

# **Shifting Ideological Commitments and Political Practices in Al-Jama‘a Al-Islamiyya: From Radicalism to Moderation and Back**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis explores whether the participation of the Lebanese Islamic Group (al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya) in the October 7 Israel-Hamas War (2023) signifies a return to a confrontational ideology of Muslim solidarity that contrasts with the broader regional Muslim Brotherhood platform, marking a shift from a period of political moderation noted by Western scholars. By investigating the political and ideological shifts within al-Jama‘a during its engagement in Lebanese politics, the study examines the group’s oscillation between radicalism and moderation. Key events explored include the resurgence of founder Fathi Yakan’s ideology in 2022 and the contrasting political visions of the moderate Secretary-General elected in 2017 and the hardliner elected in 2022. The study seeks to uncover the factors behind al-Jama‘a’s initial move towards moderation and its subsequent shift, questioning whether efforts to promote inclusion and moderation within the group have reached a critical juncture. The findings highlight how al-Jama‘a’s balance between ideological purity and political pragmatism is shaped by regional dynamics, contributing to the broader understanding of political Islam in the Middle East and the challenges Islamist movements face in aligning their ideological commitments with political realities in countries like Lebanon.

**Keywords:** The Islamic Group, Political Islam, Democratization, Moderation, Fathi Yakan, Shari‘a, Jihad, Israel-Hamas War 2023, Muslim Brotherhood

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## Notes on Translation

All translation from Arabic sources are my own unless otherwise indicated. While translation is inherently a selective re-description of the original, I have endeavored to maintain as much fidelity to the original Arabic versions as possible. Translated words or expressions are marked in italics within single quotation marks (' ').

## General Notes

In May 2023, I chose to analyze The Islamic Group's manifesto for this thesis. During the initial stage of collecting information, I encountered the following issues:

- First, the website address ([http://www.al\\_jamaa.net/](http://www.al_jamaa.net/)) no longer exists, despite being referenced as a source in Abdulghani Imad's article (Imad 2009), and in Wikipedia's sources (Ikhwanwiki, Wikipedia n.d.). The current official website of al-Jama'a is [al-jamaa.org](http://al-jamaa.org) (Al-Jama'a n.d.).
- Second, the new website was created in 2016, as indicated by the copyright date at the bottom of the site. Consequently, the old documents of al-Jama'a prior to 2016 are not included.
- Third, al-Jama'a's political vision from 2017 is not available on the new website and has been replaced by another vision, the principles of which contradict the 2017 vision. In an informal conversation on the 26th of May 2023, a former member of al-Jama'a mentioned that a cyber-attack occurred in 2022, the same year a new Secretary-General was elected, which led to an older vision being restored, replacing the 2017 vision, due to the lack of an IT specialist, according to what they were told by al-Jama'a.
- Fourth, the vision of 2022 dates back to April 9, 2001, which explains why the former member called it an older vision.

For visual evidence of these issues and changes, including screenshots of the relevant documents, please refer to the Appendix section where these printed shots are included. However, since there is no source confirming that the cyber-attack occurred, I personally and informally contacted the former Secretary-General of al-Jama'a and the current head of the Political Bureau, Azzam al-Ayoubi, after the site administrator refused to answer my question about the alleged cyber-attack. Al-Ayoubi confirmed that a cyber-attack occurred in 2022 but could not recall the exact date. He expressed surprise that the 2017 vision is not present on the new website, as it is the approach they currently follow. As mentioned, al-Jama'a's website does include an article announcing its sociopolitical commitment to the 2017 vision; however, the details are not published. Consequently, I had to obtain them from several sources, such as media broadcasts of al-Jama'a's conference and a written copy provided by Malik Faisal Mawlawi, the son of al-Jama'a's founder.

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# 1. Introduction

The Israel-Hamas War, which witnessed its latest escalation since October 7, 2023, has brought the Islamic Group (al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya) in Lebanon into the spotlight. Once isolationist, quietist even, al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya (henceforth al-Jama‘a) has now publicly declared its involvement in the conflict 11 days later, on October 18, 2023 (Dhaibi 2023). After two decades of maintaining a moderate stance, one generally promoted by Muslim Brotherhood parties in the larger region, with which al-Jama‘a is often associated, al-Jama‘a had aligned itself with the defense of the Palestinian cause. Indeed, some reports suggest that Hezbollah, the most powerful Lebanese Islamic Shiite faction, might draw al-Jama‘a into the war in southern Lebanon to secure Sunni support following the war’s escalation (Diab 2023). The time frame presented by such observations, however, may prove inaccurate. This thesis posits that al-Jama‘a’s declared participation in the “axis of resistance” following the election of a new Secretary-General in 2022, actually stems from a revival of this Tripoli-based Muslim Brotherhood party’s long forgotten ideological origins as laid out by its founder Fathi Yakan (1933–2009). This constitutes an important, but largely unacknowledged shift away from the party’s more recently held position of moderation and sectarian loyalty to Lebanese Sunni parties hostile to Hezbollah, a platform taken after the 2006 war. In other words, as research for this thesis discovers, al-Jama‘a voiced its alliance with a broader coalition resisting Israel while highlighting a shift in the party’s rhetoric and domestic strategy, a full year prior to the events in Gaza. This thesis thus explicitly sets a timeframe for internal Lebanese politics, alliances between former rivals, and the possible end to Sunni-Shiite sectarianism to events prior to October 2023. Distancing itself from the recent media reframing of Middle Eastern politics as entirely a reaction to October 2023, this thesis will analyze the possible factors contributing to these changes predating 2023 by adopting a political ethnography to account for what will prove to be a missing element in the scholarship on contemporary Lebanese politics.

This shift noted in its statement in 2022 marks a significant turning point in al-Jama‘a’s history. The dynamics behind the change warrants a new examination of its leadership’s evolved political practices and strategic decisions. As the most organized Sunni Islamic organization in Lebanon, founded in the northern city of Tripoli, al-Jama‘a’s evolution remains an academic mystery that needs a new look considering recent events. Indeed, unacknowledged in any of the English-language scholarship on Lebanese domestic politics or the larger research on the Muslim Brotherhood more generally, al-Jama‘a has undergone several stages of intellectual and structural transformation over the decades.

Since its founding, it has remained committed to the two core principles of the Muslim Brotherhood organization: the application of Islamic law (Shari‘a) and jihad for the liberation of Palestine (Imad 2006, p.57-58). In this regard, al-Jama‘a’s ideology was closely aligned with the Islamic advocacy of Egyptian founder Hassan al-Banna. In time, however, it evolved towards a more “actionable ideology” under the founder of al-Jama‘a at the time, Fathi Yakan (1933–2009), a reflection on Yakan’s adoption of Sayyid Qutb’s “jihadist ideology” (Rabil 2011, p.32-33). This ideological evolution was evident in the contradiction between al-Jama‘a’s intellectual stances and its political practices since the decision to enter formally into the Lebanese political arena after the signing of the Ta’if Accord in September 1989 (Imad 2006, p.64). Prior to 1989, Yakan’s party had largely remained out of Lebanese politics, a principle of moderation only partially challenged in the works of even Qutb. Answering the question of why the decision to suddenly part-take in Lebanese election requires a deeper consideration of the Ta’if agreement overseen by the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Ta’if, which ended the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990), stipulated a “new power-sharing formula” to ensure “more equal representation of Christians and Muslims” (Barclay 2007, p.6). The shift in al-Jama‘a’s ideology came in response to some of the restrictions put on Lebanon after the Ta’if Accord, including the blocking of the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon (Imad 2006, p.64). This explicit feature in the accords interfered in a process which al-Jama‘a had formally sought for decades. As explored in chapter three, the party adapted and became increasingly invested in participating in Lebanese politics availed by way of elections. The results were less than adequate for many in the party.

Another pivotal moment thus occurred in 2003, with internal disagreements over this policy of gradualism in moderation leading to the defection of its jihadi-minded founder, Fathi Yakan. This dramatic event precipitated further changes, culminating in 2017 when the reconfigured leadership issued a new framework for action, a vision within a Lebanese context that caused al-Jama‘a to break ties with its Islamic traditions and promising to turn al-Jama‘a “into a more open, transparent, and dynamic political party” (Lefèvre 2016). This capitulation to the demands of the American Embassy and its Saudi allies ended in 2022 with the aforementioned election of a new Secretary-General who re-emphasized Shari‘a and jihad (Al-Jama‘a n.d.), reflecting a return to Yakan’s original ideology.

This thesis aims to explore the political practices and visions of al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya as it evolves over these four stages, focusing particularly on the leadership changes and the broader political context in Lebanon. As al-Jama‘a initially relied on the writings of Yakan to reflect its political visions (Imad

2006, p.41), those works will serve as the backbone of this study. After Yakan's final defection in 2003, when al-Jama'a shifted towards moderation, the political visions of 2003 and 2010 articulated in sources studied below represented attempts to integrate into Lebanese society by acknowledging the impracticality of Islamic rule in Lebanon (Imad 2006, p.100). The subsequent vision of 2017 marked an event greater departure from the party's Islamist origins, promoting inclusivity and civil governance. The vision of 2022 signals a reversion to a more exclusionary and religiously stringent discourse, likely in response to external threats and internal ideological consolidation.

These transformations require examination in terms of how these ideological shifts, particularly the contrasting visions of the moderate Secretary-General elected in 2017 and the hardliner elected in 2022, shaped al-Jama'a's participation in Lebanon's political landscape. This examination is possible when adopting the lens of political ethnography. Through a variety of interactions with members of the party that includes their accounting of the documents the party produced over these four periods of transformation, this study seeks to understand the complex interactions and decisions within al-Jama'a that have led to its current ideological stance and its participation in the October 7 war. By closely examining the group's leadership dynamics, political strategies, and responses to both internal and external pressures by way of a political ethnography, this research will help provide new insights into Lebanese politics, add a new layer to the larger scholarship in Middle East Studies on Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, and perhaps provide new guidance about how we must study such groups in Lebanon moving forward.

## **1.1. Methodology**

As stated above, this thesis utilizes political ethnography as its primary methodological approach, allowing for a close examination of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's ideologies and political practices.

### **1.1.1. Political Ethnography**

Political ethnography involves immersing oneself in political environments to observe and participate directly in political processes, providing a real, on-the-ground perspective of the group's actions (Schatz 2009). This method employs various qualitative techniques, such as participant observation and document analysis, to understand political behaviors and interactions (Wedeen 1999). In this study, political ethnography is applied through direct observation of al-Jama'a's activities within

Tripoli, Lebanon. These observations were made during my extended stay in the city, where I had the opportunity to witness and analyze the group's political behavior and community interactions.

Loïc Wacquant defines ethnography as "social research based on close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think, and feel the way they do" (Wacquant 2003, p.5). This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of the lived realities within al-Jama'a and how its ideological shifts manifest in practical terms.

Political ethnography provides both a lens and a set of tools to simultaneously address two central issues within the concept of repertoire: the influence of structural change on collective action and the evolution of the culture of popular protest (Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007, p.4). This thesis utilizes political ethnography to examine in detail the underlying structures of political institutions and their associated practices. It is particularly well-suited to clarify why political actors behave as they do and to identify the causes, processes, and outcomes that are integral to political life (Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007, p.2). The study also draws on a wide range of publicly accessible sources, such as speeches, media reports, and official statements by al-Jama'a leaders, which were critically analyzed alongside direct observations during my residency in Tripoli to provide a comprehensive understanding of the group's ideological evolution. In addition to engaging ethnographically with the political tools of al-Jama'a and some of its members, the larger thesis will rely on the use of sources that require a different set of analytical methods.

### **1.1.2. Empirical Data**

The empirical data for this thesis draws on a wide range of sources, including documents, political visions, speeches, and publicly available statements from the leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, as well as scholarly writings and media reports.

Primary sources for this study include al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's political frameworks, leaders' statements, and the writings and interviews of Yakan, all of which serve as crucial materials. After Yakan's defection in 2003, al-Jama'a released two political visions in 2003 and 2010. Since these visions are not included in the new platform created in 2016, insights into them are drawn from Abdulghani Imad's book and the *Al-Jazeera* website, respectively (Imad 2006, Al-Masri 2010). The 2017 vision, which is not accessible online after a cyberattack in 2022, is included in the Appendix

after I obtained a printed copy from Faisal Mawlawi's son, while a screenshot of the 2022 vision, still accessible on the group's official website till now, is also provided in the Appendix (Al-Jama'a n.d.).

Additionally, the study examines a variety of materials, including books, magazines, reports, and journal articles. Many of these sources are available online, including archived statements and interviews with al-Jama'a's leaders. These documents, along with scholarly studies, are key to analyzing the shifts in al-Jama'a's political ideologies and practices, offering a comprehensive understanding of the group's evolution.

These sources were carefully selected to offer a deep understanding of the group's history, ideology, and political strategies. Each chapter integrates this data to critically examine the evolution of al-Jama'a, with a focus on its ideological transformations as registered in the content of their released materials and how individual members account for them by way of political action.

## **1.2. Objectives**

As this thesis aims to explore the ideological and political evolution of the Lebanese Islamic Group (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya), focusing on its oscillation between radicalism and moderation, the study must examine the group's participation in pluralist political processes and the factors that influenced its ideological trajectory.

In the process, this thesis addresses two key research questions:

- How did al-Jama'a's participation in the pluralist processes influence its ideological stance towards moderation, as reflected in its 2017 vision under Azzam al-Ayoubi?
- What internal and external factors contributed to the ideological shift of al-Jama'a towards a more radical stance under Mohamad Takoush's leadership in 2022?

The research questions are designed to concentrate on the key periods of ideological change within al-Jama'a, allowing the analysis to stay focused and within the study's intended scope. By adopting this approach, the study aims to provide a clearer understanding of how political participation has influenced the group's ideological shifts. As mentioned above, a variety of documentary evidence has been utilized to answer these research questions, including an examination of al-Jama'a's historical

ideologies, the circumstances leading to the changes in its visions from 2017 to 2022, and the agenda behind its alliances with other Islamist movements, particularly Hezbollah and Hamas.

In order to successfully accomplish this agenda, it will be necessary to move beyond the leading scholarly approaches adopted by political scientists studying the larger region. One of the ways this thesis challenges conventional scholarly approaches is by questioning the assumption that such groups could be utilized if integrated into a “process” that is often characterized in the scholarship as democratization (Schwedler 2006). The Bush administration’s 2003 strategy to promote this democratization in the Middle East aimed to include Islamists in the political process to prevent the region from becoming a breeding ground for violence (The White House 2003). Scholars like Gilles Kepel suggested that by 1996, a significant decline of Islamist movements generally and their shift towards moderation took place after the failure of jihadists in various political fronts (Kepel 2003, pp. 299-322). Al-Jama‘a’s shift towards moderation in 2003 and the subsequent developments marked such a change. These changes, however, will be examined over the long term to assess whether efforts to encourage its transition towards moderation were in fact successful. As observed throughout, since 2021, through Hamas mediation, al-Jama‘a actually formed an alliance with Hezbollah (Qasem 2021), indicating a faltering integration into the Lebanese democratic politics as the Americans wished and Western scholars promised. While not the kind of “integration” Western policy makers advocated, this new alliance does, nevertheless, indicate an oscillation between extremism and moderation that, though unrecognized in much of the scholarship, does prove essential to understand what has happened “after October 7, 2023.”

### **1.3. Oscillating Between Islamism and Moderation**

Since the late 1990s, the Middle East has witnessed a broader trend of “post-Islamism” where secular democratic states coexist with religious societies (Bayat 2010, p.7). The Bush administration’s belief in the coexistence of democracy and Islam (The White House 2003) corresponded with scholars at the time who argued that Islamist participation in democracy was necessary to avoid “radicalism” among those “uncommitted to democratic norms” (Schwedler 2006, p.1).

Throughout this period, the “political trajectories” towards moderation were seen not to only depend on “elite-level decisions,” but also a variety of relations and practices (Schwedler 2006, p.6). By testing Jillian Schwedler’s comparative study model of the inclusion-moderation hypothesis (Schwedler 2006,

p. 24), one that was leading the Western scholarly interest in the Islamist moderation potential, this thesis will argue that al-Jama‘a’s inclusion in the moderation process, as promoted by Schwedler’s work, proved unsustainable.

The issuing of a moderate political vision in 2017 could have allowed Schwedler and others to conclude that, like their affiliates in Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen, Lebanon’s Muslim Brotherhood had also gravitated away from Islamist violence to accommodating an American vision of Islamic coexistence with democracy (Bayat 2007). Since the late 20th century, moderate Islamic parties, known as Muslim Democratic Parties (MDPs), have shifted from opposing democracy to supporting it by integrating Islamic values with democratic principles, including human rights and individual freedoms (Yildirim 2016). This change was also influenced by economic growth and global connections, helping these parties play a significant role in democratizing Muslim countries (ibid, p.10). Indeed, Hasan al-Turabi in Sudan articulated best what was happening. As he reinterpreted Shura (the practice of consultation among members of society), it was increasingly possible to believe Islamic governance could align more closely with democratic ideals, though rooted in Islamic values rather than Western concepts. Al-Turabi grew famous in the 1990s by emphasizing the need for constantly rethinking Islamic teachings to fit modern social and political contexts, showing how Islamic political thought is continuously evolving (Moussalli 1994, pp. 57-60). Scholars like Schwedler were thus exonerated when offering a theory for Islamists participation that would include Lebanon.

However, as demonstrated by exploring its internal Arabic-language content, al-Jama‘a’s journey towards moderation proved fraught with challenges unanticipated by Schwedler and others. While the group made significant strides towards moderation engagement in 2017, various internal and external pressures ultimately led to its reversion to radical ideologies in 2022. By focusing on the moderate Secretary-General’s vision in 2017 and the hardliner’s vision in 2022, this thesis will analyze how, paradoxical to Schwedler’s model, al-Jama‘a’s participation in Lebanon’s pluralist political processes actually negatively influenced its ideological trajectory. The vision of 2017 promoted a modern civil state and refrained from external conflicts while the vision of 2022 re-emphasized Shari‘a and jihad. This analysis will seek to understand the Islamist’s challenges in moderation within Lebanon’s sectarian regime and its broader implications for Middle East politics, challenges that were not registered by scholars using Schwedler’s paradigm. To best appreciate these challenges the party faced in the 2017-2022 period, it is crucial to explore the roots of al-Jama‘a as it mirrors the rise of its main ideologue until 2009, Fathi Yakan.

#### 1.4. Roots of Al-Jama‘a in Lebanon and Islamist Fathi Yakan

In the 1950s, many Islamic movements began to grow across the Arab world, significantly influencing large groups of Lebanese Sunni Muslims. The Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt and Mustafa al-Siba'i in Syria (Imad 2009, p.2), led to the formation of al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya in 1964 by “Tripoli natives Fathi Yakan and Faysal Mawlawi” (Gambill 2007, p.6). Al-Jama‘a’s advocacy for the Palestinian cause has been central to its Islamic ideology viewing Palestine as a “Muslim land” that must be liberated (Abu-Amr 1993, p.5).

The organizational and educational legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood and “Yakan’s writings” constituted al-Jama‘a’s basic and essential materials and resources (Imad 2009, p.2). Yakan’s ideology was influenced by Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb; however, he leaned more toward the “actionable ideology” of Qutb to face the challenges of this fateful battle (Rabil 2011, p.33).



Figure 1. Fathi Yakan (February 9, 1933 – June 13, 2009)

Through his writings, Yakan began calling for the necessity of establishing a single global Islamic movement. In the 1970s, Yakan presented himself as an Islamic thinker whose interests transcended the borders of the homeland through his book, (ماذا يعني انتمائي للإسلام) ‘*What Does My Belonging to Islam Mean*’, (Yakan 1979). He considers that a Muslim is not completely Muslim except by his active affiliation to Islamic movement, which its organizational characteristics can be defined among others by openness in work but secrecy of organization and belief in the strategic orientation for long-range victory (Yakan 1979, p.117). This book summarizes the intellectual project of al-Jama‘a in that period. It is crucial to note that Yakan’s call to those belonging to al-Jama‘a to adhere to the secrecy of the organization was the answer to the questions of many about the reason for the ambiguity that usually

surrounded al-Jama‘a. It can be considered, in addition, one of the transformations that occurred in al-Jama‘a when it issued its vision of 2017 in a public conference, abandoning its old policy of holding meetings in closed rooms.

With the eruption of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, the Islamic Group was immersed in the internal conflict, participating alongside the Palestinians and the National Movement against Christian Maronite forces (A. N. Hamzeh 1997). In 1979, Yakan wrote a book entitled, (المسألة اللبنانية من منظور إسلامي) ‘*The Lebanese Issue from An Islamic Perspective*’, that addresses the causes of the war and solutions (Yakan 1979, p.16). He concluded that the background of the crisis proves the failure of the Lebanese system, calling for implementing Islamic law (Shari‘a) on a basis that the Christian religion does not have its own constitution (Yakan 1979, p.134). He argued that since Christianity lacks its own constitution, Lebanon's system will rule with a non-Christian constitution in all cases. Thus, since Shari‘a is accepted by the Arab Muslim majority and majority rule is a global standard, it should be considered (Yakan 1979, p.134). Yakan also believed that Lebanon should be integrated into a larger entity, reverting to its status before 1920 as part of the Levant (prior to Lebanon’s division from Syrian unity under the French mandate), arguing that any other solution would be a temporary solution that worsens the situation (Yakan 1979, p.136). However, Yakan's ideology shifted after the Ta’if Accord, as al-Jama‘a members decided to participate in Lebanese politics and the 1992 parliamentary elections (Imad 2009, p.3).

### **1.5. Engaging in local politics**

The Ta’if Accord declared Lebanon’s “Arab identity and belonging” (Salloukh 2015, p.21), redistributed political power, elevated the Shi‘a community, and positioned Syria as the postwar arbiter. It shifted executive power from the Maronite president to the Council of Ministers, emphasizing the “covenant of mutual coexistence” (Salloukh 2015, p.22) to prevent domination by either the Muslims or the Christians. This restructuring turned Lebanon’s political system into a consociational partnership, resulting in the “troika,” where all the political decisions required the agreement of the three heads of state (Salloukh 2015, p.23).

After the signing of the Ta’if Accord, al-Jama‘a recognized the impracticality of establishing an Islamic order and adapted to operate within the Lebanese political framework (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.6). This adaptation led to internal divisions in 1996, particularly between Fathi Yakan and then

Secretary-General Faysal Mawlawi over alliances with the secular Sunni party, Future Movement (Imad 2009, p.6). After Yakan's departure in 2003, al-Jama'a adopted an even more moderate stance, culminating in the 2016 election of Azzam al-Ayoubi as Secretary-General. Once elected, al-Jama'a eliminated its website, along with its historical Islamic visions and practices, and created a new platform reflecting al-Ayoubi's moderate political vision, (رؤية وطن) '*Vision of a Nation*', issued in 2017. This vision indicated a new leadership committed to adhering to the Lebanese constitution and asserting Lebanon's neutrality in external events (Fadel 2017).

