


Political Islam: A Legitimized Political Alternative, Misunderstood in the International Liberal Order

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*Political Islam; A Legitimized Political Alternative,
Misunderstood in the International Liberal Order*

Governmental Politics of the Middle East

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Introduction

In foreign policy circles in Washington, there exists a common narrative that political Islam is a threat to the Middle East and regional aspirations for democracy. Policy circles have dedicated entire research projects and centers to the study of ‘fundamental’ Islamic movements; scholars have authored fields of study on the linkage between political Islamic parties and radicalism; Western governments have attempted policies of deterrence against Islamic political parties, perceiving them as a threat to liberalism itself. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair famously remarked that the ‘threat’ of Islamic politics is “spreading across the world... it is destabilizing communities and even nations. It is undermining the possibility of peaceful coexistence in an era of globalization. And in the face of this threat, we seem curiously reluctant to acknowledge it and powerless to counter it effectively.”¹ The former National Security Advisor of the Trump administration, Michael Flynn, remarked that political Islam was like a ‘metastasized cancer,’ that is sheathed behind religion, but seeks eventual global domination.²

The West’s reaction to the Arab Spring revolutions, and the rise of political Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Ennadhda party, was one of dissuasion. Despite the demise of the Tunisian regime and the democratic election of the Ennahdha party into the new, constitutional parliament, critiques cast the Islamist movement as a ‘villainous’ force against the secular force of ‘good.’³ The same could be claimed with many Western policymaker’s preferences for the familiar — the thirty-year regime of President Hosni Mubarak or governmental military rule under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi — over the Muslim Brotherhood during 2011 and 2014.⁴ These assumptions were mired by a metaphorical perception that political Islam was inherently juxtaposed to liberalism, and that secularism was the ‘cure’ to the Middle East’s malaise.

Yet, religion has always been embedded in politics — even in secularized, Western ‘models’ of democratic institutionalism. In the United States, some of the most treasured principles are derived from the Ten Commandments, a biblical interpretation of moral and ethical instructions. These religious blueprints can be unearthed in many secularized states’ legal codes, as well as within the

¹ Patrick Wintour, “Tony Blair to Say Battle Against Islamic Extremism is Paramount,” *The Guardian*, (April 23, 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/apr/23/tony-blair-battle-islamic-extremism-political-agenda>

² Kevin Gosztola and Roqayah Chamseddine, “Trump Administration Largely Treats Islam as ‘Political Ideology’ Which Carries Profound Implications,” *Shadow Proof*, (February 23, 2017), <https://shadowproof.com/2017/02/23/trump-administration-largely-treats-islam-political-ideology-carries-profound-implications/>

³ Saumaya Ghannoushi, “Misconceptions of Political Islam,” *The Huffington Post*, (November, 2014), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/saumaya-ghannoushi/misconceptions-of-politic_b_6166086.html

⁴ Geoff Dyer and Heba Saleh, “Clinton and Obama: An American rift over an Egyptian despot,” *Financial Times*, (October 27, 2016), <https://www.ft.com/content/38aead1a-9614-11e6-a80e-bcd69f323a8b>

architecture of international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) and International Criminal Court of Justice (ICCJ).⁵ Why then, are Islamic elements rejected in the common ‘perception’ of proper governance? The answer lies in narratives play in orientalist narratives, such as the Huntingtonian “clash of civilizations,” about political Islam — one that should be deeply critiqued by policy circles and scholarship in the West.⁷ This worldview is one that casts Islam as the ideological opponent of Western interests, and a threat to liberalism itself.⁸ This narrative is a false one, domineered by what George Lakoff deems an “asymmetrical” metonymy that ignores the complexity of conflicts; political Islam is not a threat to Middle East societies, but really a *legitimized* tool of authentic political activism.⁹

How can discourse seek to understand the motives, and political validity, of political Islam? Firstly, it should be noted that political Islam is a separate entity of fundamentalism. While some political Islamist groups, such as Hamas, practice violence in the name of religiosity, that does not deem *all* political Islamist movements radicalized entities nor a threat to political institutionalism. Secondly, it is important to analyze the political, historical context out of which political Islamism was born; while Islam was incorporated in Ottoman rule for centuries, Islamism is a modern invention, a reinterpretation of the religion’s political dimension that applies Islam to modern nation-state systems in the international liberal order. It is important to understand the potency of political Islamist parties and movements in the 21st century; while the Arab Spring was mired by political uncertainty, the phenomenon proved Islamist party’s immense political capabilities.

