CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East

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Shadi Hamid, **Joanne J. Myers**

Transcript
Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to welcome you to a discussion on the role of religion in public life.

Our speaker is Shadi Hamid. His book, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East*, will help us to understand the complex interplay among Islam, Islamists, and the competing demands of democratic legitimacy.

Although the news in recent weeks has focused on the missing Malaysian airlines jet, Russia, or the Ukraine, the advancing influence of Islamic movements in Arab countries, especially those that underwent political upheavals over the past few years, is still on a lot of people's minds. It seems that the endurance of Islamic groups continues to threaten liberals and secularists alike, as evidenced by the recent crackdown of the Muslim Brotherhood, not only in Egypt, but in other governments in the region, as well as in Great Britain.

For a long while, Islamists played only a minor role in Arab Spring uprisings, mainly because the prospect of power had seemed too remote. But once free from years of repression, and with the political arena wide open, they found themselves with an unprecedented opportunity to put their ideas into practice across the region. The Arab Spring gave an unprecedented boost to modern Islamist parties, who went on to win the elections in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco.

But their electoral triumph also sparked a strong reaction from secular groups. Protests against the new Islamist-led governments showed the limits of Islamic power in the Middle East, resulting in the final ouster of Egypt's president, Mohamed Morsi.

Bringing down dictators was one thing; agreeing on the exact nature of the new political system quite another. Cultural politics soon took over, with the Islamists and secular parties quarreling over the role of Islam in the legislation. Issues arose about the constitutional protection for women and religious minorities and, most importantly, who was going to be in charge.

The underlying question, then as now, is whether Islamists' religious commitments can coexist with others whose respect for democracy, pluralism, and women's rights are indelible. In *Temptations of Power*, Shadi tries to understand why Islamists make certain tactical and strategic choices rather than others and how they perceive their own actions. He focuses his attention on mainstream Islamist movements, most of which are descendants or affiliates of the Egyptian Muslim

Brotherhood.

Several salient issues are addressed, such as: What do Islamists really want? What are their objectives? In the end, what are democratic governments willing to accept?

For this timely reassessment of where the region's varied Islamist groups have come from and where they might be headed, please join me in welcoming our guest today, Shadi Hamid, whose book, by the way—today is the pub date, so we're very happy to have him here.

Shadi, thank you for coming.

Remarks

SHADI HAMID: Hi, everyone. Thank you, Joanne, for that kind introduction, and thanks to all of you for coming. I look forward to having a good discussion with all of you tonight.

Let me just start by setting the context. I'll focus on a couple of key themes and arguments that I discuss in my book and hopefully offer some provocations to kind of get the discussion going.

This book really has been 10 years in the making. I started conducting field research on Islamist movements in 2004-2005. I was living in Jordan at the time. In starting my study of these groups, I just became fascinated by the interplay between religion and politics, the tensions between them. Here you have groups that are aspiring to these absolute religious ideals, but that comes into conflict with the mundane realities of everyday political life.

In Jordan at the time, I was a young, naïve graduate student, and the Muslim Brotherhood there must have thought I was a little bit weird, because I would go on a regular basis, every other day or something, to the archives of the Muslim Brotherhood's political party in Amman and I would just sit there for hours looking at documents and articles and just trying to immerse myself in this new world that I was discovering. That was at a time when political Islam wasn't a very hot topic, and certainly not in Jordan. So the Jordanian Islamists were, "Who is this guy? What does he want? What is he up to? Is he a spy?"—that sort of thing.

Ever since then, I've been trying to understand, as Joanne said, who are Islamists? What really animates them? I think one problem that we have here in the United States sometimes is that a lot of people write or talk about Islamist groups, and some of them haven't actually talked to a real live member of the Muslim Brotherhood or other similar groups. I take that very seriously, that to really understand these groups, you have to spend a lot of time with them. You have to immerse yourself in their world and in their worldview.

I'll just say that we don't have to like them, but we do have to understand them. I think that's especially important now as Islamists are at the front lines of a lot of the conflicts and debates that we're having in the Middle East. It also relates to us in terms of how we conceive U.S. foreign policy in the region.

To just highlight a few of the key arguments I make in the book, this book kind of began with a puzzle. What I saw in my research was that repression was getting worse in the Arab world, in particular in Egypt and Jordan, after political opening. There were brief democratic openings in the 1980s and then you see a turn to repression starting in the 1990s, intensifying in the 2000s.

