

## Transformation of Salafist Political Attitudes during the “Arab Spring” Period: “Democracy” and “Parliamentary Politics” for Egypt’s *al-Da‘wa al-Salafiya*

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### Abstract

This paper explores how *al-Da‘wa al-Salafiya* (the Salafi Call: DS), the largest Salafist organization in Egypt, changed their attitude toward “democracy” and “parliamentary politics” and participated in public politics during the so-called “Arab Spring/Arab Uprising” of the 2011 period. DS was previously considered “apolitical/quietist,” but after the resignation of Ḥusnī Mubārak, they established a political party, *Ḥizb al-Nūr* (the Nour Party: NP) and participated in public politics. In addition, after the political upheaval of 2013, they have survived until today as the only Islamist party in parliament under the Sīsī regime. Following the change from their previous stance of distancing themselves from public politics, a certain number of studies focus on the situation at the very beginning of their political participation and analyze interviews with DS/NP officials at the time. However, little is known about the continuity/innovation (discontinuity) in DS/NP’s thought and strategy before and after the transformation of their attitude and the internal logic behind it. Thus, this study investigates how they justified their actions in the changing socio-political environment and what continuity/innovation can be seen in comparison to their conventional thought and strategy. This was done through discourse analysis of articles written by DS leaders and writings and statements of DS/NP officials before and after their change in political attitude.

**Keywords:** Egypt, Political Islam, Salafism, *al-Da‘wa al-Salafiya*, *Ḥizb al-Nūr*

### I. Introduction

The 2011 mass movement known as the “Arab Spring/Arab Uprisings (hereafter, Arab Spring)” and the scenes in Egypt experienced in the following years, i.e., Salafists<sup>1</sup> rising in

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1 I would like to indicate beforehand what I mean when I refer to “Salafism” in this paper. “Salafism” is a problematic term. In fact, previous studies have pointed out that the term “Salafism” has been used to refer to a group of ideological trends that have overlapping elements but are considered different in substance [Yoneda 2021: 308–311]. The most common definition of “Salafism” is the broad definition as “a branch of Sunni Islam whose modern-day adherents claim to emulate ‘the pious predecessors’ (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*; often equated with the first three generations of Muslims) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible” [Wagemakers

the political sphere, have created an impact on scholarships of Islamism/political Islam. This was because the so-called “*Purists/Quietists* Salafists,” who had previously been considered to distance themselves from public politics and focus only on religious practices, established a political party, and participated in the public political and legislative process.

Following the political upheaval of 2011, Salafist forces enhanced their presence in the elections, with the *Hizb al-Nūr* (the Nour Party: NP), based on Egypt’s most organized and grassroots Salafi movement/organization, *al-Da‘wa al-Salafiya* (the Salafi Call: DS), becoming the second largest party behind the Muslim Brotherhood (*Jamā‘a al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*)’s FJP (*Hizb al-Hurriya wa al-‘Adala*: Freedom and Justice Party).<sup>2</sup> More interestingly, after

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2016b]; it has been pointed out that the elements included in this broad definition overlap with the general characteristics of Sunni Islam, making it problematic to attempt to define “Salafism” in such a way that most Muslims would identify with this description [cf. Kosugi 2006: 230, 640; Hamdeh 2021: 24; ‘Imād 2013: 957; Wagemakers 2020: 22–23]. To escape from such a lack of accuracy, this paper would like to define “Salafism” originally in the following way, based on recent outstanding research works by scholars of Islamic thought [cf. Matsuyama 2017; Hamdeh 2021], by stating that Salafism is “one of the Sunni currents of understanding and interpreting Islam, and they (Salafists) take a negative stance toward the authority of the traditions of the four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence, and the two schools of theology, which have been formed by consensus through scholars, and they (Salafists) attempt to realize the ideal image of Islam found in the early generations of pious predecessors/forefathers (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) through direct (re-)interpretation of *Qur‘ān*, the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (*Sunna*), and other scriptures.”

2 It is a very controversial issue how to place the Muslim Brotherhood among those who call themselves Salafists in contemporary Egypt / within the study of Salafism in contemporary Egypt. I would like to point out some of the reasons for this, using the substance of the Muslim Brotherhood and previous studies that have addressed it as evidence. To begin with, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), proposed eight elements defining the Brotherhood at its Fifth Conference in 1939 (*Risāla al-Mu‘tamar al-Khāmis*, Letter of the Fifth Conference), two of which were “an instance ‘a Salafi Call’ that ‘takes back Islam to its pure fountainhead, the *Qur‘ān* and the *Sunna*,’” and “a Sunni way of thought for all things, especially faith and worship, following the tradition of the Prophet” [al-Bannā 1998: 170–171; Yokota 2006: 34–35; Willi 2021: 17–18]. In addition, at a ceremony celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Brotherhood’s founding held in Istanbul in 2018, Ibrāhīm Munīr (d. 2022), the former Acting General Guide of the Brotherhood, again referred to “a Salafi Call (*Da‘wa Salafiya*), a Sunni way” [*Al Jazeera Mubashir*, 1 April 2018; Willi 2021: 386], it seems to be clear that Salafism has remained a component of the Brotherhood’s organizational identity. However, we should understand that the relationship between both the Muslim Brotherhood and the ideological currents that this paper defines as Salafism (see footnote 1), i.e., actors like the DS, in the Egyptian Islamic political scene was a contentious and rivalrous one, as Lacroix [2022b] has pointed out, as follows: For the Brotherhood, “the solution to the problems of the Muslim world was eventually political: the establishment of an Islamic State. This implied ignoring many of the differences that pitted Muslims against each other in order to unify the Umma behind a common political goal.” In strong opposition to the Brotherhood conception, “the Salafis believed erasing those differences by purifying the creed was the only Islamically valid goal.” For Salafis, “the propagation of the correct creed to the masses was the only valid means of change. They shunned politics, first because political involvement would end up tarnishing the creed, and second because no genuine change could come from above—only from society” [Lacroix 2022b: 2]. Simultaneously, we should also mention that the relationship between the Brotherhood and the ideological currents, which this paper defines as Salafism, has not been completely mutually exclusive and incompatible up to the present time. For example, as Lacroix [2011] made clear and Tammām [2012] called “the Salafization of the Muslim Brotherhood (*tasalluf al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*)” [Tammām 2012: 95–135], there was an interaction between the value-systems and cultural-religious practices among Muslim Brotherhood members in Egypt and the Salafi doctrine from Najd in the Arab peninsula during the second half of the 20th century; as well as trends that showed the movement of the Brotherhood toward the Salafists’ stance in certain events after the “Arab Spring” of 2011 [Yaghi 2021]. In order to tackle the question presented earlier: how to place the Muslim Brotherhood among those who call themselves Salafists in contemporary Egypt / within the study of Salafism in contemporary Egypt, further research should be conducted, keeping in mind, as Lauzière

