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Modern Middle East Authoritarianism
Roots, Ramifications, and Crisis

Edited by
Noureddine Jiboun, Mehrdad Kia and Mimi Kirk

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Editors

Nouredine Jebnoun (also a contributor), is a faculty member at Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS), where his teaching interests focus on governance and security challenges of the Arab Middle East and North Africa. He served as Visiting Professor of Arab and Middle Eastern Affairs at the University of Montana from 2008 to 2010 and was also an assistant professor at the Tunisian War College, the Tunisian Command and General Staff College, and the Tunisian National Defense Institute from 1998–2004. He is the author of L’espace méditerranéen: les enjeux de la coopération et de la sécurité entre les rives nord et sud à l’aube du XXIème siècle (2003), as well as many book chapters. His articles and essays have appeared in EurOrient Journal, CCAS’ Occasional Papers Series, Jadaliyya, Al-Akhbar English (Beirut), the Egypt Independent (Cairo), and the MEI Insights Series (National University of Singapore), among others.

Mehrdad Kia (also a contributor) is Director of the Central and Southwest Asian Studies Center and Professor of History at the University of Montana. He has published extensively on the emergence of a new Muslim intelligentsia in nineteenth-century Iran and the Ottoman Empire, with a particular focus on issues of political modernization, socio-economic reform, and the relationship between the Islamic world and the West. He is the author of numerous articles as well as Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire (2011) and The Ottoman Empire (2008). Professor Kia has won several teaching awards at the University of Montana, including in 1997 the Distinguished Teacher of the Year and in 1999 the Most Inspirational Teacher of the Year. In 2000 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching directed by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education honored Professor Kia as one of the U.S. Professors of the Year.

Mimi Kirk is Research Director at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. and the former editor for the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies.
10 Islamism, Authoritarianism, and Democracy

A Comparative Study of Egypt and Iraq

Eric Davis

Does Islamism as an ideology and political movement inhibit democratic change? Conversely, does Islamism promote authoritarianism? Does adhering to Islamist values make a political actor less inclined to support democratic politics? What type of conceptual framework and methodology best helps us answer these questions? This essay examines the rise and development of Islamism in Egypt and Iraq. Using these two cases, it argues that existing studies of Islamism often fail to situate the ideology and movements it generates within a historical and developmental context. In so doing, Islamism assumes a transhistorical and hence reified quality.

How is Islamism defined for the purposes of this essay? Islamism is the belief that politics must be subordinated to Islamic norms and values. Islamism thus involves the politicization of religion whereby one set of believers seeks to impose its understandings of religion on society as a whole. It differs from individual piety and devotion in which belief is confined to the individual and thus has no necessary political implications or consequences.1

The failure to ground Islamism in a structured and diachronically oriented conceptual framework creates (at least) two problems. First, it becomes difficult to conduct comparative analysis or to understand the trajectory of Islamist movements because political and social change is not theorized. Second, because Islamism is conceptualized in largely static terms, its relationship to democratization cannot be ascertained. This static understanding of Islamism is problematic since it has undergone significant change not only in Egypt and Iraq, but throughout the Middle East during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Further, this essay argues against a “cultural determinism” that informs much analysis of Islamism. I hypothesize that most political change in Egypt and Iraq since the founding of the modern state has been influenced by political economic variables set in motion by the intrusion of colonial powers into the Middle East. This assertion is not meant to deny the significance of culture, but rather to point to the need to likewise integrate political economic variables when analyzing Islamist movements.

This chapter’s methodological approach is to analyze the phases through which Islamism has passed in Egypt and Iraq. These include the
developmental phase in the early part of the twentieth century when these movements were founded, the repressive phase that these movements encountered after they acquired political influence and were suppressed by the state, and the "fragmentary" phase during the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries when the movements began to experience internal divisions pitting those who favored radicalism against those who favored using democratic means to seize power.

This latter phase constitutes the central focus of this chapter because it entails the development of elements within the Islamist movement that have decided to commit to democratic governance. The key questions raised here include why Islamist movements have developed different ideological tendencies. Of particular importance is which sectors of the Islamist movement have developed a commitment to democracy. If a meaningful relationship develops between Islam and democracy, then we can potentially offer hypotheses about the future that suggest a move toward greater political stability and tolerance among those segments of the populace committed to democratic rule.

The Comparative Analysis of Egypt and Iraq

Why compare Egypt and Iraq? Both countries experienced similar trajectories in their economic development, relationship to colonial powers, and in the form and composition of their nationalist movements. Both developed quasi-liberal political systems after achieving independence following World War I. Egypt and Iraq had multiparty political systems from the 1920s until they were overthrown by military coups in the 1950s. Both countries witnessed the development of pluralistic nationalist movements in which neither religion nor ethnicity created impediments to political cooperation and solidarity.

Egypt and Iraq also experienced parallel historical trajectories in terms of the structure of their political systems, both institutionally and ideologically. Egypt achieved formal independence after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, as did Iraq. Both countries became monarchies—Egypt under the Muhammad Ali dynasty and Iraq under the Hashemites. In each case, Great Britain, the major colonial power of the era, created the new states and held effective control until the late 1940s.  

The quasi-liberal systems established by the British after World War I were characterized by extensive corruption and dysfunctional political institutions. Most significant of all, these political systems produced great differentials of wealth while neglecting the social needs of the populace at large. Despite considerable freedom of expression, the benefits of the political systems were largely confined to the professional, intellectual, and upper classes.

Despite being ruled by elites inclined toward authoritarianism, democratic impulses were evident in Egypt and Iraq during the period of colonial influence. While most districts, especially those in rural areas, were controlled by large landowners, in both countries urban electoral districts existed where elections were conducted in a fair and transparent manner. Widespread artistic production and a vigorous press developed in both Egypt and Iraq. Newspapers and magazines went beyond simply reporting the news. Articles on the meaning of nationalism, social democracy, and a wide variety of other topics were made available to a broad spectrum of the educated populace. Civil society flourished and was most evident in the formation of professional associations, which included lawyers, doctors, secondary school teachers, engineers, artists, agronomists, and many other professions, as well as labor unions and women's and student organizations. Thus a strong sense of democracy was created among the urban and educated classes.

These democratic impulses were thwarted by the refusal of the political elite that dominated the quasi-liberal systems to address the populace's social needs. This failure led to violent protests as the urban poor's living standards declined and progress toward ridding Egypt and Iraq of colonial influence was not forthcoming. Rising social unrest and the breakdown of law and order unnerved the armed forces.

In Egypt, King Farouk, the Muhammad Ali dynasty's last monarch, was overthrown in a military coup d'état on 22 July 1952. In Iraq, King Faysal II was overthrown by the military on 14 July 1958, ending the Hashemite monarchy. In both instances, the military used spreading social unrest and disorder as its rationale for intervening in politics. In Egypt, the burning of Cairo in January 1952 created a sense that the nation's social order was breaking down. Likewise in Iraq, the 1948 Wathba, the 1952 Intifada, and violent demonstrations against the signing of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 and against the Tripartite Invasion of Egypt in 1956 energized the military to organize a coup d'état.  

In both Egypt and Iraq, military seizure of power was the result of similar social and political processes. First, the corruption and manipulation of parliamentary elections undermined faith in democratic institutions because "democracy" came to be associated with corruption and elite venality. This setback for support for democratic processes and institutions had little to do with Islamism. The fact that the political systems of the interwar period failed to provide critical social services for the populace at large indicates that the primary dynamic of political change in the transition from the quasi-liberal system to the political corporatism of military rule was socioeconomic in origin.