Abstract

In this essay, I will dichotomize the aspects of political Islam that make it a legitimate, successful alternative to authoritarian governance. I argue that conceived political Islam was conceived out of the failures of secular, nationalist regimes, and still competes with these ideational movements in the 21st century. From centuries of successful Ottoman rule, embedded political structures within Quranic texts and interpretations, and the provision of necessary services unacknowledged under authoritarian regimes, political Islam has emerged as a useful, *authentic* alternative to Westernized expectations of governance. Two elements define the allure of political Islam as a legitimate alternative. Firstly, Islam is universally familiar, opposed to the cosmetic nationalist and secular narratives used by Middle Eastern dictators. Secondly, Islam, like other Abrahamic religions, is organically political, as it embodies principles of governance through Quran and Hadith. It is important for the scholarly discourse to pivot towards a more analytical, understanding approach to the motives of contemporary Islamism, noting its capability to achieve a plurality of governance styles and address a decades-long ‘identity crisis.’

⁵ “The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact,” *The United Nations Global Compact*, (Accessed April 24, 2017). <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

⁶ Doris Buss, *Globalizing family values: the Christian right in international politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁷ Huntington, Samuel P. "The clash of civilizations?." *Foreign Affairs* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993): 22-49.

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, (Penguin Books India, 1997).

⁹ George Lackoff, “Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify war in the Gulf,” *Peace Research*, vol. 23, no. 2/3, Canadian Mennonite University: May 1991. pp. 25-32.

Out of the Ashes of Ottoman Rule

In 1994, Columbia University professor, Edward Said, authored *On Orientalism*, a colossal contribution to the study of the post-colonialist approach.¹⁰ Said argued that narratives and depictions of the Middle East and Islam were mired with dire misconception; indigenous culture and Islamic rule was deemed ‘backwards,’ requiring the civilized touch of European modernity. Of course, modernity was conceptualized in a euro-centric dimension; Christian missionaries were encouraged to indoctrinate Muslim societies into followers of Christ; in the mandates of Lebanon and Syria, French rule would impose designed social hierarchies to excluded the Sunni Muslim majority, preventing resistance to French imposed rule; indirect monarchs were installed to concentrate on westernized ‘reforms’ aimed at economic output, casting Islamic piety as a deterrent to industrialization and modernity. One of the largest watershed moments in the collective Islamic struggle, was 1924.¹¹ The Ottoman Empire had disintegrated following the conclusion of the First World War, and in its ashes remained a political uncertainty. Ethnic Turks capitalized on this governance vacuum, abolishing the last caliphate — the chief Islamic political authority of the Ottoman Empire — and stripped much Islamic representation in the favor of secularization and discarding Arabic — the language of the Quran — for Turkish as the national language. The government isolated the former Arab Hamidian regime members — Islamic officials — and pursued a national agenda of modernization reform.¹² Scholar and Brookings fellow, Dr. Shadi Hamid, noted that Turkish tanzimat reforms ‘eviscerated’ sharia law, weakening Muslim clerics and confidence of the Islamic population.¹³ 1924 is exemplary of what scholar Fouad Ajami calls the “crisis of legitimacy” — the shared feeling of lack of cultural and religious authenticity.¹⁴

