



# THE POLITICS OF ISLAMISM

Diverging Visions and Trajectories



Edited by

JOHN L. ESPOSITO  
LILY ZUBAIDAH RAHIM  
NASER GHOBADZADEH



# Middle East Today

Series Editors

Fawaz A. Gerges

Department of International Relations

London School of Economics

London, UK

Nader Hashemi

Center for Middle East Studies

University of Denver

Highlands Ranch

CO, USA

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq have dramatically altered the geopolitical landscape of the contemporary Middle East. The Arab Spring uprisings have complicated this picture. This series puts forward a critical body of first-rate scholarship that reflects the current political and social realities of the region, focusing on original research about contentious politics and social movements; political institutions; the role played by non-governmental organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood; and the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Other themes of interest include Iran and Turkey as emerging pre-eminent powers in the region, the former an 'Islamic Republic' and the latter an emerging democracy currently governed by a party with Islamic roots; the Gulf monarchies, their petrol economies and regional ambitions; potential problems of nuclear proliferation in the region; and the challenges confronting the United States, Europe, and the United Nations in the greater Middle East. The focus of the series is on general topics such as social turmoil, war and revolution, international relations, occupation, radicalism, democracy, human rights, and Islam as a political force in the context of the modern Middle East.

More information about this series at  
<http://www.springer.com/series/14803>

John L. Esposito · Lily Zubaidah Rahim  
Naser Ghobadzadeh  
Editors

# The Politics of Islamism

Diverging Visions and Trajectories

palgrave  
macmillan

*Editors*

John L. Esposito  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC, USA

Naser Ghobadzadeh  
Australian Catholic University  
Sydney, NSW, Australia

Lily Zubaidah Rahim  
University of Sydney  
Sydney, NSW, Australia

Middle East Today

ISBN 978-3-319-62255-2

ISBN 978-3-319-62256-9 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62256-9>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017948711

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This publication was made possible by the support of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Sydney and the NPRP award [NPRP 9-309-5-041] from the Qatar National Research Fund (a member of The Qatar Foundation). The statements made herein are solely the responsibility of the authors.

Cover image: © i'am/Getty Images

Cover design by Fatima Jamadar

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To Natana DeLong-Bas, exemplary scholar and friend & her amazing family: Christophe, Aurora, and Gabriel*  
John Louis Esposito

*For my mother, Mawan Wajid Khan, an intuitive feminist who imparted to her daughters, in myriad ways, the value of educational achievement as a path towards gender equality and empowerment. This book is for you dearest Mak, in deep gratitude and much love.....*  
Lily Zubaidah Rahim

*To my wife, Bitu, who has been with me every step of the way, through good and bad times*  
Naser Ghobadzadeh

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Theological Contestations and Political Coalition-Building</b>	<b>1</b>
	John L. Esposito, Lily Zubaidah Rahim and Naser Ghobadzadeh	
<b>2</b>	<b>Islam and Democracy: Perspectives from Reformist and Traditional Islam</b>	<b>23</b>
	Mohsen Kadivar	
<b>3</b>	<b>Democratisation of Islamic Political Theology</b>	<b>47</b>
	Naser Ghobadzadeh	
<b>4</b>	<b>Tunisia's Ennahda: Islamists Turning the Learning Curve of Democracy and Civic Habituation</b>	<b>87</b>
	Larbi Sadiki	
<b>5</b>	<b>From Moderation to De-moderation: Democratic Backsliding of the AKP in Turkey</b>	<b>127</b>
	Menderes Çınar	
<b>6</b>	<b>Negotiating Popular Mandate and the Sovereignty of God in Iran</b>	<b>159</b>
	Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry	

7	<b>Careful What You Wish for: <i>Salafi</i> Islamisation and Authoritarian Governance in Malaysia</b> Lily Zubaidah Rahim	179
8	<b>The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, Democratisation and the Dilemmas of Internal Organisational Reform: Seeking Unity, Finding Division?</b> Paul M. Esber	217
9	<b>The Dilemmas of Dual Resistance: Hamas and Political Learning in Gaza</b> Martin Kear	243
10	<b>Transformations and Prospects</b> John L. Esposito, Lily Zubaidah Rahim and Naser Ghobadzadeh	267
	<b>Index</b>	275



# EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

## About the Editors

**John L. Esposito** is University Professor, Professor of Religion and International Affairs and of Islamic Studies and Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. His more than 50 books include: *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Shariah Law*, *The Future of Islam*, *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, *Religion and Violence*, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*, *Islamophobia and the Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*. Esposito's writings are translated into more than 40 languages.

Past President of the American Academy of Religion and Middle East Studies Association of North America and Vice Chair of the Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy's Board of Directors, Esposito has been a member of the World Economic Forum's Council of 100 Leaders and the E. C. European Network of Experts on De-Radicalisation, a Senior Scientist for The Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, and ambassador for the UN Alliance of Civilizations. He has served as a consultant to the U.S. Department of State and other agencies, European and Asian governments, corporations, universities and media worldwide.

**Lily Zubaidah Rahim** is Associate Professor at the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. She

is a specialist in authoritarian governance, ethnic politics, democratisation and political Islam. Her books include *The Singapore Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community*, (Oxford University Press 1998/2001) *Singapore in the Malay World: Building and Breaching Regional Bridges* (Routledge, 2009) and *Muslim Secular Democracy* (Palgrave, 2013). Her fifth book on governance reform in Singapore is close to completion. Lily has published in numerous international journals such as *Democratization*, *Contemporary Politics*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics and Critical Asian Studies*. She is the Convenor of the multidisciplinary Religion, State and Society (RSS) Network and Co-Convenor of the Social Inclusion Network (SIN) at the University of Sydney. Lily is also Vice-President of the Australian Association for Islamic and Muslim Studies (AAIMS) and President of the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MASSA)—the peak academic association on Malaysia and Singapore studies in Australia.

**Dr. Naser Ghobadzadeh's** interests, researching at the intersection of religion and politics, Naser's interests lie in the study of Islamic political theology, secularism, state–religion–society relations and Middle East and Iranian politics. By mapping competing discourses and practices in the Muslim world, his current research project involves conceptualising the possibility not only of the coexistence of religious and secular democracy but also the need to recognise the religious roots of an emerging model of secularity in the Muslim world. Naser is also working on authoritarian resilience in Iran with the aim of exploring the contribution of repeated elections to the durability of authoritarianism.

Naser has authored three books including *Religious secularity: a theological challenge to the Islamic state* (Oxford University Press, 2015), *Caspian Sea: legal regime, neighbouring countries and US policies* (Farhang-e Goftehan, 2005—In Persian), and *A study of people's divergence from ruling system* (Farhang-e Goftehan, 2002—In Persian). His articles have been published in internationally refereed journals such as *Third World Quarterly*, *Democratization*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Contemporary Politics* and *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*. Naser is one of the principal investigators of a 3-year QNRF-funded NPRP project on intersections of Islam and democracy with special reference to the production of civic and democratic learning and identities in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Malaysia, Qatar, Syria and Tunisia.

## Contributors

**Shahram Akbarzadeh** is Research Professor of Middle East & Central Asian Politics based at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. Between 2013 and 2017, he held a prestigious Australian Research Council Future Fellowship examining Iranian foreign policy making. He has published more than 40 refereed papers in leading international journals. Among his latest publications are a sole-authored book on Uzbekistan and the USA, a coauthored book on *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (with Kylie Baxter) and *Muslim Active Citizenship in the West* (with Mario Peucker). Prof Akbarzadeh led a number high-profile events, including a Chatham House rule workshop on Australia's relations with Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan (2007), a conference on the Arab Revolutions with Freedom House (2012), sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and an international conference on the Future of the Middle East (2016). In 2014, he was a Visiting Fellow at School of Foreign Service in Qatar, Georgetown University to work on a joint project examining sectarianism in the Middle East funded by the Qatar National Research Fund.

**James Barry** is an Associate Research Fellow with Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI). James' research interests involve the intersections of religious, linguistic and national conceptions of identity in the Middle East, specifically Iran. James speaks Armenian and Persian-Farsi. He has a longstanding relationship with the Armenian community in Australia, and has been interviewed for community radio and magazines in both Australia and the USA, and has worked with several Iranian expatriate communities at each end of the Pacific Rim. In 2013, James received his Ph.D. from Monash University for his thesis 'My Nation is not Soil, My Nation is Alive: Armenian Christian Identity in the Islamic Republic of Iran'. James' dissertation was an ethnographic study focusing on the sense of identity experienced by religious minorities in the Islamic Republic. This involved research in social institutions such as sports clubs, ethnic affiliated restaurants and churches, the general sites where identity is formed and reinforced. His fieldwork site was Tehran, with additional interviews conducted in Armenia, Australia and the USA. His findings not only have contributed to how identity is constructed in Iran but also how these identities differ between generations and are changed by the process of migration.

James has published in a variety of journals, including the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *the Muslim World and Islam* and *Christian-Muslim Relations*. In addition to his work at ADI, James was involved in research on decision-making among irregular maritime arrivals to Australia, and others living in Indonesia from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. James was a lecturer at Monash University from 2012 to 2014.

**Menderes Çınar** is Professor of political science at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Başkent University, Ankara. He is a former Giorgio La Pira research fellow at the European University Institute, Florence, and a visiting scholar at Boston and Harvard Universities. His main research interests are comparative Islamism and Turkish politics. He has previously published in *Political Science Quarterly*, *Muslim World*, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Turkish Studies*, *Insight Turkey*, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* and several collected volumes, they include *Secular and Islamic Politics in Turkey: The Making of the Justice and Development Party*, ed. Umit Cizre (Routledge, 2008) and *Political Parties and Social Forces in Turkey*, eds. Nicole Watts and Elise Massicard (Routledge, 2013). His most recent publications include *'Reproducing the Paradigm of Democracy: Parochial Democratization in the Decade of the AKP'*, *Turkish Studies* 15 (2014) (coauthored) and *Vesayetçi Demokrasiden 'Milli' Demokrasiye* [From Tutelary Democracy to the 'National' Democracy] (Birikim, İstanbul, 2015).

**Paul M. Esber** is a researcher and Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Arabic Language and Cultures at the University of Sydney Australia. His research focused on the Eastern half of the Arab World (al-Mashreq); examined in a constructivist manner, the interplay between state institutions and social movements in the social construction of identities, the evolution of political systems, and the intersection between local, national, regional and international/transnational scales in political behaviour.

Recently returned from Amman, where he was a Visiting Researcher at the Identity Center for Human Development, Paul is currently working on a Special Issue *Journal on Arab Parliaments*, and a book chapter with the Danish–Arab Partnership.

**Mohsen Kadivar** is a Philosopher, and Research Professor of Islamic Studies in the department of religious studies at Duke University (Durham, NC). He was a visiting professor at Harvard Law School, University of Virginia, Duke University, UNC, and research fellow at Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. Kadivar studied at the Islamic Seminary at Qom ending with a certificate of Ijtihad, and earned a Ph.D. in Islamic Philosophy and theology from Tarbiate Modarress University in Tehran. He taught for three decades in Iran. Kadivar spent 18 months in jail in Tehran (1999–2000) illegally for expressing his religious-political thoughts.

Specializing in classical Islam and contemporary Islamic thought, his main intellectual interests and topics of publications include: classical Islamic philosophy, classical and modern Shi'a theology and legal theories, and human rights and democracy in Islam. Kadivar has published 13 printed books and 12 e-books (publication of his books are banned in Iran from 2009 onwards) in Persian and Arabic, and several book chapters in English such as '*The Innovative Philosophical Ideas of Sage Agha Ali Mudarris Tibrani*' (2017), '*Human Action Within Divine Creation, Muslim Perspective*' (2017), '*Routinizing the Iranian Revolution*' (2014), '*Revisiting Women's Rights in Islam: "Egalitarian Justice" in lieu of "Meritocratic Justice"*' (2013) and '*Wilayat al-faqih and Democracy*' (2011). Three of his books are translated to Arabic and published in Lebanon, one is translated to Germany and published in Freiburg, and two of his books are translated to English including *The Right of People in Islam* (to be published in the UK) and *Apostasy, Blasphemy, & Religious Freedom in Islam: A Critique Based on Demonstrative Jurisprudence* (to be published in the USA). His forthcoming monograph is *Islamic Theocracy in A Secular Age: Revisiting Shi'ite Political Theology & Ideology of Islamic Republic of Iran* (to be published by UNC Press).

**Martin Kear** completed his Ph.D. at the Department of Government and International Relations, the University of Sydney. He is completing a book titled '*Is This the Way to Palestine? Hamas and the Contested Road to Statehood*'. The book critically examines the scope, limits and causation of the shifts in Hamas's political behaviour between 2005 and 2015. It scrutinises Hamas's dual resistance strategy in maintaining and defending its status as a legitimate political actor in Palestinian politics. Martin's research interests include the political participation of Islamist

movements, particularly Hamas, and the function of violence in the narrative of Islamist movements.

**Larbi Sadiki** received his academic training at Sydney University and at the Australian National University where he read for a Ph.D. on Islamist movements' notions of democracy. The resulting doctoral thesis and a longitudinal-type research on the same issue will be published in a 2017 book on Islamist conceptions of democracy with special reference to Islamists in Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan. He is the editor of the series *Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government*, and author of *The Search for Arab Democracy* (2004), *Rethinking Arab Democratization* (2009), co-author of *Europe and Tunisia* (2010). These have been followed by edited texts such as the Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring (2015) and Democratic Transition in the Middle East (2013). He is author of prescient articles such as 'Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization', published 11 years before the Arab Spring (IJMES, 2000), and 'The Search for Citizenship in Ben Ali's Tunisia: Democracy versus Unity' (Political Studies, 2002). Forthcoming books include *Hamas and Democracy*, *Hezbollah and Democracy*, *Tunisia's Revolution: Peoplehood & Democracy and Salon Democracy*. He is guest editor of the Special Issue (Volume 20, Issue No. 5, 2015) in the *Journal of North African Studies*, where he tackles the question of 'democratic knowledge' in the Arab world. His research has been funded by the British Academy and Leverhulme in the UK. He regularly contributes articles and commentaries on various topical issues concerning the Arab Spring, democracy and democratization, civic Islamism, to Al-Jazeera English and diverse newspapers. He has had current and past scholarly association with various think-tanks such as Carnegie, Middle East Institute, amongst others. Larbi is professor of Arab democratization at Qatar University. He is also lead principal investigator of a 3-year QNRF-funded NPRP project on intersections of Islam and democracy with special reference to the production of civic and democratic learning and identities in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Malaysia, Qatar, Syria and Tunisia.

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1	Key understandings of ‘fundamentalism’	91
Table 4.2	Ennahda Islamists’ perceptions of civic/democratic habituation	112

## Introduction: Theological Contestations and Political Coalition-Building

*John L Esposito, Lily Zubaidah Rahim  
and Naser Ghobadzadeh*

Political Islam has ‘many faces’, as manifested by the diverse and divergent Islamist parties and movements operating in Muslim-majority states and beyond. In recognising the imperative of challenging one-dimensional myths about Islam and portrayals of Muslims, Edward Said urged scholars to discern the ‘*different kinds of Islam, at different moments, for different people, in different fields*’ (Said, 2002, p. 69). Affirming this perspective, Larbi Sadiki reminds us (in this volume) that ‘*Islamism is often incubated in local matrices that must be understood. These matrices may condition certain practices, both peaceful and violent*’.

---

J.L. Esposito (✉)  
Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA

L.Z. Rahim  
University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

N. Ghobadzadeh  
Australian Catholic University, Sydney, Australia

© The Author(s) 2018

J.L. Esposito et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Islamism*, Middle East Today,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62256-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62256-9_1)



Given the diversity of political Islam, Islamists and Islamic movements, there is unsurprisingly limited agreement on what legitimately constitutes an Islamic or Muslim state, whether and how *Shari'a* is to be operationalized and who should interpret *Shari'a* law. Islamists range from reformist political and social protest movements to ultra-conservative movements focused on morality-related issues rather than economic redistribution. The more 'moderate' Islamists tend to adopt flexible and contextual interpretations of Islam and the holy texts while conservative Islamists are inclined to adhere to rigid and literalist interpretations of the scriptures. Islamists differ on who should be accorded religious authority. Indeed, some Islamists reject the traditional sources and methods of premodern religion. It is worth noting that this 'interpretive modernism' does not necessarily signal a firm endorsement of Western political liberalism (Marsh, 2015, p. 104). Some Islamists are strongly nationalist in orientation, as the case studies on Tunisia, Turkey and Malaysia in this volume exemplify, whilst the more radical and militant tend to be transnational in focus. Political Islam has often been characterised by fluctuating cycles of success and failure, intertwined with hope and despair. Hope has been fuelled by democratic ripples in some Muslim countries and its waves ebb and flow in the Muslim world. The combined effects of the 1997 Reformist and 2009 Green movements in Iran, fall of the authoritarian New Order regime in Indonesia in 1998 and relative success of Muslim Brotherhood parties in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia fuelled cautious optimism. Many secular-oriented regimes have co-opted the Islamist agenda through top-down and state-led Islamisation initiatives in an attempt to 'out-Islamise Islamists' and, in doing so, attract the pious Muslim vote. Islamist political advancements have been driven, in part, by the pragmatism of most Islamists—engaged in elections and coalition-building with political actors operating within and beyond the Islamist frame. This then begs the question: Will the arc of history in the twenty-first century eventually bend towards deepening democratisation in the Muslim world—driven by the pragmatism and inclusive vision of Muslim democrats operating within Islamist and secular-oriented political parties and by autonomous business classes and progressive civil society movements? Tunisia's *Ennahda* and Iran's Islamic reform movement represent the possibilities of this potential political flowering.

Yet, hope for substantive political reform in the heartland of the Muslim world has descended to disappointment with the political

backsliding of formerly ‘moderate’ Muslim-majority governments in Turkey and Malaysia, challenged by weakening electoral support—as discussed by Çınar and Rahim in this volume. Despair has been generated by the bloody Egyptian military coup in 2013 and brutal civil wars in Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq. Moreover, *salafti* Islamists who have participated in the political process have made considerable strides, aided by the series of repressive actions against Muslim Brotherhood parties and movements in the Middle East. They have been supported by conservative Gulf monarchies determined to ensure that the non-Arab republics of Iran and Turkey do not effectively capitalise on the contested regional leadership vacuum in the Middle East.

Many of these monarchies are determined that the republican Islamist paradigm, where national elections have become the norm and Muslim Brotherhood parties clearly electorally competitive, does not take hold. The severity of the intra-Islamist conflict, as exemplified by the 2017 Saudi-led sanctions against Qatar and diplomatic campaign against the republican *Shi’a* regime in Iran, highlights the persistence of intra-civilizational tensions that have escalated (since the 2011 Arab Uprisings). These tensions are not likely to be resolved in the near future. The severity of this intra-Islamist ideological conflict has been cogently referred to as the ‘Arab Cold War’ (Ryan, 2012; Valbjørn & Bank, 2012).

The intra-Islamist conflict has been complicated further by the ‘Russian resurgence’, as manifested in their overt involvement in the Syrian conflict and covert meddling in the competitive electoral contests in the West. This resurgence has been accompanied by the rise of Islamophobic sentiments fuelled by populist ethno-nationalists and movements in the West. The murder of the US Ambassador to Libya and *jihādī* involvement in the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts have contributed to Western cynicism in the Islamist commitment to democratic principles. This may have also influenced many Western governments to remain relatively silent following the 2013 military coup in Egypt. Inter alia, the coup culminated in the killing of more than a thousand Muslim Brotherhood protestors and has radicalised elements within the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—reinforcing long-held Muslim suspicions that Western support for democracy and human rights is inconsistent and strongly tied to narrow geostrategic and economic interests.

In many Muslim-majority states, *salafti* Islamists have exploited the electoral and democratic processes by resorting to the language of individual and human rights despite railing against democratic and liberal

principles—deemed unIslamic under *Shari‘a* law. Yet, it remains unclear whether the participation of Islamists in the electoral process is more strongly tactical rather than ideological—or have repeated tactical shifts incrementally paved the way for eventual ideological change. This then begs the questions: Is there a fundamental difference between conservative participatory *salafi* parties and movements and other participatory Islamists, such as Muslim Brotherhood parties and movements? Are Muslim Brotherhood parties more inclined towards political pluralism when operating in a plural political environment? Are some Muslim Brotherhood parties more inclined to be theologically flexible and willing to incorporate principles such as equal citizenship rights for women and religious minorities when the democratic structures of the state are robust? The fine-grained country-case studies of Tunisia, Turkey, Jordan, Iran, Palestine and Malaysia (in this volume) systematically examine these complex issues and questions. These case-studies demonstrate that the diverse political and theological trajectories of *salafi* and Muslim Brotherhood parties are strongly shaped by the interplay of intra-party, national, regional, economic and international factors and forces.

Paradoxically, the ‘Arab Uprisings’ fuelled the resurgence of *jihadi* (militant) *salafi* Islamism and the escalation of sectarianism in the Muslim world. To be sure, *jihadi* Islamism constitutes a miniscule fragment of the broader Islamic political landscape (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Yet despite its fringe status, the wave of militant Islamism is intent on fundamentally reconstructing the Muslim world. This savage strand of Islamism is intent on out-staging participatory Islamists who have largely pursued their faithful contestations and aspirations through electoral and other civic channels—more often than not, without much fanfare. By contrast, *jihadi* Islamists have captivated the attention of the international media and community—reinforcing negative and monolithic stereotypes of Muslims, Islam and Islamists. Instructively, *Jihadi salafi* Islamists have consistently denounced participatory Islamists as apostates espousing a bankrupt political model based on the nation-state. Despite these differences, are non-militant Islamists indirect enablers of *jihadi* Islamism, by strengthening Islamist identity which then contributes towards generating a larger pool of recruits for *jihadi* Islamists to draw on—as posited by the conveyor belt hypothesis, commonly noted in the security studies literature? Notwithstanding the setbacks following the ‘Arab Uprisings’, political norms in the form of elections and parliamentary politics have become a dominant feature in the vast majority

of Muslim-majority states. These norms are supported by theologically grounded discourses articulated within a reformist Islamic framework which emphasises *wasatiyyah* (middle-path, centrist or moderate) principles. Such norms have not emerged from a void. They are, in many respects, manifestations of the incremental political shifts propagated by participatory Islamists—often operating ‘under the radar’. To what extent then have *wasatiyyah* Islamist parties and movements acted as an ideological ‘firewall’ in terms of averting more Muslims from descending down the path of radicalism and militancy? Sympathetic to the firewall hypothesis, Marc Lynch observes that the ‘*need for effective firewalls against radicalization*’ (Lynch, 2016, p. 2) create opportunities for the revival of centrist Islamist parties and potentially contain the rise of *salafi* extremists. The conveyor belt and firewall theses are explored in many of the country-case studies in this volume.

As the Tunisian experience suggests, *wasatiyyah* parties such as *Ennahda* have not been particularly successful in stemming the stream of Tunisian Muslim youth joining *jihādī* Islamists in Syria and Libya. This then raises the question: Does *wasatiyyah* Islam become more effective in serving as a ‘firewall’ against radicalization when buttressed by an inclusive and democratic state that possesses considerable institutional capacity—in terms of providing social services and jobs, facilitating economic growth and delivering political stability?

Recognising the imperative of effective governance based on democratic rights and socio-economic justice, Rāshid al-Ghannūshī’s vision of an inclusive secular democratic state calls for ‘*The separation of religion and politics [that] will prevent officials from using faith-based appeals to manipulate the public... [and] compassionate capitalism...balances the freedom of enterprise with the ideas of social justice and equal opportunity... [and where the state protects] citizens while ensuring respect for individual rights and the rule of law*’ (al-Ghannūshī, 2016, p. 62), is particularly instructive. Approximating the dilemmas confronting Tunisia’s consolidating democracy, Indonesia’s erstwhile *wasatiyyah* electoral democracy has not experienced a severe political backsliding but exhibits worrying signs of incremental regression. This incremental regression has been fuelled by the politicisation of Islam by opportunistic politicians and *salafi*-inspired Islamists. The latter appear intent on dismantling the quasi-secular democratic foundations of the postcolonial state, ironically through democratic electoral processes.

*The Politics of Islamism* represents a collective effort on the part of scholars endeavouring to make sense of the political trajectories, theological transformations and chequered shifts that are re/shaping the Muslim world—both within the Arab Middle East and beyond. Contributors to this volume focus on the role of Islamists, particularly centrist participatory Islamists and their engagement with *salaḥī* Islamists and non-Islamist political actors, in propelling the political transitions and shifts such as regime change, electoral breakthroughs, political backsliding, backlash and authoritarian resilience. The book focuses on the theological and political tensions between participatory Islamists—from civic Muslim democrats (*Ennahda*) reconciled with the secular democratic state at one end of the spectrum, to conservative Muslim democrats (such as the Turkish AKP), the spectrum of Muslim Brotherhood parties and movements (including Hamas’s national liberation oriented dual resistance strategy), secular Muslim regimes that have opportunistically embarked on the state-led Islamisation trajectory and *salaḥī* Islamists committed to literalist interpretations of the scripture, comprehensive *shari‘a* law, divine sovereignty and the establishment of an Islamic state.

The case studies elucidate why different Islamist parties and movements responded differently to the political openings generated by the ‘Arab Uprisings’ and the constraints arising from the post-Uprisings. These dynamics are integral to the inclusion-moderation hypothesis which essentially posits that Islamist political moderation can be generated by intra-party democracy and generational shifts, inclusion into the mainstream political process, theological articulations which rationalise Islamist participation in electoral politics or even political repression (Schwedler, 2006; Wickham, 2004). The volume contributes to the literature on Islamist political learning via the fine-grained analyses which focus on the divergent trajectories and visions of participatory Islamists which have been shaped by:

1. theological reformulations of *wasatiyyah* (centrist) Islamist and Muslim intellectuals and political actors who emphasise the religious roots of democratic values and postulate that the inclusive secular democratic state is consistent with key Islamic principles;
2. sustained engagements of Islamic parties and movements in political and electoral processes and participation in coalition-building with non-Islamist parties and actors;

3. Islamist leadership that possess the intellectual and theological vision to harmonise the principles of Islamic justice with the principles of popular sovereignty and equal citizenship rights for women, Muslim minorities and non-Muslims;
4. internalising the lessons from past experiences of political inclusion, exclusion and repression;
5. theological and electoral contestations within Islamists parties and between centrist and *salafi* Islamists;
6. institutional embeddedness and coalition alliances within authoritarian regimes and states;

*The Politics of Islamism* is informed by the above six dimensions which have arguably moulded the political learning curve of Islamists. They shed new light on why some Islamists have been able to nimbly traverse political challenges while others have failed to consistently partake in democratic processes or recognise the imperative of coalition-building. The more doctrinaire and less inclusive Islamists may well have squandered political opportunities that arise from the uncertainties presented by electoral politics.

Following the repression and near decimation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, many Islamists find themselves navigating uncharted waters in a Middle East plagued by escalating tensions between Sunnī and Shīʿa regimes, monarchies and republican regimes, Islamic and republican regimes and secular-oriented and Islamic regimes. Yet, the increasingly tense and uncertain regional and international geopolitical environment have, in some respects, provided opportunities for Islamists to creatively venture beyond more conventional postures—in theological, political and organisational terms. As Kear highlights (in this volume), this uncertain era has prompted Hamas in 2017 to promulgate a new Charter in recognition that its past strategy of armed resistance is unsustainable and that flexible political approaches and discourses are imperative in realising its goal of establishing an independent Palestinian state.

## THEOLOGICAL CONTESTATIONS

A characteristic feature of the twentieth century was the flourishing of disparate utopian political visions. Universal utopian ideologies imported from the West had mixed effects on the Muslim world. Many Muslims

became frustrated with Western utopian visions. Their growing disenchantment paved the way for the emergence of indigenous ideologies that energised Muslims to tap into their intellectual, ethical, political and cultural roots for inspiration (Roushan, 2015; Shahibzadeh, 2016, pp. 46–48; Shariati, 1982). Viewed as all-encompassing, Islam was regarded as a panacea for prevailing sociopolitical challenges in the Muslim world, particularly its laggard status with regard to the modernity of the West. This was crystallised by the slogan ‘*Islam is the solution*’, as the cornerstone of a utopian promise to build a better future.

Islamist utopian visions swept the Muslim world, particularly from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. However, the dawning of the new millennium marked the decline of utopian visions, in large part due to the utopian‘isms’ of the twentieth century losing their ability to mobilise universal enthusiasm for sociopolitical change. Islamism was no exception, albeit the term remains a fashionable tag. Versions of Islamism have evolved in such divergent ways that any attempt to bring them together under one overarching umbrella would prove highly problematic. As evident in the various chapters of this volume, the politico-religious orientations of contemporary Islamist movements are diverse. This diversity goes far beyond the strategies and tactics employed by Islamist movements to manoeuvre in the political environment of their respective countries. Islamism has witnessed important theological diversification. From the emergence of modern Islamism in the 1960s, different theological articulations called for the engagement of Islam in both the public and political lives of Muslims.

Two major Sunni Islamic movements emerged in the 1930s and 1940s led by Egypt’s Ḥasan al-Bannā’ and his Muslim Brotherhood and Pakistan’s Abu ‘l-a‘lā Mawdūdī and his Jama‘at-i-islami. Their ideologies and organisational models informed other movements in the Arab world and South Asia in the 1950s and 1960s. Sayyid Qutb of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood produced a more militant ideology, in response to the repression of Egypt’s ruler Gamal Abdel Nasser, which influenced a wing of the Brotherhood in the 1960s and subsequent militant Islamic movements including Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. In the 1970s Ayatollah Khomeini’s ideas and ideology and that of Dr. Ali Shariati informed the Iranian Revolution and ‘spurred’ Islamic movements, both Shi‘i and Sunnī in the Muslim world (Esposito, 1990).

The 1980s post Khomeini were dominated by fears of a revolutionary Islamic fundamentalist wave that would destabilise governments and

come to power through violence and terror. At the same time, a quiet non-violent revolution occurred in countries, many of which had failing economies and inadequate educational and social services. Islamist social activism provided schools, clinics, hospitals, day care, legal aid, youth centres and other social services. Private (not government-controlled) mosques and financial institutions such as Islamic banks and insurance companies also proliferated. In the late 1980s and early 1990s widespread public unrest produced protests and mass demonstrations in many countries and led to 'government-controlled' elections in Arab countries like Jordan, Tunisia, Sudan, Algeria, and Egypt. Islamic candidates won in local and national elections and assumed leadership in professional associations and trade unions. To the surprise of many, democratic elections in Turkey, the bastion of secularism in the Middle East, saw the founder of the Welfare Party, Dr. Necmettin Erbakan become the first Islamist prime minister from 1996 to 1997.

The trend continued into the twenty-first century. Recep Erdogan became Prime Minister of Turkey along with his Justice and Development Party (AK) which dominated the Parliament. Islamists were well-represented in the cabinets and parliaments of many countries, from Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain and Turkey to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia and Indonesia. However, 9/11 brought into sharp focus a militant struggle that had previously threatened many Muslim countries and societies for years. From the 1970s to the early 1990s, Muslim extremist groups had emerged and challenged national governments, especially in Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan and Indonesia. However, by the mid-1990s transnational terrorist movements and networks emerged, in particular, Al-Qaeda. Why the transformation from a local/national to a global Jihād? The last half of the twentieth century witnessed a globalisation of militant Jihād in religious thought and in action. Five factors have influenced the growth of global terrorism: the Afghan war against the Soviet Union; the growth of a global Jihādī ideology; policies of governments and conflicts in the Middle East and in the broader Muslim world; US foreign policies in the Muslim world; militant brands of Wahhabi theology or ideology spread and supported by Saudi Arabia; and the occupation of Iraq and Sunnī-Shīʿa sectarianism.

The resultant theological polemics gave rise to full-scale conflict among divergent forms of Islamism. Varying theological/ideological articulations culminated in a situation in which the propagators of



divergent forms of militant Islamism viewed each other as the primary enemy. For example, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006), who founded ISIS, declared Shīʿism as the primary target, claiming that the Shīʿa posed a dangerous threat to the Sunnīs. Whilst recognising the Americans as a major threat, he considered the Shīʿa more dangerous. The damage they could inflict on the *umma*, he said, was potentially more lethal than any threat posed by the Americans. But the theological transformation of Islamists has not been confined solely to militant extremists and movements. Diversity has underpinned endeavours to articulate democracy-seeking theologies. Whereas an apocalyptic theology resides at one end of the spectrum, the other end accommodates democratic theological articulations. These are two sides of the broad spectrum of theological articulations and political practices discussed and analysed in this book.

Ghobadzadeh’s chapter examines whether there are any grounds for hope and optimism beneath the dismal surface of militant Islamism. One important and promising development is the theological transformation generated by some reformist Muslim thinkers who have pledged themselves not only to the reformation of Islamic political theology but also to rethinking earlier conceptions of Islamic political theology. Drawing upon different experiences, Islamist scholars and ideologues in numerous Muslim countries are embarking upon various trajectories and re-examining their understanding of the political teachings of the Islamic scriptures. These reformist theological and jurisprudential articulations mark a theological transformation informed by the lived experiences of Islamists. The book includes chapters that conceptualise the discourses of progressive theologians across sectarian and geographic locales within the Muslim world.

Disenchanted with the discourses of both transnational militant groups and authoritarian Islamists, a growing number of religious scholars from both Sunnī and Shīʿite schools of thought have sought to critically re-examine Islamist ideologies that promised a utopian future for the Muslim world based on the implementation of comprehensive *sharīʿa* and the formation of an Islamic state. Cognizant of the failure of state-imposed *sharīʿa* and the claimed Islamic states to promote political and economic justice, progressive theologians and scholars have proposed an understanding of religion that is sensitive to contemporary norms and the relationship between democracy, human rights, freedom, citizenship rights and secularity with Islamic concepts of justice.

Many of the chapters investigate religiously informed discourses and endeavours geared towards accommodating and cultivating democratic principles within an Islamic framework. Motivated primarily by religious concerns, these endeavours are shaped by the lived experiences in Muslim-majority states and societies. Authoritarian governance, both Islamist and secular, are two dominant political trajectories that have deeply configured the Muslim world. Secular authoritarian regimes (most of which originated from nationalist, anti-imperialist, and/or socialist movements) have often been supplanted by authoritarian Islamic regimes promising Islamic social justice. Despite their utopian postulations and promises, these authoritarian regimes have failed to deliver on their promises—prompting progressive and reformist theologians to reformulate Islamic political theology. Democratic theological articulations draw particular attention to the detrimental effects of the unification of religion and state—as manifested by the Islamic state ideal. Rooted in religious sources including Islamic scriptures and traditions, theological articulations offered by religious scholars employ jurisprudential and theological methods to challenge the sacralisation of the political sphere, critique authoritarian readings of religion and elevate democratic politics as a necessary prerequisite for the cultivation of genuine religiosity. Put simply, these efforts are rooted in the understanding that Islamic and democratic principles are fundamentally compatible. Inspired by Qur’ānic verses, *ḥadīths* and Islamic history, they provide religious justification for the inclusive democratic state.

Sensitive to the exploitation of religion by political elites, these reformist endeavours stipulate limitations on religion in sociopolitical life and the intrusions of the state into the religious domain. Whilst affirming the divinity of religion, they postulate that religious experience is inherently personal. Thus, state intervention in religion, such as the implementation of *sharī‘a* has led to the contamination of the belief in God and the traditions of Islam. Neither the Islamic scriptures nor the foundational history of Islam (namely the governing patterns of the Prophet and the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs) specify a particular political structure, much less a state. By contrast, Islamic scriptures provide specific affirmations on the imperative for social justice. Consistent with the key principles of Islam, governance is implicitly ceded to the realms of human rationality and experience. Inspired by this understanding of Islam and governance, a reformist Islamic cleric and scholar, Mohsen Kadivar, maintains that: ‘*Democracy is the least erroneous approach to the*

*politics of the world. [It] is a product of reason, and the fact that it has first been put to use in the West does not preclude its utility in other cultures—reason extends beyond the geographical boundaries. One must adopt a correct approach, regardless of who came up with the idea’* (Kadivar quoted in Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2012, p. 339).

*The Politics of Islamism* investigates the interaction between Islamic values and traditions with democratic principles as a means of enervating accountable, inclusive and just governance. In other words, democratic and just governance arguably provide the social environment conducive to the cultivation of genuine religiosity. As affirmed in the various global surveys (Gallop and World Values) on Muslim attitudes, religion claims a prominent place in the lives of Muslims. Islamic teachings and theological conceptualizations have a profound influence on Muslim sociopolitical norms. As an alternative paradigm, *wasatiyyah* theological articulations offer considerable sociopolitical potential, particularly when progressive Islamic clerics and scholars interact closely with participatory Islamists, secular democrats and other pro-democracy actors at the national and international levels.

Political developments within Tunisia’s *Ennahda* Party point to this transformative potential with the declaration in May 2016 to separate the party from the broader Islamist social movement. However, as the case studies on Iran and Malaysia in this volume demonstrate, this potential can be blunted by the authoritarian theology of state *ulama* operating within the bureaucracy and agencies of the authoritarian state—both quasi-secular and Islamic. This political and theological conundrum is explored in the various country-case studies.

## ELECTORAL POLITICS: THE DYNAMICS OF ALLIANCE-BUILDING AND PARTY REFORM

Many of the chapters in this volume focus on the ideological and behavioural shifts of Islamist parties and movements featured in the country-case studies. Despite the chequered record of Islamist parties embroiled in the ‘Arab Uprisings’, many that have effectively engaged in democratic and electoral processes and forged formidable national, regional and international coalition networks, have remained within the arenas of government or close to the levers of power. Participatory Islamists have pragmatically positioned themselves as partners (as well as substitutes) to incumbent authoritarian regimes—both secular and

Islamic. A few have formed government and engaged in coalitions with non-Islamist parties.

Many participatory Islamist parties and movements appear equipped for the long haul fuelled by the tradition of building local social and welfare networks that, in many states, have transformed into formidable political machines that have both attracted votes and inspired optimism. Benefitting from the reservoir of social capital rooted in identity politics, Islamists have been able to appeal to middle-class voters that ‘left’ parties have been unable to inspire. They have also been able to reach the poor due to the embeddedness of the religious social infrastructure (Masoud, 2014).

Yet, many of the case-studies in this volume examine the way by which secular-oriented regimes and other democratic political actors in the Muslim world and governments in the West remain wary of participatory Islamists, fearing that the latter have only tactically shelved their goal of establishing the mythical Islamic state—only to revive this end-goal once in firm control of government. As Stathis observes, for democratisation to make considerable headway, Islamists need to resolve their ‘commitment problem’ by sending clear signals about their post-electoral behaviour prior to the elections (Kalyvas, 2000). Until then, the ambiguous commitment of many participatory Islamists to the implementation of comprehensive *shari‘a* and the promotion of constitutional democracy will continue to be viewed with cynicism.

These suspicions were reinforced further by the brief tenure of the Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamad Morsi, who exhibited the ‘*righteous majoritarianism*’ mindset (Pahwa, 2017) and veered towards non-consensus politicking. But was Morsi’s style of governance a function of Islamist politics or largely the result of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood having suffered from prolonged exclusions from the structures and institutions of political power—rendering them poorly equipped with the skills of organisational change and governance within a complex transitional and post-regime political setting? (Milton-Edwards, 2016, p. 194).

The Muslim Brotherhood under Morsi failed to work in coalition with secular democrats and other political actors, underestimating the socio-economic and political undercurrents that had driven the Uprisings—spearheaded initially by secular and liberal democrats. Morsi failed to fully appreciate that he had been elected to the Presidency by only a slim majority. Additionally, he failed to recognise that in the more

mature electoral democracies (such as Tunisia, and Indonesia), parties with Islamist roots operate within the constitutional framework of the secular democratic state—as the secular democratic state has guaranteed their constitutional right to participate in the political process. These Islamist parties have been willing to engage in grand alliances with secular, liberal and leftist parties and civil society movements—in loose as well as structured electoral coalitions.

Importantly, the Muslim Brotherhood under Morsi also failed to recognise the re-grouping of deep-state military forces—forces willing to cooperate with *salafī* Islamists, state ‘*ulamā*’ and regional Gulf States determined to undermine the republican vision of Brotherhood Islamists. As Lily Zubaidah Rahim observes in her case study of political backsliding in Malaysia, *salafī* Islamists have a record of venturing into alliances with authoritarian regimes on the grounds that such an alliance avoids *fitna* (anarchy) and maintains Muslim unity. As discussed above, the divergent pathways of Islamists suggest that intra-Islamist tensions can be as problematic as tensions between Islamist and non-Islamist parties.

Cynicism towards participatory Islamists has also been encouraged by the political trajectory of Turkey under Erdogan. After a decade of participating in coalition-building with secular-based parties, liberals and Kurds, the AKP has since its third term in government (2011), become increasingly authoritarian—particularly with the waning Kemalist influence over the media, judiciary and military. Menderes Cinar observes (in this volume) that Erdogan and the AKP government are now commonly perceived by its erstwhile supporters as having betrayed democrats that participated in the cross-ideological coalition that helped sweep the AKP to power in 2003. Similarly, Paul Esber highlights (in this volume) the paradox of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood demanding greater democracy in Jordan even though the party leadership was unwilling to democratise the party by allowing rigorous intra-party debate on policy issues and respecting the general principles of pluralism. This contradiction eventually pushed reformists in the party to form a breakaway Brotherhood party that has been endorsed by the Jordanian government.

In contrast to the Egyptian and Turkish Islamist experience, Tunisia’s *Ennahda* has sought to build alliances with other political parties in government and has even been willing to give up the levers of government in the face of intense public criticism for their less than robust stance

against *jihādī* Islamists. The *Ennahda* Party's separation of religion and politics and rebranding itself as a party of Muslim democrats in 2016 has broadened the political space for creating alliances but also expanded its electoral constituency. This significant shift has also demonstrated that the *Ennahda* leadership has learnt from the experiences of democratic transitions in the West and the setbacks of Islamist parties and regimes in the Muslim world. This then raises the pertinent questions: To what extent does *Ennahda's* alliance-building, consensus-based and power-sharing approaches represent a viable political model for Islamist parties and movements in the complex post-Uprisings era? Tunisia's reputation as the only successful political transition from the 'Arab Uprisings' can be attributed to the recognition of the visionary leadership in *Ennahda* that governance in post-authoritarian polities is inherently fragile. As such, skilful calibration is required when grappling with complex nation-building tensions between Islamism, secularism and democracy and the different approaches to governance.

Nearly a decade after the 2011 Arab Uprisings, the likelihood of another democratic wave in the Arab Middle East appears remote. Tunisia stands as the rare *wasatiyyah* lighthouse in the Muslim world, with much riding on its resilience to further inspire the Muslim world—stirring other Islamist parties and movements and Muslim regimes that have suffered from acute or incremental political backsliding, towards the evolving *wasatiyyah* path of Muslim democracy.

## STRUCTURE AND SYNOPSIS

*The Politics of Islamism* focuses on augmenting conceptual and theoretical perspectives through an analytical mapping of Islamist discourses and strategies. The chapters by Mohsen Kadivar and Naser Ghobadzadeh elucidates the evolving theological and sociopolitical perspectives and approaches of Muslim-based political parties and 'progressive' intellectuals moulded by specific national and historical contexts. Responses to these myriad shifts have varied, from incremental to more dramatic political and theological trajectories.

The chapters by Larbi Sadiki, Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry, Menderes Cinar, Lily Zubaidah Rahim, Paul Esber and Martin Kear focus on Islamists and their interactions with regimes and political and religious actors in specific Muslim-majority states. They investigate the divergent approaches that political parties and movements deploy when

navigating electoral politics, and negotiating coalition politics and citizenship rights as well as economic and social justice imperatives. These chapters analyse the key factors and forces that have contributed to the resilience of authoritarian regimes, as well as the incremental and more dramatic political shifts (oscillating forwards and backwards) in the Muslim world. In contributing to the literature on Islamist politics, political learning and the inclusion-moderation theoretical framework, they also consider whether these shifts are more strongly tactical, ideological, syncretic or a combination of various strands.

In the twenty-first century, Islamic principles and diverse theological conceptualisations of the state and society will continue to guide and shape the political learning of participatory Islamists who are responsive to the majority of Muslims. As major global polls indicate, the majority of Muslims desire a democratic form of government that includes space for Islam in Muslim democratic settings. By drawing upon Islamist discourses and electoral politics to analyse comparative and country-specific case studies which incorporate democratic and non-democratic Islamist theology (both *Sunnī* and *Shī'a* and from Arab and non-Arab polities), this volume offers insights into the complex, variable and granular dynamics that drive participatory Islamists and shape their political learning.

The country case-studies allow for sharp empirical interpretations of cause and effect compared to large quantitative studies. Broadly similar historical narratives of participatory Islamist parties and organisations across various country-case studies allow us to see the causal processes at work in each country and identify the broader patterns of continuity, change and transformation. This approach also allows us to highlight the relationship between Islamist strategic adaptation, pragmatic reform, policy oscillations and theological reformulation. Chapters 2 and 3 of this volume address theological and jurisprudential questions pertinent to the interaction of Islamic teachings with democratic principles. As such, they identify and illustrate both diverging and converging scholastic trends that have emerged in the Muslim world. In Chap. 2, Mohsen Kadivar explores factors that influence the potential for the accommodation or subversion of democratic principles in a religious framework, identifying the following three themes: (a) popular sovereignty and oversight; (b) political equality; and (c) public decision-making. After scrutinising competing approaches to these themes, Kadivar explicates the ongoing polemics that distinguish the

two dominant schools of thought: traditionalists and reformists. While the former is mainly associated with clerical establishments and seminaries, the reformist school is generally promoted by religious intellectuals, e.g. the clergy and lay thinkers. According to Kadivar, an in-depth understanding of the above-mentioned themes is essential to articulating the in/compatibility of Islam and democracy. This chapter suggests that traditionalist interpretations of the scriptures have given rise to a specific mode of understanding that leaves no space for democratic principles. By contrast, Kadivar argues for reformist interpretations of Islamic teachings, according to which people have sovereignty over their own lives, property and futures. Chapter 2 ultimately takes a prescriptive position by emphasising the compatibility of the essence of Islam with the foundational elements of democracy.

Chapter 3 details a specific theological endeavour in which leading Shī'ite jurists engaged in conceptual conversations and collaborated with democracy-seeking forces, with the aim of accommodating fundamental themes—such as those explained in Chap. 2—within an Islamic framework. In addition to providing this distinctive example of the employment of *ijtihād* to develop an advanced form of political jurisprudence capable of facilitating the co-existence of Islamic teachings and democratic norms, in this chapter Naser Ghobadzadeh underlines the necessity of this co-existence, particularly insofar as its implementation will ensure that Muslims lead pious lives. Ghobadzadeh re-visits a lived practical and conceptual experience in the Shī'ite world to illustrate the possibility of such a theological articulation. At the time of the Shī'ite world's first encounter with modern political thought, most high-ranking jurists were very receptive to the notion of a democratic form of governance. During the Constitutional Revolution in the early twentieth century, for example, the Shī'ite world's leading *marja' al-taqlīds* (models for emulation) actively contributed to the conceptual articulation and ultimate realisation of parliamentarianism in Iran. The chapter demonstrates that those jurists who accommodated democratic principles within an Islamic framework rarely drew upon religious sources such as the *Qur'ān*, *ḥadīths*, Islamic/Shī'ite history and tradition. Rather, they argued for the necessity of introducing a parliamentary system largely on the basis of selected theological and ecclesiastical canons as well as principles such as 'the avoidance of the more corrupt by the less corrupt' (*dafē'i afsad bā fāsīd*), the protection of the homeland of Islam, the expansion of justice and eradication of oppression, and enjoining good and forbidding



evil (*amr bi ma'rūf wa nahy 'az munkar*). Indeed, this line of argument has retained a decisive role in the current politico-religious reformation endeavours in Iran, specifically among those Islamists who have become disillusioned with the authoritarian inclinations of the Islamic Republic. Chapter 2 concludes by suggesting that this theological and jurisprudential approach has already planted the seeds of a democratic vision for Shī'ite political theology.

Chapter 4 focuses on the most promising democratic experiment of the post-Arab uprisings era: the Tunisian Islamist party Ennahda. Larbi Sadiki shifts our attention to the underlying problem of binary representations in the debate surrounding the relations between democracy and Islam. He urges his readers to move away from binaries such as 'west' and 'Islam' or 'democracy' and 'non-democracy', as such terms are grounded in a hierarchical understanding of all things, situating 'west' as superior to the 'rest'. Highlighting the significance of the system of knowledge, Larbi contends that any understanding of democracy that excludes a thorough grasp of 'knowledge' and 'democratic knowledge' will inevitably traverse a circuitous route. For Larbi, the term 'democratic knowledge' encompasses intellectual and practical capacities as well as ethics, the primary cognitive weight of which lends itself to democratic learning, civic habituation, and socialisation via an open-ended and interactive cross-cultural reflexive process. In addition to transcending time and space, this process maintains close ties with the local context in which good government is formed. The latter develops out of an inherited repertoire of ideas and morals, including those grounded in faith, and although good government emerges from institutions and experiences, it does not exclude global adaptations. Having established this conceptual framework in the first part of the chapter, Larbi uses it to specifically interrogate the democratic learning of Ennahda's Islamism—what he terms 'soft Islamism'. He does so mainly to attest to the emergence of a version of political ethos that is informed by the notion that good government must be rooted in a local system of knowledge. In this chapter, Larbi argues that Ennahda Islamism is largely concerned with the management of matters involving political competition that does not reject sharing space with secularists and non-Muslims. He further suggests that Ennahda Islamism appears to be coaching itself in the art of democratic politics, that its priority has, in effect, shifted away from Islamisation and towards the quest for a democratic society.

The second case study of this volume features the Turkish AKP. Revisiting some of the main tenets of the inclusion moderation theory, Menderes Çınar suggests three possible factors accounting for the Turkish AKP's decay from a potentially 'Muslim democrat' political force, embracing the universal principles of rule of law, human rights and pluralism, to a 'populist authoritarian' political force. The latter redefines democracy in nativist terms to dismiss democratic opposition, centralise and concentrate power in its hands, and deploy the Islamic moralist language of 'forbidding evil, commanding good' to legitimise its 'instructive' policies. Çınar asserts that the three factors include strong leadership and internal party structure, the political context within which the AKP interacted with secular actors and the shifting international context on the revival of the AKP's Islamist ideology.

In Chap. 6, Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry interrogate the practical constraints of a key theme discussed by Kadivar in Chap. 2, namely the popular vs. divine sovereignty divide. This chapter focuses on Iran, a country wherein the Islamists' dream of forming an Islamic state was realised. Akbarzadeh and Barry assert that Iran's political system benefits from dual sources of legitimacy, which seemingly enables Iran's ruling clergy to proclaim their system to be the ultimate representation of a perfect political system, one that brings Islam and democracy together. Questioning this propaganda-laden claim, Chap. 5 argues that this duality has embedded an inherent contradiction between the theory and practice of an Islamic Republic. Indeed, it is for this reason that elected and appointed offices in Iran have been continually embroiled in tense relations since the inception of the Islamic Republic. Elaborating on the country's electoral rules and procedures, Akbarzadeh and Barry maintain that despite the vetting of candidates by the appointed Guardian Council, Iranian elections are highly competitive and revolve around issues of national importance such as the economy and social issues. Additionally, Chap. 5 includes a detailed investigation of the challenges that have arisen from the inherited contradiction between divine and popular sovereignty, which has gained considerable credence during Hassan Rouhani's presidency. The authors suggest that this inherent contradiction at times appear to tilt in favour of popular sovereignty. However, that is only because the political elite are acutely aware of the fact that without the illusion of popular rule, the regime could very well be cast aside, mirroring the fate of the Pahlavi regime. It is argued that Rouhani's achievements do not address the contradiction

between divine and popular sovereignty, but rather illuminate the astute political calculations made in the top echelons of power in order to create a semblance of popular rule. By interrogating the theory and practice of the Islamic Republic, Akbarzadeh and Barry point out the hollowness of the ruling clergy's official proclamations, arguing that divine sovereignty in the form of the *wilāyat al-faqīh* hovers over the empty shell of democracy.

Chapter 7 explores the process which has contributed to Malaysia's fragmentation under the weight of *salaḥī* Islamisation and authoritarian governance—threatening the country's secular democratic constitutional foundations. Malaysia's sociopolitical fragmentation is tied to the dramatic electoral battering suffered by the ruling *Barisan Nasional* (BN or National Front) coalition in the 2008 and 2013 elections to the opposition *Pakatan* (People's Alliance) coalition. In response to these electoral challenges and legitimacy deficits, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) led BN coalition government, supported by religious bureaucracies and state '*ulamā*', have intensified their long-standing campaign to Islamise the state and society. This campaign has emboldened the Islamist opposition party, *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*, (PAS) to introduce *ḥudūd* (Islamic penal code) law despite *ḥudūd*'s violation of the spirit and letter of the secular Federal Constitution. These ruptures have been complicated further by corruption scandals implicating Prime Minister Najib Razak. In this chapter, Lily Zubaidah Rahim analyses Malaysia's sociopolitical and economic convulsions within the broader context of the politicisation of religion and race by a regime mired in legitimacy crises. The chapter critically examines the way by which the forces of *salaḥī* Islamisation and authoritarian governance are mutually reinforcing whilst destabilising the secular and democratic constitutional foundations and institutions of the Malaysian state.

A central argument of Chap. 8 is that political actors advocating for democratic reform in authoritarian polities are confronted by extra-party challenges when attempting to offer alternative visions. In his investigations of the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan (JMB), Paul Esber highlights the challenges confronting Islamist movements and parties that navigate the internal and external facets of democratic learning. He maintains that the executive leadership of the JMB were unable to effectively navigate the concomitant external and internal fluidity of political learning in the post-2011 regional environment. The inability to accommodate difference as a matter of principle contributed in no small way to the fragmentation of the Movement into five distinct political constellations.

In Chap. 9, Martin Kear frames Hamas's publication of its 2017 Charter as another initiative geared towards integrating political facets to its resistance against Israeli occupation as well as challenging Fatah's narrative for Palestinian self-determination. Hamas has become increasingly aware that its strategy of armed resistance has been less than effective, and that flexible political approaches and discourses are required to further its objective of realising an independent Palestine. To creatively advance this agenda, Hamas has deployed a dual resistance strategy that incorporates political and armed resistance components. The dual resistance strategy is mutually reinforcing and geared towards ensuring Hamas's continued political viability as a national liberation movement striving towards an independent Palestinian state.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- al-Ghannūshī, R. (2016). From political Islam to Muslim democracy: The Ennahda party and the future of Tunisia. *Foreign Affairs*, 95(5), 58–75.
- Esposito, J. L. (1990). *The Iranian revolution: Its global impact*. Miami: Florida International University Press.
- Esposito, J. L., & Mogahed, D. (2007). *Who speaks for Islam?: What a billion Muslims really think*. New York: Gallup Press.
- Ghobadzadeh, N., & Rahim, L. Z. (2012). Islamic reformation discourses: Popular sovereignty and religious secularisation in Iran. *Democratization*, 19(2), 334–351.
- Kalyvas, S. N. (2000). Commitment problems in emerging democracies: The case of religious parties. *Comparative Politics*, 32(4), 379–398.
- Lynch, M. (2016). *In uncharted waters: Islamist parties beyond Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood*. Retrieved June 01, 2017, from [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_293\\_Lynch\\_Muslim\\_Brotherhood\\_Final.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_293_Lynch_Muslim_Brotherhood_Final.pdf).
- Marsh, A. (2015). Political Islam: Theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18(1), 103–123.
- Masoud, T. E. (2014). *Counting Islam: Religion, class, and elections in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Milton-Edwards, B. (2016). *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Arab Spring and its future face*. New York: Routledge.
- Pahwa, S. (2017). Pathways of Islamist adaptation: The Egyptian Muslim Brothers' lessons for inclusion moderation theory. *Democratization*, 1–19. doi :10.1080/13510347.2016.1273903.
- Roushan, A. (2015). *Ali Shariati: bazgasht be khishtan va ronesans-e Eslami* [Ali Shariati: The return to the self and Islamic renaissance]. Tehran: Tisa.
- Ryan, C. (2012). The New Arab Cold War and the struggle for Syria. *Middle East Report* (262), 28–31.

- Said, E. W. (2002). Impossible histories: Why the many Islams cannot be simplified (Vol. 305). *Harper's Magazine*.
- Schwedler, J. (2006). *Faith in moderation: Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shahibzadeh, Y. (2016). *Islamism and post-Islamism in Iran: An intellectual history*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shariati, A. (1982). The return to the self. In J. J. Donohue, J. L. Esposito, & C. Mazal Holocaust (Eds.), *Islam in transition: Muslim perspectives* (pp. 305–307). New York: Oxford University Press.
- ValbjØRn, M., & Bank, A. (2012). The New Arab Cold War: Rediscovering the Arab dimension of Middle East regional politics. *Review of International Studies*, 38(1), 1–22. doi:[10.1017/S0260210511000283](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210511000283).
- Wickham, C. R. (2004). The path to moderation: Strategy and learning in the formation of Egypt's Wasat Party. *Comparative Politics*, 36(2), 205–228.

## Islam and Democracy: Perspectives from Reformist and Traditional Islam

*Mohsen Kadivar*

More than one-fifth of the world population are Muslims. In the twenty-first century, democracy is one of the most desirable political systems in the world but most Muslim-majority societies are authoritarian. Many factors have contributed to this democratic deficit. One common explanation is that this deficit is due to the incompatibility of Islam and democracy (Esposito & Piscatori, 1996). Many Islamic political and social movements have long championed democracy, along with independence, justice and freedom. Particularly when these movements exhibit religious undertones, they have been supported by some religious scholars. The leaders and activists of these political and social movements saw no contradiction between Islam and democracy and the realization of a society that is both democratic and Islamic (Enayat, 1982, Chap. 4).

Over the past fifty years, Islamic societies have confronted another ideological current that maintains the primacy of Islam. This particular ideological trend ignores democratic demands and maintains that not only are Islam and democracy incompatible but that the pursuit of a democratic society ignores Islamic teachings and succumbs passively

---

M. Kadivar (✉)  
Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

to Western modernity.<sup>1</sup> The political and social realities mentioned above highlight difficulties associated with investigating the relationship between Islam and democracy and the political make-up of Islamic societies. This investigation is problematic not least because there are powerful elites and influential thinkers who champion both positions. A comparative analysis of these two perspectives can be facilitated by addressing the following questions: do the supporters and opponents of the compatibility of Islam and democracy have a unified understanding of Islam or do they offer different interpretations? What do they mean by democracy?

The two assumptions that underpin this chapter are as follows:

1. Traditional and historical interpretations of Islam are incompatible with democracy.
2. Reformist interpretations of Islam are compatible with democracy.

The tenets of traditionalist and reformist interpretations of Islam and the three tenets of democracy will be outlined. This will be followed by an examination of the three areas of tension between Islam and democracy—popular oversight, political equality and public decision.

### TENETS OF TRADITIONAL AND REFORMIST INTERPRETATIONS OF ISLAM

Islam is based on three principles:

1. Belief in a single almighty God;
2. Belief in the resurrection and hereafter;
3. Belief in the Prophet Mohammad and his divine revelation;

These three principles have specific obligations in both individual and social arenas, including particular rituals of worship, specific commandments related to the family, civil rights, trade and even mundane activities such as eating and drinking. These obligations are acquired through the interpretation of two foundational sources, the Qur'an and the authoritative example of the Prophet (*sunna*).

---

<sup>1</sup>As an example, see Qutb (2006).

The traditional reading of Islam, which is dominant among Muslim clerics, is based on three fundamental beliefs. The main centres for teaching this interpretation are Al-Azhar (for Sunnis) and Najaf and Qum (for the Shi'as). The significant characteristics of this interpretation of Islam are<sup>2</sup>:

1. All religious commandments that exist in the Qur'an are constant, unchanging and timeless. This is also true for most of the religious commandments in the *sunna*. Positive law (*fiqh*) encompasses the religious commandments related to the behaviour of Muslims and is considered the most important standard for gauging religiosity. The Islamic jurists (*fuqaha*), as the scholars of this unchanging religious tradition, are considered the vanguards of *shari'a* (Islamic law) and the main spokespeople for Islam.
2. Human reason is incapable of understanding the higher objectives of religious commandments (*ahkam-e shari'at*). Given humanity's ignorance of divine motivations and inability to ascertain [God's] worldly objectives, the ultimate goals of religious commandments are not readily accessible to the human mind. As a consequence, believers are required to accept a religious commandment faithfully, even if they are not aware of all its benefits. Accordingly, religious commandments can be neither critiqued or modified on the basis of logical reasoning nor affirmed on the basis of logical proofs.
3. Although all humans are ultimately equal and are judged only on the basis of their piety, justice in this world does not necessitate equality. Hence—though race and skin colour are not bases for discrimination or legal inequality—in cases of specific religious laws, gender, religion and freedom (or slavery) do result in legal difference. As such, women, non-Muslims and slaves do not enjoy rights equivalent to free Muslim males. In addition, religious scholars benefit from more legal privileges in the public sphere than the general public. These legal inequalities are immutable and intrinsic to Islamic law.

---

<sup>2</sup>Traditional religious scholars have not explicitly stated the characteristics of their interpretations. What follows is the result of the author's familiarity with traditional Islamic thought.



4. Although no Muslim can be forced, under duress or through compulsion, to leave Islam and no non-Muslim can be forced to become a Muslim, Muslims are not permitted to change their religion and punishments are enacted for apostasy. The existence of punishments for abandoning certain religious practices, the impermissibility of proselytizing other religions among Muslims, and so on all speak to the (assumed) impropriety of religious freedom. The same problem affects the freedom of thought and of expression.
5. Important religious duties such as jihad and promoting good and prohibiting evil speak to a completely inviolable responsibility regarding the actions of others. This religious commitment obliges Muslims to take action to rectify not only their societies but also the broader international community. Undoubtedly, Muslims prefer measures, both in terms of proselytizing and in the cultural arena, that are peaceful. However, if it proves impossible to reform people through cultural activities and verbal admonitions, then it is permissible to respond with appropriate physical action and even violence, though of course within the framework of the *shari'a* and with attention to religious laws. Furthermore, it is not necessary to acquire the consent of people in matters that are religiously mandated and in circumstances where God's approval is certain.

In contrast to this orthodox view, we have witnessed the growth of a new reading of Islam in the last century. Those who hold to this new reading are generally known as religious intellectuals or reformist Muslims and often situated in an academic setting.

The main characteristics of reformist Islam are as follows:

1. Rejecting discrimination based on religion, gender, race, or ideology; each individual member of society has an equal right to political self-determination as well as to participating in the construction of the public sphere and social life. There is no difference between different schools of law in Islam, Muslims and non-Muslims, or men and women—whether in terms of having rights in the public sphere and being able to elect a representative or in terms of being elected oneself. Similarly, religious scholars (from jurists,

theologians and *mujtahids* to clerics) are not endowed with any special rights or privileges in the public sphere.<sup>3</sup>

2. All people possess the freedom of belief and religion, and no one should be compelled to accept a particular belief or religion. These freedoms are a fundamental and inalienable right. Thus, people are free to discard their religion and apostatize. They are also free to perform or not perform religious practices. No one can be forced to perform or be punished for non-performance of a religious practice. Worldly freedoms do not contradict more absolute concerns and spiritual obligations. In the same way, the freedom to practice religion is not in conflict with social obligations that arise from just and democratic laws.<sup>4</sup>
3. Social responsibility and fulfilment of religious commitments should occur with the consent of others. Force and violence, particularly in religious affairs, is rejected. Proselytizing religion should be based on convincing others of the superiority of religious solutions over non-religious ones, and preparing the field for the free selection of religion and religious teachings. In other words, it is necessary to participate in free competition with other religions, denominations and schools of thought.
4. Religious precepts are respected by believers, and they are still open to discussion, criticism and questioning. The fact that they are *religious* precepts does not make them unquestionable. Indeed, sanctifying religious beliefs weakens rather than strengthens them. Believers should welcome dialogue and debate regarding religious beliefs. No religious belief should be turned into a legal requirement unless it has been subjected to rigorous public debate and represents the will of the majority. Additionally, no irrational interpretation can be considered a religious commandment. This does not mean, however, that Islamic precepts must be logical and rational since some religious principles go beyond the reach of reason—supra-rational.

---

<sup>3</sup>I have dealt with this specific issue in detail in a separate article entitled ‘Human Rights and Religious Intellectualism’, see Kadivar (2009b).

<sup>4</sup>The issue has been elaborated upon in ‘Freedom of Thought and Religion in Islam and Human Rights Documents’, see Kadivar (2006).

5. The instructive texts of Islam, whether the Qur'an or the traditions of the Prophet, include temporary, changeable and transitory commandments alongside constant, timeless and universal principles. These commandments were established with the time-period and location of the revelation and, with the end of those temporal and locational circumstances, they may be no longer valid. During the period of revelation and the formative period of Islam, all religious commandments were just, reasonable (meaning, open to intellectual debate) and superior to any alternative solutions. Therefore, articulations of Islam in our current context should adhere to three requirements; they must be just, reasonable (open to intellectual debate), and superior to alternative solutions. Each commandment that is unable to fulfil these three requirements is exposed for being impermanent and should be abrogated and religiously invalid. Independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) is discerning continually defends eternal commandments and does not treat all commandments as permanent and eternal.<sup>5</sup>
6. Through constant and timeless commandments, Islam has dealt with matters that are difficult for most people to comprehend. These matters are only understandable through revelation and are thus supra-rational in nature. However, matters that are within the capabilities of human experience and collective wisdom have been relegated to the wisdom of the people. On this basis, Islam, the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet have not been articulated for the experimental sciences, social sciences or the humanities, nor have they clarified political, economic, or social orders. Islam has resisted fully presenting a single specific political, economic, or administrative system for all times and place but instead has presented some general principles that leave space for human experience, collective human wisdom and initiatives relevant to various temporal and locational circumstances. For this reason, while Islam is incompatible with monarchies, dictatorships and autocratic systems, deriving or inferring democracy from Islam is also impossible. However, one can speak of the compatibility of the essence of Islam with democracy by looking to teachings such as

---

<sup>5</sup>I have discussed this topic in detail in 'From Historical to Spiritual Islam', see Kadivar (2009a).

the principles of consultation (*shura*) and of the sovereignty of the people over their own life, property and fate. These stand in contrast to the religious guardianship (*velayat*) and governance over the people without their consent.<sup>6</sup>

### TENETS OF DEMOCRACY<sup>7</sup>

While some conceptions of democracy resemble each other, their inconsistencies have led some to conclude that democracy is an inherently contested concept over which there fundamentally can be no consensus.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, it does seem possible to think about an essential core to the idea of democracy and to offer a few fundamental concepts as the principles of democracy. Therefore, it is useful to first define democracy in terms of its foundational principle or principles and then in terms of the institutions that embody them. In other words, we need to determine which principles are foundational to democracy. However, we should begin by delineating the ‘relevant’ sphere of democracy. According to the political theorist David Beetham, “The sphere of democracy... [is] that of decisions about collectively binding rules and policies for any group, from the family or group of friends to larger associations.... If democracy, then, belongs to the sphere of the political, of decision-making for an association or collectivity, then a system of collective decision-making can be said to be demonstrated to the extent that it is subject to control by all members of the relevant association, or all those under its authority, considered as equals” (Beetham 1999: 4–5).

The spirit of these principles is realized in small groups and associations since everyone is endowed with equal and effective right to speak and vote. In larger societies and particularly at the level of the whole society in which members, due to limitations of time and place, have decided to delegate to their elected representatives and democracy becomes realized when voters can influence the decision-making process and decision makers as well. Supervision or control is thus mediated but the principles of popular control and political equality still hold.

---

<sup>6</sup>See Kadivar (2001b).

<sup>7</sup>In this section I have benefited from the work of David Beetham, *Democracy and Human Rights*, see Beetham (1999).

<sup>8</sup>The idea of democracy as a contested concept can be found in: Beetham (1999) and Gallie (1956).

Since these principles of popular sovereignty/control and political equality can be utilized for making decisions in groups or associations, democracy finds expression beyond government. In effect, democratic society is energized by the dynamism of associational life and its practical realization towards political equality.

Although we can combine the two principles of popular sovereignty/control and political equality and say that democracy requires equal and effective rights for participation in decision-making, their separation helps us distinguish between the principle of distribution (equality) and what should be distributed (popular sovereignty/control). In every historical period, popular struggles under the banner of democracy have called for the realization of the above-mentioned principles, namely the increase in popular sovereignty/control in terms of decisions made regarding rules and collective policies. Opponents of democracy have always resisted two things: reduction of their control over decisions and the idea that an ordinary citizen deserves as much right to express their opinion as wealthy and well connected.

One of the important criticisms of political equality in a democratic society is that citizens (provided favourable conditions are realized) do not have similar capabilities. This is essentially an epistemological critique and relates to a conception of knowledge about public good that, throughout history, has legitimized undemocratic or at least paternalistic regimes. According to this view, societal interests can be determined by a select elite who gain the right to engage in decision-making due to their particular abilities in knowledge acquisition (Beetham, 1999; Dahl, 1989).

For Plato, knowledge of a vibrant society can only be accessed following many years of studying philosophy in order to become familiar with its complexities (Beetham, 1999; Plato & Allen, 2006). Traditionalists believe that only knowledge can guarantee correct decisions but this knowledge is in the hands of either elders or people whose heritage guarantees superior access to government—aristocratic rule. Religious rule is based on the knowledge that is derived from sacred texts or through divine will that is relegated to the clergy or experts who are believed to possess the competence to make decisions for the rest of the society. In a Marxist–Leninist interpretation, it is knowledge about the path of the future that gives the party and its ideologues a unique understanding of the best way to manage a society. The technocratic interpretation purports that the sciences (like the science of economics, management

or certain branches of applied technology) provide objective solutions regarding questions about the public good.

## TENSION BETWEEN ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

The question of whether Islam and democracy are compatible depends upon the relationship between the principles of democracy and the two previously mentioned interpretations of Islam. The relationship between democracy and religion (including Islam) can be analysed and assessed in accordance to three principles:

1. Popular sovereignty and oversight;
2. Political equality;
3. Public decision-making.

Political theorists such as David Beetham have stressed the first two principles as foundational elements of democracy. As I noted in the previous section, we occasionally find traces of the third principle in responses that challenge democracy. However, it has not been discussed as a distinct and separate principle. Yet, in analysing the relationship between religion and democracy, the third principle is critical. In any case, all three principles constitute comprehensive criteria for assessing the compatibility of Islam and democracy. The possibility for and extent of the realization of all the above principles in Islamic thought is the main concern of this chapter.

### *First Principle: Islam and Popular Sovereignty/Control*

In Islamic texts, the term ‘overseer’ (*nazer*) of Muslims is utilized in three contexts: devising wills; charitable endowments; and non-litigious affairs.<sup>9</sup> However, the term ‘popular sovereignty/control’ (*nazarat-e ’umumi*) does not draw on these meanings. Islamic teachings that are closest to the principle of popular sovereignty/control are two religious duties: (1) ‘commanding good and forbidding evil’ and (2) ‘advising the

---

<sup>9</sup>Regarding supervision see my article ‘Nezarat bar amalkard-e vali-ye faqih’, Kadivar (2001a).

leaders of Muslims'.<sup>10</sup> These two religious duties are firmly supported in the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions as well as by the religious practices of Muslims. The duty to command good and forbid evil binds Muslims to be diligent in propagating virtues such as kindness and goodness and to eradicate vices such as wickedness and foulness. The duty to advise the ruler binds Muslims to advise the leaders of an Islamic country to be benevolent, critique lies and dissimulations and support praiseworthy actions.

From one perspective, these two religious duties bind Muslims, without any exception (men and women, free and enslaved, religious scholars and laypeople, the industrious and the libertines) to command good and forbid evil and to advise their leaders. Therefore, no section of the public sphere (economic, political, cultural, social, military, international and domestic institutions) is outside the reach of these two religious duties. Relying on these two obligations implicitly requires all Muslims (including the nobility and royalty, army commanders and the rich, the influential and even the common people) to actively participate in governmental and popular oversight.

The relationship between these two religious duties and popular sovereignty/control is that societal supervision or control over the performance of the state and government in an Islamic society becomes necessary for the implementation of religious duties. None of these obligations to uphold virtue and prohibit vice, advice, direct, or critique rulers is possible without popular sovereignty/control. If Muslims cannot access the necessary information about management, leadership and governance, neither of these two duties will be fulfilled. In the same way, without the realization of these two religious requirements, popular sovereignty/control cannot be based on Islamic teachings.

Given that these duties include not only being informed and overseeing government, but also the possibility of physical action (including armed insurrection against the government such as we saw in the revolt of Hussain bin 'Ali against the Caliphate of Yazid bin Mu'awiya in seventh century), it is clear that the reach of these two duties is greater than that of the principle of popular sovereignty/control. In any case, there is no place in the principle of popular sovereignty/control for violence in

---

<sup>10</sup>Regarding propagation for the good and against the wrong, see Montazeri (1987, pp. 213–304).

the form of physical force or verbal harassment. The idea of sovereignty/control does not extend beyond gaining information, admonishing officials and making them aware of public opinion, and at most turning them over to the judiciary.

The outcome then of these two religious duties is that all Muslims have the right to question every state official, in particular, the leader (*rahbar*) and the Imam. This questioning does not need to be confidential, invisible, or secret. Muslims have the right to openly question and critique the leader, commanders and other governmental officials. On this issue, it is worth recalling both the customs of the Muhajerun (the first converts to Islam who migrated from Mecca to Medina with the Prophet) and the Ansar (those Arabs in Medina who welcomed the Prophet Muhammad and converted to Islam), including the followers of Abu Zar Ghaffari, and the humane administrations of the first four caliphs, particularly those of Imam ‘Ali bin Abi Talib.<sup>11</sup> Islamic teachings stress the importance of a humane governmental administration which is vital to the security and survival of the state.

When we compare the principle of popular sovereignty/control (which is based on democracy) to the religious duty of commanding the good and forbidding evil (which is rooted in Islam), several common and compatible points arise. Yet we also see a number of differences or, at the very least, areas where compatibility is questionable. These questionable issues include:

1. In democratic thought, the principle of popular sovereignty/control is premised on administrative institutions and specific legal mechanisms such as free elections, a just legislative and executive branch, government, directly and indirectly, accountable to the people through the political, legal and financial spheres, the independence of the legislative and judicial branches from the executive branch, the freedom of expression and assembly, the right to trial and to participate in associations and institutions independent of the government. Although in traditional Islam an institution called ‘*hasabbah*’ was envisioned for the administration of the government, an institution of the people for administering the activities of government had not been devised. This does not mean that

---

<sup>11</sup>In this regard, see Ali ibn Abu-Talib and Seyyed Razi (2006, Sermon 31, p. 216).



traditional Islam opposes building institutions to supervise governments. Rather, this issue raises the perspective that historical Islam lacks popular administrative institutions to oversee the state. Reformist Islam, however, fundamentally conceives of institution building as a rational, human, and temporal matter and *not* as one of the duties anticipated by religion. Thus, for reformist ideology, the lack of popular institutions in traditional Islam is not viewed as problematic.

2. Since the two religious duties of commanding good and forbidding evil and advising the leaders of Muslims are only required of Muslims, popular sovereignty/control is reduced to Muslim sovereignty/control. Therefore, the other religious members of society (including Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians) or those who do not believe in the revealed religions (whether believers in non-revealed religions, non-religious, or atheists) are excluded. In other words, popular sovereignty/control is a religious duty only for the Islamic community (*ummah*). Traditional Islam has not given non-Muslims the opportunity to access the necessary information to administer governmental matters over Muslims. The Qur'an states that those who 'rejected the path [of God]' (*nafi al-sabil*),<sup>12</sup> non-Muslims are not allowed such exalted positions. In such an interpretation, most non-Muslims enjoy the blessings of security and a peaceful life under the shelter of an Islamic government, but are not invited to engage in societal and governmental matters. From this perspective, historical Islam does not combine well with democracy.