The Egyptian and Iraqi nationalist movements were not reacting to the fact that Western values had penetrated local political culture. Rather, their main concern was the lack of employment, health care, educational opportunities, and housing, which they saw as caused by a corrupt and uncaring political elite that only remained in power through support by Great Britain.

In both Egypt and Iraq, the military offered citizens a new social contract. In exchange for accepting the curtailing of freedom of expression, political participation, and civil society organizations, the populace would benefit from social order and increased economic development. Social fragmentation and conflict would end and society would achieve a new sense of purpose and
direction. Colonial influence would be eliminated. Many Egyptians and Iraqis found these promises very attractive.

Were there cultural or religious variables that influenced support for a military coup? Clearly, the nationalist movements rejected colonial interference in the domestic political realm. However, Westernism or Westernization as a cultural discourse was not rejected by the middle classes and workers who formed the nationalist movements’ basis of support. In both Egypt and Iraq, the nationalist movements were almost exclusively secular.

The Rise of Islamism

A critical question is why Islamism arose in Egypt and Iraq in light of the dominance of secular nationalist movements. Why did it assume different forms in the two countries in light of many similarities in political and ideological development? A secondary question is how Islamism triumphed in Egypt in 2012 and to a lesser extent in Iraq after 2003 if it did not have strong social foundations during the twentieth century, especially within the powerful nationalist movements that developed in each country. Answering these questions requires an analysis of the historical development of Islamism in Egypt and Iraq.

In Egypt, the development of Islamism was highly contextual. As is well known, the Islamist movement began with the efforts of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani to create a pan-Islamic, anti-colonial movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Al-Afghani’s efforts in Egypt failed but they stimulated a powerful Islamic reform movement that was led by the Grand Mufti, Shaykh Muhammad Abduh (1860–1905). In comparison to al-Afghani, Abduh’s approach was more intellectual than activist. The Islamic reform movement that Abduh initiated was “fundamentalist” in intent, as he sought to remove from Islamic doctrine all the spurious innovations and exegeses which, in his view, had corrupted Islam. However, his goal was also to demonstrate that Islamic and Western scientific values were not in conflict. In this sense, Abduh’s effort was to reconcile Islam and the West, not to reject Western scientific and technological progress.

The argument is often made that the Islamic reform movement degenerated following Abduh’s death in 1905. Under his student and successor, Shaykh Rashid Rida, the movement focused less on the tolerant elements and thinking proposed by Abduh. Instead, Rida focused more on the idea that the West was corrupting Egypt’s cultural fabric by undermining Islam through the introduction of secular values, and the blame for Egypt’s problems was increasingly laid at the doorstep of these values.

Rida in turn had a powerful impact on the founder of the most prominent Islamist movement in the Arab world, the Society of Muslim Brothers, known more commonly as the Muslim Brotherhood. Hassan al-Banna’s message was based on a Salafism that called for expunging Western values from Egyptian society. While deeply disturbed by colonial economic exploitation, his message was more cultural than economic. It was not sufficient to simply remove colonial influence—both political and economic—but more important to counter the secular trends that were, in his view, robbing Egypt of its identity as a society. The Brotherhood’s message was predominantly a cultural one in which Muslims needed to create a “cultural firewall” between themselves and the West if they hoped to preserve Egyptian society.

As the power of the Brotherhood increased, the Egyptian government began a process of repression. In 1948, following the Arab defeat in the Arab-Israeli War, the Brotherhood’s assets were confiscated and, in 1949, its Supreme Guide, Hassan al-Banna, was assassinated. Despite some initial indications that the Brotherhood would cooperate with the military regime that seized power in 1952, relations soon soured, especially after the new leader Gamal Abdel Nasser accused the Brotherhood of trying to assassinate him while delivering a speech in Alexandria in 1954. Scores of Brothers were imprisoned and the movement was suppressed throughout Nasser’s rule until he died in September 1970.

A key variable that affected the Muslim Brotherhood’s political trajectory was Anwar al-Sadat’s decision to break the close ties the Nasserist regime had maintained with the Soviet Union. Sadat was aware that the only way he could remove Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula, which they had occupied during the June 1967 War, was through assistance from the West. He also was aware that no foreign investment in Egypt’s ailing economy would be possible unless the state of war with Israel was terminated.

Sadat’s coordinated attack with Syria on Israeli forces in October 1973 was not designed to defeat Israel but rather to inflict enough damage that would force Israel to negotiate a peace treaty. Once that process was underway—facilitated by the United States—Sadat introduced his so-called “Open Door” policy (al-Infatih) in 1973, which sought to attract foreign investment. Rather than reducing the influence of the public sector, Sadat’s efforts increased economic interaction between the state public sector and foreign firms. With access to foreign capital, the public sector became even more powerful.

One of the key outcomes of this process was the institutional development and expansion of Egypt’s judiciary. While the judiciary had played a subordinate role under the Nasserist regime, it was given new life under Sadat, but especially his successor Hosni Mubarak, who assumed power when Sadat was assassinated in October 1981. The development of the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) was intended to create an aura in the international arena of an Egypt based in modernity, democracy, and the rule of law. The state’s more fundamental concern was to assure foreign investors that contracts concluded with public sector firms would be respected and, in the event of financial contestation, the investor would have recourse to an arbiter in the form of the SCC.

It is only within this transition of power from the left wing of the Nasserist movement to Sadat and a new wing of the political elite that favored scuttling the autarkic model of the 1960s and developing closer ties with Western
capital that one can understand the evolution of Islamism in Egypt in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood. Accompanying his move toward allying with the West, Sadat placed an emphasis on "science and faith" (al-'ilm wa'l-imān) as part of an effort to mobilize support from Islamists and conservative elements in Egyptian society. At the same time, the Sadat regime released Muslim Brothers from prison and allowed them to open offices and publish newspapers and journals. One incentive behind these decisions was the state’s desire to have the Brotherhood smash left-wing Nasserist control of professional syndicates and student organizations.

During the 1980s, the Egyptian state attempted to create a parliamentary system of governance that can be characterized as "competitive" or "electoral authoritarianism." Participating in elections, even if they constrained candidates who were not members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to interact with the state in ways that it had not been able to since the late 1940s. In the elections of 1984, the state attempted to create an electoral law that would limit the ability of small political parties and independents to gain seats. Instead, the electoral system was stacked in favor of the NDP. The Muslim Brotherhood formed an alliance with the pre-1952 Revolution Wafd Party, with the coalition winning 15.1 percent of the vote. In the 1987 elections, the Brotherhood eschewed its alliance with the Wafd in favor of the ideologically weaker Labor Party. This electoral alliance won 17 percent of the vote.

By the 1990s, the Brotherhood had become a sophisticated political party. Rather than pursuing divisive issues in parliament, such as focusing on the need to impose shari'a law, it worked instead to introduce laws in coalition with other opposition parties that supported the public good. Even though the Brotherhood's parliamentary members knew that the NDP would refuse to pass these laws, they gained considerable legitimacy by proposing and publicizing them. During the 1990s, the Brotherhood dramatically increased its political influence by sweeping elections in most of Egypt's professional syndicates. These successes had less to do with its Islamist message than with its sophisticated organizational skills.

What was remarkable during this period was the formulation of a number of documents that came to lay out the Brotherhood's strong commitment to democracy as the most desirable form of governance in Egypt. In addition to underscoring its commitment to democratic processes, the Brotherhood developed policies on other important issues, especially its acceptance of religious difference, its support for women's rights and a multiparty system, and its condemnation of attacks by radical Islamists on Egyptian police and foreign tourists.