the political change of 2013, NP has become the only Islamist party allowed to sit in Egypt’s parliament, and at the same time, its mother religious organization, the DS, has succeeded in surviving in the country’s turbulent socio-political context; Egypt has experienced an authoritarian regression under the leadership of President Sīsī (‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Sa‘īd Ḥusayn Khalīl al-Sīsī, b. 1954) since 2013, and henceforth, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist organizations have been repressed drastically in all socio-political spheres.

Responding to their change of position from DS’s traditional distancing from public politics, a certain number of studies focus on the situation at the very beginning of their political participation and analyses of interviews with DS/NP officials at the time.<sup>3</sup> While there is an accumulation of studies on DS’s agency in the early stages of their political participation in 2011–2012, analysis of NP’s 2011 party platform, and analysis of mobilization mechanisms for NP, few studies have examined how DS/NP, which have successfully survived to the present, have changed their ideologies from the beginning to the present, or in other words, what kind of continuities/innovations (discontinuities) in their thoughts and strategies existed before and after the transformation of their political attitude, and was the internal logic behind them.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this paper is to contribute to filling these research gaps.

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[2016] pointed out, the difference between what we, as researchers, mean by “Salafi” and what they, who call themselves Salafists, meant by saying “Salafi.” During the author’s fieldwork in Alexandria, Egypt, in September and October 2022, multiple bibliographic sources were identified in which DS officials discuss the Muslim Brotherhood. A separate paper will address DS’s perception of the Brotherhood based on these primary sources.

3 For example, a study that revealed the political ideologies and strategies of NP and the conflicts between the NP and DS sides in the early stages of political participation through interview-based fieldwork [Lacroix 2012]; a study that identified the political aims and internal divisions of NP in their early years of political participation and their pragmatic approach to politics [Lacroix 2016]; a study of affiliation and mobilization for early NP using ethnographic methods [Deschamps-Laporte 2014]; a study that examined the emerging political agency of the Salafis and Sufis, pointing out that the scope of political Islam in Egypt after the “January 25 Revolution” is no longer limited to the Muslim Brotherhood and the parties derived from it [Brown 2011]; a study that addressed the role of NPs in current Egyptian politics and examined their ability to survive in the tumultuous environment from 2011 to the 2015 parliamentary elections [Ghalwash and Philips 2017]; a study of DS’s vision of social and political change in post-revolutionary Egypt through fieldwork and discourse analysis (critical discourse analysis) [Selim 2016]; a study that showed the complexification of the Salafist currents since 2011 and the challenges they face [El-Sherif 2015]; a study which pointed out that once Salafists, previously apathetic about politics, took a step toward proactive political involvement, their traditional claims of being pious and incorruptible actors were relativized, and those who remained involved in politics were forced to follow the path taken by the Brotherhood: that, like the Muslim Brotherhood, they must transform slogans and principles into pragmatic solutions to real problems, and as a result must choose between being involved in politics and not being involved [Utvik 2014]; a study that examined the structures and opinions of Salafi groups prior to the revolution and their political parties, political attitudes, and opinions in the wake of the “January 25th Revolution” [Yıldırım 2014]. More recently, the following studies have evolved: a study that unpacks the relationship between DS and Saudi Arabia and points out that DS did not enjoy particularly close ties with Saudi Arabia since its founding, and therefore their political behavior needs to be explained as a reflection of domestic political calculations [Lacroix 2022a]; a study that redrew the historical development of the Islamic awakening in Egypt, with the Salafis, such as DS, as the primary focus [Lacroix 2022b]; a study that proposed a new category for the traditional typology of studies on Salafism by reexamining the actions of the DS/NP in the Egyptian political process [Deschamps-Laporte 2023].

4 One of the reasons for this academic suspension is that scholars of contemporary Salafism have continued to rely on and deduce from specific analytical frameworks within the field of political science: what

While Egypt experienced drastic changes in its political landscape after the “Arab Spring,” Islamic currents also had to modify their thoughts and strategies. Salafists were also not an exception to this situation. Since Egyptian politics was decoupled *before* and *after* the “Arab Spring,” we can assume that DS/NP’s thoughts and strategies were also different from those of the previous period. As will be discussed in this paper below however, close analysis reveals that the DS/NP have shown some ideological shifts while emphasizing some continuity from their previous lines. This is because for them, a sudden and dramatic shift in principle could have resulted in the loss of popularity among their adherents.

This paper investigates how both DS and NP have legitimized their actions in the changing socio-political context through philosophical shifts, developing a logic to ensure continuity in comparison with their conventional thoughts and strategies. In the analysis, I will shed light again on the primary sources originated by DS and NP officials. These attempts will reveal their flexibility and their ability to adapt and survive within the current context, which differs from the conventional perception of the so-called “*Purists/Quietists* Salafists” as dogmatic, hard-liner actors who focus exclusively on religious practice.<sup>5</sup> Questioning both continuities and discontinuities in DS/NP’s thoughts will not only reveal their dynamism, but also their irreconcilable positions, in other words, their “Salafi-ness.”

