

Jihadi Radicalization of Muslim Clerics

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Abstract

This paper explains why some Muslim clerics adopt the ideology of militant Jihad while others do not. I argue that clerics strategically adopt or reject Jihadi ideology because of career incentives generated by the structure of cleric educational networks. Well-connected clerics enjoy substantial success at pursuing comfortable careers within state-run religious institutions and they reject Jihadi ideology in exchange for continued material support from the state. Clerics with poor educational networks cannot rely on connections to advance through the state-run institutions, so many pursue careers outside of the system by appealing directly to lay audiences for support. These clerics are more likely to adopt Jihadi ideology because it helps them demonstrate to potential supporters that they have not been theologically coopted by political elites. I provide evidence of these dynamics by collecting and analyzing 29,430 fatwas, articles, and books written by 91 contemporary clerics. Using statistical natural language processing, I measure the extent to which each cleric adopts Jihadi ideology in their writing. I combine this with biographical and network information about each cleric to trace the process by which poorly-connected clerics become more likely to adopt Jihadi ideology.

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1 Introduction

In this paper, I explore the degree to which Muslim clerics express the ideology of militant Jihad. The key question is simple: why do some Muslim clerics become radical Jihadists while others do not?

Clerics wield significant power within Islam, especially the preeminent scholars called the *‘ulamā’*¹ (literally, “learned ones”) who interpret the Quran and expound Islamic doctrine for lay Muslims. This relatively small number of individuals has an enormous effect on what Muslims believe and do. Historical debates among the *‘ulamā’* have determined which doctrines are considered acceptable or heretical in Islam. Contemporary pronouncements by clerics can have substantial sway among lay Muslims, defining norms of acceptability and permissibility for the entire range of human action. Clerics that support transnational Jihad have been of particular concern to counter-terrorism experts because these ideologies directly motivate Jihadi terrorist attacks (McCants, 2006). The influence of Jihadi clerics is so great that extremist cleric ʿĀnwar al-ʿUlaqī was called the “most dangerous man in the world” by a New York Police Department counterterrorism official in November 2010.²

Despite the importance of these clerics and a proliferation of research on Jihad, we know very little about the causes of Jihadi extremism among the clerical elite. Although scholars have studied radicalization of lay Muslims, the processes of cleric radicalization are unexplored. Unpacking the sources of extremism among clerics is important because these religious elites have disproportionate power to shape the discourses, and ultimately actions, of the extremist organizations that feed on these ideologies. An understanding of why some Muslim clerics support militant Jihad may illuminate how extremists can be persuaded to moderate their views or how new generations of extremist clerics can be neutralized.

I argue that cleric educational networks shape the career opportunities available to clerics and push some to radicalize and others to remain moderate. Most clerics support themselves by holding paid positions as Imams, teachers, bureaucrats, and advisors in the state-run systems of

¹For Arabic terms not common in English, I use standard Library of Congress transliteration, including “ʿ” for *ayin* (a voiced pharyngeal fricative) and “ʾ” for *hamza* (a glottal stop).

²<http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/awlaki-dangerous-man-world/story?id=12109217>

mosques, universities, and ministries of their respective countries. Governments throughout the Muslim world strongly oppose Jihadi ideology and clerics in the state system generally adapt their views accordingly. However, poorly-networked clerics face limited options for advancement within the state institutions, so they often seek careers outside the system by appealing directly to lay Muslims for support. Many lay constituencies prefer clerics that are theologically independent, so some clerics adopt Jihadi ideology as a costly, credible signal of their commitment to doctrinal integrity.

In the following sections, I first discuss the doctrine of Jihad within Islam and describe the particular type of transnational Jihadi ideology that is the focus of my analysis. I then develop explanations for variation in adoption of Jihadi ideology by clerics and test these explanations using the writings and biographies of 91 contemporary clerics, along with interviews of clerics and students in Cairo, Egypt. I conclude by discussing the findings and their broader implications.

2 Jihad in Islam

Since the revelation of the Quran, the concept of Jihad has played a prominent and often controversial role in Islamic doctrine and political thought.³ The term *Jihād* (جهاد) comes from the Arabic verb “to struggle” and is often roughly translated into English as “holy war”. The word “Jihad” appears in the Quran, although often with somewhat different connotations than the word carries today (Bonner, 2006, 21-22). The concept of military defense of Islam was certainly operative in Muhammad’s lifetime during the early conflict between his followers and the other Arabian tribes, although ideas of Jihad were not fixed at this early date (Mottahedeh and al Sayyid, 2001) and they remain contested today.

After the Prophet’s death, the responsibility of interpreting Islamic law fell gradually to the *‘ulamā’* — the scholarly religious elite. Islamic jurisprudence covers virtually all aspects of both private and public life, so Jihad naturally became subject to interpretation by these clerics. Among the many understanding of Jihad, perhaps the modal interpretation among the *‘ulamā’* is that

³It is impossible to survey the literature on Jihad in its entirety. Some recent works include Bonner (2006), Devji (2005), and Brachman (2009).

there are two forms of Jihad: the greater Jihad in which individuals struggle to purify their souls, and the lesser Jihad of armed defense of Islam and Islamic lands. In moderate interpretations of Islam, violent Jihad is relatively unimportant and clerics that defend it in principle are unlikely to advocate for it in practice.

The Salafi movement, a conservative Islamist movement founded in the 19th century based on the interpretations of Ibn Taymiyya (1263 C.E. – 1328 C.E.), Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahāb (1703 C.E. – 1792 C.E.), and later Sayyid Quṭb (1906 C.E. – 1966 C.E.) is the progenitor of modern Jihadi ideology (Wiktorowicz, 2005*a*, 2006). Salafis seek to purify Islam by adhering to a strict interpretation of the faith that follows the perceived practices of the first generations of Muslims. Most Salafis are not Jihadis, and there is substantial animosity between the “establishment” Salafi clerics and their Jihadi brethren, but modern Jihadi ideology is best understood as coupling conservative Salafist ideology with an open avowal of violence as a legitimate tool for political change (Brachman, 2009).

In contrast to the nationalist strains of Jihadi ideology voiced by groups like Hamas and Hizbulah, this transnational Jihadi ideology attacks the “far enemy” — the West — in addition to the secular governments of Jihadis’ own countries or Israel. This transnational Jihadi ideology is rooted in a set of perceived grievances perpetrated by the West against Islam, including oppression, coercion, and victimization, especially of Muslim civilians. Jihadis see themselves as participating in a fundamental struggle between good and evil which justifies violence until the forces of Jihad ultimately vanquish the crusading West. For Jihadis, action is required now. Calls for delay or peaceful reconciliation with the supposed enemies of Islam represent festering stagnation while militant action for the sake of Jihad purifies the soul and advances the cause of justice (Brachman, 2009). Jihadi clerics work to prove that various violent activities that are typically forbidden in Islam, such as terrorism, suicide bombing, and attacking non-combatants, are actually permissible or obligatory to counter the perceived Western threat.

3 A Theory of Cleric Radicalization

There is very little work on why Muslim clerics choose theological positions or support militant Jihad. What we know about radical Muslim clerics comes from careful ethnographic or historical accounts of the lives of few clerics and ideologues (Wagemakers, 2012; Lia, 2008; Euben, 1999; Musallam, 2005; Hegghammer and Lacroix, 2011; Jackson, 2011) or the history of intellectual movements among the *‘ulamā* (Lacroix, 2011; Hegghammer, 2010; Brachman, 2009; Moghadam and Fishman, 2011; Lav, 2012). The literature on Jihadi ideology has delved deeply into specific texts to understand the world-view of these clerics and ideologues, but this depth has come at the price of breadth — although the Jihadi cannon has consists of hundreds or thousands of texts,⁴ the current scholarly literature typically only engages one or a few texts, assuming that these are representative of the rest (Kepel and Milelli, 2010; Euben and Zaman, 2009; Deol and Kazmi, 2012; Bergesen, 2007). Scholarship on Muslim clerics in domains other than Jihad also tends to focus on a handful of scholars and texts (Masud, Messick and Powers, 1996; Graf and Skovgaard-Petersen, 2009; Zebiri, 1993; Lazarus-Yafeh, 1981; Caeiro, 2011). These studies have provided rich detail and valuable descriptions, but with no systematic comparison of Jihadi clerics to non-Jihadi clerics, these studies are not able to answer the question of why some clerics adopt Jihadi ideology.⁵

There is a more systematic literature on Jihadi radicalization, but it focuses on radicalization of lay Muslims. The clearest account of radicalization among lay Muslims is a general process described by Wiktorowicz (2005b) and Sageman (2004). First, relatively non-religious lay Muslims face some type of shock or societal alienation that induces frustration and leads to “cognitive opening” in which individuals seek new frames for understanding the world. During this period, individuals may turn to Islam for answers and support; individuals with social ties to extremists may be pulled toward radical versions of Islam. Once introduced, some individuals become convinced that an extremist cleric or group offers the most authentic and legitimate source of Islamic interpretation. With this credibility established, the extremist indoctrinates individuals to believe

⁴An electronic collection of Jihadi indoctrination texts known as the *Mujahid’s bookbag* contains 1,029 documents. The Jihadi web-library *Minbar al-Tawhīd wal-Jihād* (<http://tawhed.ws/>) contains 5,433 documents.