Islam versus Ideation

There were many movements and ideologies that attempted to fill the void of Islamic rule. The most influential ideational movement was Arab nationalism, conceived by a class of Arab elites and intellectuals. Influenced by Western nationalist movements such as the German Unification in 1848 and European institutions, scholars such as Nasif al-Yaziji, Michel Aflaq, and Salah ad-Din al-Bitar, explored the Arab identity as a cultural ‘other’ to Persians and Turks.¹⁵ Arab nationalism sought to remedy the gaping wound of imperialism and create a postcolonial forum for discourse, championing the unity of the Arab world. One of the pioneering aspects of Arab nationalism was the aspect of community, or the الأمة, “umma.” Arab nationalism sought to bridge Arab peoples across the Gulf, Levant, and North Africa through a singular ideational narrative, something called pan-Arabism. Yet, this ideology left many questions unanswered, such as “who could be defined as an Arab? How could one pursue pan-Arabism within nationalist boundaries? And what indigenous minorities could be included in the Arab nationalist cause?” The ideology placed immense emphasis

¹⁰ Edward W. Said, “Orientalism reconsidered,” *Race & Class*, 27, no. 2, (1985): 1-15.

¹¹ Shadi Hamid, “Is Islam ‘Exceptional’?” *The Atlantic*, (June 6, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/06/islam-politics-exceptional/485801/>

¹² Great Britain, Foreign Office, Historical Section, *The Rise of the Turks and the Pan-Turanian Movement*. (London: Foreign Office, 1920), pp. 80, 81.

¹³ Hamid, “Is Islam Exceptional’?” 2016.

¹⁴ Fouad Ajami, “The End of Pan-Arabism,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 57 no. 2, (Winter 1978) pp. 356

¹⁵ “The two ‘isms’ of the Middle East,” *Al Jazeera*, (February 4, 2008). <http://www.aljazeera.com/focus/arabunity/2008/02/200852518534468346.html>

on the charismatic charm and strongman rule of authoritarian leaders. Some of the most notable Arab nationalist despots were Gamel Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt and legendary ‘father’ of Arab nationalism, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi.¹⁶ This emphasis was at the sacrifice of political individuality; national interest was concentrated towards lofty foreign policy objectives, such as the defeat of Zionism and Israel, the liberation of Palestine, and opposing the West, rather than rebuilding the internal political institutions. While many of these authoritarian leaders did pursue series of national reform, it was cosmetic attempts to withhold temporary popular support among citizens. Reformist policies were uniformly economic — Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal for Egyptian profit and pursued agrarian reform to financially appease peasant farmers; the Iranian Shah, Reza Pahlavi, pursued the ‘White Revolution’ where tribal and religious communities were weakened through land reform and profit-sharing industrial schemes.¹⁷ Political individuality — grassroots participation in governance — was not guaranteed in the regimes of Arab nationalist leaders. In Saddam Hussein’s government, full-scale political participation was limited only to Ba’ath Party members, just a mere 8% of the Iraqi population, and the establishment and engagement of competing political parties were closely monitored by the Hussein regime.¹⁸ Sectarian identities, most notably the Iraqi Shiites, were excluded from many political rights and activism — persecuted at any sign of resistance.¹⁹ Short-term reforms bolstered popular support, but only from citizens that were allowed to engage in the political arena.

The orientalist view that Islam was ‘incompatible’ with modernity, with democracy, with proper governance, was a worldview that was passed onto authoritarian leaders in the mid-twentieth century. While many regional despots pursued an anti-west agenda — capitalizing upon shared memories of colonialism and imperialism — the maintained the concept that Islam was a threat to politics. The Egyptian Free Officers Party in the 1950’s and 1960’s were in constant contention with the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁰ Nasser and his government recognized the grassroots fellowship the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood had, and was skeptical of many of its intellectual, educated members and used a Brotherhood assassination attempt to justify intense political repression. While the Muslim Brotherhood had supported the Free Officers’ coup d’etat that ousted King Farouk, a British puppet, Nasser sought greater benefit in delegitimizing them, accusing them of conspiracy against the Egyptian government and imprisoned over two thousand Brotherhood leaders, including an immensely influential Islamic theologian, Sayyid Qutb.²¹ In 1982, Syrian Ba’athist dictator, Hafez al-Assad, massacred over a thousand individuals in Hama with aerial forces and hydrogen cyanide in order to quell the Muslim Brotherhood’s political outcries against the socialist, secular government.²² Authoritarian leaders placed a metaphorical noose around Islamic political groups and identities, and contradicted their own ideational messages of anti-imperialism and

¹⁶ William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Amir Arjomand, Said, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): pp. 72–73.

