

Political Islam and protest movements

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PID_00197489



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Introduction

In the previous module, we have analysed the nature of political regimes in the Middle East and North African countries, pointing at the existence of several factors that have made authoritarianism particularly resilient in this part of the world. In this second module, we will analyse who has been the political opposition to these regimes, what kind of protests have erupted and with what effects.

As we have seen, in the fifties and sixties, state-building in this region was made at the expense of democracy and many regimes introduced a single-party system or went as far as forbidding any political party (this is the case of Libya). Thus, political opposition, which was then represented by left-wing parties as well as by Islamist movements, was severely repressed by both conservative monarchies, western-friendly republics such as Tunisia but also by presumably revolutionary regimes such as the ones of Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Libya and Iraq.

Yet, since the defeat of the Nasser-led alliance in the Arab-Israel war of 1967 and particularly with the sharp decline of pan-Arabism following the 1979 Camp David agreements between Egypt and Israel and the subsequent expulsion of Egypt from the Arab League, Islamist groups became the forerunners of political opposition in almost all Arab countries. It can be argued that Islamist groups represented the only sound political alternative to the elites that were in power. Arab regimes but also external actors, such as Israel and the US, combined strategies of repression and tolerance towards these movements, as they were at the same time a real challenge for their monopoly of power but also a useful tool to erode the remaining social bases of leftist, nationalist and revolutionary movements.

In Iran, a non-Arab Middle-Eastern country, Islamists gained the power as a result of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and established an Islamic republic. Nevertheless, the attractiveness of the Iranian model for most Islamist groups in this region was nuanced due to the sunni–shia divide. More than a decade later, the Algerian elections of 1991 could have brought the Islamic Salvation Front to power. However, the intervention of the Algerian military (supported by both local actors and by France and the US) aborted this possibility. Later on, in 2006, Hamas (an Islamist Palestinian movement) won the legislative election in a process that was qualified as free and fair by international observers. Yet, an international boycott followed suit. In contrast, in Turkey, a party with an Islamic background, the Justice and Democratic Party (AKP), lead by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, won the elections in 2002 and has, since then,

General Readings

Rodinson, Maxime (1972). *Marxisme et monde musulman*. Paris: Seuil.

Esposito, John L.; Voll, John O. (1996). *Islam and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Halliday, Fred (2003). *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Lust-Okar, Ellen (2005). *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Zubaida, Sami (2009). *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris.

been portrayed as a model that makes Islam and Democracy compatible and has been internationally praised for being able to undergo a profound ideological evolution.

The academic and political focus on the phenomenon of political Islam, particularly its violent and radical expression, has for a long time diverted the attention from the analysis of other forms of political opposition. Protest movements, including worker strikes and citizens' platforms, which to a large extent were the precedent of major protests leading to the fall of several autocrats in the year 2011, have been a raising phenomenon in many Arab countries. This module provides an overview of both actors: political Islam and protest movements; and its concluding section discusses what role they have played and how they can benefit from the political changes that have occurred in the region since 2011.

Objectives

- 1.** To offer an overview of the ideological bases, the contemporary evolution and the diversity of movements included in the category of political Islam.
- 2.** To familiarise students with the strategies of protest movements (including worker movements, citizens' platforms, human rights activists etc.) and their impact in today's Middle East.

1. Political Islam: a common origin, distinct political strategies

There is no commonly agreed definition of what political Islam is. The attempt to come with a definition for this concept is even more difficult due to the existence of other terms that are often used as synonyms: radical Islam, fundamentalists, militant Islam or, simply put, Islamist forces. The term political Islam is used to refer to a very diverse type of movements, ranging from terrorist groups to moderate forces that accept to participate into parliamentary politics and reject all kinds of violence. The common element of all these groups is that they affirm that Islam is their ideological base, that is, their frame of reference. They want to establish an Islamic government in their respective home countries (based on Islamic law or *sharia*) and have the unity of the Islamic world (*Umma*) as an ultimate goal.