⁵Attempting to explain radicalization by looking only at radical clerics is an example of selection on the dependent variable (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994).

that militant Jihad is an essential religious duty that will help them achieve the salvation prioritized by their newfound religious conviction.

Can theories of radicalization among lay Muslims that travel to explain cleric radicalization? Here, I consider four factors suggested by Wiktorowicz (2005*b*) and Sageman (2004): alienation, ignorance, poverty, and socialization.

Alienation

The initial conditions in this sequence are a combination of psychological and experiential factors that make particular individuals susceptible to radicalization. Sageman (2004) argues that individuals who become culturally and socially isolated seek out groups and organizations that can provide them with camaraderie, friendship, and purpose. At least some alienated individuals will find social support in the company of other individuals under the guidance of a radical or radicalizing spiritual leader, who subsequently prepares and recruits these individuals for Jihad. Wiktorowicz (2005*b*) also relies on this mechanism to explain the initial conditions that allow for radicalization. For Wiktorowicz, cultural and social isolation are among many possible sources of stress that lead to “cognitive opening”, in which an individual becomes open to new and potentially radical ideas.

Helgren (2011) extends this theory to argue that this social alienation combines with “Western” experience to produce individuals that are likely to blame the West for their problems and thus seek out transnational terror networks such as Al-Qaeda to provide camaraderie and social support. Helgren argues that Western experience makes Jihad against the “far enemy” more attractive than participation in national militant groups that do not attack the West.

Ignorance

Perhaps counter-intuitively, lay Muslims who are less religious are more susceptible to Jihadi radicalization than Muslims who are deeply embedded in their faith. In a comparison of joiners and non-joiners of a Britain-based extremist group, Wiktorowicz (2005*b*) finds that “most al-Muhajiroun activists were irreligious prior to their seeking and involvement in the movement” and “were unlikely to have adopted a religious identity” (102). In comparison, non-joiners “view themselves first and

foremost as Muslims” (102-103). This lack of identification with or knowledge about Islam makes individuals susceptible to radicalization for several interrelated reasons. Low levels of religious knowledge mean that individuals are less equipped to discriminate between moderate and extreme versions of Islam. Simultaneously, individuals with little religious knowledge that nevertheless turn to Islam are more easily influenced by religious elites with expert knowledge. When this religious elite espouses radical views, these are likely to be passed on to followers.

At first blush, ignorance does not seem likely as a cause of cleric radicalization because it is hard to imagine that Jihadi clerics are ignorant of Islam given their position as religious elites. However, Jihadi clerics may have less formal training on average, in part because the decentralized nature of religious authority in Islam means that individuals can claim religious authority outside of any existing educational hierarchy. Relatively untrained clerics might espouse Jihadi ideology in a bid to earn respect through their ideological positions rather than their credentials.

Poverty

According to Sageman (2004), relative economic deprivation, discrimination, and the inability to find adequate work are the key sources of the individual frustration that leads to cognitive opening and religious seeking. More generally, there has been substantial debate as to whether poverty and low education are drivers of terrorism of all types (Keefer and Loayza, 2008; Krueger, 2007; Krueger and Maleckova, 2003). The scholarly literature currently grapples with a conundrum – terrorism and political violence arise disproportionately from impoverished states where education levels are very low, but the actual perpetrators of terrorist violence are often relatively educated and well-off. One possible explanation for this is suggested by Bueno de Mesquita (2005), who argues that terrorists will be more educated and wealthy than the average population, even if they are motivated by poverty, because terrorist organizations will only select candidates with high levels of human capital. Some recent evidence supports his argument that economic deprivation may be a source of terrorism, even if terrorists themselves are relatively well educated and well-employed (Benmelech and Berrebi, 2007; Benmelech, Berrebi and Klor, N.d.), although this finding has also been questioned (Lee, 2011).

Poverty may have radicalizing effects on cleric ideologies. Future clerics who living as children in poor areas may be more likely to encounter sources of radicalization. Anecdotally, at least a few radical clerics such as Ābū Qatāda al-Filistīnī have come out of the Palestinian territories and other exceptionally poor areas, suggesting that poverty may have a radicalizing effect in at least some cases.

Socialization

Both Sageman (2004) and Wiktorowicz (2005*b*) highlight the role of teachers who indoctrinate and socialize lay Muslims on the path to radicalization, and similar socialization effects may also shape the ideologies of clerics. Family is generally the first source of socially acquired information about Islam, but for most clerics, their sense of what constitutes legitimate Islamic practice is acquired outside the home at the hands of teachers. After their primary schooling, future clerics are typically enrolled in a religious secondary school where a significant portion of the day is spent in Quranic studies. Students that display aptitude will then enter specialized theological training, perhaps at one of the famous Islamic universities in Egypt or Saudi Arabia. It is at this point that clerics typically begin to mention the influence of specific mentors on their thinking. Because Islamic schooling instruction emphasizes memorization,⁶ this training with senior clerics may be the first time that clerics-to-be are asked to think critically about theological and religious issues for themselves.

It is in the process of this training that clerics acquire most of the religious expertise that informs their legal thinking. This education hones clerics' abilities to identify, locate, and use relevant passages of the Quran, *hadeeth* (sayings of the Prophet and his companions), *seera* (the biography of Muhammad), and *tafseer* (Quranic exegesis). The ideological bent of a cleric's teachers could strongly influences the sources that a new cleric ultimately favors. Cleric attitudes and beliefs about most doctrinal issues are likely to be formed during this time of intense tutelage. Just as apprentices in other fields often inherit the ideological leanings of their mentors, clerics may acquire

⁶The degree to which Islamic education prizes memorization can hardly be overstated. In June of 2011, I sat with a study circle of Al-Azhar students from the College of Shariah and Law as they tested each other on their word-for-word memorization of a 300-page 3rd-year textbook. See also Boyle (2004)

their beliefs about the legitimacy of militant Jihad from the clerics that train them.

3.1 Educational Networks, Career Incentives, and Jihadi Ideology

I propose an alternative theory explaining why some clerics adopt Jihadi ideology while others do not. The outline of my argument is as follows: I argue that clerics strategically adopt or reject Jihadi ideology because of career incentives generated by the structure of cleric educational networks. Well-connected clerics typically enjoy successful careers within state-run religious institutions. In exchange for continued support from the state, they assist the political elites by opposing — or at least not adopting — the ideology of militant Jihad. In contrast, clerics with low-quality educational networks cannot rely on connections to advance through the state-run institutions, so many pursue careers outside of the system by appealing directly to lay audiences for support. These clerics are more likely to adopt Jihadi ideology because it credibly signals to potential supporters that they have not been theologically coopted by political elites.

The story starts with the rise of Salafism, a conservative Islamist movement seeking to return Islam to the supposed doctrinal purity and authentic practices of the first generations of Muslims. Thinkers and theologians in this movement repeatedly clashed with regimes and political elites, and the conflict helped to forge a core part of Jihadi doctrine: that leaders of Muslim states can be branded apostates and replaced via Jihad. This doctrinal development was obviously unwelcome by political elites who endeavored to repress Jihadi ideology because it particularly threatened their legitimacy and tenure as rulers. Most of the open conflict between Jihadis and their respective regimes has occurred in Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Lacroix, 2011), but enmity between the ruling elites and Jihadi ideologues has been almost universal.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Arab countries of the Middle East underwent modernization; as part of this process, venerable religious institutions were coopted by political elites and brought under the aegis of the state. In Egypt, for example, this meant that the famous and previously independent University of Al-Azhar became a state institution, and rather than being supported by an independent financial endowment, it was re-funded under the government ministry of endowments. Most clerics became government employees. They still led mosques, taught schools, and

issued advice and fatwas, but rather than drawing support from independent financial sources, they were paid from government coffers. Career advancement and appointments were now regulated by the state rather than being the sole purview of the community of *‘ulamā*.

This system remains in place today, meaning that most clerics have to pursue careers within the state-run system of religious institutions. The state attempts — usually successfully — to ensure that clerics’ teachings and writings are acceptable to the state. Clerics that openly endorse Jihadi ideology are acting contrary to the state’s wishes and are often relieved of their appointments, arrested, and imprisoned (Lacroix, 2011; Brachman, 2009). This has the obvious result of discouraging Jihadi ideology among the vast majority of clerics who are trying to make a living while working their way through the ranks of the state system. Even the most respected and prestigious clerics have conceded to the demands of the state in order to maintain their careers. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz bin Bāz — the head cleric in Saudi Arabia — was widely seen as compromising Islamic legal principles for political expediency when he issued a fatwa authorizing the basing of US warplanes on Saudi soil during the 1991 Gulf War (Masud, Messick and Powers, 1996).

While most clerics make careers within the state-run institutions, a few make their careers partially or entirely outside of this system. These clerics eschew advancement through the ranks of state-employed clerics, instead gaining financial support by appealing directly to lay Muslims who are willing to support independent clerics. Salafi Muslims are the largest and most readily available group of lay Muslims motivated to support clerics. They form a substantial and growing subpopulation in almost all of the Arab Middle East and tend to be particularly devout and interested in proper clerical interpretation. Clerics appeal to Salafis by adopting the conservative Salafi ideology and practicing the Salafi methodology (*al-manhaj al-salafi*) of favoring a direct interpretation of the Quran and Sunna (the sayings of Muhammad) over the consensus of later Muslim jurists. In large part, clerics compete to demonstrate their integrity and to persuade others that their rulings represent an accurate interpretation of Islam as intended in the original sources.