However, reformist Islam accepts the concept of citizenship rights that is not dependent on a particular religion. Additionally, it accepts that the right of popular sovereignty/control is open to both Muslims and non-Muslims. This interpretation of Islam emphasizes the right of popular sovereignty/control in terms of religious duties and governmental oversight. Furthermore, though it accepts Qur'anic rule over non-believers, it does not see this rule as relevant to the administration of non-Muslim citizens.<sup>13</sup> Reformist Islam believes that 'if your conscience is clear, you have

---

<sup>12</sup>See Quran 4:141.

<sup>13</sup>Regarding rule of rejection of path of God, see Bojnourdi (1998, pp. 185–207).

no reason to be afraid' (Sa'di & Newman, 2004, p. 42). The superiority of Islam must be realized in a free and just environment. Ultimately, from this perspective, reformist Islam has no issue with democracy.

3. In traditional Islam, women are denied from certain offices such as social, religious, legal and political leadership. Given that administering the public sphere includes overseeing these offices, women would likewise be excused from public administration. In other words, popular control of the public sphere is equated with male oversight and women are not permitted to enter the public sphere. Thus, traditional Islam and democracy are incompatible with regard to this issue. In contrast, reformist Islam neither considers barring women from important political and judicial positions to be appropriate nor does it consider overseeing the public sphere to be an exclusively male prerogative. Thus on this issue, reformist Islam does not contradict with democratic principles.

We can summarize the relationship between popular sovereignty/control and Islam as follows:

1. The principle of popular sovereignty/control is an aspect of two important religious duties, to command good and forbid evil and to advise Muslim rulers. These are the axioms of Muslim governments since the beginning of Islam.<sup>14</sup>
2. The principle of the popular sovereignty/control of citizens over government raises three problems for traditional Islam:

---

<sup>14</sup>Traditional interpretations assume an exclusive decision-making role for God in Islam; however, one may argue that God does not have a physical presence on earth and He does not speak directly to people. Human beings, namely the clergy, claim to speak on behalf of God (i.e. to be His representatives). Islam explicitly decrees that no person or member of an institution (e.g. the clergy or the state) has the authority to represent God on earth. According to the Islamic scriptures, with the exception of the Prophets, no human being is authorised to convey God's orders. Still, the Islamic scriptures do refer to human beings as the Caliphs of Allah on earth. Reformist reading of Islam argues for the reconciliation of God's authority with people's authority by asserting that people as a whole represent God on earth. This is a compelling standpoint from which to argue for popular sovereignty and the right of the people to exercise political authority.

- (a) The relationship between the institution of popular oversight of government alongside the institution of *hisbah*—the institution of governmental oversight of people.
- (b) The public administration of popular sovereignty/control of Muslims but the impermissibility of non-Muslims overseeing the public affairs of Muslims.
- (c) The impermissibility of women overseeing both the public sphere and important political and judicial offices.

Historical Islam is thus incompatible with democracy on each of the above issues. However, this incompatibility is not fundamental to Islam itself as reformist Islam has no problem with popular sovereignty/control and is compatible with democratic principles.

### *Second Principle: Islam and Political Equality*

In each society, the law and its implementation is crucial to the facilitation of equality—including political equality. The aim of equality in implementing the law (equality before the law) is for the equal treatment of all individuals. Islam has accepted equality in the exercise of the law—the equality of individuals before the law. Thus, in implementing religious commandments (*ahkam*), which are considered the law (*qanun*) of Islam, no distinctions between people are recognized. Equality in implementation of the law has been among the honoured teachings of Islam since the very beginning. This principle was particularly defended during the time of the Prophet and the first four Caliphs. However, in terms of legal equality (equality in the substance of the law), we find two different discourses of equality and legal discrimination in Islamic teachings:

1. The first discourse of reformist Islam recognizes legal equality and denies legal discrimination based on skin colour, race, wealth (and poverty) and lineage. This legal equality contributes to political equality and is based on authentic narratives (*ravayat-e mu'tabar*) of the Prophet of Islam.<sup>15</sup>
2. The second discourse concerns traditional Islam's acceptance of legal inequality as necessary for justice and has, therefore,

---

<sup>15</sup> *La fahkre lel- 'Arab 'alal- 'Ajam wa la lel- 'abyadhe 'alal- aswade ulla bet- taqwa.*

recognized legal discrimination. The four arenas in which legal inequality manifest are as follows<sup>16</sup>:

- (a) The legal inequality of non-Muslims in relation to Muslims. Muslims of a specific sect have complete rights. In the second tier, Muslims of other traditions enjoy most rights. In the third tier, people of book (i.e. Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians) enjoy some rights on the condition that they accept *dhimmi* regulations and sign a pact with Islamic countries. In the fourth tier, all other people (i.e. non-Muslims who are not lawful *dhimmis*), including those in a state of war with Muslims, are barred from most rights. Political inequality thus exists as Muslims of a particular sect are given preferential treatment due to their adherence to Islam (submission) and Iman (faith). Therefore, Muslims from other traditions are barred from election and appointment to these posts. Cultural security is also among the privileges of believers (*mu'minan*). While mocking, slandering, falsely accusing and speaking ill of believers is forbidden, same prohibition is not extended to non-believers. Thus, non-Muslims (including the people of the book and those who have signed treaties) are barred from being in key political offices, political rule, the presidency and ministerial positions. They are only permitted to occupy low-level administrative positions. The right to ownership and the security of life, property and reputation would be protected within the framework of *dhimmi* or treaty regulations. However, this group of people would be legally forbidden to head the executive branch or represent people in parliament. Non-Muslims who are not *dhimmi*, have signed no treaties and are not protected, are denied all political rights. Political inequality and the four tiers of legal distinctions are accepted practices of traditional Islam. This political discrimination relies upon verses found in the Qur'an and Sunna.
- (b) Traditional Islam views women as unfit for political leadership—guardianship (*vilayat-e 'amr*), the presidency, political rule, the governor and, therefore, ministerial positions, governorship, or mayorship, judgeship and leading Friday prayers. In the traditional reading of Islam, just as the biological

---

<sup>16</sup>See Kadivar (2009b).

differences between men and women are self-evident, so too are legal differences. Gender discrimination and political inequality are legal assumptions of traditional Islam.

- (c) The political inequality of free and enslaved peoples,<sup>17</sup> based on religious commandments regarding slavery, which still enjoys credibility in traditionalist discourse. Male and female slaves are the property of their masters and are prohibited from undertaking activities or enjoying property rights without their masters' permission. Any political activity of the slave is dependent on the owner's permission.
- (d) Political inequality between laypeople and jurists<sup>18</sup> in the public sphere is premised on traditional Islam's elevation of jurists in the public sphere. The majority viewpoint does not accept their privileged position. The second viewpoint, which is a distinctly minority position, locates the jurists in a position of privilege. According to this view, public issues related to politics entail inequality. Laypeople and righteous jurists are not equal in administering political matters and in managing society's issues based on religious commandments. Laypeople are incapable of leadership and in need of a religious guardian in all public affairs, social issues, political concerns and particularly in the management of society. Laypeople are considered to be 'in need of supervision' due to lack of sufficient knowledge or intelligence. Any participation of or intervention by laypeople into public issues requires the prior permission or subsequent authorization of jurist. The standard for decision-making in the public sphere is determined by the jurist. The jurist guards over the people but does not represent them. Thus, in administering society, he is not, unlike a representative, bound to enact the views of his constituents. It is the people who must conform to the views of the jurist. If the jurist thinks it advisable, he might delegate some small matters—not important political and social issues to the people. However, even in these matters, the guardianship and final responsibility remain in the hands of the jurist.

---

<sup>17</sup>I have dealt with this issue extensively in 'Mas'aleye barde-dari da islam-e mo'aser' (The Issue of Slave Holding in Contemporary Islam.) in Kadivar (2008a).

<sup>18</sup>I have discussed the fourth sphere in detail in my book (Kadivar, 2008b).

Traditional Islam dictates that ‘the two principles of equality and freedom are harmful in that they destroy the conventional pillars of divine law, since the strength of Islam is in devotion not freedom, and the foundation of its commandments is in adding and subtracting violations, not in equality’.<sup>19</sup> As traditional Islam does not accept political equality in terms of religion or gender and accepts both slavery and the political privilege of the jurist, it is incompatible with democracy.

Reformist Islam believes in political equality and espouses the following: (1) for believers (Muslims), there are no privileges or special rights in the public sphere; (2) maleness is not a condition for holding office; (3) slavery is to be abolished; and (4) the political guardianship of the jurist lacks basis in the Qur’an, authentic narratives and rationality.

In a majority-Muslim society, Muslim leaders are expected to be chosen in free elections. However, it is still unacceptable to have legal prohibitions against non-Muslims holding office. Muslim candidates often garner more public confidence. To legally bar women from political leadership positions is to resort to anachronistic social relations that is neither just nor rational. Similarly, viewing politics as a branch of religious jurisprudence and accepting the jurists or clergy as political authorities is simplistic, an incorrect interpretation of jurisprudence and defies reason. As reformist Islam accepts the principle of political equality, it is compatible with democratic principles.

Reformist Islam’s principle of political equality can be summarized as follows:

1. Accepts political equality in terms of race, class, wealth, aristocracy and lineage.
2. Accepts political equality between laypeople and jurists.

### *Third Principle: Public Decision-Making*

No policy or law is greater than the will of the people. Any law is only valid while it has public support and once the people no longer approve of a given policy or law it is no longer valid. All laws, rules and policies are considered changeable so that the period of their validity is commensurate with the public will.

---

<sup>19</sup>Torkoman (1995, pp. 59–60).

Traditional Islam disagrees with each of the above points and clearly views Islam and democracy as incompatible. From this point of view, since only God is able to organize life, the best laws are divine laws. As one scholar argued, ‘Creating laws, whether general or specific ones, conflicts with Islam. This work [of devising laws] belongs to the Prophet; a Muslim does not have the right to create laws’.<sup>20</sup> It is legally forbidden and a heretical innovation to write a constitution and take into account the majority view even on matters that are open to debate (*mobah*).<sup>21</sup> The people’s sovereignty is a rejection of God’s sovereignty. As Sayyid Qutb argued, ‘believing in the sovereignty of God means revolting in all ways against the forms, faces, examples, regulations, and laws of human government, as well as absolutely denying all the laws on this earth that hold humanity to be sovereign and place the source and origin of legal power in human hands’.<sup>22</sup>

Here, the contradiction between Islam and democracy is clear—the source of legitimacy is God. In democracy, the source of legitimacy is the people. Religious laws and commandments are enacted through God’s mediation. Because they are designed based upon what is right, they are constant and unchangeable. Yet in a democracy, laws and regulations are enacted based upon the will and desires of the majority of people.<sup>23</sup>

In Traditional Islam, as in other historical religions: (1) Enacting laws and required commandments is a divine matter; (2) Because humanity is ignorant of the Day of Judgment and lacks knowledge, Prophets are required to discern the true path; (3) A law is valid as long as it is based on truth, regardless of whether people want it or not. Thus, the understanding of the majority has no impact on the validity or invalidity of a law.

Reformist Islam differentiates between a ‘religious commandment (*hukm-e shar’i*)’ and a ‘customary law (*qanun-e urfi*)’. The founder of a religious commandment is God or the Prophet, and no human being has the right to legislate religious commandments. Yet, law, as a tool for

---

<sup>20</sup>Torkoman (1995, pp. 56–58).

<sup>21</sup>Torkoman (1995, pp. 104, 106).

<sup>22</sup>Qutb (1996, vol. 9).

<sup>23</sup>Al-Tabatabai (2004). See the discussion of social relations in Islam at the end of al-Omran Sura, vol. 4. Also see ‘Velayat va za’amat dar Islam’ (Guardianship and Representation in Islam) in Al-Tabatabai (1990, p. 182).

social order, cannot be realized until it is accepted by each member of society or, in practice, by the majority of people. The validity of law is dependent on the people's consent. This 'validity' is distinct from 'righteousness'. It is possible for a law to be in agreement or in conflict with ethical, spiritual, or religious criteria. A law is ethically righteous when it conforms to ethical principles and foundations and religiously righteous when it is compatible with religious criteria and values. The consent of the people is proof of neither righteousness nor the lack thereof. However, their consent or dissent absolutely affects the validity of law (regardless of its righteousness). Ignoring this 'validity', which is based on public consent, invites force, compulsion and despotism. If believers find a law contradictory to sublime religious values and commandments, then they must convince the public, through rational legal critique. It was the Prophet's custom to propagate goodness so that the people would desire goodness. Islam is optimistic about humanity and believes that people will choose correctly if rightly guided. In any case, the criterion for the validity of a law (right or wrong) is the people's consent.

Any religious commandment that they would turn into a law must first pass through the filter of public consent. That commandment remains legally valid as long as public opinion supports it. As soon as, for any reason, they do not accept it and vote on its alteration or removal, then that rule will lack legal validity—although its religious righteousness will remain both before and after its removal. Reformist Islam maintains that no religious commandment can be forced onto a society as law. Many religious commandments have been removed from the legal sphere in Islamic societies *not* because the people pursue worldly things or lack faith, but rather because changeable and time-bound commandments from the period of revelation have been misunderstood as constant and applicable to other societies and eras. Without a doubt, some of the commandments of the Prophet's age were designed for the organization of a particular society but with the change of time and place, these commandments are less relevant. We find these time-bound and variable commands not only in Prophetic traditions, but also in the Qur'an. All religious commandments during the period of revelation were just, rational and superior to other solutions based upon the custom of the



time—and the believers accepted them for this reason.<sup>24</sup> Based upon the customs of our own time, some of these commandments have become unjust and irrational. It is for this reason that they are not accepted as law in many Islamic societies. Many of the religious commandments that are considered in conflict with human rights fit this description.

Reformist Muslim scholars do not suggest that all the religious commandments not related to worship are irrational. Any understanding of the holy texts is based on human understanding and interpretation. Reformist Islam, thus, is compatible with the principle of public decision-making for the following reasons:

1. The validity of laws is based on the consent and opinion of the people (even though their righteousness is not).
2. People can enact, change, or repeal any law.
3. If the current, repealed, or changed law opposes indisputable religious commandments, the religious scholars will endeavour to convince the people and public opinion that they should not accept, change, or repeal this law.
4. Religious scholars are unable to sway public opinion, and the people do not accept their claims, the use of force, compulsion and pressure is never permitted in Islam. In a situation where the decision made is democratic but incorrect from a religious point of view, any attempt to repeal the law must use recognized legal approaches.

Having examined the three principles of democracy within the framework of two interpretations of Islam, it is evident that reformist Islam and democracy are compatible. In contrast, traditional Islam is incompatible with democracy as it rejects the principles of popular sovereignty control and political equality, accepts subordination of non-Muslims

---

<sup>24</sup>Islam accepted and practiced many of the pre-Islamic-established rules pertaining to socio-political matters in order to achieve justice (Kadivar, 2002: 427). They can be valid insofar as they are seen to be just and rational according to the conventions of time and space. Thus, all precepts which are not just and rational in the context of the conventions of time and place ought to be abolished. Instead of modifying these precepts, we should see them as outdated and disqualified from practice. Rational laws ought to be issued by the collective reasoning of people, and these laws must not be attributed to religion (Kadivar, 2002: 429).

to Muslim control and the subordination of women to the domination of men.

## CONCLUSION

For more than a century, the question of the compatibility of Islam and democracy has been extensively investigated by various scholars representing both political and theological perspectives. Although a reasonably large corpus of literature has undertaken to address this seemingly simple question, in the main, the extant scholarship not only appears somewhat perplexing, but also falls short of reaching a consensus on the substantive issues underpinning this debate. To a large extent, this perplexity is due to the problematic premise of the question. Prior to any effort to interrogate the question of the compatibility of Islam and democracy, one ought to clarify the definition of democracy and, perhaps more importantly, what interpretations of Islam are to be addressed. Three principles—popular sovereignty, political equality and citizens' equal and effective engagement in public decision-making—are the foundational elements of democracy. More crucial is the need to rethink the concept of Islam and acknowledge the increasing heterogeneity of interpretations of the Islamic teachings. The recognition of this heterogeneity should prompt us to speak of 'Islams' in the plural sense rather than advocate a single version and understanding of Islam. Apropos the controversy surrounding the compatibility versus incompatibility of Islam and democracy, at least two principal readings of Islam are identifiable: a traditional/historical reading and a reformist interpretation. The traditional understanding of Islam differs greatly from reformist Islam, specifically in the spheres of: (a) the comprehensiveness and eternity of the religious commandments; (b) religious freedom; (c) equality and discrimination based on gender and religious conviction; (d) the trustworthiness of human wisdom; and, finally, (e) the permissibility of using coercion and violence, particularly in religious affairs. Scrutiny of the divergent approaches of reformists and traditionalists to these issues can help to make sense of their opposing positions vis-à-vis the question of the compatibility of Islam and democracy. The traditional articulations of the above points eliminate any possibility of the coexistence of Islamic teachings and democratic principles. In contrast, by challenging the traditional articulations and highlighting the sovereignty of the people over

their own lives, property and futures, reformist perspectives emphasize the compatibility of the essence of Islam and democracy.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al-Tabatabai, M. H. (1990). *Barrasibaye Islami* [Islamic investigations]. Qom: Boostan-e Kitab.
- Al-Tabatabai, M. H. (2004). *Al-Mizan: Tafsir al-Kor'an* [The balance in the interpretation of the Qur'an]. Beirut: Al Alami Library.
- Ali ibn Abu-Talib, & Seyyed Razi. (2006). *Nahj al Balaghah* [Peak of eloquence for children]. New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an.
- Beetham, D. (1999). *Democracy and human rights*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bojnourdi, M. H. (1998). *Al-Qava'ed al fiqhiyeh* [Rules of jurisprudence]. Qom: Al-Hadi.
- Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Enayat, H. (1982). *Modern Islamic political thought*. London: The Macmillan Press.
- Esposito, J., & Piscatori, J. (1996). *Islam and democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gallie, W. B. (1956). Essentially contested concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, 167–198.
- Kadivar, M. (2001a). *Nezarat bar amalkard-e vali-ye faqih* [Supervision over the performance of the jurisconsult guardian]. *Aftab*, 7, 65–85.
- Kadivar, M. (2001b). The political rights of the people in Islam: The right to choose destiny. In H. Salimi (Ed.), *Islamic views on human rights: Viewpoints of Iranian scholars* (pp. 107–124). Tehran: Al-Hoda International Publications.
- Kadivar, M. (2002). Az Islam-e Tarikhi be Islam Maanavi [From Historical to Spiritual Islam]. In M. M. Shabestari, A. Soroush, M. Malekian, M. Kadivar (Eds.), *Sunnat va secularism (Tradition and secularism)*. Tehran: Serat.
- Kadivar, M. (2006). Freedom of thought and religion in Islam and human rights document. In M. Kamrava (Ed.), *The new voices of Islam: Rethinking politics and modernity: A reader* (pp. 119–142). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kadivar, M. (2008a). *Haghigh on-Nass* [The right of people: Islam & human rights]. Tehran: Kavir.
- Kadivar, M. (2008b). *Hokumat-e velayee* [The guardianship government] (5 ed.). Tehran: Nashr-e Ney.
- Kadivar, M. (2009a). *From historical to spiritual Islam*. Tehran: Kavir Publication.
- Kadivar, M. (2009b). Human rights and religious intellectualism. In K. Vogt, L. Larsen, & C. Moe (Eds.), *New directions in Islamic thought: Exploring reform and Muslim tradition* (pp. 47–74). London: I.B. Tauris.

- Montazeri, H. (1987). *Darajat fi velayeh al-faqi-yeh va fiqh al-dolah al islamiyah* [Teachings on the guardianship of the jurisconsult and jurisprudence of the Islamic government]. Qom: The Office of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri.
- Plato, & Allen, R. E. (2006). *The republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Qutb, S. (1996). *Fi zilal al-qur'an* [In the shade of the Qur'an]. Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq.
- Qutb, S. (2006). *Al-Salam al-'Alami wa al-Islam* [World peace and Islam]. Cairo: Maktatat Wahba.
- Sa'di, & Newman, R. J. (2004). *Selections from Saadi's Gulistan*. London: Alhoda.
- Torkoman, M. (1995). *Rasaele Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri* [Dissertations of Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri]. Tehran: Rasa Cultural Center.

# Democratisation of Islamic Political Theology

*Naser Ghobadzadeh*

## INTRODUCTION

The heartland of the Muslim world suffered a major setback following the Arab uprisings, which had initially inspired hope for a democratic shift and profound political reform in the region. Amidst widespread disappointment with the post-uprisings political climate, a new wave of *Salafi-Jihādism* took hold, expanding the scope and magnitude of violence in the name of religion. These developments have helped breathe new life into the notoriously essentialist depiction of Islam, further demonising Islam as the central barrier to democratisation in Muslim-majority countries. Going even further, this account also holds Islam responsible for the unbridled violence that continues to inflict untold suffering and destruction on the Muslim world and beyond (Beck, 2015; Bunzel, 2015; El-Badawy, Comerford, & Welby, 2015; Harris & Nawaz, 2015; Wood, 2015). In view of this charge, some scholars dismiss the role of religion and theology in such violence, largely out of fear of pandering to Islamophobes (Ghazal & Sadiki, 2016). This line of argument

---

N. Ghobadzadeh (✉)

Institute for Social Justice, Australian Catholic University, Sydney, Australia

© The Author(s) 2018

J.L. Esposito et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Islamism*, Middle East Today,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62256-9\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62256-9_3)

goes so far as to deem the search for a theological grounding of radical extremism ‘utter stupidity’, and by extension asserts that ‘there is no theological dimension’ to groups such as ISIS (Dabashi, 2015; Roy, 2015, p. 12).

This chapter, which takes issue with both of the above extreme positions, presumes that there is no such thing as a trans-historical version of Islam unaltered by disparate cultural and political contexts. That is to say, different political theologies are constantly being renegotiated and recreated in ways for which essentialised treatments of religion cannot account. Understanding a dogmatic or pro-democratic theology is not a matter of understanding the perennial essence of religion; rather, it requires thorough interrogation of the evolution of a theological articulation through its encounters with the pertinent political context. It would thus be naïve to suggest that the dogmatic theologies that have emerged, particularly from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, are merely products of theological explorations by some Muslim ideologues. Theological explorations are greatly informed by the political and societal dynamics that exist between religious visions and historical circumstances. Accordingly, one may argue that the lived circumstances of Muslims have made substantial contributions to the emergence of dogmatic theologies. This is especially evident in the fact that prior to the proliferation of radical Islamism, the initial responses of religious strata to democratic principles, particularly from within the orthodox circle of both the *Shī*’ite and *Sunnī* faculties, were positive. Not only did they not consider secular democracy contrary to Islamic teachings, but, more importantly, they embraced the model as an ideal political set-up capable of shaping a bright future for Muslims.

The theological endeavours of ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq (1888–1966) and Mullā Muḥammad Kāzīm Ākhūnd al-Khurāsānī (1839 to 1911—also known as Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī) in orthodox *Sunnite* and *Shī*’ite circles respectively are good examples in this regard. In the *Sunnite* context, ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq published his seminal work titled *Islam and the foundations of political power* in 1925, soon after Turkey’s republican government abolished the Caliphate system. He was the first Muslim scholar in the modern age to argue against the ideal of the Islamic state. The main points of his thought is summarised as follows: Islam does not stipulate preference for a specific political system, nor does it impose on Muslims a particular system according to which they must be governed; rather, it allows its followers absolute freedom to organise the state in accordance

with prevailing intellectual, social, and economic conditions, taking into consideration social development and the requirements of the time (‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq quoted in Binder, 1988, p. 131). Unfortunately, the al-Azhar establishment silenced ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq, preventing him from further developing this line of thought. In contrast, the *Shī‘ite* world had a much more successful experience with secular democracy in the form of the theology of constitutionalism. Given that this is the main subject of this chapter, the focus will be on elucidating the contextual background and conceptual heritage of this experience, which was led by Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, the best-known *marja‘ taqlīd* of *Shī‘ite* world in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Through his direct engagement with the constitutional movement, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī reimagined and redefined the foundations of *Shī‘ite* theology to accommodate democratic notions such as parliamentarianism, elections, freedom of expression, equality and liberty within an Islamic framework. Subsequent to their first glimpse of the possibility of the democratisation of the *Shī‘ite* world, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and his companions—e.g. Mīrzā Khalīl, ‘Abdullāh Māzandarānī, Nā‘inī, Mahalātī, Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, Behbahānī, and Seqat-ūl-Islam Tabrīzī—produced a rich legacy of political theology that continues to inform the mainstream orthodoxy of the *Shī‘ite* faculty even today. This enduring influence has been particularly evident in the politico-religious thought and deeds of Grand Ayatollah Sistani in post-Saddam Iraq. While closely engaged with politics, he at the same time distances himself from state institutions. He has not only resisted the application of Ayatollah Khomeini’s model of an Islamic state in Iraq but also, and more importantly, he actively supports the ideal of democracy and electoral politics in Iraq.

During his time, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī’s theological intervention had a pronounced practical impact. It facilitated the triumph of a constitutional movement that put an end to the arbitrary rule of the king, saw the introduction of a constitution, and ushered in the establishment of a parliament in the country. These achievements have survived for more than a century, despite the political turmoil that has repeatedly devastated the country. Moreover, the pro-democratic institutions that were formed as a result of the constitutional movement have played a

---

<sup>1</sup>For a biography of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī in English, see Farzaneh (2015, pp. 119–130) and Hairī (1984).

profound role in inhibiting the Islamic Republic of Iran's development of a closed authoritarian system, although its theological foundation and institutional structure are geared towards that direction (Rahim & Ghobadzadeh, 2016). The contemporary significance of this theological articulation lies in the fact that it serves as a rich autochthonous source for the current reformist movement in Iran. Disillusioned by the authoritarian excesses of the Islamic Republic, a group of religious scholars and jurists began exploring Shī'ite traditions in a bid to establish grounds for democracy within the religious framework. The conceptualisation entertained by Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and other pro-constitutionalist '*ulamā*' has proven to be a powerful foothold from which religious reformists have sought to reason for the compatibility of democratic principles with Islamic teachings.

The reformist movement is a relatively recent development in post-revolutionary Iran. From a democratic standpoint, at the time of the Islamic Republic's establishment in 1979, the pro-constitutionalist '*ulamā*'s experience of the Constitutional Revolution did play a constructive role. For their part, the Islamists made constant references to the purported failure of the Constitutional Revolution in order to justify their complete seizure of political space. This failure was perceived as the result of pro-constitutionalist '*ulamā*'s misplaced trust in the country's secular elites, which steered the Islamists' resolve to keep all political power to themselves. Furthering this narrative, the vicissitudes endured by the anti-constitutionalist '*ulamā*' were widely publicised and Shaykh Faḍlallāh al-Nūrī, the leading anti-constitutionalist, was declared a martyr. Of course, this is not to say that there was an absolute lack of pro-democratic inclinations among the Islamists.

Indeed, their liberal democratic faction enjoyed a brief moment in the sun in the months following the revolution, but they were sidelined soon thereafter. Two leading figures of this faction were Mehdi Bazargan (1907–1995), the interim prime minister, and Āyatullāh Sayyid Maḥmūd Ṭāliḳānī (1911–1979), Tehran's first Friday prayer Imām following the Revolution. Whereas Bazargan's liberal thought was to some degree attributable to his exposure to western democratic ideas/values, Āyatullāh Ṭāliḳānī was influenced by ideas held by the pro-constitutionalist '*ulamā*'. Among the latter's publications is his commentary on the reinstatement of the most important quasi-democratic treaty in Shī'ite history, a document written by Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'īnī



during the Constitutional Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Āyatullāh Ṭāliqānī's conception of authority was more democratic than that of other Islamists. For him, representative government and the rule of law were both desirable and compatible with Shī'ite Islam. Indeed, during the revolution, Āyatullāh Ṭāliqānī emerged as a spokesman for a rationalist epistemology that emphasised the role of human beings—rather than a distant and autocratic God—in shaping society, the economy, and history (Akhavi, 1988, p. 409). In his political thought, power-sharing was essential to political continuity, and in support of this premise, he advocated for constitutional limitations to autocratic power. He strongly promoted the notion of *Shūrā* (consultation) and was the leading champion of decentralised governance and local councils (Akhavi, 1988; Basteh Negar, 2016; Shirkhani, 1998).

Unfortunately, Ṭāliqānī's endeavours ultimately proved fruitless, and not only because he died a few months after the revolution; the fact remained that radicalised politics left no space for the implementation of a rationalist approach. Still, notwithstanding these beginnings, in the second decade post-revolution, a new episode in the conceptualisation of religion-state-society relations emerged and crystallised in what is now known as the reformist movement. For these contemporary reformist scholars, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's legacy serves as a rich resource. Particularly in view of his unparalleled religious credentials and his continuing influence over the Shī'ite orthodoxy, reference to Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's politico-religious *modus operandi* lends considerable credence to reformists' conceptualisations of religious roots for democratic principles. In fact, his *ijtihād* methods are widely used by today's reformist jurists, and the last two decades have seen a significant increase in the number of publications about Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and his political thought. All of this could support the claim that his pro-democratic theology has garnered almost unprecedented attention in contemporary Iran.

In order to explicate this pioneering pro-democratic theology, this chapter will start by providing a brief overview of the foundations of Shī'ite theology, which is based upon the irrefutable claim of the divine

---

<sup>2</sup>A detailed discussion of Nā'inī's book, entitled *The Enlightening of the Muslim Community and Its Purification*, appears later in this chapter.

political authority of the twelve infallible Imāms. This will be followed by the identification of three turning points in the history of Shī'ite political theology that transformed it from an *apolitical theology* into a *pro-democratic theology* during the constitutional movement, and ultimately into Khomeini's *anti-democratic theology* from the 1960s onwards. Finally, the intellectual and theological canon of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and the *Uṣūlī* school will be discussed in detail to demonstrate how the former reimagined Shī'ite political theology to accommodate democratic principles within an orthodox religious framework.

### A NON-DEMOCRATIC BEDROCK: DOCTRINE OF IMĀMATE

Imāmī, Twelvers (or *Ithnā 'asharī*), and Ja'afarī Shī'a are different appellations used in the literature to refer to the mainstream Shī'ite sect.<sup>3</sup> Whereas 'Imāmī' signals Shī'ite belief in the infallible Imāms, 'Twelvers' denotes the number of such Imāms, commonly believed to total twelve. 'Ja'afarī', which mostly appears in jurisprudential writings, is derived from the name of the sixth Shī'ite Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (702–765), who articulated Shī'ite jurisprudence. Shī'ism was primarily founded upon a specific political claim, i.e. belief in the divine politico-religious authority of the infallible Imāms, following the demise of the Prophet Mohammad. Aside from that, all other theological and jurisprudential differences with the Sunnī school of thought have gradually evolved over the course of time. In contrast to the majority of Muslims, that is Sunnīs, the Shī'a believe that the issue of politico-religious leadership could not be left to the believers. After the death of the Prophet Mohammad in 632 AD, Shī'ite doctrine claims that the Prophet's politico-religious authority passed to a succession of twelve Imāms, beginning with Imām Ali (559–661) and continuing through to his eleven descendants. However, with the exception of Imām Ali, who ruled the Muslim world from 656 to 661 as the fourth 'rightful caliph', not one of the other eleven Shī'ite Imāms was able to assume political leadership. The third Imām, Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (626–680), was the only 'infallible Imām' to revolt against a ruling caliph—in his case Yazīd (680–683).

---

<sup>3</sup>Other Shī'ite branches include the *Ismā'īlīs* (sevens), *Zaydīs* (fivers), 'Alawīs, and *Durūzes*.

The remaining Shī'ite Imāms made no concerted efforts to claim political leadership.

Mehdi, the last Imām—who ostensibly disappeared in 941—is believed to still be living and is expected to return to form a just government. Indeed, in 941, the advent of the Occultation Era marked a significant turning point in Shī'ite political theology, which saw the doctrine of *Intiẓār* (the messianic expectation of the Hidden Imām) dominate Shī'ite political theology. Despite the fact that Shī'ism was formed around a political claim, for centuries the doctrine of *Intiẓār* cultivated an apolitical theology for Shī'ism. Politico-religious leadership rested exclusively with the hidden Imām. Not only were all rulers considered illegitimate, but any form of cooperation with them was deemed *ḥarām* (Eshkevari, 2009; Goudarzi, Jawan, & Ahmad, 2010; Lambton, 1981: 242–243). The notion of Imāmate, the founding linchpin of the Shī'ite school, not only specifies *divine sovereignty* as the defining feature of Shī'ite political theology, but also constitutes the very identity of the Shī'ite system of belief. However, despite its exclusive and totally restrictive nature, Imāmate has not quelled the evolution of divergent and conflicting political theologies in Shī'ite history. This statement is supported by the fact that Shī'ite political theology has experienced at least three major turning points, among which only one explicitly dismisses the possibility of a democratic polity; that is, Ayatollah Khomeini's politico-religious doctrine of *wilāyat-i faqīh*.

The Ṣafawid era (1502–1736 AD) might be singled out as the first turning point during which a confrontation took place between the Ṣafawid dynasty and the Ottoman Empire, the two great powers of the Islamic world. Because they were in competition with the Ottoman Empire, the Ṣafawids could not seek religious legitimacy from the Caliphs. Thus, they created an independent religious identity through the coercive conversion of Iranians to Shī'ism. The Ṣafawid invited Shī'ite jurists from Iraq, Bahrain, and Jabal 'Āmil (Lebanon) and provided them with multiple facilities from which to spread the Shī'ite doctrine in Iran (Abisaab, 1994; Browne, 1919; Hourani, 1986: 406–407; Lambton, 1981: 266–268). Frequently, Shī'ite jurists were appointed to respected and high-ranking positions in the Ṣafawid administration; in return, they provided religious legitimacy to the Ṣafawid kingdom. For example, Mohaghegh Karakī (1465–1533) issued a *fatwā* proclaiming the permissibility of paying religious taxes to the king (Shiroodi, 2003:

96).<sup>4</sup> Although king-jurist cooperation was restricted to the Ṣafawid era, this experience yielded jurists a new Shī'ite country wherein they could claim formative influence for centuries to come. Even during the period of apolitical dominance in the post-Ṣafawid era, jurists wielded considerable power, which on occasion led to conflict between jurists and kings. One such example was the Tobacco Movement (1890 and 1892), during which Nāsir al-Din Shāh, the fourth king of the Qajar Dynasty (1848–1896), was entrusted with a monopoly on producing and selling tobacco to an English company headed by Major Gerald Talbot for a period of fifty years. Many Iranians, in particular the merchants, opposed this contract. Yet, the major conflict did not occur until Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Shīrāzī (1814–1896) issued a fatwā which decreed that using tobacco would be ḥarām as long as this contract remained in effect. This compelled the king to terminate the contract, and it is said that even the king's wife refused to serve him tobacco.<sup>5</sup>

The post-Ṣafawid era saw the renewed dominance of *apolitical theology* in the Shī'ite school, establishing a strict wall of separation between jurists and kings in the process. In particular, Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī's school of thought played a decisive role for more than a century. Anṣārī (1799–1864), whose thought has long dominated the Shī'ite school, was in agreement with the arguments of general Shī'ite political thought that the twelve Imāms were appointed by God, and that they alone possessed the divine right to rule the Muslim world. Arguing that the political authority of the Imāms was not transferrable to the jurists, he further stated that while the jurists possessed the same religious authority as the Prophet and the infallible Imāms, they nonetheless had neither political authority nor the right to legitimise kings' authority. In effect, this rendered all kings religiously illegitimate (Bashiriyeh, 2009: 241–246), for,

---

<sup>4</sup>There was of course strong resistance to this approach among religious leaders. Two especially noteworthy examples were Shaykh Ibrāhīm Ghaffī (died post-1539) and Moghaddas Ardabīlī (died 1614), for whom paying religious taxes to the king and cooperating with him were ḥarām. See Shiroodi, M. (2003) 'Aray-e Siyasi Fughahay-e Safaviyeh va ghajariyeh [Political thought of jurists in Safavid and Gajar eras]', *Revagh-e Andisheh*, 3(18), 95–108.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed discussion of the Tobacco Movement and the clerics' role in this movement, see Moaddel, M. (1992) 'Shi'i Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1890-1892', *Sociological Forum*, 7(3), Poulson, S.C. (2005) *Social movements in twentieth-century Iran: culture, ideology, and mobilizing frameworks*, Lanham: Lexington Books.

according to Anṣārī, the jurists' cooperation with kings was sinful. After Anṣārī's demise, the ideal form of Shī'ism remained apolitical. Shī'ite religious leaders adopted a passive approach to the political sphere, and they opted not to pursue any political ambition until the late twentieth century.

### KHOMEINI'S ANTI-DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The Shī'ite jurists' cooperation with the Ṣafawid kings marked a radical departure from the strict, centuries-old belief in the illegitimacy of all rulers. Jurists granted religious legitimacy to kings in return for enjoying the privilege of spreading the Shī'ite doctrine throughout the country. Furthermore, as Kadivar asserts, this era marked a division between political affairs and religious affairs. An agreement reached between the jurists and kings allowed the former to occupy a leading position in the religious sphere, leaving political affairs to the kings.<sup>6</sup> Reconsidering this allocation of positions from a contemporary perspective, one may speculate that this politico-religious arrangement did not rule out the possibility of a democratic polity. This articulation of political theology neither dictates a specific form of political system, nor necessarily culminates in a democratic system.

Unarguably, the innovative political theology articulated by jurists during the Ṣafawid era paved the way for the advancement of jurists' claims to political authority in the centuries to come. In the nineteenth century, for example, Mullā Aḥmad Narāqī (1771–1829) proposed the extension of the divine political authority of the infallible Imām to apply to jurists in the Occultation Era as well (Kadivar, 1999). In contemporary times, Ayatollah Khomeini radically advanced this line of Shī'ite political theology by articulating an unequivocal anti-democratic political theology and implementing it with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2012).

---

<sup>6</sup>Nonetheless, during the Ṣafawid era, disagreement between Shī'ite scholars over state-religion relations persisted. There were some clergy who believed that the king's authority could be religiously legitimised through the consent of jurists. Mīrzā-yi Qumī (known as Sāhibi Ghavānīn) and Kāshīf ul-Ghīta subscribed to this notion. In contrast, others, including Shaykh Mohammad Ḥassān Sāibi Javāhīr, were of the opinion that during the Occultation Era, the right to rule belonged solely to jurists and could not be transferred to the king.

Ayatollah Khomeini simply broadened the application of the proclaimed divine political authority to encompass jurists in the Occultation Era as well as the infallible Imām. As the title of his political doctrine suggests, the theory of *wilāyat-i faqīh* by no means refers to the representation of the people. The term ‘*walī*’ (meaning Custodian) literally refers either to a parent (specifically a father) or to one who is appointed to protect a ward. Building on the overarching *Shī‘ite* theological framework, Khomeini maintained that the Prophet Mohammad appointed infallible Imāms to implement *Sharī‘a* and God’s ordinances: ‘It was this function—the execution of law and the establishment of Islamic institutions—that made the appointment of a successor such an important matter that the Prophet would have failed to fulfil his mission if he had neglected it’ (Khomeini & Algar, 1981, p. 40). Embellishing some *Shī‘ite* *ḥadīths* with political features, Khomeini asserted that just as the Prophet and the infallible Imāms possessed political authority, so too do the jurists possess the divine right to lead Muslim society:

The idea that the governmental power of the Most Noble Messenger(s) were greater than those of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a), or that those of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) were greater than those of the *faqīh*, is false and erroneous. Naturally, the virtues of the Most Noble Messenger(s) were greater than those of the rest of mankind, and after him, the Commander of the Faithful was the most virtuous person in the world. But superiority with respect to spiritual virtues does not confer increased governmental powers. God has conferred upon government in the present age the same powers and authority that were held by the Most Noble Messenger and the Imāms (‘a), with respect to equipping and mobilizing armies, appointing governors and officials, and levying taxes and expending them for the welfare of the Muslims. Now, however, it is no longer a question of a particular person; government devolves instead upon one who possesses the qualities of knowledge and justice (Khomeini & Algar, 1981: 62).

Khomeini’s message was crystal clear when he repudiated any suggestion that *walī-yi faqīh* was indirectly chosen by people’s vote through the mediation of the Assembly of Experts: ‘*walī-yi faqīh* is not something created by the Assembly of Experts, *walī-yi faqīh* is something created by Almighty God. It is the same guardianship of the Noblest Messenger’ (2006: 95). Thus, the task of the ‘Assembly of Experts is to prove the *walī-yi faqīh*, [...], they want to ratify something, which is told by

Almighty God’ (Khomeini, 2000: 27). On another occasion, Khomeini insisted on the primacy of the endorsement of the presidency by walī-yi faqīh<sup>7</sup> over the people’s vote: ‘Islam has made wilāyat-i faqīh compulsory. If the president is not endorsed by walī-yi faqīh, [his presidency] is illegitimate and when it is illegitimate, it becomes *Tāghūt* (oppressive government). Thus obeying this sort of government is obeying *Tāghūt*’ (2006: 118).

### INSTITUTIONALISED BUT NOT ENTRENCHED

By granting jurists an exclusive and divine right to political leadership, Ayatollah Khomeini’s doctrine ultimately ruled out any possibility of reconciliation between democratic principles and his version of *Shī’ite* political theology. Khomeini’s version of political theology has been dominant in Iran for almost four decades, and, due to various reasons, it has attracted significant attention not only in media outlets, but also in academic scholarship. It is widely considered the only existing *Shī’ite* political theology. As a result, scholars show scant interest in the enduring *Shī’ite* apolitical theology. However, his politicisation of *Shī’ite* theology has been and remains an exception, a somewhat marginal discourse within the orthodox circle of *Shī’ite* faculty. As has been the case with most Muslim-majority countries, over the last few decades *Shī’ite* nations have experienced dramatic ups-and-downs, many of which have drawn religious strata, either willingly or unwillingly, into politics. This is why *quietism*—which could once delineate the political orientation of the major *Shī’ite* capitals—is no longer precise enough to describe today’s political reality in the *Shī’ite* world. For example, despite the clamorous rise of Khomeinism, the Najaf seminary continued to remain apolitical during the 1980s and 1990s (Ghobadzadeh, 2015, pp. 151–155). It was only the volatile circumstances in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein that compelled eminent religious leaders such as the Grand Ayatollah Sistānī<sup>8</sup> to engage in politics. Still, while on more than one

<sup>7</sup>After the election, the president should be endorsed by the Supreme Leader before officially commencing his presidency. Some argue that the winner’s presidency would not be legitimate without this endorsement, despite his election by the people.

<sup>8</sup>Due to the marja’ taqlīd’s weak institutional structure, it is impossible to precisely determine the number of its followers. However, Ayatollah Sistānī is widely cited as the most prominent living marja’ taqlīd in the *Shī’ite* world. It is believed that nearly 80% of

occasion Sistānī has exerted his influence in Iraqi politics, he has never attempted to assume political leadership. His participation in politics has included advising the government on referendums and constitution making, settling conflicts generated by Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical young Shīʿite militant, and, more notably, his thus far unsuccessful efforts to ease Shīʿa-Sunnī tensions. For Sistānī, Iran’s experience of clericalism has not proven successful. In 2006, he commented to a visiting scholar: ‘Even if I must be wiped out, I will not let the experience of Iran be repeated in Iraq’ (Sistānī, quoted in J.R.I. Cole, 2006: 8).

Today, almost four decades since its success in Iran, the anti-democratic polity developed by Ayatollah Khomeini has failed to find a home in any one land in the Muslim world, leaving its future prospects of expansion in limbo. In a hypothetical post-Islamic Republic era, during which Khomeini’s anti-democratic theology would risk losing its power leverage, one may speculate that his theology would barely be able to maintain its current place of prominence in the Shīʿite faculty, due mainly to its failure to become entrenched in the orthodoxy of the school. Of course, this by no means suggests that it would vanish. Rather, my point here is that the political orientation of mainstream Shīʿite orthodoxy is informed by a combination of *apolitical theology* and *pro-democratic theology*, which is a production of the Shīʿite faculty’s initial response to the ideals of democracy and parliamentarianism in the early twentieth century. From there, the second turning point, which remains understudied from a theological viewpoint, occurred during the Iranian constitutional movement (1906–1909) and left behind a powerful legacy of democratising political theology. The constitutional movement marked the first direct encounter between traditional Shīʿite Islamic culture and the West (Enayat, 1982, p. 166). Through their practical and conceptual engagement with constitutionalism, the most high-ranking members of the Shīʿite orthodoxy reconceptualised various aspects of its history, theology, and system of belief to accommodate democratic values within its own system of belief. To a large extent, they succeeded in making a substantial impact on the political process and, more importantly, in articulating a pro-democratic political

---

Footnote 8 (continued)

Shīʿite believers emulate Ayatollah Sistānī, which provides him with a significant degree of sociopolitical influence (Khalaji, 2006: 7; Terhalle, 2007: 78).



theology. However, later developments, specifically in the political domain as opposed to in the religious strata, not only interrupted the democratisation process in Iran, but also created a cohort of disaffected religious leaders, who felt impelled to return to their comfort zone of apolitical tradition. In fact, political backsliding and resilient authoritarianism following the constitutional movement both suppressed a prospective democratisation process in Iran and eliminated any possibility of the maturation of the seeds of the pro-democratic political theology that was planted by constitutionalist ‘ulamā in the initial years of the twentieth century.

### SHĪ‘ITE ‘ULAMĀ IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT

The constitutional movement led to the establishment of a parliament, the promulgation of a constitution in Iran, and a change in the country’s political system from a monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. However, it failed to facilitate an altered political course in terms of forming and consolidating a democratic polity. The constitutional movement occurred over the course of two periods: from 1906 to 1908 and from 1908 to 1909. During the first period, it was largely only jurists who resided in the country that engaged with the movement. The revolution that occurred in the fall and winter of 1905–1906 was triggered by the governor of Tehran’s order for a number of leading merchants to be bastinadoed in public in an attempt to force them to lower their sugar prices. In response to this humiliation, the entire Bazaar went on strike, which resulted in a large number of merchants, guild leaders, and theology students—led by the two leading jurists Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1842–1920) and ‘Abdallāh Bihbihānī (1840–1910)—having to seek sanctuary in the Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīm shrine in the south of Tehran. Initially, they made a few demands that included a call for the establishment of a house of justice (‘Adālatkhāna), but subsequent events led to their demand for the formation of a parliament and a constitution for the country (Abrahamian, 1979). This phase of the revolution saw the proclamation of the constitutionalism law, the establishment of Iran’s first parliament, and the drafting of the country’s first constitution, which Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh signed and endorsed in August 1906. These achievements were all wrought through nonviolent and civic resistance, such as by utilizing methods such as strikes and taking *bast* (sanctuary) in holy shrines and in the British Embassy.

Shortly after signing the new constitution, Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh died, and his son, Mohammad Ali Shah, succeeded him as king. From the beginning of the latter's reign, he proved determined to maintain absolute power. For example, he chose not to invite members of parliament to his coronation and delayed signing the amendment to the constitution. Ultimately, Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh, who adopted a confrontational position vis-à-vis the parliament, abolished the constitution. On 23 June 1908, he ordered his artillerymen, armed with cannons and aided by Russian Cossacks, to open fire on the parliament. They arrested and executed dozens of constitutionalists instigating the violent and costly phase of the revolution. After the constitutionalists were brutally suppressed in Tehran, the revolution spread to other cities, becoming a nationwide phenomenon over the following two years. A period that became known as the Lesser Despotism (*Istibdād-i ṣaghīr*), it culminated in a military confrontation between the constitutionalists and the supporters of Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh. This violent episode of the movement came to an end when pro-constitution forces from other states marched into Tehran and deposed Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh in July 1909. The constitution was then re-established and the second parliament was formed in October 1909. A defining feature of the second phase of the movement was the extensive involvement of Shī'ite jurists at the highest levels, including those beyond Iran's borders. Specifically, the most high-ranking Shī'ite jurists, who resided in the city of Nadjaf (Iraq), became actively engaged in the second phase of the movement. They played a leading role not only by mobilising the masses across the country, but also by supporting nonreligious associations (*anjōmans*), closely collaborating with secular intellectuals, and attempting, albeit unsuccessfully, to gain the support of other nations such as the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain (Hairi, 1976; Hojjati, 2011, pp. 176–183). The roles 'ulamā played during the movement are discussed in detail in countless books and articles published in both the Persian and English languages. However, the conceptual contribution or, to be more precise, the theological legacy of such 'ulamā has received scant attention. This chapter aims to present this episode of Shī'ite theological history as a significant turning point under the banner of democratising theology.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Qajar dynasty entered a phase of decline that eventually led to its downfall. On the eve of the constitutional movement, the regime was openly criticised by intellectuals and the elite in particular for being tyrannous, oppressive,

and corrupt, as well as too weak to resist British and Russian encroachment. Thus, the constitutional movement was rooted in widespread dissatisfaction not only with the economic hardship facing the country, but also with its political circumstances (Adamiyat, 1985, p. 148). These circumstances fuelled the formation of a powerful coalition of liberal thinkers typically educated in and influenced by Western ideas, merchants, and tribal leaders, who united to demand change in the statute. The 'ulamā responded positively to the merchants' and liberal intellectuals' demands to join the coalition. The constitutional movement might not have unfolded in the way that it did had there not been an alternative political vision put forward specifically by the liberal thinkers.

This visionary alternative, rather than being a locally and/or religiously grounded political aspiration, was both Western-inspired and secularly oriented. Initially, the notion of constitutionalism and its sub-concepts were introduced into the country by secular intellectuals whose aim was to engage religious leaders in their cause. In every publication about the constitutional movement, it is clear that prior to the 'ulamā's engagement, nonreligious intellectuals and members of the ruling elite had entered into deep discussions about reforming the way in which the country was being managed. Chronological accounts of the constitutional movement provide numerous examples of the 'ulamā following in the footsteps of liberal intellectuals. In his explication of the changing narratives of the movement, Adamiyat repeatedly reminds us of how secular intellectuals, in their attempts to further the demands for reform, fed progressive ideas to 'ulamā and other participants in the movement. For example, he details the tactics that secular intellectuals employed to persuade the 'ulamā to shift their demands from the 'house of justice' to the parliament and to call for the introduction of the constitution (Adamiyat, 1985, pp. 162–175).

However, the 'ulamā were not only on the receiving end of ideas as the sequence of events surrounding the constitutional movement unfolded. Most significantly, secular thinkers passed on the entire package of constitutionalism and its accompanying concepts to the 'ulamā, a point well-documented by Hairī in particular, who traces the intellectual origins of constitutionalism in Iran. Elaborating upon the political thought of key liberal thinkers including Mīrzā Fath 'Alī Ākhūnd-zāda, Mustashār al-Dawla, Mīrzā 'Abd al-Rahīm Tabrīzī Talibov, and Mīrzā Malkam Khān, he discusses the leading role their ideas played in the theoretical and conceptual front of the revolution (Hairī, 1977). This is

not to downplay the role of the 'ulamā in the constitutional movement; on the contrary, they played an important role in the practical process of the movement, so much so that it would have been almost impossible for liberal intellectuals to promulgate their progressive ideas without the 'ulamā's support (Ajodani, 2004, p. 92; Kasravi, 1984, p. 730).

Stressing the nonreligious origins of pro-democratic ideas helps to better inform us of how different theological articulations have been formed through encounters steeped in networks of sociopolitical dynamism (Thaghafi, 2011). What is important to highlight here are the ways in which the 'ulamā engaged with these ideas to internalise, amend, and rearticulate them within their own web of knowledge and system of belief. Their approach undoubtedly facilitated more effective communication with the masses than did the language and rhetoric used by secular and liberal intellectuals (Enayat, 1982, pp. 277–287). Indeed, the 'ulamā's capacity to mobilise the masses was such that it would not be far-fetched to argue that had they not lent their support to the constitutional movement, liberal intellectuals and reformists would not have stood a chance to effect change at the scale and to the extent they did.

Having encountered modern political philosophy in general and constitutional parliamentarianism in particular, mainstream Shī'a did not consider either detrimental to religion.<sup>9</sup> Rather, they considered these ideas compatible with Islamic teachings and, more importantly, embraced them as a necessary step towards safeguarding Twelver Shī'ism and its values. For example, in a joint statement, three leading 'ulamā of Najaf, Ḥājdjī Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khalīlī Ṭīhrānī, Shaykh 'Abd Allāh Māzandarānī, and Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī wrote:

Today, the wise men of the world agree that the circumstances of this millennium differ from those of the past centuries ... and adhering to the old method won't bring any result except [to send the country into] a tailspin

---

<sup>9</sup>The constitutional movement, in effect the first Shī'ite confrontation with modern political notions, marked a milestone that distinguished the premodern and modern epochs in Iran's political history. Not only did the movement introduce new political notions, but it also posed vital questions pertinent to Shī'ite political philosophy (Feirahi, 2010: 363). This affected the clergy's conceptual articulations of politics as well as their practical engagement with politics. Ultimately, the constitutional movement represented a new phase of Shī'ite political engagement, which led to the reformation of religious thought (Derakhsheh, 2001: 192).

and annihilation. Hence, establishing these respected affairs [constitutionalism] is in the interest of the protection of the territory of Islam, and, indeed, this endeavour is a sort of defensive jihad (Jihād-i dīfai) that is religiously indispensable (vajib) for all Muslims, and nothing in Sharī'a is more important than this (quoted in Kadivar, 2006, p. 213).

They went on to warn that failure to accommodate the pro-democratic polity would put the safety and future of both the religion and the nation in jeopardy, subordinating Muslims to infidels and colonial powers. This position stands in sharp contrast to Ayatollah Khomeini's theopolity, which is grounded in the argument that resisting modern notions such as democracy and human rights is the key to claiming genuine independence and putting an end to the hegemony external powers hold over the country. It should be mentioned, of course, that the 'ulamā were not completely united. There was a sharp division between two camps in particular: the pro-constitutionalists and the anti-constitutionalists. The latter camp included leading 'ulamā such as Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzīm Yazdī (d. 1919) and Shaykh Faḍlallāh al-Nūrī (1843–1909), who drew from the Islamic scriptures and history to argue against constitutionalism.<sup>10</sup> Due to the divisions that emerged, an important clash took place within the religious ranks, provoked by what was both a theological polemic and political struggle. Conceptually speaking, the anti-constitutionalists' challenges goaded the pro-constitutionalist 'ulamā into further developing their conceptualisations of notions such as parliament, equality, and freedom. When the pro-constitutionalists prevailed in 1909, the anti-constitutionalist camp lost both its theological polemic and political battle. The anti-constitutionalists also suffered further consequences, with their leading figure, Shaykh Faḍlallāh al-Nūrī, having been executed in July 1909.

Here, it is important to mention that among the pro-constitutionalist 'ulamā, there was a division of labour. Some among them, e.g. Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabaṭabā'ī (1842–1920), Sayyid 'Abdallāh Bihbahānī (1840–1910), and Mīrzā 'Āḳā 'Alī Tabrīzī (1861–1911), who were at the forefront of political activities, were directly engaged in mobilising

---

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed discussion of the political thought and activities of the anti-constitutionalist 'ulamā, see Arjomand (1981), Bayat (1991, pp. 161–183), Farzaneh (2015, pp. 191–224); Hoseinizadeh (2010, pp. 79–82), Malek-Ahmadi (2015, pp. 44–49) and Salehi (2009).

the masses, propagating constitutionalism through their orations, and leading mass protests and strikes. Meanwhile, other ‘ulamā, mostly those who resided in Nadjaf, took the leading role in conceptualising constitutionalism within a Shī‘ite theological framework. Among these ‘ulamā was Mīrzā Muḥammad ḥusayn Gh̄arawī Nā‘īnī (1860–1936), whose book titled ‘The Enlightening of the Muslim Community and Its Purification’ [*Tanbīh al-umma wa-tanzāh al-milla*] is widely cited as the first quasi-democratic articulation of politics in Shī‘ite history. This work is considered the most important conceptual legacy of the pro-constitutionalist ‘ulamā. It is also widely known as the most important Shī‘ite treaty in the contemporary age promoting democratic polity. Nā‘īnī supported the parliamentary system not because he viewed it as the ideal system for the Shī‘a, but because it was a feasible option deemed superior to an absolute monarchy system. He declared that he preferred a parliamentary system because there was neither an infallible Imām nor a pious person who could serve as ruler (Derakhsheh, 2001: 199).

This chapter will not discuss Nā‘īnī’s thought in detail; there is a vast corpus of the literature, in both the Persian and English languages, about his thought and role in constitutionalism.<sup>11</sup> More to the point, Nā‘īnī’s ideal form of state is an authoritarian system under the leadership of a jurist, akin to the political formula that was later devised by Ayatollah Khomeini as the doctrine of wilāyat-i faqīh. While Nā‘īnī supported constitutionalism in principle under the circumstances of the time period under discussion, he favoured the rule of a pious jurist during the occultation era. In the second chapter of his book, Nā‘īnī clearly grants an authoritative ruling position to a pious jurist, described as the representative of the Hidden Imām (Nā‘īnī, 2003, p. 46). He used the category of ḥisbīyya matters to justify a divine and exclusive right for a jurist in the political arena. Generally speaking, ḥisbīyya matters refer to particular cases of guardianship, for example, over the affairs of orphans, the missing, divorces, or managing endowments. However, some jurists, including Nā‘īnī, have expanded the scope of ḥisbīyya matters to include all public affairs, an expansion that intuitively positioned a jurist as the ruler. Nā‘īnī wrote:

---

<sup>11</sup>For a detailed explanation of Nā‘īnī’s political thought and his contribution to the constitutional movement, see Boozari (2011, pp. 99–152), Feirahi (2016), Hairī (1977, pp. 109–234), Nā‘īnī (2003), Najafī (1994) and Nouraie (1975).

According to our Imāmite [Shī'a] faith, in the age of the absence of the Hidden Imām, hisba duties are those wilāyāt naw'īyya (typical wilāyahs), that if left unattended, would dissatisfy God. In these duties, by applying the measure of qadr al-mutayaqqīn (the least amount of certainty) the general deputyship of the jurists is [considered to be] proven. Even if we refuse [to agree with] the proof of such deputyship in all positions [for jurists], it is an obvious fact that the duty of safeguarding the order of Muslim society is superior to other duties. It is also clear that God will be dissatisfied if the duty of restoring order to society and protecting the homeland—all being among the hisba duties—were to be left unattended. Therefore, the jurists' deputyship in undertaking such duties is one of the certainties of religion. (Nā'īnī quoted in Boozari, 2011, p. 108)

In sum, Nā'īnī's support for constitutionalism was temporary and due to the lack of an opportunity to enact a jurist-led state. This chapter will now turn to the political thought of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, for whom the ideal form of state or, to be more precise, the genuine legitimate state ought to be formed solely by the Hidden Imām. While this would not be a democratic government given that the Hidden Imām exclusively possesses this right, in his absence it is left to the believers to decide on the form of state. Consistent with his *Uṣūli* jurisprudence, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's writings<sup>12</sup> explicitly charge human intellect with this task, dismissing the argument that religion and religious sources should provide a specific form of polity. His consistent support for implementing pro-democratic measures in Iran in the early twentieth century was, therefore, based on the notion that decisions regarding the form of state were to be left to believers in the occultation era. Moreover, he logically argued that because the human intellect favors limiting authoritarianism through constitutionalism, believers have religious responsibility (*taklīf*)

---

<sup>12</sup>Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī did not write a specific book or treatise outlining his political thought. Rather, he expressed his politico-religious thought through his declarations, statements, letters, telegrams, and, of course, his political deeds during the constitutional movement. Associated documents have been collected in a number of books by different authors. It is for this reason that, instead of making direct references to works by Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, I have referenced the following three books throughout this chapter: *Khurasani's political philosophy: political statements in the works of Akhund Mulla Mohammad Kazim Khurasani* (2006) by Mohsen Kadivar; *A page of contemporary history* (1999) by S.M. Hassan Aghnajari-Ghochani; and *Perspectives of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and his disciples* (2011) by Akbar Sobout.

to support the latter. During the constitutional movement, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī in effect argued for the necessity and benefit of eliminating tyranny and arbitrary rule through human intellect, as opposed to religious scriptures.

### RATIONALIST (UṢŪLĪ) AND SCRIPTURALIST (AKHBĀRĪ) SCHOOLS

An investigation of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's approach to *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) is a prerequisite for understanding his political thought. Within the Shī'ite jurisprudential framework his major contribution has been his path-breaking approach to *ijtihād* and his methodology of issuing religious creeds. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī belonged to the *Uṣūlī* school of thought, which at the time had already become dominant after eliminating its rival, the *Akhhbārī* school. The *Uṣūlī* school differs from the *Akhhbārī* school in that they favour the use of *ijtihād* to assess ḥadīth and to exclude traditions that are unreasonable according to the convictions of a given time and place.<sup>13</sup> Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's master, Shāykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī (1799–1864), was one of the leading *Uṣūlī* scholars to emerge at the end of a long period of polemic fighting between the *Uṣūlī* and *Akhhbārī* schools. Shāykh Anṣārī made a major contribution to the establishment of a quasi-institutionalised clerical establishment, which has proven to be very effective for more than a century (Mohajernia, 2010, pp. 381–432; Mottahedeh, 2000: 211; Moussavi, 1985: 45). Furthermore, it was his fame that drove Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī to undergo hardship and migrate to Nadjaf in order to study under Shāykh Anṣārī. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī attended Shāykh Anṣārī's classes for two years before the latter's demise in 1864. Then, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī became a favourite student of another leading Shī'ite jurist, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Shīrāzī (1815–1895), who is known for his fatwā against the use of tobacco in what became known as the Tobacco Movement (1890–1891).

---

<sup>13</sup>For a detailed explanation of the *Uṣūlī-Akhhbārī* dispute and their differences, see Al-e Ghafur (2007), J. Cole (1985), Enayat (1982, pp. 166–170), Fazlhashemi (2010), Gleave (2007), Moussavi (1985), Nasr, Hamid, and Nasr (1989, pp. 281–286), Newman (1992) and Tabatabaee (2005). An historiographical account of the rivalry between the proponents of the two schools can be found in Algar (2007), J.R. Cole (2002, pp. 31–77) and Heern (2015).



Shaykh Anṣārī and Shīrāzī had a great impact on both Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's method of *ijtihād* and his approach to politics (Feirahi, 2005). Indeed, it is reasonable to suggest that Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's politico-religious thought was a result of an aesthetic combination of Shaykh Anṣārī's theological school of thought and Shīrāzī's political conduct. For example, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī advanced Shaykh Anṣārī's *Uṣūli* theology by giving more weight to the intellect ('aql) in *ijtihād* and Shīrāzī's one-off style of political engagement by continually engaging in great depth with the constitutional movement. As the bedrock of his theology, intellect and reasoning were granted three unprecedented roles:

1. First, as sources of *ijtihād*, for Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, intellect and reasoning were as important as other sources of *ijtihād*, i.e. the Qur'ān, ḥadīths, and consensus (*ijmā'*) (Farzaneh, 2015, pp. 145–146). There is a principle in Shī'ite jurisprudence known as the 'rule of correlation' (*qā'idat al-mulāzama*), according to which whatever is ordered by reason is also ordered by religion, and vice versa (Boozari, 2011, pp. 31–35). Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī added an appendix to this jurisprudential rule. Expanding the territory of intellect, he asserted that there is a possibility that while intellect may order an act, Sharī'a may be incapable of issuing the corresponding order because for a ruling to be included in Sharī'a, the additional condition of public interest is required. If there is public interest in a given matter, then there will be a Sharī'a ruling on the matter (MirAhmadi, 2011, pp. 52–64). This directly contradicts the all-encompassing understanding of Islam that claims religion is capable of fulfilling all human needs, irrespective of whether they are worldly or other-worldly. This maximalist understanding of Islam was a significant factor in the emergence of Islamists in the second half of the twentieth century, as evidenced by the main slogan of most of the Islamic movements: 'Islam is the solution' (*al-Islam huwa al-hal*). In contrast to this approach, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī highlighted the capacity of intellect in order to minimise expectations of religious sources.
2. Second, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī used intellect as a key methodological instrument for *ijtihād*. When conducting *ijtihād*, his predecessors and contemporaries drew mostly upon documentation methodology to substantiate their rulings. That is, they validated their rulings with references to the rulings of other jurists and heavily cited

from the scriptures, Qur'ān, and ḥadīths. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's line of *ijtihād*, in contrast, relied more upon reasoning. In the words of Gorji: 'He [Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī] paid attention to reasoning and [did not] search for evidence. From his point of view, reasoning was principium' (Gorji quoted in Daryabeygi, 2007, p. 360). A clear manifestation of this approach in Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's political thought was his willingness to issue unprecedented fatwās and statements/declarations based upon reasoning alone and relying on the intellect. He could not have achieved what he did during periods of political turmoil had he been required to substantiate his statements and rulings with reference either to the scriptures or to his predecessors. As I will explain in the following section, he grounded his political platform and actions in only a few generally accepted theological canons. For the rest of his argument for the constitutionalism, he used reasoning to conclude not only the acceptability but also the ineluctability of accommodating democratic norms within an Islamic framework. For example, in his joint statement with Shaykh 'Abd Allāh Māzandarānī in which they promoted constitutionalism, he articulated his ideas based upon rational reasoning:

The other side of constitutionalism is tyranny and despotism of the state, which allows the rulers and agencies to rule arbitrarily, omnipotent, unaccountably, coercive and cruelly over their people and nation. Freedom of every nation, on which the state's constitutionalism relies, is founded on the absence of subjugation to the authoritarian rule of the ruler, and of the barrier in realization of their legitimate rights and entitlements. Retrospectively, servitude is also being subjugated and dispossessed of anything before the government's will and power. (Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and Mazandarani quoted in Boozari, 2011, p. 99)

3. Similar to the second function, the third function of intellect in Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's *Uṣūli* jurisprudence had profound sociopolitical implications. By narrowing the scope of Shari'a law, he opened up significant spaces for the use of intellect as the main source of and instrument for issuing a ruling. Since *Akhhbārīs* did not consider intellect trustworthy, they 'maintain[ed] that whenever an

act is not explicitly permitted by Sharī‘a, one should refrain from performing it by way of precaution (*ibtiyāt*) against committing a sin’ (Enayat, 1982, p. 168). In the jurisprudential lexicon, this approach is encapsulated in the notion of *īsālat ul-hazar*, that is, to vehemently deny the acceptability of any legitimate extrapolation from the canonical sources (Motahhari quoted in Dabashi, 1993). In contrast, *Uṣūlis* believe in *īsālat ul-ībāha*, which maintains that whenever access to “definite ruling” proves impossible, ruling based on conjecture (*zann*) is permissible. Thus, *Uṣūlis* contend that any act should be presumed to be permissible except when there is a definite religious ruling against it. As Enayat asserts, this *Uṣūli* approach ‘allows wide scope for juridical innovations through their belief in the validity of “probable knowledge” to deduce canonical rules’ (Enayat, 1982, p. 168). In other words, while *Akhhārīs* forbid a given act due to the possibility of committing sin, *Uṣūlis* allow intellect to make the decision when the search for a possible Sharī‘a ruling ends in conjecture.

The political implications of this approach to *ijtihād* and the role of intellect in it are well described by Enayat:

The political implications of these principles can hardly be overstated. By upholding the authority of reason and the right of *ijtihād*, the *Uṣūli* doctrines could not fail to render the Shī‘a mind susceptible to social changes, and inspire confidence in the human ability to regulate social affairs. ... Moreover, principles such as those of the validity of probable knowledge and the permissibility of actions not specifically forbidden by the [religious] sources, encouraged a more flexible approach to the application of jurisprudence to emerging social and political problems. (Enayat, 1982, p. 168)

Indeed, this was exactly how Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī responded to the emergence of a political situation in which he acted as the chairman of the spiritual authority of the Shī‘ite Muslims (Farzaneh, 2015, p. 180). He opted in favour of a few key theological canons on which to build a theological premise to religionise pro-democratic notions using intellect and reasoning. Before explaining how he utilised specific theological canons, it is important to first explore the way in which he set the foundation for divesting religious scriptures and religious leaders of their potential claim to divine authority within the political sphere.

## DISMISSAL OF SCRIPTURES AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

In the politico-religious thought of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, neither Sharī‘a nor religious leaders should be granted the authority or right to take charge of the political sphere. Having adamantly rejected such an arrangement, he maintained that the political sphere should be managed through a collective consensus decision-making method. For him, constitutionalism at that time was the product of collective consensus. In sharp contrast to his view, non-democratic Shī‘ite theology grants exclusive political authority to Sharī‘a and the religious leaders. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, however, unequivocally refuted the notion that the ‘ulamā represent the hidden Imām during the occultation era. In fact, he went even further, taking the hitherto unprecedented step of introducing restrictions to the authority of the Prophet Mohammad and the infallible Imāms. From the Shī‘ite perspective, the Prophet Mohammad and the twelve infallible Imāms possessed absolute authority over believers’ personal and public affairs. Conversely, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī argued that the sacred authority of these infallibles was confined to sociopolitical and, of course, religious issues. In his view they did not have any sacred authority over the personal and private affairs of believers (Kadivar, 2005, pp. 217–222).

Another marked difference between Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī’s thought and that of other jurists can be discerned in ḥisbīyya matters. As explained earlier, although jurists’ interpretations may differ when defining the scope of ḥisbīyya responsibilities, Shī‘ite jurists are in agreement that jurists should be in charge of these matters. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī sought to narrow the scope of jurists’ authority, arguing that the right to—and responsibility for—dealing with issues related to ḥisbīyya was not exclusively that of the ‘ulamā. Rather, he argued that all believers have the authority and responsibility to participate in these matters (Aghnajafi-Ghochani, 1999, p. 52; Kadivar, 2005, pp. 235–250). His groundbreaking articulations of ḥisbīyya left only three exclusive rights/responsibilities for the ‘ulamā: promoting religion; issuing religious creeds (fatwā); and judgment. Sacred providence chose not to endow the ‘ulamā with rights in the political and there is not a single verse in the Qur’ān or ḥadīths to support the ‘ulamā’s claims to rights in the political arena (Feirahi, 2005, pp. 203–206). After contemplating this theological omission, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī concluded both that (a) politics was the right and responsibility of believers; and, (b) it was up to the latter

to choose the most effective political set-up. This was clearly spelled out in a telegraph co-written by Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and two other leading ‘ulamā of Najaf, Māzandarānī, and Mīrzā Khalīl. In this communication, they specified that ‘during [the] occultation era, the right to rule Muslims lay with the people (*jomhour-e Musleīn*)’ (quoted in Kermani, 1978, p. 231).

As far as Sharī‘a is concerned, we must remember that constitutionalism, more than anything else, was concerned with legislation and the rule of law. For the anti-constitutionalist ‘ulamā, this was a fundamental issue that continues to be a source of tension between reformist Islamists and fundamentalists (Ghobadzadeh, 2013; 2015, pp. 102–127). Anti-constitutionalist ‘ulamā contend that legislation produced by human beings violates two indispensable tenets of Islam, i.e. ‘Seal (*khātām*) of the prophets’ and ‘Accomplishment of Religion’ (*Ḳamāl-i dīn*). They subscribe to an all-encompassing notion of Islam according to which religion is not confined to worshipping, but also determines all political issues. Thus, Sharī‘a, a comprehensive body of laws, is thought by anti-constitutionalist ‘ulamā to include all of the rules and regulations crucial to managing the everyday affairs of Muslims (MirAhmadi, 2011, pp. 117–120; Torkaman, 1983, pp. 56–57). Hence, it should be applicable to and sufficient for dealing with contemporary issues as well, and it is the ‘ulamā’s duty to apply it (Shimamoto, 1987, p. 106). The fact that constitutionalism urged believers to submit to something beyond Sharī‘a was not only considered a pernicious innovation or heresy (*bid‘a*); it was totally unacceptable. The leading jurist of the anti-constitutionalist camp emphasised that when humans create new laws they are, in effect, “trampling” on Sharī‘a because God is the sole lawmaker. Forging (*jā‘al*) new laws, irrespective of their form and content, amounts to meddling in the affairs of God and the prophethood. Thus, it is without question religiously unlawful (*ḥarām*) (Jamshidi, 2001).

On the other hand, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī distanced himself from such a maximalist approach to religion. He made an audacious contribution to Shī‘ite political theology by granting reason a position of unparalleled dominance in the political arena. For him, Islamic scriptures did not include any specific prescriptions or instructions for political conduct during the occultation era. As will be discussed in the following passages, from Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī’s viewpoint, a religiously legitimate form of government was one which should be exclusively formed and led by the hidden Imām. In the absence of the hidden Imām, he held

that believers should be in charge of politics, with their main instruments for decision-making being intellect and reasoning. Neither the religious scriptures (Qur'ān and ḥadīths) nor Islamic/Shī'ite history and traditions offer a blueprint for instructions about political matters. Due to this lack of political guidance in the scriptures, according to Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's idea of the *isālat ul-ibāha* (everything is permissible until one knows for certain that a given act is forbidden in the authoritative scriptures), Muslims must deal with politics on their own terms. This is why, when engaged in politics, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī hardly made reference to religious scriptures, the deeds of the Prophet Mohammad and/or the infallible Imāms, or the writings of his predecessors. Instead, he repeatedly referred to a few theological and ecclesiastical canons and principles that are widely accepted among Shī'ite jurists. These canons included 'the avoidance of more corrupt by less corrupt' (*dafe'i afsad bā fāsīd*), the protection of the homeland of Islam (*hefz-i bayd'ah-i Islam*), the expansion of justice and eradication of oppression, and enjoining good and forbidding evil (*amr bi ma'rūf wa nahy 'az munkar*).

#### USING THEOLOGICAL CANONS TO PROMOTE CONSTITUTIONALISM

Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī referred to these canons repeatedly throughout his statements and writings over the course of the constitutional movement. For example, alluding to all of the above-mentioned canons in a statement, he argued that constitutionalism would ensure that they were observed: [constitutionalism] encompasses the protection of the religious and national honour, prohibiting what is religiously reprehensible, promoting justice and abolishing the foundations of oppression, avoiding arbitrary behaviors, [and] protecting the homeland of Islam and Muslims' territory (Akhund-Khurasani quoted in Zargari, 2008, p. 295). The entire premise of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's political thought was built upon these canons and, in effect, they are the only capital that Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī borrowed from the scriptures. For the most part, he simply used reasoning to argue that defending constitutionalism was religiously incumbent (*wādjīb*). He used these theological canons in various ways, including as the bedrocks, justifications, and points of departure to substantiate his belief that it was his religious responsibility—as well as the responsibility of other 'ulamā and indeed all believers' *taklīf* (religious duty)—to actively engage with and support constitutionalism. One could

reasonably argue that during his engagement with the constitutional movement his main achievement was to prove that a parliamentary system would facilitate the fulfilment of these canons and principles.

Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's writings show that the theological rule of avoiding more corruption by means of allowing less corruption (*dāfe'i afsad bā fāsīd*) inspired him to promote constitutionalism as an important religious responsibility. This canon, which stipulates that a jurist is religiously obliged to permit and commit a corrupt action to avoid a more corrupt action or situation (Ali-Abadi & Esfandiyari, 2015), is among those most utilised in all fields of Shī'ite jurisprudence. Jurists have generally established three benchmarks to help with decision-making in this regard. The jurist's ruling on the subject of corrupt acts ought to prioritise: (a) the integrity and authority of Islam and Muslims; (b) the lives and honour of Muslims over their assets and belongings; and (c) human rights over issues which are unrelated to rights. While, on the one hand, constitutionalism has no basis in Shī'ite history and/or theology, on the other, the perspicuously constricted and exclusive theology of Shī'ism has informed its formation and identity for centuries. Thus, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī utilised the canon of *the avoidance of more corrupt by less corrupt* to argue for the necessity of supporting constitutionalism within a religious framework. Having declared support of constitutionalism religiously incumbent (wādḡib), he even went so far as to denounce opposition to constitutionalism as the equivalent of waging war against God (*mohārīb*) (Kadivar, 2006, p. 213; Tabatabaee & Hojjati, 2012, pp. 47–50).

