

Introduction

On a December day in 2010, twenty-eight-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself ablaze in a small Tunisian town. Earlier that day, local authorities had confiscated his fruit cart and publicly humiliated him. Soon, Bouazizi's act of desperation and search for dignity ignited protests in his hometown. The proverbial fire quickly spread to neighboring mining towns and shortly reached the coastal cities. Bouazizi's self-sacrifice ignited a revolution that toppled the autocratic regime in Tunisia in twenty-four days. This was just the beginning. The Tunisian uprising inspired millions in the region as they poured onto the streets of Cairo, Amman, Rabat, Sena, and Tripoli to demand jobs, freedom, and dignity. The people had revolted before with similar demands, but this time was different. This time they succeeded in overthrowing their long-time dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya and gained concessions in Morocco and Jordan. Observers, hopeful, dubbed the revolutionary wave the "Arab Spring."

As the revolutionary dust settled, the reality of regime change hit many. Transitions required organized actors with resources and mobilizational capacity. Political parties sprouted up with the hope of translating the revolutionary momentum into democratic regimes. It soon became clear that the youthful revolutionaries were unorganized, divided, and without resources. The most organized actors with mobilizational capacity turned out to be Islamist movements.¹ They already had formed a formidable opposition under the former autocratic regimes. As these regimes fell one after another, Islamists made critical advances. With the fall of dictators, Islamists in exile returned, those in prison regained their freedom, and together they

¹ I adopt Hegghammer's definition of Islamism, which is "activism justified by primary reference to Islam" (see Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go?"). Scholars often adopt "a call for application of Sharia rule" as the definitive criterion for Islamism (see Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*). I agree with Masoud (*Counting Islam*, 1) that this criterion is problematic since non-Islamist parties may call for sharia rule as well. It is also common that other Islamist parties do not explicitly call for sharia rule and yet still justify their activism by primary reference to Islam, as we observe in the case of Turkey.

established legally recognized political parties. Their strong grassroots and wide membership delivered them victories in transitional elections.

Witnessing Islamists' ascent, analysts revisited the old debate on Islamism and democracy. For skeptics, Islamists posed a threat to democratic transitions; the Arab Spring, for them, was now an "Islamist Winter." They recycled the arguments of Bernard Lewis or Samuel Huntington, who expected Islamists to build autocratic regimes based on Islamic principles. In Lewis' words, "[f]or Islamists, democracy ... [was] a one-way road on which there [was] no return, no rejection of the sovereignty of God, as exercised through His chosen representatives. Their electoral policy has been classically summarized as 'One man (men only), one vote, once.'"² This skepticism stemmed from essentialism that treated Islam as an antidemocratic force.³ Islamists who promised to apply Islamic principles to politics were inadvertently a threat to democracy.

Others contested the essentialist take and entertained the transformative impact of sociopolitical contexts on Islamist movements. For them, Islam lacked an unchanging political essence but offered a multiplicity of interpretations.⁴ What Muslims make of Islam mattered more in discerning the relationship between Islamism and democracy. And these formulations were open to continuous change; Muslims articulated and rearticulated their political visions with rising opportunities and in interaction with their political rivals as well as their environments. Political institutions and opportunities, previous learning experiences, and the behavior of other political actors, all mattered.

In reality, Islamist movements have a track record of change under different contexts. The Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, hereafter AKP) in Turkey was an excellent case in point. Having roots in Islamism dating back to the 1970s, the party came to power in 2002 with a promise of "moderation" and commitment to liberal democracy. Operating within a secular political framework, the

² Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 111–12.

³ Essentialists suggest that there is no separation of religion and politics in Islam, which also rejects any separation between private and public spheres, whereby the sole authority is vested in God. See Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, 54–56; Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*, 5–6; Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" 208. Huntington also suggested in his famous "clash of civilizations" thesis that Islamists would be the gravest threat not only to democracy in their own societies but also to Western civilization at the global level. See Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

⁴ Anti-essentialists argued that understanding the relation between Islam, Islamists, and democracy requires a closer analysis of each and every society under scrutiny, for there is no one Islam but many tendencies and interpretations which may or may not be compatible with democratic values. See, for instance, Esposito and Voll, *Islam and Democracy*; Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*.

party leaders took several democratizing steps to improve political rights and civil liberties in the country. For many, the AKP proved Islamists' democratic habituation. That is why many treated Turkey as a "model" for the transitioning countries in the Arab world.

Islamists in the region also picked up the reference and tried to calm skeptics' fears by highlighting their resemblance to the AKP. Such assurances and their unmatched mobilizational capacity delivered electoral victories. Harakat al-Nahda (Renaissance Movement, hereafter Ennahda) in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood's (Ikhwan al-Muslimeen) Hizb al-Hurriya wal-Adala (Freedom and Justice Party, hereafter FJP) in Egypt joined the AKP in Turkey as freely elected Islamist parties in power. Upon their wins, the party leaders promised to bring democracy to their countries.

A decade later, only Ennahda has fulfilled its promise. The party worked with other stakeholders to build the only democratic regime in the Arab world.⁵ Surprisingly, the AKP, the "model" for the Arab world, took an authoritarian turn after 2011. In a few years, Turkey was no longer a democracy.⁶ Egypt also reverted to authoritarian rule, albeit under different circumstances. The Brotherhood dominated the transition at the cost of alienating most Egyptians. Its exclusionary practices and ambiguous democratic platform created a perfect pretext for the military intervention of 2013. The movement has since fallen into disarray as Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt's new president, cut the democratic experience short.

What caused the different trajectories of these three Islamist parties in power? Why has Ennahda adhered to democratic principles while the AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood adopted hegemonic, majoritarian, and exclusionary politics? Is Islamism (and Islam) at odds with democracy as skeptics claim?

