

Book Review

John L. Esposito, Tamara Sonn and John O. Voll (2016). *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 306 Pages. ISBN: 978-0-19514798-8

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This book discusses the dynamics of the relationship between Islam as a religious and political teaching with democracy in the context of the effects of the Arab Spring and the subsequent events after it. The authors, who are considered to be “titans” in the field of democracy and Islam, started the book by saying “*Many western observers were shocked when Arabs began open rebellions against their governments in December 2010*” and this seem to point out not only the unpredictability of the uprisings, but also to the inaccuracy behind several of the most accepted assumptions about politics and governance in the Arab world. The chapters of the book discuss the experiences of political transition in general and how democratisation works in particular through the examples of seven different countries, namely Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Senegal, Tunisia and Egypt.

Quoting Turkey’s experience with modernisation and secularisation, many believed that Turkey provided the model for Muslim-majority nation-states as a well-established democratic system. Supported by figures like Erbakan and Erdogan, Islamic activism began to rise, and democracy is used as a yardstick by which to prove the failure of Turkish secularism to be truly pluralistic and respectful of the rights of its citizens. While the effects of the use of religion as a source of legitimacy in modern Iran are explained in the third chapter, it also revealed how the foreign interventions were decisive from the 19th century to the coup in which Mosaddeq was overthrown and the period after the Iranian Revolution. In particular, it emphasized on how the imams were a centre of attraction against the oppressive administration of Shah Pahlavi, and thus the issues such as social justice with Islamic references and the reconnection of the society to religious values were brought forward. The ideas of Ali Shariati, Khomeini’s adoption of the idea of guardianship or governance by religio-legal scholars and his alliance with leftist and secular groups during the revolution are highlighted.

Pakistan is described by the authors as a work in progress. The army has become an institution that defends its own interests which leads to constraints to the democratic path of the country. The increase in the power of the army after the crises and wars and the manipulation of the public in this direction have been a recurring result. On the other hand, maintaining this motivation by making use of Islamist political movements paved the way for them to open up in the political arena. Mawdudi’s idea of the Islamisation of the state, Zia ul Haq’s accelerating Islamisation, and the country’s support for the resistance in Afghanistan paved the way for Pakistan’s gradual radicalisation. Today, despite several periods of military rule, Pakistan is once again operating as a democratic country.

In the fifth chapter, Indonesia progressed on the path of democracy after a series of authoritarian administration – namely, Sukarno’s one-party regime to Suharto’s military administration – and this is referred to as the Indonesian model of transformation by the authors. The election of Jokowi as president marked the fourth successful transfer of presidential leadership through democratic means in Indonesia since the overthrow of the regime of Suharto in 1998, and hence the “Indonesian model” were seen as one of the possible guidance for the new governments created by the Arab Uprisings. This chapter emphasized on the evolution of the political elite, Islamic groups, military groups and the change in interaction between them. From the author’s perspective, Indonesia is an important example of how the transition from authoritarian military rule to democracy can take place without inciting reverse waves or eliminating important groups of people.

Senegal is a distinct example quoted by the authors, as it was never ruled by the military and has different ethnic structures. Despite these features, religious divisions were not used politically and a repression regime was not established as a result of the instability that could be driven by these divisions.

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The political transition demonstrated in the 2012 Senegalese elections was neither the outcome of a revolution such as those that ended dictatorships in Eastern Europe or dramatic mass movements such as the Arab Spring. Senegal's current political structure is the result of a lengthy gradual transition. Ethnic and religious groups as well as the military and urban elites continue to shape Senegal's political system, but each operates in new ways in the changing political world of the 21st century.

The authors described Tunisia as "revolution to republic". It is impossible not to mention Tunisia when talking about the Arab Spring as according to the authors, Tunisia is the "cradle of the Arab Spring". Tunisians were able to move along the road to democratisation, avoiding derailment, despite significant differences and fierce rivalries in Tunisian politics, in contrast to Egypt's coup or Libya's chaos, because of stronger civil society organisations, the military's professionalism, and the responsiveness and significant concessions made by Ghannouchi and Ennahda. The authors also highlighted that Tunisia's Islamist-secularist divide must give way to a more nuanced understanding of democracy to ensure unity and equality for all.

Lastly, Egypt is described to be different to Tunisia of which contrary to the transition from revolution to democratisation - the course was dramatically reversed in Egypt. As the authors point out, the return to the re-establishment of the authoritarian regime in Egypt shows how difficult and troublesome the democratisation process can be. The fact that the military regime established after Morsi's overthrow re-established the army-led administration instead of strengthening democracy is a major failure in terms of democratisation. Finally, the authors call out the support of so-called liberals and military pressure on religious groups and opposition parties as the catalyst to the possible democratic transition in Egypt.

All in all, the complex relationship between Islam and democracy presented by the authors seem to argue that democratisation can be a very challenging process when put side to side with the needs of political transformation. The authors oppose to the ideas of the impossibility or incompatibility of democracy in the Islamic world, noting that the search for democracy had already exist even before the Arab Spring. Overall, this book is definitely interesting as it deals with the relationship of Islam and democracy after the Arab Uprisings while relating it with the wave of change brought forward by the 21st century.