

ISLAM, ISLAMISTS, AND
THE ELECTORAL PRINCIPLE
IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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**ISLAM, ISLAMISTS, AND
THE ELECTORAL PRINCIPLE
IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

James Piscatori

LEIDEN ISIM

ISIM, P.O. BOX 11089, 2301 EB LEIDEN

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For an idea whose time has supposedly come, “democracy” masks an astonishing number of unanswered questions and, in the Muslim world, has generated a remarkable amount of heat. Is it a culturally specific term, reflecting Western European experiences over several centuries? Do non-Western societies possess their own standards of participation and accountability—and indeed their own rhythms of development—which command attention, if not respect? Does Islam, with its emphasis on scriptural authority and the centrality of sacred law, allow for flexible politics and participatory government?

The answers to these questions form part of a narrative and counter-narrative that themselves are an integral part of a contested discourse. The larger story concerns whether or not “Islam” constitutes a threat to the West, and the supplementary story involves Islam’s compatibility with democracy. The intellectual baggage, to change the metaphor, is scarcely neutral. The discussion itself has become acutely politicised, caught in the related controversies over Orientalism, the exceptionalism of the Middle East in particular and the Muslim world in general, and the modernism of religious “fundamentalist” movements.¹

This paper began life as a series of introductory and concluding comments at a conference organised by the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in Leiden on “Islam and the Electoral Process”, 10–12 December 1999, convened by Martin van Bruinessen. I am very grateful to ISIM’s Academic Director, Muhammad Khalid Masud, for his kind invitation to participate in this meeting and his patience in waiting for the revised text, and to Martin van Bruinessen for his support and encouragement. I have drawn on the informed insights of the conference participants. I am also grateful to Laurence Whitehead at whose Seminar on Democratisation at Nuffield College, Oxford, a version of this paper was presented, 16 May 2000. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of several colleagues: Paul Dresch, John Gurney, Eric Hooglund, Gaelle Le Pottier, and Yahya Michot.

1. A voluminous literature has already appeared. Those arguing for Islam’s compatibility with democracy include John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Elie Kedourie has argued against the proposition in *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), as has Martin Kramer, “Islam and Democracy”, in Kramer, *Arab Awakening & Islamic Revival; The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1996), pp. 265–278.

Those who argue that Islam and democracy are antithetical build their analysis on the supposed uniqueness of Muslim societies—they are not like other societies or, perhaps more to the point, not like Western societies—and on what Leonard Binder has called “the cluster of absences”. In this view, the absence of a concept of citizenship and of a legal-political culture of compromise and flexibility marks a critical deficiency.² In some accounts, the absence of fair and free elections is also seen as a prime indicator of the lack of democratic development.

The theoretical literature on democratisation is unanimous on one point—that an intimate connection exists between democracies and elections.³ As the antithesis of autocracy, democracy is the rule of the people, but they, naturally, cannot govern directly or as a whole. The pragmatic way out of this problem is representation, and it follows in turn that representatives (here including rulers) are chosen in periodic expressions of popular will. But debate persists as to whether these elections must necessarily embody majoritarianism—what Alexis de Tocqueville in his great nineteenth-century study of *Democracy in America* called the “absolute sovereignty of the majority”—or serve as a conduit for diffuse elements—what G. Bingham Powell calls the “proportional vision”.⁴

The question of electoral participation is thus complex, and a quick glance at the Middle East indicates that it is especially so given that notions of democracy and popular sovereignty will have seemed less entrenched than narrowly based regimes. Yet substantive electoral politics have, to a certain extent, also emerged in the region. Elections have occurred with regularity in Turkey and Iran; and, in the Arab world, in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, and Yemen. Beyond the Middle East, they have long formed part of the political landscape of Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Senegal, and Muslim minorities have become actively engaged in the electoral politics of Europe, America, and Australia. Despite common expectations, Islamists—Muslims who are committed to political action to implement what they regard as an Islamic agenda—have routinely participated in most of these elections. They have engaged in the kind of tactical political calculations that are common to other groups.

2. Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 225.
3. See, for example: “Introduction”, Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes and Bernard Manin (eds.), *Democracy, Accountability and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–4; and José Antonio Cheibub and Adam Przeworski, “Democracy, Elections, and Accountability for Economic Outcomes”, in *ibid.*, pp. 222–223.
4. G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 5–7, quotation at p. 5.

It is clear, however, that in terms of government intervention, the degree of enfranchisement, the extent to which alternation of power occurs, and the fairness of the electoral process itself, none of these elections would rank particularly high. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens have highlighted three criteria of democracy: repeated elections without restriction of race, gender, or class; accountability of institutions to the electorate; and guarantees of freedom of expression, association and of individual rights.⁵ It is obvious that by these standards, democracy has a long way to go before it could be said to be entrenched in most parts of the Muslim world.

The purpose of this work is to engage with a specific dimension of the general debate on democracy and Islam—commitment to the electoral principle. It would be inappropriate to assume that substantive or “deep” democratisation is occurring—or even that it will necessarily follow from the electoral experience that has been unfolding.⁶ Many obstacles stand in the way of such development, not least the embedded power and the anti-pluralist ideology of narrowly based governments. Be that as it may, a newer, relatively more open form of politics has emerged for three reasons. First, the nature of opposition and the fragmentation of authority in the Muslim world are encouraging an instrumental attachment to the electoral process. Second, a discursive shift has also occurred, and a normative commitment has emerged, that validates the very concept of elections. Third, the experience of elections has initiated a potentially reinforcing, though by no means certain, learning process. Elections, then, may not lead inevitably to democratisation in the Muslim world, but they are increasingly a force to be reckoned with.

OPPOSITION AND FRAGMENTATION

The starting point of analysis must be that the state has, to a large extent, been patrimonial and authoritarian throughout the Muslim Middle East. Often based on narrowly communal rather than ideological affinities, regimes seek to maintain their own cohesion and the acquiescence of society by a policy of repression, co-

5. Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development & Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 43–44.
6. In fairness, it should be noted that even in more established democracies the linkage between elections and democratic accountability is not certain. See, for example, Cheibub and Przeworski, “Democracy, Elections, and Accountability for Economic Outcomes”, pp. 222–239; and Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracy*.

optation, and the maintenance of patron-client relations. Autonomous centres of power—predominantly Islamic ones—are seen as a threat, and the writ of the state purports to be comprehensive. In this situation, opposition to the regime automatically takes the form of appealing to what the state is *not*—i.e., participatory. Putting the point slightly differently, because the state has appropriated economic capital, opponents attempt to usurp “moral capital”.⁷ Electoral politics are the antithesis of authoritarian, patrimonial politics, and Islamists, rather than automatically standing as critics outside the system, are intimately involved in it. They are able to offer themselves at once as the proponents of change and the standard bearers of tradition and probity. They fight on terrain where the narrow ruling circles are most vulnerable. To paraphrase Charles Tripp⁸, there is a secular logic to opposition by which elections assume an instrumental importance even for religiously defined groups. Self-interest, to put it baldly, is self-interest regardless of the proponents; and calculated choice often explains social action notwithstanding the level of ideological commitment.

But this utilitarian explanation provides only part of the picture. Contemporary Islam is characterised by a fragmentation of authority, a contest over who speaks for Islam. The religious bureaucracy and official *‘ulama* (religious scholars) find themselves in competition with unofficial or popular religious leaders and preachers, Sufi movements, Islamist groups, and lay intellectuals. All of these and others claim direct access to Scripture, purport to interpret its contemporary meaning, and thus effectively question whether any one individual or group has a monopoly on the sacred—even as they appropriate that right for themselves. The result is, on the one hand, the radicalisation of Islam, the resorting to violence in an attempt to outbid one’s Muslim opponents and certify one’s pre-eminent right to speak for Islam. On the other hand, there is a *de facto* structural pluralism in this fragmentation. As rational actors, these groups quickly appreciate that, as they are unable to dominate over the others, they must compromise and engage in the give-and-take of electoral politics common everywhere. Bargaining and democratic procedures validate themselves as ways to contain or resolve social conflict, and are not morally desirable ends in themselves. Not out of ideological commitment or virtue, then, but because of a sober calculation of interests comes the turn to electoral pol-

7. Nazih N. Ayubi, “Islam and Democracy”, in David Potter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh and Paul Lewis (eds.), *Democratization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 363.

8. Charles Tripp, “Islam and the Secular Logic of the State in the Middle East”, in Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 51–69.

itics. In this interpretation, the search for constituencies leads to a kind of broadening of one's appeal and moderation. Coalitions are one obvious consequence, dictated in part by the peculiarities of the electoral system. Examples include Hizbullah in Lebanon needing to work with its Shi'i competitor AMAL and even non-Muslim groups from the late 1990s, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt fielding candidates with the New Wafd and Labour parties in 1984 and 1987. Constrained by government on the national level, Islamist groups often find local, grassroots organisation fertile ground on which to operate.

Another factor that works towards enhancing the opening of the political order, and even moderation, is the fact that the "Muslim vote" is scarcely monolithic, and self-designated Islamist groups do not automatically have a monopoly on it. In Turkey, for instance, the Refah Party was constrained in part by the fact that Islamist support went to such supposedly secular parties as True Path and Motherland. Yet it must also be remembered that the imperative of seeking constituencies has a built-in check on fragmenting pluralism—the need to appease a core constituency. If a group such as Refah was pushed towards accommodationism, it was pulled towards an ideologically distinctive agenda by the insistent demands of its die-hard supporters.

Opposition and fragmentation are thus powerful forces. They may well work in favour of intensified competition and against the democratic ethos, but it is also possible that they will provide the initial impulse towards electoral politics. In effect, they provide both utilitarian⁹ and structural¹⁰ explanations, which have an established place in democratic theory and which in common assume that a cultural commitment to democratic norms is either not necessary or improbable in the near future. In short, they hold out for the possibility of a democracy without democrats whereby the logic of electoral engagement, not its spirit, is sufficient.¹¹

9. See, for example, Richard J. Arneson, "Democratic Rights at National and Workplace Levels", in David Copp, Jean Hampton, and John E. Roemer (eds.), *The Idea of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 118–148. Stathis N. Kalyvas, in a probing essay, argues that democratic development is initially dependent on "strategic self-interest rather than normative commitment": "Democracy and Religious Politics: Evidence from Belgium", *Comparative Political Studies*, 31, no. 3 (June 1998), p. 293.

10. See, for example, Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

11. John Waterbury, "Democracy Without Democrats? The Potential for Political Liberalization in the Middle East", in Ghassan Salamé (ed.), *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), pp. 43–45. Also see "Introduction: Where are the Democrats?", especially pp. 16–20.

NORMATIVE CHANGE

The question of whether Muslims, especially politically active Islamists, internalise their adoption of electoral politics is, however, one that repeatedly appears in discussions on the subject. Indeed, a leitmotif in the argument of those who see an incompatibility between Islam and democracy, or at least between Islamists and democracy,¹² is that electoral commitment is only tactical and cynical—“one person, one vote, one time”.¹³ My own interpretation is that Muslims have, to some extent, accepted the normative framework of elections, but in order to assess the degree of this commitment historical and theoretical developments need to be taken into account.

Development of the Electoral Principle

Contrary to what may be assumed, the roots of elections reach into the nineteenth century. The first stirrings were detected in the 1830s in Egypt and Crete where local councils with both Muslim and non-Muslim members were created. The concept and limited practice came into their own, however, during the Ottoman empire of the Tanzimat period in the nineteenth century. In part influenced by reforming, Europhile bureaucrats and in part constrained by the unwanted interest of the Great Powers, the imperial government issued a series of edicts that opened the door to political experimentation of a kind hitherto not seen in the empires of the Muslim world. The Hatt-ı Humayun of Gülhane (1839) did not promise parliamentary government, but it did proclaim the rights of all subjects under, and their equality before, the law. The principle of representation was first recognised in a *firman* (edict) of January 1840 whereby, in addition to the abolition of tax-farming, administrative councils were established in the major districts of the empire. Of the thirteen members in the large urban councils, six were appointed by the government, but of greater importance was the fact that

12. I. William Zartman, “Democracy and Islam: The Cultural Dialectic”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 524 (November 1992), p. 189.

13. Bassam Tibi, for example, says he agrees with the Democratic Movements in the Middle East Project which concluded that Islamists are “committed to using the fragile reemergence of democratic processes to destroy any decisive move in [the] direction of liberal democracy itself”: “Democracy and Democratization in Islam: The Quest for Islamic Enlightenment”, *Universitas*, 4 (1994), p. 246.

the majority—seven—were chosen by a complex and indirect process of selection and that non-Muslims were allowed a place.¹⁴ To the extent that the electoral principle had been introduced, it should also be remembered that this was still on the corporate basis of the *millet* (community) system and not, as we have come to expect, on the foundation of individual rights.

The process of reform soon gathered steam from two directions. At the imperial centre, the unsettling results of the recently concluded Crimean war encouraged officials to extend the earlier reforms. The Hatt of 1856 applied this incipient process of representation to the national level. Non-Muslim *millets* were now to allow for the greater participation of laymen, and their representatives were to be included in the *meclis* or national assembly whenever matters of concern to all Ottoman subjects were being discussed. But also involved was the reconstitution of the *millets* themselves, which were increasingly coming under criticism from merchants and other bourgeois elements who felt excluded by the traditional Greek, Armenian, and Jewish elites. An assembly of indirectly elected delegates was created within each *millet*; the notable effect was to limit the authority of their clergy in civil matters.¹⁵

With these as precedents, elections were first formally recognised in the *vilayet* (district) laws of 1864 and 1867. Indirect elections were held for district administrative councils and general assemblies, and the pressure for greater representative government steadily increased, partly as a result of liberal experiments in such further reaches of the empire as the United Principalities, Egypt, and Tunis. Namık Kemal and the Young Ottomans insistently argued that the experimentation had not gone far enough and that a national consultative assembly (*meclis-i şura-yı ümmet*) was required. With this as the larger picture, and the poor handling of the Balkan revolts of 1875 the immediate context, 1876 witnessed the deposition of two sultans and the promulgation of a constitution that challenged the political status quo as no other prior event had done. It established a chamber of deputies all of whose members were to be elected. Each deputy would represent 50,000 male electors, and each—significantly—would represent all Ottomans, not merely his electoral district or sect.¹⁶ Power remained, of course, mainly in the hands of the sultan, the *‘ulama* were steadfast

14. Roderic H. Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774–1923; The Impact of the West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 100.