Remaining loyal to the fundamental Shī'ite belief in the divine political authority of the hidden Imām, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī classified forms of ruling into two categories: Islamic state (*ḥukūmat-i mashrū'e*) and non-Islamic state (*ḥukūmat-i ghaire mashrū'e*). The only religiously legitimate form of state would be one formed and ruled exclusively by the hidden Imām. Thus, as Kadivar suggests, according to Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's vision of the Islamic state, the ruler should be appointed by God and thereby possess divine authority (Kadivar, 2005, p. 226). In response to the anti-constitutionalist 'ulamā who spoke of an Islamic state, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī maintained that the infallible is commissioned and appointed by divine providence, similar to the nature of the Prophet Mohammad's governance in Medina, Imām Ali's caliphate, and the future point when the hidden Imām will reappear and assume power (Boozari, 2011, p. 112). As emphasised above, for Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, jurists did not

enjoy such a position of authority: it exclusively belonged to the hidden Imām during the occultation era. Thus, all other forms of ruling and rulers, including constitutionalism, did not fall within the category of an Islamic and Sharī'a-based state. Yet, this did not necessarily mean that these other forms of governance were all illegitimate or unacceptable from a religious point of view. As Kadivar suggests, a non-Islamic state is neither inherently contradictory to Sharī'a, nor religiously unlawful (*ḥarām*) (Kadivar, 2006, pp. 12–16). There is a form of non-Islamic state that is permitted from a religious perspective, a form that Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī terms a 'non-Islamic just state' (*hukūmat-i ghaire mashrū'e adelāne*).

Here, I consider it important to point out that the non-Islamic-ness of the constitutional state remained a more or less theoretical discussion in Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's politico-religious thought. This was particularly so when he was deeply engaged with the constitutional movement, which he supported full-heartedly. Even when the anti-constitutionalist 'ulamā, under the banner of the Islamic state, took issue with the constitutional movement, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī explicitly charged them with impiety and abusing religion. More importantly, he argued that establishing a so-called Islamic state while the hidden Imām remained absent could prove detrimental to Islam.<sup>14</sup> He questioned the integrity of the proponents of an Islamic state by reiterating the fact that the arbitrary sultanate system was certainly not a Sharī'a-based form of state. He, therefore, argued that attempts to shift to a constitutional form of state should not evoke in some 'ulamā a desire to deceive the public and sow sedition (*fitna*) and corruption (*fīsād*) (Aghnajafi-Ghochani, 1999, pp. 51–52).

---

<sup>14</sup>According to one report, when tension among the ulama heightened, Nā'inī urged Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī to call for an Islamic state and assume political leadership. Nā'inī proposed that the creation of an Islamic state would resolve the discord among the religious leaders. The ulama would be able to put Sharī'a into practice, and a just Islamic state would be established. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, however, refused this request, not only from a theological perspective but also due to the possibility that the ulama's political leadership could have an effect on the reputation of Islam. He cautioned Nā'inī that the ulama's repute could be tarnished if their direct political leadership became a reality. For a detailed account of this particular conversation between Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and Nā'inī, see Sobout (2011, pp. 345–405). A counter-narrative that challenges the authenticity of this conversation between Nā'inī and Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī can be found in Javadzadeh (2012).



It was evident throughout Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's discourse that he believed the situation in the Muslim world of his time was not only bad, but deteriorating more each day. Apropos the political situation, he considered the endemic corruption attributable to the arbitrary sultanate system, essentially viewing the latter as culpable for the prevailing circumstances (Tabatabaee & Hojjati, 2012). It should come as little surprise that he shared his assessment with influential figures prior to the emergence of the constitutional movement. In August 1902, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī wrote a letter to the soon-to-be king, Muḥammad 'Alī Mīrzā, in which he raised his concerns regarding the increasing level of corruption in the political sphere (Kadivar, 2006, pp. 159–160). That said, constitutionalism offered Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī a window of opportunity to push for change that would not only prevent the worsening of the political climate, but would also turn the situation around by facilitating better management of the nation's affairs. For Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, the arbitrary rule of an unbridled sultan was equal to the lack of laws, rules, and order, which ultimately led to high levels of corruption.

Constitutionalism, more than anything else, was intended to introduce restrictions on arbitrary power by way of establishing rules and regulations in the political sphere. As Farzaneh writes, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī defined constitutionalism 'as a system in which "limitations and conditions" required "the monarchy and all government offices" to work within "boundaries that the laws and religion of every nation determine"' (2015, p. 166). In Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's thought the necessity to restrict arbitrary power corresponded to another theological canon, i.e. the indispensability of protecting the homeland of Islam (*hefz-i bayd'ah-i Islam*). Protection of the homeland of Islam is considered the most 'religiously incumbent issue' (*o'ujab-i wādjjībāt*), that is, the most essential of all religiously required tasks. In other words, if there is a conflict with other religious precepts, this canon is to be given priority. Even collaboration with an oppressive ruler would be sanctioned, should the fulfilment of this canon require it (Shahid al-Awwal, 1991, p. 30).

Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's perception of the Muslim world as lagging behind the Western/colonial nations claimed a profound place in his writings. Indications that 'infidels' (*kuffār*) could assume power over Muslims was of deep and growing concern to him (Hojjati, 2011). Other nations' prosperity and triumphs, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī believed, were due to the better management of their countries, especially with regard to the confinement of political power and the application of

rules and regulations in the political sphere. On more than one occasion, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī observed that the lack of rules and regulations to restrict the arbitrary use of power had made Muslims vulnerable to infidels' intervention and domination. As such, he argued that continued laxity of this nature could pose an existential threat to the Muslim world (Aghnajafi-Ghochani, 1999, p. 49). The introduction of constitutionalism would bring development and wealth to the nation, strengthening Muslims' position vis-à-vis infidels. Furthermore, this would ensure the protection of the homeland of Islam, which had for some time been subject to the dominance of infidels due to various weaknesses stemming from the sultanate system (Abadian, 1995, p. 83).

Another theological canon that Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī repeatedly employed was the expansion of justice and eradication of oppression. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī categorised non-Islamic states into two distinct forms: oppressive and just. On this scale, the arbitrary rule of an unbridled kingship was the absolute epitome of an oppressive state that allowed the ruling class to rule arbitrarily and cruelly over the nation. Conversely, constitutionalism had the potential to greatly reduce oppression. In the eyes of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and his companions, constitutionalism 'aimed to limit the monarchy's unchecked powers, eliminate tyranny and arbitrary rule, and establish equity between various Iranians' (Farzaneh, 2015, p. 133). For the Shī'a, there was a definite link between infallibility and justness. Because the hidden Imām is infallible, it is taken for granted that he will establish a just government. This implies that other forms of states that are ruled by the fallibles are not only non-Islamic; they are also considered intrinsically unjust. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, who differentiated between 'infallibility' and 'justness', agreed with other Shī'ite jurists that infallibles were just, but he did not rule out the possibility of infallibles forming a just government. As Kadivar argues, while Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī gauged an 'Islamic state' by the 'infallibility of the ruler', he did not accept the exclusive unification of 'infallibility' and 'justness'. Both infallibles and fallibles, he asserted, could form a just government (Kadivar, 2006, p. 226). In his view, reasonable and pious individuals could create a just government by collectively participating in the management of the nation. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī wrote:

The illegitimate [non-Islamic]<sup>15</sup> rule is divided into two categories: just, like the constitutionalist state in which the reasonable and pious individuals administer public affairs, and unjust - oppressor, where absolute sovereignty is vested in an omnipotent ruler. By the clear rule of reason and the apparent text of the Sharī'ah, an illegitimate just rule is certainly superior to an illegitimate unjust one. It is obvious, by the experience and accurate precision and careful investigation, that nine-tenths of the despotic ruler's abuse of power will be reduced in a constitutionalist system. (Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī quoted in Boozari, 2011, p. 112)

Thus, for Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, justice was a prerequisite for a non-Islamic state to be acceptable from a religious point of view. On that point, he believed constitutionalism to be a just form of government because it embodied a collective and rational process of administering the affairs of Muslims, limiting the unchecked power of the sultan and ensuring the equitable distribution of power (Kadivar, 2005, p. 227). Once implemented, these measures would counter the oppression that had resulted from arbitrary rule.

### CONCLUSION

It would be difficult to overemphasise the significance of the elegant distinction that Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī drew between 'Islamic state' and 'non-Islamic state', which established the acceptability of a non-Islamic state from a religious point of view. According to his thought, as long as the hidden Imām has yet to return to Earth, the establishment of an Islamic state is impossible. In its place, pious and reasonable individuals may form a 'just non-Islamic state' by leveraging their collective intellectual faculties. In effect, this theological articulation secularises politics and denies both the scriptures and the religious authorities opportunities to claim leverage in the political sphere. In the main, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī

---

<sup>15</sup>Boozari uses the literal translation of the concept *ghaire mashrū'e*, which is misleading given that 'illegitimate' means unauthorised by law (Sharī'a), i.e. not in accordance with accepted standards or rules. In addition to supporting constitutionalism, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī did not feel that it contradicted Islamic principles and laws. His chief contribution to constitutionalism was, in effect, to show that it was in compliance with and authorised by Islamic teachings. Thus, it is correct to treat the terms Islamic state (ruled exclusively by infallibles) and non-Islamic state (ruled by fallible individuals) as dichotomous concepts.

utilised intellect and reasoning to support constitutionalism as a necessary mechanism to fulfil a number of theological canons. It is for this reason that his politico-religious discourse rarely drew upon religious sources such as the Qur'ān, ḥadīths, Islamic traditions, and/or history. As Hairei suggests, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī and his co-thinkers were very concerned with the welfare of the people. In addition to fuelling their engagement with constitutionalism, their determination to see the people treated justly reified their pursuance and protection of the nation's interests, rather than prompting them to establish a Shī'ite political doctrine (Hairei, 1976: 152). Finally, it should be noted that Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī became involved in constitutionalism not because he believed in a particular place for the 'ulamā in politics, but as part of his perceived religious duty (Farzaneh, 2010: 239–242; Kadivar, 2006: 17). He assumed this responsibility based on certain overarching precepts, e.g. 'enjoining good and forbidding evil', as well as a desire to fulfil his responsibility as a model for emulation (*marja' taqlīd*) who played a pivotal role in the uṣūlī school. In contrast to the akhbārī school that would not tolerate individual rational reasoning, the uṣūlī school ensure continuous guidance of the believers and provide flexibility in the case of pertinent political questions (Bayat & Moussavi, 1989, p. 281).

Another important point to note is that in the process of democratising Shī'ite political theology, Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī never strayed from the tenets of the Shī'ite system of belief. He articulated his pro-democratic political theology within the conceptual framework of the Islamic perception of politics. This is why his politico-religious discourse—along with that of his co-thinkers—was widely accepted. It spurred the mobilisation of 'ulamā and the masses—both in Najaf and throughout Iran—in support of constitutionalism. Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's high religious credentials enabled him to lend a solid religious foundation to a pro-constitutional theology, effectively restricted anti-constitutionalists' ability to argue for the religious credibility of their counter discourse. Although the anti-constitutionalist faction did include some influential 'ulamā who utilised religious rhetoric to challenge Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī's pro-democratic discourse, its members never had the audacity to charge him with heresy or treason.

The constitutionalism movement's failure to consolidate a democratic polity in the Shī'ite world led to disappointed 'ulamā being pushed back into their apolitical corner in the seminaries. This disappointment

then paved the way for the emergence of radical Islamism decades later, and particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It should be noted, however, that the importance of the pro-democratic theological articulation advanced by constitutionalists was not completely diminished by the setbacks that followed the constitutional movement. The reconceptualisation of *Shīʿite* political theology during the constitutional movement provided a powerful conceptual and empirical model for supporting democratic principles from a religious standpoint. Today, it continues to constitute a powerful discourse within the mainstream orthodoxy of the *Shīʿite* world. This is especially noticeable in the politico-religious thought and deeds of the most eminent and influential contemporary *Shīʿite* leader, Grand Ayatollah Sistānī. Similar to Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, Sistānī has not authored a specific publication or treatise detailing his political theology. Yet, his statements, deeds, and active intervention in the politics of post-Saddam Iraq are indicative of a political theology similar to that of Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī. A thorough investigation of Sistānī's political theology would be needed to delineate this statement further; however, that falls beyond the scope of this chapter.

Apropos support for pro-democratic theology, it is important to note that it is not confined to the continuation of constitutional theology within the orthodoxy of the *Shīʿite* world. There is a new generation of *ʿulamā* who, together with Muslim scholars and intellectuals, argue for inclusive secular democracy with the intention of emancipating religion from the detrimental impact of political power. There can be no disputing that radical Islamism has managed to dominate Muslim polity for the past few decades, but one could argue that it has also urged reformist scholars to reconceptualise religion-state-society relations in an effort to accommodate democratic principles within an Islamic framework. Not only are adherents to radical Islamism shrinking in numbers, but its geographic scope and sphere of influence are also waning. There is a reason to hope that, in the foreseeable future, pro-democratic theologies will prevail over anti-democratic Islamic theologies. A final point to stress is that Muslims' democratic learning curve, rather than being confined to theological reformulation, generally includes endeavours to facilitate the engagement of increasing numbers of Islamic movements and parties in democratic processes in various Muslim-majority countries as well. Both Islamic movements and reformist scholars are engaged in deep conversation, foreshadowing the possibility of not only the coexistence of Islamic teachings and democratic principles, but also the inevitability of the

emergence of a democratic Islamic polity that will secure the future well-being of believers.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abadian, H. (1995). *Mabani-e nazari-e hukumat-e mashroteh va mashro'a* [Theoretical foundations of Islamic and constitutional governance]. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney.
- Abisaab, R. J. (1994). The Ulama of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran, 1501-1736: Marginality, migration and social change. *Iranian Studies*, 27(4), 103-122.
- Abrahamian, E. (1979). The causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10(03), 381-414.
- Adamiyat, F. (1985). *Ideolozhy-e nehzat-e mashrutiyat-e Iran* [The ideology of constitutional movement in Iran]. Tehran: Payam.
- Aghnajafi-Ghochani, S. M. H. (1999). *Bargi az tarikh-e moa'aser* [A page of contemporary history]. Tehran: Haft.
- Ajodani, L. (2004). *'Ulamā va enghelab-e Mashrutiyat-e Iran* ['Ulamā and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution]. Tehran: Akhtaran.
- Akhavi, S. (1988). Islam, politics and society in the thought of Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Taliqani and Ali Shariati. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 24(4), 404-431.
- Al-e Ghafur, S. M. (2007). *Jaygab-e siasi-e alem-e dini dar do maktabe Akhbari va Usuli* [The political position of clergy in the two Akhbari and Usuli Schools]. Qom: Boustān-e ketāb.
- Algar, H. (2007). Religious forces in eighteenth and nineteenth century Iran. In P. Avery, G. Hambly, & C. P. Melville (Eds.), *The Cambridge history of Iran* (Vol. 7, pp. 705-731). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ali-Abadi, A. S., & Esfandiari, R. (2015). An investigation into the principle of avoiding more corruption by means of allowing less corrupt behaviour from the viewpoint of Islamic jurisprudential schools. *Journal of Islamic Denominations*, 2(3), 9-32.
- Arjomand, S. A. (1981). The Ulama's traditionalist opposition to parliamentarism: 1907-1909. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 17(2), 174-190.
- Bashiriyeh, H. (2009). *Jameh shenasi-e siyasi: naghsh-e نیروهای اجتماعی در زندگی سیاسی* [Political sociology: The role social forces in political life]. Tehran: Nashr-e Nay.
- Basteh Negar, M. (2016). *Andisheb-haye ijtimaei va siyasi-e Āyatullāh Sayyid Mahmūd Ṭāliqānī* [Socio-political thought of Āyatullāh Sayyid Mahmūd Ṭāliqānī]. Tehran: Samadiyeh.
- Bayat, M. (1991). *Iran's first revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Bayat, M., & Moussavi, A. K. (1989). The Usuli-Akhbari controversy. In S. H. Nasr, D. Hamid, & S. V. R. Nasr (Eds.), *Expectation of the millennium: Shi'ism in history* (pp. 280–287). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Beck, G. (2015). *It is about Islam: Exposing the truth about ISIS, Al Qaeda, Iran, and the Caliphate*. New York: Simon & Schuster Audio.
- Binder, L. (1988). *Islamic liberalism: A critique of development ideologies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Boozari, A. (2011). *Shi'i jurisprudence and constitution: Revolution in Iran*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Browne, E. G. (1919). *A literary history of Persia*. Cambridge University Press, The University Press.
- Bunzel, C. (2015). *From paper state to caliphate: The ideology of the Islamic State*. Washington, DC: The Brookings.
- Cole, J. (1985). Shi'i clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbari-Usuli conflict reconsidered. *Iranian Studies*, 18(1), 3–34.
- Cole, J. R. (2002). *Sacred space and holy war: The politics, culture and history of Shi'ite Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Cole, J. R. I. (2006). *The ayatollahs and democracy in Iraq*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Dabashi, H. (1993). *Theology of discontent: The ideological foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: New York University Press.
- Dabashi, H. (2015). *The IS cutthroats and the cotton candy professor*. Retrieved January 20, 2016, from <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2015/3/2/the-is-cutthroats-and-the-cotton-candy-professor#sthash.F1fzBSy6.dpuf>.
- Daryabeygi, M. (2007). *Hayat-e siyasi, farhangi va ijtimaii Akhund-Khurasani* [Political, cultural and social life of Akhund-Khurasani]. Tehran: Researching and Development Institute of Social Sciences.
- Derakhsheh, J. (2001). Jostari dar tafakor-e siasi-e 'Ulamāy-e shi'a az mashrotiyat ta 1320 [An inquiry about the political thought of Shiite 'Ulamā between the Constitutional Revolution and 1320]. *Imam Sadeq Quarterly*, 7(13 & 14), 189–224.
- El-Badawy, E., Comerford, M., & Welby, P. (2015). *Inside the Jihadi Mind: Understanding ideology and Propaganda*. Retrieved December 21, 2015, from <http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Inside%20the%20Jihadi%20Mind.pdf>.
- Enayat, H. (1982). *Modern Islamic political thought*. London: The Macmillan Press.
- Eshkevari, H. Y. (2009). Farbehi din va khoroj az korsi-e akhlagh, maanaviyat va edalat [Wealthy religion and abandonment of ethics, spirituality and justice].
- Farzaneh, M. M. (2010). *Shi'ite clerical authority and modern politics: Muhammad Kazim Khurasani of Najaf and his support of the Iranian Constitutional*

- Revolution of 1906-1911*. Ph.D., University of California, Ann Arbor. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database.
- Farzaneh, M. M. (2015). *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the clerical leadership of Khurasani*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Fazlhashemi, M. (2010). Faith or Reason? The Shi'ite tradition of political ideas in the light of the theological debate. *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, 3(1), 143–161.
- Feirahi, D. (2005). Mabani Fiqih Mashrotehkhahi az didgah-e Akhund-Khurasani [Jurisprudential foundations of the constitutionalism: Akhund-Khurasani's perspectives]. In T. University (Ed.), *Barrasi mabani-e fekri va ejtemaei Mashrotiyat Iran* [Review: Intellectual and social foundations of Iran's Constitutionalism] (pp. 192–214). Tehran University.
- Feirahi, D. (2010). *Din va dolat dar asr-e modern: dolat-e Islamic va tolidat-e fekr-e siyasi* [Religion and state in the modern age: Islamic state and development of political thought]. Tehran: Rokhdad-e No.
- Feirahi, D. (2016). *Astaneye tajaddod* [Threshold of modernity]. Tehran: Nashreney.
- Ghazal, A., & Sadiki, L. (2016). *ISIS: The 'Islamic State' between orientalism and the interiority of MENA's intellectuals*. Retrieved January 19, 2016, from [http://interviews.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/23616/isis\\_the-islamic-state-between-orientalism-and-the](http://interviews.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/23616/isis_the-islamic-state-between-orientalism-and-the).
- Ghobadzadeh, N. (2013). Religious secularity: A vision for revisionist political Islam. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 39(10), 1005–1027.
- Ghobadzadeh, N. (2015). *Religious secularity: A theological challenge to the Islamic state*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ghobadzadeh, N., & Rahim, L. Z. (2012). Islamic reformation discourses: Popular sovereignty and religious secularisation in Iran. *Democratization*, 19(2), 334–351.
- Gleave, R. (2007). *Scripturalist Islam: The history and doctrines of the Akhbhari Shi'i school*. Leiden: Brill.
- Goudarzi, M., Jawan, J., & Ahmad, Z. (2010). Ayatollah Khomeini and the foundation of legitimacy of power and government. *Canadian Social Science*, 5(6), P103–P114.
- Hairi, A.-H. (1976). Why did the Ulama participate in the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909? *Die Welt des Islams*, 17(1/4), 127–154.
- Hairi, A.-H. (1977). *Shi'ism and constitutionalism in Iran: a study of the role played by the Persian residents of Iraq in Iranian politics*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Hairi, A.-H. (1984). "*Khurāsānī*" *encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.). Retrieved May 27, 2016, from [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/khurasani-SIM\\_4337](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/khurasani-SIM_4337).
- Harris, S., & Nawaz, M. (2015). *Islam and the future of tolerance: A dialogue*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



- Heern, Z. M. (2015). *The emergence of modern Shi'ism: Islamic reform in Iraq and Iran*. London: Oneworld.
- Hojjati, A. (2011). Eghdamat-e Akhund-Khurasani baraye defaa' az esteghlal-e keshvar [Akhund-Khurasani's deeds to protect country's independence]. In A. K. I. l. Congress (Ed.), *The collection of articles of the international congress of akhund khurasani: Social and political* (pp. 169–200). Qom: Academy of Islamic Science and Cultural.
- Hoseinizadeh, S. M. A. (2010). *Political Islam in Iran*. Qom: Mofid University Press.
- Hourani, A. (1986). From Jabal 'Amil to Persia. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 49(1), 133–140.
- Jamshidi, M. (2001). Chalesh ba saitar-e Gharb [Challenging the supremacy of the West]. *Kaiban-e Farhangi*, 28(292), 44–53.
- Javadzadeh, A. (2012). *Hakemiyat-e siyasi-e faghiban az didgab-e Akhund-Khurasani* [Political leadership of jurists in Akhund-Khurasani's view]. Qom: Imam Khomeini Educational Research Institute.
- Kadivar, M. (1999). *Hokumat-e Velaae* [Theocratic state]. Tehran: Nashr-e Nay.
- Kadivar, M. (2005). Andisheh Siyasi Akhund-Khurasani [The political thought of Akhund-Khurasani]. In S. Azarmeh (Ed.), *Barrasiy-e mabaniy-e fekri va ijtimai mashrutiyat-e Iran* [An investigation of social and intellectual foundations of Iran's constitutionalism] (pp. 215–259). Tehran: Researching and Development Institute of Humanism Science.
- Kadivar, M. (2006). *Siasat-nameh Khurasani: qgata'ate siasi dar athare Akhund Mulla Mohammad Kazem Khurasani, saebe Kefayeh* [Khurasani's political philosophy: Political statements in the works of Akhund Mulla Mohammad Kazim]. Tehran: Kavir.
- Kasravi, A. (1984). *Tarikh-e Mashrute-ye Iran* [History of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution]. Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Kermani, N.-u.-I. (1978). *Tarikh-e Bidaari-e Iraniaan* [The history of the Iranian awakening] (Vol. 2). Tehran: Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran.
- Khalaji, M. (2006). *The last Marja: Sistani and the end of traditional religious authority in Shiism*. Washington, D.C: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.
- Khomeini, R. (2000). *Sabifeh Nour* [Book of light] (Vol. 10). Tehran: Moasseh Tanzim va Nashre Asare Imam.
- Khomeini, R. (2006). *Sabifeh Nour* [Book of light] (Vol. 6). Tehran: Moasseh Tanzim va Nashre Asare Imam.
- Khomeini, R., & Algar, H. (1981). *Islam and revolution: Writings and declarations of Imam Khomeini*. Berkeley: Mizan Press.
- Lambton, A. K. S. (1981). *State and government in medieval Islam: An introduction to the study of Islamic political theory: The jurists*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Malek-Ahmadi, F. (2015). *Democracy and constitutional politics in Iran: A weberian analysis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MirAhmadi, M. (2011). *Andisheh Siyasi Akhund-Khurasani* [The political thought of Akhund-Khurasani]. Qom: Academy of Islamic Sciences and Culture.
- Mohajernia, M. (2010). *Andisheh Siyasi Motafekeran-e Islami* [The political thought of Islamic thinkers] (Vol. 2). Qom: Academy of Islamic Sciences and Culture.
- Mottahedeh, R. (2000). *The mantle of the prophet*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Moussavi, A. K. (1985). The establishment of the position of Marja'iyat-i Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community. *Iranian Studies*, 18(1), 35–51.
- Nā'inī, M. M. H. (2003). *Tanbih al-Umma wa Tanzih al-Milla* [Admonishment of the Umma and the Purification of the Nation/Religious Community]. Qom: Boostan-e Kitab.
- Najafi, M. (1994). A critique and analysis of social democracy in the political thought of Mirza Naeini. *Journal of Las and Political Science Department*, 32(25), 193–218.
- Nasr, S. H., Hamid, D., & Nasr, S. V. R. (1989). *Expectation of the millennium: Shi'ism in history*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Newman, A. J. (1992). The nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī dispute in late Ṣafawid Iran. Part I: 'Abdallāh al-Samāhijī's 'Munyat al-Mumārīsīn'. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 55(1), 22–51. doi:10.2307/620475.
- Nourae, F. M. (1975). The constitutional ideas of a Shi'ite Mujtahid: Muhammad Husayn Na'inī. *Iranian Studies*, 8(4), 234–247.
- Rahim, L. Z., & Ghobadzadeh, N. (2016). Electoral theocracy and hybrid sovereignty in Iran. *Contemporary Politics*, 22(4), 450–468.
- Roy, O. (2015). *What is the driving force behind jihadist terrorism? A scientific perspective on the causes/circumstances of joining the scene*. Retrieved December 12, 2015, from <https://life.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/OLIVIER-ROY-what-is-a-radical-islamist.pdf>.
- Salehi, A. M. (2009). *Andisheh-haye Siyasi-e Shaykh Faḍlallāh al-Nūrī* [The political thought of Shaykh Faḍlallāh al-Nūrī]. Tehran: Islamic Revolution Document Center.
- Shahid al-Awwal, M. a. i. M. (1991). *Al-Durus al-shariyah fi fiqh al-Imamiyah* (Vol. 3). Qom: Daftar-e Entesharat-e Eslami.
- Shimamoto, T. (1987). Re-evaluation of Shaykh Fazl Al-Lah-E Nuri's position in the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. *Orient*, 23, 94–112.
- Shirkhani, A. (1998). Zendegi va andishe Āyatullāh Ṭāliqānī [Life and thought of Āyatullāh Ṭāliqānī]. *Ulom-e Siasi*, 2(1), 208–241.
- Shiroodi, M. (2003). Aray-e Siyasi Fughahay-e Ṣafawiye va ghajarieh [Political thought of jurists in Ṣafawid and Gajar eras]. *Revagh-e Andisheh*, 3(18), 95–108.

- Sobout, A. (2011). *Didgabhay-e Akhund-Khurasani va Shagerdanash* [Perspectives of Akhund-Khurasani and his disciples] (Unpublished Manuscript).
- Tabatabaee, M. (2005). *Barrasi ara-e Akhbari va Usuli* [Review of Akhbari and Usuli thought]. Tehran: Mostafa Tabatabaee.
- Tabatabaee, S. M. R., & Hojjati, A. (2012). Dalayel-e sazegari kukumat-e mashrouteh ba mabani Islamic dar andisheh siyasi Akhund-Khurasani [Reasons for the compatibility of constitutionalism and Islamic principle in the political thought of Akhund-Khurasani]. *A Quarterly for Shi'ite Studies*, 10(1), 37–68.
- Terhalle, M. (2007). Are the Shia rising? *Middle East Policy*, 14(2), 69–83.
- Thaghafi, S. M. (2011). Taasir-e tahavvolat-e tarikhi-ijtimaei bar zehniyyat-e Akhund-Khurasani [The impact of socio-historical developments on Akhund-Khurasani's mentality]. In A. K. I. I. Congress (Ed.), *The collection of articles of the international congress of akhund khurasani: Social and political* (pp. 143–168). Qom: Academy of Islamic Science and Cultural.
- Torkaman, M. (1983). *Treatise, manifestos, writings and press releases by Shaykh Faḍlallāh al-Nūrī*. Tehran: Rasa.
- Wood, G. (2015). What ISIS really wants. *Atlantic Monthly*, 315(2), 78–94.
- Zargari, G. H. (2008). *Rasa-e mashrutiyat* [Constitutionalism treaties]. Tehran: Researching and Development Institute of Humanism Science.

# Tunisia's Ennahda: Islamists Turning the Learning Curve of Democracy and Civic Habituation

*Larbi Sadiki*

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Islamism is the ideology of the *sabwah* or Islamic resurgence, and as such it has remained mostly 'fixed' and 'singular' in the minds of many scholars. This is a position that has intermittently been revised by dissenting scholars (Esposito & Piscatori, 1991). Generally, as an enduring and transnational socio-political phenomenon, Islamism has been the source of many of our most persistent stereotypes about Islam itself. Indeed,

---

<sup>1</sup>Thanks are due to the organizers of the Sydney conference in 2015 who invited me to contribute a paper with a similar title about Ennahda's democratic learning curve. I thank a few colleagues who read an early version of this article, namely Laurence Whitehead (Nuffield College, Oxford University); Amal Ghazal (Dalhousie University, Canada); and Mohammed Moussa (Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University). I alone, however, accept responsibility for any lacunae or mistakes.

---

L. Sadiki (✉)  
Qatar University, Doha, Qatar

Islamism seems to be constantly taken for granted that it is increasingly difficult to appreciate its diversity, complexity and once reformist agenda. Every decade had its ‘Islamist bogey’ on the ‘radar’ of security practitioners (El-Affendi, 2013). The rise of Muslim Brotherhood’s ‘secret apparatus’ or *al-Jihaz al-sirri* in the 1940s up to the present (al-Qaida, Da’ish) marked an epoch in which Islamism became stigmatized by proneness to violence, secrecy, and aversion to democracy. With the surge of extremist groups, Islamism has partly become for decades shrouded in ‘security’ concerns and accounts. Voices that associated Islamism with democracy have remained largely marginal (J. Anderson, 2006). A minority of exceptions that pioneered research on the nexus of Islamism and democracy tried to buck the dominant trend in the field of scholarship on political Islam (Esposito & Voll, 1996).

When Arab protesters revolted against dictatorship, many scholars and political practitioners alike turned their attention to ‘testing’ Islamists as potentially bona fide claimants or contestants of power (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013). To an extent, the best way of rethinking the conundrum of Islamism and democracy is through in-depth analyses of case studies—e.g. Islamist parties. Through generalization and reductionism many works that, in the pre-Arab spring world, propagated the incompatibility of Islamism and democracy have today become, more or less, otiose. At the current historical juncture, it is apposite to revise and question the reigning wisdom with its hegemonic political language, and ‘foundationalist’ (favouring Euro-American paradigms) prism,<sup>2</sup> both of which narrowly frame the contours of democratic discourse. In this vein, the chapter addresses three intertwined issues, focusing on (1) Islamism as a brand of discourse, highlighting its diverse representations, with the specific aim of stressing that it is neither fixed nor single; (2) knowledge-making and practices, questions that cannot be transcended easily when democracy is discussed; and (3) tentative empirical findings (derived from author’s use of two sessions of participant observation in Tunisia in May 2016) that give a flavour of Ennahda’s democratic thought-practice after the 2011 revolution, the most sustained of all Arab uprisings despite ups and downs (Charles, 2012), and share of violence (Gall, 2013). Some have argued that it veered off its initial path-breaking course (Dakhli, 2013).

---

<sup>2</sup>For more details on foundationalist discourses, see Sadiki (2004).

In this respect, Ennahda party seems to feature as a ‘trail-blazer’, inviting much scholarly attention (Piser). If there is such a thing as Tunisian ‘exceptionalism’, in the context of the Arab Spring, Ennahda, like its compatriot syndicalist movement, the Federated Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), (Chayes, 2014) forms part of its backbone. At the core of this ‘exceptionalism’ is the potential for coexistence of Islam and democracy (Stepan, 2012). True, the seminal ideologues who once invoked Islam’s teachings, values, laws and principles were opposed to the Westernizing practices and thought of the emerging postcolonial national-secular order. Founding fathers of Islamism, such as Imam Hassan Al-Banna, sought to reform and Islamize their society—and later on polity. For, they held a desire to found ideas and ideals to return Islam to the public as a beacon of morality, humanity, charity, justice, solidarity and renewal. They sought to found an Islamist ideology merely as a counterculture to colonialism, Westernization, namely secular politics. Ennahda seems to be dissenting from this worldview, as shall be explained below, even if it still clings, at least in rhetoric, to an Islamist ideal (McCarthy, 2015, pp. 449–451).

### ONE ISLAM, MANY ISLAMISMS: A CONTEXTUALIZATION

The terms ‘Islamism’ and ‘political Islam’ are generally used interchangeably. They are used throughout in preference to a number of other terms such as ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘fundamentalist movements’. The terms are used here to denote a particular brand of thought and praxis aimed at ‘Islamizing’ polity, economy and society. A process referred to in Arabic as *‘ta’seeḥ*, which opposes privatization of religion. ‘Islamism’ is not monolithic: the diversity and nuances within it must be accounted for. Islamists differ in terms of thought and praxis. Their political behaviour ranges from the most apolitical and peaceful (Tableegh) to the most extremist (al-Qaida, Da’ish or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant—ISIL). What is most noticeable about political Islam is the endeavour to undertake an inversion of the earlier ‘dis-establishment’ of Islam from the political realm. If dis-establishment refers to the separation of religion from politics, the inversion of ‘dis-establishment’ is generally about the blurring of the boundaries of the religious and the political. It can thus be said that the Western notion of ‘rendering to God what’s God’s, and rendering to Caesar what is Caesar’s’ has no resonance in Islamist thought. Dis-establishment of religion was coterminous with the brand

of nation and state-building that followed either de-colonization in most of the Muslim World or the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire when the Caliphate was abolished in the mid-1920s. *'Ijtihad'* refers to the operationalization of the Islamic instrument to render a rational meaning to religious texts by the individual or believer. *'Shari'ah'* is associated with Islamic law. *'Jihad'* is spiritual struggle with non-violent connotations. Finally, *'ummah'* is the Islamic community that is bound by faith and whose membership is conferred upon adherents of Islam who uphold the notion of *'tawheed'* (Unity of God).

The semantic and conceptual field is literally replete with attempts to understand 'political Islam', which some imprecisely refer to as 'fundamentalism', a misnomer that has receded in explanatory power and linguistic clarity. As Table 4.1 shows scholars have all left their mark on the attempt to define 'political Islam'. The French school, through Roy and Kepel, suffers from a 'fetish' for labels, often generalizations that all in some or another highlight the 'failing' nature of 'political Islam' and its extremist tendencies. What is positive in the various understandings is the dynamic and diverse nature of the phenomenon. What is negative is the presence of a derogatory residue in the term 'radical' and 'radicalism', perhaps from the days of communism. Radicals may want reform. But the bottom line is that they work against the centre of the establishment, deploy illegal and non-constitutional strategies, and even when they embrace democracy, they tend to fail in it or misuse it.

Islamists practise 'revisionism', and this is something that continues to elude observers and scholars of Islamist movements and groups. I find Bayat's notion of 'post-Islamism' (Bayat, 2005, p. 5) somewhat awkward. It assumes there is one Islamism. Islamism cedes to Islamisms, a concept that captures the essence of what I call the 'constructivist' nature of political Islam. That is, it is an ever-changing phenomenon, an open-ended project. Emphasis must be placed on *open-ended-ness*. Islamists, peaceful and violent, anti-systemic or systemic, are forced by local and global dynamics to adjust thought and practice or risk extinction. 'Post-Islamism', as Bayat puts it, refers to 'the birth, out of the Islamist experience, of a qualitatively different discourse and politics.' He gives the example of how Islamists look for a synthesis of Islam and Western ideas in democracy. I think it is more than a synthesis—there is a never-ending dialectic. Fundamentally, however, whilst violent groups, such as al-Qaida, tend to assume an exclusivist and singular view of religious truth, a majority of Islamists is renouncing such a practice. However, Bayat has

**Table 4.1** Key understandings of 'fundamentalism'

<i>Scholar/year of publication</i>	<i>View of 'political Islam'</i>	<i>Critique against scholar's approach</i>
Eric Davis, 1984 <sup>a</sup>	"Islamic radicalism": stresses revolutionary zeal	Not nuanced as if radical change is singular for all forces of political Islam, with stress put on 'militancy', i.e. negative
R. Hrair Dekmejian, 1985 <sup>b</sup>	"fundamentalism" used interchangeably with Arabic translation " <i>usuliyyah</i> "	Distinction between 'passive' and 'militant' strands with stress on 'regenerative' capacity
Emmanuel Sivan, 1985 <sup>c</sup>	"fundamentalism" is a continuum with two poles: "conservative" and "extreme" radicals	Continuum idea is innovative and captures nuances but ignores overlap between 'conservative' and 'extreme' 'radicals'
Olivier Roy, 1988 <sup>d</sup>	"fundamentalism" equated with "Islamism" as "neo-fundamentalism": ever changing zealous and revolutionary forces	Dynamism and difference are stressed; tends towards negative labelling: "neo-fundamentalism" is not any clearer than "fundamentalism"
Ervand Abrahamian, 1989 <sup>e</sup>	"fundamentalism" is made up of both liberal and radical forces	Boxes 'political Islam' into neat groups of radicals: clerical, lay-religious, and secular. 'Clerical populism' ignores historiography of Islam's learned scholars
Martin Marty & Scott Appleby, 1991 <sup>f</sup>	"fundamentalism" refers to anti-state politicization	Dilutes spiritual or religious ethos of political Islam
John Esposito & John Voll, 1996 <sup>g</sup>	Self-identified Islamists are not a monolith; many Islamists accept democracy	'Democracy' is neither single nor fixed—just like Islamism which is diverse
Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser, 1995 <sup>h</sup>	"fundamentalism" denotes "mutual siege"	Lacks contextualization; use of 'siege': generalization and imprecise abstraction
Youssef Choueiri, 1997 <sup>i</sup>	"fundamentalism" denotes radicalized revivalism with totalitarian tendencies	'Ideologizes' political Islam in a fixed way; stresses sequential linearity
John Esposito, 1999 <sup>j</sup>	"fundamentalism" is dynamic; subject to increased 'radicalization': "revivalism" to "neo-revivalism" to extremism	Ignores parallel process of increased 'moderation', and the interplay between processes leading to extremism and moderation

(continued)



**Table 4.1** (continued)

<i>Scholar/year of publication</i>	<i>View of 'political Islam'</i>	<i>Critique against scholar's approach</i>
Barry Rubin, 2002 <sup>k</sup>	"fundamentalism" refers to oscillation between revolutionary militancy and outright terrorism	Apocalyptic view, that leans towards a 'martial' view of all things Islamic
Gilles Kepel, 2002 <sup>l</sup>	"fundamentalism" <i>qua</i> 'jihad'-bent movement is dying: transition to 'post-Islamism'	Captures idea of dynamism; but Kepel's work is yet to be deconstructed properly for its generalization and orientalism, and fixation with 'jihad'

<sup>a</sup>Davis (1984)

<sup>b</sup>Dekmejian (1985, pp. 3–7)

<sup>c</sup>Sivan (1985, pp. 49–51, 183–184)

<sup>d</sup>Roy (1998)

<sup>e</sup>Abrahamian (1989, pp. 40–49)

<sup>f</sup>Many and Appleby (1991, p. xixiv)

<sup>g</sup>Esposito and Voll (1996)

<sup>h</sup>Fuller and Lesser (1995)

<sup>i</sup>Choueiri (1999, pp. xvi–64)

<sup>j</sup>Esposito (1999)

<sup>k</sup>Rubin (2002)

<sup>l</sup>Kepel (2004); also see by Kepel (1993)

a point in observing that Islamists are increasingly tending to 'acknowledge...ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion, and compromise in principles and practice' (Bayat, 2005, p. 5). This quest for crystallizing a 'centrist' position, in accordance of what is termed in Islamist parlance '*wasatiyyah*' (literally moderate), can be noted in the less successful attempt by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (EMB) before the 2011 revolution. In its quest for acquiring legal status as a political party, the EMB included Copts within its ranks; fielded female candidates in the country's elections; and developed a dialogue with Western diplomats, especially Americans.

The 9/11 tragic events have re-opened the proverbial gates of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) everywhere in the world. This trend is mostly manifest in the rich panoply of religious discourse and counter-discourse in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. What is most specific about the return of *ijtihad* is the phenomenon of Islam as a shared terrain for all discourses, top-down and bottom-up. All claimants of *ijtihad* deploy

Islam to legitimate their thought and their praxis and de-legitimise opponents. Discursively, a variety of 'islams' (with small 'i' to use Dale Eickelman's anthropology of Islam) is at play. Elsewhere in the Muslim World contestation has largely been most fierce between claimants of some form of 'modern' (Muslim Brotherhood movements), 'radical' (Salafi & Wahhabi), cultural-spiritual (Sufi brotherhoods), or missionary (Tableegh & Da'wah) brands of Islam against an 'Ataturkist'-type of socio-political modernization.

### *Contextualization of 'Political Islam'*

The phenomenon of 'political Islam' must be read within specific contexts. This is vital for avoiding the pitfalls of generalization and reductionism—the flaws of some Orientalists (Western discourses about the 'Orient') and Occidentalists (Eastern discourses of the 'Occident' or 'West' by the 'East'). Islam has thus far served as a legitimator of state-building along secular-nationalist lines (all former and current liberation movements prior to state-formation) or against the state (e.g. Somalia, Afghanistan and Yemen) as well as a legitimator of political reform below the state. It must be pointed out that Islam is the shared ideological repository of political identity and value-assignment in most Muslim states, including self-professed secular states before the 2011 revolutions. In some Muslim states, where religion in the form of the Salafi puritanical creed provides a *raison d'être*, the state has coached religion into 'clientship'.

Yet in other states, religion was dis-established. But the state, despite declaratory policies in favour of secularization, activates Islamic idioms and metaphors for the purpose of shoring up support from the public at large, and the religious voices and institutions in particular. Bourguiba was a staunch secularist—but one influenced by historical reformist figures such as Khayr al-Din (van Krieken, 1976). He was one who meddled in religion. He publicly advocated an image of Tunisia in which women were unveiled rather than veiled, and of renouncing the fasting of Ramadan (one of the five pillars of Islam). The Islamism that emerged in the former French colony reflected the local context: staunchly anti-secular politics that sought to efface religious and cultural identity. It went further, and mostly via peaceful means, to argue the case for a place for religion in society as is the case in the European Union where separation of the sacred and the political does not largely curtail

religious freedom or worship. However, the many veil sagas over the years in France force these very Islamists to re-evaluate what is called ‘secular fundamentalism’. Like in Tunisia, non-establishment forces of Islam advance a different vision of polity, society and economy shaped by the dream of partial emulation of the ‘Medinan’ city-state built by the Prophet Muhammad by reference to legality, communal solidarity, mutual compassion, and toleration and protection of difference. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, older than the state and steadfast in its quest for an Islamist state, has contested the non-Islamic nature of the state from the time of King Farouk. It has been involved with the state in processes of mutual inclusion and exclusion, which entailed resort to violence during the 1950s and up to the 1970s, and again in 2013 prior to the coup that deposed the country’s first elected Islamist president (Brown, 2013). During Sadat’s reign, and before the peace treaty with Israel, the Brotherhood welcomed the margin of existence given to it by the late Sadat. It used him to rebuild its disorganized and weakened institutions and demobilized and largely oppressed membership. He used the Brotherhood to counter leftist forces that questioned and threatened his power in the immediate post-Nasser years. He, too, turned to Islam’s idioms to shore up his legitimacy and popularity; and he bankrolled al-Azhar to invest in another formidable ally, recruiting to his service a revered Islamic institution with a large bureaucracy and vital affective resources. His tax concessions to the resurging forces of Islam led to the proliferation of private mosques, eventual hot-beds of anti-systemic religious forces, including his very assassins in October 1981.

The anti-systemic forces of political Islam that thrived under Sadat have today all but gone. The notorious *al-Jama’ah al-Islamiyyah* (the Islamic Group)—along with Islamic Jihad, the *Takfeer wa al-Hijra* (Excommunication and Emigration)—which up to the late 1990s fought the state and targeted state symbols, including tourism as a Westernizing facet and activity—have gradually laid down their arms under a policy of ‘*tawbah*’ (repentance). The hundreds and thousands of activists who committed to the overthrow of the state in Mubarak’s Egypt have been tamed. Moreover, many of their leaders have become ‘defenders’ of social peace, with the state, before and after the 2011 revolution, benefiting a great deal from this unlikely source of favourable propaganda. This is one of the successes of ousted Egyptian president Mohamed Hosni Mubarak—taming anti-systemic and violent Islamists. Islamism is

often incubated in local matrices that must be understood. These matrices may 'condition' certain practices, both peaceful and violent.

In Algeria, a unique case of a state and society that rose from the embers and the ravages of a brutal war of liberation, a quasi praxis of violence (in the name of a spurious notion of '*jihad*' since Muslim killed Muslim) followed the cancellation of the second round of elections in early 1992, which would have confirmed the FIS's parliamentary majority. The state chose violence—through a coup—and the Islamists followed suit. The rest is history. The state has not flinched as the Arab Spring proved infectious (Volpi, 2013). In neighbouring Tunisia, despite limited use of violence in the late 1980s by Ennahdah, without leadership endorsement, the Islamists tended to favour peaceful engagement, even emigration over anti-state armed tactics. Tunisia prior to the 2011 revolution was assumed to be more or less the most stable Arab state, and part of the credit was owed to the peaceful ways of its Islamists. There were others, of course, who expressed misgivings about the outcome of Tunisia's revolution (Mullin & Rouabah, 2014). In contrast to Algeria, Tunisia was largely spared the brutality of liberation war in Algeria, next door. Why Islamists tend to be violent requires contextualization. Violence, extremism and intransigence are not givens that are invariably and indiscriminately 'cemented' to the forces of political Islam. They must not be treated as such. Accordingly, the linguistic field itself deployed by the security apparatuses that today engage with Islamism calls for revision. Islamism and Islamists are socially, spatially and temporally constructed. There is no 'one "Islamist" size that fits all.'

### *Between 'Political Islam' and 'Muslim Politics'*

Eickelman and Piscatori view 'Muslim politics' as involving 'the competition and contest over both the interpretation of religious symbols and the control of the institutions that produce and sustain them'. Consequently, 'Muslim Politics' is a sophisticated analysis of the ever-changing correlation between the sacred and the profane in the Muslim world. Piscatori and Eickelman advance the idea that the politics of language that embed the expression and organization of Muslim politics must be 'deconstructed'. The Muslim world has witnessed a process of 'objectification of consciousness', a process leading to fundamental questions in the minds of large numbers of believers. This objectification has come about as a result of mass education and wider channels

of communication in the Muslim World, rendering exegesis widespread, especially as religious authority has itself been subjected to fragmentation. The learned monopolies of the past are receding. Religious discourse is wide-open and open-ended. As they put it, the levelling of the playing field has led to an element of danger owed to heightened contestation of the symbols and idioms of Islam. This contestation cultivates poly-centricity, and this poly-centricity, in return, spawns contestation. The two work in tandem, reifying a more plural community of inquisitive and active Muslims who leave not the question of religious decision to religious elites. The resulting diversity produces and enriches interpretation and understanding of the experience of being Muslim in the modern and post-modern 'movement'. As if so-called 'sacred authority' has lost its sanctity. Sanctity of text is to be separated and differentiated from the sanctity of revelation and text. Context matters. Text is given meaning within temporal and spatial contexts. Meanings and symbols are deployed by radically different Muslim actors and agents for fundamentally different ends. Sacred authority has multiple uses. It has the potentiality for being used as the medium both for maintaining state power as well as challenging or winning it. Their processes of 'protest and bargaining' underscore the dynamics of internal struggles within Muslim communities everywhere for control of production and application of religious symbols. Fragmentation of religious authority has pluralized as well as enabled open discussion about how to be Muslim according to time and space, and the demands of both religious identity and modernity.

'Muslim Politics', aided by the dynamic of objectification of Muslim consciousness, has produced a transnational Islam. In this newly carved space of globality and trans-nationalism, voiced Islam rivals traditional printed Islam. It is within this space that the travel of the sacred idioms, symbols and metaphors of 'islams' (as interpreted and experienced locally not globally) opens vistas for both affinity with and hostility to the norms of globalism, modernism and internationalism and the norms underpinning them. How 'fundamentalism' is produced by which metaphors and symbols in which temporal and spatial contexts call for appreciating the endeavour of wedding the ideals of pristine, puritanical and textual Islam with the challenges and pressures of the daily lived 'islams' from Bali to Cairo. In the midst of multiple 'islams' (as Eickelman and Piscatori use this term), there exists a horizontal trans-nationalism forming a loose universal Muslim consciousness. This produces what has been

described by some observers as ‘an intercalation of civilizations in which debates become more at hand and more complex’. This ‘intercalation’ of ‘islams’ and ‘modernities’ are misinterpreted with telling effect, feeding the familiar bias and depiction of a global Islamic ‘terror’ threat to world peace and civilization. This, in turn, reproduces the implicit notion of more than one level of Muslim consciousness.

### FROM AL-BANNA TO QUTB AND ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Sayyid Qutb stands for thought and action. He may come across as sitting astride Islam and the modern world. Qutb understands both. His treatise on modernity’s materialism reveals sharp insight. He is probably the first Muslim scholar to predict back in the early 1960s that communism, and to an extent party democracy, was doomed to failure and collapse. He develops a vision for an idealized Muslim state. To that end, he believed in a new paradigm along with a new praxis for the reification of the Muslim state. Only living under God’s law and under the banner of an Islamic state would solve the Muslim community’s problems of sovereignty, identity, religiosity, justice and Godly rule (*hakimiyyah*) (Moussalli, 1992). Qutb entreated the Muslims to work hard towards the objective of emulating a comprehensive form of Islam as practised in the time of the prophet: ‘Islam is an integrated and comprehensive system that in tradition of the *salafiyah* should be understood exclusively from the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*’ (Jackson, 2006, p. 199). In *Milestones* (*Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq*) (Qutb, 1991), in some tracts, Qutb permits fighting against non-Muslims. On this account, many would disagree with Qutb’s belligerence against ‘Peoples of the Book’. This, however, is not the justification for Bin Laden and Co. in declaring war against what they called in the 1990s ‘the Jews and crusaders’. Qutb’s world and mindset were shaped by surrounding realities of colonialism, including occupation of Palestine.

While this radical side of Qutb’s discourse is what many Western critics focus on (interpreting *Milestones* as a handbook for fundamentalism and terrorism), the discourse he emits in his other seminal but overlooked work *Social Justice* is one of humanity and care. Like Al-Banna whose brand of Islam is one that ‘cares for health and well-being’ (Fifth Conference in al-Banna, 1987), Qutb invokes the Qur’an, especially the Godly commandments emphasizing communal obligation and the needs to sustain a good community and to care and exercise compassion:

‘Everyone of you is a shepherd and everyone of you will be held responsible for his flock—he who strives on behalf of the widows or the poor is like one who fights for the cause of Allah’ (Qutb, 2000). ‘Western civilization is unable to present any healthy values for the guidance of mankind [...] In short, all man-made individual or collective theories have proved to be failures’. Thus in *Milestones* Sayyid Qutb seems to engineer or construct a brand of reformist Muslim politics. The aim is to respond to what he considers to be a universal crisis of deficiency in the values of humanity and spirituality. Indeed, *Milestones* departs from the premise that man-made laws have failed, necessitating a wider search for meaning, delivery and superior values that ultimately lead to God for guidance. Another key premise, which Qutb shares with Al-Banna, is the necessity to ‘halt at the lines fixed by Allah and the limits fixed by the Holy Prophet’. For guidance, Qutb returns to the Qur’an and its basic teachings. He is aided by the empirical examples of the first Muslim community and Islamic order constructed by the Prophet and his companions. The aim is revival of the moral perfection of pristine Islam. Stress therefore is on the need for God’s law to govern all aspects of human life—the sacred and profane.

Unlike Qutb, Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, pragmatically prioritizes maximization of public utility and, to this end, contends that ‘Islam never avoids borrowing from any good system, provided it does not clash with its general principle and laws’. By contrast, in *Milestones* Qutb is adamant that all man-made systems and theories form a *jahiliyyah* (pagan order). For him, *jihad* against the pagan society is necessary. Only ‘true Muslims’, who abide by the law of God and the traditions of the Holy Prophet, are outside the realm of the decay and spiritual pollution of paganism. This is the pool of faith and piety Qutb endows with the potential to grow in numbers to eventually partake in his quest for reform of Muslim societies, ridding it of all un-Godly laws, knowledge and government. Qutb’s *jahiliyyah* includes Muslim and non-Muslim states as well as Western imperialists, reminding us of Qutb’s anti-colonial prism.

Qutb places human nature (*fitrah*) in the centre of the quest for delivery in every sense, spiritually, politically and socially. It is this God-given capacity and disposition for enacting God’s laws that render believers agents of positive transformation. But this agency and the praxis that goes with it are all instruments for self-discovery in a cosmos in which revelation must be humans’ main frame of reference. So a combination

of pre-determinism—the Godly sanctions of what is acceptable and reprehensible set out in revelation—and determinism, the will to act in a Qur’anic fashion, enjoining the good and preventing wrongdoing. Thus the assignment of vicegerency (*khilafah*) on earth is truly enacted by the believers. That vicegerency is not possible without an Islamic state that implements and reflects God’s sovereignty and authority (*hakimiyyah*). Mastery is God’s, and is not divisible. God’s sovereignty is an essential precondition for a socio-political order in which all humans are equal by virtue of equality in powerlessness before God and equality in submission to the one and only authority, God’s laws. Qutb’s worldview, however, does not denude humans of all power. They are on earth to enact God’s rule, a purpose for which they have been endowed with a positive disposition to enjoin the good and work for the good of man, as well as with God-given subservience only to God and not to fellow-human beings. Hence—as elaborated in his seminal *Milestones*—the phrase God is greatest is in a manifesto for reclaiming God-given ennoblement, humanity and dignity. No Caesars are greater than man; and no earthly kings.

Qutb remains misunderstood. In Post-9/11, he is caricatured as if he plotted the mayhem heaped on New Yorkers in 2001, or as if he penned the plans for terror against Americans (Irwin, 2001). Of course, the context of inequality, authoritarian secular nationalism, colonialism and Muslim disunity around him perhaps led Qutb to produce political treatises (especially *Milestones*) the chief aim of which was to unhinge what he saw a state of moral decay and religious laxity. He was harsh in relegating fellow Muslims to a state to pagan existence (*jahiliyyah*), virtually anointing himself judge and arbitrator of right and wrong—exclusively God’s role. Qutb’s discourse declares unequivocal commitment to out-and-out renewal and reform of Islam and Muslims. Whilst strongly endorsing the role of education, Qutb looked for and found a practical solution for the re-Islamization of society for the purpose of instituting God’s order. His idea of the vanguard (*tala’i’*) embodies the agency and positive will by the believers to fight and sacrifice themselves in the cause of a Godly just state. This script for reform of Muslim societies should not be read outside the temporal and spatial contexts within which Qutb lived, suffered brutality, imprisonment and censure, wrote and then died for his cause. That cause was primarily reform of Islam.



## DEMOCRATIC KNOWLEDGE

Any understanding of democracy that excludes a thorough grasp of ‘knowledge’ and ‘democratic knowledge’ would lead to a circuitous route to contextualizing how democratic learning may unfold in Muslim settings. The reproduction of power through management of knowledge practices and production, including the cultural sphere, is scantily addressed in the field of scholarship on Arab and North African states, but there are exceptions. Joffé and Paoletti make this case in relation to Gaddafi’s use of his Green Book and the creation of what they refer to as ‘shared cultural paradigms’, superimposed top-down (Joffé & Paoletti, 2011, p. 186). Democracy and democratization are defined as essentially contested concepts, and even more so in the Arab Spring historical moment (Valbjørn, 2012). Ideally, defining democracy should go beyond the stress on institutional arrangements involving competition over a share of the public vote to secure a mandate for democratic decision-making (Schumpeter, 2003). The linearity of three-stage sequential progression from liberalization phase that leads to openings of transition through elections and wider participation the culmination of which is consolidation that routinizes the democratic game is not adopted here (Linz & Stepan, 1996). O’Donnell doubts the utility of this supposedly consolidation-bound process of democratic transition (O’Donnell, 1996). This type of process is applied uncritically to the Arab region (Lesch, 2014). The understanding proposed for democratization favours notions of open-endedness and indeterminacy and for democracy a meaning that defines it as neither single nor fixed (Sadiki, 2009). In his book *Democratization: Theory and Experience*, Whitehead suggests that democratization stumbles upon a variety of experiences and contexts. The disjunction between what theory surmises and experience suggests is a point not missed by Whitehead. Thus, he puts forth an interpretation of democratization as an essentially contested concept. He reasons that if democracy is an essentially contested concept so is democratization (Whitehead, 2002: 7–22). The Arab setting is illustrative of this line of argument (Ottaway, 2003).

In order to define democratic knowledge, the question of how knowledge itself is understood must first be clarified. The departure point of this article is the idea that good government must be in the first instance rooted in a local system of knowledge. The term ‘local’ speaks to locality and specificity in the assimilation, application and interpretation of

ideas, values, morals, myths, symbols and the technologies they necessitate. This system or repertoire, called in Arabic *makhzun*, which people adaptively and inter-generationally transmit and supplement as they manage change over time and space, is integral to the identity template of society as a whole. Such a *makhzun* (from the root verb *khazan*, i.e. to store from which the term *makhazan* is derived) or knowledge system does not only embody the full repository of cumulatively inherited and adapted learning, spiritual, intellectual and technological, it also engenders belonging. Integral to this is the totality of the socio-cultural imaginary, a filter, as it were. In Arabic this is rendered as *al-mikhyaal* or socio-cultural imaginary. A social imaginary furnishes the only keys for reading and mapping out the world and making sense of it in the quest for self-conception (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). Thus, social imaginaries construct social identity and a kind of group solidarity and in-built narrowness. This is what Castoriadis means by the idea of society creating themselves ‘in and through the closure of meaning’ (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 152). This is one reason why the editors of *The Imaginary and its Worlds* (Bieger, Saldívar, & Voelz, 2013) echo Friedl’s criticism of Taylor’s ‘social imaginaries’, making a powerful point: The concept ‘epitomizes the neglect characteristic of socio-centrism of those dimensions of being that transgress what is already socially scripted’. All social imaginaries present blind spots owing to their inherent socio-centrism. Nonetheless, a social imaginary is closely tied a society’s biggest project of creation of all: ‘self-creation’ (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 149). That is ‘ontological creation’, the glue of which are, according to Castoriadis, ‘institutions (language, norms, family forms, tools and production modes, etc.) and...the significations these institutions embody (totems, taboos, gods, God, *polis*, commodities, wealth, fatherland, etc.)’ (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 149). Castoriadis closes the circle by describing the psychological hold a social imaginary has over a group: ‘social imaginary significations create a proper world for the society considered—in fact, they *are* this world [author’s emphasis, not mine]; and they shape the psyche of individuals. They thus create a “representation” of the world, including the society itself and its place in this world’ (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 152). This is of import here. It raises questions about the possibilities or impossibilities of self-creation when navigating the world, trying to make sense of it, and perhaps perennially chasing after the illusion of ‘we’ or of ‘self’ when not equipped with one’s own institutions or significations, or seeking to cognize the social world when afflicted

with a huge chasm between institutions and significations. For example, ‘democracy’ travels the world and may be challenged by the variety of settings that are built with Castoriadis’s ‘closure of meaning’. It stumbles upon understandings of norms, family forms, God and city that may not mirror the origins of democracy in a different context where it was conditioned by surrounding institutions and significations, and attendant meanings used for self-representation and representations of evolving reality.

The Arab *mikhyal* is no different from any other social or cultural imaginary anywhere else. It is not static and is today like other social imaginaries, whether coloured by secularity or religiosity, subject to revision due to encounters with competing imaginaries, including millennial processes of cross-cultural fertilization. Like colonization in the past, modernization and globalization have opened up the social space of formerly colonized peoples. The *mikhyal* in question has in the course of nation and state-building underwent processes of close scrutiny and even disputation pitting Arabisants against Francisants (such as in Algeria), national-secularists against Islamists (everywhere in the Arab region), and Westernizers against champions of the local *turath* (heritage) as deftly captured by Hourani, amongst others (Hourani, 1991). This is part and parcel of cultural dynamism. As Eugene Rogan eloquently observes ‘...to say that the Arab World has been subject to foreign rules does not mean the Arabs have been passive subjects in a unilinear history of decline. Arab history in the modern age has been enormously dynamic, and the Arab peoples are responsible for their successes and failures alike’ (Rogan, 2009, p. 6). Indeed, all societies inevitably suffer from ‘auto-centrism’. Their representations of themselves and the world around them indulge their most cherished and endeared norms, symbols, myths, and gods, etc. This makes representations outside what is cumulatively culturally and socially scripted, as noted above by Bieger et al., challenging. The ‘neglect’—or the silence—in any social imaginary has in the modern era of globalization and close encounters are what sets all societies in search of new learning as part and parcel not only of self-preservation, but also of supplementing the local *makhzun*. The *makhzun* or repertoire includes also what Castoriadis calls ‘a transcendent, extra social, source of the institutions and significations, that is, religion’ (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 152). Besides Islam’s staying power as a frame of spiritual and religious reference Charles Taylor argues that belief in God within Muslim societies has remained unproblematic despite the advent

of secularity in the modern age; (Taylor, 2007, p. 3), there is the intellectual repository, from the time of pagan or (*Jabiliyyah*) epics to the literary and non-fiction marvels that adorn the Arabic library, including al-Farabi, al-Mutannabi, Averroes, Ibn Khaldun, al-Jabarti, al-Tahtawi, Kayr al-Din, Gibran, Taha Hussein, Al-Jabiri, among other luminaries. This *makhzun* is the over-arching corpus or compendium and filter, the *mikhyal* inclusive, informing interactions, aggregations, representations, and imaginings of community and self in the world.

Accordingly, when broaching the subject of democratic knowledge, the stress is not so much on the epithet 'local', 'traditional' or 'indigenous'. Rather, the emphasis is on 'democratic' as interpreted and filtered through the *makhzun* aided by the *mikhyal*, or social imaginary. The search is not only for the local continuities provided by cumulatively preserved and adapted sets of institutions and significations, but also for the discontinuities be they violent (colonization) or voluntary (globalization). These discontinuities constitute the cracks through which novelty flows to any social life steeped in historical continuity and yet tattered by the trials of time. Rogan mentions the full gamut of outside processes that Arabs have encountered, prompting responses, adjustments, reactions, intersections, accommodation and rejection. As he puts it 'Nationalism, imperialism, revolution, industrialization, rural urban migration, the struggle for women's rights—all the great themes of human history in the modern age have played out in the Arab world' (Rogan, 2009, p. 23). These series of encounters—colonization-cum-Westernization-cum-modernization-cum-globalization—have all left incredible imprints, inevitably 'transgressing', to invoke Bieger et al., anew, all that is 'already socially scripted'. Just as in the case of imagining nation and community (B. Anderson, 2006, pp. 3–10) imagining democracy deploys not only Anderson's 'cultural artefacts' and Castoriadis's institutions, significations, and the social-extra of religion, but also the intermittent borrowings that encounters with the 'other' bring to the fore.

Ultimately, however, 'Athens cannot exist without Athenians ... but Athenians are created only in and by Athens' (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 149). A Democratic knowledge—by the same token—suited for Arabs must be created only within the local *makhzun* and *mikhyal* and via local agency. This does not preclude useful comparisons or exchanges (Kaldor, 2011). There is of course an important proviso that Castoriadis adds to the mix. Any society is constantly under construction, 'undergoing a process of

self-alteration' (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 149). The point of relevance to the Arab region here is that this process of continuous creations, involving institutions and significations, necessitates responses to internal, external and historical 'constraints' for the purpose of functionality and self-institution (Castoriadis, 1994, p. 152). This is partly akin to Taylor's mid-point along the journey to modernity (Taylor, 2007, pp. 111–113). Therefore the *makhzun* and its *mikhyal* are not, by these accounts of transformation of social imaginaries, 'brim-full', so to speak.

In seeking to crystallize a notion of democratic knowledge, the stress is on the dynamic nature of the *makhzun*. It is neither in a state of abeyance, nor is it inhospitable to cross-cultural engagement. The Arab *makhzun* has had encounters with democracy since the ninth century AD. Al-Farabi stands out as one of the best known Muslim students of Greek democracy (Sadiki, 2012, pp. 123–127). Democratic knowledge in an Arab context will find it difficult to transgress the symbiosis of God and man, and the individual and the group. As Taylor notes the Western world might have gone a long way down the track of secularism but this has not dented the credibility of divinity in Arab countries (Taylor, 2007). There is a great deal in the social imaginary whether as regards family forms, norms, God or economic distribution that remains governed by the symbiotic character of social life in Arab contexts. Co-evolution with religiosity and with community (group solidarity) is difficult to ignore. In the same vein, co-evolution with 'otherness' from time immemorial makes it imperative for designers of a democratic knowledge didactic framework to factor this into future learning. What this actually means is that any realistic conception of a democratic knowledge system may not be able to eschew religious sensibilities—not organized religion. Toleration, social justice, a moral economy (Tripp & NetLibrary, 2006), communal obligation and responsibility approximate many of the values one finds in literature on social capital (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994). If harnessed under civic arrangements by a spirited citizenry, it could furnish values that can help undergird democratic knowledge systems in the region. Therefore, visions of democratic knowledge must be guided by holistic approaches. Moreover, the idea of 'situational knowledge' (Haraway, 1988) adds a critical dimension that appeals in the conceptualization of democratic knowledge, namely in terms of its contingent nature—its dependence on inescapable facts of life of language, history, culture, social imaginaries, etc.

Based on the foregoing, a working definition of democratic knowledge may be offered thus: Democratic knowledge refers to the intellectual and practical capacities, skills, ethics whose primary cognitive weight lends itself to democratic learning, and civic habituation and socialization via an open-ended, constructivist, interactive, cross-cultural but also reflexive process, across time and space, cumulatively and collaboratively, relative to the local context in which good government is formed, grounded within the inherited repertoire of ideas, morals, including faith based, and within institutions, significations and experiences, but without excluding global adaptations. Ontologically speaking, this definition mirrors the fundamental idea of the very reality of knowledge, like society's own existence, being continuously under construction and creation—ideas raised by Castoriadis. Moreover, as a process, democratic knowledge is almost *sui generis*, being neither entirely local, even if context specific, nor global. Similarly, it presupposes the blurring of intuitive/spiritual, intellectual and practical know-how, in a sense favouring a holistic approach. Dynamism is integral to the construction of democratic knowledge: reflexive (internal) and cross-cultural (external). There is a didactic substance to it, stressing learning with a view to long-term habituation<sup>3</sup> and socialization. The analysis now turns to Ennahda's emerging democratic thought-practice.

### REVISIONING ISLAMISM: ENNAHDA'S DEMOCRATIC LEARNING CURVE?

#### *Tunisia: Ennahda's 'Second Founding'*

Ennahda's tenth congress has been a leap of faith into re-endorsing the movement's historical leadership as well as into learning to 'Tunisify' its specific brand of Islamism—or whatever is left of it. However, the stakes are high and so are the challenges lurking ahead. At a historical juncture of intra-Islamists divisions over matters of substance and organization, from Morocco to Egypt, and parallel divisions within secularists, Tunisia's Islamists seem to be favouring the contest of power over the contest of ideology. Policy is primary; ideology is secondary.

---

<sup>3</sup>'Habituation' is a term that belongs to D. Rustow.

Have they ‘killed’ Imam Hassan Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, the late Hassan Al-Turabi, and Imam Khomeini and Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (both prominent religious references or *marja*’ in the Twelver Shia school), all iconic ideologues whose writings have stamped Islamist dogma with the dictum that Islam is *din wa dawlah* (religion and politics)? Tunisian Islamists, like their Moroccan and Turkish counterparts before them, seem to have rethought their ideas, which have over nearly a 100-year period postulated the inseparability of Islam and politics. Ennahda’s resolve to put to bed once and for all the conundrum of religion and politics, by finally declaring their separation, in its 10th Congress in May 2016, may be a turning point in the movement’s 36-year history. It amounts to quasi ‘second founding’. This is not necessarily motivated by tactical manoeuvring. ‘Civic habituation’ is a moderating force too, as I shall argue below.

### *Neo-political Islam and the Primacy of Practical Knowledge*

Why a ‘second founding’? Three key observations are in order.

First, the tendency today by Islamists such as in Morocco and Tunisia to ‘separate’ religion and politics or more aptly deemphasise religion in their brand of politics speaks to the failure within political Islam to translate theoretical ideals, agendas and knowledge into a convincing and satisfactory practice in terms of political behaviour, and civic engagement in many Arabo-Islamic settings. There are qualified exceptions (Turkey and Malaysia may be imperfect examples but both function well). Second, separation of religion and politics by Islamists subverts the original paradigm: instead from moving from theory to practice, the new trend to focus on the experience of political Islam has the potential to inform theory-building. Perhaps, it will be the practice of political Islam at the level of the state that will eventually enable deeper appreciation of the theoretical potentialities of Islam as a religion. This will help the incorporation of practical knowledge into the organization of politics by Islamists informed by theories that have thus far eluded application. Reconciling this ‘contradiction’ is a huge challenge for Arab politics, in general. It is easy to pontificate about an ideal, such as social justice, or its ethical foundations as do many Islamist theoreticians, as being an indispensable virtue of Islamic democracy or governance. It is more of a challenge to apply it as part and parcel of lived Islam.

Third, the tendency today to separate religion and politics may bode well for levelling the playing field. The interpretation of religion ceases to be the exclusive bastion of righteous voices whose missionary zeal in some settings may have turned them into self-appointed speakers on behalf of 'Islamic correctness'. No one reserves the right to claim the moral high ground and dictate what religion in the public sphere should and should not mean.

### *The Tunisian Context*

Islamism is not going away. Scholars ranging from John Esposito and John Voll (1996) to Khaled Abou El Fadl (2004) have established this axiom. What comes under close scrutiny or is subject to tactical shifts or rethinking is the dogma that underpins the variety of Islamisms vying for attention in the Muslim world. Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori view 'Muslim politics' as involving 'the competition and contest over both the interpretation of religious symbols and the control of the institutions that produce and sustain them'. Consequently, 'Muslim Politics' is a sophisticated analysis of the ever-changing correlation between the sacred and the profane in the Muslim world. They advance the idea that the politics of language that embed the expression and organization of Muslim politics must be 'deconstructed'. The Muslim world has witnessed a process of 'objectification of consciousness', a process leading to fundamental questions in the minds of the community of believers. This objectification has come about as a result of mass education and wider channels of communication in the Muslim World, rendering exegesis widespread (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). Tunisia, like other Arab Spring countries, is today awash in contestation over meaning, in politics, religion and culture. It is a facet of maturing pluralism, civic engagement and freedom.

Political Islam or Islamism is simply refashioning itself according to the exigencies of time and space. Old conundrums are being tackled head on. Tunisian Islamists are no exception. In his recent book *Young Islam*, Avi Spiegel makes a few points—with special reference to Morocco—of relevance to those pondering the state of play within Islamism today (Spiegel, 2015). Taking a leaf from the book of Eickelman and Piscatori about how 'Muslim politics' is actually lived, Spiegel considers political Islam in practice, the way it is being operationalized, especially by the younger generation of activists. This is where research on Islamism leaves much to be desired.



He makes two points worthy of consideration when accounting for transformative processes within Islamism.

1. Islamist–Islamist relations inform behaviour and thinking more than external factors: This is more relevant to Morocco than Tunisia. Morocco’s Islamism is more dispersed and plural. There are competing versions of Islamism, including establishment Islamism, that compete for influence in the monarchy’s ‘public sphere’. Ennahda in Tunisia has been shaped by its relationship to the state (which Spiegel says is not the case in Morocco). A brand of secular nationalism led by Bourguiba did provoke Islamists into voicing opposition to the suppression of Tunisia’s Islamic identity and heritage in nation and state-building. Ennahda today says that the question of identity no longer divides Tunisians. It is doubtful whether Ansar Al-Sharia, (Zelin, 2013) now much weaker than three years ago, has forced policy rethinking within Ennahda.
2. Separation of civic activism/politics/or *al-siyasi* and religious/proselytisation activities/or *da’awi* has been in the offing within Morocco’s Justice and Development Party (PJD—known by its French acronym). Through the examples of Abdelali Hamiddine, amongst others, Spiegel, marshals evidence of how there is a separation between the religious movement (*harakah*) and the political party (Spiegel, 2015, p. 178). This is the direction taken by Ennahda today.

Ennahda’s emerging brand of rethought Islamism provides a more open engagement in the socio-political sphere after the democratic reforms that routinized the Islamist party as a major stakeholder in Tunisia’s fledgling ‘public sphere’. This brand of civic Islamism that slots the political and the religious into two different compartments works in tandem with increasing civic engagement, contest of power, a power-sharing record since 2011, and massive investment in the professionalization of the Islamist party.

Concomitant with this newly found status as a power broker in Tunisian politics, Ennahda is engaging with deeply entrenched leftist and secularist forces through both dialogic (including alliance with secularists in government in 2011 and currently) and concessionary means (Brody-Barre, 2013). Ennahda has adopted a declaratory policy of deference to the state when it comes to the management of mosques—leaving them

as venues of worship. It has also supported current plans to re-educate Imams and professionalizing their functions. This may also be a defence mechanism at a time when the state is eager to counter terrorism and overall religious radicalization, especially amongst youth (Khechana, 2016). Religiously inspired actors in the Muslim world are trying to define themselves in opposition to the likes of ISIL. Ennahda is no exception. A narrative pitting ‘moderates’ versus ‘radicals’.

Distinguishing between the fixed (*al-thabit*) and the mutable (*al-mutaghayyir*) may explain Ennahda’s recognition of the state. Politics belongs to the sphere of the changing. There’s a question of public utility or ‘*maqasidi* framework’ at play here I would propose. Exigencies and necessities of the Tunisian context have influenced this move. In the Tunisian national milieu, Ennahda is also probably responding to the misgivings of its detractors that it is hiding a secret theocratic agenda: that once in power it will impose dictatorship. The shift is intended also to pre-empt criticisms from liberals and secularists that it does respect Tunisia’s political identity. Ennahda can now claim it is transcending politics of identity.

In a nutshell, the plan to refashion Ennahda as announced in the movement’s 10th Congress in May 2016 can be summed up in the following areas: It commits to a civic state (*dawlah madaniyyah*), which rethinks earlier Islamist positions to make *shariah* (Islamic legal system) the law of the land (Amara, 2012). (For example, Imam Al-Banna did commit to this objective). It moves away from the revivalist brand of Islamism, by locating itself as a national actor which shares a political space with other power claimants and contestants. The old claim by Muslim Brotherhood movements that ‘Islam is the solution’ is no more (Ennahda did not really make use of this motto in its discourse). Ennahda Redefines Islamism more or less as ‘political ethics’ rather than ideology that informs political ends in the contest of power. In this sense, Ennahda is attempting to become post-ideological. This is a quasi ‘end of ideology’ moment.

It embraces the market unambiguously. This position breaks with earlier Islamist reservations about capitalism (Sayyid Qutb is a leading voice in this regard, with Islam’s social justice being a key tenet of his political thought). Ennahda’s discourse after the revolution embraces social justice. It renounces moralization in the social realm in a society which is 99% Sunni Muslim. This aims to end the pursuit of *da’wah* or call for religion by the newly professionalized political party and monopoly over

the interpreting of religious dogma—much less endeavouring to implement it. Where Ennahda is concerned all of the fundamentals (e.g. “The Quran is our Constitution”; “*jihad* is our method”) that defined Muslim Brotherhood-type movements no longer apply to it in any evaluative (normative) or practical (political) sense.

