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# Islamisation And Democratic Transition In The Post-Revolution Egypt

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**Abstract:** This article explores the effects of the political upheaval on Egyptian domestic politics and the democratic transition. It examines whether the Arab Spring was a movement for political freedom or merely an attempt to place the Brotherhood in power. A qualitative data analysis approach was applied in this study. Various books, journals, and research reports on Egyptian and Middle Eastern politics were consulted as sources of information. Current political events in Egypt and neighbouring countries were also followed. The study concludes that democratizing a predominantly Arab and Islamic nation such as Egypt seldom hits the target. Moreover, the goals of the Arab Spring for a better Egypt have not yet been achieved. This research is especially useful for students or readers specializing in Egyptian or Middle Eastern politics within the context of political changes in the region. The Jasmine Revolution witnessed across the Middle East and North Africa is the focus of this study. The Middle East region, dominated by tyrannical leadership pre-revolution, is the primary area of focus. The study's originality lies in the observation that the lack of freedom and political rights galvanized anger among Arab youths, from Tunisia to across the region. This research contributes to the scant literature on the democratic transition in Egypt, which occurred for the first time in the country's history.

**Keywords:** Revolution, Islamization, Egypt, North Africa, Democracy, Shari'ah Law

## 1. Introduction

For many decades, people in West Asia and North Africa, from Yemen to Morocco, have endured autocratic and tyrannical leadership until the first quarter of 2011, when a wave of political revolutions shook the system (Teti & Gervasio, 2011). Similarly, dozens of Sub-Saharan African countries have leaders who turn public offices into hierarchical vacuums instead of facilitating free and fair elections, where all citizens have equal rights to participate in forming their governments. Ethnically, Africa is divided into two major regions: North Africa (Arab) and Sub-Saharan (indigenous black Africans). Arab-Africans are often associated with West Asia in the Arabian Peninsula.

The tyrannical regimes of Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Mu'ammarr el-Ghaddafi have galvanized political lawlessness and violence throughout the region (Abubakar, 2014). Arabian societies have long yearned for liberty, freedom, and political rights, desiring altruistic governance, transparency, and peaceful power transitions. The historic upheaval led by Tunisian youths extended beyond the Maghreb sub-region. The mistreatment of a young Tunisian man over his vegetable cart provoked national outrage, leading to a series of revolutions that eventually overthrew several longstanding regimes.

In Libya, the revolution dismantled the forty-year-old regime of Muammar el-Ghaddafi. This political change, sparked initially in Tunisia, spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, and further to Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Sudan. This highlights how liberalism could become a significant force among non-Western Arab populations.

There is a general perception that the contents of liberal democracy, particularly legislation, sovereignty, and law-making processes, contradict fundamental Islamic teachings, where sovereignty is vested in the hand of God. Democratic legislation involves processes to control and regulate government affairs, necessitating a secular legislative framework.

Many Muslim scholars argue that democracy is incompatible with Islamic political systems, while others see no contradiction. This debate is ongoing and remains crucial when discussing secular democracy in Muslim nations. A Western viewpoint often asserts that Islam opposes democratic rule, supporting authoritarianism in the Arab world. Huntington argued that Islam and democracy are inherently incompatible due to Islam's lack of separation between "Church" and "State," prioritizing the Ummah over individuals (Huntington, 1996). Fukuyama similarly asserted that Islamic law and doctrine are fundamentally illiberal (1992). Others claim Islam fosters

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antidemocratic values among its adherents, though some argue Islam is more pluralistic than other religions (Abdul-Fattah, 2006).

Efforts to Islamize democracy are based on the assumptions that democratic values are not solely Western and that wisdom is a universal aim. Historically, Muslims adopted administrative systems from the Persians. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian scholar, attempts to reconcile Islam and democracy in his works, supporting the 2010/2011 revolts against corrupt Arab leaders. Scholars like Huntington and Larry Diamond contend that there is inherent incompatibility between democratic principles and Islamic values, igniting vibrant debates about the transition to democracy in the Arab world and other Muslim-majority countries (Huntington, 1996; Diamond, 2010).

