ISLAMISM AND DEMOCRACY IN NEW ARAB DEMOCRACIES

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Since the Arab Spring Revolutions have ended in North Africa and the Middle East, certain states have started down a long road towards democracy. Historically, the countries of Egypt and Tunisia had authoritarian governments without significant electoral participation or popular representation. After the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011, both countries successfully deposed their authoritarian presidents and sought to install new governments elected by popular vote. When evaluating democratically elected parties and politicians, it is useful to examine how consistent their platforms and rhetoric are with their actions in office. Using Ruth Grant's moralism/moderation and hypocrisy/integrity ethical framework, identify where these parties best fit and whether such an observation provides meaningful insight into the political decision making of these parties.

Rhetoric and Action in Two New Democracies

The Ennahda party in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt offer examples of political movements with similar Political Islamic ideologies. Political Islam can be understood as an extension of Islamic practice into political thought. In the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions, both parties came to power in the governments of their respective countries, but they would pursue their goals in different ways.[1]

In Tunisia, the relatively progressive Ennahda movement won 89 seats (37%) in the 2011 parliamentary election. The party was open to members of all religions in the country and wanted to incorporate certain Sharia perspectives in the new Tunisian constitution. This can be seen as original language of the new constitution sought to declare Islam the "main source of legislation" in the state.[2] While maintaining and openly expressing their ideological preferences, the party also emphasized their desire to be only a part of the political process. In general, Ennahda was careful to not extend beyond its portion of representation.

The following year, Egypt's first election since the removal of President Hosni Mubarak came as a massive victory to the Muslim Brotherhood, whose Freedom and Justice Party won the most seats in parliament at 235 (37.5%) as well as the presidency. While Brotherhood leadership across the years would employ progressive language in certain contexts, the party is considered to be more conservative than its Tunisian counterpart. Political scientists Harnisch and Mecham add to this commentary voicing concern in 2009 that the Brotherhood may be dishonest in its commitment to matters such as women's rights, the role of Islam, and the role of democratic discourse in a government. The party had already demonstrated its willingness to abandon platform positions to strategically satisfy a larger denominator of voters in 2007, when a notably conservative platform proposal was met with strong backlash from the Egyptian people. As a result, the Brotherhood announced that it had rescinded the policy positions outlined in this paper.[3] Harnisch and Mecham note this change in 2009 and voice hesitation in regards to its sincerity.

To determine the polarity of Islamist parties, party goals are frequently scrutinized. Ennahda leadership characterized their goals within the context of the democratic process in Tunisia while the Brotherhood's priorities centered on religious issues, aside from ostensible political constraints. The iconic leader of the Ennahda movement, Racchid Ghannouchi, published an Op-Ed in the New York Times after the recent Tunisian elections. Ghannouchi explained that he see the struggle in Tunisia as one "between democracy and despotism" – not between religion and secularization.[4] Ghannouchi has maintained this position since he first entered politics in 1979. This dedication to the political process can be seen in 2012 and 2013 when, despite facing insurmountable gridlock, the party did not partake in any acts of circumvention. Instead they simply continued to participate in negotiations. In contrast, Brotherhood leadership made it clear when they first entered politics that their ambitions were primarily religious. To justify entering politics in 1984, the organization's leader Umar al-Tilmisani argued that such a move was simply the use of political means to achieve a religious end.[5] To quell internal hesitation, the group's leader emphasized that such a pursuit was ultimately in service of the broader, religious goals and the only real victory the Brotherhood was concerned about was a "Victory for God."[6]

Another key difference between the Brotherhood and the Ennahda movement is found on the topic of female inclusion. In the case of the Brotherhood, notable reformist pressures can likely take credit for a platform change