According to the kind of conventional academic wisdom on this, repression is often thought to lead to

radicalization. But instead of seeing mainstream Islamist groups radicalizing, what we saw instead was something quite different. This was what really got me interested. This was the puzzle I was trying to address. Instead of radicalizing, they actually during this period embraced many of the tenets of democratic life—alternation of power, popular sovereignty, this idea that parliaments have to determine the law; it doesn't just come from God straight down. You start to see them taking on more moderate positions on women's rights, on the protection of minorities, and so on. They were also democratizing their internal organizational structures, while the repression was going on.

There are a number of reasons that I identify for that in the book. One of them, I'll just mention very quickly, is quite intuitive—this idea that if you're being repressed, it has a way of concentrating the mind. You're not going to worry about banning alcohol or segregating the sexes in primary school if the secret police can come unannounced, knock on your door at 3:00 in the morning, and put you in prison. You realize how important democracy is, that basic level of freedom, when it is being taken away from you.

So Islamists began to realize that this is the fundamental minimum. They can't pursue their vision, they can't pursue their ideological objectives unless there is that fundamental democratic space for them to operate.

Now, the flip side of this is that—we have this idea that process trumps ideology, that when you have the opening of democratic space, Islamists will become more moderate, they will maybe even become somewhat liberal on issues, they will move in this kind of bold linear projection towards accepting a lot of the things that we associate with liberalism, whether it's gender equality, minority rights, and they'll keep on going in that direction. It's something that we hear a lot in the popular debates as well. Not just among academics, but even our former president, George W. Bush, really subscribed to this idea that inclusion can lead to moderation.

I'll just quote you something, which is really interesting in retrospect, that he said. He was talking about Hezbollah and its participation in Lebanese elections in 2005. This is what he said: "I like the idea of people running for office. There's a positive effect. Maybe some will run for office and say, 'Vote for me. I look forward to blowing up America.' But I don't think so. I think people who generally run for office say, 'Vote for me. I'm looking forward to fixing your potholes.'" This is where we get the idea of the so-called pothole theory of democracy, that if ideological groups are put into positions of power and responsibility, they are going to have to deliver; they are going to have to fix the potholes.

So it's something that we hear a lot. What I found in my own research for this book and even before that was that that's not necessarily the case. Democratization does not necessarily have a moderating effect, and we have to kind of problematize that idea. So let me just discuss that for a little bit.

First of all, we're talking about deeply conservative societies. When you have an opening of democratic space, Islamist parties have to be responsive to that popular sentiment. They have to respond to their conservative supporters, and their conservative supporters voted for them because they want to see more Islam in public life, not less.

Just to give you an example of the kind of popular sentiment that we do see. There was a Pew Global Attitudes survey poll from 2011, right after the Arab uprisings. This is interesting. Eighty percent of Egyptian respondents said they believed that adulterers should be stoned, 70 percent said they believed that the hands of thieves should be cut off, and 88 percent said they supported the death penalty for apostasy—i.e., leaving Islam.

Those are high figures. There's some debate about how seriously we should take polls like this. Even if we cut off 20 percent, that's still a significant portion of the population that wants to see strict, somewhat harsh Islamic laws implemented. If there's a demand for this kind of thing, then someone has to supply it. And that's where Islamist groups come in. They are not just believing in these things in a vacuum; they are actually reflecting a popular sentiment, to some extent, as well.

The other thing, too, is that not only do you have to respond to your own conservative base, you also have to compete with other Islamist groups. I call this in the book a kind of Tea Party effect. One idea in median voter theory, as we call it, is that ideological groups have to move to the center of the political spectrum because that's where independent voters are. They have to build broad-based coalitions. All of that should push these groups toward the center. That's the theory at least.

But what we have found even here in the United States is that you have far-right groups—or pressure groups, let's say—that are dragging the Republican Party from the center-right towards the right. So it's not just something you see in the Middle East. It's something that we deal with here in our own country.

In the Egyptian context, for example, with a democratic opening, you see the rise of far-right Islamist groups that are more hard-line—the Salafis, we call them, ultra-conservatives, if you will, that subscribe to an even stricter interpretation of Islamic law.

So in these democratic openings, you have to worry about your right flank, because your supporters might vote for the more conservative party if they feel that you are not reflecting their beliefs and desires.

Just one last thing on this point. We have also seen it quite recently in Turkey. Turkey is a relative democracy, at least compared to other countries in the region. Instead of Erdoğan reaching out more to liberals, he is actually alienating them and moving further to the right. He's doubling down on his conservative base.