The 2017 vision emerged amid a divided regional political discourse, with factions supporting either dialogue or armed resistance against Israel. This division was evident in Lebanon after the 2005 assassination of the former PM Rafiq Hariri and Syria's withdrawal leading to formation of the Sunni-led 14 March alliance, which is externally aligned with the USA and Saudi Arabia, and the predominantly Shi'a, though not exclusively, 8 March alliance, which is allied with Syria and Iran (Salloukh 2015). The known leaders of al-Jama'a split with Mawlawi aligning with the government and Yakan joining the opposition (Gambill 2007, p.13), further shaping its democratic trajectory.

In 2022, Mohamad Takoush, affiliated with the Hamas and Hezbollah factions, was elected Secretary-General (Barakat 2022). Following his election, a cyber-attack on al-Jama'a's website replaced the 2017 vision with the 2022 vision (Al-Jama'a n.d.), aligning with Yakan's pre-2003 ideology. As the party's vision dating back to April 9, 2001, when Mawlawi was Secretary-General and Yakan was still in the ranks of al-Jama'a, this largely unreported change within the leadership of al-Jama'a would initiate a new era of regional politics. The quiet replacement of the two visions first reflects internal ideological struggles and then external influences. The subsequent reversion to fundamentalist principles and renewed emphasis on Shari'a and jihad meant that as of 2022, al-Jama'a rejected the call for a civil modern state and advocated for jihad against Israel, a platform on which the party leadership had since 2017 advocated while eliminating any mention of Shari'a and prohibiting military intervention outside Lebanon's borders. This study will examine these shifts to understand al-Jama'a's evolving political and ideological landscape, contributing to the broader discourse on Islamism and moderation in Lebanon and the Middle East. To best realize such an examination requires a survey of the extant scholarship on the topic, in part because much of this literature did not capture the evolution of the party and its significance to Lebanese politics.

## **1.6. Scholarship**

A significant body of scholarship has examined the history, ideology, and practices of al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya, as well as Islamism in Lebanon and the broader region. These studies consistently highlight the origins, development, relationships with other Islamic movements, and adaptation to local political contexts. Understanding the ideological and political evolution of al-Jama‘a, particularly its oscillation between moderation and radicalism, requires an in-depth examination of the group's foundational principles—Shari‘a and jihad—within the political visions of its leadership.

### **1.6.1. Historical Context**

Abdulghani Imad provides an in-depth analysis of the intellectual and political evolution of al-Jama‘a, highlighting its initial adherence to the principles of the Muslim Brotherhood and its subsequent pragmatic adaptations (Imad 2006). He has extensively studied the history of al-Jama‘a in Lebanon, highlighting its intellectual and political evolution until 2006. Primarily, Imad focused on al-Jama‘a’s internal organizational structure, where its members get educated in militarization and security awareness to (1) avoid al-Jama‘a’s exposure to penetration, and (2) preserve secrecy, concealment, camouflage, and monitoring. Then, he discusses al-Jama‘a’s political views and practices (Imad 2006, pp. 57- 69). Stressing that the liberation of Palestine is a major priority which cannot be achieved only through jihad. In Lebanon, the wars pushed al-Jama‘a towards delving into politics and its details. Al-Jama‘a’s inclusion into the political system is to prevent the monopolization of non-Muslims in power that does not only mean the disappearance of Muslims but also the disappearance of Islam in Lebanon. Imad also discusses the ideological differences between leaders like Yakan and Faisal Mawlawi (Imad 2006, pp. 71-73), concluding with al-Jama‘a's political framework issued in 2003 (Imad 2006, pp. 102-105), which is not found in any other source. However, Imad does not delve deeply into al-Jama‘a’s military practices, focusing more on its political transformations.

The history and practices of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon cannot be fully understood without considering the Brotherhood’s practices in Egypt. Sana Abed-Kotob summarizes the practices of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, noting their continuous calls for constitutional access to the political system, based on the belief that an Islamic state will be built from the individual upward (Abed-Kotob 1995). The vast scholarship on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood largely supports this assessment (Munson 2001, Ehrenfeld 2011, Tadros 2012, Wickham 2002). Ziad Munson emphasizes that the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was deeply rooted in its ability to tie its Islamic message

to the everyday lives of Egyptians, making the organization highly relevant to both political and social contexts (Munson 2001). Rachel Ehrenfeld traces the evolution of the Brotherhood, emphasizing its pragmatic adaptation to changing political environments while maintaining its core ideology (Ehrenfeld 2011). Mariz Tadros highlights how the Brotherhood redefined its approach to democracy in contemporary Egypt, often balancing between ideological commitments and political necessities (Tadros 2012). What is inferred from the larger scholarship on the Egyptian party is the shared ideology between the Brotherhood in Egypt and al-Jama‘a in Lebanon in terms of (1) the belief that Islam is a religion and a state, (2) the implementing of Shari‘a to later reach the establishment of an Islamic state, (3) the participation in the political system which puts them in conflict with the radical Islamists, (4) the presence in parliament to monitor the regime and preserve the rights of Muslims, (5) jihad is obligatory for Muslims. There is also a fundamental issue in common between the two movements, which is that they later distanced themselves from the more extreme beliefs of Sayyid Qutb in favor of the original moderate founder of Hassan al-Banna (Abed-Kotob 1995). What the two movements differ in is that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has been exposed to many attempts to ban, while the democratic system in Lebanon has given al-Jama‘a a greater freedom.

Research by Tine Gade and Nisrine Ghassan Barakeh has contributed to understanding al-Jama‘a's activities during Syria's presence in Lebanon and the local dynamics in Tripoli, respectively (Gade 2015, Barakeh 2016). Tripoli's population is in majority Sunni Muslim (80.9%) and includes in addition to a Christian minority in decline, the largest Alawi community in Lebanon (8,9 %). This is presented in the research paper by the Norwegian researcher Tine Gade in 2015 (Gade 2015). She focuses on al-Jama‘a's activities during Syria's presence in Lebanon (1976-2005), particularly during the Hama massacre in 1982. Gade reveals that while some members supported the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, al-Jama‘a as an organization opposed the fighting in Syria, as al-Jama‘a pursued “a more pragmatic political strategy than the Syrian and Egyptian Brotherhoods,” noting that the failure of the “Islamist uprising” in Syria proved “that it could never work in Lebanon, because of the plural Lebanese society” (Gade 2015, p.26). She also explains how the Syrian intervention exacerbated divisions among the Sunni population in Tripoli, contributing to the complex local dynamics (Gade 2015). In fact, this distinction appeared clearly when al-Jama‘a lost its ties with its traditional Islamic principles in the political framework of 2017. Nisrine Ghassan Barakeh's thesis addresses the rise of Sunni Islamist movements in Northern Lebanon, particularly against the backdrop of the Syrian conflict (Barakeh 2016). She attributes the rise in Islamist appeal to the perceived deprivation and injustice felt by Tripoli's Sunnis, leading to increased radicalization and a desire for power. Her work is crucial for understanding the local dynamics in Tripoli and how the Syrian conflict influenced the

rise of Sunni Islamist movements, contributing to the decline of al-Jama‘a’s popularity and electoral success (Barakeh 2016). Her thesis also examines the reasons behind al-Jama‘a’s electoral defeats in recent years. These studies reveal how external conflicts and internal divisions influenced al-Jama‘a’s political strategies and contributed to its oscillation between moderation and radicalism. The primary prism by which scholars studied these divisions was the relative emphasis on the Shari‘a and jihad by different generations of party leadership.

### **1.6.2. Ideological Commitments**

The adaptability of Shari‘a within socio-political contexts is critically examined by scholars like Tariq Ramadan and Wael Hallaq, whose works underscore the tensions al-Jama‘a faces as it navigates its ideological commitments and the practicalities of political participation (Ramadan 2004, W. Hallaq 2009, W. B. Hallaq 2012). Tariq Ramadan, until recently, Europe’s most referenced Muslim Brotherhood public advocate, provide a nuanced understanding of the adaptability of Shari‘a within socio-political contexts (Ramadan 2004). He argues that “[i]n the area of human and social affairs, ... people have complete discretion to experiment, progress, and reform as long as they avoid what is forbidden” (Ramadan 2004, p.35). He stated that the notion of the common good “has been used to justify... *fatawa* [religious ruling or opinion issued by an Islamic scholar (Briggs 2023)]... even some that were manifestly in contradiction with obvious proofs from the Qur’an and the Sunna” (Ramadan 2004, p. 38). This adaptability can be seen in the democratic norms reflected in al-Jama‘a’s 2017 vision. Conversely, Wael Hallaq critically examines the challenges of integrating Shari‘a into modern state systems, arguing that the structural and ideological foundations of modern states are inherently incompatible with traditional Islamic governance (W. B. Hallaq 2012). He emphasized the contradiction between the modern state and Shari‘a (W. B. Hallaq 2012, p.7), saying that “modern forms of globalization” is “sufficient to render any brand of Islamic governance either impossible or, if possible, incapable of survival in the long run” (W. B. Hallaq 2012, p.9). Hallaq’s perspective underscores the tensions within al-Jama‘a as it navigates its ideological commitments and the practicalities of political participation. In another study, Hallaq addresses how the advent of modernity and European colonialism imposed significant changes, leading to the marginalization of Shari‘a in favor of Western legal systems (W. Hallaq 2009, p.153). He points out that modernity brought transformations, including structural "reform" based on the assumption that Shari‘a law contained "deficiencies" (W. Hallaq 2009, p.153) that needed to be corrected and replaced by "European models" (W. Hallaq 2009, p.177). Consequently, Shari‘a was "eviscerated, reduced to providing no more than the raw materials for the legislation of personal status by the modern state" (W. B. Hallaq 2012, p.7).

In the same context, Yussef Auf references those who argue that "Islam serves only as a religion," while the "vast majority of Islamic scholars" assert that Islam is "a religion and a state" (Auf 2016, p.2). Auf notes that amidst this debate, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged in Egypt in 1928, advocating for the application of Shari'a law in all aspects of life and promoting the slogan "Islam is the solution" (Auf 2016, p.6). These analyses provide crucial insights into the broader challenges of integrating Islamic law into modern state systems.

Scholars like Robert G. Rabil and Gilles Kepel have explored the ideological underpinnings of jihad within Islamist movements, including al-Jama'a, highlighting the group's commitment to jihad as a central aspect of its activism (Rabil 2011, Kepel 2003). Robert G. Rabil explores the ideological underpinnings of Yakan, emphasizing his commitment to jihad as a fundamental aspect of Islamic activism (Rabil 2011). Rabil concluded three ideas that Yakan believes in. First, Yakan apparently believed in Qutb's Jihadist ideology as he centered the methodology of Islamic activism on the "*Hakimiyah* (sovereignty)" of God (Rabil 2011, p.3). Second, Yakan believed that the existing political and economic system, complemented by a secular and materialistic ideology, threatened the very existence of Islam as global paradigm of thought and way of life. Third, Yakan emphasized as a priority of Islamic activism the destruction of this "*Jahiliyah* (the age of ignorance before God's message to Prophet Muhammad)" (ibid, p.2) system and society and setting up in its stead an Islamic state. However, in spite of that fact that Yakan believed in Qutb's jihadist ideology, he typified jihad more in terms of transformational than radical (revolutionary) activism (Rabil 2011). Rabil's approach led some Muslim scholars either to assume that Yakan's Islamic activism is ambivalent or not in line with the Muslim Brotherhood's actionable ideology and activism. Gilles Kepel provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of jihad within Islamist movements, detailing the shift from local insurgencies to global jihadist networks, particularly highlighting how the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union unified Islamists worldwide and marked a transition from nationalism to Islamism; he also notes that by the 1990s, internal conflicts and external pressures led to the fragmentation and decline of these movements (Kepel 2003, pp. 61-80, 299-322). However, Ahmad Moussalli, argues that political Islam is not in decline but is maturing, suggesting that the rise of Islamism as a popular political and religious trend continues, and the weakening of extremist groups does not necessarily translate to the weakness of moderate political Islam, but rather to its development and increased influence (Moussalli 2004, p.4). Their work provides a foundation for understanding al-Jama'a's continued emphasis on jihad and Shari'a, despite its fluctuating political strategies.

Three distinct poles of Islamism exist in Lebanon. Shi'a Islamism embodied by Hezbollah, and two distinct Sunni Islamism, Political Islamism embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, and Salafism. Gary C. Gambill provides a comprehensive understanding of Hezbollah and the competition between al-Jama'a and other Sunni Islamic forces (Gambill 2007). He discusses the rivalry with Dar al-Fatwa and Salafism, and the significant milestones in al-Jama'a's political life, though with some inaccuracies regarding the timeline of internal divisions. Gambill's analysis highlights the competitive landscape in which al-Jama'a operates, focusing on its efforts to establish its own network of schools and charities to counter the influence of Dar al-Fatwa. He also addresses how Hezbollah accepted a political order that perpetuated Shi'a deprivation in exchange for control over resistance in southern Lebanon (Gambill 2007). Although Gambill mentioned many important milestones in al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya's political life, he was not accurate in the part related to the period of al-Jama'a's division, as it occurred months before the war of 2006 and not after it. Gambill notes also that while al-Jama'a shares ideological commitments with Hezbollah, including the emphasis on jihad, it rejects the Shiite model of Islamic governance.

Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh addresses this issue saying that al-Jama'a believes in achieving an Islamic order based on "the Shari'a (Islamic sacred law) through jihad of the heart (spiritual struggle), jihad by word (education and propaganda), and jihad by hand (economic, political and military action)" (A. N. Hamzeh 1997). According to Hamzeh, Hezbollah's doctrine adheres to "Khomeini's theory that a religious jurist (*wilayat al-faqih*) should hold ultimate political power" (A. N. Hamzeh 1997). According to Hamzeh, the power of this jurist, encompassing both spiritual and political realms, is unassailable; his commands must be followed. Hezbollah perceives its mission as fulfilling a prophetic role by transforming Lebanon into an Islamic state, proclaiming in 1985 that Muslims must comply with the directives of the sole sagacious and equitable leader, embodied in the supreme jurisconsult, currently represented by Imam-Ayatollah Khomeini. This indispensable connection between divine guidance and the necessity of establishing an Islamic order makes Islam a comprehensive system of social existence in Hezbollah's ideology.

The call of al-Jama'a to abolish the political sectarianism is compatible with what the "proponents of liberal power-sharing arrangements" considers as "an institutional recipe to engineer democracy in deeply divided societies" (Salloukh 2015, p.12). Bassel Salloukh traces the institutionalization of sectarianism in Lebanon and the emergence of Sunni Islamic movements calling for the abolition of political sectarianism. He highlights the division of Lebanese politics into two main blocs after Syria's withdrawal in 2005, which influenced al-Jama'a's internal conflicts. Salloukh's study is significant for

understanding the broader political context in which al-Jama‘a operates, particularly the sectarian divisions that shape its strategies and alliances. He discusses the making of sectarian identities in Lebanon and how these identities influenced political alignments and conflicts.

### **1.6.3. Political Practices**

To assess al-Jama‘a’s participation in politics and parliamentary elections, a study by A. Nizar Hamzeh analyses the participation of the group as a major Islamic movement enjoying organizational and political functions similar to those performed by political parties (A. N. Hamzeh 2000). He suggests that al-Jama‘a’s gradualist approach helped it win municipal and parliamentary seats. Hamzeh’s analysis offers a detailed examination of how al-Jama‘a navigates the complexities of Lebanese politics, balancing its ideological commitments with practical political considerations. He argues that the group's strategy evolved to adapt to political realities, promoting gradualism over revolutionary change (A. N. Hamzeh 2000). However, Hamzeh's analysis can be seen as somewhat optimistic, given the series of electoral defeats that al-Jama‘a suffered as they obtained three seats in the 1992 elections, one in the 1996 elections, and none in 2000.

A parallel study regarding the shift to becoming moderate is analyzed by Jillian Schwedler, who examines the inclusion of Islamists in the democratic process and their potential movement from a relatively closed ideology to one that is more open, tolerant, and pluralist (Schwedler 2006). Schwedler highlights the importance of including Islamists in democratic processes to prevent radicalization and encourage political participation. Her work focuses on the transition process to moderation, structuring a process-model approach that assesses a variety of factors and the mechanisms that connect changes along various dimensions (Figure 2).

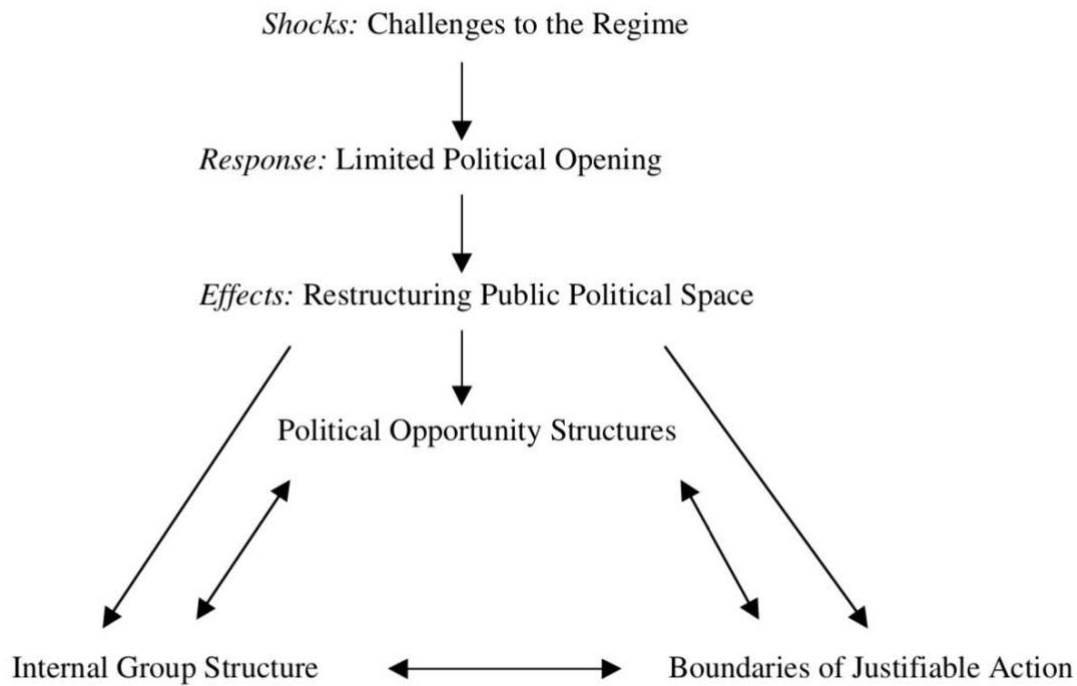


Figure 2. “Liberalization Producing Multiple Dimensions of Change” (Schwedler 2006, p. 24).

## 1.7. Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis

In this thesis, Schwedler’s model to study her inclusion-moderation hypothesis (Figure 2) is applied to explore al-Jama‘a’s moderation process from 1992 to 2017 and its stalled evolution in 2022. This model provides a lens to assess how al-Jama‘a’s participation in pluralist processes influenced its ideological shifts. Schwedler’s framework is particularly useful for analyzing the factors that influenced al-Jama‘a’s political trajectory and its potential for moderation. It illustrates how initial attempts at moderation and integration into the Lebanese political system eventually gave way to a reversion to more radical stances due to external and internal pressures. According to Schwedler’s framework, the efforts to organize politically are shaped by a variety of relations and practices, “including repertoires of contention, the efforts of the political elite to manage participation, the structure of oppositional groups, and the ideological commitments and resources of all political actors” (Schwedler 2006, p.85).

This thesis examines three interconnected aspects where an initial change in one area influences the dynamics of others, potentially leading to the adoption of new political behaviors and ideological moderation (or subsequent challenges to them). These aspects include political opportunity frameworks, initially transformed through state-led political openings; internal group structures and

decision-making processes; and the boundaries of justifiable actions. While these dimensions are neither exhaustive nor independent, they highlight the cyclical relationship between structures and practices that can help explain moderation. The primary challenge to the inclusion-moderation hypothesis is determining with certainty whether a political actor's views have genuinely become more moderate as a direct consequence of inclusion and identifying the mechanisms driving this change. Schwedler emphasizes that “[t]he core issue of moderation is ideological commitments, rather than only behavior” (Schwedler 2006, p.19). Thus, we need to analyze al-Jama‘a’s ideological commitments on Islam as both a religion and a state, which is clearly evident in its slogan, "Holy Qur’an and sword" (Figure 3).



*Figure 3: Flag of The Islamic Group*

This slogan reflects the traditional Muslim Brotherhood principles of implementing Islamic law (Shari‘a) and jihad. The analysis of al-Jama‘a’s ideological commitments, particularly its adherence to the principles of Shari‘a and jihad, illustrates how these commitments have influenced its political behaviors and participation in pluralist processes. By examining the group’s political visions in 2017 and 2022, this study demonstrates al-Jama‘a’s initial moderation and its subsequent return to a more radical stance, as evidenced by its involvement in the October 7 war. This shift is rooted in the revival of the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideologies, particularly the jihadist ideology of Fathi Yakan.

## **1.8. Key Definitions**

To define the key terms—moderation, radicalism, extremism, Shari‘a, and jihad—this study draws from various resources:

- Moderation: Defined not merely as a behavioral shift but as an ideological transition from a rigid, closed worldview to one more open and tolerant of differing perspectives (Schwedler 2006, p.22).
- Radicalism: Seeks fundamental changes in the socio-political order, often advocating drastic measures to achieve such transformations. The term is rooted in the Latin word "radix," meaning "root," and involves challenging the status quo, sometimes through extreme actions (Adnan and Amaliyah 2021, p.28).
- Extremism: Closely related to radicalism, extremism represents the final stage of the radicalization process. It involves deeply entrenched beliefs that deviate sharply from societal norms, often leading to extreme and socially dangerous actions, particularly when motivated by political or ideological hostility (Adnan and Amaliyah 2021, p.31).
- Shari'a: Islamic law that governed various aspects of life before the 19th century. It is derived from four main sources: the Qur'an, the Sunnah (practices and traditions of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh)), Ijma'a (consensus of Muslim scholars), and Qiyas (reasoning by legal analogy) (Asif 2021).
- Jihad: Derived from the Arabic root meaning "to strive" or "struggle," it also encompasses the duty to defend Islam and the Muslim community from attacks (Esposito 2002). Radicalism is present in all religions, but within Islam, the concept of jihad (holy war) is recognized by many scholars as a fundamental cause of extremism (Adnan and Amaliyah 2021, p.29).

## 1.9. Overview of the Chapters

To fulfill the objectives outlined above, this study comprises five chapters organized around the intellectual and political evolution of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Lebanon, with a focus on its oscillation between extremism and moderation from its inception to recent developments in 2023.

