
REVIEWS AND NOTES

**REVIEW OF THE MONOGRAPH
'ISLAMISM, ARAB SPRING, AND THE FUTURE OF
DEMOCRACY. WORLD SYSTEM AND WORLD VALUES
PERSPECTIVES' BY LEONID GRININ, ANDREY KOROTAYEV,
AND ARNO TAUSCH**

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'Islamism, Arab Spring, and the Future of Democracy: World System and World Values Perspectives'. Perspectives on Development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region. Leonid Grinin, Andrey Korotayev, Arno Tausch. Springer International Publishing, 2018. ISBN 3319910760, 9783319910765. 364 pp.

Islamic and Islamist resurgence, along with the evolving dynamics thereof, continues to shape the increasingly complex political landscape of Muslim societies worldwide. While a lot has been written about why and how Islam has been (and is being) instrumentalized in politics – often coined as a phenomenon of 'Islamism' or 'Political Islam', much confusion still remains in both public and academic circles. We still lack a thorough understanding of Islamism's intricate nuances and diverse manifestations in a rapidly changing and an ever-connected, techno-driven global village. Perhaps, it is not surprising given Islamism's multi-level, multi-dimensional character. However, to date, little has been done to systematically unpack the complex dimensions of modern Islamism, particularly from its genesis to its becoming a dominant political force in the Muslim world. The extent to which Islamism has influenced and continues to shape democratization is arguably a major point of debate and contention. Particularly, we still know little about (both current and prospective) dynamic challenges/opportunities that diverse young Islamist political actors (old and new) present both in domestic as well as in cross-national context for the future of democracy. By directly addressing this lacuna, this important and timely study – by Grinin, Korotayev, and Tausch – enables the reader to better understand and contextualize what modern Islamism entails and the ways in which it grapples with socio-political challenges and opportunities in contemporary Muslim politics.

At the same time, this study is a high-quality-caliber comparative politics masterpiece that juxtaposes the sociopolitical developments (as well as historical backgrounds) of the Arab Middle East with other global regions, including India and China. Specifically, the puzzle of 'why, how, and to what extent things evolved in the MENA much differently compared with the other regions' is cogently elucidated.

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Remarkably, the authors effectively probe the ways in which ordinary Muslims negotiate support for politically *moderate* and politically *radical* Islamism and how these attitudes have changed over time. In doing so, this volume accomplishes three critical tasks: (a) *diagnosing* the enduring and outstanding socio-political issues pertaining democratization, (b) *explaining* the genesis and contingencies of Islamist political ideology, and (c) *forecasting* the trajectory for potential triumphs and pitfalls of modern Islamist movements, particularly in the MENA region.

In conceptualizing Islamism, the authors emphasize that,

Islamism is an ideology and movement associated with the politicization of Islam and the transformation of the ideas and values of Islam (often into political slogans but sometimes even into political programs). Yet, the ideological range of political Islamists is broad and diverse.

While the overarching puzzle of the book is to unpack the nexus among Islamism, Arab Spring, and evolving democratization patterns, the authors remarkably accomplish this goal by providing nuanced and contextualized narratives to the following, though not limited to, four overarching questions:

1. *What is modern Islamism and in what ways it continues to evolve?*
2. *How can we deconstruct and analyze the different dimensions of modern Islamist ideologies?*
3. *To what extent has the recent wave of revolutions shaped the societal values in the Middle East? What did the Arab Spring deliver and in what ways did it fail?*
4. *How, if any, will moderate political Islamism influence the democratization trajectory in the post-Arab spring space? Under what conditions will it succeed and in what ways may it fail?*

As this book is a product of scholarly collaboration (of three authors) reflecting years in the making, each author brings a unique perspective in addressing the questions at hand. Perhaps, the most distinguishing aspect of this scholarship is that the authors invite readers to view the familiar questions (that scholars have long grappled with) in a completely new and fresh light. The breadth of historical accounts as well as the scope of the contemporary issues are remarkably comprehensive. Said otherwise, the explanatory conditions involve all major domains of life including civil society, political economy, human developmental metrics, critical historical junctures, international relations (including the exogenous interventionist policies), and, of course, domestic politics. In short, the readers will find robust explications for each of the abovementioned questions.

Rampant in the existing literature are conceptual overgeneralizations as well as simplistic reductionism that hamper our understanding of a complex concept such as Islamism. To avoid these pitfalls, engaging in a painstaking dialogue between theory and empirical data is instrumental (Achilov 2016). Yet very few studies have attempted to unpack the intricate nuances of political Islam by engaging in rich qualitative-comparative as well as quantitative analyses in a diverse cross-national context (*Idem* 2015). To this end, this book makes a timely contribution that advances the research frontier on the evolving dynamics of Islamism from a comparative and cross-national perspective.

