

Definition: The word “ikhwan” translates literally to “brothers,” but in the Libya context and many others throughout the Middle East, it is predominantly used to refer to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as it is shorthand for the full title: al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen. As discussed in the context of the conflict, the MB is a Sunni Islamist organization with an associated political party, the JCP, in Libya. Similar to how the term “Daeshi” has come to be used to apply to more than actual members of ISIL, “ikhwan” has largely moved away from a merely descriptive definition referring to a member of the MB and is often used to imply various negative characteristics. According to focus group discussions, it indicates that the target of the term is connected to a foreign agenda, that they are self-interested, and that they act against the police and military forces in Libya. Focus group discussants stated that the term was often used against people viewed as having more closed-minded political beliefs or, according to respondents in Kufra, anyone who is opposed to the LNA or “Operation Dignity.” One participant said that, “Anyone who is bearded, backwards in religion, opinionated is Muslim Brotherhood.” Another participant stated that this term had been used against her due to her more conservative style of dress. There appeared to be an assumption across the focus group conversations that the MB—and the term “ikhwan”—is widely viewed negatively throughout the country. One participant stated, “Everyone has the right to believe in whatever he wants as long as it’s not harming other people, but this group [the MB] - in order to get what they want – they have a history of hurting people. Everyone knows they only work for their own benefit.”

Why it’s offensive and inflammatory: From the discussions held in the focus groups, there is a strong bias from many groups in Libya against the MB and the term “ikhwan” has come to be used as an accusation and insult, particularly in the eastern region of the country. Even while discussing the use of the term as hate speech, many of the participants indicated their own bias towards the MB with some stating that they are “very dangerous,” that “they are literally worse than devils,” and that “all of Libya’s problems are because of Muslim Brotherhood.” While some of the conversations recognized that “ikhwan” is used as hate speech against MB members or individuals perceived as having related political goals and beliefs, some of the statements made in the focus groups would themselves qualify as hate speech. For example, one participant said that, “they should be killed!” Furthermore, use of the term goes beyond bias and hatred against actual members of the MB, as many respondents indicated that the term may also be employed against people who call for reforms of the military or government or who otherwise express opposing political views (particularly those opposed to the LNA).

As indicated by several of the participant comments, many Libyans now attribute many of the country’s problems to the MB and accuse them of trying to take power and control people. The use of “ikhwan” has been seen to lead to the social seclusion of those labeled as such. Often, “ikhwan,” “Daeshi,” and “khawarij” are used interchangeably, with many people not differentiating between the political MB and the radical groups Ansar al Sharia or ISIL. Therefore, the term can be just as inflammatory as “Daeshi” and “khawarij.” The use of “ikhwan” as hate speech may increase given the decision of the HoR on May 14, 2019, to classify the MB as a terrorist organization.²⁶

Non-offensive alternative terms: الداعون للإسلام تحت حكم يتبع شريعة الإسلاميه (English translation: *those calling for Islam under the rule of Sharia law*)