Documents such as "Shura and Party Pluralism in Muslim Society" and the "Statement on Democracy" represented remarkable breaks with the Brotherhood's past, especially the doctrine of la'a hizbiyya (no partisanship), developed by Hassan al-Banna, which adamantly rejected party politics as corrupt and politically divisive. Although it faced a period of serious repression between 1990 and 1995, during a period when radical Islamists in the form of the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya deployed violence in an attempt to achieve their goals, the Brotherhood had become by the 2000 and 2005 elections the most sophisticated political party in Egypt. Indeed, when the Mubarak regime, under pressure from the Bush Administration, removed some of the electoral constraints on the Brotherhood, it won 88 seats in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

What types of conceptual insights can we derive from an overview of the inclusion of the Brotherhood in Egypt's electoral authoritarian political system between 1980 and 2010? First, the political system's modification from one-party rule under the Nasser regime was transformed into an obsessively democratic system under the Mubarak regime, which in reality was dominated by the official party, the NDP.

Second, a major stimulus for the transformation of the political system was Egypt's changing role in the international political economy. In the effort to attract foreign investment and create a more favorable perception in the eyes of Western states and potential investors, the Mubarak regime created the illusion of a democratic state. Periodic elections were held and the judicial system was expanded. That Islamism became more powerful in the form of greater Muslim Brotherhood representation in parliament (albeit still constrained) was thus facilitated by the state.

Third, the state's policies toward the Brotherhood were also intended to dampen calls for greater democracy, whether by domestic political forces or foreign governments, especially the United States. In allowing the Brotherhood to become the "official opposition," the Mubarak regime used the organization as a political foil. Whenever domestic or foreign pressures for democratization arose, the regime warned that truly free elections would lead to a government under the control of Islamists who were hostile to personal freedoms, women's rights, and Western interests. Thus the Brotherhood became a tool for deflecting calls for meaningful democratization of the political system.

Fourth, the Brotherhood's policies were modified substantially by what we may call "institutional design." In other words, the decision to interact with the new system of competitive or electoral authoritarianism helped the Brotherhood's parliamentarians develop a wide variety of new skills, including coalition building, using the courts to challenge the government's restrictive electoral laws, and recruiting large numbers of new activists based on a more inclusive and tolerant message, one that included women.

If Sadat's Open Door policy provided the necessary conditions for the emergence of a Brotherhood committed to democracy, the new institutional makeup of the Egyptian state, including limited electoral competition in parliament, the emergence of an assertive judiciary, and the articulation of a clear message dedicated to democratization, provided the sufficient conditions.
What is also clear is that the Brotherhood’s leadership has drawn extensively from Egypt’s professional classes. This represents a pattern of recruitment that goes back to the 1950s and continues to this day.20 Indeed, the current Egyptian president, Muhammad Morsi, is himself an engineer. We also know that Egypt’s religious elite has always resented the Brotherhood for engaging in religious discourse, as such discourse is viewed in competitive terms and as impinging on its professional prerogatives.21

While the Mubarak regime’s highly choreographed political theater constrained the Brotherhood, it nevertheless aided it in developing a distinct advantage over its secular rivals during the 1980s and after. Unlike Islamists, secular forces were largely refused licenses when they tried to establish new political parties and civil society organizations and were therefore unable to mobilize politically.22 The advantages Islamists enjoyed were especially apparent in the aforementioned 2005 parliamentary elections that resulted in the election of 88 Muslim Brothers. Serving in the Chamber of Deputies allowed the Brotherhood’s members to develop a sophisticated understanding of parliamentary procedures and form alliances with other opposition parties. As a distinct minority, the Brotherhood’s members could criticize the government, but they were unable to effectively challenge its policies.

**Egypt, Islamism, and the “Arab Spring”**

Clearly, the Mubarak regime was disturbed by the Brotherhood’s 2005 electoral success. When the next round of parliamentary elections was held in the fall of 2010, not a single Brother was elected to parliament. With the elections clearly rigged, public outrage spread. The state’s flagrant intervention in the elections was one of the key factors that set the stage for the emergence of Egypt’s “Arab Spring.”

Having run candidates in previous parliamentary elections and maintained a quasi-legal political movement, the Brotherhood was much better situated than secular parties to take advantage of the toppling of the Mubarak regime. In November 2011 and January 2012, the first fairly free elections were held in Egypt since 1952, when the military overthrew the monarchy. Islamists won 75 percent of the parliamentary seats.

In June 2012, after several presidential candidates were disqualified by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), two remaining candidates—Ahmad Shafiq, the last prime minister under the Mubarak regime, and Muhammad Morsi, the leader of the Brotherhood—were allowed to run. To the great dismay of the Brotherhood’s supporters, however, SCAF disbanded the newly elected parliament two days prior to the presidential elections. On 24 June, after investigating a number of purported election irregularities, SCAF announced that Morsi had won the presidency.

While the military thought that it could contain Morsi, he quickly moved to reconvene the dissolved parliament in which the Islamists held the majority of the seats and remove the most senior members of SCAF, including Field Marshal Muhammad Hussein Tantawi. Although many had thought that the office of the presidency would have very limited powers under a SCAF-dominated political system, Morsi and the Brotherhood have already shown themselves to be adept at outmaneuvering SCAF by cutting deals with younger officers in the military.

**Islamism in Iraq**

Despite the similarities between political development in Egypt and Iraq, the trajectories of their respective Islamist movements differ substantially. Unlike Egypt’s relatively homogenous population, Iraq is an ethnically divided society. Among its three main ethno-confessional groups, the Sunni Arabs, the Shi‘i Arabs, and the Kurds, the relationship between Islam and politics has assumed very different forms. One of the key independent variables affecting Islamism in Iraq is its ethno-confessional composition.

During the lengthy Ottoman occupation of Iraq (1533–1918), the privileged status enjoyed by the Sunni Arab community during that period, particularly access to lower-level positions in the bureaucracy and army, provided little incentive for Sunni Arabs to conjoin religion and politics. The Shi‘i clergy of the shrine cities of al-Najaf and Karbala dominated the Shi‘i community and were economically and culturally linked to Iran, Ottoman Turkey’s historic enemy, which meant that mixing religion and politics suggested adopting a societal model characteristic of Iraq’s Shi‘i clergy. Thus, the failure to mix religion and politics reflected an effort by the Sunni community to distinguish itself from the Shi‘a.

The tribal organization of much of Iraqi society likewise had an adverse effect on promoting a strong relationship between religion and politics. Loyalty to tribal culture and values (al-‘urf) superseded loyalty to Islam and Islamic values. Among the Kurds, a strong tribal culture and the development of Sufism and Sufi orders further dampened any tendency to develop a radical Islamist politics. In this sense Iraq differs from Egyptian society where, except for a small area of Upper Egypt, tribes have disappeared.

Largely ignored by the Ottoman administration, Iraq’s Shi‘a organized their own religious, social, cultural, and economic institutions. Many of the social services made available to the Shi‘i community were provided by the clergy, who were sustained by an extensive system of charitable donations from pious Iraqi Shi‘a and pilgrims. A substantial industry developed to provide services to the large numbers of pilgrims who visited tombs and shrines in Iraq. The Shi‘i clergy also procured considerable funds from the corpse trade, in which devout Shi‘a wanted their relatives to be buried in the shrine cities of southern-central Iraq, particularly in al-Najaf.

