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Responses to revolutions: A comparative analysis of the actions of the Muslim Brotherhood branches in Egypt and Syria in the wake of the Arab Spring – by Molly Blessing

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The Muslim Brotherhood is generally believed to be the most influential Islamist organization in the world, serving as the flagship for Sunni Islamist movements. Decisions made by the Brotherhood hold especial significance in light of the recent upheavals known as the Arab Spring. An active group in several of the countries involved, the Brotherhood's actions during the revolutions play a determinate role in shaping the future of the Arab world. Brotherhood branches in Egypt and Syria are of particular interest given how both countries remain enveloped in rebellion today. An understanding of the variance between the two branches can help reveal the dynamics behind the Brotherhood's response to each country's revolt and predict its future trajectory.

Now on its third leader in as many years, Egypt seems unable to settle on any one form of government. On the other hand, Syria has had only one official leader but the continued bloodshed within has caused the country to disintegrate into civil war. In both the Muslim Brotherhood is present, but the involvement of each Brotherhood group in revolution differs. The Egyptian branch attempts to take complete control of its chaotic country, while the Syrian branch tends toward negotiation with other groups and remains in the background.

This paper seeks to explain the difference in response through a comparative analysis of the original Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt and the Brotherhood branch in Syria. I outline sources of variation between the two branches and how these dissimilarities arose, from fundamental differences that existed since their very founding to the actions of modern rulers. First, I discuss the similar basic ideology and organizational structure with which the two groups began. Next, I point to key distinctions in the type of internal conflict occurring in each and their involvement with politics and violence. I show how differences in demographics, the openness of the political environment, and the treatment of the Brotherhood by various rulers caused the divergence by shaping the individual evolution of the two. Lastly, I apply conclusions drawn from this comparison to an analysis of each branch's present-day revolutionary strategy.

Ideology and Structure: the foundations of the Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) originated in Egypt, with the Syrian branch drawing much of its ideology and structure from its Egyptian sister. At a fundamental level the ideals each branch advocates for are therefore the same: a revitalization of Islam amongst the general populace and adherence to shari'a law[1]. It is in their chosen methods of achieving these goals that the two branches differ.

Both the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood also follow the same general structural pattern. The organization is pyramidal, a federated structure of many branch offices held together by a central headquarters. In Egypt, it is the Cairo-based Guidance Bureau that tops the pyramid, a group of about 15 members led by the Supreme Guide (murshid)[2]. Members are elected by the Shura Council (majlis al-shura), a legislative body consisting of roughly 105 members, 90 of whom are regional representatives and up to an additional 15 selected by the Guidance Bureau based on their specific skill sets[3]. Major policy decisions, such as electoral participation, are also voted on by the Shura Council[4]. Leaders of a network of branch offices act as liaisons between regular members and the Guidance Bureau and Shura Council, enabling decisions made centrally to be quickly passed down the hierarchy and implemented at a local level. A stringent recruitment process in which becoming a full member typically takes several years

has resulted in a base of committed[1]members with a strong sense of duty ready to follow any orders given[5].[2]While the society has been refined since the Muslim Brotherhood's founding in 1928, the basis of a federated structure and lengthy recruitment has always been there[6]. The organization in Syria, developed between the mid-1930s and 1945, was formed along similar lines, clearly inspired by its Egyptian sister. A Comptroller General (muraqib al'amm) was set up to lead an Executive Committee whose members were elected by a Shura Council made up of members representing different regions and beliefs. Headquarters were based in Damascus, and many regional offices were also established[7]. The tight control over decisions and extensive regional decentralization practiced by both the Egyptian and Syrian branches has helped maintain them, causing members to focus on fulfilling their duties rather than on achieving hierarchical ascendance and increasing efficiency through outsourcing control to local leaders.

Internal conflict: the swell of ideological and generational strife

This same control and decentralization present in the Brotherhood's basic organizational structure has also weakened the unity of the Egyptian and Syrian branches, however. As a result of the decentralization both branches contain members from a broad array of ideologies and regions, leading to ideological conflicts between members in Egypt and regional ones within the Syrian branch. In addition, the holding of decision-making power by older members of the Brotherhood only has led to rising discontent amongst the younger generation in Syria and exacerbated ideological conflict in Egypt.