Islamists' track record in power seems to vindicate essentialists' claim about the anti-democratic tendencies of Islamism. I argue, however, that these assertions are not only misleading but also inaccurate. The Islamist experience in Turkey, Tunisia, and Egypt clearly shows that Islam's political manifestation is varied. The three countries prove that the relationship between Islamism and democracy is complex. Essentialists' reductionism fails to capture this complexity. How Islamists relate to democratic practices has changed over time as well as across and within different countries. Some Islamists have undermined democracy once in power, whereas others strengthened and nourished it.

⁵ In the summer of 2021, President Kais Saied, elected as a political outsider in 2019, issued emergency measures and suspended parliament for an indefinite period. His power grab put the nascent Tunisian democracy to a test, which is still ongoing at the time of writing.

⁶ Esen and Gumuscu, "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey."

A key finding of this book is that all three of these Islamist parties indeed internalized democratic procedures to a great extent, contrary to essentialists' claims. Both the AKP after 2011 and the Brotherhood in Egypt until 2013 showed clear commitment to electoral politics. Elections for Islamists were not a "one time, one man, one vote" affair as Lewis suggested. It was a clear political choice.

Equally crucial, some Islamists went beyond electoralism to commit to liberal democratic principles. These "liberal Islamists," as I call them, even after coming to power, have adhered to pluralism, institutional forbearance, and mutual tolerance in addition to electoral politics.

Islamism is therefore never monolithic. Instead, a central claim of this book is that mainstream Islamist parties include various groups that self-position along a spectrum of "electoralism" and "liberalism." This plurality of positions eschew essentialism and invites further analysis.

This book, relying on original research in three countries, explains why some Islamist parties commit to democracy while others undermine it. I trace these parties' democratic experience by unpacking intra-party dynamics, particularly the diverging perceptions of political power, democracy, and civil liberties. I find that Islamist parties are comprised of groups with different understandings of democracy. While most Islamists converge on the centrality of elections, they disagree on the norms underpinning electoral politics. *Electoralists* carry majoritarian and exclusionary tendencies, while *liberals* commit to pluralist and inclusionary politics.

Yet it is not the absence of liberals among Islamists that explains why some Islamist parties remain committed to democracy while others do not. Rather, the balance of power among factions determines the party's trajectory. Most mainstream Islamist parties, the focus of this book, host both groups and many fence-sitters within their organization. While liberals' dominance produces democratic commitments at the party level, their weakness can also determine the hegemonic posture of Islamist parties. To put it differently, wherever liberal Islamists dominate, they keep their parties committed to liberal democracy. Otherwise, electoralists inject majoritarian and exclusionary tendencies into their parties.

Liberal Islamists within each movement have gained prominence in all three countries, yet only in Tunisia – and briefly in Turkey – could they successfully transform the Islamist movement into a democratic force. In Egypt, liberal Islamists tried and failed to induce a similar transformation in the Brotherhood and remained marginal within mainstream Islamism. What are the reasons behind this disparity? Why have liberal Islamists in Tunisia succeeded in carrying out a large-scale democratization which led to the marginalization of electoralists while their Egyptian counterparts failed and became marginalized themselves? Why did

liberal Islamists in Turkey succeed initially only to lose their position to electoralists later? These questions are the focus of this book.

I argue that power distribution among different factions determines the course of an Islamist party. The key to power balances, in turn, lies in organizational resources. When a faction commands key resources, it can build a tight incentive structure, which is required to form a dominant alliance within the party. Selective and collective incentives offered to members cultivate loyalties and convert fence-sitters and even some rivals into allies. Extra-party resources often fortify organizational resources and build a virtuous cycle of dominance for the ruling alliance. I trace the internal struggle over organizational resources in all three parties and explain why and how liberals prevailed in Ennahda but not in the AKP or the Muslim Brotherhood.

This approach advances our understanding of Islamist party behavior in key respects. Existing accounts focus on the transformative impact of external factors on either individual Islamists or the entire party organization as a group. Scholars have done brilliant work in unpacking the origins of democratic commitments, both electoral and liberal, among Islamists, as I discuss in Chapter 1. They have studied the impact of external factors such as inclusion and exclusion on Islamists' democratic attitudes. In certain cases, these studies documented how "inclusion" in formal politics allowed Islamists to spread their message to wider audiences, win the hearts and minds of Muslims, and obtain power. Thus, electoral politics became a protective shield against state repression, a means to capture power, establish a more Islamic society, *and* maintain legitimacy. Such internalization, scholars posit, stems from strategic calculations.

Sustained political participation, some scholars have also argued, taught Islamists, at least some of them, the value of democratic politics beyond its immediate benefits. Sometimes it was the transformative impact of political learning and political socialization with ideological rivals, while at other times it was Islamists' common experience with the political other under repression or living in exile in democratic countries that altered their political preferences. Regardless of the trigger, they came to internalize democratic norms and principles at a deeper ideological level and appreciate the democratic system and its inherent qualities. Hence, my terminology: "liberal Islamists."

These accounts offer compelling explanations of individuals' ideological transformation induced by inclusion and/or exclusion. However, they fail to explain why some Islamists commit to democratic norms as a result of such experiences, while others do not. They also suffer from the problem of indeterminacy. As a result, ideological

change remains a puzzle, often overdetermined and hard to theorize. In addition, with their focus on individuals' experiences, these accounts also fail to overcome the aggregation problem: how members' personal experiences translate to the party level. The question of why some Islamist parties adhere to democratic principles while others adopt hegemonic, majoritarian, and exclusionary politics once in power remains unanswered.

