Ikenna Steve Nweke, 2022, 7(3):29-41

Resurgence of Terrorism-Egypt After the Fall of the Muslim Brotherhood

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Abstract

In March 1999, the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, a radical group which had carried out terrorism campaign against the Egyptian State for over a decade, causing more than 1,300 dead, and many more socio-political and economic consequences renounced violence. Because of that truce, Egypt witnessed a decline in terrorist activities. However, since the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice party in 2013, Egypt has witnessed a resurgence of terrorism. The position of this paper is that the resurgence transcends the usual narrative of power struggle between Islamist and secularists, which always dominates discusses on Terrorism in Egypt and other Muslim Countries. To this end the study asks: What major factor is responsible for the resurgence of terrorism in Egypt since the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood? To answer the question, the paper highlights the importance of understanding terrorism as a multifaceted phenomenon, identifying conditions that drives it at various times by using the case of Egypt as a case study. The study relied on sources from the Global Terrorism Database, Human Rights Watch, the Amnesty International, and Newspaper publications in Egypt before and after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Keyword: Bedouin tribesmen, Injustice, Muslim Brotherhood, Resurgence, Terrorism

Introduction

Since the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood government through a military coup 'd'état led by Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi on 3 July 2013, Egypt has witnessed a resurgence of terrorism. The need to understand the reason for that resurgence has produced many studies but with divergent arguments about the factors responsible for it. Some of the studies revolve around economic factors, arguing that they laid the foundation for the resurgence. Strachan (2017) stated that Egypt's dwindling economy, which manifested in the form of rising inflation, devaluation of the country's currency, and record unemployment rate as a third of Egyptian youth were not employed laid the foundation for terrorism as it created an army of young people who became willing tools for terrorism. Further arguments about economic factors were the increase in electricity charges, rising inflation, increase in tax and food scarcities, which created discomfort among the citizens, and led to demonstrations (Mansour, 2016).

There are many other studies that argue that political factors laid the foundation for the resurgence. The argument is that the responses of the government to the ensuing antigovernment demonstrations that greeted the military coup against the Muslim Brotherhood led government, which included the use of brutal violence, indiscriminate arrest and incarceration of demonstrators played huge role in radicalizing many people (Biagini & Ardovini, 2022; Farasin et al., 2017; Süß & Aakhunzzada, 2019; Shafick, 2020). In a bid to silence every form of opposition after the military coup, the government Anti-Terrorism Law of 2015 definition of terrorism included those who demonstrate or disturb public peace as terrorists (Atlantic Council, 2015; Blackbourn & Walker, 2016; Saerom, 2016). It also cites the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2015 as an ominous promoter of confrontation against the Egyptian military regime. It defined terrorism thus:

> *The use of force or violence for the purpose of disturbing public order, endangering the safety, interests, or security of the community; harming individuals and terrorizing them; jeopardizing their lives, freedoms, public or private rights, or*

> *security, or other freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law;*
> *harms national unity, social peace, or national security or damages the environment,*
> *natural resources, antiquities, money, buildings, or public or private properties or*
> *occupies or seizes them; prevents or impedes public authorities, agencies or judicial*
> *bodies, government offices or local units, houses of worship, hospitals, institutions,*
> *institutes, diplomatic and consular missions, or regional and international*
> *organizations and bodies in Egypt from carrying out their work or exercising all or*
> *some of their activities or resists them or disables the enforcement of any of the*
> *provisions of the Constitution, laws, or regulations (Atlantic Council, 2015:3).*

That kind of labeling ensured that many non-radical individuals were jailed together with die-hard jihadist. As a result, the prison in Egypt, where more than sixty percent of inmates were held on political charges, became an incubator for radicalization (Kotb & Okail, 2017).

Some studies also provide arguments that revolves around religion. They focus on the believe that Egypt, historically, has always been enmeshed in a struggle between the Islamists and the secularists over who controls the country (Ottaway, 2013; Utvik, 2017). This argument maintains that having a government by the former will ultimately attract the ire of the latter (Alam, 2013). It further opines that the emboldening of radical preachers and other Islamists after the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood government was the precursor to the resurgence of terrorism after the regime collapsed (El-Sherif, 2015).