Clashes within the Egyptian branch have mainly revolved around ideological, rather than generational or regional, differences. The close-knit older members of the Brotherhood, known as the "old guard," have historically made up most of the seats on the Guidance Bureau as well as held the position of Supreme Guide and so have easily been able to exercise their conservative, democracy-wary beliefs. The rigidity of the ideology of the old guard and their monopoly of power continually frustrate more reformist members who wish to see a more moderate expression of Islamic ideals and increased democratic participation. This conflict inspired a full-on split by Brotherhood members in 1996 to form the Wasat party, created to represent "a civic platform based on the Islamic faith, which believes in pluralism and the alternation of power," as stated by its founder Aboul 'Ela Madi[8]. Those involved were considered part of the middle generation of the Muslim Brotherhood, but reformist ideas have also been generally promoted by some of the Brotherhood's older leaders[9]. In addition a group of younger members, including several bloggers, began advocating for the reformist cause in the early 2000s[10].[3]While the majority of reformist members choose to remain within the Muslim Brotherhood rather than join a split-off such as the Wasat party, their presence within the conservative-dominated organization contributes to an overall lack of cohesion.

Clashes in Syria, on the other hand, have occurred along regional and generational lines. Initially a split formed in the late 1960s between the moderate leadership in Damascus, comprised of educated elites who promoted the idea of peaceful Islamic democracy, and a group referred to as the "Northern axis" made up of members from Aleppo, Hama, and other cities. Many reasons have been cited as seeding divisiveness, from regional resentment over Brotherhood leader Issam al-Attar's reliance on fellow Damascene members to form most of his Executive Committee to an unwillingness by members to be led by a leader in exile (al-Attar was forced out of Syria in 1964). The main culprit, however, appears to have been personal resentment against al-Attar's leadership style[11]. By the early 1970s the "Northern axis" had succeeded in taking over leadership and many Damascene members who remained loyal to al-Attar had left the Brotherhood for good. A further regional conflict then formed among remaining members in the mid-1970s, between what became known as the "Aleppo faction" and the "Hama clan." This arose from a difference of opinions over the best response to continued rule of Syria by the secular Ba'ath party: Aleppine leaders valued political involvement, while Hama-born leaders firmly believed in armed resistance. Divisions between the two remain a part of the organization to this day[12]. In addition to the historical Aleppo-Hama divide, generational clashes have also occurred between the older leaders who have controlled the organization since the 1970s and younger members who wish to play a larger role. Complaining about the "'autocratic, tribal structure'" of the Brotherhood, some youths have even split off entirely (for example, in the 2011 formation of the National Action Group for Syria), and those that remain express a growing sense of dissatisfaction[13]. As only one-fifth of current members are under age forty-five, it is vital for the Syrian Brotherhood's continuance to gain and maintain support from the younger generation[14].[4]While regional divisions seem more based on differences in leadership style and response to repression rather than differing long-term visions, and so are not likely to cause a fundamental split in the organization, the increasing generational gap arising from monopoly of power by

elderly leaders could cause the Brotherhood to degenerate into irrelevance through youth's abandonment of it.

Why did the Muslim Brotherhood branches in Egypt and Syria splinter along different divisions, if both used the same pyramidal, decentralized structure as a basis for their organization? The answer lies with the variance in demographics between Egypt and Syria and the extent of the presence of other Islamist and political groups during the founding of each branch.