Why is he doing that? I think this kind of gets us to the reality of deeply polarized societies. He's doing that, in part, because the people on the other side don't like him and probably aren't going to be convinced to vote for him anytime soon. You have a real ideological divide between secularists and Islamists.

So Erdoğan had the Twitter ban. He's calling his opponents traitors and all of that. We might say, as Americans, "Why is he doing that"? But he was actually able to really rally and excite his base in the most recent local elections, and the AK Parti actually increased its share of the vote in local elections from 39 percent to 45 percent. So we might say that Erdogan is losing it and he's acting in a very erratic manner, but, in the very narrow sense of winning and keeping power, he's actually solidifying his base support.

This gets me to another key theme of the book, which is this idea of illiberal democracy. It's not just that Islamists are moving to the right because that's where their base is. They are moving to the right because they do actually believe in these things. They are Islamists for a reason. Otherwise, they would be something else. This is why I think it's very important to take ideology seriously. Again, as Americans, we want to think that process trumps ideology, that when it comes to economics and delivering on bread-and-butter issues, that takes precedence. But Islamists do have a distinctive worldview, and this is where the key divide comes in.

So I think it's important for us to bring back ideology into the discussion. Part of what I try to do in the

book is go into greater detail about what Islamists really believe, what drives them, what animates them.

It brings up a very, I think, thorny question: What if Arabs or what if Egyptians, or any particular group of people, decide through the democratic process that they don't want to be liberal, that they want to participate in the democratic process and they believe in that, but it's not being used for liberal ends? In other words, Islamists and the broader population, to some extent, have different views on gender rights.

Just to give one example on that, there was a March 2012 YouGov poll where only 18 percent of Egyptians said they believed that a woman could be head of state. That's a pretty low number. If you break it down by gender, only 24 percent of female respondents said they believed that a woman can be head of state. That tells us something.

So the question is, democracy, at its essence, is about the right to make the wrong choice, in my view. So how far can this go? What will these illiberal democracies look like?

This is quite different from our own history. This is why I think it's difficult from an American perspective to really grasp this. Liberalism and democracy went hand in hand in our own history. We started with constitutional liberalism first, at least some degree of constitutional liberalism. That was established, and then we see a real move towards democracy later on in terms of universal suffrage, in terms of equality of all citizens, in terms of participating in the democratic process, and so on. Also if you look at other Western democracies, you see a similar sequencing.

Fareed Zakaria, in his book, which some of you may have read, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, makes the argument that it's better to start with a foundation of constitutional liberalism, and then and only then should you move towards democracy. So he has a clear sequencing there.

The problem with actually adopting that in Middle Eastern countries is that it's very difficult to tell an Egyptian or a Jordanian or a Tunisian voter, "Listen, before we give you democracy, or before you're ready for democracy, you have to do all this other stuff first—constitutional liberalism, establish the foundation." Democracy has become such a normative good in the public discourse, not just in the West, but across the world, that people want democracy right away, and rightfully so. They want to be able to make their own decisions, to vote for their own representatives. So you can't really have a sequencing where you establish the kind of liberal basis first.

I guess I would just, in that respect, pose the question to you: Do people have the right to try out an alternative ideological project? If a majority decides that they want to go in this illiberal conservative direction where they are implementing Islamic law, where, to some extent, they are restricting, perhaps, the rights of women or minorities or there isn't full equality, how far can these majorities go, if that's something that they really believe? It's not just something they are doing because they want to win votes; it's something that is central to their own ideology.

This is where I think the tensions between liberalism and democracy become very thorny. As Americans, our instinct is to say that democracy is good. We want to support the democratic process. But what happens if the outcomes of democracy are not to our liking and we fundamentally disagree with those outcomes in one respect or another? This brings us to where we are today.

I'll just close by talking about what I think are the fundamental ideological divides in the region. We see them in very stark fashion in a place like Egypt, where you do have a very flawed—there was a

democratic process. It was flawed. You had the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi in power. They didn't do a good job in power. But they were democratically elected. Then you had the military coup on July 3 of last year, where you have the democratic process being aborted.

I think one of the questions now is, are Islamist parties going to be allowed to participate in the democratic process or are they going to be blocked? A question that I get a lot—and I think it's one that a lot of people struggle with—is, in a country like Egypt, where you do have a democratic transition, how come many liberals and so-called pro-democracy activists actually ended up supporting the coup against Egypt's first democratically elected president? That's a very interesting question of how people who said they believed in democracy and who were on board initially turned against the Muslim Brotherhood—but not just turned against them; actually supported a military coup against them. There was nearly unanimous support for the coup among so-called liberals in Egypt.