15. On the millets and equality, see generally *ibid.*, pp. 112–132.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–106.

in their opposition, and the electoral process did not quite live up to its promise but, rather, followed the *vilayet* precedent of corporate representation. Yet, with these developments, the notion of popular sovereignty began to penetrate the Islamic political consciousness. Albert Hourani neatly summed up the contrary impulses at work:

The elections took place under pressure from the local officials; not all the deputies could speak Turkish, or knew how parliamentary debates should be conducted; the Speaker had not changed his view that nothing should be done which weakened the authority of the sovereign and the domination of the Muslim element. In spite of all this, however, the debates were real: political ideas were expressed, ministers and court officials were criticised and an opposition group emerged.¹⁷

Pragmatic certification that evolution, perhaps imperceptibly at times, was nonetheless occurring can be found in the fate of an electoral law passed by the first chamber. Although Sultan Abdülhamid did not give assent to this law disallowing religious preferment or discrimination, it did not disappear for good. It came into effect in the young Turk period (1908–1918) and for all elections in the Republic until 1939.¹⁸

The reaction to Hamidian authoritarianism that characterises the triumph of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1908 marks the second explicit turn to the language of freedom and rights in the late Ottoman period. It was to prove no more lasting than the first in the mid-nineteenth century, and the promise of constitutionalism was to be dashed by almost immediate civil strife. But in 1911 the newly reconstituted parliament showed signs of vigour with the emergence of competing political parties. The Entente Libérale (Hürriyet ve İtilâf Fırkası), an amalgam of oppositional groups to the CUP, soon made its mark when it won a by-election to parliament. The electoral college's selection of the Liberal candidate was the "first genuine electoral contest between two candidates, each representing a different party and programme". Expectations were immediately raised, but despite what appeared to be the advent of "the constitutional millennium", the "democratic redemption", in Bernard Lewis's memo-

17. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 105.

18. Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History*, p. 107.

rable phrase, was not to occur. Parliament was dissolved in January 1912, and the ensuing staged election, appropriately called *sopah seçim* (“the big-stick election”), produced only six oppositional members out of 275 representatives.¹⁹ From mid-1913 until 1918, the empire would be ruled by a military clique, leaving modern Turkey with the legacy of delicately interacting constitutional and praetorian rule.

The electoral principle became further entrenched in the Muslim world as a result of turmoil elsewhere—the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. The unsettling events, internal and external, that combined to weaken the power of the Qajar Shah from the late nineteenth century came to a head in the summer of 1906 when thousands took refuge in the grounds of the British Legation. According to contemporary reports, this *bast* became a “school” for the learning of politics and law—for example, that “Shah” should mean “representative of the nation”.²⁰ In truth, the picture was more complex as the *‘ulama* divided between proponents of major political reform and those loyal, after a fashion, to the court. The momentum for a consultative assembly of some kind was unstoppable, however, though disagreement ensued as to whether this should be an Islamic assembly, ostensibly based on the *shari‘a*, or a national (*milli*) assembly. An imperial rescript on 6 August announced “the establishment of a Majles of elected representatives” of various social classes, which would provide advice to the Shah’s ministers and would devise reforms to be “enforced in accordance with the *shari‘a*”.²¹

The task of devising an electoral law for the Majles fell to a motley crew of religious officials, bureaucrats, merchants, and guildsmen who seemed intent on advancing their own interests. The religious officials wanted to keep dissidents from dominating the Majles, and the court wanted to maintain overall control and to prevent an assembly dominated by the clergy.²² One contemporary observer commented:

19. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 206–225, quotations at p. 217. Also see: Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, rev. ed., 1998), pp. 107–108.
20. Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism; The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989), p. 93.
21. Cited *ibid.*, p. 98.
22. Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911; Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 65.

A number of totally uninformed people are busy writing the electoral rules in the Military School. About two thousand meet there twice a week and ask for their “rights”. The government is trying to avoid implementing the rescript, and there is likely to be a struggle between them and the people. The members of the government suppose that they can deceive the people, and the people think that they can achieve these wonderful results free of cost.²³

An electoral law based on the Belgian constitution and supported by the merchants and bureaucrats was finally adopted, and elections in Tehran occurred at the end of September. Of the 200 members of the Majles, 60 were to be chosen from Tehran and were divided into five categories: 32 represented the guilds, 10 the merchants, 10 the landowners including the *a‘yan* (notables), four the *‘ulama*, and four the Qajars. There were only a few hundred electors in each category, and electors had to be literate males, Persian nationals, over 25, and substantial property owners or engaged in a recognised trade or business. No mention was made of religious affiliation, although heretics as well as women, minors, bankrupts, and convicts were specifically excluded.²⁴ The position of minorities such as Zoroastrians, Armenians, and Jews was not specifically addressed, but some feared that their natural demands for representation would alienate sections of the *‘ulama*. In the hope of avoiding this, the minorities were persuaded to allow leading Shi‘i religious and merchant figures to speak for them, thus securing representation of a de facto, tentative kind. These events in Tehran were to produce differing reactions in the provinces. Some members of the *‘ulama* such as in Rasht and Kermanshah feared diminution of their power and opposed the elections, whereas others, such as in Najaf and to some extent Isfahan, saw the Majles as strengthening Islam.

As the constitutional experiment unfolded, attitudes hardened, and the debate centred on the somewhat artificial distinction between *mashruta* (constitutionalism) and *mashru‘a* (*shari‘a*-minded rule).²⁵ Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba‘i (1841–1918) and Sayyid ‘Abdullah Bihbihani (d. 1910) provided lukewarm support for the Majles, but Shaykh Fadlallah Nuri (1842–1909), who had encouraged lim-

23. The words of Mukhbir al-Saltana cited in Martin, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 100.

24. Mangol Bayat, *Iran’s First Revolution: Shi‘ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 146. Bayat puts the minimum age at 30 whereas Martin (*Islam and Modernism*, p. 101) and Afary (*The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. 64) list it as 25. The electoral law was revised by electoral committees once voting had begun: Afary, p. 65.

25. Bayat, *Iran’s First Revolution*, pp. 161–183.

itations on the power of the Shah, grew for a number of reasons to oppose the Majles and its principles of representative, elected government. To his mind, the equality of all citizens was “impossible” in Islam, for it would be nonsensical to put believers and non-believers, the rich and poor, husbands and wives, the learned and ignorant on the same plane. Moreover, there was no need for a legislative body because “Islam does not have any shortcomings that require completion”.²⁶

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

With the Tanzimat and Constitutional Revolution the electoral principle put down early and strong roots, but, as the criticism of Fadlallah Nuri suggests, differing views quickly emerged. They have in fact crystallised into three modern schools of thought.

The first happily accepts that elections are fully consistent with Islamic principles. Building on Arab political thought that had emerged in the nineteenth century, this view has expressed admiration for the electoral experience of Europe and, to a lesser extent, America. Rifa'i al-Tahtawi (1801–73) referred approvingly to *dhawi al-intikhab*, the elected officials, and Adib Ishaq sounded positively Lincolnesque when he spoke of *hukumat al-sha'b bi'l-sha'b*, “government of the people by the people”.²⁷ In the twentieth century, it is perhaps not surprising that a Europhile like 'Allal al-Fasi (1906–73) should find the competition of political parties a desirable development, and the majority party the facilitating linkage between parliament and executive.²⁸

Fasi's argument, like so many others, invokes the traditional notion of *ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd*, “those who loose and bind”. In medieval usage, it referred princi-

26. Shaykh Fadlallah Nuri, “Refutation of the Idea of Constitutionalism”, in John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 293–294, 296. Those who argue that Islam does not provide for equality of individuals often base their argument on the Qur'anic verse, “Is one who is a believer like one who is godless? No, they are not equal (*la yastawun*)” (32:18).

27. See: Ami Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of Modern Political Discourse* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 55 and 105.

28. See: Erwin I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 161.

pally to jurists who “elected”—really, selected—the caliph. In modern usage, the term has, perhaps inevitably, been broadened and democratised. Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi (d. 1889) likened *ahl al-hall* to a parliament,²⁹ and Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935)—certainly not an admirer of late Ottoman and republican developments in Turkey—equated them with the members of the Grand National Assembly. Unable to function except in a country free of imperial control, they could not, in Rida’s view, operate as the categorical “guides and leaders”³⁰ of the community in Egypt or India, but, even so, parliamentary bodies approximated the modern embodiment of *ahl al-hall*.

The comparison is revealing of the extent to which the representative idea had gained currency by 1923 when Rida brought together various articles on the subject from his widely influential periodical *Al-Manar* and published *Al-khilafa aw al-imama al-uzma* (The Caliphate or the Supreme Imamate). Indeed, earlier in this journal he had noted the positive effect republicanism had induced in Europe.³¹ But in an allusion to the special qualities of the caliphal electors, he was aware of an important difference with Western assemblies: Islam, unlike Europe, demanded parliamentarians of high intellectual and moral quality. This implied suspicion of the European experience should remind us that Rida was ultimately a proponent of the rule of the *shari’a*³², not democratic governance as we know it today, and the overall vision, not unlike that of later Islamist writers, was of an integral whole in which the truly Islamic leader provided just and consultative rule in close co-operation with an elite corps of religious and legal scholars. But idealism of this kind was leavened with practical reason. However desirable the caliphate based on *ijtihad* (independent judgement) was, an interim practical arrangement must pave the way. The main institutions of Muslim learning, such as Al-Azhar in Cairo or the Deobandi school in India, had fallen into irrelevance, and political accommodations would have to be made among the Arabs and between them and other Muslims.³³ The religious authorities, however imperfect, have the opportunity, on the basis of active consultation, to forge a new con-

29. See: Wael Hallaq, “Ahl al-hall wa’l ‘aqd”, in John L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), vol. 1, p. 53.

30. Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Al-khilafa aw al-imama al-uzma* (Cairo: Matba’at al-Manar, 1341/1923), p. 58.

31. *Al-Manar* [The Lighthouse], vol. 1 (1898), p. 869.

32. Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 55.

33. Rida, *Al-khilafa*, pp. 58–64.

sensus (*ijma'*) appropriate for the times.³⁴ Moreover, although the *shari'a* would naturally be supreme, the caliph and *ahl al-hall* would need to supplement this with enacted law (*qanun*).³⁵ His acknowledgement that *ahl al-hall* had in effect acquired contemporary identification with parliaments and that legislation—*ishtira'* in his words³⁶—was a reasonable necessity was thus part of a candid recognition that political reality had impinged upon the modern civic thought of Muslims.

'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966), in his controversial reinterpretation of Islamic political thought that in significant ways took exception with Rida's interpretation, argued that Islam did not specify a particular form of political system; nor did it require the caliphate. The Prophet was purely a spiritual leader, and Muslims had long suffered under the tyranny of a government that was supposedly ordained by either God's law or the will of the community of believers (*umma*). Despite what the great philosophers and the pious would say, both supposed foundations, in his view, are mythical. It clearly cannot be said that 'Abd al-Raziq advanced a theory of democracy,³⁷ but his was nonetheless a powerful critique of Islamic history based in part on a voluntarist perspective. The caliphate was built on brute force and the imposition of narrow will, rather than, as Rida had argued it ought to be, on a considered contract (*'aqd*) between those who are endowed with the power of choice and those chosen. Whereas the two writers disagreed as to whether the ideal caliphate was possible or even Islamically ordained, they revealed a shared, though rudimentary, sense of what kind of governance was desirable. 'Abd al-Raziq implied that government in our time should not follow the example of 'Ali's and Mu'awiya's accession, but should rather rest on the foundation of willing allegiance (*asas al-bay'a al-ikhtiyariyya*). The dangers of internal lust for power and external manipulation are substantial. The "election" the British organised to validate the rule of Faysal ibn Husayn in Iraq in 1921 may have formally conformed to what was expected, for example, but *ahl al-hall wa'l-'aqd* were constrained to choose and a real consensus was not reached.³⁸

34. Hourani observed: "[H]aving rejected the old conception of *ijma'*, he is introducing a new one: the *ijma'* of the '*ulama*' of each age, a legislative rather than a judicial principle, working by some sort of parliamentary process". See *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 254.

35. Rida, *Al-khilafa*, p. 90.

36. *Ibid.* Also see: Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), p. 79.

37. Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, p. 147.

38. 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, *Al-islam wa usul al-hukm* (Islam and the Foundations of Government) (Tunis: Dar al-Ma'rif li'l-Tib'a wa'l-Nashr, 1999), pp. 34–43. quotation at p. 35.

The idea that government rests upon the consent and participation of the people came into its own only from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The title of the secular intellectual Khalid Muhammad Khalid's book is indicative of this shift: *Muwatinun, la raya* (Citizens, Not Subjects).³⁹ At times a similar acceptance of republicanism among the religious establishment has seemed little more than its characteristic acquiescence in entrenched power and the status quo. The Egyptian mufti, Jad al-Haqq, responded for instance to the radical challenge of 'Abd al-Salam Faraj's manifesto, *Al-farida al-ghayba* (The Missing Precept), by arguing that the particular form of government is dependent on current circumstance. The *umma* chooses its ruler (*hakim*) by whatever form of *shura* (consultation) is prevalent at a given time. *Amir*, caliph or president, the exact title is a matter of historical contingency, not theological imperative.⁴⁰ Others have been more enthusiastic in endorsing consultative government as religiously sanctioned.

Muhammad Asad (1900–1992), European convert and peripatetic, may be thought of as an unrepresentative and ultimately unassimilated Muslim intellectual and, given his service to the Saudi and Pakistani states, to have contradictorily offered an avid endorsement of democratic principles.⁴¹ But his thought provides a window on Islamic modernism, which powerfully emerged in his lifetime and to which he contributed. He argued that it was misleading to apply a Western term like democracy to Islam, especially since Muslims subordinate themselves to divine law. However, the Islamic state is not an end in itself: its goal is to bring into being a community of people committed to maximising God's word in preventing injustice and establishing justice. The nearly forty injunctions in the Qur'an to "obey God, the Prophet, and those in authority from among you" (e.g., 4:59) are key to his conceptualisation. Obedience is a condition of government,

39. (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Khanji, 6th ed., 1958). Ami Ayalon points out that the Lebanese historian Ra'if Khuri drew this distinction of the French after their revolution: *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East*, p. 44. See pp. 44–53 for an informed discussion of the citizen-subject debate in modern Arab political thought.