In effect, the Shi‘i clergy in the shrine cities of south-central Iraq formed a state within a state, providing spiritual sustenance and social services to their co-confessionalists and collecting funds to sustain their institutions. This clerical community remained a relatively small percentage of Iraqi society until
the eighteenth century, when the clergy began proselytizing among the tribes of southern Iraq. These activities were intended to raise funds to offset the drop in foreign revenues due to political instability in neighboring Persia (Iran). In light of the lack of large waqf properties (religious endowments) that were available to the Shi'i clergy in al-Najaf and Karbala, the Shi'i religious authority (al-Marja'iya) was forced to devote considerable time to insuring that it could obtain sufficient funds to support the large network of educational institutions, known as the al-Hawza al-Ulimiya (the Scientific Place of Learning), and other Shi'i institutions. In understanding the factors shaping the behavior of the al-Marja'iya, political economic variables need to be taken into account.

The conversion of large numbers of Iraqi tribesmen was stimulated in part by their desire to avoid conscription into the Ottoman Army, which sought to expand in the late nineteenth century to offset Europe's military and economic threats. Various tribal motivations, the growth in Iraq's Shi'i population enhanced the al-Marja'iya's power. Thus, unlike the Egyptian clergy, which had always been subservient to the state, the Shi'i al-Marja'iya possessed access to its own economic resources, even if these resources were often limited. Unlike Iran's Shi'i clergy, which had access to land and thus a great degree of independence from the state, there was little incentive for the Iraqi al-Marja'iya to promote a radical form of Islam. Such an action would have encouraged conflict with their Ottoman overlords, thereby threatening their institutional status and (often marginal) economic resources. Rather, the Shi'i clergy sought to sustain its social and economic position in the shrine cities of south-central Iraq and avoid involvement in politics.

Yet, developments during the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries prevented the clergy from remaining isolated from politics. As the Ottoman Empire came under ever more pressure from European powers, anxiety developed in its remaining provinces such as Iraq, greater Syria, and Palestine. Local poets who had traditionally sung the Ottoman Sultan's praises now came to criticize him. The al-Marja'iya increasingly felt the need to address the rapidly changing political situation, especially once British economic influence began to dramatically increase in southern Iraq. This was especially true after British steamships began plying the Tigris River during the 1860s, transporting a variety of agricultural goods destined for overseas markets. The degree of British control of the economy was evident by the fact that Great Britain had become Iraq's main foreign trading partner by 1900.

The British invasion of Iraq in 1914 forced the al-Marja'iya to become actively involved in politics. Notably, the Shi'i clergy issued religious decrees (fatwa) that were meant to protect all Iraqis—regardless of religious creed—from the British invasion and that in effect implicitly recognized Iraq as a nation-state as opposed to a more ill-defined Islamic nation (al-umma al-Islamiyya). With Ottoman forces and bureaucrats having fled Iraq and British forces having not yet occupied much of the country, the clergy was required to assume many administrative and political roles to which it was not accustomed. The clergy's contribution to the stable administration of al-Najaf and Karbala during the interim of 1914–16 between the Ottoman withdrawal and the British occupation was well regarded by the Shi'a of southern Iraq.

After capturing Baghdad in March 1917, Britain failed to meet its promises that Iraq would be given its full independence. After numerous efforts to prod the British to keep their word, tensions mounted, eventually leading to the June through October 1920 Revolution. Here the Shi'i al-Marja'iya played a key role in encouraging not only the tribes but urban Iraqis of all ethnic groups to support the uprising. Most innovative was the cooperation that developed between the Shi'i clergy and their Sunni counterparts. Shi'a were encouraged to pray in Sunni mosques and celebrate their festivals while Sunni clerics likewise encouraged their co-confessionalists to pray in Shi'i husayniyat and to celebrate Shi'i rituals, such as the ta'ziya.

Because of their central role in the 1920 Revolution, the British deported many Shi'i clerics or forced those who were allowed to remain in Iraq to sign pledges that they would no longer participate in politics. Thus began a long period in which the al-Marja'iya was limited to the realm of religious duties and teachings and was largely excluded from the sphere of politics. It was precisely during this period that secular forces such as the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), the Ahali Group (Jama'at al-Ahali), and the National Party began to assume prominent positions within the growing nationalist movement.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the secular nationalist movement began to acquire great power and influence. Large numbers of Shi'i youth joined its ranks, drawn to its message of anti-sectarianism and social justice. Here Shi'i youth encountered activists and youth from Iraq's other ethnic-confessional groups, including Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Turkmen, and others. Many youth entered government schools because they knew that without an education they would not be able to find employment and develop careers.

Matters came to a head during the late 1940s and 1950s when the ICP acquired increased power within the nationalist movement. Following the 1958 Revolution, the ICP found itself transformed from its former position as a pariah institution under the Hashemite monarchy to one on which the new revolutionary regime led by General Abul Karim Qasim relied, thus further increasing its power and influence. It was during this period that its recruitment of Shi'i youth grew dramatically.

During the 1950s, but especially after the 1958 Revolution, a debate within the al-Marja'iya over the role of the Shi'i clergy in politics burst into the open. Highly alarmed at what they viewed as the negative impact of increased recruitment of Shi'i youth to the ICP and secularism generally, a group of clerics, led by the highly respected Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, decided to form a political party. Despite clerics' desire to be consulted by the state on certain laws, especially those relating to personal status, the founding of an explicitly Islamist political party contravened the rule that clerics should not directly engage in political activity.
It is unclear exactly when the Islamic Call Party (Hizb al-Da’wa al-Islamiyya) was formed. Most observers agree that it occurred in the late 1950s, possibly even early in the 1960s. Its formation reflected the decline of the al-Marja’iyya. Thus an Islamist movement in the narrow sense of the term only began in Iraq during the late 1950s, well after such a movement had begun in Egypt. Further, in Iraq, the development of an institutionalized Islamist movement occurred as a result of a split within the Shi’i clergy, not as the result of a cleavage between the lay and the clerical hierarchy. In other words, the Islamic Call Party was a party formed by clerics who broke with the long-standing clerical tradition of avoiding participation in politics.

This pattern differentiated the Islamic Call Party from the Muslim Brotherhood, which was a movement largely formed by educated professionals dissatisfied with what they saw as the subservience of the clergy to both the state and the British colonial occupation of Egypt. In both cases, the Islamist movements were grounded in the middle and lower middle classes, with leadership drawn largely from the educated middle classes. Whereas segments of the peasantry and working class demonstrated support for Islamism in Egypt and Iraq from time to time, these movements had and continue to have a distinctive social base grounded in the lower middle and middle classes. A key factor to note is that the Brotherhood’s leadership differed from that of the Islamic reform movement, which was more upper class in its social composition, while the Islamic Call Party attracted lay members as well as clerics, unlike the movement to oppose the British, which coalesced in 1914 and included only the clergy.

The Iraqi nationalist movement was suppressed in February 1963 by the first Ba’thist regime. The Ba’thists were in turn ousted in November of the same year due to the severe violence the movement deployed during its eight months in power against those it considered its enemies. The Abd al-Salam Arif regime that took power after the removal of the Ba’th was sectarian and anti-Shi’i. Given the first Ba’thist regime’s killing and exile of a large number of democracy activists who supported the nationalist movement, a vacuum existed after 1963 that made it difficult to offset the rise of sectarianism in Iraqi political circles. According to one author, the years between 1964 and 1968 were the “golden years” of the Da’wa in which it expanded its membership and influence, particularly among university students in Baghdad and elsewhere.

The Da’wa Party faced serious repression from the new Ba’thist regime that came to power in July 1968. Given the intense power struggles within the Ba’th Party between 1968 and 1973, which created extreme insecurity within the regime, the Party’s response to any perceived threat was extraordinarily violent. Beginning in 1971, the regime initiated an effort to completely eliminate the Da’wa Party. Executions of prominent members took place in 1973 and 1974.