While acknowledging the roles played by the above factors in the resurgence, this study argues that the feeling of a sense of injustice was the foundation of the resurgence. An examination of the resurgence shows that the feeling of a sense of injustice by the Islamists, and the Bedouin tribesmen, rather than the need to spread an ideology, or the urge to revolutionize the state along the Islamist beliefs was responsible for the resurgence.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the ***Grievance Theory*** of terrorism in consonance with its argument that the feeling of a sense of injustice laid the foundation for the resurgence of terrorism in Egypt after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood. The theory sees terrorism as a reactionary and confrontational force against perceived injustice (Basedau, 2017; Bindner, 2018; Vinci, 2006). For example, the LTTE, otherwise known as the Tamil Tigers, took to terrorism because of they were aggrieved by the introduction of Singhalese as the official language, and not English (Bandarage, 2012; Sarvananthan, 2018), while the Palestinian Hamas feels that Israel is occupying their land hence their terrorism against the Israeli State (Ali, 2000; Shlaim, 2015).

In Egypt, after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliate bodies felt they were ousted by the military even when they legitimately gained their mandate through a popular election. Similarly, the Bedouin tribesmen felt that their hope of getting succor from an Islamic regime, after years of utter neglect, deprivation of their rights as citizens, and violence against them by successive secular regimes, was dashed. Terrorism thus became an expression of their grievances.

For the resurgence of terrorism after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, the study focuses on the period between 2013 and 2016. This is because the coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood occurred in 2013, while the peak of the resurgent terrorism was 2016.

Ikenna Steve Nweke, 2022, 7(3):29-41

History of terrorism in Egypt

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in Egypt. In theory, while it is often a subject of debate that Hassan al Banna the founder of the Brotherhood, provided the framework for its incubation (Azoulay, 2015; Saleh, 2016), there appears to be a consensus that Sayyid Qutb, a renowned Islamic scholar, and leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood was the main ideologue. Qutb's ideas on radical Islamism and offensive jihad respectively helped in fueling terrorism in Egypt (Sageman, 2004; Soage, 2009; Manne, 2016). As Saleh (2016) noted, "Al-Banna's ideas and teachings are the foundations of modern Islamic fundamentalism", while Shepard (2003), posited that Qutb's Doctrine of *Jāhiliyya*[1] opened a pandora box by calling for a violent overthrow of un-Islamic regimes by Jihadists.

In Practice, the formation of *Jama'at al-Muslimin* (Society of Muslims), a group widely known as *Takfir wal-Hijra* (Excommunication and Exodus) by Shukri Mustafa in 1971 and the formation of al-Jihad al-Islami (Egyptian Islamic Jihad, EIJ) by Abd al-Salam Faraj in 1972 played pivotal roles in shaping terrorism in Egypt.

However, since this study suggests that the factors responsible for terrorism in Egypt over the years are dynamic, it periodized it into waves for proper comprehension. As Rapaport (2004) noted, terrorism should be periodized based on distinct objectives and motivations that dominate each period, this study periodized terrorism in Egypt[2] into Reformative, Revolutionary, and Retaliatory waves.

Reformative wave of Terrorism in Egypt: 1936- 1970s

The first wave of terrorism in Egypt is the Reformative wave. It is so-called because of the objective the groups involved sought to achieve. It emerged from the struggle between Islamism and secular nationalism over which ideology should control the state. From the name, it can be adduced that the groups involved sought to bring about changes by seeking a transition from secular to Islamic rule, and not to change the government in power. Chaperoned by the secret apparatus of the Muslim Brotherhood (Lia, 2006; Streusand, 1996; Brown & Mitchell, 1969), it carried violent activities against western interests in Egypt, Jewish interests, and the government, which it sees as a collaborator, including the October 26, 1954, assassination attempt on President Abdel Nasser Mahmoud Abdel Latif, a Muslim Brotherhood member (Reid, 1982, Sid-Ahmed).

