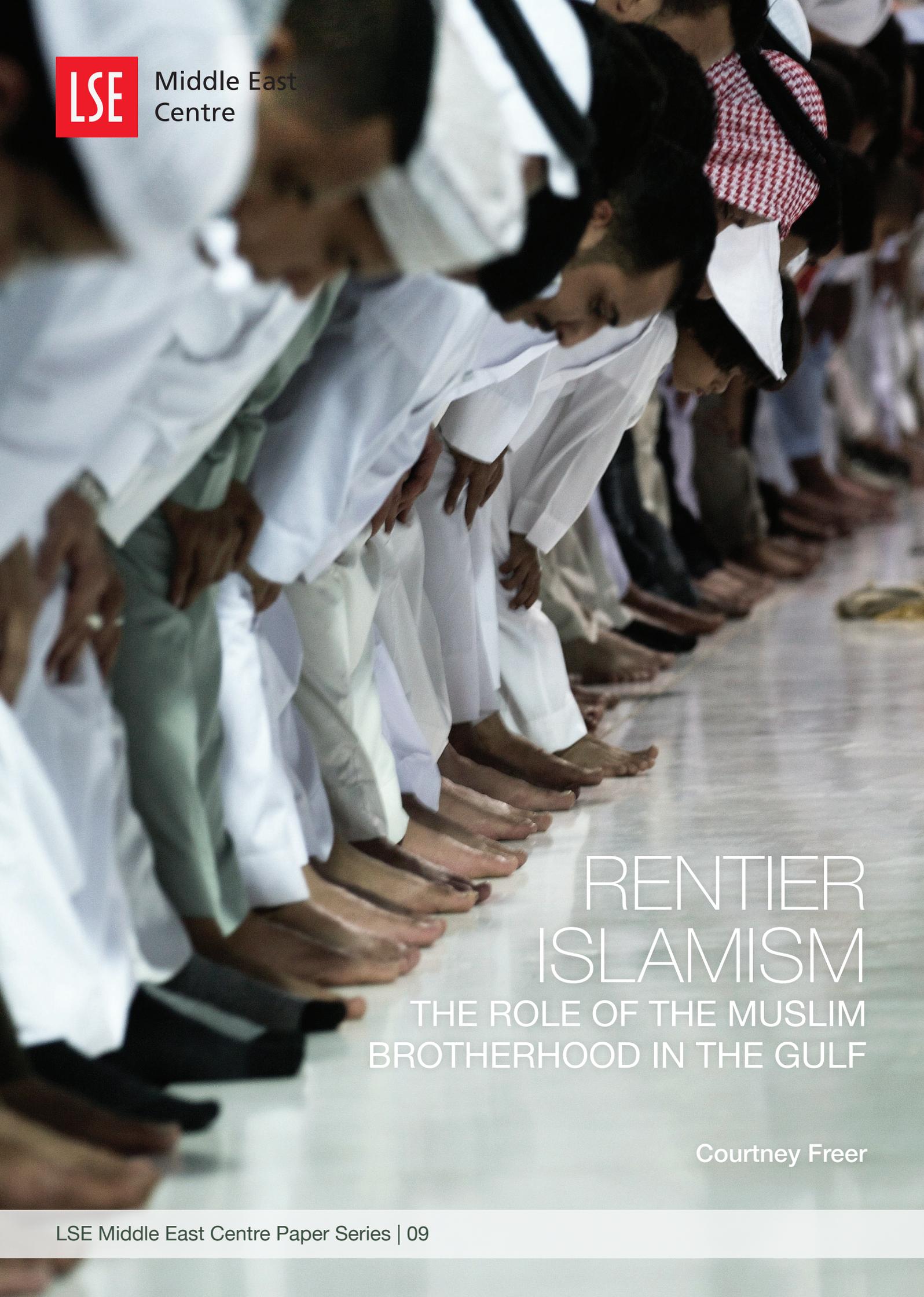




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A photograph showing a long line of men in white thobes and ghutras performing a prayer (sujood) on a light-colored floor. They are prostrating with their foreheads and hands touching the ground. The men are in a line, and their heads are bowed. The background is slightly blurred, showing more people in the distance.

# RENTIER ISLAMISM

THE ROLE OF THE MUSLIM  
BROTHERHOOD IN THE GULF

Courtney Freer

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# RENTIER ISLAMISM: THE ROLE OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN THE GULF

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## About the Author

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## Executive Summary

Too often political discussion of oil-wealthy states like Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) becomes centred on the means in which their economic largesse facilitates political quiescence. While rulers of these states, which I dub ‘super-rentiers’ due to their massive oil and gas wealth, have at times used their riches as a means of buying good will from their citizenries, they cannot and have not completely deterred independent political actors. Of these, ideological agents are, logically, the least likely to be ‘bought off’ and therefore the most viable independent political forces. Nonetheless, political Islam is rarely discussed in the context of the Gulf states which provide few institutionalised opportunities for political participation and do not require welfare services often provided by Islamist groups. In this paper, I discuss the degree to which Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE influence political decision-making and how those governments have chosen to handle the Ikhwan.<sup>1</sup> Given my analysis, I provide the following policy recommendations to both regional and Western actors.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘Ikhwan’ (the Arabic term for Brotherhood) and ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ are used here interchangeably.

## Policy Recommendations

### Policy Recommendations for Gulf Governments

- Look beyond economic considerations. A variety of political outcomes is observed in states with similar GDPs, thereby eliminating economic wellbeing as an explanatory factor for political outcomes. Considering citizens' political demands as primarily pecuniary is short sighted and simplistic. Not only is paying off unhappy citizens unsustainable, it also fails to address the root of most viable political complaint in the Gulf, which is Islamist-driven.
- Do not underestimate the power of informal Islamist networks. Simply because an Islamist strand is not institutionalised does not mean it is politically unimportant; the super-rentiers are under-institutionalised, rather than under-politicised.
- Recognise the political importance of social policies. The social and the political spheres become less distinct in states which allow limited space for independent political action. Part of the Brotherhood's appeal remains its ability to provide social networks, as well as a broader ideology that informs political action.
- Consider co-optation, rather than crackdown, a more sustainable policy towards Brotherhood affiliates in the Gulf. These groups will not disappear, but rather will go further underground. Because it appeals to local populations, Ikhwan ideology will remain in the region, despite government crackdowns. Rather than working against Brotherhood groups and attempting to dismantle them, regimes should endeavour to co-opt them.