¹⁸ “Iraq: A Population Silenced,” *U.S. Department of State Archive: The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*, (2002), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/15996.htm>

¹⁹ Vali Naser, “When the Shiites rise,” *Foreign Affairs*, (2006): 58-74.

²⁰ Steven A. Cook, “Nearly 60 years ago, Egypt’s generals tried to crush the Muslim Brotherhood. It didn’t go well,” *Foreign Policy*, (July 17, 2013). <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/17/echoes-of-nasser/>

²¹ “Portrait of a Revolutionary,” *The Economist*, (July 5, 2010). <http://www.economist.com/node/16588026>

²² Julian Perry Robinson, “Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria,” *Harvard Sussex Program Occasional Paper*, Issue 4, (June 2013). http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/spru/hsp/occasional%20papers/HSPOP_4.pdf

westernization with the very use of Western principles of secularization and nationalism. It was clear that regime leaders foresaw the natural aptitude Islamism possessed, and authoritarian persecution against Islamic factions demonstrated a deep-seated paranoia for an Islamic revolution. While Muslims experienced intense oppression, authoritarian discrimination molded a narrative for Islam — one that would help shape it as a viable political alternative. Underneath the thumb of dictators, Islam experienced what Stevan A. Cook described as a “culture of oppression” and a “narrative of victimhood,” where their basic religious rights and subaltern voices were cast aside in favor of corruption, evil, and ungodliness.²³ Ayatollah Khomeini used this potent “culture of oppression” in the 1979 Iranian Revolution when he returned from exile imposed by the Shah’s government. Khomeini was arrested after speaking out against the Shah and his White Revolution reforms, and the government targeted Khomeini and the Fadayan-e Islam movement. While in exile in Iraq, the Islamic leader disseminated cassette copies of lectures speaking of an Islamic revival, restoring Islamic justice and spirituality as the rightful rule of law. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt too, used this narrative in 2013 when they maintained control of the government through the election of President Mohamed Morsi. They ran on campaigns of social justice and reform, advocating against exclusionary policies that discriminated against practicing Muslims and free speech. These political and moral struggles against authoritarian structures served as an underlying story that lured those that practiced *jihad* — the Muslim concept of a spiritual struggle and need to protect ones’ faith from the enemies of Islam.

Politics and Islam; An Embedded Identity

There is a common conception within scholarship and policy communities that Islam is incompatible with liberal democracy. Such reasoning explains why political Islam was excluded from political arenas to begin with, and continue to be under regimes in the contemporary regional order. Yet, politics and Islam are synonymous in many ways; governance is embedded into the history of the religion and state building entrenched into its most holy of texts, the Quran. Brookings Institution fellow, Dr. Shadi Hamid, has claimed that Islam is inherently ‘exceptional,’ having politics part of its complete identity. Hamid has noted that this characteristic traces back to the beginning of Islam, when the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant, politician, theologian, and soldier that warred with neighboring tribes in his own ‘holy struggle.’²⁴ The base that Muhammad constructed in Medina was a political entity, to which he and his followers had to defend, annex, and conduct foreign policies with the sedentary, monotheistic communities outside the city. Muhammad built a metaphorical state, from his Quraysh tribe and from his fellowship, and as leader was forced to conduct cost-benefit analysis to achieve strategic aims.²⁵ While Islam and the political context of state-building have evolved, the humble beginnings of the Islamic religion still resonate with Muslims and political movements. Struggle, mass grassroots movements, and devotion to the Quranic blueprint for governance serve as strategic political tools.

One of the greatest reasons why political Islam triumphed over authoritarian governance was its universality — the region was familiar with Islam, far more with the imported ideological movements that dictators borrowed from Europe’s nationalist movements and institutions. While political Islam is complex, its blueprint for governance is simple and well-understood by Muslims.

²³ Cook, “Nearly 60 Years ago, Egypt’s generals tried to crush the Muslim Brotherhood. It didn’t go well,” 2013.