Demographic variance: The homogeneity of Egypt and the heterogeneity of Syria

The Egyptian Brotherhood was faced with both a relatively homogenous population supportive of Sunni Islam and an environment free of other strong religious anti-system groups, leaving a clear opening for them to become a dominant organization. 90 percent of Egypt's population is Muslim and most follow the Sunni tradition[15].[5]At the time of the Brotherhood's founding beliefs within Sunni Islam were also relatively uniform across Egypt; the religious establishment was dominated by the interpretations of scholars associated with al-Azhar University, a center of Islamic learning in Cairo[16]. The Muslim Brotherhood, as a Sunni Islamist organization, has therefore had a wide base of potential supporters to work with and faced little region-specific difference in ideology. In addition, the Brotherhood's message of country reform based on Islamic values and governance was unique at the time of its founding. While there were both religious societies working to promote Islam and anti-system groups highlighting the ineffectiveness of the established government, none existed that combined the two ideas. A high level of discontent among the general populace in the 1930s and 40s, due to British control over Egyptian affairs and Egypt's highly skewed wealth distribution, provided a wave of mass emotion with the potential to be channeled into support of an anti-system group[17]. By tying their message of political change to a religion practiced daily by the vast majority of the country, the Brotherhood was able to draw concrete connections between their ideas and the lives of ordinary citizens and so direct this mass discontent into support for its organization. The Brotherhood also drew in members through its system of beginning a public services project along with its establishment of each new regional branch, since the poor living conditions of many Egyptians made them appreciative of the organization's tangible efforts to put calls for a better society into practice. The gradual filling of gaps in the Egyptian political system combined with the emotional power generated by a mass movement led to the Brotherhood's rapid spread throughout the country. Its network of social services grew just as quickly; in fact, so imbedded were these services that, when the organization was dissolved in 1954 by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, the government was forced to take over providing the network with funding out of fear that a breakdown would lead to mass revolt[18]. By 1949 the organization was estimated to have between 300,000 and 600,000 members, despite having been founded a mere twenty years prior[19].   [6]

The wide extent of the Brotherhood's membership and its powerful position among Egypt's opposition groups led both to the organization's encompassment of a wide range of ideologies and to a reluctance to leave on the part of its members. No matter how drastic the ideological clash with the narrow circle of Brotherhood leaders, giving up the power and support that came with being a part of the organization was a difficult decision. As one reformist leader described it, "when a Brother leaves the group, he is uprooting himself from a milieu with which he has organic, emotional, and fateful ties." To put it more simply, "your friends boycott you."[20]. Leaving the Brotherhood meant not only leaving one's religious circles but also giving up close friends and a chance to create change (for no split-off has ever come close to being as successful as the original organization). Unsurprisingly, most have chosen to remain despite diverging beliefs. The result is internal ideological conflict that has plagued the Egyptian Brotherhood for many years, led by members from all generations and all regions.

The greater diversity found in Syria's population and the large amount of ideology-based societies and political parties already in existence at the time of the Syrian branch's birth meant that from the beginning the Syrian Brotherhood faced a more uphill battle to win members. A substantial portion of Syria's population, 26 percent, follows a religious tradition other than Sunni Islam: 16 percent believe in a different branch of the Muslim religion (ex. Alawite, Druze) while 10 percent consider themselves Christian, in addition to a few small Jewish communities[21]. The distribution of these different groups has resulted in high regional variance in religious faith, including differences within Sunni Islam itself. For example, followers of the Sufi tradition make up the vast majority of Sunni Muslims in Aleppo and Hama, while those in Damascus tend towards a belief in Salafism[22]. Regional differences were exacerbated, rather than eradicated, by the way in which the Syrian Brotherhood was formed. As many Islamic societies (jamiat) had already developed in Syrian cities, the Brotherhood sprang into existence by