- **Chapter One** addresses the reasons for al-Jama'a's transition to moderation after it decided to benefit from the political openness of 1990 and participate in Lebanese public life.
- **Chapter Two** explores al-Jama'a's alliances with Islamist movements and political parties, along with its engagement in local politics.
- **Chapter Three** examines al-Jama'a's gradual participation in pluralistic political competition and the changes from 2003 until the issuance of the 2017 vision, addressing the first research question.

- **Chapter Four** explains the pressures that led al-Jama‘a to practices that contradicted its 2017 vision, addressing the second research question.
- **Chapter Five** analyzes the findings, providing insight into the motivations behind al-Jama‘a’s participation in the October 7 war.
- Finally, the **Conclusion** summarizes the thesis's findings and contributions, answers the two research questions, and offers ideas for future research.

## **2. Adapt to Change**

The modes of political contestation within contexts of elite-led openings elucidate the mechanisms at work in the inclusion-moderation hypothesis. To explore this hypothesis based on Schwedler's method, the study will focus on the ways in which the organizational structure and practices of al-Jama'a have evolved in response to the changing opportunities associated with the Lebanese political openness after the Ta'if Accord. The efforts to organize politically are shaped by different relationships and actions, including conflicts management, political leaders' control over participation, the structure of opposition groups, and the beliefs and resources of all political players (Schwedler 2006, p.85). Al-Jama'a capitalized on the political openness in 1990 and participated in the Lebanese public life. This chapter addresses the reasons for its participation in pluralist processes.

### **2.1. Reasons for Inclusion**

Lebanon, a Mediterranean Arab country, faces social, political, and economic turbulence due to structural imbalances, entrenched sectarianism, regional spillovers, and the influence of transnational Islamist groups such as al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Lebanon. Al-Jama'a, a major Sunni Islamist movement in Lebanon, draws inspiration from the ideology of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, dedicated to "Liberating the Islamic nation from foreign rule" and "establishing a free Islamic state" (Rabil 2011, p.5).

At the beginning of the nineties, al-Jama'a began adapting its ideologies to respond to changing circumstances. Several internal and external factors contributed to this flexibility, including: (1) The Ta'if Accord, which revived the Lebanese political system based on consensual democracy among various sects; (2) the Syrian presence, as Syria was tasked with implementing the Ta'if Accord, and the Islamists had already experienced the consequences of Syria's hostility, such as in Tripoli in 1985 when they rebelled against Syrian policy; and (3) post-Islamism, which emerged as the political climate shifted, particularly in Iran after Khomeini's death in 1989 and Rafsanjani's rise to power, marked by a pragmatic, conciliatory approach towards Arab and Islamic countries, including Lebanon (Imad 2006, p.64).

#### **2.1.1. Blocking the Path to Establishing an Islamic State**

Al-Jama‘a’s intellectual project began to conflict with its political practices after entering the Lebanese political arena. Since its inception, al-Jama‘a remained committed to two primary principles: establishing an Islamic state and engaging in jihad for the liberation of Palestine. Initially rooted in a moderate Islamic ideology aligned with al-Banna's thought, al-Jama‘a later developed towards extremism under Yakan’s influence, who leaned towards Qutb’s jihadist ideology. A fundamental change occurred after the Ta’if Accord in 1989, which obstructed the path to establishing an Islamic State (Imad 2009, p.4). Faced with the challenges of implementing its core principles, al-Jama‘a focused on adhering to the principle of jihad.

The Ta’if Accord, which marked the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), emerged from the state’s deterioration. Most members of the Lebanese Parliament (elected in 1972) met in Ta’if, Saudi Arabia, on October 22, 1989, and accepted a constitutional reform package that restored Lebanon’s convocational government in a modified form (Kingston 2024). The Accord's preamble declares Lebanon’s “Arab identity and belonging,” addressing the country’s longstanding identity crisis (Salloukh 2015, p.21). This declaration aimed to bridge the divide between conflicting sectarian perspectives on Lebanon’s history and to promote its political development. Initially, al-Jama‘a did not prioritize Arab unity as much as it focused on establishing an Islamic state in the region. Yakan and his colleagues sought to align with “the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology and dedication to establishing a free Islamic state” (Rabil 2011, p.5). Between its founding in 1957 and the official manifesto of 1964, al-Jama‘a engaged in a “short but not insignificant war in Lebanon” in 1958 after the endorsement of “the January 1957 Eisenhower Doctrine,” which angered Muslim politicians (Salloukh 2015, p.18). During this period, “some Muslim deputies ambiguously demanded union with the UAR [United Arab Republic],” unlike al-Jama‘a, which participated in the fighting to defend Muslims rather than advocate for Arab unity, due to its reservations about Nasser’s harsh policies against the Muslim Brotherhood (Rabil 2011, p.6). Recognizing that “Lebanon’s ethno-sectarian demography is manifestly unsuitable for the establishment of an Islamic state” (Gambill 2007, p.1), al-Jama‘a ultimately ruled out the idea of establishing an Islamic state after the Ta’if Accord. Initially, Yakan rejected the concept of “democratization,” warning Islamist movements against participating in “governments and parliaments” of systems of unbelief (Imad 2009, p.3). However, the facts and variables of the 1990s prompted al-Jama‘a to modify its political language and adopt the jurisprudence of necessity or stage-jurisprudence (Imad 2009, p.3).

Their decision to participate in political and electoral life in 1992 required justification, particularly in the face of criticism from Islamic opponents. In 1996, al-Jama‘a issued a statement of justification,

emphasizing that the parliamentary path was the only available route to change pre-Islamic regimes to an Islamic system. This statement framed the challenge not as an impossibility but as an obstacle to establishing full Islamic rule in a country with multiple religions and sects like Lebanon (Imad 2009, p.4). Consequently, concepts of gradualism were introduced until “God fulfills His command and allows the emergence of a new Islamic Dawn” (Imad 2009, p.4). Thus, al-Jama‘a became involved in the state project. This shift in the practical and pragmatic proposals that Yakan put forward in his writings marked a significant intellectual and political transformation. The previous beliefs of al-Jama‘a would not have persisted in post-war Lebanon. This shift led to the defection of many Islamic cadres and leaders from al-Jama‘a, constituting a significant drain on its progress and growth (Imad 2006).

### **2.1.2. Subjecting to Syrian Guardianship**

The Syrian presence in Lebanon (1976-2005) incentivized al-Jama‘a to integrate into the Lebanese political system after Syria was tasked with implementing the Ta’if Accord and rebuilding institutions. It was challenging for al-Jama‘a to advance its projects and operate its institutions effectively outside the power circle dominated by the political elite and Syria. Moreover, “Islamist groups that provide social welfare services to the community are more likely to develop a high level of interest in local politics than those that do not offer such services” (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.4). Over the years, al-Jama‘a successfully developed a nationwide network of “schools, clinics, and charities that provided much-needed services to impoverished rural and urban Sunni communities” (Lefèvre 2014, p.16). After the Syrian regime’s intervention in 1976, the Sunni community, particularly in Tripoli, experienced growing socioeconomic and political marginalization. This led many Sunnis to rely on the services provided by al-Jama‘a as an alternative to state services (Lefèvre 2014).

While the Syrian presence exacerbated the split in the Sunni population in Tripoli, this division was also influenced by national dynamics. The Syrian regime intervened in Lebanon in 1976 at the request of Christian conservatives to crush the momentum of the “Palestinian-Islamo-Progressive alliance” (Dawisha 1980, p.99). This intervention was viewed by “most radical Sunni Islamists in both countries as a nefarious power play by Alawites (the heterodox Islamic minority sect that dominates Syria’s Ba’athist regime) to subvert Sunni Influence” (Gambill 2007, p.6). In reality, this intervention aimed to secure more tangible strategic gains essential for the regime’s survival. Syrian control over north Lebanon and Tripoli was primarily motivated by the need to manage Islamists, prevent the rise of a popular Sunni leader, and share economic interests with elites and businessmen (Gade 2015).

### **2.1.2.1. Islamists in Tripoli – A Space Between Neglect and Oppression**

Syria was not necessarily threatened by Islamists because “they were easy to manipulate” (Gade 2015, p.36), thus it supported the rise of different strands of Salafism by “neglecting it” (ibid, p.31). The presence of Salafism in Tripoli, which increasingly resonated with local Sunni conservatives (Lefèvre 2014, p.18), suited the Assad regime because it (1) fragmented the religious scene and diminished al-Jama‘a’s influence (Gade 2015, p.31); (2) decreased Sunni voter turnout due to Salafism’s traditional aversion to electoral politics (Gambill 2007, p.12), thereby weakening the influence of Lebanese political Sunnism; and (3) provided Syria with a justification for its presence in Lebanon as a protector of the West from Jihadism (Daher 2014, pp.416-420).

Moreover, during the brief military rule of the Islamic Unification Movement (IUM) under the leadership of Said Shaaban, supported by Iran, the Syrian army besieged Tripoli but allowed IUM to retain power (Gade 2015). From 1983 to 1985, the conservative Sunni political party IUM controlled Tripoli, imposing an Islamic emirate and strict social norms on the local population (Lefèvre 2014, p.18). The demographic change in the city, as Tripoli’s Christian minority shrank from 20% of the population before the war to 5% today (Gambill 2007), further alienated the population. Shaaban’s method of implementing Islamic rule was violent, creating fear and alienation. For example, IUM cars patrolled the streets, warning women to wear the hijab or risk having firewater thrown on their faces. Leaflets urged people to beat women who wore immodest clothes, accusing them of spreading sedition. The IUM also detained young people associated with leftist and communist parties in its centers in Abu Samra, a high hill area in Tripoli, releasing them only after they memorized Surah Al-Baqarah. These practices led to widespread rejection in society. Many women who intended to wear the hijab rejected it at that time due to IUM’s practices. Syria’s neglect of the movement’s actions for two years, until Syrian troops ended the IUM’s “mini-state” in 1985 (Gambill 2007, p.7), served the Syrian regime by alienating the idea of establishing an Islamic state, accepting the Syrian presence, and surrendering the Islamists to the regime. Besides the IUM, Salafists and al-Jama‘a played “a prominent role in the battle against the Syrian army in 1985” (Gade 2015, p.23).

One of the key reasons for the Syrian regime’s intervention in Tripoli was that the city “was affected by the armed confrontations” carried out by the regime “against the Sunni Muslim opposition members in Homs, Hama, and Aleppo” (Gade 2015, p.24). While individual members of al-Jama‘a may have supported the cause of the Muslim majority in Syria, al-Jama‘a as an organization did not engage in

these conflicts (ibid). Tensions arose between the Syrian regime and al-Jama‘a due to the influx of Syrian Brotherhood members into Tripoli’s neighborhoods. In early 1979, the regime kidnapped Yakan for two weeks until popular pressure from al-Jama‘a led to his release (Reuters-Archive 1979). In late 1979, a delegation led by Yakan went to Syria and held extended talks with Syrian officials and President Hafez al-Assad, as recounted in an interview with Yakan (Al-Hiwar 2009). The Syrian regime convinced al-Jama‘a that maintaining good bilateral relations was essential for Syria’s strategic depth, according to an interview with al-Jama‘a’s leaders republished in 2021 (Al-Islamiyya 2021). Since then, al-Jama‘a has been cautious, to the extent of distancing itself from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s battles with the regime and opposing the fight pursued by the Syrian MBs, avoiding becoming a “Syrian MB auxiliary” (Gade 2015, p.26). However, the 1985 battle in Tripoli remains an exception, which al-Jama‘a now considers a mistake (Al-Islamiyya 2021). A notable point in this interview is the leaders’ lack of comment on Shaaban’s imposition of an Islamic emirate. Instead, Abdullah Babiti addressed Shaaban’s separation from al-Jama‘a to form the IUM, emphasizing that their disagreement with Shaaban was solely about his approach, not his underlying strategy, beliefs, or ideology (Al-Islamiyya 2021, min 47:07):

*‘And we did not disagree with him except in the approach. Meaning in strategy, in belief, in idea, in movement, there was agreement’*

Babiti is considered one of the first to publicly reveal al-Jama‘a’s conflicts and scandals. He had a history of disagreements with Yakan. After Yakan left al-Jama‘a’s General-Secretariat in the mid-nineties, he criticized the disastrous results of the 2000 elections for al-Jama‘a. In response, Babiti accused Yakan of controlling al-Jama‘a “for five decades,” exploiting “the first educational project” for personal gain and seizing al-Jama‘a’s funds (Imad 2009, p.5). After this public scandal, a reconciliation took place within al-Jama‘a, but it was short-lived, as Yakan resigned in January 2003. This was not the only financial controversy involving al-Jama‘a’s leaders. In 2005, rumors surfaced that al-Jama‘a had received substantial funds from Saad Hariri, leading many of its top leaders to publicly support the coalition (Gambill 2007, p.12).

### **2.1.2.2. The Missing Political Sunni Leader**

Tripoli’s political landscape was once unified around Sunni Islamic norms and the affirmation of Lebanon’s Arab identity (Salloukh 2015). However, Syrian intervention created divisions and alliances that fractured this internal solidarity. The Assad regime’s relations with Sunni Islamic movements in

Tripoli were highly ambivalent. In the late 1980s, Syria overlooked the rise of Salafists in Tripoli, whose institutions were funded by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar (Gade 2015, p.27). Syria continued to provide strong political support to Lebanon's Alawites against the Sunnis (Lefèvre 2014). This sectarian division led to years of conflict and violence. In return, Syria prevented the emergence of specific Sunni political parties (Hourani 1981, p.177). The Syrian regime feared “the emergence of strong and independent Sunni political leaders in the Levant region with international contacts that could inspire Syria's Sunnis” (Gade 2015, p.36). Therefore, it sought to distance Yasser Arafat and diminish Rafiq Hariri's popularity and influence (Gade 2015, p.36). The evacuation of the PLO from Lebanon in the early 1980s “weakened the Lebanese Sunni community relative to other Lebanese sects” (Gade 2015, p.33). The start of negotiations between Fatah and Israel and the sponsorship of Hamas by Syria and Iran caused the Sunnis to lose a militant cause (Gade 2015), while Syria granted the Shiite Hezbollah the role of resisting Israel, depriving the Sunnis of this role (Salloukh 2015). The removal of Rafiq Hariri's political influence from Tripoli and the neglect of the rise of Islamist influence also contributed to al-Jama‘a’s success in the 1992 elections.

### **2.1.2.3. Syrian Army Officers / Nouveaux Riches Businessmen**

Imad al-Hout’s 2023 statement that al-Jama‘a had distanced itself from its popular base by reconciling with Hezbollah (Fakhredine 2023) raises the question: Why did the Sunni popular base reject Hezbollah? Among other reasons, it was due to Hezbollah’s alignment with the Syrian regime, which employed tactics against Sunni interests during its presence in Lebanon. As previously mentioned, Syria used its intervention in Lebanon to suppress political enemies, particularly in Tripoli. However, the political economy also played a role in strengthening Syria’s control over Tripoli and Lebanon after 1983.

The Syrian regime “could not dominate its opponents using domestic resources alone,” so it relied on Lebanese resources as an “additional advantage for its own domestic political agenda” (Lawson 1984, p.474). The regime benefited from developing shared economic interests between the Syrian army and businessmen in north Lebanon, involving legitimate and illegitimate businesses, such as goods smuggling and drug trafficking (Gade 2015, p.39-43). Businessmen pursued short-term profits rather than sustainable economic policies aimed at creating job opportunities (Gade 2015). This created a stark division in Tripoli between disaffected poor neighborhoods and wealthy suburbs with access to quality infrastructure (Lefèvre 2014, p.12). The area most affected by the Syrian intervention was Bab al-Tabbaneh, once known as “the gate of gold” due to its affluent residents (Lefèvre 2014, p.13). The

urban poor also suffered from Syrian oppression and competition from Syrian labor (Gade 2015) as well as from tensions with Jabal Mohsen, a high hill area in Tripoli where Alawites supported by the Syrian regime resided (Gade 2015). Al-Jama‘a and other Islamist movements attracted people from these marginalized neighborhoods by providing services as an alternative to the collapsed state institutions.

### **2.1.3. Post-Islamism**

The creation of Israel and subsequent US support for the state fueled Middle Eastern suspicions and anger towards the West and its intentions (Gray 2010, p.53). Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954–1970) symbolized Arab resistance against Israel, with his legitimacy rooted in his anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist stance as well as other factors (Heikal 1972, p. 26-27). During this time, al-Jama‘a was hesitant to support Arab nationalism, believing that the Arabs' defeat against Israel in 1948 was due to their deviation from Islam (Rabil 2011, p.5). In the 1970s, al-Jama‘a grew significantly in response to geopolitical shifts and challenges, including the decline of leftist movements, the emergence of the Iranian revolution as a model for an Islamic government, and the failures of Arab nationalism and secularism. Arab nationalism in Lebanon lost momentum after the evacuation of the PLO in 1982/83 and its subsequent negotiations with Israel (Gade 2015, pp. 33-34). In the early 1990s, growing Islamic movements in Lebanon split into those who refused to engage in politics (Salafists) and those who began to believe that inclusion in democracy does not conflict with Islam (al-Jama‘a), based on the concept of “Shura in the Qur’an,” which seeks to ensure the compatibility of Islam with democracy (Bayat 2016, p.504). This evolution of Islamism in its ideas, approaches, and practices is what Bayat describes as post-Islamism. He coined the term in 1995 to discuss the reform movement of the late 1990s in Iran (Bayat 2016, p.511).

Just as the Iranian Islamic Revolution influenced Islamist movements, the ideological shift in Iran, along with internal and external factors, played a role in sparking the post-Islamism transformation within al-Jama‘a. “[P]ost-Islamism has gained expression in a number of political movements and parties in the Muslim world,” including “the current Lebanese Hezbollah” and “the ruling Turkish Justice and Development Party (AK Party)” (Bayat 2010, p.7). After Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani became president of Iran in 1989, Iran’s influence in Lebanon began to wane (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.6). “With the radicals eclipsed, the most militant factions in Lebanon also lost power” (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.6).

## **2.2. Conclusion**

Several internal and external factors influenced al-Jama‘a’s decision to embrace political openness in 1990 and participate in Lebanese public life. The Ta’if Accord played a pivotal role in redefining Lebanon’s political structure and encouraging inclusivity among various sects. The Syrian presence in Lebanon further motivated al-Jama‘a to integrate into the political system to navigate the complex socio-political landscape effectively. Additionally, the broader trend of post-Islamism, marked by a shift towards more pragmatic and conciliatory political strategies in the Muslim world, also impacted al-Jama‘a’s ideological and practical approaches.

These factors collectively prompted al-Jama‘a to reconsider its initial principles and adapt to the evolving political environment. Chapter Two will delve into the evolving practices of al-Jama‘a, examining its engagement in local politics, parliamentary activities, and alliances. This analysis will shed light on how these practices further defined al-Jama‘a’s role in Lebanon’s political arena and its ongoing struggle to balance ideological commitments with pragmatic political participation.

### **3. Local Politics, Parliamentary Engagement and Alliances**

Over four decades, the Islamic Group (al-Jama‘a) evolved into a prominent movement in Lebanon, engaging in social, political, and electoral activities. Al-Jama‘a was active on the political scene before the Ta’if Accord, participating in the 1972 parliamentary elections for the Sunni seat in Tripoli, though with limited success (Imad 2009, p.3). The group resumed political participation more significantly in the 1992 parliamentary elections, where it began to cooperate with various political actors in Lebanon, including courting “the Syrians in hopes of gaining influence in government” (Gambill 2007, p.7). Given Lebanon’s complex sectarian landscape, with 18 officially recognized religious sects (Gambill 2007, p.1), al-Jama‘a had to develop coalitions with various parties. This cooperation aligns with the inclusion-moderation hypothesis, which suggests that political institutions constrain behavior, thereby encouraging moderation (Schwedler 2006, p.108). This chapter examines how al-Jama‘a’s alliances with Islamist movements and political parties influenced its ideological shifts. It analyzes the group’s engagement in local politics under Pax Syriana and in the post-Syria era, illustrating how these alliances shaped its political trajectory.

#### **3.1. Poles of Islamic Fundamentalism**

The inclusion-moderation hypothesis posits that when radical political groups engage in formal political processes, they often temper their perspectives to appeal to a broader audience (Schwedler 2006). This dynamic is evident in al-Jama‘a’s participation in Lebanon’s political landscape, particularly in its attempts to influence other Islamist movements and to navigate the complex interplay between Shi‘a Islamism, Sunni political Islamism, and Sunni Salafism (Gambill 2007, p.1). During the early 1990s, al-Jama‘a, which favored political liberalization, sought to convince more radical elements to engage with the political system, framing this engagement as necessary for preserving Muslim rights in Lebanon’s sectarian context (Imad 2009). However, this rationale did not resonate with Salafists, who largely remained apolitical, except for their brief involvement in the 2005 elections to support Saad Hariri (Gambill 2007, p.12).

The third pole of Islamic fundamentalism in Lebanon is Hezbollah, a Shi‘a party follows Khomeini’s theory, which states that “a religious jurist (*wilayat al-faqih*) should hold ultimate political power” (A. N. Hamzeh 1997). Ideologically, al-Jama‘a is compatible with Hezbollah in calling for the establishment of an Islamic state, fighting the Western project in the region, and destroying Israel to

liberate Palestine; however, the Sunni Islamic Group rejected Hezbollah's Shiite model of an Islamic state along Iranian lines, as the former believes in achieving it based on Islamic law, Shari'a (A. N. Hamzeh 1997). The complex relationship between these groups underscores the strategic alliances that al-Jama'a formed to navigate Lebanon's political landscape. These alliances, while pragmatic, also reflected shifts in al-Jama'a's ideological positioning as it balanced its foundational principles with the realities of political engagement.

Similar to the influence of Syria in Lebanon, the weakening of Iran's militant factions, and the delivery of social welfare services affected al-Jama'a, these elements also compelled Hezbollah to participate in the Lebanese political framework (A. N. Hamzeh 2000). Both adopted a pragmatic approach, recognizing the unfavorable conditions for establishing an Islamic state, advocating for dialogue with Christians, and accepting the reality of Lebanon's sectarian system until their aim of eliminating political sectarianism is realized (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.6). This desire is considered "a step which arguably could pave the way for an Islamic state down the road by first enshrining majority rule" (Gambill 2007, p.4). This consideration is consistent with Yakan's writing in 1979 that the Islamic constitution should govern because the Christian religion does not have laws and systems for governance and politics, and all the world's systems are subject to the rule of majority (Yakan 1979).