From 1975 onward, the Da’wa took an active role in organizing and leading the marad al-ras, or Arba’in ritual, which involved processions going to Karbala to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. These efforts led to a ban of the procession culminating in a bloody conflict in February 1977 between the Shi’i faithful and government forces. The number of arrests reported in this confrontation varies widely, but it was certainly in the thousands. The Ba’thist regime also banned large-scale festivals such as the annual ‘Ashura’ celebration in 1977. Such events helped radicalize the Da’wa Party during the 1970s. A number of radical offshoots of the organization, such as al-Harak (The Movement), which developed into the Munazamat al-Amal al-Islami (MAI or Islamic Hope Movement), felt the need to move beyond the Da’wa Party’s emphasis on teaching to engaging in violence. Unlike the Da’wa, the leaders of MAI always avoided using the term “party” to refer to themselves or any of their offshoots.

In 1979, as the revolution against the Shah’s regime in neighboring Iran intensified, there were a number of assassination attempts against members of the Ba’thist regime. The assassins were members of MAI, even though the movement’s leadership had not authorized these attempts. The most prominent was the effort to kill Foreign Minister and long-time confidant of Saddam Hussein, Tariq Aziz, while he was addressing a rally at Baghdad’s al-Mustansiriya University. The regime’s reaction to these assassination attempts was swift and violent.

The threat that the Ba’th perceived from the marad al-ras demonstrations and assassination attempts led it to incorporate more Shi’a into the ranks of the regime, Pan-Arabism, which many Shi’a viewed as an effort to make them a minority in a larger Sunni-dominated Arab state, was played down in favor of a greater focus on Iraq’s Mesopotamian past. Shi’a were made members of the ruling Revolution Command Council for the first time.

Despite such gestures of inclusion, Iraq’s Shi’a were clearly becoming increasingly angry at the discrimination that they perceived on the part of the Ba’thist regime. However, it is important to recognize that the rise in Islamism during this period produced contradictory tendencies. Among senior clerics, for example, emphasis was placed on democratic values. Already in the late 1950s, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr had stipulated that, while absolute sovereignty belongs to God, the people were the ultimate source of political legitimacy, as was made clear by his concept of wilayat al-imama (governance of the people). In this sense, al-Sadr’s formulation of Islamism had a democratic component. Other writings such as the memo by Ayatollah Muhammad Rida al-Shabibi to Prime Minister Abd al-Rahman al-Bazza in 1965 likewise carried a tolerant tone and indicated support for democratic principles. For instance, al-Shabibi criticized the Arab Socialist Union for its monopoly on political power and single party states generally.

However, the al-Shabibi memo reflected the internal social class divisions and concerns within the Shi’i community in Iraq. The wealthier members of the community, especially the Shi’i merchant class, were concerned with the state nationalization of banks, industry, and commercial firms in 1964 as Iraq sought to prepare itself for a merger with Egypt into a new pan-Arab state.
They viewed these nationalizations as not just an attack on their property holdings but on the Shi‘i community as a whole since its members were disproportionately the owners of confiscated property. Middle class Shi‘a resented what they saw to be discrimination in government jobs. Lower class Shi‘a were often less aware of the discrimination perceived by the middle and upper classes, but they took their political cues from these groups.

In addition to the earlier establishment of the offshoots of al-Harakat and MAI, the Da‘wa Party developed internal fissures during the 1980s that were stimulated in part by the tremendous pressure placed on it by the Ba‘thist regime. As mentioned, many members had been arrested, tortured, and executed during the 1970s. One split that developed was the establishment of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) in Iran in 1982. Formed in Tehran by exiled Shi‘i clerics and Iraqi Shi‘i prisoners of war, SCIRI was initially viewed as an arm of Iran’s Islamic Republic. In the first few years, SCIRI was led by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, who also controlled the organization’s intelligence and military units. For the first time in the history of modern Iraq, developing an Islamic state in Iraq became the goal of a powerful Islamist movement. At the same time, the Iranian government sought to interfere in Iraqi politics to unify the increasing number of Islamist factions.

A broader and key development during the 1980s was the emergence of splits in Islamist movements throughout the Middle East. The split between MAI and al-Da‘wa in Iraq was paralleled by splits elsewhere in the region, such as Hizbullah in Lebanon, which split from al-Amal; the al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya in Egypt, which left the Muslim Brotherhood; and the emergence of the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé) in Algeria, which decided to pursue violence as the process for seizing power. Increasingly, however, segments within the Islamist movement began to push for a new form of politics, namely for participating in the political process and seeking to acquire power through democratic means. This option became available in Egypt when Sadat established the People’s Assembly in 1971. There were also further splits within the Da‘wa Party due to this debate over the use of a democratic path, namely the Soldiers of the Imam (Jund al-Imam) (1977); the Da‘wa Islamiyya group, which avoided using the word “party” (1982); the Da‘wa Party—Majlis Fiqhi (1988); and the Cadres (Kawadir) (1990). These factional disputes represented a tension between the Iraqi as opposed to the Iranian nature of the party; ideological differences such as the influence of Sayyid Qutb on party ideology; the role of clerics in party leadership; and the anger of many intellectuals that the party rejected democratic norms and values.

Even though Iraq established a rump parliament in 1970 that was only allowed to begin functioning in June 1980 after Saddam Hussein seized the presidency in 1979, there was no opportunity for representation of Islamist parties or movements. As the Iran-Iraq War progressed and Iraqis largely rallied in support of the Iraqi army and the Ba‘thist regime to prevent an Iranian victory, the Islamist movement was cut off from Iraq’s three major urban centers that contained half the country’s population: Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. As regime repression intensified following Act 461, which was passed by the Revolution Command Council in March 1980 and made membership in the Da‘wa Party punishable by death, many party leaders fled to Iran. This action undermined the party’s popularity because it became increasingly associated with the Iranian regime.

Leaders of SCIRI expressed not just discontent with the traditional Da‘wa leadership but a desire to break with the idea that the party was an extension of Iran’s Islamic Republic. With the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, many of its leaders left Iran to take up residence in Western countries. While a debate over the notion of the “Guardianship of the Jurist” (velayat-e faqih) circulated in party circles during the late 1990s, it was gradually marginalized during the 1990s until it no longer retained any serious legitimacy among party members.

Following the January 1991 Gulf War in which Iraqi forces were expelled from Kuwait, an enormous uprising (intifada) spread throughout Iraq that almost toppled Saddam Hussein’s regime. While Islamist organizations participated in the intifada, its suppression by Saddam’s Republican Guard units and helicopter gunships set a new standard for regime brutality. By the regime’s own admission, it killed over 300,000 Iraqis in crushing the uprising.

Although the intifada was brutally suppressed, the United Nations (UN) sanctions regime that was imposed on Iraq after 1991 to ensure that the country would not be able to rebuild its Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Industry program resulted in a major contraction of the state. The Iraqi economy and education system collapsed while the urban middle class was devastated by hyperinflation. Over 60 percent of Iraqis fell below the poverty line. The contraction of the state meant that new opportunities for organization were made available, especially in rural regions and in poor urban quarters.

In this social and economic environment, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, the brother of the late Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, began to organize a large network of apprentices along the lines of his brother as well as charitable organizations to provide the services that were no longer forthcoming from the state. Along with his effort to manipulate religion to enhance his regime’s legitimacy, Saddam initiated a so-called “Faith Campaign” in 1993. With this campaign, Saddam reached out to Sadiq al-Sadr in the hope that he would promote a better image of the Iraqi leader among the Shi‘a. However, al-Sadr used the resources provided by Saddam to mobilize groups against him. When Saddam discovered this duplicity, he ordered Sadiq al-Sadr and two of his sons assassinated.