The origins of all these movements are to be found in the 19th century, as a reaction to the decline of the Muslim world compared to the strength and growing influence of Western and colonial powers. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War and the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk gave new arguments to these groups. The Islamist response consisted in advocating the return to the Caliphate, arguing that the ruling elites, with the support of external powers, had corrupted Islam. Thus, this movement can be defined as a *revivalist* movement (some may say a *regressionist* one) as they were inspired by the past and wanted to move back to an idealised past.

As Bruno Étienne (1987) said, these movements propose the return to the ideal city state of the first four Caliphs as a cure for all the evils of modernity/modernisation. Some of the most influential thinkers in the inception of this movement were Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (in Iran), Muhammad Abduh (in Egypt) and Rashid Rida (in Lebanon/Syria). The political views of these movements contrasted with liberal groups, which advocated the introduction of western-inspired political, economical and administrative reforms, and were also opposed to the incipient leftist revolutionary parties that followed a revolutionary line (*thawra*).

Already in the 20th century, the creation of two political forces: the Muslim Brotherhood (the *Ikhwan*) by Hassan Al-Banna in Egypt in 1928 and the *Jammat-e-Islammi* in British India by Abu Ala Mawdudi in 1941 became the most visible political expression of this intellectual movement. The Muslim Brotherhood was particularly influential by setting a model for political activism and by opening branches of this political movement around the Muslim World. The *Ikhwan* and the *Jammat-e-Islammi* coincided in their rejection of

General recommended readings

Etienne, Bruno (1987). *L'islamisme radical*. Paris: Hachette.

Ayubi, Nazih (1993) *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*. New York: Routledge.

Esposito, John L. (ed.) (1997). *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner.

Kepel, Gilles (2000). *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Burgat, François (2003). *Face to face to political Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Ismail, Salwa (2006). *Re-thinking Islamist Politics. Culture, State, the State and Islamism*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Ayoob, Mohamed (2007). *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Ashour, Omar (2009). *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*. New York: Routledge Publishers.

Shehata, Samer (2012). *Islamist Politics in the Middle East: Movements and Change*. New York: Routledge.

European colonialism and the need to create an Islamic state. In both movements we can also observe a radicalisation process, mainly as a result of the repression of the regimes. Sayyid Qutb, successor of Hassan Al-Banna as leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, led the radicalisation of this movement and was executed by hanging in 1966. He became an icon and his works, for instance on the *jihad*, were particularly influent among the groups that resorted to armed struggle.

A mix of factors has contributed to the strength of Islamists movements over time: the weakness of other opposition movements, which were either repressed or co-opted by the regimes in place; the decline of Arab nationalism following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War; the capacity of these movements to provide social assistance, healthcare and education in areas when the states neglected their responsibilities (particularly since the implementation of IMF adjustment plans and privatisation programmes); the abundance of financial resources from oil-rich countries, which allowed private (and in some occasions public) actors to support religious groups and charitable activities; conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli wars, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the US intervention in Iraq, which provided arguments that presented the West (in cooperation with the Arab regimes) as enemies of Islam.

In today's Middle East, there is a wide range of political actors and all kinds of movements that call themselves, or are called by others, Islamists. It is common place to differentiate between moderates and radicals.

As Tamara Coffman Wittes said

“conventional policy discussions label Islamists either ‘moderate’ or ‘radical’, generally categorizing them according to two rather loose and unhelpful criteria. The first is violence: Radicals use it and moderates do not. This begs the question of how to classify groups that do not themselves engage in violence but who condone, justify, or even actively support the violence of others. A second, only somewhat more restrictive criterion is whether the groups or individuals in question accept the rules of the democratic electoral game. Popular sovereignty is no small concession for traditional Islamists, many of whom reject democratically elected governments as usurpers of God’s sovereignty. Yet commitment to the procedural rules of democratic elections is not the same as commitment to democratic politics or governance”.