Al-Jama'a established a close relationship with the Muslim World League. In Lebanon, al-Jama'a formed a joining council with northern Islamic groups to embrace the diverse Islamic movement in the Sunni street, with the exception of the Association of Islamic Charitable Projects, al-Ahbash (Imad 2006), which is a blend of "Sunni and Shi'a theology with Sufi spiritualism into a doctrinal eclecticism that preached nonviolence and political quietism" (Gambill 2007, p.7). Through offering a moderate alternative to Islamism, al-Ahbash "enjoys excellent relations with most Arab states, particularly Syria" (A. N. Hamzeh 1997), which has supported this association "in conjunction with its suppression of radical Sunni Islamists" (Gambill 2007, p.7). The relationship with Hezbollah was complex as al-Jama'a sought to coordinate with it at the level of electoral alliances (student union, and political) (Imad 2006) but clashed with it over the issue of Hezbollah's monopoly on the resistance against Israel. In 1991, during the era of Syrian tutelage and in agreement with the Lebanese authority, al-Jama'a was forced to surrender its weapons as there was a clear decision to limit the resistance to one party (Hezbollah) (Salloukh 2015, p.17). This decision caused a dispute between al-Jama'a and Hezbollah regarding the right to wage jihad to liberate Palestine (Al-Hiwar 2009). This dispute was added to their previous disagreement over the form of the Islamic state. As for fighting the Western intervention,

especially the USA, al-Jama‘a distanced itself somewhat from this demand from the period between 2005 to 2022, as will be further examined in the next chapter.

In short, al-Jama‘a was keen to get along with various local and international Islamic groups. But in dealing with the practicalities of politics, al-Jama‘a had to deal with various parties in its transformation from “revolutionary strategy into a gradualist-pragmatic one” (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.5). Its alliances and opponents affected its popular base and thus its political results in the elections under Pax Syriana and Post Syria. In terms of its political rival struggle, al-Jama‘a was opposed to the “Sunni political elites (Karami’s family in Tripoli, Salam’s in Beirut and the newly emerged Hariri’s family in Sidon)” (A. N. Hamzeh 1997).

### 3.2. Elections and Political Alliances

Since the Ta’if Accord, al-Jama‘a has actively participated in Lebanon's parliamentary elections, marking its shift from a revolutionary strategy to a gradualist-pragmatic approach (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.5). This transition is evident in al-Jama‘a’s fluctuating electoral success, such as winning three seats in the 1992 elections, securing one seat in 1996, and then facing setbacks in the 2000 elections. The group boycotted the 2005 elections, reflecting its strategic recalibration in response to the changing political landscape. However, in 2009, al-Jama‘a re-entered the political arena, winning one seat, although it failed to secure any seats in the 2018 elections. In 2022, the group once again won a single seat.

**Table: Al-Jama‘a’s Parliamentary Engagement (1992-2022)**

Year	Governate	Winning Candidate
1992	Tripoli	Fathi Yakan
1992	Akkar	Assad Harmoush
1992	Beirut	Zuhair al-Oubaidi
1996	Akkar	Khaled al-Daher
2000	-----	-----
2005 (Boycott)	-----	-----
2009	Beirut	Imad al-Hout
2018	-----	-----
2022	Beirut	Imad al-Hout

Al-Jama‘a’s electoral participation and alliances with various political actors, including Hezbollah and the Future Movement, highlight the group’s ongoing ideological adjustments. These alliances were not merely tactical but were instrumental in shaping al-Jama‘a’s political identity. For instance, its alliance with Hezbollah in the 1980s and early 1990s, followed by its subsequent alignment with the Future Movement after 2005, demonstrates a shift in its ideological stance, influenced by the broader political environment and the need to remain relevant within Lebanon’s sectarian political system.

### **3.2.1. Al-Jama‘a Under Pax Syriana (1990 – 2005)**

The inclusion-moderation hypothesis suggests that al-Jama‘a’s participation in formal politics should have led to increased moderation. However, the complex alliances and shifting loyalties during this period revealed the challenges al-Jama‘a faced in maintaining a consistent ideological stance.

During the Pax Syriana, “the structural deficiencies of the postwar power-sharing arrangement” made Syria ruled Lebanon “supported by loyal Lebanese allies” (Salloukh 2015, p.15). These allies were primarily Hezbollah after “the deepening of the alliance with Iran by the mid-1980s and Syria’s isolation from the Arab world during the Iran-Iraq war” (Gade 2015, p.27). Therefore, when Syria demobilized the former militias prescribed by the Ta’if Accord, it excluded Hezbollah and established the latter’s monopoly over resistance operations against the Israeli occupation in South Lebanon. This politicization of postwar security raised the ire of the non-Shi‘a sectarian groups (Salloukh 2015), including al-Jama‘a which was close to Hezbollah. Al-Jama‘a supported the Iranian revolution and fought Israel in joint operations with Hezbollah in the 1980s (Crisisgroup 2007).

The inclusion process of al-Jama‘a under the Pax Syriana was promising in the beginning. It was able to achieve success in the parliamentary elections in 1992 with the victory of three candidates: Fathi Yakan (Tripoli) and Asaad Harmoush (Akkar), and Zuhair al-Oubaidi (Beirut). Al-Jama‘a considered that running alone without allying itself with any party or list was the element of its success (Al-Islamiyya 2021). During that period, Faisal Mawlawi was elected Secretary-General of al-Jama‘a, succeeding Fathi Yakan, who submitted his resignation to devote himself to prosecution and public affairs. That promising beginning was followed by setbacks because the first stage of democratic transition is broadly characterized by uncertainty. As Terry Lynn Karl argues, “during regime transitions, all political calculations and interactions are highly uncertain. Actors find it difficult to know what their interests are, who their supporters will be, and which groups will be their allies or opponents” (Karl 1990, p.6). This uncertainty and dispersion in identifying allies caused a fall of all

its candidates except Khaled Al-Daher (Akkar) in 1996. In Tripoli, al-Jama‘a was enjoying widespread Sunni support, but Sunni former Prime minister Omar Karami and Hariri competed as well as they tried to contain the political strength of al-Jama‘a (A. N. Hamzeh 2000, p.11). In that election, disagreements within al-Jama‘a began and emerged into the open. Yakan’s main objection was to Mawlawi’s alliance with Rafik Hariri, with whom Syria was not satisfied (Imad 2006). For Yakan, who preferred an alliance with Karami (Imad 2006), Hariri was standing by the Zionist-American project against the Syrian-sponsored resistance project (Al Hiwar TV 2009). In fact, Syria after the signing of Ta’if Accord, supported “Hariri’s ambitious drive to break the political power of traditional Beirut Sunni families” (Gambill 2007, p.8). But the situation soon changed with the 1996 elections when Syria wanted to curb Hariri’s popularity among the Sunnis. After seeing three of its candidates elected in 1992 and one in 1996, al-Jama‘a was defeated in 2000. The results of the elections were disastrous, leading to a mass resignation of the Political Bureau and some departments and councils (Imad 2006). This is despite its success in the municipal elections in 1998, due to its keen to preserve Islamic values in its municipal program to be in line with the aspirations of its popular base (A. N. Hamzeh 2000).

### **3.2.2. Al-Jama‘a in Post-Syria**

After the assassination of Rafik Hariri in February 2005 and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, major changes occurred in the Lebanese scene. That year and the following year 2006, which witnessed a war between Hezbollah and Israel, were pivotal in the path of al-Jama‘a because they led to a radical disagreement between the leaders of the old generation of al-Jama‘a, Mawlawi and Yakan, that followed the latter’s split in 2003. Starting with the result of the two events, Lebanon witnessed sectarian mobilization and division. The sectarian power struggle has become between “the Sunni-dominated 14 March alliance and the mainly but not exclusively Shi‘a-dominated 8 March opposition,” while the Maronite Christians are stuck between the two parties (Salloukh 2015, p.18). The Saudi-sponsored Future Movement, led by Saad Hariri, has become the largest representative of the Sunni community. Meanwhile, Hezbollah, sponsored by Iran, exploited the Syrian withdrawal to impose “absolute Shi‘a’s political hegemony” (Gambill 2007, p.11). In fact, Sunnis had begun to support Rafik Hariri since he “began to oppose the Syrian regime in the 2003-2004 period” (Gade 2015, p.35). However, after his assassination, which “was experienced as an ‘earthquake’ and ‘an assault against all Sunnis’” (Crisisgroup 2007, p.13), his popularity passed to his son Saad. Hence, “Northern Lebanon became a Sunni base for the Future Movement” (Gade 2022, p.1). This marked an important shift for al-Jama‘a and affected its popularity, which was already shaky. The Tripolitans, who preferred to support their local leaders, rallied for the first time around a leader and political party

from outside their conservative nationalist and Sunni city (Gade 2022). The Tripoli Street was previously divided between those who supported traditional elite leaders and those who supported Islamic groups. Smartly, “the Future Movement ended up using Islamic and sectarian slogans” to mobilize Sunnis in that period (Gade 2022).

As noted, the aftermath of the Hariri’s assassination in February 2005 divided Lebanon into two camps. This confrontation overlapped with a wider regional geopolitical contest. Iran and Syria supported 8 March coalition, while the US and its allies, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the UAE, supported the 14 March coalition (Salloukh 2015, p.30). The names of both coalitions go back to the popular polarization of both camps on March 8 and March 14, 2005. The first organized a demonstration three weeks after Hariri’s assassination in solidarity with Syria. The response was a huge demonstration on March 14 to affirm the demand for an “independent Lebanon” (Gade 2022, p.2). Meanwhile, al-Jama‘a was witnessing a sharp division. Yakan, who was close to the Syrian regime and openly supporting Hezbollah, announced his support for the March 8 coalition based on the latter’s announcement that its position opposed “the threat of Israel and US ambitions to impose hegemony over Lebanon” (Gade 2022, p.3).

In the elections of May 2005, the March 14 Coalition courted Sunni Islamists in its attempt to defeat Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) in the mixed Sunni-Christian areas of northern Lebanon. Sunni participation has been low for years due to harassment from Syrian-backed governments (Gambill 2007). The Salafist movements responded to Hariri’s call, but al-Jama‘a joined most traditional Sunni politicians in boycotting the elections (Gambill 2007). Al-Jama‘a then attributed the reason for its boycott to the international interventions and the wording of the electoral law (Al-Jazeera 2005). Sunni participation was large, reflecting the decrease in al-Jama‘a’s popularity in the Sunni street (Gambill 2007). Their popularity was affected mainly by Yakan’s break with al-Jama‘a to form the rival Islamic Action Front after joining March 8. This new Islamic organization brought together many Islamists in Tripoli and a substantial minority of al-Jama‘a’s rank. Before the 2006 war in Lebanon, many Islamists in Tripoli criticized Saad for his pro-American stance. After the war and its aftermath, they viewed him “as the Sunnis’ sole protector” (Crisisgroup 2007, p.13). Right before the 2006 war, Saad’s priority was to unite the Sunnis under his leadership. He began providing services to the poor Sunnis while getting support from al-Jama‘a’s leaders, who were also influenced by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s position “against Syrian President” Bashar al-Assad “after 2005” (Gambill 2007, p.12).

During the 33-day American-backed Israeli military campaign against Lebanon in July 2006 and the placement of UNIFIL forces on the border between Israel and Lebanon, Hezbollah received strong support from Sunnis in Lebanon, including al-Jama‘a (Crisisgroup 2007). In many media interviews, al-Jama‘a even confirmed that it fought alongside Hezbollah in 2006 war through its military wing, the Fajr Forces. In an interview with *al-Arabiya* on August 1, 2006, the leader in al-Jama‘a, Ibrahim al-Masri, noted that there is always coordination with Hezbollah and constant meetings within the “framework of Islamic resistance” established in 1982, which is based on joint jihad (Nayouf 2006). Although Hezbollah is the only militia that retained its weapons after the Ta’if Accord, al-Jama‘a still possesses simple weapons. This became clear after its participation in that war and the October 7 war in 2023. But the broad Sunni solidarity with Hezbollah didn’t long last. After the government responded to international pressure regarding the need to disarm Hezbollah, the latter concerned itself with domestic political affairs and formed an opposition front with the FPM and Shiite leaders to boycott the government. This alienated many Sunni Islamists who had been its supporters during the war, and “the Sunni/Shiite split took center stage” (Crisisgroup 2007). They considered Hezbollah siding with “the secular Christians” against the Sunni prime minister (Gambill 2007, p.13). Mawlawi and some other Sunni Islamic movements, such as the Salafists, “lined up behind the government”, while Yakan, his supporters, and many Islamic organizations, such as the IUM joined the opposition under the umbrella of the pro-Syrian Sunni organization, the Islamic Action Front (Gambill 2007, p.13). In an interview with Yakan, he stressed that the establishment of the organization was not to support Hezbollah but to express the Sunni position in support of jihad, through which they consider themselves in one trench with Hezbollah (Nayouf 2006).

The subsequent phase saw cold relations between al-Jama‘a and Hezbollah. Al-Jama‘a’s alliance with the Future Movement strengthened after Hezbollah and its allies turned their weapons inward in Beirut in May 2008 (Gade 2022). However, in a 2010 interview, al-Jama‘a stressed its independence, although it continued to align with the Future Movement in parliamentary elections to maintain support among Sunni voters. Regarding resistance, al-Jama‘a maintained that it was necessary as long as Israel remained a threat but advocated for a national defense strategy (Itani 2010).

### **3.3. Conclusion**

Using Schwedler’s Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis, the dimensions explored in Chapter one and two contribute to unpacking this hypothesis by shedding light on the elite alliances, the relation of the

ruling elites to public political space, and the evolving structure and practices of al-Jama‘a. These factors provided a partial explanation of why al-Jama‘a has developed through engaging in the local politics. While the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis suggests that al-Jama‘a has become more tolerant and pluralist, questions are raised about the intellectual dimensions of al-Jama‘a in the public political space. Is internal restructuring serious or just tactical? Chapter three will answer this question by dealing with the ideational dimensions of public political space. It will explore the issuance of al-Jama‘a’s political visions in the years 2003, 2010, and 2017. It will also continue to address the factors of alliances and practices for all actors in the public political space to complete the explanation of al-Jama‘a’s development and the success of its transition towards moderation.

## **4. Ideological Commitments and Path to Moderation**

Following Hariri's assassination in 2005, Lebanon's progress toward democracy stalled due to political divisions and the dysfunction of the Lebanese system in the post-Ta'if Accord. The Lebanese political structure is based on the consociational system among sects, with each sect receiving specific representation in the government. The power-sharing agreement outlined in the Ta'if Accord determines each sect's share of power (Salloukh 2015). However, the consociational system proved ineffective in Lebanon since it is difficult to make any decision requiring the consent and cooperation of all players. To establish and maintain a consociational democracy, it is crucial to have relationships "between elites, between masses, and between elites and masses within one subculture" (Barclay 2007, p.11). While the Ta'if Accord improved power-sharing, ensuring more equal representation of Christians and Muslims, it gave less power to the Shi'a compared to the Sunni (Barclay 2007) in exchange for Hezbollah monopolizing the resistance (Gambill 2007). After demands in 2006 that Hezbollah surrender its weapons, the Shiite sect expressed dissatisfaction with its share of executive power (Salem 2009). Meanwhile, the Ta'if Accord granted political rights to the Sunnis but never addressed their social and economic inequality (Lefèvre 2014).

Despite these issues, Lebanon's public political space continued to accommodate pluralist practices. Al-Jama'a, a strongly ideological group, became more moderate as it engaged in pluralist practices like elections and alliances. Although al-Jama'a retained the conservative ideology close to the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, under Mawlawi and al-Masri who assumed the general secretariat (Imad 2006, p.100), Azzam al-Ayoubi's leadership beginning in 2016 marked additional steps towards democracy in the vision of 2017. After his election, al-Ayoubi promised to oversee a period of "transition" to transform al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya "into a more open, transparent, and dynamic political party" (Lefèvre 2016). This chapter will examine al-Jama'a's ideological commitments to moderation and its gradual participation in pluralistic political competition from 2003 until the issuance of the 2017 vision. It will also highlight the two basic items in the vision of 2017 regarding the form of the state and the stance on resistance and jihad.

### **4.1. Ambiguity in Ideological Commitments**

While we cannot ignore al-Jama'a's inclusion in pluralist processes prior to 2016, its moderation then had a narrower definition similar to Schwedler's explanation: it is a "moderation movement from a

relatively closed and rigid worldview to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives” (Schwedler 2006, p.3). This limited moderation raised concerns among some Lebanese who argued similarly that “Islamist political parties threaten emerging democratic processes”, since they are “uncommitted to democratic norms and seek to exploit electoral processes to achieve nondemocratic ends” (Schwedler 2006, p.1). These concerns were voiced in an interview with Mawlawi in 1998 (Sarkis 1998), where he was asked whether his condemnations were temporary until al-Jama‘a could establish an Islamic state as the IUM did in 1983. He replied that establishing an Islamic state was not in the interest of the people in Lebanon (Sarkis 1998). This uncertainty in al-Jama‘a’s commitment to democracy might stem from the contradictory statements of its leaders. Yakan believed that establishing Islamic rule in Lebanon is difficult but not impossible. Additionally, Babiti’s statement about al-Jama‘a’s rejection of the IUM’s style but not its ideology adds to the ambiguity. This may explain why al-Jama‘a, under al-Ayoubi’s leadership, canceled the old website in 2016 that mimicked the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and created a new website carrying the 2017 vision, which avoided any reference to establishing an Islamic state or applying Shari‘a.

## **4.2. The Openness in The First Decade of The Millennium**

Al-Jama‘a’s participation within the public political space continued in the first decade with a new approach towards moderation. Al-Jama‘a underwent significant changes in political structures and practices until it succeeded in the transformation process in 2017. In June 2009, al-Jama‘a’s founder and former Secretary-General Fathi Yakan passed away. At the end of 2009, al-Jama‘a made internal adjustments after then-Secretary-General Faisal Mawlawi became ill. Al-Jama‘a appointed Ibrahim al-Masri as Secretary-General, Muhammad Ammar as Deputy Secretary-General, and Azzam al-Ayoubi as head of the Political Bureau (Itani 2010). Al-Jama‘a issued a new vision in 2003 and a developed vision in 2010, both revolving around the same intellectual and political orbit with some gradual amendments towards more moderation (Imad 2006, p.100).

### **4.2.1. Vision of 2003**

It was difficult for al-Jama‘a to embrace moderation without compromising its intellectual, ideological, and political constants. Al-Jama‘a’s choice towards moderation, clear in its 2003 statement, was one of the main reasons for Yakan's final departure from al-Jama‘a that year. After his departure, he commented that leadership in Islam is individual, not collective (Yakan 2007, p.299). In the vision of

2003, quoted from Abdulghani Imad's book (Imad 2006), due to its absence on al-Jama'a's new official website created in 2016, al-Jama'a emphasized the Lebanese civil state while calling for the adoption of Islamic law provisions through dialogue and persuasion, not imposition or coercion. Additionally, it stressed the principle of jihad while rejecting any interpretation directing it within society. The 2003 vision also emphasized the Arab option in confronting the Zionist project, stating that if this option is abandoned, Islamic forces must remain loyal to this principle. From this standpoint, Syria is considered a strategic depth for Lebanon, where coordination and integration are in everyone's interest (Imad 2006, p.102). The 2003 vision showed that al-Jama'a's political and organizational choices were moving towards moderation but needed a firm decision to remove the ambiguity within its choices (Imad 2006).

#### **4.2.2. Vision of 2010**

In 2010, al-Jama'a presented a new political vision in which it dropped the demand for applying Islamic law, justifying that no sect should impose its legislation on others, while maintaining the emphasis on the necessity of resistance within a defensive strategy allowing all societal forces to participate, not limited to Hezbollah, quoted from *al-Jazeera* (Al-Masri 2010) as it's also not included on al-Jama'a's new website. The change in al-Jama'a's 2010 vision and what followed in 2017 can be understood in light of the changes in its leadership and the sharp political polarization in Lebanon and the region.

#### **4.2.3. Mawlawi Moderation Followers**

Both Mawlawi and al-Masri, who assumed the position of al-Jama'a General Secretariat after Yakan, are considered part of the older generation who lived through the period of reconciliation with Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria despite differences in some viewpoints. In an interview with Mawlawi in 2008, he was careful when asserting that Hezbollah targeted Sunnis in Lebanon (Al-Jazeera 2008), unlike al-Ayoubi who belongs to the younger generation that grew up during the sharp dispute with Hezbollah and the Syrian conflict. His hostility toward Iran and Hezbollah was clear in an interview with *al-Jazeera* in 2016 (Al-Jazeera 2016), which will be detailed in Chapter four and five. Azzam al-Ayoubi, head of the Political Bureau in 2010, took over the General Secretariat in 2016, cancelling the old website of al-Jama'a and issuing the 2017 vision, which is considered the culmination of al-Jama'a's transition to moderation. After the split within al-Jama'a's ranks in 2006, most of its senior leadership remained with Mawlawi. These cadres and those who joined later follow Mawlawi's

moderate thought, including al-Ayoubi and Imad al-Hout, who won a parliamentary seat in Beirut in the 2009 elections within al-Jama‘a’s alliance with the Future Movement.

#### **4.2.4. Integration with Future Movement**

Al-Jama‘a participated in the 2009 election alongside the Future Movement, leading to the victory of its candidate Imad al-Hout. Elections were not held in Lebanon until 2018 due to the failure of parliament to approve a new law and the crisis in Syria. In the 2018 elections, al-Hout lost his seat for many reasons, the most prominent being the sudden separation of the Future Movement before the elections in response to “pressure from Saudi Arabiya, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt” not to ally with al-Jama‘a, the representative of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon (Imad 2019, p.9).

During the 2009 elections, al-Jama‘a was still in an ambiguous situation between the Future Movement and Hezbollah. Months after that election, al-Jama‘a confirmed that it was not affiliated with any political movement and that its alliance with the Future Movement was the result of pressure from the Sunni street due to the issue of the assassination of Rafik Hariri (Itani 2010). The issue cooled, especially after Prime Minister Saad Hariri’s visit to Damascus to meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (Itani 2010). Saudi Arabia played a major role in that visit and in the decline in the popularity of the Future Movement since 2010. After the assassination of Hariri, Saudi Arabia supported the March 14 Alliance and the Future Movement politically and financially against Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran.

After the defeat of the Future Movement in May 2008, Saudi Arabia became realistic about Hezbollah's power in Lebanon and also wanted to ensure Lebanon's stability to secure its financial investments (Gade 2022). Following the Saudi-Syrian rapprochement in 2009, Saudi Arabia reduced its support for Sunnis in Lebanon and stopped its financial support for the Future Movement (Gade 2022). Hariri responded to Saudi Arabia's demand and visited Syria, which led to the blame for his father's death being shifted from Syria to Hezbollah. This step caused Hariri to lose many of his supporters who saw him as “untrustworthy” (Gade 2022, p.32).

Politically, in light of the growing vacuum left by the absence of the Future Movement at all service and development levels, the Sunni street began looking for another party to represent its aspirations and emerge from the ongoing series of disappointments since the assassination of Hariri. The Sunni street in Tripoli was divided between supporters of the Future Movement and supporters of Najib

Mikati, who by 2009 “had increasingly invested in charitable and cultural institutions in the city” (Gade 2022, p.33). With the support of Hezbollah, Mikati formed his government on June 13, 2011, which increased the rift and weakness among the Sunnis (Salem 2011). As a local politician stated, “the issue with Tripoli is that it has many leaders but lacks leadership” (Lefèvre 2014, p.13). With Tripoli's increasing poverty due to the practices of businessmen (as mentioned in Chapter one) and Lebanese law, which did not guarantee a budget to improve the city's social affairs, people were either turning to a political leader or a religious charity (Lefèvre 2014).