1 See section 'Background on Political Islam' following the case
2 http://www.loc.gov/law/help/tunisia.php
3 Harnisch, Chris, and Mecham, Quinn. 2009. "Democratic Ideology in Islamist Opposition? The Muslim Brotherhood's 'Civil State'". *Middle Eastern Studies.* 45 (2): 189-205.
4 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/20/opinion/rachid-ghannouchi-how-tunisia-will-succeed.html?emc=eta1
5 Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky, 1962-. 2013. *The Muslim Brotherhood : Evolution of an Islamist movement.* Princeton: Princeton University
6 Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky, 1962-. 2013. *The Muslim Brotherhood : Evolution of an Islamist movement.* Princeton: Princeton University

starting in the mid 90's. Political scientists Kurzman and Naqvi note that the Brotherhood follows the greater Islamist trend by increasing its rhetoric in support of equal protection of women since the turn of the century.[7] This comes with limitations as the Brotherhood to this day maintained its rejection of women running for political office as well as support for the limitation of various social liberties. Alternatively the Ennahda movement campaign included a woman, Souad Abdel-Rahim, in its 2011 race. Rahim notably did not wear a traditional hijab, demonstrating the party's support of the right to personally choose to wear or not to wear the religious garment.

During its time in power, the Brotherhood was much more pragmatic in its political efforts. The reason for this pragmatism is a result of the Brotherhood having little concern for a political process they did not support. This pragmatism in the political space was best demonstrated by the party's use of executive powers during its time in office. Only a few months after assuming control of the government, the Brotherhood would abandon negotiation efforts and begin using the powers endowed to the executive branch to overcome political gridlock.[8] In Tunisia, the Ennahda movement would experience political gridlock as well, however it would not attempt to circumvent the democratic process by way of the executive branch.

At first glance, it seems like a very similar story: two Islamist parties gain strong power shares in newly established North African governments. Both parties have similar backgrounds, exist in semi-comparable political landscapes, and voiced opinions supporting the active role of Islam in government.

In Tunisia, Ennahda continued its pro-democracy platform. While initial attempts were made to construct an Islamist constitution, the party was quick to negotiate the extent of Islam's presence in the government and consistently engaged with opposition parties on similar topics. During these negotiations, Ennahda leadership made multiple concessions in regards to the new constitutional framework including removing any language mirrored by Sharia law. In Egypt, the Brotherhood also made similar attempts to incorporate Islam within the constitution. Unlike the Ennahda movement, however, the Brotherhood was quick to disregard negotiations and employ more coercive tactics such as propaganda issuance via their satellite television channels as well as heightened security measures that would ultimately result in a mandated curfew.

Background: Political Islam

One of the unique issues faced by new Arab democracies is the overwhelming presence of Political Islam (commonly referred to as Islamism). Islamism is not a direct critic of democracy; in the most basic of descriptions Islamism is a political ideology that relies on the individual citizen's adherence to Islam to create a politically sovereign nation. Since sovereignty is a religiously derived concept in Political Islam, its principles may at times conflict with democratic principles.

The practice of Political Islam is derived from an active interest in Islam and its role in politics. More broadly, those who subscribe to Political Islam believe their religion to be a universal, wide-reaching concept that can and should be applied to all aspects of life. In other words this movement is a natural product of a universalist perspective. It is this universalism that is key, since addressing only political motivations fails to fully capture the ideology.

One can look to the Justice and Development Party in Turkey or the Indian Union Muslim League in Indonesia to understand that Islamism can and does exist in a democratic setting. What differentiates these aforementioned cases from the democracies installed after the Arab Spring is the representative power allotted to non-democratic Islamist parties. By attaining a dominant presence in the legislative and executive branches in a state-building phase of

7   Charles Kurzman and Ijlal Naqvi. "Do Muslims Vote Islamic?" *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 2 (2010): 50-63.
8   Lesch, Ann M. 2014. Troubled political transitions: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. *Middle East Policy* 21 (1): 62-74.

democratization, the Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia had the ability to establish governmental institutions that could violate certain democratic norms. For example, the Brotherhood on more than one occasion sought to establish a religious council of oversight known as a Shura council in the state. This would have established the precedence of religion over public policy. When Islamist concepts such as a Shura council have the potential for installment, a democratic paradox can emerge.

In regards to the concept of progressivism in Political Islam, progressivism is used to describe an Islamist party's polarity along a two dimensional scale of religiosity. At one end, you have the most radical Islamist groups that seek to establish a strict Islamic state (think the Islamic Republic of Iran or specific Islamic regions of Afghanistan), on the other end of this scale you find the strict secularist parties that seek to abolish all religious influences from policy making decisions. Parties that lie close to the center of this scale are referred to as 'moderate.'

See Olivier Roy's 'The Failure of Political Islam' (Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 1994), pages 12-21.