Authors

Mohammad Affan

İsmail Yaylacı

Date

10 July 2020

CONCEPT PAPER

POLITICAL ISLAM MOVEMENTS

IN THE SECOND WAVE OF **ARAB UPRISINGS**

AL SHARQ
STRATEGIC
RESEARCH

Contents

Contextualizing the 2019 Uprisings

In December 2018, eight years after Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia sparked the Arab Uprisings, fuel and bread riots erupted in Sudan's north-eastern city of Atbara. Popular mobilizations intensified during 2019 and spread to four other Arab republics in what came to be referred to as the second wave of the Arab Uprisings. These events culminated in the ousting of the Algerian and Sudanese Presidents, Abdul-Aziz Bouteflika and Omar al-Bashir respectively, as well as the resignation of the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri and his Iraqi counterpart Adel Abdel Mahdi.

This wave of events came as a total surprise since they happened at a time when people in the Arab world had developed an "Arab Spring fatigue." This Al Sharq taskforce argues that, despite different contextual and unique dynamics in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon and Iraq, these protests belong to the phenomenon of Arab uprisings in terms of the nature of the protesters' demands and mobilization. Hence, they can and should be seen as a second wave of these uprisings and not as some scattered and disconnected events. The events of 2011 and 2019 bare unmistakable resemblances, namely:

- Both were widespread popular demonstrations against inefficient, corrupt, authoritarian or democratically flawed regimes which resulted in either the resignation of the heads of the executive or the intervention of the military to unseat autocratic presidents who had monopolized power for decades.
- Protesters voiced similar demands stemming from comparable grievances.
- The protestors raised almost identical banners and chanted the very same slogans despite the eight year gap.

Another line of similarity between both waves is the dynamics of diffusion, contagion and learning amongst these protest movements. In the first wave of the Arab uprisings, the protests swiftly spilled over to six Arab countries in a matter of few months. Similarly, when the protests in Sudan started in December 2018, it was rapidly followed by the Hirak Movement in Algeria in February 2019. Then, in October, massive protests erupted almost simultaneously in both Iraq and Lebanon. The underlying demonstration effect of these protests, which encouraged activists to mobilize and to take their demands to the streets to challenge the incumbent regimes, is unmistakable.

The first wave of the uprisings has attained a very complicated and paradoxical character. On the one hand, it entailed democratization attempts, such as holding fair and free elections for the first time, political reforms and mobilizations for social justice and political participation. On the other hand, it also brought about military coups, civil wars, state and non-state violence, and failed states. This stark intertwinement of radically different outcomes created an ambiguity in observers' characterizations of the ongoing events. A plethora of different terms such as revolution, revolt, uprising, 'refolution', Intifada, and regime change cascade were used to refer to these events, not to mention the widely used term 'the Arab Spring'.

Similar to the first wave, the recent protests have also resulted in variable outcomes. Although they have forced the ruling regimes to make some concessions and revisions to the existing order, they have initiated a regime transition process in only one case (Sudan). After the Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir was deposed in April 2019, a challenging process of regime transition started. However, it is too early to tell whether this transition away from al-Bashir's authoritarian rule will kick start a process of democratization.

Meanwhile in Algeria, limited measures were taken to get rid of the oligarchic ruling clique, dubbed 'le pouvoir', allowing a sort of elite rotation with few promises of reform. In this way, the regime sought to absorb the thrust of the protests by shifting some actors in power without allowing for a consequential

structural transformation. Similarly in Lebanon and Iraq, the protestors' struggle to bring about real changes to the rules of the game are still ongoing in the face of attempts by the dominant elites to contain the revolutionary wave and limit the scope of policy change.

Within the scope of this taskforce we are mainly concerned with how the Political Islam movements and parties as the predominant socio-political actors in both the first and second wave countries have affected, and in turn have been affected, by these uprisings. On this question we see a very interesting and significant contrast between the first and the second waves: In the first wave, Political Islam movements were all in the opposition struggling against incumbent rulers and regimes. In the second wave, however, in all of the four cases we see some sections of Islamists either as rulers or as supporters of and partners in the existing regime. Being the target of popular mobilizations rather than their active organizers (or being both in some cases), creates a very different dynamic for Political Islam in all these cases under study. In some countries, factions of Islamists in opposition mobilized against other sections of Islamists in power. This is a manifestation of the deepening of the divide within the Islamist movements in the Arab world. It is also an occasion for different Islamist movements and parties to clarify their positions on key political issues.