### Policy Recommendations for Western Governments

- Pay close attention to the politics of cultural and national identity in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Because socio-economic issues are less important for Islamists in such states, these matters take on primary significance. As the number of Western expatriates increases in these states, Islamists will probably continue to position themselves as preservers of local identity and culture, as well as Islamic values.
- Do not simplify the role of Brotherhood organisations as solely political, as their social role is influential. Such a social presence is particularly important in states which provide limited means of institutionalised political participation, as in the Gulf.
- Discourage the use of monetary disbursements as a means of addressing Islamist complaint. Because such movements do not provide material support or seek to gain it, they cannot be 'bought off' and indeed have not been in the past, even in states where they needed fiscal assistance.
- Do not treat all Muslim Brotherhood affiliates as part of the same group. Even in the small states of the Gulf, which have striking economic and political similarities, the Brotherhood functions differently. It is not possible, then, to have a blanket policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood; its international cohesion is limited in the present day.

## Introduction

Muslim Brotherhood movements in the wealthiest rentier states of Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are often overlooked as domestic political actors, due to the relatively placid environments of such states and comparatively few means of institutionalised political participation (outside of Kuwait). In reality, grassroots social outreach programmes in the Gulf help Brotherhood members spread their ideology and garner support. Although they are not needed on the material level in the Gulf (aside from Iraqi-occupied Kuwait), such programmes have become popular in their provision of ideological guidance and social activities in societies that are often criticised for lacking indigenous intellectual or cultural vibrancy. They also link the Brotherhood to political life; ‘by engaging in hands-on activist work in popular neighbourhoods, they [Islamists] have learned the informal language of politics spoken by the people’.<sup>2</sup> Brotherhood affiliates in Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE thus exercise political influence primarily due to their ideological appeal. In Kuwait, the Brotherhood influences political outcomes in a straightforward way through its participation in electoral politics and its grassroots outreach, particularly in the youth and education sector, which helps to influence new generations of voters. In Qatar, the Brotherhood maintains social influence, which is communicated to the political leadership largely through the informal sector of the *majlis*.<sup>3</sup> The Emirati Brotherhood, though outlawed today, operated in the social sphere primarily, yet also came to join forces with other political opposition movements in the efforts to expand popular participation in government.

## Persistence of Brotherhood Ideology in the Super-Rentiers

### Kuwait

The Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, established in 1951, is the most organised and influential branch in the Gulf. In its first decades, through *Jam‘iat al-Irshad* (1951-59) and *Jam‘iat al-Islah al-Ijtima‘i* (hereafter *Islah*, 1963 to present), it enjoyed cordial ties with the regime, and, beginning in the 1960s, had some limited political success, especially with social policies like the banning of alcohol (1965) and the restriction of nationality to Muslims (1982). Through to the 1980s, Brotherhood members were particularly powerful in the ministries of education and Islamic Affairs, and this influence lasted for generations through the curricula they approved.

From 1981, the Kuwaiti Brotherhood contested parliamentary elections as an organisation, and a decade later it created a dedicated political bloc, the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM or *Hadas*), alongside *Islah*, its social arm. The *Ikhwan* in Kuwait is

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<sup>2</sup> Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> The *majlis* (plural *majalis*), similar to Kuwait’s *diwaniyya*, is a crucial element of civil society. Such meetings are hosted by rulers, as well as by private citizens.

distinct in the Gulf not only because it contests legislative elections, but also because it is the only branch that has been forced to provide services in the state's absence – a task common among Brotherhood affiliates outside of the Gulf. The Kuwaiti branch undertook this during the Iraqi occupation from August 1990 to March 1991.

Today, the ICM forms a critical part of the broader Kuwaiti opposition movement that includes secular, left-leaning political groupings. Its agenda remains exclusively domestic. Former ICM MP Nasser al-Sane explains, 'of course we want Islam to be our social norm and the government to respect Islam'.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the bloc's primary goals have changed from a focus on enshrining *shari'a* as the source of legislation in Kuwait to promoting a pro-democracy agenda. The organisation pushes for reforms such as an elected prime minister, a single electoral district to reduce gerrymandering, the legalisation of political parties, and, eventually, the creation of a constitutional monarchy.

Reflecting their commitment to domestic politics, 'the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood are Kuwaiti first and Muslim Brotherhood second'.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it formally broke ties with its mother organisation following the failure of the latter to support the US-led liberation of Kuwait in 1991. While its members remain outspoken in their disapproval of the Egyptian Sisi regime, with the organisation condemning his takeover as a coup three days after it took place,<sup>6</sup> the issue has not remained central to its platform<sup>7</sup> – despite the government investing US\$4 billion in Sisi's regime.

The organisation's agenda is marked by gradualism. Until recently it has sought to make incremental changes *through* the existing system and *with* the ruling family. Despite its boycott of elections since 2012, former ICM MP Usama al-Shahin insisted, 'we are 100 percent loyal to [the ruling family]. We want reform, repair, not change'.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the amir meets with members of the Brotherhood and attends their *diwaniyyat*,<sup>9</sup> demonstrating that the Kuwaiti government, unlike others in the Gulf, 'isn't in panic mode'.<sup>10</sup>

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*'The Kuwaiti Muslim  
Brotherhood are Kuwaiti first  
and Muslim Brotherhood second'*  
- Mohammad al-Rumaihi

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Nasser al-Sane, 21 November 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mohammad al-Rumaihi, 25 November 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Lori Plotkin Boghardt, 'Kuwait's Elections: It's Not What Happens Now, but What Happens Next', *The Washington Institute Policy Analysis*, 26 July 2013. Available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/kuwaits-elections-its-not-what-happens-now-but-what-happens-next>

<sup>7</sup> Heba Saleh, 'Gulf states put their money on Sisi's Egypt with pledges worth \$12bn', *Financial Times*, 13 March 2015. Available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/85c2b3cc-c9a0-11e4-a2d9-00144feab7de.html#axzz3nP85255k>.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Usama al-Shahin, 24 November 2013.

<sup>9</sup> A *diwaniyya* (plural *diwaniyyat*) is an informal meeting, which has long been a part of Kuwaiti political life. Such gatherings, hosted by members of the ruling family, politicians, and private individuals, are most often convened in homes and cover topics ranging from social life to religious ideology to politics.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Abdullah al-Shayehji, 27 November 2013.