While Iraq suffered under the repressive UN sanctions, many similar organizations paralleling what al-Sadr had attempted to create were organized. Parading as religious charities seeking to provide social services to the poor
and downtrodden, many of these Shi‘i organizations were actually fronts for criminal activity, while others were more political in orientation and mobilized groups against the Ba‘thist regime.

When the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, it had little knowledge of the vast underground of sectarian and criminal organizations that used religious symbolism, but were in reality more akin to political-criminal syndicates such as the Mafia, Camorra, and ‘Ndrangheta in southern Italy.46

Conceptual and Empirical Considerations

In comparing the development of Islamism in Egypt and Iraq, we note that religious variables, understood in isolation, have not been the key causal elements in creating these movements. The linking of an Islamic idiom to nationalism was the most powerful causal factor in allowing Islamist movements to gain legitimacy and political influence in the first half of the twentieth century. Iraqi sociologist Faleh Abdul-Jabar’s argument that Shi‘ism “is neither a sociological nor a political category” calls our attention to the fact that Islamism is bound up with religion, nationalism, and cultural identity.47 In this sense, what the study of Islamism demonstrates is the need to theorize it within a broad social, cultural, political, and economic context.

Despite the ethno-confessional diversity that differentiates Iraq from Egypt, many of Abdul-Jabar’s observations about nationalism also apply to Egypt. Its Islamist message notwithstanding, the Muslim Brotherhood remained a small and nondescript organization until the mid-1930s. Only when it decided to send volunteers to Palestine in 1936 to support the local Arab populace’s uprising against the British and the growing Zionist presence did the movement attract any significant interest and support. Its political credentials were further strengthened when it sent volunteers to fight in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Indeed, the popularity the Brotherhood acquired after 1948 led the Egyptian government to close the organization and seize its assets. It also resulted in the assassination of its leader, Hassan al-Banna, in 1949.

Motivations for the creation of Islamist movements also often have little to do with abstract religious values. The drivers of Islamist movements have been as much nationalism and an effort to end social discrimination as they have the desire to establish an Islamic state. Indeed, in Iraq Islamism has been largely linked to the Shi‘i community. In this context, it has always played a role not just of enhancing Islamic values but of defending communal rights. In other words, Islamism has served as a defense against what many Shi‘a have considered a predatory state. If Islamism was closely tied to anti-colonialism in its early stages, Islamism in Iraq has been largely a movement to bolster the declining influence of the al-Marja‘iyat and defend the Shi‘i community against negative attacks by the state, such as the 1964 nationalizations that disproportionately affected Shi‘i private capital.

What is significant is the need to reference non-religious (non-Islamic) variables to understand the Brotherhood’s general attraction. The Brotherhood’s ideology, which combined anti-colonialism, Egyptian nationalism, and an attraction to cultural authenticity in the form of an emphasis on Islamic values, provided the larger complex of variables that helped the Brotherhood recruit its followers.

Nevertheless, it is also important to recognize that, despite its founding in 1928, the Brotherhood did not represent the Egyptian nationalist movement’s core ideology. Taken together, secular political parties such as the Wafd, the Liberal Constitutionalists, the Saadist Party, and the Egyptian Communist Party together enjoyed greater popular support. As most analysts point out, Islamism did not begin to gain a large measure of support until the collapse of Nasserism in the early 1970s.48

In this context, another consideration is critical. Contemporary Islamist ideologies reflect less some inherent quality of Muslim-majority societies than a response to the failure of prior ideologies. Post-colonialism’s inability to meet the populace’s social needs, corporatist nationalism’s failure under single-party regimes to address the desire for personal freedoms, and both systems’ inability to address the problems of corruption and nepotism led to their collapse. The Arab armies’ utter defeat in the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War underscored to many Arab citizens the need to turn to a new ideology.

The rise of Islamism in Egypt and Iraq was thus not some immanent development that was prefigured by a political culture inherently inclined toward Islamism. In Egypt, much of the Muslim Brotherhood’s support was facilitated by a reversal of state behavior toward the organization when it began to be treated favorably after 1970. In Iraq, the rise of Islamism was facilitated by U.S. policy after 2003, which gave preference to ethnically based and sectarian-based Shi‘i and Kurdish political parties at the expense of cross-national political movements.

It is often said that an Islamist movement developed in Iraq in response to the British invasion of Iraq in 1914. However, we need qualify the description of this movement as Islamist. It is true that the al-Marja‘iyat played a critical role in opposing the British after they invaded and conquered Iraq between 1914 and 1917. Yet it would be conceptually incorrect to characterize the clergy’s role in the struggle against the British occupation of Iraq as Islamistic. While it did invoke Islamic norms of jihad to protect a Muslim majority country from non-Muslim invaders, the clerics issued fatwā calling upon all Iraqis to oppose the British, arguing that, regardless of ethnicity or confession, they were all under the protection of their religious decrees.

This action points to the thinking of the clergy in 1914 and after as indicative of a Iraq that was a modern nation-state with multiple religious and ethnic groups, all of which deserved to be protected against an invasion by a colonial power. Put differently, the al-Marja‘iyat did not conceive of itself as a political movement seeking to create an Islamic state, but rather as exercising
its civic function in an ecumenical manner to protect the nation-state and all its inhabitants.\textsuperscript{49}

In 1920, the clergy also played a central role in the June to October Revolution against the British. Again, their behavior was highly ecumenical in the sense that Sunni and Shi'i clerics called upon their co-confessionalists to pray in their respective mosques. Shi'i clerics celebrated Sunni rituals and religious festivals. Likewise, the fact that many religious clerics participated in the 1919 Revolution in Egypt did not make that uprising "Islamist."

After the Shi'i clergy who participated in the Revolution were forced into exile, the remaining clergy were forced to promise not to participate in politics. Following the foundation of the state in 1921, Shi'i participation in the new Iraqi government was extremely circumscribed and limited to one cabinet position, the minister of education. It was not until 1948 that a Shi'i, Salih Jibril, was appointed prime minister, and then only in response to the Wathba and as an effort to placate Shi'i protesters. Until 2003, there was no meaningful Shi'i participation in national politics in high leadership positions, except as individual politicians.

The Shi'i clergy in Iraq during World War I and after paralleled the Islamic reform movement in Egypt under the leadership of Shaykh Muhammad Abduh. Thus, while the leadership was clerical, its goal was to create a more tolerant and ecumenical society, not to impose a political form of Islam that privileged Muslims over other segments of society. Early Islamism, therefore, differs significantly from its iteration later in the twentieth century, when it became much narrower and politically and culturally intolerant.

The social base of Islamism in both countries changed as well. In Egypt, the Brotherhood attracted a largely professional membership, especially among its leaders and activists, while in Iraq, lay elements joined the Da'wa Party in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and lower class Shi'is became the core element of urban populist organizations. As the base of Islamist movements broadened, the movements recruited members who often were attracted to them not because of religious norms or symbols but for political and economic reasons. Indeed, many of these recruits were not well versed in Islamic doctrine.