As post-revolution Egypt surprised many, this paper explores the historic upheavals brought by the revolts, marking the first democratically elected government in modern Egyptian history. The upheavals allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to form a government under Muhammad Mursi in 2011. This paper examines the potential outcomes when democracy enables an Islamist party to rule a nation, focusing on Egypt's recent turmoil and the collapse of Mursi, which led to his subsequent death.

## 2. Middle Eastern Culture And Political Modernization

Shahin (1998), Entelis (1997), Crone and Cook (1977), and Rubin (2003) argue that there is no clash between the West and Islam, even considering the immature democracy of the Arab and Muslim world. Some authors, however, argue that North African countries, particularly Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, have experienced a clear manifestation of Islamic reassertion since the beginning of the 1970s. Islam has resurfaced as a dynamic factor in these societies' affairs and as vibrant political language expressed by both the incumbent elite and protest groups (Shahin, 1998).

Both Beinun and Stork (1996) advocate that the genesis of contemporary Islamic ideology presents a false illusion that political Islamization is among the factors causing modern Muslims to fail. They attempt to fitfully accommodate European liberal thoughts such as citizenship, the rule of law, the separation of Church and State, and secular nationalism. Ayyubi (1991) identifies Islam as a religion of collective morals, not necessarily a political religion. He further clarified that the main Quranic concept of the body politic is not inherently religious, as neither the Quran nor Hadith specify how governments should be formed or what they should look like.

Anthony Black (2011) stressed that the emergence of Islam and its culture is fully discerned, especially if religion, whatever else it may do, serves as a way of accomplishing other social desires. Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) established a new monotheistic religion to accommodate the contemporary wants of the tribal community. The Prophet provided the ideology currently maintained in the Arab world and other Muslim nations.

Learning from Islamic political ideologies can advance an understanding of the history of European political ideas. From the beginning, European and Islamic political cultures shared many similarities, often more so than with any other cultures. Islam and Christianity are both part of Mediterranean beliefs. Islamic history is intellectually close to Europe in geography and content, making it common to compare Europe with the Islamic world when explaining Europe's uniqueness. Documented examples include historic confrontations between Muslim warriors and Western European armies from Spain/Portugal to France and Italy. Muslim scholars and writers such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126-1198) and Ibn Hazm (994-1064) had apparent influences in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain/Iberia, modern-day Portugal) after the Muslims' nearly 7-century-long conquest (711-1492).

Islam provides a clear alternative to Europe. The impactful consequences of Middle Eastern beliefs (Abrahamic religions) and Platonic ideas were not the same from all angles of consideration. Despite proven similarities, the overall patterns were conceptually different. This highlights the cardinal importance of these traditions in the history of Western political philosophy, supported by factors like Roman and Iranian legacies which had similar importance.

Abdelilah Belkeziz (2009) addresses the problematic matter of the nation-state for Islamic Reformism in its first and second generations, the problematic state of al-Khilafah for Rashid Rida (defended by al-Azhar Ulama against Ali Abd al-Raziq), the Islamic state according to al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the theocratic state as viewed by al-Mawdudi, Qutb, and Khomeini, leading to the jihadist takfiri movement. These issues produced the four primary discourses in modern and contemporary Islamic thought: Reformist discourse, salafist shar'e discourse, Muslim Brotherhood discourse, and theocratic discourse: discourse of 'al-Hakimiyah,' 'wilayat al-Faqih,' and Jihad within the 'dar Al-Islam.'

Modern Muslim Ulama have attempted to expand the intellectual understanding of modern Islamic thought beyond the Arab world to the wider Islamic world. However, understanding the diversity of Islamic cultures in multiple countries, especially post-World War II, requires examining its orientations and movements. This period strengthened the connection between Arab Muslim philosophy and non-Arab and non-Muslim thought.

While this thought was not addressed in major Islamic regions such as Turkey, Indonesia, or Malaysia, or smaller ones like Africa (an acknowledged academic gap), other Islamic texts, particularly Iranian ones, and to a lesser degree Indian and Pakistani, were presented to break the confinement to Arab-Islamic thought alone, common in many Islamic intellectual studies in the Arab world.