Despite the attempts of the Future Movement and the Azm Movement of Mikati to adopt a joint political and religious discourse (Gade 2022), the Tripolitans separate political and Islamic movements. The latter had an independent popular base in the city. The spillover of Syrian conflict led to the popularity of Salafists due to their clear hostile stance towards Hezbollah and Syria (Barakeh 2016). However, they were not involved in the Lebanese political system. Sunni Islamists feel relatively deprived, preventing them from accepting the power-sharing model in the Lebanese consensual system (Barakeh 2016). According to the relative deprivation theory, the discrepancy between what a person deserves and what they think they can actually achieve leads to violence (Barakeh 2016, p.19). This feeling not only led to the rise of Islamists but also to their refusal to sit at the same table with Hezbollah before achieving a balance of power (Barakeh 2016).

Thus, since strengthening the Sunni street in the Lebanese consensual system required cooperation in representation between a political and an Islamic movement, al-Jama‘a aimed for it with the Future Movement, as shown in their interviews (Al-Jazeera 2008). Al-Jama‘a indicated the necessity of integration with the Future Movement to strengthen the Sunni arena at the national level. This was an advantage that Mikati lacked, as his popularity was limited mainly in Tripoli, in addition to his close relationships to Hezbollah and Syria. While integration with the Future Movement, the secular political movement, required more Lebanesation, the result was the 2017 vision.

#### **4.2.5. The Arab Spring**

Another factor that contributed to the rapprochement with the Future Movement and the issuance of 2017 vision was the repercussions of the Arab Spring. Hezbollah's support for the revolutions in Bahrain and Syria demonstrated the contrast between al-Jama‘a and Hezbollah. In a brief study by Abdulghani Imad published by *al-Arabiya*, he states that al-Jama‘a did not consider the Peninsula Shield forces led by Saudi Arabia in Bahrain as occupation forces, unlike Hezbollah (Imad 2012).

Moreover, he confirmed al-Jama'a's condemnation of Hezbollah intervention to save the Syrian regime. Despite its sympathy for the Syrian people; al-Jama'a before 2016, remained careful about its relations with Hezbollah and was subjected to criticism from some extremist Islamists who considered its position to be fluid and more sensitive to circumstances than to principles (Imad 2012).

The Arab Spring coincided with the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, deepening the Shi'a-Sunni division. Sunnis in Lebanon and the region believe that Iran has expansionist ambitions based on its activity in Iraq and Syria, and they regard Hezbollah's fighting in Syria as a war against Sunnis (Abdo 2016). The tension among Lebanese Islamists towards Hezbollah started mainly in 2006 when many Islamists were arrested without trial following the events of Fatah al-Islam and the Nahr al-Bared camp (Barakeh 2016). The Salafist Salem al-Rafei then accused the "Lebanese Armed Forces of collaborating with armed Shi'a-dominated movement" (Abdo 2016, p.38). Al-Rafei and Bilal Baroudi, two prominent Salafists figures, called their increasing followers to support the Syrian revolution. Their opposing position led to consequences, as in 2016, two Syrian intelligence officers were indicted in a bombing outside mosques in Tripoli, while al-Rafei and Baroudi were preaching in August 2013, killing 40 and injuring hundreds (Reuters 2016).

Al-Jama'a was constantly exposed to criticism for its insistence on standing in the gray zone on many points, whether in its ambiguous position between March 8 and 14 or its negative stance on the Arab Spring. This coincided with the rise of Islamists after the Syrian conflict broke out in March 2011, particularly in the North. With al-Ayoubi assuming the General Secretariat in 2016, al-Jama'a's position shifted to a more confrontational stance with Hezbollah, aligning with the Sunni Street and the Future Movement, which supported the Syrian revolution. Although the cancellation of the old website of al-Jama'a, which held its old Islamic ideologies, and the issuance of the 2017 vision were for the purpose of rapprochement with the alliance led by Saad Hariri, al-Jama'a suffered a setback when Hariri acquiesced to the demand of Egypt, Saudi Arabiya and the UAE to disengage from al-Jama'a in the election of 2018. Egypt's position not only stemmed from al-Jama'a's denouncement of the military coup against Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi but also from its parliamentary member Imad al-Hout in 2013, who led a signature campaign that included parliamentarians around the world to highlight the illegitimacy of the coup (Nemr 2013). This coup had been supported by a powerful coalition of Gulf States, which believed that Muslim Brotherhood organization "might pose a threat to their survival" due to its ideology spreading in these countries in the past decades, influencing "generations of students" (Steinberg 2014).

### 4.3. Vision of 2017 – ‘*Vision of a Nation*’

On May 15, 2017, al-Jama‘a held its general conference at Biel Hall in Beirut to present its new political framework, ‘*Vision of a Nation,*’ in the presence of a wide audience of officials, politicians, and diplomats, in addition to the presence of leaders and cadres of the Islamic Group from all Lebanese regions. In front of the media, al-Jama‘a issued the 2017 vision, which contains nine articles, including many provisions and texts revolving around Lebanese affairs. As mentioned in the introduction, the official website did not include the elements of the 2017 vision but rather general information about its announcement (Al-Jama‘a 2017), which is also available in Appendix (Figure 4). The published general information states that:

*‘The conference this year was different from previous conferences as this time it was not in closed organizational rooms, which is a confirmation from al-Jama‘a that it has nothing to hide from its audience and from Lebanese public opinion. al-Jama‘a wanted to dispel the stereotypical image that had been erected throughout history about the introversion and isolation of Islamic movements from society and it wanted to confirm that it is at the core of society, a partner in it, with a vision for building and elevating it to what is higher and better’*

The political vision articulated by al-Ayoubi in 2017 marks a shift towards moderation and political integration, aligning with Schwedler’s inclusion-moderation hypothesis, which suggests that Islamist groups tend to moderate their positions when participating in pluralist processes (Schwedler 2006). This vision reflects al-Jama‘a’s transition toward greater moderation, pluralism, and openness. According to al-Jama‘a, the 2017 vision aimed to present elements of a project that offered hope for change and advancement, despite the turbulent period the country and region were experiencing (Al-Jama‘a 2017). It proposed a modern civil state, refrained from explicitly calling for jihad, and emphasized citizenship and legal equality without mentioning Shari‘a or jihad. This shift was intended to align with broader democratic principles and the realities of Lebanese sectarian politics, while also complementing the Future Movement’s stance against Hezbollah’s illegal weapons (Asharq-al-Awsat 2011). The vision included points such as:

- A state based on citizenship, ensuring rights and duties guaranteed by law.
- A modern civil state where responsibility is based on competence and eligibility.

- Emphasizing peaceful political engagement and rejecting illegal weapons.
- Avoiding involvement in regional conflicts, such as the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.
- Supporting the Palestinian cause without explicitly calling for jihad.

#### **4.3.1. Vision of 2017: Political Realism Theory**

However, once delivered, the vision of 2017 faced criticism for abandoning Islamic principles in favor of political realism, a theory that prioritizes practical and materials factors over doctrinal or ethical concepts (Altshuler 2009). The political realism adopted by al-Jama‘a can also be explained through the rapprochement with the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during that period and deduced from “Erdoğan’s switch to realism” as noticed by many newspapers (Karataş 2022). During the Syrian revolution, al-Jama‘a considered Erdoğan, who was also hostile to the Syrian regime, close to Brotherhood thought according to an article (Fayad 2023). However, the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Justice and Development Party (JDP) led by Erdoğan, has become tense in recent years, especially following Erdoğan’s major shift in foreign policies and the implementation of the largest process of reconciliation of relations with the most prominent Arab and Gulf capitals, according to a report by Samer Zreik, a Lebanese researcher known to closely follow the Islamists and al-Jama‘a (Zreik 2024). According to another article by Zreik, it is true that Erdoğan is a student of the founder of political Islam in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan, but in fact, the Saadet Party, the fifth in the series of parties founded by Erbakan, is the representative of the Brotherhood movement in Turkey, not the JDP (Zreik 2023).

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Did al-Jama‘a’s inclusion in pluralist processes lead it to become moderate? By engaging in Lebanese politics and democratic processes, al-Jama‘a transitioned from a relatively closed ideology to one that is more open, tolerant, and pluralistic. The creation of a new platform reflecting a moderate vision, and the abandonment of al-Jama‘a’s ideological commitments—particularly its adherence to implementing Shari‘a and its focus on jihad for the liberation of Palestine—serve as clear evidence that al-Jama‘a’s participation in pluralist processes influenced its ideological stance towards moderation, as reflected in its 2017 vision under Azzam al-Ayoubi.

The 2017 vision marked the culmination of al-Jama‘a’s journey towards moderation, as it openly contradicted its earlier doctrine and Islamist ideology. This shift was a result of various factors, including changes in leadership, political alliances, and regional dynamics. However, this path towards moderation was disrupted in 2022 with the election of a new Secretary-General, who led the group back to its original ideological roots. This shift reflects a reversion to the foundational ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood and Fathi Yakan, signaling a renewed commitment to these principles over the more moderate approach of the past. The next chapter will explore the circumstances that halted al-Jama‘a’s inclusion-moderation trajectory and the implications of this ideological reversion.

## **5. What Factors Influenced Al-Jama‘a to Return to Radicalism?**

The previous chapters examined the inclusion-moderation hypothesis through a study of al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya in Lebanon. The findings indicate that al-Jama‘a became more moderate over time, influenced by factors such as the Ta’if Accord in 1989, the U.S. push to democratize the Arab world in 2003, and the aftermath of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, which led to the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. A key factor in al-Jama‘a’s moderation was its reinterpretation of central ideological commitments, culminating in the establishment of a moderate platform in its 2017 vision. However, subsequent political developments in Lebanon and the broader region placed significant pressure on al-Jama‘a, affecting both its practices and ideology. These pressures can be categorized into three key factors: regional influences following the Arab Spring in 2011 and the Gulf crisis, structural issues stemming from internal disputes, and ideological shifts following the election of a new Secretary-General. This chapter explores these pressures that ultimately caused al-Jama‘a to deviate from its 2017 vision and revert to more radical practices.

### **5.1. Regional Influence**

The Muslim Brotherhood, including al-Jama‘a, faced significant challenges after the reversals of the Arab Spring in 2011. These challenges were intensified by the counterrevolution in Egypt, the transformation of the Syrian conflict into a sectarian war and changing dynamics with the Future Movement and Saudi Arabia.

#### **5.1.1. The Anti-Revolutionary Axis**

The counterrevolution in Egypt led by General al-Sisi’s on 3 July 2013, aimed “to restore the democratic transition in Egypt and avoid the ‘Brotherisation’ of the country” by “bringing Morsi down” (Giampaolo 2021, p.12). This counterrevolution led to Islamists being targeted by regimes in many countries. For example, al-Sisi presented himself to the people as “their saviour from the barbarity of the Islamist forces” (Giampaolo 2021, p.12). Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said in an interview in 2018 that the Muslim Brotherhood “invaded” Saudi schools’ curriculum by many elements, which he was working to “eradicate” completely stating that “no country in the world would accept that its educational system be invaded by any radical group” (CBC 2018).

Targeting of the Muslim Brotherhood escalated after the Gulf crisis when Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt considered the Muslim Brotherhood a threat to their domestic authorities, leading them to cut ties with Qatar in 2017 based on “the actions of the Muslim Brotherhood to whom Qatar is seen as a patron across the region along with *al-Jazeera*’s coverage of regional events” (Menshawy and Mabon 2021, p.3). The Qatari *al-Jazeera* channel had angered the Saudi regime during the Arab Uprisings by hosting a weekly program by the Egyptian Brotherhood ideologue Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who used to criticize “Saudi Arabia and its allies as being ‘against Islam’” (Menshawy and Mabon 2021, p.4). Additionally, in one of the episodes, al-Qaradawi highlighted the strength of the Islamists’ rise after the removal of “tyrants,” saying that “nothing prevents Islamists from taking their rightful place in the heart of society” (Menshawy and Mabon 2021, p.4).

### **5.1.2. Iranian Axis and Sectarian Conflict with Hezbollah**

As mentioned previously, al-Jama‘a’s relationship with Iran was positive after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Despite the difference in ideologies, al-Jama‘a agreed with Hezbollah on the principle of resistance to Israel, and they carried out joint operations against Israel after its invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Sectarian differentiation began after Syria granted the Shiite Hezbollah the right to resist. The sectarian discourse became very clear after the 2006 war and reached its peak in Lebanon after Hezbollah took control of Beirut by military force in 2008. Al-Jama‘a, with its new Secretary-General Azzam al-Ayoubi, considered that Hezbollah’s policy had become sectarian within Lebanon and then surpassed it regionally with Iranian expansion in the region after the Arab revolutions, especially in Syria. This was expressed by al-Ayoubi in an interview in 2016 (Al-Jazeera 2016). According to him, Hezbollah's weapons are causing disagreement and dividing the Lebanese, criticizing its refusal to join a national defense strategic system. Al-Ayoubi also criticized Hezbollah's role among the movements supported by Iran in the battles taking place in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, considering Iran’s interventions in the Arab region to contribute to raising sectarian division. By its intervention, Iran aims to expand its influence and presence within regions seen by these regions' people as an attempt for a new hegemony over these areas. According to al-Ayoubi, who also conveyed the feeling of disappointment among the Muslim Brotherhood in general towards Iran, saying in the interview (Al-Jazeera 2016, min: 7:50):

- *‘The Muslim Brotherhood in general has been disappointed with the Islamic Republic of Iran because they had long believed that the Islamic Republic of Iran was attempting to transcend*

*deep historical stages in Islamic history and overcome the issue of Sunni-Shiite division. But unfortunately, at the first critical juncture, the situation was contrary to that. Today, Iran, in one way or another, is contributing to the deepening of the rift between the two major Islamic components, the Sunnis and the Shiites'*

According to al-Ayoubi, the only thing in which al-Jama'a shares with Hezbollah is resistance to Israel. But what unites al-Jama'a with the Future Movement is political work within one arena, which is Sunni. In addition to al-Jama'a's intersection with the March 14 Coalition around the process of building a true state that will be the guardian of all citizens regardless of their sectarian, political and ideological affiliations, which Hezbollah disagrees with to be free to intervene regionally as part of the Iranian system (Al-Jazeera 2016). In establishing a new website reflecting the moderate vision of 2017, al-Ayoubi sought to align more closely with Sunni powers, such as the Future Movement and Saudi Arabia, in response to these sectarian challenges, although this alignment was not fully accepted by the Saudi-led bloc.

### **5.1.3. Closing the Sunni Door in Face of Al-Jama'a**

Al-Jama'a's policy in Lebanon and the region shifted due to its reading of the new reality that there was sectarian targeting of the Sunni majority in the region by the Iranian project (Al-Jazeera 2016). In this regard, al-Jama'a sought to find another project to balance it by getting closer to Saudi Arabia because of its status and symbolism in the Islamic world. This was demonstrated by al-Jama'a's efforts in 2016 to be part of the project entitled '*Uniting the Sunni House*', which brought it together with Saad Hariri and Najib Mikati, a coalition encouraged and blessed from the leadership in Saudi Arabia (Akil 2016). It also seems that canceling al-Jama'a's old website in 2016 that held its historical ideology close to the Muslim Brotherhood and replacing it with a new one falls within those efforts. But al-Jama'a's quest ended with Prince Mohammed bin Salman becoming the Crown Prince in 2017. In the 2018 election in Lebanon, "Saad Hariri's Future Movement and other powerful Lebanese political currents" responded to the pressure by Saudi Arabia and its allies UAE and Egypt to prevent these Lebanese parties from "allying with al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in the elections" (Imad 2019, p.9). This severing of relations with al-Jama'a occurred despite the fact that al-Jama'a "was not involved in a hostile discourse towards Saudi Arabia" (Imad 2019, p.10).

The abandonment of al-Jama'a by the Future Movement and March 14 Alliance led to the weakening of the political leaders before the members of larger party. This weakness was exacerbated by the

resignation of its head of the Political Bureau, Asaad Harmoush, weeks before the elections, declaring his support for al-Hariri's candidate in Tripoli (Imad 2019). Naturally, it was not possible for al-Jama'a to ally with Hezbollah, so it formed a "surprising alliance with the Christian FPM" (Imad 2019, p.12). This increased the frustration of al-Jama'a's supporters due to the FPM's provocative stances towards the Sunni (Imad 2019). This electoral setback sparked controversy over "the validity of the new leadership options" with criticism directed at Azzam al-Ayoubi, who was reelected in 2019 by a narrow margin (Imad 2019, p.13).

## **5.2. Structural Influence**

Al-Jama'a suffered from financial distress due to the regional pressure amid internal disputes between moderates and hardliners members. Hamas' influence played a major role on al-Jama'a's internal restructuring in the favor of the hardliners. This was evident is in the 2022 elections for the General Secretariat when the candidate affiliated with Hamas and Hezbollah won (Ghaddar and Zelin 2024).

### **5.2.1. Financial Deterioration**

The isolation of al-Jama'a locally and regionally led to "a financial blockade" (Choucair 2020). In an interview with a leader in al-Jama'a, Wael Nejm, the researcher Chafic Choucair conveyed details of that financial crisis, noting that al-Jama'a's primary income, which was from abroad donations, had declined to the point of deterioration (Choucair 2020). Al-Jama'a had become largely dependent on the financial contributions of its members, in addition to some limited investments. As for al-Jama'a's income from the Lebanese public, it was almost negligible due to the slow recruitment for organizational reasons. Al-Jama'a remained relatively elitist and targeted mainly a religious Sunni audience. It was unable to establish a discourse that met the aspirations of its local arena and faced national challenges to at least compete with the Future Movement. This prevented al-Jama'a from forming a supportive segment of the Sunni public, specifically from the middle class, to serve as an economic and political lever (Choucair 2020).

Amid al-Jama'a's financial suffering, demonstrations spread across Beirut on November 17, 2019, aiming to change the current ruling class responsible for economic crises. Al-Jama'a welcomed and supported the movement, seeing it as an opportunity to remove the Lebanese sectarian system (Choucair 2020). Although all Lebanese parties initially welcomed the movement and its demands,

Amal Movement, Hezbollah and the FPM stood against the movement (Choucair 2020). These parties' stance may come naturally in the context of their prioritization of survival above everything, based on the argument of Adam Przeworski that the regime abandons political reforms to preserve its survival (Przeworski 1991, p.182). However, the crisis led Saad Hariri to announce his withdrawing from political life. In a televised speech on January 24, 2022, he said: "I'm convinced that there is no room in Lebanon for opportunity in light of Iranian influence, international confusion, national division, sectarianism, and state weariness" (CNN 2022). A year before Hariri's withdrawal, leaving a vacuum in the Sunni leadership, al-Jama'a experienced a pivotal event in 2021 when Hamas mediated with Hezbollah to end the dispute between the latter and al-Jama'a and improve relations.

### **5.2.2. Hamas' Role**

Hamas, sharing a common origin with al-Jama'a as branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, significantly influenced al-Jama'a's internal dynamics, especially after the Syrian conflict strained relations between Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. Hamas, Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Resistance Movement), which means "zeal" in Arabic, "was born of the intifada" and founded in 1987 (Abu-Amr 1993, p.1). All Islamic groups in the Muslim world consider Palestine as an Islamic land where "true Muslims are called upon to sacrifice lives and money to liberate every inch of the holy Land" (Abu-Amr 1993, p.5). Although al-Jama'a's early founders were more vocal in defending the Palestinian cause, the more moderate vision in 2017 did not neglect to mention the support for the Palestinian cause. This cause is what al-Jama'a agreed upon with Hezbollah, as they believe in "the need to resist Israeli aggression and the Israeli occupation of Palestine" (Imad 2019, p.10). However, Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian crisis not only deepened the disagreements between al-Jama'a and Hezbollah but also led to the severing of relations between Hamas and Hezbollah and Iran (Skare 2023). In the period preceding that crisis, Iran was the largest supporter with "the money and arms" of Palestinian Islamic groups, as the Islamic Jihad leader, Fathi al-Shiqaqi confirmed to *Newsday* in 1993 (Levitt 2002). After the Syrian crisis, Hamas rejected the Iranian demands "to provide unconditional support for Syria's president" (Skare 2023). This caused "a rupture in relations" between Hamas and Iran, leading the latter to reduce its financial support to Hamas by "half", while keeping ties with "hardliners Hamas leaders based in Gaza" (Skare 2023).

In fact, what connects Hamas and al-Jama'a is not just their affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood. Two key structures linked to al-Jama'a played a major role in Hamas's expansion among Palestinians in Lebanon during the 1980s: *The Islamic Association of the Sons of Palestine*, which started in 1985

in the Burj al-Barajneh camp, and *'The Islamic Association of Palestinian Students'*, which was established in 1987 and is still active today. At the time, Faisal Mawlawi played a major role in supervising and guiding Hamas in the Palestinian camps, while he was the Secretary-General of the 'Ibad al-Rahman group and a leader in al-Jama'a. Very few people know these details, which are contained in a document written by Khaldoun El Charif, a politician who was the head of the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee from June 2012 to April 2014 and a former political advisor to the Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati. Previously unpublished, this information was shared with me in the course of conducting a journalistic interview in May 2024. This information proves valuable to help decipher decisions as important as reuniting Hamas and al-Jama'a projects of political direct action.

#### **5.2.2.1. Hamas: Moderate vs. Hardline**

In 2017, Yahya al-Sinwar was appointed head of Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, succeeding Ismail Haniyeh, who assumed the movement's Political Chief, succeeding Khaled Meshaal, who became head of Hamas political bureau abroad (BBC 2024). Meshaal was known for "his support for the Arab Spring revolutions, particularly in Syria" (Jawhar 2022). A political repositioning of the movement took place under al-Sinwar and Haniyeh "firm control" by "gradually gravitated further towards Iran" (Jawhar 2022). Hamas was one of the Islamic movements that responded to the attempts to transition towards moderation (Bayat 2010). But the international boycott of Hamas following its victory in the 2006 elections weakened "the moderate wing, which sought to establish diplomatic ties with the Western capitals" (Skare 2023). The targeting of political Islam in the wake of the overthrow of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi in 2013 "strengthened the hardliners, who push for closer ties to Iran and argue that armed violence is the only way forward" (Skare 2023). The internal divisions within Hamas between moderates and hardliners mirrored the struggles within al-Jama'a. The increasing dominance of hardliners within both movements pushed al-Jama'a closer to Iranian and Hezbollah influence, distancing it from its previous moderate stance.