The structure of this paper is as follows: after this introductory section, the second section will describe how DS/NP have emerged and developed in the Egyptian socio-political context, using the narratives of DS officials themselves as sources; the third section will unpack the

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I call a “typology-oriented understanding of Salafist thought and actions” formulated by the American political scientist Quintan Wiktorowicz [for details, see Yoneda 2021: 311–314]; this typology [Wiktorowicz 2006] and the analysis that relies on and deduces from it have been widely spread since then. As Deschamps-Laporte [2023] pointed out, “his typology is about the nature of Salafism, but it is also a debate about social science methods,” and “his typology is interpreted as being made of mutually exclusive categories,” [Deschamps-Laporte 2023]; the problem with the widespread use of typology-oriented understanding is that when individual actors show changes in behavior, explanations are given only by replacing analytical concepts (in the case of a shift to another type of typology, e.g., the case of DS/NP where *Purists/Quietists* who had kept their distance from politics became involved in politics: *Politicos*). As a result, explanations based on the internal logic of individual actors and investigations of continuity/innovation(discontinuity) in thoughts and strategies *before* and *after* the behavioral change are insufficient. (It should be noted, however, that this type-oriented understanding has not always been accepted uncritically. In recent years, the academic journal *Contemporary Islam*, published by Springer Nature, in its Volume 17, Issue 2 (July 2023), featured a special issue entitled “Revisiting Wiktorowicz - Salafism, Politics and Violence in the Contemporary World,” and scholars of contemporary Salafism such as Wagemakers [2016a; 2020] have also made vigorous efforts to reconsider this typology.) In addition, many of the studies on Islamism/Salafism have been concerned with “jihad,” “terrorism,” and “radicalization” [cf. Gauvain 2013: 11–14], which means that they have a bias in their subjects of study (e.g., in the context of scholarship on Islamism/Salafism in Egypt, as Lacroix [2022b] has pointed out, there is a longstanding bias in the subjects of study that focus on the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood and radical thinkers [Lacroix 2022b: 1]; whereas DS, which should be Egypt’s most organized and grassroots Salafi movement/organization, was rarely placed at the center of analysis until the “Arab Spring” of 2011). Also, the so-called “*Purists/Quietists*” Salafi movement who had distanced themselves from politics before the “Arab Spring” of 2011, were wrongly equated with apoliticism or regarded as orthodox actors dedicated to “decontaminating” Islam from heresy. In this paper, I will break away from such static and inflexible perceptions and again shed light on the internal logic of DS/NPs to reveal their dynamism.

5 See footnote 4.

thought and action of DS in the context of *before* the “Arab Spring” of 2011, with particular attention to the issues of “democracy” and “parliamentary politics”; the fourth section will explore DS/NP’s thoughts and actions in the context of *after* the “Arab Spring” of 2011 and their political participation, also focusing on the issues of “democracy” and “parliamentary politics,” and discussing their continuity/innovations compared to their previous attitudes; finally, in the fifth section, this paper concludes with a compilation of the findings and implications derived from them.

## II. DS/NP within the Egyptian Socio-Political Context: Its Origins and Development

DS was founded in Alexandria, a city facing the Mediterranean Sea in Egypt, between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. This period coincided with the emergence of the Islamic revival/ Islamic awakening in Egypt due to President Sādāt (Muḥammad Anwar al-Sādāt, d. 1981)’s policy of appeasement toward Islamic forces to eliminate the leftist forces of former President Nāṣir (Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, d. 1970), thus causing the complexification of the Islamic currents in the country. This complexification of Islamic currents could be traced by looking at the diffusion of student organizations, known as “Islamic Groups: IGUs (*al-Jamā‘āt al-Islāmīya fī al-Jāmi‘āt*: Islamic Groups at Universities),”<sup>6</sup> that President Sādāt initiated in universities around Egypt to secure his power base, within the socio-political context of the time. The following will deal with this point briefly to understand the origins and development of the DS, as well as its characteristics.

As senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood, suppressed under Nāṣir’s regime, began to be released around 1975, they started incorporating IGUs youth into their faction of the Muslim Brotherhood [Kandil 2015]. In the 1980s, the official merger took place, and 40,000 youths joined the Muslim Brotherhood [Kandil 2015: 86]. Nevertheless, not all IGUs were integrated into the Brotherhood, as some local IG factions resisted this integration, which resulted in the diffusion of the IGUs. Two main groups stood out among those currents that resisted integration and later established their own currents. The first was the current led by some of the IGUs chapters in Middle and Upper Egypt that resisted the merger [Stein 2011], and these served as breeding grounds for GI, who appealed to violence. Its members were implicated in Sādāt’s 1981 assassination and led an armed struggle against the Mubārak (Muḥammad Ḥusnī Mubārak, d. 2020) regime until 1997 [Lacroix 2022b: 8; Sallam 2022: 95]. The second group was the current based in the IG of Alexandria University, which became critical of both GI, which took the violent revolutionary option, and the Muslim

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6 The term IGUs is used to reference the entire network of Islamic Groups at public universities. The term Islamic Group (*al-Jamā‘a al-Islāmīya*: IG) is used to describe specific university-level IGUs, while the Egyptian Arabic name *al-Gamā‘a al-Islāmīya* (GI) is used to describe the differentiated currents that bear the same name Islamic Group but have become armed anti-regime factional groups. For the IGUs, see Sallam [2022].

Brotherhood, which had strong political ambitions. This group emphasized a bottom-up approach of religious purification and proselytizing for commanding right, forbidding wrong, and reforming society. It was this second group that formed the Salafi School (*al-Madrasa al-Salafiyya*: MS), the step-forward organization of the DS [Bakr 2014; Tawfiq 2012b].