40. *Al-fatawa al-islami min dar al-ifta' al-misriyya* (Fatwas from the Egyptian Dar al-Ifta') (Cairo: Wizarat al-Awqaf, 1481/1997), vol. 10, pp. 3779–3781. For the translation of Faraj's polemic as well as informed commentary on it, see: Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

41. In an excellent biographical sketch, Martin Kramer notes that Asad had tried to encourage the newly formed Pakistan to adopt a liberal democratic constitution: "The Road from Mecca: Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss)", in Kramer (ed.), *The Jewish Discovery of Islam* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1999), pp. 236–237.

but it is not unconditional and although the real source of sovereignty is the will of God, the community is subject to the control of the people.⁴²

The small phrase *minkum* (among you) in the Qur'anic phrase above is given great weight and is thought to represent either the community as a whole or at least those representing it. Asad's conclusion is unambiguous: "[I]t follows that, in order to satisfy the requirements of Islamic law, the leadership of a state must be of an elective nature; consequently, an assumption of governmental power through non-elective means of any description becomes automatically, even though the person or persons concerned be Muslims, as illegal as an imposition of power by conquest from outside the Muslim community".⁴³ It follows that the *majlis al-shura* (consultative assembly) must be both representative of the entire community, men and women, and the result of free and general election based on universal suffrage. While the details of the electoral system were best left to the particular community, it seemed only commonsensical to Asad that the main institution of consultation in a Muslim society⁴⁴ should itself be the product of wide and direct consultation—that is, election.⁴⁵

The principle of majoritarianism, which, as we shall see, has seemed problematic to many Muslims thinkers, is thought by Asad to be pragmatic and prescribed by the traditions. To be sure, there is no guarantee that the majority will do the right thing. Nor is there any certainty that a privileged minority will always do the enlightened thing. Moreover, a Prophetic *hadith* (saying), derived from Ibn Hanbal, can be summoned to the defence of the majoritarian principle: "It is your duty", it says, "to stand by the community and *al-'amma*"—what Asad pointedly translates as "the majority". His conclusion would scarcely be out of

42. Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, new ed., 1980), pp. 30, 35.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

44. Ami Ayalon makes the important point that the concept of *shura* gradually acquired a different meaning in the modern age. When Muslim Arab writers used the term throughout the nineteenth century, they meant it to refer descriptively to parliamentary experience in Europe and America, and normatively to local institutions that were, by contrast to the West, grounded in the conventional Muslim understanding that rulers could seek advice but were not obligated to follow it. With the advent of the Islamic reformist or modernist trend at the end of the century, however, an attempt was made to associate *shura* more positively with parliamentary rule in the hope of rendering both parliaments more acceptable to Muslims and Islam more appealing to the liberal-minded: *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East*, pp. 120–122.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

place in Western liberal discourse: “the best we can hope for is that when an assembly composed of reasonable persons discusses a problem, the majority of them will finally agree upon a decision which in all probability will be right.”⁴⁶

Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), head of the Shari‘a Faculty at the University of Qatar, is sometimes thought to be a conservative, but on the issue of democracy he takes a place along with the modernists such as Asad. His own experience of Nasserist tyranny as a Muslim Brother in Egypt doubtless accounts for his strong antipathy to authoritarian regimes and, perhaps, for the appeal to both practical and sacred reason to sustain the defence of democracy. In his view, as authoritarian regimes have consistently acted against the interests of Islam, it seems only reasonable that the Islamic movement should be in favour of democratic institutions. It is true that many Islamists remain wary, and in the face of this concern it must be affirmed that Islam is a unique political order and should not be understood by comparison with others. Moreover, the distorting effects of secular democracies must be resisted, and the demands for Islamic law to replace deleterious positive laws should be respected.⁴⁷

But Muslims have to be realistic and understand that democracy comes closest to incorporating the values that Islam advocates—consultation, enjoining what is good and prohibiting evil, resisting unbelief, among others. Parliament is virtually a good in itself; it can only prevail in an environment of democracy and political freedom. *Ahl al-hall wa’l-‘aqd* remain important, but it is understood in our age that they are chosen by “way of election” (*tariq al-intikhab*),⁴⁸ Voting itself is a kind of certification of a candidate’s *bona fides* for those who vote must themselves, like witnesses in a legal case, be both just and reputable. If the individual Muslim neglects the “duty of voting” (*wajibhu al-intikhabi*) and thereby allows the unjust to come to power, it is tantamount to abdication of the responsibility to serve witness to the truth. By the same token, voting for candidates because of kinship or advantage, rather than voting for the upright candidate, is similar to false testimony.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50, quotations at p. 50.

47. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Min fiqh al-dawla fi’l-islam* (On the Jurisprudence of the State in Islam) (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1419/1999), pp. 101–118; “Al-sahwa al-islamiyya wa tatbiq al-shari‘a” (The Islamic Awakening and the Application of Islamic Law), *Liwa’ al-islam* (Standard of Islam), no. 42 (June 1987), p. 28.

48. Al-Qaradawi was here responding—in a kind of verbal *fatwa*—on Al-Jazira Channel, a Qatar-based television network, to a question on whether the Muslims of Belgium should participate in a government-sponsored election for a Muslim representative council there: *Fi su’al ila al-duktur al-shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi hawl mawdu’ intikhab majlis tamthili li-muslimi baljika* (n.p., 4 October 1998).

Anticipating, in part, the Qutbian argument that we shall see below, al-Qaradawi acknowledges that the control of a fickle majority would be alarming. But common sense, Islamic law, and “reality” (*al-waqi‘*) combine to dictate that majority voting and decision-making are practical arrangements. Furthermore, because we are talking about a *Muslim* society, the majority (*al-kathra*) can be trusted not to pass legislation that would contradict the basic principles of the faith. If necessary, a constitutional provision can be adopted that would nullify any such offensive enactment. The notion that the people are entrusted with the right to govern themselves is fundamental and does not derogate from God’s ultimate sovereignty. As a complementary principle, the avoidance of tyranny and the development of political freedom are imperative for the practice of the faith and realisation of Muslim aspirations. A “jurisprudence of balances” (*fiqh al-muwazanat*), serving both the fundamental tenets of the faith and the interests of Muslims, thus endorses democratic participation.⁴⁹

A second line of argument stands in stark contrast with this view and is far less sanguine. We have already encountered it with the views of Fadlallah Nuri. In fact, it starts from the opposite end of the spectrum and rejects any notion of popular sovereignty.⁵⁰ Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), the great theoretician of the Muslim Brotherhood, presented a coherent view of man in his magnificent exegesis of the Qur’an. In a manner that might be unexpected, he allows for human agency and his language is suffused with voluntarist and contractarian allusions, for man is the viceregent of God on earth. But freedom and rights prevail only in the context of submission to divine will. Man’s volition (*irada*) is at the core of his being, but it must be used responsibly and not debased by selfish and animal instincts.⁵¹ It is also the case that in our age tyrannical, secular politics have significantly deprived individuals of the right to choose and have thwarted their freedom of belief (*hurriyyat al-‘aqida*).⁵² One of the functions of *jihad* is to overthrow despotism and to establish in its place a just order that enshrines the freedom of summons to the true path (*hurriyyat al-da‘wa*).⁵³ Individual liberty is guaranteed, even for those not professing Islam, but all are subject to a basic covenant (*‘ahd*) with God. No one can try to impose their views and attempt to control via

49. Qaradawi, *Min fiqh al-dawla*, pp. 130–146, quotations (in order) at pp. 139, 142, and 131.

50. The Qur’anic justification for this is found in 12:40: “dominion [*al-hukm*] belongs to God alone”.

51. Sayyid Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Qur’an* (In the Shade of the Qur’an) (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1399 A.H./1979), vol. 1, Surat al-Baqara, pp. 60–61.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 294. Cf. p. 291 (*hurriyyat al-‘aqa’id*).

53. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

legislation (*al-tashri'*); authority is vested by the community only in those who uphold the *shari'a*.⁵⁴ Commenting on the Qur'anic verse that says, "were you to follow the majority (*akthar*) of those on earth, they will lead you away from the path of God" (6:116)⁵⁵, he infers that this applies to those who would harmfully provide changing norms for Muslim society.⁵⁶ By implication, majoritarianism and following popular opinion are rendered suspect. In his political manifesto, *Ma'alim fi'l-tariq* (Signposts on the Road), Qutb makes it abundantly clear that because the sovereignty of God is supreme, any form of popular sovereignty is a fundamental deviation and all "man-made" law must be eliminated.⁵⁷ It is clear that, in this worldview, legislative assemblies and elections such as Asad envisioned have decidedly no place.

The contemporary Turkish writer Rasim Özdenöen has similarly argued that a system based on popular sovereignty is incompatible with a theocentric order and engenders a way of thinking that can only undermine the Islamic way of life.⁵⁸ In 1982 in Egypt, Shaykh Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi, a popular religious leader, also created controversy by saying that Islam and democracy are incompatible and that *shura* does not mean simple domination of the majority. A particular manifestation of this argument is the denunciation of partyism (*hizbiyya*) as discordant and tantamount to religiously proscribed *fitna* or disorder. Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, saw the formation of distinct political parties as a prime threat to Islamic unity; such divisiveness could only play into the hands of Islam's enemies, especially the imperialists. All elements within the *umma* must organise themselves into one powerfully unified bloc.⁵⁹

54. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

55. Other Qur'anic invocations ostensibly cast the majority in a negative light as well: "Most people know not" (7:187); and "most people do not believe" (13:1). "Most people" in both verses is a translation of *akthar al-nas*, but whether this is equivalent to "majority" and has relevance to participatory politics as we know it is clearly a matter of substantial disagreement among interpreters of Islam today.

56. Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1405/1985), vol. 3, Surat al-An'am, pp. 1195–1196. By way of contrast, Fahmi Huwaydi, a prolific Egyptian writer and journalist, believes that because this verse relates to a specific context, it does not refer adversely to modern notions of majority decision-making: *Al-Islam wa'l-Dimuqratiyya* (Islam and Democracy) (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahram li'l-Tarjama wa'l-Nashr, 1413/1993), p. 209.

57. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi'l-Tariq* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1988), p. 68.

58. See: Burhanettin Duran, "Islamist Intellectuals and the Recent Elections in Turkey", paper presented at the conference on "Islam and the Electoral Process", p. 16.

59. Hasan al-Banna, "Mushkilatuna" (Our Problems), in *Majmu'at rasa'il al-imam Hasan al-Banna* (Collection of Imam Hasan al-Banna's Missives) (Cairo: Dar al-Shabab, n.d.), pp. 405–407.

In Algeria, one of the younger leaders of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) and a popular preacher, 'Ali Belhadj (b. 1954), has justified his group's electoral participation in the ill-fated elections of 1990–1991 by the longer-term effect of advancing the cause. It was one way among others to affirm the role of Islam in public life; participation was for Islamic, not democratic, reasons. It is clear that he adheres to the line of thought that is critical of democracy as generally conceived. He echoes the refrain that, derived from a Greek word and developed in the Judeo-Christian context, it erroneously puts faith and impiety on the same moral ground. Unrestricted liberty ends in anarchy and decadence. According to Belhadj, democracy is also a flawed system because elections too often end as those with the most money or might would like them to. In this sense, despite the rhetoric of popular sovereignty and majoritarianism, only a minority governs in reality. But even the supposed ideal is objectionable. Popular sovereignty leads to the rule of scoundrels and is thus the antithesis of God's authority. Moreover, contrary to Asad, the very concept of majority rule is objectionable since issues of right and justice cannot be quantified; the greater number of votes does not translate into the greater moral position. All the parliaments of the world cannot prescribe what God forbids. It is thus only to be expected that democracy should be replaced by inherently Islamic principles of governance, principally *shura*.⁶⁰

The writings of a young British-born Muslim, Tahir Mahmood (b. 1968), gives a sense of how the views of the second school reach into situations where Muslims live in a participatory democracy. He vehemently denounces notions of popular sovereignty as “tantamount to the postulation of the inferiority or non-existence ... of God”. God's sovereignty cannot be shared, and any Muslim states that purport to be running “Muslim parliaments” are merely misleading the believers. Certainly, such bodies cannot introduce the *shari'a*, for divinely ordained law cannot be legislated in a piecemeal fashion and is, at any rate, beyond human manipulation.⁶¹ Islamic modernists, such as represented in the first school of

60. *Al-munqidh* (The Saviour), no. 24 (August 1990), p. 10; French translations of other Belhadj pieces from *Al-Munqidh* are found in M. Al-Ahnaf, B. Bottiveau, and F. Frégosi, *L'Algérie par ses islamistes* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1991), pp. 87–103. Also see: Hayder Ibrahim 'Ali, *Al-tayyarat al-islamiyya wa qadiyat al-dimuqratiyya* (The Islamic Tendencies and the Question of Democracy) (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahda al-'Arabiyya, 1996), pp. 268–269. For Belhadj's general views, especially on *jihad*, see his *Ghayat al-murad fi qadiyat al-jihad* (Algeria: Al-Jabha al-Islamiyya li'l-Inqadh, 1994).