In modern political thought, the idea of the state (al-Dawlah) originated from the idea of Reform (al-Ihsan) and was a theoretical result. It was not an independent concept but was considered alongside the causes of Arab and Islamic societies' delays and the means to achieve advancement, renaissance, and positive entry into modern civilization. Islamic Reformism (al-Islahiyah) first formulated a thesis about the state (al-Dawlah) and political questions since the closing of discussions on 'Islamic legal politics' (al-Siyasah al-Shar'iyah) in the Islamic Middle Ages, establishing itself as the sole knowledge repository on the subject for successive generations of fuqaha.

### 3. Post-Revolution North Africa, More Chances For Islamists

Pollack, Byman, and Al-Turk (2011) argued that in some countries, Islamists have only grown stronger in the wake of the revolutions. The opening of political space means that Islamist parties will proliferate, and non-Islamist parties, if they want to win, will need to adopt policies and positions that more closely align with the conservative sentiments of voters. They further suggest that even if Islamists underperform in elections, they will invariably contribute significantly to the future of their societies. If they are not leading governments, they will be part of them.

According to Abd-Rabou, the army's impenetrable presence in politics, especially after seizing power and ousting Husni Mubarak, has not limited their interference in the Egyptian political atmosphere. The first post-revolutionary elected president, Muhammad Mursi, was handed over the affairs of the country by the military in July 2012. In the subsequent 12 months, Egypt witnessed another incident as the military once again intervened, ousting the democratically elected civilian president and declaring a roadmap for Egypt's future. A new interim government was set up, and parliamentary and presidential elections were rescheduled. The perplexing move was that the majority of Egyptians who revolted against Mubarak supported the military coup led by el-Sisi immediately after the elections, causing a wrangling debate on the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood and bewildering both Egyptian and international academia on how to name this military intervention: was it a revolution championed by Egyptians that ousted another dictatorship regime, or was it just a coup? (Abd-Rabou, 2014).

Mursi's winning declaration, which led thousands of protesters to occupy Tahrir Square once again to celebrate the election results, indicated that Mursi was the candidate backed by the popular revolution. The newly elected president was officially handed over the affairs of the country in front of huge crowds of Egyptians and the Constitutional Court Judges. This showed that he had the support of the revolutionary forces. The new administration under Mursi restructured some government machineries to attract public support. When he took office, there were no hopes that the military would return to the Egyptian political stage. His sluggish economic and political policies instigated public dissatisfaction and attracted military governance instead of civilian rule.

Despite the political upheaval, many doubt the value of these waves of protests. When the protests posed a real challenge to Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, few believed the revolts would spread to other Arab nations. However, the turmoil moved across the region: from Yemen to Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Many presumed that Arab leaders would be well-prepared to face the riots to avoid the fate of the Tunisian regime. Despite significant efforts, many autocratic regimes remained in power.

### 4. The Two Arguments on Islam and Democracy

The world's largest democracies are predominantly non-Muslim communities. The United States, India, and European countries, including the UK, have more than 1.5 billion non-Muslim people. Except for India, the influx of Muslims into Europe occurred through modern immigration from the 1960s onwards, from various parts of the Muslim world: North Africa, Asia, and Turkey. Muslims are significantly large in number in the West, accounting for about 5-6 percent of Europe's population.

According to Fuller, Europe presents a unique borderline for Muslims, unlike China, Russia, or India. Throughout Europe, Muslims left their homelands as modern immigrants for work and financial opportunities. Initially temporary, these decisions often became permanent, leading Muslims to seek citizenship through various legal means and accept minority status. Europe, with its well-established ancient identities and cultures, presents a more conservative lifestyle compared to North America. Europe has long been familiar with Muslims as historical foes, repelling Muslim forces from Spain in 1492 and thwarting Ottoman forces during the siege of Vienna in 1683. Europe also expanded its control and occupied almost the entire Muslim world in different periods (Fuller, 2012).

These battles were over ideology, civilization, culture, ethnicity, and tribe. By the 20th century, the emphasis shifted to the new world order, freedom, and democracy. Muslim scholars maintain various stances on whether Islam and democracy can coexist.

There are two main paradigms on Islam and democracy (Huntington, 1996). One argument is that there is incompatibility between political Islam and democracy. Islam is seen as a pre-reformation and pre-industrial ideology that stands in the way of modernity, including liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1992). The alternative paradigm cites examples of old Islamic states or Caliphates to show that Islam emphasizes the community (Umma) above rulers (the Caliph or Imam/Khalifah). Some argue that Islam emphasizes equality, a basic principle of democracy (Lewis, 2005).