²⁴ Shadi Hamid and Will McCants, “Rethinking Political Islam,” *The Brookings Institution*, (May 6, 2016). <https://www.brookings.edu/research/rethinking-political-islam/>

²⁵ William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and statesman*, Vol. 409, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

The message of the Quran and the Hadith is “accessible and straightforward,” ensuring rule by the book.²⁶ Just like any religion, the Islamic religion expresses a set of legal codes that exist to guide the moral, ethical, and principled behavior of its followers. Despite the multiplicity of ways that states and societies interpret Islamic codified law across the region, Shari’a law was much more applicable, approachable, and understandable than the incalculable agendas that dictators preached. For example, Nasserism and pan-Arabism set the defeat of Israel as one of their loftiest foreign policy objectives — perceiving that the direct defeat of Zionism would serve as an indirect loss hit to the United States and indirect liberation of the Palestinians — yet did not justify these goals with sufficient organization and statist resources. By the time of the 1967 Six Day War, the ‘Waterloo’ of Nasser’s presidency, the viability of Arab nationalism was disproven and destroyed the confidence in the movement’s legitimacy and Nasser’s ability to lead a hegemonic Egypt.²⁷ On the contrary, political Islam has not set increasingly ambitious goals that their pan-Arab peers had in the 1950’s and 1960’s. While many Islamist movements have expressed sentiments of anti-Americanism, most parties have focused on domestic reform of the judicial system, educational reform, and strengthening institutions of political participation.

The provision of services — services that authoritarian governments did not guarantee — was a crucial aspect of why political Islam prevailed over secularized and nationalist forms of administration. Islamic social service has evolved into a strategy and key element of their success; parties and movements have mobilized medical caravans, emergency response teams, health facilities, and ‘madrassats’ — schools — to fill perceived infrastructural voids the government has created. Authoritarians often looked beyond their borders to obtain domestic approval. Nasser provoked Israel in a series of battles from 1948 to 1967 in order to ‘defeat’ Zionism with pan-Arabism. Saddam Hussein pursued the eight-year Iran-Iraq war and then, the invasion of Kuwait, in the hopes that it would distract Iraqi citizens from the estimated \$35 to \$45 billion war debt the state had accumulated.²⁸ Political Islamic parties recognized the miscalculation of authoritarian despots and oriented their strategy to garner popular support through grassroots outreach. Instead of following the hegemonic desires of regime leaders, strengthening the stature of *watanniya* — the ‘homeland’ — abroad, political Islam enabled Muslims to focus on the *ulama*, the Arabic word for community. The Muslim Brotherhood was a pioneering force in the provision of services. The . Steven Brooke has remarked that availability of these services increase drastically before any parliamentary or presidential election; the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt timed much of their outreach before 2013 presidential election, dressing their members in branded clothing and advertising their efforts on social media pages.²⁹ The proven empty narrative of pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism naturally drew many Muslims to what they were familiar with: their faith and their community.

Interpretational Plurality

While Islamic codified law has been perceived as a binary, static doctrine, its interpretational flexibility is one of the greatest reasons why political Islam is a legitimate mechanism of

²⁶ Hamid, “Is Islam ‘Exceptional’?” 2016.

²⁷ Adeed Dawisha, “Requiem for Arab Nationalism,” *The Middle East Quarterly*, (Winter 2003) pp. 25-41.

²⁸ “Iraq Economic Data (1989-2003),” Central Intelligence Agency, (Accessed April 27, 2017). https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/chap2_annxD.html