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consolidating several of these pre-existing jamiat. This helped the Brotherhood's development in society, since it started out with members already tied to it, but also resulted in a greater decentralization of the overall organization than seen in Egypt[23].[7]Local leaders were reluctant to give up much power to a central head, and so the Brotherhood resembled more a consolidated series of regional subgroups than the tight-knit hierarchy of the Egyptian branch[24]. Even with this grouping of jamiat, the Syrian Brotherhood failed to gain anywhere near the following of its Egyptian sister. Membership was lower partly due to a general lack of support by a quarter of Syria's population for a Sunni Muslim organization. There were also already other strong ideology-based political organizations competing for members in Syria – mainly the Communist Party and the Ba'ath Party – and so the Brotherhood's denouncement of the existing political system in favor of a new school of thought did not hold the same uniqueness as in Egypt. The organization also failed to marshal public support through tangible efforts to better the lifestyle of Syrian citizens. As the Syrian Brotherhood originated in urban cities rather than smaller towns or rural areas, its social services programs focused mainly on helping workers[25]. This gained it support from the urban lower- and middle-class, but to the poverty-stricken rural citizens the Brotherhood's visions of a better society appeared more of a mirage[26]. The combination of a substantial religious minority presence, competition from other ideological political parties, and a lack of concrete involvement with much of Syria's population led to the Syrian Brotherhood having only 10,000-12,000 members by the 1950s, compared to the Egyptian branch's several hundred thousand[27]. [8]

The smaller size of the Syrian Brotherhood combined with its regional disparity meant the organization held less power than its Egyptian sister and was more inclined to fracture along demographic lines. As one of many groups fighting for influence and support from the population, the Brotherhood was not so firmly established in society that leaving it was notably difficult. Those with fundamental belief-based conflicts or differing long-term visions from the Brotherhood were therefore likely to simply bow out, possibly joining another Islamist organization or even a secular one. This prevented the festering of deep-rooted discontent within the organization seen in Egypt from becoming a major source of divisiveness in Syria. As in Egypt, however, unrest began to grow among the younger generation over the Brotherhood's narrow concentration of power. In addition, the heterogeneity of Syria's population both in and outside of Sunni Islam combined with the Brotherhood's origins in several pre-existing groups resulted in strong regional, even clannish, loyalty among members. Overall, the Syrian organization continues to face much internal divisiveness, but these conflicts are based more on regional factionalism and generational disparity over control of power than on differing ideological end goals for the Brotherhood.

Political involvement: the anti-system Egyptian branch and the participatory Syrian branch

The Brotherhood branch in Egypt has historically remained separate from the government and not taken part in elections, while in Syria electoral involvement has been much sought after. Initial differences in participation have their roots in the type of political environment each group faced upon formation. Divergence was further influenced by the attitude of country leaders towards the Muslim Brotherhood and the resulting levels of persecution experienced by each of the two branches. The explicit effects of environment and attitude on shaping the Egyptian branch's rejection of the government system and the Syrian branch's embrace of it are discussed below.

The political environment of Egypt and Syria

General country demographics helped to shape the amount of popular support gathered by each Brotherhood branch, and drew the fault lines along which cracks in unity would later form. However, it was the specific political environment of Egypt and Syria at the time of founding that determined each organization's emphasis on political involvement. The elitist, patronage-based system in place in Egypt before the Free Officers coup of 1952 made it difficult for the Brotherhood there to achieve electoral success, having been founded by a man with no higher-level connections.[28] Corruption and lingering British domination of Egypt's politics also aroused the disgust of Brotherhood members for the existing political system. This led to the Egyptian Brotherhood developing an isolationist policy with regard to politics, remaining "an organization outside and against the political order."[29] Syria's political system, on the other hand, was much more open, as Syria's independence from France in 1946 had resulted in the establishment of a parliamentary democracy free of domination by any one group or party. The Syrian Brotherhood took advantage of this by forming a political party and actively participating in elections.[30] [9]A certain amount of parliamentary seats were required to be filled by sectarian and religious minorities,

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as outlined by electoral laws governing the first elections the Brotherhood participated in (1947 and 1949). This shaped the organization's ideology by creating a need for collaboration with groups outside of Sunni Islam, leading to the Brotherhood's emphasis that the implementation of Islamic law should be inclusive and non-sectarian.[31] The estrangement of the Egyptian brotherhood from political involvement due to the elitist nature of Egypt's political system meant that the moderate school of Islamic thought embraced by Syrian members was disregarded by most Egyptian members in favor of targeted hostility against the regime. While the Syrian political branch ran members in elections and promoted its ideology through emphasis of its universality, the anti-system Egyptian branch focused more on firing critiques at the current political order and working outside the system to develop its own network of social services.