#### **5.2.2.2. Hamas in Lebanon**

In 2018, Hezbollah, the strongest party on the Lebanese scene, had allowed Hamas leaders to settle in the country after the rapprochement in 2017 (Jawhar 2022). One of those leaders was the deputy head of Hamas political bureau, Saleh al-Arouri (Jawhar 2022), who was assassinated in January 2024 in an Israeli strike on an office in the Dahieh neighborhood of Beirut, a stronghold of Hezbollah, along with six other individuals, including two members of al-Jama'a, as reported by a leader in al-Jama'a

to *al-Jazeera* (Dahsha 2024). Those two members of al-Jama‘a were the first to be killed in its ranks since the conflict began on October 7, 2023 (Dahsha 2024). Since 2018, Hamas extended its presence to a "military" presence in the Palestinian camps to reinforce the strategy of "unified front" with Hezbollah to confront Israel (Jawhar 2022). This “unification of the arenas” strategy is a coordination and cooperation among the “Iranian-sponsored alliance of armed militant groups that includes Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic jihad, the Houthis in Yemen, militias close to Tehran the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, and various smaller groups” aiming at enhancing the balance of deterrence against Israel “in order to surround it with a ring of fire” (Young 2023). This strategy has been activated and put to the test for the first time after the eruption of the Gaza war in 2023 (Young 2023). Hamas’ strengthened presence in Lebanon, particularly after 2018, contributed to the renewed alliance between al-Jama‘a and Hezbollah. This alliance was reinforced by their shared goal of resisting Israeli aggression, which became a central theme in al-Jama‘a’s political and military strategy.

### **5.2.2.3. Hamas Restructuring al-Jama‘a**

The presence of Hamas in Lebanon had a major influence on the relations between Hezbollah and al-Jama‘a. Hezbollah’s sponsorship of Hamas in Lebanon brought both Lebanese parties together after years of disagreements. In June 2021, *al-Akhbar* newspaper, which is close to Hezbollah, published that Hamas was able to intervene in the mediation between Hezbollah and al-Jama‘a, pushing for improving relations (Qasem 2021). The newspaper revealed that Azzam al-Ayoubi accompanied Haniyeh in his visit to Hezbollah Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, in 2020 in an attempt to restore trust between the two opposing parties (Qasem 2021). According to reports, including a report by Samer Zreik, this reconciliation did not receive the approval of all the members in al-Jama‘a (Zreik 2022). The members were divided between moderates led by al-Ayoubi and MP Imad al-Hout, and hardliners who control two main components within al-Jama‘a, the military wing (the Fajr Forces) and the security wing (Zreik 2022). Most of the latter's members are employees in Hamas receiving monthly salaries, according to Zreik, adding that the hardliners in al-Jama‘a fully coordinate with Hezbollah and hold mutual periodic meetings that have never ceased (Zreik 2022).

This was actually debated in 2007 when newspapers revealed the conflicts within al-Jama‘a regarding the loyalty of the Fajr Forces after the defection of Yakan in 2003. One of these newspapers is *al-Akhbar* (Al-Samad 2007). It pointed out that Yakan, who was allied with Hezbollah at the time, claimed that the Fajr Forces had become one of the pillars of the Islamic Action Front led by Yakan,

defending the Sunni villages in the border strip after al-Jama‘a abandoned the resistance (Al-Samad 2007). The newspaper quoted an article published in *al-Mustaqbal* newspaper in the same year (Chamiyeh 2007), about al-Jama‘a dismissal of Abdullah Teriaqi, one of the cadres of the Fajr Forces who owes the entirety and most of the elements of the Fajr Forces to Yakan (Al-Samad 2007). His dismissal came after it became clear to al-Jama‘a that Iran had absorbed him into a project far from al-Jama‘a’s orientations (Al-Samad 2007). In his report, Lefever also mentioned the close relationship between Yakan and Teriaqi with Hezbollah by 2006 (Lefèvre 2016). In 2012, the Lebanese Forces website quoted the political official of al-Jama‘a in Beirut, Omar al-Masri, accused Teriaqi of receiving monthly payments from Hezbollah (Lebanese Forces 2012). This coordination between the Fajr Forces and Hezbollah continued and never ceased even with the subsequent tensions (Zreik 2022). Then the relations of al-Jama‘a’s Political Bureau with Hezbollah marked a period of improved relations, especially since the 2022 election of Takoush, according to Muhannad Al-Haj Ali, a researcher at the Carnegie Center (Asharq al-Awsat 2024).

The influence of Hamas led to significant changes within al-Jama‘a, including the reassertion of hardliner control over key organizational elements such as the Fajr Forces. The 2022 election of Mohamad Takoush, a candidate aligned with Hamas and Hezbollah, marked a definitive shift in al-Jama‘a’s ideological and strategic orientation.

#### **5.2.2.4. Election of Secretary-General**

Before the election of 2022, al-Jama‘a lived in an extremely complex geopolitical and ideological circumstance and was unable to maintain the balance required to preserve its identity as a cross-border reformist Islamic movement. al-Jama‘a was forced either to side with its audience as a Sunni Islamic movement living in the Iranian geopolitical space or to subject to its direct influences. It seems that the majority of al-Jama‘a’s members chose the second direction, as was evident from the results of the elections for the position of the General Secretariat that took place on 12 September 2022. Numerous reports indicate that Mohamad Takoush, a candidate affiliated with Hamas and Hezbollah factions (Ghaddar and Zelin 2024), who previously served as al-Jama‘a’s security chief for Beirut and is reportedly on the Hamas payroll (Hage Ali 2022), was elected Secretary-General. Additionally, Muqdad Qalawun, another figure with close ties to Hamas and Hezbollah, was reappointed as al-Jama‘a’s overall security chief (Hage Ali 2022).

Three months after his election, Takoush held a meeting with some media figures reported by *al-Akhbar* newspaper (Fakhredine 2022). In it, he denied the reports concerning al-Jama‘a’s shift from Turkish tendencies to Iranian influence, noting that al-Ayoubi was the first to hold a reconciliation meeting with Nasrallah (Fakhredine 2022). He also emphasized that al-Jama‘a is an independent Lebanese party and no one dictates its decisions. Regarding the relationship with Hezbollah, Takoush said that al-Jama‘a and Hezbollah resemble each other in many ways, agree on many issues including fighting Israel, and differ on others. He also expressed the two parties’ concern about the Sunni-Shiite strife (Fakhredine 2022). Takoush was al-Jama‘a’s first Secretary-General from outside Tripoli since its founding, meaning that al-Jama‘a wanted to give Beirut special attention, a step confirmed by electing a Beirut resident for the Speaker of the Shura Council, according to another report in *al-Akhbar* newspaper (Fakhredine 2022). In 2022 (with no certain knowledge of the exact day and month), the group’s website was hacked, leading to 2017 vision being replaced by a new political framework that emphasized the principle of jihad and the rejection of secularism.

The election of Takoush as Secretary-General in 2022 signaled a departure from al-Jama‘a’s previous efforts at moderation. His leadership, supported by factions within al-Jama‘a aligned with Hamas and Hezbollah, set the stage for the re-adoption of the more radical vision of 2022, which emphasized jihad and rejected the civil state model.

### **5.3. Ideological Influence**

The vision of 2022, which reflects an earlier, more radical framework, marks al-Jama‘a’s return to its original ideological commitments rooted in the principles of Shari‘a and jihad. This shift was catalyzed by the election of Takoush and the growing influence of hardliner factions within the organization. It seems that replacing the vision of 2017 with the vision of 2022 raised more disagreements between the moderates and the hardliners within al-Jama‘a. MP Imad al-Hout, the moderate who succeeded in the parliamentary elections on May 15, 2022, had clearly expressed his complaint about al-Jama‘a’s smooth transition from one side to another, distancing itself from its popular base after the wing affiliated with Hamas took control (Fakhredine 2023). But these disagreements no longer had a place after the October 7 war. In an interview with al-Hout on Nov 6, 2023, he defended the resistance and confirmed that “as long as there is aggression, the group will continue to fire missiles at Israel” (The-Cradle 2024). The consensus within al-Jama‘a between moderates and hardliners regarding resistance to Israel did not completely remove their disagreement over the political framework. In an interview

in March 2024, al-Hout denied that al-Jama‘a was following any political framework other than the vision of 2017 (Asas Media 2024), despite its current website not adopting its provisions.

### **5.3.1. Vision of 2022**

Vision of 2022 consists of 18 items. It dates back to April 9, 2001, when Mawlawi was Secretary-General and Yakan was still in the ranks of al-Jama‘a. Since Mawlawi began issuing statements simulating moderation in 2003, the vision of 2022 is an evidence of the re-adoption of the pre-moderation vision that mimics Yakan’s jihadist ideology, particularly moving away from any mention of a civil state and rejecting secularism. The vision emphasizes Shari‘a and jihad, stating that political participation should be governed by Shari‘a and that jihad is essential for liberating Palestine.

The vision addresses Lebanese and regional realities, emphasizing the need for jihadist mobilization due to ongoing Israeli threats on Lebanon and the plight of Palestinians. It highlights that Shari‘a should govern political work and coexistence with Christians and rejects secularism as a solution for sectarianism. Regarding jihad and the Palestinian cause, the vision of 2022 calls for national mobilization, raising awareness of Israeli threats, and supporting jihad and resistance. It prioritizes confronting the Israeli occupation through coordination with Hamas and other resisting forces, ensuring Lebanon remains a battleground against Israeli occupation.

### **5.3.2. October 7 War (2023): Legitimacy Theory**

The October 7 War in Gaza allowed al-Jama‘a to put its vision of 2022 into action. The group actively called for jihad and engaged in rocket attacks against Israel (Ghaddar and Zelin 2024), marking a significant shift back to the militant strategies outlined in its 2022 vision. This participation in the conflict highlights a clear return to jihad, aligning with the group's earlier ideological commitments. While the transition towards moderation, which aimed to reduce violent actions as outlined by the Bush administration (The White House 2003), appears to have stalled, al-Jama‘a’s popularity has paradoxically increased. Reports indicate that al-Jama‘a’s popularity surged in the 2022 parliamentary elections, partly due to the "absence of political leadership within the Sunni community." This popularity continued to grow after the October 7 war, driven by widespread sympathies for Gaza, even though al-Jama‘a’s forces are relatively small, numbering around "500 fighters" (Ghaddar and Zelin 2024). Additionally, al-Jama‘a has bolstered its appeal by turning the funeral ceremonies of its martyrs

into military and political parades, aiming to recruit and attract "young Sunnis desperate for leadership" by emulating Hezbollah (Ghaddar and Zelin 2024).

The use of legitimacy theory in political discourse helped al-Jama'a justify its return to armed resistance and re-engage with its foundational ideological principles. Legitimacy in political discourse is a generalized perception or assumption that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman 1995, p.574). In an interview with *al-Jazeera* a few weeks after the outbreak of the war in Gaza and al-Jama'a's participation, Takoush stated that the missile strikes directed by the Fajr forces were a response to the Israeli occupation's attacks on "our people and villages" and also to support "our people in Gaza," emphasizing that they are "not alone" in this battle (Dhaibi 2023). Takoush's statements underscored the legitimacy of resistance and jihad, asserting that al-Jama'a resists the strikes of the "treacherous, oppressive, and criminal enemy on Lebanon" which has committed horrific massacres in the Gaza Strip, acts that are "unacceptable and cannot be tolerated" (Dhaibi 2023). By framing its military actions as a defense against aggression and a show of solidarity with Gaza, al-Jama'a's leader is able to construct a narrative that legitimizes its involvement and resonates with the broader Sunni community.

## **5.4. Conclusion**

The first three chapters explored the inclusion-moderation hypothesis using Schwedler's method and demonstrated that al-Jama'a effectively transitioned towards moderation, most notably through the issuance of the 2017 vision, which advocated for a modern civil state devoid of illegal weapons and regional conflicts. However, this chapter reveals that al-Jama'a's journey towards moderation was interrupted, as evidenced by the re-adoption of the vision of 2022, which emphasizes adherence to Shari'a and the necessity of jihad. This regression is attributed to three key factors: regional influences, internal structural challenges, and ideological shifts within the organization. These elements collectively explain why al-Jama'a reverted to a more radical stance. The next chapter will analyze these findings in greater detail.

## **6. Analysis of Findings**

Through a structured study of al-Jama‘a, this thesis explores the ideological shifts within the group, focusing on the dynamic interplay between its participation in pluralist processes and its evolving stance on Shari‘a and jihad. These principles are central to understanding al-Jama‘a's ideological trajectory. The vision of Azzam al-Ayoubi in 2017 marked a significant shift towards moderation, embracing pluralism and openness by sidelining these foundational principles. However, under Mohamad Takoush’s leadership in 2022, the group experienced a deliberate reversion to radicalism, driven by a return to the core ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the teachings of Fathi Yakan. This shift reflects al-Jama‘a’s renewed commitment to its traditional religious values, highlighting the ongoing tension within the group between modern civil governance and these values. While influenced by the growing presence of Hezbollah, this reversion underscores al-Jama‘a’s determination to maintain an independent stance. Their participation in conflicts, including the recent war, can thus be understood as a continuation of their return to Muslim Brotherhood ideologies, rather than an alignment with Hezbollah.

### **6.1. Shari‘a and Jihad: Foundational Principles in Focus**

Shari‘a and jihad are foundational within al-Jama‘a, rooted in the group's origins in the Muslim Brotherhood. Over the decades, these principles have evolved within al-Jama‘a’s political frameworks, reflecting the circumstances of each era while remaining true to the group's founding manifesto from 1964 (Al-Jama‘a n.d.). The manifesto's principles—propagating Islam in response to contemporary issues, organizing and educating the faithful, confronting Western civilization, and rallying Muslim sects—have continuously shaped the group's actions in response to changing political, social, and geopolitical contexts (Rabil 2011, p.2).

Both al-Banna and Qutb wished to incorporate Shari‘a law “as a counterpoint against the continual decline of Islamic civilization at the time” (Larsson 2017, p.92). They also “considered Shari‘a as essential to any Islamic society,” but Qutb went further to consider it essential “for all mankind” and “perfect civilizational project for Muslims” (Larsson 2017, p.87). Yakan, similar to al-Banna and Qutb, believed that the Islamic Ummah had lost its civilizational brilliance and weakened because Muslims had strayed from the core principles and teachings of Islam (Rabil 2011, p.2). In facing the existing reality, the Muslim Brotherhood eventually accepted the modern state, arguing that it “does not stand

in contradiction with the implementation of Islamic Shari‘a” (W. B. Hallaq 2012, p.7). This is what Yakan did when he justified al-Jama‘a’s entry into the Lebanese political process.

Following the 2011 uprising in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was afforded an opportunity to govern. However, their absence of a clear plan for implementing Shari‘a led to the emergence of opposition and their eventual ousting in 2013 (Auf 2016, p.6). In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the ensuing political turbulence, al-Jama‘a in Lebanon introduced a political framework in 2017, embodying a pragmatic approach aligned with the belief that the modern state is not in conflict with Shari‘a and recognizing that early Islamic societies had established the concepts of citizenship, democracy, and suffrage (W. B. Hallaq 2012, p.7). Nevertheless, with the resurgence of Islamism, Shari‘a became a crucial element in political action as outlined in the vision of 2022.

While most people limit jihad’s meaning to war, the Holy Qur’an did not only use the word jihad in relation to “armed struggle for the cause of Islam,” but rather used the term “Qitaal Fi Sabeel-e-Allah” (Shah 2009, p.5), which means “fighting in the way of Allah” (Sahih-Muslim n.d.) to refer to armed struggle and to jihad at “the physical level of fighting to defend the country, society and Islamic sovereignty” (Kaslan 2021). Jihad is interpreted by:

- The greater jihad, “for it is a life-long process of an individual Muslim to remain constantly engrossed in fighting against the evil nature of his soul”
- The lesser jihad “which is a military warfare waged by the Muslims against others for various reasons” (Md 2008).

## **6.2. Moderation Under Azzam al-Ayoubi’s Leadership**

Under Azzam al-Ayoubi’s leadership in 2017, al-Jama‘a experienced a significant shift towards moderation. His vision emphasized the creation of a modern civil state grounded in citizenship, where rights and duties were guaranteed by law, and governance was based on competence and merit. This vision, which deliberately omitted references to Shari‘a or jihad, was a strategic attempt to align with the March 14 Alliance and to address Western concerns regarding the role of Shari‘a in governance. Al-Ayoubi’s approach was rooted in the broader historical context of law in the Muslim world, where, over centuries, Shari‘a had been integrated with various legal systems, including those influenced by Ottoman, French, and Canon laws (Ergene 2014, Nordanskog 2002). His 2017 vision, therefore,

represented a deliberate move away from traditional religious governance towards a framework more aligned with democratic principles and the complex realities of Lebanon's sectarian political landscape.

While discourse is a practice not just of representing the world but of signifying the world, constituting, and constructing the world in meaning (Fairclough 1992, p.64), Bayat states that true power lies not just in words but in those who speak them (Bayat 2010). Words gain power when given material force; for example, the statement "Islam is compatible with democracy" varies in impact depending on the speaker (Bayat 2010, p.6). Bayat concludes that the right ideas need material support and consensus to become powerful. This underscores how the 2017 vision's language integrates Islamic principles within a modern state framework.

Despite these efforts, al-Jama'a's shift towards moderation under al-Ayoubi was not universally accepted within the group. The departure from the strict ideological commitments of Shari'a and jihad created tensions, particularly among members who remained deeply influenced by the group's foundational principles. This internal discord set the stage for a reversion to more radical positions under subsequent leadership.

### **6.3. Reversion to Radicalism Under Mohamad Takoush**

Takoush's leadership can be seen as a response to both internal pressures and external threats. Internally, there was growing discontent among members who felt that al-Jama'a had strayed too far from its original mission under al-Ayoubi. Externally, the escalating regional conflicts, particularly the Syrian Civil War and the rise of Hezbollah as a dominant force in Lebanon, created a sense of urgency within al-Jama'a to reassert its identity and purpose. Takoush's vision of 2022, therefore, represented a return to the group's foundational ideologies, positioning it once again as a defender of Sunni Islam in the face of perceived threats from both local and regional actors.

The reversion to radicalism under Takoush also reflected a broader trend within the Muslim Brotherhood network, where some factions have resisted the push towards moderation and instead doubled down on their traditional commitments to Shari'a and jihad. This shift has significant implications for al-Jama'a's political and military strategies, particularly in its approach to regional conflicts.

#### 6.4. Outlines of The Visions of 2017 and 2022

The political frameworks reflect the leadership's visions. In 2016, under al-Ayoubi's leadership, the group deleted the old platform—effectively deleting the entire old history and practices of the group—and created a new one reflecting the vision of 2017, which abandoned al-Jama'a's ideological commitments, particularly its adherence to implementing Shari'a and its focus on jihad for the liberation of Palestine. This serves as clear evidence that al-Jama'a's participation in pluralist processes influenced its ideological stance towards moderation. While a printed copy of the vision of 2017 is available in the Appendix, it includes items reflecting the characteristics of the state that al-Jama'a aspires to (Figure 7):

- *'A state based on citizenship, where citizens enjoy rights and duties guaranteed by law'*
- *'A modern civil state, where responsibility is based on competence and eligibility'*

The term qanun (law) has been extensively studied in the context of the Ottoman Empire, referring to a legal code containing government directives on various matters (Ergene 2014). According to scholar Boğaç A. Ergene, "[g]iven supposed inadequacies of Sharia, which regulate the entirety of public and private life, the Ottomans had to adopt a separate, non-religious system of law in order to effectively govern their territories" (Ergene 2014, pp. 109-112). However, in the nineteenth century, as "European powers began to gain political and economic influence in the Muslim world and the Middle East", affecting "the legal field" (Masud 2022, p. 93), "qanun gradually became a generic name for all laws and regulations" (Esposito 2003, p.96). In Lebanon, the legal system integrates French legal principles, remnants of Ottoman (ancient Turkish) law, Canon law, and elements of Islamic Shari'a law (Nordanskog 2002, p.1). In the 1990s, the Lebanese legal system was gradually reformed with the creation of a French-inspired institution called the Constitutional Council (ibid, p.18). While religion is highly significant in Lebanon, personal status is the only area of law directly influenced by religious affiliation (ibid, p.23). This means that Lebanese law includes Shari'a only in personal status matters.

Perceptions of Shari'a vary widely; in the West, it is often viewed as a threat to democracy and the rule of law, while many in the Muslim world see it as a positive force for improvement, encompassing "a wide variety of ideological and religious ideas, both moderate and puritan" (Otto 2008, p.5). The vision of 2017 proposed a modern civil state emphasizing citizenship, law, and legal equality without

mentioning Shari‘a, likely to mitigate Western concerns about Shari‘a, especially since al-Ayoubi, who issued this vision, was trying to approach the March 14 alliance. This vision aligns with broader democratic principles and the realities of Lebanese sectarian politics. It contrasts starkly with the vision of 2022, which re-emphasizes Shari‘a as a guiding principle, calling for governance in accordance with Shari‘a regulations, and marks a return to al-Jama‘a’s traditional roots in response to heightened regional tensions and the need for ideological cohesion (Al-Jama‘a n.d.).

