the *Wasat* party highlights not only its better chances of success but also its ability to appeal to moderate Muslims interested in political participation. By contrast, to the Brotherhood the past confrontation with the regime made the concept of self-sacrifice central, and jail-time often a prerequisite for authority and a time for “training and study” that in the long run would be “useful.”<sup>62</sup>

The aura of persecution that Brotherhood members exuded and were proud of, *Wasat* members saw as defeatist. “Listen and obey,” the proud mantra of a Brotherhood at war with a tortuous regime became pejorative to *Wasat* members such as Esam Sultan, who said, “The opinion of the leader is the opinion that is followed. Listen and obey,

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<sup>60</sup> Shadid, Anthony. (2001). The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p255

<sup>61</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the *Wasat* Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p428.

<sup>62</sup> Ma'mun Hudaibi in an interview with Anthony Shadid. In The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. p259

absolutely, without discussion. You should listen and obey. Listen and obey.”<sup>63</sup> What the Brotherhood framed as unity and discipline the *Wasat* party framed as secrecy, suspicion and rigid hierarchy.

The importance of survival may have contributed to the Brotherhood’s reluctance to initiate change. The government’s unpredictable and arbitrary crack-downs on the group greatly influenced much of its senior leadership, and it is quite understandable that they would eschew any kind of radical change that would attract government attention.<sup>64</sup> However, much of the government’s focus had been the more moderate Brotherhood membership, since the former wanted to avoid making martyrs of the radicals within the Brotherhood.<sup>65</sup> The confusion resulting from such tactics and the Brotherhood’s inability to develop a standard operating procedure to deal with government incursions would have doubtless created much conflict within the group, especially in reference to its relationship with the government.

Both groups have attempted to appeal to the government for further political liberalization, but the language of the *Wasat* is more clearly based on liberal democratic principles while that of the Brotherhood makes only vague references to pluralism and openness. The first real condemnation of the regime made on democratic grounds by the Brotherhood was after the nullification of election results in which Brotherhood members would have made significant electoral gains. Before that discussions of democracy were limited to its possible synthesis with Islam. This change mirrors the discussion of human rights within many Islamist groups, whereby the discussion of human rights evolved from

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, p255

<sup>64</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the *Wasat* Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p419.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*

principled protest against the torture of Islamists.<sup>66</sup> The statement of Mohammad ‘Umara of the Brotherhood illustrates this characteristically vague democratic speech:

If Mubarak opens the door and windows to listen to thinkers and leaders of Islamist movements on the struggles and views on the Islamic renaissance, his picture of the Islamist movement would change . . . . this encourages us to ask President Mubarak, whom we recognize as having transferred the relationship between the state and Islam from a clash with the Islamist movement to a period of truce, we encourage him to transfer this relationship to a period of peace . . . . If he opens the doors to the thinkers and leaders of the Islamist movement, he will find a new color of men who give without considering the cost.<sup>67</sup>

Some Brotherhood members have tried to minimize the appearance of substantive differences between the two groups, and have suggested that it was personal frustration with their own limited decision-making influence, not an ideological rift, that lead the future Wasat members to leave.<sup>68</sup> However, Wasat members have sought to emphasize the appearance of differences, notably by offering a clear written vision that articulates democratic principles like tolerance, compromise, elections and peaceful transfers of power, that are merely alluded to by the Brotherhood.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

At least one observer of the struggle between the Brotherhood and the Wasat has noted that the orientation of the Wasat has become only more moderate and pragmatic

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<sup>66</sup> Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky. “Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt’s Wasat Party.” *Comparative Politics*. January 2004. p219

<sup>67</sup> Abed-Kotob, Sana. (1995). “The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 27: p326

<sup>68</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumbblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p419. Stacher, goes on to suggest that younger members who had been more effectively incorporated into the Brotherhood’s hierarchy didn’t leave the Brotherhood despite their solidarity with the Wasat initiative and its young leadership.

<sup>69</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumbblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p425.

over time.<sup>70</sup> Some media accounts (including statements issued by Rafiq Habib, a Coptic Christian member) suggest that the group platform is becoming less about Islamism and more about building a genuine political opposition that focuses on civic and political freedoms for ordinary Egyptians.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that through the struggle to differentiate and define themselves the Wasat members not only maintained their commitment to political participation and moderate Islamism, but actually deepened and broadened this commitment. Likewise, as Brotherhood members are forced to contend with the dissatisfaction of some of its most promising adherents, it may reevaluate its current organization and strategies.