This is where I think we get to the thorny issue. It's the prospect of illiberal democracy in these countries that provokes liberals and secularists to have anti-democratic reactions. They don't want to test out that experiment. These divides are really, at the core, quite raw and existential. Unlike, say, in Latin American transitions where the divides were primarily economic in nature and you could reassure people about their economic interests, what makes the Middle East so difficult is that you have these intangible divides about the role of religion in public life. You don't know what the Muslim Brotherhood is going to do if it stays five, ten years in power. It's not just a fear of Islamists being in power at the time, but a fear of what they might do in the future if they stay in power. So it's a kind of speculative fear, and that becomes very hard to address through reasoned debate.

The other thing, too, is that a lot of these countries haven't had a real open discussion about the meaning of the nation-state, the identity of their country. With Islamists coming to power, many people felt that those things were being threatened in a very basic way.

This is where I think, in some ways, what we're seeing in the Arab world today isn't really comparable to Eastern Europe or Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, but is actually more comparable to the Revolutions of 1848 or even the wars of religion in Europe before that, where it was really about the state, the nature of the state, these fundamental issues. And there isn't real consensus on them.

You hope ultimately that people will work those divides out through a peaceful, democratic process. But sometimes they can't, and in Egypt they couldn't. This is where you see the emergence of unprecedented civil conflict in a place like Egypt, which I think a lot of us thought—Egypt is relatively homogeneous culturally. Ninety percent of the country is Sunni Arabs. There is a sense of being Egyptian. But even with that, you do see this divide which is tearing the country apart.

Just to give you one example—and I'll close with this, because this shows the kind of starkness of feeling—I was in Egypt right before what Human Rights Watch calls the worst mass killing in modern Egyptian history. This happened on August 14, 2013. Over 600 people were killed in the same day, in a very short period of time. I was in Egypt a few days before the massacre.

I was talking to friends and colleagues, and trying to get a sense of what people were thinking, the people that I knew and, in some cases, even cared about. It was very striking for me to see a kind of bloodlust. I had friends of mine telling me, "We want to wipe them out. We want to destroy them. Why hasn't the military gone in and done that already?"

Usually when you support the killing of innocent civilians, you feel kind of circumspect about it. It's something that you should feel some shame about. But what was so remarkable here was that

people in Egypt were saying this openly and publicly, without shame.

It really gets to this question of how people can so quickly lose faith in democracy. I come back to this issue of ideological divides. These people, if you talked to them, would say, "Yes, democracy is nice in theory, but when push comes to shove, other things take precedence over that"—for example, if they don't see their economic situation improving or if they feel their way of life is being threatened by Islamists, who they see as retrograde and fundamentalist.

Ultimately there has to be a way for them to work these issues out, without the resort to violence. But that's going to take quite some time, and I think we're in for a pretty rocky road in terms of the Arab Spring more generally, and certainly in a country like Egypt, where you do see this kind of unprecedented civil conflict.

I'll just end there. I look forward to hearing your questions. Thank you.

Questions

QUESTION: Allen Young.

There have been a number of speakers here who have argued that there is no incompatibility between Islam and liberalism and democracy. But from what you're saying, the Islamic base, if anything, is indeed illiberal and so many of the positions they are taking and they are forcing the Islamists to adopt are clearly inconsistent with democracy. Can we really say that Islam is compatible with the Western values of liberalism and democracy?

SHADI HAMID: This is where I think it's really important to make a clear distinction between liberalism and democracy. If you're talking about Western-style liberal democracy the way that we practice it here in the United States, I would say that I don't think Islamism or Islamist parties are going to reconcile themselves to or adopt liberal democracy, because they aren't liberal. Otherwise, they wouldn't be Islamists. That's part of their *raison d'être* as organizations. They do believe that Islamic law should play a primary, central role in their societies. This is what they believe.

This is why I think there are a lot of interesting debates about what a kind of Islamic democracy would look like or what it would look like if groups like the Muslim Brotherhood stayed in power for five, ten years. You would see something potentially new. This is where I think we have to kind of problematize the notion—and I cite Francis Fukuyama's famous article, "The End of History," where he argues that this is the final endpoint of civilization, liberal democracy; this is all there is and there are no real ideological competitors to liberal democracy.

QUESTIONER: Can you distinguish between Islam and Islamism?