Knudsen, (2003) quoted Sayyid Qutb, editor-in-chief of the *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*[3] and one of the leading figures of the period wrote:

> We acknowledge allegiance only to an Islamic leadership
> that strives to re-establish Islam in practical life,
> dissociating ourselves from all other types of society
> and leadership (Knudsen,2003:2).

Another major actor of that period was the *Jama'at al-Muslimin*. Led by Shukri Mustafa, the group alleged that most Egyptians had departed from the true tenets of Islam, and had become *takfir*, a term that denotes unbelievers, because of their inability to confront the state (Sageman, 2004). The declaration of *takfir* was also extended to members who abandon the group for another. In one

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[1] A period when people live in sin because of widespread ignorance.
[2] The periodization into waves is the original idea of the author. It is based on the study of motivation of groups that have operated in Egypt between 1936 and 2016
[3] The official newspaper of the Muslim Brotherhood.

instance, he led an attack that resulted in the killing of his former members, a move that resulted in the arrest and detention of his members.

The group kidnapped a government minister and leading Muslim cleric, Muhammad al-Dhahabi on July 3, 1977. On that note, the group demanded for the release of its incarcerated members, or the minister would be killed. Ignored by the government, the group carried out its threat by killing the minister. However, Shukri was arrested, tried, and executed on March 19, 1978 (Ibrahim, 1982).

The swift action taken by the government by arresting and executing of people convicted of terrorism helped in the decline of this wave. Another factor responsible for its decline was the cooperative posture of Sadat's regime that succeeded Nasser's regime. By releasing jailed Islamist, allowing them to carry their publication and proselytization, it discouraged the groups from carrying out violent activities (Jackson, 1981; Max, 2012).

Revolutionary wave of terrorism in Egypt: 1981-1999

The second wave of terrorism in Egypt is otherwise known as the Revolutionary Wave. It is so-called because the primary objective of the actors was to remove the government through violent strategy. This wave was inspired by two main factors. First, the signing of peace accords with Israel at Camp David, and of Sadat winning the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway for such feat. To the Islamists, Sadat had betrayed the Muslim world by making peace with Israel, and the Nobel Peace Prize he got thereafter was a reward from the West for such treachery (Corman, 2016; Kiener, 1997).

The second factor was the fall of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran following the Iranian revolution. The defeat of a secular monarchy, which the Shah represented through an Islamic revolution, and the subsequent adoption of a sharia-based government was a morale boost for them in their resolve to replicate a similar feat in Egypt (Kagan et al, 2012).

Tanzim al-Jihad, a group formed in 1980 by Abdul-Salam Faraj pioneered this wave. Lewis (2002), quoted Faraj as saying:

> *The basis of the existence of imperialism in the lands of Islam is these self-same rulers. To begin with, the struggle against imperialism is a work that is neither glorious nor useful, and it is only a waste of time. It is our duty to concentrate on our Islamic cause, and that is the establishment first, of God's law in our own country and causing the world of God to prevail. There is no doubt that the first battlefield of the jihad is the extirpation of these infidel leaderships and their replacement by a perfect Islamic order and from this will come the release of our energies (Lewis, 2002:107).*

The group, in 1981, successfully carried out the assassination of President Sadat. Faraj had recruited the khalid Islambouli for the assignment following a *fatwa*[4] from a prominent leader of the Brotherhood Omar Abdel-Rahman (Ajami, 2001). Both Faraj and Islambouli were executed on 15 April 1982. Members of group were arrested, and jailed, while others went on exile. Ayman al-Zawahiri, who became the leader of the group, coordinated the activities of the group from exile, where the group continued to operate until it merged with Al Qaeda in 2001 (Lewis, 2004).