Like the other political blocks that compete for seats in the Kuwaiti parliament, the Brotherhood does not enjoy legal recognition in Kuwait. But only limited actions have targeted the Brotherhood specifically: a lawsuit calling for the closure of Islah in March 2014, an MP trying to outlaw the Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation in July 2014, and rumours circulating about purges of Brotherhood supporters from government in 2013. The lack of large-scale government action against the Ikhwan is in part due to the larger role that it plays in the opposition movement. Because ‘Kuwaiti Islamists are liberal politically but conservative socially’,<sup>11</sup> they are able to work with secular liberal members of the opposition. Indeed, the Brotherhood has never run for a plurality of seats in parliament, instead allying with other blocs to enhance its influence in the legislature while also gaining political cover from secular groups. Determining the ICM’s popularity, then, is difficult, especially since it generally does not give estimates of its membership numbers. As of 1989,

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*‘Kuwaiti Islamists are liberal politically  
but conservative socially.’ - Abdulla al-Nibari*

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however, the number of officially registered members of the movement reached 1,170.<sup>12</sup>

## Qatar

Qatar, like the UAE, no longer houses an organised Muslim Brotherhood affiliate. Although the Qatari Brotherhood completed its voluntary disbandment by 2003, claims remain about its ongoing political influence. One Qatari explained, ‘Muslim Brotherhood influence is informal, not institutionalised’,<sup>13</sup> making it difficult to trace.

In an institutionalised form, the Qatari Brotherhood was founded in 1974, after an influx of Qatari students returned to the country, having studied in places like Egypt and Kuwait with active Ikhwan movements. Eager to replicate such movements at home, these students created the organisation described by former Supreme Leader Jassim Sultan as ‘just collaboration, a simple thing’.<sup>14</sup> Before this, Brotherhood ideology had become popular through the prominent positions of sympathetic expatriates in the education system. For a brief period in the 1980s, under the influence of newly emigrated members of the Syrian Brotherhood, the Qatari Ikhwan published a magazine, *al-umma al-Qatariyya* (The Qatari Umma), under the leadership of Amr Abid Husna.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Abdulla al-Nibari, 2 February 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Falah Abdullah al-Mdaires, *Jama ‘at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi al-Kuwait* (The Muslim Brotherhood Group in Kuwait), (Kuwait: Huquq al-Taba’ va-l-Nashar Mahfuza, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Hassan al-Ibrahim, 2 October 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Jassim Sultan, 4 November 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Mustafa Ashur, ‘Tajribat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi Qatar’ (The Experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar), in *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun wa-l-Salafiyyun fi al-Khalij* (The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis in the Gulf), ed. by Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Centre, pp. 187-204. (Dubai: Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Centre, 2011), p.192.

By the end of the 1980s, a generational split emerged. Younger members hoped to ramp up political activities and older ones were cautious.<sup>16</sup> Division led to the creation of an extensive two-part study – ‘an intellectual and organisational dissection of the Brotherhood’ in terms of its structure, communication, leadership, prevailing culture, and goals, as well as feasibility of the goals and risks associated with them.<sup>17</sup> Important questions included: Is there a real plan for the organisation? How much has been achieved, and what remains to be accomplished?<sup>18</sup> The study ‘finished with one of the problems that pushed the re-evaluation to begin: that the Muslim Brotherhood’s plans generally lacked clarity – what did it want exactly? And how would it get there?’<sup>19</sup>

Members considered the Qatari Brotherhood to have ‘been frozen by dogma, lost direction, and failed to adapt’.<sup>20</sup> They questioned the need for a Brotherhood organ-

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*‘[In Qatar] Muslim Brotherhood influence is informal, not institutionalised’.*

- Hassan al-Ibrahim

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isation in Qatar, a state with few major economic, social, or political problems or openings, whose oil wealth obviated the need for non-state social welfare, and which was naturally conservative and religious due to its Wahhabi roots.<sup>21</sup> As the Qatari Ikhwan’s former Supreme Guide Jassim Sultan put it, ‘[b]y study and

research, the pitfalls were obvious. The program doesn’t fit Qatar. There is a major defect in the theory’.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, today, ‘there is interest ideologically, but the Brotherhood’s social structure is not as helpful in Qatar. It is perhaps least helpful here than in any other Gulf state’.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the Brotherhood exists in Qatar solely at the ideological level and organisationally only on a very limited scale – with small Qur’anic recitation circles. Determining what it means to be a Brotherhood member or supporter in a state lacking formal organisation is challenging. Few Qataris identify themselves as members of the Brotherhood even if they agree with its ideology, making it difficult to determine the organisation’s domestic popularity and strength. A difference in labelling comes into play; ‘[i]t is very complicated because lots of Qataris agree with the Muslim Brotherhood but don’t even realise it’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Abdulaziz Al-Mahmoud, ‘Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi Qatar...Man hum?’ (The Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar...Who are They?), *Al-Arab*, 1 August 2012. Available at <http://www.alarab.qa/story/-الإخوان المسلمون في قطر - من هم>.

<sup>17</sup> Ashur, p.197.

<sup>18</sup> Abdullah Al-Nafisi, ‘Al-Hala al-Islamiyya fi Qatar’ (The Islamic Situation in Qatar), *IslamToday*, 12 March 2007. Available at <http://www.islamtoday.net/bohooth/artshow-19-8828.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Amr al-Turabi and Tarek al-Mubarak, ‘Qatar’s Introspective Islamists’, *Asharq al-Awsat*, 18 June 2013. Available at <http://www.aawsat.net/2013/06/article55306189>.

<sup>20</sup> Marc Lynch, ‘Muslim Brotherhood Debates’, *Abu Aardvark* (blog), 28 February 2007. Available at [http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2007/02/muslim\\_brotherh.html](http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2007/02/muslim_brotherh.html).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Jassim Sultan, 9 October 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Shadi Hamid, 5 November 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Michael Stephens, 1 November 2013.

Conflation between support for the Brotherhood and allegiance to conservative Islam further complicates the study of the organisation in isolation in Qatar. ‘Lots of Qataris agree with what al-Qaradawi is saying but they see this as being religious, not being Muslim Brotherhood’.<sup>25</sup> The government, recognising the appeal of conservative Islamist doctrine in a Wahhabi country, has largely endeavoured to appease, rather than silence, such elements, having accepted them as a part of Qatar’s ideological landscape.