This creates a somewhat cramped marketplace of clerics, each attempting to appeal to similar groups of lay Muslims, and each attempting to promote their own credentials. In this setting, clerics try to send credible signals that they are both expert and theologically independent. One

such signal is to adopt ideological stances that prove a cleric to be theologically independent because they are costly. Jihadi ideology serves this purpose because it is costly to adopt — clerics may face reprisals from the state — and it is broadly compatible with Salafi ideology.

Thus, clerics outside the state system face subtle pressures to adopt Jihadi ideology in order to gain popular support and advance their careers. This is not because Jihadi ideology is itself particularly popular with Salafi Muslims; it probably is not. Rather, clerics gain a positive reputation for speaking without equivocation because they have proven that they will speak their mind even when it is costly.

This means that adoption of Jihadi ideology is in part traceable to the decision of a cleric to make a career inside the state system or outside of it. What leads clerics to make this decision? I argue that some clerics come to the state system with structural advantages that make their career prospects much better inside the state system than outside. Other clerics lack these structural advantages and are more likely to choose a career path outside of the state-run system.

The primary structural advantage that some would-be clerics have over others is access to prestigious educational networks. Clerics' career trajectories are often determined by who they know, and the friendship and endorsement of prominent clerics is extremely valuable. Although it is not an iron rule, clerics are often promoted because they are the successful student of a cleric who is in a position to recommend and endorse their promotion. This means that equally talented and intelligent would-be clerics can face very different career options depending on their access to training with the most famous and well-connected clerics. Individuals who do not have these connections have a lower expected career trajectory within the state-run system and face increased payoffs to making a career outside.

No previous research has fully outlined this career-based theory of Jihadi ideology, but my arguments are supported by existing historical and ethnographic work. Zeghal (1999) hints that these motives may be behind expressions of radical Jihadi ideology as she traces the effects of the Egyptian regime's attempts to coopt the clerics of Al-Azhar from the 1950s onward. As more moderate clerics followed the regime's wishes and denounced violent Jihad, some clerics seem to have endorsed violent Jihad specifically to show that they were not puppet clerics of the state. Likewise,

although the goal of Wiktorowicz (2005*b*) is to explain why lay Muslims choose to be radicalized by clerics, his interview evidence also illustrates the credibility that clerics can generate by adopting radical ideology. Wiktorowicz finds that Omar Bakri Muhammad, leader of the Muhajiroun in London, derives substantial credibility from his reputation for theological independence. It is well-known that Omar is financially independent, a fact which he uses to criticize clerics who need funds from the Saudi regime to support themselves. It is also clear that his willingness to risk deportation or arrest by endorsing violence gives him added credibility. According to one of Wiktorowicz's respondents, Omar "dares to say things that no one else does. Other religious leaders don't do that. They don't have the guts" (2005*b*, 144-145).

4 Measuring Jihadi Ideology using Clerics' Writings

To test these arguments, I select a sample of Muslim clerics and measure their adoption of Jihadi ideology using their writings. There is no way to determine the population of Muslim clerics, so randomly sampling clerics for analysis is not a possibility. Instead, I focus the analysis on contemporary Sunni clerics writing in Arabic.⁷ In order to compare Jihadi clerics to the those that were most likely to become Jihadi but ultimately did not, I intentionally over-sample two key groups of clerics: (1) Jihad clerics and (2) conservative Salafi clerics who share similar beliefs to Jihadis but reject the ideology of militant Jihad. Practically, this means the analysis is focused on conservative clerics primarily from Saudi Arabia (58 percent) and Egypt (22 percent) who are currently living or lived in the last century.

I have collected texts and biographical information for 91 prominent clerics and identified 379 of their teachers and students. These 91 include the key players in contemporary Salafi circles, meaning that results below hold for the most well-known and influential clerics.

To measure the ideology of these clerics, I collect their books, articles, and fatwas with special emphasis on the latter. In Islam, questions of religious belief are brought by lay Muslims to a member of the *‘ulamā’* who answers in the form of a fatwa. A fatwa is a non-binding legal opinion

⁷I focus on clerics writing in Arabic for practical reasons: (1) most of the Jihadi discourse happens in Arabic, and (2) I can read Arabic but not Indonesian, Urdu, etc.

which serves an advisory role for the recipient and possibly for other Muslims as well.⁸ Fatwas are ideal for measuring cleric ideology because of the broad range of topics they cover and their law-like status. However, some clerics do not issue fatwas (or do not record them) so I use books, articles, and sermons to measure cleric ideology where necessary.

Throughout a lifetime of scholarship, clerics generate many writings which they or their followers often organize and release as collections. Increasingly, cleric writings are available online via Internet “fatwa banks” or clerics’ own websites. These collections of writings may not be representative of the entire body of writings produced by a cleric because clerics and their admirers consciously select a wide range of topics to demonstrate the expertise of the cleric and to illustrate his recommendations on varied aspects of Islamic life. While non-representative corpuses are often problematic for inference, the selection of texts for distribution does not pose a fundamental problem for measuring cleric ideology. The corpus of texts that clerics or their followers choose to disseminate widely is perhaps the *best* representation of the ideology the cleric would like to portray and the ideology they are perceived to have.

It is often easy to identify militant Jihadi ideology from quick inspection of a cleric’s writing. For illustration, the quotation below comes from a fatwa issued by extremist cleric ʿĀnwar al-ʿUlaqī in the Winter 2010 issue of *Inspire*, an English-language⁹ Jihadi web magazine.

Muslims are not bound by the covenants of citizenship and visa that exist between them and nations of dar al-harb [the non-Muslim world]. It is the consensus of our scholars that the property of the disbelievers in dar al-harb is halal for the Muslims and is a legitimate target for the mujahidin.¹⁰

The vast majority of fatwas, such as this one from *www.islamweb.net*, are quite different.¹¹

Question (excerpted): ...my problem is that i really love my husbands family, but they interfere very much in my son and almost dont let me to be mom for him...

⁸A volume edited by Masud, Messick, and Powers (1996) provides an overview and collects some of the latest work on fatwas in both recent history and the distant past.

⁹Unless otherwise noted, the texts I use are in Arabic. Here, I use an English source to allow readers access to authentic texts without the intermediate step of translation.

¹⁰ *Inspire*, Winter 2010, p. 56. Accessing this web magazine is slightly difficult because Western governments have tried to censor it. I accessed it through links provided by Christopher Anzalone at <http://occident.blogspot.com/2011/01/4th-issue-of-inspire-magazine-from-al.html>. The term *dar al-harb* literally translates as “house of war” and refers to the non-Muslim world; *halal* means “permissible”; *mujahidin* means “jihadi fighters.”

¹¹This fatwa was selected effectively randomly — I simply used the most recent fatwa issued in English by *www.islamweb.net*.

Answer (excerpted): ...Among the most important Islamic objectives is that affection and love should prevail in the Muslim society; this is even more confirmed among those who are related to each other, like the case of the in-laws. Hence, they should close the doors to the devil so that he would not spoil this relationship. Allaah Says (what means): *{And tell My servants to say that which is best Indeed, Satan induces [dissension] among them. Indeed Satan is ever, to mankind, a clear enemy.}* [Quran 17:53]...¹²

In principle, identifying Jihadi ideology is often as simple as distinguishing between these two texts. However, with 29,430 texts from 91 clerics, close reading of each is infeasible. Instead, I measure cleric ideology by applying supervised learning methods from the statistical machine learning literature (Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman, 2009) to the documents. Most of the previous work on measuring the ideology of political actors has used roll-call votes to estimate actor ideal points (Poole and Rosenthal, 1985; Martin and Quinn, 2002). This is not possible for Muslim clerics (because they do not vote on a common set of proposals), so instead, I directly scale the texts to estimate cleric support for militant Jihadi ideology.

My method uses two sets of training documents, one of which is assumed to be Jihadi and the other of which is assumed to be non-Jihadi. The Jihadi corpus consists of 765 texts of various genres that are available on Jihadi web forums as the “Mujahid’s bookbag” (حقيبة المجاهد).¹³ These documents are specifically selected by Jihadis themselves as sources of spiritual instruction and advice, as well as mixed political and religious commentary.¹⁴ By using a set of known Jihadi documents as my training data, I avoid the difficult task of deciding which texts are most authentically “Jihadi”. Instead, I let Jihadis themselves identify the texts that are most representative of Jihadi ideology.

Identifying a set of representative non-Jihadi texts is more difficult. While Jihadi ideology is focused and well defined, there are many types of non-Jihadi ideology, making it difficult to find a single set of texts that is representative of “non-Jihad.” Instead, I use a sample of 1,951 texts from the 91 clerics in the study as the baseline for non-Jihadi cleric writing. In fact, there are Jihadi

¹²Fatwa No. 153879. “Her in-laws interfere with the way she brings up her child.” April 7, 2011. Accessed at <http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=153879> on April 7, 2011.