Tamara Coffman Wittes

To confront these ambiguities, Coffman Wittes proposed a three-part typology of Islamist movements:

- The **Takfiri**, which are relatively small but important groups of radical, ideologically driven movements that label other Muslims heretics, apostates, and therefore justifiable targets of violence. Such groups include al-Qaeda, of course, along with its affiliates and allies in Algeria, Iraq and elsewhere. These groups take no interest in formal politics save for the strict pan-Islamic state that they envision setting up once they have toppled their region’s existing governments. They glorify violence as a religious duty and reject democracy as a violation of God’s sovereignty. This

category corresponds to what some other authors qualify as jihadism or salafi-jihadism.

- **Nationalist militant Islamist:** such movements combine Islamist ideology with local political demands and include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine or the Shia militias of Iraq. Unlike the *takfiris*, they seek and benefit from the vocal support of a given local community. Notably, they all exist in weak or failing states (or nonstates, in the case of Hamas). Only regimes with weak legitimacy and a seriously incomplete monopoly on force are compelled to allow such groups to participate in politics with weapons in hand.
- **Non-violent political parties:** these groups eschew violence (at least locally) and aspire to a political role in their respective countries, without voicing any revolutionary goals. Such groups may operate as legal parties, such as the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and the Party of Justice and Development in Morocco, or they may be excluded from formal political recognition but still engage in the political process, like Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (MB) or Kuwait's Islamist societies. They all want to transform society and government into something more Islamic, but aim to do so from below—that is, by persuading citizens to adopt Islamist ideas, demand Islamist policies from government and behave as more closely observant Muslims. This category corresponds to what other authors range as moderate Islamists.

For Marc Lynch, different Islamist groups are not only different but are even antithetical. He argues that the Muslim Brotherhood “poses a unique challenge to efforts to combat Al Qaeda and like-minded groups. It is one of the key sources of Islamist thought and political activism, with affiliated organizations in almost every country in the world and a sophisticated political and social infrastructure. It plays a crucial role in promoting Islamic consciousness and organizing political activism in a wide range of countries, particularly in the Arabic-speaking world. It strongly supports violent resistance against Israel, but at the same time has consistently denounced Al Qaeda’s ideology and terrorist activities in Muslim countries and in the West. It offers a significantly different vision of an Islamic state from that favoured by Salafi-jihadist groups”.

The participation of Islamist parties in electoral competition has triggered a substantive and controversial debate on whether these movements could genuinely embrace democracy or whether their participation in elections is a purely tactical move to capture power without any possibility of alternation.

Recommended readings

Coffman Wittes, Tamera (2008). “Three Kinds of Movements”. *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 19, n° 3, July 2008, pp. 7-12).

Lynch, Marc (2010). “Islam Divided between Salafi-jihad and the Ikhwan.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (vol. 33, n° 6, pp. 467–487).

Jillian Schwedler, in a review article published in *World Politics* entitled “Can Islamists Become Moderates?”, reviews the scholarly literature that analyses changes in behaviour, ideology and tactics at different levels (groups and individuals). She argues that

“moderation is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) tied to liberal notions of individual rights and democratic notions of tolerance, pluralism, and cooperation (...) mere participation in elections or democratic processes —behaviour that might appear to indicate the embrace of liberal and democratic norms of governance— is alone insufficient as an indicator of moderation; participation is a form of political behaviour that a group might adopt for purely strategic purposes while continuing to harbour a more radical political agenda.”

Jillian Schwedler

In her paper, Schwedler also reviews several of the factors that have been identified as conducive to moderation: political openings that create incentives for behavioural moderation, the existence of a charismatic leader providing an ideological justification for a shift that will allow him to profit from new political opportunities or cooperation across ideological lines with non-Islamist forces.

Bassam Tibi, in his article “Why they can’t be democratic” is much more emphatic, qualifying movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Hamas in Palestine as totalitarian. He argues that

“Islamism is not compatible with democracy, for Islamism’s sine qua non is the notion of *din-wa-dawla* (the organic unity of state and religion). If Islamists honestly —rather than tactically— were to accept democracy wholeheartedly, they would cease by that very act to be Islamists, and it would be wrong to call them such. Of Islamism’s two tactical orientations —institutional and jihadist— the latter, with its violent vision of Islamic world revolution, is easier to write off as plainly antithetical and destructive to democracy. The institutional Islamists pose a subtler challenge. They will compete in elections for instrumental reasons, but they refuse to accept the full measure of democracy, including the political culture of democratic pluralism —something that must never be forgotten”.