The founders of the second group,<sup>7</sup> who established themselves as MS (later DS), were not individuals with a conventional religious education but rather from universities/colleges of medicine and engineering [Bakr 2014; al-Anani and Malik 2013: 59]. Their main concern was putting religious purification above all else, staying aloof from politics, and forming an elite that would preach the correct creed to the masses [Lacroix 2022b: 8]. According to sources in which DS officials spoke about the origins of their organization, the MS initially focused on training preachers who could preach with reference to the scriptures, and on publishing Salafist books to spread the beliefs and methods they advocated [‘Abd al-Ḥamīd 2013]. Their criticism against the excessive politicization of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>8</sup> resulted in pressure from the Brotherhood side [Tawfiq 2012b], and they also faced the growth of violent extremism like the GI in the country: for them to survive under these circumstances, the MS was forced to organize and institutionalize their activities. As a result, they shifted their focus from MS, which had been mainly engaged in academic activities, to DS in the early 1980s, transforming their strategy to become a more systematic, structured, and wide-ranging organization [‘Abd al-Ḥamīd 2013; Tawfiq 2012a; 2012b]. This was how the most organized grassroots Salafist movement in Egypt up to the present day emerged.<sup>9</sup>

It is, therefore, essential to recognize the characteristics of the DS that we need to consider how they developed their organizational identity in the context of interactions among Islamic currents that became increasingly complex during the same period; this is because DS did not suddenly arise by themselves out of nothing. There was, indeed, a sense of rivalry in the thought and strategy of the DS, which began as a current distinct from both the Muslim Brotherhood and extremism.<sup>10</sup> For example, we can see some of its characteristics in the work

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7 In addition to Yāsir Burhāmī (b. 1958), the current DS leadership figure, there is Aḥmad Ḥuṭayba (b. 1958), a high school classmate of Burhāmī; Muḥammad Ismā‘īl al-Muqaddim (b. 1952), who says he met Burhāmī in high school; Aḥmad Farīd (b. 1952), who says he met al-Muqaddim when they were both at Alexandria University; Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ (known as Abū Idrīs, b. 1954), who said he met al-Muqaddim while visiting *Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya* (AS)-affiliated mosques; and Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-‘Azīm (b. 1952) who befriended the other members during his time at Alexandria University [Selim 2016: 97; Tadros 2014: 41–45]. According to DS officials, some of the founding members were greatly influenced philosophically by the huge collection of Salafist books that AS, “the first Salafist organization in Egypt,” owned [‘Abd al-Ḥamīd 2013].

8 DS was aware that any political action or organizing factions might lead to *fitna* (internal rebellion) and that they were not allowed to cause great evil by taking such action [‘Abd al-Ḥamīd 2013].

9 According to DS officials, MS was founded in 1977 [Tawfiq 2012b], as well as according to Ahram Online and Shalāta [2016], DS was founded in 1984 [Ahrām Online, 19 Nov 2011; Shalāta 2016].

10 As a result, it has been noted that they have benefited from generous treatment by the regime and have succeeded in expanding their organizational infrastructures [Lacroix 2012: 2; 2016: 4–5; Hoigilt and Nome

*Salafism and the Method of Change (al-Salafīya wa Manāhij al-Taghyīr)*, published by Yāsir Burhāmī, a leader and ideologue of the DS, in the 1412 A.H. /corresponding to 1991–1992.<sup>11</sup> He argues that the approach to eliminating “deviance” and returning to “pure Islam” should be a bottom-up approach (i.e., placing above all else the importance of preaching: *da‘wa* activity at the individual and society levels), rather than a top-down one (i.e., revolting against the rulers and carrying out violent revolution, or participating in national politics to bring social change)<sup>12</sup> [Burhāmī 1412A.H.].

As the “Arab Spring” that began in Tunisia spread to Egypt and public demands for the ouster of President Mubārak became louder, DS was forced to reconsider such a conventional position.<sup>13</sup> DS initially maintained their traditional attitude, expressing an antagonistic position toward not only participating in the political sphere, but also the civilian mobilization demanding democratization for the regime [Burhāmī 2011a; cf. Ghalwash and Phillips 2017: 318; Ahrām, January 24, 2011]. Later, however, when it became more certain that President Mubārak would step down, they broke away from their traditional attitude and authorized involvement in demonstrations and political activities, issuing a statement<sup>14</sup> calling for DS sympathizers to actively participate in voting during the March 19, 2011, referendum on constitutional reform [Ahrām, March 7, 2011]. After that, on June 15, 2011, they established their own political party, NP [Lacroix 2016: 6; Mokhtar 2014].

The first experiment for DS with establishing a political party and managing operations did not go smoothly. In particular, there were some conflicts between the political party and the mother religious organization, including differences of opinion between ‘Imād al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ghafūr (b. 1960), the first NP leader, and Yāsir Burhāmī, the leader and ideologue of the DS. Previous studies on the early stages of DS political participation have also noted this [Lacroix 2012: 6–7; 2016: 8; al-Anani 2016; Tarek 2011]. These conflicts between both sides resulted in a separation into two factions, with the first NP leader leaving the party in December 2012 and founding a new political party, *Ḥizb al-Waṭan* (the Watan Party), in January 2013; this

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2014: 39]. At the same time, it has been noted that they have not always had good relations with the regime [Tadros 2014: 35].

11 I will discuss this in detail in Section 3.

12 They have criticized violent extremist groups (jihadists) as simply those that provoke military confrontations, separating them from Salafism, and have also criticized participating in elections and the legislative process.

13 In Burhāmī’s essay the Salafi Call and Political Action (*al-Da‘wa al-Salafīya wa al-‘Amal al-Siyāsī*), published in 2011 by DS’s publishing house, the Orthodox Caliphate Bookstore, he presented the perception that the changes in the situation in recent months are comparable to those of the past 30 years, and that the decision to seek any path or make any decision now will affect the future as well [Burhāmī 2011b: 3–6] (I will discuss this in detail in Section 4).

14 The background to this was DS’s rivalry with secularist and Christian forces over Article 2 of the Constitution, which corresponds to the state religion clause in Egypt [Kuroda 2019: 218]. Subsequently, the DS and other Salafist blocs succeeded in influencing the 2012 constitutional article to embody the “enforcement of the Sharī‘a” and the “legal sources of the Sharī‘a” [Lombardi and Brown 2012; Sabry 2013; Tadros 2013].

new experiment in political participation can be said to have caused some bitterness, causing DS officials to split from each other. After that, NP became an entity that strongly reflected the direct intentions of its mother religious organization, DS [Lacroix 2012]. DS/NP thereafter openly supported the so-called “June 30th Revolution,” the military intervention on June 30, 2013, in the context of the anti-Mursī (Muḥammad Muḥammad Mursī ‘Īsā al-‘Ayyāṭ, d. 2019) presidential movement (*Tamarrud*), resulting in a successful survival of both the political party (NP) and the mother religious organization (DS) under the current Sīsī regime—choosing to continue to be involved in politics—(although the number of parliamentary seats has been significantly reduced from the original number).