### *Civic Habituation*

Like other Islamist parties in Morocco, Ennahda is undergoing a phase of ‘civic habituation’. Islamists today are faced with real power, reversing exclusionary practices of the past (Sivan, 1998). So moderating policy and political behaviour may not be tactical or ephemeral. The party has a fixed constituency and following (sympathisers and members) that secure it political visibility and prominence, not always as the winning party as was the case in the 2014 parliamentary elections (“Why Did Islamic Party Lose Election in Tunisia,” 2014)—unlike in the 2011 elections of the Constituent Assembly (Murphy, 2013). It has gained kudos, status and know-how that deepen civic habituation. Ennahda was before the revolution at the receiving end of the dictatorial proverbial ‘stick’. Now its political fortunes have improved and with the gained territory come increased legal participation, recognition of the political system, legitimacy and shared power.

As a stakeholder, Ennahda is now concerned with self-reproduction: via the contestation of power, effective political strategies and responsive public policy platforms. Ideology ceases to be a guiding force. Even if in the minds of many members and the wider Islamist transnational community the separation of religion and politics may seem heretical. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt showed how contest and acquisition of power play a moderating role, thus informing incipient civic habituation. Most of the EMB has observed a de facto separation following the Arab Spring, the Egyptian MB founded a party, the Freedom and Justice Party, open to members and non-members, which accepted the civil state and political pluralism, at least in theory.

Adaptation is the name of the game: the challenge to measure up to the demands of pluralism, freedom and democratic transition through constant training into the art of politics. That is, finding a shared or ‘*wasati*’ space for engaging self and other through clear messages, legal and democratic strategies, shared values and rallying multi-partisan objectives. Thus Tunisia’s Islamists may contribute in a practical sense to

a form of 'Islamic democracy', an 'oxymoron' for many of their detractors (Krämer, 1993). In fact, as the so-called 'Arab liberals' continue to fragment or are slow at self-reforming (Alterman, 2004), it is legalized Islamists that seem to be turning the learning curve of democratic government.

Of course, it is a moot point whether civic habituation through increased participation as a result of the adoption of the separation of religion and politics produces radicalization or de-radicalization within society. It is undeniable that there is demand for a role for religion in political affairs in Tunisia, as in many other Arab states. Abandoning a powerful tenet of Islamism may be read as a form of retreat, which may have a radicalizing effect (Georgy & Perry, 2013). Nonetheless, the rule of thumb is that civic engagement spells moderation and de-emphasis of ideology, not radicalization.

### THE LEARNING CURVE

Table 4.2 is a tentative summary of two sessions of participant observation with two small groups of Ennahda members. I conducted the research in Tunisia on 21 and 22 May 2016 during Ennahda's historical tenth congress in Yasmine Hammamet (Nabeul, Tunisia).

- The first had 8 members (six of whom were in the 2011 elected Constituent Assembly that drafted the 2014 democratic constitution).
- The second had eight members (4 of whom are members in the current parliament elected in 2014).

I have chosen this research methodology for various reasons, including familiarity with the party and its members, many of whom are friends or good acquaintances (Ennahda formed part of my Ph.D. thesis at the ANU in the mid-1990s). I was able to immerse overtly myself in the 'informal' discussions in an atmosphere that did lend itself to maximizing contact with Ennahda members (over three consecutive days in Hammamet). The gist of the exercise was to make the most of the setting and the congress and experience the participants and the event Tunis by allowing a firm grasp of the changes, the motions discussed and passed by Ennahda during its congress. In particular, my aim was to use participant observation to understand the changes through Ennahda

**Table 4.2** Ennahda Islamists' perceptions of civic/democratic habituation

<i>Perceptions of civic habituation values</i>	<i>Envisaged democratic learning outcomes</i>	<i>Proposed approach/method</i>
Internal democratization or intraparty democracy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Transparency</li> <li>2. Power-sharing</li> <li>3. Dispersion of power</li> <li>4. Openness of internal decision-making</li> <li>5. Empowerment of members</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regular rotation of posts</li> <li>2. Ending all appointment</li> <li>3. Limiting top leadership terms to 2 or 3 short terms</li> <li>4. Stress on experience-tested leadership in selection procedures</li> <li>5. Direct election of all party leaders/cadres</li> </ol>
Lower degree of centralization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Levelling of the playing field</li> <li>2. Inclusiveness of rank-and file members</li> <li>3. Inclusiveness of regions in selection of leaders</li> <li>4. Inclusiveness in decision-making by low and middle-ranking cadres</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Delegation of decision-making to regions</li> <li>2. Inclusiveness of more youth</li> <li>3. More equal distribution of power</li> </ol>
Democratizing reforms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adjusting to changes in Tunisia</li> <li>2. Responsiveness to members' political preferences</li> <li>3. Responsiveness to Tunisian public opinion</li> <li>4. Learn how to enhance party electoral appeal</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Internal polling of party grassroots</li> <li>2. Commissioned polling of national public opinion</li> <li>3. Learn to gauge and gain exiting and new voters' confidence</li> <li>4. Redefine policy to respond to change</li> </ol>
Civic programmatic adaptation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use civic language</li> <li>2. Adopt consensual policies</li> <li>3. Deploy a nationalist and coalitional political calculus</li> <li>4. Transcend partisan narrow-interest</li> <li>5. Renew party public image along civic lines/messages</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gaining wider appeal</li> <li>2. Putting Tunisia's interest before party interest</li> <li>3. Finding a shared middle ground</li> <li>4. Stressing civic over religious values</li> </ol>
Entrenching democratic legitimacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduce merit-based incentives</li> <li>2. Promote party discipline</li> <li>3. Promote autonomy and integrity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Neutralize nepotism and patronage, if any</li> <li>2. Widen members' participation in intraparty affairs</li> </ol>

members' perceptions and interpretations of the proposed changes and the motions voted on during the congress. In conducting the research, I obviously was aware of the challenge to observe the highest standards of objectivity required for performing the research (Gans, 1999). For instance, the motion related to the separation of the religious and the political are not read as rigidly by my interlocutors. They do not view Ennahda as parting company with its Islamist ideals. Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi himself (evening of May 21 and again on the morning of May 22) told me that the 'fine-tuning' is not intended to abandon the Islamic values of truthfulness, justice, fairness, and gradualism etc., which he views as not too different from the civic values any democrat subscribes to in any type of established democracy. He stresses the 'civic' nature of the changes. That is, voting more within the party, holding members to account, respecting due process, deepening alternation of power, and building a civic institution with a democratic structure and whose members are sufficiently professional, taking their responsibilities very seriously. Ghannouchi says a civic party is not intended to engage in proselytization. Islamist civil society can fulfil functions abandoned by the professional civic party—including charity work and alleviation of poverty.

What follows is a brief summary of the key findings in Table 4.2 that have transpired through participant observation in five areas. Three of these are explained briefly below.

### *Internal Democratization*

All interlocutors view Ennahda as paying more attention to the historical low level of intraparty democracy. However, they blame this on the nature of the party's evolution through exclusionary measures and security risks involving all members, especially prominent leaders. Ennahda, they point out, had not until the 2011 revolution had a continuous respite from oppression to develop its internal democracy. Internal democratization, in the new era including from the time of the ninth congress of 2012, has been on the party's political agenda. The perception of internal democratization is that of openness in all internal decision-making processes. To turn Ennahda into a fully electoralist party will take at least a decade as a good number of decision-making positions, including one-third of the party's Shura Council is appointed by the president. So gradualism is thought to be the way forward so long as internal party

policy keeps up with reforming the party and this is partly what is being achieved in the tenth congress, my interlocutors point out. They are of the view that Ennahda will not be atrophied by mistrust and that internal democratization is key to transparency, higher degree of inclusiveness, legality and systematic reform. One main challenge of internal democracy, which for my interlocutors constitutes the backbone of power-sharing and power alternation internally, is to rise above the intra-party wrangling.

### *Decentralization*

Generally, my interlocutors view Ennahda as heading towards greater decentralization and reproach secularist parties in Tunisia for nepotistic practices (a reference to parties where spouses or family members command almost full authority over these parties—a few parties where named but they prefer this to be suppressed) and a high degree of centralized leadership. Nonetheless, in relation to the selection of all posts and leadership positions, there is almost invariably a stress on the need to orient party policy towards greater decentralization so that regional party branches assume greater autonomy in the management of local issues. All take this policy preference to have the potential enhance internal inclusiveness and, by implication, greater internal democratization.

### *Democratizing Reforms*

Most perceptions in relation to this area agree on the need to make Ennahda Tunisia's leading party, in the generation of ideas and overall democratization for the entire country. This, according to their perceptions of democratizing reforms, calls for a party that is not narrow-minded ideologically. Its agenda must square with Tunisia's needs and interests. Thus, the rationale for democratic reforms must be geared towards enhancing the party's public image as primarily a Tunisian party working for the good of all Tunisians. These reforms, they observe, would help rebrand the party from that of the 'khwanjia' (derogatory term meaning 'Islamist brethren') to that of all democratic citizens. This is why they all support the motion to open up membership to all Tunisians and abandon former strict rules for joining Ennahda, which required endorsement from existing party members. Such reforms, they contend, will be able to enhance electoral appeal among all voters,

including secularists, especially after the 2014 electoral setback. So these reforms would also improve the party's future electoral performance.

*'Neo-Ennahda'?*

Is Ennahda renouncing 'Islamism', its doctrinaire *sine qua non* and the basis of its foundational identity? Since its emergence in the late 1970s as the 'Islamic Tendency Movement', identity politics, namely promoting the idea of Islam as an organic frame of reference for imagining polity, society and economy has defined the movement's declaratory policy, rhetoric, discourse and political engagement. This template and attendant agency came at a high price: exile, imprisonment and exclusion under both Habib Bourguiba and his successor, ousted dictator, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Under Ben Ali, Ennahda sought accommodation and even contested bi-elections showing in the late 1980s early indications of electoral support, which made the then dictator buckle and shift policy from coexistence to systematic exclusion and coercion. No single political current in Tunisia's history suffered as much at the hands of Ben Ali's police machinery, and the confrontation with the ousted dictatorial regime was not fully of its making (Allani, 2009).

Neo-Ennahda over a three-day historic congress (20–23 May 2016, Yasmine al-Hammamet, Tunisia) punctuated by fascinating and heated but pluralist debates, part of which I witnessed first-hand, is refigured into a national political party with an Islamic frame of reference that deploys democracy as a mode of political engagement. To this end, Neo-Ennahda is now committing to separate the religious (*al-da'awi*) and the political (*al-siyasi*). A vision that was upheld for more than three decades has ceded to a new brand of civic Islamism. That is, as an analogy neo-Ennahda has not only edged closer to the notion of a civil state, but also to Turkey's AKP and further from Egypt's standard Muslim Brotherhood or '*Ikhwanî*' model: the former operationalizes politics with minimum ideology, the latter has historically harboured ambitions of Islamizing polity.

This is why in one of his interventions during the congress, the party's president Shaykh Rachid Ghannouchi adopted a new discourse angled at stressing the primacy of the market, economic growth, renouncing the politics of identity (*huwiyyah*), very much part of the fundamentals of his thought for over 30 years. I think there are three interconnected motivations.



First, normalization of Ennahda with the ‘deep state’, which has preserved the imprints of Bourguiba’s political modelling of it in a ‘Francophile’ fashion: secular in nature (Perkins, 2004). Modern Tunisia’s society is similarly shaped, manifesting a deeply hybrid national persona that reveres Islam but with a bent for civic engagement of all aspects of the horizontal side of life, including politics. Tunisia’s Islam was historically stamped with a dosage of liberal exegesis (Ashur, 1984). Today, Ennahda seems finally to be intelligently and deftly adaptive, seeking a brand of ‘Tunisification’ of its identity as a major political force with a fixed 35–40% political following.

Second, professionalization, and this is common to all major parties anywhere as they mature politically. So by defending a new identity that separates the religious and the political, Ennahda has turned an important learning curve on the way to a fully-fledged civic political party. The amendments that have all passed with absolute majority—800 plus votes by the conferences—all prove that several months of internal debates have come to full fruition for the reformists within the party. This includes further empowerment of the party’s *Shura* Council, of which 100 are directly elected by the conferences, and another 50 by the Council’s elected 100 representatives. Ennahda’s partnering in the troika government that delivered the country’s democratic constitution in early 2014 provided the party with an invaluable ‘reality check’, which it used to reflect, revise and adjust. Some have even reproached Ennahda’s leaders for concessionary deals and compromises that might have eased a return of the old order (Bozonnet).

Third, democratization via ‘factionalization’: a salient feature of maturing political parties anywhere. One of the most fascinating debates and the first ever in the history of Ennahda took place on the morning of May 22. Three leading leaders representative of first and second generations took to the floor to openly contest and defend their respective views of how the party should be internally organized, led and administered (I am not at liberty to disclose more). This was unthinkable before the revolution. Ennahda’s practice of internal democracy has produced a kind of factionalization. Factionalization may over time serve to reduce huge concentration of power in party executive. Islamist parties, like Arab secularist parties, tend to be resistant to democratic transformation in party structures and internal democracy. From this perspective, factionalization must be seen as having a democratizing effect, at least in the long term.

*Al-Banna's Islamism no more?*

Surveying the state of political Islam (Islamic movements) in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, what is most conspicuous is the presence of a specter of stagnation, crisis and fragmentation. From Egypt to Tunisia there are signs that there is confusion in the 'Islamic project' adopted since the days of Hassan Al-Banna (assassinated in 1949), the founding father of the Muslim Brotherhood ideal and model of socio-politico-moral organization. Morally, the flame of the ideal has not dimmed. It still lights up millions of 'subaltern' lives. Al-Banna—and after him other like-minded iconic figures ranging from Sayyid Qutb (seminal ideologue and scholar, Egyptian, hanged by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966) to Maulana Abu Ala Maududi (leading Scholar of Indian–Pakistani origin, d. 1979)—have made a strong case for 'Islamic governance'. They find in Islam an organic repertoire not only for giving the former colonized a voice, but also the means to resist subjugation, Westernization including secularization, moral decay and dissolution into followers of Euro-American models of organizing polity, society, economy and morality.

In a brilliant but short 'foreword' to Sayyed Abul Hassan Al-Nadwi's famous book, *Islam and the World* (Qutb, 2005, p. vii), Sayyid Qutb seconds the author's ideas of an Islam that sanctions liberation from 'superstitions and banalities', 'slavery and degradation', and from religious and political 'tyranny'. Islam, Sayyid Qutb argues, blesses life with faith, a font of 'knowledge, fraternity, justice and self-confidence'. These are in turn life-giving values that through hard work maximize humans' potential for realising the quest for a 'just, healthy and balanced system' (Qutb, 2005, p. vii).

The genius of Islam resides in the *telos* of a 'just' and 'balanced system'. Just as in social justice, and a balanced system defuses the tension between dualisms such as God/man, this world/the hereafter, Muslim/non-Muslim (or peoples of the Book), community/individual and theory/practice. Sayyid Qutb does not mince his words when it comes to articulating the primacy of Islam (as *din wa dawlah* or religion and state) but also in terms of visibility and leadership in world (and worldly) affairs. He affirms that there is 'good' to be had when Islam assumes a leading role 'to fashion life according to its own special genius' (Qutb, 2005, p. vii). There is no doubt in his mind that justice and a balanced society or polity derive from Muslims leading not following. He takes leadership to be intrinsic to Islam. Moreover, he affirms that 'proving'

and ‘testing’ Islam’s mettle obtains only when assuming responsibility. Thus in his view, Islam is predisposed to ‘lead the caravan of life. It cannot be a camp follower’ (Qutb, 2005, p. vii).

Perhaps this is no longer the case. Muslims, being today plugged into the international economy, integrated in an international order not of their making, and, of late, as they are being converted to the view of separation of religion and politics, cannot be but ‘camp followers’. The issues that shaped the thinking of Sayyid Qutb more than fifty years ago (Khatib, 2006)—the ideological standoff with the ‘West’, colonial penetration, Muslim identity—do not seem to feature large in the thinking of current Islamist ideologues. Sayyid Qutb found both capitalism and communism to be inferior to Islam (Qutb, 1949).<sup>4</sup> He found both to be steeped in materialism and even when they valorise justice, such as communism, they expunge it of all spiritual content. So in its continuous transformation, Islamism has shifted emphasis according to time and space, oscillating between phases of confrontation and reconciliation, and of rejection and accommodation:

1. Deployment of Islam as a moral and educational medium for raising levels of consciousness and resisting colonialism.
2. As a medium of resisting secularization to the point that mere political participation in secular politics was considered a heresy.
3. Resurgence or *sahwah islamiyyah* that positioned the question of identity at the heart of the quarrel with national-secular elites and states.
4. Islamization of state, society, morality and knowledge, all overlapping agendas that gave rise to transnational rethought Islamisms, recognizing authoritarian regimes (what the Muslim Brotherhood and the PJD did, respectively, in Egypt in Morocco) and approving of engaging the secular state by equating *shura* with democracy.
5. Islamism going hand in hand with revolution, and emergence of Islamist resistance movements.
6. Wahhabi Salafist explosion promoting literalist interpretations of Islam spread to all corners of the Muslim world.
7. Intra-Salafist divisions and the rise of intellectual and radical salafisms.

---

<sup>4</sup>See also Qutb (1975).

8. Divisions within moderate Islamisms (Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, etc.) and attendant 'rationalization' of Islamism through adoption of formerly rejected positions such as separation of religion and politics.

### *The End of Political Islam? End of Ideology?*

It is too early to state with confidence the shift that marks the end of political Islam. Because it depends on how one defines political Islam in the first place. A strict ideological one will inevitably lead to the conclusion that in a certain sense it is the end of political Islam. But if one allows for the elasticity of ideas and practice then no. Islamists come in all shapes and colours: they are neither fixed nor unitary. For me, as a Tunisian who follows closely the politics of a fledgling democracy (Redissi, Nouira, & Zghal, 2012), I never cease to remind myself of the enduring legacy of Bourguiba's secularism. It lives on and today reshapes Tunisia, including obviously its Islamists.

Many Tunisians and even Ennahda sympathizers and members are left with a big question: has Bourguiba been right all along? This is a question Ennahda has to ponder. For, after the tragic experiences of torture, martyrs, exile and suffering doing a big volte face on this issue is not easy. Was the suffering for nothing at all? Has Ennahda abandoned its original vision that Islam and politics belong to an organic sphere in which they are mutually reinforcing as a matter of conviction or necessity? These are questions that will not for some time go away.

## CONCLUSION

There are no fixed or universal 'keys' for reading the intellectual map of political Islam. Traversing the vast terrain of this phenomenon, across various and variable contexts of time and space unearths diversity, contingency and fluidity. There is no 'one fundamentalism fits all' formula for generalizing about a complex current that is multi-vocal and discourses within speak to multiple 'islams' in the name of a single and universal 'Islam'. What is certain about political Islam is that it is not about to retire from engaging modernity and all that it offers, positively and negatively. Likewise, modernity or those claiming to be its agents are not to give up engaging with all matters Islamic, positively and negatively.

Ennahda seems today to be oscillating between two stark paradigms of Islamism: an old and dying one, an ideologically rigid morally grounded, and perhaps politically sterile brand of Islamism that originated in colonial times, and an emerging version of political ethos noted by pragmatic fervour and intellectual fluidity. The quarrel with the ‘West’ and ‘Westernizing’ other is no more. Ennahda seems to be taking ‘Qutbism’ (metaphorically speaking) out of Islamism without furnishing it with any intellectual artefacts that distinguish the brand of political Islam intended by its original founders to reshape identity, morality (long-term goals), society and polity (short-term goals). The new Islamism is largely geared towards prioritizing the management of matters concerned with political competition—and without rejecting sharing space with secularists and non-Muslims. Ennahda experimented with this through the 18th of October anti-Ben Ali grand coalition prior to the revolution.<sup>5</sup> To this end, Ennahda’s Islamism seems to be coaching itself into the art of democratic politics. For the foreseeable future, it seeks to be equipped with it to navigate the travails of a polity, society and identity that are far from ideal, on many fronts (Byrne, 2014). Thus, it seems that it is the quest for the democratic society that Ennahda is now seeking first. The ‘Islamized’ polity and society seem for now to be going out of fashion and are thus relegated to a secondary—perhaps delayed—phase.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abou El Fadl, K. (2004). *Islam and the challenge of democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Abrahamian, E. (1989). *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- al-Banna, H. (1987). *Majmu‘at Al-Rasa’il*. Beirut: Dar Al-Hadarah Al-Islamiyyah.
- Allani, A. (2009). The Islamists in Tunisia between confrontation and participation: 1980-2008. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 14(2), 257–272. doi:10.1080/13629380902727510.
- Alterman, J. B. (2004). The false promise of Arab liberals. *Policy Review* (125), 77.
- Amara, T. (2012, March 26). *Tunisia’s Ennahda to oppose Sharia in constitution*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-constitution-idUSBRE82P0E820120326>.

---

<sup>5</sup>See Samti (2013).

- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.
- Anderson, J. (2006). *Religion, democracy and democratization*. New York: Routledge.
- Ashur, M. T. I. (1984). *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* [Commentary on the Qur'an, liberation and renewal/enlightenment—Also known as Tafsir Ibn Ashur]. Tunis: Al-Dar al-Tunisiyyah li al-Nashr.
- Bayat, A. (2005). What is post-Islamism? *ISIM Review*, 16, 1–5.
- Bieger, L., Saldívar, R., & Voelz, J. (2013). *The imaginary and its worlds: American studies after the transnational turn*. Lebanon: University Press of New England.
- Bozonnet, C. (2014, November 11). *Moncef Marzouki: «Béji Caïd Essebsi, c'est le retour de l'ancien régime»*. Retrieved from [http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/11/26/moncef-marzouki-beji-caid-essebsi-c-est-le-retour-de-l-ancien-regime\\_4529609\\_3212.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/11/26/moncef-marzouki-beji-caid-essebsi-c-est-le-retour-de-l-ancien-regime_4529609_3212.html).
- Brody-Barre, A. G. (2013). The impact of political parties and coalition building on Tunisia's democratic future. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18(2), 211–230. doi:10.1080/13629387.2012.742365.
- Brown, N. J. (2013). Egypt's failed transition. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(4), 45–58.
- Byrne, E. (2014, October 13). *Tunisia becomes breeding ground for Islamic state fighters*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/13/tunisia-breeding-ground-islamic-state-fighters>.
- Castoriadis, C. (1994). Radical imagination and the social instituting imaginary. In G. Robinson & J. F. Rundell (Eds.), *Rethinking imagination: Culture and creativity*. London: Psychology Press.
- Cavatorta, F., & Merone, F. (2013). Moderation through exclusion? The journey of the Tunisian Ennahda from fundamentalist to conservative party. *Democratization*, 20(5), 857–875.
- Charles, D. (2012, April 11). *Tunisia: Martyrs' Day Violence, why and what's next?* Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/david-charles/tunisia-martyrs-day-violence-whyand-whats-nex>.
- Chayes, S. (2014, March 27). *How a Leftist Labor Union Helped Force Tunisia's Political Settlement*. Retrieved from [https://www.google.com/search?q=How+a+Leftist+Labor+Union+Helped+Force+Tunisia%E2%80%99s+Political+Settlement&rlz=1C1SVEA\\_en-GBGB438GB463&oq=How+a+Leftist+Labor+Union+Helped+Force+Tunisia%E2%80%99s+Political+Settlement&qs=chrome.69i57.3209j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=How+a+Leftist+Labor+Union+Helped+Force+Tunisia%E2%80%99s+Political+Settlement&rlz=1C1SVEA_en-GBGB438GB463&oq=How+a+Leftist+Labor+Union+Helped+Force+Tunisia%E2%80%99s+Political+Settlement&qs=chrome.69i57.3209j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8).
- Choueiri, Y. M. (1999). *Islamic fundamentalism* (Rev. ed.). Washington: Pinter.
- Dakhli, L. (2013, March 5). *A betrayed revolution? On the Tunisian uprising and the democratic transition*. Retrieved from [http://photography.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10463/a-betrayed-revolution\\_on-the-tunisian-uprising-and](http://photography.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10463/a-betrayed-revolution_on-the-tunisian-uprising-and).
- Davis, E. (1984). Ideology, social class and Islamic radicalism in modern Egypt. In S. A. Arjomand (Ed.), *From nationalism to revolutionary Islam* (pp. 134–157). London: Macmillan.

- Dekmejian, R. H. (1985). *Islam in revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (1st ed.). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Eickelman, D. F., & Piscatori, J. P. (1996). *Muslim politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- El-Affendi, A. (2013). Arab Spring, Islamist Ice Age: Islamism, democracy, and the dictatorship of the “Liberalism of Fear” in the Era of revolutions. *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 30(4), 1–18.
- Esposito, J. L. (1999). *The Islamic threat: Myth or reality?* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Esposito, J. L., & Piscatori, J. P. (1991). Democratization and Islam. *Middle East Journal*, 45(3), 427–440.
- Esposito, J. L., & Voll, J. O. (1996). *Islam and democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fuller, G. E., & Lesser, I. O. (1995). *A sense of siege: The geopolitics of Islam and the West*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Gall, C. (2013, July 25). *Second Opposition Leader Assassinated in Tunisia*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/26/world/middleeast/second-opposition-leader-killed-in-tunisia.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/26/world/middleeast/second-opposition-leader-killed-in-tunisia.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).
- Gans, H. J. (1999). Participant observation in the era of ‘ethnography’. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(5), 540–548. doi:10.1177/089124199129023532.
- Georgy, M., & Perry, T. (2013, October 28). *Special report: As Brotherhood retreats, risks of extremism increase*. Retrieved from [www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/28/us-egypt-brotherhood-special-report-idUSBR-999R0DU20131028](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/28/us-egypt-brotherhood-special-report-idUSBR-999R0DU20131028).
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in Feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599.
- Hourani, A. (1991). *A history of the Arab peoples* ([New]. ed.). London: Faber and Faber.
- Irwin, R. (2001). *Is this the man who inspired Bin Laden? Sayyid Qutb the Father of Modern Islamist Movement*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/nov/01/afghanistan.terrorism3>.
- Jackson, R. (2006). *Fifty key figures in Islam*. London: Routledge.
- Joffé, G., & Paoletti, E. (2011). The foreign policy process in Libya. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 16(2), 183–213. doi:10.1080/13629387.2010.526288.
- Kaldor, M. (2011, February 7). *Civil Society in 1989 and 2011*. Retrieved from <http://www.opendemocracy.net/mary-kaldor/civil-society-in-1989-and-2011>.
- Kepel, G. (1993). *Muslim extremism in Egypt: The prophet and pharaoh*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kepel, G. (2004). *Jihad: The trail of political Islam* (New ed.). London: I.B. Tauris.

- Khatab, S. (2006). *The political thought of Sayyid Qutb: The theory of jahiliyyah* (Vol. 2). London: Routledge.
- Khechana, R. (2016, April 25). *The thorns in the side of Tunisia's young democratic process*. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.it/aspenia-online/article/thorns-side-tunisia-young-democratic-process>.
- Krämer, G. (1993). Islamist notions of democracy. *Middle East Report* (183), 2–8.
- Krieken, G. S., van. (1976). *Khayr al-Din et la Tunisie, 1850-1881*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Lesch, A. M. (2014). Troubled political transitions: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. *Middle East Policy*, 21(1), 62–74. doi:10.1111/mepo.12057.
- Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. C. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Many, M. E., & Appleby, R. S. (1991). Foreword. In J. P. Piscatori (Ed.), *Islamic fundamentalisms and the Gulf crisis* (pp. xixiv). Chicago: American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- McCarthy, R. (2015). Protecting the Sacred: Tunisia's Islamist Movement Ennahdha and the challenge of free speech. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(4), 447–464. doi:10.1080/13530194.2015.1005055.
- Moussalli, A. S. (1992). *Radical Islamic fundamentalism: The ideological and political discourse of Sayyid Qutb*. Beirut: American University of Beirut Press.
- Mullin, C., & Rouabah, B. (2014, December 22). *Requiem for Tunisia's Revolution?* Retrieved from <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20334/requiem-for-tunisia%E2%80%99s-revolution>.
- Murphy, E. C. (2013). The Tunisian elections of October 2011: A democratic consensus. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18(2), 231–247. doi:10.1080/13629387.2012.739299.
- O'Donnell, G. A. (1996). Illusions about consolidation. *Journal of Democracy*, 7(2), 34–51. doi:10.1353/jod.1996.0034.
- Ottaway, M. (2003). *Democracy challenged the rise of semi-authoritarianism*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Perkins, K. J. (2004). *A history of modern Tunisia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Piser, K. (2016, March 31). *How Tunisia's Islamists embraced democracy*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/31/how-tunisia-islamists-embraced-democracy-ennahda/>.
- Putnam, R., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. (1994). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy* (STU—Student ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Qutb, S. (1949). *Al-Adalah Al-Ijtima'iyyah fi Al-Islam* [Social justice in Islam]. Cairo: Makatab Masr.



- Qutb, S. (1975). *Ma'rakat Al-Islam wa Al-Ra'smaliyyah* [The Battle of Islam and capitalism]. Cairo: Dar Al-Shuruq.
- Qutb, S. (1991). *Milestones*. Indiana: American Trust Publications.
- Qutb, S. (2000). *Social justice in Islam*. New York: International Islamic Publications.
- Qutb, S. (2005). Foreword. In S. A. H. A. Al-Nadwi (Ed.), *Islam and the world: The rise and decline of Muslims and its effect on mankind*. Leicester: UK Islamic Academy.
- Redissi, H., Nouira, A., & Zghal, A. (2012). *La Transition Démocratique en Tunisie: État des Lieux: Les Acteurs*. Tunis: Diwan Edition.
- Rogan, E. (2009). *The Arabs: A history*. London: Penguin.
- Roy, O. (1998). Has Islamism a future in Afghanistan? In W. Maley (Ed.), *Fundamentalism reborn?: Afghanistan and the Taliban* (pp. 199–201). New York: New York University Press.
- Rubin, B. (2002). *Islamic fundamentalism in Egyptian politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sadiki, L. (2004). *The search for Arab democracy: Discourses and counter-discourses*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sadiki, L. (2009). *Rethinking Arab democratization: Elections without democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sadiki, L. (2011). BA 2886: *The return of Ghannouchi*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/01/201113082557864558.html>.
- Sadiki, L. (2012). Islam. In B. Isakhan & S. Stockwell (Eds.), *The Edinburgh companion to the history of democracy* (pp. 123–127). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Samti, S. F. (2013, October 18). Eight years ago today, when Islamists and secularists got along. Retrieved from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/10/18/eight-years-ago-today-when-leftists-andislamistsgot-along/#sthash.B9ivpQL7.dpuf>, retrieved: 12/12/2014.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (2003). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Sivan, E. (1985). *Radical Islam: Medieval theology and modern politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sivan, E. (1998). Why radical Muslims aren't taking over governments. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 2(2), 3–9.
- Spiegel, A. (2015). *Young Islam: The new politics of religion in Morocco and the Arab world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Stepan, A. (2012). Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations. *Journal of Democracy*, 23(2), 89–103.
- Taylor, C. (2004). *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*. New York: Belknap Press.

- Tripp, C., & NetLibrary, I. (2006). *Islam and the moral economy: The challenge of capitalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Valbjørn, M. (2012). Upgrading post-democratization studies: Examining a re-politicized Arab World in a transition to somewhere. *Middle East Critique*, 21(1), 25–35. doi:10.1080/19436149.2012.658496.
- Volpi, F. (2013). Algeria versus the Arab Spring. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(3), 104–115.
- Whitehead, L. (2002). *Democratization: Theory and Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Why Did Islamic Party Lose Election in Tunisia. (2014, November 17). Retrieved from <http://www.thedailystar.net/why-did-islamic-party-lose-election-in-tunisia-4873>.
- Zelin, A. Y. (2013, October 25). *Tunisia: Uncovering Ansar Al-Sharia*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tunisia-uncovering-ansar-al-sharia>.

# From Moderation to De-moderation: Democratic Backsliding of the AKP in Turkey

*Menderes Çınar*

## FROM MUSLIM DEMOCRATS TO MUSLIM NATIONALISTS

Of the participatory Islamist political forces that are integrated into the formal political processes, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP) is arguably one of the most successful in the Muslim world.<sup>1</sup> Established in 2001 by the younger

---

<sup>1</sup>The AKP's political identity has been a matter of controversy for a number of reasons. First, the party was established by the younger generation of Islamist, who were pious Muslims and who claimed Conservative Democracy to be their new identity. But this was a vaguely defined identity designed to achieve political legitimacy in a context where the parameters of legitimate political activity was set by Turkey's military-led secular establishment. Second, the predominance of Orientalist/essentialist approaches that denied the possibility of a change in Islamist politics has further complicated the problem and hindered a better understanding of the true nature of the AKP. And, third Islamism has been a broad term used in referring to violent as well as participatory (civil and political) movements.

---

M. Çınar (✉)  
Baskent University, Ankara, Turkey

generation of the Islamist National Outlook Movement (*Millî Görüş Hareketi*—1969–present), the AKP has assumed the reigns of government with an overwhelming majority in the very first election it competed in 2002 and has since maintained its grip on power. The AKP has also managed to abort alleged coup attempts, narrowly survived closure by the Constitutional Court and dismantled the tutelary power of the military-led secular establishment. Judging by the magnitude of the power it commands today, the AKP has certainly surpassed the performance of its predecessors. This includes not just the political parties associated with the Islamist National Outlook Movement, none of which could win majorities nor escape recurrent closures for allegedly being a focal point of anti-secular activities, but also Turkey’s centrist political traditions. Since the transition to competitive politics in 1950, no political party has governed without having to share power with the military-led secular establishment for more than a decade (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1997). The AKP has shown how skilled Islamists politicians can be, and perhaps set a new model of “doing politics” for Islamist political parties elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Setting aside the success in profoundly altering the balance of power, the AKP’s political discourse and practice have been less than consistent in both substance and style. In fact, the AKP has given diametrically opposing messages in terms of the cultivation of a full-fledged Muslim democracy and the reconciliation of Islam and democracy. In the first

---

Footnote 1 (continued)

Fourth, as the party got leader centered, the relative weight of Conservative Democracy as the AKP’s original political program/identity has decreased. To the extent that a conscious epistemological and ontological reference to “Islam” is regarded as the essential feature of Islamism, the AKP can be considered as a case of renewed Islamism. At the outset, the AKP’s “new Islamism” did not entail a political project to capture the state for a top-down Islamism or Islamize the social sphere by way of investing it with Islamic signs and symbols, but a willingness to meet the Islamic demands, like freedom to wear headscarf at university campuses, with a view to transform individuals. The AKP has problematized the Kemalist illiberal practice of secularism out of this “Islamic sensitivity,” which may be called “Islamism without Islamists”. The AKP’s “new Islamism” in a sense entailed the defense of the negative liberties of the Islamic identity in Turkey. It has also retained the Islamist claim to a distinct civilizational identity, but, in radical contrast to the clash of civilizations perspective of the “old” Islamism of its predecessors, taken civilizational dialogue between the West and Islam as essential. See Çınar and Duran (2008) and Yıldız (2008).

period, which roughly lasted until the AKP's final victory against the secular establishment in 2010,<sup>2</sup> the former seemed to represent a moderate Muslim political force. As a political force with an Islamist pedigree, it initially claimed credibility by putting forward a clear and sophisticated program for governance, by advocating a non-authoritarian practice of secularism. It employed liberal language in defending the rights of the Islamic identity and embarked upon democratic reforms to drive Turkey's alignment with the political norms of the European Union. Defining politics as an arena of compromise and consensus, the AKP also displayed an inclusive and conciliatory attitude towards alternative views. It reduced the power and influence of the military-led secular establishment, which was then projected as the major contributor to Turkey's democratic failures, including the dominance of authoritarian secularism. During this phase, the AKP postponed taking up issues of Islamic identity in an attempt to highlight their pragmatic orientation that is geared towards delivering effective governance. Towards this end, the AKP employed the language of democracy/democratization as a rallying point against Turkey's illiberal secular establishment. The AKP thereby appeared to have "moderated" in the sense of showing "greater acceptance and understanding of democracy" (Clark, 2006: 541).

As the AKP consolidated its power at the expense of Turkey's secular establishment, which traditionally determined the parameters of legitimate political activity, its increasing authoritarian political orientation served to reinforce the Orientalist essentialism which claims that Islamist can never be fully committed to liberal democracy. Since the 2011 elections, the AKP's political stance sharply contradicts earlier promises and policies. The AKP defended the notorious 10% electoral threshold, maintained Turkey's centrist political structures and allowed Ergenekon trials of the alleged coup plotters to be show trials, violating the principles of due process, thereby casting a shadow of doubt over its democratic intentions. Policies that the AKP framed as an illustration of their "democratic responsiveness to the demands of conservative masses" were coupled with a unilateralist, imposing, moralistic and combative style that denigrated, if not interfered with, secular life styles. The

---

<sup>2</sup>After containing the military and taking over the Presidency, a package of Constitutional amendments rendering the last bastion of the establishment, the judiciary, a more heterogeneous and friendly institution were accepted by popular vote in a referendum in 2010.

AKP justified these policies on the basis of either the popular mandate it enjoys, the Islamic principle of “commanding good, forbidding evil” or the Islamist project of correcting the errors from the long years of Westernization.<sup>3</sup> This was accompanied by a non-centrist and populist vote-maximization strategy, which bars the possibility of shades of grey in socio-political matters. Critics and opponents were thereby disqualified from democratic engagement and dismissed as self-interested, illegitimate, unnecessary, redundant and manipulative – willing to align with all sorts of domestic and international evil forces to undermine the AKP and its mission of serving the country.

Alienating a large portion of society, the AKP’s exclusionary and unilateralist politics contributed to the expansion of protests against the demolition of Gezi Park in Istanbul’s Taksim Square into a nation-wide protest against the government in the summer of 2013. Rather than alleviating the concerns of the protestors, the AKP has employed forceful measures to end and prevent a possible repeat of the Gezi Park protests. It has determined the ballot-box as the acceptable place for any expression of discontent and denied any democratic legitimacy to the protests. The protests have been depicted as symptomatic of the intolerance to the pious AKP leadership or frustration with the loss of their former privileges. Since these protestors could neither triumph over the AKP in elections nor stage a coup, they took to the streets and this, the AKP claimed, constitutes another attempt at staging a (street) coup. In so doing, the protestors are alleged to have, wittingly or unwittingly, collaborated with various forces conspiring against the AKP and the “rise” of Turkey. The corruption probe against the four government ministers

---

<sup>3</sup>These policies included creating a “religious generation”, compelling the students to choose religious schools and courses and introducing regulations to restrict the sale of alcohol. When defending the last, the AKP leader Erdoğan made the following illustrative statement: “The regulation of the sale of alcohol is not an intervention into anyone’s identity, ideology, life style. Those who perceive it otherwise are mistaken and those who portray it otherwise are ill-intended. Drink at your home, if you want to drink. Unfortunately, in the last 200 years our youth has been detached from their own values, alienated from their own civilization and land, and moulded with an approach that imitates and imports [from the West]. What’s more this has not been a natural process. The youth were subjected to impositions, children were wanted to be formatted, people’s freedom of choice was taken away from them. I thank everyone who, by playing a part in the introduction of this important regulation, created the right climate for the growth of the generation of 2023, 2053, 2071” See, Hürriyet (2013a).

and Erdoğan's inner circle in mid-December 2013 was also projected as a coup attempt by the religious network led by Fethullah Gülen in alliance with domestic and international forces conspiring against the AKP and Turkey. The probe was blocked by compromising the rule of law and introducing greater controls over the judiciary, press and social media. In tandem with this, the AKP continued to claim democratic legitimacy by pointing to its continuing electoral support, popular mandate and counter-mobilization capacity.

The AKP's claim to democratic legitimacy did not just rest on its continuing electoral success but entailed an attempt at redefining democracy in terms of promoting "our civilization". This "nativist" definition of democracy made allegiance to "our civilization" a precondition for being a democrat in Turkey and allowed the AKP to free itself from the universal norms and principles of democratic governance. The AKP's "nativist" democracy project also allowed it to categorize all alternative views, critics and opponents as Islamophobic, Eurocentric, Orientalist, elitist, tutelary, undemocratic or anti-democratic by virtue of their supposedly non-native civilizational paradigm. The latter paradigm is projected as an unjust Westernization project. The AKP also used its nativist democracy paradigm to turn politics into a salvational mission of restoring civilizational identity by way of remaking state and society. Such an extraordinary task, in turn, enabled the AKP to elevate itself above politics and provided it with a pretext to concentrate power, shirk away from transparency and accountability and reject the principle of separation of powers by instructing the judiciary to serve the "national interest" (Karakuş, 2012; Hürriyet, 2014). In addition to the excessively uncivil language depicting its critics as traitors, enemies of the nation, scums, thugs and drunkards, AKP opponents and critics have been harassed by arbitrary fiscal and administrative investigations and fines and threats of physical violence.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, EU reports which draw attention to Turkey's

---

<sup>4</sup>In the run up to November 2015 elections, threats and acts of violence against the Istanbul daily Hürriyet, its columnist Ahmet Hakan and pro-Kurdish HDP supporters by the leader of the AKP's youth branch and by a mob leader went without a neat public disapproval by the AKP leaders, let alone a serious police investigation. The leader of the Youth Branch, Abdurrahim Boynukalın, then was honored with a seat in the board of the AKP's September 2015 Congress.

deteriorating democracy have been denounced for deliberately undermining the “rise” of Turkey.<sup>5</sup>

The AKP’s nativist democracy signified its limited regard for democratic norms such as pluralism, individual rights, freedom of expression, tolerance and compromise. At least since 2011, the AKP has not cultivated a pluralist society based on liberal democracy but reconstructed Turkey as a “Muslim nation” that is supposedly freed from hundreds of years of Westernization by restoring Islamic civilizational identity (Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015; White, 2013). Such a project necessitates holding on to power in order to remake Turkish society. The AKP’s resolve to monopolize power is best illustrated by its rejection of the results of the June 2015 elections, which dictated a sharing of power within the context of a coalition government. Erdoğan, President since 2014, took the initiative to derail the coalition government and return to the polls in November 2015 in order to “correct” the June 2015 election results (Cizre, 2015).

Particularly since 2011, the AKP has contradicted its earlier reputation as a center-right, Islamic liberal, liberal Islamist, post-Islamist party (Öniş, 2009; Özbudun & Hale, 2010). Also, the earlier expectations that embracement of universal values of human rights and democracy for instrumental reasons would eventually lead to a substantive belief in these values (Dağı, 2005), or that the logic of electoral competition would result in the emergence of a substantive Muslim democracy (Nasr, 2005) have been proven to be erroneous. It turned out that the AKP’s moderation was tactical and superficial. This chapter will attempt to explain the AKP’s “moderation” and “de-moderation” by focusing on three possible factors: the AKP’s strong leadership and internal party structure, the political context within which the AKP interacted with secular actors and the impact of the changing international context on the revival of the AKP’s Islamist ideology. Significantly, the AKP is characterized as a new political phenomenon that does not neatly fit into existing analytical categories.

---

<sup>5</sup>“Their duty is to prepare the report and ours is to go our own way” Erdoğan once stated, cited in Kubicek (2013). Also, counter-reports dismissing the EU’s criticisms were published by the relevant government bodies, see Radikal (2013). For Erdoğan’s most recent rejection of a European Parliament report on the declining state of democracy, see Hürriyet (2016a).



## THE AKP'S ORIGINS: A 'MODERATELY RADICAL' POLITICAL FORCE?

It is important to note that Turkish Islamism has been less an intellectual movement of ideas than a political movement for defending the interests of conservative Muslims within Turkey's secularist power structures (Yıldız, 2006). It has moreover always had a strong nationalist dimension with very weak links to the Ottoman past and Islamist movements elsewhere in the Muslim world (Çınar & Duran, 2008). Considered by some commentators as an impoverished intellectual movement, these features of Turkish Islamism were partly due to the Ottoman legacy and the Republican Westernization in Turkey (Duran, 2010). Unlike many of the Arab states, the Turkish state did not emerge as a result of Western colonization but was built on the remnants of the Ottoman state which enjoyed domestic social institutionalization and non-religious forms of legitimacy (Brown, 2009; Jung, 2007). The Turkish Westernizing elite had therefore the will and capacity to deliver and maintain independence, establish a militantly secular nation-state and maintain it long enough to render secularism a socially accepted organizing principle—not just a state ideology. The militant secularization in the early years of the Republic had forced Islamism underground, breaking the continuity with Ottoman Islamist thought. Since its reemergence in the early years of the multi-party regime (1946–), Turkish Islamism has been led by modern-educated professionals who reproduced republican orthodoxies (Çınar & Sezgin, 2013). Turkish Islamists have, moreover, been relatively sophisticated politicians, capable of distinguishing between political and missionary activities, making political calculations and developing relatively coherent political platforms as a result of their integration into the political process. They were able to form political parties, capture the imagination of the religious and participate as minor political actors in the coalition governments of the 1970s.

Yet it was not until the mid-1990s that Islamists became a major political force. They won the plurality of seats in the parliament and became a major partner in a coalition government with a center-right party, but could neither survive in government for more than a year nor deliver on any of their promises in the face of a mounting secularist state aggression. The military embarked on a project of reconfiguring politics to restore the secularist center by mobilizing the institutions of state and society (Cizre & Çınar, 2003). It cracked down on any signs of

a resurgence of Islamic identity in political, economic and social realms. The Islamists could not resist this repression partly because of their exaggerated, exclusionary and absolutist rhetoric, and policy initiatives, which alienated large sectors of society and substantiated the military's claim that secular regime and life styles were under threat. Consequently, Islamists were forced to resign from government, their political parties were closed and leaders were banned from political activity. Islamic social identity too was restricted by forceful measures, including the infamous prohibition of wearing the headscarf in university campuses. Equally significant was the decline in centrist political traditions as a result of the military's attempt to restore the Kemalist center by establishing a zero-sum relationship between Islam and secularism. These moves placed the Turkish Islamists in disarray, but also created a major political vacuum, luring politically sophisticated younger generation Islamists to the political arena.

The AKP was founded by this younger generation who were driven by the promise of being a pragmatic political force that, unlike their elders, would not "rock the boat". This promise entailed gaining enough electoral support to form single party governments, surviving in government, establishing a counter balance to the secular establishment, bringing secularist aggression against the promotion of Islamic identity to a halt and expanding the spheres of Islamic identity in the long run. To achieve these ambitious ends, the AKP employed a twofold strategy. First, it adopted a centrist position by downplaying the Islamist rhetoric and projecting its political activity as a pragmatic non-ideological activity of "serving the nation". In this way, the AKP moved closer to the Turkish center-right tradition, the hallmark of which has been using "service to nation" as a dictum to underplay the unpopular Kemalist cultural Westernization project, disguise their own ideological ambiguity and emphasize their responsiveness to the aspirations of the people. This stance was accompanied by an additional discourse that associated ideological politics with the Cold War era. In this era of globalization, the AKP argued, ideological politics was superseded by pluralist political approaches that are geared towards the protection of basic rights and liberties (Aksoy, 2004). The AKP thereby captured the imagination of many people who were tired of the tension-generating and conflict-ridden politics of the 1990s.

Second, the AKP had to struggle with the secular establishment out of survival instincts. As counter-elites in the social, cultural, political and

economic realms, the AKP was neither a part of the power structure, nor welcomed by the military-led establishment (Göle, 1997; Taşkın, 2008). In this struggle, the AKP recognized the power and prestige of the establishment, and refrained from provoking it. As such, it downplayed issues pertaining to Islamic identity, and invoked universal principles of human rights and democracy that the Kemalists' only embraced in rhetorical terms. In this way, the AKP has shown how superficially Western the Kemalist Westernization had been, especially in its practice of secularism and democracy (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1998; Keyder, 1993). This strategy entailed deploying the universal norms and values of Western democracy and adopting a pro-Western and pro-European Union membership stance. Obviously, these were the political opportunities and strategic resources, provided by the very Kemalist regime the AKP challenged.

The AKP was neither a reincarnation of Turkish Islamism, nor another one of the pro-establishment center-right parties. What the AKP represented was an anti-establishment sentiment that attempted to redefine Turkey's center in more inclusive, pluralistic and democratic terms. This did not mean that the AKP embodied liberal democratic norms or aimed at a liberal democratic transformation of Turkey. The AKP took on a vaguely defined conservative democratic identity, which gave it some ideological flexibility and ability to engage in liberal terms. In this way, the AKP was able to reject being categorized as Islamist, form anti-establishment coalitions especially with the pro-democratization liberal sectors of society, and emerge as a proto-democratic political force.

The deployment of pro-Western liberal rhetoric and engagement ironically entailed a radical anti-establishment stance aimed at redefining Turkey's illiberal center, rather than adjustment to it. State repression compelled the Islamists to prioritize gaining access to power at a time when the AKP's political identity was still in its infancy. Whether the AKP's "moderation" and alliance with pro-democratization liberal sectors were tactical or ideological at this stage of the "disestablishment of the establishment" is less than clear. As elsewhere in the Muslim world, the common oppositional frame hindered a fuller articulation and more meaningful embrace of liberal democratic values (Browsers, 2009).

However, there were some objective grounds for projecting the AKP as a case of genuine ideological moderation. They include the presence of a pro-market conservative bourgeoisie, pro-democratization Islamist intellectuals and a charismatic leader capable of justifying moderation

as well as the absence of an Islamist social movement or a rival Islamist party that would trigger an out-Islaming race (Ashour, 2007; Dağı, 2004; Gümüüşcü, 2010; Tuğal, 2012; Wenger & Pellicer, 2009). The fact that the AKP was founded by younger generation of Islamists critical of earlier Islamists who operated within hierarchical party organizations and promised intra-party democracy augured well for ideological moderation (Schwedler, 2006). Also the incentives and constraints provided by being integrated into the electoral process of a strictly secular and Western-oriented political system were among the factors likely to facilitate ideological moderation. Finally, the relatively long history of pluralism (Angrist, 2004) as well as the presence of anti-establishment secular sectors willing to engage and align with the AKP increased the prospects of an ideological moderation in Turkey.

Yet, there were grounds for questioning the sustainability of the AKP's ostensible moderation. The AKP's conciliatory approach ran the risk of being driven by a strategic concern for not provoking the establishment to embark on another crackdown against Islamist identity. This is especially so because the AKP's vaguely defined conservative democratic ideology assumed societal differences to be in harmonious unity (Çınar, 2006). In this respect, the AKP failed to recognize the inevitability of conflict as a source of renewal and invention. The AKP was thus disinclined to build coalitions and alternative emancipatory political initiatives. Also, the institutions that maintained the strictly secular system were more like extensions of the tutelary establishment than truly autonomous institutions enjoying high prestige and respectability. Moreover, there was the risk of populist degeneration because as an anti-establishment party of "outsiders" the AKP lacked and rejected the need for a guiding ideology but strongly identified with its charismatic leader (Tepe, 2005). This combination of factors hindered the prospect of introducing democratic reform and redefining the center.

#### ERDOĞAN'S AKP: FROM "A PARTY OF 'US' TO A PARTY OF 'ME'"

A positive redefinition of the political center required the enunciation of a clear democratizing political platform. A clear political platform, however, posed a dilemma to the AKP for it would risk the benefits of ideological flexibility and undermine its charismatic leader, who with

his “strong leadership” made up for the limitations of the party’s vague political identity. The AKP “resolved” this dilemma by submitting to the strong charismatic leadership by Erdoğan. Rapid back-peddalling from the promises of intra-party democracy, coupled with the rise of populist politics arrested the development of a clearly defined political identity. In fact, Erdoğan has gradually turned the AKP into his organizational tool and epitomized its political identity. This has seriously diminished the AKP’s capacity to institutionalize democratic reforms, introduced to “disestablish the establishment”, improve the public debate, and further democratize the polity (Lancaster, 2014; Tezcür, 2010). This is not just because a personalistic party in itself is an impediment to democratization, but also because the strong charismatic leader that binds the AKP possesses a limited understanding of democracy and justice. In fact, once furnished with the popular mandate to rule, Erdoğan considered the representation of political differences as damaging the national interest. He claimed that the AKP was non-ideological – serving the nation and not exclusively representing AKP supporters (Radikal, 2004). He yearned for the people to appreciate his policy initiatives and did not fully comprehend why the remaining 50% of the electorate did not vote for his party (Hürriyet, 2011). As he moved away from inclusionary practices, he complained about non-AKP voters failing to appreciate his national vision—accusing them of being unconcerned with the national interest, engaging in ideological politics and creating unnecessary conflict. He took criticisms personally, as a questioning of, and insult to his Islamist ideals and sense of justice. It appears that Erdoğan had “moderated” for tactical reasons, in order to facilitate the right conditions for “commanding good” and in accordance to God’s directive.<sup>6</sup>

In 2002, the AKP leadership by a team of prominent Islamist politicians as well as some respectable center-right figures pledged to promote coalition politics, intra-party democracy and democratization discourses – ingredients and indicators of its ostensible “moderation”. By 2003, however, the Party’s constitution was revised to strengthen the

---

<sup>6</sup>In a number of statements he made in the mid-1990s Erdoğan likened his change to a change in the shell. Later, he referred to the change AKP represents as “taking off the [Islamist] National Outlook shirt”. As a Muslim he was assigned by God with the task of preparing the ground for the good. In the realization of the good, he stated “they [the secular sectors] will get used to some things, like they got us used to some things in the past”. See his interviews with Karaalioglu (1996), Cerrahoğlu (1996) and Düzel (1995).

leadership at the expense of intra-party democracy. Erdoğan had apparently equated intra-party democracy with internal strife and mischief.<sup>7</sup> Initially, the struggle against the authoritarian establishment necessitated suppressing the “untimely” and “extreme” demands of the conservative Islamist rank and file in order to present a united and coordinated front against the establishment. This was followed by the gradual departure and side-lining of heavy-weight Islamist actors, and independent-minded centrist figures who represented countervailing forces to Erdoğan’s domineering status in the party.<sup>8</sup> Erdoğan deployed the support of party members and recruited loyalists without an independent power base, as a means of imposing party discipline. In this way, he was able to dominate the party without significant challenge. The AKP, thus became a personalistic party united around loyalty to Erdoğan. With this, Erdoğan alone reaped the reputation for struggling against the secular establishment and assumed the position of an indispensable guarantor and benevolent patron of Islamic identity in Turkey.<sup>9</sup> Henceforth, any criticism of AKP’s policies was projected as a case of “personal enmity” against Erdoğan.

Under the charismatic leadership of Erdoğan, the AKP was reduced to a party based on discipline rather than a coherent political party – as coherence is arguably a function of a political programme (Kitschelt, 2000). The unity and survival of the AKP were therefore dependent on the leader’s ability and skills to impose discipline – punish and reward. This, in turn, rendered the maintenance and expansion of the domains of

---

<sup>7</sup>The importance of the intra-party democracy for the future of the party was emphasized by Ertugrul Yalçınbayır, one of the top policymakers of the AKP between 2002 and 2007, see Gül (2012).

<sup>8</sup>One of the founding Islamist leaders Abdullatif Şener left the party over disagreement with Erdoğan on the issues of corruption and polarization in 2008; another one, Abdullah Gül, was moved to the impartial, non-executive seat of the presidency in 2007 and his team was marginalized and gradually purged. Despite his apparent disagreement with Erdoğan on many issues from the handling of Gezi protests and the peace process with the Kurds to the categorization of opposition as enemies rather than rivals, Bülent Arınç stayed within the party at the cost of a very effective marginalization by Erdoğan and his stalwarts.

<sup>9</sup>For example, parts of Abdullah Gül’s interview, expressing his contributions to the AKP’s successful resistance to the e-memorandum issued by military on the eve of the 2007 Presidential elections was censored in the pro-AKP media, see Özvanş (2014). Also, Bülent Arınç was practically prohibited from a number of tv channels, including the public channel TRT, which was under his portfolio as the Deputy Prime Minister, see Hürriyet (2015).

power, a sine qua non for both the leader and AKP. Erdoğan's tendency to centralize and concentrate power in his hands gained a new momentum as the AKP was turned into a political machine, serving and benefiting from this acute concentration of power. In the ensuing symbiosis, Erdoğan was not bound by the party which he assigned with the task of providing the organizational and mobilizational resources necessary for his power machinations. As long as Erdoğan's divisive populist rhetoric led to electoral victories and improved access to clientalist distribution, its undemocratic substance was not to be questioned, disputed or debated.

To maintain his concentration of power and constructed charisma, Erdoğan could not rely on clientalist distribution alone for this would render him vulnerable, much like other center-right political figures. Therefore, the AKP came up with catchphrases such as "new Turkey", "civilizational restoration" and "2023 targets" to create a sense of mission and vision, capture the imagination of the people and maintain electoral predominance. In the absence of a clear political program, however, the AKP's seemingly transformative outlook and agenda was actually limited to Erdoğan's anti-establishment and anti-status quo stance. He now acted like a maverick chief set out to liberate the nation and (re)build the state. Consequently, Erdoğan was compelled to be in command and the AKP was compelled to heed his command—ensuring further centralization and concentration of power in his hands.

The AKP's transformation was not a natural process, but a consequence of Erdoğan's conscious disciplinary manoeuvres which prevented the development of a centrist middle ground. With the shrinking of the middle ground the construction of a zero-sum political paradigm flourished. This paradigm was disseminated through a wide network of loyalist media outlets, thus denying the validity of nuanced approaches that recognized the political shades of grey. As such, any criticism of the Turkish Prime Ministers Menderes and Erbakan or the Egyptian President Morsi was perceived as justifying the military coups against them (Akparti, 2013a). By implication, criticizing him and his party was tantamount to supporting a coup. This dichotomous and polarizing approach arguably saved the AKP from having to confront complicated political issues and intra-party debates on policy. But at the same time, this approach necessitated the construction of an enemy. Having disqualified all critics and opponents from democratic political engagement, Erdoğan employed a highly combative political discourse and style

that transgressed liberal democratic norms and values, denied representative politics and generated tension and mistrust. A fictitious enemy front, constituting all who were “unqualified and unwilling to serve the people”, “evil forces”, “aliens and traitors who have nothing to give this country” was constructed. It was against this “enemy front” that Erdoğan, as the patron of Muslims, suppressed internal criticism, demonstrated leadership skills, built charisma, maintained the AKP’s unity and claimed democratic legitimacy.

To render his exclusionary and polarizing rule effective and valid, Erdoğan followed two strategies. First, he engineered the liquidation of actors that could potentially undermine his polarizing machinations. The merger with, or more accurately takeover of, the critical yet Islamist HAS Party and the recruitment of its leader Numan Kurtulmuş as well as some potentially promising careerist center-right figures like Süleyman Soylu to the high-echelons of the party are illustrations of this strategy. Second, by centralizing and concentrating power in his hands, he increased the cost of resistance to his dictates.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, the potential benefits of supporting him were increased as well. This added some muscle to his infamous warning “those who are neutral will be disposed of” and facilitated the emergence of a loyal network of civil society organizations, foundations, think tanks, media outlets, business conglomerates – all acting as his auxiliaries rather than autonomous bodies. Dedicated to the tasks of rendering Erdoğan uncriticizable and shifting the burden of responsibility for various governmental failures to others, these organizations and their personnel dominated the public sphere and have made Erdoğan’s political logic the new paradigm of Turkish “democracy”.

As Erdoğan empowered himself at the expense of his party and Turkey’s democratic institutions, his paternalism and zero-sum approaches have become the norm. By declaring his Islamist maxim that “those who remain silent against injustice are tongueless devils”, he has reduced injustice only to cases that he stands against. His statement “we take the steps that need to be taken, we do what needs to be done”

---

<sup>10</sup>Rare instances of failure to toe the line, even if they were in a friendly manner and from within the ranks of loyalist organizations, were subject to harsh response by Erdoğan and his stalwarts in the form of termination of employment/business contracts or ostracization. Ali Akel of pro-AKP daily *Yeni Şafak* was fired for he called on the AKP to account for the bombing of Turkey’s Kurds by fighter jets on the Syrian border.



(Sabah, 2012) and monopolization of the discourse on justice provided the rationale for delegitimizing and dismissing any alternative calls for justice, accountability and public criticism against policy failures. Such alternatives are projected as unfair, ill-intended and hostile endeavours aimed at undermining his stature as the sole patron of Islamic identity. For Erdoğan, elections are sufficient evidence of democratic accountability. “If we do something anti-democratic”, he once stated, “our nation will take us down” (Taraf, 2013). Other forms of democratic accountability beyond elections were denounced for not being “respectful” to the will of the nation—which he embodies (Akperti, 2014a).

Electoral victories have therefore provided Erdoğan with the democratic mandate to rule in any way he deems fit. He is projected as having rectified the under-development, injustices, artificial divisions and conflicts caused by the “Westernization adventure”, which had also replaced the religious scholar with Western-educated individuals who Westernized the state and the nation (Milli Gazete, 1997). “For 200 years [of Westernization]” he stated “a direction has been imposed on the nation, no choice has been offered to the nation. Its opinion has not been asked and its values have been ignored. For 200 years, a certain truth has been told to the nation, and this truth has been imposed by a repressive, violent and despotic state. ... Only the nation counts for us. Those who pay attention to this or that group, and not the nation, loses the mission at the outset” (Akperti, 2013b). The failure to recognize the differences within the nation does not really matter, for justice, in his opinion, was more important. Consequently, the AKP tarnished all its opponents with the Kemalist Westernization project which supposedly looked down on the Turkish nation and its values, and unable to come to terms with an authentic nation (Akperti, 2012; Hürriyet, 2013b). In the name of achieving justice, a counter-othering project was justified.

### THE PRESIDENTIAL DISCIPLINE

Erdoğan’s election to the constitutionally non-partisan and non-executive seat of the Presidency in 2014 brought the relationship of symbiosis to an end, at least formally. By implication, Erdoğan’s ascendance to the presidency generated some challenges but also created some opportunities for both him and the AKP. As President, he was formally devoid of both the disciplining powers and the organizational and mobilizational resources from the AKP. The AKP, on the other hand, was formally left

without Erdoğan's charisma, skills and discipline, which at the same time was an opportunity to develop a non-personalistic political identity. However, like many populist leaders (Weyland, 2003), Erdoğan could not be content with a non-executive position. Neither could he let the AKP develop an autonomous identity for this would entail a rethinking of his legacy—potentially damaging his status and charisma.

Erdoğan maintained his discipline over the AKP by not allowing for any political vacuum that could be filled by other key political actors. He prevented Davutoğlu from developing independent basis of power and legitimacy in the AKP leadership. Meanwhile, the AKP's extraordinary Congress convened to elect a new leader that left Gül out of the frame. As President, he reorganized the General Secretariat of the Presidency into a shadow cabinet to enhance his supervising and steering capacities in various fields of policy-making ranging from foreign policy to internal security to energy (Çetin, 2014). This was in line with his election campaign message that as the (formal) head of the executive, the president should be informed about all matters. He directly engaged with senior AKP administrators to complain about the failure of Davutoğlu to seek his "counsel". He created a new platform to communicate to the broader public by organizing meetings in his presidential palace. Erdoğan has shown that he is the ultimate decision-maker by imposing some policy initiatives and blocking others, and doing so in public to embarrass and undermine Davutoğlu.<sup>11</sup> Erdoğan continued to violate his constitutionally non-partisan status by turning the June 2015 elections into a referendum for a presidential system. These manoeuvres undermined the AKP's chances of winning a comfortable majority and strengthened the prospects of the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples' Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*—HDP) to pass the 10% electoral threshold.

For the first time since 2002, the election results did not deliver power to the AKP, signifying a clear rejection of Erdoğan's ambitions for an executive presidency. This was another opportunity for the AKP to reconsider its relationship with Erdoğan, but having been reduced to an

---

<sup>11</sup>Davutoğlu was compelled to withdraw the "Political Ethics and Transparency Bill", designed to fight against widespread corruption, upon Erdoğan's strong disapproval in public. Davutoğlu also invited the head of the National Intelligence, Hakan Fidan to apply for nomination as a parliamentary candidate on the AKP list. But, again upon Erdoğan's strongly worded disapproval, Fidan had to withdraw his application for nomination.

organizational tool for Erdoğan's ambitions, the AKP's capacity to do so was seriously restricted. Even though some AKP leaders indicated a willingness to accept the election results and form a coalition government, preferably with the pro-secular center-left CHP, to continue the peace process with the Kurds and to ease the polarization that has been building for years, Erdoğan resisted these sentiments. Instead, he engineered another round of elections. To this end, he used his constitutional powers and leverage over the AKP to delay coalition talks, limit its duration and increase the political cost for the AKP. He then declared 1 November 2015 as the date for repeat elections. At the same time, he made sure that Davutoğlu was strongly influenced by his loyalists. As an undisclosed AKP source commented, "none of the names Davutoğlu wanted and all of the names Davutoğlu did not want" were elected to the AKP's executive bodies at the September 2015 Congress.

More importantly, to re-impose his will, Erdoğan declared the peace process with the Kurds disposable. This enabled him to turn the HDP's previously known relationship with the armed PKK into a liability and a pretext for its demonization. Declaring the peace process over shrewdly deflected attention from the declining economy and democratic regression and focused on the escalation of security tensions. This shift has tarnished the political credibility of the ultranationalist MHP, which for a long time has been a single-issue party preoccupied with opposing the AKP's past attempts at a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue. It has also placed the CHP in an awkward position, for it too had a considerable Turkish nationalist support base unsympathetic to the public recognition of the Kurdish identity.

The AKP has the ability to shift the ground of Turkish politics. Erdoğan has associated coalition governments with instability and the AKP as a source of stability. Consequently, in the November 2015 elections, the AKP regained the votes and single party majority government it had lost in June that year. Having set the terms of the repeat elections, Erdoğan's formidable political skills were evident. He rallied less, spoke more carefully and refrained from pressing for a presidential system, seemingly providing some space for Davutoğlu to claim some credit for the November victory. In reality, the de facto executive Presidency of Erdoğan was firm in place. In May 2016, Erdoğan replaced Davutoğlu with Binali Yıldırım, a long-term loyalist, as the Chair of the Party and the Prime Minister of the country.

## OUTMANOEUVRING THE OPPOSITION: THE PROCESS OF ‘UN/LEARNING’

Despite winning overwhelming parliamentary majorities in Turkey’s electoral democracy, the AKP, for the large part of its rule since 2002, had faced a secular opposition that single-mindedly rejected its legitimacy. The latter undermined the AKP simply because of the Islamist pedigree of its founding leaders. The opposition strategy was based on categorizing the AKP as Islamist, provoking fears of Islamization and disqualifying the AKP and its constituency from democratic politics. Instead of engaging with the AKP on the basis of policies and utilizing democratic norms, the secular opposition relied on the power and prestige of the military establishment, adopted an explicitly uncivil attitude, defended and justified the use of forceful measures, and bent the rules of the game in order to contain the AKP government and its conservative Islamic constituency. The secular opposition, in other words, reproduced the zero-sum-politics that the military imposed in the mid-1990s. Their political calculus turned out to be one that openly denies the need for, and the value of, democratic reform. The secular opposition practically vacated the sphere of democratic politics and fuelled tension in the polity. This enabled the AKP to define its struggle for power and recognition as a struggle for democracy. Consequently, the limitations of the AKP’s understanding of democracy and secularism could not be readily exposed and the empowerment of the AKP was conflated with Turkey’s democratization (Çınar, 2008, 2011).

The AKP’s interaction with the secular opposition strengthened its distrust of secular actors and increased the importance of holding on to power. Its interaction with the secular opposition/establishment did not contribute towards democratic power sharing, essential for a reconfiguration of the political center. This is because the secular opposition was compelled to come to terms with the power and popularity of the AKP as a result of a somewhat unruly power struggle in which democratic rules, norms and values were compromised. The lack of regret and remorse on the part of the alleged coup plotters, for example, seemed to have solidified the view of the AKP that the establishment would never countenance their legitimacy (Şenocaklı, 2012). Also, the failure of the secular liberals, who supported the AKP’s demilitarization and Europeanization drive but failed to stand by the AKP in its 2008 attempt to lift the ban on the headscarf in university campuses, weakened this

alliance and revived deep-seated distrust. In fact, this distrust reinforced the AKP's zero-sum approach as liberals were denounced for being inconsistent when it came to the rights and liberties associated with Islamic identity. The distrust of secular actors facilitated the perpetuation of insecurity which was then used as a political strategy. To overcome this insecurity, the AKP-concentrated political power in its hands, and thus compromised democratic processes. Populist anti-establishment discourse and policies continued to be deployed even after the disestablishment of the establishment. The target was now the secular actors. In this respect, Erdoğan's denigration of the secular lifestyles was justified as an attempt at injecting legitimacy to religiosity (e.g. Ete, 2013). As a corollary, the criticisms of the AKP's combative policies were reduced to the defense of secularist privileges and struggle against conservative actors.

It is true that the political context in Turkey did not habituate or compel the AKP to the norms of democracy (Çınar, 2006). But can the lack of a democratic center, to which the AKP adjusted to become a major player, provide us with an adequate explanation for this downward spiral into authoritarianism? The idea that the AKP adopted the democratic practices only in so far as the center itself was democratic is questionable as this notion downplays the democratic capacities of political actors (cf. Somer, 2014). In other words, there is some circularity to this argument: partial democracies cannot produce democratizing actors because they are partial-democracies. As such, the possibility of an indigenous democratization is foreclosed. Also, the focus on the context runs the risk of underplaying the importance of the choices of political actors (such as the AKP) as far as the fortunes of democracy are concerned. This is especially because the AKP now commands an immense amount of institutional, political and societal power that furnishes it with the capacity to redefine Turkey's identity and center in its own terms.

Why then did the AKP's project of redefining Turkey's center (identity) not entail putting forward a clear democratization agenda and committing itself to it? Why has the AKP discontinued with the democratization rhetoric but embarked on a populist vote-maximization strategy that has deepened the divisions in Turkey's already torn society? The recent predicament of the Turkish democracy can be explained by the AKP's zero-sum approach, but there seems to be more to the AKP's zero-sum approach than the lack of a democratic center. After all, a mature political identity would recognize that reciprocating with the same zero-sum mentality that victimizes a sector of society would result

in a self-fulfilling prophecy, not bridge Turkey's already torn society, and positively redefine the center. The AKP's zero-sum approach allows no other form of recognition than allegiance or loyalty to the party. This in turn increases the cost of recognizing or rejecting the legitimacy of the AKP, placing the secular sectors in a difficult predicament. Moreover, the zero-sum approach renders the resistance to the AKP as "democratic", for democracy cannot just be about the exclusive empowerment of the AKP and its constituency at the expense of other political actors.

The AKP's conservative religious ideology and apparent overlap with the way the Kemalist legacy has been framed seems to have facilitated the AKP's zero-sum approach. Defining the nation as Muslim first and foremost, the Islamist tradition in Turkey has been projected as an authentic form of nationalism. According to this narrative, Islamists were forcefully marginalized and repressed by the Westernizing elite who captured the power of the state, acted as internal colonizers and created an artificial identity in order to manipulate the nation and prolong their self-interested rule. The Turkish Islamist tradition, therefore, linked the authoritarian aspects of the state to its Westernizing and secular orientation. It framed democratization as bringing the alienation of the Westernizing state and Muslim society to an end and rendering it harmonious with the values of Muslims. The parties to the political struggle for the nation's liberation, Erdoğan declared on many occasions, are the (Westernizing repressive) state and the (Muslim) nation. In this narrative, the AKP represents and embodies the Muslim people and is reclaiming what had been usurped by the Westernizing elite a hundred or so years ago.

A reductionist reading of the Turkish political history as the struggle between the Kemalist (secular) state and Muslim society lends some legitimacy to this narrow understanding of democracy.<sup>12</sup> Focusing on the forceful submergence of Islam for the sake of Westernization, this reading of the cultural alienation thesis reduces the authoritarian nature of the Turkish state to its secular character. It suggests that once the state's authoritarian grip on society loosens, the Islamic identity will inevitably rise and this will constitute Turkey's democratization. By turning a blind eye to the authoritarian aspects as well as the flexibility of Kemalist secularism and Westernization and to the plurality of challenges to it, the

---

<sup>12</sup>For a comprehensive statement of this reductionism and its critique see respectively, Yavuz (2003) and Çınar (2004).

cultural alienation thesis conforms with the AKP's narration of republican history as the story of the struggle of democratic Muslim masses located at the periphery against the authoritarian encroachments of the Kemalist civil-military elite located at the center. Moreover, this narrative reproduces the Orientalist paradigm in terms of restricting Turkey's trajectory towards either submergence or resurgence of Islam. Hence, the misleading conflation of democratization with the rise of Islamic identity in Turkey.

### RETURN TO "OUR CIVILIZATION"

Two external factors have facilitated the AKP's use of "our civilization" to reject the universally binding norms of Western democracy and engage in authoritarian practices. The first relates to the loss of the EU anchor despite the start of the accession negotiations in 2005. By framing Turkey's integration with the EU in terms of a "reconciliation of civilizations", the AKP had from the very beginning identified Turkey with an unnamed non-Western civilization, but without explicitly rejecting the liberal political norms of European democracy. In fact, the AKP has embarked upon a rapid reform program to align Turkey with European political norms in order to accelerate Turkey's membership to the EU. Characterizing Turkey as non-Western, therefore, did not necessarily entail a rejection of the universality of the political norms of European democracy. As such, the AKP represented the possibility of rendering Western political norms with the norms of "our civilization". Islamist intellectuals as well as the AKP leadership argued that EU membership and norms are an asset for Turkey.

From 2012, Erdoğan began invoking the "our civilization" discourse as a means of rejecting Western democracy as a reference point. "The core of democracy is cohabitation of differences and it is rooted in our civilization", he once stated. This was followed by the claim that when it comes to matters of democracy, "we do not need to look elsewhere", for "contemporary universal values and principles were strongly defended and practiced by the Ottoman and Seldjuki states" (cited in Ergin, 2012). Such statements were also coupled with the explicit rejection of liberal democratic principles like the separation of powers, delegitimization of all critics as Eurocentric, Islamophobic and non-national, and rejection of all Western criticisms as colonialist or Orientalist exercises. The AKP used the "our civilization" discourse to free itself from

democratic norms and to delegitimize and dismiss those who failed to abide by Erdoğan's dictates. The Constitutional Court, for example, was declared non-national for its rulings which upheld freedom of expression principles (Hürriyet, 2016b; Taraf, 2014).

Foreign policy has been used to offset the AKP's legitimacy deficit (Duran, 2006). EU norms had provided the AKP with strategic resources. But since instrumental adoption of values and norms might even result in an internalized commitment, this instrumentalization alone cannot account for the AKP's return to "our civilization" discourse. The EU itself has diminished its relevance for the AKP. First, the ECHR's decision to endorse the ban on wearing headscarfs in university campuses was for many of the AKP leaders indicative of Europe's willingness to compromise its democratic standards. Second, resistance to Turkey's full membership from within the EU has gained momentum and hardened. Additionally, France and Germany have openly opposed and blocked Turkey's full membership on cultural essentialist grounds. To be sure, the EU's exclusionary approach facilitated the AKP's return to the "our civilization" stance.

If the EU pushed the AKP towards the "our civilization" stance, the Arab Spring has pulled it further into that direction. The AKP, and Turkish Islamists in general, traditionally saw Turkey's disinterest in the Middle East as one of the many unfortunate results of the identity crisis caused by Kemalist Westernization (Kösebalaban, 2011). Demonstrating that it was not suffering from this identity crisis, the AKP, diversified Turkish foreign policy priorities to include the Middle East. Until the Arab Spring, the AKP focused on building cooperative relations especially through trade with the Middle Eastern states and capitalized on Turkey's economic success, democratic credentials, engagement with the West and Erdoğan's popularity on the Arab street as the outspoken defender the Palestinian cause in the international arena (Öniş, 2011). These factors have boosted the domestic, regional and international prestige of the AKP, catapulting Turkey's status as a regional power, model for the Middle East, Islamic world and beyond.