The attitudes of Egyptian and Syrian leaders towards the Muslim Brotherhood

The level of involvement the Egyptian and Syrian Brotherhoods in their respective political systems was determined by the response of later country leaders to the organization. The rigidity of the Egyptian political environment and lack of true liberalization kept the Brotherhood there as a force that worked mainly through non-governmental channels, even as it slowly began to participate in elections. The initial openness of the Syrian political environment led the Syrian branch to start out as an active political participant, but violent repression decimated the Syrian Brotherhood's presence in the country. The response of each Brotherhood branch to political changes, however, differed little from their original directions: the Egyptian branch continued to work outside the system, while the Syrian one focused on regaining political legitimacy.

From the toppling of Egypt's constitutional monarchy by the Free Officers in 1952 to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, the Egyptian branch of the Brotherhood never experienced anything but authoritarian rule. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian ruler from 1952-1970, actively attempted to eradicate the organization through mass incarceration and succeeded in forcing it underground, deepening the gulf between the Brotherhood and the regime.[32] Some political liberalization and increases in public freedoms were implemented by Anwar Sadat (1970-1981), which included the granting of amnesty to the Brotherhood. This relaxation caused the organization to hesitantly involve itself in the system by lobbying parliament members to support shari'a law. However, Sadat never eased control to the point of allowing the Brotherhood to gain formal recognition as a political force, and he specifically forbade the formation of parties on the basis of religion in the Political Parties Law of 1977.[33] A similar increase in political freedoms began with the rise to power of Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). Encouraged by the changes, the Brotherhood began to run candidates for parliament, albeit on the lists of other parties. Mubarak was just as against the formation of a Brotherhood political party as his predecessor, and so the organization carefully limited the extent of its electoral participation to avoid triggering Nasser-era repression.[34] The Brotherhood's long experience with operating under authoritarian rule caused it to become used to working outside the system, to the point where it preferred a lack of formal recognition so as to avoid being constrained by rules for legitimate opposition groups.[35] A lack of official recognition also meant that the Brotherhood was free to allow major inconsistencies in its speech and actions, ambiguities that enabled the organization to embrace contradictory ideologies.[36] The continued inability to formally participate in politics drew the attention of the Egyptian branch to the advantages gained by remaining separate from the formal governmental structure, and so the Brotherhood limited its political involvement until the sudden collapse of Mubarak's authoritarian regime in 2011. [10]

In contrast, the Syrian Brotherhood experienced the freedom of an open political system at the time of its germination, but was then heavily repressed by Ba'ath party rulers during the Ba'ath takeover in 1963, and continuing to present day. At first the Brotherhood and the Ba'ath party competed for power, both building up strong electoral support bases. A short period of oppression of the Brotherhood by Colonel Adib Shishakli, who ran a military dictatorship from 1951-1954, combined with the aggression of popular Arab figure Gamal Abdel Nasser towards its Egyptian sister, led the organization to temporarily decrease its direct political involvement, running candidates as independents rather than continuing to build up a formal political party. As a result of this brief absence, the Ba'ath party was able to greatly increase its electoral success, outperforming the Brotherhood even once Brotherhood candidates again began running as representatives of the official party.[37] Ba'ath influence in Syria was cemented with the party's 1963 coup d'état. Now in control of the country's institutions, Ba'athist officers – who tended to be from rural, impoverished areas – quickly moved to disintegrate the Syrian Brotherhood and remove power from the urban Sunni middle and upper-class that formed much of the organization's support base.[38] Oppression of the Brotherhood only increased when Hafiz al-Assad took control of the country in an internal coup in 1970, eventually culminating in the 1982 massacre of tens of thousands of people in the city of Hama.[39]