SHADI HAMID: Sure. Islam can be different things to different people. If you get five Muslims in a room, they are all going to have different interpretations of certain things in their religion. Ultimately it comes down to the believer and his or her relationship with God. You would have al-Qaeda-style extremists who would say Islam is one thing in particular. On the other side of the spectrum, you would have liberals or progressives or secularists who say Islam is a very tolerant, open, progressive religion. And because Sunni Islam in particular doesn't have a clergy, there's no way to come up with a definitive answer of what Islam is or is not.

But you can certainly have Muslims who are practicing and religious who don't necessarily believe in Islamism. Islamism is a particular ideology, represented by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. The

definition that I think most of us use is that these are groups that believe in a central role for Islam and Islamic law in public life and politics. They do not see any kind of separation between religion and politics. The two are fundamentally intertwined.

QUESTION: First of all, thank you very much for your talk. My name is Chris Durante. I'm an ethicist and scholar of religion and sociopolitical theory.

First off, I love that you're emphasizing the distinction between illiberalism and democracy, which I think we often conflate, especially in the West. On that note, I have two questions.

One is, what are the prospects of accepting pluralism, from your research? This is related to the idea that in classical liberalism, liberalism itself is this political ideology, this political philosophy that embraces multiple visions of the good, and hence multiple ways of life being able to be pursued in the same state.

Is that aspect being neglected, which makes it incompatible with some democratic functioning in the Middle East? What are the prospects for this kind of pluralism being accepted?

On that note, what do you think about the future of Arab Christians or Middle Eastern Christians in general in the region? We have spoken about secularists and we have spoken about liberal Islam, more conservative Islamists. What do you see as the prospects for the continuation of Christianity in the Middle East? Do they have a role to play maybe in this?

SHADI HAMID: What liberals would say in the Arab world is that liberalism is the way to go because that allows everyone a chance to express their views openly. That's also what I think we would say as well, that in a liberal society, there's enough room for dissenting voices, and if conservatives want to see Christianity playing a bigger role in this society, they have a chance to kind of express those views, as long as it doesn't come into conflict with other people's freedoms.

The problem with that, though—it doesn't quite work as a compromise solution. As I argue in the book, illiberalism is fundamental to Islamist ideology. Let's take the example of the ultra-conservative Salafis. They believe that they should impose some version of Islamic law on the rest of the population. Now, they might do it through the democratic process. But ultimately in a liberal society, they wouldn't be allowed to push their views on the rest of society. They want to be able to move towards their vision of an Islamic state. This is what they believe.

So there's no room for them in a liberal society. If that's what the clear boundaries are, then Salafis are going to hit a wall, and there's no place for them in the democratic process.

You might argue that that's the way it should be, that Salafis believe in certain things that are unacceptable, and they shouldn't be allowed to express their views fully in the political process. But that's a difficult debate, because at the same time, you don't want to drive them underground and push them outside the process, where they might be more prone to violence.

So there isn't a clear answer. I think part of it is, what do you prioritize? Democracy in the sense that people should be able to make their own decisions even if we disagree with them, or liberalism? I think it's up to each individual to decide what takes precedence in these particular situations.

I'll just say one more thing on this. This is a little bit of a different debate, but I think it's worth putting out there. I do think Islam as a religion is more resistant to secularization than other religions have been historically. That's a big, perhaps controversial discussion to have, but I think there are things

about Islam that make it very difficult to remove the political aspect from the religion.

Also, in terms of the Koran, unlike other holy books, to be a Muslim, you have to believe that every word is literally—the Koran is divine. It's not inspired by God. It's not through his prophets. This is God's word directly. That leaves less room to have the kind of fundamental reinterpretation that you might have had in other religions.

That's something of an oversimplification, but I do think we've seen historically that Islam has been resistant to secularization. There was very much an attempt in the 1950s and 1960s, the kind of heyday of secular nationalism, under regimes like Gamal Abdel Nasser's in Egypt. That did not persist, and you see the Islamic revival in the 1970s, until the present day. You see a lot of efforts to push Islam out of the public sphere by autocrats and dictators. But it hasn't worked.

So I think we have to ask ourselves, is Islam going to have the kind of reformation that a lot of people, I think, in the West call for? People say, when will Islam have its reformation? Depending on what we mean by that, it might not happen in the way it has happened with other religions.

I'll just say on Arab Christians, certainly in a country like Egypt this is an important question, because they are 10 percent of the population. That kind of sectarian element makes it more difficult, because they, understandably, are fearful when Islamists come to power or do well in elections. They feel that their freedoms are threatened or will be threatened to a greater degree in the future.