Although not spearheaded by Islamists, the Arab Spring in Egypt and Tunisia brought Islamist to power and seemed to set a trend of Islamist takeover elsewhere in the Arab world. The Arab Spring, the AKP believed, had diminished its credibility as a Muslim democratic force for three reasons. First, although it has benefited from Turkey's Western orientation, the AKP was discouraged from emphasizing Western



democratic support. This is because the Arab Uprisings, as Burnell (2013: 841) noted, “have taken place without effective democracy support, or in spite of it, and not because of it”. Second, perhaps because of their colonial past, Arab Islamists have been more suspicious of Western democracy discourses and feared it would entail importation of alien secular values. Third, both Turkey and the AKP itself were too secular and inadequately Islamic by the Arab standards (Perekli, 2012; Rene, 2012). This view was reinforced by Erdoğan’s 2011 Cairo Speech endorsing secularism as a neutral platform that will not compromise Islam. To be sure, the Muslim Brotherhood leadership did not welcome Erdoğan’s remarks on promoting the secular state.

Following the Arab Spring, the AKP felt compelled to clarify its identity more strongly in Islamic terms to more effectively communicate with its Arab counterparts and continue assuming a regional leadership role. However, due to the relative success of Kemalist secularism, the AKP lacked the capacity to produce theologically grounded political arguments (Duran & Yılmaz, 2011). Herein lies the identity crisis of the AKP – in feeling compelled to emphasize its Islamist credentials, the AKP choose to be what it cannot be and choose not to be what it can be. The AKP could not be content with being a Muslim democrat for that identity inevitably necessitated coming to terms with the legacy of Kemalism. Instead of recognizing the legacy of Kemalism on its Muslim democrat identity and building on a Turkish form of “Islamist” politics, the AKP choose to cover up its “inadequate Islamism” with a civilizational discourse. The Islamic character of this civilizational discourse was a derivative of its anti-Western orientation, rejection of the legacy of the European colonialism in the Middle East, and the challenge of Western supremacy in the international order. The AKP saw Middle Eastern states and their borders as artificial constructions of the Western imperialism, which had dismantled the Ottoman Empire a hundred years ago. Turkey as a successor to the Ottoman Empire could lead the Middle East to close the century old Sykes-Picot Order, opened by Western imperialism and bring an end to the alienation of the region from each other. “A hundred years ago”, Erdoğan claimed “these lands were divided by way of drawing borders with a ruler. A hundred years ago, Istanbul and Medina, Izmir and Beirut, Ankara and Aleppo were the same [for us the people of the region]” (Akparsi, 2014b). Unwilling to be a Muslim democrat and yet incapable of producing a coherent theological-political discourse, the AKP’s civilizational discourse was reliant on poorly framed

policies that was critical of the Western-dominated international order and directed at the “Árab Street”. Unconditional support had been extended to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood administration for the purposes of constructing an axis with this key movement in the Middle East. In so doing, the AKP wanted to benefit from Egypt’s centrality to the Middle East and its production of theological-political discourses. With the eclipse of the Arab Spring, at least in Egypt, the AKP’s civilization-based foreign policy has been largely relevant to its domestic strategy of redefining Turkey in non-Westernist terms, and categorizing the pro-Western secular sectors as non-national aliens.

### CONCLUSION

The AKP, under the leadership of Erdoğan, has attempted to redefine Turkish identity. This redefinition, however, is not geared towards cultivating a pluralist and democratic society but attempts to reconstruct Turkey as a Muslim nation based on negating the legacy of Westernization and democratic principles. However, whether this “Muslim nation” project is the source of, or pretext for, AKP’s de-moderation and authoritarian practices is debatable. What is clear is that the AKP has replaced democratization with the restoration of an allegedly authentic civilizational identity. In the process, the inclusionary and conciliatory approaches have been overtaken by combative and exclusionary politics. This Islamist project of reconstructing and reclaiming the Muslim nation complements a populist strategy that relies on mutually exclusive categories and zero-sum politics. As the AKP became an organizational tool of a charismatic populist leader, its capacity to develop a political identity independent of Erdogan has diminished. The AKP represents an Islamist ideology that is limited to the prejudices of its leader. Erdoğan’s political strategy over both the AKP and the Turkish polity is based on polarizing the polity and centralizing power. Without an Islamic missionary gloss this quest for political power is more readily exposed. Past interaction with the authoritarian secular establishment has provided the excuse to maintain zero-sum strategies and justification for continuing with the populist anti-establishment trajectory. The AKP could have promoted the institutionalization of democracy and the rule of law as a better means of delivering security, had it not been turned into the organizational tool of its leader. Perhaps the AKP could have remained a Muslim democrat political force despite the push of

the EU and pull by the Arab Spring, if it had kept the original promise of intra-party democracy. This would have facilitated the articulation of democratic voices as a means of transcending the weight of Kemalist authoritarianism whilst maintaining the legacy of Westernization—a missed opportunity.

### POSTSCRIPT: DEEPENING OF AUTHORITARIANISM AFTER THE JUNE 2016 COUP ATTEMPT

On the night of June 15, 2016, Turkey experienced a coup attempt led by the followers of Fethullah Gülen, a religious cleric in self-imposed exile in the US. The attempt was aborted thanks to the collective resistance of all strands of the Turkish political class as well as the people, who for the first time in Turkish political history took to streets against the coup. A total of 246 people were killed during the clashes.

Had the AKP not shifted the ground of Turkish politics and not claimed the championship of demilitarization, civilianization and democracy for doing so, the coup attempt may have succeeded. But one of the greatest achievements of the AKP has been altering the balance of power significantly in its favour. The coup attempt has demonstrated that all that talk of democratization was a sham, disguising the weak policy reforms ostensibly geared towards strengthening democratic institutions and mechanisms. It seems plausible to suggest with the benefit of hindsight that the AKP mobilized the support base of the Gülen community in the bureaucracy for its power struggle against the military-led establishment. In return, Erdoğan, in his own words, gave them “whatever they asked for”. This enabled the Gülen community to further expand their economic enterprises from banking to media to education, infiltrate further into bureaucracy, especially the military and judiciary and manipulate the system for its own ends in the Ergenekon investigation into the coup plots. Erdoğan stopped turning a blind eye to the activities of Gülen community only when the latter openly challenged his power by starting a corruption probe against four AKP ministers and Erdoğan’s inner circle in December 2013. Since then, the Gülen community has been denounced for harbouring a “Parallel State Structure”, and declared a Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO). As a supposed security threat, those who are related or connected to Gülen community have become targets of the state authorities. A massive purge of Gülenist

officers was expected at the end of July 2016, had the coup attempt not taken place.

Popular resistance to the coup attempt could have been transformed into a fresh starting point geared to the establishment of a more substantive democratic polity in Turkey. Ironically, the political class that the AKP leaders dismissed as pro-tutelary and anti-democratic joined the AKP in resisting the coup attempt. The AKP under the leadership of Erdoğan, however, took the foiled coup attempt as an opportunity to rule by decree and push for a shift to presidential system.

The state of emergency, declared on 20 June initially for 3 months and repeatedly extended, enabled the AKP government to bypass parliament, avoid the review of the constitutional court and govern by decree. The AKP government then used its extraordinary powers not to initiate a thorough investigation into the coup attempt but to conduct massive purges against the bureaucracy, military and academia. Anyone connected or related to the Gülen community regardless of their involvement in the coup attempt, including secular critics and other opponents of the AKP were expelled from the public service. Amnesty International reported in late May 2017 that the total number purges from public service exceeded a hundred thousand. This included five thousand academics, around 350 of whom are leftist and Islamist members of the Academics for Peace group who signed a petition calling on the government to return to peace process with the Kurds. The AKP also used emergency powers to close around 1500 civil society organizations and 150 media outlets. The management of many companies was taken over by government appointed trustees, or their were assets confiscated because of their relationship to the FETO. Meanwhile, the AKP-dominated parliamentary committee investigating the coup has not uncovered any substantive information about the coup attempt, other than an alleged donation by Gülen to the main opposition Republican People's Party in the 1960s. This was probably a public relations exercise to divert attention from the AKP's close cooperation with what is now designated as a terrorist organization.

It was in this context of increasing government arbitrariness and growing insecurity that the AKP, together with the far-right Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*—MHP), drafted a bill to amend the constitution to introduce a presidential system. This bill was submitted to referendum in April 16, 2017. Bearing in mind the suspension of the rule of law, due process and freedoms under the emergency rule,

the bill could not be, and was not, debated freely nor was it shaped by a parliamentary deliberation. During the referendum campaign, Erdoğan mobilized the AKP and state resources for a “yes” vote for a system that enables the president to rule by decree. Some campaigners against the bill were arrested and detained and the opposition’s access to media was severely restricted, damaging Turkey’s reputation as an electoral democracy. The bill was approved by a narrow margin (51.4%). The narrow margin of approval signalled that almost half of the country is discontent with AKP rule. Erdoğan’s de facto executive presidency depended on his command of the parliamentary majorities through his party. As the electoral fortunes of the AKP was already in decline, and winning parliamentary majorities a risky venture, the new presidential system is, in many respects, a means of changing the rules of the political game to hold on to power. The narrow margin of victory, however, signals that even changing the rules of the game may not suffice, if free and fair elections are to be held.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akparti. (2012). Ders Almaz Bir Zihniyetle Mücadele Ediyoruz. <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/ders-almaz-bir-zihniyetle-mucadele-ediyoruz/19940#1>. Accessed February 8, 2012.
- Akparti. (2013a). Darbelerin Hiçbir Gerekçesi Olamaz. August 25, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/darbelerin-hicbir-hakli-gerekcesi-olamaz/51107#1>. Accessed August 26, 2013.
- Akparti. (2013b). Başbakan Erdoğan’ın 12 Kasım tarihli Grup Konuşmasının Tam Metni. <https://www.akparti.org.tr/tbmm/haberler/basbakan-erdoganin-12-kasim-tarihli-tbmm-grup-toplantisi-konusmasinin-tam-m/55308>. Accessed November 14, 2013.
- Akparti. (2014a). Yargı Millete Rağmen Karar Veremez. <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/yargi-millete-ragmen-karar-veremez/57707>. Accessed January 14, 2014.
- Akparti. (2014b). Bataklık Demek Öz Kimliği İnkardır. <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/bataklık-demek-oz-kimligi-inkardir/64114#1>. Accessed June 17, 2014.
- Aksoy, E. (2004, April 1). Erdogan: Dünyayı Anlamadılar Gittiler. *Radikal*.
- Angrist, M. P. (2004). Party systems and regime formation in the Modern Middle East: Explaining Turkish exceptionalism. *Comparative Politics*, 36(2), 229–249. doi:10.2307/4150144.

- Ashour, O. (2007). Lions tamed? An inquiry into the cause of de-radicalization of armed Islamist groups: The case of the Egyptian Islamic Group. *The Middle East Journal*, 61(4), 598–625.
- Browsers, M. L. (2009). *Political ideology in the Arab world: Accommodation and transformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511626814.
- Brown, N. J. (2009). Constitutionalizing Islam in the Arab world. In R. Fatton, Jr., & R. K. Ramazani (Eds.), *Religion, state, and society: Jefferson's wall of separation in comparative perspective* (pp. 195–213). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9780230617865\_11.
- Burnell, P. (2013). Democratisation in the Middle East and North Africa: Perspectives from democracy support. *Third World Quarterly*, 34(5), 837–41. doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.800742.
- Cerrahoğlu, N. (1996, July 14). Demokrasi Bizim İçin Araçtır. Interview with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. *Milliyet*.
- Çetin, U. (2014, December 12). Gölge Kabine Tartışması. *Hürriyet*. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/golge-kabine-tartismasi-27757166>.
- Çınar, M. (2004). Modified orientalism: The case of Hakan Yavuz's. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey. New Perspectives on Turkey*, 30, 155–168. doi:10.1017/S0896634600003940.
- Çınar, M. (2006). Turkey's transformation under the AKP Rule. *Muslim World*, 96(3), 469–486. doi:10.1111/j.1478-1913.2006.00138.x.
- Çınar, M. (2008). The Justice and Development Party and the Kemalist Establishment. In U. Cizre (Ed.), *Secular and Islamic politics in Turkey: The making of the Justice and Development Party* (pp. 109–131). London: Routledge.
- Çınar, M. (2011). Turkey's present ancien regime and the Justice and Development Party. In M. Casier & J. Jongerden (Eds.), *Nationalism and politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue* (pp. 13–27). London: Routledge.
- Çınar, M., & Duran, B. (2008). The specific evolution of contemporary Islam in Turkey and its 'difference'. In U. Cizre (Ed.), *Secular and Islamic politics in Turkey: The making of the Justice and Development Party* (pp. 17–40). London: Routledge.
- Çınar, M., & Gencel Sezgin, I. (2013). Islamist political engagement in the early years of multi-party politics in Turkey: 1945–60. *Turkish Studies*, 14(2), 329–345. doi:10.1080/14683849.2013.802921.
- Cizre, U. (2015). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Two Elections. *Middle East Report (New York, N.Y.)*, 276, 36–43.
- Cizre-Sakallioğlu, U. (1997). The anatomy of the Turkish Military's political autonomy. *Comparative Politics*, 29(2), 151–166.
- Cizre-Sakallioğlu, U. (1998). Rethinking the connections between Turkey's 'Western' Identity versus Islam. *Critique*, 7(12), 3–18. doi:10.1080/10669929808720118.

- Cizre, U., & Çınar, M. (2003). Turkey 2003: Kemalism, Islamism and politics in the light of the February 28 process. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102(2-3), 309-332. doi:10.1215/00382876-102-2-3-309.
- Clark, J. (2006). The conditions of Islamist moderation: Unpacking cross-ideological cooperation in Jordan. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 38(4), 539-560. doi:10.1017/S0020743806412460.
- Dağı, I. (2004). Rethinking human rights, democracy, and the West: Post-Islamist intellectuals in Turkey. *Critique*, 13(2), 135-151. doi:10.1080/106692042000244290.
- Dağı, I. (2005). Transformation of Islamic political identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and Westernization. *Turkish Studies*, 6(1), 21-37. doi:10.1080/1468384042000339302.
- Duran, B. (2006). JDP and foreign policy as an agent of transformation. In M. Hakan Yavuz (Ed.), *The emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Party* (pp. 281-305). Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press.
- Duran, B. (2010). The experience of Turkish Islamism: Between transformation and impoverishment. *Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies*, 12(1), 5-22. doi:10.1080/19448950903507313.
- Duran, B., & Yılmaz, N. (2011). Ortadoğu'da Modellerin Rekabeti: Arap Baharından sonra Yeni Güç Dengeleri. *Türk Dış Politika Yıllığı* (pp. 15-86). Ankara: SETA.
- Düzel, N. (1995, January 8). Ben İstanbul İmamıyım. Interview with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. *Hürriyet*.
- Ergin, S. (2012, November 30). Muhteşem Yüzyıl Dizisine Neden Kızıyor. *Hürriyet*.
- Ete, H. (2013, November 17). İnşa Sürecinde Muhafazakarlık Harcı. *Star Açık Görüş*.
- Göle, N. (1997). Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The making of Elites and Counter-Elites. *The Middle East Journal*, 51(1), 46-58.
- Gül, E. (2012, December 24). Eleştiriyi Katlanamıyor. *Cumhuriyet*.
- Gümüşcü, Ş. (2010). Class, status, and party: The changing face of political Islam in Turkey and Egypt. *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(7), 835-861. doi:10.1177/0010414010361341.
- Hürriyet. (2011, June 25). Diğer % 50 Niye Oy Vermedi, Anlamaya Çalışıyoruz. *Hürriyet*.
- Hürriyet. (2013a, May 29). Al Evinde İç. *Hürriyet*.
- Hürriyet. (2013b, January 31). Bunların Hangisi CHP. *Hürriyet*.
- Hürriyet. (2014, September 2). Başınızı Dik Tutun. *Hürriyet*.
- Hürriyet. (2015, October 24). Bülent Arınç: TRT de dahil Bazı Kanallar Bana Ambargo Uyguluyor. *Hürriyet*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bulent-arinc-bazi-kanallar-bana-ambargo-uyguluyor-40005377>.
- Hürriyet. (2016a, April 20). Eninde Sonunda Dokunulursunuz. *Hürriyet*.

- Hürriyet. (2016b, February 29). O Karara Uymuyorum. *Hürriyet*.
- Jung, D. (2007). Islam and politics: A fixed relationship? *Critique*, 16(1), 19–35. doi:10.1080/10669920601148596.
- Karaalioğlu, M. (1996, October 6). İngilizce Öğreniyor. Interview with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. *Yeni Şafak*.
- Karakuş, A. (2012, December 18). Bürokrasi ve Yargı Karşımıza Dikiliyor. *Milliyet*.
- Keyder, Ç. (1993). The Dilemma of Cultural Identity on the Margin of Europe. *Review*, XVI(1), 19–33.
- Kitschelt, H. (2000). Linkages between citizens and politicians in democratic politics. *Comparative Political Studies*, 33(6–7), 845–879. doi:10.1177/001041400003300607.
- Kösebalaban, H. (2011). *Turkish foreign policy: Islam, nationalism, and globalization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9780230118690.
- Kubicek, P. (2013). Democratization and relations with the EU in the AK Party period: Is Turkey really making progress? *Insight Turkey*, 15(4), 41–49.
- Lancaster, C. (2014). The Iron Law of Erdoğan: The decay from intra-party democracy to personalistic rule. *Third World Quarterly*, 35(9), 1672–1690. doi:10.1080/01436597.2014.970866.
- Milli Gazete. (1997, April 26). Erdoğan: Sahte Gündemlerin Dışındayız. *Milli Gazete*.
- Nasr, V. (2005). The rise of Muslim democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 16(2), 13–27. doi:10.1353/jod.2005.0032.
- Öniş, Z. (2009). Conservative globalism at the crossroads: The Justice and Development Party and the Thorny path to democratic consolidation in Turkey. *Mediterranean Politics*, 14(1), 21–40.
- Öniş, Z. (2011). Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between ethics and self-interest. *Insight Turkey*, 14(3), 45–63.
- Özbudun, E., & Hale, W. (2010). *Islamism, democracy and liberalism in Turkey*. London: Routledge.
- Özvanş, H. (2014, May 5). Doğan Ertuğrul: Star’da Başbakan rahatsız olur diye Gül sansürlendi, Cem Yılmaz’a yasak tartışıldı! Interview with an editor of the pro-AKP Star daily. T24. <http://t24.com.tr/haber/dogan-ertugrul-starda-basbakan-rahatsiz-olur-diye-gul-sansurlendi-cem-yilmaza-yasak-tartisildi,257586>.
- Perekli, F. (2012). The applicability of the “Turkish Model” to Morocco: The case of the Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD). *Insight Turkey*, 14(3), 85–108.
- Radikal. (2004, June 16). DEHAP’a Sert Tavir. *Radikal*.
- Radikal. (2013, January 1). AB Bakanlıđından Toz Pembe Rapor. *Radikal*.
- Rene, H. (2012). An alternative to the Turkish Model. *Insight Turkey*, 14(4), 47–65.
- Sabah. (2012, September 29). Atılması gereken adımları biz atarız, yapılması gerekeni biz yaparız. *Sabah*.



- Saraçoğlu, C., & Demirkol, Ö. (2015). Nationalism and foreign policy discourse in Turkey under the AKP Rule: Geography, history and national identity. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(3), 301–319. doi:[10.1080/13530194.2014.947152](https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2014.947152).
- Schwedler, J. (2006) *Faith in moderation: Islamic parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:[10.1017/CBO9780511550829](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511550829).
- Şenocaklı, M. (2012, October 1). Darbeleri önleyen hukuk sistemi olmalı, Hilmi Özkök gibi kişiler değil! Interview with Nimet Baş, AKP MP and Chair to the ad hoc Parliamentary Committee for Investigating Coup Attempts. *Vatan*.
- Somer, M. (2014). Moderation of religious and secular politics, a Country's 'Centre' and Democratization. *Democratization*, 21(2), 244–267. doi:[10.1080/013510347.2012.732069](https://doi.org/10.1080/013510347.2012.732069).
- Taraf. (2013, June 4). Anti-demokratik Bir Uygulama Yaparsak Milletimiz Bizi Alaşağı Eder. *Taraf*.
- Taraf. (2014, April 5). Başbakan: Twitter Kararı Milli Değildir, Saygı Duymuyorum. *Taraf*.
- Taşkın, Y. (2008). AKP's move to "Conquer" the center-right: Its prospects and possible impacts on the democratization process. *Turkish Studies*, 9(1), 53–72. doi:[10.1080/14683840701814000](https://doi.org/10.1080/14683840701814000).
- Tepe, S. (2005). Turkey's AKP: A model 'Muslim-Democratic' Party. *Journal of Democracy*, 16(3), 69–82. doi:[10.1353/jod.2005.0053](https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2005.0053).
- Tezcür, G. M. (2010). The moderation theory revisited: The case of Islamic political actors. *Party Politics*, 16(1), 69–88. doi:[10.1177/1354068809339536](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809339536).
- Tuğal, C. (2012). Fight or acquiesce? Religion and political process in Turkey's and Egypt's neoliberalizations. *Development and Change*, 43(1), 23–51. doi:[10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01762.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01762.x).
- Wegner, E., & Pellicer, M. (2009). Islamist moderation without democratization: The coming of age of Moroccan Party of justice and development. *Democratization*, 16(1), 157–175. doi:[10.1080/13510340802575890](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340802575890).
- Weyland, K. (2003). Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: How much affinity? *Third World Quarterly*, 24(6), 1095–1115. doi:[10.1080/01436590310001630080](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590310001630080).
- White, J. (2013). *Muslim nationalism and the New Turks*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Yavuz, H. (2003). *Islamic political identity in Turkey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yıldız, A. (2006). Transformation of Islamic thought in Turkey since 1950. In Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Ed.), *Blackwell companion to contemporary Islamic thought* (pp. 39–54). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing. doi:[10.1002/9780470996188.ch3](https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996188.ch3).
- Yıldız, A. (2008). Problematizing the intellectual and political vestiges: From 'welfare' to 'justice and development'. In U. Cizre (Ed.), *Secular and Islamic politics in Turkey: The making of the Justice and Development Party* (pp. 41–61). London: Routledge.

## Negotiating Popular Mandate and the Sovereignty of God in Iran

*Shahram Akbarzadeh and James Barry*

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) projects its form of government as the ultimate representation of a perfect political system—one that brings Islam and democracy together. Accordingly, the IRI is at once legitimised by following Islamic teachings and enjoying popular support. This combination is presented as a pillar of strength that elevates the IRI over other political systems that are marked by personal monarchy or capital oligarchy. This perspective masks an underlying contradiction at the heart of the IRI which has caused periodic crises, at times presenting it with existential challenges. The contradiction hinges on the question of sovereignty and sources of political legitimacy. Divine rule and popular mandate point to very different modes of government and political rule. How are these divergent trajectories to be negotiated? Is there a hierarchy of rule: sovereignty of god or the sovereignty of people?

This inherent contradiction was introduced in the constitution at the inception of the IRI and continues to affect the way the state operates.

---

S. Akbarzadeh (✉) · J. Barry  
Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

As part of the commitment to popular sovereignty, the IRI holds public elections for the parliament (*majles*), the president and the Assembly of Experts (*Majles-e Khobregan*). While this is not too dissimilar to working democracies, the IRI also requires commitment to the supremacy of the *Vali Faqih* (the most learned jurisprudence) as a condition of entry into the political system, and superimposes the position of the Supreme Leader over the elected structure. The Supreme Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts, whose members need to demonstrate a commitment to the incumbent Supreme Leader, and effectively privileges him to appoint his successor. The Supreme Leader (or *Vali Faqih*) is the Head of State and represents divine sovereignty for life.

The founders of the IRI expected divine and popular sovereignty to offer a dual source of legitimacy to the new political system. The matching of these two was designed to maximise political authority. However for this to work, one had to be emptied of its essence, or at least seriously downgraded. Popular sovereignty in the IRI is systematically measured in terms of electoral participation. Turnout at ballot boxes is seen as evidence of the popularity of the IRI and a measure of legitimacy. This exaggerated attention to procedural aspects of democracy, while ignoring the atmosphere of censorship and political restrictions which silence alternative voices, has allowed the fictitious twining of divine and popular sovereignty to continue. It has also meant that any decline in electoral participation due to boycott action is taken very seriously, not simply as a sign of dissatisfaction with certain policies but alienation from the political system as a whole.

Furthermore, the procedural commitments to elections and popular mandate have presented the IRI with surprising challenges, most recently with the election of Hassan Rouhani who has negotiated a nuclear deal with Western powers. While the deal promises to remove crippling sanctions and boost Iranian economy, it also subjects Iran to an unprecedented inspection regime which many in the political elite view as humiliating and oppressive. Even the Supreme Leader has sent mixed signals in relation to the deal, while ultimately acknowledging that Iran has no option but to accept it. President Rouhani's ability to negotiate structural barriers are significant for this study, as they demonstrate how what was considered a God-given right (i.e. access to nuclear technology) has been modified by a popularly elected mortal.

This chapter explores the uneasy relationship between divine and popular sovereignty, and how the government of President Rouhani

has leveraged his popular mandate for change to negotiate and at times push back against ideological redlines. The chapter will conclude with an assessment of the extent to which this push for reform against ideological pillars of the state, most notably divine sovereignty, may be successful in reversing the hierarchy of authority in the IRI.

### THE DUAL SYSTEM

As one of the authors had written a decade ago, ‘the Islamic Republic of Iran suffers from a dual personality’, being at once an Islamic state that upholds the sovereignty of God while also being a republic that recognises the idea of the sovereignty of the people (Akbarzadeh, 2005: 25). Guided by the principle of the *velāyat-e faqīh*, the Guardianship of the Religious Jurists, Iran is an Islamic state, where all laws and government policy must adhere to the Shi’a interpretation of the *shari’a*. At the same time, the government also relies on national elections for its popular legitimacy. This coupling of divine and popular sovereignties has made Iran a unique one party state that pursues factional elections on the national scale. The bulk of personnel in the Iranian government gain their posts through election, with the office of the President, seats in the parliament (*majles*) and positions in the Assembly of Experts all determined by universal suffrage. The Presidency and parliament are open to clerics and non-clerics alike, while the Assembly of Experts is limited to clerics alone. Even the Supreme Leader, the highest office in state, can be said to be elected indirectly by the people through the Assembly of Experts (Coma & Abdolmohammadi, 2015: 562).

The elections are controlled and a specific set of criteria is employed in order to keep opponents of the regime from running for office. The Guardian Council, an unelected body made up of lawyers and clerics, decides on the legality of legislation from the parliament and vets all candidates before they run for office, often excluding reformist candidates and skewing elections in favour of conservatives. Furthermore, the system is dominated by the figure of the Supreme Leader, a position created by Ayatollah Khomeini for himself in 1979 and held by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei since Khomeini’s death in 1989. The Supreme Leader is the most senior representative of divine authority, being the temporal representative of God on Earth in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, who Twelver Shi’a believe will return to govern the world at the end of days. He remains the ultimate authority in Iran, with the power to declare war,

the right to reject laws passed by the parliament and even the ability to dismiss the popularly elected president (Iran Const. art. 110 & 112). For this reason, there is a significant amount of tension between him and the elected bodies of government over which he has the final word.

Despite the extent of his authority, the Supreme Leader is not able to act as an absolute ruler. His power is constrained by the pragmatic needs of running a modern nation-state. Khomeini was aware of this and developed the concept of *fiqh al-maṣlahah* (jurisprudence of expediency) where ‘the Islamic state is allowed to overlook Islamic principles’ when it considers it is necessary to do so, especially in cases where pragmatic needs of the state outweigh religious obligations (Ghobadzadeh, 2015: 5). The Supreme Leader generally keeps his distance from day-to-day governance, or maintains the illusion of doing so. This allows him to maintain an air of impartiality in the intensely factional political system, while not being held accountable for any of the regime’s failings. As will be argued later in this chapter, this is precisely the technique Khamenei has employed in relations to Iran’s negotiations with the United States over its nuclear program. The Supreme Leader continues to control key arms of the state, such as the Guardian Council which oversees elections and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

In contrast to the Supreme Leader’s divine authority is Iran’s system of popular participation. Despite being highly controlled, presidential elections have been held consistently every four years since 1981. The value that the Islamic Republic puts on these elections cannot be underestimated, as these elections were allowed to take place in the difficult circumstances of war, in the shadow of serious terror attacks, not even postponed following the death of the Ayatollah Khamenei in 1989. Many argue that periodic parliamentary and presidential elections have an important pragmatic value.<sup>1</sup> Elections serve the Islamic Republic’s unelected elite by reinforcing the image of the revolutionary appeal of the state and creating the appearance of popular support for the system. Additionally, elected officials provide the unelected ruling elite with the necessary scapegoats in times of difficulty. In this way, the elected officials usually bear the blame for failures in policy, both domestic and

---

<sup>1</sup>See for example, Abdol Moghset Bani Kamal, ‘The Ninth Majles Elections in Iran: Electoral Laws, Procedures and Institutions’, *Intellectual Discourse*, 21/1 (2013), 71–86: 72; Giampiero Cama and Pejman Abdolmohammadi, ‘Peculiar Hybrid Regime’, 565.

foreign, as they are the most visible face of the regime in the eyes of the citizenry and most accountable to voters. This is not to say that Iranians are not aware of the way the system works, but only to argue that the elected officials are the only level of government where criticism in the form of voter backlash is tolerated. However, boycotting elections is considered highly dangerous to both elected and unelected officials, and therefore voting in itself is a politically charged act.

National elections with universal suffrage have been an essential component of the system that emerged immediately after the Revolution. The new leadership saw elections as fundamentally crucial in building legitimacy for their rule and for the changes they introduced. Elections immediately after the Revolution saw massive turnouts, especially in 1979 and 1981 (Gheissari & Nasr, 2006: 91–92). In the early days of the Revolution, many Iranians, who had experienced only the tokenistic elections of the Pahlavi Shahs, were driven to ballot boxes by patriotism. But as more voters became aware of the role of legislators, the electorate began voting more strategically which worried the elite in the early 1990s (Ebadi, 2006: 104–105). For this reason, the vetting of candidates by the Guardian Council was introduced during Rafsanjani's presidency (1989–1997) to alleviate some of the threats this posed to what was considered to be divine rule.

Despite this, the Supreme Leader and other non-elected officials place a high value on elections. The idea of going to the people and holding elections is a propaganda tool for the regime against its critics. The Supreme Leader has consistently advocated that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict should be resolved by a referendum, as fair elections would lead to an independent Palestinian state (Khamenei, 2015). This is a view shared by many in the government, with Rouhani stating in 2015 that the ballot box posed the greatest threat to terrorism in the region (Rouhani, 2015). Statements such as these both assert the authenticity of the Iranian model, but also present Iran as a stable and popular Islamic state.

Even though candidates are vetted, Iranian elections are highly competitive and revolve around issues of national importance such as the economy and social issues. Presidential elections in particular are places where differing political visions within the regime openly compete with one another (Coma & Abdolmohammadi, 2015: 567). For this reason, electoral democracy is an area of significant tension within the different factions of the Islamic Republic, and the need to manage these tensions

is of particular concern to the ruling elites. Tensions between different factions emerged almost as soon as the Shah had left Iran. Even though the 1980s saw the elimination of many leftist and liberal alternatives which rejected the concept of *velāyat-e faqīh*, political tensions continued. Under Rafsanjani, tensions between his economically liberal administration and a faction which favoured state ownership in the parliament led to the censor of the latter by the Guardian Council (Maloney, 2008: 7–8). This move proved to have far reaching consequences, as it only emboldened the conservative faction who argued that Khomeini had never wanted a ‘republic’ and sought to pursue an Islamic social agenda, leading Rafsanjani to align himself to the growing Reformist movement (Ansari, 2007: 15–16). This tension between reformists and conservatives has persisted into Rouhani’s administration.

The Reformists movement was initially led by Mohammad Khatami, who was unexpectedly elected to the presidency in 1997. Khatami wanted to reform the Islamic Republic, enhancing civil society and the rule of law while keeping its theocratic structure intact (Tazmini, 2009: 18). Khatami saw Islam as democratic but different from the Western model of democracy. He outlined this by using different terms, employing the Persian-derived *mardomsālārī* (rule by the people) to describe authentic Iranian democracy while resorting to the loan word *demokrāsī* to represent the erroneous practice of Western governments (Holliday, 2011: 115). This differentiation appealed to the regime’s support base where the more conservative religious members of the society often view the term democracy with suspicion (Tezcür, Azadarmaki, & Bahar, 2012: 243). Such attitudes towards democracy are not limited to the conservative, religious working class or rural inhabitants of Iran, and even well-educated Iranians are known to express suspicion of Western democracy’s values, citing the banning of veiling in France as an example (Holliday, 2011: 134). However, Khatami’s views were considered too radical by some in the system who were afraid he was diluting the Islamic Republic. A conservative faction dubbed the Principlists emerged as a political force during Khatami’s presidency mainly out of concern for the perceived damage that reformism was doing to the Islamic Republic and the legacy of the Revolution (Ehteshami & Zweiri, 2007: 71). This bloc gained significant influence following the 2004 Majles elections and supported Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in his bid for presidency in 2005. The Principlists claimed legitimacy by proclaiming adherence to the principles

of the revolution and Islamic Republic. In that respect, this grouping defined itself in opposition to the reformist agenda advocated by former President Khatami and more recently by President Rouhani.

The Reformists and the Principlists consider themselves to be polar opposites but they still believe in the same system. Both factions frequently use the same verses of the Qur'an and hadiths to justify their political positions, with one side arguing for divine sovereignty while the other claiming that religious laws advocate for popular sovereignty (Ghobadzadeh, 2015: 44). Tensions between these two interpretations exploded during the 2009 Presidential elections where two candidates, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, disputed the results, leading to violent protests that rattled the country. The fact that both men at the helm of the 2009 electoral campaign for reform, dubbed the Green Movement, were political veterans who had participated in the 1979 revolution and had played key roles in solidifying the Islamic Republic, dealt a psychological blow to the system. During the unrest which continued into the following year, the debate between the reformist leadership and the conservative camp was not about the legitimacy of the *velāyat-e faqīh* system—even if many street protesters questioned it—but about different interpretations of the ‘republic’ in the Islamic Republic. Following the brutal suppression of the Green Movement, Mousavi and Karoubi were put under house arrest. The 2009 crackdown on dissent put an abrupt end to the public debate.

There is a demonstrated link between voter turnout in Iranian elections and the prospects of reform (Coma & Abdolmohammadi, 2015: 576). For that reason, the conservatives have an interest in permitting more moderate candidates to guarantee a decent turnout, since the electoral process has come to represent the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. The official view confers significant meaning to the act of popular voting. Electoral participation is seen as an act of popular endorsement for the political system as a whole. Even the Supreme Leader has gone on the record to encourage electoral participation regardless of the voters' political affiliation and preferences—of course within the constraints of what is permissible within the Islamic republic of Iran. The irony is that reformist candidates tend to energise the electorate much more than the conservatives and attract voters to the ballot box. This dynamic works in favour of reformist candidates. This was evident in the presidential election.



## PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

Iran in 2013 was extremely tense. The Ahmadinejad era had left the country in a dire situation, with the economy at standstill under international sanctions and Iran isolated. The Supreme Leader was clearly concerned about the effects of this on Iranian citizens, and worked hard to make sure that the people came out to vote at the presidential elections. He stated at *Nowruz* (Persian New Year on 21 March) that he did not pre-determine the outcome of elections and like every Iranian citizen had only one vote (Khamenei, 2014). This was interpreted as an indication of a more permissive attitude. In the lead up to elections, the Supreme Leader reiterated that the election provided Iranians with an opportunity to demonstrate their point of view on the world stage. In the days before the 2013 Presidential election, he stated that Iran's enemies, namely the United States and its allies, 'wish either a low turnout in the election or sedition to emerge after the election' (Khamenei, 2015). This language was consistent with his usual statements on the issue, as he often touts election turnouts as a victory for the Iranian people against their enemies.

The Supreme Leader repeatedly argued that the presidential election provided the Iranian people the opportunity to create a '*hemaseh-e siasi*'. In the English-language media, this was translated as 'political epic', but its connotations are much more far reaching than in English. The concept of 'political epic' which was repeated by candidates in the shadow of the Supreme Leader's speeches, meant that by voting, the Iranian people would create something unachievable, much like a hero from the epic *Shahmameh*. By employing this concept, the Supreme Leader insinuated that anything was possible in the elections. The leader encouraged a country still reeling from the 2009 post-election violence and from the economic disaster that occurred in 2011–2012 to fulfil their dreams through the ballot box. For this reason, the Supreme Leader often combined *hemaseh-e siasi* with *hemaseh-e eqtesadi* (economic epic) to give the impression that the dire economic straits could be addressed through political participation. Khamenei's commentary on the elections was mainly distant. He clearly wished to avoid being drawn into the factional rivalry that typically marked Iranian politics. He made a key point of reiterating that he had only one vote, thereby stating that he did not decide the elections, and even went as far as to say that those Iranians who did

not support the regime should vote regardless, as their vote would be for the country and not the regime (Khamenei, 2013).

The 2013 election took place under the shadow of the suppressed reformist movement. It was far from clear whether the next government would distance itself from Ahmadinejad's gross mismanagement. When the field of candidates was announced, it included five known conservatives, one reformist, one moderate and one completely unknown figure. In the end, it was the moderate, Hassan Rouhani, who was elected. As in 2009, there was no need for a run-off election. Hassan Rouhani based his campaign on a promise for change and he made 'hope' a key electoral slogan. Upon announcing his candidacy on 11 April 2013, Rouhani stated that he would run a unified government with only one exception: he would not accept those he considered to be 'extremists'; those responsible for the post-election violence in 2009 (Rouhani, 2015). This was an ambiguous category, and he clearly included both the more radical elements of the Green Movement (i.e. street protestors who challenged the legitimacy of *velāyat-e faqih* in 2009) as well as the Ahmadinejad faction, who largely carried the blame for the dire situation in the country.

Rouhani linked international relations with domestic economic health, stating early in his campaign that he considered removing tensions with other countries, including neighbours, as the first step towards an end to sanctions (Rouhani, 2013). He placed a great deal of focus on issues that were sensitive to many Iranians, such as youth unemployment, noting that they presented a danger to the future of the Islamic Republic. In linking these problems with international relations, Rouhani was not alone. All of the candidates made references to the economy and outlined their own plans to remedy the situation. Even hardliners such as Said Jalili, considered the Supreme Leader's favourite, campaigned on the promise of helping mend Iran's international relations in order to revive the economy.

Despite not being a Reformist, Rouhani made a number of direct challenges to his Principlist opponents during the campaign. The slogan of resistance economy (*eqtesād-e moqāvemātī*), an economy not reliant on the West, was promoted by most conservatives but heavily criticised by Rouhani as empty rhetoric:

The economic slogans are not consistent with our economic performance. We chant slogans of resistance, but in practice, there is no resistance at work. (Rouhani, 2015)

In this, he openly challenged some of the Principlist candidates, such as Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, the Supreme Leader's son-in-law. Rouhani succeeded because he offered an alternate vision, calling for a boost in domestic production to meet the requirements of the economy, taking a slightly populist protectionist stance against the reality of cheap imports harming Iranian industry. Rouhani made a direct appeal to the electorate by highlighting the daily struggles of the populace and refraining from ideological grand standing.

Rouhani remained relatively obscure until the screening of a biographical documentary on television gave him the momentum to please voters, and suddenly he was considered the front runner (*Aftabnews*, 2015). He ran a campaign which in many ways mirrored Barack Obama's 2008 US Presidential bid, down to the use of Obama's slogan of 'Hope'. Rouhani also appealed to the youth on the issue of poverty and unemployment:

Some people are still taking pride in the country's poverty and foreign humiliation. We are seeking change, prudence and hope. The young generation cannot accept unemployment, high inflation, and a sense of disappointment about an uncertain future. (Rouhani, 2015)

While his call for moderation in the face of extremism remained constant throughout his campaign, the additional slogan of 'Prudence and Hope' was put at the forefront in the final week, and he continued to speak on sensitive issues such as equality between men and women (Rouhani, 2015). Alongside this was the slogan of 'Construction and Reform', and promises about the environment. He was drawing links between himself and several other figures, past and present.

Even the most casual observer would have noted that the slogan of 'reform' directly connected Rouhani to former President Mohammad Khatami. This may have been a partial reciprocation as the Reformist camp had put their hopes in Rouhani, asking the only Reformist approved by the Guardian Council, Mohammad Reza Aref, to stand aside in his favour. But the implications were immense, since several Reformists had been labelled seditionists following the 2009 Presidential election, and even former President Khatami had been politically marginalised and forbidden to leave the country. Adopting the agenda of 'reform' was a bold move.

‘Construction’ hinted at another former President, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had promoted his presidency as one of reconstruction in the wake of the Iran–Iraq War. It sent a clear signal to Rafsanjani’s supporters about the affinity of his agenda and that of Rafsanjani. The endorsement of both Rafsanjani and Khatami proved very significant for Rouhani. But most interesting and subtle were his calls for ‘prudence’ and ‘moderation’. While the most obvious reference was to the Ahmadinejad’s incumbency, which was all too often neither prudent nor moderate, it was a direct borrowing of philosophical thought from antiquity, as prudence and moderation comprise two of the four virtues (alongside courage and justice) introduced by Plato in his *Republic*.

While Rouhani came to office as an inside member of the system, he maintained a visible distance from the ideological proclamations that have become the staple of Iranian politics. Throughout his campaign and after his inauguration, he refrained from the revolutionary rhetoric one would expect from a regime insider. Instead, he spoke in plain terms about the economy, the nuclear issue and foreign policy which at times made his campaign indistinguishable from what one would expect in Europe or the United States. Because of the role of the Supreme Leader, the question arises as to whether Rouhani is a change or a new strategy by the ruling elite (Sherrill, 2014: 64). Rouhani was an ideal candidate for the Supreme Leader as he was an insider with a reputation for being pragmatic (Sherrill, 2014: 65). Among Rouhani’s various roles in the elected and unelected organs of the state, he served both the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations as a national security advisor (Sherrill, 2014: 72). A former nuclear negotiator, he had developed a reputation as a critic of Ahmadinejad’s approach and an advocate of a moderate foreign policy (Maloney, 2008: 22–23). Additionally, in promising reform without being a reformist, he seemed to bridge over factionalism. Nevertheless, this did not protect him against the inherent tension between divine and popular sovereignty which has been the hallmark of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The same dynamic was at play in the 2017 presidential election. Rouhani went back to the electorate with the message of reviving the hope. The campaign for his re-election played on the familiar themes of economic recovery and regaining Iran’s standing in the international community of states. The ‘people’ of Iran were central to Rouhani’s campaign as he sought to convince the voters that his return to office

will benefit citizens. The irony of this presidential campaign was that even his critics chose to focus on mundane economic issues, not high-brow ideological topics. Mohammad Ghalibaf (Mayor of Tehran) and Ebrahim Raisi (Head of Quds waqf endowment), who mounted a challenge to Rouhani from the Principlist camp focused on the slow pace of economic growth, unemployment and nepotism. This showed a keen awareness among Rouhani's critics that repeating the slogans of the 1979 revolution would have little appeal to voters, especially the new generation with no lived-experience of the revolution. Instead, they focused on everyday economic challenges faced by young voters who may have to postpone marriage because they do not have job security and cannot afford purchasing their own dwelling. While this approach did not equate with the promotion of popular sovereignty, it did highlight that people's needs could not be ignored.

#### POPULAR VERSUS DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY UNDER PRESIDENT ROUHANI

Rouhani's term in office has been defined by his administration's efforts to secure a deal with the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (dubbed P5+1) regarding Iran's nuclear programme to end the sanctions. The negotiations were fraught with political risk as Rouhani had to balance the country's pragmatic needs with the revolutionary ideology of the Islamic Republic. This was especially pertinent in dealing with the United States. Rouhani had come to office with a popular mandate to bring Iran out of isolation, but he was fully aware that the conservative power base of his opponents was less concerned with the people's wishes and more focused on Islamic dogma. Rouhani's critics appealed to a higher source and claimed to reflect divine authority. Rouhani could not afford to be undermined by claims of betraying the revolution and Islamic principles. Rouhani had to play a careful game, promoting his religious and revolutionary credentials to balance his electoral mandate. Through this he hoped to achieve a deal without isolating powerful factions or alienating the Supreme Leader.

Khamenei's opinions of the United States are well known, and he frequently refers to it as the enemy. He has long dismissed the need to negotiate with the United States on Iran's nuclear programme and has frequently pointed to a fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in which the

late Supreme Leader declared weapons of mass destruction as haram. Khamenei himself has upheld this ruling and argued it to be sufficient evidence that Iran was not pursuing a nuclear weapon. However, the dire economic and tense political situation that Iran encountered in the second Ahmadinejad term represented a threat to the future viability of the Islamic Republic that Khamenei knew well not to ignore. He therefore permitted Rouhani's engagement with the P5+1.

The Supreme Leader dealt with the negotiations at a distance, issuing ambiguous statements which could easily be discarded at a later date. At critical points, he made statements that could be interpreted as supportive of Iran's negotiating team, while at other times his language seemed to endorse Rouhani's critics. Khamenei's support for continued negotiation, calling for 'heroic flexibility', stands out as a rare moment of explicit support for President Rouhani (Khamenei, 2013). In most cases, Khamenei strategically worded his commentary on the negotiations in a way that was neither too optimistic nor too pessimistic. He sought to balance his consistent opposition to the United States with the need to achieve his 'economic epic' for the sake of stability in the country. From the moment of Rouhani's election, he gave conditional support to the new administration to engage the United States and went as far as to warn Rouhani's critics away from being too harsh, lest they sabotage the process (Khamenei, 2013). At the same time, he repeatedly reiterated his position that a meaningful and fair deal cannot be negotiated with the United States without compromising Islamic values (Khamenei, 2013). He has used public meetings with President Rouhani to express his support for the nuclear negotiations as well as to state his doubts. For example, the Supreme Leader has directly engaged the President and his negotiators in public meetings, warning them against compromising the principles of the Islamic Republic in order to achieve the deal, and ordering them to negotiate from an ideologically acceptable position (Khamenei, 2014).

The strongest pressure on Rouhani has come from other high profile political figures in the religious establishment and, to a lesser extent, from the Revolutionary Guards. He has generally deflected non-clerical criticism by arguing that religion is best understood by clerics, and those not educated in Islam should refrain from making comments about what is religiously just (Rouhani, 2014). As a member of the clergy, bearing the title of *Hojatu-l-Islam wa-l-Muslimin*, Hassan Rouhani can claim religious authority. However, he has not escaped criticism from rival

clerics, with Ahmadinejad's former spiritual advisor, Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, making fairly obvious references to Rouhani when he asked if those with responsibility in the Islamic Republic received their religious credentials from the Feyziyeh Seminary in Qom or from England (*Raja News*, 2015).<sup>2</sup> As Britain is one of the old enemies of Iran in the worldview of the Islamic Republic, occasionally being referred to as the 'sly fox', Mesbah-Yazdi's attack was not only on Rouhani's religious credentials, but also his loyalty to the country.

Rouhani has used his position as a participant in the Revolution and during the Iran–Iraq War to bolster his religious credentials, especially by associating himself with the most revered figures in the Islamic Revolution. In particular, he has sought to appropriate the words of Ayatollah Khomeini, who he personally knew, as a means of deflecting criticism from conservatives. He has quoted Khomeini in speeches, noting that while the late Supreme Leader had always been unbending in confrontations with the 'arrogant powers', he also had the insight to choose peace when possible (Rouhani, 2015). In this way, he has played the game necessary for an elected leader of the Islamic Republic by assuring his loyalty towards divine sovereignty alongside his own popular mandate.

Rouhani also sought legitimacy from the leaders of Qom, which is the heart of religious learning in Iran, as a way of dealing with his clerical opponents. This was a shrewd move, as many of highest ranking Ayatollahs in Qom quietly disapprove of many excesses of the system. One influential endorsement for Rouhani came from Ayatollah Vahid Khorasani, who is among the leading clerics in Qom but rarely speaks on political matters. Ayatollah Khorasani told Rouhani directly that he was 'one of the best Presidents of the Republic and one who faced deep problems', before quoting Surah 65:3 of the Qur'an: 'and whoever relies upon God, then He is sufficient for him' (Khorasani, 2015). Following a visit to Qom in February 2015, a number of high profile clerics toned down their opposition to nuclear negotiations, although support for Rouhani's social policies was far from universal. For example, Ayatollah Nouri-Hamedani, who holds hard-line opinions on Sufism and on

---

<sup>2</sup>This was a reference to Rouhani's law degree from Glasgow Caledonian University. M. Mesbah-Yazdi, 'Sokhanān-e šariḥ-e 'alāmeh-e mešbah yazdi [The Explicit Remarks of the Cleric Mesbah-Yazdi]', *Raja News*, June 3, 2015. Accessed March 17, 2015. <http://www.rajanews.com/news/174544>.

women's rights, was among the first to applaud Rouhani's visit to Qom, even praising the nuclear negotiators for their piety and dedication to the Revolution (Nouri-Hamedani, 2015). Yet only two months later he hit out at Rouhani's comments on the limited role of the police in enforcing public morality, stating that while police should not have unlimited powers, they had a duty to uphold the values of the Islamic republic among the populace (Nouri-Hamedani, 2015).

Iran and the P5+1 managed to reach a deal in July 2015 which raised both hope and fear in Iran about the consequences of the change. In return for an end to EU, US and UN sanctions, Iran agreed to alter the production outputs of the Natanz, Arak and Fordow facilities for a period of 15 years, reducing enrichment to low levels, removing any plutonium by-products and converting the latter two plants into research centres. Additionally, Iran would permit the monitoring of these facilities for the agreed duration. The elation of many Iranians was matched by the criticisms that it received from conservatives in the regime. Khamenei maintained his traditional ambiguity, making his first comments four days after the deal at his sermon on the festival marking the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr. Khamenei praised and thanked Rouhani alongside the negotiating team, stating that they would be rewarded for their efforts. He added, however, that the deal was yet to be finalised and that 'no one will be permitted to violate the principles of the Islamic system (*nezām-e eslāmī*)'. Khamenei referred to the fatwa, stating that the construction of nuclear weapons would violate Iran's religious obligations, insinuating the unfairness of the situation, and stated that they would never abandon their commitment to Palestine, Syria or Yemen (Khamenei, 2015).

While Rouhani's supporters saw the Supreme Leader's comments in a positive light, the insinuation that the deal may not be successful and hints that it may violate the Islamic principles of the Islamic republic was seized upon by the conservatives. But even amongst those traditionally opposed to Rouhani, there was division on the deal. One of the President's consistent critics is Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor of the *Kayhan* daily, a newspaper close to the office of the Supreme Leader. Shariatmadari was personally appointed to the role by Khamenei, and is known for publishing the Supreme Leader's 'thoughts' in his editorials. In the wake of the nuclear deal, he published an article in which he stated that the Supreme Leader was against the agreement (Shariatmadari, 2015). Khamenei, as usual, neither confirmed nor denied the accuracy of Shariatmadari's assertions, but a deputy commander of



the Revolutionary Guards, an organisation also close to the Supreme Leader, openly disputed that claim. Hamid-Reza Moghadam-Far criticised Shariatmadari, stating that it would be better for him to share his own thoughts rather than claiming to represent those of the Supreme Leader. He concluded by noting that Khamenei himself had voiced support for the negotiators on Eid al-Fitr (Moghadam-Far, 2015). For his part, Khamenei reiterated his position, that he is for the deal but the country must remain aware of its enemies (Khamenei, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Were President Rouhani's electoral victories and concessions offered to the international community to free Iran of crippling sanctions evidence of democratic vibrancy? Has his popular mandate allowed the president to push through a deal which many of his critics reject as an embarrassing sign of weakness and a violation of Islamic principles? Successive governments prior to Rouhani elevated Iran's access to nuclear technology as a matter of national pride and a God-given right. Negotiating any deal that would curtail the nuclear program was treated as unacceptable and taboo. Yet, under Rouhani's presidency Iran committed to an invasive inspection regime of its nuclear facilities and the down-sizing of its nuclear program. Even the Supreme Leader felt compelled to support the efforts of the Iranian negotiating team by endorsing their compromises as 'heroic flexibility'. Is this an indication of the surge of popular sovereignty? Is the scale tipping in favour of people's rule at the expense of divine rule, finally resolving the inherent tension in the Islamic Republic?

The political elite in Iran is fully aware of the limitations of a system that does not take note of the people. The Islamic Republic of Iran was established on a surge of popular revolution against the reviled Pahlavi regime—despised for ignoring popular wishes and serving a foreign master (the United States). Notions of popular sovereignty, national interests and a just form of government, called an Islamic government (for Islam was seen to embody justice), were central to the 1979 revolution and found their way into the post-Pahlavi constitution. The clerical rulers do not wish to be seen in the same light as the former regime and have adopted the language of democracy, or *mardum-salari* as the term is adopted into Persian, to emphasise the difference. Holding elections and enjoying large electoral participation serves that purpose. It also masks a

fundamental flaw. Elections do not offer genuine choice to the electorate as long as the (unelected) Guardian Council vets out candidates whose commitment to the Supreme Leader is questionable, and the security organs of the state and mass media are controlled by the Supreme Leader who occupies his post for life.

The political system maintains an inherent contradiction which at times appears to tip in favour of popular sovereignty. But that is only because the political elite is acutely aware that without the illusion of popular rule, the regime could be cast aside in the same vein as the Pahlavi regime. Rouhani's achievements, significant as they are for regional stability and the welfare of the Iranian population, do not address that contradiction. Instead, his achievements highlight an acute awareness at the top echelons of power that divine sovereignty needs to rest on a semblance of popular rule. Emptying the essence of democracy by offering the electorate a carefully constructed choice between regime insiders or devotees to the Supreme Leader serves that important purpose. In this model, divine and popular sovereignty are not mutually dependent, despite the cliché in the official proclamation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Instead Divine Sovereignty represented by the Supreme Leader sits over the empty shell of democracy.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ansari, A. (2007). 'Chapter One: The Rafsanjani and Khatami Presidencies,' *Adelphi Papers* 47/393, 11–22.
- Akbarzadeh, S. (2005). Where is the Islamic republic of Iran heading? *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 59(1), 25–38.
- Coma, G., & Abdolmohammadi, P. (2015). Iran as a peculiar hybrid regime: Structure and dynamics of the Islamic republic. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(4), 558–578.
- Ebadi, S. (2006). *Iran awakening* (pp. 104–105). London: Rider.
- Ehteshami, A., & Zweiri, M. (2007). *Iran and the rise of the neo-conservatives: The politics of Iran's silent revolution* (p. 71). London: I.B. Tauris.
- Gheissari, A., & Nasr, V. (2006). *Democracy in Iran: History and the quest for liberty* (pp. 91–92). Oxford: OUP.
- Ghobadzadeh, N. (2015). *Religious secularity: Theological challenge to the Islamic state* (p. 5). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holliday, S. (2011). *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Iran. (1997). *The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Tehran: Department of Translation and Publication, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Articles 110 and 112).

- Khamenei, A. (2013, March 21). 'Bīānāt dar haram-e motahar-e razavī [Statement at the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza]'. *Khamenei.ir*. Viewed 17 September 2014. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=22233>.
- Khamenei, A. (2013, September 5). Āmrīkā darbāreh-e sūrīeh khatā mīkonad va qaṭ'an żarar khāhad kard [America is making mistakes regarding Syria and will certainly lose]. *Fars News*. <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920614000362>. Accessed February 9, 2015.
- Khamenei, A. (2013, September 17). Bayānāt dar dīdār-e farmāndehān-e sepāh-e pāsādārān-e engelāb-e eslāmī [Remarks at the meeting with the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps]. *Khamenei.ir*. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=24033>. Accessed September 28, 2015.
- Khamenei, A. (2013, June 4). 'Election should Create Political Epic in Iran'. *Mehr News*. Viewed on 21 July 2015, <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/55534/Election-should-create-political-epic-in-Iran>.
- Khamenei, A. (2013, June 12). Hattā kasānī keh ḥāmī nezām nīstand beh khāter-e keshvar rāi bedahand [Even those who do not support the regime should vote for the country]. *BBC Persian*. [http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2013/06/130612\\_139\\_khamenei\\_election\\_ir92.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2013/06/130612_139_khamenei_election_ir92.shtml). Accessed September 1, 2015.
- Khamenei, A. (2013, September 9). Vaz'iyat-e manāqeh dar emtedād-e rüyārüyī chand qarnī eslām va gharb ast [The regional conditions are many centuries of confrontation between Islam and the west]. *Hamshabri*. <http://www.hamshahronline.ir/details/230422>. Accessed February 9, 2015.
- Khamenei, A. (2014, March 21). Bayānāt dar haram-e motahar-e razavī [Statement at the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza]. *Khamenei.ir* (2013). Viewed 17 September 2014. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=22233>.
- Khamenei, A. (2014, March 6). Dīdār-e a'żā-ye majles-e khobregān bā rahbar-e enghelāb [The meeting of the assembly of experts with the leader of the revolution]. *Khamenei.ir*. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=25686>. Accessed September 14, 2014.
- Khamenei, A. (2014, June 23). Rahkar-e az beyn raftan-e esra'il bargozari referendum ast [The solution to the destruction of Israel is the holding of a referendum]. *Radio Farda*. [http://www.radiofarda.com/content/f4\\_khamenei\\_israel\\_destroy\\_referendum/25467971.html](http://www.radiofarda.com/content/f4_khamenei_israel_destroy_referendum/25467971.html). Accessed September 4, 2015.
- Khamenei, A. (2015, August 26). Dīdār-e rā'īs-e jomhūrī va a'żā-ye hey'at-e dowlat bā rahbar-e enqelāb [The meeting of the president and cabinet with the leader of the revolution]. *Khamenei.ir*. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=30581>. Accessed September 1, 2015.
- Khamenei, A. (2015, June 4). Election should create political epic in Iran. *Mehr News*. Viewed on 21 July 2015. <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/55534/Election-should-create-political-epic-in-Iran>.

- Khamenei, A. (2015, July 18). Khoṭbeh-hā-ye namāz-e 'eyd-e feṭr [Sermon on Eid al-Fitr]. *Khamenei.ir*. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=30331>. Accessed September 7, 2015.
- Khorasani, W. (2015, February 26). Tavakol bar khodāvand va tavasol beh ḥazrat-e valī 'aṣr ('aley-he salām) rāh-e ḥal tafavoq bar moshkelāt [Trust in god and recourse to the hidden Imam (peace be upon him) is the solution to overcoming difficulties]. *Wahid Khorasani*. [http://wahidkhorasani.com/رصد-ع-یلو-ت-رض-ح-هب-ل-سوت-و-دن-وادخ-رب-ل-کوت-256\\_اوت-حم-رابخ/ایسراف-تالکش-م-رب-قوفت-ل-ح-مار-م-السل-ا-میل-ع](http://wahidkhorasani.com/رصد-ع-یلو-ت-رض-ح-هب-ل-سوت-و-دن-وادخ-رب-ل-کوت-256_اوت-حم-رابخ/ایسراف-تالکش-م-رب-قوفت-ل-ح-مار-م-السل-ا-میل-ع). Accessed March 17, 2015.
- Maloney, S. (2008). *Iran's long reach: Iran as a pivotal state in the Muslim world* (pp. 22–23). Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace.
- Maloney, S. (2008). *Iran's long reach: Iran as a pivotal state in the Muslim world* (pp. 7–8). Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace.
- Mesbah-Yazdi, M. (2015, June 3). Sokhanān-e šarīḥ-e 'alāmeḥ-e mešbāḥ yazdī [The explicit remarks of the Cleric Mesbah-Yazdi]. *Raja News*. <http://www.rajanews.com/news/174544>. Accessed March 17, 2015.
- Moghadam-Far, H. (2015, August 15). Sokhanī bā barādar-e mota'ahed va enqelābī jenāb-e āqā-ye hoseyn-e šarī'atmadārī [A talk with the committed and revolutionary brother, excellency Mr. Hossein Shariatmadari]. *Tasnim*. <http://www.tasnimnews.com/Home/Single/830790>. Accessed September 1, 2015.
- Natāyej-e tāzēhtarīn nažarsanjī yek markaz-e mo'tabar: ḥassan-e rowḥānī bā 23.3 daršad bīštarīn rāy rā dārad/ qālībāf dar rotbeh-e dovvom [Latest results from the polls of the official centre: Rouhani has the most votes by 23.3 percent/Qalibaf is in second place]. *Aftab* (2013), June 3. Viewed on 21 July 2015. <http://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/195989/>.
- Nouri-Hamedani, N. (2015, January 27). Možākeḥ-e konandegān motadayen va enqelābī hastand [The negotiators are Pious and revolutionary]. <http://dolat.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Serv=12&Id=259187>. Accessed March 17, 2015.
- Nouri-Hamedani, N. (2015, April 27). Vākoneš-e marāje'-e taqlīd beh dīdgāḥ-e 'adam-e mas'ūliāt-e polis barā-ye ejrā-ye eslām [Responses of the clerics to comments on the absence of police responsibility in implementing Islam]. *Fars News*. <http://farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940207001222>. Accessed May 4, 2015.
- Rouhani, H. (2013, May 27). Rāhbord-e ḥassan-e rowḥānī barā-ye možākereḥ bā āmrīkā [Hassan Rouhani's strategy for relations with America]. *Entekhab*. Viewed on 21 July 2015. <http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/113445/>.
- Rouhani, H. (2014, May 31). Rouhani says state should not have religion on its side. *Mehr News*. <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/102967/Rouhani-says-state-should-not-have-religion-on-its-side>. Accessed June 2, 2014.

- Rouhani, H. (2015, January 28). Emām (r.h.) ān rūz keh żarūrī būd rāh-e şolḥ rā bargozīd [The Imam preferred the path of peace when it was necessary]. *ISNA*. <http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/93110804879/>. Accessed February 2, 2015.
- Rouhani, H. (2015, August 31). Matn-e sokhanan-e ra'is-e jomhuri dar kongereh-e bein olmellali 17 hezar shahid-e terur [Text of the President's Words at the International Congress on the 17,000 Victims of Terror]. *President.ir*. <http://www.president.ir/fa/89084>. Accessed September 2, 2015.
- Rouhani, H. (2015, June 1). Presidential candidates elaborate on economic plans. *Mehr News*. Viewed on 21 July 2015. <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/55487/Presidential-candidates-elaborate-on-economic-plans>.
- Rouhani, H. (2015, June 12). Rohani calls for moderation, Shuns Extremism. *Mehr News* (2013). Viewed on 21 July 2015. <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/55602/Rohani-calls-for-moderation-shuns-extremism>.
- Rouhani, H. (2015, June 10). Rohani says Fallacy that casting Ballots has no effect is "Word of Satan". *Mehr News*. Viewed on 21 July 2015. <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/55583/Rohani-says-fallacy-that-casting-ballots-has-no-effect-is-word>.
- Rouhani, H. (2015, May 29). Rouhani vows to bring moderation to the country. *Mehr News*. Viewed on 21 July 2015. <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/55458/Rohani-vows-to-bring-moderation-to-the-country>.
- Shariatmadari, H. (2015, August 14). Tanhā gozīneh-e pīsh ravī (yāddāsht-e rūz) [Only one option for success (note of the day)]. *Kayhan*. <http://kayhan.ir/fa/news/52516/>. Accessed September 1, 2015.
- Sherrill, W. C. (2014). Why Hassan Rouhani won Iran's 2013 Presidential Election. *Middle East Policy*, 21(2), 64–75.
- Tazmini, G. (2009). *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*. IB Taurus: London.
- Tezcür, G. M., Azadarmaki, T., & Bahar, M. (2012). Support for Democracy in Iran.' *Political Research Quarterly*, 65(2), 235–247.

# Careful What You Wish for: *Salafi* Islamisation and Authoritarian Governance in Malaysia

*Lily Zubaidah Rahim*

## INTRODUCTION

When President Barack Obama visited Malaysia in April 2012, he was informed by civil society activists that Malaysia was no longer a ‘moderate’ Muslim-majority country. Maria Chin Abdullah, Chairman of the NGO *Bersih* (which focuses on electoral reform), cautioned President Obama that despite the assuring pronouncements of government leaders, ‘*Malaysia is not moderate and democratic*’. President of the Malaysian Bar, Christopher Leong, reminded the US President that detention-without-trial laws have been directed not only to fight terrorists, ‘*but against Malaysians on the pretext of fighting crime*’. Representatives from progressive Muslim NGOs, Islamic Renaissance Front, and Sisters in Islam warned that the Malaysian government has used Islamic rhetoric to silence dissent, censure civil rights activists and persecute dissenting Muslims and religious minorities (Zurairi & Yap, 2014).

---

L.Z. Rahim (✉)  
University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

In October 2014, a delegation of Malaysian politicians from the opposition party *Parti Keadilan Raayat* (PKR) met senior Australian parliamentarians to caution the international community that political repression had become increasingly acute. They maintained that the ruling BN government was relying increasingly on the *ulama* (Islamic clerics), conservative Islamic bureaucracy, ethno-nationalists and draconian laws to shore up its weakening support base. They warned that in the increasingly authoritarian Islamised environment, conservative Islamism from the Middle East have developed firm roots<sup>1</sup> and that the government has become increasingly reliant on conservative Islamist and ethno-nationalist organisations to shore up its weakening domestic support.

These warnings took on another level of urgency when the UMNO-led BN government, in May 2016, fast-tracked PAS's tabling of an amendment to the *Sharia* Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965. This amendment aims to extend the sentencing powers of the *sharia* courts, paving the way for the introduction of *hudud* (Islamic penal code) laws. The incremental jurisdictional expansion of *sharia* law since the 1980s has seriously destabilised Malaysia's secular constitutional foundations.

Malaysia's deepening conservative Islamist ethno-nationalist trajectory contradicts the image commonly held within the international community of the country as a 'moderate' and democratic Muslim-majority country. This perception has been energetically promoted by Prime Minister Najib via the launching of initiatives such as the 'Global Movement of Moderates' and rhetoric on combating Islamic militancy. At the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly in October 2015, Najib (2015) pronounced:

'Five years ago, I stood before the assembly and called for a Global Movement of Moderates of all religions, of all countries – to marginalise extremists, reclaim the centre, and shape the agenda towards peace and pragmatism. We in Malaysia have followed up, both with practical action and by building intellectual capacity....Malaysia stands ready to share its experience, of upholding Islam and marginalising extremism, of implementing the objectives of shariah while practising democracy, of maintaining a multi-ethnic society where different faiths coexist and prosper'.

---

<sup>1</sup>'Malaysian delegation warns of terror threat', *AAP*, 21 October 2014.

In a 2014 speech welcoming Turkish leader Recep Erdogan to Malaysia, Najib described both Muslim-majority countries as ‘progressive’ and ‘democratic’. He claimed that, ‘*Where others have succumbed to radicalism, we have chosen a moderate, progressive vision of Islam. Where others have fallen away from democracy principles, we share a commitment to both the spirit and practice of democracy.*’ (Cited in Ahmad Fauzi & Che Hamdan, 2015: 301). At the May 2017 US-Arab Islamic Summit in Riyadh, Najib once again pronounced that ‘*Malaysia will never falter in our efforts to fight for moderation and the true path of Islam*’.<sup>2</sup>

Instructively, Najib’s rhetoric of Muslim moderation is largely directed at international audiences. When communicating with Malaysian Muslim audiences, his rhetoric becomes increasingly *salafi* Islamist. This double-speak is demonstrated by his 2014 tribute to Islamic State (IS) fighters for bravery and calls for UMNO party members to emulate IS’s valour. Najib has also identified ‘*humanism, secularism, liberalism and human rights*’ as ‘*new threats*’ to Islam and Muslims.<sup>3</sup> This then begs the question: what do the terms ‘moderate Islam’ and ‘moderate Muslim country’ actually mean when authoritarian regimes with a less than savoury human rights record strenuously claim the credentials of Islamic and Muslim moderation?

In Malaysia, non-Muslims are forbidden from using the word ‘*Allah*’, bibles translated into the Malay language have been seized, Muslims deprived of the right to religious freedom, *shias* and other non-orthodox Muslim communities detained and denounced as deviants, *hudud* legislation deliberated in state and Federal parliaments, Malay ethno-nationalists have been allowed to denigrate non-Malay Muslims, the jurisdiction of the sharia courts and Islamic bureaucracy have rapidly expanded and draconian laws have targeted political dissidents and the independent media. But despite having ‘*unleashed the forces of Islamist authoritarianism and Malay ethnic supremacism*’,<sup>4</sup> the international

---

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Prime Minister Najib Razak’s speech at <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1101886>.

<sup>3</sup> This warning by Najib was made at the 57th national-level Quran recital assembly. See Ambiga Sreevenasan, ‘Towards a Bold and Transformative Leadership’, *The Malaysian Insider*, 20 June 2014.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Najib’s scandals can affect ties with Australia, reports says’, *The Malaysian Insider*, 27 September 2015.



community continues to be receptive of the myth of Malaysia as a ‘moderate’ Muslim-majority country.

Reflective of the international community’s uncritical acceptance of this myth of a ‘moderate’ Malaysia, President Obama pronounced in 2014 that, ‘*Prime Minister Najib came in as a reformer, and one who is committed to it*’.<sup>5</sup> The international community’s acquiescence of this myth has in large part been encouraged by the global war against Islamic State (IS) and, particularly alarming to the United States, the ‘rise’ of China. Forging relations with self-declared ‘moderate’ Muslim-majority regimes is considered expedient in this turbulent era.

Since the instigation of state-led Islamisation from the early 1980s, the passage of *salafi*-inspired *sharia* laws and policies in Malaysia have eroded fundamental rights and liberties guaranteed by the secular Federal constitution. *Salafi* Islam has rolled back the enactment of rights enhancing *sharia* laws which had enhanced the status of Muslim women in Malaysia. The expanded jurisdiction of the *sharia* courts has contributed to the erosion of civil liberties and rights enshrined in the Malaysian Federal constitution (Rahim, 2013). In an effort to stem the tide of *salafi* Islam and challenge regressive *sharia* laws which violate key principles of the Malaysian Constitution, pro-democracy actors and organisations in civil society have championed for a return to the secular and democratic spirit of the Federal Constitution. In leading this campaign, a group of retired Malaysian civil servants, referred to as the Group of 25 (G25), caution that in order for orthodox interpretations of *sharia* law ‘*to meet the highest standards of justice... [and] for Islam to continue to be relevant and universal in our times, the understanding, codification and implementation of the teachings of our faith must continue to evolve*’.<sup>6</sup>

If the warnings of Malaysian opposition politicians and democratic civil society activists against the country’s *salafi* Islamisation and deepening authoritarian rule are salient, this question is pertinent: What can other Muslim-majority states, who were also initially conceived as secular democracies, learn from Malaysia’s experiences of more than three decades of *salafi* Islamisation and deepening authoritarian rule?

---

<sup>5</sup>Commentary, ‘When ‘in principle’ really isn’t about principles’, *The Malaysian Insider*, 28 April 2014.

<sup>6</sup>‘G25, Champion open debate and discourse on Islamic law’, *The Malaysian Insider*, December 8, 2014.

This chapter examines Malaysia's sociopolitical and economic convulsions within the broader context of the politicisation of religion and race by a long-serving regime mired in legitimacy crises. It critically analyses the way by which the forces of *salaḥī* Islamisation and authoritarian governance are mutually reinforcing, whilst destabilising the secular and democratic constitutional foundations and institutions of the Malaysian state.

## SECULAR DEMOCRATIC FOUNDATIONS OF MUSLIM-MAJORITY STATES

Like many post-colonial Muslim-majority states, Malaysia was initially conceived as a secular democratic state, with Islam recognised as the national religion for symbolic purposes. Various articles in the post-colonial Malaysian constitution provide for religious freedom, the right to personal liberty and equality before the law. This constitutional arrangement is consistent with many other Muslim-majority states and democracies such as Britain, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. These states possess established churches but do not assertively exclude religion from the public sphere and are constitutionally obliged to treat all faiths fairly (Rahim, 2013: 6–7). Such states have been referred to as passive secular states (Kuru, 2009) and operate within the constraints of tradition, the law, and constitution.

Particularly since the late twentieth century, the legitimacy of many secular-based Muslim-majority states has been under considerable pressure by Islamists and opportunistic politicians ostensibly championing the Islamic state ideal—despite the absence of Islamic state models that possess robust nation-building and governance records. Ironically, opportunistic politicians from secular-based parties have contributed to the erosion of the secular democratic foundations of the state by exploiting the constitutional ambiguity and fragile consensus on the following issues and questions:

- Should the state maintain a neutral stance with regard to religious matters?
- Have cohesive nation-building and citizenship rights been promoted when *sharia* law is imposed by the state?

- How should the dual legal jurisdictions (civil and codified *sharia*) be managed in order to safeguard key constitutional principles and rights?
- Is *sharia* law ‘rights enhancing’ (or ‘rights eroding’) for women minorities and the broader citizenry?
- Should the state *ulama* and Islamic state bureaucracy be solely charged with interpreting *sharia* laws and issuing *fatwas*?
- Can traditional interpretations of *sharia* law genuinely accommodate principles such as popular sovereignty, citizenship and human rights, gender equality and democratic constitutionalism?
- Is there a need to rethink traditional interpretations of *sharia* law so that it is in line with international conventions and norms on rights?

The above questions and issues were considered, but in a less than comprehensive manner, by many modernising founding nationalists in secular-based Muslim-majority states. For example, Malaysia’s founding Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman pronounced, shortly after independence in 1957, that ‘*this country is not an Islamic state as it is generally understood, we merely provide that Islam shall be the official religion of the state*’ (Cited in Rahim, 2013: 165). The historical evidence suggests that the drafters of the Malaysian Federal Constitution never intended for Islam to have a comprehensive role in the affairs of the state (Fernando, 2006). Despite Tunku’s pronouncements and the secular democratic spirit of the Federal Constitution, the lack of specificity with respect to the above questions and issues have enabled many political and religious actors in Muslim-majority secular states to redefine the relationship between the religion (Islam) and the state. Conservative Islamists have simplistically argued that if Islam is the religion of the state, the state should be dictated by comprehensive *sharia* law rather than civil law.

Conservative Islamists in Muslim-majority states are inclined to denounce post-colonial constitutional arrangements as anti-Islamic and thus illegitimate. The *salafi*-oriented Islamist opposition party President, Hadi Awang, has dismissed Malaysia’s Federal constitution as needing ‘*correction*’ by elevating the status of *sharia* courts and implementing *hudud* laws.<sup>7</sup> He believes that only with the implementation of

---

<sup>7</sup>Currently, Malaysian law only allows sharia courts at all levels to carry out a maximum punishment of three years jail, RM5000 fine or six strokes of the *rotan* (whip).

comprehensive *sharia* laws will the ‘*true position of Islam*’ as the national religion of the Federation be redeemed (Sipalan, 2015). Because Islam is Malaysia’s national religion, Islamists believe that it is only natural and legitimate for the country to become an Islamic state based on comprehensive *sharia* law—ignoring the reality that many Muslims, including 40% of Malaysians who are non-Muslim, do not wish to live in an Islamic state. Instructively, the quest for a state based on comprehensive sharia laws and courts, that are able to override civil law and courts, is held by an increasing number of UMNO politicians, confronted by electoral, governance and legitimacy crises. To shore up the standing of UMNO, they have expediently sanctioned the *salafi*-oriented worldview of many leading PAS politicians. Embracing the views of conservative Islamists, these UMNO politicians are inclined to dismiss the secular vision of founding UMNO nationalists such as Tunku Abdul Rahman as misguided and symptomatic of the internalisation of colonial Western values. Malaysia’s post-colonial secular constitution, including the guarantees to civil and political rights, has incrementally whittled away with the expanding jurisdiction of the *sharia* courts, law, and Islamic bureaucracy.

Mirroring the Malaysian experience, politicians from other secular-based Muslim-majority states have also expediently expanded the jurisdiction of *sharia* law as a means of deflecting their less than robust governance record and tenuous political legitimacy. In attempting to demonstrate that they are more Islamic than their Islamist political rivals, political elites have reduced theology to a ‘*political football*’ to placate the masses.