In Sudan, the Islamist political parties and movements were divided. Sudan's ruling party, The National Congress Party (NCP), was supported by the Islamic Movement (IM), whilst other Islamist forces such as the Reform Now Movement (RNM) and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Sudan, joined the demonstrations. In Algeria, due to the heavy weight of the civil war, the most sizeable Islamist party, Movement for Society and Peace (MSP) became a defacto partner in the Bouteflika regime and was forced to change its position toward opposition more recently. Other Islamist parties are scattered along the spectrum of opposition to and cooperation with the regime. In Iraq and Lebanon, the ruling parties were supported by the Islamist movements in the highly divided and complicated political landscape of these countries.

The Islamist landscape in Lebanon and Iraq is further complicated by the Shi'a and Sunni sectarian divide. The Shiite Islamist parties and movements stand as the dominant forces in the ruling coalitions in both Lebanon and Iraq, and hence became a target of popular protest either directly or indirectly. In contrast, the Sunni Islamist parties and movements in these two countries mostly belong to the opposition, but they suffer from organizational divisions and leadership problems which cripple their political influence.

To study the Political Islam movements in the second wave Arab countries, each paper in the taskforce discusses the socio-political contexts in order to highlight the conditions under which Islamist movements act and reactand to examine the root causes and dynamics of the current wave of uprisings. It also maps the positions of Islamist actors in each case study and discusses the ways in which these uprisings affected their political orientation, strategy, and behavior.

Theoretical Framework

To broach these issues, we benefit from insights developed in three main scholarly literatures in social sciences:

The first is the body of work on **social movements and contentious politics**. The popular upheavals against autocratic regimes in the Arab world constitute a typical case of contentious politics in which people engage in collective action to change government policy or an incumbent regime, and Islamists have proven to be the most deeply entrenched and well-organized collective actors with the most sizeable and organized social movement in all the second wave countries. The social movement theory fundamentally tries to understand why, how, and under what conditions people mobilize to engage in contentious politics with incumbent regimes or governments. Not all social movements adopt a contentious attitude or adopt the strategies of contentious politics such as demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience, riots, or even insurrection. As Charles Tilly notes, contentious politics includes "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interest, in which governments appear either as targets, initiator of claims or third parties." [1]

One can speculate whether people who gathered in Tahrir Square, and in other squares of the Arab world, constitute a social movement since both the first and the second wave of Arab uprisings were quite spontaneous and unexpected. In order for a particular form of political participation to count as a social movement there needs to be a sustained interaction among a group of people who face a collective challenge and have common purpose.[2] That is why some characterize the masses of the Arab uprisings as social non-movement and their uprising as "collective actions of non-collective actors" which aim for a unified goal (i.e. social change) despite lacking a unified ideology, leadership, or organization.[3] Therefore, social movements need not be formal, well-established and unified. Social movements can consist of informal networks which share a common purpose and can be very broad, such as opposing global capitalism, racism, or authoritarianism.[4]

Drawing on social movement theory we analyze three aspects of these collective actors: (i) the structures of political opportunity within which actors find themselves, (ii) the resources available for actors' mobilization which enable or facilitate collective action, and (iii) the way in which actors frame the reasons and goals for the movement.

Broadly speaking, the political opportunities refer to the environmental factors which create incentives for social movements to act, most prominently the political windows which open due to state vulnerability and creates room for mobilization.[5] Political opportunities include factors such as the general public's perception of the regime's legitimacy, the extent of the regime'seffectiveness in creating "performance legitimacy" (i.e. providing employment and decent standards of living), the existence of cracks within the regime that can be exploited by the opposition, the regime's propensity and capacity for repression, and the regional and international support of the regime and/or the opposition.[6]