When analyzing Islamist movements, we also need to differentiate between ideologues, activists, and mass following. In the case of one of the two main Islamist movements compared in this essay, the Muslim Brotherhood produced an important ideologue in its founder and first leader, Shaykh Hassan al-Banna. However, the movement also spawned an activist element, the Secret Organization (al-Jihaz al-Sirri), which was more concerned with direct action than with the fine points of the relationship between Islam and politics.\textsuperscript{50}

Though activists are important, they tell us little about the cultural and ideological construction of Islamist parties. Ideologues play an important hegemonic function in that they articulate the values of the movement that are critical to the construction of political and social meaning among the movement's members. Hassan al-Banna was central to formulating a new critique of foreign cultural and political control over Egypt that could vie with traditional Marxist and Arab nationalist critiques.

Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr provided tremendous legitimacy for the Da'wa Party through his two influential works, \textit{Iqtiṣāduna} (Our Economy) and \textit{Falsafatuna} (Our Philosophy). Al-Sadr's writings not only offered the thoughts of a highly respected marjia that presented an alternative to Marxist ideology. Al-Sadr argued that Shi'ism could offer the believer the material well-being of the Iraqi Communist Party but, in addition, could also offer spiritual sustenance, something atheistic ideologies were unable to provide.

To assume that Islamist movements are ideologically cohesive is to impose on them an attitudinal and behavioral standard that is uncharacteristic of social movements generally. As we have seen, Islamist movements in Egypt and Iraq experienced very different historical trajectories. Both began as responses to colonial penetration of their respective societies. Both began as ecumenical movements that were less interested in imposing a narrow ideological perspective on society than in formulating a religio-political discourse that would include all elements of society.

However, as the nationalist struggle intensified and broader elements of society became politically mobilized, the Islamist movements adopted a less tolerant and more socially fragmented perspective. In other words, they became more rigid in their thinking and limited their view of who qualified as a "good citizen" to those who subscribed to their view of Islam.

Repression by the state can suppress Islamist or other movements, such as what happened to the Da'wa Party in Iraq during the 1980s. However, repression can ultimately lead a movement to decide that pursuing its goals through democratic means, rather than through violence, is a more effective strategy for achieving political power. This is precisely the strategy followed by the Muslim Brotherhood beginning in the 1980s as well as the Da'wa Party after the U.S. invasion of 2003 deposed Saddam Hussein's Ba'hist regime. Relatively little theorizing has been done on the relationship between Islamist movements and institutional development. In the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization took advantage of the opportunities to participate in politics that became available after 1970. As members of parliament, Brothers learned how to use the institutional system to promote the organization's agenda. In this process, many became enamored with their legislative roles. Indeed, the Brotherhood introduced more laws in parliament after winning a large percentage of seats in 2000 and 2005 than any other political party.

The hypothesis in this instance is that access to parliamentary institutions—even if they constitute a manifestation of "electoral authoritarianism"—can play a key role in transforming Islamist political parties. While Hassan al-Banna was completely contemptuous of party politics, by 2005 Brother- hood parliamentarians were avidly forming alliances with other opposition parties in an effort to bring laws to the chamber floor for a vote.\textsuperscript{51}
This behavior brought condemnation from the Brotherhood’s Guidance Council and Supreme Leader, who forbade parliament members from forming coalitions without the leadership’s permission. Despite these prohibitions, attempts to use coalition building as a way of bringing the Brotherhood’s agenda to the floor of the parliament for a vote and hence to make it public continued. Thus an important cleavage developed within the Brotherhood along ideological lines.

In Iraq, the Islamist movement was brutally suppressed by the Ba'th. Consequently, it was only after 2003 that it had access to political power and then only because such access was facilitated by the U.S. occupation in the form of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Unlike Egypt, where participation in parliament over a period of over 30 years had brought significant numbers of Brotherhood members into the political process, Islamist parties and movements in Iraq remained completely marginalized under the Ba’th. These behavioral changes suggest, from a rational choice perspective, that members of the two parties formulated a new cost-benefit analysis in response to repression by the state in which the costs of democratic politics were preferable to the costs of resorting to violence in terms of achieving their goals of acquiring power. Nevertheless, the main Islamist parties in Iraq after 2003 have not sought to impose a radical agenda on Iraq. The Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC) changed its name from the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), indicating an effort to present a less radical image of itself. Initially the armed wing of the Supreme Assembly, the Badr Organization, split off from the SIIC and became a political party under the leadership of Hadi al-Amiri.

The Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, has lost much of its legitimacy and support within the Sunni Arab community. In the January 2005 interim parliamentary elections, IIP members ran for office in tribal areas, such as al-Anbar Province, which the local Sunni Arab population boycotted. When IIP members won national office, conflict developed between the provincial tribal leaders and the IIP leadership, which was viewed as composed of interlopers and carpetbaggers. By the time of the 2010 national parliamentary elections, the IIP parliamentarians were replaced by local Sunni politicians who had decided that they needed to participate in the elections.

The largest Islamist movement in Iraq by far is the Sadrist Trend (al-Tayyar al-Sadrî), formerly known as the Mahdi Army (Jaysh al-Mahdi). The Sadrists resemble a social movement more than a political party, even though they have 40 members in the Council of Deputies who serve under the Ahbar label (the Liberals). The Sadrists have created a mini-state on the order of Hizbullah in Lebanon, within which they provide employment for many of their members and a wide range of social services to the poor Shi’i population in urban slums such as Sadr (Revolution) City in northeast Baghdad.

There is no strong institutional legacy in Iraq that would work toward promoting a respect for parliamentary politics among Islamist parties. That process has begun in Iraq but only after the elections for an interim parliament in January 2005 and then elections for a full four-year parliament in December 2005 and March 2010. What we see in Iraq reflects to a large degree the legacy of Ba’thist rule, which forced many politicians to flee abroad where they often developed localized clienteles. The lack of the institutionalization of the Islamist movement likewise reflects the ethnic, tribal, and regional differences that have divided it in Iraq.

Despite the strong support it receives from poor urban Shi’a, the Sadrist Trend focuses less on religion than on building its political base through providing social services to the needy. Although the Sadists constantly attempt to appropriate the historical memory of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Muqtada al-Sadr’s father, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, the Sadrist movement is very different from the Da’wa Party, which Baqir al-Sadr helped form, and is much closer to the more populist and radical social movement favored by Sadiq al-Sadr.52 Yet another consideration is the cleavages among the Islamist movement in both Egypt and Iraq. While the Muslim Brotherhood dominates the Islamist trend, it faces challenges from the right and left. To the right, the Brotherhood is opposed by the “Party of Light” (Hizb al-Nur). The party, which was established during Egypt’s “Arab Spring” in 2011, represents the political arm of the Salafi Call (al-Da’wa al-Salafiyya), which was founded in the 1970s. The Hizb al-Nur advocates application of shari’a law in Egypt. After the Salafi Call was established at Alexandria in the 1980s, clashes developed between the party and the Muslim Brotherhood at Alexandria University. To its left, the Brotherhood faces a challenge from the Center Party (Hizb al-Wasat). While largely a party of Islamist intellectuals without a large national infrastructure, the party is nevertheless highly significant. Founded by Alaa al-Din al-Mahdi, who broke away from the Brotherhood in the mid-1990s, the party fought for a decade and a half to obtain a government license. Significantly, the Brotherhood joined the Mubarak regime in opposing awarding the party a license.

The Brotherhood’s behavior points to another cleavage within the Islamist movement that is not strictly ideological in nature. This cleavage is generational. Many younger and better educated Islamists want the movement to become more tolerant and democratic. Because this demographic is well informed and highly adept at using social media, the Brotherhood feels that parties like the Hizb al-Wasat will attract younger members away from its own movement.