More recently, scholarly attention has focused on the impact of external factors on party behavior. Accordingly, the military, secular civil society, popular protests, regional developments, or international pressures have explained the actions of Islamist parties. The stronger the pressure from outsiders, the greater the incentives for Islamists to commit to democracy.

Often absent in these accounts is the divergence of responses to such external stimulus among Islamists. After their rise to power, different Islamists approached crises and constraints in distinct ways. When faced with similar challenges, some Islamists recognized incentives for collaboration and engagement, while others within the same party perceived threats. They disagreed, for instance, on what political protests signified; or they estimated their party's social support and political power differently; or they read regional developments in a very different light. Interestingly, all factions operated within the same context and faced similar constraints and incentives. Yet their perceptions of their political rivals and what the best course of action was in a specific context diverged markedly.

Such accounts oftentimes retrospectively rationalize party behavior instead of explaining how parties formulate their strategies. This hindsight bias obscures internal struggles over party behavior and strategy and explains away the entire causal mechanism behind party behavior. These explanations assume that parties are monolithic and unitary, and that they formulate the most rational strategy under given circumstances. Such assumptions are faulty. All political parties, including Islamists, host a diversity of opinions and preferences.

I argue that party behavior in a particular instance is not the *only* rational choice the actors could make under given circumstances but a product of internal coalition-building efforts of different factions. This implies that a party's response to the exact same stimulus can be completely different according to different factions.

A more rigorous analysis, thus, requires a closer look at intraparty politics. We need to move beyond the individual level to unpack power dynamics within political parties, often treated as unitary actors. Political factions offer an analytically useful level of analysis that both supersedes the individual level and addresses the issue of aggregation. Indeed,

factions form major sources of party change,⁷ taking primacy over external factors such as electoral defeats, social dynamics, or economic crises. In other words, the impact of such external factors should be placed within the broader framework of intraparty politics.

In this book, I analyze intraparty politics to identify Islamist groups with diverging democratic attitudes. By focusing on factions, I explain how individual preferences (and political attitudes) aggregate within party organizations while discerning how intraparty dynamics mediate the impact of external factors on party behavior. This approach allows us to overcome the weaknesses of existing accounts, as I discuss in the next chapter. Building on the studies of Islamist change at the individual level, in Chapter 2 I offer a theory of aggregation using factions as the major unit of analysis.

My aim is not to offer a theory of ideological moderation for individual Islamists. Instead, I study the aggregation of preferences with changing incentive structures within a party, as factions try to build larger coalitions. This book thus explains why *some* parties adhere to democratic norms, while others choose not to. In contrast to answers that foreground the transformative effect of external factors on Islamists, I argue that intraparty struggles take primacy in shaping Islamist party trajectories.

Islamism and Democracy

The question of democracy gained urgency among Islamists with the emergence of political opportunities often through regime-induced political openings: in the 1950s in Turkey and in the 1970s and 1980s for most of the Arab world. Mainstream Islamist movements, the focus of this book, responded by forming parties seeking the integration of Islam, politics, and society.⁸

These Islamist parties are ideological parties⁹ that seek to reform the political system in line with their political vision.¹⁰ As such, they belong to the family of political parties motivated by a distinct worldview, that is, Catholics, socialists, communists and so on. Like any other ideological party, they come in different shades as their political programs, objectives, and methods diverge significantly. This is particularly the case when it comes to their relationship with democracy. They often partake in electoral politics to fulfill different aims. For some the aim

⁷ DiSalvo, *Engines of Change*.

⁸ In some cases, Islamists were not allowed to form parties, so they ran as independents or formed alliances with existing parties.

⁹ Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*.

¹⁰ Note that these parties do not include mainstream parties that instrumentalize Islam to gain votes or stay in power such as United Malays National Organisation in Malaysia, center-right parties in Turkey, and the National Democratic Party in Egypt, among others.

is to capture the state; for others democracy is an end in itself. These political attitudes do not originate from what essentialists imagine as a singular Islam but arise from different interpretations of Islam that inform actors' preferences along with broader political, social, and economic contexts. That is why no two "Islamisms" are alike.¹¹

When given the option to participate in elections, at first many Islamists were ambivalent, but later they embraced electoral politics following sustained political activism in the 1970s and 1980s. Many Islamists treated elections as another way of winning the hearts and minds of Muslims. The National Salvation and Welfare Parties in Turkey, the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, the Islah Party in Yemen, Hamas in Palestine, Hadas in Kuwait, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, among others, participated in elections and won seats in parliament or municipal governments.¹²

Once several Islamist parties embraced political participation in different countries, they also emerged as the strongest opposition to the authoritarian practices of existing regimes. In the face of repression, they took up the mantle of democratic reforms and human rights against authoritarian infringements. They thus started to speak the language of civil liberties and political rights. Skeptics believed that this was dissimulation, a claim hard to test until Islamists gained political power.

Momentous events like the Arab uprisings created the conditions for Islamists' recent surge, allowing analysts to assess the extent of Islamist change and incumbency's effects on their democratic attitudes. Islamists' rise to power, however, occurred amid revolutionary upheaval, which generated institutional flux, whereby institutional incentives were uncertain or nonexistent. More importantly, Islamist parties are hardly fringe parties that need to move to the center to win elections. In point of fact, these parties had built strong social movements and enjoyed certain advantages over their weak secular rivals. As a result, Islamist parties often – and certainly in the three cases studied in this book – emerged as a dominant political force in their societies.

Despite such uncertainty and their capacity to redesign institutions, I find that Islamist parties in all three cases showed high level of commitment to electoral politics even when institutional incentives to do so

¹¹ Tezcür, *Muslim Reformers in Iran and Turkey*. Also see Yadav, "Understanding 'What Islamists Want'"; Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates?" Ashour, *The Deradicalization of Jihadists*; Ayoub and Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam*.