61. Tahir Mahmood, *Against Democracy* (Bhalwal: At'her Publishers, 1999), pp. 338–340, quotations at p. 338. The author does not regard this book as academic, but rather as a “revolutionary tract” (back cover).

thought above, have inflicted immense harm on the *umma* by aping the manners and ideas of their colonial and post-colonial tutors. They have embraced democracy, partly because they see it as a milieu in which they can prosper, and partly because they have forgotten the superior spiritual vision of Islam.⁶² Indeed, democrats are fundamentally superficial and self-centred, and political parties pretend to serve the public but care only about attaining power. They are anti-individual and anti-liberty: “[T]hanks to the mass character of democracy, typified in its concept of ‘majoritarianism’ that is concretely expressed via the electoral system, the party system inevitably and naturally ignores the particular, the unique and individual dimensions of each human being”. The ballot box sadly becomes an end itself; and the fundamental democratic motto, “The Bottom Line is Winning Elections”.⁶³

There is a third line of argument that straddles the previous two: A form of democracy is acceptable but not in its Western guise, and elections must particularly avoid the excesses and distortions found in Western parliamentary systems. The clearest proponent of this point of view was Abul A’la Mawdudi (1903–1979), founder of the Jamaat-i Islami in South Asia and influential thinker in the Middle East and elsewhere. To his mind, Islam promotes its own kind of democracy, ‘theo-democracy’, but his conception was not altogether consistent. He said that each individual is God’s *khalifa* (vicegerent) and the government is constituted by “the general will of Muslims” who have a right to depose it. Moreover, although “Islam does not regard the mere number of votes as a criterion of truth and rectitude”, he accepted that majority voting in an advisory body is a practical necessity. But it is also clear that since the basis of legislative authority, *shura*, is itself based on *ijtihad*, it must be limited to a select few who are well-versed in religious subjects, Arabic, and now the modern sciences.⁶⁴

Mawdudi’s view of elections is similarly ambivalent. On the one hand, even though this did not apply to the Rightly Guided Caliphs (632–61), there is nothing to prevent a legislative assembly from being elected. On the other hand, only Muslims are entitled to vote in this situation. Moreover, majoritarianism is a suspect principle—either in elections or in the operation of the assembly—because, in his view, Islam does not regard the mere number of votes as a criterion of truth and rectitude. What is more, elections themselves are a deeply flawed political method:

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–81.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 341–352, quotations at pp. 347 and 351.

64. S. Abul A’la Mawdudi, *Political Theory of Islam*, trans. By Khurshid Ahmad (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 6th ed., 1980), pp. 21–25, 34–42, quotations at pp. 22 and 41.

There is no room in Islam for candidature and electoral propaganda ... Even the very idea of three or four persons offering themselves as candidates for a post and then duping the vote[r]s by issuing posters and placards, holding public meetings, engaging in press propaganda, and adopting other methods of this nature, is repugnant to the Islamic mentality. Islam detests the notion that the voters should be fed and feasted and taken around in motor-cars and that the candidate who beats others at the game of lying, cheating and squandering money should win the game. These accursed methods are characteristic of a Godless democracy. Under an Islamic government if the activities of a person even smack of such a procedure he would, instead of being elected to the council or caliphate, be prosecuted for doing so and punished.⁶⁵

Such antipathy to the enthusiastic pursuit of public preferment would have met with the approval of Sir Thomas More, who in his *Utopia* wrote with similar distaste: “[A]nyone who deliberately tries to get himself elected to a public office is permanently disqualified from holding one”.⁶⁶

A contemporary example suggests that the Mawdudi-like attempt to square the circle has some appeal. Ali Bulaç, a Turkish intellectual who had previously argued that Islam and democracy are incompatible, has come to advocate an Islamic democracy that is predicated on what he refers to as a new Medina Compact. Just as the seventh-century document laid out the contours of the original Islamic state and its relations with indigenous non-Muslim communities, the new agreement would bring together diverse communities—Muslim and non-Muslim—in an overall political union whose shared guiding principles would be agreed by autonomous “social blocs”. Because legislation would be reserved for each bloc or community, seemingly contradictory impulses would be reconciled: the *shari’a* would be upheld, as Muslims expect; and other communities would be allowed to follow their lights in matters that were not agreed in common with the Muslims.⁶⁷

Alija Izetbegovic (b. 1925), president of Bosnia-Herzegovina and a writer on Islamic matters with a wide readership, endorses what he refers to as a willing acceptance of the “bipolar principle” whereby the biological and spiritual, sci-

65. *Ibid.*, p. 43; Seyyed Vali Nasr notes that Mawdudi proposed a peculiar system of proportional representation that would effectively “allow for elections without candidates”: *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 95.

66. Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. by Paul Turner (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 106.

67. Duran, “Islamist Intellectuals, Democracy and the Recent Elections in Turkey”, pp. 17–18.

ence and reason, are not seen as inevitably in conflict with each other. His quarrel is with the atheism and undue materialism of Western scientific theories and political ideologies, including socialism on the one hand and democratic capitalism on the other. He approves of a “third way”, which in the social realm is neither “forced” nor exaggeratedly free.⁶⁸ Islam rejects extremism of both kinds and enshrines the “republican” principle. By this, he means, rather ambiguously, that the “nation” has the duty to participate in governing society and specifically should choose the head of state, who must be responsible to the nation in return. Such a seeming endorsement of the electoral principle is explicitly based on the Qur’anic injunction of consultation⁶⁹—“consult them with regard to the conduct of affairs, and once you have decided, put your trust in God” (3:159)—as have many other modern thinkers.⁷⁰ Simultaneously, however, he reaffirms the absolute sovereignty of God, and his translator, Ahmed Abidi, tells us that mass political participation is central to the Western, but not the Islamic, idea of democracy. Those who have the right to choose in an Islamic society must be individuals of learning and good sense.⁷¹ This, presumably, is an effort to connect the insistent demands of modern participation with the reassuring existence of a traditional institution, though the broader definition of *ahl al-hall wa’l-‘aqd* is itself reflective of how far the participatory impulse has taken hold. As with Mawdudi, then, the promotion of a specifically Islamic form of democracy, what he suggests is “moderate democracy”,⁷² is an attempt to assert both difference and—what is perhaps more important in the long run—similarity.

Although we are left, perhaps inevitably, with several contrasting and coexisting views, the larger picture suggests, if not a shift in action towards the pluralist and participatory end of the spectrum, the infiltration into the hegemonic discourse of the vocabulary of participation. Indeed, a dialogue between Saudi *‘ulama* and European scholars in 1974, widely distributed by the Saudis even today, startlingly proclaims that the Islamic state derives its power from the peo-

68. Alija Ali Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1405/1984), especially Chapter 11. Quotation at p. 223.

69. Alija Izetbegovic, *Le manifeste Islamique* (Paris: Editions Al Bouraq, 1999), p. 100.

70. For example, although Mohammad Hashim Kamali does not specifically refer to elections, he finds *shura* to be “the Islamic equivalent of democracy”. He goes on to qualify this by noting that it is communally based whereas democracy is tied to individual rights: *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, rev. ed., 1997), p. 73.

71. Izetbegovic, *Le manifeste Islamique*, p. 98, fn. 9.

72. Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West*, p. 223.

ple (*sultatuha min al-sha'b*). In this regard, the Islamic state, while naturally guided by the principles of faith, is thought to be similar to “constitutional democratic states” predicated on popular sovereignty.⁷³ The overall thrust of the political philosophy propounded therein is, of course, against a democratic, participatory system and the immediate point being made is that the *‘ulama* do not constitute a privileged, clerical class in Islam. Furthermore, it must be recognised that the target audience of this discussion was external to the kingdom and the intention was doubtless to improve its public image. If this was nothing other than an attempt by the Saudis to legitimise themselves, however, the apparent sensitivity to an emergent international norm of constitutional and participatory government is nonetheless revealing.

LEARNING PROCESS

Standard views of elections argue that they have three effects: They legitimise the regimes that allow them; provide for the recruitment and circulation of political elites; and influence policy making.⁷⁴ To this we may tentatively add a fourth: they initiate a learning process whereby participatory experience exercises a kind of socialising, feedback effect.

Iran

The experience of Iran and elsewhere in the Muslim world testifies to the changes that are under way. Iran has had to date six Majles elections and seven presidential elections (with five presidents chosen). The Iranian Constitution affirms that the people should participate “in determining their political, economic, social and cultural destiny” (Principle 3), and provides for a popularly

73. *Nadwat ‘ilmiyya hawla al-shari‘a al-islamiyya wa huquq al-insan fi’l-islam* (Colloquia on Islamic Law and Human Rights in Islam) (Jidda: Dar al-Bilad li’l-Tib’a wa’l-Nashr, n.d.), p. 26 of session on “Huquq al-insan wa wahdat al-usra al-bashariyya” (Human Rights and the Unity of Mankind in Islam) at Strasbourg, 2–4 November 1974.

74. “Epilogue: Comparative Electoral Politics in the Middle East”, in Jacob M. Landau, Ergun Özbudun, and Frank Tachau (eds.), *Electoral Politics in the Middle East* (London: Croom Helm/Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980), p. 315.

elected national assembly (Principle 62) and for periodic referenda on issues that are submitted “directly to the people for a judgement” (Principle 59). Of course, the residual power of the Council of Guardians to vet and deselect candidates is, without doubt, a powerful reminder that elections are not convincingly open and free. In early 2000, for example, it disallowed more than 775 names for the Majles elections.⁷⁵

For the most part, however, recent experiences have been encouraging. The Presidential election of 1997 was clearly a watershed. Graffiti had appeared on Tehran walls during the campaign cynically predicting, “we vote, you elect”. But, faced with more than an 80 percent turnout and 69 percent of the vote going to Muhammad Khatami (b. 1943), the regime could not do anything other than acquiesce, even if unhappily so. Drawing together a formidable coalition of the young, professionals, the liberal intelligentsia and especially women, Khatami gained in his electoral landslide the incalculable advantage of legitimacy for measured change. Khatami has not always been able to prevail, as he did at the outset when he removed the head of the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) who had said he would not allow the election to stand. Indeed, subsequent events such as his timid handling of student riots, the jailing of his former Minister of the Interior, and the invalidated election of several of his supporters indicate how he has been embattled. It is often said in Iran that Khatami is the only president in the world who is also the leader of the opposition.

But, stepping back a bit, we might say that the election demonstrated the maturity of a system in which a serious challenger to the status quo could be popularly chosen *and* remain in office. Some even profess to see in this, and the explosion of publications popularising ideas of liberalism and civil society, the beginning of the move to a “post-Islamist” or post-fundamentalist state.⁷⁶ Whether one goes as far as this or not, it is clear that the proliferation of journals—more than a thousand in the estimate of Farhad Khosrokhavar⁷⁷—has had an impact on politicising the public.

75. This, however, represented only approximately 11 percent of the proposed candidates, as compared with approximately one-third in the 1996 elections: Suzanne Maloney, “Elections in Iran: A New Majlis and a Mandate for Reform”, *Middle East Policy*, 7, no. 3 (June 2000), p. 60.

76. See: ‘Le Post-Islamisme’, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, nos. 85–86 (1999), especially the article, ‘Le Post-Islamisme’, by Olivier Roy who edited, along with Patrick Haenni, this special issue. Generally, I am grateful to Houchang Chehabi; for his insights on the Khatami election and afterwards.

77. *Le Monde*, 22 February 2000. To give one example, *Kiyan*, the main outlet for Abdul Karim Soroush’s ideas, has had a circulation of some 40,000.

In the municipal elections of February 1999, the first in Iran's long history, Khatami-type reformers were the big winners—80 percent. The turnout, particularly in Tehran, was lacklustre—only 1.4 million out of 4 million eligible voters in the capital—but there was relatively greater enthusiasm in the less jaded small towns and villages. Women won 300 out of the 197,000 seats, and had fielded 5,000 candidates out of the total of 300,000. But this, overall, was a significant step forward. The tendency of women to vote along gender lines concentrated the impact of their vote. In Saveh, for example, a farming town south of Tehran, women took a majority of seats on the council.⁷⁸

In the Majles elections of February/April 2000, another large turnout—80 percent of the 38 million eligible voters—indicated the widespread sense both that something important was at stake and, implicitly, that voting mattered. “Many voters, even those in districts that are traditionally conservative, said they were casting ballots for the first time since the 1979 revolution because they felt, for once, that their vote counted”.⁷⁹ The pro-Khatami forces gained the majority of seats, initially taking 29 of the 30 seats in Tehran for example and winning overall nearly two-thirds of the Majles.⁸⁰ “Conservatives” fared badly, even in Qum and the bazaar in Tehran. But manipulation from above was certainly not absent. ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (b. 1935), the former Speaker of the Majles and President, secured the last seat in Tehran with a humiliating 25.587 percent of the vote (the law requires a candidate to win at least 25 percent of the vote in order to be elected in the first round).⁸¹

The electoral campaign was noteworthy for the way in which candidates of all persuasions embraced the give-and-take tactics of the contested election. The reformists “fashioned a cutting-edge of campaigning, complete with pep rallies and press briefings, as well as an appeal to the issues that resonate with the Iranian public ... rather than a restatement of stale revolutionary orthodoxy”. Rafsanjani sent flyers to more than 2 million homes in Tehran that depicted him without his clerical turban and sitting in a garden with a little boy. Despite the elliptical language, his slogan reflected the kind of campaign promise familiar in all electoral contests: “I will stay with you in winter and deliver you to the

78. Geneive Abdo, “Electoral Politics in Iran”, *Middle East Policy*, 6, no. 4 (June 1999), pp. 128–136.

79. *The Guardian*, 19 February 2000.

80. The total of the pro-Khatami “2nd of Khordad (*dovom-e khordad*)” alliance was 206 seats out of 290; the conservatives obtained 55, with the remainder going to independents.

81. *New York Times*, 26 February 2000: <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/international/international-iran-ra.html>. Rafsanjani, responding to sharp public criticism over a drawn out and controversial recount, eventually resigned his seat.

spring". Muhammad Reza Bahonar, a member of the conservative Disciples of the Line of the Imam who eventually lost his seat, said that his colleagues had no difficulty in using the word "freedom" in their slogans. The revolution had been fought for in the name of liberty, and "[a]fter all, God created people as free beings".⁸²

The use of such language may well be more than simply stylistic. Although, on the one hand, Khatami conceded that the authentication of the Supreme Leader of the revolution was necessary to transform electoral results into a national and religious obligation, a number of ostensibly conservative organisations have, on the other hand, seemed to internalise liberal ideas. The University Islamic Associations (Anjomanha-ye Eslami-ye Daneshgahha), while purportedly intended to Islamise the universities, have supported the Muslim reformist thinker Abdul Karim Soroush. The Association of Militant Clergy (Majma'e Ruhaniyun-e Mobarez), despite its name, was a long time defender of liberal ideas, but grew more committed to these from 1989. It and its student allies were especially impelled to defend democratic values when the government closed down its newspaper *Salam* in July 1999.⁸³ Further evidence that a discursive shift has occurred may be found in the vigorous—though by no means unchallenged—debates in the press and intellectual journals over the meaning of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist), the central concept of Islamic authority in revolutionary Iran. Some have professed to see in it the makings of popular rule, and there is no doubt that individuals such as Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar have offered a view which is at variance with the conservative clergy but which nonetheless argues that the revolution, especially the Islamic revolution, was made by and for the people.