In the following third and fourth sections, I will investigate what kind of ideological continuities/innovations can be characterized, and how DS tried to reformulate their theoretical frameworks before and after the transformation of DS/NP’s political attitudes, focusing on the topics of “democracy” and “parliamentary politics,” which have forced them to reconsider their traditional stance on politics of distancing themselves from participation in the electoral and legislative process.

### III. “Democracy” and “Parliamentary Politics” for DS before the “Arab Spring”

In this section and the following section, I will explore the dynamism of DS/NP’s thought resulting from transforming their political attitude. Prior to discussing the particulars in detail, I will introduce bibliographic sources that will be used as the groundwork for analysis as well as explaining the validity of using them.

There are three main sources<sup>15</sup> for analysis in this paper: (1) *the old edition of Salafism and Methods of Change (al-Salafīya wa Manāhij al-Taghyīr)*: hereafter *Manāhij* [Burhāmī 1412A.H.]; (2) the new revised edition of the same title (*Manāhij*) [Burhāmī 2018]; and (3) *The Salafi Call and The Political Action (al-Da‘wa al-Salafīya wa al-‘Amal al-Siyāsī)* [Burhāmī 2011b]. All three were written by the current leader and ideologue of the DS, Yāsir Burhāmī.

(1) The old edition of *Manāhij* was published in 1991/92 within the DS bulletin *Voice of Da‘wa (Ṣawt al-Da‘wa)*<sup>16</sup> at the time; it formalized their position during the transition

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15 In addition to the three sources listed below, this paper also refers when necessary to the work of Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Maṣṣūr (b. 1971), the current NP leader, *The Positions of the Nour Party: Realities and Behind the Scenes (Mawāqif Hizb al-Nūr Waqā‘i‘ wa Kawālīs)* (published by the DS’s publishing house in 2014) [Maṣṣūr 2014].

16 The old edition, originally included in the bulletin: *Voice of Da‘wa*, is no longer available directly, as it was abandoned; in 1994, DS suffered a massive repression from the regime, and this bulletin was forced to cease publication [Tadros 2014: 35]. As an alternative, I obtained an archived PDF file uploaded on the DS official web page <<https://cdn.anasalafy.com/materials/tafreeghat/salafeyah-manahej-taghyar.pdf>>. Additionally, through fieldwork conducted by the author in Alexandria, Egypt, in September and October 2022, I was able to obtain a printed version of this article (the newly revised edition of *Manāhij*). Another book *Issues of the Religious Criterion: Methodological Causes (Qaḍāyā al-Furqān: al-Qaḍāyā al-Manhajīya)*, a compilation of articles by DS sheikhs, which was also obtained, contains this newly revised edition of *Manāhij* [Burhāmī 2022], which is annotated “written by Burhāmī, in the third issue of *Voice of Da‘wa*, published



of the MS to the DS in the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> This article is one of the most fundamental resources for analyzing DS; it has been repeatedly cited in the discourse of DS officials<sup>18</sup> since its publication and has been enriched by Burhāmī since then, as confirmed by Selim [2016], who conducted fieldwork with DS and NP officials. (2) The new revised edition of *Manāhij*<sup>19</sup> was an amended and enlarged version of the same title published by Burhāmī, within the context *after* the experience of the “Arab Spring” of 2011 and the so-called “June 30th Revolution.” It was published in 2018 as a monograph by the DS’s publishing house, the Orthodox Caliphate Bookstore. (3) *The Salafi Call and The Political Action* is a booklet published in 2011 by the DS’s publishing house, which discusses the socio-political conditions that led DS to political participation and the matters that are immutable even though contexts have changed. It is, therefore, an ideal resource for understanding how Burhāmī, or rather DS, perceived the socio-political context of Egypt *after* the “Arab Spring” and the “January 25th Revolution.”

Hereafter, I will analyze these three sources, focusing on the topics of “democracy” and “parliamentary politics,” which, as mentioned above, DS/NP themselves have been forced to revisit due to the transformation of DS’s political attitude, i.e., their participation in the electoral and legislative process, which they had previously avoided until the “Arab Spring.”

First, I will examine DS’s stance *before* the “Arab Spring” of 2011. As is evident from the discussion in Section 2, DS emphasized a bottom-up approach to reform and social change through religious purification and preaching activities and avoided choosing to engage in state politics as a means of social change. Burhāmī noted in the old edition of the *Manāhij* that “There are various views on participation in the legislative institution, the parliament, through elections, but our position is as follows: Participation in such legislative institutions, whether through nomination, election, or endorsement, should be avoided” [Burhāmī 1412A.H.]. DS have prioritized their preaching activities at the individual and social levels above all else as a

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in 1412 A.H., with additions and comments on contemporary realities after the ‘January 25th Revolution’” [Burhāmī 2022: 27n1]. This paper follows this information and describes the bibliography of the previous edition of *Manāhij*.

17 This old edition begins with a scriptural quotation of the basis for *hisba*: commanding right, forbidding wrong, and then discusses the DS position on “parliamentary politics,” “jihad,” and “preaching and teaching” as means to promote *hisba*.

18 For example, a DS spokesperson was repeatedly quoted when explaining “Methods of Change” to the public in 2013, two years after DS had participated in the politics of the country [e.g., Shakhāt 2013].

19 As in the old edition, this new revised edition discusses DS’s position on “parliamentary politics,” “jihad,” and “preaching and teaching” as means of promoting *hisba*, but the tone has changed. First, the chapters are structured as follows: Chap. 1: Who sees the inevitability of military confrontation, Chap. 2: Who sees the focus on individual work in preaching and education, Chap.3: Who sees change through parliamentary elections (the old edition follows the order of Chap.3, Chap.1, and Chap.2 in the newly revised edition). Chap.1 and Chap.3 of the new revised edition are particularly revised reflecting the context of Egypt and the Middle East after the “Arab Spring” in 2011. In Chap. 1, Burhāmī has added a section that seems to be a critical stance against the so-called Islamic State (IS) that emerged after the “Arab Spring,” and in Chap. 3, especially, Burhāmī has reworked the discussion by adding much more space to its pages (I will discuss the latter in detail in Section 4).

desired form of social change, and have shunned participation in such legislative institutions, in any form. They had the perception that the accomplishment of the “genuine and pure” Islamization at the level of the state was a reward from Allah resulting from the widespread implementation of preaching activities at the individual and societal levels, and that it was predestined by divine will [Burhāmī 1412A.H.].