Since the death of Supreme Leader Hodeibi, many analysts and media reports have suggested that the Brotherhood is moving along a new trajectory, led by a younger, more charismatic cohort, much like those who left to form the Wasat. Although determining an empirical relationship between the formation of the Wasat and this new direction is beyond the scope of this paper, it is conceivable that without the challenge of the Wasat that forced the Brotherhood to articulate its platform in relation to new and changing circumstances, such a shift might have been non-existent or longer in coming.<sup>72</sup>

The Brotherhood's recent move to be more inclusive is indicative of this change, as analyst Nabil 'Abd al Fattah relates, "The Muslim Brotherhood until now refuses to recognize the citizenship of others, the Christians in their society. While they have made steps regarding Christians and women, they have never presented a clear political

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<sup>70</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. "Post-Islamist Rumbblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party." *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p424.

<sup>71</sup> Howeidy, Amira. "Third Time Lucky?" *Al-Ahram Weekly*. June 10, 1999

<sup>72</sup> "Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt nominates woman candidate for parliament." *CNN.com* August 20, 2000. Sirri, Odai. "Muslim Brotherhood members freed." *Al-Jazeera.net*. January 8, 2004. "Muslim Brotherhood leader dies." *Al-Jazeera.net*. January 9, 2004.

declaration.”<sup>73</sup> Media reports also show an increasing willingness of Brotherhood leadership to speak about inclusionary politics with respect to women and Christians.<sup>74</sup> We do, however, still see the difference between the two groups in their use of formal political declarations. Whereas the Brotherhood may choose to implement incremental change through informal passages, the Wasat enshrines this in written declarations.<sup>75</sup>

Wasat attempts to differentiate themselves may also have been strategic, since in order to gain legal party status they had to distance themselves from the Brotherhood membership and establish that they had something new to offer to Egyptian politics, as much for reasons of government regulations as to gain public support. Sadat’s infamous Law 40 demanded that new parties be substantively different from any other existing party, so difference was a matter of survival.<sup>76</sup> When the first party the Wasat proposed was turned down 62 of its 74 members were former Brothers. 48 hours later Madi re-applied for party status, with a new group renamed al Wasat al Misri (the Egyptian Middle), this time composed of a mere 24 former Brothers in a membership of 93 that included Copts, one Protestant and 19 women. Many of the Muslim Brother members who had left to form Wasat returned to the Brotherhood. This difference was stressed by Madi:

This time the former Brotherhood elements make up 24 out of a total of 93, only about 25 percent, of our membership. There are independent Islamist personalities, who never associated with the Brotherhood, within the substance of the new idea.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p428.

<sup>74</sup> Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt nominates woman candidate for parliament.” *CNN.com* August 20, 2000. Sirri, Odai. “Muslim Brotherhood members freed.” *Al-Jazeera.net*. January 8, 2004. “Muslim Brotherhood leader dies.” *Al-Jazeera.net*. January 9, 2004.

<sup>75</sup> The group’s lengthy political platform can be found on its website.

<sup>76</sup> Stacher, Joshua. 2002. “Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party.” *Middle East Journal*. 56(3): p422.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p423.

This party too was rejected legal status, however the Wasat members soon got permission to establish an NGO which has since provided an outlet for their particular brand of moderate Islamism.

The reluctance of the Brotherhood to engage the media in discussions of the Wasat challenge further amplifies these differences and stresses the quietistic, underground character that Wasat members were trying to reform within the Brotherhood. The articulation and amplification of democratic frames by the Wasat, and their persistence in portraying the Brotherhood members as out of touch, may be well received in many media outlets. Also, as the diffusion of norms of democracy increases, and as regimes continue to adopt the 'mantle of Islam' to maintain legitimacy, pluralist politics may provide a better foil for regime activity than does Islam. That is, opposition groups may make claims against the regime with an increasingly liberal-democratic list of grievances.

Of course, it is difficult to separate intergroup dialogue from other influences such as state repression, media bias and broader social forces that help shape (and re-shape) group identity. Group identity can be affected by such forces as political disintegration, economic shocks, military losses, social disruption, the rise of particular leaders, and local custom. However, because both groups are operating under the same political climate and are attempting to appeal to the Egyptian public in general, we can set aside these potentially differentiating forces, and focus on group interaction.

The continued emphasis of the Wasat members on their openness, internal democracy, peaceful accommodating stance and liberal democratic outlook demonstrates the currency democratic frames have among Islamists focused on regime opposition.

Perhaps more important is the Wasat members' insistence on being compared with the Brotherhood – emphasizing not only their own pluralism, but the Brotherhood's lack of pluralism. The elements of contested frames tell us much about how competing Islamist groups deal with the increasingly pluralist political discourse in which they must take part.

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