Hizbullah in Lebanon

In the Arab world, the transformations in Shi'i Hizbullah in Lebanon have often been remarked upon. The "Party of God" was, since its inception in 1982, unwavering in its opposition to the Israeli military presence in southern Lebanon and associated with hostage-taking of Western and other individuals. It has thus acquired in the West the image of a militant, ideologically-driven and Iranian-

82. *The New York Times*, 22 February 2000.

83. A. Reza Sheikholeslami, "The Transformation of Iran's Political Culture", *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, no. 17 (Fall 2000), pp. 114–115.

supported organisation. But its spiritual guide, Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (b. 1935), has also questioned the application of *velayat-i faqih* to multi-sectarian Lebanon and spoken of Islam as a “civic” (*madani*) religion that must be realistic above all.⁸⁴ Hizbullah fielded candidates in the first elections since the Lebanese civil war in 1992 and secured eight parliamentary seats of the 27 apportioned to the Shi‘a (out of a total of 128 members); in 1996 it won seven seats.⁸⁵ In the local elections of June 1998, Hizbullah did not fare particularly well, owing largely to splits within the movement and conflict with its Shi‘i competitor, AMAL (Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya, the Lebanese Resistance Brigades). Whereas it made a strong showing in the southern suburbs of Beirut, it won only five of the 21 seats in another Shi‘i heartland, the Biqa‘ valley. In the 2000 elections, Hizbullah was expected to benefit from what was widely perceived as its triumph over the Israelis, who withdrew from southern Lebanon in May 2000 after a 22-year occupation. The Syrians, wary of an enhanced Hizbullah and fearful of an uncontrolled spillover from intra-Shi‘i conflict, brokered an electoral alliance with AMAL. In the complicated voting that ensued, Hizbullah itself won seats in the south of the country and the eastern Biqa‘, taking 12 out of 128 total parliamentary.⁸⁶

Hizbullah’s participation in the electoral process can be explained by external and internal factors. The post-Khumaynist leadership in Iran both decreased financial support to the movement and encouraged it to work within the constraints of the Lebanese system. In addition, factionalism within the movement led to the isolation of influential figures, such as Subhi al-Tufayli, who regarded elections as a diversion from resistance to Israel and assistance to the poor. Moreover, as with other Islamist groups, many in Hizbullah regarded elections as a valuable entry point to the national political arena and a means to influence policy. Its secretary general, Hasan Nasrallah, justified participation in the 1992 elections by saying, “We have now decided to join the elections because we feel we need to fortify [opposition to confessionalism] in all positions and we must work to serve our people wherever they are”.⁸⁷

84. “Fi hiwar al-din wa’l-mar’a wa siyasa wa’l-mufawadat” (Dialogue on Religion, Women, Politics, and the Peace Talks), *Al-Majalla*, 17 June 1995, pp. 23–26.

85. Four more M.P.s were sympathetic to Hizbullah in both 1992 and 1996.

86. *Al-Nahar*, 16 September 2000. On recent Amal-Hizbullah rivalry and the implications for continued Syrian hegemony after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, see: Augustus Richard Norton, “Hizbullah and the Israeli Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 30, no. 1 (Autumn 2000), pp. 34–35.

87. Voice of the Oppressed, Ba‘albek, 29 July 1992, as reported in BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts*, 30 July 1992.

Once in parliament, Hizbullah has remained faithful to its larger agenda of opposition to Israel and American policy in the region, deconfessionalisation, and a reconstruction of Lebanon that would benefit the less fortunate, especially the Shi'a, and not just the elites. But it has also shown itself to be comfortable with the tactical shifts and accommodations that are necessary for its members to emerge as successful parliamentarians. As we have seen, despite a long-standing and often violent rivalry with AMAL, it has electorally allied with it as necessary. For example, a meeting between Nasrallah and Nabih Birri, the AMAL leader, in Damascus and under Syrian pressure, resulted in a last-minute alliance during the 1996 elections.⁸⁸ Hizbullah has also made complex pre-electoral bargains with many of the large, landed families whom it has severely criticised. Furthermore, it channelled its opposition to the first Hariri premiership (1992–1998) through parliamentary votes against his budget, economic programmes, and foreign policy. It also carefully avoided provoking the Syrians and kept within their tacit limits of acceptable policy—the “Syrian sky” (*al-saqf al-suri*). The explanation for such bargaining and pragmatism lies in significant part in its minority position, controlling less than 10 percent of the seats in parliament. Augustus Richard Norton’s fieldwork is illuminating: “Lebanese parliamentarians, including senior Maronites, a former Sunni prime minister and highly respected Armenian deputies have noted in private interviews (in 1995 and 1996) that the Hizbullah deputies have behaved responsibly and cooperatively. They have often built political alliances in the parliament on pragmatic grounds ...”⁸⁹

The question remains as to whether, in addition to these structural factors, an underlying shift in attitudes has occurred. There is no doubt that resistance, martyrdom, battle, and sacrifice formed an indispensable part of Nasrallah’s language when talking about the Israeli occupation of Lebanon.⁹⁰ Once regarded as a hard-liner and now a supporter of parliamentary politics, he also clearly advocates an Islamic state in which Muslims would dominate, the *shari’a* would prevail, no distinction between religion and politics would exist, and the posi-

88. Graham Usher, “Hizbullah, Syria and the Lebanese Elections”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 16, no. 2 (Winter 1997), pp. 59, 65.

89. Augustus Richard Norton, “Hizbullah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?”, <http://www.Norton/edmund/hizballah/hizballah.html> (mirrored from Middle East Policy Council), p. 9.

90. See excerpts from his speeches in: Caroline Donati, “Le Liban sud: Le retrait israélien”, *Monde Arabe/Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 168 (April–June 2000), p. 130.

tion of minorities would be resolved later. It is also the case that he and other leaders have invoked democratic elections as a standard by which to score points, making unfavourable judgement about opponents and drawing the obvious, approving comparison with Hizbullah. The Saudi regime, for example, is scarcely representative or pluralist in his view; nor is Egypt where the Islamists cannot openly operate. The United States also talks a good democratic game, but it thwarts the self-determination of people with whom it disagrees around the world.⁹¹

The group's Majlis al-Shura has issued *fatawa* (religious legal opinions) calling on its members to vote for Hizbullah candidates. This could be dismissed as mere instrumentalism, but the religiously charged formulation, puts voting on another plane: "Every man will be asked about his vote on judgement day—any adherent to the supreme Islamic interest should hold the list high and drop it as is in the voting box—and it is illicit to elect anybody else who is not on the list".⁹² Participatory language is also increasingly part of Hizbullah's discourse. The Islamic state that is envisioned for Lebanon must respect the will of the people and not be imposed by force.⁹³ Its 1996 electoral programme referred to the "honor" that the people had bestowed on Hizbullah by putting them in parliament in 1992, and although it spoke of the need for an overall framework of morality, it reaffirmed its support for freedom of belief, the press, and political activity.⁹⁴ Hizbullah's recognition of the need to work within Lebanese realities—what has been called Lebanonisation—is a reminder of how difficult it is to read the situation. On one level, this accommodation can be seen as short-term and tactical only, allowing the movement the freedom to prepare for the impo-

91. Interview in *Der Spiegel* (17 July 1995), translated in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, NES-95-137 (18 July 1995), pp. 59–60. For the observation about Egypt, see interview with Nasrallah in *Al-Nahar*, 3 July 1995. It is interesting to note that the November 2000 presidential election in the United States has stimulated similar ironic comparisons. In Iran, for instance, Rafsanjani commented: "The United States postures itself as a model of democracy for the whole world. But fewer than 50 percent of Americans vote, while in [the] Islamic republic, which they call anti-democratic, there is close to 90 percent participation": Agence France-Presse report in *Arab News*, 13 November 2000.

92. This is from the 1992 *fatwa*: A. Nizar Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Hizbullah: From Islamic Revolution to Parliamentary Accommodation", *Third World Quarterly*, 14, no. 2 (1993), p. 333.

93. *Al-Nahar*, 3 July 1995.

94. "The Electoral Program of Hizbullah, 1996", <http://edmundz.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324.2/hizballah/hizballah-platform.html>, pp. 2 and 5.

sition of an intolerant order later. Yet, on another level, it can be interpreted as a substantial concession to pluralism, which in the long run would amount a virtual acceptance of the principle.⁹⁵

Jordan

The Jordanian experience more clearly indicates a gradual development of commitment, by both government and opposition, to the electoral process. In the elections of 1989 to parliament (Majlis al-Nuwwab), the first free elections in the country's history, the total Islamist bloc attained 32 out of 80 seats, with the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the Muslim Brotherhood political party in Jordan, winning 22.5 percent of the seats (22) and 15.6 percent of the overall vote.⁹⁶ The number of IAF parliamentarians declined in the election of 1993, falling from 22 to 16, but its overall electoral strength slightly increased (16 percent of the overall vote). In addition to the IAF deputies, six independent Islamists were elected.⁹⁷ The explanation for the decline in Islamist seats has to do with a change in the electoral system. In the elections of 1997, which the IAF officially boycotted, the total Islamist result was seven seats (of which two were informally associated with the IAF).⁹⁸

Despite the vicissitudes of the Islamist vote, these elections formed part of an intricate pattern of increasing political openness in Jordan. The 1989 election was indisputably the result of the regime's limited capacity to repress opposition, adverse economic difficulties, changing relations in the Palestinian-Israeli con-

95. Hajj Na'im Qassim, deputy secretary-general, reaffirmed the policy of co-operating with the Lebanese government in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Shaykh Nabil Qa'uk, commander of Hizbullah forces in the south, although referring to opposition to the Israelis, noted the duality of policy: "We are capable of maintaining both activities in equal value—both fighting the enemy and helping the people". See: Beverley Milton-Edwards, "Hizbollah After Withdrawal", *Middle East Insight*, 15, no. 4 (July–August 2000), p. 48.

96. Glenn E. Robinson notes that of 68 potential seats, Islamists thus took almost half. But the turnout was only 54 percent of registered voters (representing 41 percent of potential voters): "Defensive Democratization in Jordan", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30 (1998), p. 392.

97. The turnout was 56 percent of registered voters and 45 percent of those who could have registered and voted: *ibid.*, p. 398. Malik Mufti says that one independent Islamist was elected in 1993: "Elite Bargains and the Onset of Political Liberalization in Jordan", *Comparative Political Studies*, 32, no. 1 (February 1999), p. 120.

98. Robinson puts the figure at six Islamists elected: "Democratization in Jordan", p. 404.

flict, and the calculations of King Hussein that popular participation would provide a new legitimacy formula for his rule both within and outside the kingdom.⁹⁹ But whatever structural vulnerabilities existed and however instrumental its origins were, the electoral process, once set in motion, acquired its own dynamic. Malik Mufti convincingly argues, for example, that after the political elite had made the decision to allow elections, the decision not to enforce a provision that would have required party affiliated candidature became defensible and was implemented. The National Charter of June 1991, which proclaimed that Jordan was based on “parliamentary and hereditary monarchy”, naturally followed the instability caused by the Gulf crisis and war of 1990–1991 and the growing recognition of regime and opposition that their common interest lay in formalising the liberalising process.¹⁰⁰

This “internal logic”¹⁰¹ of participation and liberalisation applied to the Islamists. Although some clearly feared that participation would leave them open to both governmental manipulation and internal charges of having sold out, the Brotherhood overcame its original hesitation and largely endorsed the idea. According to Ishaq Farhan, the secretary-general of the IAF, after 1989 “the majority tendency, more than two-thirds” became committed to “reform not through violence but gradually and by convincing people. Evolution not revolution.” Although he faced an internal revolt in the run-up to the 1993 elections and the dissenters remain an active force, the dominant attitude has been to regard elections as an indispensable ingredient of democracy and to accept setbacks as a normal feature of participatory politics from which valuable lessons can be gleaned.¹⁰²

The tribal component of Jordanian elections also needs to be entered into our analysis. Linda Layne has documented the extent to which tribal identity played a role in the earlier 1984 election. Contrary to what the state would have cared to acknowledge, tribal leaders played a disproportionately strong role in candidature, and tribal affiliation often affected voting preferences. But, significantly, tribal identity was not all determining, and shifting notions of tribesman and cit-

99. Mehran Kamrava adds that, as a “civic myth” monarchy, the regime possessed a shallow legitimacy and the national identity was emergent. This rendered it further structurally weak, thereby pushing it towards liberalisation: “Non-democratic States and Political Liberalisation in the Middle East: A Structural Analysis”, *Third World Quarterly*, 19, no. 1 (March 1998), pp. 65, 76–77, 79–82.

100. Mufti, “Elite Bargains and the Onset of Political Liberalization in Jordan”, pp. 107–109, 113–116, quotation at p. 115.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 121. Farhan described the 1993 elections as a “democratic festival” (p. 113).

izen emerged. Voting and citizenship were not abstract, disembodied political acts, unrelated to the cultural context. Yet tacit resistance to tribal influence and expressions of individual will also occurred: “The ‘*arab* [tribal] value of personal autonomy and the ideology of democratic elections complemented and reinforced each other”.¹⁰³

The case of Jordan demonstrates the combined force of structural/utilitarian and normative considerations in the reinforcement of electoral politics. Such a commitment does not mean the process of democratisation is irreversible or even substantially entrenched; nor does it mean that citizens, including Islamists, will remain predominantly favourable towards elections or be unaffected by tribal and family considerations. Indeed, surveys indicated that respondents believed the country was less democratic in 1996 than in 1993, and that confidence in political parties and electoral procedures was relatively low.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the restructuring of the

political system as well as self-interest prompted a deliberate Islamist choice to participate in elections, and this in turn has encouraged acceptance by many, though certainly by no means all, Islamists of the electoral principle. As with the Association of Militant Clergy in Iran, the calculated defence of a democratic norm is not necessarily unrelated to the advancement over time of a more open public order.