So I think one of the priorities for Islamists, if they want to be able to address it—there has to be a real discussion with the Christian community about what that would mean for them in practice. I think Islamists have been not as clear as they should be in terms of explaining the role of Christians in their kind of ideal Islamic society.

But I think at the end of the day, we haven't actually had a lot of experiments that have gone on for a long time where we have really been able to test these propositions. Islamist parties, for the most part, haven't been able to govern for sustained periods of time, so a lot of these things are open questions.

QUESTION: James Starkman.

I think history is instructive, particularly in Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt, as to how these themes of confrontation or lack of confrontation have played out. Turkey is, certainly since Ataturk, which was a very bold experiment in secular development, instructive in that respect. Iraq, where we're dealing with the Sunni-Shia split, is a whole different type of problem, which doesn't seem to be resolvable since the fourth century.

I'm just wondering if you have comments on the histories of those three countries as it pertains to the themes that you are talking about.

SHADI HAMID: Turkey is one of the examples where you have a secular strongman, Ataturk, who sought as his objective to bring Turkey into the modern era, as he saw it. For him, modernity and secularism were intertwined: You can't have modernity unless you find a way to push Islam out of the public sphere. So what you see is a kind of aggressive secularization program.

You could argue that it succeeded to some extent, in the sense that Turkey is still a secular state system. But Islamists—or let's call them neo-Islamists, because Erdogan wouldn't necessarily call his AK Parti Islamists, but they are from an Islamist school of thought—they have been able to rise to

power and consolidate their control over the political system. So despite all the efforts at secularization, there still seems to be a strong popular desire to see religion brought back into the public sphere. That's one of the reasons that Erdogan and his predecessors were able to rise to prominence and power, because they were supplying that demand. They were addressing a real need in Turkish society.

Turkey is interesting, too, because it was one of the so-called models. At the start of the Arab Spring, everyone would talk about the Turkish model. But I think the appeal of that has declined considerably in light of Erdogan's growing authoritarian tendencies, the Twitter ban most recently that I'm sure many of you were following.

Which raises the question, do Islamists have any real examples in the modern era of a successful melding of political Islam, on one hand, and democracy, on the other? There aren't real models to emulate. This is what makes it so challenging. This is also where the title of the book comes from, *Temptations of Power*. Islamists were tempted after the Arab Spring, and they came to power, despite knowing that power came with a lot of responsibilities and difficulties. But they succumbed to those temptations.

Iraq has a sectarian element that a lot of other countries don't have, the Shia-Sunni split. I think that has made it very difficult to have a working democratic process. Again, it's this kind of winner-takes-all problem. You have a majority, the Shia majority in this case, and when they come to power, the Sunnis feel like they are excluded. They haven't been able to agree on the fundamental rules of the game where each side feels that it has the necessary protections. I think you are always going to have that issue, but to a greater degree when you have that kind of sectarian element.

Egypt, as I said, is relatively homogeneous compared to other countries. But this Islamist-secular divide is the key divide right now. I think, in some ways, it's more difficult to address or resolve than the Sunni-Shia split, because these are divides within families. You have brother against brother, father against son. That's what has been so troubling about the past nine months in Egypt. You don't know who—being an Islamist isn't a very clear thing. Sunni-Shia—it's more or less clear which sect you are. But Islamist and secular is much more nebulous and intangible. Within families, you have people from both sides, and they are turning against each other. It makes it, in some sense, more difficult to address because it's within the family; it's within the same culture, within the same religion.

QUESTION: Thank you for this great talk. My name is Barbara Bowen. I'm working on a film.

I was very interested in this question of how the liberals on the ground in Egypt wound up turning against the Morsi regime, as you were mentioning, particularly because I have some friends who are Egyptian, particularly Egyptian American. They are very used to the institutions of democracy that we have here. They have lived here a long time. But even these people were vociferously against Morsi. They turned violently against him, not in a bloodlust kind of way, but really very passionately against him.

It really was surprising to me. I thought, maybe it's because the culture is not really used to having the groundedness of these institutions that are democratic in nature. They don't have the controls on executive power, for example.

My question is, could you please speak a little bit more to this question of what really happened there constitutionally? I think that's what their fear was. Can you address that, give more texture about the fear?

SHADI HAMID: Just to start on this, I think there was this euphoria when the Arab Spring started. I think certainly a lot of Egyptians, but also, I think, a lot of American observers had unrealistic expectations—the idea that all good things go together and that, once you have democracy, the economy will start to improve, that there will be stability and security. Those things didn't happen. So there was a fundamental gap between what people thought democracy would bring and what they actually saw in practice.