Following Sadat's assassination, his deputy Hosni Mubarak became the president. His regime fought a protracted battle with the Islamists as the latter, bent on carrying out a revolutionary change, mobilized against the government (Davidson, 2000, Al-Awadi, 2009). However, the revolutionary

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[4] The sanction given by an Islamic cleric over a matter of great importance.

wave reached its peak following the campaign of *Al-Gama't al Islamiyya* in the 1990s. The group started as a vanguard for Egyptian radical student groups in 1970s but did not gain much popularity at that time (Tal'at Fu'ad et al, 1996; Stein, 2011). In its early days, it was mostly active on university campuses, and was mainly composed of university students.

The group carried out some notorious attacks including the assassination of the Speaker of Parliament Rifaat al-Mahgoub, attempted assassination of President Mubarak in Ethiopia on 26th June 1995, the Europa Hotel shooting, in Cairo on 28th April 1996, and the Luxor massacre on 17th November 1997 (Gerges, 2000). It also carried out the Car bomb attack on police station in Rijeka, Croatia on 20th October 1995, in protest of the arrest and hand over of Abu Talal al-Qasimi, an Al-Gama't al Islamiyya leader by the Croatian Police to the USA government (New York Times, 1995).

The group targeted government officials, the public, the Egyptian army, religious leaders who disagreed with their practices, and tourists. Although tourists are not citizens of Egypt, an attack on them was considered a publicity stunt. Another reason for attack on tourists was to weaken the economy of Egypt since tourism is one of the backbones of the economy, and a significant source of foreign currency revenue (Gerges, 2000).

In March 1999, the Al-Gama't al Islamiyya opted for peace with the Egyptian government and declared a cease-fire. The offer was accepted by the Egyptian government, which took some steps by releasing some Al-Gama't al Islamiyya members held in prison. The event led to a drastic decline of terrorism in Egypt which had risen in 1994 (Gerges, 2000), as shown by figure 1.

Figure 1. The flow of terrorist attacks in Egypt between 1994 and 1999.
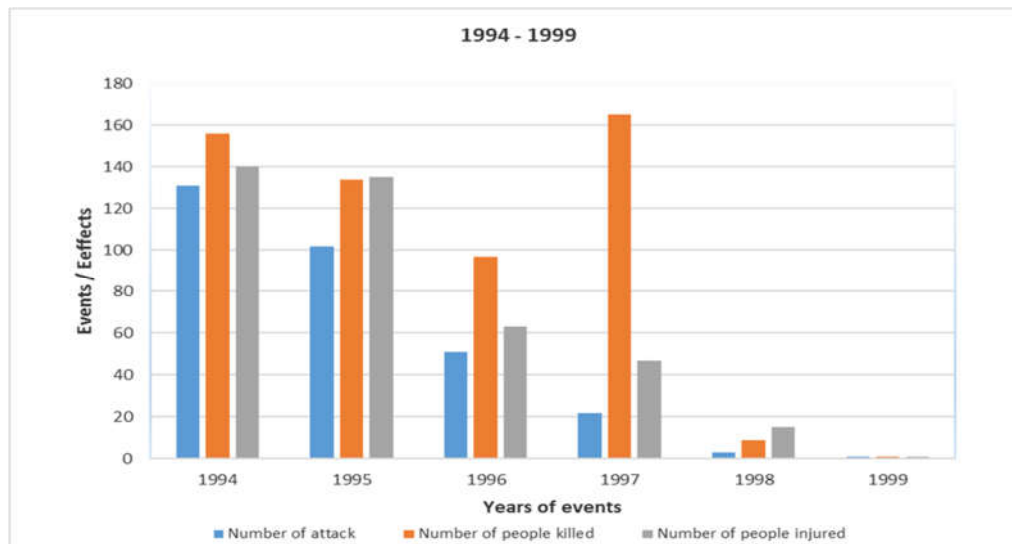
Source: prepared by the author with Data from the Global terrorism Database (GTD).

Although the ceasefire declaration marked the end of the Al-Gama't al Islamiyya's activities and eventual demise, some members who survived the period, or who did not subscribe to the ceasefire started other groups, mostly abroad. Interestingly, Egypt witnessed relative peace between 2000 and 2003.