Egypt

The situation in Egypt has been more complex. In distinct contrast to the one-party convention of the Nasserist era, Article 5 of the present constitution guarantees multi-party participation (*ta‘addud al-ahzab*), but the ruling National

103. Linda L. Layne, *Home and Homeland: The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 108–127, quotation at p. 121. Also see her “Tribesmen as Citizens: ‘Primordial Ties’ and Democracy in Rural Jordan”, in Linda L. Layne (ed.), *Middle East Elections: Implications of Recent Trends* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 113–151.

104. Maher J. Massis, “Jordan: A Study of Attitudes Toward Democratic Changes”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 20, no. 3 (Summer 1998), pp. 39, 52–53, 57. The surveys were conducted between 1993 and 1996 and involved 1,197 randomly chosen individuals; they thus do not gauge specifically Islamist opinion. But it should also be noted that these surveys indicated majority support for the notions of separation of powers and political representation for all groups. Layne observed in 1984 a similarly low regard for political parties and distinct political platforms: *Home and Homeland*, p. 116.

Democratic Party (NDP) has consistently maintained a clear hold on power. While the Muslim Brotherhood has never been legalised as a political party, it participated in coalitions with other parties in 1984 and 1987, taking eight and 35 seats respectively. The 1987 election in particular reduced the NDP's overall strength to 78 percent of the People's Assembly (Majlis al-Sha'b),¹⁰⁵ and some observers have referred to this period as Egypt's modern liberal phase. Most of the major opposition parties formally boycotted the election of 1990 because a revised electoral law failed to guarantee independent supervision. Although a number of Muslim Brothers and other Islamists stood as independents, the oppositional share of seats was substantially reduced. The 1995 election was especially troubled. Nearly 4,000 candidates—roughly ten per seat—entered the contest, but the NDP ended with 94 percent of the seats.¹⁰⁶ There was a particular crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, and while 148 members entered the race, only one was elected. The 2000 elections were regarded as fairer than those in the recent past, mainly owing to a court decision that required judges to oversee voting at polling stations. However, violence and intimidation occurred, especially directed against oppositional candidates in general and Muslim Brotherhood candidates in particular. The final result gave the NDP a substantial but reduced majority, and 17 of the 444 contested seats went to the Brotherhood, which made it the largest oppositional bloc.¹⁰⁷

Given regime manipulation of the electoral process, the unfolding of a learning process must seem problematic. To the extent that the government appears undemocratic, Islamist candidates are in the expected position of distinguishing themselves by defending democratic virtues. However, the Ikhwan has also linked the tactical with the ideological and connected short-term considerations

105. Hala Mustafa, "Mu'ashshirat wa nata'ij intikhabat 1995" (Indicators and Outcomes of the 1995 Elections) in Hala Mustafa (ed.), *Al-intikhabat al-barlamaniyya fi misr 1995* (The 1995 Parliamentary Elections in Egypt) (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahram li'l-Tarjama wa'l-Nashr, 1997), p. 45. The NDP share in 1984 was 87 percent.

106. Marsha Pripstein Posusney, "Behind the Ballot Box: Electoral Engineering in the Arab World", *Middle East Report*, no. 209 (Winter 1998), p. 42. The NDP took 417 of the 444 seats. Some observers have argued that, despite these difficulties, this election suggested possibilities for "a negotiated transition to democracy": Abdo Baaklini, Guilain Denoeux and Robert Springborg, *Legislative Politics in the Arab World: The Resurgence of Democratic Institutions* (Boulder and London: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1999), pp. 235–236.

107. *Al-Hayat*, 14 November 2000; *Al-Riyadh*, 14 Sha'ban 1421 A.H./15 November 2000; *The New York Times*, 19 November 2000. The Egyptian security court sentenced 15 members of the Brotherhood to harsh sentences almost immediately following the elections.

with the long-term. Elections are a form of public education for they expose the people to why the Brotherhood regards Islam as “the solution”, and they simultaneously provide members with the invaluable experience of advocacy. If they are successful in securing parliamentary seats, they are able to push the country towards full implementation of the *shari‘a*. If they are unsuccessful, then at least they have disseminated noble ideas and honed their communications skills.¹⁰⁸

The Brotherhood is the heir of the several intellectual trends discussed above, and there is no doubt that the majority subscribe to either the first or third schools of thought, thereby accepting the Islamic validity of elections though not necessarily their Western form. The experience of electoral participation, chequered and disappointing, has provided damning evidence for those opposed to accommodating the regime. Yet, for others, precisely because electioneering appears to make long-term sense, the participatory and pluralist values that lie behind it may be further internalised. ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Fattah of the Brotherhood saw the fielding of a female Brotherhood candidate in the 2000 elections as unexceptional: “Islam does not prejudice men against women, and our nomination of a woman to run in the election is a practical application of the fact that women are half of the society”.¹⁰⁹

Palestinian HAMAS

A case apart from other Sunni Arab movements is the Palestinian HAMAS, which does not operate within an accepted state framework. Committed to a strongly anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist ideology since its inception in late 1987, it has also vigorously opposed the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) both as a competitor for leadership of the Palestinian movement and for its promise of a secular future. HAMAS’s covenant offers a radically different programme based on the inalienability of any part of Palestine because of its sanctified status as an Islamic endowment (*waqf*). Moreover, it elevates *jihad* against Islam’s enemies to the status of an individual obligation (*fard ‘ayn*), thereby intensifying the level of commitment. The covenant is silent on issues of internal governance other than

108. These were the views of Mustafa Mashhur, then General Guide of the Brotherhood, in *Al-liwa’ al-islami* [The Islamic Standard], no. 37 (June 1987).

109. Associated Press report in the *Boston Globe*, 21 August 2000. It should be noted that the candidate, Jihan al-Halafawi, unsuccessfully called for cancellation of the election in her Alexandria constituency owing to violence: *Arab News*, 8 November 2000.

to suggest vaguely, as would be expected, that the Qur'an is the constitution and Islam constitutes the society's programme of life (*minhaj hayat*).¹¹⁰

HAMAS's attitude towards elections has been ambivalent. Its suspicion of them may be explained in part by wariness of Israeli manipulation. For example, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in April 1989 suggested holding elections in the occupied territories as a way of lowering Intifada tensions, HAMAS detected a plot and rejected any notion of Israeli disinterested good will. Interestingly, however, the rejection was not categorical: "Let our slogan be 'No!' to the initiatives of Rabin and Shamir and 'No!' to elections until the occupation is banished".¹¹¹

A more positive attitude is clearly seen in HAMAS's participation in student and professional association elections. It has been particularly successful in controlling the Islamic University in Gaza, but has fared less well at the more secular Birzeit University. Even there, however, it joined an anti-PLO coalition that won 52 percent of the vote and all nine seats in November 1993, just after the PLO-Israeli Declaration of Principles was signed. In 1996–1997, it won 46.7 percent of the student council vote at Al-Najah University in Nablus, which has had PLO sympathies, and in 1997–1998 it won 49.5 percent of the vote. Although it won only 30 percent of the medical union elections in 1997, it won the engineering union election in Gaza in 1998.¹¹² These elections helped HAMAS both to put down deeper roots into Palestinian society and, precisely because they revealed a level of popular support, to strengthen its hand against the PLO. Moreover, it was HAMAS that suggested after December 1992 that its price for joining the PLO as a sign of national unity was elections, inside the occupied territories and overseas, to its decision making bodies.¹¹³ This proposal must be read against the intense intra-Palestinian rivalry, and HAMAS naturally understood that its acceptance was a price the PLO was unwilling to pay. But, as with the university

110. *Mithaq harakat al-muqawama al-islamiyya-filistin (HAMAS) (Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement-Palestine [Hamas])* (Palestine: 1 Muharram 1409 A.H./18 August 1988), Articles 27, 11, 15, 8, and 36 (in order of textual reference above), pp. 19–20, 10, 12, 9, and 25.

111. Cited in: Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 74.

112. Khalid al-Hurub, *HAMAS: Al-fikr wa'l-mumarasa al-siyasiyya (Hamas: Political Thought and Practice)* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2nd ed., 1997), pp. 240–243; for the more recent figures, see the translated and updated: Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000), pp. 218–219.

113. Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 131–132.

and professional elections, it may have been revealing of a certain “faith” in elections¹¹⁴—at least in the sense that they were thought to be useful.

The election to the Legislative Council of January 1996 posed a considerable dilemma, however. If, on the one hand, HAMAS were to participate, it would appear to endorse the peace process, specifically the Camp David, Madrid, and Oslo agreements that had called for elections, and to enhance the legitimacy of its main rival, the PLO. Yet, on the other hand, if it were to boycott the elections, it might be left behind in the building of the Palestinian state and appear self-centredly preoccupied with its own ideological purity. The views of Shaykh Ahmad Yasin (b. 1937), the spiritual leader of HAMAS, evolved over time. In late 1993, legislative elections seemed as valid a way to express opposition as street protests, and *fatawa* opposing electoral participation were, to his mind, counter-productive and un-Islamic for they denied Muslims the right to serve the *umma* in the effective capacity of parliamentary deputy.¹¹⁵ By early 1995, however, his opposition to the proposed form of elections emerged. He made it clear that participation in these elections would only lead to the establishment of a puppet government doing Israel’s bidding.¹¹⁶ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela present a remarkable internal document that, although written in 1992, is revealing of the wider and long-standing debates over the advisability of electoral participation. These debates were notable for their express utilitarianism and the absence of Islamic terminology. Repeated references were made to protecting the position of the movement while preserving the goal of resistance, and to this end participants realistically assessed HAMAS’s limited popular appeal and candidly conceded a fear that events would overtake them.¹¹⁷

Worried that Yasir ‘Arafat would use an Islamic political party to blunt its appeal, and despite Shaykh Yasin’s earlier opposition to the formation of its own political party,¹¹⁸ HAMAS reluctantly endorsed Khalas (Hizb al-Khalas al-Watani

114. Hurub, *Hamas: Al-fikr wa’l-mumarasa al-siyasiyya*, p. 239.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

116. “Al-Shaykh al-Mujahid Ahmad Yasin yatahadath li-filastin al-muslima” (The Combatant Shaykh Ahmad Yasin Talks with *Filastin al-Muslima*), *Al-filastin al-muslima*, March 1995/Shawwal 1410 A.H., p. 26.

117. Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 121–131. See also the pragmatic views of Isma‘il Haniyah, who argued in favour of electoral participation, in: Hurub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa’l-Mumarasa al-Siyasiyya*, p. 250.

118. *Mideast Mirror*, 6 June 1995; *Al-Hayat*, 9 June 1995; “Al-Shaykh al-Mujahid Ahmad Yasin Yatahadath li-Filastin al-Muslima”, p. 25.

al-Islami, Islamic National Salvation Party), which was formed in November 1995. The majority of the HAMAS leadership hoped that through support of this party it could maintain its position in the internal political arena without giving the impression that it had also implicitly accepted the Oslo peace process; it sought to preserve both its options and its distance. In the end, neither HAMAS nor Khalas contested the election directly, but HAMAS made known its support for seven independent, sympathetic candidates. Five of these candidates were elected (out of a total Council membership of 88), and an exit poll showed that 60–70 percent of HAMAS supporters took part in the voting. In effect, then, it had chosen “unofficial participation” in the election.¹¹⁹

HAMAS leaders have not opposed participation in future municipal elections in which the movement may be expected to do well,¹²⁰ and their main attitude, despite clear disagreements over tactics, has consistently been to avoid endowing legitimacy on the Palestinian Authority. It has not objected to the electoral principle, and, notwithstanding its determined opposition to Israel, it has in fact specifically endorsed concepts of pluralism, democracy, and minority rights in the internal governance of the Palestinians. Shaykh Yasin famously said in a 1989 interview with the Jerusalem newspaper *Al-Nahar* that HAMAS’s commitment to democracy is so great that it would honour electoral results which either brought the Communist Party to power or confirmed the popular rejection of an Islamic state. Moreover, elections are intrinsically valid: “There is no other way to choose representatives of the people (*min yimthal al-sha'b*) except the way of elections”. A 1991 manifesto expressed opposition to forced conformity of opinion and specifically argued that no one could claim to represent the “masses of our people” (*jamahir sha'bina*) without “free, honest, and neutral elections” (*intikhibat hurra wa naziha wa muhayada*).¹²¹ Ibrahim Ghawsha, the movement’s spokesperson in Amman, went so far as to say that it does not matter whether the ruling party is nationalist or Islamist; what matters is that it is elected freely and fairly.¹²² These views are broadly consistent with those of the Muslim Brotherhood, of which HAMAS claims to be the branch in the West Bank and Gaza.¹²³

119. Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, pp. 135–138, quotation at p. 146. Hurub says that eight independent Islamists were elected: *Hamas: Al-fikr wa'l-mumarasa al-siyasiyya*, p. 251.

120. “Interview: Ismail Abu Shanab” in *Middle East Policy*, 6, no. 1 (June 1998), pp. 116–117. Abu Shanab was a Gaza leader of Hamas.

121. Hurub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa'l-Mumarasa al-Siyasiyya*, quotations (in order) at pp. 244 and 238.

122. *Al-Hayat*, 8 February 1995; *The Jordan Times*, 18 December 1996.

123. *Mithaq harakat al-muqawama al-islamiyya-Filistin*, Article 2, p. 7.