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From an influential part of the political system the Brotherhood had now been driven to exile and imprisonment. The transfer of power to Bashar al-Assad in 2000 at first brought hope to Brotherhood members of reintegration into politics, as he began his rule by releasing several hundred imprisoned Brotherhood members and allowing some to return from exile. In response the Brotherhood tried for years to negotiate with the regime for a lifting of the ban on its existence, working with other opposition groups to push for change in Syria, always calling for reforms that involved cooperation instead of blanket condemnation, until the mass protests of 2011.[40] Harsh repression of the Brotherhood kept it from maintaining its political presence or even continuing to function within Syria at all, but rather than devolving into an anti-system organization the Syrian Brotherhood instead searched for ways to politically legitimize its existence. [11]

Violence level: The consideration of militancy as a tool in Egypt and as a final recourse in Syria

The type of regime in place, as well as the treatment experienced by each Brotherhood branch under various rulers, not only influenced their separate political evolutions but also affected the extent to which each became involved with violence. As the Egyptian Brotherhood was kept on the outskirts of the political system from the start, it was never held accountable to government oversight or forced to set out a clear party platform, and so it was able to espouse nonviolent ideals even while it formed an underground paramilitary faction. This militia was known as the "secret apparatus," and existed for the purpose of utilizing violence to achieve the Brotherhood's goals.[41] The secret apparatus was involved in fighting in the Palestine War, and also carried out attacks on Egyptian police and government institutions, which triggered the temporary dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1948 as a result of that violence.[42] As revenge, the organization assassinated the Egyptian Prime Minister shortly thereafter, and they attempted to assassinate Nasser in 1954. Nasser's response to the assassination attempt on him was the harshest period of repression in the Egyptian Brotherhood's history, leading to the organization changing its focus to only nonviolent action.[43] This was a strategy that the Syrian Brotherhood embraced from the start, as it concentrated on gaining political power rather than using a covert military apparatus to promote Islamic values.[44] It was only once Ba'athist oppression made political success an impossibility and led to the torture and imprisonment of Brotherhood members that the organization associated itself in 1980 with the Fighting Vanguard, a radical, militant spin-off from the original Syrian Brotherhood. Brotherhood violence in Syria came to a head with the 1982 uprising in Hama. It was the Fighting Vanguard that initiated the rebellion, but local Brotherhood members actively participated, leading to the whole organization giving it support.[45] Hafiz al-Assad's ensuing bloody destruction of the city wiped out much of the Syrian Brotherhood and chased the remnants into exile.[46] While some Brotherhood members continued to attempt violent attacks on the regime even after the massacre, by the early 1990s the organization as a whole had settled back into its original moderate, nonviolent tendencies, recognizing that militancy had brought them no success[47]. As a means of achieving their goals both the Syrian and the Egyptian branches of the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to carry out violence against the regime, and both moved to nonviolent resistance upon being brutally repressed. The primary difference is that in Egypt, militancy was treated originally as an addition to the Brotherhood's work, while in Syria the taking up of arms was seen more as a last resort. [12]

Present day

The revolutions of the Arab Spring threw the political systems of Egypt and Syria into chaos, and the response of the Brotherhood branches to the upheaval may at first seem contrary to their previous histories of involvement with politics and violence. The Egyptian Brotherhood, after an existence spent outside established government order, in swift succession created a political party, ran a candidate for the presidency, and took hold of the reins of government to become the dominant political organization in Egypt.[48] The more politics-focused Syrian Brotherhood, considered an influential force on the Syrian opposition scene through its holding of important positions on the National Coalition, has tried to downplay its level of control and remain a force in the background.[49] Yet a closer examination reveals that these strategies are merely continuations of the fundamental beliefs held by each branch. [13]

Dominance of Islam over every aspect of life – social, religious, and legal – was the end goal continually expressed by the Egyptian Brotherhood. In fact, one of the major factors keeping it from trying to enter the political system in the past was distaste for the idea of the Brotherhood becoming "one party among many."[50] The idea of collaboration on an equal basis with groups that might have vastly different end