## The United Arab Emirates

The Emirati Muslim Brotherhood differs from other branches due to the state’s unique federal character. First founded in Dubai in 1974, that branch received support from that emirate’s leader and Vice President Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed al-Maktoum, signalling the government’s willingness to patronise an Islamist group as a bulwark against Arab nationalism. Sheikh Rashid contributed to the establishment of branches in Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah, and Emirati President and Abu Dhabi ruler Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan provided land for an Abu Dhabi branch at the end of the 1970s, yet it ultimately never gained permission to form there. Sharjah also lacked a branch, a reflection of the prevalence of Arabism and nationalism – rather than Islamism – there at that time, and also of its close ties to Saudi Arabia. In Ajman, ‘the Brotherhood settled for subordination to the Association of Guidance and Social Counselling [Irshad]’.<sup>26</sup>

Like Brotherhood affiliates elsewhere in the region, the Emirati Ikhwan was involved in social and cultural activities. Examination of the group’s magazine *al-Islah* demonstrates that the most commonly discussed topics concerned the development of Islamic education,<sup>27</sup> censorship of Western materials such as magazines and television programmes,<sup>28</sup> restriction of the sale of alcohol,<sup>29</sup> corruption in government spending,<sup>30</sup> and the encroachment of foreign (particularly Western) businesses and culture in Emirati society.<sup>31</sup> First and foremost, ‘Islah tapped into issues of Emiratis drinking, social issues’.<sup>32</sup> The organisation also developed a political reform agenda alongside

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Mansur al-Noqaidan, ‘Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi al-Imarat: Al-Tamaddad wa-l-Inhisar’ (The Muslim Brotherhood in the Emirates: Expansion and Decline), in *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi al-Khalij* (The Muslim Brotherhood in the Gulf), ed. by Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Centre, (Dubai: Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Centre, 2012), p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Readings into Some Curricula of Private Schools in the Emirates’, *al-Islah* 57 (1982), in Ali Salem Humaid (ed), *The Roots of Conspiracy Against the UAE 2*, (Dubai: Al Mezmaah Studies and Research Centre, 2013), pp. 180-188.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Our Children and the Lovely Pig’, *al-Islah* 34/49 (1982), in Humaid, *The Roots of Conspiracy Against the UAE 1*, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> ‘We Are Waiting for Final Ban’, *al-Islah* 7/50 (1982), in Humaid, *The Roots of Conspiracy Against the UAE 1*, p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Frugality and Extravagance’, *al-Islah* 50/51 (1982), in Humaid, *The Roots of Conspiracy Against the UAE 1*, pp.98-99.

<sup>31</sup> Omar Abdul Rahman, ‘The Devil Kai and the English Language’, *al-Islah* 26-27/49 (1982), in Humaid, *The Roots of Conspiracy Against the UAE 1*, p.40.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Dubai-based Gulf correspondent, 6 March 2014.

its social programme, pressing for more representative government and more equal distribution of wealth.<sup>33</sup> As early as March 1979, *Islah's* UAE management council wrote a letter to the local rulers ahead of a meeting of the Supreme Council of Rulers, supporting the government's attempts to diminish corruption and to spend oil money in a 'pious' way.<sup>34</sup> In 1982, *al-Islah* magazine was more explicit about the organisation's potential role as political opposition in the context of government bans on Islamic magazines: 'With Islam we liberate lands of Islam, we stop injustice to Islam. Tyrants are afraid of us because of Islam'.<sup>35</sup>

Because its members had come to exert considerable influence on Emirati society through positions in the educational and judicial sectors, the Emirati Muslim Brotherhood provoked government suspicion in the 1990s. At that time, 'the UAE's judicial and education sector was effectively a state within a state',<sup>36</sup> and student councils as well as teachers' and judges' professional associations became 'outposts dedicated to advancing their [Brotherhood] interests'.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps fearing that the Emirati Brotherhood could gain a broader following as a political bloc, as in Kuwait, the government resolved to squash it before it could influence politics on an institutionalised level.

In the early 1990s, investigations by Egyptian security services allegedly proved that individuals involved in Egyptian Islamic Jihad had received monetary donations from *Islah's* Committee for Relief and Outside Activities,<sup>38</sup> arguing that the Brotherhood is, at its core, an international organisation, 'imported by Egyptians', with the goal of a single Islamic state.<sup>39</sup> The government began investigating the influence of Brotherhood members within the education sector when promising scholarship applications were rejected, and found that the Brotherhood members managed the distribution of educational awards.<sup>40</sup> Hoping to regain control, the government dissolved the Brotherhood's previously elected boards of directors in 1994,<sup>41</sup> placing them under supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs.<sup>42</sup> External activities were also frozen,<sup>43</sup> and members were banned from holding public office.<sup>44</sup> This decision affected the branches

<sup>33</sup> Pekka Hakala, 'Opposition in the United Arab Emirates', Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department, European Parliament, 15 November 2012, 2. Available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/studiesdownload.html?languageDocument=EN&file=78691>.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Noqaidan, pp. 65-66.

<sup>35</sup> Abdullah Abu al-Hadi, 'Why Ban Islamic Magazines?', *al-Islah* 30/50 (1982), quoted in Humaid, *The Roots of Conspiracy Against the UAE* 2, p. 172.

<sup>36</sup> Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi, 'The Brothers and the Gulf', *Foreign Policy*, 14 December 2012. Available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/12/14/Muslim\\_Brotherhood\\_Gulf\\_UAE\\_Qassemi](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/12/14/Muslim_Brotherhood_Gulf_UAE_Qassemi).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> 'Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi al-Imirat...Al-Qisat al-Kamila' (The Muslim Brotherhood in the Emirates...The Whole Story), *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 1 February 2013. Available at <http://classic.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=715512&issueno=12484&section=4#.VGtRRofBZKp>.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Ebtessam al-Ketbi, 24 February 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Marta Saldana, 'Rentierism and Political Culture in the United Arab Emirates: The Case of UAEU Students', PhD diss., (Exeter: University of Exeter, 2014), p. 139.

