

# Brothers in Trouble? Gomaa Amin and the Future of the Muslim Brotherhood

by [Eric Trager \(/experts/eric-trager\)](#), [Gavi Barnhard \(/experts/gavi-barnhard\)](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### [Eric Trager \(/experts/eric-trager\)](#)

Eric Trager was the Esther K. Wagner Fellow at The Washington Institute.

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### [Gavi Barnhard \(/experts/gavi-barnhard\)](#)

Gavi Barnhard is a research assistant at The Washington Institute.

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Articles & Testimony

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**Through its choice of new leadership and other actions, the group is displaying an ideological stubbornness that may threaten its long-term viability.**

**T**he Muslim Brotherhood spent 84 years toiling in Egypt's opposition before winning power in June 2012 only to lose it 369 days later. It has been all downhill for the group since then. In the 14 months since the military responded to huge protests by toppling Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated president, the group has faced an unrelenting crackdown that has practically decimated it as a political force in Egypt. Meanwhile, the Brotherhood's deteriorating relations with key foreign governments have hindered its attempts to reorganize in exile. Even so, the group hasn't revised its ideology or changed its strategy. It has refused to seek reconciliation with the new Egyptian regime or question the feasibility of its theocratic agenda. In fact, by selecting the London-based Brotherhood leader Gomaa Amin as acting Supreme Guide -- in other words, its chief executive -- the Brotherhood has likely doubled down.

The period since Morsi's fall has been the darkest in the Brotherhood's 86-year history. Within Egypt, at least 1,000 Muslim Brothers have been killed during crackdowns on their anti-coup protests, tens of thousands have been imprisoned, and the group's notoriously rigid chain of command has been decapitated at both the national and provincial levels. The pro-Morsi National Alliance to Support Legitimacy has also collapsed: Many of the Alliance's non-Brotherhood leaders were arrested in early July, and two of its main constituent parties -- the Brotherhood offshoot al-Wasat and the Salafist al-Watan -- bolted thereafter. Meanwhile, its cadres' low-profile insurgency against the state, which targets government buildings and police vehicles, has alienated many potential civilian supporters. Ordinary Egyptians often clash with Muslim Brothers at the organization's constantly shrinking pro-Morsi

demonstrations.

The Brotherhood's attempt to manage its affairs from abroad is faltering as well. Qatar, which strongly supported Morsi's presidency and granted many Brotherhood figures asylum when he was ousted, recently responded to pressure from its anti-Brotherhood Gulf neighbors by asking top Brotherhood leaders to leave Doha. (It remains to be seen whether Qatar will adjust the pro-Brotherhood editorial stance of its Al-Jazeera network, or stop funding various other pro-Brotherhood media outlets, many of which employ Muslim Brothers in exile.) The Brotherhood's safe haven in the United Kingdom -- where the organization has maintained a strong presence, including a media office, for decades -- has also become a little less welcoming. Earlier this year, the British government launched an inquiry into the organization's London-based activities, and although the investigation reportedly found no direct links between the Brotherhood and terrorist groups, many anticipate curbs on the organization's activities in the country. Turkey, which is home to the organization's Rabaa TV satellite network, is now the Brotherhood's only reliable sanctuary, although the group seems keenly aware of its deteriorating international standing and is reportedly investigating Tunisia and Malaysia as backup bases.

Despite these setbacks, the Brotherhood has refused to rethink its approach. In fact, from the group's standpoint, its members are still engaged in the very same struggle that has defined the Brotherhood's work since its 1928 founding: It is working to "Islamize" Egyptian society so that the Brotherhood can establish an Islamic state in Egypt, after which it will build a global Islamic state that will repel Western cultural and political influence.

The Brotherhood's stubbornness -- even in the face of such severe setbacks -- is not particularly surprising. Far from being a "moderate" or "pragmatic" organization, as many optimistic analysts once described it, the Brotherhood is a deeply ideological, closed vanguard. It seeks, in the words of its founder Hassan al-Banna, to implement Islam as an "all-embracing concept which regulates every aspect of life," and deploys its members as foot soldiers to promote this totalitarian vision. To ensure the organization's ideological purity and unity of purpose, every Muslim Brother undergoes a five-to-eight-year induction process known as *tarbiyya*, during which rising members are vetted for their commitment to the Brotherhood's cause and their willingness to follow Brotherhood leaders' orders in pursuit of it. This is not, in other words, a group of second-guessers. It is an insular society drunk on its own narrative.

