

Londyn Lorenz

Dr. Schaaf

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## Thesis Prospectus

### **I. Introduction**

The Muslim Brotherhood began as an Egyptian civil society organization in 1928, founded to promote Islamic law and values and to benefit those in need. The organization and its ideology have since spread across the Islamic World and gained new roles and responsibilities in the new societies they inhabit. As the Egyptian government repressed Brotherhood members in the 1950s, its members immigrated to nearby Arab nations and gained prominent roles in these nations' education and judicial systems. As Brothers took on these roles, their ideology spread, and branches of the Muslim Brotherhood were founded across North Africa, the Levant, and the Persian Gulf. These religious groups soon gained political aspirations, however, which threatened existing regimes and led authoritarian governments to crack down on Brotherhood activity in some states. The Arab Spring of 2010-2012 inspired many regimes to fully suppress all forms of opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood after their democratic victory in Egypt in 2012.

Arab authoritarian regimes on the Arabian Peninsula found themselves in a predicament after religious groups, such as the Brotherhood, proved themselves to be oppositional and democratic forces elsewhere in the region. Wanting to bolster their legitimacy and minimize any form of opposition, authoritative governments repressed the Muslim Brotherhood and other secular and religious opponents into irrelevancy. Opposition groups were pushed underground,

which left regimes with a faceless opponent and many questions about challengers to their legitimacy. This phenomenon has led me to my research question: **Is oppression an effective strategy for weakening Islamist opposition in Arab authoritarian regimes?**

To answer this question, I will look at the Muslim Brotherhood's evolution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, beginning at members' mass immigration to these states in the 1950s and looking at critical points in their development until the modern-day. These points include the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the first Gulf War in 1991, the terrorist attack against the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and the Arab Spring. This process tracing will show how governments respond to the Islamist movement and its questioning of the government over time, showing the Muslim Brotherhood's evolution from a large presence in government bodies to underground organization. This will test my theory of authoritative regimes' oppression, which forces the Brotherhood underground, results in a legitimacy crisis, as governments force an unknown oppositional threat. This will be measured by legitimacy-proving policies, including further oppression of the domestic Muslim Brotherhood presence and foreign policy actions against foreign chapters and presences.

This question contributes to the existing discourse by specifically looking at the effects of unofficially organized Islamist opposition on perceived regime legitimacy. While existing literature has examined the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist opposition groups while they were still somewhat organized and present before the Arab Spring, my study will look at the result of these groups being pushed underground. In the cases I will be studying, scholars including Courtney Freer assert that the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology, its underlying ideals that unite members towards a common goal, is the main threat to regimes, compared to social welfare programs and political organization in other instances. A belief system and ideology

cannot be pushed underground, as it is held inside of the groups' followers and is not a physical thing to be stopped. My study uniquely looks at ideology's threat to regime legitimacy in the face of repression, in addition to how regimes work to bolster their legitimacy against what they perceive to be an unorganized ideological undermining.

In addition to contributing to the scholarly discussion of this topic, my thesis will also have practical implications. This study will look at the nature of repression and its effectiveness. Scholars including Finkel and Martin have looked at the effects of indiscriminate and selective repression, meaning broad and outward repression against all opposition versus targeted repression against certain groups that may be easily hidden (Finkel 2015, Marin 2005). My work will look at the effect of extreme selective repression in a religious context, where the regime- and opposition-approved religions overlap but differ in a political context. This research, however, can be applied out of this unique context to explain the behavior of those who are selectively repressed in other nations and settings.

To answer this question, I will look to Saudi Arabia and Qatar for data and information. I will analyze the religious language used by these two nations to legitimize themselves in addition to religious language used by the Muslim Brotherhood, the example of an Islamist opposition group I will be using in this study. I will also contrast the descriptions and images of the Muslim Brotherhood which these states use to the way the Brotherhood describes itself and its aims for their role in these nations. Additionally, I will analyze fatwas from the state-affirmed council in the case of Saudi Arabia, specifically looking at fatwas that bolster the regime as an example of legitimacy-proving regime action. Finally, I will sample foreign and domestic policy actions toward the Muslim Brotherhood and nations accused of promoting their cause.

