REACTION ESSAY

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In my paper on Morocco, I interrogate the possibility of a Moroccan "model" of political Islam—especially considering the apparent durability of the country's main Islamist party, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD). After all, the only sitting Islamist prime minister in the Arab world resides in Morocco.

In this short reaction essay, I will outline some observations and questions that have impacted my own thinking of the Moroccan case and of Islamism writ large. These are culled from reading the numerous country studies for this project, from taking part in the June 2015 workshop and discussions with fellow working group members in Washington D.C., and from participating in a three-day working group on the next generation of political Islam with Islamist activists in Doha, Qatar.

In general, the notion of Islamist "success" needs to be problematized. As Western social scientists, we seem particularly drawn to the study of elections. The data sets are available, and, indeed, we tend to reflexively study "them" the way we study "us." We love measuring and tracking "democracy," focusing on winners and losers, on horse races, victories, and defeats. We study these things, I suspect, because we are guided by the belief, perhaps even the zeal, that these outcomes matter—that the winners of elections actually win something. Yet, in authoritarian contexts—even post Arab Spring contexts—does electoral success translate into success writ large? What if longstanding regimes have stacked the deck—rigged the rules—to such an extent that electoral success might not mean what we think it does? In the Moroccan context, it becomes necessary to ask whether the PJD is really able to enact a far-reaching political agenda or affect widespread social change (or any kind of social change for that matter) in a context when the king still dominates the political sphere—specifically when it comes to religion.

Conversely, and more critically, what about non-electoral or extra-electoral means of political activism? This is an especially important question in a post-coup moment where the Egyptian

Brotherhood's experiment with electoral participation (post-Mubarak) appears to have been nothing short of abject failure. Is it perhaps conceivable that parties and movements that do not participate in elections are actually having a more dramatic effect on society? In this regard, I was particularly fascinated by Matthew Nelson's paper on [Islamist activism in Pakistan](). Pakistan is a context where the leading Islamist party appears—at least on paper—to be struggling (garnering relatively low electoral results). Yet despite (or perhaps because of) these poor electoral outcomes, the party is massively influential in ways that electorally "successful" Islamists such as the PJD are not: in influencing judicial appointments, religious tradition, educational mores, and societal norms writ-large.

Given this, it is now necessary to pay special attention to Islamist groups that might eschew electoral participation or at least those who are active in domains outside elections. In this regard, Steven Brooke's highly timely account of the challenges [facing the Egyptian Brotherhood]() in terms of social service allocation is a critical case study. Another such group that demands more attention is Al Adl Wal Ihsane in Morocco. Reading the other papers emboldens me to study Al Adl anew—to appreciate that the successes of Al Adl's extra-electoral activism as something that demands further attention and to interrogate the diverse ways in which Al Adl has become the largest Islamist group in Morocco without participating in elections. PJD gets the headlines, the ministry appointments, the fame, the international attention, but perhaps Al Adl's activism is more durable? Perhaps the more critical model is the one that we don't see everyday.

Another issue that demands further investigation is the relationship between movement and party (between *haraka* and *hizb*) in the modern Islamist project. Navigating this terrain—between longstanding Islamist movements and their newly formed parties—is a primary challenge for both scholars and Islamists alike. And this remains a topic that has not merited the amount of attention it deserves. In this regard, [Morocco]() may also very well offer a critical case for study.

The challenge for Islamist movements is how to structure or even conceive of this relationship—between *haraka* and *hizb*. When the *haraka* is too influential, when it looms too large, then the party is limited in its ability to act autonomously. This may have helped spell the demise of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—or at least doomed its ability to govern effectively. Conversely, when a party lacks a social movement organization to aid in mobilization and activism, when it lacks an organized social foundation, then the party is more vulnerable to external shocks. Based on my reading of the papers in this series, this appears, in part, to explain the continued struggles of Islamist parties in [Libya]() and [Yemen]()—or at least their inabilities to regroup or rebuild in the face of massive setbacks.

The Tunisia case offers a fascinating case of Islamists trying to navigate this new terrain in real time. In Monica Marks' explication of [the challenges facing Tunisia's Ennahda](), she suggests that the movement is now at a critical moment: about to decide whether to separate themselves into a *haraka* and a *hizb*. The risks, of course, for a new party are profound: a *haraka* helps it maintain order and discipline (especially when a young person's activism in the party is

dependent on being "accepted" into the larger movement). Yet, this all-or-nothing approach might also impair a party's ability to attract broad swaths of new members, especially those who might be interested in electoral politics, but not in full scale social movement activism.

As I detail in my new book—*Young Islam: The New Politics of Religion in Morocco and the Arab World*—Morocco's PJD faced this very predicament in 1997 in the wake of newfound electoral success. New prospective members, young people outside of its established *haraka* networks, quickly became interested in the party and, thus, the party had to figure out how to grapple with, and integrate, these people "off the street." In light of other parties' similar challenges and internal debates around the region, I will expand further on this in my continued work. I look forward to considering these and other points in the coming weeks and months.

About this Series:

The *Rethinking Political Islam* series is an innovative effort to understand how the developments following the Arab uprisings have shaped—and in some cases altered—the strategies, agendas, and self-conceptions of Islamist movements throughout the Muslim world. The project engages scholars of political Islam through in-depth research and dialogue to provide a systematic, cross-country comparison of the trajectory of political Islam in 12 key countries: Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Libya, Pakistan, as well as Malaysia and Indonesia.

This is accomplished through three stages:

- A **working paper** for each country, produced by an author who has conducted on-the-ground research and engaged with the relevant Islamist actors.

- A **reaction essay** in which authors reflect on and respond to the other country cases.

- A **final draft** incorporating the insights gleaned from the months of dialogue and discussion.