Evidence of this can be seen in the apparent selection of the new Supreme Guide. The previous guide was arrested last August, and the leadership of the Brotherhood had been unclear since then. But earlier this month, a former Brotherhood leader announced that Gomaa Amin is now leading the organization. Amin is one of the most senior Brotherhood leaders who is neither in prison nor in hiding: The longtime leader of the Guidance Office, which is the Brotherhood's eighteen-member executive body, was safely in London receiving medical treatment at the time of Morsi's ouster, and he has fulfilled one of the Supreme Guide's standard responsibilities in recent months by writing five of the Brotherhood's weekly statements.

Amin also is one of the foremost contemporary exponents of the Brotherhood's unique approach to implementing the sharia as an "all-embracing concept" through grassroots work that seeks political, and ultimately global, power. In his book *The Slandered Obligation: Jihad in the Path of God*, which Muslim Brothers study as part of the organization's required curriculum, Amin echoes Banna's interpretation of Islam as a comprehensive system that organizes all aspects of life -- from the cradle to the grave. To implement his vision, Amin calls on his readers to practice jihad, which he argues includes fighting unbelief as well as battling the "rotten conditions of human relations, governance, education and the economy."

Although Amin embraces the notion of violent jihad under certain circumstances, he primarily advocates "struggling" through indoctrination and preaching, or *dawa*. "Those working in the Islamic movement must start with a complete knowledge of Islam and believe in the *dawa*'s ability to solve individual and societal problems," he writes in his treatise. Amin stresses that reforming the individual and society through jihad and *dawa* are long-term

projects that take time and diligence.

Although this gradualist approach to Islamization sets the Brotherhood apart from groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which has already declared an Islamic State through brute force, Amin highlights the severe anti-Westernism that both brands of Islamism embrace. He sees Western cultural influence in Muslim lands as a civilizational threat. "Humanity lives in a big brothel," he writes. "Look at its exterior, its films, galleries, fashion, beauty competitions, clubs, bars, and radios. Look at its crazy voracity for naked flesh, the provocative conditions and licentiousness in literature, art and the media...on top of the deteriorating morality and societal decadence that started to threaten every soul, every family, every gathering. The fate of all this, is destruction and perdition."

The only way to correct Western-inspired immorality, according to Amin, is spreading the Brotherhood's interpretation of Islam. Indeed, he argues that doing so is an absolute obligation of every Muslim. "In order for our rights to be protected, our dignity conserved, our identity clear, there will be a fight in the path of God with the intent of threatening the enemies, scaring them of the consequences of assaulting Muslims, their lands and their people." And this religious duty will remain in effect until the Day of Judgment. In other words, the Brotherhood's strategies -- no matter the obstacles in Egypt -- must persist.

Amin has reiterated this unyielding commitment to the organization's ideology in his weekly Muslim Brotherhood newsletters. In decrying the current state of corruption and immorality, Amin writes that, "Islam is in need of a state and authority. One of its most important roles is protecting the [Islamic nation's] creed that today is mocked, in addition to establishing its rituals and observances until it governs all [aspects] of life." Despite the Brotherhood's increasingly precarious political position, in other words, Amin sticks to the exact same ideological vision he espoused over 15 years ago. He believes with absolute certainty that Islam is simply "waiting for generations of men and women who believe in what God has promised." The question, according to Amin, is not if, but when the Islamists return to power. And so he sees no need to compromise on the Brotherhood's principles or strategy.

Yet the Brotherhood's ideological stubbornness may threaten the organization's long-term viability. To be sure, its hundreds-of-thousands-strong rank-and-file will persist: They have all been vetted for their commitment to the Brotherhood's ideology and have taken an oath to follow group's leaders' edicts, and will likely stay convinced for years. But the Brotherhood's pool of recruits is likely thinning out: It is now a model of political failure, and its leaders' commitment to a discredited project won't win many admirers soon.

*Eric Trager is the Wagner Fellow at The Washington Institute, where Gavi Barnhard is a research assistant. This article originally appeared on the [Foreign Affairs website \(http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142108/eric-trager-and-gavi-barnhard/brothers-in-trouble\)](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142108/eric-trager-and-gavi-barnhard/brothers-in-trouble). ❖*

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