By 2004, with the emergence of groups like Tawhid al-Jihad, Takfir wal-hijra, Army of Islam, Abdullah Azzam Brigades, Jaljala Army, terrorism made a U-turn. Of all the groups mentioned, only

Takfir wal-hijra operated from Egypt. The others were either offshoot of Hamas that operated around the Sinai, except Abdullah Azzam Brigades which, although operated in Lebanon, also carried out some attacks in Egypt notably the Sinai bombings in 2004 and Sharm el-Sheikh bombings in 2005 (Pohl, 2014). Nevertheless, terrorism declined drastically between 2006 and 2012 as shown in figure 2 above.

Retaliatory Wave of Terrorism in Egypt: 2013-2016.

The period after the fall of the Brotherhood led government in 2013 marked a resurgence of terrorism in Egypt, on a scale not witnessed before in the country. The period is referred to as the retaliatory wave because of the objectives of the groups involved. This wave seeks to address some perceived injustice against some groups, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Bedouin tribesmen. The main actors are the Muslim Brotherhood aggrieved members, its affiliate, or sympathetic groups like Ansar Bayt al Maqdis, the Bedouin Tribesmen. It is important to note that the coming of ISIS onto the scene was because of the pledge of allegiance made by Ansar Bayt al Maqdis in November 2014 (Azoulay, 2015).

The retaliatory wave witnessed a scale of terrorism not been witnessed in Egypt when compared with the previous waves. The wave has seen the Muslim Brotherhood, a hitherto non-violent group embrace terrorism, and the Bedouin Tribes men moving from ordinary people seeking inclusion in the Egyptian society through peaceful means to people who have come to believe that terrorism is a tool for self-expression.

Figure 2. From decline to resurgence terrorism between 2004 and 2016
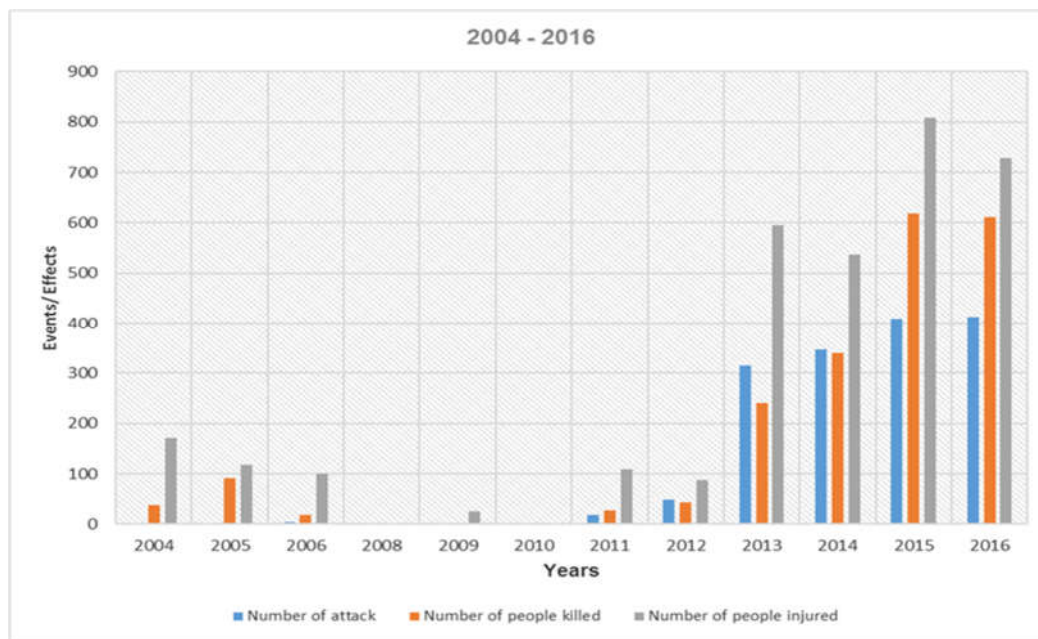
Source: prepared by the author with Data from the Global terrorism Database (GTD).