### ISLAM, IJTIHAD AND CIVIC REASONING

Abdullahi An Naim, a prominent Muslim scholar, and public intellectual, has written extensively on the relationship between Islam, *sharia* law and the state and is well known for his controversial but salient statement: ‘*in order to be a Muslim by conviction and free choice, which is the only way to be a Muslim, I need a secular state, I mean one that is neutral regarding religious doctrine [and] does not claim or pretend to enforce sharia*’ (An Naim, 2008: 1). This assertion posits that a secular state that is democratic, inclusive and neutral with regard to religious doctrine is able to promote genuine religiosity and thus consistent with key Islamic principles. By contrast, the Islamic state that is based on the imposition of *sharia* law is a political rather than an Islamic institution and cannot be

genuinely Islamic. Moreover, as *sharia* law is essentially a human construction, the imposition and compulsion of *sharia* law is thus unIslamic.

Muslim intellectuals such as An Naim have also reminded Muslims that as religious and political authority stem from different sources, different skill sets are required. As such, Islamic states (such as Iran) that are dominated by religious authority (clerics or *ulama*) but also hold elections are inevitably embroiled in an unworkable dynamic fuelled by the contradictory doctrines of divine and popular sovereignty—as discussed by Akbarzadeh and Barry in this volume. In authoritarian Muslim-majority states, the politicisation of religion has shielded elites from taking full responsibility for their policies and actions—as political power is exercised in the name of Islam (An Naim, 2008: 291).

An Naim has advanced a compelling case for governance and public policy rooted in civic reasoning that is based on ‘free and open debate by reasons that are accessible and convincing to the generality of citizens, regardless of the religion or their beliefs’ (An Naim, 2010: 220) and in accordance with the norms of civility and mutual respect. He calls for matters of public policy to be based on logical reasoning (*ijtihad*) and open to all citizens for discussion (An Naim, 2008: 93). Through the democratic processes of civic reasoning, consensus can be forged, thereby allowing for policy and legislation to be more readily binding and accepted by all citizens. An Naim makes a convincing case for the salience of civic reasoning that is consistent with the constitutional and human rights of all citizens to be extended to *sharia* law reform. This rights affirming approach contrasts with the state enforcement and imposition of *sharia* law without civic reasoning, through the decrees and dictates of the unelected *ulama*, thereby depriving citizens of their sovereignty and rights.

The imposition of *sharia* law without civic reasoning has, more often than not, led to perceived moral transgressions (sins) becoming transformed into crimes against the state. In Islamic and Muslim-majority states based on comprehensive *sharia* law, Muslims have been jailed, flogged and executed for alleged moral transgressions such as adultery, alcoholic consumption, homosexuality and engaging in sex out of marriage—with women and the poor disproportionately persecuted for these morality crimes. By contrast, the activities of the rich and powerful in exclusive establishments, clubs, residential estates or beyond the gaze and policing ambit of the Islamic authorities are rarely subjected

to prosecution for moral transgressions. *Sharia* law morality is often not adjudicated uniformly on all Muslims.

Traditional interpretations of *sharia* law do not provide equal rights to women and non-Muslims. For example, the principle of men's guardianship (*qawama*) commonly deprives women of the most basic human rights and denies women the right to hold senior public positions. As interpretations of *sharia* law are arguably human constructions, progressive Muslim scholars have championed a reinterpretation of *sharia* that is consistent with the contemporary human rights norms and the spirit of the democratic constitutionalism—with provisions against gender and religious discrimination. This is consistent with international human rights conventions and norms which call for equality and non-discrimination (An Naim, 2008: 109). Without civic reasoning in the socio-political and religious spheres, the principles of constitutionalism and citizenship and human rights are unable to develop firm roots in Muslim-majority states.

#### DEEPENING FOOTHOLD OF SALAFI ISLAM: FORGING A SALAFI CONSENSUS

Puritanical versions of *salafi* theology have become institutionalised, particularly in the more authoritarian Muslim-majority states of the Arab Middle East where the '*salafi* consensus' includes support for orthodox interpretations of *sharia* and the rejection of religious pluralism (Hamid, 2014: 32). Attacks on *sufi* shrines, intolerance towards *shias* and other Muslim minorities and non-Muslim minorities are integral to this conservative *salafi* consensus. In Malaysia, *salafi* theology has increasingly dominated the worldview of the Islamic bureaucracy, state *ulama* and *ulama* operating in political parties such as UMNO and PAS.

In the Middle East, *salafi*-based parties such as Egypt's *al Nour* party have performed relatively well in post-2011 parliamentary elections—aided and abetted by the financial support of conservative Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia. As noted in the Introduction of this volume, many *salafi* parties have been covertly supported by authoritarian regimes as a means of undermining republican Islamist parties and movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) parties (Lynch, 2012: 3). It should be noted, however, that despite the electoral competition between *salafi* and MB movements in many Muslim-majority states, there remains an

overlap between their conservative worldviews and sympathies. As Sadiki (in this volume) observes, there are widening ideological and political divisions between *salafi* parties and movements with the rise of intellectual, pragmatic and radical streams. In the context of Malaysia, the dominant *salafi* stream appears strongly anti-intellectual—under the leadership of the Saudi educated PAS President Hadi Awang.

The word *salafi* is derived from the term *al-salaf al-salih* (pious forefathers)—the first-generation Muslims who, from the seventh century, contributed to the expansion of Islam. *Salafis* advocate the return to a pristine Islam based on a literal reading of key Islamic sources—the *Quran* and *hadith*. They believe that doctrinal purity can be cultivated by emulating the lifestyles of the pious first-generation Muslims and are obsessed with outward appearances and rituals such as beards for men and tightly regulated strict dress codes for women. As only trained clerics (*ulama*) are considered legitimate interpreters of the holy texts, they are often accorded leadership positions in Islamist organisations and state religious bodies.

*Salafi* doctrine demands the rejection of traditional and pre-Islamic customs, deemed *jabiliyya* for its ‘age of ignorance’ origins. The rejection, particularly of non-Arab cultural traditions, supposedly contributes to the purification of Islam. Non-Arab Muslims are thus expected to jettison their ‘polluting’ cultural traditions by embracing Arabic cultural forms.

In Malaysia, the attempts to erase indigenous Malay cultural identity appears to have destabilised Malay identity due in part to the focus on the superficial trappings of religious rituals. This superficiality is epitomised by the emphasis on reciting Arabic salutations and phrases, particularly when praying—without fully understanding its contents. *Salafis* believe that Arabic is the language of Islam and, as such, the Quran must only be read in that language. Translations of the sacred text are frowned upon and considered a dilution of divinity, thus rendering millions of Muslims unable to fully understand the meaning of their prayers.

This form of religiosity has facilitated profound control over the private and public lives of Muslims. For example, in March 2016, the Malaysia Home Ministry warned that it is a crime to recite the Quran in a language other than Arabic (Zurairi, 2016). Such dictates are reflective of the rejection of rational and civic reasoning. To compensate for this religious superficiality, Muslims have been encouraged to focus on

external (Arabic) appearances of piety (the headscarf for women and beards for men) and on Islamic rituals rather than the substance of Islam. This performance-based Islam (Hoffstaedter, 2011: 169) constitutes a form of *salafi* cultural colonisation/imperialism, on the non-Arab Muslim world but has yet to be rigorously investigated in the scholarly literature. By contrast, Indonesia's *Nusantara* Islam movement, concerned with the Arabisation of Islam and local culture in the country, has developed deeper roots—spearheaded by a tradition of progressive Muslim intellectuals and reformist *ulama* based at the state institutes of Islamic studies (van Bruinessen, 2015: 64).

For many *sunni* Muslims, *salafism* offers a semblance of theological certainty in an increasingly uncertain social environment, empowerment in disempowering authoritarian polities and linear truth in a world of layered complexity (Maijer, 2013: 13). This fragile certainty is maintained by an over-emphasis on rules and regulations fuelled by *salafi* religious knowledge (*ilm*) which instils a sense of righteousness based on a 'we are better than you' mindset. As the supposed guardians and gatekeepers of the *sunni* Islam moral order, *salafis* are inclined to denounce Muslims deemed to have wavered in their religious duties as unbelievers (*kafirs*) that are deserving of excommunication. For resisting the 'straight path', *kafirs* are to be penalised under strict morality laws implemented by the state. Not subject to civic reasoning, these archaic morality laws transform perceived sins into crimes against the state.

It is worth noting that *salafi* theology tends to flourish in authoritarian and weak states, where electoral politics is poorly institutionalised, patriarchy deeply entrenched and indigenous cultural identity repressed. But as noted above, far from being a homogenous movement, *salafism* is made up of diverse theological currents and cross-currents. However, the dominant *salafi* theological current is the adherence to literal, patriarchal, anti-modern, anti-contextual and anti-intellectual interpretations of Islam. This dominant form of *salafi* Islam prioritises rituals over substance, imitation, and repetition over innovation and specificity over universality. The epistemology of the humanities and social sciences based on critical analyses, intellectual innovation, and civic reasoning are firmly rejected for contradicting notions of divine sovereignty (Duderya, 2007: 351). Paradoxically, the technological achievements of modernity have been adopted but its intellectual and rational premises rejected (Duderya, 2007: 351).



Salafism includes quietist tendencies (*dawa*) at one end of the theological spectrum and *jibadi* militancy at the other end of the spectrum. The blending of *salafi* and Saudi-based *wahhabi* theology<sup>8</sup> has prompted some scholars to characterise this blending as ideological ‘twins’ (Duderya, 2007: 349). Internalising the combination of *salafi* and *wahhabi* theology has been described as a ‘slippery slope’ phenomenon and contributed to the rise of militant Islamists such as *Al Qaeda*, IS and *Jemaah Islamiyah* (Hamid, 2016). The conveyor belt thesis purports that puritanical *salafi-wahhabi* theology represents a continuum within the broader process of radicalisation (Lynch, 2010). Recruits to militant Islamists movements such as IS and al Qaeda have, more often than not, been indoctrinated by *salafi-wahhabi* theology which initially emanated from Saudi Arabia.

*Salafi-wahhabi* theology has been actively propagated by Saudi petrodollars particularly after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, where the two dissimilar Islamic state paradigms competed for primacy in the Muslim world. Saudi Islam, however, has been advantaged by the existence of Islamic bureaucracies throughout the *sunni* Muslim world, that are managed by *ulamas* trained in theologically conservative *salafi* seminaries and centres of learning in Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Saudi sponsored institutions such as the Muslim World League and World Assembly of Muslim Youth have energetically promoted *salafi-wahhabi* doctrine globally. It is worth pointing out that the Malaysian *ulama* operating within political parties PAS, UMNO and the Malaysian Islamic bureaucracy are largely educated in these *salafi* institutions. Not surprisingly, they are obsessed with the imposition of comprehensive *sharia* law and the promotion of the Islamic state, fixated with purifying Islam, imposing Islamic rituals, monitoring the appearance of Muslim women, containing the spread of *shia* theology, restricting the rights of non-Muslims and regulating patriarchal norms of morality.

Integral to the attempts at erasing indigenous Malay cultural traditions is the pressure on Muslim women to adorn traditional Arab headscarves and attire in the belief that this is consistent with Islamic modesty. They are regularly reminded of their marital duties, sexual

---

<sup>8</sup>Wahhabi theology has been shaped by the views of its founder and *ulama*, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), who forged a political alliance with the Saud clan. Inter alia, al-Wahhab called for the purification of Islam by returning to the monotheistic teachings of Islam.

obligations to their husband and expected to reject concepts such as gender equality and feminism—denounced for being alien Western values and thus unIslamic.<sup>9</sup> The religious authorities and *ulama* consistently warn Muslim women to conceal their *aurat* (the ever expanding understanding of private or hidden parts), tolerate physical aggression from their husbands, maintain family honour and to avoid sexual abuse and harassment by maintaining modest attire. Instructively, the *aurat* and attire of Muslim men are not subjected to the same regulations nor tied to family honour.

Fixated with the need to purify Islam in a world supposedly engulfed by polluting influences, *salafis* are inclined adopt siege mindsets and resist inter-faith engagement. Muslims are discouraged from celebrating the festivals of other faiths as this is considered *syirik* (blasphemous) and likely to erode their *aqidah* (faith). The discouragement of social interaction with non-Muslims has contributed to social tension, misunderstanding and silo mindsets—particularly problematic in societies where Muslims do not constitute a significant numerical majority or constitute a minority. Despite their obsession with imposing Islamic morality, *salafis* appear to be relatively inattentive to ethical issues pertaining to accountable and transparent governance, corruption and citizenship rights.

### SALAFI ULAMA: COLLUSION WITH RULING ELITES

Non-*jihadi salafis* are inclined to support authoritarian *sunni* regimes based on the rationale that this safeguards *sunni* Muslim unity and hegemony. Support for regimes in power has been attributed to classical Islamic scholars from the main schools of *sunni* jurisprudence which discourage anti-regime revolts—based on the principle of *wali al-amr* (obedience to the ruler). It is worth highlighting that the *sunni* jurist al Ghazali (1058–1111) discouraged rebellion, lest it degenerates into the state of *fitnah* (strife) for the Muslim community. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, founder of the *Hanbali* jurisprudence declared that rebelling against a ruler was sinful (Ghobadzadeh & Akbarzadeh, 2015: 696). Rooted in this tradition of support for the status quo, *salafis* supported the 2013 military coup that ousted the elected Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

---

<sup>9</sup>‘Muslim husbands can’t pull out during sex without wife’s consent, says Perlis mufti’, *Malay Mail Online*, April 28, 2015. Available at <http://www.malaymailonline.com>.

(MB) President Morsi, despite the violence unleashed by the security forces which led to the killing and imprisonment of thousands of MB activists. The *salafi* and *ulama* ‘alliance with power’ is exemplified by the controversial 1990 *fatwa* issued by then Saudi Grand Mufti Ibn Baz, condoning the Saud royal family’s unpopular and controversial decision to station US troops in Saudi Arabia.

Like many of their counterparts in Saudi Arabia, *salafi ulama* operating in the Malaysia’s religious bureaucracy are strongly supportive of the UMNO-led BN government and expect Muslims to do the same. The Perak state *mufti* (religious leader), Harussani Zakaria, warned Malaysians in August 2015, after a series of large anti-government demonstrations, that it is unIslamic and thus forbidden to topple the BN government (Sharmugam, 2015). In a Friday sermon in September 2015, the Pahang mufti, Abdul Rahman Osman, warned Muslims to stay united and not support the opposition party DAP on the grounds that it ‘*is clearly against Islam*’.<sup>10</sup> Friday mosque sermons, managed by JAKIM and the state *ulama*, have alleged, in characteristic *salafi* fashion, that there is a conspiracy by the ‘*enemies of Islam*’ to manipulate Muslims through alien ideas such as secularism, feminism, liberalism, and constitutionalism (Ahmad Fauzi & Che Hamdan, 2015: 323). A Friday (3 April 2015) mosque sermon on 3 April 2015 entitled ‘*The Brittle Faith*’ warned that a ‘*main challenge for the Muslim ummah is the attack against our beliefs which is encroaching upon every aspect of our lives. The western world is propagating secularism which has managed to tie up all other religions and their holy places, and has denied the role of religion... Liberalism, or unbridled freedom in all aspects of life, has managed to sideline the syariat and guidance from the Lord. Pluralism has made all religions equal, when in actual fact Islam is above and nothing should surpass it... we must work together to propagate the message of Islam to all people around us, and to warn them in general about the heinous plans that are being implemented by the enemies of Islam... The Muslim ummah is currently facing great challenges from its enemies*’.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>The DAP has been able to attract high profile Malays as DAP leaders and members. They include National Laureate A. Samad Said, Professor Aziz Bari and Dr. Arriffin Omar. See Elizabeth Zachariah, ‘Say sorry or we’ll sue’, *The Malaysian Insider*, September 26, 2015.

<sup>11</sup>Sermon Manual Multimedia, ‘The Brittle Faith’, 3 April 2015, 1–7.

For daring to question the constitutionality of *sharia* enactments and morality laws (such as *khalwat*) which violate personal privacy, a Friday sermon in January 2016 criticised the Group of 25 (G25) and other ‘liberal’ Muslim organisations for supposedly undermining Muslim unity and maligning Islam and religious institutions. Such Muslims were denounced for their supposedly limited religious knowledge and role as ‘*turncoats or enemy collaborators ... [who will] cause Muslims to lose their greatness in the eyes of the enemies and will no longer strike fear in their hearts*’ (Cited in Shafiqah Othman Hamzah, 2016). A Friday sermon in 11 March 2016, enjoined Muslims to obey their leaders in government or be punished by God. ‘*On the Day of Judgement, Allah will honour those who honour the government. Whereas on the Day of Judgement, Allah will punish those who do not honour their government*’ (Ibid). Emboldened by the *ulama* and the Islamic bureaucracy’s call for Muslim unity, Prime Minister Najib has quoted a verse in the Quran enjoining Muslims that ‘*the issue of unity is not a choice, but an obligation to Muslims. This is the command of Allah to us*’ (cited in Lim, 2016).

Lending credibility to the conveyor belt hypothesis, Malaysia’s *salafi*-inspired Islamic bureaucracy has valorised *jihadi* interpretations of Islam in Friday mosque sermons—chastising IS only because it has inflicted atrocities without differentiation—on non-Muslim as well as Muslim civilians (Fealy & Funston, 2016). Malaysian Islamist bodies and vigilante squads such as the Organisation for the Defence of Islam (*Pertubuhan Pembela Islam*) have been formed to ‘protect’ Islam and Muslims from the supposed threat of Christian evangelical influences.

In return for legitimising the BN government, the influence and power of *ulamas* have expanded. *Fatwas* passed by the state religious authorities have the force of law and thus not easily challenged. State funding of the expanding Islamic bureaucracy has also surged under Prime Minister Najib, particularly after the controversial 2013 election where the BN lost the popular vote but held on to power. Preoccupied with upholding Islamic rituals, promoting *sharia* laws and maintaining Muslim unity, *salafi ulama* appear less interested with ethical questions related to social and economic justice. Reluctant to speak ‘truth to power’, they appear more concerned with preserving the political status quo despite allegations of electoral fraud, persecution, and jailing of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, legal harassment of dissidents and major corruption scandals which implicate Federal politicians.

Traditionally, *sunni* Islam is not based on a centralised authority that dictates a uniform doctrine. Yet Muslims are discouraged from directly analysing and interpreting Islamic texts such as the *Qur'an* and *hadith* on the grounds that they do not possess the religious credentials held by the state *ulama*. The anti-intellectual and anti-civic reasoning approach of Malaysia's religious bureaucracy is illustrated by the banning of more than 1000 internationally acclaimed books that have already been translated into the Malay language. They include seminal scientific works such as Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* to the widely acclaimed *Islam: A Short History* by renowned scholar Karen Armstrong. The Islamic bureaucracy's stringent policing of books is in tandem with the book banning fetish of the *salafi-wahhabi* Ministry of Information in Saudi Arabia.<sup>12</sup> This censorship and regulation have fostered insular, dogmatic and intolerant *salafi* mindsets—disseminated through mosques, the mainstream media, and Islamic bureaucracy.

*Salafis* and other conservative Islamists perceive sovereignty not as a right of citizens but as sovereignty lying with God—as interpreted by the *ulama*. As such, Muslims are discouraged from questioning the *fatwas* and directives of the *ulama* who are supposedly the only legitimate interpreters of codified *sharia* law. Disinclined to acknowledge that *sharia* law constitutes a diverse body of legal opinions or jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that is the product of human reasoning and thus fallible, *sharia* law has instead been projected by *salafi ulama* as direct commandments from God that must be carried out by the state. This conflation of *sharia* ideals or principles with *fiqh* contributed to the passage of Malaysia's 1997 *Sharia Criminal Offences Act* (Article 9). This act criminalises defiance of religious authorities. Article 12 of the Act criminalises the communication of an opinion that is contrary to a *fatwa*. Article 14 criminalises the failure to perform Friday prayers, Article 15 for the breaking of fast during Ramadan, Article 19 for indulging in gambling, Article 18 for drinking alcohol and Articles 20–29 for sexual deviance (Moustafa, 2013a, b: 169–170). The Act ensures that the *ulama*, Islamic bureaucracy, and *sharia* courts possess an unchallenged monopoly of religious interpretation.

---

<sup>12</sup> *The Bible* has been banned in Saudi Arabia. Refer to Mustafa Akyol, 'Islam without extremes', *The New York Times*, Opinion, March 16, 2016.

Muslims who are charged with violating *sharia* law have no choice but to be tried in the *sharia* courts rather than the civil courts. With the passage of the 1988 constitutional amendment to Article 212 (1A) of the Malaysian Constitution, the jurisdiction of civil courts over *sharia* court rulings have been curbed, thereby undermining the status of civil courts in upholding fundamental constitutional rights. It is now assumed that all matters pertaining to conversion, apostasy, morality and personal status issues are to be resolved in the *sharia* courts which are dictated by traditional interpretations of *sharia* law. In more recent times, Muslims have been unsuccessful in applying for politically sensitive cases to be adjudicated in the civil courts. Even in cases pertaining to divorce proceedings between Muslims and non-Muslims and the unilateral religious conversion of minors, the civil courts have, in Malaysia's deepening *salafised* environment, exhibited a willingness to defer to the jurisdiction of the *sharia* courts. Muslims and non-Muslims, have since the 1980s, been subjected to the jurisdiction of the *sharia* courts in matters pertaining to freedom of speech, publication, religious conversion, marriage, burial, and broader issues related to morality (Rahim, 2013: 172).

The increasingly powerful *ulama*, operating within the religious bureaucracy and Muslim-based political parties UMNO and PAS have been able to repudiate reformist Islamic initiatives such as *Islam Hadhari* (IH, civilisational Islam) spearheaded by former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi (2004–2009). Instructively, *salafi* Islamists colluded as a united force against the inclusive Islamic message (Hamid, 2013) of *Islam Hadhari*, dismissing it as a variant of liberal Islam propagated by Indonesian Muslim reformists. Ironically, while Abdullah Badawi attempted to propagate a modernising Islam, the religious authorities continued to ban books by prominent scholars of religion such as Karen Armstrong (Noor, 2014: 180). The conservative Islamist objection to IH was arguably fuelled by Abdullah Badawi's political and social reform agenda. Islamists and ethno-nationalists also felt challenged by IH's ten precepts, in particular the '*protection of the rights of minority groups and women*'. Conservative Islamists have also been contemptuous of the attempts by PAS reformists to promote inclusive social and economic justice programs such as *Negara Kebajikan Islam* (Islamic Welfare state), unveiled before the 2008 elections. Inter alia, *Negara Kebajikan Islam* is opposed to institutionalised discrimination against non-Muslims.

With the formation of UMNO's *ulama* wing called ILMU (*Pertubuhan Ilmuwan Malaysia*) in 2010, the party's ethno-nationalism

has been compounded by a thickening layer of religious nationalism. UMNO has now become a party that champions ethno-nationalist Malay dominance (*kutuanan Melayu*) as well as Islamic dominance (*ketuanan Islam*). *Salafi*-inspired UMNO *ulama* have not only provided Islamic legitimacy to the party but also strengthened its electoral credentials for the Muslim vote. ILMU *ulama* insist that Malaysia is already an Islamic state as political power is held by Muslims. As such, Muslims are urged to support the BN coalition government or risk dividing the Muslim community and undermining Muslim hegemony. Thus, any challenge to a Muslim ruler and government is deemed unIslamic (Osman, 2014). ILMU *ulama* such as Rasul Dahri has even declared democracy unIslamic on the grounds that sovereignty lies with God rather than the people. Accordingly, democracy is projected as divisive and thus must be rejected. Another ILMU *ulama*, Fathul Bari, has asserted that Muslims cannot leave the faith and that the punishment for this sin is death for violating the crime of apostasy (Osman, 2014: 206–223). Operating within an increasingly Islamised political party, secular-oriented UMNO politicians have become a marginalised force—without the clout or confidence to resist the party’s transformation from an ethno-nationalist party to one with religious nationalist pretensions.

As noted above, *salafi* Islamists view pluralism, liberalism, and secularism as an attack on Islam and Muslims. The Minister for Islamic Affairs, Jamil Khir, has urged Muslims to defend Islam from liberal ideologies ‘by any method’, claiming that the *sharia* courts have been subjected to a ‘new wave’ of assault as evidenced by civil court cases against *sharia* court rulings. (Boo, 2014). Denouncing liberal Islam as deviant, Jamil has acknowledged that the government is engaged in ‘psychological warfare’ and ‘monitoring and intelligence gathering’ against liberal Islam (Syed Jaymal Zahid, 2016). Similarly, the ethno-nationalist organisation *Ikatan Muslim Malaysia* (*Isma*) has warned Muslims that liberal democracy will destroy the faith of Malaysian Muslims, deprive them of ‘personal identity’, and result in ‘disrupt[ion] by foreign powers’ who are intent on obstructing the establishment of an Islamic state.<sup>13</sup>

In Malaysia’s deepening *salafi* environment, controversial foreign *salafi* preachers such as the Indian national Zaki Naik have been repeatedly

---

<sup>13</sup>‘Say No to a Liberal Democratic Country, Isma tells Malaysia’, *Malay Mail Online*, 24 July, 2014. Available at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com>.

invited to propagate their literal interpretations of Islam and granted permanent residency. However, progressive Muslim intellectuals and scholars are denied entry into the country or ignored when in the country. For example, in 2014, prominent Indonesia liberal Muslim, Ulil Abshar Abdalla, was prevented from visiting Malaysia to participate in a seminar on Islam organised by the progressive Muslim organisation Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF). Justifying the ban against Ulil, the Home Minister claimed that Ulil would mislead Muslims in the country if he is allowed to spread his brand of liberalism here (Zachariah, 2014). Similarly, the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) claimed that the seminar, organised by the IRF would have contravened the teachings of *shafie* Islam and ‘*threaten the faith of Muslims in Malaysia*’ (Zachariah, 2014). In contrast to the warm reception accorded to Zaik Naik, visits by progressive Muslim scholars such as Abdullahi An Naim to Malaysia have been snubbed by the religious bureaucracy, UMNO, and PAS.

Unlike Indonesia, Malaysia does not have a critical mass of progressive Muslim organisations and Islamic scholars. Progressive Muslim organisations such as IRF, Sisters in Islam and G25 are relatively small in numerical terms, unable to disseminate inclusive Islamic discourse through mosques and the Islamic bureaucracy and weakly embedded within the rural and less educated Muslim community who tend to be under the theological sway of the *ulama*. To some extent, the strength of reformist Islam in Indonesia, championed by ‘moderate’ Muslim organisations such as *Nahdatul Ulama*, which boasts a grassroots membership of more than twenty million, has served to temper deeper incursions of *salafi-wahhabi* Islam from the Arab Middle East. However, the 2017 conviction and sentencing of former Jakarta mayor Ahok to two years jail for blasphemy have raised concerns that Indonesia has become increasingly hijacked by *salafi ulama*, conservative Islamists and opportunistic politicians intent on politicising Islam for electoral gain.

In Malaysia, *Sisters in Islam* (SIS) has been subjected to ongoing harassment by the state *ulama*, religious bureaucracy, PAS and *salafi* Islamist organisations. *Sisters in Islam* has been taken to task for championing gender equality (rather than complementarity) and for insisting that *sharia* laws are not divine but humanly constructed and thus fallible. In mid-2014, the Selangor Islamic Affairs Council (Mais) passed a *fatwa* banning SIS for promoting ‘*religious liberalism and pluralism*’—purportedly deviant concepts. Undeterred, SIS has appealed against the rulings of the state Islamic bureaucracy and *sharia* court on the grounds that its



fundamental rights, as enshrined in the Federal constitution, have been violated.

### ELECTORAL POLITICS AND ISLAMIST OUTBIDDING

State-led and *salafi* Islamisation has ironically been strongly fuelled by the electoral contest between ruling regimes and Islamist opposition parties. Islamist outbidding has led to the expansion of *sharia* with secular-based and centre-right parties gravitating further to the right in both democratising as well as electoral authoritarian states in the Muslim world (Hamid, 2014: 172). Politicians from secular-based parties in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan, have promoted *sharia* regulations and laws with vigour. In particular, secular politicians discredited by corruption scandals and poor governance have attempted to shore up their legitimacy by engaging in the game of piety trumping (Buehler, 2013: 62–82).

In Malaysia, the cycle of Islamist outbidding and piety trumping between the UMNO-led coalition government and PAS, has steered UMNO further away from its secular and ethno-nationalist origins. UMNO is now commonly perceived to be almost as Islamist as the Islamist opposition party PAS—with the theological overlap between the two parties close to negligible. UMNO's deepening Islamist posture has pushed the Islamist party PAS deeper into *salafi* theological terrain. Not surprisingly, since the 2013 elections, PAS has revived its ambitions to implement *hudud* laws despite the destabilising impact of this agenda on the *Pakatan* opposition coalition. Under the leadership of scandal prone Prime Minister Najib, in May 2016, UMNO actually assisted PAS in tabling its *hudud* bill in the Federal parliament—jeopardising the unity of the UMNO-led BN coalition and risking the political stability of the multi-religious country.

Islamist outbidding has reinforced the ethno-nationalist doctrine of *bumiputra-ism* (indigenous special rights) as the UMNO-led BN government is heavily reliant on the Malay and East Malaysia *bumiputera* (indigenous) vote to remain in power, particularly after its narrow electoral success in 2013. Revealing this electoral calculation shortly after the 2013 general elections, Najib dismissed the likelihood of ethnic minorities facilitating regime change: ‘...*the reality was that even if a large number of the Chinese community voted against the Barisan Nasional, we*

would remain...we cannot change the government without the support of *Bumiputeras*' (Kassim, 2015: 28).

The BN possesses the classic features of an electoral authoritarian regime. Despite losing the popular vote in 2013, it clung on to power largely by deploying the instruments of gerrymandering and malapportionment. The 2014 Electoral Integrity Report (Harvard University and the University of Sydney) ranked Malaysia a poor 114 out of 127 nations—bestowing the country with the status of having one of the most unfair electoral laws and boundaries. In particular, the first-past-the-post system has allowed the Federal government to ‘manufacture majorities’ by giving rural seats greater electoral weightage. As such, urban constituencies do not command a majority of seats in the Federal parliament. This electoral bias, which also accords disproportionate electoral power to *Bumiputera* communities, has degraded the one-person-one-vote principle. Thus, the *Pakatan* opposition coalition may have won the popular vote in 2013, but the BN was able to claim the majority of seats in the Federal parliament.

The strong electoral backlash from ethnic minorities, who make up about 40% of the population, suggest that Malaysia’s consociational system of governance based on ethnic affiliation has broken down—particularly in West Malaysia. In the 2008 and 2013 elections, the Chinese solidly voted for the opposition with 85% of Chinese purportedly voting for *Pakatan* in the 2013 elections (Khoo, 2014: 195). Urban Malaysians no longer view the BN as a genuine multi-ethnic coalition, in recognition that BN ethnic minority parties such as the MCA, *Gerakan* and MIC do not possess the clout to effectively represent their ethnic constituents. For example, the concerns raised by MCA and *Gerakan* leaders with regard to the demeaning behaviour of Malay ethno-nationalist groups, the impact of Islamisation on non-Muslims, ongoing *bumiputera* affirmative action policies and PAS’s attempts to introduce *hudud* have largely been overlooked by UMNO politicians.

Ethnic minorities are inclined to see the opposition *Pakatan* coalition as being more inclusive and multi-ethnic than the BN, with the Chinese increasingly turning to the DAP to represent their concerns. In the 2013, elections, the BN-linked MCA only won 7 Federal seats, and only with Malay electoral support. The championing of a needs/class based affirmative action paradigm strongly resonates with urban and professional Malaysians, who are disproportionately Chinese.

## THE TALE OF TWO MALAYSIA'S

Urban Malaysia tends to be more strongly multiracial and global in orientation and better educated. Urbanites have greater access to information and are less reliant on the government mainstream media for political information. They are more strongly concerned with governance and rights related issues, such as corruption, transparency, and democratisation, and inclined to be less supportive of ethnic politics, policies, and institutions. They also concerned with the way by which poor governance has hampered the country's economic development and ability to transcend the middle-income trap.

Despite being direct beneficiaries of the state's ethnic-based affirmation action policies, referred to as the New Economic Policy (NEP), many within the urban Malay middle-class have become increasingly uneasy with the continuation of discriminatory NEP policies. In tune with their urban counterparts across the Muslim world, internet savvy Malaysian youth voters are also inclined to identify with the pro-democracy *reformasi* (reform) movement that emerged in the country from the late 1990s. A large number of younger generation Malaysians campaigned for the opposition *Pakatan* coalition in the 2013 elections and are supportive of electoral reform. The policy-oriented and good governance agenda of the opposition *Pakatan* coalition in the 2013 elections—which proposed curbs on corruption, open tender for contracts, social equality, childcare subsidies and educational support for all Malaysians—resonated with the civic reasoning of middle-class urbanites (Weiss, 2016: 82–83).

Urban Malay middle-class support of *Pakatan's* political and economic reform agenda can also be attributed to their concerns about the challenges confronted by small to medium-size enterprises that have been disadvantaged by the common practice of awarding non-transparent and non-competitive state contracts to politically connected businesses (Weiss, 2016: 83). Many are also uneasy with the extravagant lifestyles of the BN elite that could not be possibly supported by their official incomes. However, the reformist proclivities of the urban Malay middle-classes may have been blunted somewhat by the sizeable number of public servants who identify with UMNO's *bumiputera* rights discourse – placated by their secure jobs and periodic monetary handouts by the state.

Semi-rural Malaysia is predominantly Malay and *bumiputera*, poorly educated and located in the bottom 40% in income terms. They tend to be more strongly ethno-nationalist, parochial and fearful of the loss of their Malay rights and Chinese political dominance. Their limited access to the internet and social media has meant that they are strongly reliant on the state media for information and thus fed with a constant diet of government propaganda. This propaganda includes the idea that Malays can only rely on UMNO to protect them against alien and threatening forces of regime change represented by the opposition parties; that the *Pakatan* opposition coalition is covertly driven by a Chinese-based agenda; that the *Pakatan* coalition is wittingly or unwitting serving the interests of the DAP—a party supposedly intent on depriving Malays of their rights and privileges and secularising the state. In an attempt to shore up his Malay support base, Prime Minister Najib promised to promote Islam, preserve the special rights and privileges of Malays and Malay rulers at the 2014 UMNO General Assembly. At the General Assembly, where footage of the May 13, 1969 race riots was screened, Najib boldly pronounced that UMNO was the sole guarantor of peace in the country and that Malay Muslims had supposedly sacrificed more than any other community to achieve peace in the country.<sup>14</sup>

Driven by a fear of losing Malay rights and Islam's status as the national religion, many rural Malays have become desensitized to the charges of poor governance and corruption levelled against the Federal government. Their ethno-nationalist sentiments have been stoked by UMNO politicians and ethno-nationalist organisations, such as *Perkasa*, where the rhetoric of Malays (and Islam) under threat is systematically amplified. In return, Prime Minister Najib praised *Perkasa* supporters for their willingness to maintain Malay dominance and die for the BN government. '*Malay people can also show that we are still able to rise when our dignity is challenged, when our leaders are insulted, criticised, shamed*' (Leong & Marshall, 2015).

Although making up only 30% of the population, semi-rural Malays have become electoral game-changers, owing to the gerrymandering and malapportionment which has effectively multiplied their voting clout.

---

<sup>14</sup>UMNO must carry out reforms to ensure survival, says Utusan', *The Malaysian Insider*, 30 November, 2014.

In response to the vast majority of Chinese voters who have deserted the BN and urban and professional Malays who have become increasingly disillusioned with the status quo, UMNO has spent much of its resources wooing Malay semi-rural voters in the 2008 and 2013 Federal elections and the 2015 by-elections. UMNO has appealed to their ethno-nationalist insecurities whilst dispensing generous handouts to households. For example, the 1Malaysia welfare program provides RM500 (US\$500) cash payment to 80% of Malaysian households that earn less than RM3000 a month.

It is worth noting that the Malay semi-rural voter, serviced by thousands of UMNO branches located in villages across the country has been at the core of UMNO's electoral strategy, particularly since the 2013 election. This strategy is strongly reliant on the UMNO women's wing (*Wanita UMNO*) which has been particularly active in semi-rural areas, providing feedback about how to win swing voters to UMNO (Weiss, 2016: 94).

The political fragmentation of the Malaysian voter along socio-economic and regional lines is typical of many other electoral authoritarian states in Southeast Asia and around the world. UMNO's increasing reliance on Malays and East Malaysian *bumiputeras* (indigenous communities) suggests that state-led ethno-nationalism and Islamisation is likely to prevail, at least in the short to medium-term, and goes some way towards explaining UMNO's lack of political will for political reform. These considerations have prompted Saravanamuttu et al. (2015: 10) to question '*whether the road ahead will indeed lead to a 'new politics' or to an 'old politics' in a new garb*'.

#### MIDDLE-INCOME TRAP: INSTITUTIONAL IMPEDIMENTS AND THE CULTURE OF CORRUPTION

According to World Bank classifications, Malaysia is an upper-middle-income economy and, until a decade or so ago, was commonly touted as Southeast Asia's next newly industrialised economy (NIE). However, since the new millennium, investment has fallen significantly while growth has slowed down, prompting economists to caution that Malaysia is in danger of becoming 'stuck in the middle'—exemplified by the failure to qualitatively shift towards innovation intensive industries (Hill, Yean, & Zin, 2012) and '*scale the heights of Northeast Asian late*

*industrialisation*' (Khoo, 2014: 179). Despite its 'early start' advantages, Malaysia has not been able to move up the value chain in electronics due to the continued reliance on processing primary commodities such as petroleum and palm oil processing (Chander & Welsh, 2015).

Hill et al. (2012) attributes the country's middle-income trap phenomenon to political and institutional factors which have stymied the reform momentum. In particular, Malaysia's sectarian political system and policies have contributed to the BN's '*complacency and corruption*' which has been compounded further by the '*long-running affirmative action program that has...been captured by an elite*'. Khoo (2014: 179–180) characterises the elite as oligarchs who have captured state policies and are reliant on state protected sectors of the economy. State-enterprises have been privatised to the politically connected and driven by entrenched patronage. The stable of GLCs (Government Linked Companies) have become reduced to instruments of political patronage and rent-seeking, with little evidence of technological innovation and improvements in productivity.

Ethnic-based affirmative action policies have contributed greatly to the country's capital and brain-drain phenomena, with highly-skilled professionals and business people from ethnic minority communities emigrating in droves since the implementation of the NEP in 1971. The bloated civil service has soaked up the large pool of Malay graduates who have benefitted from ethnic-based affirmative action policies. Work force skills have been stymied by the poor English proficiency and wages depressed by the influx of foreign labour in low-end manufacturing industries (Chander & Welsh, 2015).

The government remains heavily dependent on oil and gas revenue which contributes about one-third of total revenue. These resource rents subsidise the protected and less competitive sectors of the economy, characterised by patronage and rent-seeking activity. However, with the fall in oil and gas prices, government revenues have shrunk. This shrinkage has been aggravated further by falling exports—thereby adversely impacting on the patronage and rent-seeking networks (Fuller & Story, 2015). To offset the decline in government revenue, an unpopular sales tax was introduced in 2015.

Rent-seeking and corruption appears to have scaled new heights under Najib's administration, with the Prime Minister positioned at the

centre of major corruption scandals. Numerous reports allege that when serving as Defence Minister, Najib received US\$155 million in kick-backs from a French submarine deal which he negotiated on behalf of the Malaysian government (Mitton, 2015). This deal is thought to be linked to the murder of a Mongolian model, Altantuya Shaariibuu, who allegedly served as a French language interpreter for Najib and his then adviser Razak Baginda.

Najib's most recent corruption scandal relates to the IMDB (1 Malaysia Development Berhad) sovereign wealth fund, created just after he assumed the Prime Ministership in 2009. The *Sarawak Report*, *Wall Street Journal* and *London Sunday Times* investigations, based on the review of thousands of documents, implicates Najib, his immediate family and Malaysian businessman Jho Low for the siphoning of millions from IMDB—purportedly saddled with US\$11.3 billion (RM43 billion) in debt.

Unlike previous corruption scandals, managed by a combination of spin and lack of clear evidence, a spirited campaign to expose the IMDB scandal (ongoing for several years) has been led by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed. Following a steady stream of investigative articles on the IMDB scandal by leading international journals, the Federal government was pressured to conduct investigations into the indebted sovereign fund. These investigations were made more pressing when *The Wall Street Journal*, in an explosive 2 July 2015 article, claimed that US\$700 million from IMDB was channelled into Najib's personal bank accounts in Singapore and Malaysia (Wright & Clark, 2015). More than US\$1 billion had been purportedly deposited into Najib's personal bank accounts since 2011 (Murdoch, 2016a, b).

The 'wall of silence' surrounding the IMDB corruption scandal within the BN government has been reinforced by Najib's sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Muhyuddin, Cabinet Ministers, the Attorney General and others who expressed concerns about the need for rigorous investigations into the indebted sovereign wealth fund. At the same time, Najib elevated his supporters to the Cabinet and the bureaucracy. Presumably, they can be relied upon to turn a blind eye to the mounting evidence against Najib in the IMDB corruption scandal. An investigation by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission had been short-circuited and requests from the Reserve Bank for an investigation into the movement of IMDB funds ignored.

Najib alleges that the US\$700 million deposited into his personal bank accounts was not from IMDB but a ‘donation’ from Middle Eastern sources. He initially claimed that the donation was a gift from Saudi sources to help his government win the 2013 elections. He then alleged that it was a donation to fight terrorists. The story then shifted again to a gift from a Saudi prince and then to a gift from the King of Saudi Arabia.<sup>15</sup> The Saudi connection was deepened when the Saudi Foreign Minister, in April 2016 alleged that an unspecified Saudi source had donated a large sum of money with no obligations attached (Victor & Paddock, 2016).

The Malaysian government may have been able to thwart domestic investigations into IMDB but international investigations into the corruption scandal have persisted. For example, the US Justice Department has examined allegations of corruption involving Prime Minister Najib and individuals close to him. This inquiry has focused on properties in the US that were purchased by shell companies that apparently belong to Najib’s step-son Reza Aziz (Story, 2015). Governments from Switzerland, Singapore, Hong Kong and the UAE have been investigating IMDB’s alleged money laundering trail.

Malaysia is one of the ten most corrupt countries in the world, according to the Ernst and Young’s Asia Pacific Fraud Survey Report 2013. Malaysia’s Corruption Perception Index had also worsened from 50 to 54 in 2015. Corruption scandals have become so commonplace in the country that they have lost the ability to remove BN leaders from public office (Welsh, 2015). In most democracies, a murky corruption scandal implicating the Prime Minister would have led to their resignation or a fall of government. Ironically, the culture of corruption and patronage in a deepening *salafised* state and society has left Najib relatively intact. Consistent with his dictum that ‘*cash is king*’, Najib is alleged to have retained loyalty within UMNO by channeling RM50,000 a month to each of the powerful 191 UMNO district chiefs (Murdoch, 2016a, b). Despite being embroiled at the centre of the IMDB corruption scandal, Najib retains the position of Finance Minister.

Under pressure by the IMDB scandal, the blatant politicisation of race, religion and tradition has been amplified. Najib appealed for

---

<sup>15</sup>‘Save Malaysia, Citizen’s Declaration’, *The Malaysian Insider*, March 4, 2016.



Malay-Muslim unity at the UMNO General Assembly in December 2015. Verses from the *Quran* were repeatedly cited to support the call for Malay-Muslim unity in the face of the supposed Chinese and secular threats. UMNO members were warned that these existential threats could only be surmounted by UMNO's alliance with the Islamist party PAS (Kamal, 2015). Repeatedly invoked were reminders of the relevance of the Malay feudal tradition of unquestioning loyalty to the ruler. '*In Islam, based on the Quran and verified hadiths, the majority of ulama hold the view that loyalty means being loyal and showing love to the leaders at the institution of leadership*' (Cited in Saat, 2015). Covert references to religion, race and political tradition have been regularly marshalled to shore up the BN's sagging legitimacy.

### THE *HUDUD* GAMBIT: FRACTURING OF PAS, PAKATAN AND THE BN COALITION

By the early twenty-first century, the theological distance between the Islamist opposition party PAS and the ruling UMNO-led BN government has virtually faded—with UMNO secular nationalists constituting a shrinking minority within the party following decades of *salaḥī* Islamisation. Since the 2008 and 2013 breakthrough elections, the UMNO and PAS leadership have been engaged in covert Muslim 'unity talks'. However, after the death of wily PAS 'spiritual head' Nik Aziz in early 2014, PAS conservatives within the *ulama* wing have been emboldened to conduct these 'unity talks' openly. It is worth noting that PAS *ulama* and conservatives such as Hadi Awang and Nasharuddin Mat Isa have long been uncomfortable with the party's cooperation with the opposition *Pakatan* coalition, made up of the stridently secular party Democratic Action Party (DAP).

When placed within a historical context, these 'unity talks' are unsurprising. PAS was formed in 1951 by *ulama* from UMNO's Religious Bureau. Like UMNO, PAS has a history of both ethno-nationalism and left-wing politics. Under the leadership of Burhanuddin al-Helmy in the 1950s and 1960s, PAS exhibited Islamist socialist leanings—influenced by anti-colonial nationalists such as Sukarno and others from the Middle East. Following the 1969 riots, PAS's ethno-nationalist orientation sharpened under the leadership of Muhammad Asri Muda, followed by a brief foray into the UMNO-led BN coalition from 1974

to 1977. The entry of PAS into the BN coalition was rationalised in terms of ‘*assisting the cause of Islam*’ (Liow & Chan, 2014: 100) Typical of many Islamist parties and movements, PAS has been strongly influenced by the Iranian Revolution, the Afghan *mujahideen* struggle, Islamisation in Pakistan and other revivalist movements in the Muslim world. Inspired by the Iranian Revolution, the concept of *ulama* leadership was instituted in the 1980s with the *Majlis Syura Ulama* (*Ulama* Consultative Council) as the most important decision making body, akin to Iran’s *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist). The *Mursyidal Am* (Supreme Leader) is also the Chairperson of the *Majlis Sura Ulama* (Shiozaki, 2015: 87).

As one of the oldest Islamist political parties in the Muslim world, PAS’s political and theological trajectory has constantly oscillated. Its theological complexion is richly multi-faceted—perpetually shifting in various directions in response to domestic, regional and international influences. These shifts have long sustained the confluence of conservative *ulama*, ethno-nationalists and reformist factions within the party—with each faction holding sway, depending on the political and electoral fortunes of the party. Instructively, PAS tends to perform well, in electoral terms, when it has worked closely with the opposition parties, downplays its Islamic state and *hudud* rhetoric and hones in on a more inclusive *negara kebajikan* (welfare state) agenda.

After the 2013 elections, the conservative *ulama* and ethno-nationalist factions strengthened their grip on the party under the stewardship of the *ulama* President Hadi Awang. The *ulama* leadership has never been fully committed to the democratic principles of pluralism, rights and social justice championed by the opposition *Pakatan* coalition. Their hold over the party was fortified when they managed to control the bulk of elected executive positions, following the purging of PAS ‘moderates’ in the 2015 General Assembly. The bulk of PAS *ulama* and conservatives have remained committed to the Islamic state and Malay-Muslim dominance agenda based on comprehensive *sharia*—including the implementation of *hudud* laws. Their bold championing of the Islamic state and *hudud* is reflective of the party’s deepening *salafi* Islamist orientation. Under the leadership of the Saudi educated Hadi Awang, the *salafi* emphasis on *talabuf siyasi* (political alliance) with UMNO, based on maintaining ‘Muslim unity,’ has taken centre-stage.

The conservative *ulama* leadership believes that PAS has lost support from its traditional support base, particularly rural and devout Muslims, due in part due to its electoral alliance with secular parties in the *Pakatan* opposition coalition such as the DAP. In the 2013 elections, PAS's share of the Malay-Muslim vote dropped compared to the 2008 elections. Of the 21 Federal seats that PAS won in 2013, 14 were attained only with strong non-Muslim support. However, PAS's limited electoral support base within the Muslim and non-Muslim communities stems from its inability to project itself as a party that is able to deliver effective governance and attract investment in states where the party has governed—Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah. This can be attributed to the fact that many within the conservative and *ulama* leadership do not understand the modern economy or possess technocratic and administrative skills—particularly with the departure of professionals and technocrats from the party in 2015. By tabling the Bill to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 in the Federal parliament, PAS will be saddled further with the reputation for being an Islamist party that is only able to make headway in rural and economically marginalised states.

To remain electorally viable, the *ulama* leadership believes that PAS needs to strengthen its core Muslim constituency in the predominantly Muslim populated states such as Terengganu, Perlis, and Kedah. *Hudud* represents a means of achieving this goal. It is also a means of strengthening PAS's political leverage with UMNO in the lead up to the Federal elections. Closer relations with the UMNO leadership offers job opportunities for PAS *ulama* in the expanding Islamic bureaucracy. Najib has also shrewdly coveted Hadi Awang and the PAS leadership by meeting them periodically to discuss political developments in the Muslim world.<sup>16</sup> Other manifestations of the PAS-UMNO 'unity pact' include the PAS leadership's failure to adopt a position on the IMDB corruption scandal and support for the imposition of the unpopular GST. In 2015, PAS abstained from voting against the BN budget in the Federal parliament despite the other opposition parties voting against it.

To be sure, PAS's tabling of the Bill to amend the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act 1965 (aka the *Hudud* Bill) represents a

---

<sup>16</sup>'PAS right to work with UMNO for Islam, says Hadi', *Malaysiakini*, January 16, 2016. Available at <http://www.malaysiakini.com>.

political windfall for UMNO. This *Hudud* Bill had ruptured the opposition *Pakatan* coalition and rescued UMNO from defeat in the June 2016 by-elections as the focus of the campaign deflected from the IMDB corruption scandal to *hudud*. Najib's risky gamble had been pursued at the cost of alienating BN component parties. Most have uniformly expressed dismay with UMNO's fast-tracking of Hadi Awang's Private Members *Hudud* Bill without bothering to consult the predominantly non-Muslim BN component parties.

The reformist PAS faction, marginalised by the elevation of conservatives within the party after the 2013 elections, resigned from the party to form *Parti Amanah Nasional* (*Amanah*). *Amanah* is now part of the opposition *Pakatan* coalition and contested in the June 2016 by-elections against UMNO and PAS. Instructively, *Amanah* remained ambivalent about its precise stance with regard to the Bill during the by-election, acutely aware that to overtly reject the propriety of *hudud* would risk PAS and UMNO accusing it of being anti-*sharia*. This ambivalent stance is reflective of the theological ties *Amanah* leaders have with Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood parties in the Middle East. *Amanah*'s ambivalence with regard to *hudud* is also driven by its acute awareness that, unlike neighbouring Indonesia, Malaysia does not have a critical mass of Islamic organisations and Muslim intellectuals that advocate for progressive interpretations of Islam. During the by-election campaign, *Amanah* focused on criticising UMNO and PAS for politicising *hudud* to further their electoral interests rather than directly questioning the relevance of *hudud*. As former PAS MP and *Amanah* Strategy Director Dzulkefly Ahmad asserted, '*PAS has indeed capitalised on the issue of hudud to break the fraternity of the Pakatan Rakyat after the 13th General Election...PAS's ulama faction strongly campaigned on hudud so as to oust the activist-professional faction of the party in the last muktamar*'.<sup>17</sup>

The Bill has triggered intense public controversy and is objected by Muslims and non-Muslims committed to preserving the secular democratic foundations of the Federal constitution. It has been denounced by rights advocates as unconstitutional. They also assert that effective governance, not the expansion of *sharia* laws such as *hudud*, is what most Malaysians desire and prioritise. Retired senior bureaucrats from the

---

<sup>17</sup>'Amanah to PAS: Clarify your position', *Free Malaysia Today*, 19 March 2016. Available at <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com>.

Group of 25 (G25), former UMNO politicians and a small but vocal group of Muslim community organisations such as Sisters in Islam (SIS) and Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF), who are committed to upholding the spirit and letter of the Federal Constitution and the country's secular democratic foundations, reject the need for the expansion of *sharia* laws such as *hudud* (Mostafa, 2013b: 796). By contrast, the vast majority of conservative Muslim organisations have either maintained a 'wall of silence' or tacitly supported Hadi Awang's *hudud* bill and UMNO's ploy in fast-tracking the bill.

Muslims, particularly those in semi-rural areas, are inclined to view *sharia* laws as God's law—conflating *sharia* with *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence. Tamir Mostafa's (2013b) surveys of Malaysian Muslims found that 75.8% believe that they should never question the views of the *ulama*. Mostafa also found that most Malaysian Muslims did not fully comprehend the spirit and letter of the Federal Constitution and the relationship between the *sharia* and civil courts. They generally assume that because Islam is the religion of the country, the civil courts should not interfere with the rulings of the *sharia* courts. Muslims also believe that *sharia* law should be more comprehensive. Mostafa's survey is consistent with PAS's 2016 survey which found that 84% of Muslims during the Kuala Kangsar by-election supported Hadi Awang's *hudud* bill (Kow, 2016). The religious disempowerment of Muslims after decades of *salafi* Islamisation has led to the closure of public debate on the propriety of the expansion of *sharia* law based on the assumption that *sharia* is divine in origin. This 'wall of silence' has been reinforced by the denunciations and reprisals from the *ulama* and the religious bureaucracy directed at Muslims who have dared to challenge their religious knowledge and authority.

With the Muslim vote deeply split and focused in *hudud*, the ongoing IMDB corruption scandal barely raised during the 2016 by-election campaigns and the opposition Pakatan coalition divided, UMNO won the by-elections in Kuala Kangsar and Sungei Besar with comfortable margins. The newly established 'moderate' Islamist party *Amanah* lost in both constituencies but took comfort in coming second in the Sungai Besar seat, ahead of PAS. Clearly, UMNO's *hudud* gamble has paid off but backfired for PAS—soundly defeated in two Muslim-majority seats.

Having pulled off its *hudud* gambit in the 2016 by-elections and successfully divided the *Pakatan* opposition coalition, with PAS's exit from the coalition and thus ensuring that the Muslim vote is split, the UMNO

expediently back-tracked on the *hudud* bill by May 2017—deferring it to a later date as it prepares for the general elections. In this crucial election, the UMNO leadership recognises that it needs non-Muslim electoral support, particularly in East Malaysia, where the Christian vote is pivotal. UMNO’s nimble tactical manoeuvres suggest that it has only supported PAS’s *hudud bill* in transactional terms, successfully manipulating the *salafi*-oriented PAS leadership who are more committed to *hudud* in theological terms. Despite its status as one of the oldest Islamist parties in the Muslim world, PAS has yet to fully appreciate that it is most dynamic and electorally appealing when the party shifts to the political centre and works in coalition with political parties on an agenda for policy reform based on citizenship rights.

### CONCLUSION

Malaysia’s post-colonial state has been subjected to considerable institutional and ideational shifts in the more than three decades of state-led *salafi* Islamisation. Inter alia, state-led and *salafi* Islamisation have contributed to the long-serving UMNO-led BN coalition government becoming increasingly reliant on Islam and the state *ulama* for legitimisation. In return for legitimising the UMNO-led BN government, the state *ulama*, religious bureaucracy, and *sharia* courts have been rewarded with job security, material inducements, expanding authority and power. Operating within an increasingly redundant consociational political system, UMNO’s ethno-nationalism has been reinvigorated by authoritarian *salafi* Islamisation.

After nearly sixty years of political independence, Malaysia, like many *sunni* Muslim-majority states engulfed in *salafi* Islamisation, continues to be challenged by the following questions: What should be the relationship between religion and the state? Should *sharia* law be enforced by the state? These questions continue to be contested because conservative Islamists refuse to accept the secular constitutional foundations of post-colonial states and are committed to the establishment of the Islamic state based on comprehensive (pre-modern) *sharia* laws. Yet, the attempt to reconcile pre-modern *sharia* law with the modern nation-state remains a key conundrum confronting conservative Islamists and opportunistic regimes that have embarked on the path of comprehensive Islamisation. As Shadi Hamid (2016) observes, ‘*the problem is that Islamic law wasn’t designed for the modern nation-state. It was designed*

for the pre-modern era'. The Malaysian experience suggests that this conundrum cannot be easily reconciled and has the potential to fragment the nation.

Authoritarian regimes, politicians, and state *ulama* have long recognised that codified *sharia* can be a powerful tool of control and socialisation, particularly when the political legitimacy of electoral authoritarian regimes has not been strongly affirmed through the electoral process. Ironically, as Muslim-majority states such as Malaysia become more Islamised, governance has also been commonly characterised by corruption, widening income disparities, weakening institutions and declining living standards. The culture of corruption and rent-seeking strongly underpins Malaysia's middle-income trap, undermining the country's long-term economic development and political stability.

The Malaysian experience of *salafi* Islamisation and authoritarian governance highlights the importance of safeguarding the constitutional foundations of the post-colonial secular democratic state. Malaysia's Vision 2020 goal of developing a harmonious multi-religious society that is underpinned by a vibrant and sophisticated knowledge economy is unlikely to be achieved under the auspices of *salafi* Islamisation based on comprehensive *sharia* law. This reality was recognised by the nation's founding nationalists more than half a century ago.

*Salafi* Islamisation has become a dominant feature in the Malaysian socio-political landscape. However, a hegemonic *salafi* consensus has yet to materialise, owing to the tenacious pockets of Muslim resistance that refuse to be silenced by the state *ulama* or subjugated by archaic interpretations of Islam that deny Malaysians their constitutional and citizenship rights. These Muslim democrats recognise the importance of working in synergy with non-Muslim Malaysian democrats. They are cognizant of the imperative of upholding the secular democratic foundations of the state—if Malaysia is to avoid hurtling towards the fate of archaic and authoritarian states prevalent in the Muslim world.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmad, N. N. N. (2013). The coming of age of the *reformasi* generation. In B. Welsh & J. Chin (Eds.), *Awakening: The Abdullah Badawi years in Malaysia*. PJ: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.
- Akyol, M. (2016, March 16). Islam without extremes. *The New York Times*, Opinion.
- An Naim, A. (2008). *Islam and the secular state: Negotiating the future of Sharia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- An Naim, A. (2010). Islam and Secularism. In L. E. Cady & E. S. Hurd (Eds.), *Comparative Secularism in a global age*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.
- Boo, S.-L. (2014, November 10). Malaysia not a theocratic dictatorship, SIS tells Jamil Khir. *Malay Mail*. Available at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com>.
- Buehler, M. (2013, October). Subnational Islamisation through secular parties. *Comparative Politics*.
- Chander, R. & Welsh, B. (2015, October 19). Solving Malaysia's Economic Crisis, *New Mandala*. Available at <http://asiapacific.anu.au/newmandala>.
- Chie, K. G. (2016, June 9). 84% of Malays in Kuala Kangsar agree with Hadi's bill. *Malaysiakini*. Available at <http://www.malaysiakini.com>.
- Duderya, A. (2007). Islamic groups and their worldviews and identities. *Arab Law Quarterly*, 21.
- Esposito, J. (2010). *The future of Islam*. New York: OUP.
- Fealy, G., & Funston J. (2016, January 6). USAID Report. *Indonesian and Malaysian support for the Islamic State*.
- Fernando, J. (2006). The position of Islam in the constitution of Malaysia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37(2), 246–266.
- Fuller, T., & Story, L. (2015, June 17). Power struggle in Malaysia pits former premier against a protege. *New York Times*.
- Ghobadzadeh, N., & Akbarzadeh S. (2015). Sectarianism and the prevalence of othering in Islamic thought. *Third World Quarterly*, 36(4).
- Hamid, A. F. A. (2013, October). Political Islam and the recent rise of Islamist conservatism in Malaysia, *ISEAS Perspective* No. 58. Singapore: ISEAS, Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Hamid, S. (2014). *Temptations of power*. New York, NY: OUP.
- Hamid, A. F. A. (2016, May 16). ISIS in Southeast Asia: Internalized *wahhabism* is a major factor, *Perspective*. Singapore: ISEAS, Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Hamid, S. (2016, June). The meaningless politics of liberal democracies. *The Atlantic*.
- Hamid, A. F. A., & Razali, C. H. C. M. (2015). The changing face of political Islam in Malaysia in the era of Najib Razak, 2009–2013. *Sojourn*, 30(2).
- Hamzah, S. H. (2016, March 18). Is history repeating itself? *Malay Mail Online*. Available at <http://themalaymailonline.com>.
- Hill, H., Yean T. S., & Zin, R. (2012). Malaysia: A success story stuck in the middle? *The World Economy*, 35.
- Hoffstaedter, G. (2011). *Modern Muslim identities*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Kamal, Y. M. (2015, December 13). Three things we learnt from the 2015 UMNO general assembly. *Malay Mail Online*. Available at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com>.
- Kassim, Y. R. (2015). New Politics and Old Politics in New Clothing. In J. Saravanamuttu, L. H. Guan & M. N. Osman (Eds.), *Coalitions in collision: Malaysia's 13th general elections*. Singapore: ISEAS.



- Kuru, A. (2009). *Secular and state policies toward religion: The United States, France and Turkey*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Kurzman, C., & Turkoglu, D. (2015, October). Do Muslims vote Islamic now? *Journal of Democracy*, 26(4).
- Leong, T., & Marshall, A. (2015, September 23). As Najib struggles in graft scandal. UMNO plays race card. *Reuters*.
- Lim, I. (2016, March 2). Najib: Islam doesn't allow alliance with anti-Islamic groups, even for noble goals. *Malay Mail Online*.
- Liow, J. C., & Chan W. (2014). Between a rock and a hard place: Reform, reticence and realignments of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party. In Q. Mehan & J. Chernov Hwang (Eds.), *Islamist party and political normalization in the Muslim World*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lynch, M. (2010). Islam divided between Salafi-jihad and the Ikhwan. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 33.
- Lynch, M. (ed.). (2012). *The New Salafi Politics, POMEPS Briefing 14*. Project on the Middle East Political Science, October, 16, p. 3. Available at <http://www.pomemps.org>.
- Maijer, R. (2013). Introduction. In Roel Maijer (Ed.). *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Meerman, J. (2008). The Malaysian success story, the public sector and inter-ethnic inequality. In J. M. Nelson, J. Meerman, & A. R. Embong (Eds.), *Globalisation and the national autonomy: The experience of Malaysia*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Mitton, R. (2015, February 25). Najib's slow death. *Myanmar Times*.
- Moosa, E. (2010). From the debts and burdens of critical Islam. In J. McAuliffe (Ed.), *The Norton anthology of world religions*. London: W. W. Norton.
- Moustafa, T. (2013a). Islamic law, women's rights and popular legal consciousness in Malaysia. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 38(1).
- Moustafa, T. (2013b). Liberal rights versus Islamic law?: The construction of a binary in Malaysian politics. *Law & Society Review*, 47(4).
- Murdoch, L. (2016a, March 20). Don't think that I am a crook: Malaysia's Najib Razak lashes out at critics. *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Murdoch, L. (2016b, March 18). The story behind the arrest of Four Corners Linton Besser and Louis Eroglu in Malaysia. *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Nasr, V. (2001). *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the making of state power*. New York: OUP.
- Noor, F. (2014). *The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS, 1951–2013*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Osman, M. N. M. (2014). Salafi ulama in UMNO: Political convergence or expediency? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 36(2).

- Rahim, L. Z. (2013). The crisis of state-led Islamization and communal governance in Malaysia. In L. Z. Rahim (Ed.), *Muslim secular democracy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Razak, N. (2015, October 2). Spread awareness of true Islam. *Malay Mail Online*. Available at: <http://www.themalaymailonline.com>.
- Robbins, M. (2015, October). People still want democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(4).
- Saat, N. (2015, December 29). UMNO general assembly 2015: Najib's call for unity and loyalty is hardly enough. *Perspective* 72. Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Saravanamuttu, J., Guan, L. H., & Osman, M. N. M. (Eds.). *Coalitions in collision: Malaysia's 13th general elections*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Sharmugam, I. K. (2015, August 21). Muslims cannot topple a government. *The Malaysian Insider*.
- Shiozaki, Y. (2015). The *ulama* network as conveyer of Islamic world trends. In K. Miichi & O. Farouk (Eds.), *Southeast Asian Muslims in the era of globalization*. London: PalgraveMacmillan.
- Sipalan, J. (2015, March 30). Hadi: Hudud Bill to 'correct' Federal Constitution on Muslim rights. *Malay Mail Online*.
- Sreevenasan, A. (2014, June 20). Towards a bold and transformative leadership. *The Malaysian Insider*.
- Story, L. (2015, September 21). Malaysia's leader Najib Razak faces US corruption inquiry. *New York Times*.
- Teik, K. B. (2014). Social transformation and the reinventions of parti Islam in Malaysia. In K. B. Teik, V. Hadiz, & Y. Nakanishi (Eds.), *Between dissent and power: The transformation of Islamic politics in the Middle East and Africa*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- van Bruinessen, Martin. (2015). *Contemporary developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the 'Conservative Turn'*. Singapore: ISEAS.
- Victor, D., & Paddock, R. (2016, April 15). Path of \$681 million: From Saudi Arabia to Malaysian Premier's Personal Account. *The New York Times*.
- Weiss, M. (2016). Payoffs, parties or policies: Money politics and electoral authoritarian resilience. *Critical Asian Studies*, 48(1).
- Welsh, B. (2015, November 9). Malaysia's Strongman? *New Mandala*. Available at <http://asiapacific.anu.au/newmandala>.
- Wright, W., & Clark, S. (2015, July 2). Investigators believe money flowed to Malaysia leader's accounts. *Wall Street Journal*.
- Zachariah, E. (2014, October 21). Malaysia needs thinking Muslims, says activist Farouk Musa. *The Malaysian Insider*.
- Zachariah, E. (2015, September 26). Say sorry or we'll sue. *The Malaysian Insider*.

- Zahid, S. J. (2016, March 17). Zaid Ibrahim: Jamil Khir a threat to democracy. *Malay Mail Online*. Available at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com>.
- Zurairi, A. R. (2016, March 6). Can a Universal Quran be lost in translation? *Malay Mail Online*. Available at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com>.
- Zurairi, A. R., & Ging, Y. T. (2014, April 28). In intimate meet, Obama lends ear to human rights issues in Malaysia. *Malay Mail Online*. Available at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com>.

# The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, Democratisation and the Dilemmas of Internal Organisational Reform: Seeking Unity, Finding Division?

*Paul M. Esber*

## INTRODUCTION

The experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan since the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 illustrates that Islamist movements and parties, like any other, navigate simultaneously the internal and external facets of democratic learning. Expressed differently, in democratising or partially democratic (hybrid) polities there is a necessity to navigate internal organisational management, ideological balancing, in addition to tactical manoeuvring in restricted environmental conditions. This is a contentious process. According to Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, whose analysis of social movements informs this analysis, contentious action occurs when the claim making of one actor infringes on the interests of another (Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 1993, 2006; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). When examining the claim making of collective actors it becomes readily

---

P.M. Esber (✉)  
University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

apparent that contention manifests itself within the organisational structure of the actor, as well as externally in the relations between actors. This is significant in the examination of the Muslim Brotherhood, which since 2011 has witnessed a series of internal fractures. Critically, these resulted in the establishment of the second society of Muslim Brothers in Jordan; formalising the disintegration of a once unified organisation.

A central argument of this chapter is that democratisation is concurrently internal and external to political actors advocating for democratic reform, therein opening ample space for contested visions. This has four components. First, collective actors engaged in democratic learning need to be cognisant to the reality that democracy involves both *practices* and *principles*. Second, democratic discourses at various times may emphasise one or the other, which resultantly influence comprehensions about the trajectory of democratisation. Third, within the context of a collective actor such as the Muslim Brotherhood, this can generate contention if factions or key individuals find themselves speaking the democratic language from different standing points. Fourth, this contention may result in division if the discourses of practice and principle are not reconciled. Central to each of these is a question of identities, interests and prioritisation.

Taking an historical situating of the JMB as our starting point we proceed to consider how democratisation engenders contestation internally and externally to organisations engaged in the democratic game. Thereupon, the analysis outlines the 2011 uprisings in Jordan before turning to the decision by the Brotherhood to boycott the 2013 general elections, centring on the increasingly vocal debates within the group expressing dissatisfaction with the executive. This dissatisfaction, which has been increasing over several years resulted in the emergence of *al-Mubādarat al-Urduniya lil-Binā'* or the Zamzam Initiative in late 2012.<sup>1</sup> This Initiative and the response to it from the executive contributed to the establishment of a second Muslim Brotherhood in 2015.

---

<sup>1</sup>In 2016, the Initiative announced its evolution into a political party, the National Congress Party.

## THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN JORDAN: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Society of Muslim Brothers in Jordan (*al-Jamā'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimiyyin*), or the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood is one of the oldest organisations in Jordan, having been established under the auspiciousness of Emir, later King Abdullah I in 1945. As Mansoor Moaddel argues, the Society since then has had a privileged relationship with the Hashemite monarchy, supporting it against the tide of pan-Arabist and leftist politics in the 1950s and 1960s, and significantly during the civil war of 1970 (Jamal 2012: 68; Moaddel, 2007: 528). Between 1967 and 1989 when martial law was declared by King Hussein, the Brotherhood was allowed to operate as a charitable organisation, which enabled it to diffuse its influence within Jordanian society, especially amongst the urban poor, the middle class and inside the Palestinian refugee camps (Clark, 2011: 153–159). A history of this nature underscores Krämer's assertion that the JMB has consistently acted upon a 'non-confrontational political strategy' (Krämer, 1994: 219).

When parliamentary life was re-convened with general elections in 1989, candidates affiliated with the Society were allowed to participate while political parties remained banned. Owing to decades of recognition developed through its charitable endeavours, Brotherhood candidates performed strongly winning 20 seats in the 80 seat parliament. The 1992 Political Parties Law expedited the reintroduction of parties into the political system for the first time since 1957, and it is important to note at this juncture that the relationship between civil society and political society in Jordan is stratified in a particularly regimented manner. Every organisation is required to register with a specific ministry according to its *raison d'être* (Wiktorowicz, 2000: 49). Thus political parties register with the Ministry of Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs, while cultural organisations in contrast register with the Ministry of Culture. The peculiarity is that once registered an organisation cannot exceed the confines of its associated ministry's portfolio. This means for example that educational civil society actors (registered with the Ministry of Education) cannot engage in political activity (Wiktorowicz, 1999: 611).

The Muslim Brotherhood therefore could not operate as both a charitable organisation and as a political one. Subsequently, in collaboration with a number of prominent independent Islamist politicians including Laith al-Shubeilat, the Society established the Islamic Action Front

(*Hizb Jubhat al-‘Amal al-Islāmi*—IAF). Because of its numerical advantage in this new party, Brotherhood members dominated the leadership apparatus, marginalising independent voices. The IAF resultantly came to be understood by Jordanians and the Hashemite regime not as an institution independent from the Brothers, but as its political arm (Abu Rumman, 2007: 37–38). This has served the Brotherhood well in terms of having more control over activity in civil and political society in Jordan. However, it has also impeded the evolution of the IAF as a nominally independent political party. Thus the rigid separation between civil and political societies and the various actors within them was bridged. A situation recognised and tolerated until 2016.

There is a perception amongst some sectors of Jordanian society that the Muslim Brotherhood/IAF are essentially Palestinian oriented entities, rather than advocates of the daily concerns of Jordanians. It cannot be ignored that this is partly a result of the Brotherhood’s development in Jordan, and its commitment to fighting the occupation of Palestine (Jamal, 2012: 68). When the Jordanian branch of the Brotherhood was established, it was spread across both banks of the Jordan River and thus managed as a single entity. When Hamas (*Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya*) emerged it was part of this trans-river organisational structure. Following Abdullah II’s ascension in 1999, it became clear that this situation was not going to be tolerated within the frame of the Palace’s *Jordan first* policy trajectory. The exiling of four Hamas leaders and Jordanian citizens, including Khalid Meshal and Ibrahim Ghosheh in November 1999 to Qatar was an early apposite illustration of this change in Hashemite policy (Hirst, 1999).

Pressure from the regime in-conjunction with changing realities on the ground in Syria and the Palestinian Territories as well as Jordan during the first decade of this century resulted in Hamas’ disengagement from the JMB in 2006, although leading figures in the latter including current Comptroller General Hammam Said, remain close to the Hamas leadership (Abu Rumman & Abu Hanieh, 2013: 222). Since disengagement, Jordan has persistently rejected requests by Hamas to open offices in Jordan (Abu Toameh, 2013). Another key contributor to the popular perception of the group’s Palestinian affiliation has been the structural arrangement of Jordanian politics, with specific regards to its tribal and kinship characteristics. In practical terms, the Brotherhood has had more electoral success developing its brand in urban centres such as Amman,

Irbid and al-Zarqa in which Jordanians of Palestinian origin constitute the nominal majority, than in more rural districts.

This is not unique. As institutionalised actors, political parties remain weak and struggle to attract votes in urban centres let alone outside of them, as the 2016 elections attest (al-Sharif, 2016). A reality such as this is the product of structural and agential circumstances. Since 1989, citizens have had voting options reduced to a single vote in six out of eight elections, with 1989 and 2016 the exceptions. Owing to the centrality of kinship relations in political engagement both historically (Tell, 2013), and encouraged under martial law 1967–1989, voting trends have tended to be on this basis rather than ideology or substantive policy. Subsequently, parliaments have been dominated by *independent* deputies; a far-cry from the ideologically infused decade immediately prior to 1967.

I do not intend by this to give undue significance to the communal distinctions between Jordanians. As Jamal notes, different opinions amongst Jordanians of all stripes regarding Islamist politics specifically, and politics generally increasingly have more to do with economic interests, than more abstract notions of kinship and blood (Jamal, 2012: 66–67). This is not to say however that the motif of Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ is not employed in relation to economic or other such interests. This does not mean that so-called East Bank Jordanians have not been active and significant leaders within the Movement (Bokhari & Senzai, 2013: 70). As shall be illustrated, the leaders of the Zamzam Initiative and the second Muslim Brotherhood were all active members as well as being Jordanians of East Bank descent. These figures were instrumental in the development of reform initiatives within the Muslim Brotherhood as part of the Society’s ‘doves’ who were concerned about the influence of Hamas in the group (Barari, 2013: 5; Larzillière, 2012: 21).

### DEMOCRACY: MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS?

The discourse of democratic *practices* and *principles* has permeated through the sociopolitical fabric of the Arab World over several decades (Brynen, 1992; Cavatorta, 2015; Esposito & Piscatori, 1991; Nonneman, 2001; Sadiki, 2000). This diffusion has accelerated since 2001, through a combination of international and regional developments, that facilitated a consolidation of (neo)-liberal conceptions



about the structures and processes of governance in the region. Islamist movements as central actors in political life were not immune to this or to the new opportunities for participation that it presented (Brown, 2006: 5–6).

However, with the possible exception of Tunisia's Ennahda, the act of integrating democratic notions within their pre-existing ideational structures has resulted in what Nathan Brown terms 'grey areas' of ambiguity (Brown, 2006: 6; Hamzawy & Brown, 2008: 49–54; Masoud, 2008: 19–24; Schwedler, 2011). These ambiguous spaces generate agitation within Islamist movements over the extent to which democratic practices and principles ought to be adopted. This struggle is acute for Islamists because they concomitantly occupy political, social and religious roles and functions. Consequently, they are pushed and pulled in multiple directions at once. There is potential for this to be further complicated via the influences of transnational democratic norms. However as Ishaq Farhan, one of the founders of the IAF argues, the JMB and wider Islamist movement have historically recognised that a model of representative government offering: free elections, separation of powers, the rule of law, a free press, and limitations on the tenure of office holders is a desirable outcome (Sadiki, 2004: 368).