¹³One of the forums is here <http://www.i7ur.com/vb/t9736.html> and I accessed the zip file at <http://www.megaupload.com/?d=0DXUXL2N> on 1/27/2011. **Be aware that the zip file appears to contain at least two computer viruses!**

¹⁴For more analysis, see <http://www.jihadica.com/a-mujahids-bookbag/>.

writers among these 91 clerics, but the center of gravity is decidedly not Jihadi. In practice, I find that using this group of texts as the “opposite” of the Mujahid’s bookbag produces accurate cleric scores.

Treating these two groups of documents as having a known category, either Jihadi or non-Jihadi, I can then use them to classify other documents. Heuristically, my method is to calculate the word frequencies of a new document and then estimate the likelihood that the document is Jihadi by comparing its word frequencies to the training corpus. Documents that have word frequencies similar to Jihadi documents will have higher scores, while documents that have word frequencies less like Jihadi documents will have lower scores.

Specifically, I follow Beauchamp (N.d.) in using a Naive Bayes classifier to calculate Jihad scores for each document.¹⁵ I am interested in estimating the probability that a new document S belongs to the Jihadi class (J), given the words in S . From Bayes’ Rule we know that:

$$P(J|S) = \frac{P(S|J)P(J)}{P(S)}$$

Take $P(S|J)$ to be the independent¹⁶ product over all words in the document S and denoting the i -th word in S as w_i , we can write

$$P(S|J) = \prod_i P(w_i|J)$$

$$P(J|S) = \frac{P(J)}{P(S)} \prod_i P(w_i|J)$$

I use the frequency of word w_i in the combined Jihadi corpus, J as my estimate of $P(w_i|J)$.¹⁷ I

¹⁵The Naive Bayes classifier relies on several assumptions that I violate below. Like most classification models, the Naive Bayes classifier relies on the assumption that the proportions of the classes are the same in the training set and the overall population of documents. This is clearly not satisfied because I am not even able to characterize the total population of texts. Recently developed methods relax this assumption (Hopkins and King, 2010; King and Lu, 2008) and could offer an alternative solution.

¹⁶This independence assumption is clearly violated because words are correlated within documents (hence the “naive” in Naive Bayes). There are other more complex options, but I find that the Naive Bayes classifier works well in practice.

¹⁷The maximum likelihood estimate is $P(w_i|J) = \frac{W_i}{\sum_{i' \in J} W_{i'}}$, where W_i is the sum of total occurrences of word w_i in J . This creates problems because terms that do not appear at all in J automatically make $\prod_i P(w_i|J) = 0$. I use the standard solution of Laplace smoothing, so the actual calculation is $P(w_i|J) = \frac{W_i+1}{\sum_{i' \in J} (W_{i'}+1)}$.

assume that a text is either Jihadi or not which allows a symmetrical equation for the probability that a text is not Jihadi.

$$P(J'|S) = \frac{P(J')}{P(S)} \prod_i P(w_i|J')$$

These two quantities can be combined and simplified to produce a logged likelihood ratio which I use as the document-level Jihad score:

$$Jihad\ Score = \sum_i \log \frac{P(w_i|J)^{w_i}}{P(w_i|J')^{w_i}}$$

Figure 1 shows which words the classifier is using distinguish between Jihadi and non-Jihadi fatwas by plotting the difference in frequencies of word use in each corpus. Words that are large and toward the left and right edges are strongly predictive of either Jihadi or non-Jihadi ideology. Words in the center of the figure are less predictive of ideology.

After training the model, I use it to produce document-level Jihad scores for 29,430 documents produced by the 91 prominent clerics described above. Next, I aggregate these document-level scores to produce cleric-level Jihad scores. Because clerics can write about many things, not all of their writing is relevant to estimating their ideal point on the issue of militant Jihad. I argue that an adequate conceptual definition of a cleric’s Jihad score is the *the most extreme statement by a cleric that is not an error* (either an error of speech by the cleric or an error of classification by my model). To operationalize this, I identify the top 10 percent of document-level Jihadi scores for each cleric and then use the median score of these documents as the cleric-level Jihad score. This ensures that (1) a cleric’s Jihad score is determined by their most extreme statements, and (2) the scores will be relatively robust to any mistaken classification of individual documents.

To assess the accuracy of these scores, I benchmark them using several expert rankings of cleric ideology. One expert ranking is provided in the *Militant Ideology Atlas - Executive Report* (McCants, 2006), Appendix 2, which lists the 56 individuals that Jihadi writers cite most often and indicates whether they are “Jihadi authors” (no coding criteria are given, but this is presumably based on the expert knowledge of the authors). Using the 32 clerics that appear in both *Atlas* list

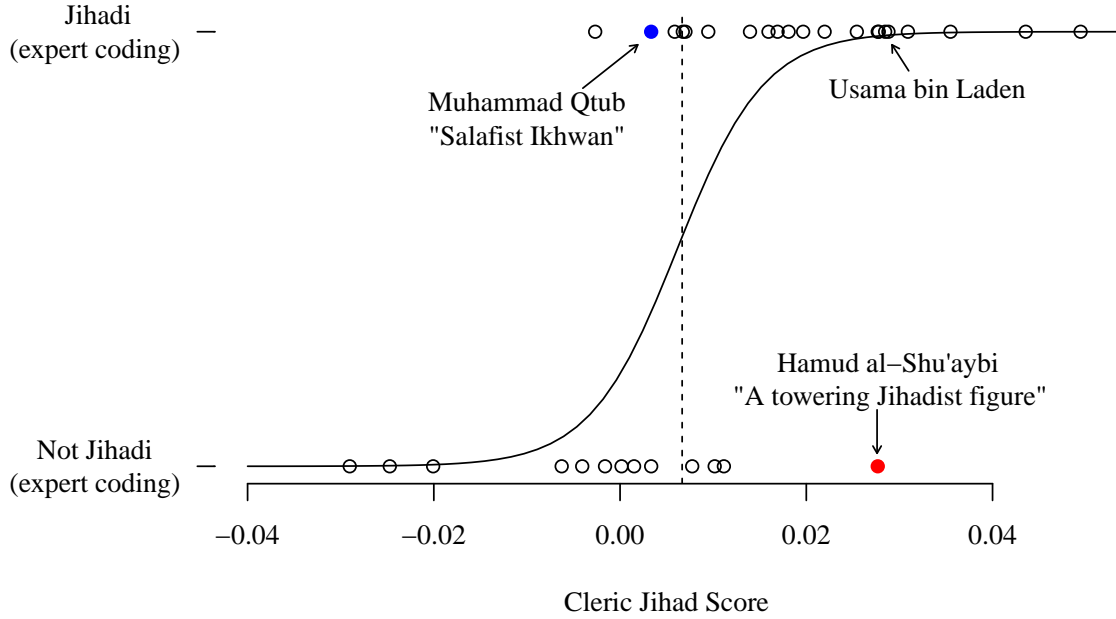


Figure 2: A comparison of my cleric-level Jihad scores to an expert coding of clerics by McCants (2006). The solid curve shows the fitted probabilities from a logistic regression predicting the Militant Ideology Atlas scores using my Jihad scores. The vertical dashed line indicates where these fitted probabilities cross 0.5. The clerics plotted in red and blue are potentially mis-coded in the Atlas (see discussion in the text). I also label Usama bin Laden’s Jihad score for reference.

a “towering Jihadist figure” (2009, p. 36). Similarly, Brachman classifies Muḥammad Quṭb as “Salafist Ikhwan” (2009, p. 55) rather than “Global Jihadist,” a distinction which is also reflected accurately in my model by his relatively low Jihad score.

I also benchmark my Jihad scores against two other expert codings, but I omit those results for brevity. First, my scores line up with the eight schools of Salafi thought discussed by Brachman (2009, pp. 26-41). Second, my scores predict whether an author’s writings will appear in the *Minbar al-Tawḥīd wal-Jihād* (www.tawhed.ws), a prominent Internet library of Jihadi thought.

5 Testing Theories of Ideology Adoption

By combining cleric Jihad scores with biographical information about the clerics, I can test competing explanations for cleric adoption of Jihadi ideology. Prominent clerics typically write short biographies describing their religious training, appointments, and scholarly works. There is a long

tradition of writing in this genre (going back to the biographical dictionaries of early Islam) and clerics have strong incentives to provide biographical information because lay Muslims use this information to evaluate clerics. A common question on Muslim forums is “Can someone post the biography of sheikh so-and-so?” As a result, these biographies are widely available on clerics’ personal websites, Muslim web forums, and Wikipedia.

I collect these biographies, including multiple versions from different sources, and use them to code biographical information about clerics that will allow me to test the competing explanations outlined above. For my 91 clerics, the median biography is 1,100 words but lengths range from a single sentence to 59,000 words.

5.1 Key Theoretical Variables

Network quality. To assess the extent to which cleric network quality affects the adoption of Jihadi ideology, I use information in the cleric biographies to construct the educational network of the clerics. Connections to individual teachers are very important to clerics and having famous teachers appears to endow a sense of prestige and credibility. This creates incentives for clerics to list one or more specific mentors; of the clerics for whom I have biographies, 65 listed specific teachers, making it possible to construct the educational network of these clerics. Figure 3 shows the network of teachers and students. Gray arrows point from teachers to students. Colored nodes indicate clerics that have estimated Jihad scores, with darker shades of blue indicating lower scores and brighter shades of red indicating higher scores.