<sup>41</sup> Hakala, 'Opposition in the United Arab Emirates', p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 'Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi al-Imirat...Al-Qisat al-Kamila'.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Hakala, 'Opposition in the United Arab Emirates', p. 2.

of Islah in Dubai and Fujairah, in addition to the more loosely affiliated Guidance Group in Ajman. Notably, the Ras al-Khaimah branch of Islah was exempted from ministerial control, though it did have to curtail its external activities.<sup>45</sup> Until the most recent crackdown, it remained independent under the protection of its sympathetic ruler Sheikh Saqr al-Qasimi, who 'rejected the dissolution of al-Islah because he felt it played a role in preserving the youth'.<sup>46</sup>

The tense relationship between the Emirati government and the Muslim Brotherhood became more confrontational following the attacks of 11 September 2001. The State Security Directorate arrested over 250 individuals accused of terrorism, mainly harbouring Islamist sympathies in 2002, yet most had been released by 2004. The government attempted to persuade Islah to disband following September 11, but the organisation refused.<sup>47</sup> Emirati officials requested that Islah follow Qatar's example because, in their view, if it were not a politically subversive group, it would not require independent organisational capacity.<sup>48</sup> After months of talks, Islah rejected the government's invitation to continue engaging in *da'wa* without an organisational structure. Large numbers of Islamist supporters were purged from the educational system.

Despite this setback, the remaining branches of Islah (Dubai, Fujairah, and Ras al-Khaimah) and the Guidance Society in Ajman continued with their activities of hosting discussions, lectures, and Qur'an recitation competitions, in addition to the publication of *al-Islah*.<sup>49</sup> By the mid-2000s, it had become clear that '[t]he regime in the UAE is not friendly towards Islamists, and prominent Islamists have been arrested, barred from teaching at university, and otherwise harassed by the government'.<sup>50</sup> In such an environment, it became increasingly difficult for members of Islah to pursue their social or political aims. In 2012, as the broader political opposition gained momentum after the issuing of a petition a year earlier, all branches of the Brotherhood were effectively closed down within the UAE.

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<sup>45</sup> Al-Noqaidan, p. 69.

<sup>46</sup> Mohammed al-Roken, quoted in Yara Bayoumy, 'UAE Islamist Group Had No Desire to Topple Government: Families', *Reuters*, 3 July 2013. Available at <http://reut.rs/12jUg8>.

<sup>47</sup> Saldana, 'Rentierism and Political Culture in the United Arab Emirates: The Case of UAEU Students', p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Jamal Khashoggi, 23 October 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Noqaidan, 'Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn fī al-Imarat: Al-Tamaddad wa-l-Inhīsar', p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> Herb, 'Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates', p. 359.

## From Co-optation to Crackdown: Government Policies towards the Brotherhood

### Kuwait

In large measure, due to the fact that the Brotherhood has existed inside Kuwait for decades and is the most organised political bloc in the country, that government has allowed the Ikhwan to operate relatively openly. It seems to have accepted the Brotherhood as part of the political landscape and thus has allowed it to continue its work within parameters, placing on it largely the same limits faced by secular political blocs in Kuwait.

Facilitating peaceful relations with the government, the Kuwaiti Brotherhood has embraced gradualism in achieving its goals, at least as far as the Islamisation of society is concerned. It has instead become a more outspoken member of the broader political opposition, privileging limited systemic changes over more limited Islamic social policies. Furthermore, because the most elected seats it has ever won was six out of fifty in 2006, the Brotherhood does not challenge government authority by contesting a plurality of seats. It instead prefers to form coalitions with other political blocs that grant it a degree of political cover.<sup>51</sup> Most recently, the organisation signed on to a document drafted alongside members of the secular Civil Democratic Movement and Musallam al-Barrak, who agree about the need for 'a full parliamentary system, with a stronger legislature, independent judiciary and revised criminal code'.<sup>52</sup>

The government has reacted harshly against recently forged opposition unity, yet has not targeted the Brotherhood specifically. Instead, it revoked the citizenship of five opposition members in July 2014, a step that Joe Stork, Deputy Director for Middle East and North Africa at Human Rights Watch, dubbed 'yet another downward step in Kuwait's assault on the right to free speech'.<sup>53</sup> Those stripped of citizenship did not include members of the ICM,<sup>54</sup> yet the organisation released a statement calling the situation a 'regretful example of utilizing the state's capabilities in fighting reformists instead of supporting the process of reform'.<sup>55</sup> In January 2015, former ICM MP Mubarak al-Duwailah was arrested on charges of endangering ties with an ally and insulting leaders of an allied state following his statements, on Kuwait's

<sup>51</sup> Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> E.A.D., 'Kuwait's Opposition: A Reawakening', *The Economist*, 17 April 2014. Available at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2014/04/kuwaits-opposition>.

<sup>53</sup> Joe Stork, quoted in 'Kuwait: 5 Critics Stripped of Citizenship', *Human Rights Watch*, 10 August 2014. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/10/kuwait-5-critics-stripped-citizenship>.

<sup>54</sup> Former Salafi MP Abdullah al-Bargash, two of his brothers and his sister were arrested, along with Ahmad Jabir al-Shammari, owner of *al-Yawm* satellite television and *Al-'Alam al-Yawm* newspaper, which are said to have ties with the liberal Popular Bloc.

<sup>55</sup> A. Saleh, 'ICM accuses government of 'using' citizenship file', *Kuwait Times*, 2 August 2014. Available at <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/icm-accuses-government-using-citizenship-file/>.

parliamentary television channel, about Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan being ‘against Sunni Islam’.<sup>56</sup> Though al-Duwailah was not charged in Kuwait, his case was referred to the UAE’s Federal Supreme Court, which will try him in absentia.<sup>57</sup>

In the face of limited government suppression, the ICM is likely to continue to privilege political reform over social policies, as opposition groups focus increasingly on pursuing common goals of political reform.<sup>58</sup> In fact, al-Duwailah explicitly called on political blocs to overcome their traditional differences in a January statement shortly after his arrest, and such opposition unification appears to be taking place.<sup>59</sup> The ICM, along with al-Barrak’s Popular Labour Movement and the Salafi al-Umma Party have led the charge in continued protests in 2015 against judicial corruption and the government’s policy of stripping citizenship,<sup>60</sup> while calling for new parliamentary elections and the release of political prisoners.<sup>61</sup> Al-Barrak’s sentencing to two years in prison in February 2015 spurred a renewed call to protests.<sup>62</sup> The most recent opposition rally, held in March in response to al-Barrak’s arrest, was broken up by security forces and resulted in the jailing of dozens of opposition leaders and alleged assault of participants.<sup>63</sup> The more the government excludes opposition political blocs from power, the more likely they are to privilege a pro-democracy agenda over ideological differences. In this way, government crackdown has encouraged the moderation of traditional Islamist social aims as the Brotherhood and some Salafi strands promote broad-ranging reform, rather than Islamisation.