Factors Responsible for The Resurgence:

The position of this paper is that the resurgence of terrorism in Egypt after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood is rooted in a sense of injustice. This position is formed by examining the two major groups most responsible for that resurgence: the Bedouin tribesmen and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The study also argues that the groups' terrorism against the Egyptian state is not to spread any form of ideology, but because of a sense of injustice and deprivation, they harbor. Terrorism, for the groups, is a weapon for retaliation and to reclaim what should be theirs by right.

The Bedouin Tribesmen: A story of discrimination and Subjugation

The Bedouin are nomadic Arab people who live in the desert areas of the Sinai region in Egypt, but they are also found in other parts of the MENA region. The term "Bedouin" originated from the Arabic "badawī", which means, "desert dweller". They migrated to the Sinai in the 7th century CE, from the present-day Saudi Arabia (Hitti, 1996). Because of their nomadic way of life, the Bedouins are usually treated unfairly, and regarded as unsuited modern societies. They are predominantly herdsmen, while some of them engage in smuggling and drug trafficking. Majority of them practice the Islamic religion (Amara et al, 2012).

The Bedouins constitute about 70 percent of the residents of the Sinai Peninsula. Successive governments in Egypt either have neglected them or have come up with polices that subjugated them. However, as Khashan (2018) noted that the only time the Bedouin experienced respite was at the time of occupation of the Sinai Peninsula by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. The Israeli occupying government did not interfere with their lifestyle, instead provided them with economic opportunities. However, the Camp David Accord that returned the region to Egyptian government put the Bedouins in a place of disadvantage.

The Egyptian government, upon taking over the region, described the Bedouins as non-Egyptians, restricted their movement, erected fences to keep them away. It also ensured that Bedouins were not employed in any government establishment in the region. More so, Bedouins who wish to move into the hinterland were required to get visa (Breen, 2013). Successive governments have maintained that status quo against the Bedouins. They are regarded as second-class citizens and are denied membership of the military, police, and civil service. The government constantly harasses them; their homes raided, which usually leaves them with a sense of humiliation in a place they call home. For example, after the attacks on Taba and Sharm el-Sheikh in 2004 and 2005, the government arrested more than 3,000 Bedouins, even after Abdullah Azzam Brigades had claimed responsibility (Khashan, 2018).

Although the Bedouins were subjected to injustice and dehumanization, they engaged in non-violent demonstration severally, held in dialogues, and sent emissaries to discuss with the Egyptian government for a better deal for themselves (Stewart, 2020). They equally took active part during the Egyptian revolution (Graham-Harrison, 2015). The only close they had come to violence was kidnapping for money or to secure the freedom of a fellow tribesmen from prison. They sometimes blocked Multinational Force and Observers bases to make the government address their grievances. For example, between January and February 2012, the Bedouin tribesmen abducted two American women and twenty-five Chinese workers in North Sinai. Their action was motivated by the arbitrary detention of their tribesmen whom they wanted the government to release in exchange for the hostages (Nelson, 2012).

However, the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood after the post Arab Spring election was perceived by the Bedouins as a positive indicator for their freedom. According to them, all the previous governments were nationalistic, and secular hence did not care about them. But because of the Brotherhood's pledge to the Islamic faith, the Bedouins believed their government was bound by the Sharia to further integrate and be responsible for their fellow Muslims, especially the poor and the marginalized, as enshrined in the Quran (Ahmed and Akins, 2012).

As expected, the only significant change for the Bedouin took place under the short-lived Brotherhood government. The government worked towards increasing spending in the Sinai, the enclave of the Bedouins. It also worked towards stopping discrimination and granting land permit to the Bedouins (El-Rashidi, 2013).