The question arose on the rationale behind their avoidance of participating in the legislative body, the parliament. As a reason for not choosing to enter public politics to reform by means of social change, Burhāmī argued that it is essential to consider the following: “Legislation is the exclusive right of Allah and a fundamental aspect of His lordship and divinity. *Halāl* (permissible) is what Allah permits, and *ḥarām* (forbidden) is what He prohibits. The religion is what He has ordained.” “Secular laws contradict Islamic law, and anything conflicting with *Sharī‘a* is considered invalid.” “Ruling with other than what Allah has revealed provokes His anger and invites His punishment.” “Ruling with other than what Allah has revealed is disbelief” [Burhāmī 1412A.H.]. He also noted that there is a “fundamental difference between the Islamic way of governance and consultation, and the secular democratic way: which recognizes the separation of religion and state (based not on Allah’s will but on the will of the people and the opinions and wishes of the majority)” and that “secular democratic governance and legislative institutions within the secular democratic system such as the Parliament is inconsistent with the Islamic principle that there is no separation of religion and state (based on divine law indicated by Allah, i.e. which is not changeable according to the majority opinion)” [Burhāmī 1412A.H.]. Consequently, he preached that people should avoid participating in the legislative institution because it was a religious compromise that gave legislative power to anything other than Allah; thus, he forthrightly rejected “democracy” and “parliamentary politics.” In these logics, as we have seen in Section 2, there is a clear indication of DS’s attitude *before* the “Arab Spring,” which established its organizational identity in a way that was different from the radicalism of violent revolution against the rulers or the way it entered the state politics and carried out reforms.<sup>20</sup>

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20 These attitudes have much in common with the tendency in traditional Islamic political thought to advocate overlooking, rather than correcting, the wrongdoings of rulers. To follow the Islamic principles of *ḥisba*, it is a legitimate act and even a moral responsibility of Muslims to act against rulers who are wrongdoers and to oust them from power. However, it was considered more serious that the community (*Umma*) itself, which was necessary for Muslims to practice the teachings of Islam, would collapse due to the social chaos that would accompany the correction of the rulers’ injustice, and that Islam would be lost. Therefore, it was considered more desirable to tolerate wrongdoing and injustice by wrongful rulers, if there was a minimum level of order, than to bring chaos to the community that could lead to its collapse. Thus, among *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* (*Sunnī* Islam), it became recognized that accepting wrongful rule until a ruler emerged who could realize the ideal of politics was a political strategy that avoided disorders and greater evils. Moreover, the avoidance of wrongdoing in the form of disapproving involvement in politics was sometimes seen as a means for pious believers to express their sense of dissonance toward impious rulers who governed wrongfully [cf. Barzegar 2013; Jomaa 2013; Kellison 2013; Sachedina 2013; al-Sarhan 2020]. In the scholarship of Islamic political thought, this tendency: a negative attitude toward political participation is often referred to as “Political Quietism” among Western scholars and “*Purist/Quietist* Salafi” in Western academia

#### IV. “Democracy” and “Parliamentary Politics” for DS and NP after the “Arab Spring”

Then, what/which perceptions led DS to participate in the legislative institution, the parliament, which they had previously avoided? In the 2011 booklet [Burhāmī 2011b], Burhāmī describes the drastic change of circumstances in 2011 as comparable to DS’s activities over the past 30 years and shows awareness of the future consequences of what path and decisions they take now. He also stated that the ruling not to participate in politics was due to previous circumstances and that those circumstances have changed, and concluded that the new conditions—such as “elections are most likely to be fair, not rigged,” “there is an opportunity to draft a new constitution,” “the level of freedom is higher than in the past,” etc.—invite them to participate in politics while maintaining the role of preaching and education as the right way to reach the necessary changes. Burhāmī also stated that to discuss the issue of political action, they must define what is immutable and invariable, even if circumstances and affairs have changed, and here remarks were made about what they consider to be immutable. That is, “it is a solid and irreconcilable belief that Islam encompasses all aspects of life, including political, economic, and social,” and that “the legislative and ruling rights belong only to Allah Almighty, and there is no parallel to Him,” and that “those who grant such rights to the people, the nation, the ruler, the governor, or anything else are not Muslims” [Burhāmī 2011b: 3–6; 63–64].

We can see how their participation in public politics (i.e., elections and legislative processes) that they had previously avoided brought them self-reflection and ideological innovation, which is clearly indicated in Burhāmī’s statements in the newly revised edition of the *Manāhij*. The fact that Burhāmī’s self-reflection focused specifically on “the issue of change through parliamentary elections” is evident from the length of 39 pages, or 54% of the 72 pages of the newly revised edition, in which he discusses this issue [Burhāmī 2018: 22–61]. The following points can be identified as the main changes from the old edition of *Manāhij*, i.e., DS/NP’s attitude *after* the “Arab Spring” of 2011.

First, while the old edition avoided participation in legislative institutions because the legislative right only belonged to Allah, the new revised edition argued that participation in elections and legislative institutions within an environment such as Egypt (unlike the legislative institutions in Western democratic governments), where the constitution requires legislative institutions to follow the *Sharī’a* [Burhāmī 2018: 22n1], would not be contrary to the *Sharī’a* [Burhāmī 2018: 29n3].