By tempering its demands for laws to Islamise society and for the implementation of *shari‘a*, the ICM has come to hold a more powerful political position as a leading opposition bloc. Its political capital, though, is not expressed solely through its representation in parliament, as its social organisation (Islah) forms a major part of

<sup>56</sup> ‘UAE to Try Kuwaiti Ex-MP over Remarks on Abu Dhabi Crown Prince’, *Middle East Eye*, 9 March 2015. Available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uae-try-kuwaiti-ex-mp-over-remarks-abu-dhabi-crown-prince-1546132555>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Hamid, *Temptations of Power*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Al-Duwailah: ‘Ala al-Quwwa al-Siyasiyya an Tafham Hassasiyyat al-Marhala Tatatalab al-Ta‘ali ‘an al-Khilafat al-Taqlidiyya’ (Al-Duwailah: The Political Forces Must Understand that the Sensitivity of the Stage Requires the Transcendence of Traditional Differences), *Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya al-Dusturiyya*, 11 January 2015. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/nnbqezm>.

<sup>60</sup> Dahlia Kholaf, ‘Kuwait’s Opposition Movements Feel the Squeeze on Freedoms’, *Middle East Eye*, 30 March 2015. Available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/kuwait-opposition-movements-feel-squeeze-freedoms-1703345061>.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Kuwait: Opposition Protest Broken Up’, *Human Rights Watch*, 29 March 2015. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/29/kuwait-opposition-protest-broken>.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Kuwait Sentences Opposition Politician Mussallam Al Barrak to Two Years in Jail for ‘Insulting Ruler’’, *Global Voices*, 22 February 2015. Available at <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/02/22/kuwait-sentences-opposition-politician-mussallam-al-barrak-to-two-years-in-jail-for-insulting-ruler/>.

<sup>63</sup> Linah Alsaafin, ‘Kuwait Security Forces Violently Disperse Anti-Government Protest’, *Middle East Eye*, 23 March 2015. Available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/kuwaiti-security-forces-violently-disperse-anti-government-protest-1878869579>.

outreach to the general Kuwaiti population and has become particularly influential as the ICM has boycotted the last two parliamentary elections.

The popular perception in Kuwait remains that ‘you can speak reason with the Ikhwan. They’re part of the system of elites, so they would never dream of overturning [the system]’.<sup>64</sup> Ismail al-Shatti, for his part, has called for the implementation of all parts of *shari‘a* over time, considering that ‘[t]he Qur’an came in stages’.<sup>65</sup> This more moderate stance prevails today, as issues of government reform appear more urgent.

While the Kuwaiti government has never legally recognised the ICM,<sup>66</sup> its approach in dealing with the bloc, and with the Brotherhood in general, is far more moderate than the repressive security-led approach seen in the UAE in part because the group’s status as a primarily local political bloc has been established and accepted.

Unlike other Brotherhood affiliates in the Gulf, the Kuwaiti branch has also benefited from years of experience in government.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps because of its involvement in public office, the Kuwaiti Brotherhood has learned to balance its conservative social goals with its pro-democracy agenda into a politically influential platform.

## Qatar

Unlike its neighbours, the Qatari government has taken steps towards the soft co-optation of the Muslim Brotherhood, considering the organisation a potential ally rather than major threat. Ira William Zartman, taking the cases of Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, points out that opposition movements can in fact amplify support of the state. ‘Neither uses the other, but each serves the other’s interests in performing its own role. Thus, stability in the contemporary Arab state can be explained not only by the government’s handling of opposition but also by the opposition’s handling of itself and the government’.<sup>68</sup> This symbiotic relationship may best describe the ties between the Qatari government and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Qatari government has historically granted a public voice to Islamists, in addition to conceding to a number of Islamist-supported social policies, and the Brotherhood has in turn praised the government for its Islamist-aligned policies, thereby cementing al-Thani power and domestic political stability – a testament to the system’s strength. Simply put, the Qatari regime does not place restrictions on the Muslim Brotherhood because it does not need to do so.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Ibrahim al-Hadban, 14 November 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Shafeeq Ghabra, ‘Balancing State and Society: The Islamic Movement in Kuwait’, *Middle East Policy* 5/2 (1997), p. 69.

<sup>66</sup> Nathan J. Brown, ‘Pushing Toward Party Politics?: Kuwait’s Islamic Constitutional Movement’, *Carnegie Papers* 79, (January 2007), p. 15. Available at [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp79\\_brown\\_kuwait\\_final.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp79_brown_kuwait_final.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Sami al-Faraj, 13 November 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Ira William Zartman, ‘Opposition as Support of the State’, in Adeed I. Dawisha and Ira William Zartman (eds.), *Beyond Coercion: The Durability of the Arab State* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 62.

As one former advisor to the Amiri Diwan put it, ‘why should the government put pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood when they don’t challenge them? The two are interdependent’.<sup>69</sup> In its current form, the Qatari Brotherhood exists as ‘a tendency’ or ‘a current’, conceived of as an ideology or set of beliefs, rather than a political bloc.<sup>70</sup> In such a loosely organised form, members are able to meet without fearing consequences of a crackdown from authorities. Furthermore, their goals of *da‘wa* and Islamic education are achievable without the implementation of a structure that the state may find objectionable. By remaining amorphous, the Brotherhood can continue to enjoy state backing while maintaining its independent activities.

Muslim Brotherhood influence in Qatar’s religious and education sectors is palpable, yet like much else in the country, uninstitutionalised and largely informal. ‘There is influence of Muslim Brotherhood in justice, education *awqaf* – not in terms of policies – but in terms of influencing people who do make policy; this influence is not institutionalised’.<sup>71</sup> As a result, studying the Brotherhood as a movement in Qatar is difficult, especially because its ideology shares many common points with conservative Islam commonly found in the Gulf and highly influential inside the country. As explained by one Qatari, ‘it’s not that these ties don’t exist but that they are more benign than people realise’.<sup>72</sup>

Islamist sentiment has, however, affected social policies inside Qatar. Determining whether this feeling reflects backing of the Muslim Brotherhood or of conservative Wahhabi Islam is difficult.

Since 2011, for example, the government has banned the sale of alcohol from the Pearl-Qatar development, has removed statues considered religiously offensive from public spaces, has placed further restrictions on when alcohol can be consumed in hotels, and has backed and funded increasingly public campaigns for moderate dress. Such campaigns would be the purview of Brotherhood organisations elsewhere in the Middle East yet in Qatar appear to have formed almost spontaneously.

The ad hoc and informal nature of the organisation inside Qatar suits the state’s political character as the least institutionalised and most personalistic of the three systems under consideration.

