

ourselves if it is the citizens who really make such a claim. Any discussion of possible manipulation and steering of protests is light-heartedly dismissed as conspiracy theories or elite propaganda. Counterfeit protest activity needs elaboration in further research.

Ivan Krastev states that democracy will survive out of this disruption caused by protest anti-politics. Twenty years ago, Patrick Ken-

non shared a similar opinion. Whatever happens and to whatever consequences, its result will still be called “democracy.” Krastev’s book on the protest wave is not only timely, fascinating, and profound, it is full of many superb references and observations, which made me several times passionately, wish I have come to them myself. Such brilliantly written books usually receive the label “must-read.” I opt to extend it to “must-think.”

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## Political Islam in the Age of Democratization

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By Kamran Bokhari and Farid Senzai

Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, ?????????? pages, \$?????????, ISBN 9781137008480.

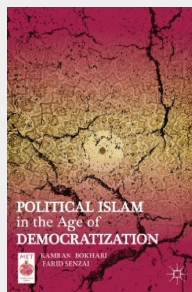
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Reviewed by Ravza Altuntas-Cakir

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IN *POLITICAL ISLAM in the Age of Democratization*, Kamran Bokhari and Farid Senzai explain the complex and diverse nature of Islamism by underscoring the primary role it plays in the context of democratization in the wider Middle East region. This work starts by offering a corrective view of Islamism in the first two chapters, which establishes the basis for the theoretical framework in the third chapter, which is then applied to several Islamist case studies. A major accomplishment is the authors’ convincing and systematic challenge to two monolithic biases within academia: *Islamic exceptionalism* and *Islamist universalism*. This review will focus on how Bokhari and Senzai present their opposing narrative in the first three chapters and the ways they validate it through the conceptual framework, as evidenced in the empirical studies.

In the initial chapters, the authors explain their theoretical position that offer a more nu-



anced and cognizant understanding of the relationship between democracy, Islam, and Islamism in challenging the notions of *Islamic exceptionalism* and *Islamist universalism*. The former notion refers to the idea that Islam is resistant to secularization and is therefore incompatible with democracy, which in turn makes democratization of Muslim societies improbable. Antithetically, the possibility of creating new and genuine ways of thinking about democracy that are specific to Muslim contexts in view of the significant role of religion in politics within Muslim societies is illustrated in this work. The second assumption challenged by the authors addresses the definition of Islamism in a way that simplifies a complex and varied movement with multiple dimensions and assigns universal qualities to actors that, in fact, do not necessarily share them. Bokhari and Senzai go to great lengths to defy this sweeping notion by presenting the Islamist image in many forms,

which hardly amounts to a singular or indeed uniform depiction.

In their theoretical framework, the authors classify Islamist movements based on their attitude with respect to democracy and offer a three-layered typology, namely *participators*, *conditionalists*, and *rejectors*. Participators are defined as the mainstream Islamist actors, such as the Muslim Brotherhood - who view Islamic political principles and democracy as politically compatible. Participators, - who have been the major actors in the construction of a Muslim democratic program, have abandoned hard-core ideology in favor of a democratic political structure that pragmatically responds to the demands of their respective Muslim populations. Conditionalists are the second category of Islamists, of which the “political Salafis” of the Kuwaiti Islamist Salafi Alliance (ISA) and Egypt’s al-Nour Party are prevalent examples (p. 85). Although conditionalists may be open to accepting and participating in democratic channels under “certain conditions;” on a philosophical level, due to their conservative interpretations of Islamic texts, they highlight the disaccord between Islam and democracy, as the former expresses support for the divine as opposed to the latter’s belief in human sovereignty (p. 44). According to Bokhari and Senzai, conditionalists’ genuine democratic participation alongside the participators is essential if regional democratization is to succeed. Rejectors, the third typology, constitute a very small minority among Islamists, as represented by groups such as al-Qaeda and Hizb al-Tahrir, they denounce democracy as wholly un-Islamic or an anti-Islamic concept, thus they refuse to participate in the democratic process.

Bokhari and Senzai test the strength of their theoretical framework using seven case stud-

ies over the last three decades. Based on a broad historical overview and empirical analysis, the authors categorize the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its various offshoots as participators, Salafis as conditionalists, al-Qaeda as well as the Taliban as rejectors, Iranian Shia Islamism as participatory, and Turkey’s ruling AK Party as post-Islamist. In general, Bokhari and Senzai demonstrate the successful applicability of their three-layered typology, yet they do accept that there may be exceptions to their typology, such as Hamas (a MB offshoot) and Arab Shia Hezbollah, which do not fit “neatly into any of the” three categories (p. 169).

The results emanating from the case studies make a significant contribution to the deconstruction of *Islamic exceptionalism* and *Islamist universalism* dichotomy. Overall, they illustrate that it is not Islam itself that dictates the outcome, but rather the different Islamist actors that interpret and negotiate the consequences of the interaction between Islam and democracy. Moreover, the ideological, systematic, and practical uses of democracy and democracy institutions within Islamism are not monolithic, but rather are based on a complex mixture of causes as rooted in national and transnational contexts, which in turn create the diverse contemporary political environments of the respective cases. Although generally convincing, one weakness of the case studies is the lack of original research. Rather than relying mainly on secondary sources, conducting primary research would provide more original and holistic empirical studies in understanding how the political leaders and other ideologues would interpret the movements’ relation to democracy and democratic rule.

Nevertheless, it is a strength that rather than asserting a normative assessment of how de-

mocracy should be in the MENA region today and in the future, this work has engaged in examining the history of democratization using cases of Islamist movements with a focus on how future Muslim democracies are likely to come into existence. The authors reach the conclusion that democratization will likely lead to various Muslim national democracies, although not all will become democratic. In other words, although over time the norm will become democratization in the region, there will be exceptions. In addition, the “end product” of Muslim democracies will almost certainly be different than the universalist Western conception (p. 194). In addition, Islamists, participators as well as a considerable number of conditionalists, will assume the leading role in the construction of democratic systems in the Middle East with Islamic overtones.

It is an undoubtedly ambitious undertaking to encapsulate almost all major Islamist movements into one single volume, as the authors attempt here, without potentially undermining the depth of analysis, as is the case with the AK Party in this work. The authors’ analysis appears rushed, if not too assertive, to say that the AK Party “can no longer be considered part of Islamism” (p. 173) and “Turkish Islamism had given way to post-Islamism” (p. 176). What has been observed recently is not a decreased but in fact an increased reference to the AK Party’s Islamist roots and the revitalization of Islamist sentiments among the

AK Party base. More importantly, leaving the spectrum of the secularized methodological framework aside, what really ontologically differentiates the “former Islamists” of post-Islamism who “seek to realize their religious ideals through democratic politics and a secular state” from participatory Islamists is ambiguous (p. 183). In essence, although there is a need for new terminology to provide analytical tools in order to make sense of the emergent patterns within the realm of political Islam, the concept of post-Islamism, as discussed by the writers, appears vague with limited descriptive power in effectively explaining the complexity of the current Turkish context.

In conclusion, Bokhari and Senzai present a generally persuasive, informed, and nuanced conceptual framework for understanding different “Islamists’ behavior in relation to democracy” and the different ways democracy can be interpreted and operationalized within Islamic societies (p. 169). This accomplishment is the major strength of this work: it successfully challenges the erroneous generalizations between *Islamic exceptionalism* and *Islamist universalism* based on a cogent theoretical approach supported by broad historical overview and empirical study. Overall, this book constitutes a must read for students of Muslim politics; it is an informative, resourceful, and easily comprehensible text for anyone who desires to understand political Islam today.