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of Salafism studies, but in the case of DS, it should be noted that their negative attitude toward and avoidance of political participation does not automatically mean that they were “apolitical.” They were indeed engaged in scientific or scholarly activities: *‘ilmīya*, and focused on preaching: *da’wa*, however, they expressed their political opinions on issues (e.g. Gulf War, Iraq War, Afghanistan War, Palestinian Issues, etc.) [anasalafy.com. April 20, 2011], and also declared the sayings and doings/actions (of a state or regime, not upon a specific individual) to be *kufr* (*takfīr ghayr al-mu’ayyan / takfīr al-muṭlaq*) [Selim 2016: 87–88].

He also continues as follows: “legislation” in the Western secular-democratic system includes the power to make prohibited matters (*ḥarām*) lawful and to make permitted matters (*ḥalāl*) prohibited (since any principle or legislation is subject to change or alteration based on the demands and opinions of the majority), and such behavior is in conflict with the text of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunna*. However, in a constitutional setting, such as Egypt’s 1981 Constitution, which mandates that the legislative institutions adhere to the *Sharī’a*, it mandates that they not legislate what is contrary to the *Sharī’a*, modifies what violates the *Sharī’a*, and requires that new legislation be derived from its source. Therefore, Burhāmī said, the use of the term “legislation” under these regulations is not contrary to the *Sharī’a*, i.e., it is not polytheism or unbelief, nor does it alter or suspend the *Sharī’a*. [Burhāmī 2018: 22n1; 36–37].

These logics also explain DS/NP’s commitment to influence the constitutional text and embody the “enforcement of *Sharī’a*” and the “legal source of *Sharī’a*” at the time of drafting the new constitution in 2012 after their political participation.<sup>21</sup> It could be interpreted that, once they participated in public politics, they prepared the ground for involvement in politics by clearly defining the constitutional terms of the *Sharī’a* rules, minimizing their religious compromises as much as possible.

Second, while the old edition rejected “democracy” flatly, the new revised edition breaks down its meaning into two parts: “the basis and philosophy of democracy (*aṣl wa falsafa al-dīmuqrāṭīya*)” and “the mechanisms of democracy (*al-ālīyāt al-dīmuqrāṭīya*)” as the basis for the discussion. Regarding the former, he argues that there is a difference between the democratic system in Western philosophy and the system and governance in Islam, and that it is unacceptable. Regarding the latter, he tends to accept democracy as a mechanism or procedure, since it is also an element found in Islam [Burhāmī 2018: 36–41; 56n2; 57n2].

In the new revised edition, he mentions that “freedom, democracy, and equality,” slogans raised after the “January 25th Revolution” as well as slogans that Islamic currents have come to advocate these days, “are not found in the *Qur’ān* or in the teachings of the Prophet in terms of these or any other meanings. Not to mention the malicious meanings that can be inferred.” He then attempts to examine in detail what these concepts really mean. Burhāmī’s aim was to examine the internal nature of those concepts in the Islamic context, which is different from those of the people of the *Jāhilīya* (the age of ignorance before Islam), i.e., in the civil society and secular systems in the Western countries [Burhāmī 2018: 24–29]. As a result of his review, Burhāmī, as mentioned above, broke down the meaning of democracy into two parts and argued that what they call “the mechanisms of democracy” are those that can be found in Islam.

What Burhāmī calls “the mechanisms of democracy” is “the way the nation chooses its ruler, the possibility of removing him, the necessity of monitoring him and his government by

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21 See also footnote 14.

the nation, and the separation of powers, legislative, executive, and judicial, to ensure that they do not encroach upon one another” [Burhāmī 2018: 25–26]; rather than referring to procedures such as “one man, one vote, one time,” as Western academia on political Islam has sometimes argued.

He also continues as follows: “the authority of the legislative institutions is a compelling force upon the head of state, ministers, as well as other state institutions as a whole,” and “it holds more power than the head of state themselves, as they nominate the president of the government.”<sup>22</sup> If the legislative institutions follow the *Sharī‘a*, Burhāmī said, institutions would be closer to the description of *Ahl al-Ḥall wa al-‘Aqd* (those who have the authority to elect the *Imām*) [Burhāmī 2018: 54–55]. He also stated that it is the belief of *Ahl al-Sunna* that the people choose their rulers. This is achieved in Islam not by direct election, but by the consensus of those who have the authority to choose (*Ahl al-Ḥall wa al-‘Aqd*). This condition refers to the situation in which the legislative institutions have the power to choose the president [Burhāmī 2018: 24–26n2].

In this way, they showed their acceptance of what they called “the mechanisms of democracy,” while maintaining the conventional stance that the right to legislate and rule belongs to Allah Almighty alone, and while reconfirming the “basic principles and beliefs that all Muslims agree on” [Burhāmī 2018: 30–47],<sup>23</sup> which they had mentioned in the old editions. These ideological shifts that divide the meaning of democracy into two parts were evident in the NP’s 2011 platform and in interviews with the NP’s leader at the time, ‘Imād al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ghafūr, and others [e.g., Lacroix 2012: 5]. However, it is worth noting that Burhāmī himself reworked it as their logic in *Manāhij*, the key literature of the DS.

Third, while in the old edition he criticized *ḥizbīya* (partisanship/factionalism, establishing a political factions) because it leads to *fitna*,<sup>24</sup> in the new revised edition, regarding the establishment of political parties and their participation in the parliament through elections, Burhāmī says that it is permissible depending on the intention/purpose (*al-nīya*) of the people who participate and the balance of expected benefits (*maṣlaḥa*) and harm/corruption (*mafsada*): he came to this view by referring to the dialogue between Shaykh, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn Bāz (d. 1999), Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn (d. 2001), and Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn

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22 Burhāmī also stated, “At the time of writing this article, the legislative institution, the parliament, nominated the presidential candidate, who was then put to a mass vote. However, now we have a system of direct elections, and the situation has changed since the time the article was written” [Burhāmī 2018: 55n1]. Behind their continued participation in politics: i.e., in legislative institutions, despite the change in situation, is their consideration of the balance between benefits (*maṣlaḥa*) and harm/corruption (*mafsada*), while adhering to the “principle of avoiding serious corruption and evils” [Burhāmī 2018: 46; Mansūr 2014: Chap. 1].

23 Compared to the old edition, we find that in the process of sophisticating the argument, their sources were clarified, and, as we have mentioned before, there are also some mentions of Egyptian legal history in appropriate contexts [e.g., Burhāmī 2018: 47–49].