Second are the resources available to the movements. The level of organization, the extent of the networks, recruitment of talented volunteers

and leaders, material capabilities and financial support, and popular support for the movement's goals are all resources which social movements, in this case Islamist movements, mobilize for their particular causes.[7] Since much of the political landscape in the Arab world is characterized by authoritarian repression, informal networks such as personal relationships and informal gatherings also become particularly useful resources.[8]

Third, social movements strategically frame their causes and grievances to mobilize their networks and the broader public.[9] They identify problems, offer strategies for their resolution, and present reasons to motivate people for mobilization.[10] Actors draw on cultural traits and deploy symbolic instruments to communicate their demands and positions to targeted audiences inside and outside their contexts. It requires a continual process of meaning-production and identity formation in order to provide the basis for collective action.[11]

Like all social movements, Islamists align their discourses according to the needs of the situation and reform their ideological platforms to incorporate the aspirations of their potential supporters. However, it is important to note that the Islamist social movements are far from unitary and monobloc. There is stark heterogeneity and fragmentation within Islamists in terms of their approaches to the questions of the legitimacy of the ruling regimes, attractiveness of cooperating with those regimes and strategies to oppose them. They aspire to rather different political ideals and visions for the future. Therefore, the taskforce papers attend to the discourses and practices of these actors to see how they frame their goals and platforms to speak to domestic and regional audiences.

In addition to the social movement theory, the second body of literature from which we draw insights is the literature on **authoritarian breakdowns and democratic transitions**. When authoritarian regimes breakdown, cracks often arise within the regime which weaken the ruling block and speed up the regime downfall. A key factor here is whether the opposition can unite against the regime and whether the regime can co-opt chunks of the opposition to steal their thunder. In that sense the organizational capital of the opposition block

and their ability to join forces around a shared political vision all affect the odds of whether the opposition can bring down an incumbent government, and whether the collapse of an authoritarian regime gives way to democratic transition. It is worth reminding here that authoritarian breakdowns are not necessarily followed by democratic transitions. Indeed, following the first wave of uprisings, only Egypt and Tunisia ushered in the process of building democratic practices, and that process survived only in Tunisia. This series of papers pays particular attention to how protests in Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon have created or deepened fissures among ruling elites, and how the social movements have fared on the question of building coalitions with the other side of the ideological aisle to maximize their ability to mobilize the public.

Third, we also draw on **historical institutionalist analysis** to trace the evolution of the discourses and actions of Political Islam movements at critical junctures in each country case. By studying the impact of crucial events and processes, we try to unpack the impact of path dependence as they affect the patterns of interactions between Islamist movements on the one hand, and the regime and other opposition groups on the other. The path-dependent approach examines how "structural and institutional constraints determine the range of options available to decision makers and may even predispose them to choose a specific option."[12] This also complements our focus on how Islamist movements respond to the opening or closing windows of opportunity in their respective contexts.

Revolutionary moments such as the Arab Uprisings are critical junctures which exhibit discontinuities and ruptures as well as the power of the status quo. But they are also an outcome of longer periods of institutional stability which reproduce a particular order. In that sense, revolutionary changes display a "cyclical interplay between periods of historical continuity and sharp disjuncture."[13] We analyze how the particular routes taken by both the ruling regimes and the Political Islam movements in the recent history of these four countries have created self-reinforcing path-dependencies as well as "brief phases of institutional flux" such as the Arab Spring.[14]

Project Description

This project started in June 2019, when Al Sharq Program on Political Islam formed a taskforce to follow the unfolding events in Sudan and Algeria. The taskforce was concerned with understanding the causes, dynamics, and consequences of the uprisings, as well as the behavior of the Political Islam movements during this unusual time. A few months later, the scope of the taskforce widened to cover the protests in Lebanon and Iraq as they erupted, and the Shiite Political Islam trend was also brought into focus. Over the course of a year, the core team was following news and media coverage, reviewing related literature, and collecting relevant documents and data.

The output of this extended research work has materialized in six papers, as well as some additional fact sheets, and infographics. The first paper is dedicated to studying the dilemma of the Sudanese Islamist movement during the December Revolution, as well as during the transitional period. The Algerian Islamists and their interaction with the Hirak movement is the focus of the second research paper.