## II. Background

For the purposes of this study, I will start my project in the 1950s as Brotherhood members emigrated out of Egypt after oppression by leader Gamal Abdel Nasser to these two nations. Brotherhood members were welcomed and became prominent members in the nations' education and judicial sectors as their Islamist ideology countered nationalist movements at the time, which threatened the regimes' power.

These ties, however, loosened after the Brotherhood and its offshoots openly opposed or revolted against the regimes, as seen in the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 1979 and the Saudi Sahwa movement beginning in the 1980s. Relations further weakened and repression began after the Muslim Brotherhood opposed Western and American military presence in Saudi Arabia during the First Gulf War and after the events of September 11, 2001. After the Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi's victory in the first Egyptian democratic election in 2012, regimes were actively threatened by the group's democratic potential and, upon the overthrow of Morsi and installment of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as the official ruler, Saudi Arabia declared the group a terrorist organization.

In Qatar, however, its branch of the Muslim Brotherhood came to a decision to disband in 1999 and was officially dissolved in 2003 (Freer 487, 2017). This came after the group decided it had no political capital to gain and no civil society function to serve. The branch very rarely came into conflict with the al-Thani regime and has generally supported the regime since its inception, which led to a more autonomous position in the state and an allowance to loosely organize if they choose, a stark contrast to the Brotherhood's place in Saudi Arabia. This contrast comes to a head in the 2010s, which I will explore in my thesis.

### **III. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

This thesis will build off of a body of literature on rentier Islamism and the nature of repression, as well as primary sources from these regimes and Muslim Brotherhood statements and media. I will use Courtney Freer's interpretation of rentier Islamism, that is, Islamism in nations whose economy is based on natural resource wealth, which "shows that ideology rather than rent motivated the formation of Islamist movements" (Freer 479, 2017). Freer claims that in a non-rentier context, the Muslim Brotherhood's roles are to participate in elections, provide social welfare, and provide a social organization for members of a larger citizenry; none of these, however, apply in a rentier context or in the two cases I am studying. In Qatar and Saudi Arabia, political organization for elections is not a reality; the state provides handsome welfare benefits to its citizens, leaving no room for the Muslim Brotherhood to provide these benefits; and the citizen population is so small that citizens do not need to be further unified. This influences the Brotherhood's move underground, as the threat to perceived regime legitimacy is not neutralized as the regime had hoped, only made less able to monitor.

As for the nature of repression, my study will look at when the repression backfires and oppositions pose a growing threat rather than a neutralized one. My argument will align with Evgeny Finkel's work studying Jewish repression during World War II, which states that groups who have experienced selective repression for longer periods of time will adapt and become more skilled resisters. This will translate into the underground, as Muslim Brotherhood members who have experienced targeted repression for many years will be able to promote their ideology while evading government detection. I will analyze this through Muslim Brotherhood sources, including their online presence through IkhwanWeb, while looking at government repression strategies over time.

The comparison of Qatar and Saudi Arabia is often overlooked, as Qatar is usually compared and contrasted with the United Arab Emirates, while Saudi Arabia is frequently studied alone. My thesis will examine what it means to be “underground,” looking to Saudi Arabia where the Muslim Brotherhood was suppressed into disorganization while the Qatari chapter independently disbanded.

To best convey this framework, my thesis will be structured as follows:

- I. Introduction
- II. Literature Review
- III. Historical Contextualization
  - A. Spread of the Muslim Brotherhood to the Persian Gulf in the 1950s
- IV. Case I: Saudi Repression of the Muslim Brotherhood
  - A. The Beginnings of Repression in 1979
  - B. Opposition During the First Gulf War
  - C. Repression after 2001
  - D. Responses to Islamism After the Arab Spring
- V. Case II: Qatari Relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood
  - A. Relationship Between the Qatari Brotherhood and the Al Thani Regime
  - B. Disbanding of the Qatari Brotherhood
  - C. The Qatari Diplomatic Crises
  - D. Unofficial Presence of the Muslim Brotherhood
- VI. Conclusion
  - A. Comparison Between Responses to the Brotherhood and Strategies of Legitimization

In the section on Saudi Arabia, I will look at the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood from a favored actor in the state government to its current state; this will be looked at through state policies and statements on the group and through Muslim Brotherhood resources that speak to its political shift. This is in addition to fatwas issued by The Council of Senior Scholars, the government-approved fatwa issuing council, and analyze how they are used as a strategy of legitimacy. Thirdly, I will also look at Saudi foreign policy actions, specifically its actions against Qatar alongside other GCC members after accusing them of promoting the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideology.

