

#### The Awakening of Muslim Democracy

Why and how did Islam become such a political force in so many Muslim-majority countries? Will it impinge on the political transitions of the Arab Spring? In this book, Jocelyne Cesari investigates the relationship between modernization and Islam in Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Turkey - countries founded by secular rulers that have since undergone secularized politics. Cesari argues that nation-building processes in these states have not created Western types of regimes, but have instead spurred the politicization of Islam by turning it into a modern national ideology. Looking closely at examples of Islamic dominance in political modernization - nationalization of Islamic institutions and personnel under state ministries, religiously motivated social unrest or violence, and internationalization of Islam-aligned political movements or conflicts – this study provides a unique overview of the historical and political developments from the end of World War II to the Arab Spring that have made Islam a dominant political force. It also discusses Islam's impact on emerging democracies in the contemporary Middle East and contends that if new democracies emerge, they will probably be unsecular - that is, limiting the rights of the individual on religious grounds. This book offers a unique and original approach to the relationships between religion, politics, and secularism that is also relevant to non-Western political experience outside Muslim countries.

Jocelyne Cesari is director of the Islam in the West program at Harvard University and senior research Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Her most recent publication is *Why the West Fears Islam: Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies*.





## The Awakening of Muslim Democracy

Religion, Modernity, and the State

**JOCELYNE CESARI** 

Harvard University and Georgetown University





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#### **Preface**

On June 24, 2012, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) won the first free Egyptian presidential elections since the end of the Mubarak regime. On July 3 of the following year, he was dismissed from power by the military after a year of unprecedented social unrest and growing popular discontent against his government. His political misfortune captures the contradictory meanings of what has been called the "Arab Spring."

At first came surprise and enthusiasm for the "democratic" power of the masses that brought down the authoritarian regimes of Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia. Then came doubt and concern when the demise of these powers resulted in the election of Islamist governments in both Egypt and Tunisia.

Steven A. Cook, in his December 19, 2011, piece for *Foreign Policy*, wrote about the "Frankenstein of Tahrir Square." The Tahririans, once heralded as revolutionaries with "a cacophony of ideas, projects, initiatives, and manifestos," later morphed in the public eye into vagabond street protestors with "no moral leadership to give the best of ideas national political meaning and content." In contrast, in both Tunisia and Egypt, the Islamists, who did not instigate the ousters and laid low during the beginning of the massive protests, are the only ones who played post–Ben Ali and post-Mubarak politics well and surfaced as the elected postrevolutionary leaders.<sup>2</sup>

When the 2011 revolution took everybody by surprise, many eagerly proclaimed the end of Arab exceptionalism.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the rest of the year,

- <sup>1</sup> Steven A. Cook, "The Frankenstein of Tahrir Square," *Foreign Policy*, December 19, 2011, accessed December 24, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/19/the\_frankenstein\_of\_tahrir\_square.
- <sup>2</sup> Wiem Melki, "'Ennahda Played It Well' Defeated Parties Learn from Ennahda's Success," *Tunisia Live*, October 28, 2011, accessed November 24, 2011, http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/10/28/ennahda-played-it-well-defeated-parties-learn-from-ennahdas-success/.
- <sup>3</sup> Omer Taspinar, "The End of Arab Exceptionalism," *Zaman Amerika*, February 14, 2011, accessed February 14, 2011, http://www.zamanusa.com/us-tr/columnistDetail\_getNewsById .action?newsId=45952&columnistId=100.



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rapid relays of information through satellite television and the Internet gave the international audience a front-row view into an Arab spring of high hopes, then into a stagnant yet restless Arab summer, and finally into an Arab winter filled with deep setbacks and protracted violence in Syria – and, for the Western viewer, slimmer prospects for democratization, especially with the rise to power of Islamist parties.<sup>4</sup> At the time, Daniel Brumberg wrote: "We must reckon with a process of authoritarian extraction that could last well into the next decade – one that promises as many if not more disappointments than successes."<sup>5</sup>

How do we make sense of such an apparently contradictory succession of events? It is a contradiction or an aberration only because most of the observers are prisoners of the dominant narrative, which pitches religion in general, and Islam in particular, as the alternative to secular politics. In other words, the first protesters in Tahrir Square did not use Islamic slogans, and that was interpreted as the end of Islam in politics. But because Islamist parties are emerging as the winners of the revolutions, the prospects of democratization are once again in question. The downfall of President Morsi in 2013 after two days of mass protest and the return of the military to the forefront of Egyptian politics have added to the confusion and raised renewed swift conclusions that Islamism is over.

Such a binary vision is closely related to the dominant approach to political Islam or Islamism defined as a set of ideas and beliefs, which are instrumentalized by political activists to bring down the secular state. At the core of such an approach are (1) the assumed definition of religion as a set of beliefs, values, and norms distinct from politics; and (2) the misnomer of previous regimes as "secular."