¹² Turkish Islamism enjoyed greater rights and freedoms due to country's democratic institutions, although they could never explicitly call for an Islamic system due to restrictions imposed on political parties by the secular constitution.

remained weak. Skeptics' fear of "one man, one vote, one time" turned out to be misplaced. Both strategic and ideological factors, I argue, effected this outcome.

For some Islamists, elections were a strategic means to come into and remain in power with a strong popular mandate. Such mandate allowed these parties to capture the state and Islamize their societies. Elections also offered an ideological and institutional solution to a puzzle Islamists grappled with for a long time. Islamist movements, often seeking the Islamization of social and political life, rarely offered an alternative to the institutions of the modern nation-state. Islamist ideologues and activists such as Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi or Hassan al-Banna kept postponing questions of an Islamic model of governance to an indeterminate future. The only specifics they offered pertained to the ideal ruler: a virtuous, pious man who would govern the society in an Islamic fashion with the help of virtuous civil servants.¹³ This ambiguity was partly due to the silence of the Qur'an and the Sunna (Prophet Muhammad's example) on governance/political systems and was partly a result of Islamists' dialectical relationship with their political contexts.¹⁴

This institutional and theoretical underdevelopment was key in Islamists' adaptation to their local circumstances, as it allowed for their internalization of democratic procedures, as they had been fixated on individual virtue rather than institutional development as a crucial pillar of an Islamic polity and had no answer to the question of selection of the "rightful rulers." Democracy, at least its procedural aspects, offered the best available solution to one of the critical issues for mainstream Islamist parties. So in contrast to scholars who argue that Islamism is inherently authoritarian, I assert that these Islamist parties are committed to elections as an indispensable mechanism for selecting decision-makers. As such, democracy filled a major vacuum in the Islamist political imaginary. Yet what they gathered from "democracy" differed markedly.

The experience of Islamist parties in power soon proved the limits of their democratic habituation. Indeed, several Islamists reversed their

¹³ Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*; for examples see Maududi, *The Political Theory of Islam*; Kısakürek, *İdeolojya Örgüsü*.

¹⁴ For instance, for Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the emphasis was on "social Islam" and not the establishment of an Islamic state. Islamization of the state would come through "greater attention to religion and spirituality across all sectors of all public life, [hiring] more graduates of religious schools, and encouraging greater religiosity in the part of the populace." In the late 1930s, Banna issued open calls to the palace to initiate Islamizing reforms. His successors translated this vision into full implementation of the sharia only after Anwar Sadat changed the Egyptian constitution in 1974, stating that the source of legislation in Egypt is the sharia (Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 77–79).

earlier commitment to civil liberties and democratic norms such as pluralism and mutual tolerance after coming to power yet without foregoing their commitment to *electoralism* (echoing right-wing populists elsewhere). Other Islamists, in contrast, experienced substantial ideological change through inclusion in or exclusion from the political system. After coming to power, they remained unwaveringly committed to democratic norms such as pluralism, mutual tolerance, and institutional forbearance.

The Outcome of Interest: Islamist Parties' Democratic Commitments

This book focuses on Islamists' democratic commitments. The outcome of interest is therefore democratization, and not "moderation." The latter is often used by scholars but also widely criticized for its ambiguity.¹⁵ Democratization is a much clearer and more analytically useful alternative, since it can be tracked in a more systematic fashion.

There is no singular definition or understanding of democracy. Since democracy can be perceived in different ways, democratization may also occur in different degrees. In its minimalist conceptualization, offered by Schumpeter, democracy is "the institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote."¹⁶ Schumpeterian democracy rings a majoritarian tune, and those who subscribe to it may focus more on its procedural aspects than its normative requirements. As such, democracy may quickly devolve into an instrument of amassing power, rather than being an end in itself, as recently seen in many democracies and hybrid regimes.

In contrast, a thicker understanding of democracy would recognize the centrality of certain principles, including pluralism, regular give-and-take, and mutual compromise. As Levitsky and Ziblatt specify, there are two crucial norms that form the basis of democracy: institutional forbearance

¹⁵ Scholar often use the concept of "moderation" to define Islamists' ideological change. The theories of moderation of Islamists do not necessarily define moderation as democratization (except Wickham, who sets a higher bar for moderation – i.e., liberal and democratic commitments). Some define it as a change in worldview which falls short of democratic politics. Regardless, the concept of "moderation" is quite problematic, as several scholars have already pointed out. Parties hold different positions on a variety of issues; Islamists are no exception. The concept appears more confusing than clarifying. For a thorough critique of the concept, see Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates?" Brown, *When Victory Is Not an Option*; Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood*; Künkler and Brocker, "Religious Parties"; Netterstrøm, "The Islamists' Compromise in Tunisia."

¹⁶ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 269.

and mutual toleration.¹⁷ This means whoever wins the electoral game in round one should not abuse their access to state power (institutional forbearance) to pack the courts and politicize key institutions or to undermine civil liberties and rights of their opponents (mutual tolerance). That way, if they lose in round two, they have other chances to compete, making elections not a zero-sum but an iterated game. These norms are closer to Robert Dahl's thicker, yet still procedural, conceptualization of democracy. In a widely accepted formulation, Dahl lists free, fair, and regular elections, universal suffrage, right to office, absence of veto powers over elected officials, and freedom of expression, information, and assembly as key components of democratic rule. Building on Dahl's definition, I add the rule of law, pluralism, and protection of minorities¹⁸ as indispensable features of democratic rule to ensure that democracy does not translate into the tyranny of a majority.