Thus the question then becomes one of how is the process and model of representative government framed in terms of its potentialities and limitations. Particularly erudite given that the chief obstacles explicated by mainstream Islamists are secularisation and individualism that are often assumed baggage with democratisation (Bokhari & Senzai, 2013). Nathan Brown's definition of democracy on the basis of three interconnected entities: elections, parties and uncertainty; is therefore especially pertinent for our purposes. 'Elections without parties and uncertain outcomes' he posits 'are not enough to make democracy' (Brown, 2011: 60), and though referring specifically to national elections, this logic may be equally applied to sub-state groups. Concerning the first half of Brown's equation, the JMB and the IAF have historically, and continue to hold internal elections for its committees and Shūra Councils. Its advocates claim these to be illustrations of the group's adoption of, and commitment to democracy (Abu Rumman, 2007: 45).

Yet as Jordanian analyst Muhammad Abu Rumman notes, this commitment to elections, to *practice*, within the Brotherhood, involves candidates who on a basic level share similar ideational, ideological and political perspectives (Abu Rumman, 2007: 46). Thus, although

there is a degree of uncertainty inherent to the process, it is nonetheless restricted. Subsequently, it is necessary that there is an acceptance of difference as a matter of *principle*. A practical product of this on the intra-organisation level would be to see more transparent elections and discussions. The division of the JMB post-2011 has thus far suggested that more needs to be done in this area. On the national level, acceptance of difference would produce a consensus that in the event of elected parliamentary government all parties contesting would be prepared to accept public decisions at the ballot box. Cognisant of this, the IAF's 2016 electoral list *Qā'imat al-Iṣlah* (the Reform List) made the explicit point of including in their campaign material the precept: '*al-sha'ab maṣḍar al-sulṭāt*' (the people are the source of authority) (Reform List, 2016). The significance here resides in the distinction that is to be made between *sulṭāt* and *hakamiyya* (sovereignty). Krämer notes that when analysing Islamist discourse there is the appearance of a zero-sum game between the analogies of *hakamiyya* and representative models of government (Krämer, 1994: 207–208). A possible circumvention of this is in the application of *sulṭāt*, which denotes a more temporal authority, which can be made subject to contestation.

This not uncontested shift in thinking and discursive framing of political modelling is part of the process of what Bermeo identifies as 'political learning'; and is directly associated with democratisation. Political learning is 'the process through which people modify their political beliefs and tactics as a result of severe crises, frustrations, and dramatic changes in environment' (Bermeo, 1992: 274). It can manifest itself in a number of areas, including alterations to group ideology, and internal structures. It thus incorporates both practices and principles. If political learning is to facilitate representational government at any level then the relevant elites on those levels must recalibrate their assumptions towards democracy. Framing is of incontrovertible significance here. Interviewed in 1994, Muhammad Abd al-Rahman Khalifah of the JMB explained that 'we oppose the label 'democracy' because it reflects Western histories and *khushūsiyat*' (specificities). Instead, he frames it as the attainment of a consultative system of government '*al-nizām al-shūrī*', which it is asserted 'can perform many of the functions of democracy and even achieve more than it in terms of social justice and rights' (Sadiki, 2004: 368). Recognising and respecting local norms is consequently integral if Islamist elites are to conceive democratisation as the optimum way of avoiding both internal and external disorder.

One criticism of the JMB is that while they have adopted democratic practices, both externally and internally in the form of participation in elections; they have not similarly embraced its principles, such as an acceptance of perpetual competition and difference (Krämer, 1994: 209). Identities are central in this regard, as a democratic state of being must be philosophically understood to be a worthy end goal in of itself, rather than a means to an ulterior end. As we have seen, Sadiki is erudite in arguing that this is the case (Sadiki 2004, 2009). Furthermore, ‘multi-party democracy can be accepted’ enunciates Krämer, ‘provided it remains within the ‘framework of Islam’, i.e. provided its laws as well as individual and collective behaviour conform to the provisions of the *shari’a*’ (Krämer, 1994: 208). For Farhan, this involves a movement away from imitating models observable elsewhere, in order to build a model grounded in the Islamic conceptions of: ‘*shūra* (consultation), *tarāḥum* (mutuality), *ta’āwun* (cooperation), *musāwāt* (equality), *‘adālah* (justice) and *al-mas’ūliyyatu l-jamā‘iyyah* (mutual obligation) between *jamā‘atu l-muslimin* (Muslim communities)’ (Sadiki, 2004: 368). In the absence of localising the global (democratisation), it is dubious as to whether a system of authority recycling can become established practice.

Localising involves what Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow refer to as repertoires of contentious action. Repertoires refer to ‘a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice’ through a given group’s experience of struggle with another (Tilly, 1993: 264–265). Central to this interaction are claims; claims about both present and future states of affairs. The manner in which the claim is expressed or performed in public does not emerge out of thin air, but is instead derived from ‘society’s public culture’ (Tarrow, 2011: 29, 98). A repertoire can subsequently be conceptualised as a socially recognised and accepted map or guide to action, a *what to do when* template that is historically constituted and socially constructed.

With this in mind, we ought to recall Khalifah’s dictum on specificities concerned with the installation of representative government models. Notably that a model’s sustainability is predicated on its association with local norms and practices. Such constitutes according to Sadiki the chief opposition mainstream Islamist movements have towards democracy.

That the ‘exporting of democracy is the promoting of what they regard as ‘alien values’ that accompany it’ (Sadiki, 2004: 365–366; 2009: 210–213). By extension, any project of representative government needs to incorporate localised repertoires and associated norms. Models that do not engage in this way are rejected by JMB and their contemporaries in the region. Developing a consensus generating model however is not an easy operation in the context of collective actors. Who by their nature contain within them conflicting or at the least differing perspectives on the present and future actions of the group.

Repertoires become contentious when the proposed claim/s trespass on the interests of the other actors engaged in the interaction. Therefore, they ‘are the established ways in which pairs of actors make and receive claims bearing on each other’s interests’ (Tilly, 1993: 265). Tarrow argues that contentious action emerges when activity that threatens the interests of the status quo is undertaken by groups who are denied consistent access to, or are excluded from representative channels (Tarrow, 2011: 7). Accordingly, contentious collective action has three components. First, it must involve people who do not have consistent access to institutions in which they can express claims and concerns (Lust-Okar & Jamal, 2002: 337–366). The flip-side to this is that whatever institutions that do exist must be seen to be responsive to the claims of individuals and factions within an organisation or movement. As we shall demonstrate in the second half of this chapter, the internal structures of the JMB were not sufficiently responsive to avert a splintering of the group. If the institution has a history of being unable to consistently convey and institutionalise the claims of citizen claim-makers on a nominally equal level, then its existence is no bulwark against the emergence of contentious politics, and the risk of division harming unity.

Second, contentious action is undertaken by individuals and collectives whose action is predicated on a set of novel claims, or ones that are understood by the hegemonic status quo as undesirable. As can be anticipated, whether the action is founded on a new set of claims or ones that might be old temporally, but remain unacceptable to ruling structures and elites, will influence the trajectory of the action taken. Finally, Tarrow asserts that contentious action is innately challenging. That is to say, that contentious politics must constitute a challenge to the prevailing system of power and authority.

## JORDAN'S 2011 UPRISINGS

The 2011–2012 uprisings had, and continue to have an indubitable impact on the permeation of democratic processes and principles within the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. As we intimated previously, the adoption of one does not necessarily indicate the congruent adoption of the other. Increasingly vocal internal debates between members of the so-called *hawkish* and *dovish* factions, in-conjunction with the inability of the Brotherhood's leadership to navigate them is demonstrative of this.

Before addressing this facet, it is expedient to outline two characteristics of the uprisings in Jordan. On 7 January 2011, a week before the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Dhiban, a small town to the south of the capital Amman witnessed a small protest of two to three hundred young Jordanians. They urged King Abdullah II to sack the prime minister, Samir al-Rifai, and called on decision makers to accelerate the flagging project of political reform and improve economic conditions in the kingdom. One key aspect was the nature of these demands, coalescing as they did around the precepts of reform as opposed to revolution. Thus illustrating that unlike their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt for example, Jordanians held some belief in the validity of their political institutions.

Second, the uprisings were unprecedented in Jordanian history for their geographic and temporal scope. Since before the initiation of political and economic liberalisation in 1989, Jordan has borne witness to several important moments of protest. These include Yarmouk University in 1986, Ma'an 1989 and 1998, and Amman and other centres in 1996. Each of these was limited both temporally and geographically. The 2011 demonstrations contrastingly, spread across the kingdom to each of the governorates, and persisted each week for several months, reaching a number of momentous peaks, including the March 2011 attempted sit-in at Amman's Gamal Abdul Nasser Square and the November 2012 kingdom wide demonstrations (al-Şamādi, 2012b; Neimat, 2012).

The Brotherhood, similar with its parent in Egypt joined the demonstrations after they were initiated by relatively new players to the political scene, led in Jordan's case by the youth led *al-Hirak* (the Movement) (Yom, 2014; Yom & al-Khatib, 2012). This is important in revealing something of the attitude of the Society's leadership towards the uprisings. Specifically that the Brotherhood did not immediately perceive of the events in Dhiban as a catalyst for reform. Jordan's history of temporally and geographically limited protest movements and the

institutional memory of these perform a role. The cautious approach of the organisation conveys a sense to which, that despite the frustration over the fraudulent elections of 2007, and the boycott of 2010, the Brotherhood decision makers were not, at least initially, willing to push the Society's relationship with the regime too far (Abuelbeh, 2016; al-Tamiydh, 2016).

This changed as the uprisings maintained their momentum over time (Bronner & Kadri, 2011; Fahim, 2011; Yom, 2011). Debates within the Brotherhood therefore shifted ground on how to best optimise outcomes out of this historical moment. While public demonstrations continued to disrupt there was a utility in participating in them unilaterally and as part of the National Front for Reform. However, regional dynamics soon excoriated this momentum. The deteriorating situation in Syria, the counter-revolution of the Gulf States combined with the longevity of the regime and protester fatigue on the domestic front, enabled Jordan's ruling elites to gradually contain the uprisings, desaturating their potential (Hamid & Freer, 2011; Helfont & Helfont, 2011: 82–85; UNHCR, 2016).

### BOYCOTTING THE 2013 ELECTIONS

As the uprisings became contained and domesticated, the normal patterns of political life began to re-emerge. Discussions regarding whether to participate or not in the 2013 elections were played out in the Brotherhood. In essence, some decision makers were concerned that participation would signal an acceptance of a return to normality in Jordanian political life (al-Jazeera, 2013). This seemed anathema given the possibilities that seemed to be on the immediate horizon in the months before. Thus, an election boycott was seen as a vehicle through which disruption could be reintroduced into a process that the regime was historically adept at engineering. Disruption can manifest itself through three key, but not exhaustive rationales for boycotts. First, groups engaging in boycotts may do so to cast doubt on the credibility of the electoral process. Hassan al-Turabi's decision that the Popular Congress Party (PCP) of Sudan boycott the 2015 elections is an illustration of this (Sudan Tribune, 2014).

Second, collective political actors may decide to boycott an election in order to demonstrate opposition to, and discredit a particular policy of the incumbent government or regime. Illustrative in this regard, was

the IAF's boycott of the 1997 elections to protest the 1994 Wadi Araba peace agreement between Jordan and Israel, and the increasing censorship of the Jordanian public sphere (Brand, 1999; Campagna, 1998; Ryan, 1998). Finally, boycotts can be utilised as a means of discrediting the incumbent regime directly. Such is evident in Starcher's analysis of the 1990 boycott of Egypt's general elections (Starcher, 2004: 222). In each of these cases, opposition groups seek, to operate outside of institutional structures in an endeavour to short-circuit the system or elements of it (Hourani, 1998: 30). In-so-doing their interests and claim making impinges on those of ruling elites. Thus, the boycott is a contentious act, and one which is of particular significance in the context of hybrid politics, where it is often the only disruptive avenue available to opposition groups (Brown, 2011: 55–56).

The benefits seemed obvious, as a boycott could discredit the electoral process as well the regime by highlighting the absence of substantial reform. The opportunity exists therefore for a group to increase its leverage with the government, other opposition actors and the voting constituency. Therein the movement can brand itself as an advocate for democratic reform and hence boost its social capital. That said, the case for boycotting needs to be persuasive, because an inevitable outcome is that the organisation will spend the subsequent parliamentary term outside of the state's institutions of governance. Ramifications of this include a reduced scope to influence policy, and a reduced profile both inside and outside the parliament as an opposition force. Furthermore, in the context of Jordan, where parliament operates as a 'dispensing system' of benefits, being absent from it over the course of a parliamentary term reduces the ability of an organisation like the Muslim Brotherhood to access this system and pass on the benefits to its constituency (Tell, 2016).

While there is the possibility of increasing leverage, boycotts simultaneously are generators of uncertainty, and thus engenders innate risks. First, they can negatively influence the relationship between actors. In political systems where parties compete to earn patronage benefits from the government, this is an especially concerning possibility, as poor inter-opposition relations do not improve the trajectory of democratic learning (Starcher, 2004: 219). Associated with this, is the risk of compound deterioration. As Lindberg study's findings on opposition-regime relations illustrate, successive boycotts can lock competing groups, including the incumbent regime into a cycle of 'non-cooperative strategies'

(Lindberg, 2006: 250–251). A potential development in this situation is the emergence of violence as a mechanism for breaking this cycle, and the utilisation of repressive tactics by the ruling establishment. Another liability of boycotts is that by being self-excluded from institutional channels of governance, a boycotting party or group will lose the opportunity to associate themselves with positive changes and concessions from regimes (Lindberg, 2006: 251).

The social capital of the party may also suffer, ceding relevance to other opposition groups. For example, the MB/IAF's boycott of the 2013 elections enabled the Islamic centralists, the Wasat Party, to become the largest bloc in the parliament, and therein make a claim to 'the mantle' of Islamist leadership in Jordan (Schenker, 2013). Beyond this more institutionalised and moderate challenge to the MB/IAF traditional dominance of Jordanian Islamist politics, Schenker explicates another emergent risk. That of Salafi and other collectives; whose brand of politics is even less compromising than that of the Brotherhood. And who consequently may attract affiliates of the group disillusioned with its involvement in organised politics (Schenker, 2013).

The decision to boycott was made several months before the scheduled polling day of 23 January 2013. In doing so, the intention was to convince the government to cede concessions to the Movement (al-Şamādi, 2012a). The compromises hitherto enshrined in the August 2011 constitutional recommendations and the subsequent associated acts of parliament were not sufficient for the leadership of the Brotherhood, who were seeking a rescinding of the Single Non-transferable Vote (SNTV). However, with the passage of time it became increasingly clear, not only that the government had no desire to compromise further, but that it had no *need* to do so. In other words, the tactic of boycotting the elections was not going to have the intended effect. Of equal significance was that the leadership had no alternative course of action to pursue. Prominent leaders within the Organisation's Executive Office revealed consternation at the 'disregard' shown by the government and the wider regime (the Royal Court particularly) to the boycott decision (al-Şamādi, 2012a).

A further concerning development was that the ineffectiveness of the decision to facilitate dialogue, let alone generate the desired results created a platform for dissident voices within the Brotherhood. Members of the moderate *dove* faction for example demanded that Hammam Said and deputy leader Zaki Bani Arsheid account for their decision-making



at a special session of the Shūra Council. Irhail Gharaibeh, a leading figure within this faction, expressed during this time his disappointment that the leadership had failed to recognise the nature of the historical moment because of ‘a lack of political maturity’ (al-Şamādi, 2012a).

The question of maturity relates to the previous decision by the Brotherhood executive to reject a negotiated compromise offer with then Prime Minister Awn al-Khasawneh, which could have seen the SNTV replaced with a three vote per voter system (Abboud, 2013; AFP, 2011). Arguably a reasonable compromise; given the domestic and regional circumstances. Al-Khasawneh, a reform minded prime minister resigned from office after six months, and observers at the time noted that his authority had been strategically undercut from within by other players in the regime (Younes, 2012). His replacement, Fayez al-Tarawneh a known conservative and regime loyalist was understandably not as amiable to negotiate with. On a more philosophical level, the resignation of al-Khasawneh is totemic of the closing of the reform window. In addition to this lost opportunity, the Brotherhood’s executive overplayed the value of their social capital, in not comprehending that while they were the largest and most influential member of the opposition there was nevertheless a limit to what could be achieved through unitary action. This becomes especially evident in relation to efforts to discredit the electoral process. Shafiqul and Hakim’s examination of the 1986 Bangladesh elections for example, demonstrates that when the opposition is fragmented on the decision to boycott it becomes difficult to discredit elections (Omari, 2016; Shafiqul & Hakim, 1993: 254–255).

The Jordanian parliament does not exist as a strong engine of governance but of resource distribution (Lust, 2009; Tell, 2013, 2016). It can therefore be expected that voters will behave in ways which maximise the resources they can accrue from the system. This goes some way in explaining the persistence of voting along kinship lines (Lust, 2009). Parties then do not compete in elections to form government so much as to become favoured members of the opposition and therefore improve their access to state resources (Bueno de Mesquita, 2005: 58; Starcher, 2004: 219). While the Brotherhood was remaining steadfast in its threat to boycott, the government was negotiating with other members of the opposition, including leftist, nationalist and other Islamic parties to secure their participation in the elections. It was reported in *al-Hayat* that ‘new understandings’ were reached between the various sides and the state, which included the provision of funds from the state to these

parties (al-Šamādi, 2012c). Internal opposition to the boycott decision was apparently driven by both ideational and material factors. Some not insignificant members of the JMB objected to both the handling of the Movement's relations with the regime, especially when viewed in light of its decision-making procedures.

### REFORM FROM WITHIN? THE EMERGENCE OF THE ZAMZAM INITIATIVE

Readily apparent from the above discussion is the internal and external components of the decision-making process and its consequences, both intended and unintended. The internal element highlights; first, the importance of difference of opinion and the necessity of providing space for different views to be meaningfully considered in the decision-making process. Second, it emphasises that this acceptance of difference as a principle was absent from the structure of the Brotherhood. This is problematic recalling the centrality given to consultation, mutuality, cooperation and equality in Farhan's *shūra* aphorism—that a more refined application requires practice and rectification. As such, there was, according to some members a requirement to reform in order to maximise the opportunities of future democratic openings. Into this context, the Initiative was launched in November 2012 as a statement of principles at Amman's Zamzam Hotel (Ammon News, 2012). While debates over the 2013 boycott decision acted as a catalyst for the emergence of internal reformist movements it is necessary to state that they were not the only factor, for the gestation of the Initiative within the Muslim Brotherhood occurred over several years and is intimately connected with the dynamics of identity politics within the group.

A balance between the Brotherhood's ideological trajectory that is inherently transnational in scope, and its more immediate domestic political role as an advocate for its constituency had to be recalibrated. This constituency is one which includes Jordanians of both East Bank and Palestinian origins, who at various moments have advocated diverging positions (Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh). It must be stressed that these are not binary categories. The Brotherhood would have been able to operate for as long as it has if they were. However, it is genuinely intriguing that the leading figures behind the reform agendas of recent years have East Bank origins.

The emergence of the Zamzam Initiative in the wake of more than a year of state-wide protests demanding systemic democratic/representational reform sheds light on the practice—principles dynamic of political learning in hybrid regimes. The Brotherhood, while actively joining calls for greater democracy in Jordan was unable to democratise sufficiently and insulate itself from internal divisions. A further two additional points can be made: First, the Brotherhood’s leadership prioritised democratic *practice* over *principles*. With regards to democratisation within the group, supporters of the Said/Bani Arsheid leadership contend with critics of the Group’s democratic credentials by pointing to the internal elections that are held for positions on committees. An important caveat to consider is the extent to which ideational diversity and contested visions of the future are not only given space to be articulated, but more profoundly that the institutional architecture framing this space has the capacity to produce a consensus necessary to bridge any divides. In cases where Brotherhood affiliates have attained positions of authority, their behaviour and practices have substantiated criticisms that they do not respect pluralism as a philosophical principle (Abu Rumman, 2007: 45).

The second point to make involves the risks of democratising in unfriendly systems. Jordan’s formally institutionalised channels are structured to encourage behaviours that are not facilitative of the kind of coalition building required to generate momentum behind significant reform agendas. Individual and collective political actors are encouraged to compete against each other for access to the state, with those obtaining favourable access receiving benefits (al-Ramahi, 2008). Structural arrangements of this nature do not promote or reward trust building initiatives between actors. A ramification of this is that when coalitions have formed in Jordan which span ideological and other identity cleavages, including most recently the National Front for Reform, they have not managed to remain unified for long enough to effect substantial change.

### THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF DIFFERENCE—BEGINNINGS

The Brotherhood executive’s management of the Zamzam Initiative rather than generating a coming together of members to strengthen the organisation resulted in a further crystallisation of difference. This crystallisation of difference was triggered by the release of an internal tribunal finding which stated that the Initiative ‘violates the Brotherhood’s regulations and principles’ (al-Daameh, 2014; Ammon News, 2014).

A week later, the Initiative's three most prominent leaders Irhail Gharaibeh, Nabil Kofahi and Jamil Dheisat were sacked from their positions (al-Sharif, 2014; Ghabun, 2014). It appears that internal reform was not a priority for the Leadership of Said/Bani Arsheid. Furthermore, rather than make concessions to the Initiative and compromise, for the sake of organisational unity, it was preferable to sever connection with the Initiative entirely.

By addressing the Zamzam Initiative, the Society's hawkish leadership unintentionally created a space not for less debate about the identity, purpose and focus of the organisation, but for the exact opposite. Affirming Abu Rumman's description of the manoeuvre as equally 'vengeful' and void of foresight (Abu Rumman, 2014), this debate had two important initial manifestations, expressing the emerging reality that principles (synonymous with democratic norms) of reform were embedded in the Brotherhood, to a greater extent than the executive recognised. On Saturday 31 May, another group of reformists consisting of forty or so members, not directly associated with the Zamzam Initiative, held an 'internal reform summit' in the northern city of Irbid. The summit's objective as reported in *The Jordan Times* was to discuss how to change the prevailing conservative leadership of the Movement (Luck, 2014a). Following on the success of the Irbid conference, Dr. Abdul Majeed Thneibat, a former comptroller general of the Society, organised a similar meeting in Karak, arguing that 'there is a strong will for change in the movement, and we will export the uprising from the north to the south' (Luck, 2014b).

That Thneibat would characterise the Irbid and Karak summits as an uprising is illustrative of the extent to which opposition to the Movement's prevailing governance structures had proceeded beyond quiet calls for reform. Further reflective of this was the nature of a number of reform topics discussed at both of the summits. These included calls to instil fixed terms for the Society's overall leader, reform the internal court system—which the reformists felt had been abused by the hard-line establishment—and to disengage the Brotherhood from the IAF, making the latter an independent party in its own right (Luck, 2014a). Evidently, the future trajectory of the Movement and its constitutive parts became a site of contestation.

In turn, this speaks volumes about the change in political thinking represented by the reformists. And thus, the Irbid and Karak conferences highlight the critical importance of democratic principles to the

operation of political parties and actors in such a hybrid regime as Jordan (Sadiki, 2009). By allowing for greater transparency and increased member interaction within the organisation, decision makers are in a better position to make informed decisions about the trajectory of the organisation. It is in sacking the three heads of Zamzam, and declaring to the rank and file that association with the Initiative was a punishable offence; the Leadership believed that to be the end of the matter. However greater transparency of decision-making and improved communication between committee leaders and rank and file members would have clearly signalled to the MB's heads that there was a grassroots desire amongst members for internal reform.<sup>2</sup>

### THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF DIFFERENCE—CONSOLIDATION

Following their sacking from the Brotherhood, the Zamzam Initiative's executives worked to convert the initiative into a distinct organisation. Although damaging to the unity of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Initiative's triumvirate nevertheless inadvertently reduced the scope of this damage by establishing a new organisation. In this regard, it is similar to the Wasat Party, whose founders split from the Brotherhood in 2001 (Abu Rumman, 2007: 40). In a particular way, Gharaibeh and the other Zamzam leaders responded in a manner agreeable to the established Brotherhood executive, who in rescinding their membership from the organisation, made it difficult for them to continue the internal reform agenda.

The same cannot be said however of Thneibat who on 3 March 2015 registered the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood with the Ministry of Social Development as a social organisation (BBC, 2015). The controversy was that this was a separate organisation from the original Society of the Muslim Brotherhood, with a different registration, but with the same name. Jordan now had two Muslim Brotherhoods. On the level of ideology and identity, this development was significant because the division had become more than a series of disagreements between 'hawks and doves', but had evolved into something more concrete (Keilani, 2015). At the heart of this institutionalisation of difference

---

<sup>2</sup>It is important to note however that ascertaining exact numbers of Brotherhood members supportive of the status quo or the reformist agendas is difficult to establish.

was a failure of the Brotherhood's executive to accept the democratic *principle* of difference. And furthermore allow it to influence internal decision-making.

In the absence of an external point of coalescence, the Brotherhood's executive demonstrated that it did not know how to effectively address the question of difference. It was only after the registration of this second Muslim Brotherhood for example, that the option of compromise appeared to be put on the table as a means of conflict resolution by the original Brotherhood's Shūra Council. Yet, by that time it was too late as external forces, including the sitting Ensour government, began to support the new organisation (al-Sharif, 2015).

That the government, and subsequently the regime, had sided with the new Brotherhood was on full display a year later on 13 April 2016, when government security forces raided, evacuated and sealed the offices of the original Muslim Brotherhood in Amman (Malkawi, 2016). The official rationale was that the organisation was illegal, having not updated its license to exist with the relevant ministry. This was made possible by the reality of there being two Brotherhoods in Jordan, and only the newer version had registered with an appropriate ministry, therein confirming its legal status. The original Brotherhood over successive decades had refused to clarify its status. Flouting of the rules of the game was tolerated by the regime so long as the Brotherhood's social capital meant that: first, the organisation was a useful future ally, and second, that decisive action against the group was too risky. Once these two pillars were weakened however, the circumstances changed. What had begun with a small internal reform initiative in 2012 had, within a few short years, evolved into a set of circumstances resulting in the disintegration of the largest and best-organised opposition force in the Kingdom.

## CONCLUSION

The JMB in post-2011 Jordan became a site of contestation, in which its internal organisation and its future trajectory/s were subject to vigorous debate. The process involved functions of democratisation on both internal and external levels. While the 2011 uprisings provided an unexpected window of opportunity for democratic reform in the Kingdom, the reality that concessions were made because of claims that were external to pre-existing institutions and parties highlights the extent to which formal politics in Jordan had entered a state of miasmatic stasis.

This stasis applies equally to the behaviours and strategizing of actors including the Muslim Brotherhood, whose executive leadership proved unable to simultaneously manage the internal and external tensions. With regards to the former, the executive was unable to create a meaningful space for difference as a principle within the JMB. This is reflected in their branding of the reformists as something which could only be responded to through purging it from the Brotherhood—like a disease from the human body.

Inability to maintain internal unity in the face of difference intersected sharply with the external environment. First, the unexpected emergence of the second Society of Muslim Brothers in Jordan brought into renewed question the legal status of the older organisation and its deteriorating relationship with the regime (Malkawi, 2015). The original Brotherhood could avoid questions regarding its legal status because of its historical utility to the regime and its embeddedness within Jordanian society. Both of these however changed once a new society was registered and displayed a greater desire to play the political game according to the regime's rules. Had the original Brotherhood been registered adequately then it would have been more difficult (although not impossible) for the raids of April 2016 to have taken place.

Second, the opening procured by the 2011 uprisings shed light on the seemingly innate hypocrisy of the executive. Here was a cadre of individuals demanding democratic reform, requiring the transferral of power and authority from the monarchy to the parliament. And yet at the same time they were unwilling to allow a similar process to occur within the Brotherhood. The divisions which evolved into crystallised separation did not necessarily begin with the Jordanian uprisings. However, the protests illuminated that the environment had changed, and new responses and ways of thinking were required of the JMB and its leadership (al-Ṭweissi, 2016).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abboud, S. (Trans.). (2013, September 12). Jordanian PM's abrupt resignation reveals deep political crisis. *Al-Monitor*. Retrieved May 05, 2016, from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/05/al-khasawneh-resignation-reshuf.html>.
- Abu Rumman, M. (2007). *The Muslim Brotherhood in the 2007 Jordanian Parliamentary Elections: A passing 'Political Setback' or diminished popularity?*

- Retrieved May 5, 2016, from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/05320/05320-eng.pdf>.
- Abu Rumman, M. (2014, April 22). Al-‘āqil khaṣīym nafsu. *Al-Ghad*. Retrieved May 02, 2016, from <http://www.alghad.com/articles/518222>.
- Abu Rumman, M., & Abu Hanieh, H. (2013). *The ‘Islamic Solution’ in Jordan: Islamists, the state, and the ventures of democracy and security*. Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Abu Toameh, K. (2013, September 17). King Abdullah says no to Hamas. *The Gatestone Institute*. Retrieved May 03, 2016, from <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3978/king-abdullah-hamas>.
- Abuelbeh, A. (2016, March 24). Personal interview.
- AFP. (2011, October 22). Jordan’s Islamists Snub New Government. *Al-Arabiya*. Retrieved May 05, 2016, from <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/10/22/173166.html>.
- Ammon News. (2012, November 26). Al-Ḥarakat al-Islāmiyya wa Thiyqat Zamzam. *Ammonnews*. Retrieved May 05, 2016, from <http://www.ammonnews.net/print.aspx?articulo=137878>.
- Ammon News. (2014, April 22). Al-Dahyisāt li-Ammon: Nuḥarāṣ ‘ala ‘al-Jamā‘at’ akthar min faṣliynā. *Ammonnews*. Retrieved May 02, 2016, from <http://www.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articulo=190272>.
- al-Daameh, M. (2014, April 22). Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood split over Zamzam initiative. *As-Sharq al-Awsat*. Retrieved May 02, 2016, from <http://english.aawsat.com/2014/04/article55331497>.
- al-Jazeera. (2013, January 19). Thousands call for election Boycott in Jordan. *Al-Jazeera*. Retrieved May 13, 2016, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201311814194824370.html>.
- al-Ramahi, A. (2008). Wasta in Jordan: A distinct feature of (and benefit for) Middle Eastern Society. *Arab Law Quarterly*, 22, 35–62.
- al-Ṣamādi, T. (2012a, October 18). Al-nadam yatamalek qiyādāt ‘Ikhwān al-Urdun’ ba’d qarārḥā muqāṭ‘at al-intikhābāt. *Al-Hayat*. Retrieved April 9, 2015, from <http://www.alhayat.com/Details/445895>.
- al-Ṣamādi, T. (2012b, November 28). Al-Urdun: Ighlāq Shuwāri‘ al-‘Āṣimat ‘ashiya tẓāhirāt al-Mu‘āriḍa. *Al-Hayat*. Retrieved February 19, 2015, from <http://www.alhayat.com/Details/457166>.
- al-Ṣamādi, T. (2012c, October 21). Ikhwān: al-Urdun yuṭalibūn tājil al-intikhābāt wa liqā’ al-Malik. *Al-Hayat*. Retrieved April 9, 2015, from <http://www.alhayat.com/Details/446654>.
- al-Sharif, O. (2014, April 24). Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood divided over reform faction. *Al-monitor*. Retrieved March 11, 2015, from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/jordan-zamzam-muslim-brotherhood-division.html>.



- al-Sharif, O. (2015, May 12). Jordan takes sides in Islamist rift. *Al-Monitor*. Retrieved May 04, 2016, from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/jordan-government-side-muslim-brotherhood-society-split.html>.
- al-Sharif, O. (2016, September 28). Who are the winners and losers in Jordan's latest elections? *Al-Monitor*. Retrieved September 29, 2016, from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/jordan-legislative-elections-winners-losers.html>.
- al-Ṭamiydh, F. (2016, March 26). Personal interview.
- al-Ṭweissi, B. (2016, April 18). Al-Islām al-Siyāsi fi al-Urdun: al-Forṣa a'm al-Nihāya? *Al-Ghad*.
- Barari, H. (2013). *The limits of political reform in Jordan: The role of external actors* (pp. 1–11, Rep.). Amman: Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung. Retrieved May 8, 2016, from <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/10455-20140108.pdf>.
- BBC. (2015, March 04). Mā aldhīyī Ada ila Inqasām jamā'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimiyyin fi al-Urdun? *British Broadcasting Corporation*. Retrieved February 22, 2016, from [http://www.bbc.com/arabic/interactivity/2015/03/150304\\_comments\\_jordan\\_brotherhood\\_cnonflict](http://www.bbc.com/arabic/interactivity/2015/03/150304_comments_jordan_brotherhood_cnonflict).
- Bermeo, N. (1992). Democracy and the lessons of dictatorship. *Comparative Politics*, 24(3), 273–291.
- Bokhari, K., & Senzai, F. (2013). *Political Islam in the age of democratization*. New York: Palgrave.
- Brand, L. (1999). The effects of the peace process on political liberalization in Jordan. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 28(2), 52–67.
- Bronner, E., & Kadri, R. (2011, February 01). King of Jordan dismisses his cabinet. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 14, 2015, from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/02/world/middleeast/02jordan.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/02/world/middleeast/02jordan.html?_r=1).
- Brown, N. (2006). *Islamist movements and the democratic process in the Arab World: Exploring the Grey Zones* (pp. 1–24, Rep. No. 67). Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Brown, N. (2011). Dictatorship and democracy through the Prism of Arab Elections. In N. Brown (Ed.), *The dynamics of democratization: Dictatorship, development, and diffusion*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Brynen, R. (1992). Economic crisis and post-rentier democratization in the Arab World: The case of Jordan. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 25(1), 69–97.
- Campagna, J. (1998). Press freedom in Jordan. *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 206, 44–48.
- Cavatorta, F. (2015). No democratic change... and yet no authoritarian continuity: The inter-paradigm debate and North Africa after the uprisings. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(1), 135–145.

- Clark, J. (2011). Social movement theory, selective incentives, and benefits. In F. Volpi (Ed.), *Political Islam: A critical reader* (pp. 153–159). London: Routledge.
- de Mesquita, B. B. (2005). *The logic of political survival*. London: MIT Press.
- Espósito, J., & Piscatori, J. (1991). Democratization and Islam. *Middle East Journal*, 45(3), 427–440.
- Fahim, K. (2011, July 19). Jordan's protesters ask little, and receive less. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 20, 2015, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/20/world/middleeast/20jordan.html?ref=kareem-fahim&r=0>.
- Ghabun, H. (2014, April 20). Ikhwān al-Urdun Yufaṣīlūn Qiyādāt Bārazat Ba'd 'Ashhar min Itlāqhum Mubādarat Zamzam. *CNN*. Retrieved May 03, 2016, from <http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/04/20/jordan-muslim-brotherhood>.
- Hamid, S., & Freer, C. (2011). *How stable is Jordan? King Abdullah's half-hearted reforms & the challenge of the Arab Spring* (pp. 1–11, Rep.). Doha: Brookings Center.
- Hamzawy, A., & Brown, N. (2008). A boon or a bane for democracy? *Journal of Democracy*, 19(3), 49–54.
- Helfont, S., & Helfont, T. (2011). Jordan between the Arab Spring and the Gulf Cooperation Council. *Orbis*, 56(1), 82–95.
- Hirst, D. (1999, November 22). Jordan curbs Hamas. *The Guardian*. Retrieved May 10, 2016, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/nov/22/israel>.
- Hourani, H. (1998). Prospects for the development of political parties and strategies for enhancing political party processes in Jordan. *Middle East Report*, 209, 30–31 & 40.
- Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal. (2016, February 06). Retrieved February 22, 2016, from <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>.
- Jamal, A. (2012). *Of empires and citizens: Pro-American democracy or no democracy at all?*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Keilani, M. (2015, March 07). A move with possible wide impact. *The Jordan Times*. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://www.jordantimes.com/opinion/musa-keilani/move-possible-wide-impact>.
- Krämer, G. (1994). The integration of the integrists: A comparative study of Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia. In G. Salamé (Ed.), *Democracy without Democrats? The renewal of politics in the Muslim world* (pp. 220–226). London: I.B. Tauris.
- Larzilliére, P. (2012). Political commitment under an authoritarian regime: Professional associations and the Islamist movement as alternative arenas in Jordan. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6(1), 11–25.

- Lindberg, S. I. (2006). Tragic protest: Why do opposition parties Boycott elections? In A. Schedler (Ed.), *Electoral authoritarianism* (pp. 203–223). Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Luck, T. (2014a, May 31). Brotherhood ‘Dissenters’ meet to overhaul leadership. *The Jordan Times*. Retrieved May 02, 2016, from <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/brotherhood-dissenters%E2%80%99-meet-overhaul-leadership>.
- Luck, T. (2014b, June 03). Brotherhood dissenters declare ‘Uprising’ against leadership. *The Jordan Times*. Retrieved May 03, 2016, from <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/brotherhood-dissenters-declareuprising%E2%80%99-against-leadership>.
- Lust, E. (2009). Competitive clientelism in the Middle East. *Journal of Democracy*, 20(3), 122–135.
- Lust-Okar, E., & Jamal, A. (2002). Rulers and rules: Reassessing the influence of regime type on electoral law formation. *Comparative Political Studies*, 35(3), 337–366.
- Malkawi, K. (2015, May 28). Legislation Bureau says newly licensed Brotherhood Entitled to Manage Group’s Assets. *The Jordan Times*.
- Malkawi, K. (2016, April 14). Authorities close more Muslim Brotherhood offices, others to follow. *The Jordan Times*.
- Masoud, T. (2008). Are they democrats? Does it matter? *Journal of Democracy*, 19(3), 19–24.
- Moaddel, M. (2007). Religion and the state: The singularity of the Jordanian religious experience. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 15(4), 527–568.
- Neimat, K. (2012, March 24). Hundreds March in Downtown Amman on ‘Friday of Dignity’. *The Jordan Times*.
- Nonneman, G. (2001). Rentiers and Autocrats, Monarchs and Democrats, State and Society: The Middle East between Globalization, Human ‘Agency’, and Europe. *International Affairs*, 77(1), 141–162.
- Omar, R. (2016, May 16). Personal interview.
- Qā’imat al-Iṣlah (the Reform List). (2016). Election campaign brochure. Amman.
- Ryan, C. (1998). Peace, bread and riots: Jordan and the International Monetary Fund. *Middle East Policy*, 6(2), 54–66.
- Sadiki, L. (2000). Popular uprisings and Arab democratization. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32(1), 71–95.
- Sadiki, L. (2004). *The search for Arab democracy: Discourses and counter-discourses*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sadiki, L. (2009). *Rethinking Arab democratization: Elections without democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schenker, D. (2013, October 2). Down and out in Amman: The rise and fall of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

- Retrieved April 8, 2015, from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/down-and-out-in-amman-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-jordanian-muslim-brotherhood>.
- Schwedler, J. (2011). Can Islamists become moderates? Rethinking the inclusion-moderation thesis. *World Politics*, 63(2), 347–376.
- Shafiqul, A., & Hakim, M. A. (1993). Elections in Bangladesh: Tools of legitimacy. *Asian Affairs*, 19(4), 248–261.
- Starcher, J. A. (2004). Parties over: The Demise of Egypt's opposition parties. *The British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 31(2), 215–233.
- Sudan Tribune. (2014, October 14). Turabi's party to Boycott Sudan's 2015 Elections. *Sudan Tribune*. Retrieved May 15, 2016, from <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article52723>.
- Tarrow, S. G. (2011). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tell, T. (2013). *The social and economic origins of Monarchy in Jordan*. New York: Palgrave.
- Tell, T. (2016, March 25). Personal interview.
- Tilly, C. (1993). Contentious repertoires in Great Britain 1758-1834. *Social Science History*, 17(2), 253–280.
- Tilly, C. (2006). *Regimes and repertoires*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Tilly, C., & Tarrow, S. G. (2007). *Contentious politics*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2016). Helping to Build Lives and Rebuild Communities: UNHCR Syria Mid-year Report. Retrieved September 12, 2016, from [http://www.unhcr.org/sy/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/11/Mid-Year-Report-2016\\_En.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/sy/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/11/Mid-Year-Report-2016_En.pdf).
- Wiktorowicz, Q. (1999). The limits of democracy in the Middle East: The case of Jordan. *Middle East Journal*, 53(4), 606–620.
- Wiktorowicz, Q. (2000). Civil society as social control: State power in Jordan. *Comparative Politics*, 33(1), 43–61.
- Yom, S. (2011, August 19). Jordan goes Morocco. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved February 20, 2015, from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/08/19/jordan-goes-morocco/>.
- Yom, S. (2014). Tribal politics in contemporary Jordan: The case of the HIRAK movement. *The Middle East Journal*, 68(2), 229–247.
- Yom, S., & al-Khatib, W. (2012, July 08). Jordan's new politics of tribal dissent. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved February 20, 2015, from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/07/jordansnewpoliticsoftribaldissent/>.
- Younes, A. (2012, May 01). The struggle for power in Jordan. *Al-Arabiya*. Retrieved April 25, 2016, from <https://english.alarabiya.net/views/2012/05/01/211469.html>.

## The Dilemmas of Dual Resistance: Hamas and Political Learning in Gaza

*Martin Kear*

### INTRODUCTION

On 1 May 2017, the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas announced that it had released a new policy document that would replace its much-maligned Charter (*al-Jazeera*, 2017; Hamas Covenant, 1988). The new document was an attempt by Hamas's leadership to expound a fresh vision and political trajectory that would reflect the current political realities for Hamas, and for Palestinians, concerning their long-standing conflict with Israel over the establishment of a sovereign Palestine, and their place in the regional political milieu. Out-going Chairman, Khaled Meshaal, professed that Hamas should be considered an open and moderate movement, declaring, '...we are changing, and we might have a new charter moving forward...' (*al-Jazeera*, 2017).

The most astounding aspect of the document was Hamas's acceptance that in the foreseeable future any Palestinian state would exist along the 1967 ceasefire lines delineating the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, known collectively as the Occupied Palestinian Territories

---

M. Kear (✉)  
University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

(OPT). While this appeared like a tacit acceptance of the two-state solution, a framework vehemently opposed by Hamas since its inception, the reality was more nuanced. Hamas was careful to clarify that this version of a Palestinian state was an interim measure, and did not amount to either the formal recognition of the state of Israel, nor the repudiation of its utopian goal of seeking a Palestinian state from ‘the river to the sea’. Hamas also remained adamant that it would not relinquish its commitment to armed resistance against Israeli occupation of the OPT (*al-Jazeera*, 2017).

To many in the international community the contents of this policy document, especially the acceptance of a truncated Palestinian state, seemed to be a remarkable volte-face for a movement better known for its use of egregious violence, and a dogmatic adherence to Islamist ideology. Despite this violent, and intransigent reputation, the May 2017 document forms part of Hamas’s continued efforts to reposition the locus of its ideological narrative by integrating a distinct political facet into its long-standing resistance to Israeli occupation.

Hamas began this integration when it, and the other 13 Palestinian factions, signed the Cairo Accord in 2005 (ECF-a). Here Hamas signalled its intent by agreeing to prioritise political participation over armed resistance as the most appropriate strategy for achieving its organisational goals. This was followed quickly by Hamas’s decision to contest the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), the formation of a political party, Change and Reform (CR), and the subsequent publication of a comprehensive Political Manifesto that concentrated on secular-orientated policy positions such as health, education, human rights, and housing (Tamimi, 2006: 292–316). The third instalment was the signing of the Mecca Agreement in 2007 (ECF-b) in which Hamas acknowledged, among other things, that the optimal way of prosecuting the case for a sovereign Palestine lay in achieving an equitable political settlement with Fatah.

The gradual tempering of its reliance on armed resistance in favour of political participation was not only an acknowledgement of the failure of its strategy of unilateral armed resistance, but an acknowledgement by Hamas that it required an independent political voice. Hamas needed this voice to participate substantively in the administration of the OPT. More importantly, a political voice would allow Hamas to contribute meaningfully to the decision-making processes undertaken by Palestinian representatives in the perpetual negotiations with Israel concerning the advent of a sovereign Palestine.

To gain and retain this political voice, while continuing its traditional strategy of armed resistance, Hamas has employed a dual resistance strategy (DRS) consisting of political and armed resistance components that operate in a mutually supportive fashion. The inception of this strategy is reflective of Hamas's incorporation of a malleable conservatism (Marks, 2016). This signals Hamas's capacity to adapt its ideological narrative to reflect its fluctuating political fortunes, while retaining key aspects of its traditional narrative that are central to its *raison d'être*. To understand the operationalisation of the DRS, the chapter investigates the mechanics of dual resistance, beginning with the various facets of political resistance, to illustrate how political participation has developed into the latest manifestation of Hamas's resistance to Israeli occupation, and to Fatah's hegemony of the Palestinian self-determination agenda. The combination of political resistance and armed resistance allows Hamas to remain a significant actor in Palestinian politics.

### BROTHERHOOD BEGINNINGS

Hamas is an acronym of *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyah* (The Islamic Resistance Movement), and is an offshoot of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood (PMB). It was launched at the beginning of the First Intifada (1987–1991) to simultaneously resist Israeli occupation of the OPT, and challenge Fatah's hegemony of Palestinian politics, and strategy for Palestinian self-determination (Abu-Amr, 1993: 5–6). The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) itself was established in 1928 by an Egyptian teacher, Hassan al-Banna who advocated that personal development was the precursor to societal improvement. He believed in the establishment of an Islamic state where there would be no distinction between religion and government, and where the Qur'an and the *sunna* would form the basis of all parts of life (Abu-Amr, 1993: 6). This provided the MB with a broad and flexible philosophy that contributed to it possessing a wide range of organisational expressions from the social, to the political, and to the militant (Brown, 2012b: 62).

In its early stages, the MB adopted an anti-system persona, situating itself outside, and against the established political order of an Egyptian system perceivably corrupted by British colonial administration (Helbawy, 2010: 63). The MB's narrative cast Islam not only as a model for private belief and ritual, but as a comprehensive set of values and governance structures that were inherently different, and superior to

that propagated by Western secular political systems (Wickham, 2013: 20, 22–23). The MB depicted itself as the revolutionary vanguard who emphasised ‘action’, and ‘organisation’ over ideology (Strinberg & Wörn, 2011: 78; Wickham, 2013: 24). To accomplish this, the movement concentrated on a program of religious outreach (*da’wa*) via regular contact and integration with local communities through the sponsorship of schools, health clinics, and numerous charitable organisations (Wickham, 2013: 24).

Despite its apparent anti-system narrative, the overarching goal of the MB was not to overthrow the existing Egyptian political system and seize power for itself. Instead, it wanted to encourage a process of gradual societal reform that would lead inevitably to the public’s demand for an Islamic state (Wickham, 2013: 42). In fact, the MB supported key democratic tenets such as the need for a parliament, popular elections, an independent judiciary, and the protection of citizens’ rights by law (Brown, 2012b: 24). The acceptance of these democratic tenets, coupled with its quest for societal reform, inevitably led the MB to participate in Egyptian elections in the 1940s, and again in 2011/2012 (Brown, 2012b: 64).

Despite a high degree of ideological commonality between Hamas and the MB, the key difference is that Hamas’s ideological narrative is driven by national liberationism. Hamas was intended to bridge the gap between the traditional passivity of Palestinian Islamism, and the dynamism of Palestinian nationalism. The latter had been forged in opposition to British colonialism, and then shaped ideologically, and strategically by its acrimonious confrontation with Zionism, and the formation of the Israeli state (Mishal & Sela, 2006: 13, 42). Hamas uses national liberationism’s popularism to temper Islamism’s pre-occupation with societal reform, and to counter its quiescence by ensuring that Hamas remains focused on, and energised by, the liberation of Palestine. This means that Hamas’s efforts to realise an independent Palestine mould its decision-making processes and pathways, in addition to influencing its ideological maturation. This inspires Hamas to refine its ideological narrative regularly, adapting to the continually shifting political, and social dynamics of its conflict with Israel, and with Fatah. This makes the goal of an independent Palestine simultaneously an inspiration, and an aspiration for Hamas (Sen, 2015: 211).

As Hamas strives to harmonise these two ideological narratives, there has developed a marked pragmatism in its operational ethos that enables Hamas to navigate occasional ideological inconsistencies, and



contradictions without suffering a loss of support, or purpose. This ideological interplay explains why Hamas's narrative continues to evolve from its original dogmatic rhetorical and ideological guise, into a more pragmatic, centrist, and incrementalist narrative; one that has enabled it to effectively combine political and military identities with its traditional military one (Hroub, 2010a: 176).

### DUAL RESISTANCE STRATEGY

The notion of a movement possessing dual political and military identities is not especially new, with the Irish Republican Army (IRA)/Sinn Féin, and the Lebanese Islamist movement Hezbollah, representing two recognisable cases. Nevertheless, the degree of synergy between a movement's military and political identities in furthering its objectives is not readily understood. This is because political parties and militant groups are commonly depicted as being at opposite ends of the political organisation spectrum (Weinberg et al., 2009: 1). At one end, political parties are characterised as essential components of a democratic political system because they can form government, be held accountable by the people, and are responsible for ensuring the rule of law (White, 2006). Within a democratic system, parties provide a vehicle through which citizens can organise and participate in politics. The advent of a political party can also signify that a group acknowledges the legitimacy of a political system through its willingness to operate within the system to achieve its organisational goals (La Palombara & Weiner, 2016).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, militant groups are depicted as the antithesis of this. Militants use violence to coerce and intimidate state regimes into altering their behaviour concerning particular issues or grievances expressed by the group (Kydd & Walter, 2002: 264–265; Pape, 2005). Indeed, there is a corpus of literature that suggests that militant groups have a significantly adverse impact on key democratic political activities, particularly elections (Guelke, 2000; Indridason, 2008). Consequently, state regimes consider any violent acts perpetrated by militant groups as lying outside the boundaries of acceptable political behaviour, and a clear threat to the safety and security of the state, and its citizens. Paradoxically, states react to this threat by meeting these violent acts, and the groups that employ them, with a similar, or greater, degree of abnormal, levels of force. Meanwhile, the traditional and more measured actions of the sovereign state are placed into abeyance temporarily (Ayyash, 2010: 111–112). Whereas the existence of political parties

connotes broad acceptance of the political system, militant groups are associated with anti-democratic and anti-systemic behaviour (Thomas, 2011).

Occasionally states agree to permit militant groups to participate in the political process to diffuse and/or control any threat(s) posed by the militant's use of violence. The state promotes this inclusion as a pathway for the militants to increase their political power, and to begin to implement some of their own policy agenda. In return, the state demands that the militants renounce their use of violence, disband their militarised elements, relinquish any revolutionary desires, and agree to work within the existing political system (Huntington, 1993: 170).

Nevertheless, as Berti argues, the idea that inclusion in the political process leads inevitably to groups renouncing violence is contested. While participating in politics may mean that a group favours political engagement over a military option, it does not necessarily equate to the movement renouncing the use of violence (Berti, 2013: 5). Indeed, by employing a DRS, Hamas's use of violence may well buttress its continued political viability. The key to comprehending the mechanics of Hamas's DRS is to understand the role that violence plays in its strategic narrative. Hamas's own struggle for Palestinian statehood challenges simultaneously Fatah's hegemony over the Palestinian self-determination narrative expressed through Fatah's domination of both the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and the Palestinian Authority (PA), and Israel's denial of Palestinian self-determination. Hamas's political and military identities represent interwoven avenues for achieving the same goal—a sovereign Palestine. As such, Hamas's political and military goals are mutually supportive. Significantly, while tensions between the proponents of each identity exist, Hamas recognises that alone neither is capable of achieving Palestinian statehood, making their synergy essential.

A crucial aspect of Hamas's continued legitimacy as a resistance movement is the Palestinian public's demand that their national representatives exhibit both identities in their promotion of Palestinian self-determination (Milton Edwards & Farrell, 2010: 302). According to Hroub, the ability of a Palestinian movement to resist Israeli occupation is critical to its legitimacy. This occurs because the legitimate leader of Palestinian resistance is the one who holds the banner of resistance, and bringing the goals of liberation closer (Hroub, 2010a: 175–176). The DRS allows Hamas to enhance and amalgamate its electoral success in 2006 with its more traditional legitimacy achieved through armed

resistance against Israeli occupation. Thus the DRS is not only a strategy intended to drive Palestinian statehood efforts, but a means of gaining public support for Hamas's strategic narrative. Being able to synergise its political and armed resistance identities enables Hamas to challenge the veracity and effectiveness of Fatah's own strategic narrative that relies solely on diplomacy to achieve a sovereign Palestine.

The DRS is exemplified by Hamas's slogan, 'One hand resists, while the other one builds.' (US Senate Report, 2006). Despite the privations of Israel's siege, and the three wars Hamas has fought with Israel, the political component of the DRS remains dominant, and reflects the primacy of the political participation strategy within Hamas's Political Bureau, which is its principle decision-making institution (Hroub, 2010b: 119). Importantly, the DRS is not designed to represent an existential threat to the Israeli state. It is intended to challenge the existing political *status quo* in the OPT, one that is dominated by Fatah and Israel.

A key pillar of the DRS is political resistance. This form of resistance takes many guises, and is utilised in whatever ways the leadership deem most appropriate. Hamas sees political resistance is a means of challenging simultaneously Fatah's dominance of the Palestinian self-determination agenda, and Israel's occupation of the OPT through political participation. Hamas hoped that by gaining a political voice legitimised by an election, it would no longer be marginalised by either Fatah or Israel. Prior to the 2006 election, Hamas envisaged its political resistance would consist of advocating for the reformation and institutional capacity building of the PA as part of a coalition government headed by Fatah (Usher, 2006: 21–22). However, after its unexpected election victory, Hamas found itself able to govern the OPT outright. This transformed Hamas's contest with Israel and Fatah into a struggle to legitimise Hamas's right to govern the OPT, namely who has justified access to power; who is justified to select the government; and how and under what conditions and limitations Hamas's rule is legitimately exercised (Kalitz, 2013: 41). In this contentious political environment, the primary goal of Hamas's political resistance became geared towards entrenching its political authority in Gaza, and having its right to exercise political power accepted by Palestinians, and the international community.<sup>1</sup>

---

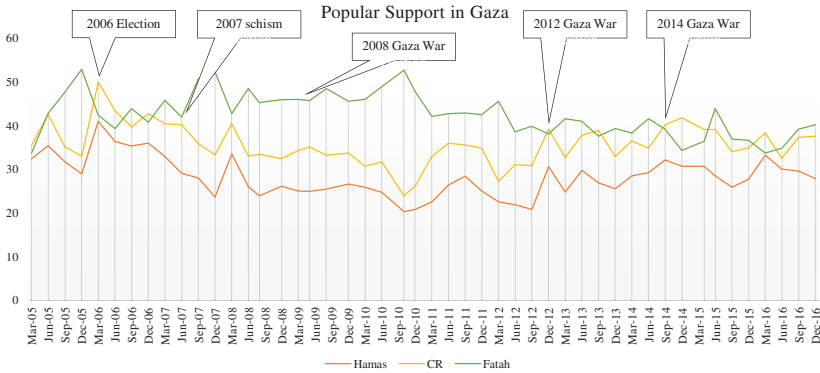
<sup>1</sup>Buchanan argues that an entity only possesses political authority if they (1) possess political legitimacy, and if (2) those upon whom it attempts to impose rules have an obligation to the entity to obey it (Buchanan, 2002: 691).

The second pillar of the DRS is armed resistance. This involves Hamas resorting to acts of violence to resist Israeli occupation, while simultaneously supporting its political resistance initiatives. In self-determination struggles such as the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, violence is often a manifestation of the contest over political space, and a measure of the asymmetry between key parties. If the conflicting parties are relatively equal in resource terms, a greater amount of political space exists, often resulting in lower levels, and less egregious forms of violence. All parties recognise that the level of violence necessary to achieve system hegemony is either beyond their means, or is unsustainable in the long term. In political systems where the asymmetry between the principle parties is more acute, the political space available is often significantly restricted, with the ‘dominant’ party closer to achieving and/or maintaining system hegemony. In these cases, violence is often more prevalent, and egregious as the ‘weaker’ party seeks to compel the hegemon to relinquish its grip on the available political space (Grinberg, 2010: 15).

Hamas’s use of violence, such as pre-emptive attacks or reprisals, thus becomes a compelling metaphor for justice and injustice. These acts become representative of the discourse between Israel and Hamas concerning the broader contest for control of the concepts and symbols by which the conflict is evaluated by their respective local, national, and international constituencies (Scott, 1985: 27). Hamas uses violence to demonstrate its capacity to harm the ‘stronger’ Israeli state, while Israel uses violence to demonstrate its capacity to withstand these attacks, and injure Hamas. The messages Hamas and Israel convey to each other extend to their respective constituencies to generate support, sympathy, and solidarity.

### POLITICAL RESISTANCE

When Hamas surprisingly won the 2006 PLC elections, it legitimised Hamas’s position in Palestinian politics. Hamas’s majority in the PLC also gave it control of the PA, which is the institution responsible for administering the OPT. However, after the election, Israel and the International Quartet (United States (US), European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and Russia) subjected Hamas to a political and economic siege in Gaza that was intended to cripple Hamas’s fledgling



**Fig. 9.1** Source Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), Poll No. 30–62, *Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research*, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/154>, accessed 1/7/2017.

administration, and cause it to collapse (ICG, 2007: 2).<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, this transformed the struggle between Hamas, Fatah, and Israel into one concerning the legitimacy of Hamas's right to exercise, and enforce, the political authority granted to it by its election victory. However, as Fig. 9.1 shows the popularity of Hamas and CR declined rapidly after the election. Hamas realised quickly that for it to consolidate and entrench its political authority, it needed to demonstrate its governing acumen in Gaza to Palestinians and the international community. Hamas also recognised that it needed to establish diplomatic relationships with external benefactors that would recognise its government, and provide it with valuable diplomatic, and financial support.

Without the political cover of being a junior partner in a coalition government, Hamas underwent a rapid process of political learning in order to cope with an increasingly capricious, and hostile political environment. Bermeo argues that political learning is a process through

<sup>2</sup>The International Quartet was formed in 2000 in response to the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Its goal was to broker a peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis (Elgindy, 2012: 3).

which people/movements modify their political beliefs, and tactics because of severe crisis, frustrations, and dramatic changes in environment (Bermeo, 1992: 274). The flexibility required to modify organisational narratives, and ideological positions through experience are important factors in judging the capacity of a movement to adopt a more expansive and inclusionary world view (Karakatsanis, 2008: 387–388).

As Hamas became more engaged in political processes like alliance building, bargaining, and compromise, its leadership steadily internalised which strategies worked, which did not. They also enabled Hamas to learn how willing it was to make any ideological compromises that might be necessary to achieve organisational goals, and/or policy successes. Within Hamas's leadership, there developed an increased pragmatism, especially concerning ideological rigidity, as they came to understand that there is often a trade-off between gains in policy, and losses in ideological principles (Sánchez-Cuena, 2004: 326). The various crises, frustrations, and changes in the political environment that Hamas has faced following its 2006 election victory serve as key reference points, something to guide the movement and its leadership, and to learn from, in their future deliberations (Bermeo, 1992: 283). Indeed, it is often the negative experiences, perceived as failures, which tend to drive the political learning of Hamas because its leadership is compelled to search for different, and new ways of doing things (Karakatsanis, 2008: 391). Overall, the process of political learning reinforced amongst Hamas's leadership the notion that core political concepts such as survivalism, gradualism, and pragmatism are strategically advantageous (Marks, 2016).

### SOFT ISLAMISATION IN GAZA

In June 2007, Hamas's efforts to consolidate its political authority in Gaza became more germane when it assumed unilateral administrative control of Gaza after its schism with Fatah.<sup>3</sup> The schism

---

<sup>3</sup>The relationship between Hamas and Fatah had been fraught since the 2006 election, with Fatah desperate to retain some form of control over the vast sums of foreign aid that was necessary for the viability of the PA. Tensions finally exploded in June 2007 with Hamas forcing Fatah out of Gaza (Caridi, 2012: 251–258; Milton-Edward & Farrell, 2010: 278–288).

polarised Palestinian politics resulting in the PA's bifurcation with a Fatah-controlled government in Ramallah, and a Hamas-controlled government in Gaza. It also resulted in a precipitous drop in support for both Hamas and CR (see Fig. 9.1) as they struggled to cement their control of Gaza. The schism marked the effective end of any prospect of political reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, with neither side trusting that the other would negotiate in good faith, despite them entering power-sharing arrangements in 2011 and 2014.

With Hamas now in sole control of Gaza it had to learn how to govern effectively while navigating the problematic ideological tension between popular sovereignty and divine sovereignty. Hamas was able to modulate this tension by implementing a process of soft Islamisation. This was designed to ensure that Gaza's political and social institutions conformed broadly to Islamic ideals while building institutional capacity through bureaucratization and professionalization, and providing essential government goods and services (Sayigh, 2011: 48).

The soft Islamisation of Gaza was necessary for two reasons. First, while the overwhelming majority of Gazans consider themselves religious, and are more socially conservative than West Bankers, this does not necessarily mean they approve of, or want, the wholesale implementation and enforcement of *shari'ah*, and other Islamisation initiatives in Gaza (Hroub, 2010a: 173). As an advisor to then Prime Minister (PM) Ismail Haniyeh outlined, 'Hamas as a movement emphasises Islam as a philosophy and way of life. But when we decided to contest elections, we did so in the framework of civil law, and we are committed to abiding by it. We can have Islamic views, but they must be expressed within the framework of the law.' (ICG, 2011: 26). Second, Hamas remained cognisant that concerted Islamisation efforts could be misconstrued by the international community, especially given the persistent attempts by Israel, and the Quartet to de-legitimise Hamas by linking them to militant Salafi-jihadist movements like al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The implementation of a soft Islamisation approach is consistent with the MB's method of adopting a socially conservative, and incrementalist approach towards governance that is aligned more with community expectations, rather than normative ideological dictates. Consequently, Hamas surreptitiously articulates separate spheres of responsibility for Hamas, the secular-orientated government, and the Islamist movement. The former is responsible for upholding existing laws guaranteeing personal freedoms, and the provision of government goods and services, while the latter promotes and implements Islamist social, and religious

agendas (Sayigh, 2010: 5). Sayigh notes that Hamas leaves enough grey areas in its approach to allow for a degree of policy, and ideological flexibility. In this way Hamas's governing pragmatism prevails, ensuring that its Islamisation endeavours do not diverge too far from prevailing public opinion and expectations (Sayigh, 2011: 97–98).

This pragmatic approach to governing permits Hamas a degree of plausible deniability should certain policies and/or regulations incur the public's ire (ICG, 2011: 28–29). To further guard against this, Hamas regularly releases policy 'test balloons' that are designed to gauge public opinion on potential policy positions. Hamas also adopts a tactic of 'advising and recommending' on appropriate community standards. These policy auditions gauge just how far, and in what areas, Hamas can safely pursue its soft Islamisation without incurring too much public opposition, while simultaneously mollifying its more conservative members (ICG, 2011: 28–29). The effects of these efforts can be seen in the support for CR gradually improving in the period from mid-2007 (after the schism) to the first half of 2008 (see Fig. 9.1).

This practical policy approach is evident in Hamas's efforts to reform Gaza's chaotic and dysfunctional criminal justice system. Remaining faithful to its election Manifesto, Hamas did not advocate the wholesale Islamisation of the justice system, rather the adoption of a holistic approach that saw *shari'ah* incorporated into the existing secular system. This led to the establishment of a hybrid legal framework comprising two principal components: a structured network of community-based conciliation committees, alongside a government-run judicial system embracing the existing civil (statutory) system, *shari'ah*, and military courts (Sayigh, 2011: 76). The government's approach was not coercive but gradualist, aiming to create a moral, pious, and law-abiding society that broadly respects individual rights through self-monitoring, and improvement (Sayigh, 2011: 89).

The conciliation committees formed by the Hamas government were headed by religious scholars experienced in Islamic and customary law, and who had a close liaison with local community police (Sayigh, 2011: 77–78). The committees were necessary because Fatah's government had ordered employees in Gaza on its payroll to boycott the legal system in Gaza, threatening its collapse. They were also necessary because during the Second Intifada (2000–2005) local clans had assumed responsibility for the administration of justice in Gaza, after the PA's administrative capacity had been all but destroyed by Israel's efforts to quash the uprising. This resulted in the clans becoming alternate centres



of power in Gaza, challenging Hamas's capacity to establish its political authority.

The committees' principle roles were to weaken the authority of the clan's capricious form of justice, and to ensure the implementation of *shari'ah* in social arbitration (Sayigh, 2011: 79–80). Importantly, Hamas's government limited the committees' role, and their rulings had no official legal legitimacy. They wanted them to serve as informal arbitrators resolving community disputes, rather than acting as formal semi-judicial institutions (Brown, 2012a: 10–11). *Shari'ah* was used by the government to provide an unambiguous and more reliable form of community justice that was distinct from the fickle clan adjudication system that had been allowed to develop under Fatah's rule.

Hamas's government focused on the institutional capacity building of the justice system to ensure that key societal demands were met, and troublesome issues addressed, while ensuring that the system included an Islamic frame of reference. As Hamas's government managed to slowly increase its authority and institutional capacity in Gaza, the need for the committees gradually decreased. As the government modernised the dilapidated criminal and social justice infrastructure it allowed the criminal justice system to perform its role more effectively, further decreasing the need for such ad hoc forms of justice.

### DIPLOMATIC EXERTIONS

As well as implementing a domestic policy suite, Hamas also needed to develop a broader diplomatic strategy. With Israel's siege intending to ensure the collapse of its government, Hamas understood that it needed external patrons to recognise its government, ameliorate the siege, and support its efforts to confront Israeli occupation. Regional patrons are important because they can act as legitimacy reservoirs for Hamas to draw upon to enhance, and cement its political authority in Gaza through the patron's endorsement, and support of Hamas's political narrative, and agenda (Stinchcombe, 1968: 161).

However, this strategy was complicated by the fact that Hamas's election victory had created significant disquiet amongst the region's predominantly authoritarian Arab regimes. Hamas's victory had seen the electoral defeat of an incumbent Arab regime for the first time. It also saw the ascension to power of a Brotherhood-styled government creating further uneasiness (Brown, 2010: 375). Given the rapid censure of

Hamas by Israel, the US, and EU, many regimes were forced to re-calibrate their own geopolitical positions concerning the Palestinian/Israeli conflict (Caridi, 2012: 287).

In this uncertain, and increasingly unpredictable diplomatic environment, Hamas needed to craft a diplomatic strategy that demonstrated that it could negotiate, compromise, and co-operate with a wide array of diplomats, and external policy makers (Huang, 2016: 100). It became essential for Hamas to learn how to signal its diplomatic intentions, mitigate regional security concerns, create and maintain diplomatic relationships, and to communicate strategically with other diplomatic agents (Coggins, 2015: 99–100).

However, like Fatah, Hamas found that its strategy was hampered by the fact that it needed to persuade sceptical regional actors to take a sustained interest in a conflict outside of their own geopolitical, and occasionally ideological, rationales (Bob, 2005: 14). Overall, Hamas's diplomatic strategy became predicated on obtaining international recognition of its ability to govern Palestinians, create order, and administer laws, while continuing its armed resistance to Israeli occupation (Huang, 2016: 98). To adjust to this unfamiliar political environment, Hamas underwent another steep learning curve that included gradually modifying its political beliefs, and tactics because of the severe crises, frustrations, and dramatic changes in its diplomatic environment that it experienced (Bermeo, 1992: 274).

To provide it with time to become accustomed to its new diplomatic role, Hamas initially established close diplomatic ties with states who shared its aversion to Israel, particularly Iran, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Libya. While Hamas maintained cordial diplomatic relations with other key Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the Gulf states, these relationships were more diplomatically restrained (Hroub, 2010b: 93–95).

Nevertheless, Hamas found that its diplomatic objectives were often made subservient to those of key regional actors involved in the diplomatic 'cold war' between the so-called 'Moderate Front' of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and later Egypt, and the 'Axis of Resistance' comprising of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. These regional tensions were exacerbated by the social and political upheavals associated with the Arab Uprisings.

### *Hamas and Egypt—Unrequited Ambitions*

Hamas's relationship with Egypt has always been complicated, despite the brief tenure of Mohammed Morsi, and is emblematic of the diplomatic

challenges faced by Hamas in the post-Uprisings era. Despite Egypt being one of the Arab world's cultural and political powerhouses, its complex geopolitical calculations have resulted in successive regimes adopting an elastic, and occasionally detached, diplomatic position to the 'Palestinian Question' (Abu Amar, 2013: 59). Indeed, since the formation of the Israeli state in 1948, the 'Palestinian Question' has often provided the *cause célèbre* around which successive Egyptian leaders have attempted to galvanise the Arab world in their desire for regional hegemony. Contrarily, Egypt's geopolitical calculations concerning the 'Palestinian Question' are also increasingly shaped by the requirements of its US patron, namely: peace with Israel, unfettered access to the Suez Canal, and bi-lateral military co-operation. To maintain cordial diplomatic relations with Israel, Egypt is expected to confine Hamas on Israel's southern border, and contribute to Gaza's siege (Sharp, 2011: 13–14).

When Hamas first came to power in 2006, its relationship with Mubarak's regime reflected this diplomatic *status quo*. However, the Arab Uprisings in 2011 changed Hamas's diplomatic calculus irrevocably. The Uprisings unleashed previously dormant diplomatic divisions throughout the Arab world that were compounded by sectarianism, economic challenges, and ideological contests between modernity, tradition, and tribal affiliations (Amour, 2016: 1–2). The Uprisings brought about the unexpected rise of Islamism movements throughout the region, allowing Hamas the space to consider a more expansive, and proactive diplomatic strategy.

In February 2011, Mubarak's 30-year reign came to an abrupt, and unforeseen end. Within 18-months Egyptians elected Mohammed Morsi to the Presidency. Hamas hoped that Morsi's victory would see an end to Israel's siege, and Hamas gaining a powerful patron in its efforts to confront Israeli occupation (ICG, 2012a: 1–2). Despite this initial euphoria, Morsi's brief reign, and its aftermath, were replete with diplomatic frustrations, crises, and hostility rather than fraternity, providing valuable lessons for Hamas on the dangers of relying too heavily on just one patron.

Notwithstanding the MB affinity, Morsi's relationship with Hamas was filtered through a diplomatic prism, rather than an ideological one. Like his predecessors Morsi was cognisant of being drawn inadvertently into a diplomatic and/or military conflict with Israel by being too closely allied with Hamas, and other Palestinian factions. Soon after assuming the Presidency, Morsi addressed the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). While he castigated the UN for its inability to resolve the 'Palestinian Question', he reiterated that Egypt would remain a party

to the various international agreements that it had ratified previously (Documents and Source Material: B3, 2012: 170–171). In other words, Morsi retained Egypt's contrary diplomatic position of publicly supporting Palestinian self-determination efforts, while refusing to alter the diplomatic *status quo*, particularly concerning Egypt's security relationship with Israel, and its siege on Gaza.

During the 2012 war between Hamas and Israel, Morsi was keen to demonstrate his diplomatic support for Hamas. Morsi dispatched his PM to Gaza, and ensured that Gaza received sorely needed medical supplies through the Rafah Crossing. Simultaneously, Morsi recalled the Egyptian Ambassador to Israel, and hosted a conference on Gaza attended by the Turkish PM Erdogan, Hamas Chairman Khaled Meshaal, the Emir of Qatar, and the Tunisian Foreign Minister (ICG, 2012b: 13). Nevertheless, Egypt declined to provide Hamas with any substantive assistance beyond the diplomatic realm. The overarching goal of these manoeuvres was to keep Morsi's diplomatic options open without being constrained by any perceived bias towards Hamas, or towards Israel and the US (ICG, 2012b: 12–13). Like his predecessors, Morsi conducted a delicate balancing act between maintaining domestic support for Hamas's plight, and the broader 'Palestinian Question', while demonstrating to the US and Israel that Egypt would continue to ensure the security of Israel's southern border.

Hamas's political calculations changed dramatically again on 3 July 2013, when head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) General al-Sisi overthrew Morsi's government, and seized power. Almost immediately, the Egyptian military and police launched large-scale security operations arresting hundreds of MB members and leaders throughout Egypt (ICG, 2013: 5–7). The coup's effect on Hamas cannot be understated, with former senior political advisor, Ahmed Yousef observing, 'The repercussions of the overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi were like an earthquake on Hamas because the movement lost a strong ally in Egypt, which has served as a backbone.' (Abu Amer, 2015). The new regime associated Hamas with Morsi's Brotherhood government, and was determined to purge Egypt of Hamas's presence. Hamas activities in Egypt were banned, with Egyptian security officials seizing its offices and assets (Bar'el, 2014). Then in February 2015, an Egyptian court ruled that Hamas was a terrorist organisation. Despite Hamas professing its

innocence, it chose to remain quiet, hoping that eventually the Egyptian military would no longer perceive it as a threat (Isaacharoff, 2015).

Over the next two years, little changed in the tense dynamics of the Hamas/Egypt relationship. Egypt's military regime continued to view Hamas, with its Brotherhood antecedence, with intense suspicion. In late 2016, there were some superficial signs of Egyptian rapprochement, particularly concerning the potential increase in economic ties between Gaza and Egypt. However, these overtures included the Egyptian military attempting to manipulate Hamas's parlous economic situation by co-opting it to assist in Egyptian efforts to combat the emergence of militant Salafi-Jihadists groups in the Sinai (Eldar, 2017; Khoury & Associated Press, 2017). This situation placed Hamas in an invidious position. Should they refuse to accede to Egyptian demands, then the *status quo* comprising Israel's crippling siege, and Egyptian animosity and repression would continue unabated. Should Hamas agree to Egypt's demands then it would make Hamas an Egyptian proxy, exposing the extent of its political weakness. Hamas feared that this would place further pressure on its already depleted political authority in Gaza.

Understanding the import that Hamas places on placating Egypt's regime cast a fresh light on some of the other key tenets of the 2017 policy document. The other instructive aspect of the document in this context was Hamas announcing that it had severed all ties with the MB (al-Jazeera, 2017). Similar to its declaration concerning a truncated Palestinian state, the import of this announcement is more nuanced than may first appear. This is because Hamas is announcing organisational severance from the MB, not an ideological one. With Israel's siege continuing to erode its political authority in Gaza, coupled with ongoing Egyptian enmity, Hamas was desperate to cast itself as a non-threatening entity to Egypt's military regime.

### ARMED RESISTANCE

Hamas's armed resistance to Israeli occupation of the OPT is not only a key pillar of its DRS, but a core facet of its *raison d'être*. Nevertheless, having a DRS, with its emphasis on political resistance has enabled Hamas to alter the posture of its armed resistance from the strategic offensive to the strategic defensive. This means that Hamas uses its

armed resistance to bolster, support, and defend its political agenda, rather than using it to aggressively challenge Israeli occupation as it did in the 1990s, and early 2000s. The 2014 war between Hamas and Israel provides a good example of the mechanics of the DRS, and the synergy between Hamas's political and armed resistance identities.

### THE 2014 GAZA WAR

The war began on 8 July 2014 and lasted for 56 days before a ceasefire was agreed to. The war took place in the context of the April 2014 announcement of a Palestinian consensus government that would see Hamas withdraw completely from governing until PLC elections could be held later in 2014 (Kuttab, 2014). The announcement reflected Hamas's continued failure to ameliorate the effects of Israel's siege, and the deleterious effect this was having on its political authority (see Fig. 9.1). Compounding this was the parlous state of Hamas's budget, with officials forecasting a budgetary shortfall of approximately US \$699 million in 2014 (Shaban, 2014). This dire situation, coupled with flagging public support, led many within the movement to support a temporary withdrawal from government to revitalise Hamas's political fortunes (Abu Amer, 2014a).

Despite these continuing parlous conditions, the war rejuvenated Hamas's political fortunes significantly (United Nations, 2015: 6). As Fig. 9.1 illustrates, Hamas and CR both received significant boosts in their popularity after the war. Palestinians perceived Hamas as victorious, despite the excessive loss of life, and widespread destruction that left many Gazans homeless. The fact that Hamas had survived the Israeli onslaught demonstrated its apparent fortitude and forbearance, and was sufficient to thrust a politically chastened Hamas back into the forefront of Palestinian political resistance efforts against Israeli occupation.