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*‘Why should the government put pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood when they don’t challenge them? The two are interdependent.’ - Ibrahim Arafat*

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ibrahim Arafat, 4 December 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Al-Nafisi.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Hassan al-Ibrahim.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Michael Stephens.

## The United Arab Emirates

In contrast to its Kuwaiti and Qatari counterparts, the Emirati government considers the Muslim Brotherhood to be an existential threat, as an organisation promoting a foreign ideology. As such, its response has been security-focused, yet has differed slightly among emirates. Abu Dhabi has taken the strongest stance, reflecting the belief of that emirate's Crown Prince Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed that 'if there were an election [in the UAE] tomorrow, the Muslim Brotherhood would take over'.<sup>73</sup> Abu Dhabi has always been cautious about the Muslim Brotherhood, having denied the organisation permission to operate in the emirate as early as the 1990s. The government has responded with efforts to promote what it considered to be the appropriate brand of 'moderate' Islam. In fact, restrictions exist about the length of beard that members of the armed forces can grow, for fear that they may be mistaken for conservative Muslims who traditionally favour long beards.<sup>74</sup> Aware of the Brotherhood's eagerness to participate in political debate, that emirate's government also promoted the emergence of other, more politically quietist. Further cementing the Emirati government's stance against the Brotherhood, a new anti-terrorism law passed in August 2014 updated the 2004 legislation, allowing for expanded use of the death penalty and other severe punishments.<sup>75</sup> The legislation, though cracking down on violent extremist groups at a time of regional fear about an resurgence of violent jihadist activity, also 'has the potential to be used against peaceful activists and government critics due to the broad ambit of its provisions, their vague definition, and the range of actions that may be considered under the law to amount to terrorism'.<sup>76</sup> As Sarah Leah Whitson of Human Rights Watch put it, '[i]n the UAE it's now a case of 'you're with us or you're a terrorist''.<sup>77</sup> In November 2014, the UAE released a list of 82 organisations that it considers terrorist groups. Although this record includes violent groups such as al-Qa'ida and IS, it also comprises nonviolent groups like Islah and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, in addition to advocacy organisations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations.<sup>78</sup>

Dubai's government, on the other hand, has traditionally focused primarily on "tracking' individuals known to be sympathetic to the Islamist agenda'.<sup>79</sup> In an effort to dissuade Dubai citizens from Islamism, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum,

<sup>73</sup> Mohammed bin Zayed, quoted in Christopher M. Davidson, *After the Sheikhs: The Coming Collapse of the Gulf Monarchies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> 'UAE Minimizing Influence of Islamic Extremists', Embassy of the United States Abu Dhabi, *WikiLeaks*, 10 November 2004. Available at [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04ABUD-HABI4061\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04ABUD-HABI4061_a.html).

<sup>75</sup> "There Is No Freedom Here': Silencing Dissent in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)", *Amnesty International*, November 2014, p. 10. Available at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/there-is-no-freedom-here-silencing-dissent-in-the-united-arab-emirates>

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> 'UAE: Terrorism Law Threatens Lives, Liberty', *Human Rights Watch*, 4 December 2014. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/03/uae-terrorism-law-threatens-lives-liberty>.

<sup>78</sup> 'UAE Blacklists 82 Groups as "Terrorist"', *Al Arabiya*, 15 November 2014. Available at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/11/15/UAE-formally-blacklists-82-groups-as-terrorist-.html>.

<sup>79</sup> 'UAE Minimizing Influence of Islamic Extremists'.

until the recent crackdown, met with them ‘to explain to them the error of their ways, and to tell them that if they are looking for a job, or land, or any other assistance, they should not hesitate to ask’. Apparently, this approach (direct appeal from the ruler) is often effective, especially for younger devotees. Those who are resistant to change, however, are locked up, sometimes repeatedly, for months at a time in hopes that this will dissuade them from acting on their Islamist tendencies.<sup>80</sup> In contrast, rulers in Ras al-Khaimah have traditionally allowed more freedom to the Brotherhood, yet a member of that ruling family was jailed in the recent crackdown.

It remains to be seen whether a large-scale Abu Dhabi-led crackdown on the Emirati Ikhwan was necessary due to the group’s widespread appeal. In the words of Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, ‘one-third of the population probably thinks this way, that the state could be more Islamic’, but not necessarily Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>81</sup> The Emirati government has understood the influence of Brotherhood organisations to be primarily political and thus threatening to their ruling system. In the face of such ideological competition, they hope to promote secular nationalism and institutionalised Islam that will harbour loyalty to the regime.

April 2012 marked the beginning of arrests targeting the Muslim Brotherhood, which the government considered to be the primary political threat. In the words of liberal activist Ahmed Mansoor, the Ikhwan ‘was more popular and well-known [than the liberal movement] due to its social activities. Many of its members were seen as the

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*‘In the UAE it’s now a case of  
‘you’re with us or you’re a terrorist’*

- Sarah Leah Whitson

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cream of society [...] with good reputations and important positions’.<sup>82</sup> In April 2012, seven Islah members (the so-called UAE7),<sup>83</sup> who were signatories to the March 2011 petition and whose citizenship had been stripped

in December 2011, were jailed after they did not leave the country as the government requested.<sup>84</sup> They contended that they had been ‘unjustly targeted for their political views’ since they had signed the petition on behalf of Islah.<sup>85</sup> These arrests marked only the beginning of the crackdown on Islah. By the end of 2012, 94 alleged members of Islah had been imprisoned.

The Emirati government has been surprisingly outspoken in its recent criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood, dismissing the organisation’s calls for reform as attempts to dismantle the regime. Although the government’s actions against the Ikhwan only made headlines during the Arab Spring, members of the government had expressed concerns

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, 10 February 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Ahmed Mansoor, 26 March 2014.

<sup>83</sup> The seven included Sheikh Mohammad Abdul Razzaq al-Siddiq, Ahmed Ghaith al-Suwaidi, Ali Hussain al-Hammadi, Shaheen Abdullah al-Hosani, Hussain Munif Abdullah al-Jabri, Hassan al-Jabri, and Ibrahim Hassan al-Marzouqi.

<sup>84</sup> “‘There Is No Freedom Here’: Silencing Dissent in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)”, p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> Davidson, *After the Sheikhs*, p. 225.

about the organisation in conversations with American officials as early as 2007. At that time, they used “quiet marginalization’ and support for reintegrating MB [Muslim Brotherhood] members back into mainstream society. Members of the ruling families often got personally involved in this process’.<sup>86</sup> The UAE ruling families long feared Brotherhood influence, despite their massive wealth, demonstrating the salience of ideological politics in a super-rentier. Having failed to ‘buy off’ such movements, the government resolved to squash it.