I measure the quality of a cleric’s education network in two ways that both capture the idea that well connected clerics will have better opportunities for insider career advancement and thus less incentive to endorse Jihad. First, I measure the *eigenvector centrality* of each cleric in the network. This measure formalizes the notion that the importance of each network node depends upon its connection to other important nodes, so clerics receive higher eigenvector centrality scores if they have many connections to teachers who are themselves well-connected. Alternatively, I also measure the *degree centrality* of each cleric in the network — the raw number of teachers they list. Clerics listing more teachers have more extensive networks.

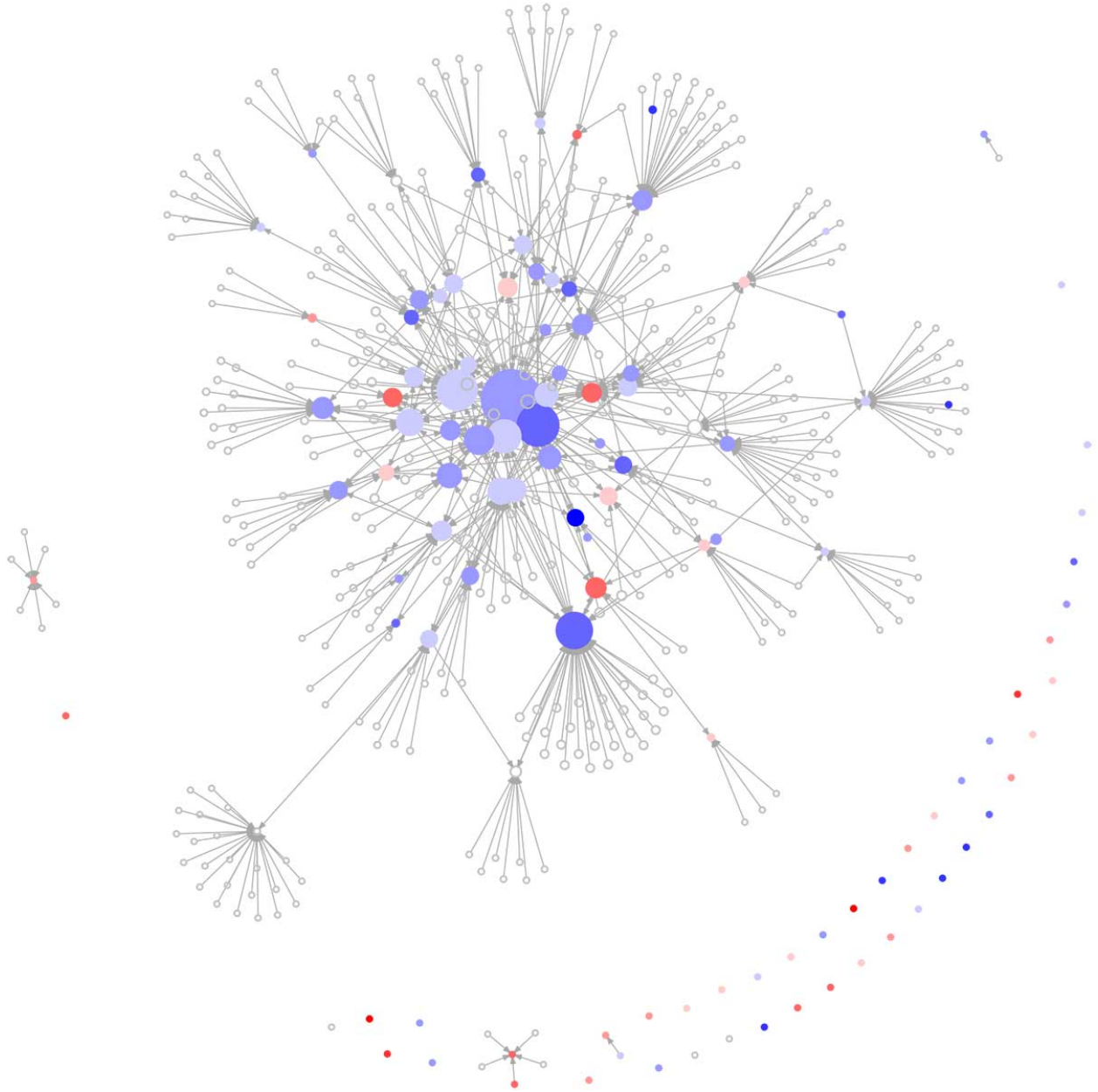


Figure 3: *The network of teachers and students. Gray arrows point from teachers to students. Colored nodes indicate clerics that have estimated Jihad scores. Darker shades of blue indicate lower scores and brighter shades of red indicate higher scores. Node size indicates the eigenvector centrality of each cleric in the network.*

Career Paths. Differences in cleric career paths are an intermediate outcome that can provide additional evidence to support or refute my theory. I expect that clerics who have better networks will be more likely to have successful careers inside the state-run religious institutions. Clerics who have prestigious appointments virtually always list them with their biographical information. These appointments include positions on religious councils, national ministries for the distribution of *Waqfs* (Muslim trusts), national fatwa offices, and similar positions. The words denoting these positions are distinctive enough that as a first cut, I simply count the number of relevant terms in each cleric’s biographies. To more closely mirror the concept of particularly rewarding insider careers, I dichotomize this variable into *career appointees* (clerics in the top 25 percent based on the count of references to appointed positions) and *others*. Based on this definition, 21 of the 91 clerics are career appointees.

Prison. In contrast to clerics who become career appointees, my theory predicts that Jihadi clerics will face punishment for endorsing Jihadi ideology in the form of arrest, detention, and imprisonment. To identify clerics who have spent time in prison, I searched for the words “prison” and “arrest” in cleric bios and coded the variable *prison* as “1” if either of these words appear and “0” otherwise. Twenty of the 91 clerics have been arrested or spent time in prison.

5.2 Control Variables

Each of the alternative explanations for cleric adoption of Jihadi ideology can also be tested using information coded from cleric biographies. In addition to control variables inspired by other theories, I also include several potential confounders that may influence both network quality and subsequent adoption of Jihadi ideology. This is because of the potential for selection, in which clerics with predispositions toward Jihadi ideology choose different kinds of networks. More generally, there may be some common cause of both network structure and subsequent ideology that will lead to non-causal correlation between network centrality and ideology if we do not condition on it.

There are several plausible processes through which such a selection effect might occur, some of which cannot be effectively accounted for with the information available. It could be the case that Jihadi ideology is developed well before clerics begin to express it in their writings. It could

be the case that future clerics who have already radicalized are less inclined to form connections with teachers, or choose less central teachers. Alternatively, teachers may choose not to take on students who show early signs of radicalization. I do not have measures of ideology independent of cleric writings, so it is difficult to say whether future Jihadi clerics might have shown early evidence radicalization that affected their network.

There could also be bias in the educational networks that clerics report in their biographies; perhaps Jihadis are equally connected to prominent clerics but choose not to report these connections because they do not burnish their Jihadi credentials. While it is difficult to be sure that such reporting bias does not exist, Jihadi clerics do have substantial respect for the scholarly status of the top establishment Salafis. Jihadis that report studying with them play up this credential in their biographies, suggesting that Jihadis who have prominent connections report them.

Finally, it is possible that Jihadi clerics share some personality trait that makes them less likely to connect with others and more likely to adopt the Manichean world-view of militant Jihad. Based on anecdotal accounts, it is not true that Jihadi ideologues are more inclined to be loners, lack social skills, or have unpleasant personalities; for example, Usama bin Laden was famously charismatic. However, it is currently impossible to systematically measure the personality traits of the 91 clerics in my study.

Despite these limitations, indicators of many alternative explanations can be measured and included in the analysis.

Western exposure. I test whether exposure to the West is a plausible explanation for Jihadi ideology by coding whether a cleric mentions spending time in one or more of the advanced Western democracies during their formative years and education. I do not include time spent in the West after a cleric has already radicalized, and I also do not include the phenomenon of well-established clerics traveling to Western countries to give lectures or perform *Da'wa* (missionary work) later in life. Ten of the 91 clerics have eligible Western exposure according to my definition. Conditioning on time in the West also controls for the possibility that Jihadi clerics have disproportionately spent time in the West and been disadvantaged when networking with teachers.

Religious ignorance. To test whether religious ignorance was a potential factor pushing some

clerics toward Jihadi ideology, I use the information in cleric biographies to develop measures of religious knowledge. First, I code indicator variables for whether a cleric has (1) a master’s degree and (2) a doctoral degree in a subfield of the Islamic sciences. Fifty-three percent of the 91 clerics have a master’s degree, while 38 percent have a doctorate degree.

Second, many clerics have memorized the Quran and list this fact in their biographies, along with some indication of the age at which they first completed the memorization. Complete memorization of the Quran is greatly respected and conveys substantial religious credibility so any cleric who is a *ḥāfiẓ* (having memorized the Quran) has every incentive to indicate this among their religious credentials. I assume that any cleric who does not mention having memorized the Quran has not; in my sample of 91 clerics, 37 percent mention memorizing the Quran.