HAMAS's attitudes have clearly been shaped by its circumstances, particularly opposition to the Israeli occupation and competition for political advantage with the PLO. Internal divisions within the movement itself have also played a role. For example, despite Ghawsha's general statement above, he was opposed to the January 1996 election and thus often found himself at odds with influential individuals inside the occupied territories. Mahmud al-Zahar in Gaza, for example, argued that an Islamic movement must adapt to realities, including self-rule elections, and not appear to reject democracy.¹²⁴ But in this instance and elsewhere, the objection was to a particular election, not to the general concept itself. The instrumentalist nature of HAMAS's views may well lead to questions about the depth of its democratic commitment. But because elections in the factionalised context of Palestine are an indisputably effective means to what all political movements seek—power—they may begin to put down roots in HAMAS's normative territory, or become an integral part of its political strategy. Indeed, HAMAS's experience in university and syndicate elections, in which it has suffered wins and losses but continues to take part, may be generating over time a kind of learning process that helps to ratify an incipient normative commitment. There is no doubt, however, that its electoral history is too new and the configuration of the Palestinian state still too unsure to warrant definitive pronouncements.

Qatar

In the small and conservative emirate of Qatar, a notable experiment in political participation occurred in February 1999. Initiated from the top and seemingly unrelated to economic or legitimacy crises, relatively open elections were held for the first time in the Arab Gulf, with women both allowed to vote and to stand for office. Of the 22,225 registered voters—of the roughly 70,000 Qataris eligible to register—45 percent were women. The turnout in the election for the Central Municipal Council was 95 percent in the capital and main population centre, and 75 percent in the rest of the country.¹²⁵ Three percent of the 227 candidates were women, but none was among the 29 elected.

124. Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, pp. 164–166. Al-Zahar was the official HAMAS spokesperson within the occupied territories from 1994 to 1996.

125. Louay Bahry, "Elections in Qatar: A Window of Democracy Opens in the Gulf", *Middle East Policy*, 6, no. 4 (June 1999), p. 123.

Clearly, the results of the election were not all that many, especially women, had hoped for. Amira Muzza in particular, who has been active in promoting new attitudes towards women, was not thought to be pleased. One defeated candidate blamed a traditional, patrimonial society in which women acquiesced in their husband's political wishes. As an indicator of entrenched attitudes, 18 members of the *‘ulama*—taking a position affirmed by Mawdudi and others¹²⁶—petitioned the *amir* not to allow women to sit in the Council and thus have leadership over men.¹²⁷ In addition, voting often occurred on the basis of tribal ties and personal loyalties. Four candidates were chosen from the Al-Murra tribe alone, and some individuals voted in the first place as an act of allegiance to the *amir*.¹²⁸ Noticeably absent were well-defined political and ideological platforms or groupings. The example of Kuwait, where distinct political groupings have emerged but where the ruling house has nevertheless often encouraged tribal voting as a way of insuring a compliant national assembly,¹²⁹ suggests that the Qatari regime will not have difficulties in manipulating future elections. Finally, although the turnout figures indicated a high level of interest among registered voters, the low registration rate should be remembered; overall, less than 30 percent of those of voting age in the country actually voted.¹³⁰

The problems are thus formidable and the experiment is too young to suggest a reinforcing effect. But there is no doubt that the election forms part of an often startling reform process that has been underway since Shaykh Hamad ibn Khalifa Al Thani (b. 1950) overthrew his father in June 1995. Elections have been held to the formerly appointed Chamber of Commerce and to student bodies, and the media have unprecedented freedom. The *amir* has said this election is but a “test stop” on

126. Mawdudi invoked a *hadith* that refers to the ascension of Khusrow's daughter to the Persian throne in pre-Islamic times. It could be translated as: “A nation would not prosper that hands over the reins of government to a woman”.

127. *Al-Hayat*, 31 December 1998.

128. Bahry, “Elections in Qatar”, p. 123; Fatiha Dazi-Héni, “Des processus électoraux engagés dans les monarchies du Golfe: les cas du Koweït et du Qatar”, *Monde Arabe/Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 168 (April–June 2000), p. 85.

129. See: Nicolas Gavrielides, “Tribal Democracy: The Anatomy of Parliamentary Elections in Kuwait”, in Layne (ed.), *Elections in the Middle East*, pp. 153–191.

130. Dazi-Héni, “Des processus électoraux”, p. 86. The low registration may be explained, however, by the short period of time citizens were given to enter the electoral rolls and by unfamiliarity with the electoral process itself: Owen Kirby, “Change and Continuity in 1999”, *Middle East Insight*, 15, no. 1 (January–February 2000), p. 16. Kirby puts the registration figure at less than 40 percent of eligible voters.

the way to full constitutional rule.¹³¹ It is also striking that, despite some religious-based opposition, many Islamists have specifically approved of the right of women to vote and hold office. This, notably, was the position of the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, echoing the Ikhwan's position in Egypt and Jordan. Ma'mun al-Hudaybi said: "There is nothing in Islam that prevents women from participating in the elections and being a member of parliament; thus there is a role for women in all aspects of life, side by side with men".¹³² The 1999 election is an integral part of, and substantial boost to, this evolving participatory political process.

Turkey

The situation in Turkey is certainly different. A society with an intermittently functioning democracy, it has seen a number of religion based parties—variations on a theme—compete for power and other parties make explicit and implicit appeals based on Islam. Neçmettin Erbakan (b. 1926) even became the first Islamist prime minister in June 1996 when he replaced his coalition partner, Tansu Çiller (b. 1946) of the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi). In an earlier incarnation¹³³, Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) had regularly secured between six and seven percent of the vote in the 1980s when the very successful prime minister and president Turgut Özal (1927–1993) and even a section of the military had advocated ways of integrating Islam into the national life.¹³⁴ By the early 1990s Refah had broadened its base, securing control of key cities such as Istanbul and Ankara in the local elections of 1994. In the December 1995 parliamentary election, with the vote fractured along several lines, it garnered 21.38 percent of the vote and entered government.

131. Kirby, "Change and Continuity in 1999", p. 16.

132. Bahry, "Elections in Qatar", pp. 120, 124, 126, quotation at p. 124.

133. The National Salvation Party (Millî Selâmet Partisi), which was formed in late 1972 as the successor to the short-lived National Order Party (Millî Nizam Partisi), first entered parliament in the election of 1973 when, having picked up protest votes against established parties, it secured 49 seats and won 11.8 percent of the vote. Erbakan entered the cabinet as a result of this electoral success. In the 1977 election, it lost half of its seats while its share of the vote dropped to 8.6 percent. Erbakan also served in the newly formed cabinet: Ergun Özbudun, "Turkey", in Landau, Özbudun and Tachau (eds.), *Electoral Politics in the Middle East*, p. 109; Ergun Özbudun, "Comparisons", in *ibid.*, p. 197.

134. This was the "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" (*Türk İslam Sentezi*) advanced by Hearths of the Enlightened (*Aydınlar Ocağı*), an intellectual, conservative-nationalist movement begun in 1970: Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, p. 303.

Refah's success was to prove short lived, however. The military, self-appointed guardians of the Kemalist legacy of laicism, became increasingly nervous, and on 28 February 1997 effectively served notice that it would not tolerate Islamist policies. In May 1997, the government closed Refah, and under such pressure, Erbakan resigned in June. In January 1998, the Constitutional Court proscribed the party for "anti-secular activities" and prohibited Erbakan and other leaders from political activity for five years.¹³⁵ The popular mayor of Istanbul, Tayyip Erdogan, was imprisoned and banned for life from political activism. Yet the movement displayed some resilience when it re-emerged as the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi), and although it placed only third in the parliamentary election of April 1999 and its share of the vote declined to 15 percent, it secured 105 out of the 550 seats.

During the eighteen months it was part of the ruling coalition, Refah pursued unexpected policies. Erbakan visited Iran and Libya as part of his Islamic-oriented foreign policy, and argued that the European Union and United Nations were Zionist organisations. Yet despite his pan-Islamic and anti-Western rhetoric, he also tolerated the Turkish-Israeli security arrangement and supported NATO. Although there was talk of a new social welfare-oriented, vaguely socialist Just Order (Adil Düzen), he adopted liberal economic policies with ties to the much criticised International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Moreover, "more state enterprises and lands were sold off under the Welfare coalition than under any government". It officially endorsed secularism and spoke of the values of the "centre", with an emphasis on human rights and democracy.¹³⁶ It may be argued that this was due to such structural constraints as the paramount position of the military, the need to maintain a coalition, and the ever-present competition for "Muslim votes" with other major political parties.¹³⁷ In this interpretation, the

135. In March 2000, Erbakan was sentenced to a year in prison for "provoking hatred": *The New York Times*, 11 March 2000.

136. Aslı Aydintaşbaş, "The Malaise of Turkish Democracy". *Middle East Report*, no. 209 (Winter 1998), pp. 32–35, quotation at p. 34.

137. Note that, at least in terms of the piety of its members, the public perception, in a study conducted by the Turkish Foundation for Economic and Social Studies (TESEV) in 2000, was that the True Path Party ranked first. The Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) and the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP), headed by Mesut Yılmaz and the party of former president Özal, came in joint second: Whit Mason, "The Future of Political Islam in Turkey", *World Policy Journal*, 17, no. 2 (Summer 2000), p. 60. It should also be noted that the government rather cynically promoted the Islamic but nationalist "neo-Nurcu" movement of Fethullah Gülen in the run-up to the April 1999 election as a counter to Fazilet: Hakan Yavuz, "Towards an Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gülen", *Middle East Journal*, 53, no. 4 (Autumn 1999), p. 602.

conversion was more tactical than strategic—in effect if not also in intention a kind of political *taqiyya* (religiously sanctioned dissimulation). Clearly, as in Jordan since 1989, much of what has emerged has been the result of intricate manoeuvring and careful bargaining among the major political groups.

The extent to which a feedback effect has induced an internalisation of participatory and pluralist values is, as always, difficult to ascertain. Erdogan famously remarked: “Democracy is sometimes seen as a means and sometimes as an end ... We see it only as a means. Whatever is the system that you want to establish, it is a means to elect that system”.¹³⁸ In light of such overt instrumentalism, the democratic *bona fides* of Refah/Fazilet have understandably been called into question. However, responding to this general view and specific military claims that Fazilet made possible the climate in which an extreme group, Hizbullah, allegedly committed atrocities,¹³⁹ one Istanbul leader said: “It is nonsense because we strongly support the ideas of democracy and human rights”.¹⁴⁰ In 1993, furthermore, Refah endorsed the concept of “multiple legal orders”. Admittedly of limited practical application in a society in which almost everyone is a Muslim and who would therefore presumably be subject to the *shari’a*, it represents nonetheless a degree of sensitivity to the issue of minority rights. Abdullah Gül, unsuccessful contender for the leadership of Fazilet and a reformer whose wife wears traditional dress, has said: “We don’t want to force people to wear headscarves, we want to make it free. It’s up to individual desire”.¹⁴¹ In addition, Gül’s reformist wing, which includes Erdogan, stresses that entrenched national problems like Kurdish autonomy can only be resolved through democratic means. Conceiving of an Islamist party in the European Christian Democratic mould, it accepts the separation of religion and politics¹⁴² and believes that internal party democracy is the natural complement of national democracy. This wing

138. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 58.

139. Many Turks openly question whether “Hizbullah”—if it in fact existed as a distinct group—could have operated without the knowledge of the security forces.

140. *The New York Times*, 29 January 2000:

<http://www.nytimes.com/library/world/europe/012900turkey-military.html>.

141. Mason, “The Future of Political Islam in Turkey”, p. 59. With regard to the *shari’a*, only 20 percent of Turks say they advocate its adoption, but actual support is even less substantial when the specific kinds of Islamic laws are considered: p. 60.

142. In the specific Turkish context, this would mean removal of mosques and religious schools from the control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, thereby enhancing the position of Muslim institutions. But Fazilet also says this separation would not mean the forced introduction of obligatory prayers, dress, and other practices: *ibid.*, p. 66.

did not secure control of Fazilet in its first national congress in May 2000, but, significantly, won 45 percent of the delegates' support. Even the successful, pro-Erbakan wing (led by Recai Kutan) framed its position in terms of engagement with the democratic process: "We are a protest against the shortfalls in democracy. The Virtue Party is the sole and joint vote of protest in Turkey".¹⁴³

CONCLUSION

If we were to pose the basic question, why have elections occurred in the Muslim world, the theoretical literature suggests several possible answers: the process of modernisation has created new social conditions conducive to greater pluralism and political participation; elites have chosen strategies of power-sharing to manage change and maintain their own grip on power; and long-term structural changes such as of class, state, and international power provide constraints that force the emergence of new political orders.¹⁴⁴ The above discussion has referred in various indirect ways to all three approaches, and it has thus situated electoral participation in a political calculus that is neither wholly subservient to outside forces nor simply disingenuous and manipulative.

Three broad conclusions follow from this discussion. First, if, as a part of the conventional literature holds, elections are a function of modernisation,¹⁴⁵ something like the obverse may be equally, if not more, true. In a way, it is unwise to use the term "modernisation" itself, for it has largely been discredited in recent social science because of its purported secular and Western political biases and its distorting interpretation of tradition.¹⁴⁶ Some may also take cultural offence at the presumed suggestion that Muslims need to look outside their own traditions and become "modernised" in order to have "proper elections".¹⁴⁷ Further-

143. *Ibid.*

144. These, in turn, have been called the modernisation, transition, and structural approaches. For a concise review of their differences, see: David Potter, "Explaining Democratization", in David Potter, David Goldblatt, Margaret Kiloh, and Paul Lewis (eds.), *Democratization* (Milton Keynes: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 10–24.

145. See, for example: "Epilogue: Comparative Politics in the Middle East", in Landau, Özbudun and Tachau (eds.), *Electoral Politics in the Middle East*, p. 321.

146. See, for example: Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 23–45.

147. See, for example: Bobby Sayyid, "Democracy and Islamism", forum on Pluralism and Civil Society (London: Islam 21, 2000): <http://www.islam21.org/pages/keyissues/key3-8.html>.

more, it is clear that the attributes associated with modernisation, such as increased wealth, the emergence of middle classes, the rise of literacy, and the growth of urbanism, do not automatically lead to democratisation. In fact, they often enhance authoritarianism as elites find themselves facing significant political and social challenges. But if we take the term to mean, broadly, greater differentiation of political, economic, and social functions, modernisation has both helped to make elections possible *and* been enhanced by the electoral experience.