²⁹ Steven Brooke, “Assumptions and Agendas in the Study of Islamic Social Service Provision,” *Project on Middle East Political Science*, (September 23, 2014). <https://pomeps.org/2014/09/29/assumptions-and-agendas-in-the-study-of-islamic-social-service-provision/>

governance. One of the largest aspects of political Islam is the plurality of governmental compatibility. These systems have evolved to pander to sectarian identities and correspond to geopolitical interests, implementing Shari'a law through a variety of legal and governmental channels. In Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy has existed since 1926, maintaining Wahhabist rule through a body of Islamic leaders and jurists, the ulama.³⁰ Saudi Arabia's brand of Islamic governance differs with many of its regional neighbors, with an emphasis on hereditary rule under the al-Saud royal family and the ulama under the by the Al ash-Sheikh family.³¹ Saudi Arabia's neighbor, Yemen, functions within a more tribalized political context.³² With greater emphasis placed upon localized authority and intra-tribal structures guided by chieftains, patronage, and tribute.³³ In Lebanon, governance is more sensitive to sectarian identities and minority subaltern voices, with a parliamentary democratic republic that prioritizes confessionalism, a system of governance where offices are always held by a civil servant from a particular religion or religious sect.³⁴ According to this system, established in the 1989 Ta'if Agreement, the Lebanese president must be a Maronite Christian, the Parliament Speaker a Shi'a Muslim, and the Prime Minister, a Sunni Muslim.³⁵ Tunisia stands as a recent example of political Islamism in liberal democratic systems, a successful product of the Arab Spring revolts in 2011. The Ennahdha party rose in opposition to Tunisian secularists, socialists, and fundamentalist factions, successful in the October 2011 elections and reconstructing the Tunisian constitution into a unitary democratic republic.³⁶ This open-interpretation gives Islamic parties to adapt, mold, and shape a national vision that corresponds to the constraints of local political realities. The ability to narrate their own political future through spirituality presented a more personal, locally authentic side to politics that was not available under nationalist and secular authoritarianism.

Conclusion

There lie many obstacles ahead for political Islamism in the Middle East, even in the face of authoritarian structures. One of the largest remaining regimes in the Levant, the government of Bashar al-Assad, still stands in the face of a multiplicity of political Islamist factions, militias, and sectarian rebel groups. Some Islamic governmental systems, such as the Saudi Arabian monarchy and the Islamic Republic of Iran, have been criticized for egregious regard for human rights, adopting an authoritarian statist persona parallel to those that political Islam seeks to dismantle. Even in the most 'western' form of democratic institutionalism in Tunisia, the Ennahdha Party has

³⁰ Joseph A. Kechichian, "The role of the Ulama in the politics of an Islamic state: The case of Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 01 (1986): 53-71.

³¹ Eleanor A. Doumato, "Gender, monarchy, and national identity in Saudi Arabia," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (1992): 31-47.

³² Soumaya Ghannoushi, "Misconceptions of Political Islam," pp. 1.

³³ Louis A. Gordon and Ian Oxnevad, *Middle East Politics for the New Millennium: A Constructivist Approach*, (Lanhan: Lexington Books, 2016): pp. 182.

³⁴ Clyde G. Hess Jr, and Herbert L. Bodman Jr. "Confessionalism and feudality in Lebanese politics," *The Middle East Journal* (1954): 10-26.

³⁵ Ralph E. Crow, "Religious sectarianism in the Lebanese political system," *The Journal of Politics* 24, no. 3 (1962): 489-520.

³⁶ Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle, and Francesco Cavatorta, "Beyond Ghannouchi. Islamism and Social Change in Tunisia." *Middle East Report* (2012).

experienced challenges to balancing the democratic experiment with the terrorist threat, geopolitical environment, and lack of sufficient economic productivity.³⁷

Yet, the most paramount obstacle is not the application of political Islam into governance structures, but international acceptance and understanding of it — as a peer of other political movements. The orientalist literature and misled perspectives surrounding political Islam, Shari'a law, and the religion itself is often confused for fundamentalism and terrorism. It should be the responsibility of scholars and policymakers to analyze the reason why political Islam is considered a more legitimized form of governance to many in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia. Through two elements, Islam serves as a viable alternative to authoritarian structures. It is universally familiar in the region, assessing an authentic identity that had been threatened under imperialism, modernism, and nationalist forces. Secondly, Islam is organically political in nature; from the text of the Quran, the state-building beginnings of the Islamic religion, and interpretational plurality of governmental styles, Islam is presented as a natural choice against the forced, ambiguous narratives of authoritarian nationalism and secularism.

³⁷ Ghannoushi, "Misconceptions of Political Islam," pp. 2.

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