If clerics adopt Jihadi ideology out of religious ignorance, than I expect that clerics who have memorized the Quran and who have graduate degrees in theological studies will be less likely to adopt Jihadi ideology. Controlling for these measures of religious ignorance also rules out a selection story in which Jihadis have lower mental or religious ability and are thus rejected by the most central teachers.

Poverty. Cleric biographies rarely list any details about the material circumstances in which they were raised, so it is difficult to directly test the hypothesis that clerics who grew up in poverty are more likely to be Jihidist. As a rough proxy, I measure the wealth of the country in which they were born (in GDP per capita) at the year of their birth, or at the earliest year for which there is recorded data (typically 1950). This roughly captures the economic milieu in which clerics were born and raised, but it cannot capture variation at the subnational or family level.

Socialization. With the cleric educational network described above, I can test the argument that clerics primarily adopt ideologies similar to their teachers via a socialization process. Specifically, I measure *Teacher ideology* using the average Jihad scores of a cleric’s teachers.

Cleric families. Some clerics have fathers, grandfathers, and other relatives who were also clerics. It may be the case that these individuals in “cleric families” have better networks than others because they inherit the network of their family member rather than having to develop a network on their own. If not accounted for, this dynamic could induce a selection effect by

linking future clerics to more moderate networks early on and pushing them toward more moderate ideology. I code an indicator variable specifying whether a cleric mentions having a relative who is a cleric or, more specifically, taking theological instruction (often primary school and Quranic recitation) from a relative. Fifteen percent of the 91 clerics in my sample have cleric family members by this definition.

Religious primary school. In the Muslim world, religious and secular primary school systems often exist side by side. Parents may have many reasons for enrolling their children in on or the other, but an outcome of enrollment in religious primary school might be that clerics develop better education networks later in life because they are able to forge early connections with clerics in their primary school. I code (to the extent possible) whether each cleric was enrolled in religious or secular primary school. This particular fact is included in many biographies but not all, since it is not particularly central for establishing a cleric’s religious authority. This means that the variable *religious primary school* is inevitably measured with a non-trivial degree of error.

5.3 Findings

I argue that clerics are more likely to adopt Jihadi ideology when they face diminished career opportunities within the state-regulated system of religious institutions. To support this claim, I provide several pieces of statistical evidence using the variables described above, along with additional evidence from personal interviews and field observations.

Network Centrality Predicts Adoption of Jihadi Ideology

First, I present statistical results supporting the main proposition of my theory — that clerics with better educational networks are less likely to be Jihadi. The outcome variable is a dichotomous indicator for whether a cleric is *Jihadi* or not, based on the Jihad scores developed above. I dichotomize the scores at the separation point I identified while benchmarking my scores against the expert coding of the *Militant Ideology Atlas*. By this definition, the sample contains 26 Jihadi clerics and 65 non-Jihadi clerics. The key predictor of interest is each cleric’s network centrality in the cleric educational network (eigenvector centrality in some specifications, degree centrality in

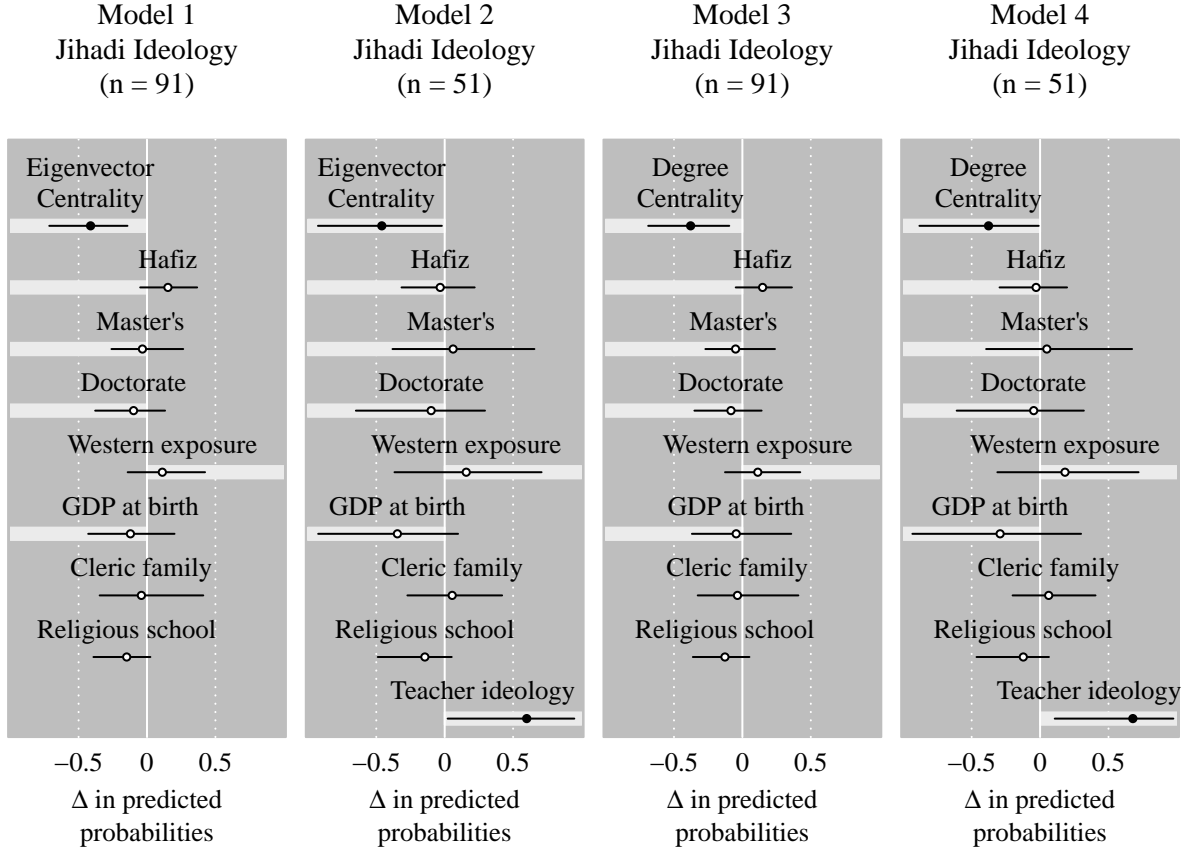


Figure 4: *The change in predicted probabilities as each variable moves from its minimum to its maximum in four logistic regression models predicting adoption of Jihadi ideology. Point estimates are represented by points with 95% confidence interval bands. Statistically significant changes have filled disks, while statistically insignificant changes have open disks. For variables about which my theory (or an alternative) makes a prediction, I highlight the region that the theory predicts in lighter gray to show which hypotheses are supported by the models. Note that including the variable Teacher ideology decreases the sample size from 91 to 51 because Teacher ideology is not defined for clerics who fail to list teachers in their biography.*

others). I control for the covariates described above: cleric family, *ḥāfiẓ* status, religious primary school, master's degree, doctoral degree, Western exposure, and GDP per capita of the cleric's home country in the year of their birth. I also control for the average Jihad scores of each cleric's teachers in some specifications, but this decreases the sample size from 91 to 51. I use logistic regression with robust standard errors.

The key findings are presented in Figure 4. I find that clerics who are more central in the network are substantially less likely to adopt Jihadi ideology. The model predicts that a cleric with the minimum eigenvector centrality and average values of the other covariates has a 43 percent

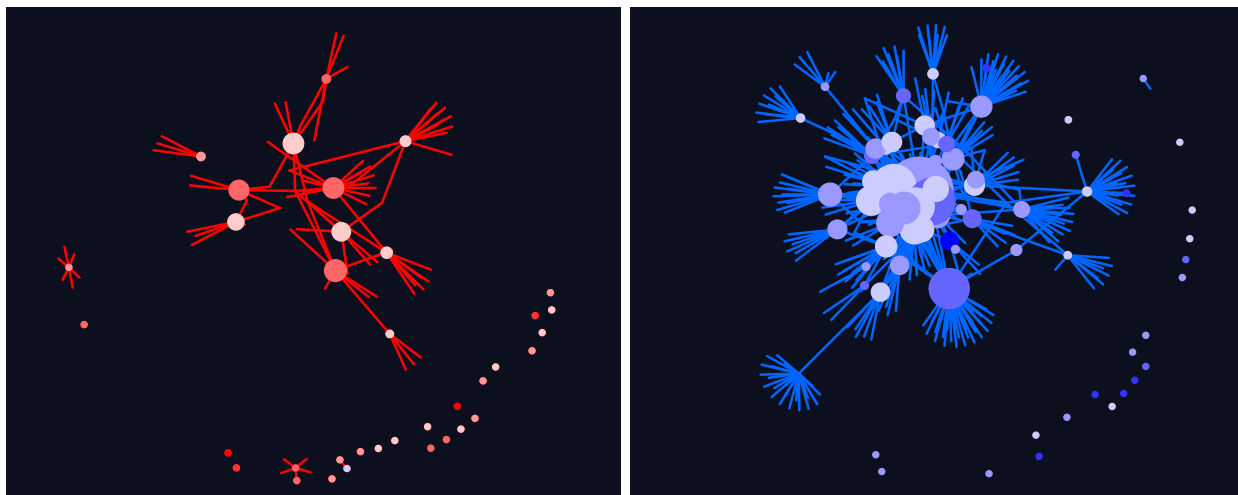


Figure 5: *The network of teachers and students, separated into Jihadist clerics (red) and non-Jihadist clerics (blue). Colored nodes indicate clerics that have estimated Jihad scores. Darker shades of blue indicate lower scores and brighter shades of red indicate higher scores. Node size indicates the eigenvector centrality of each cleric in the network. The network layout is the same as in Figure 3.*

chance of being Jihadist. If this same cleric instead has the maximum centrality observed in the network, the probability drops to two percent, a statistically significant 41 percentage point change. These results are almost identical if I use degree centrality instead of eigenvector centrality (see Models 3 and 4) or if I use cleric Jihad scores as a continuous outcome measure (not shown).