Bassam Tibi

Much more nuanced, Nathan Brown, Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy, in a paper published by the *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, listed six topics on which mainstream Islamist groups (including, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) are particularly ambiguous. These are: Islamic law, violence, pluralism, civil and political rights, women’s rights and religious minorities. According to these authors,

“the resolution of these issues will determine whether the rise of Islamist movements leads the countries of the Arab world, finally, toward democracy or, conversely, to a new form of authoritarianism with an Islamic character”.

Brown, Nathan J.; Hamzawy, Amr; Ottaway, Marina (2006). “Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Gray Zones”. *Carnegie Working Papers* (n° 67).

Finally, Sebnem Gumuscu, in an article published in *Comparative Political Studies*, identifies economic liberalisation as a key factor explaining the differences between the Turkish and Egyptian Islamist groups (and their different degrees of moderation/democratisation). According to her, economic liberalisation has not only distributed power among components of Islamist coalitions but also generated an elective affinity between the most powerful group and a liberal perception of Islam through novel articulations of Islam and its relations with the economy, politics and society. The emergence of a “devout bourgeoisie” in central Anatolia, to use Gumuscu’s term, or the rise of some sort of “Islamic Calvinists” is a relatively recent phenomenon and has been pointed out to explain the peculiarities of the ideological evolution of political Islam in Turkey.

Coming back to Bassam Tibi’s argument, can we still qualify as Islamist movements that abandon the goal of establishing a sharia-based Islamic state such as the Turkish Justice and Democracy Party (AKP) or even *En-Nahda* in Tunisia? Are parties, such as the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt or Hamas in Palestine, with a strong territorial and national (and even nationalistic) ideology and which have abandoned the rhetoric of creating a political entity embracing all Muslim people, still part of the Islamist family? This debate has led some authors such as Oliver Roy to announce the failure of political Islam as an ideology as it has been forced to evolve into something else which is, to some extent, contradictory with its funding principles. New terms have been coined. Concepts such as post-islamism or muslim democracy have been coined to better describe the result of this ideological evolution.

Vali Nasr states that the distinction between these groups and traditional Islamist movements is that

“unlike Islamists, with their visions of rule by *shari’a* (Islamic law) or even a restored caliphate, Muslim Democrats view political life with a pragmatic eye. They reject or at least discount the classic Islamist claim that Islam commands the pursuit of a *shari’a* state, and their main goal tends to be the more mundane one of crafting viable electoral platforms and stable governing coalitions to serve individual and collective interests — Islamic as well as secular— within a democratic arena whose bounds they respect, win or lose. Islamists view democracy not as something deeply legitimate, but at best as a tool or tactic that may be useful in gaining the power to build an Islamic state. Muslim Democrats, by contrast, do not seek to enshrine Islam in politics, though they do wish to harness its potential to help them win votes”.

Vali Nasr

The nature, tactics and position in the political arena of Islamist political movements in each of the countries of this region are very diverse. That is why, next to the academic contributions that try to draw conclusions that could be applied to the whole region, we should take into account a vast literature that focuses on specific countries. The cases of the Turkish AKP (as the party that has undergone a more profound ideological evolution) or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (as it is seen as a party where different sensitivities coexist and whose evolution could have a critical impact in other Arab countries) and Hamas (the case that better illustrates the increasing nationalistic

Recommended readings

Brown, Nathan J.; Hamza-wy, Amr; Ottaway, Marina (2006). “Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Gray Zones”. *Carnegie Working Papers* (n° 67).

Tibi, Bassam (2008). “Why they can’t be democratic”. *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 19, n° 3, pp. 43–48).