As it becomes clear as you read on, the authors construct complex arguments that go beyond simplistic reductionism. Theoretically, the explanations are grounded on the world-systems theoretical framework. This framework helps to draw a *big picture* of the World politics in terms of shifting paradigms of the past decade. This is significant given that the social science literature has been largely silent on this matter. Particularly, the book makes a cohesive inquiry into the macro-level, world order systemic analysis in terms of how Muslim states position themselves given the complex web of 'clashing' international conflicts and competing strategic interests. Empirically, extensive individual-level survey data (also nested at the state-level aggregation) inform the findings. Finally, the emerging nexus between theory and empirical analyses serve as a foundation for the policy formulation in regard to the pressing questions listed above.

The book is organized into two broad segments. The first one examines both diverging and converging patterns of genesis, diffusion, and evolution of modern Islamism: in this process, the complexities and Islamism are unpacked in greater detail. Uniquely, the book engages in a civilizational comparative analysis of India, China, and MENA through the world-systems theoretical lens. This novel theoretical and methodological approach is both fresh and innovative which takes the reader through a previously uncharted territory of Muslim politics.

By rightly highlighting that 'Islamism not only spiritually but also functionally permeates the social fabric of society', the volume explores this venue further and thereby addresses an uneasy task head-on: providing a context-rich elucidation of the *characteristics, intelligibility, and practical socio-political functionalities* of Islamism. The book successfully documents how *diverse* Islamist actors are (and have been) who are not merely bounded in political affairs; rather, previously less known aspects of Islamist diversity is expressively discussed.

In so doing, both social bases, along with humanistic value systems, are accounted while the prevailing (and often simplistic) assumptions regarding Islamism are debunked. At the same time, the authors do not shy away from raising hard questions about shifting popular sentiments toward 'moderate vs radical' Islamism. What makes this volume distinct from other studies on the field is that the proposed function-characteristic typology (*e.g.*, functionalities) is highly innovative (*i.e.*, novel) in terms of how diverse manifestation of Islamism is embodied in society at large.

Furthermore, conducting a careful and nuanced analysis of the Arab Spring mass mobilizations, the authors also present an elaborate sketch of post-revolutionary and post-voluntary events that unfolded in Egypt as well as in Yemen, Libya, and Syria. The book also provides the primary source accounts in the post-revolution Egypt following Chapter 5 ('*Letters from Tahrir*'). These raw accounts (letters) of the events provide insightful, yet diverse context to the ongoing uneasy Egyptian struggle for democracy.

The second half of the book presents rich empirical account of how Muslims negotiate the attitudinal sentiments toward radicalism, terrorism, relations with the West, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, civil society, and collective political mobilization (*e.g.*, mass protest engagement). Impressively, the account of who actually participated in the Arab Spring demonstrations, along with the individual demographic and political-ideological indicators, is well documented. In doing so, the authors interrogate voluminous quantitative data head on while corroborating (and triangulating) the findings with

qualitative process tracing methods. The analyses and findings are grounded on empirical (e.g., factor analytical) examination of individual-level quantitative survey data (nested at country-levels) primarily sourced from the *Arab Barometer*, *PEW Research Center*, *World Values Survey* and other reputable databases.

Central to the authors' findings is the emphasis that 'it will take much time and hard work' to promote liberal values in the MENA region: 'not instead of the Islamist ones but in combination with them.' In other words, the authors posit that '...only through moderate Islamism interacting with secular political forces will the Islamic world be able to undergo a considerable transformation of its society. This is complex and contradictory, but perhaps the only real path to social development for many Islamic countries'.

Relatedly, the volume effectively illustrates *why* the use of force is insufficient to combat radical and militarist Islamism and, in this regard, explicate *how* the politically moderate Islamist voices may triumph over radicalism *organically*. Thus, the intervening exogenous factors (i.e., international variables, particularly stemming from the West) are not discounted. In my humble view, the book makes a precise diagnosis that the future of Muslim democratization (in which both secular and Islamist forces may coexist and compete electorally) rests on preventing misguided and ill-informed foreign interventions (particularly in the MENA region).

Indeed, one of the most distinctive accomplishments is the effective assemblage of large volume of comparative-qualitative and path-breaking quantitative data. In addition to providing rich-contextualized explanations, the volume provides insightful *forecasts* based on the current socio-political trajectories (particularly in the MENA region). From this vantage, what makes this contributing particularly unique is that the monograph offers *tangible*, *realistic*, and *innovative* policy venues that can help foster conditions conducive to building pluralist society with moderate Islamism playing an instrumental role.

On the final note, this study is a valuable source for advancing the field of comparative political studies in further investigation of the triadic empirical relationship among Islam, Islamism, and Democracy and how they are informing socio-political change in the Muslim world. The book speaks to a large audience: both academic and popular readers will find this scholarship compelling, insightful, and timely.