During the January 2012 GCC National and Regional Security Conference sponsored by the Bahrain Centre for Strategic, International and Energy Studies, Dhahi Khalfan went so far as to state: ‘The Muslim Brotherhood is a security threat to the Gulf, and is no less dangerous than Iran’.<sup>87</sup> Emirati Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan similarly denounced the Brotherhood as ‘an organization which encroaches upon the sovereignty and integrity of nations’ and called on Gulf governments to work against its expanding influence.<sup>88</sup> Such language illustrates government attempts to use fears about emerging Islamist political parties in the region as an excuse to dismiss such groups’ demands for political reform within the UAE.

## Conclusions

As expatriate populations increase, Islamist groups like the Brotherhood will retain a powerful voice against increasing Westernisation. Super-rentier governments endeavour to balance their desires to modernise and to accommodate their overwhelming non-national populations with the need to address grievances of national populations that remain, for the most part, conservative and religious.

Due to strict laws concerning civil society in Qatar and the UAE, Muslim Brotherhood affiliates there are relegated to the social realm, and non-Islamist political blocs often have little space in which to operate. Kuwait affords the Brotherhood an institution-alised place in political life, however. These different forms highlight the fact that Islamists adapt their activities to operate within the restrictive system; their ideology cannot be ‘bought off’ simply through government disbursements. By creating ideological links at the grassroots, they amass long-term popular support.<sup>89</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE began with the goal of Islamising society in the face of Western encroachment. Since their establishment, these

<sup>86</sup> Ingo Forstenlechner, Emilie Rutledge, and Rashed Salem al-Nuaimi, ‘The UAE, the ‘Arab Spring’ and Different Types of Dissent’, *Middle East Policy* 19/4 (2012), p. 55.

<sup>87</sup> Abdullah al-Rashid, ‘The Brothers and the Emirates’, *The Majalla*, 14 February 2013. Available at <http://www.majalla.com/eng/2013/02/article55238281>.

<sup>88</sup> Ian Black, ‘Emirati Nerves Rattled by Islamists’ Rise’, *The Guardian*, 12 October 2012. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/on-the-middle-east/2012/oct/12/uae-muslimbrotherhood-egypt-arabspring>.

<sup>89</sup> Larry Diamond, ‘Why Are There No Arab Democracies?’ *Journal of Democracy* 21/1 (2010), pp. 100-01.

groups have altered their priorities to varying degrees. The Kuwaiti Brotherhood has come to privilege electoral success and political influence more broadly through wide-ranging reform over the initial social agenda that it pushed in the 1980s. The Qatari Brotherhood, on the other hand, has favoured the ideological and social elements of its platform over structural or institutionalised influence. Even what appears to be social power, as in the Qatari case, is hardly politically neutral, particularly in a super-rentier that allows few outlets for political debate. Finally, the Emirati Brotherhood, before the most recent crackdown began in 2012, operated in a space between the purely political (inhabited by the Kuwaiti Brotherhood) and the amorphous (represented by the Qatari Ikhwan). While it advocated for social reforms, the Emirati Brotherhood came to voice concerns about political freedoms more broadly, thereby leading to restrictions from the regime. The government thus made it unlikely for the Emirati Brotherhood to evolve to the state of its Kuwaiti counterpart, which has developed a clearly defined political platform and popularity. Despite the different trajectories they eventually took, each of the Gulf Brotherhood movements began with the platform of countering Western encroachment into their societies.

The presence of oil rents thus does not mitigate Islamist complaint, nor does it make such voices politically irrelevant. Emirati rulers were particularly attuned to the political capital held by their domestic Brotherhood movements and even considered the Ikhwan an existential threat. Kuwait and Qatar, on the other hand, have granted the Ikhwan more freedom, reflecting those leaders' beliefs that co-optation and containment are more effective than crackdown.

Rulers in the Gulf seem to be coming to terms with the fact that Islamist complaint will always form a part of political discourse in that region. Signalling modification of its previous hardline stance, Saudi Arabia hosted the International Union for Muslim Scholars, headed by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and dubbed a terrorist organisation by the UAE, for the Islamic Conference convened in February 2015 by King Salman.<sup>90</sup> Earlier that month, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud bin Faysal stated that his government has 'no problem with the Muslim Brotherhood'.<sup>91</sup> While Qatar's support of Brotherhood regimes in Egypt and Tunisia has been heavily criticised, its moderate approach towards the Ikhwan inside its borders may be inspiring a change in the Saudi stance. With the Brotherhood unlikely to disappear from the political or social scene, as it can maintain its position in the social sphere, a strategy of co-optation or cooperation is more sustainable than one of crackdown. Even in cases, as in the UAE, where the government has urged the closing of the Brotherhood affiliate, it has been pushed farther underground and has become increasingly informal, rather than having become radicalised.

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<sup>90</sup> 'Saudi King Hosts Muslim Scholars Close to Brotherhood', *Middle East Monitor*, 24 February 2015. Available at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/17159-saudi-king-hosts-muslim-scholars-close-to-brotherhood>.

<sup>91</sup> Saud bin Faysal, quoted in Mary Atkins, 'Saudi Arabia Has 'No Problem' with Muslim Brotherhood: Foreign Minister', *Middle East Eye*, 11 February 2015. Available at <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-foreign-minister-no-problem-muslim-brotherhood-230201904>.

Perhaps due to the union of unequal emirates in the UAE, the state has been more concerned about the emergence of ideological politics. States that seem similar from the outside, then, have very different considerations when formulating policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood.

Because they gain appeal primarily through an ideology unaffected by the presence of wealth, Islamist organisations, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood, will not become any less influential in the Gulf in the coming years, despite campaigns against them. Rather, they will take on different forms, depending on the political freedom afforded them. Further, because Ikhwan groups in the super-rentiers do not need to provide goods and services, as they do in poorer states like Egypt and Jordan, they have been allowed more freedom in terms of structural appearance.

Rentier Islamists will continue to hold sway primarily through the informal sector. The means through which such Islamists gain support is not threatened by changes to the Ikhwan's strength elsewhere in the Middle East due to the power of their ideological message. As long as the state continues to politicise Islam, which seems likely as a legitimisation strategy, political Islam will remain relevant.



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