Islamists do not always agree on the underlying principles or implications of democratic politics. Some Islamists, who I call *electoralists*, internalize democracy as the best available procedure to select the rightful leaders in a community, as I stated above. Their perception of democracy remains procedural, majoritarian, and populist. They adopt a hegemonic position with respect to other political groups in violation of political pluralism and infringe on the rule of law and civil liberties in line with the spirit of majoritarianism. It is their self-fashioned ideological and moral superiority that informs their right to rule in a hegemonic manner. So they refuse to commit to democratic norms such as pluralism, deliberation, mutual tolerance, and forbearance. When they treat democracy as only elections, they act with a sense of moral superiority that rejects limits on majority rule and opens the gates to democratic backsliding and even breakdown.

Not all Islamists are electoralists, though. In fact, some, who I call *liberals*, commit to norms of deliberation, engagement, pluralism, and power-sharing. They prioritize democratic principles and politics over their partisan interests, which is a key pillar of democracy, as Levitsky and Ziblatt suggest. These Islamists, in contrast, view their movement on par with their rivals and shun any sense of moral superiority; for them, democracy, with its liberal norms and values, is the closest one can get to the ideal Islamic society premised on justice and freedom. This understanding supports pluralism and minority rights.

¹⁷ For a discussion of these democratic norms, see Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

¹⁸ Scheppele makes a compelling case for the indispensable need for liberal checks and balances and protection of individual liberties for a sustainable democracy. I follow her definition of liberalism in this book. See Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," for further details.

An Islamist party's political trajectory ultimately rests on the balance of power between liberals and electoralists. When liberals dominate, the party adheres to democratic principles and advocates pluralism and power-sharing. Even after attaining political power, they resist "righteous majoritarianism" and advocate a pluralist democratic system with safeguards for civil liberties for all groups and individuals. In contrast, when electoralists dominate, they become a force for polarization, zero-sum politics, and top-down Islamization, reflecting a majoritarian view of democracy and a tendency to monopolize power by excluding and delegitimizing the opposition.

Despite amassing substantial power, electoralists do not forego electoral politics for the reasons I listed above. Meanwhile, their hegemonic understanding of Islamism informs their understanding of democracy. Their belief in "righteous majoritarianism," as Pahwa calls it,¹⁹ primes their style of governance and justifies the systematic violation of the civil liberties of those who contest their vision.

The Cases of Turkey and Egypt vs Tunisia: When and Why Electoralists Prevail

Why study Islamist parties? Islamist parties are assumed to be monolithic entities with high internal coherence and an ideology that is inherently antidemocratic or fixed, as I pointed out earlier. As such, they are often treated as something distinct to which theories of party politics may not apply. Studying Islamist parties in light of these theories allows us to explore how widely the mechanisms we identified in our study of parties in advanced democracies travel. This endeavor hence minimizes the distance between Islamist and non-Islamist parties while challenging common assumptions about Islamism to show that Islamist parties are like any other political party. That said, the study of ideological pluralism in parties based on a religious tradition and unpacking the conditions under which liberal or authoritarian tendencies prevail is instructive for all political parties that harbor both authoritarian and liberal wings. This study, then, offers key insights into party capture by populist factions in recent years and why and how nonpopulist factions are losing their grip on their parties.

Why study these three parties? Since Islamist parties in these three countries came to power in free and fair elections and formed governments with substantial influence over the design of political institutions,

¹⁹ Pahwa, "Pathways of Islamist Adaptation."

they constitute excellent cases to trace Islamists' democratic commitments in power.²⁰ The Islamist movements in Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia also deserve an in-depth analysis for other reasons. Unpacking the AKP experience since 2002 is important due to its widespread regional appeal. In the wake of Arab uprisings, the AKP government in Turkey was treated as a model for the coexistence of democracy and Islam by leaders of both the Brotherhood and Ennahda. After coming to power in 2002, the AKP registered political success by winning consecutive elections, generating extensive economic growth, and beginning accession talks with the European Union. However, the AKP reversed its course midstream, a move that ultimately undermined Turkish democracy. This within-case variation in the outcome of interest – namely, the adoption by Islamists of liberal norms after coming to power only to abandon them later – significantly enriches the comparative analysis and makes for an interesting empirical puzzle.

The Brotherhood in Egypt, on the other hand, is the most established and influential Islamist movement with several chapters in the Middle East and North Africa. Its influence on other Islamist movements, in both Turkey and Tunisia, cannot be disputed. Finally, Ennahda is also of critical importance because its leader, Rached Ghannouchi, is not just a political leader but also a philosopher and ideologue who has written extensively on Islam and democracy and inspired generations of Islamists in multiple countries, including Turkey and Egypt. More importantly, Ennahda has steered Tunisia toward democracy along with other stakeholders and has registered Tunisia as the only democracy in the Arab world for several election cycles until recently. This party with a clearly democratic platform has sustained a pluralist agenda while compromising with other political actors to democratize Tunisia.

²⁰ Elsewhere in the Muslim world, Islamists made meaningful electoral advances, but they either failed to establish governments or were denied power. For instance, the Justice and Development Party in Morocco governs under the shadow of the king, consociationalism in Lebanon and its restricted appeal and Hezbollah limited power, the power of Islamist parties in Indonesia is circumscribed to regional governments, while many other Islamist parties are denied freedom of organization or the opportunity to run in competitive elections, as is the case in Jordan, Kuwait, Algeria, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. The FIS in Algeria, Hamas in Palestine, and the Shi'a parties in Iraq are exceptions, since they also had electoral victories in relatively free and fair elections. However, the military intervened in Algeria before the FIS could register an electoral victory in the second round of elections in 1991, while Hamas was denied the opportunity to govern Palestine by external actors in 2006, and the post-invasion circumstances complicated Iraqi politics and led to state failure instead of opening the way for the establishment of a government under Islamist parties. For more on Islamist parties' political opportunities in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, see Hamzawy and Brown, "Islamist Parties and Democracy."