The Qatari chapter, however, will rely on different forms of data, as Qatar is home to many prominent Muslim Brotherhood members, including Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and allows the organization to exist to a certain extent. I will track the dissolving of the Qatari Brotherhood, looking at the causes that began in the 1950s and how the government received it. I will also analyze how the informal presence of the Brotherhood affects Qatari policy and legitimization strategies through an analysis of Qatari statements on the Muslim Brotherhood and. I will also look at foreign policy actions of other nations, specifically members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, who acted against Qatar, accusing the nation of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and its state-sponsored media outlet Al Jazeera of being the organization's mouthpiece and how those actions affected the Qatari relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood.

#### **IV. Methodology**

This thesis will use historical process tracing to analyze oppression's role in weakening Islamist opposition. This strategy will show how the chosen governments respond as the Muslim

Brotherhood chapters evolve and, as we see in Saudi Arabia, take on an increasingly oppositional role.

I selected these cases based on Ellen Lust and Courtney Freer's data on Middle East nations. In her piece "Missing the Third Wave: Islam, Institutions, and Democracy in the Middle East," Lust defines Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE as Islamic-based regimes that actively exclude Islamists (Lust 173, 2011). Freer, in her piece "Rentier Islamism in the Absence of Elections: The Political Role of Muslim Brotherhood Affiliates in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates" defines three attributes of Muslim Brotherhood activity that are impossible in a rentier context, as mentioned in the theoretical framework. I selected the two largest super-rentiers, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, for my cases, which also can easily be contrasted due to the nature of the Brotherhood in these nations.

I will rely on qualitative data for this study, as I analyze Saudi and Qatari government sources, beginning in the 1950s, looking for instances of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood and their justification. I will compare these to available Muslim Brotherhood sources, as I look for shifts in Gulf Brotherhood ideology that begin to threaten regime legitimacy, especially in the aforementioned critical points.

## **V. Preliminary Argument**

Based on my research, I hypothesize that these regimes will enter a self-imposed legitimacy crisis after they repress the Muslim Brotherhood into going underground, where we will see demonization of the Brotherhood through propaganda and selective repression towards the Muslim Brotherhood and its members. Additionally, due to fears around the unknown size of the opposition, these regimes will overcompensate and initiate legitimacy-proving policies,



which manifests as foreign policy actions against nations accused of supporting Brotherhood interests and efforts to confirm state legitimacy through religious authorities. These will include cutting of ties with accused pro-Muslim Brotherhood states, as we see in the Qatari Diplomatic Crises, and consolidation of authority in religious contexts, as we see in the pressuring of the Council of Senior Scholars to issue regime-backing fatwas by the Saudi regime.

## **VI. Alternative Explanations**

There are, however, alternative explanations for these phenomena. If the Brotherhood's move underground does not threaten the regime and they are believed to moderate, the government will not issue statements regarding the group or act against it in foreign nations. We will also see little to no engagement from Muslim Brotherhood publications with the Gulf or comments on the group's situation in these states. If the state experiences a legitimacy crisis outside of the Muslim Brotherhood's perceived opposition, we will not see a history of loosening ties between the government and the Brotherhood nor instances of selective repression against the Brotherhood and its members. Instead, we will see a broad action against all forms of opposition after the onset of this crisis, with the Muslim Brotherhood only being lumped in with other threatening groups. If my argument is right, however, we will see a gradual breaking of ties between the government and the Brotherhood as we move out of the 1950s, with selective crackdowns coming at the studied critical points and during times of other domestic moments of interest. After the group is officially disorganized, its perceived ideological threat will remain with the government, causing further anti-Brotherhood propaganda and domestic and foreign actions against the group.

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المفتي: إياكم أن تكونوا من المخزبين أو تتخذوا بالمغلطين وابتعدوا عن البلبلة. ---

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