Bouma and Sayed Khatab (2007) suggest that Islam cannot accommodate proper human rights or democracy, raising concerns for Western policymakers. The fear is that the human rights enjoyed by Western societies could

be dismantled if Muslims integrate into Western societies. Thus, the issue of Islam and democracy is part of a global contestation affecting nation-states and political and religious stripes.

### 5. Modernity And Reinterpretation Of Shari'ah Law

Based on the Islamic perspective, there are different arguments about the world system, which is believed by political scientists to be in a state of fermentation. The political agendas promoting human values and the absolute free will of choice are fundamentally traceable in the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet. This suggests that democracy and liberty could suitably fit Islam if a precise interpretation of modernity is carried out by competent Ulama.

Goodly innocent interpretation is valuable in the realm of government and law. Islam is not against modernity or its laws. The clash often arises from contradictions between secularism and Islamism, which is the genesis of their differences. These heated debates on whether Islam and modern democracy can accommodate each other have been a source of frustration for many. In different parts of the world, religion has re-penetrated politics through various means. In the case of Islam, the separation between State and Religion is not well recognized, drawing red lines between Islam and Western societies.

Western observers view the Ayatollah's claim during the Iranian Islamic revolution, calling for a theocratic government based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, as a system that does not apply in the terms understood in the Christian West. Milbank's work, which insists on an ontological basis for ethics and the analysis of social order, does not promote theocracy, recognizing that historical theocracies in Judaism and Christianity often amounted to rule by self-appointed clergy beyond accountability to the people they ruled (Ismael, 2013).

Secularism is another Western concept that sits uncomfortably with the theory/theology of Islamic governance. It is possible to argue that the forms of Islamic governance represent a pre-differentiated form of statecraft left behind in the West in favor of a clear differentiation between state and religious organizations. The West has made this transition, but whether this differentiation is necessary or peculiar to the West is debatable. The forms of the state and religious organization differ in both contexts.

### 6. Conclusion

Since ancient times, Egypt has been renowned for hosting different civilizations that have influenced global affairs (Rawlinson, 2018). The last civilization to conquer Egypt was Islam. However, Egypt has long been a borderland of the three Abrahamic faiths: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, situated between Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine. Revolutionary upheaval can be an apocalyptic condition for a country, although it is not unprecedented in Egypt's history.

Rising poverty rates, declining per capita GDP, and unemployment, coupled with regimes with questionable legitimacy from Yemen to Morocco, have galvanized millions of protesters demanding freedom, rights, legitimate ruling systems, and equal political participation. These opportunities have been blocked by geriatric ruling tyrants for decades. One of the most entrenched leaders, Hosni Mubarak, was toppled by a wave of protests. Demonstrations and mass riots are not strangers to modern Egypt, nor are the strong nationalist and freedom fighters' movements (Peters, 2011).

These revolutions transitioned Egypt into a version of democracy through a historic election that brought a new model under Morsi's administration. Morsi, the first post-revolution elected president, was toppled a year later and imprisoned over multiple charges, including ordering the arrest of protesters and espionage in a Qatar-related case. The struggle to ensure a freely elected government in Egypt opened the door for Islamizing systems and maintaining modernity and democratic transition, influencing the broader region. These protests seek to change the political landscape and leadership, presenting both opportunities and challenges to Western societies. Rebuilding nations, restoring peace, law and order, and democracy remain top challenges for regional governments.

Mubarakism has ended, making way for the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood under Muhammad Morsi. The Brotherhood, the longest and largest opposition group in Egypt, saw their post-revolution victory as a dilemma for Western pro-democracy countries. Blake Hounshell (2011) noted that when Islamist political groups won elections in Egypt and Palestine, the U.S. lost its enthusiasm for democratization in the Arab world.

Abdul Fattah el-Sisi seized power from Morsi, claiming to address the demands of the Egyptian people. This move opened a Pandora's box of internal uncertainties, including the potential ruination of democracy, seen for the first time since the 2010 revolution. The future of democracy in Egypt is uncertain, especially after the new amendment passed by Parliament allowing el-Sisi to remain in power for another ten years. The West's position on supporting democratically elected civilian governments, potentially led by Islamists, remains a dilemma.

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