To put this finding in more concrete terms, I consider *Ābū Baṣīr al-Ṭarṭūsī* who has the highest Jihad score of the 91 clerics and has no connections in the network. The model predicts that he has a 50 percent chance of being Jihadist, given his covariates (meaning that roughly half of the clerics who fit his covariate profile will be Jihadist). However, when I simulate predictions for this same cleric while changing his centrality score from the 1st to the 75th percentile, the model now predicts that he would have only a 25 percent chance of being Jihadist. This change would move him from being one of the most outspoken advocates of Jihad to simply being a relatively conservative Salafi with few, if any, Jihadist leanings.

This correlation between the quality of educational networks and adoption of Jihadi ideology can be clearly seen in the raw structure of the network. Figure 5 shows the educational network of the 91 clerics in my statistical models, divided into Jihadist (red) and non-Jihadist (blue), with their connections mapped (following the same network layout as Figure 3). The red graph showing the

educational network of the Jihadi clerics has far fewer connections than the blue graph showing the network of non-Jihadi clerics, indicating less dense connection among Jihadi clerics, fewer connections to the networks of non-Jihadis, and fewer teachers in general.

Network centrality is the strongest predictor of Jihadi ideology in the model; all of the other covariates are statistically insignificant and have much smaller effects on the predicted probability that a cleric is Jihadi. This means that most of the alternative explanations for cleric radicalization find no empirical support. Clerics are not more likely to adopt Jihadi ideology after spending time in the West, if they have less religious training, or if their respective countries of origin were poorer at the time of their birth.

The only alternative explanation that finds support is the socialization argument. I include the measure of socialization — average teacher ideology scores — only in Models 2 and 4 because including it limits the sample to the 51 clerics who list at least one teacher in their biography. In models where average teacher ideology is included, I find that is strongly predictive of cleric Jihad scores. Specifically, a cleric who has the minimum observed value of average teacher Jihad scores has only a 16 percent chance of being Jihadi with the other covariates held at their means. Changing average teacher ideology to the maximum observed score increase the predicted chances of adopting Jihadi ideology to 75 percent. Of the other predictors, only network centrality is significant in this model.

These results suggest that cleric educational networks are key drivers of Jihadi ideology in two ways. First, educational networks facilitate the spread of ideology from teachers to students, leading to strong correlations between the ideology of teachers and the ideology students. However, the structure of the network is equally important. Clerics who are well-connected are much less likely to adopt Jihadi ideology than their less-networked peers. In fact, the model predicts that increased network centrality can offset having extreme teachers. Holding the other variables constant, the model predicts that a cleric with the most extreme teachers observed in the sample has a 76 percent chance of becoming Jihadi. However, if this cleric were to have the same extreme teachers but also have the maximum observed level of network centrality, the predicted probability of adopting Jihadi ideology drops to 16 percent. Centrality is only weakly correlated with teacher ideology, meaning

that these types of cross-cutting effects may well be operating in practice.

What Predicts Network Centrality?

To better understand the process of cleric radicalization, I briefly explore whether there are factors that lead certain clerics to have better network centrality. Treating network centrality as the outcome variable, I estimate a new model in which I use most of the control variables described above as predictors. I do not include average teacher ideology because this is not temporally prior to network centrality (it is determined at the same time). The model can be estimated via OLS because eigenvector centrality is continuous over its range from zero to one.

The results are shown in Model 5 of Figure 6. Most of the factors I have measured do not influence the quality of cleric educational networks. I find that only *cleric family* is an important predictor of centrality. Holding other variables constant, a cleric who has another cleric in the family is predicted to have a higher centrality score by about one standard deviation. This suggests that at least some clerics have better networks because of their family connections to the clerical elites. No other factors are good predictors of network centrality.

Career Paths

I now turn to evidence that well-connected clerics are less likely to adopt Jihadi ideology because they have a better chance of making a career within the state-run system of religious institutions. Here, I present the results of a logistic regression model in which I use network centrality and the control variables discussed above to predict the probability that a cleric will be a *career appointee*.

I find that centrality in the educational network is a strong predictor of subsequent appointments (see Model 6 of Figure 6). Based on the model, an average cleric with the minimum centrality score has only a 14 percent chance of becoming a career appointee, but if this same cleric instead has the maximum observed centrality score, the probability rises to 76 percent. This demonstrates that well-connected clerics can expect better career prospects within the state system than their poorly connected peers.

These findings are corroborated by evidence from interviews with students of al-Azhar Univer-

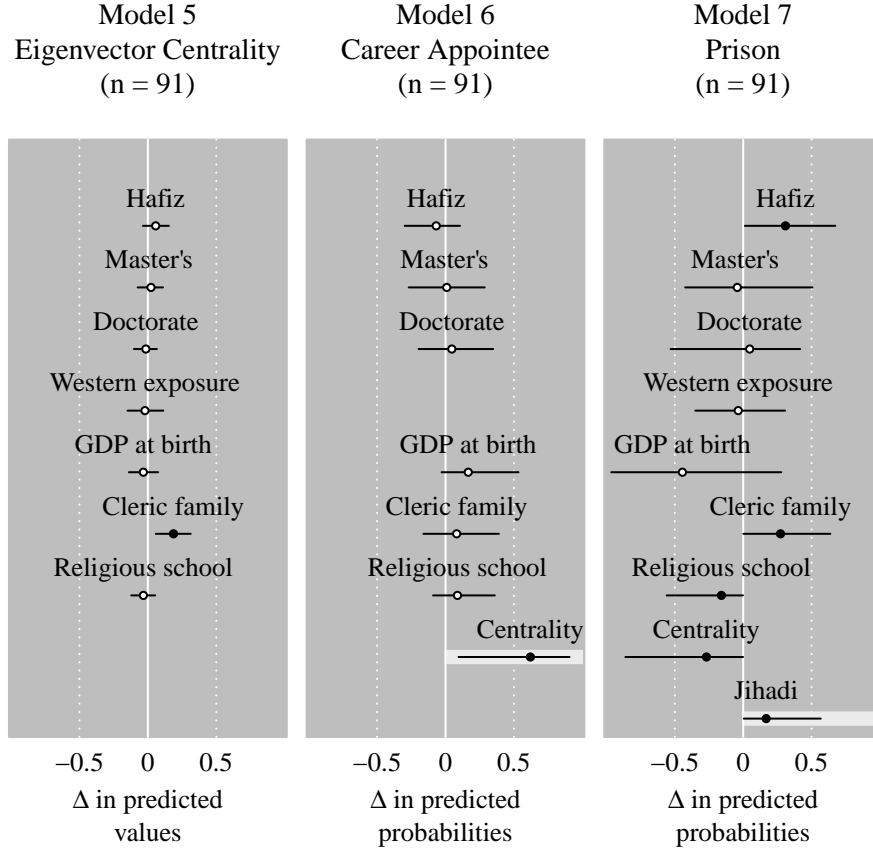


Figure 6: The change in predicted probabilities as each variable moves from its minimum to its maximum in three regression models predicting adoption of Jihadi ideology. Model 5 is OLS regression and models 6 and 7 are logistic regressions. Point estimates are represented by points with 95% confidence interval bands. Statistically significant changes have filled disks, while statistically insignificant changes have open disks. For variables about which my theory (or an alternative) makes a prediction, I highlight the region that the theory predicts in lighter gray to show which hypotheses are supported by the models. The variable Western exposure drops out of Model 6 because the 10 clerics who have spent time in the West are not career appointees.

sity in Cairo. When asked how to become a cleric, one student responded, “It’s really all about trying to study with the prominent sheikhs and getting some kind of *ijaza* [certificate] from them if you can. You just try to get into people’s networks.” Then, speaking specifically of how one might go about promoted as a cleric in contemporary Egypt:

“Being in ‘Ali Gomaa’s crew [the current Grand Mufti of Egypt] is really the way to move up right now. That’s how you get appointed to teach, how you get a position in the *Dar al-Ifta* [Egyptian Fatwa Ministry], which gets you a nice car. He has lots of

students, and he'll often favor them in promotions and stuff. Of course, he is a good teacher so they are pretty solid.”¹⁸

In exchange for these promotions, clerics who are career appointees generally avoid commenting on topics that directly oppose the government. For example, as I sat in the study circle (*halaqa*) of Sheikh Āḥmad al-Riyān in the al-Azhar mosque of Cairo, a student asked for his opinion on the controversial visit of Sheikh Ali Gomaa' on April 18th, 2012 to the al-Aqsa mosque. Gomaa's visit violated a long-standing practice of not visiting the mosque as long as the territory is held by Israel. Other clerics, particularly Jihadists, had been quite vocal in their condemnation because they viewed the visit as legitimating Israel and undermining the Palestinian Jihad. But Sheikh al-Riyān is a career appointee at al-Azhar where he has taught since 1974 and enjoyed several promotions. In response to this sensitive question, Sheikh al-Riyān chuckled, paused, and replied, “I don't like to speak about politics.”¹⁹

Instead of garnering prestigious appointments, Jihadi clerics tend to go to prison. Anecdotally, it is well known that prominent Jihadi clerics have spent significant time in prison because of their ideology. A number of clerics are still incarcerated, notably ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Raḥman (the “blind Sheikh”) and Ābū Muḥammad al-Maqdisī (“the most influential living Jihadi Theorist” according to McCants (2006)). A large number were detained by Saudi Arabia during the 1990s and ultimately released, with some going on to moderate their views and others going on to form the core of Al-Qaeda's current stable of theologians and apologists (Lacroix, 2011).