It's easy for us as Americans to kind of hold onto our democratic idealism, because democracy, for the most part, has worked for our country and it's something that we all grew up with. These are key to our values as a country. But when democracy doesn't work, then people lose faith in that process.

I think what you saw in the three years after Mubarak's fall was a slow but steady loss of faith in the democratic process. Democracy wasn't leading to the kinds of outcomes that people were hoping for.

On the specific issue of the constitution—and this kind of goes to this idea that democratic openings push Islamists further to the right—the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi, when they came to power, came under a lot of this pressure, especially from the Salafis. They moved to the right. The constitution has real illiberal elements that are problematic and, I think, angered and frightened liberals and secularists. That was, I think, one of the turning points, the whole debate around the constitution.

Going forward, I think one of the lessons—you would hope that Islamists in the future would, at least when it comes to the foundational document of the state, make more concessions and compromises so that liberals feel they have a stake in the political process, because the last thing you want to do is push people out of the process. Then they have an incentive to bring the whole thing down, because they don't think they have the voice they deserve.

QUESTION: I'm Sadaf Jaffer. I'm a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard University in Near Eastern studies.

First, I just want to push back a little bit on the idea that there is an inherent difficulty in separation between religion and politics in Islam. Perhaps in the modern period, but definitely in the pre-modern period, we see a lot of diversity. I think that's something of a possibility for Muslims to look forward to.

My question is about the importance and meaning of equality to democracy. Can you have a democracy where each person's vote or each person's subjectivity in the court system is not equal? Is that still democratic? As you say, these Islamist parties, for example, think that perhaps Muslims are more of a citizen than Christians or that men are more of a citizen than women. Is that actually acceptable in a democratic system to you?

Also I was wondering about this idea that the supply has to be fulfilled when there's a demand. If there's a demand that women should wear *hijab* or there's a demand that we need to have religious education in schools, does that really need to be supplied? What are the limits of that? If there's a demand that we kill off a certain minority population that we don't like—do we have to supply what people demand if it's inherently, in my view, wrong?

SHADI HAMID: Sadaf is actually an old friend. It's really nice to see you. And I knew you were going to ask a really tough question.

Look, I don't want to get into a debate about Islamic history and the role of Islamic law throughout the centuries. I think there was a lot of diversity of debate in terms of the relationship between the state and the clerics. I would say that in some Islamic societies there was a degree of secularism in the

sense that there was separation between mosque and state, if that's what we mean by secularism.

But what I'm talking about, more broadly, is religion and politics. There wasn't a separation between religion and politics throughout Islamic history, in the sense that Islamic law was always very much part of the public discourse. It was part of the decision-making process. Clerics had influence on the decisions of the executive, at the end of the day.

I'm sure you probably have a response to that.

I think for these societies today to remain democratic, the key consideration is, do liberals—let's say there's an Islamic party in power. The key issue is, do liberals have full opportunity and equality in the political process where they can advocate for their views and try to reverse something they disagree with? Let's say that Islamists ban alcohol, to give an obvious, somewhat stereotypical example. Some liberals will disagree with that. Do they have a chance to work through the democratic process and advocate, through the court system, through the electoral process in terms of trying to win the next election or winning local elections, so they can start to overturn some of these Islamic provisions?

If they are denied that opportunity, then that's no longer democratic, because you always have to have recourse to change laws that you disagree with in a democratic process. If that's taken away, that's where I would draw the red line.

But I would kind of pose the question back to you. I don't really have an answer to the question of how far elected majorities can go. There's a very rich debate in political theory about what majorities can and cannot do. I think different societies have to kind of make those determinations accordingly. Here in the United States, we have a Bill of Rights. That's where our fundamental red lines are. But in a place like Switzerland, you have a situation where minarets are banned, or in France, where wearing *niqab*, the face veil, is banned. That, in some sense, is illiberal, because you're denying people personal freedom in something that is very important to them as citizens. So different societies draw the line in different places.

I think we can all agree that killing off minority populations—I think there's a universal consensus that majorities cannot do that, obviously. Those clear-cut cases are obvious, but it becomes much more difficult when we're talking about things that you can kind of see different arguments for.

What would you say about banning alcohol? What would you say about segregation of sexes? What would you say about the state taking on a role in terms of disseminating a particular vision of religion? Should the state be involved in promoting a certain kind of religious observance? Let's say they're not forcing it, but they're using the state apparatus to promote these ideas.