Schwedler, Jillian (2006). *Faith in moderation: Islamist parties in Jordan and Yemen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gumuscu, Sebnem (2010). “Class, Status and Party: The Changing face of Political Islam in Turkey and Egypt”. *Comparative Political Studies* (vol. 43, n° 7, pp. 835–861).

Schwedler, Jillian (2011). “Can Islamists Become Moderates?: Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis”. *World Politics* (vol. 63, n° 2, pp. 347–376).

Recommended readings

Roy, Olivier (1998). *The Failure of Political Islam*. Harvard University Press.

Roy, Olivier (1999). “Le post-islamisme”. *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* (vol. 5-86, n° 1).

Nasr, Vali (2005). “The Rise of “Muslim Democracy”. *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 16, n° 2, pp. 13–27).

Hale, William (2005). “Christian Democracy and the AKP: Parallels and Contrasts”. *Turkish Studies* (vol. 6, n° 2).

Bayat, Asef (2007). *Making Islam democratic: social movements and the post-Islamist turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

rhetoric of Islamist groups and a party that has also accepted to participate in parliamentary politics) are particularly interesting. The evolution of political Islam in Morocco has also caught the attention of the academic community due to the existence of two movements: the Justice and Development Party, which participates in politics and accepts the red lines of the regime, and the movement *Al Adl wal Ihsan* (Justice and Charity), which has not been legalised as a political party and which combines an anti-regime political agenda with social and charitable activities.

Recommended readings (case studies)

On Turkey (and particularly the AKP)

Turam, Berna (2006). *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Yavuz, Hakan (2009). *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hale, William; Özbudun, Ergun (2009). *Islamism, democracy, and liberalism in Turkey the case of the AKP*. New York: Routledge.

On the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky (2003). *Mobilizing Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ghobashy, Mona El- (2005). "The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers". *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (vol.37, n° 3 (August), pp. 373–95).

Leiken, S.; Brooke, S. (2007). "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood". *Foreign Affairs* (vol. 86, n° 2).

On Hamas

Hroub, Khaled (2002). *Hamas. Political Thought and Practice*. Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.

Hovdenak, Are (2009). "Hamas in transition: the failure of sanctions". *Democratization* (vol. 16, n° 1, pp. 59–80).

On Morocco

Zeghal, Malika (2005). *Les islamistes marocains, le défi à la Monarchie*. Paris: La Découverte.

Wegner, Eva (2011). *Islamist Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes: The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Due to their popular support, the ideological evolution of Islamist groups is seen as a factor that can favour or hinder democratisation processes in the Middle East. At the same time, the democratisation processes that have started in several Arab countries since 2011 may also influence the doctrinal evolution of Islamist forces. In this new context, Islamist parties have started to win elections and are assuming political responsibilities. This will be a litmus test to show whether they have embraced democracy and whether Muslim democracy takes roots in the Arab world.

2. Protest movements

Before 2011, the Iranian revolution in 1979 was the only experience in the Middle East where popular mobilisation for political reform succeeded in bringing on regime change, putting aside the struggle for independence. Previous attempts such as the Islamist mobilisations in Syria in the early eighties or more spontaneous demonstrations and riots elsewhere in the Arab world were unable to challenge the regimes and were met with harsh repression and, occasionally, some limited concessions by the incumbent governments.

The failure of protest movements, in addition to the strength and visibility of Islamist opposition, may explain why the academic literature has paid little attention to this phenomenon. However, in this section, we will give an overview on the development of protest movements in the Middle East and North Africa since the late 1970s until the so-called Arab Spring. After a short background note on the bread riots of the last quarter of the 20th century, we will identify the factors that have increased social unrest in many Arab countries since 2005. We will then move to the analysis of the petitionist phenomenon, a peculiar form of protest that is common to many Gulf countries and particularly spread in Saudi Arabia. Finally, this section concludes with some references on the nature, the actors and the impact of the Arab Spring.