Islamist Party Commitment to Democracy		
Dominant faction	Liberal democracy	Electoral democracy
Liberals	AKP 2001–2007 Ennahda 2011–	
Electoralists	AKP 2001–2002	Ennahda 1989–1990 AKP 2008– Muslim Brotherhood 2011–2013

Figure 1 Intraparty dynamics and Islamist party attitudes in Turkey, Egypt, and Tunisia
Source: the author

In this book, I explain why the AKP slid into authoritarianism and back to ideological rigidity, although it was established as a moderate splinter party; why the Brotherhood failed to commit to democratic norms after coming to power; and why Ennahda followed a different path and displayed sustained commitment to democracy, mutual tolerance, and compromise in its encounters with other political actors. As Figure 1 summarizes, liberal Islamists had the upper hand in the AKP until 2007 and in Ennahda since the 1990s, while electoralist Islamists had dominated the Brotherhood before and after they rose to power in Egypt. Chapter 2 offers a theoretical explanation for these shifts, and the empirical chapters illustrate how the theory plays out in individual cases.

Methodology

I adopt a comparative approach to reveal similarities and differences across cases and test for the impact of such differences on the outcome of interest. A comparative approach combined with process tracing in all three cases allows for causal inference and testing for competing explanations. This combination of methods allow me to explain why Ennahda remained committed to liberal democratic norms, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood did not, and why the AKP initially committed to such norms only to abandon them later. Variation across cases and changes within each case over time provide a fertile ground for comparative analysis.

All three cases, for instance, belong to the same branch of Islamism: They are mainstream political movements that prioritize gradual political and social change (reformism) through formal institutions rather than revolutionary or violent upheaval. All three are also based on strong social movements, which makes them “movement parties” even when they are not legalized by the ruling regimes, as was the case before the revolution in Egypt and Tunisia.²¹ Even then both Ennahda and the Brotherhood acted as institutionalized and bureaucratized movement parties with bylaws, internal elections, and executive and legislative branches. Perhaps more importantly, they showed a clear desire to participate in formal politics and ran in elections when permitted on electoral platforms defined by the organization. The Turkish Milli Görüş (National Outlook) movement, which gave birth to the AKP in 2001, enjoyed greater political freedoms, while its parties were also embedded in a social movement.²² Of course, the three parties had differences when it came to the primacy of politics within the broader social movement. This was a point of contention within each movement, and factions, in Ennahda and the Brotherhood in particular, rallied around a particular position, that is, primacy of the *da‘wa* (preaching) vs politics. This issue was largely resolved in the Milli Görüş movement by the early 1980s in favor of political activism, while it preoccupied factions in the other two movements, as I discuss later. Such internal debates are part of the outcome I intend to explain.

In addition, before coming to power, all three parties endorsed competitive politics, political pluralism, and civil liberties. The three parties also proved to be dominant actors in their respective contexts. Their competition remained weak and fragmented, while they maintained strong grassroots networks and a tight organizational structure. This comparative strength secured their political dominance even when their electoral fortunes remained relatively modest. Such crucial similarities among parties notwithstanding, the three countries also diverge in several respects. I return to these differences and their implications for democratic commitments in Chapter 1. Despite their differences, simultaneous revolutionary moments in Tunisia and Egypt allow for a fruitful paired comparison. When combined with case variation in Turkey, all three cases permit

²¹ For the concept of “movement party,” see Kitschelt, “Movement Parties”; for a discussion on the Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda’s transition from movements to parties, see Zollner, “The Metamorphosis of Social Movements into Political Parties.”

²² The Milli Görüş movement had organic ties to associations that were established to raise funds for religious schools and to mobilize youth (Milli Gençlik Vakfı) and immigrant workers in Europe (Avrupa Milli Görüş Teşkilatı). The movement also ran social welfare programs for lower-income families through the party branches and later through local municipalities. The AKP later replicated this frame at a larger scale.

controlling for different factors. Several such factors that seemed important in a single case – structural, institutional, and contextual – lost their analytical value when all three cases were studied together, as I show in the next chapter and discuss in greater detail in the empirical chapters. Examining all three cases allowed me to surpass the pitfalls of single case studies which miss the chance of finding common patterns.

Through process tracing in all three cases, I also identify causal mechanisms. Specifically, I trace the internal workings of each party within their broader political context to specify causal chains and their observable implications.²³ I also test alternative causal explanations based on external pressures. Process tracing reveals the multiplicity of paths that an Islamist party could take at different junctures. Using this method, in conjunction with comparative analysis, I trace why and how a party ends up adopting a strategy, and not others, as its “dominant strategy.”

Process tracing in a comparative study requires rich fieldwork in all three countries. A topic such as intraparty politics, which is hard to observe as party members are not willing to reveal their differences, requires the collection of data from various sources. The book relies primarily on semi-structured interviews with prominent members of Islamist parties in all three countries as well as party platforms, official statements, media interviews, and memoirs of Islamic activists collected during field trips and online. Collecting information on a phenomenon from multiple sources helped me minimize missing data as I traced the process in its observable implications.²⁴

A second layer of primary data comes from several interviews conducted with non-Islamic activists, analysts, and journalists. Such conversations complemented interviews I conducted with Islamists and enriched my understanding of the context within which Islamists operated. I used purposive and snowball sampling technique to select respondents among the leading Muslim Brothers, Ennahda, and AKP officials, as well as non-Islamist party representatives, columnists, civil society activists, businessmen, union leaders, and intellectuals. At times I met with interlocutors to build connections with party members, and at others, I reached out directly to party leaders whom I identified through official documents of the party and news archives. When I started this research, I had a good sense of intraparty conflicts in the Muslim Brotherhood and Milli Görüş but had limited knowledge of such splits in the AKP and Ennahda. My understanding of internal disagreements in these parties crystallized during fieldwork.