Significantly, the war tilted the balance of power back towards Hamas, and away from Fatah (see Fig. 9.1). This enabled Hamas to transmute its perceived military victory into increased political authority in Gaza. In a poll conducted after the war, 76.3% of respondents believed that conditions in Gaza were either 'Bad' or 'Very Bad'. Despite this, Hamas PM Haniyeh held a commanding lead over Fatah's President Abbas as preferred President, 54.6–38.1%. When asked who won the war, 69.4% of respondents nominated Hamas, and the other resistance factions. Furthermore, 79.5% of respondents supported the continued launching of rockets from Gaza against Israel until its government lifted the siege (PCPSR Poll No. 53).

The boost in support for Hamas was chiefly the result of the war's asymmetry, and the losses inflicted upon Palestinian civilians, political institutions, and social infrastructure by the Israeli military. Seeking to take advantage of the situation, Hamas demanded that Fatah reverse key tenets of the 2014 Agreement that would allow Hamas to re-assert its political authority in Gaza. Hamas propagated a narrative that any new government should be a government of national consensus, not simply made up of Fatah representatives, and other technocrats. It also proposed that a national committee consisting of all factions in Gaza be set up immediately to oversee re-construction efforts, and the distribution of aid. This proposal mirrored calls from Palestinians appealing for a National Unity Government made up of leaders and politicians from all the major political factions (Abu Amer, 2014b; PCPSR Poll No. 53). Such was the extent of Hamas's reversal of political fortunes that in September 2014 Fatah announced that the elections promised as part of the consensus agreement had been postponed. While Fatah claimed that its government was concentrating its re-construction efforts, it was also clear that its electoral fortunes had waned significantly since the signing of the Agreement in April. So much so, that it did not dare risk a repeat of the 2006 election result (Winer, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The contents of Hamas's 2017 policy document are emblematic of a long process of political learning undertaken by Hamas since its formal entry into politics in 2006. Since that time, Hamas has had to face a series of crises, frustrations, and significant changes in its political environment. The document reflects an increasingly pragmatic outlook on the part of Hamas that can be tied to the experiences it has learnt since in government. It is here that having a DRS has been essential to Hamas's political perseverance. The DRS has enabled Hamas to re-conceptualise the mechanics, and operationalisation of its resistance to Israeli occupation, while bolstering its flagging political authority. The transformation of Hamas into a 'dual-status' movement through the inclusion of a political identity, has enabled it to adopt this more pragmatic, and incrementalist resistance strategy that is aligned to its current political situation.

The effects of Israel's siege have meant that cementing and buttressing its political authority in Gaza have become core goals of Hamas's government. Cognisant of its need to retain public support Hamas implemented a process of soft-Islamisation that allowed it to

bureaucratise and professionalise elements of the PA within an Islamic framework. One of the key observations to arise from the preceding analysis is the complex interplay that occurs between the Palestinian public and Hamas as the latter seeks to find the middle ground between its ideological precepts, and community expectations. This means that the public has come to play an increasingly integral role in shaping how Hamas governs.

The exigencies of Israel's siege have also resulted in Hamas quickly developing and implementing a diplomatic strategy. This strategy was again predicated on pragmatism, and having clear political goals such as the amelioration of the siege, supporting Hamas's political agenda, and resisting Israeli occupation. Despite its frustrating experiences with Egypt, Hamas knows that it needs regional benefactors to retain sufficient political authority in Gaza.

These political efforts are complimented by Hamas's armed resistance efforts. These are geared towards retaining Hamas's status as a viable actor in Palestinian politics, rather than directed at achieving anti-systemic or anti-democratic objectives. Using the DRS enables Hamas to transmute its 'resistance legitimacy' into political authority that had been steadily eroded by its inability to mitigate the effects of Israel's siege. This transmutation enables Hamas to remain a viable political actor.

The reconceptualization of Hamas's resistance to Israeli occupation of the OPT, and its determination to remain an influential actor in Palestinian politics is reflected in Hamas's gradual shift towards moderating its political stance. In this way, Hamas is able to present a fresh face to the international community as it continues to learn from its experiences in government.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu Amar, M. (2013). Egypt, Syria and the war on Gaza: A study on the Egyptian and Syrian foreign policy responses to the 2008/2009 Gaza War. *al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations*. [http://www.alzaytouna.net/english/books/Book\\_Egypt\\_Syria\\_Gaza-War\\_1-15.pdf](http://www.alzaytouna.net/english/books/Book_Egypt_Syria_Gaza-War_1-15.pdf).
- Abu Amer, A. (2014a, March 10). Hamas debates technocrat government in Gaza. *al-Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/gaza-hamas-government-polls-popularity.html>.
- Abu Amer, A. (2014b, September 3). Unity government at crossroads as Fatah and Hamas bicker. *al-Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/abbas-pa-hamas-fallout-ties-war-israel.html>.



- Abu Amer, A. (2015, May 21). Former Hamas official speaks out. *al-Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/hamas-war-gaza-ahmed-youssef-ismail-haniyeh-advisor.html>.
- Abu-Amr, Z. (1993). Hamas: A historical and political background. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 22(4), 5–19.
- Amour, P. (2016). Israel, the Arab Spring, and the unfolding regional order in the Middle East: A strategic assessment. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. doi:10.1080/13530194.2016.1185696.
- Ayyash, M. (2010). Hamas and the Israeli state: A ‘violent dialogue’. *European Journal of International Relations*, 16(1), 103–133.
- Bar’el, Z. (2014, March 5). Egypt turns it tentacles on Hamas. *Haaretz*. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.577980>.
- Bermeo, N. (1992). Democracy and the lessons of dictatorship. *Comparative Politics*, 24(3), 273–291.
- Berti, B. (2013). *Armed political organizations: From conflict to integration*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Bob, C. (2005). *The marketing of rebellion: Insurgents, media, and international activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, N. (2010). The Palestinian Authority. In M. P. Angrist (Ed.), *Politics and society in the contemporary Middle East*. Boulder: Reinner Publishing.
- Brown, N. (2012a). Gaza five years on: Hamas settles in. *The Carnegie Papers—Middle East, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June. [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/hamas\\_settles\\_in.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/hamas_settles_in.pdf).
- Brown, N. (2012b). *When victory is not an option: Islamist movements in Arab politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Brown, N., & Hamzawy, A. (2010). *Between religion and politics*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Buchanan, A. (2002). Political legitimacy and democracy. *Ethics*, 112(4), 689–719.
- Caridi, P. (2012). *Hamas: From resistance to government* (A. Teti, Trans.). New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Coggins, B. (2015). Rebel diplomacy: Theorizing violent non-state actors’ strategic use of talk. In A. Arjona, N. Kasfir, & Z. Mampilly (Eds.), *Rebel governance in civil war*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Documents and Source Material: B3. (2012). Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, address to the UN General Assembly, New York, 26 September 2012. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 42(2), 170–171.
- Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF-a). *Cairo Declaration (2005)*. Viewed 10 May 2017. [http://content.ecf.org.il/files/M00866\\_CairoDeclaration2005English.pdf](http://content.ecf.org.il/files/M00866_CairoDeclaration2005English.pdf).
- Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF-b). *Mecca Agreement (2007)*. Viewed 10 May 2017. [http://content.ecf.org.il/files/M00860\\_MeccaAgreement2007English.pdf](http://content.ecf.org.il/files/M00860_MeccaAgreement2007English.pdf).

- Eldar, S. (2017, January 30). 'Can Hamas' Haniyeh accept Egyptian demands? *al-Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/israel-egypt-gaza-strip-palestinians-hamas-jihad-sinai.html>.
- Elgindy, K. (2012). The Middle East Quartet: A post mortem (Analysis Paper No. 25), February. *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings*. [http://www.brookings.edu/~-/media/Research/Files/Papers/2012/1/02%20middle%20east%20elgindy/02\\_middle\\_east\\_elgindy\\_b.PDF](http://www.brookings.edu/~-/media/Research/Files/Papers/2012/1/02%20middle%20east%20elgindy/02_middle_east_elgindy_b.PDF).
- Grinberg, L. (2010). *Politics and violence in Israel/Palestine: Democracy versus military rule*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Guelke, A. (2000). Violence and electoral polarization in divided societies: Three cases in comparative perspective. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 12(3–4), 78–105.
- Hamas accepts Palestinian state with 1967 borders. (2017, May 2). *al-Jazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/hamas-accepts-palestinian-state-1967-borders-170501114309725.html>.
- Helbawy, K. (2010). The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Historical evolution and future prospects. In K. Hroub (Ed.), *Political Islam: Context versus ideology*. London: London Middle East Institute.
- Hroub, K. (2010a). Hamas: Conflating national liberation and socio-political change. In K. Hroub (Ed.), *Political Islam: Context versus ideology*. London: London Middle East Institute.
- Hroub, K. (2010b). *Hamas: A beginner's guide* (2nd Ed.). London: Pluto Press.
- Huang, R. (2016). Rebel diplomacy in civil war. *International Security*, 40(4), 89–126.
- Huntington, S. (1993). *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- ICG. (2011). *Radical Islam in Gaza* (Middle East Report No. 104), 29 March. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/104-radical-islam-in-gaza.aspx>.
- ICG. (2012a). *Light at the end of their tunnels? Hamas & The Arab Uprisings* (Middle East Report No. 129), 14 August. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/129-light-at-the-end-of-their-tunnels-hamas-and-the-arab-uprisings.aspx>.
- ICG. (2012b). *Israel and Hamas: Fire and ceasefire in a Middle East* (Middle East Report No. 133), 22 November. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/133-israel-and-hamas-fire-and-ceasefire-in-a-new-middle-east.aspx>.
- ICG. (2013). *Marching in circles: Egypt's dangerous second transition* (Middle East/North Africa Briefing No. 35), 7 August. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/egypt/b035-marching-in-circles-egypts-second-transition.aspx>.
- Indridason, I. (2008). Does terrorism influence domestic politics? Coalition formation and terrorist incidents. *Journal of Peace Research*, 45(2), 241–259.

- International Crisis Group (ICG). (2007). *After Mecca: Engaging Hamas* (Middle East Report No. 62), 28 February. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/062-after-mecca-engaging-hamas.aspx>.
- Isaacharoff, A. (2015, March 1). El-Sisi leading a Churchillian fight against Hamas. *The Times of Israel*. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/el-sisi-leading-a-churchillian-fight-against-hamas-terror/>.
- Kailitz, S. (2013). Classifying political regimes revisited: Legitimation and durability. *Democratization*, 20(1), 39–60.
- Karakatsanis, N. M. (2008). Political learning as a catalyst of moderation: Lessons from democratic consolidation in Greece. *Democratization*, 15(2), 386–409.
- Khoury, J., & Associated Press. (2017, January 23). Top Hamas leader visits Egypt for first time since 2013. *Haaretz*. <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/1.766996>.
- Kuttab, D. (2014, April 23). Does Hamas-Fatah reconciliation spell end for peace talks? *al-Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/fatah-hamas-reconciliation-merger-palestine-peace-talks.html>.
- Kydd, A., & Walter, B. (2002). Sabotaging the peace: The politics of extremist violence. *International Organization*, 56(2), 263–296.
- La Palombara, J., & Weiner, M. (2016). The origin and development of political parties. In J. La Palombara & M. Weiner (Eds.), *Political parties and political development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Marks, M. (2016). Did Egypt's coup teach Ennahda to cede power? *Project on Middle East Political Science*, 8–9 June. <https://pomeps.org/2016/07/22/did-egypts-coup-teach-ennahda-to-cede-power/>.
- Milton-Edwards, B., & Farrell, S. (2010). *Hamas: The Islamic resistance movement*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mishal, S., & Sela, A. (2006). *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, violence and coexistence* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Palestine Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR). <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/psrindex.html>.
- Pape, R. (2005). *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*. New York: Random House.
- Sánchez-Cuena, I. (2004). Party moderation and politicians' ideological rigidity. *Party Politics*, 10(3), 325–342.
- Sayigh, Y. (2010). Hamas rule in Gaza: Three years on. *Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University*, March. <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB41.pdf>.
- Sayigh, Y. (2011). “We serve the people”, Hamas policing in Gaza (Crown Paper No. 5), April. *Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University*. [www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/cp/CP5.pdf](http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/cp/CP5.pdf).

- Scott, J. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sen, S. (2015). Bringing back the Palestinian state: Hamas between government and resistance. *Middle East Critique*, 24(2), 211–225.
- Shaban, O. (2014, March 17). Hamas budget shows another tough year ahead for Gaza. *al-Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/contents/articles/originals/2014/03/hamas-gaza-budget-economy-finance-blockade.html>.
- Sharp, J. (2011). Egypt: The January 25 revolution and the implications for U.S. foreign policy, 11 February, RL33003. *Congressional Research Service*. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/157112.pdf>.
- Stinchcombe, A. (1968). *Constructing social theories*. San Francisco: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc.
- Strinberg, A., & Wörn, M. (2011). *Islamism: Religion, radicalization, and resistance*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tamimi, A. (2009). *Hamas: Unwritten chapters* (2nd ed.). London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.
- The Avalon Project. *The covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, 1988*. Viewed 10 May 2017. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp).
- Thomas, C. (2011). Why don't we talk about 'violence' in International Relations? *Review of International Studies*, 37(4), 1815–1836.
- United Nations. 2015. *Office of the High Commission for Human Rights*. Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry Established Pursuant to Human Right Council Resolution, June 15, A/HRC/29/52. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIGazaConflict/Pages/ReportCoIGaza.aspx>.
- United States Senate. (2006). *Palestinian Legislative Council Elections—Challenges of Hamas' Victory*. Staff trip report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, 109th Congress, Second Session, Senate Report 109-55, January. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CPRT-109SPRT26018/html/CPRT-109SPRT26018.htm>.
- Usher, G. (2006). The democratic resistance: Hamas, Fatah, and the Palestinian elections. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 35(3), 20–36.
- Weinberg, L., Pedahzur, A., & Perliger, A. (2009). *Political parties and terrorist groups* (2nd ed.). Oxon: Routledge.
- White, J. (2006). What is a political party? In R. S. Katz & William Crotty (Eds.), *Handbook of party politics*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd.
- Wickham, C. (2013). *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Winer, S. (2014, September 11). Palestinian elections postponed over war damage, PM says. *The Times of Israel*. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-elections-postponed-over-war-damage-pm-says>.

## Transformations and Prospects

*John L. Esposito, Lily Zubaidah Rahim and Naser  
Ghobadzadeh*

Nearly a decade after the 2011 ‘Arab Uprisings’, a mapping of the political landscape of the Muslim world would not provide a promising image of democratisation possibilities. Although elections have become an essential component of politics in almost every Muslim-majority country, few of these nations can claim to be consolidated or consolidating democracies. Additionally, radicalism and militant Islamism continue to dominate many parts of the Muslim world. Ironically, the Arab Uprisings have, if anything, led to dramatic political reversals and political instability rather than facilitating transitions to democracy. This suggests that many Muslim-majority states lack the requisite foundations and conditions for sustainable democratic transition. This dire political

---

J.L. Esposito  
Georgetown University, Washington D.C., USA

L.Z. Rahim (✉)  
University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

N. Ghobadzadeh  
Australian Catholic University, Sydney, Australia

situation lends support to the Huntingtonian argument that the problem lies in Islam and its supposed incompatibility with democracy. This line of argument advances a simplified understanding of Islamic political theology. Moreover, such generalisations fail to recognise the political, social, economic and theological diversity in the contemporary Muslim world. Simplified generalisations overlook major shifts in thinking that have transformed the political mosaic of the Muslim world in recent decades. Perhaps more importantly, the limited attention afforded to Islamic movements, Muslim ideologues, and the masses more broadly, has impeded an accurate reading of the complex political dynamics in the Muslim world today. The reality is that the extensive and widespread engagement of Muslim elites, scholars, movements, and the masses in the political arena has evoked an ongoing re-examination of both religious teachings and different ways of 'doing politics'. Islamists and their ideologues, as well as the masses in Muslim-majority countries, have learned valuable lessons from the intense engagement of religion in the political sphere.

Rather than offering an answer to the prolonged debate vis-à-vis the incompatibility of Islam and democracy, the primary goal of this book has been to problematise the aforementioned essentialist and simplistic analyses of the Muslim world. *The Politics of Islamism* has achieved its mission if it has effectively demonstrated the inherent political complexities among and within contemporary Islamic movements and parties. While scholarship has, to some degree, reached the consensus that there is no single Islam, there is a pressing need to further delineate the multiple 'Islams'. In an effort to challenge the boundaries of existing scholarship, our aim has been to demonstrate the plurality of political Islam—to emphasise the multiplicity of political Islams.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the spread of Islamism to different parts of the Muslim world, and despite the myriad geographical, sociocultural, and political differences among the local contexts in which Islamic groups had emerged, their common features had effectively brought them together under the single banner of political Islam. The widely held view was that all these movements: (a) share a utopian vision of an Islamic state; (b) seek to implement the Sharī'a to its fullest extent as the sole source of legislation; and (c) maintain that democracy and its corresponding set of political institutions, procedures, and principles have no place in their political lexicon. Their reliance on radical methods and violence to achieve political ends was thought

to point to another contentious commonality. In truth, however, one would be hard pressed to find two contemporary Islamic movements that share these precepts today. The degree of plurality and diversity among Islamic movements has become so pronounced that these differences are the primary sources of conflict and tension in the Muslim world. For example, while violence has become the defining feature of ISIS's modus operandi, many other Islamic movements have become champions of non-violent reform and electoral participation in their respective political contexts. Differences among Islamic movements exist not only from one country to the next but also within single nation-states. In either case, one can often observe disparate forms of political Islam, some engaged in peaceful interactions and others pursuing violent modes of rivalry. The fallout between different Islamic movements in a single country has, in some instances, played a decisive role in reshaping the political landscape. One such example was the 2013 Egyptian coup d'état, during which the sheikh of Al-Azhar and the leader of the Islamist al-Nour Party (Ḥizb al-Nūr) supported General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's military coup against the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, the role of *salaḥī* Islamisation in the fragmentation of the authoritarian governing and opposition coalitions in Malaysia offers yet another example of how secular and Islamist factions, emboldened by decades of state-led Islamisation, politicise Islam in the pursuit of political and electoral power—with dire consequences for cohesive nation-building in the multi-religious society.

In sum, political Islam in its singular form is incapable of representing and encompassing the collisions, incongruities, and discord among and within diverging Islamic movements and parties. It is for this reason that some scholars advocate abandoning the term 'Islamism' altogether (Alatas, 2010; Hanafi, 2010; Hussain, 2010; Rauf, 2010; Varisco, 2010). *The Politics of Islamism*, in addition to demonstrating the divergent strategies that Islamists employ, has sought to elaborate upon the transformation of ideologies and worldviews effected by Islamic ideologues. As such, the diverse political landscape in the Muslim world is closely linked to the theological transformations of Islamism. The universal form of political theology that represented the conceptual foundation of Islamism in the second half of the twentieth century attempted to transform the existing state of affairs. A hitherto unrivalled Islamic political theology envisaged a utopian Islamic society that, seemingly by dint of adhering to an Islamic ideology would solve Muslim problems and

ensure a better worldly life for all. This political theology also claimed that it would facilitate pious life, a critical prerequisite for the next-world. One could, however, argue that the potency of this theology was short-lived. Today, it claims only a marginal place in the Muslim world. Critical of the destabilising nature of the utopian Islamist vision, many ideologues and political leaders have abandoned it altogether. One such example is Rāshid al-Ghannūshī, who once advocated the establishment of an Islamic state. However, when al-Ghannūshī returned to Tunisia after more than two decades in exile, he distanced himself from the Islamic state paradigm and championed the civic state (al-Ghannūshī & Bouazza, 2011). In his political statements as well as his scholarly writings, al-Ghannūshī has insisted that his version of political Islam is reconcilable with the inclusive secular democratic state (al-Ghannūshī, 2000, 2013). As Larbi Sadiki observes in Chap. 3, Ennahda has become the leading engineers of democratisation in Tunisia. Meanwhile, the Islamist seizure of political power in Iran in 1979—while marking an historic victory—has left many Islamists disillusioned with the grim realities of the Islamic republic. In a departure from their utopian vision, these disillusioned Islamists are engaged in rich theological conversations aimed at revising their earlier understanding of political Islam. They endeavour to find various ways of reconciling Shīʿite teachings with a secular democratic form of governance.

These Islamic reform discourses and movements, however, are not confined to one or two Muslim-majority countries; rather, they represent a dynamic political and intellectual wave shifting across the Muslim world. This is manifested by the emergence of the *Wasatiyyah* (inclusive middle path) discourses, which variously makes reference to ‘new Islamists’, ‘post-fundamentalism’, ‘post-Islamism’, ‘beyond Islamism’, ‘religious secularity’, and ‘Muslim secular democracy’ (Baker, 2003; Bayat, 2007; Browsers & Kurzman, 2004; Burgat, 2003; Ghobadzadeh, 2013; Harub, 2010; Jahanbakhsh, 2003; Kian-Thiebaut, 1999; Mandaville, 2007; Rahim, 2013; Roy, 2004: 58–99; Volpi, 2011). These intellectual conceptualisations signify theoretical and practical endeavours which investigate the possibility of melding social justice, citizenship and human rights, gender equality, and democratic principles with Islamic teachings—within the framework of inclusive and secular democratic states.

Whilst contemplating the above, one should not overlook the competing trajectory marked by an extremely violent and destabilising



vision that has replaced the utopian vision for Islamic society with an apocalyptic ideology fuelled by violence. This militant ultra conservative version of political Islam has overshadowed other forms of Islamism, detracting attention from the diverging trajectories offered by twenty-first-century Islamists. More to the point, militant Islamists have formed a tacit coalition with assertive secularists in order—to use Ahmet Kuru’s phraseology—to push Wasatiyyah Islamists out of mainstream politics. The Wasatiyyah approach to Islamism is considered a threat to both secular authoritarianism and radical Islamism. For militant Islamists, the contributions of Wasatiyyah Islamists to mainstream politics are seen as a betrayal of Islam. Nonetheless, most Islamists have opted to pursue their political ambitions through democratic processes such as electoral procedures, despite pressure from both militant Islamists and assertive secularists. As has been elaborated in various chapters in the volume, many Islamists have managed to create spaces for themselves in the political milieus of their respective countries. Of course, this is not to say that they are all deeply committed democrats. Some Islamists are playing leading roles in the democratisation process, while others are engaged in coalition-building with secular and non-religious parties and movements. Others are institutionally embedded and engaged in coalition alliances with authoritarian states. Yet not all these endeavours would be met with firm endorsement from a democratic standpoint. They do, however, demonstrate the prevalence of pragmatism and rational calculation among Islamists. This is fundamentally at odds with the logic of fringe militant Islamists, for whom the status quo ought to be transformed in its entirety—leaving no space for participation in mainstream politics.

*The Politics of Islamism* neither offers clear predictions nor prescriptions regarding the possibilities of democratisation and/or authoritarianism in the Muslim world. The adoption of such an approach would necessitate thorough investigation of each possibility, which is beyond the scope of this volume. It would also entail the inclusion of multiple variables beyond religion, for religion and politics are not the only factors critical to resolving issues pertaining to cohesive and sustainable nation-building based on democracy and social justice. The key aim of this volume has instead been to highlight the complex diversity within Muslim movements and parties, and to explicate the internal struggles and contestations both within and between these movements and parties. The very existence of this diversity and plurality among Islamic movements, and their general willingness to partake in mainstream

politics, signals an important transformation in the Muslim world over recent decades. It shows that the Muslim world has gravitated from the simplistic focus on the compatibility or incompatibility of Islam and democracy. Islamic movements and parties are now adhering to and promoting multiple versions of political Islam, engaging in different forms of politics that may or may not ultimately prove to be compatible with democratisation. The most important and promising outcome of these divergent visions and trajectories is that extremist and militant Islamists have been relegated to a marginal fringe and to the periphery of the political landscape of the Muslim world.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- al-Ghannūshī, R. (2000). Secularism in the Arab Maghreb. In A. Tamimi & J. L. Esposito (Eds.), *Islam and secularism in the Middle East* (pp. 97–123). London: Hurst & Company.
- al-Ghannūshī, R. (2013). The state and religion in the fundamentals of Islam and contemporary interpretation. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 6(2), 164–171. doi :[10.1080/17550912.2013.783184](https://doi.org/10.1080/17550912.2013.783184).
- al-Ghannūshī, R., & Bouazza, B. (2011, January 03). AP Interview: Ghanouchi says ‘I’m no Khomeini’. *The Guardian*.
- Alatas, S. F. (2010). Rejecting Islamism and the need for concepts from within the Islamic tradition. In R. C. Martin & A. Barzegar (Eds.), *Islamism: Contested perspectives on political Islam* (pp. 87–92). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Baker, R. W. (2003). *Islam without fear: Egypt and the new Islamists*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bayat, A. (2007). *Making Islam democratic: Social movements and the post-Islamist turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Browers, M., & Kurzman, C. (2004). *An Islamic reformation?* Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Burgat, F. (2003). *Face to face with political Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Ghobadzadeh, N. (2013). Religious secularity: A vision for revisionist political Islam. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 39(10), 1005–1027.
- Hanafi, H. (2010). Islamism: Whose debate is it? In R. C. Martin & A. Barzegar (Eds.), *Islamism: Contested perspectives on political Islam* (pp. 63–66). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Harub, K. (2010). *Political Islam: Context versus ideology*. London: Saqi.
- Hussain, A. (2010). Terminological problems for Muslim lives. In R. C. Martin & A. Barzegar (Eds.), *Islamism: Contested perspectives on political Islam* (pp. 57–62). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Jahanbakhsh, F. (2003). Religious and political discourse in Iran: Moving toward post-fundamentalism. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 9, 243–254.
- Kian-Thiebaut, A. (1999). Political and social transformations in post-Islamist Iran. *Middle East Report* (212), 15.
- Mandaville, P. G. (2007). *Global political Islam*. New York: Routledge.
- Rahim, L. Z. (2013). *Muslim secular democracy: Voices from within*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rauf, F. A. (2010). Why Islamism should be renamed. In R. C. Martin & A. Barzegar (Eds.), *Islamism: Contested perspectives on political Islam* (pp. 116–124). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Roy, O. (2004). *Globalised Islam: The search for a new Ummah*. London: Hurst.
- Varisco, D. M. (2010). Inventing Islamism: The violence of rhetoric. In R. C. Martin & A. Barzegar (Eds.), *Islamism: Contested perspectives on political Islam* (pp. 33–50). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Volpi, F. (2011). *Political Islam: A critical reader*. London: Routledge.

# INDEX

## A

- Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud, [164](#), [166](#),  
[167](#), [169](#), [171](#), [172](#)
- Akhbārī school, [66](#), [78](#). *See also*  
Scripturalist
- Ākhūnd-Khurāsānī, [48–52](#), [62](#), [65–79](#)  
constitutionalism, [49](#), [65](#), [68](#), [70–78](#)  
discourse, [75](#), [78](#), [79](#)  
Islamic state and, [73](#), [74](#), [76](#), [77](#)  
justice and, [76](#), [77](#)  
method, [66](#), [67](#), [70](#)  
politico-religious thought, [67](#),  
[70–74](#), [79](#)  
*Shi'ite* system of belief and, [78](#)  
*Sistānī* and, [79](#)  
theological cannons, [72](#), [75](#), [76](#), [78](#)  
writings, [65](#), [72](#), [73](#), [75](#)
- AKP  
authoritarianism, [145](#), [150](#), [151](#)  
bill to amend constitution, [152](#)  
case study, [19](#)  
coalitions and, [135](#), [136](#)  
compromise and consensus, [129](#)  
conservative democratic ideology,  
[136](#)  
conservative religious ideology, [146](#)
- Davutoglu and, [142](#), [143](#)  
democratic governance and, [131](#)  
democratic legitimacy and, [130](#),  
[131](#), [140](#)  
de-moderation, [132](#), [150](#)  
discipline and, [138](#), [141](#), [142](#)  
election results, [142](#), [143](#)  
Erdogan and, [130](#), [131](#), [136–143](#),  
[145](#), [148](#), [150–153](#)  
EU and, [131](#), [147](#), [148](#)  
human rights and, [132](#), [135](#)  
inevitability of conflict and, [136](#)  
intra-party democracy, [136–138](#)  
Islamist ideology and, [19](#), [132](#), [150](#)  
Kemalist Westernization, [135](#), [141](#),  
[148](#)  
legitimacy deficit, [148](#)  
liberal democratic transformation,  
[135](#)  
moderation, [19](#), [132](#), [135](#), [136](#), [150](#)  
narrative, [146](#), [147](#)  
nativist democracy, [131](#), [132](#)  
new Islamism, [128](#), [135](#)  
new Turkey, [139](#)  
non-Western civilization, [147](#)  
origins, [133](#)

pluralist society and, 132  
 polarizing approach, 139  
 political discourse, 128, 139, 149, 150  
 political identity, 127, 135, 137, 142, 145, 150  
 political programme, 138  
 politics, 130, 132  
 proto-democratic political force, 135  
 secular establishment and, 129, 134, 138  
 secular opposition and, 144  
 the Arab Spring and, 148–150  
 zero-sum approach, 145, 146  
 Al-Azhar, 25, 49, 269  
 Al-Banna, Hassan, 8, 89, 97–99, 106, 109, 117, 245  
 Algeria, 95  
 Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq, 48, 49  
 Al Qaeda, 8, 9, 88–90, 190, 253  
*Al-siyasi*, 108, 115  
 Al-Turabi, Hassan, 106, 227  
*Amr bi ma ‘rūf wa naby ‘az munkar*, 18, 72  
*Ansari* theological school, 67  
 Anti-constitutionalist, 50, 63, 71, 74, 78  
 Anti-constitutionalist camp, 71  
 Anti-corruption, 204  
 Anti-system persona, 245  
 Apostasy, 26, 195, 196  
 Arab Cold War, 3  
 Arab Islamists, 149  
 Arab Spring, 95, 100, 117, 148, 149, 151, 217  
 Arab Uprising, 4, 6, 12, 15, 47, 149, 256, 257, 267  
 Armed resistance, 244, 245, 249, 250, 259, 260, 262  
 Assembly of Experts, 160, 161  
 Atatürkist, 93

Authoritarian establishment, 138, 150  
 Authoritarian governing, 269  
 Authoritarianism, 65, 151, 271  
 Authoritarian rule, 182  
 Authoritarian secular nationalism, 99  
 Authoritarian states, 212, 271  
 Authority  
   divine, 55, 69, 161, 162, 170;  
     political, 52, 54–56, 73  
   politico-religious, 52  
   religious, 2, 96, 171, 186  
   sacred, 70, 96  
   ultimate, 161  
 Axis of Resistance, 256

## B

Bahrain, 9, 53  
 Barisan Nasional (BN), 20, 180, 192, 198–202, 206–209, 211  
 Basic human rights, 187  
 Bazargan, Mehdi, 50  
 Ben Ali, Zine El Abidine, 115, 226  
 Blasphemy, 197  
 Bourguiba, 93, 108, 115, 119  
 Boycott, 218, 227, 229–231  
 Brown, Nathan, 94, 133, 222, 228, 245, 246, 255  
*Bumiputera*, 198–201  
*Bumiputra*-ism, 198  
 Bureaucracy, 94, 151, 152, 180, 181, 184, 185, 187, 190, 193–197, 208, 211

## C

Cairo Accord, 244  
 Caliphate, 32, 48, 73, 90  
 Capitalism, 5, 109, 118  
 Case studies, 4, 6, 12, 13, 16, 19, 88  
 Ceasefire, 243, 260  
 Censorship, 160, 194, 228

- Centralization, 112, 139  
 Christian, 34, 37, 193, 211  
 Citizenship, 4, 184, 187, 270  
 Citizenship rights, 7, 10, 16, 34, 183, 191, 211, 212  
 Civic habituation, 18, 105, 106, 110–112  
 Civic programmatic adaptation, 112  
 Civic reasoning, 185–189, 200  
 Civic state, 109, 270  
 Civil courts, 195, 210  
 Civilization, 3, 97, 98, 128, 130, 147, 148  
 Civil society, 2, 14, 113, 140, 152, 164, 179, 182, 219  
 Clergy, 17, 19, 20, 30, 39, 55, 62, 171  
 Cleric, 11, 12, 25, 27, 151, 161, 171, 172, 180, 186, 188. *See also Ulama*  
 Clericalism, 58  
 Clientalist distribution, 139  
 Coalition government, 20, 132, 133, 143, 196, 198, 211, 249, 251  
 Collective consensus decision-making method, 70  
 Colonialism, 89, 97, 99, 118, 149, 246  
 Commanding good and forbidding evil, 31, 34  
 Conflict, 3, 9, 27, 41, 54, 58, 75, 136, 141, 163, 235, 246  
 Conservatism, 245  
 Constitutionalism, 49, 58, 61, 63–65, 68, 70–78  
 Constitutionalists, 60, 79  
 Constitutional parliamentarism, 62  
 Constitutional Revolution, 17, 50, 51  
 Construction, 26, 105, 139, 169, 186  
 Consultation, 29, 51, 224, 231. *See also Shūrā*
- Corruption, 21, 37, 74, 75, 130, 151, 191, 198, 200, 202–205, 212  
 Criminal justice system, 254, 255  
 Cross-ideological coalition, 14  
 Cultural dynamism, 102  
 Cultural imaginary, 101, 102
- D**  
*Da'ish*, 88, 89  
*Dawa*, 190  
*Da'wa*, 246  
*Da'wah*, 93, 109  
*Dawlah madaniyyah*, 109  
 Decentralization, 114  
 Decision-making  
   institution, 29, 113, 229, 244, 249  
   internal, 112, 113, 231, 234, 235  
   process, 16, 29, 100, 113, 231, 235, 244, 246  
   public, 16, 30, 31, 35, 38, 39, 42, 43, 70, 100, 244, 246, 249  
 Demilitarization, 144, 151  
 Democracy, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13–15, 17–20, 23, 24, 28, 29–31, 33–35, 39, 40, 42–44, 48–50, 58, 63, 79, 88–91, 97, 100–104, 106, 111–116, 118, 119, 127–129, 131, 132, 135–138, 140, 142, 144–147, 149–151, 153, 159, 160, 163, 164, 174, 175, 180, 181, 196, 218, 221–224, 232, 267, 268, 270–272  
   consolidated or consolidating, 267  
   definition, 43, 222  
   divisive, 196  
   electoral, 3, 5, 6, 14, 15, 19, 20, 49, 114, 115, 129, 131, 132, 136, 142, 144, 153, 160, 163, 174, 223, 271  
   essence of, 17, 28, 44, 90, 160, 175  
   exporting of, 225

- functions, 13, 104, 106, 113, 138, 222, 223  
 inclusive secular, 5, 6, 79, 270  
 internal, 19, 20, 104, 112, 113, 114, 116, 132, 142, 146, 218, 222–224, 232  
 intra-party, 6, 14, 114, 136–138, 151  
 Islamic, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 17–20, 23, 24, 31, 33–35, 42, 43, 48–50, 58, 63, 79, 80, 90, 97, 106, 111, 113, 115, 119, 129, 132, 135, 138, 144–147, 149, 150, 159, 163, 164, 174, 175, 180, 181, 196, 224, 268, 270–272  
 liberal, 3, 13, 111, 129, 132, 135, 144, 145, 147, 164, 181, 196  
 multi-party, 224  
 narrow understanding, 146  
 partial, 145  
 practices and principles, 218, 221–223  
 procedural aspects of, 160  
 questions, 5, 15, 19, 24, 31, 33, 43, 119, 136, 137, 145, 159, 175, 181, 221, 218, 221–225  
 secular, 5, 6, 12–14, 20, 48, 49, 79, 182, 183, 184, 209, 210, 212, 270  
 set of political institutions and, 268  
 transition to, 13, 15, 100, 110, 267  
 Turkey electoral, 144  
 Western, 50, 135, 147, 149, 164; values, 50, 135, 147, 164  
 Democratic accountability, 141  
 Democratic institutions, 49, 140, 151  
 Democratic knowledge, 18, 100–105  
 Democratic learning, 18, 20, 79, 87, 100, 105, 217, 218, 228  
 curve, 79, 87, 105  
 Democratic legitimacy, 112, 130, 131, 140  
 Democratic norms, 17, 68, 132, 135, 140, 144, 148, 222, 223  
 Democratic practice over principle, 232  
 Democratic principle of difference, 235  
 Democratic reform, 20, 108, 114, 129, 136, 137, 144, 218, 228, 235, 236  
 Democratization, 2, 100, 113, 114, 116, 129, 137, 144–147, 150, 151, 218, 222, 223, 232, 267, 272  
 factionalization and, 114, 116, 222  
 institutionalization of, 150  
 internal, 112–114, 146, 218, 222, 223, 232  
 in Tunisia, 2, 270  
 process, 100, 113, 129, 150, 222, 223, 271  
 rhetoric, 145  
 Turkey's, 129, 144–147  
 Democratizing reforms, 112, 114–116  
 Democrats, 19, 113, 131, 149, 150, 271  
 De-moderation, 127, 132, 150  
 Demonstrations, 9, 192, 226, 227  
 Despotism, 41, 60, 68  
 Determinism, 99  
*Din wa dawlah*, 106, 117  
 Discourse  
 Akhund-Khurasani, 75, 78, 79  
 authoritarian Islamists, 10  
 between Israel and Hamas, 250  
 beyond Islamism, 270  
*bumiputera* rights, 200  
 civilizational, 128, 139, 149, 150  
 democratic, 5, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 57, 78, 79, 88, 137, 139, 141, 145, 147–150, 218, 221, 270  
 democratization, 137, 145, 147, 150

- Eastern, 93, 148, 149  
 Ennahda's, 5, 15, 88, 109, 115, 119, 270  
 Islamic reform, 270  
 Islamist, 5, 7, 11, 15, 16, 109, 119, 128, 134, 137, 147–150, 221, 223, 270  
 justice, 5, 7, 10, 11, 16, 36, 97, 109, 137, 141, 223, 250, 270  
 Muslim secular democracy, 270  
 new, 7, 79, 97, 99, 115, 128, 139, 200, 270  
 new Islamists, 270  
 our civilization, 147, 148  
 political, 5, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 21, 36, 38, 57, 75, 78, 79, 88, 90, 92, 93, 99, 109, 115, 119, 128, 134, 137, 139, 145, 147, 150, 200, 218, 221, 223, 250, 270  
 politico-religious, 78, 79  
 post-fundamentalism, 270  
 practice and principle, 218, 221  
 pro-democratic, 78, 79  
 Qutb's, 97, 99, 109  
 religiously informed, 11, 92  
 transnational militant groups, 10  
*Wassatiyyah*, 270  
 Western, 75, 90, 92, 93, 147–150, 223  
 Divine authority, 69, 73, 161, 162, 170  
 Divine sovereignty, 6, 19, 20, 53, 160, 161, 165, 170, 172, 175, 189, 253  
 Dual resistance strategy (DRS), 6, 21, 245, 247–262
- E**
- Economic recovery, 169  
 Egypt, 2, 3, 7–9, 94, 105, 110, 117–119, 148, 150, 198, 226, 256–259, 262  
 Egyptian, 3, 13, 14, 94, 110, 117, 139, 150, 191, 245, 246, 257–259, 269  
 Elections  
   boycott, 160, 163, 218, 227, 228  
   fraudulent, 227  
   general, 142, 198, 206, 207, 211, 218, 219, 228–230, 254  
   national, 3, 4, 9, 19, 20, 128, 161, 163, 169, 174, 232, 246, 250, 261  
   parliamentary, 4, 110, 142, 153, 162, 187, 219, 223, 228  
   presidential, 142, 143, 153, 162, 163, 165, 166, 168, 169  
   tokenistic, 163  
   transparent, 200, 223  
 Electoral democracy, 5, 144, 153, 163  
 Electoral game-changers, 201  
 Electoral participation, 160, 165, 174, 269  
 Electoral process, 4, 136, 165, 212, 227–230  
*Ennahda*, 2, 5, 6, 12, 14, 15, 18, 87–89, 95, 105, 106, 108–116, 119, 120, 222, 270  
   alliance-building approach, 15  
   *al-mutaghayyir*, 109  
   *al-thabit*, 109  
   democratic society and, 18, 120  
   fundamentals, 89, 95, 105, 110, 111, 115, 119, 270  
   in Tunisia, 2, 5, 12, 14, 15, 88, 89, 95, 106, 108–112, 114–116, 119, 222, 270  
   Islamism, 6, 15, 18, 87–89, 95, 105, 108, 109, 111, 115, 119, 120, 270  
   leadership, 14, 15, 95, 105, 111, 114, 116  
   learning curve, 87, 105, 116  
   members, 110–114, 119  
   normalization of, 116



- paradigms of Islamism, 120  
 party, 6, 12, 14, 15, 18, 89, 108–116  
 refashion, 109  
 sympathizers, 119  
 Tunisia's leading party, 114
- Equality, 16, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31, 36–39, 42, 43, 49, 63, 99, 168, 183, 184, 187, 191, 197, 200, 224, 231, 270  
 gender, 25, 38, 39, 43, 184, 187, 191, 197, 198, 270  
 legal, 25, 36–39, 42, 184  
 political, 16, 24, 29–31, 36–39, 42, 43, 49, 63, 99, 184, 187, 200, 231, 270
- Erdogan, Recep Tayyip, 9, 14, 130, 131, 132, 133–153, 181, 258
- Espósito, John, 4, 8, 23, 87, 88, 91, 107, 221
- Essentialist approach, 198, 199
- Ethnic minorities, 198, 199, 206
- Ethno-nationalism, 195, 202, 206, 211  
 state-led, 202, 211  
 UMNO, 180, 195, 202, 206, 211
- Ethno-nationalists, 147, 180, 196, 198, 199, 201, 202, 206, 207
- Euro-American models, 117
- European Union (EU), 93, 129, 131, 135, 147, 148, 151, 173, 250, 256
- Exceptionalism, 89, 180
- Extremism, 48, 91, 95, 168, 180
- F**
- Factionalization, 116
- Fadlallah, Mohammad, 106
- Fatah, 21, 244, 245, 246, 248, 249, 251–257, 260, 261  
 controlled government, 66, 253  
 hegemony, 248, 257  
 reverse key tenets, 253, 261
- Fatwā/Fatwas*, 53, 54, 66, 68, 70, 170, 173, 184, 192–194, 197
- Feminism, 191, 192
- Fethullah Gulen, 131, 151
- Fiqh*, 25, 162, 194, 210
- Fiqh al-maṣlaḥah*, 162
- Firewall hypothesis, 5
- First Intifada, 245
- Fisād*, 74
- Fitna*, 14, 74
- Fitnah*, 191
- Foundationalist, 88, 254
- Framework  
 hybrid legal, 16, 254  
 inclusion-moderation theoretical, 11, 16  
 Islamic, 5, 11, 17, 49, 68, 79, 109, 224, 262  
*maqasidi*, 109
- France, 94, 148, 164
- Freedom, 5, 10, 23–27, 33, 39, 43, 48, 49, 63, 68, 94, 107, 110, 128, 132, 148, 152, 181, 183, 192, 195, 253
- Freedom and Justice Party, 110
- Fundamentalism, 71, 89, 90–92, 94–97, 119, 270
- Fundamentalists, 8, 71, 89
- G**
- Gallop, 12
- Gamal Abdul Nasser, 226
- Gaza, 243, 249–255, 257–262
- Gerrymandering, 199, 201
- Ghalibaf, Mohammad, 170
- Ghannouchi, Rachid, 113, 115
- Globalization, 102, 103, 134
- Global Movement of Muslim Moderates, 180

- God-given right, 160, 174  
 Governance, 5, 12–13, 15, 17, 29, 32, 51, 73, 74, 106, 129, 179, 185, 186, 191, 198–201, 208, 209, 222, 228–230, 233, 245, 253, 270  
   authoritarian, 11, 20, 183, 212, 269  
   consociational system, 199  
   decentralized, 51  
   democratic form, 17, 270  
   effective, 5, 208, 209  
   institutional channels, 229  
   institutions, 228  
   just, 12  
   Morsi's style, 13  
   processes, 222  
   programme for, 186  
   public policy and, 186  
   secular democratic form of, 270  
   structures, 222, 233, 245  
 Government  
   arbitrariness, 152  
   consultative system of, 223  
   just, 53, 76, 77, 174  
   Palestinian consensus, 260  
   representational, 223  
   secular-oriented, 13  
 Group of 25 (G25), 182, 193, 210  
 Guardian Council, 19, 161–164, 168, 175
- H**
- Habituation, 18, 105, 106, 110–112  
*Hadith/Hadīths*, 11, 17, 56, 66–68, 70, 72, 78, 165, 188, 194, 206  
*Hakamiyya*, 223  
 Hamas, 7, 21, 220, 221, 243–262  
*Hanbali* jurisprudence, 191  
*Harakah*, 108  
*Harām*, 53, 54, 71, 74, 171  
 Hashemi Rafsanjani, 169  
 Hashemite policy, 220  
 Headscarf, 128, 134, 144, 189  
 Heresy, 71, 78, 118  
 Hezbollah, 247, 256  
 Hidden Imam, 53, 64, 65, 70, 71, 73, 74, 76, 77  
*Hisbīyya*, 64, 70  
*Hudūd*, 20, 180, 181, 184, 198, 199, 206–208, 210  
   bill, 208–211  
   laws, 184, 198, 207  
 Huntington, Samuel, 248, 268
- I**
- Identity  
   autonomous, 142  
   cultural, 93, 188, 189  
   dual political and military, 247  
   Hamas's political and armed resistance, 260  
   Islamic, 128, 129, 134, 135, 138, 141, 145–147; social, 134  
   Islamist, 4, 136  
   Malay cultural, 188  
   Muslim, 118  
   political, 93, 137, 150, 247, 261  
   politics, 109, 115  
   social, 101  
   Tunisia's Islamic, 108  
   Tunisia's political, 109  
 Ideological commonality, 246  
 Ideological flexibility, 135, 136, 254  
 Ideological moderation, 135, 136  
 Ideologies, 10, 30, 48, 89, 106, 117, 118, 268–270  
 Ideology  
   identity and, 234  
   Islamic, 269  
   Islamist, 89, 132, 150, 244; AKP's, 19, 132  
   revolutionary, 170

- Ijtihād*, 17, 28, 66–69, 90, 92, 185, 186
- Ijtihad* methods, 51
- Ikhwani*, 115
- Imaginary, 101
- Imagined community, 221
- Imamate, 53
- Imāmī, 52
- Imperialism, 103
- Inclusion-moderation hypothesis, 6
- Inclusion moderation theory, 19
- Inclusiveness, 112
- Inclusive secular democratic state, 270
- Independent Palestinian state, 20
- Individualism, 222
- Industrialization, 103
- Infallible Imams, 72
- Informal arbitrators, 255
- Institutionalization of difference, 232–234
- Instrumentalization, 148
- Intellectuals, 6, 15, 17, 26, 60–62, 79, 135, 147, 186, 189, 197, 209
- Interactive cross-cultural reflexive process, 18
- Internal reform summit, 233
- Interpretative modernism, 2
- Intizār*, 53
- Intra-party debate, 14
- Iran, 3, 4, 9, 12, 17–19, 50, 51, 53, 55, 57–60, 65, 78, 159, 161
  - elections, 165
  - nuclear programme, 170
  - parliamentarism, 17
  - politics, 166, 169
- Iranian Revolution, 207
- Iran-Iraq War, 169, 172
- Iraq, 3, 9, 49, 53, 57, 58, 60, 79, 89
- Iraqi politics, 58
- ISIS, 10, 48, 269
- Islam
  - all-encompassing, 8, 67, 71
  - Arabization, 189
  - civic engagement and, 108, 111, 116
  - constructivist nature of, 90
  - cultural-spiritual, 93
  - daily lived, 96
  - democracy and, 15, 18, 89, 128, 159, 268
  - democratic, 164
  - demonizing, 47
  - deployment of, 118
  - enemies of, 192
  - framework of, 224
  - governance and, 11
  - history of, 11
  - homeland of, 17, 65, 72, 73
  - incompatibility with democracy and, 268
  - interpretations, 197
  - jihadi interpretations, 193
  - leadership and, 117
  - liberal, 196
  - maximalist understanding of, 67
  - moderate, 181
  - modern, 93
  - multiple, 96
  - myths, 1
  - national religion, 183, 185, 201
  - neo-political, 106
  - performance-based, 189
  - polarization of, 5
  - political, 2, 89–91, 93–95, 106, 107, 119
  - political identity and, 93
  - politics and, 119
  - primacy of, 117, 249
  - promote, 201
  - purifying, 190
  - radical, 93
  - reform of, 99
  - resurgence, 147
  - role, 184

- Salafî*, 189, 192, 194  
 status, 201  
 sunni, 189, 194  
*telos*, 117  
 traditional printed, 95  
 trans-historical version, 48  
 transnational, 95
- Islamic Action Front (IAF), 219, 233  
 Islamic centralists, 229  
 Islamic concepts of justice, 10  
 Islamic constituency, 144  
 Islamic jihad, 94  
 Islamic jurisprudence, 210  
 Islamic militancy, 180  
 Islamic principles, 162, 170, 174  
 Islamic radicalism, 91  
 Islamic Renaissance Front (IRF), 179, 197, 210  
 Islamic republic, 18–20, 171, 270  
 Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), 50, 159–167, 171–174  
 Islamic resurgence, 87  
 Islamic Revolution, 172  
 Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), 162  
 Islamic scriptures, 11, 35, 63, 71  
 Islamic social agenda, 164  
 Islamic State (IS), 73, 74, 77, 99, 161–163, 181–185, 190, 196, 207, 246, 270  
   ideal, 11  
   Iraq, 49  
   Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), 89  
   mythical, 13  
   paradigm, 270  
 Islamic teachings, 12, 16, 17, 23, 36, 37, 43, 48, 50, 62, 70, 77, 79, 159, 270  
 Islamic Tendency Movement, 115  
 Islamic tradition, 78  
 Islamic values, 12, 171  
 Islamisation, 18, 202, 254  
 authoritarian *Salafî*, 211  
 comprehensive, 211  
 in Pakistan, 207  
*Salafî*, 179, 182, 183, 212  
 soft, 252–254, 261  
 state-led, 182, 269; *Salafî*, 211
- Islamism, 87, 91, 93–95, 107, 108, 115, 118  
 Al-Banna's, 117  
 brand of, 120  
 civic, 108  
 conservative, 180  
 democracy and, 87  
 divergent forms, 9  
 Ennahda's, 120  
 forms of, 271  
 jihadi, 4  
 local matrices, 1  
 militant, 4, 10, 267  
 moderate, 119  
 Morocco's, 108  
 new, 120  
 radical, 48, 79, 271  
 retreat, 111  
*Salafî*, 4–7  
 soft, 18  
 spread, 268  
 theological transformations, 269  
 Turkish, 133, 135  
 versions of, 8
- Islamist/Islamists  
   agenda, 2  
   authoritarianism, 181  
   conservative, 2, 184, 194, 211  
   disillusioned, 18, 270  
   diversity, 2  
   elites, 223  
   ideals, 113  
   identity, 4  
   identity politics and, 13, 115, 231  
   ideologies, 10

- ideologues and, 48, 89, 118, 268, 269
- jihādi, 4, 5, 9, 15
- leadership, 7
- leadership Jordan, 229
- members, 152
- militant, 190, 271
- moderate, 2
- movements, 133, 222
- nationalist, 2
- National Outlook Movement, 128
- non-militant, 4
- outbidding, 198
- paradigm, 3
- participatory, 4–6, 12–14
- parties, 116
- political learning, 6
- political moderation, 6
- political roles, 222
- politics, 221
- project, 130
- reformist, 71
- roots, 14
- Salafī, 3, 4, 181, 196
- scholars, 10
- social activism, 9
- state ideal, 183
- strategies, 269
- strategic adaptation, 16
- theological transformation of, 10, 269
- Tunisia's, 105–107, 110
- Turkish, 133, 134
- wassatiyyah*, 271
- Islamization, 99, 118, 144
- Islams multiple, 119, 268
- Ismā'īlis*, 52
- Israel, 228, 244–246, 248, 251, 253, 258
- Israeli occupation, 21, 244, 245, 248, 249, 255, 257, 256, 259, 261, 262
- Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 163
- Israeli state, 246, 249, 250, 257
- Ithnā 'ashari*, 52
- J**
- Ja'afari Shi'a*, 52
- Jahiliyya*, 188
- Jahiliyyah*, 98, 99, 103
- Jamaah Islamyah, 94, 190
- Jews, 34, 37, 97
- Jihād, 9, 26, 63, 90, 92, 94, 95, 98, 110
- Jihādi, 3, 4, 5, 9, 15, 190, 193
- Jihadi militancy, 190
- Jordan, 2, 4, 9, 14, 20, 119, 198, 217–220, 226–229, 232–236
- Jordanian politics, 220
- Jordan's uprising, 218, 226–227, 236
- Jurisprudence, 17, 39, 52, 65–69, 73, 160, 162, 191, 194, 210
- Jurist, 17, 25, 26, 38, 39, 50, 51, 53–57, 59, 60, 64–67, 70–73, 76, 161, 191, 207
- Justice, 5, 7, 9–11, 16, 17, 23, 25, 36, 42, 56, 59, 61, 72, 76, 77, 89, 97, 104, 106, 108–110, 113, 117, 118, 127, 137, 141, 169, 174, 182, 193, 195, 205, 207, 223, 224, 250, 254, 255, 270, 271
- Justice and Development Party, 9, 108, 127
- K**
- Kadivar, Mohsen, 11, 12, 15–17, 19, 27–29, 31, 37, 38, 42, 55, 63, 65, 70, 73–78
- Kafirs*, 189
- Karoubi, Mehdi, 165
- Kemalism, 149

- Kemalist authoritarianism, 151  
 Kemalist center, 134  
 Kemalist legacy, 146  
 Kemalist Westernization, 134, 135, 141, 146, 148  
 Ketuanan Melayu, 196  
 Key democratic political activities, 247  
 Key democratic tenets, 246  
 Khamenei, Ayatollah Ali, 161–163, 166, 167, 170, 171, 173, 174  
*Khatam*, 71  
 Khatami, Mohammad, 164, 165, 168, 169  
 Khomeini, Ayatollah, 8, 49, 53, 55–58, 63, 64, 161, 162, 164, 170, 172  
 Knowledge  
   local system of, 18, 100  
   practical, 106  
   primacy of, 106  
   *Salafî* religious, 189  
   situational, 104  
 Kuru, Ahmed, 183, 271
- L**
- Learning curve, 7, 79, 87, 105, 111, 116, 256  
 Legitimacy  
   democratic, 112, 130, 131, 140  
    Hamas's, 248–251  
   Islamic, 185, 196  
   popular, 94, 161  
   religious, 53–55, 71, 73  
   resistance, 248, 262  
   sources of, 19, 159  
   traditional, 248  
 Lesser Despotism, 60
- M**
- Majles*, 160–162, 164  
 Makhzun, 101–104  
 Malay ethnic supremacism, 181  
 Malaysia, 2–4, 9, 12, 14, 20, 106, 179–180, 181–185, 187, 188, 192–205, 209, 211, 212, 269  
 Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), 192, 197  
*Maqasidi*, 109  
*Marja' al-taqlids*, 17  
*Marja' taqlid*, 49, 57, 78  
 Marxist-Leninist, 30  
 Medinan, 94  
 Miasmatic stasis, 235  
 Middle East, 3, 6, 7, 9, 15, 148–150, 180, 187, 190, 197, 206, 209  
*Mikhyal*, 101–104  
 Militant groups, 10, 247, 248  
 Military courts, 254  
 Model for emulation, 17, 78  
 Moderate Front, 256  
 Moderation, 6, 16, 19, 91, 111, 127, 132, 135, 136, 137, 150, 168, 169, 181  
 Modernity, 8, 24, 96, 97, 104, 119, 189, 257  
 Moral economy, 104  
 Morocco, 2, 9, 105–108, 110, 118  
 Morsi, Mohamad, 13, 14, 139, 192, 256–258  
 Mousavi, Mir-Hossein, 165  
 Movement/Movements  
   constitutional, 49, 52, 58–62, 64–67, 72–75, 78, 79  
   contemporary Islamist, 8  
   dual-status, 261  
   fundamentalist, 89  
   Green, 2, 165, 167  
   Hamas, 243  
   Iran's Islamic reform, 2  
   Islamic, 2, 8, 67, 79, 117, 268, 269, 271, 272  
   Islamist, 1, 2, 8, 20, 90, 118, 133, 136, 187, 190, 243, 247, 253, 257; social, 12, 136  
   modern and post-modern, 96

- Muslim, 271  
 national liberation, 21  
*Nusantara* Islam, 189  
 opposition mainstream, 224  
 Palestinian Islamist, 243  
 participatory Islamist, 4, 13  
 pro-democracy reformasi, 200  
 progressive civil society, 2  
 reformist, 50, 51, 164, 167, 231  
 Sunni Islamic, 8
- Mujahideen, 207  
 Mujtahids, 27  
 Multiple Islams, 96, 119, 268  
 Muslim/Muslims  
   consciousness, 96, 97  
   country moderate, 180–182  
   democracy, 128, 132  
   democrat, 2, 6, 15, 19, 127  
   minorities, 7, 187  
   moderation, 181  
 Muslim Brotherhood, 14, 88, 109;  
   Egyptian (EMB), 3, 13, 94,  
   110, 150, 191, 245, 257,  
   258; ideal, 97, 117; in Jordan  
   (JMB), 14, 20, 217–220, 235,  
   236; military coup, 269; par-  
   ties, 2, 3, 4, 6, 187; second,  
   218, 221, 235, 236  
   nationalists, 127  
   politics, 95, 96, 107  
   polity, 79  
   societies, 98, 99, 102; reform of, 99  
   sociopolitical norms, 12  
   states, 93, 98  
   Sunni, 109, 189  
   *ummah*, 192  
   universal consciousness, 96
- Muslim-majority  
   countries, 57, 79, 181, 267,  
   268, 270; democratic, 180;  
   democratization, 47; moderate,  
   179, 182; progressive, 181  
   state, 182, 186; authoritarian, 186;  
   citizenship and human rights,  
   187; conservative Islamists, 184;  
   Malaysia, 183, 212; secular-  
   based, 183, 184; sunni, 211
- N**  
*Nad̲jaf*, 60, 62, 64, 66, 78  
*Nahdatul Ulama*, 197  
 Nā'īnī, Mīrẓā Muḥammad Ḥusayn,  
   Imam, 49, 50, 64, 65, 74  
 Najib, Razak, 20, 180–182, 193, 198,  
   201, 203–205, 208, 209
- Narrative  
   anti-system, 246, 248  
   for Palestinian self-determination,  
   21, 245, 248, 249, 258  
   Hamas, 246, 247, 249, 255, 261  
   ideological, 244–247  
   organizational, 16, 252  
   traditional, 245, 247
- National Front for Reform, 227, 232  
 Nationalism, 99, 103, 108, 146, 196,  
   246
- National Unity Government, 261  
 Nation-building, 183, 269, 271  
 Nation-state, 4, 133, 162, 211  
*Negara Kebajikan Islam*, 195, 207
- Neo-Ennahda, 115  
 Neo-fundamentalism, 91  
 Neo-liberal conceptions, 221  
 Neo-revivalism, 91  
 Nepotism, 112, 170
- New Economic Policy (NEP), 200,  
   203  
 09/11, 9, 92, 99  
 Non-Arab republics, 3  
 Non-Islamic rule, 77

- Non-jihadi salafis*, 191  
 Non-Muslim communities, 208  
 Non-Muslim minorities, 187  
 Non-Muslims, 7, 18, 25, 26, 34, 36, 37, 39, 42, 92, 97, 98, 117, 120, 181, 185, 187, 190, 191, 193, 195, 199, 208, 209, 211, 212  
 Non-violent reform, 9, 90, 269
- O**  
 Objectification of consciousness, 95, 107  
 Occidentalists, 93  
 Occultation, 53, 55, 56, 64, 65, 70, 71, 74  
 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), 243, 244, 245, 249, 250, 259, 262  
 Organization for the Defence of Islam, 193  
 Organizations  
   conservative Islamist, 180  
   ethno-nationalist, 180, 201  
   *Salafi* Islamists, 197  
 Organized religion, 104  
 Orientalist paradigm, 147  
 Orientalists, 93, 127, 129, 131, 147  
 Orthodox Sunnite, 48  
 Orthodoxy, 49, 51, 58, 79, 133
- P**  
 Pahlavi, 19, 163, 174, 175  
*Pakatan*, 20, 198–201, 206–210  
*Pakatan* coalition, 199–201, 206, 207, 209, 210  
 Pakistan, 8, 9, 198, 207  
 Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), 248  
 Palestinian  
   Authority (PA), 248, 250, 262  
   Islamism, 243, 246  
   Israeli conflict, 250, 256  
   Legislative Council, 244  
   Muslim Brotherhood (PMB), 245  
   nationalism, 246  
   politics, 245, 250, 253, 262  
   question, 257, 248, 249, 258  
   self-determination, 21, 245, 258  
   state, 7, 21, 163, 243, 244, 259  
   Territories, 220, 243  
 Parallel State Structure, 151  
 Parliamentary majorities, 4, 144, 153  
 Parti Se-Islam Malaysia (PAS), 20, 185, 187, 188, 190, 195, 197, 198, 206–211  
 Participant observation, 88, 111, 113  
 Party(ies)  
   *Amanah Nasional*, 209  
   anti-establishment, 136  
   Arab secularist, 116  
   centrist Islamist, 5  
   *Ennahda*, 12, 15, 89  
   ethnic minorities, 199  
   independent, 233  
   Islamist, 1, 5, 12, 13–16, 18, 88, 108, 110, 116, 136, 187, 198, 206–208, 210, 211  
   Islamist opposition, 20, 184, 198, 206  
   Justice and Development, 9, 108, 127  
   *Keadilan Raayat* (PKR), 180  
   Muslim-based political, 15, 195  
   Muslim Brotherhood, 2–4, 6, 187, 209  
   non-Islamist, 6, 13, 14  
   opposition Salafi-oriented Islamist, 184  
   political, 15, 92, 108, 109, 115, 116, 128, 133, 134, 138, 187, 190, 195, 196, 207, 211, 218–220, 234, 244, 247



- Popular Congress, 227  
 Pro-Kurdish People's Democratic, 142  
*Salafi*, 4, 187, 188  
*Salafi*-based, 187  
 secular-based, 14, 183, 198  
 secular-oriented political, 2  
*wasatiyyah* Islamist, 5  
 Passive secular states, 183  
 Paternalism, 140  
*Perkasa*, 201  
 Pluralism, 4, 14, 19, 107, 110, 115, 132, 134–136, 150, 187, 192, 196, 207, 232  
 Policies, 9, 19, 30, 39, 93, 112, 129, 130, 138, 144, 145, 150, 160, 172, 182, 186, 199, 200, 203  
 Political agenda, 113, 260, 262  
 Political authority, 35, 52, 54–56, 70, 73, 160, 186, 249, 251, 252, 255, 259–262  
 Political ethics, 109, 142  
 Political learning, 6, 7, 16, 20, 223, 251, 252, 261  
 Political manifesto, 244  
 Political participation, 118, 166, 244, 245, 249  
 Political philosophy, 62, 65  
 Political power, 13, 50, 75, 79, 145, 150, 186, 196, 248, 249, 270  
 Political reform, 2, 47, 93, 202, 226  
 Political restrictions, 160  
 Politics  
   anti-secular, 93  
   coalition, 16, 137  
   electoral, 6, 7, 12, 16, 49, 189, 199, 269  
   Islamists, 2, 6, 13, 16, 109, 127, 128, 132, 137, 149, 185, 198, 207, 219, 221, 229  
   left-wing, 206  
   Muslim, 95, 96, 98, 107, 129  
   unilateralist and exclusionary, 130  
 Polity  
   anti-democratic, 58  
   authoritarian, 15, 20, 189, 198  
   democratic, 53, 55, 58, 59, 63, 64, 78, 152  
   democratic Islamic, 80  
   Islamized, 120  
   Islamizing, 89, 115  
 Popular mandate, 130, 131, 137, 159, 160, 161, 170, 172, 174  
 Popular sovereignty, 7, 16, 19, 20, 30–36, 42, 43, 160, 161, 165, 169, 170, 253  
 Populist ethno-nationalists, 3  
 Post-colonial secular constitution, 185  
 Post-Islamism, 90, 92, 132, 270  
 Post-Pahlavi constitution, 174  
 Pragmatism, 2, 180, 246, 252, 262, 271  
 Pre-determinism, 99  
 Principlist camp, 170  
 Principlist candidates, 168  
 Principlists, 164, 165, 167  
 Pro-constitutionalists, 50, 63, 64  
 Pro-democratization, 135  
 Prophet Mohammad, 24, 33, 52, 56, 70, 72, 73, 94  
 Proselytization, 108, 113  
 Proto-democratic political force, 135  
 Pro-Western liberal rhetoric, 135  
 Prudence, 168, 169
- Q**  
 Quietism, 57  
 Qum, 25  
 Qur'an, 24, 25, 28, 32, 34, 37, 39, 41, 97–98, 110, 165, 172, 188, 193, 194, 206, 245

## R

Radical Islamism, 48, 79, 271  
 Radicalism, 5, 90, 267  
 Rahim, Lily Zubaidah, 1, 3, 12, 14, 15, 20, 50, 55, 179, 182–184, 195, 267  
 Raisi, Ebrahim, 170  
 Rāshid al-Ghannūshī, 5, 270  
 Rationalist epistemology, 51  
 Reformist, 2, 5, 10, 11, 14, 17, 24, 26, 34–36, 39–44, 50, 62, 71, 79, 88, 93, 98, 161, 164, 167–169, 189, 195, 197, 200, 207, 209, 231, 233, 236  
 Reformist jurists, 51  
 Reforms, 108, 112, 114–115, 129, 137, 151  
 Regime(s)  
   authoritarian, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16, 118, 181, 187, 212  
   authoritarian Arab, 255  
   authoritarian Islamic, 11  
   authoritarian sunni, 191  
   Egypt's military, 259  
   electoral authoritarian, 199, 212  
   hybrid, 232, 234  
   incumbent, 228  
   inspection, 160, 174  
   Kemalist, 135  
   moderate Muslim-majority, 182  
   secular, 134  
   secular Muslim, 6  
   secular-oriented, 2, 7, 13  
   Sunni and Shia, 7  
   visual face, 163  
 Religion  
   accomplishment of, 71  
   dis-establishment of, 89, 93  
   politicization of, 20, 183, 186, 205  
 Religious commandment, 25, 27, 28, 36, 38, 40–43  
 Religious jurists, 161

Religious scriptures, 66, 69, 72  
 Religious social infrastructure, 13  
 Research methodology, 111  
 Resistance, 6, 7, 21, 59, 116, 118, 140, 146, 148, 151, 152, 167, 212, 243–250, 256, 259–262  
 Resistance economy, 167  
 Revelation, 24, 28, 41, 96, 98, 99  
 Revisionism, 90  
 Revivalism, 91  
 Revolutionary Guards, 171, 174  
 Revolutionary rhetoric, 169  
 Rouhani, Hassan, 19, 160, 163–174  
 Rule of correlation, 67

## S

Sadat, 94  
 Sadiki, Larbi, 1, 15, 18, 47, 88, 100, 104, 188, 221–225, 234, 270  
 Şafawid, 53–55  
*Sabwah*, 87  
*Sabwah islamiyyah*, 118  
 Salafi  
   consensus, 187–191, 212  
   cultural colonization, 189  
   doctrine, 188  
   foreign preachers, 196  
   Islam, 3, 182, 187  
   Islamisation, 20, 182, 183, 198, 206, 210, 211, 212, 269  
   Islamists, 3, 4, 6, 7, 14, 195, 196  
   Jihadism, 47  
   mindsets, 194  
   ulama, 191–194, 197  
 Salafis, 188, 189, 191, 194  
 Salafisms, 118, 189, 190  
*Salaḥiyyah*, 97  
 Sanctions, 3, 99, 117, 160, 166, 167, 170, 173, 174  
 Saudi Arabia, 9, 187, 190, 192, 194, 205, 256

- Sayyid Qutb, 40, 97, 98, 106, 109, 117, 118
- Schism, 252–254
- Seal (khātam) of the prophets, 71
- Second Intifada, 251, 254
- Secular establishment, 127–129, 134, 138, 150
- Secularism, 9, 15, 119, 128, 129, 133–135, 144, 146, 149, 181, 192, 196
- Secularists, 18, 105, 108, 109, 115, 120, 271
- Secularization, 93, 117, 118, 133, 222
- Seditionists, 168
- Shari‘a  
 based state, 74  
 codified, 184, 194, 212  
 comprehensive, 6, 10, 13, 71, 207  
 courts, 180–182, 184, 185, 194–196, 210, 211  
 law, 2, 4, 6, 77, 68, 180–187, 190, 193–195, 209–212  
 operationalized, 2  
 reiteration of, 187  
 state-imposed, 10
- Shī‘a, 3, 7, 16, 52, 62, 64, 65, 69, 76, 161, 181
- Shiism, 10, 17, 18, 48, 49, 52
- Shi‘ite*  
 belief, 52, 53, 55, 58, 62, 72, 73, 78  
 country, 54  
 doctrine, 52, 53, 55–57, 78  
*hadiths*, 11, 17, 56, 67, 70, 72, 78  
 history, 17, 52, 53, 60, 62, 64, 72, 73, 78  
 Imams, 52–54, 56, 70, 72  
 Islamic culture, 58  
 jurisprudence, 52, 67, 73  
 jurisprudential framework, 66  
 jurists, 17, 50, 51, 53–57, 59, 60, 64, 67, 70, 72, 73, 76
- Muslims, 17, 48, 52, 54, 56, 58, 63, 64, 69, 71–73, 76, 79, 270
- orthodoxy, 49, 51, 58, 79
- perspective, 55, 70
- political theology, 10, 49, 52–55, 57–59, 71, 78, 79, 270
- political thought, 17, 51, 54, 61, 63, 66, 72
- religious leaders, 55, 57, 59, 61, 69, 70
- school, 10, 17, 52–54, 58, 66, 67, 78
- sect, 52
- system of belief, 53, 58, 62, 78
- teachings, 10, 17, 48, 50, 62, 79, 270
- theological framework, 56, 64
- theological history, 60
- theology, 10, 18, 48, 49, 51–55, 57–60, 70, 71, 73, 78, 79, 270
- ulama, 50, 59, 60, 61–64, 70, 71–73, 78, 79
- Shūrā*, 29, 51, 113, 116, 118, 222, 224, 230, 231, 235
- Shūrā* Council, 113, 116, 222, 230, 235
- Single non-transferable vote, 229
- Sistānī, ‘Alī Ḥusaynī, 49, 57, 58, 79
- Sisters in Islam (SIS), 179, 197, 210
- Social capital, 13, 104, 228–230, 235
- Social imaginary, 101–104
- Social justice, 5, 11, 16, 97, 104, 106, 109, 117, 207, 223, 255, 270, 271
- Societal reform, 246
- Socio-centrism, 101
- Socio-cultural imaginary, 101
- Southeast Asia, 202
- Sovereignty of God, 40, 159, 161
- Sovereignty of people, 159, 161
- Sufi, 93, 187
- Sufism, 172

Sunna, 24, 25, 37, 245  
 Supreme Leader, 57, 160–175, 207  
 Sustainable democratic transition, 267  
 Syria, 3, 5, 140, 173, 220, 227, 256  
 System  
   authoritarian, 50, 64  
   democratic political, 247  
   Egyptian, 245  
   factional political, 162  
   First-past-the-post, 199  
   hegemony, 250  
   judicial government-run, 254  
   of power and authority, 225  
   Parliamentary, 17, 64, 73  
   political, 19, 23, 48, 55, 59, 110,  
     136, 159, 160, 162, 165, 175,  
     203, 211, 219, 228, 246–248,  
     250  
   presidential, 142, 143, 152, 153  
   sectarian political, 203  
   secular, 136, 254  
   sultanate, 74–76  
   Western secular political, 246

## T

*Taklīf*, 65, 72  
 Ṭālikānī, Āyatullāh, 50, 51  
*Tawbeed*, 90  
 Terrorist organization, 152, 258  
 The Guardian Council, 161–164, 168  
 Theological canons, 52, 68, 69, 72,  
   75, 76, 78  
 Theology  
   anti-democratic, 52, 55, 58, 79  
   apocalyptic, 10  
   apolitical, 52–54, 57, 58  
   authoritarian, 12  
   democratising, 58, 60, 78  
   Islamic political, 10, 11, 47, 268,  
     269  
   of constitutionalism, 49

political, 11, 47–49, 52–55, 57–59,  
   79, 269, 270  
 political Shī'ite, 18, 52, 53, 55, 57,  
   71, 78, 79  
 pro-democratic, 48, 51, 52, 58, 79  
 pro-democratic political, 58–59, 78  
 Salafi, 189  
 Salafi and Saudi-based Wahhabi, 190  
 Salafi-wahhabi, 190  
 shia, 190  
*Shī'ite*, 49–53  
*Shī'ite* political, 18, 52, 53, 55, 57,  
   71, 78, 79  
 Tobacco Movement, 54, 66  
 Tolerance, 132  
 Traditionalist, 17, 24, 30, 38, 43  
 Transformation, 9, 10, 104, 116, 118,  
   135, 139, 196, 267–272  
 Transparency, 112, 131, 141, 200,  
   234, 239  
 Tunisia, 95, 106, 111, 114, 119, 226,  
   270  
 Tunisian exceptionalism, 89  
*Turath*, 102  
 Turkey, 2–4, 9, 14, 106, 127,  
   130–139, 145–153  
 Turkish Islamist tradition, 146  
 Twelfth Imam, 161  
 Twelver Shi'a, 161  
 Twelver Shi'ism, 62  
 Twelvers, 52

## U

*Ulama/Ulamā's*, 12, 50, 64, 74, 180,  
   184, 186–197, 206–212  
 anti-constitutionalist, 50, 63, 71,  
   73, 74  
 capacity to mobilize, 62  
 clerics, 186, 188  
 conservative, 190, 194, 195, 206,  
   207, 208

ILMU, 195, 196  
 leadership, 207, 208  
 PAS, 187, 190, 195, 197, 206–208  
 pro-constitutionalist, 50, 63, 64  
 reformist, 50, 71, 189, 197, 207  
 responsibilities, 70, 72  
 roles, 60, 62, 64  
 state, 12, 14, 184, 187, 192, 194, 197, 211, 212  
 support, 20, 62, 70, 180, 187, 208, 210  
 views of, 190, 210  
*Umma*, 10  
*Ummah*, 34, 90, 192  
 United Malay National Organization (UMNO), 20, 180, 181, 185, 187, 190, 192, 195–199, 201, 202, 205–211  
 US-Arab Islamic Summit, 181  
*Uşūli*  
 approach, 69  
 doctrines, 69  
 jurisprudence, 65, 68  
 school, 52, 66, 78  
 Utopian Islamist vision, 270

**V**  
 Violence, ix, xiv, 9, 26, 27, 32, 43, 47, 88, 94, 95, 131, 166, 167, 192, 229, 244, 247, 248, 250, 268, 269, 271  
 Vote-maximization strategy, 130, 145

Voting constituency, 228

**W**

*Wādʿijib*, 72, 73, 75  
 Wahhabi, 9, 93, 190, 194  
 Wahhabi Salafist, 118  
*Wali*, 56  
*Wasatiyyah*, 5, 6, 12, 15, 92, 270, 271  
 electoral democracy, 5  
 theological articulations, 12  
 Way of precaution, 69  
 West, 15, 18, 58, 93, 118, 120, 148, 167  
 Westernization, 89, 103, 117, 130–135, 141, 146, 148, 150, 151  
 Westernizing, 89, 94, 120, 133, 146  
*Wilāyat-i faqih*, 20, 53, 56, 57, 64  
 Wisdom, 28, 43, 88  
 Women's rights, xiii, 103, 173

**Y**

Yemen, 3, 93, 173

**Z**

Zamzam Initiative, 218, 221, 231–234  
 Zero-sum approach, 140, 145, 146  
 Zero-sum strategies, 150  
 Zoroastrian, 34, 37