Using the cleric biographies, I confirm that Jihadi clerics are systematically more likely to spend time in jail. Of the non-Jihadi clerics in the data set, 12 percent report spending time in prison, while 46 percent of Jihadis report prison time. This stark difference in incarceration rates holds when I control for other cleric characteristics. Using logistic regression, I predict whether a cleric will mention prison time in their biography using the indicator for Jihadi clerics and the other control variables. The model, shown as Model 7 in Figure 6, predicts that with the other covariates held at their means, non-Jihadi clerics face only a five percent chance of being imprisoned while Jihadi

¹⁸Interview with Jamaal Diwan, September 25, 2011.

¹⁹The lecture, including this exchange, was recorded and is viewable on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgJiCFxBfvA#t=5900s>.

clerics face a 22 percent chance of imprisonment. Interestingly, network centrality is statistically significant in this model and has a negative sign, meaning that conditional on being Jihadi or not, well-connected clerics are less likely to spend time in prison. Thus, although clerics with better networks are less likely to be Jihadist in the first place, this implies that if a well-connected cleric does become Jihadist, it is harder for the government to punish them.

The costs of incarceration may actually be beneficial to the careers of Jihadi clerics building careers outside of the state-run institutions. They allow clerics to credibly demonstrate that their rulings are not compromised by allegiance to a political regime but instead represent their genuine interpretation of Islamic doctrine. This is reflected in the way that Jihadi clerics discuss their arrests and incarcerations as credentials. The biographies of Jihadi clerics repeatedly stress instances where a cleric's unwillingness to make ideological compromises led to punishment by regime authorities. This credible demonstration of independence helps further these clerics careers by helping them appeal to lay Muslims who want independent clerics.

I saw evidence of this support for imprisoned Jihadist clerics while attending Salafi demonstrations in downtown Cairo on April 26, 2012 following the banning of the Salafist presidential candidate. Although the protest was aimed at persuading the military government to step aside and allow the candidates to run freely, I spotted a sign supporting the release of Jihadi cleric 'Umar 'Abd al-Raḥman who is serving a life sentence in the US for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing (see Figure 7). At the same time, I was having a discussion with a group of approximately 15 to 20 protesters who assured me that their movement was peaceful and did not support violent tactics to achieve political aims. This apparent contradiction highlights the possibility that 'Abd al-Raḥman's advocacy of militant Jihad is primarily viewed as evidence that he is willing to speak truth to power. This buys him support among Salafis in Cairo, even those who are not particularly interested in the Jihadi cause that 'Abd al-Raḥman represents.

On the other hand, some clerics renounced have their Jihadi ideology after being imprisoned. Most notably, three Jihadi members of the "awakening" movement — 'A'id al-Qarnī, Safar al-Ḥawālī, and Salmān al-'Awda — renounced Jihadi ideology after spending significant time in Saudi jails during the 1990s. Unlike other clerics who have retained their Jihadi orientation, these three



Figure 7: Photograph of a sign supporting Jihadi cleric ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman taken at a Salafi rally for the presidential candidacy of Sheikh Hazim Salah Abu Ismail on April 26, 2012 in Tahrir square, Cairo, Egypt. Photograph by the author. The sign displays ‘Abd al-Rahman’s face and reads “Freedom for Sheikh ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Rahman”.

clerics have little incentive to play up their incarceration. Rather than being a symbol of theological independence, the prison time of these “reformed” clerics is a reminder that they ultimately gave up Jihadi ideology to appease political elites. I find evidence of this: the biographies of the three clerics do mention their arrests and imprisonment, but it is often mentioned obliquely as “the sheikh’s troubles.” While other Jihadi clerics who have been to jail mention this fact an average of eight times in their biographies (and some as many as 25 times), the three “reformed” clerics mention their prison time an average of only two times. This is evidence that clerics who are widely known to be co-opted by the state no longer try to use Jihadi ideology or the resulting prison time as signals of theological independence.

6 Conclusion

Why do some Muslim clerics voice more support for the ideology of militant Jihad in their writings than others? I find evidence that clerics strategically adopt or reject Jihadi ideology in response to career incentives. Clerics that are well-connected face promising prospects within the state system of religious institutions and have little incentive to adopt an incendiary ideology that would undermine their career. Clerics with less access to prestigious networks of senior clerics face more limited career opportunities within the state system and are more likely to seek careers outside. In doing so, they face pressure to adopt Jihadi ideology to signal their independence from the political regime in order to attract the trust of lay Salafi Muslims.

What, if anything, can policy-makers in Arab or Western countries do to limit the adoption of Jihadi ideology? My research suggests that the preferred policy of Arab regimes — arrest and imprisonment — may be a double-edged sword. Incarcerating Jihadi clerics counteracts the pressures toward Jihad by raising the cost of a career based on Jihadi ideology, but it also raises the signaling power of adopting Jihadi ideology. Clerics who are close to indifferent between their career paths will probably be persuaded by the threat of repression to avoid Jihadi ideology, but these were never the clerics who would become hard-core Jihadis under most circumstances. The hard-core Jihadi clerics appear willing to bear the cost of increased repression and it makes them more credible in the eyes of their followers.

Instead, my research suggests that co-opting clerics may be more successful. Doing so in the late stages of cleric ideology development is probably costly and difficult because clerics who successfully resist “selling out” will send the same costly signal about their theological independence as clerics who risk imprisonment. Rather, successful cooptation starts early, by providing more clerics with access to better educational networks and ultimately, the possibility for better career prospects within the state system.

More broadly, my research suggests that changes in the political institutions of Egypt and other Muslim-majority states after the “Arab spring” of 2011 may have far-reaching consequences for the future adoption and expression of Jihadi ideology. On one hand, events in Egypt between February 2011 and June 2012 seems to confirm Western fears that political opening will lead to the rise of

militant Islamists throughout the Middle East. For example, Muhammad Mursi, the newly elected Islamist president of Egypt publicly declared on June 29th, 2012 that he would seek for the release of the Jihadi cleric ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Raḥman, an act suggesting that his sympathies lie with the Salafi protesters I encountered in Tahrir square in late April (see Figure 7). In the short term, it seems that democratic opening is making militant Islamist ideologies more mainstream, rather than sidelining them.

However, my research suggests that this opening is likely to eventually undermine the sources of legitimacy upon which Jihadi clerics currently rely. Jihadi clerics survive in part because of the cooptation of the mainstream clerical elite by the governments of the Middle East. This cooptation fuels Jihadi ideology by provoking fears among certain types of lay Muslims that clerics who work for the regime cannot be trusted, making them more likely to listen to and support non-state clerics, such as Jihadis. The political opening in Egypt has undermined the control of the central government over the religious establishment. For the first time in a half century, the clerics of Al-Azhar University are contemplating electing their head sheikh rather than accepting a government appointee. And Azharite clerics have been more outspoken on political issues in the wake of the January 25th revolution, in some cases breaking with the interim military regime. As mainstream clerics become more free to speak their minds, the credibility value of being a declared Jihadi will substantially decrease, draining long-term support among the majority of lay Muslims who do not support militant Jihad. This in turn will decrease the attractiveness of Jihadi ideology as a potential career path for outsider clerics.

Jihadi ideology is often perceived to be the result of immutable, irreconcilable conflicts between fundamentalist Islamism and Western society. Voices in the West claim that Jihadi ideology is popular because of a fundamental hatred for the Western way of life. Jihadists view their struggle to force Western military forces out of the Middle East and to force secular governments out of power as a continuation of the 10th and 11th century Crusades against encroaching Christianity. But my findings suggest that this interpretation, while rhetorically convenient for actors on both sides, is mostly false. In fact, the primary ideologues fueling the Jihadist movement appear to do so because of career incentives rather than ancient hatreds. Hatred may exist — there is evidence of

substantial cultural distrust between Muslim and Western societies — but most clerics do not adopt Jihadi ideology despite this animosity. Instead, adoption of violent, transnational Jihadi ideology is strongly influenced by the structure of seemingly mundane social networks, career incentives, and domestic political institutions. Perhaps the adoption of Jihadi ideology is less about Islam and less about the West than we have previously supposed.

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