For Lebanon and Iraq, two reports have been prepared for each case study, one for the Sunni and the other for the Shiite Islamist groups. In Lebanon, the scope of the research was narrowed down to include only the Islamic Group and Hizbullah being the main Sunni and Shiite movements in the Islamist current. In contrast, the landscape of the Iraqi Political Islam movements was so complex that our papers had to address many religious-political groups, parties, and networks in both Sunni and Shiite sects.

From these papers, some general observations can be made on the conditions and behavior of the Political Islam movements during the 2019 uprisings:

First, the disagreements and rivalries between different factions within the Islamist political landscape prevented them from adopting a unified or coordinated position during the uprising. It was up to each party or group to make its own choices based on its own calculations. Moreover, in Sudan, Iraq, and Lebanon, some Islamist parties mobilized their support bases against other Islamists in power.

Second, even for those Islamist groups and parties who were in opposition, their response to the uprisings varied remarkably. In some cases, they officially joined the protests and full-heartedly supported their demands such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Reform Now Movement in Sudan. In other cases, they informally participated in the uprisings and utilized the chance to call for reform as with most of the Algerian Islamist parties. Other groups remained loyal to the incumbent regimes despite the participation of some of their members in the demonstrations on personal grounds.

Third, in the countries where the Political Islam landscape is divided between Sunni and Shiite groups, namely in Iraq and Lebanon, the situation was more delicate and complicated. On the one hand, the Sunnis were reluctant to join the uprisings challenging the Shiite-dominated regimes in order not to jeopardize their relationship with the powerful Shiite groups. On the other hand, they did not want to lose their support bases and miss the chance to potentially improve their political position.

Fourth, if the 2011 wave of the Arab Uprisings hit the Sunni Islamist movements badly after a short period of political ascendance, the 2019 wave of uprisings deepened their crisis after toppling the al-Inqaz regime in Sudan. However, the second wave hit the Shiite movements as well. The Lebanese Hizbullah and the major Shiite political alliances in Iraq were severely affected by this wave of uprisings which resulted in a serious erosion of their popular support.

Finally, it is worth noting that the mobilizations in the second wave countries are far from over. The shaky transitional process in Sudan may crumble under the growing conflicts between the rival political forces there. The uprisings in Iraq and Lebanon are expected to resume if the new governments fall short in their handling of economic situations which have further deteriorated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Even in Algeria, which currently appears to be the most stable country in the second wave cluster, disappointment with the presidential elections and the limited political reforms included in the new draft constitution may unleash a new wave of unrest.

Endnotes

1- Charles Tilly, Contentious Performances, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.5.
2- Sydney Tarrow, Power in Movement 1998.
3- Asef Bayat, Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp.14-15.
4- For these points, see Della Porta and Diani, Social Movements: An Introduction, 1998; Crossley, Making Sense of Social Movements, 2002.
5- Sydney Tarrow, 1996.
6- Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow, Contentious Politics, 2007.
7- McCarthy and Zald, 1973, Resource Mobilization and Social Movements.
8- Quinton Wictorovicz, Islamic Activism: a social movement theory approach. Indiana univ press 2004.
9- McAdam et al 1996.
10- David Snow and Robert Benford, 1988.
11- Mueller et al, Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, 1992.
12- Terry Lynn Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," Comparative Politics 23, no. 1 (1990), 7.
13- Ruth Berrins Collier and David Collier. Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, The Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 28.
14- Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," World Politics 59, no.3 (April 2007): pp.341–69.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohammad Affan is the coordinator of Al Sharq program on political Islam and a Ph.D. researcher at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter.

Ismail Yaylaci, Assistant professor at Istanbul Sehir University in the department of political science and international relations.

ABOUT AL SHARQ STRATEGIC RESEARCH

A think tank that looks to undertake impartial, rigorous research to promote the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue and social justice.

Address: Istanbul Vizyon Park A1 Plaza Floor:6
No:68 Postal Code: 34197
Bahçelievler/ Istanbul / Turkey
Telephone: +902126031815
Fax: +902126031665
Email: info@sharqforum.org

AL SHARQ
STRATEGIC
RESEARCH
للأبحاث الاستراتيجية

research.sharqforum.org

/ SharqStrategic