After the coup that removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power, the Sinai area became highly securitized. The destruction of over 1,200 tunnels that had served as smuggling routes for the Bedouins, and as one of the means of survival by most Bedouins tribesmen had a demoralizing effect on the people of the region. The government later pledged to develop the place to create more job opportunities for the Bedouins, but it was not kept (Khashan, 2018).

It is worthy to note that the Bedouins are not jihadist; neither are they trying to spread any ideology. They want to be accorded all civic rights available to citizens of Egypt. The frustration and the sense of injustice have led the Bedouins to adopt terrorism as an instrument that will bring them justice. Even when they fight alongside Islamist groups, they are often motivated by the need to address their subjugation by the state and not by religion (Rageh, 2013). According to Aftandilian and Gregorian (2018), the population of Sinai accommodated terrorists, especially those from the Brotherhood and the Islamic State because of their grievance against the Egyptian government, and not because they believed their ideology. In doing that, they passed a message to the government for the need to address their challenges.

The unjust treatment of Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters.

The Muslim Brotherhood, as already noted in this paper, believed in democratic process hence the group participated in the Post-Arab Spring election. The group's political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) fielded Mohamed Morsi as its candidate, who eventually won the election and was sworn in as the fifth President of Egypt. However. Barely one year in power, he was removed by a military coup led by Abdul Fatah al-Sisi.

After the coup the group wanted to reclaim its mandate by demonstrating peacefully against the military government. However, every peaceful attempt was met with force, brutality, and incarceration of its leaders and members. There was a debate among the Brotherhood members over what would be next line of action. Hashem (2016) stated that some members, especially the older generation denounced a non-violent approach, fearing that it would give legitimacy to the government's brutality against the group. The Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie even admonished, "Our peacefulness is stronger than bullets" (Biagini & Ardovini. 2022). But the younger generation believed that the government would not stop at nothing until every shred of the Brotherhood was gone. For them, it was time to confront the state (Tadros, 2015).

However, the Rabaa Massacre marked a turning point in their peaceful struggle to reclaim their popular mandate. Awad (2017) stated that at that point the Brotherhood became divided, with one group preferring political violence. Many other members who could not tolerate the pacifist disposition of the joined other militant groups notably the Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, Takfir wal-hijra, and the Army of Islam. Others moved to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State.

Unable to stomach the injustice suffered by the group, the youth wing of the Brotherhood in Egypt in full took up arms (Hashem, 2014). According to Tadros (2014), the Rabaa Massacre made the Brotherhood to form protection units to guard the group from the security forces. Nevertheless, the protection units became offensive because of the clampdown by the Egyptian government. This eventually gave rise to the emergence of a militancy, targeting police stations, military personnel, electricity towers, roads, and other infrastructure.

At that point, some members of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, most of whom had escaped Egypt during the wake of massive campaigns by the Mubarak Regime, but returned after the Arab Spring, joined rank with some members of the youth wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. That union gave rise to massive terrorism, such that in November 2014, the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (Awad & Hashem, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2014), and has led Egypt back to the road of terrorist activities.

Conclusion

The resurgence of terrorism in Egypt, after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, as demonstrated in the paper, has its foundation on the feeling of injustice by the Muslim Brotherhood, its affiliates, and supporters, and not on radical Islamic ideology or economic challenges as dominated in literature. The ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood-led democratically elected government by the military, as well as the violent suppression of its demonstrating members and sympathizers was interpreted as injustice that needed to be confronted through any available means. In the same vein, the Bedouin tribesmen perceived the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood government as the end of their aspiration for a just, inclusive, and equitable society.

More so, the paper shows that the place of radical Islamic ideology in terrorism in Egypt is, although substantial but dynamic. It can serve as a major driver, a tool for recruitment, and a ground for justification. As such, the division of terrorism in the country into waves helped to situate the dominant factor that motivated it at various times. Unlike in the first and second waves, where the dominant motivation was the struggle between the Islamists and the secularists over which ideology should control the state, the third wave springs from an accumulated grievance harbored by both the Bedouins tribesmen and the Muslim Brotherhood.

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Ikenna Steve Nweke, 2022, 7(3):29-41

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