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goals, such as Coptic Christians or secular opposition forces, was repugnant to many members; complete dominance of the Brotherhood was the only way forward.[51] Under the authoritarian regimes of the past, the likelihood of gaining power through electoral success was slim to none even if the Brotherhood did participate, as winning elections only resulted in further restrictions and harassment of the organization by the regime.[52] The Brotherhood's maintenance of its status as an anti-system organization was therefore a recognition of the fact that its sprawling social and religious networks enabled it to hold more influence over Egyptian life than if it attempted to become part of the official government. Once Mubarak was toppled and there were no restrictions on the ability of any one party to win elections, the Brotherhood was tempted to formally join the political scene. Use of violence in achieving electoral success never came into play, and the organization continued with the nonviolent ideology successfully implemented since Nasser's crackdown in the 1950s and 60s.[53] The July 2013 military-driven ousting of Muhammad Mursi, the Brotherhood member who took over the Egyptian presidency in June of 2012, triggered state violence harsher than any ever experienced by the Brotherhood. However, whether the crackdown was severe enough to shock the Brotherhood out of its previous patterns remains uncertain.[54] Overall, the Egyptian Brotherhood's active entry into the political system in response to the chaos induced by mass revolt has so far been consistent both with their reluctance to share power and their history of nonviolent action. [14]

A recognition that support from disparate factions was necessary for electoral success was a driving force behind Syrian Brotherhood policies. Its rhetoric in the past had always emphasized moderation in the implementation of shari'a law, calling for political pluralism rather than its own total domination, and highlighting the nonsectarian aspects of its visions for the future in order to gain support from non-Sunni Muslims and other religious minorities.[55] The Brotherhood's attempt to have members be elected to important positions on the National Coalition, the closest group to an official opposition organization, while keeping itself out of the spotlight so as to decrease fear of an Islamic takeover, can be seen as simply a continuation of its "political and pragmatic nature."[56] In addition to political advances, the Brotherhood was once again moved to become involved in militant activities due to the brutal violence of Bashar al-Assad's regime against protestors. Though the organization has not actually taken up arms itself, exiled Brotherhood leaders have officially declared support for and funded armed resistance groups in Syria since March of 2012.[57] According to former Syrian Supreme Guide Ali al-Bayanouni, "the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria believes there is no room for a political solution with this regime...we encourage any national revolutionary party that is defending the Syrian people and protecting the civilians."[58] The lack of direct violence on the part of Brotherhood members suggests that the rejection of arms as a tool for power that shaped Brotherhood ideology after the Hama massacre is still a part of their belief system today. The Syrian Brotherhood's decision to quietly build up influence through participation in a democratic multi-party opposition group is consistent with the pluralist outlook it has historically advertised, and its support of armed groups a further demonstration of its belief in the use of violence only as a last resort to deal with oppression.[15]

The differences in revolutionary strategies between the Egyptian and Syrian Brotherhood branches, while at first seeming remarkably large for organizations with the same ideological basis, are shown in this inquiry to stem clearly from the way each was formed, the political environment and repression each experienced, and the general diversity of the population of each country. The Egyptian Brotherhood, as a result of being an organization formed around a unique idea, experiencing authoritarian rule but never a lengthy period of bloody repression, and the homogeneity of Egypt's population, emphasized the all-encompassing nature of Islamic values and aimed to gain total control over all areas of Egyptian life by taking over the presidency. The Syrian Brotherhood, as a result of being formed from the consolidation of many smaller organizations, experiencing political freedom in the beginning but then suffering long-lasting regime brutality, and the heterogeneity of Syria's population, emphasized the universal applicability of Islamic values and aimed to gain a political foothold in Syrian life through collaboration with other opposition groups. On the surface, the Egyptian Brotherhood seems the stronger of the two. Growing ideological divisiveness could cause that organization to collapse from the inside, however, while the generational and regional clashes faced by the Syrian Brotherhood are more easily fixed by increased communication and transfer of power. As the Arab Spring progresses, with the revolutionary movement roiling Egypt and Syria becoming steadily bloodier, it remains to be seen whether each branch's strategy can be successfully maintained or if the conflict will destroy them.

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