²³ Gonzalez Ocantos and Laporte, “Process Tracing and the Problem of Missing Data.”

²⁴ Ibid.

In the field, I relied on the networks I had built in Turkey and Egypt for my dissertation.²⁵ I also built new connections in Tunisia through my connections in Turkey and Egypt. My first field trip was to Turkey in 2011 to gain a deeper understanding of the AKP's growing dominance in the country. As part of this new field study, I observed the party campaign for the 2011 national election in one of its strongholds, Istanbul, Turkey's largest city. I did house visits with an AKP nominee and witnessed the party's interactions with its supporters. I also observed the workings of local branches and interviewed party activists at the district and neighborhood levels to get a sense of the party structure.

With the onset of the Arab uprisings, I went back to the field to do research on Islamists' role in democratic transitions. I went to Tunisia in 2012 to observe the postrevolutionary developments and meet with representatives of Islamist and non-Islamist political organizations. My goal was to grasp Ennahda's role and political attitudes throughout the transition. I joined an exchange program organized in Tunis and traveled around the country to meet with activists and civil society representatives in Kasserine, Sfax, Sidi Bouzid, and Gafsa. The group interviews during the program often revolved around the causes of the revolution, Islamists' perception of democracy, and the heightened polarization in the society.

I went back to Egypt in January 2013 during the second anniversary of the revolution to conduct another set of interviews in Cairo. I intended to observe Egypt under Morsi's rule and inquire about the impact of his (and the Brotherhood's) decisions on the transition process. I ended up meeting with several former members of the Brotherhood, activists from different parts of the political spectrum, and civil society representatives.

With the AKP's increasing authoritarianism, I returned to Turkey to observe the party's transformation more closely. In January 2014, I took two trips to Istanbul and Ankara to interview liberals purged from the AKP. By then, the party was already on an authoritarian path, and Erdoğan successfully quelled intraparty struggles by purging his rivals within the party organization. I went back to Turkey in 2017 for additional interviews in Istanbul, Ankara, and Bursa, where I met with several founding members of the party who had previously served in AKP governments and played a critical role in Turkey's democratic reforms in the

²⁵ In the summer of 2006 and 2007, I traveled to Egypt to interview prominent names among both electoralists and liberals within the Brotherhood. I also interviewed former members of the Muslim Brotherhood who left the movement to establish the Wasat Party in 1996. In this project, I studied ideological moderation of Islamists in Turkey and Egypt through internal splits in the Milli Görüş movement and the Muslim Brotherhood. I also rely on my observations from these trips in this book.

party's first term in power. I supplemented these interviews with further conversations with experts of political Islam in Turkey. In the meantime, I monitored five local and general elections from March 2014 to June 2019. I also conducted participant observation in several AKP events, including the party's major rally in Istanbul that concluded its electoral campaign of June 2015 elections and democracy rallies organized after the 2016 failed coup attempt. Such opportunities for participant observation were critical to deciphering the party's pivot to hegemonic Islamism.

In 2016, I started another cycle of interviews with Brotherhood members, this time in Istanbul. Thousands of Brothers went into exile in the wake of the coup in 2013. Hundreds relocated to Istanbul, several of whom I met to discuss what went wrong in Egypt's transition. The Brothers I spoke with included a diverse group including liberal and electoralist, old and young, and former and current members of the organization.

In the summer of 2017, I returned to Tunisia to meet with high-ranking figures in Ennahda. I frequented the Tunisian parliament to interview deputies from the party and observe their legislative activities. I ended up meeting the majority of the party's executive bureau as well as the party chairman and his deputies. I also had the opportunity to converse with non-Islamist members of the parliament who had been working with Ennahda deputies since the transition. The trip also allowed me to speak with analysts who closely observe Tunisian politics.

After I completed the field trips, I conducted several more online interviews with prominent names in Ennahda and the Brotherhood to enrich the material and clarify a few questions.

In the end, I met with more than 120 Islamists and analysts, some of them multiple times, for more than 130 interviews. Most interviews lasted about an hour, and a few took several hours. All the interviews were in Turkish, Arabic, or English. For the interviews carried out in Arabic, I had an interpreter to make sure that my comprehension was accurate. Because all three countries now have more autocratic regimes than they had when I began this research, I have anonymized my contacts unless they are among the top leadership or their views are already public.

Outline

Chapter 1 starts with a discussion of the role of external factors on Islamist party behavior informed by three major perspectives: structural factors such as modernization and economic development, institutional factors including inclusion and exclusion, and balance of power considerations informed by rational choice. I argue that external factors

often play a secondary role in shaping party behavior; instead, intraparty dynamics determine the impact of external pressures on the organization as different factions frame external impetus in divergent ways in line with their own ideological and strategic positions. For instance, both *liberals* and *electoralists* in the AKP, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Ennahda developed different strategies under similar circumstances and attributed conflicting meanings to the actions of their rivals. In each case, factions disagreed on the best course of action for the party.

In Chapter 2, I offer a theory of interfactional politics to unpack party trajectory. Organizational resources, I argue, determine internal balances of power and the formation of internal coalitions. A faction that controls specific resources in the party organization builds an incentive structure indispensable for erecting intraparty alliances. The larger the resource pool, the greater the odds of building a dominant coalition. Extended incumbency reinforces this dominance by way of expanding a party's resource pool and allowing the ruling faction greater access to such resources to build broader internal coalitions with selective rewards and sanctions.