24 See footnote 8.

al-Albānī (d. 1999) and the questioners towards them [Burhāmī 2018: 41–45; 50–61].

We have already discussed in the first point of change that Burhāmī argued that elections and participation in the legislative institutions in the environment of Egypt, where the constitution requires that the legislative institutions follow the *Sharī‘a*, do not violate the *Sharī‘a*. In addition to this, he argued that the intention in establishing a political party and participating in legislative and parliamentary politics is essential. This means that, bearing in mind that Islam mandates them to command the right, and forbid the wrong, it is essential to sit in the seat of the legislative institution, parliament, in order to reveal the truth to others, not for the pious to become corrupt, but to correct the corrupt and bring about reform; not for secular or personal interests, but for the desire to participate with knowledge and insight, and to struggle to guide people to goodness and to prevent missteps [Burhāmī 2018: 49n1, 50–54]. In addition, interestingly, Burhāmī and his colleagues also suggest that, depending on the balance between *maṣlaḥa* and *mafsada*, they may refrain from participating in elections and legislative mechanisms in the future [cf. Burhāmī 2018: 59n2].

While the above changes from the old edition can be identified, they emphasize that these intellectual transformations do not change the DS’s methodology for change that they have been advocating all along. To them, participation in politics is only “one of the instruments and methods for reforming the state and society,” which has become a new element in the DS since the “January 25th Revolution.” [Burhāmī 2018: 71]. Burhāmī also states: “Our experience of political action after the revolution has changed our previous view of the need to distance ourselves from political activity. In fact, this is not a change in methodology, but a change in *Fatwā* (religious ruling) due to changing circumstances and conditions. As for political participation, it is no longer necessary to make concessions in beliefs and practices to be allowed to enter the political arena as it was in the past. The NP was founded based on adherence to the *Sharī‘a* and was able to maintain the *Sharī‘a*’s reference through positive participation in drafting the new 2012 constitution and its 2014 amendments, further clarifying the meaning of the stated principles” [Burhāmī 2018: 23].

## V. Conclusions and Implications

The main goal of the current study was to fill research gaps surrounding DS/NP, i.e., to examine the continuities/innovations (discontinuities) in DS/NP’s thoughts and strategies and their internal logic before and after the transformation of their political attitudes, which have received little attention so far. By shedding light on DS/NP’s internal logic, this paper examined “what kind of ideological continuities and innovations can be seen and how they are trying to reconstruct their ideological backbone *before* and *after* the transformation of their political attitudes.” In Section 2, I showed how DS and NP have emerged and developed in the Egyptian socio-political context, using their own narratives as sources. The results suggest

that in order to understand the origins, development, and ideological characteristics of DS, it is necessary to understand that they did not suddenly establish their own organizations out of nothing, but established their own organizational identities in the interaction of Islamic currents that became increasingly complex during the same period. In Sections 3 and 4, using the old and newly revised editions of *Manāhij*, one of the most fundamental sources for analyzing DS, as the primary sources, I contrasted and analyzed them to examine what continuities and innovations can be seen in their ideas and strategies *before* and *after* the “Arab Spring” of 2011. In analyzing their ideology, I focused on the topics of “democracy” and “parliamentary politics,” which became the subjects of their reconsideration specifically as a result of their political participation. The analysis of Burhāmī’s writings revealed DS’s ideological flexibility and its dynamism.

As discussed in this paper, it became clear that *before* and *after* the “Arab Spring,” DS accepted partisanship/factionalism (*ḥizbīya*) and participation in electoral and legislative mechanisms that they had previously shunned, and they also broke down “democracy,” which they had previously rejected, into two meanings and accepted “the mechanisms of democracy (*al-ālīyāt al-dīmuqrāṭīya*).”

Their shift in beliefs and ideologies regarding political participation in the legislative body, the parliament, through elections suggests that their shift *after* the “Arab Spring” may have been driven by strategic and tactical changes. Egypt’s 1981 constitution, i.e., the rationale for Burhāmī’s argument in the new revised edition of *Manāhij* that “participation in elections and legislative institutions within an environment such as Egypt, where the constitution requires legislative institutions to follow the *Sharī‘a*, would not be contrary to the *Sharī‘a*,” should have existed even when the old edition was published (1991–1992). Nevertheless, this description took place only in the new revised edition. These findings suggest that, in contrast to the *pre*- “Arab Spring” DS, which formed their organizational identity based on a strategy of acting as nonpolitical characters in highly political spaces, the *post*- “Arab Spring” DS/NP restructured their traditional beliefs and principles and gave them legitimacy, following a strategy of political participation. This also indicates, in other words, DS/NP’s flexibility and ability to adapt and survive within context, which cannot be grasped based on the vision deduced from the label the conventional perception of the so-called “*Purists/Quietists* Salafists.”

The transformation of their political attitudes after the “Arab Spring” of 2011 seems to have forced DS/NP to ask themselves how to re-present their organizational identities. *Until* the “Arab Spring,” they had asserted their organizational identity by acting as non-political actors in Egyptian politics, but *after* the “Arab Spring,” they began to display various attempts to redefine and legitimize their strategies, while at the same time stressing that this did not change their long-held “methodology for change”: it is important to note that while DS/NP

have adopted dynamic strategies for survival within the socio-political environment, they do not want to project their agency in a dynamic way. DS/NP is struggling for survival by pondering how to sail in the changing socio-political context of Egypt, the Arab Mashriq/Middle Eastern region, and the Islamic World. More research on Salafists, who have not been on the research agendas of political Islam in the past, is required to understand better the dynamics of the political and the religious currents in Egypt after the “Arab Spring.” For this purpose, not only approaches that focus only on the contexts, which are often the forte of social science fields such as political science and sociology, but also approaches that are the strength of religious studies and ideological studies, might be of great importance. Simultaneously, when considering the ideological characteristics of the Islamic currents categorized as Salafism and the conceptual definition of “Salafism,” it may be necessary to consider Salafism not only within Salafism(s), but also relativizing it in the midst of multiple contexts that exist in the same period.

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