The vision of 2017 marked a significant shift in al-Jama‘a’s stance on jihad. While reaffirming support for the Palestinian cause, the vision refrains from explicitly calling for jihad, instead emphasizing peaceful political engagement and the rejection of illegal weapons (See Appendix; Figure 5, 8):

- *‘The joining of a group of Lebanese in the ongoing wars in Syria, Iraq and Yemen’*
- *‘Rejecting illegal weapons and refusing to involve Lebanon in regional conflicts’*

This position clearly complements the position of the Future Movement, which called for the rejection of “Hezbollah’s illegal weapons” (Asharq-al-Awsat 2011). Regarding the Palestinian cause, al-Jama‘a emphasized its support without any mention to jihad, contenting itself with mentioning only this sentence (Figure 7):

- *‘Supporting the Palestinian cause’*

The 2017 vision is considered the culmination of its path towards moderation, as it contradicted its earlier doctrine and Islamist ideology and was presented openly and publicly, unlike the closed organizational settings of the past. However, al-Jama‘a’s path to moderation was influenced by various factors explained in Chapter four. This halt in the transition to moderation is evidenced by the adoption of the vision of 2022 after a cyber-attack occurred in the same year Takoush was elected, replacing the vision of 2017 with a vision that calls for adherence to Shari‘a and jihad. While this vision still exists in the group’s platform, the Appendix includes screenshots of it too. The vision of 2022 refers to Shari‘a and to the abandoning of the modern state (Figure 11, 13):

- *‘Activating political work within al-Jama‘a because we believe in our doctrine and awareness that political work is an act of worship if it is governed by the regulations and rulings of Shari‘a’*

- *'The reality of coexisting with Christians in Lebanon necessitates reaching an acceptable formula for this coexistence governed by Shari'a regulations considering the specificities of each sect in their personal affairs and beliefs'*
- *'The issue of confusing religiosity with sectarianism and presenting secularism as a cure for sectarianism necessitates that everyone understands that the remedy for abhorrent sectarianism can only be true religiosity. The problem lies with the merchants of sectarianism and the advocates of secularism who are opposed to our values and morals. A truly religious person does not know fanaticism; he is open-minded, acknowledges the other, and respects his opinion and belief (There is no compulsion in religion).'*

The vision of 2022 reasserts the importance of jihad, framing it as a necessary response to continued Israeli threats on Lebanon and the plight of Palestinians (Figure 11):

- *'Moreover, the ongoing Israeli threat to Lebanon and its resistance, and the continued occupation of part of its land, necessitate the continuation of jihadist mobilization given the presence of one of the largest Palestinian populations on Lebanese territory, depriving them of their right to return to their land, and the spread of news about their settlement and the impact of this on the political reality in Lebanon'*

As for the issue of jihad and the Palestinian cause, the vision of 2022 calls for jihad to liberate Palestine (Figure 14, 15):

- *'Mobilizing the nation and raising awareness of the Israeli threat that jeopardizes it in all its aspects and existence and working on building a resistant society through thought and practice and supporting the path of jihad and resistance by all possible means. This necessitates cooling down all other political fronts and enhancing coordination with the Arab and Palestinian arenas to confront the threat that endangers Arabs, Muslims, and all of humanity'*
- *'Considering confronting the Israeli project as a top priority through full coordination with ( Hamas Movement) and supporting all resisting forces and ensuring that the Lebanese arena remains a battleground against the Israeli occupation'*

The vision of 2022 under Takoush emphasized political involvement as a form of worship when guided by Shari'a, called for respectful coexistence with Christians under Shari'a law, and criticized secularism as a harmful influence that undermines religious values. This vision framed true religiosity, not secularism, as the solution to sectarianism, thereby deepening the group's exclusionary stance. The use of terms like '*secularism*,' '*cure*,' '*religiosity*,' and '*our values and morals*' further highlighted the ideological shift back to a framework that opposed Western democratic ideals in favor of a more rigid Islamic governance model (Cambridge Dictionary). In the context of Lebanon, secularism is defined as the separation of religious institutions from state functions, ensuring that the state remains neutral in religious matters to protect the freedom and equality of all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs (Yassine 2021).

## **6.5. Moderate vs. Radical Visions**

The 2017 vision's focus on citizenship and legal rights represents an attempt to engage with modern political contexts, influenced by leaders like Azzam al-Ayoubi. His pragmatic approach is evident in the emphasis on modern civil government and political participation. In contrast, the vision of 2022, which replaced the vision of 2017 following the election of Mohamad Takoush, reintroduces Shari'a as a cornerstone of governance. This vision aligns with the foundational principles of al-Jama'a and the teachings of Yakan, emphasizing the inseparability of religion and state and the necessity of Shari'a in all aspects of life.

The vision of 2017 marks a significant departure from the traditional Islamist stance, reflecting a willingness to engage with secular democratic principles. This vision marks an era of moderation and political integration, aligning with Schwedler's inclusion-moderation hypothesis, which suggests that Islamist groups tend to moderate their positions when participating in pluralist processes (Schwedler 2006). Conversely, the vision of 2022 returns to al-Jama'a's foundational principles, emphasizing Shari'a and religiosity as core components. The shift responds to the need to assert a distinct ideological identity, aligning with Hallaq's critique of the feasibility of Islamic governance within modern state structures (W. B. Hallaq 2012, p.9).

The contrasting visions of 2017 and 2022 underscore the tension between modern civil governance and traditional religious values within al-Jama'a, reflecting broader debates across the Muslim world about the role of religion in state affairs. The election of Takoush as Secretary-General in 2022, and

his reintroduction of Shari‘a and jihad into the group’s vision, marks a clear reversion to the foundational ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood. This shift was likely motivated by perceived external threats and a need for internal ideological consolidation, with Takoush’s leadership steering al-Jama‘a back to a more exclusionary and religiously stringent discourse.

## **6.6. Yakan vs. Al-Ayoubi: Parallels with Takoush**

The ideological shifts within al-Jama‘a can also be understood by examining the dissimilarities between the leadership styles and visions of Fathi Yakan and Azzam al-Ayoubi, as well as the similarities between Yakan and Mohamad Takoush.

In 2016, under Azzam al-Ayoubi, al-Jama‘a had moved towards moderation by engaging in democratic and pluralist processes, excluding commitments to Shari‘a and jihad. This shift was seen as an attempt to align with the Sunni axis led by the Future Movement and supported by Saudi Arabia. However, the unity of Islamic movements, particularly those aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology, had been a core principle emphasized by Fathi Yakan, a key figure in al-Jama‘a’s history. Yakan, in a 2009 interview, discussed how he had addressed disputes within al-Jama‘a by engaging with the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Al-Hiwar 2009, min, 36:36). This connection to the broader Muslim Brotherhood network was not a priority for al-Ayoubi, who emphasized al-Jama‘a’s independence as a Lebanese organization with its own local decisions, free from external influence (Al-Jazeera 2016, min. 23:04):

*‘The Islamic Group is a Lebanese organization. It originates from the Muslim Brotherhood and follows the intellectual school of the Muslim Brotherhood, yes, but it is a Lebanese organization. Like all Muslim Brotherhood organizations across the Arab and Islamic world, they are national organizations with local decisions, and no one country interferes with the affairs of another’*

His vision in 2017, a year and two months after this interview, marked a significant departure from Yakan’s approach, which is based on secrecy, discretion, concealment, and camouflage (Yakan 1981, pp. 129, 130, 131). While Yakan calls for not being hypocritical with the rulers and not going along with the tyrants by deviating from any of the principles of Islam (Yakan 1981, p.157), most notably Shari‘a and jihad (Yakan 1981, pp. 79-136), the vision of 2017 was considered an attempt by al-Jama‘a

to transition to moderation and openness while aligning with the rulers within the Sunni axis. This appears clearly in al-Ayoubi's continuing statement (Al-Jazeera 2016, min. 23:25) using words like 'realistic', 'stepping out of the closed organizational', 'diversity,' and 'Lebanese arena':

*'Today, we are in the process of practicing a more active and realistic role in our Lebanese society. We will be part of this society, stepping out of the closed organizational framework to be more interactive with the surrounding environment that is outside the organization but shares with us visions and significant national interests. Therefore, our project is no longer just an organizational project but a societal one. This society, with all its diversity, will be the focus of our attention as the new leadership of the Islamic Group. I do not think we are deviating from a previous path, but we are naturally evolving to meet the demands of the upcoming stage and the aspirations of our audience. Today, the audience in the Lebanese arena, specifically the main audience in the Sunni arena, looks to us to play a more engaged role with them, and I do not think we are in a position to disappoint their expectations. Therefore, we will strive to truly represent and embody these aspirations'*

In stark contrast, Takoush's leadership brought the group back to a more exclusionary discourse. The 2022 vision reasserted Shari'a's role in political action and called for a jihadist approach to liberate Palestine, a clear reversion to the foundational ideologies of Yakan. The similarities between Takoush and Yakan's ideologies are evident, particularly in their rejection of secularism, which both leaders viewed as a threat to Islam's existence. Yakan had long criticized the secular, materialistic political and economic system as a threat to Islam's global paradigm (Rabil 2011, p.3). This perspective is mirrored in the 2022 vision. This ideological alignment is further supported by interviews with both leaders, where Takoush's return to a more radical stance was emphasized. In a March 2024 interview, Takoush described his group's involvement in the Lebanon-Israel conflict as a "national, religious, and moral duty" to defend "our land" and support "our brothers in Gaza," aligning his actions with Yakan's vision of resistance (Mroue 2024). He also emphasized that while his group made independent decisions on the ground, it maintained close coordination with Hezbollah and Hamas (Mroue 2024). These strategic alignments, coupled with a renewed focus on jihad and resistance, mirrors Yakan's vision of a pan-Islamic resistance movement. Yakan had predicted that both Sunni and Shi'a communities would develop their own initiatives, leading to a broader resistant Islamic project across the Islamic world (Al-Hiwar 2009, min, 27:07):

*'I believe that the coming days will highlight an Islamic project. First, the Sunni community will have its project, and the Shi'a community will have its project. Then, a resistant Islamic project will emerge across the entire Islamic arena, not just in Lebanon. This is what it strives for. I have conveyed this to many Arab leaders. The challenges of today are different from those of the past, and these challenges make us at the highest levels of readiness and precision in understanding what is happening. In the coming days, the project will have matured and will have produced a resistant Islamic project that combines education, preaching, and jihad, which are our slogans. Our agreement with Hezbollah is that the resistance should be the resistance of the entire nation to confront the American project'.*

In this interview held a week before his death, Yakan addressed the unification of Sunni and Shi'a initiatives into a wider Islamic resistance throughout the Muslim world. He emphasized the importance of readiness and conveyed this vision to Arab leaders, highlighting a collective resistance alongside Hezbollah against American influence. Al-Jama'a's alignment with the 'axis of resistance' following the 2022 election of a new Secretary-General reflects a revival of its original ideological roots, as established by its founder, Fathi Yakan.

Yakan's concept of "pan-Islamism" is the focus of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology, which called on all Muslims to "unite and gather under the same banner, nation, and identity" (Larsson 2017, p.40). But the Brotherhood's founder, Hassan al-Banna, is considered "pragmatic vis-à-vis Qutb" (Larsson 2017, p.35) and took a "nonsystematic approach to the West and colonialism as the antagonist of Islam" (Larsson 2017, p.89). Unlike Qutb, who "did not propose any compromises", calling for "jihad of the sword" as a strategy to "abolish all Satanic forces" and "end the lordship of one man over others" (Larsson 2017, p.77). As mentioned previously, it is true that Yakan's ideology was influenced by al-Banna and Qutb; however, he leaned more toward the actionable ideology of Qutb to face the challenges of this fateful battle. The vision of 2022 emphasizes supporting the path of jihad and resistance by all possible means. After the 7 October war, al-Jama'a used not just oratory but also armed support. In addition, it uses armed appearances during the funeral processions, confirming to the public that it is adopting a jihadist approach. This prediction seems to have come to fruition under Takoush's leadership, with al-Jama'a playing a key role in the October 7 war and adopting a jihadist approach influenced by Yakan and Qutb's advocacy for "jihad by the sword" (Larsson 2017, p.77).

## 6.7. Conclusion

In sum, al-Jama‘a’s ideological trajectory is best understood as a deliberate and ideologically motivated shift, rather than a reactionary move influenced by external forces such as Hezbollah. This thesis argues that the group’s involvement in the October 7 war is rooted in a revival of the foundational principles of the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly those espoused by its founder, Fathi Yakan, and his vision of a resistant Islamic project. The election of Mohamad Takoush as Secretary-General in 2022 marked a return to these principles, with a renewed emphasis on Shari‘a and jihad, signaling a significant departure from the moderation promoted under Azzam al-Ayoubi. This ideological reversion, which began a full year before the escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict, reflects a conscious realignment with Yakan’s vision of resistance and a rejection of the modern civil state model.

Far from being drawn into the conflict by Hezbollah, al-Jama‘a’s actions in the October 7 war were consistent with its renewed jihadist ideology. The group’s stance remains ideologically distinct from Hezbollah’s Shiite model of an Islamic state, which is based on the concept of “wilayat al-faqih,” where ultimate political and spiritual authority rests with a religious jurist (A. N. Hamzeh 2004, p.28). In contrast, al-Jama‘a’s Sunni perspective, grounded in the Muslim Brotherhood’s teachings, emphasizes “consensus (ijma‘), the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and ijtihad,” as the sources of law, rejecting the centralized authority inherent in Hezbollah’s model (ibid). This fundamental difference underpins al-Jama‘a’s independent stance and its continued commitment to its own interpretation of Islamic governance, distinct from the Shiite model espoused by Hezbollah.

This analysis reinforces the thesis’s central argument: al-Jama‘a’s renewed participation in the conflict and its return to a more radical ideology were driven by internal ideological developments rather than external manipulation, aligning with a broader revival of the Muslim Brotherhood’s principles within the group.

## **7. Conclusion**

By applying political ethnography, this thesis has examined the ideological and political evolution of al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya in Lebanon, focusing on its oscillation between extremism and moderation from its inception to the recent developments in 2023. The analysis demonstrates that al-Jama‘a’s renewed participation in the October 7 Israel-Hamas War and its return to a more radical ideology were primarily driven by internal ideological developments rather than external manipulation. This finding supports the central argument that the group’s ideological trajectory reflects a complex interplay between internal leadership changes and external pressures, ultimately leading to a reversion to the principles of its founder, Fathi Yakan, particularly in the year leading up to the war.

The research illustrates that while al-Jama‘a’s engagement in pluralist processes initially facilitated a phase of moderation, the election of Mohamad Takoush as Secretary-General in 2022 marked a significant ideological shift. The group’s return to the foundational ideologies of Shari‘a and jihad, central to the Muslim Brotherhood, represents a deliberate reversion to its jihadist roots. Contrary to some reports, this shift was not a response to Hezbollah’s influence but rather a conscious reaffirmation of Yakan’s vision of a resistant Islamic project, deeply rooted in the group’s historical commitments.

This thesis also reveals that the impact of the Arab Spring in Syria created a rift between Iran and both the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Jama‘a in Lebanon. Al-Jama‘a’s attempt to align with the Sunni axis (Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Egypt) in 2017 by advocating for a modern civil state and avoiding external conflicts ultimately failed, partly due to the Sunni axis’s targeting of al-Jama‘a following the Gulf crisis in 2017. This targeting, along with the cessation of cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood after their rise in Egypt in 2013, has now pushed the group back towards the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. This raises important questions about whether al-Jama‘a’s commitment to moderation would have persisted if cooperation with the Sunni axis had been possible, and if the actions of the Sunni axis had not undermined moderate thought within al-Jama‘a.

### **7.1. Research Question Responses**

This thesis addressed two key research questions:

- **How did al-Jama‘a’s participation in the pluralist processes influence its ideological stance towards moderation, as reflected in its 2017 vision under Azzam al-Ayoubi?**

Chapter three, supported by the analysis, explored al-Jama‘a’s engagement in Lebanese politics and its participation in pluralist processes, revealing how these experiences led the group to evolve from a closed, rigid ideology to one that embraced greater openness and tolerance. The 2017 vision, crafted under Azzam al-Ayoubi’s leadership, was the culmination of this shift toward moderation. This vision abandoned al-Jama‘a’s traditional commitments to Shari‘a and jihad in favor of advocating for a modern civil state, signaling a significant ideological transformation. The analysis highlighted that this moderation was not just a strategic alignment with the Sunni axis but also a genuine attempt to integrate into Lebanon’s pluralistic political landscape, demonstrating how participation in democratic processes can reshape Islamist groups’ ideological stances towards moderation.

- **What internal and external factors contributed to the ideological shift of al-Jama‘a towards a more radical stance under Mohamad Takoush’s leadership in 2022?**

Chapter four, in conjunction with the analysis, examined the factors that led al-Jama‘a to revert to a more radical stance under Mohamad Takoush’s leadership in 2022. This shift was influenced by a combination of external and internal pressures. Externally, the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Gulf crisis, and the increasing regional influence of Iran and Hezbollah created a volatile environment that pressured al-Jama‘a to reconsider its stance. Internally, structural challenges, financial strains, and ideological disputes between moderates and hardliners within the organization set the stage for this reversal. The election of Takoush, a leader aligned with the hardliner faction, marked a decisive turn away from the moderation of the 2017 vision. The re-adoption of the vision of 2022, which re-emphasized Shari‘a and jihad, reflected a return to the foundational ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood and Fathi Yakan, demonstrating how both internal dynamics and external influences can drive ideological shifts within Islamist movements.

## **7.2. Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research could further explore the role of individual leaders in shaping the ideological and political strategies of Islamist groups. Comparative studies between al-Jama‘a and other Islamist movements in different regional contexts could provide deeper insights into the factors influencing

their political behavior. Examining the impact of socio-economic conditions on the ideological commitments of Islamist groups would also be a valuable addition to the existing literature. This comprehensive analysis of al-Jama‘a’s political and ideological evolution offers significant insights into the challenges and dynamics of political Islam in Lebanon and the broader Middle East, contributing to a better understanding of the complex interplay between ideology, politics, and regional influences.

Moreover, analyzing Arabic-language content intended for internal Lebanese consumption provides a unique perspective on the evolution of a Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated party, a topic often overlooked by Western scholars. Understanding the engagement of Muslim Brotherhood parties with ideological principles within a Lebanese context underscores the need to differentiate among parties in the broader Middle East. The evolution of al-Jama‘a in Lebanon, as evidenced by their shifting positions in the 2017 and 2022 visions, indicates that political and religious doctrines are adaptable to new conditions. This study reveals that so-called fundamentalist Islamic parties are not necessarily rigid in their ideologies. It also shows that Sunni parties in Lebanon are capable of identifying common causes with Hezbollah, which is often narrowly defined in the literature as an exclusivist Shiite faction.

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## 9. Appendix

### 9.1. Vision of 2017

The summary of the vision of 2017 on the official website of al-Jama'a (Figure 4):

2/29/24, 8:00 PM

0096171514545

بحث

الجماعة الإسلامية في لبنان

الرئيسية من نحن اخبار ونشاطات الجماعة المواقف الاسبوعية بيانات و تصريحات اتصل بنا

البنسبة - المواقف الاسبوعية - رؤية وطن

من نحن

المشروع السياسي للجماعة الإسلامية

مواقع صديقة

اتصل بنا

"رؤية وطن"

الإثنين 15 أيار 2017

الموقف  
الاسبوعي

1/3

2/29/24, 8:00 PM

تحت هذا العنوان "رؤية وطن" عقدت الجماعة الإسلامية في لبنان مؤتمرها العام في مركز الاحتفالات في مجمع الببال بيروت بحضور رسمي وسياسي ودبلوماسي، أمام عدسات الاعلام وبحضور قيادات وكوادر الجماعة الإسلامية في المناطق اللبنانية كافة.

فارق عدد الحضور في المؤتمر من المشاركين والضيوف أكثر من ألف مشارك، وتمت بحسن التنظيم، وقدمت الجماعة فيه رؤيتها للمسألة الوطنية من النواحي السياسية والأمنية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية وغيرها، وأكدت حرصها على الانفتاح على كل مكونات الوطن، كما أكدت في خطابها على وسطيتها واعتدالها ونسجها مع قناعاتها وفهمها للقضايا الدينية والسياسية.

وقد جاء المؤتمر هذا العام مختلفاً عن المؤتمرات السابقة، فهذه المرة لم يكن في عُرف تنظيمية مغلقة، وهو تأكيد من الجماعة أنه ليس لديها ما تخفيه عن جمهورها وعن الرأي العام اللبناني.

أرادت الجماعة تبديد الصورة النمطية التي رُكبت عبر التاريخ عن إبطاء وانعزال الحركات الإسلامية عن مجتمعاتها وأرادت أن تؤكد أنها من صلب المجتمع، وشريك فيه، ولها رؤيتها لبنانه والارتقاء به الى ما هو أسمى وأفضل.

لقد كان المؤتمر نجاحاً بالمقاييس التي يجري اعتمادها عادة في قياس مثل هذه المحطات والمناسبات، إلا أن التحدي الآن أمام الجماعة في تحويل هذه الرؤية وما تضمنته من تصورات وتوصيات الى فعل يومي، وحركة دائمة وإيجابية تسهم في البناء المنشود والشراكة التي يتم العمل من أجلها للارتقاء بالوطن الى مواقع أخرى مقدمة.

التحدي الآن في مزيد من الانفتاح على المكونات الوطنية لاجاد أجواء تطلعن الجميع وتقدم "الإسلاميين" كمساهمين في النهضة المرجوة والمنشودة، على خلاف الصورة التي تعمل الكثير من الوسائل الاعلامية على ضخها بشكل مستمر لـ "شيطنة" التجربة والحركة الإسلامية.

تم إن التحدي الآخر هو في إقناع الصف الداخلي بخطوات الانفتاح و المقاربة المتجددة للقضايا التي تعني الناس والمجتمع، وتأكيد للمعنى الذي ترفعه الجماعة على أنها حركة إصلاحية تعنى بالانسان والمجتمع والدولة كجزء من مسؤوليتها في إعمار الأرض.

توقع البعض أن تتضمن وثيقة المؤتمر تنازلات أو تراجعاً في فكر الجماعة و رؤيتها السياسية و الحيوية، لكن الجميع تأكدوا بأن انفتاح الجماعة لا يعني بأي حال من الأحوال تراجعها عن ثوابتها الفكرية و السياسية، وقد برز ذلك في خطاب الأخ الأمين العام و الحوارات المفتوحة التي استمرت ساعات.

Figure 4

The printed copy of the vision of 2017 from a personal source (Figures 5-9):

وثيقة الجماعة الإسلامية ٢٠١٧، رؤية وطن  
يشهد الواقع اللبناني مجموعةً من التحديات الداخلية والخارجية  
ينبغي التعامل معها في سبيل النهوض بالواقع الإسلامي في  
لبنان بما يتناسب مع تطورات المرحلة.  
من هنا جاءت وثيقة «الجماعة الإسلامية – رؤية وطن» لتقدم  
عناصر مشروع، يحمل الأمل بالقدرة على التغيير والنهوض رغم  
المرحلة المضطربة التي يمر بها الوطن والمنطقة.

#### قراءة في الواقع العام

على المستوى السياسي:

- تعطيل المؤسسات السياسية وضعف الدولة الضامنة  
بمؤسساتها للمواطن.
- تعدد هوية الانتماء مما أدى إلى انتشار الطائفية والتنافس  
على المحاصصة ومواقع النفوذ.
- واقع سلبي للعدالة والمساواة.
- إلباس الصراعات السياسية اللبوس الطائفي والمذهبي.
- انخراط فريق من اللبنانيين في الحروب الدائرة في سوريا  
والعراق واليمن.

على المستوى الاجتماعي:

- صعوبات معيشية حادة في ظل الانكماش الاقتصادي.
- وجود ما يوازي مليون ونصف نازح سوري.

على المستوى الخارجي:

- خطاب متطرف.
- تشويه صورة الإسلام والهجمة على التيار الإسلامي  
والحركي.
- تطورات الثورة السورية وانعكاساتها.

#### رسالة الجماعة الإسلامية ورؤيتها

تتلخّص الجماعة في عملها من رسالة تتضمن:

السعي لمرضاة الله عز وجل، وممارسة المعنى الشامل للعبادة،  
وجمع المسلمين حول الفهم الصحيح للإسلام، والعيش المشترك.

الرؤية:

تتلخّص رؤية الجماعة الإسلامية في هذه المرحلة بكلماتٍ بسيطة  
وواضحة: البناء القوي.. الحضور الفاعل.. الريادة والشراكة.

#### محاور التركيز

البناء القيمي - البناء المؤسسي - البناء المجتمعي بناء الدولة -  
محور البناء القيمي

وتقوم الجماعة الإسلامية على العمل في هذا المحور من خلال:

- منظومة تحصيل فكري وقيمي عبر نشاطات تثقيف وتوعية  
فكرية لأعضائها والجمهور المتصل بها.