There are a lot of difficult debates there. I think that, in some sense, it can't be for us as Americans to decide what those red lines are. I think it has to be up to those societies, through an inclusive democratic process, to decide what the boundaries of political contestation are, where they put the red lines.

They really haven't had those debates in any great degree yet. That's going to take time. And that's a difficult, sometimes bloody process.

QUESTION: My name is Mac Deford.

This is sort of a history question as well. Suppose you go back—as you mentioned, Nasser and the

early Egyptian revolutionaries were certainly secularists. They failed. They failed economically. They failed in terms of their relationship to the West because of Israel. If you look at the failure of secularism in the Arab world—or, for that matter, in Pakistan, because Pakistan at one point—Jinnah was a famous secularist. But it all failed, as I say, in the Arab world. It's sort of an anti-Western reaction because of our support of Israel and because of the failure, frankly, of their economies over the last 50 years.

So it seems to me that's where the Islamists have come in, because, not democracy, but Westernization has failed and secularism has failed.

SHADI HAMID: Certainly there was this process of attempted secularization, modernization, where you see rapid growth in educational attainment. Under Nasser, first of all, we see universal education. A lot of Egyptians are moving to urban areas. They are entering the workforce. They are going to college for the first time. So you do see that process of modernization.

I would say, on that, Nasser did actually have some successes, even though he failed miserably in other areas.

But I think certainly there has been a backlash to perceived Westernization. That can be whether it's the West's political influence, economic influence, but also cultural, a sense that Islamic identity is under attack. Certainly Islam has drawn that, and that's why Islamists have often been purveyors of some pretty staunch anti-Americanism over the years and decades. They draw legitimacy from this sense of authenticity, that they are the ones who represent the true Islamic-Arab identity.

But it's not just Islamists. I think what you see is that anti-Americanism can be used by anyone and everyone. Even liberal and leftist groups in the Middle East also adopt oftentimes this anti-American rhetoric, because they can use that to build support. That's just what the broader political atmosphere is in the region, where the vast majority of Egyptians, Jordanians, and most other countries have a very negative opinion of the United States. So, naturally, in a democratic process, people are going to use that to get votes and to excite their base. Populism and ideology can be very effective mobilization tools.

QUESTION: My name is Mike Koenig.

One country you haven't mentioned is Tunisia. Tunisia now has a constitution with some rather liberal elements in it. Would you address what the possibility is for Tunisia to be a model for the accommodation of Islam?

SHADI HAMID: I'm glad you mentioned Tunisia because it is the relative bright spot in the region. It's always nice to end a talk on a positive note. So that's good.

I also have a chapter in the book, "Is There a Tunisian Exception?"

I don't think we can definitively answer it, but I think you're right. So far Tunisia shows the way forward. Here you have an Islamist party that came to power through the democratic process, and it made major concessions and compromises on the constitution. By and large, it's a pretty good constitutional document.

Now, I think there's a darker undercurrent in Tunisia. This is what we're going to have to watch going forward. After the coup in Egypt, you had the secular opposition kind of threatening mass protests, threatening to bring down the elected Islamist government by any means necessary. So you did

have this real ideological and political confrontation in the summer, going into the fall. Ultimately, the agreement they reached was that the Islamist party, the Ennahda party, would voluntarily step down from power and you would have a new technocratic government that had no clear political affiliation take things up until there were new elections, even though we don't quite know when these new elections will be.

Islamists are no longer in power in Tunisia. Members of Ennahda's conservative base, as well as Salafis, see this as unacceptable, that Islamists voluntarily gave up power, even though they won fair and square in elections.

So the question is, what happens if Ennahda wins in the next elections? What happens if they keep on winning and they feel they have to be more responsive to their conservative base? To what extent will the secular opposition accept that or will there be a renewed confrontation, as there was in the summer and fall?

So the test is still to come, but so far Tunisia, to its credit, has averted a kind of Egypt-style disaster, largely because Islamists said, "We don't want to repeat what happened in Egypt. We're going to make these concessions. We're going to step down." And they deserve credit for that.

But I think the real ideological battles are still to come, and we're going to see more and more of that going forward.

JOANNE MYERS: I just want to thank you for such a rich discussion on religion, politics, democracy. I invite you all to continue the conversation.

Audio
What if a group decides democratically that they don't want to be liberal--that they want an "illiberal democracy"? Shadi Hamid argues that repression originally compelled Islamists to moderate their politics. But ironically, democratic openings pushed them back to their original fundamentalism, leaving no space for liberal norms such as women's rights.

Video Clip
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