Anthropologist Talal Asad and philosopher Michael Connolly have strongly questioned such a limited approach of religion<sup>6</sup> and demonstrated that this understanding, far from being universal, is the direct outcome of the historical evolution of Christianity in the West.<sup>7</sup> Yet, interestingly, the

- <sup>4</sup> Daniel Byman, "After the Hope of the Arab Spring, the Chill of an Arab Winter," Washington Post, December 1, 2011, accessed July 9, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/after-the-hope-of-the-arab-spring-the-chill-of-an-arab-winter/2011/11/28/gIQABGqHIO\_story.html.
- Daniel Brumberg, "Sustaining Mechanics of Arab Autocracies," *Foreign Policy*, December 19, 2011, accessed December 20, 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/12/19/sustaining\_mechanics\_of\_arab\_autocracies.
- <sup>6</sup> Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 40–44.
- <sup>7</sup> In *Genealogies of Religion*, Talal Asad describes the status of religion in medieval society as very different from the place religion holds in the modern age. He argues that during this period Christianity functioned as a "great cloak" that defined an adherent's entire experience of the world. It possessed an "all-embracing capacity" a distinctive practice and belief system that disciplined the religious subject and nurtured certain virtues. Religion was not some essentially distinct form of culture, process of reasoning, or experiential state that existed apart from other cultural experiences. It encompassed the cultural horizon of the subject's practices and assumptions about the world.



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historical and political conditions that led to the imposition on Islam of such a Western category of religion have not been systematically explored.<sup>8</sup> This book is an attempt to shed light on the political mechanisms that underlie the transformation of Islam into a modern religion. It shows that the state (not only Islamists) has been a central if not the primary agent in politicizing Islam.

Therefore, in this book, the term *political Islam* does not refer to the common definition of religiously based political opposition to the state. Instead it is broadened to include nationalization of Islamic institutions and personnel under state ministries; usage of Islamic references in political competition by both state actors and opponents (Islamism); religiously motivated social unrest or violence; and internationalization of Islam-orientated political movements or conflicts.

Such an exploration questions two major assumptions of the scholarly work on political Islam: the dichotomies between state and religion and between modernization and Islamization (see Chapter 1).

The main assertion of this book is that the modernization of Muslim societies, unlike Western ones, did not lead to privatization of religion but to the opposite, that is, the politicization of Islam in a way unprecedented in premodern Muslim polities. This is not because Islam does not separate religion and politics (which is, by the way, historically false), but because the Islamic tradition was integrated in the nation-state building that took place at the end of the Ottoman Empire. And by Islamic tradition, I refer not only to ideas or creeds but also to institutions of education and learning as well as religious personnel. For this reason, I advance new operational definitions of *religion* and *secularism*.

Islam is not only a set of beliefs; it is not a way of life either (in the sense that Islamists define it). It is better defined by the never-ending dialectics between believing, belonging, and behaving, which explains why Islam was woven into the social fabrics of modern Muslim societies throughout the nation-building process. In other words, religious belonging became entangled with national belonging.

In this regard, the state has played a central role in redefining and politicizing Islam. Strangely, the analysis of the state has been remarkably absent from any evaluation of political Islam and its capacity to influence political liberalization.

In light of the Arab Spring, the objective of this book is to explore this unexamined dimension of the politicization of Islam – that is, state actions and policies vis-à-vis religion in general and Islam in particular. My analytical eclecticism<sup>9</sup> combines institutional and norm diffusion

For a parallel imposition of the Western category of religion on Judaism, see Leora Batnitzky, How Judaism Became a Modern Religion (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein, Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).



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approaches to propound several counterintuitive propositions. First, it is crucial to bring state actions and policies back into the study of cultural and religious changes. Second, an institutional approach to state-Islam dynamics substantially broadens the analysis beyond polarized state-religion relations, revealing a complex set of interactions between the two entities, including adaptation, cooperation, and competition. Third, the approach to secularization goes beyond state and religion in institutional arrangements to encompass social and individual aspects. Although the institutional level of state-religion relations is very important, as we will show in Part I of the book, it is not sufficient to efficiently differentiate regimes of secularity. For this reason, we introduce the social and individual levels and discuss how these three levels – institutional, social, and individual – interact to produce unique forms of secularity for each country.

In the case of Muslim countries, the building of the state led to a situation I call hegemonic Islam, in which the religion is not only absorbed within state institutions but also is fused with national identity and with the norms of the public space. This fusion has influenced the social status of Islam as well as the development of individualism. Interestingly, in contrast to the European and (to some extent) American experiences, we are witnessing a combination between, on one hand, the acceptance of free and fair elections, institutional stability, and social and political equality of citizens and, on the other hand, the acknowledgment of religion in politics. The latter translates into multiple initiatives to preserve the status of Islam as the religion of the nation through a discriminatory use of law, detrimental not only to religious minorities but also to Muslim citizens who wish to assert freedom of speech. Concretely, it means that the places of worship, clerics, and institutions of the dominant religion are part of the state institutions and, in addition, that the central status of religion in public space is secured by blasphemy laws and limitations on conversion.

Therefore a differentiation between legitimate and illegitimate individual rights is at play, with direct consequences on the nature of democracy that Muslim countries will attain. More specifically, I will demonstrate that the recognition of the rights concerning the spiritual and sexual actions of the person is a major challenge for democratization, even in cases of recognized democracies like Indonesia. I have called the recognition of this specific set of rights the principle of self, which translates into freedom of speech and sexuality independently of religious norms.