As Chapters 3 through 5 uncover, in all three cases a dominant coalition sidelined its rivals to set the course of the party by capturing organizational resources and building solid incentive structures. The rise of a dominant coalition was predicated on two factors, one internal and the other external to the party. Internally, a party's foundational moments provided the opening factions needed to vie for resources and build new incentive structures. These foundational moments included the AKP's formation in 2001, the Muslim Brotherhood's second founding in the 1980s, and Ennahda's second founding in 2012. In the case of the AKP and Ennahda, the foundational moments coincided with an external shock that brought the two parties to power. In these two cases, unlike the case of the Brotherhood, factions also utilized expanding public and private resources to build dominant coalitions in their organizations (the AKP for a longer period than Ennahda).

As Chapter 3 demonstrates, liberals in the AKP left their imprint on the first two AKP governments (2002–07), known for their ambitious reformist agenda that carried Turkey to European Union candidacy. In this chapter, I analyze the internal struggles within the party, often neglected by scholars, based on interviews I conducted with its founding members. Particularly important is the marginalization of the liberals starting in 2007, the resultant monopolization of power in the hands of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (the leader of the electoralists), and the growing authoritarianism in the country. I discuss in detail key organizational resources and their changing distribution across factions

in favor of electoralists. Capitalizing on the institutional flux at the time of party formation, electoralists changed the party rules, written by liberals, and allowed the party leader to command all recruitment and promotion within the organization. Combined with their access to party finances, electoralists built an extensive incentive structure that they used to reward their supporters and punish dissenters through the allocation of positions within the government, parliament, and party organization. Their growing control over the party's internal communication as well as the national media further consolidated their position in the party. While a few liberals and many fence-sitters joined this alliance, others first strived to keep the party on a liberal democratic path. When they realized they no longer had any power in the organization, they left.

Electoralists in the Brotherhood, in a similar fashion, successfully thwarted threats liberals posed to their leadership in the movement. Chapter 4 explores the Muslim Brotherhood's internal politics since its second founding in the 1980s to document the increasing prominence of electoralists, also known as the old guard, in the movement at the expense of liberal reformist voices. Relying on extensive fieldwork and interviews, I identify three critical waves of purges within the movement: the establishment of the Wasat Party by reformists leaving the Brotherhood after a long internal strife in 1996, the internal elections of 2010 that marginalized liberal voices remaining inside the organization, and the 2011 revolution and expulsion of remaining liberals from the movement. Electoralists' growing control over the executive offices of the Brotherhood after the death of General Guide Omar al-Tilmisani along with the intentional recruitment among rural Egyptians underpinned their dominance. Their command over the movements' internal communication, indoctrination, and financial resources further entrenched their control. The old guard's manipulation of party rules and rigging of the 2009 internal elections secured their hold on to power at the time of the revolution in 2011. When Mohamed Morsi, as the nominee of the old guard, was elected as president in 2012, he carried the righteous majoritarianism of his faction to power. Liberals, now purged from the movement, heavily criticized Morsi's actions in office, but to no avail. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the key decisions made by the leadership over the course of Morsi's presidency and their impact on the political crisis of 2013, which ended Egypt's democratic transition.

Chapter 5 studies the contrasting case of Ennahda and its history with a focus on the party's trajectory since its first founding in the 1980s. At the time, the party hosted both radicals and democrats, and

thanks to the strong collective incentives they could offer, radicals had the upper hand in the movement. Democrats, led by Ghannouchi, tried but failed to keep Ennahda on a democratic path. After 20 years of exile, the party's second founding in 2012 reshuffled the cards. Ghannouchi, who regained party leadership in exile, capitalized on the foundational moment and the democratic transition to build a liberal alliance within Ennahda. After coming to power, liberal democrats under Ghannouchi's leadership sought consensus and compromise with their political rivals. They encountered criticism from within but managed to reinforce their command over the party organization by recruiting liberal-minded members, allocating public positions to their supporters, and expanding their control over intraparty debates. This heightened control over the party allowed liberals to sideline electoralists within the party who had been pushing for a more assertive and hegemonic posture for Ennahda.

Although the empirical chapters trace the changing balances of power among factions in all three cases, each of these chapters is organized differently to follow key moments in each country. Real life is messy, and it is not always easy to fit political events into neat boxes, as much as we would like to. Those readers who would prefer the same structure repeat in all three chapters will be disappointed. Yet a different organization, I believe, would be more frustrating since it would be confusing and harder to follow. Instead, the chapters trace the evolution of all three parties over time with a particular focus on intraparty struggles.

The final chapter concludes with a discussion of how this framework travels to other cases, Islamist and non-Islamist parties alike, and the implications of this study for party capture and democracy.

The framework I offer in this book is dynamic and flexible enough to explain change within a party across time. It both sheds light on the past course of a party *and* offers a causal explanation for potential changes that may take place in the future. The theory, therefore, applies to other parties, such as right-wing parties, which often include majoritarian and antipluralist tendencies within. As such, this book provides keys to understanding party capture and how autocratic factions prevail.

The book hence adds to the broader conversation on democratization and democratic backsliding and the study of hybrid regimes, whereby electoral politics still carry great significance, yet the ruling elite systematically violates pluralism and civil liberties essential for a well-functioning democracy. The role of political parties in democratization and democratic backsliding is undeniable. If we are to understand parties and their role in democratic advancement and backsliding, we need to pay greater attention to intraparty politics. This book explains why.

Finally, this study informs policymakers and the broader international community on the diversity of Islamist actors by shattering the myth of monolithic Islamism. That is, there is a third option besides jihadi violence/“war on terror” and anti-Islamist authoritarian rule in the Muslim world. This third option requires better coordination among democrats, Islamist and non-Islamist alike. By displaying the complexity of Islamist politics, this study offers paths of dialogue among political actors in Muslim societies by questioning the false binaries that undermine trust between Islamists and non-Islamists.