The uprisings popularly known as bread riots were spontaneous protests that took place in most Arab countries in the late 70s and early 80s (although in some cases such as the bread riots in Mauritania they continued in the nineties). These protests, which paralysed the streets of cities such as Casablanca, Alexandria, Khartoum or Tunis were the popular response to the increase of food prices, in most cases after the reduction or the removal of government subsidies following the demands of the International Monetary Fund. These demonstrations were severely repressed by the coercive apparatus of these countries, resulting in hundreds of victims.

According to Larbi Sadiki, these events exemplified the collapse of a tacit pact between ruler and ruled that

“is best encapsulated by the Arab term *dimuqratiyyat al-khubz* (democracy of bread). (...) Essentially, its chief premise is that post-independence Arab rulers have been paid political deference by their peoples in return for the provision of publicly subsidized services: education, health care, and a state commitment to secure employment. Political deference has been traded for *khubz*, or ‘bread’, used here in a generic sense to refer to free education, health care, and other services. Thus, the waning capacity to provide those services opened the window for limited political openings since the late 80s, in order to increase the domestic and international legitimacy of the regimes”.

He notes, however, that

“there should be no mistake, however, concerning the real motives and motivations of the liberalizing regimes: political reforms following mass riots are often carried out with the intention of manipulating the public and defusing serious crises of legitimacy and challenges to the rulers' hold on power”.

Larbi Sadiki

While some opposition groups (including Islamists) gained popular support by joining these protests, trade unions were not particularly active. As explained by Éric Gobe, in most Arab countries, Trade Unions behaved as corporatist organisations and were closely linked to the incumbent regimes. The exceptions are, on the one hand, the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT)*, which has been historically very active in the political life of this country, being the main counter-weight of the single party of Habib Bourghiba to the point that in the seventies it contested many of the government policies. On the other hand, Moroccan trade unions stand out as a case in itself in the Arab context due to their diversity and politicisation.

Next to these bread riots, which mushroomed in many Arab countries, we should also mention the existence of specific protest movements with a nationalistic or ethnic base. This is the case of the Intifada in Palestine in 1987 (see the third module) or the Black Spring of 2001 in the Berber region of Kabilia in Algeria.

A new wave of protest movements started in 2005 mainly in Egypt but also in other countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Jordan. It can be argued that this second generation of protest movements is the precedent of the popular uprisings of 2011.

In the case of Egypt, we should note the confluence of three types of movements: political activism denouncing the regimes' authoritarian character and urging for political reforms (the clearest representative is the Kefaya movement (meaning *enough* in Arabic), worker strikes asking for better labour conditions and specific actions by professional groups (mainly lawyers and judges). This wide range of actors, which had no formal coordination among themselves, took the Egyptian streets in a context characterised by privatisation policies, constitutional amendments and the frequent rumours on the succession of Hosni Mubarak by his son, Gamal Mubarak.

In their review of protest movements in the region, Marina Ottaway and Amr Hamzawy argue that

Recommended readings

Seddon, David (1986). “Riot and Rebellion: Political Responses to Economic Crisis in North Africa (Tunisia, Morocco and Sudan)”. *Discussion Paper*. Norwich: University of East Anglia.

Burke, Edmund (1986). “Understanding Arab protest movements”. *Arab Studies Quarterly* (n° 8, pp. 333–345).

Sadiki, Larbi (2000). “Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization”. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (vol. 32, n° 1, pp. 71–95).

Bennani-Chraïbi, M ; Filieule, O. (2003). *Résistances et protestations dans les sociétés musulmanes*. Paris: Presses de Science Po.

Gobe, Eric (2006). “Corporatismes, syndicalisme et dépolitisation” in Picard, Élizabeth (dir). *La politique dans le monde arabe*. Paris: Armand Colin.

“in Egypt, strikers have been careful to strictly focus their demands on economic grievances. Political protest movements that flourished briefly around the 2005 parliamentary elections and then again during the 2010 elections did not reach out to the groups involved in labour and economic protest. The Kefaya movement—which was behind the first wave of political protest in the run-up to the 2005 elections—was founded by intellectuals demanding political reform and had limited success mobilizing a critical mass of protesters, and found it especially difficult to reach workers. The two streams of protest converged briefly in the nationwide strikes that occurred on April 6, 2008. Ultimately, the national protest highlighted the differences in demands and motivation between the various groups, with many workers and university students holding active demonstrations while prominent opposition members sat on the sidelines.”