In these circumstances, if there is an effective transition to democracy (which at the time of this writing is uncertain), the plausible political evolution of Muslim countries is what I call *unsecular democracy*. I borrow the term *unsecular* from Kalyvas<sup>10</sup> but give it a more institutional meaning by

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, "Unsecular Politics and Religious Mobilization," in T. Kselman and J. A. Buttigieg (eds.), *European Christian Democracy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 293–320.



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basing it on the *limitation by law* of the rights of the person on two levels – spiritual and sexual – through criminalizing blasphemy, homosexuality, and indecency. These limitations do not automatically coincide with discrimination against religious minorities. When religious minorities are discriminated against, as in Turkey, the regimes are better defined as competitive authoritarianism, as will be discussed in Part III. Unsecular democracy, on the other hand, refers to countries such as Indonesia or Senegal where religious minorities are recognized but limitations still apply to the spiritual and sexual rights of all individuals.

#### LAYOUT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE BOOK

In sum, the claim of this book goes against the dominant consensus that modernization projects are correlated with the social and political decline of religion. In other words, I challenge the underlying assumption that modernization, secularization, and democratization go hand in hand.<sup>11</sup>

It is worth emphasizing that the connection between modernization and secularization is not as common and systematic as the narrative of modernity would have us believe. Part I of this book sheds light on the role of the state in major domains of nation and institution building that have contributed to the politicization of Islam, even in the case of strong secular projects in Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, and Iraq before the rise of Islamist opposition. These chapters specifically describe the construction of Islam as the hegemonic religion (i.e., a religion that not only is dominant but also enjoys legal privileges) as an inherent part of the nation building. To illustrate how the construction of hegemonic religion occurs in most Muslim-majority countries, I focus on those that have been defined as secular according to Western standards, meaning countries ruled by a secular elite educated or otherwise openly influenced by the West, such as Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, Turkey, and Pakistan. Given that Egypt and Tunisia experienced drastic regime changes in 2011, the possibilities of political evolution under the Arab Spring conditions will be analyzed in light of Islam's status as a hegemonic religion. Particular attention will also be paid to the situation of Iraq since 2003 because, unlike Tunisia or Egypt, it illustrates the particular challenge of sectarian tensions on democratization.

In brief, the first part of the book demonstrates that state-generated norms of Islam are highly institutionalized. They are constructed and at the same time reflected in several facets of the state, including the constitution, the

I am, of course, following the path opened by scholars such as Talal Asad, Jose Casanova, and Shmuel Einsenstadt, whose work will be discussed in the next chapters. While their work questions the dyads modernization-secularization or modernization-democratization, my specific objective was to deconstruct the triad modernity-secularism-democracy taken for granted in many analyses of Islam and politics.



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religious state institutions, the legal system, and religious education in public schools. I have conducted this investigation by systematically collecting and analyzing original documents: constitutions, administrative materials, platforms of political parties, and Islamic textbooks as well as by tracing all political events and reforms relevant to state-Islam relations from the time of independence until now.

The building of Islam as a hegemonic religion under the authoritarian regime explains why and how Islamism became the major political opposition under authoritarian rule (Part II). It also provides hints on the future of political Islam in democratic transitions.

In this regard, the institutional approach to religion also holds implications for the direction Islam-state relationships will take in the post-Mubarak and post-Ben Ali contexts, as discussed in Part III. It is worth emphasizing that the goal of this part of the book is not to assess the overall democratic transition of these countries but only the role of Islam in it. The probability that Tunisians, and even more so Egyptians, will move toward questioning the legal privileges conferred upon Islam seems very thin, and the failure to do so may impinge on the future democratization of these regimes. However, it does not mean that the Islamic tradition per se is the cause for the lack of democratization.<sup>12</sup>

As I am putting the last touches to this book in September 2013, the Egyptian military has launched a fierce initiative to annihilate the Muslim Brotherhood by repressing and jailing its followers and main leaders. At the same time, the Ennahada government in Tunisia has agreed to step down in an attempt to put an end to long months of political crisis. As events are unfolding, it would be premature to draw any definitive conclusion on the near future of Islamism. But if any lesson can be learned from the recent political history of these countries and from their political culture as analyzed in the next chapters, it is reasonable to assume that political Islam will not disappear anytime soon.

<sup>12</sup> After all, the major ranking systems of degree of democracy concur that Muslim-dominated Senegal and Indonesia are relatively advanced on the democratic scale. From Ted Robert Gurr's Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2010, accessed July 9, 2012, http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm. Polity IV Country Report 2010: Senegal, accessed July 9, 2012, http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Senegal2010.pdf. Polity IV Country Report 2010: Indonesia, accessed July 9, 2012, http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Indonesia2010.pdf. Also see Freedom House, "Country Ratings and Status by Region, FIW 1973–2012 (EXCEL)," Freedom in the World Index: 1973–2012, accessed July 9, 2012, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world?gclid=CLO5hNLaj7ECFUlN4A odTwq3Cw.