Making the point generally, context is important, and reflecting the transitional nature of these societies, “traditional” and “modern” have intimate interconnections. Patriarchal, patrimonial attitudes form an inescapable part of the story, as does tribalism in some societies. Much of what has emerged has been the result of intricate manoeuvring and careful bargaining among several forces—ruling elites, prominent families or ethnic groups, and Islamist movements, to name but a few. Those who may be thought to be the natural beneficiaries of elections, the better educated and employed, even sometimes view them with suspicion. A 1999 poll among Palestinians, for example, suggests that holders of university degrees and professionals were more likely to join HAMAS supporters in refraining from participation in future elections for a Palestinian president and Council than the illiterate and unemployed.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, just as we would expect, the advent of mass education, the spread of literacy, urbanisation, and rapid demographic growth have combined to encourage social and political mobilisation. Wider elements have been incorporated into political society. These notably include women, although the case of Kuwait, where an intransigent national assembly in late 1999 stymied liberalising reform from above that would have allowed women to vote in future elections, reminds us of the entrenched difficulties.

My point is that the “modernisation”-elections relationship does not move in one direction only. Elections are made possible to some extent by social and political openings and increased economic complexity. By the same token, however, they also have a ramifying impact on that changing social tableau. To the extent that elections assume a defined place in a political society such as Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, or Egypt and to the extent that Islamists routinely participate in them, they push the differentiation along and enhance structural pluralism. They may do so in the name of defending tradition or by reconfirming the political salience

148. Center for Palestine Research and Studies, Public Opinion Poll #44 (Nablus: CPRS, 14–16 October 1999), p. 4: <http://www.cprs-palestine.org/polls/99/poll44a.html>.

of tribal and ethnic identifications. But as they become a normal fixture of the political landscape, elections establish new, “modern”—or, at least, alternative—standards of legitimacy that co-exist with other standards.

Second, elections facilitate the *transition* from authoritarianism and are not simply one of the hallmarks of a stabilised or consolidated democratic regime. They are themselves a transformative strategy. A “mature” system ostensibly finds in elections the formalisation and articulation of recognised group interests. But in societies in transition, such as the ones we have been discussing, elections crucially perform other functions: They formalise existing informal networks, in effect bringing new actors into the game; and they enmesh or entangle these actors in the rules of a game of inter-group bargaining, even as they may seek to subvert those rules. The entanglement and the bargaining are by no means guaranteed to make democrats of the Islamists, but the short-term stability or the space that is created may lead—though it is by no means certain—to longer-term salutary results. The habitual patterns may well have a spill-over effect.

This process is possibly aided, ironically, by the innate conservatism of the traditional religious authorities such as the *‘ulama*. Once Islamist groups are incorporated in the political game and parties are formalised, the religious officials may well come to view them as the tolerable alternative to grass-roots Islamic radicals. These radicals, after all, are censorious of both the religious and political establishments. The competition for religious authority and the political imperative of preserving one’s own power are important elements here. Through the lending of well-timed support, religious arbiters may help to mitigate the “commitment [to democracy] problem” of the newly incorporated Islamists.¹⁴⁹ Structural factors and elite choice are thus relevant.

Third, political culture is also likely to be a critical factor in determining whether the electoral involvement of Islamists will prove to be transformative. Fragmentation of authority, as just noted, may impel religious elites to endorse more moderate Islamists over radical ones. As was suggested earlier, it may work as well in favour of creating a vitally important *de facto* political pluralism. Such structural pluralism can, furthermore, create initial political openings or liberalisation, and the self-interest of groups, including regimes, may lie in devising

149. See the suggestive comparison of Algeria and Belgium in: Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties”, *Comparative Politics*, 32, no. 4 (July 2000), pp. 390–391.

power-sharing arrangements. Structural and utilitarian considerations are thus important; to use the provocative formulation, democracy without democrats becomes possible. At the same time, the normative dimension does not seem irrelevant to the process of democratic development, but this takes us into uncertain territory. Indeed, in making the case for the normative roots of democracy, one can easily fall into essentialist or reductionist readings of Islamic public culture, such as Orientalism or, indeed, the view of those who regard Islamism as inherently antagonistic to democracy. There is particular danger in ascribing a generic character type or mentality to Muslims, of overstating the importance of tribalism and patrimonialism, and assuming that Muslims always act out of expressly religious motivations.¹⁵⁰

However, should we, as Michael Hudson asks,¹⁵¹ throw out the political cultural baby with the Orientalist bathwater? It would, to my mind, be inadvisable because cultures are not monolithic or homogeneous; they are made up of a variety of strands of thought and multiple interpretations, as we have seen with regard to Muslim thought on elections. In addition, cultures change over time. Ideas concerning, for example, nationalism, popular participation, and social justice are not stagnant, and Qur'anic meanings are nothing if not ambiguous. Contrary to what may have been expected, as has been noted, ideas of popular sovereignty now coexist with the concept of divine sovereignty in modern Islamic political thought. It is probably the case that indigenous notions such as *shura* and *ijma'* 'do not comprise a compelling theory of government'.¹⁵² But they do provide the intellectual foundation for the metaphorical extension of Islamic ideas into the "modern" realm—in short, and despite what many conservative Muslims would themselves say, the reinterpretation of doctrine. Religious belief is thus relevant to the process of electoral participation and democratisation, and it is contingent.

As has been argued, a long history of normative evolution has provided the backdrop for current thinking in the Muslim world on elections and democracy.

150. Lisa Anderson, "Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach", in Rex Brynen, Baghat Korany, and Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, vol. 1 (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), pp. 79–88.

151. Michael C. Hudson, "The Political Culture Approach to Arab Democratization: The Case for Bringing it Back In, Carefully", in Brynen, Korany, and Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, pp. 61–76.

152. Augustus Richard Norton, "The Future of Civil Society in the Middle East", *Middle East Journal*, 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993), p. 209.

Roots go into the nineteenth century with critical reforms in both Ottoman Turkey of the Tanzimat period and Iran of the Constitutional Revolution period. Many Muslims responded to the imperialist encroachment by professing similar viewpoints to those of the West, in part to affirm the political equality of their countries, in part as a consequence of an unconscious intellectual adaptation. But there were opponents and, in truth, dissenting views attained considerable prominence. Rejection of the idea of elections has been framed in terms of specific objection to the associated notions of constitutionalism, popular sovereignty, majority rule, and equality. These are powerful arguments, and it is understandable why some observers today believe that Muslims are constrained by a weighty intellectual inheritance and regard whatever electoral participation has occurred as superficial tactical manoeuvring.

Two factors may be set against this interpretation, however. First, as we have seen, several schools of thought have emerged on the question of elections, and ideas are constantly being defined and refined according to shifting circumstances. Although debate continues over majoritarian *versus* “proportional” rule—that is, the degree of domination and inclusiveness of political groups¹⁵³—the disagreement is over the kind of electoral system, not whether elections are desirable in the first place. Moreover, Islamism—the current experience that has become the testing case for all Muslim moral and practical virtue—involves a diversity of groups whose activities and means span a broad spectrum. It is thus a simplification to suggest, as the following quotation does, that the fundamentalists’ version of Islam is unwaveringly intransigent: “They regard liberal democracy with contempt as a corrupt and corrupting form of government. They are willing to see it, at best, as an avenue to power, but an avenue that runs one way only”.¹⁵⁴

Second, practical experience reinforces the discursive shift that often precedes it, and may lead, over time, to an internalisation of the underlying values to which the discourse refers. The language of rights, pluralism, and participation has been present for some time in the Muslim world, and as elections occur they confirm these ideas as standards of legitimacy and delegitimisation. As the same time, they may help to promote a sense of commitment to the ideas. In

153. A recent example is Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi who says that “the rule of 51 percent” is unworkable in societies “which need the efforts of all political groups, not only the one that gains victory in an election”: “Islam and Liberal Democracy: The Limits of The Western Model”, *Journal of Democracy*, 7, no. 2 (1996), p. 82.

154. Bernard Lewis, “Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview”, *Journal of Democracy*, 7, no. 2 (1996), p. 54.

short, historical experience has an effect on the reinterpretation of Muslim thought and beliefs in this domain. Putting it in the context of negotiated politics, the experience helps Muslims and especially Islamists to accept the “spirit”, and not just the “logic”, of the rules of the game.¹⁵⁵

Bassam Tibi remains dubious that pragmatism is equivalent to real intellectual adaptation.¹⁵⁶ But utilitarian concerns do not necessarily preclude an intellectual evolution in the direction of the practical imperative. Intention—an area of immense obscurity to social scientists—does not necessarily predetermine effect, and accumulated social practice, mediated by evolving circumstances and a range of cultural and political institutions and authorities, may produce unanticipated consequences. Though referring to a completely different context and speaking of subjectivities rather than beliefs, Lila Abu-Lughod makes the general point about adaptive process well: “[T]elevison serials in Egypt, while perhaps failing in their self-appointed missions of inculcating values of nationalism and feminism through their overt messages, may nevertheless, and quite inadvertently—through the subtle effects of their generic conventions—be making it possible for those values to make sense”.¹⁵⁷ The discussion of this paper has suggested—tentatively—that the radical separation of instrumental and principled attachment to elections may be overstated. Electoral participation creates its own inner logic, or rules of the game, that entangle or enmesh the participants further.

This is not to suggest that escape from this involvement is impossible, or that acceptance of the rules is universal. Much of the evolution that has been described will seem minimalist and the pace of change glacial. It has often been remarked that the fundamental democratic requirement is the commitment to achieving power only via free elections and the willingness to relinquish power to others similarly inclined and elected. By this standard of commitment, many Islamist groups are sadly lacking. In addition, the associated value of equality of participation often appears to be a distant goal. Indeed, the internal Others of women, minorities, and political opponents are likely to be the litmus test of whether democratic values have been adopted. Even the liberal Muhammad

155. Waterbury, “Democracy Without Democrats? The Potential for Political Liberalization in the Middle East”, p. 45.

156. Bassam Tibi, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change*. trans. by Clare Krozl (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

157. Lila Abu-Lughod, “Melodramas of Nationhood” (1996 George Antonius Lecture, St Antony’s College, Oxford), in Derek Hopwood (ed.), *Arab Nation, Arab Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.125.

Asad, endorsing female suffrage, could not bring himself to admit that non-Muslim minorities should have an equal share in the Islamic order.¹⁵⁸

The evolving public culture of Islam is clearly not isolated from important problems:

- Electoral politics are largely class-based, encouraged by the intelligentsia and new middle classes but scarcely incorporating the masses.
- Governments, and specifically militaries, still control and manipulate the process, redefining the rules of the game for obvious advantage. For instance, the Jordanian government in 1993 adopted a “one person, one vote” system in the hope of maximising the victory of compliant tribal elements, and the Turkish military forced the ouster of Refah and remain uneasy about Fazilet. Moreover, regimes sometimes see elections as a way for opponents to let off steam,¹⁵⁹ or as a way to promote a loyal opposition that could be contrasted with disloyal elements. To the extent that elections are perceived as subject to manipulation (*tala'ub*) or as merely cosmetic, they are likely to make matters worse by undermining faith in democratic procedures and encouraging radicals.
- Islamist parties, even when they participate in the game and seek broad support, cannot stray too far from their ideologically committed base. This built-in tension may impel them towards both political progressivism—participation in elections—and, with an eye on their core constituency, social conservatism. The schizophrenic consequence could ultimately destabilise Islamist movements and undermine their engagement with participatory politics.
- The authoritarian internal practices of many Islamist groups, like other political parties in the Middle East, may exacerbate tensions among members and discourage the broader commitment to principles of pluralism and alternation of power.¹⁶⁰

158. Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, pp. 40–41.

159. For example, Henry Munson, Jr. argues that this is what occurred in the Moroccan elections of 1993: “The Elections of 1993 and Democratization in Morocco”, in Rahma Bourgia and Susan Gilson Miller (eds.), *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power and Politics in Morocco*, Harvard Middle East Monograph XXXI (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1999), pp. 273–277.

160. Jillian Schwedler, “A Paradox of Democracy? Islamist Participation in Elections”, *Middle East Report*, number 209 (Winter 1998), pp. 28–29. Kalyvas presents the alternative view that corporatist and internally policed organisations are disciplined enough to make external compromises and to keep spoiling, violent dissidents in check: “Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies”, p. 393.

- Factors outside the country skew the internal balance. Regimes are impelled to open the political system in the hope of winning financial and political favour from international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank or from Western governments. Yet, equally, the distortions of globalised economic relations may reinforce internal authoritarianism as liberties are sacrificed, with the complicity of multinational corporations, in order to guarantee reliable economic performance in the “periphery”.

The imperfection of elections can, however, be overstated, reinforcing what has been called the “electoralist fallacy”.¹⁶¹ Sceptics of the democratic progress of the Muslim world often make too much of electoral failings and, in fact, overemphasise the significance of elections themselves. In essence, they regard them as sufficient for democratisation, rather than as only necessary. Elections are not by themselves the test of democracy. Nevertheless, they are consequential. If, as Lisa Anderson suggests, it is important to see what actually exists rather than to speculate on what is absent in Islam or Muslim societies, as much of the analysis of democratisation in the Muslim world has tended to do,¹⁶² then elections are a striking presence. It is also noteworthy that Muslim experience is less exceptional than has often been assumed. The electoral politics of Muslim societies are not radically different from what has occurred elsewhere, although the terms of the discourse naturally relate to a culturally specific vocabulary.

The tableau is evolving, and final judgement depends on whether one regards the glass as half empty or half full. As this analysis has argued, grounds for qualified optimism lie in increasing Muslim and Islamist acceptance of the electoral principle. This, in turn, may signal a more inclusive politics in the Middle East. Elections may thus not be the guarantor of democratisation, but they are likely to be an important transitional phenomenon.

161. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation; Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 4.

162. Anderson, “Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach”, p. 89.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM
IN THE MODERN WORLD (ISIM)

Visiting address:

Rapenburg 71
2311 GJ Leiden
The Netherlands

Postal address:

P.O. Box 11089
2301 EB Leiden
The Netherlands

Telephone:

+31-(0)71-527 79 05

Fax:

+31-(0)71-527 79 06

E-mail:

isim@let.leidenuniv.nl

Web site:

<http://www.isim.nl>

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