Marina Ottaway; Amr Hamzawy

Since then, the country has been the scene of thousands of strikes.

In the Maghreb, demonstrations also took the streets of cities and towns even in very authoritarian contexts such as the one of Tunisia. There were political protests such as the 2005 demonstrations in defence of freedom of expression when Tunis hosted the World Summit on the Information Society but, even more important, in 2008, major clashes occurred in the mining area of Gafsa between workers and security forces. In Morocco, the movements of unemployed graduates have been particularly active in the organisation of rallies, sittings and demonstrations. In Algeria, there have been small-intensity protests to denounce housing policies, public works, electricity cuts or labour conditions all across the country.

The situation in the Moroccan-administered area of the Western Sahara deserves a mention apart. Next to the struggle between the Polisario (pro-independence movement whose headquarters are in the Algerian province of Tindouf) and Morocco, a new form of unrest has emerged in the areas controlled by Morocco, confronting indigenous Saharawi population with the Moroccan authorities and settlers. The episode of the Dignity Camp in Laâyoune in autumn 2010 has, to date, been the clearest example of how social protests can become an act of political and nationalistic contestation.

Demonstrating is, in some Arab countries, more difficult than in others. This explains why the petitioning phenomenon has been particularly popular in the Gulf Region and in countries where there is no margin for political organisation such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar or the Union of Arab Emirates. Petitioning has been a way for the less radical of the opposition sectors to convey their demands in a period in which some of these countries had suffered terrorist attacks by radical opposition groups.

In Saudi Arabia, for instance, different groups of intellectuals, ranging from Ulema to individuals with a Western education, submitted several open letters to rulers asking for better governance and more reforms in the early nineties. Among these, the “Reform petition” in 1990, the “Petition of moderate groups” in 1991 and particularly the “Memorandum of advice” in 1992, were signed mostly by Islamist figures. In view of the lack of response from the authorities, in September 1993, more than 300 Saudis (including 50 women)

Recommended readings

Shrobagy, Mona (2007). “Understanding Kefaya: The New Politics in Egypt”. *Arab Studies Quarterly* (n° 29, pp. 39–60).

Ottaway, Marina; Hamzawy, Amr (2011). “Protest Movements and Political Change in the Arab World”. *Policy Outlook*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Gobe, Eric (2011). “The Gafsa Mining Basin between riots and a social movement: meaning and significance of a protest movement in Ben Ali’s Tunisia”. On-line paper:

http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00557826_v1
http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/55/78/26/PDF/Tunisia_The_Gafsa_mining_basin_between_Riots_and_Social_Movement.pdf

Bennadji (2011). “Algerie 2010: l’annes des mille et une émeutes”. *L’Anne du Maghreb*. Aix-en-Provence: MMSH.

Beinin, Joel (2012). “The rise of Egypt’s workers”. *Carnegie Papers*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

signed another petition entitled “In defence of the nation” and, in December, yet another one, “An Appeal to the leadership and the people: Constitutional reform first”. The response to this insistence was an ambivalent one. On the one hand, it showed certain openness by promulgating the Basic Law of Governance in 1992 and creating the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*) as a kind of parliament but with neither legislative powers nor control. On the other, however, the regime did not hesitate in sanctioning the most non-conformist elements of the movement, through reprisals including the imprisonment of some of the leaders of the petitioning movement.

Following September 11th, a revitalisation of this phenomenon took place. In some cases, there were demands of an ideological, especially liberal, nature as in the petition entitled “A vision for the present and future of the homeland” of January 2003, or of a fiercely territorial nature, as in the petition of the People of Najran entitled “The homeland for all, all for the homeland”. While at the beginning, the regime prosecuted those that dared to sign those letters, since the year 2003, King Abdullah opted for another strategy and launched a process of National Dialogue and introduced mild reforms (e.g. municipal elections).