In Iraq, social class differences divide the Islamist movement. The Sadists have confiscated property in middle class neighborhoods that they “ethnically cleansed” of Sunni Arab residents. However, after seizing such neighborhoods, they subsequently began to likewise confiscate the property of middle class Shi’a. Thus there is a strong hostility on the part of the SIIC toward the Sadist movement because its social base lies in the middle class. It views the Sadists as urban rabble who threaten their businesses and livelihoods.
In addition to the social class cleavages within the Iraqi Shi'i community, cleavages exist along regional lines as well. The Shi'a of the far south in Basra and the surrounding provinces, for example, view the clergy of the shrine cities of al-Najaf and Karbala as seeking to dominate their region. In more recent times, this view has been enhanced by the discovery of large amounts of oil in southern Iraq, which contains 60 percent of the country's proven reserves.

Though the Islamist movement is highly fragmented in Iraq, it has focused on acquiring seats in parliament and acquiring control of cabinet positions. As such, the Islamist agenda—such as promoting the implementation of Islamic law (shari'a)—has taken a backseat to assuring that the parties do not lose out on benefitting from the extensive corruption and patronage that comes with control of ministries.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the need for a more sophisticated conceptual framework with which to understand the political dynamics of Islamist movements. The Egyptian and Iraqi experiences call our attention to the manner in which Islamism as an ideology and as political practice has experienced significant change over time. It also underscores the extent to which developments in the Islamist movements have been driven less by internal ideological preferences than by exogenous variables, such as state repression or tolerance, or by political opportunity structures, especially those that have provided potential pathways of coming to power via democratic means.

One of these key exogenous variables that crystallized after the collapse of communism between 1989 and 1991 was the rise of a Pax Americana. The assumption that the United States was the world's sole superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the development of what has come to be known as neo-liberalism, perhaps best reflected in the so-called “Washington Consensus.” The core idea was that non-Western countries needed to open their markets and liberalize trade, privatize state public sectors, and dramatically reduce economic subsidies. While the poor might be hurt in the short term, the idea was that reinvigorated markets would create economic growth and development, thereby leading the entire society to benefit and prosper. Allowing markets free reign would not only bring prosperity but encourage a transition to democracy, such as had occurred in much of Latin America, Eastern Europe, and East Asia.

We need to recognize that pressures on authoritarian states in the Middle East such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria to open their economies to foreign investment were wielded not only by the United States but by international financial agencies, especially the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to examine these dynamics closely, we need to be aware of the degree to which “the Islamic turn” was promoted by exogenous forces in the form of this changing global political economy. The comparative study of the development and evolution of Islamist and Islamist movements in Egypt and Iraq cannot be fully comprehended if limited conceptually and theoretically to endogenous variables, namely variables derived from within the two cases themselves.

If pressures for economic liberalization emanating from the global political economy undermined the “authoritarian bargain” between sectarian regimes such as those of Hosni Mubarak, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, and Bashar al-Assad and their citizens, they also promoted even higher levels of corruption once state-sponsored political and economic actors gained access to additional capital in the form of the foreign direct investment (FDI) that accompanied the so-called liberalization process. Extensive corruption, nepotism, and expanded patronage networks, combined with declining standards of living, were key factors in bringing demonstrators to the streets and in the outing of autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria.

One key question that confronts the Islamist movement in its democratic configuration is the issue of gender. Under Islamist governance, will women enjoy the same benefits of democracy as men? Many Islamist women are challenging rules that constrain their potential as leaders within the Islamist movement. Others are working to socialize women into subservient roles and limit their activity primarily to the private sphere. This latter process seems more evident within the Egyptian as opposed to the Iraqi Islamist movement. Without equality for women, the promise of Islamist democracy will not be able to be met.

Another key question is whether Islamist leaders such as Muhammad Morsi and Nouri al-Maliki are actually committed to democratic norms and values. Morsi’s successful but highly controversial effort to create a new constitution in Egypt that enshrines many ill-defined and vague clauses regarding individual freedoms, including freedom of religion and human rights, has deeply disturbed not only Coptic Christians, secular liberals, and leftists, but also many Muslims who fear the Egyptian president is trying to create a new authoritarian regime, only one that rules in the name of Islam.

In Iraq, Islamic Call Party leader and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has kept none of the promises he made before the March 2010 national parliament elections. The elections, which were controversial in that they allowed al-Maliki to remain in office as prime minister though his State of Law Coalition did not win the largest number of parliamentary seats, have been followed by his methodical efforts to consolidate power. He has removed the independence of the Higher Electoral Commission; taken control of the Central Bank; ensured that the security services are loyal to him personally; and intimidated judges who do not adjudicate cases according to his wishes. Contrary to Egypt and Iraq, Tunisian leader and head of the Islamist al-Nada (Renaissance) Party Rashid al-Ghanemish, as well as Turkish prime minister and leader of the Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP) Recep Tayyip Erdogan, both seem committed to democratic governance.
What these considerations suggest is the importance of the processes of democratization in encouraging potentially radical forces in the region to consider alternative pathways to political power. This process has not only occurred in Egypt and Iraq but in Turkey, Tunisia, and, in a more limited sense, in Morocco as well. It is far too early to predict whether the new democratic trend that seems to encompass many Islamist movements in the Middle East will become institutionalized. Rather, it may lead to "illiberal democracy" or "competitive authoritarianism." Nevertheless, what this trend does suggest is the need to seriously question the narrative that only sees Islamist movements as producing radical and destabilizing politics in the Middle East.

Notes
6 Ibid., pp. 121, 211–23.
7 Ibid., pp. 15–16, 154.
8 Hassan al-Banna, Mudhakkar al-Da'wa wa-l-Da'ya (Memoirs of the Islamic Call and Proselytization), Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1979 (originally published in the 1940s).
13 Ibid., 379.
11 The "Islamic Republic of Iran" and the Crisis of Legitimacy

Ali M. Ansari

Voltaire is famously noted to have remarked that the "Holy Roman Empire" was neither holy, roman, nor in any meaningful sense an empire. Much the same can be said of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the twenty-first century. It can no longer claim to be a "republic" and its identification with Islam has long since ceased to be orthodox, while its application and exploitation of nationalism is increasingly regarded as both cynical and insubstantial. This is a remarkable achievement for a state that was founded on the back of a revolution against a monarchy that was widely perceived as exclusive and alienated from many of its subjects. The Islamic Republic of Iran was constructed with a view to be an inclusive alternative that drew strength and social depth from its multiple sources of legitimacy. It was both popular and divine, religious and national.

Yet, few states in the contemporary period have been as effective as the Islamic Republic of Iran in deconstructing their own sources of ideological legitimacy. Never a state at ease with itself, the continued turmoil within reflected its mixed political heritage, which drew both on ideas of republicanism and radical new innovations in Islamic political thought. It sought in many ways to cement these contradictions through a healthy dose of nationalism, which was regularly conscripted into political discourse as the need arose. The continued frictions between the republican and Islamic wings of the revolution have resulted in a greater dependency on nationalist motifs, which reached its apogee during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—who proved remarkably liberal in his use of nationalist rhetoric and evocation of Iranian exceptionalism. Even this rhetoric has proved something of a double-edged sword as Iranians have contrasted it with the reality of power in the Islamic Republic.

This paper will argue that far from building on its inheritance the Islamic Republic has moved with alarming alacrity to a highly personalized form of government more akin to the pre-constitutional period and that not only has the Islamic Republic transformed itself into a new "dynasty," it has sought to compensate for its institutional weakness by articulating a theory of personal rule far in excess of anything aspired to by traditional Iranian dynasts. The paper will be divided into three broad sections, looking first at the