- مشروع المحضن التربوي النموذجي لتعزيز مقومات  
الشخصية الإسلامية القدوة.

- أكاديمية البناء القيادي الموجهة للشباب لإعدادهم إعداداً  
قيادياً.

#### محور البناء المؤسسي

تعمل الجماعة الإسلامية من خلال منظومة متكاملة من المؤسسات  
وفق منظومة مؤسسية مرنة، فعالة ومتناسكة. فجميع مستويات  
العمل في الجماعة الإسلامية تأتي بالانتخاب.

#### محور البناء المجتمعي

تسعى الجماعة الإسلامية من خلال عملها مع المجتمع اللبناني  
لترسيخ المفاهيم الآتية:

- الإيمان بقيم الرسائل السماوية.

- ممارسة العدالة والمساواة - التكافل ورعاية الأسرة - الأمن  
والإنتاج.

وتعمل الجماعة الإسلامية في هذه المرحلة لتحقيق هذه القيم من  
خلال مجموعة من المشاريع والبرامج.

Figure 5

Figure 6

### محور بناء الدولة

إن الدولة التي تريدها الجماعة الإسلامية هي الدولة القوية بقوة تمثيلها للناس وقيمهم ومصالحهم.

#### خصائص الدولة التي نطمح إليها:

- دولة تقوم على المواطنة حيث يتمتع المواطنون بحقوق وواجبات يكفلها القانون.

- دولة دستورية تداولية تقوم على الفصل والتكامل بين السلطات التشريعية والتنفيذية والقضائية.

- دولة سيادة القانون يتقدم فيها أمن المجتمع على أمن السلطة والأحزاب.

- دولة مدنية حديثة، المسؤولية فيها حسب الكفاءة والأهلية.

- دولة لا تعارض فيها بين المواطنة والطوائف، بل علاقة توافق وتكامل.

#### رؤية الجماعة للريادة والشراكة

ريادة الحالة الإسلامية، وذلك من خلال:

- تصحيح الصورة الذهنية عن الإسلام.

- الدعوة إلى اللقاء التشاوري الذي يجمع أطراف الساحة الإسلامية.

- المساهمة في تطوير المؤسسات الإسلامية.

الشراكة في تحصين وبناء الوطن:

- النهوض البلدي من خلال تنفيذ برامج تطوير كفاءات الجسم البلدي واستفادته أفضل استفادة من مفهوم اللامركزية الإدارية.

- المشاركة في الإصلاح الانتخابي وبناء المؤسسات.

- دعم قضايا الشعوب العادلة

- دعم حق الشعب السوري في سعيه للحرية.

- دعم القضية الفلسطينية.

### رؤية الجماعة الإسلامية لبناء الدولة...

- المواطنة ودولة المؤسسات والتي تقوم على:

- استكمال تطبيق اتفاق الطائف.

- لا مركزية إدارية وإنماء متوازن.

- رفض السلاح غير الشرعي ورفض الزج ببلدان في الصراعات الإقليمية.

- حماية الحريات ومنع تعديبات التوقيفات، وإلغاء صلاحيات المحاكم العسكرية الاستثنائية على المدنيين.

#### القيم والعدالة الاجتماعية

- دعم الأسرة كوحدة أساسية في بناء المجتمع ورعاية الأخلاق العامة.

- دعم دور المرأة التكاملية مع الرجل.

- تفعيل دور الشباب وتأمين فرص العمل لهم.

استثمار الثروات ومكافحة الفساد:

- تعزيز استقلالية الهيئات الرقابية.

- تفعيل دور المجتمع المدني الرقابي.

- اقتصاد إنتاجي دعم القطاعات الإنتاجية.

- شفافية مالية عامة.

عناصر الاستراتيجية الدفاعية والأمنية...

- عداء ثابت وواضح للكيان الصهيوني.

- تأكيد حق الشعب اللبناني في تحرير أرضه.

- صيغة توازن رعب مع العدو الصهيوني.

Figure 7

Figure 8

## الموقف من الإرهاب...

### أسباب الإرهاب

- العنف والظلم السياسي.
- الفهم الخاطئ للدين وغاياته ومقاصده.
- رعاية مخابراتية لهذه الظواهر وتوظيفها.
- انحياز المجتمع الدولي لمصالحه على حساب الشعوب ومن ذلك القضية الفلسطينية.

### ليس إرهابياً

- مقاومة العدو المحتل (المقاومة في فلسطين نموذجاً).
- الدفاع عن النفس في وجه نظام يمارس القتل (الشعب السوري نموذجاً).

## وسائل المعالجة

- تعتبر الجماعة أن التعامل مع هذه المجموعات يجب ألا ينحصر بالتعامل الأمني فقط بل ويشمل:
- المعالجة الفكرية والعلمية، وهنا يبرز دور التيار الإسلامي الوسطي.
- نشر الحريات الأساسية وحرية التعبير.
- التنمية الاجتماعية.
- إدانة ووقف ممارسات الأنظمة القمعية.
- تعزيز الإجراءات القضائية.
- إن الجماعة إذ تتطلع للقيام بدورها وواجبها في تحصين الواقع اللبناني والنهوض به، تضع هذه الوثيقة بين أيدي مختلف القيادات والهيئات لتشكل نقطة حوار وانطلاقاً لعمل مشترك يساهم في تحقيق هذه الرؤية.

Figure 9

## 9.2. Vision of 2022

The detailed terms published on the official website (Figures 10-15), showing the date of the vision (April 9, 2001) at the end of the vision and the creation of the website in 2016 as the copyright date references at the bottom of the site (Figure 15):

0096171514545 بحث



**الجماعة الاسلامية في لبنان**

الرئيسية من نحن اخبار ونشاطات الجماعة المواقف الاسبوعية بيانات و تصريحات اتصل بنا

للإبسة - المشروع السياسي للجماعة الإسلامية

- من نحن
- المشروع السياسي للجماعة الإسلامية
- مواقع صديقة
- اتصل بنا

## المشروع السياسي للجماعة الإسلامية

إن تحديد مضامين المشروع السياسي للجماعة الإسلامية في لبنان، يكمن في عملية المقاربة الصعبة بين واقع الحياة السياسية اللبنانية، وخصوصياتها وتداخلاتها الكائمية والسياسية الإقليمية والدولية من جهة، وتوافق ذلك مع منطلقاتنا الفكرية والعقائدية الناظمة لحركة دعوتنا الإسلامية من جهة أخرى.

أولاً في واقعنا اللبناني: إن الوضع السياسي اللبناني المزوم، الذي بدأ مع اختلاف اللبنانيين حول الهوية والكيان منذ الاستقلال وحتى توقيع اتفاق الكائف ووقف دورة العنف، لم يستطع حتى الآن الوصول إلى واقع سياسي مستقر، مما يوجب على القوى السياسية كافة وضع المخطط المناسب والشعبي لمغادرة الأزمة البنوية أم بوتيرة متسارعة، لأن تركيبة لبنان الطائفية - لا سيما بعد تكريس طائفية الإثناسات - في ظل إدارة عاقبة

Figure 10

فاسدة ومترهلة، وأزمة اقتصادية خانقة، تهدد بنسف كل الإنجازات السياسية والأمنية، الأمر الذي دفع إلى حالات انقسام شتى بين اللبنانيين نتيجة الشعور بالإحباط والتهميش السياسي المنتقل بين الطوائف، وانعدام حالة الاستقرار والتوازن السياسي في لبنان من جراء الأذى السياسي المتعمد للحكومات المتعاقبة والآثار السلبية الناتجة عن قوانين الانتخابات وتحالفاتها وتنازعاتها، مما أوجد لدى البعض شعوراً بالانقراض من الحزبية والشهادة فجاهر بالعداء العروية وسوريا وطالب بانسحابها من لبنان، الأمر الذي دفع البعض الآخر إلى التنبية من مخاطر ومفئة ركوب هذا المركب الخشن. ولقد ساعد في هذا تزايد التأثير الثقافي والسياسي والاقتصادي والأمني، الإقليمي والدولي بين فئات المواطنين، مع ما يرافق ذلك من اندحار غالبية اللبنانيين نحو حافة الفقر.

كما أن استمرار التهديد الإسرائيلي للبنان ومقاومته، وبقاء الاحتلال على جزء من أرضه، يوجب استمرار التعبئة الجهادية مع وجود إحدى أكبر التجمعات البشرية الفلسطينية على الأراضي اللبنانية، وحرمانها من حق العودة إلى أرضها، وتسريب أخبار توطيها، وأثر ذلك على الواقع السياسي في لبنان.

ثانياً في واقعنا الإقليمي: 1- إن التفرد الأمريكي في العالم، في ظل التوجه الدولي نحو قمع وتأييد كل الخارجين على مخططاته الاستعمارية وعمليّات محاصرة وتضييق الخناق على حركات المقاومة والتحرر، فرض نظاماً عربياً عاجزاً عن تلبية تطلمات الشعوب وتوقها إلى الحزبية والاستقلال، ودفع نحو المزيد من الانحياز بعد فشل سياسة فرض التسوية مع إسرائيل وفشل كل محاولات التطييع معه.

2- بالإضافة إلى تزايد حالات التضامن الشعبي والرسمي العربي مع انتفاضة شعب فلسطين، وتبخر أوهام الصلح المعتدل مع وصول الليكود إلى سدة السلطة وانسداد أي أفق للتسوية، مما يؤسس لمواجهة شعبية شاملة في الأذال المحتل يستحيل بقاء المحيط العربي في منأى عنها، خاصة مع تزايد مساحة الوعي وتباشر الصخرة الإسلامية الواعدة، الأمر الذي يطرح الإسلام كبديل حضاري للواقع القائم.

3- انطلاقاً من نظرة الجماعة إلى أن لبنان جزء لا يتجزأ من الأمة العربية، وحيث أن العمق العربي والإسلامي يمثل البعد الاستراتيجي للبنان، لذلك فإنه يجب على لبنان والحركة الإسلامية فيه تمكين علاقة الأخوة مع المحيط العربي وخصوصاً مع الدول التي تشكل حالة رفض للمشروع الإسرائيلي.

في حركة المشروع السياسي الإسلامي: إن الصراع السياسي في لبنان سيعيد بعض الحيوية المفقودة إلى الحياة السياسية، حيث سينمور النقاش والجدل السياسيين حول الحزبية والسيادة، وقانون الانتخاب العتيد، والحلول المناسبة للخروج من أفاق الملف الاقتصادي والاجتماعي، في جو ينبيى بحدوث تبكالت في التحالفات بين القوى السياسية، الأمر الذي يوجب على حركتنا السعي لتحقيق التالي:

1- تفعيل العمل السياسي في الجماعة، لأننا نؤمن في عقيدتنا ووعينا أن العمل السياسي عبادة إذا كان محكوماً بضوابط الشرع وأحكامه، مما يحتم علينا إجلال العمل السياسي مكانه اللائق في تربيتنا الأسرية وترتيبنا الدعوية وعدم اعتباره عبثاً، مع لحظ إمكانية تعثره وخطئه كما سائر الأعمال الدعوية الأخرى.

Figure 11

2- السعي إلى استعادة المبادرة السياسية في ساحتنا الإسلامية من خلال إطلاق النشاطات والبرامج والندوات والمحاضرات وتبني القضايا المحققة والدفاع عنها، والانخراط في شؤون المجتمع لما فيه خيرته وصلاحه.

3- إبراز دور القيادة الإسلامية الملتزمة من خلال تفعيل الاتصال بالمجتمع عن طريق:

أ - المشاركة في المؤسسات الإسلامية الرسمية (الأوقاف - المجلس الشرعي - دار الفتوى - الخطباء - الأئمة..) والمطالبة بإصلاحها وتفعيل دورها.

ب- الاشتراك في مؤسسات المجتمع (الجمعيات الأهلية واللجان الثقافية) والانخراط في العمل النقابي وتأمين وصول الطاقات الإسلامية إلى قيادته والاهتمام بالقطاع العقالي.

ج- السعي إلى إيصال الكفاءات الإسلامية إلى المؤسسات الرسمية على اختلافها.

د- تحسين شروط المشاركة الفعالة في الانتخابات النيابية والتمثيلية كافة، والاهتمام بالبلديات والمجالس الانتخابية، وتدعيم ورعاية وجودنا فيها.

هـ- قد ندعى الجماعة إلى المشاركة في الحكم، وبنينا يتخذ مجلس الشورى موقفاً مبدئياً في هذا الموضوع، يبقى للمجلس حق تقرير المصلحة في المشاركة أو عدمها وإجازة ذلك.

4- مقاومة نهج الظلم والاستبداد السياسي، ومخاربة الفساد في الإدارة من خلال تبيان الأخطاء والانحرافات، والتصدي لمحاولات كتم الأفواه وقمع المعارضة والتخدير من عسكرة النظام.

5- السعي إلى إلغاء الطائفية السياسية، باعتبارها المخرج من المأزق القائم أمام أي إصلاح سياسي أو إداري.

6- الدفاع عن الحرية باعتبارها مقصداً عظيماً من مقاصد الشريعة، والاهتمام بقضايا حقوق الإنسان والمحافظة على الحريات العاقبة، كإطار صالح لممارسة حياة سياسية نظيفة، والحرص على المكتسبات التي كفلها الدستور.

7- إن الديمقراطية في مفهومنا هي الوسيلة المتاحة لحماية الحرية الشخصية وتأكيد مبدأ الشورى، واستمداد السلطة من الشعب، ومسؤولية الحاكم تجاه شعبه وخضوعه للمساءلة والمحاسبة، ولذلك فنحن نسعى إلى إصلاح النظام اللبناني باتجاه تحقيق تمثيل أفضل للجماهير الشعبية، وتحسين الحريات السياسية، والمحافظة على أخلاقيات العمل السياسي.

8- إن سن قانون عادل ومتوازن للانتخابات النيابية له أهداف وآثار بعيدة على الحياة السياسية، ومن المفترض أن يكون أكثر معة وتمثيلاً وعدالة. وهذا يرتبط بنظام التمثيل كما يرتبط بتقسيم الدوائر الانتخابية، لذلك فإن المطالبة بتطبيق النظام النسبي - وإن على مستوى المحافظة - هو السبيل الأكثر عدلاً ومساهمة في تحديث

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الحياة السياسية وإنشاء التكتلات على أساس البرامج، مما يؤدي إلى رفع نسبة المشاركة في الحياة العاقبة (دراسة مفصلة)

9- إن واقع العيش المشترك مع المسيحيين في لبنان، يستدعي الوصول إلى صيغة مقبولة لهذا التعايش، محكومة بالضوابط الشرعية، تلحظ خصوصية كل طائفة في أحوالها الشخصية ومعتقداتها.

10- إن إشكالية الخلط بين التدنن والطائفية، وطرح العلمانية كعلاج للطائفية، يستدعي أن يدرك الجميع أن علاج الطائفية البغيضة لا يكون إلا بالتدين الصحيح، والمشكلة تكمن بتأثر الطائفية ودعاة العلمانية المعارضة مع قيمنا وأخلاقنا والتدين لا يعرف التعصب فهو منفتح ويعترف بالأثر ويحترم رأيه ومعتقداته (لا إكراه في الدين).

11- إننا نرفض بالمطلق ظاهرة الخروج المسلح على المجتمع والدولة، وندعو إلى نبذ العنف بكل أشكاله، ونعتقد أن إزالة المنكرات وإصلاح المجتمع يكون بالحكمة والموعظة الحسنة، وأن الحوار هو السبيل لتزسيخ السلم الأهلي والحياة المشتركة، وندعو إلى الوسطية في الموقف والكلمة والتوجه (وكذلك جعلناكم أمة وسطاً لتكونوا شهداء على الناس...) وإلى رفض كل أنواع التطرف والغلو.

12- إن نظرنا إلى التحالفات السياسية نتطرق من أن العمل السياسي يتحرك في واقع متعدد الأطراف، وصياغة التحالفات تتم من خلال الدائرة الصغيرة وموالياً إلى الدوائر الكبيرة، لذلك نرى:

أ- ترتيب الساحة الإسلامية عبر محاوره القوى الفاعلة والشخصيات والتوصل إلى تحديد رؤية مشتركة.

ب- محاولة حشد كل طاقات الصف الإسلامي في جبهة واحدة تعمل على تكامل العمل الإسلامي وتنسيقه.

ج- رسم قاعدة الالتقاء مع القوى السياسية التي تجمعها قواسم مشتركة مع الجماعة، والدعوة إلى إطار متحد يجمع كل الطاقات في (حلف فضول) جديد ضد الظلم والاستبداد، وتوفير المناخ الاجتماعي والسياسي والفكري للمناقشة الحرة بين الأفكار والمعتقدات عبر تبني أسلوب (الافتتاح السياسي) في مرحلة مواجهة الهممة والنسب، ومد يد التعاون والتنسيق إلى كافة أطراف الساحة الوطنية على قاعدة الاحترام المتبادل، والتصدي للمشروع الأميركي الإسرائيلي وإفرازاته على الساحة اللبنانية.

13- إن الوضع الاقتصادي المتفاقم وحالة العجز المتزايدة في الموازنة يدفعان إلى تأكيد التالي:

أ- وضع سياسة اقتصادية تعتمد الفرص الذاتية للاقتصاد الوطني بعيداً عن المشاريع الكبرى التي تفوق قدرة الوطن والمواطن، ووقف الهدر في التلزيما وترسيده الإنفاق وضبطه وتحقيق الإصلاح الإداري وتفعيل أجهزة الرقابة والمحاسبة.

ب- وضع حدٍ لسياسة إغفال الموارد الداخلية والتماهي في الاعتماد على القروض الخارجية لما لذلك من آثار  
أ - على مستقبل الفرار الوطني، والمطالبة بوضع قانون نسوية مخالفات الأملاك البحرية موضع التنفيذ.

Figure 12

Figure 13

واستعادة سوق النفط من الشركات الخاصة، والمحافظة على الثروات المائية والطبيعية والسياحية وسائر الأملاك العمومية واستثمارها في النطاق العام.

ج- السعي لإيلاء الوضع الزراعي الاهتمام اللازم، حيث أنّ نصف الشعب اللبناني يعيش من هذا القطاع، وثبت أنه أساس الدورة الاقتصادية، وعندما تُرب القطاع الزراعي بدأ الشلل يصيب الاقتصاد الوطني ككل، لذلك يجب تطوير وتصنيع وحماية وتدعيم الإنتاج الزراعي بكلّ إبعاد.

د- إنّ مستقبل الصراع في المنطقة يتمحور حول المياه والحاجة الماشية إليها في الفترة القادمة، الأمر الذي يوجب المحافظة القصوى على هذه الثروة ومنع استنزافها وإنشاء البحيرات والسدود لحفظها واستثمارها.

هـ- شُكّلت السياحة والاصطياف والخدمات واقفاً معيّراً في الموقع والدور للبنان والمنطقة، لذا تُكتسب حملات حماية البيئة ومنع التلوث وتأمين مستلزمات النظافة العافية والوقاية اهتية بالغة

و- السعي الدائم إلى تحقيق إنماء المناطق والمحافظات، ومطالبة الدولة بتبني سياسة إنمائية وإعمارية شاملة للمناطق المحرومة والعمل على إيصال الحقوق إليها وتحقيق التكامل باعتماد اللامركزية الإدارية عبر دعم البلديات وتطوير أدائها.

14- الخصخصة: مع تقديرنا لنجاح القطاع الخاص ومعالجته في إدارة المؤسسات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية، إلا أنّنا ندعو الدولة التي طرحت الخصخصة لتأمين موارد مالية للخزينة، إلى التنهتة من خطوة اختكار حاجة الناس إلى الضروريات والسعي لتحقيق أفضل الشروط المناسبة، وعدم بيع المؤسسات الرابطة والإبقاء على الخاسرة لصالح بعض المحظوظين، وتأمين كاتمة وسائل المراقبة والضبط.

15- السعي إلى توسيع إطار استفادة المواطنين من التقديمات الاجتماعية ولا سيما توفير بطاقة الاستشفاء الموحد والضمان الصحي وضمان الشيخوخة، ودعم وتطوير المستشفيات الحكومية.

16- التعليم: تطلب الجماعة بإيلاء التعليم مكانته اللائقة به، وتوفير سبل تحصيل التعليم المّادي لجميع اللبنانيين، وتوحيد المناهج المدرسية، وإتجار كتاب موحد للتاريخ والتربية الوطنية، بما يحقّق تخريج أجيال مرتبطة بثقافتها وجزورها العربية، بعيداً عن التوجّهات التغريبية أو العنصرية الشوفينية.

17- القضية الفلسطينية: انطلاقاً من الواجب الملغى على العرب والمسلمين إزاء القضية الفلسطينية فإنّ الجماعة ترى من واجبها: -إ- تعبئة الأفة وتوعيتها بالخطر الإسرائيلي الذي يتهدّد بها بكلّ مقوماتها ووجودها، والعمل على بناء المجتمع المقاوم بالفكر والممارسة، وتدعيم مسيرة الجهاد والمقاومة بكلّ الوسائل الممكنة، الأمر الذي يستدعي تبريد كلّ الجهات السياسية الأخرى وتفعل التنسيق مع الساحة العربية والفلسطينية لمواجهة الخطر الذي يتهدّد العرب والمسلمين والإنسانية بكاملها.



Figure 14

ب- تبني قضية اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في لبنان ولا سيما تمّتعهم بحقّ العودة، وإقرار الحقوق المدنية والإنسانية للشعب الفلسطيني المشرد، ورفع الظلم والحرمان عنه.

ج- اعتبار مواجهة المشروع الإسرائيلي في مقدّمة اهتماماتنا من خلال التنسيق الكامل مع (حركة حماس) ودعم كلّ القوى المجاهدة، والحرص على إيلاء الساحة اللبنانية كساحة مواجهة ضدّ الاحتلال الإسرائيلي.

18- قضية المرأة: المرأة نصف المجتمع ومرتببة النصف الآخر، وهي معنيّة بالتكليف والمسؤولية الشرعية والمدنية كالرجل، ومن حقّها ممارسة العمل السياسي والمشاركة في الانتخابات على كلّ المستويات ترشيحاً وانتخاباً ضمن الضوابط الشرعية، بيروت في 15 محرم 1422 الموافق 9 نيسان 2001

من نحن

في مطالغ الحسنات كانت الحركة الإسلامية في عدد من أقطار العالم العربي قد نمت وولت تشكل تياراً فكرياً وسياسياً واضحاً على الساحة العربية. كانت مؤلفات حسن البنا وسيد قطب ومصطفى السباعي، وما جرى تعريبه ونشره من كتب أبي الأعلى المودودي في باكستان، وإصدارات الإخوان المسلمين كمجلة "الدعوة" و"المسلمون" من مصر و"الشهاب" من سوريا و"الفتح الإسلامي" من الأردن المرید

Figure 15

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