Protest movements moved a step forward in 2011. The growing social and territorial disparities, high levels of corruption, worrying rates of youth unemployment, the increase of food prices, the waiving of civil and political freedoms, the abuses of power by security forces and the eroded legitimacy of the governments in place have been pointed out as factors that explain the growing discontent of the Arab streets and the virulence of the protest movements in 2011, popularly known as the Arab Spring.

The episode that started this phase of protests involved a young Tunisian from Sidi Bouzid, a small city in the deprived centre-west of the country, who set himself on fire in front of the governors’ office. The desperate act of Mohamed Bouazizi, followed by massive demonstrations, public outrage and brutal repression throughout the country, started an unprecedented and largely unforeseen wave of protests that led to the fall of the Tunisian ruler, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The success of the Tunisian revolution inspired Egyptian activists, who in a few weeks also succeeded in overthrowing Hosni Mubarak, and other protest movements across the Arab world. In the first months of 2011, all countries from Morocco to the Gulf were affected with different intensity and effects by this wave of social and political unrest. There were street protest even in countries such as the Sultanate of Oman, with no tradition of demonstrations.

Recommended readings

International Crisis Group (2004). “Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?” *Middle East Report* (n° 28), Riyadh/Amman/Brussels.

Sager, Abdulaziz O. (2005). “Political Opposition in Saudi Arabia”, in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (Eds.). *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. New York: New York University Press (pp. 234–270).

Glosemeyer, Iris (2005). “Checks, Balances and Transformation in the Saudi Political System”, in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (Eds.). *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. New York: New York University Press (pp. 214–233).

The form and scope of the protests as well as the response of the regime varied from one country to another, depending among other factors on: 1) the nature, resources and cohesion of the regime, 2) socio-economic conditions, 3) the organisation of political opposition and 4) the existence of regional, ethnic, religious or linguistic tensions. These factors are relevant to understand not only when and how protests have erupted, but also how the political situation could evolve in the coming years in each of these countries.

This wave of protests has not only challenged the incumbent regimes but the assumptions of political scientists and area studies specialists on the resilience of authoritarianism, on the passivity of the population or the role of political Islam.

Several scholars, such as Dietrich Jung and Gregory Gause, have also published pieces trying to elucidate why “Middle East studies missed the Arab Spring”. Other authors, in contrast, have seen, in the Arab Spring, elements that confirmed their hypothesis on the failure of political Islam (Olivier Roy) and on the role of the coercive apparatus as a determining factor for the durability of authoritarian regimes in the region (Eva Bellin).

Recommended readings

Bellin, E. (2011). “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring”. *Comparative Politics* (vol. 44, n° 2, pp. 127-149).

Gause, F. Gregory. (2011). “Why Middle East studies missed the Arab Spring”. *Foreign Affairs* (vol. 90, n° 4, pp. 81-90).

Jung, Dietrich (2011). “Unrest in the Arab world: four questions”. *Insight Turkey* (vol. 13, n° 3, pp. 1-10).

Pace, Michelle; Cavatorta, Francesco (2012). “The Arab Uprisings in Theoretical Perspective – An Introduction”. *Mediterranean Politics* (vol. 17, n° 2, pp. 125-138).

Roy, Olivier (2012). “The Transformation of the Arab World”. *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 23, n° 3, pp. 5-18).

Summary

This module analyses more or less politically organised groups that have contested incumbent regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Political Islam groups (a category that encompasses very different political movements) have been, for several decades, the strongest alternative to the regimes in place. This module overviews the ideological bases, the contemporary evolution and sheds some light on the diversity of movements and their sometimes contradictory strategies. It also analyses the dynamics of protest movements, pointing out the growing social unrest in several Arab countries since the year 2005 and advancing how the events of 2011 (the so-called Arab Spring) have channelled previous assumptions on the durability of authoritarianism in the Middle East.