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The Rise of Electoral Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia: The Use of Democracy as a Master Frame

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Following the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions, Salafi parties have been established in Egypt and Tunisia. They tend to have ultra-conservative views on social and gender issues, but have denounced the use of violence. The al-Nour party in Egypt and the Reform Front in Tunisia have advocated the implementation of Sharia by democratic means. They have chosen to campaign through the parliament and within the constitution. However, their participation in the political system of post-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia is a puzzle given Salafism's rejection of democracy. The article will utilize framing theory to understand why electoral Salafis have endorsed democratic practices to gain support and survive politically. It will first explain the content of the democracy master frame. Then the article will describe the political transformation of Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia. Finally, it will analyse how Salafis have adopted the democracy master frame to achieve their political goals.

Salafism, Egypt, Tunisia, democracy, elections, Al-Nour

Introduction

The Salafi movement has long been identified with extremism and violence. Yet, it is far from being homogeneous. It is a large and acephalous movement with many different variations

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that has spread across the Muslim world (Cavatorta 2015; Meijer 2009). It has been claimed that there are three subgroups of Salafis: the purists, the jihadis, and the politicos (Wiktorowicz 2007, 207). Each one has its own strategy and agenda, although the common goal is to live under Sharia. Many Salafis have engaged only in *da'wa* (call to Islam) and education activities, while attempting to purify Islam from its non-Islamic elements; other Salafis have engaged in jihadi activities against foreign powers or fellow Muslims; and some others believe that the Salafi movement can play role in the political life of a country.

Salafi parties have been established in post-Arab Spring Egypt and Tunisia participating in elections. Yet, most Salafis have typically rejected democracy as a man-made system that goes against the tenets of the Muslim faith. From their point of view, Sharia is a God-given code of laws that human beings must always follow. Democracy is immoral because man does not abide by God's rules and becomes ignorant of his duties. Indeed, several Salafi scholars have openly condemned democracy and elections. For instance, Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, one of the most important Salafi scholars, argued that 'elections according to democracy are unlawful, and parliaments that do not govern in accordance with the Quran and the Sunnah, but rather on the basis of the majority's arbitrariness, are tyrannical' (Rabil 2014, 37).

However, the article will claim that some Salafis now see elections as a method to advance their faith-based agenda which aims at the establishment of a Sharia-ruled society. For this purpose, they have utilized the master frame of democracy. More specifically, they have framed their political struggle as part of the democratization process following the Arab Spring revolutions. The article will first describe the master frame of democracy. Then it will examine the rise of al-Nour party in Egypt. Also, it will describe the emergence of electoral Salafis in

neighbouring Tunisia. Finally, it will analyse how electoral Salafis have applied the democracy master frame to their local political environments.

The master frame of democracy

The Muslim world has experimented with democracy for more than one hundred years. The Ottoman Empire initiated some democratic reforms in the last quarter of the 19th century. The constitution of 1876 established a system of constitutional monarchy that lasted only two years before the restoration of absolute monarchy by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. Following the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, the Sultan was forced to restore the 1876 constitution and re-establish the Ottoman parliament (Rogan 2015, 2). The Muslim world went through a second phase of democratization after the end of Second World War. Syria became an independent republic in 1946 and had its first parliamentary elections one year later; Turkey held its first legislative elections in 1950; Indonesia's first parliamentary elections took place in 1955 alongside neighbouring Malaysia. Despite the organization of elections, democracy failed to develop strong roots in the Muslim world which suffered from authoritarianism and repression.

Since the early 2000s, more and more Islamist groups and parties have joined the democratic process. It is the third phase of the Muslim world's democratization conducted not by governments but non-state actors. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood first participated in parliamentary elections in 2000. The Palestinian group Hamas participated in the 2005 municipal elections and the 2006 legislative elections. Graham E. Fuller supports the view that 'the majority of Islamist movements have long since reached the conclusion that democratization is the best overall vehicle by which to present their agenda to the public and to gain political influence and

thereby eventually to come to power' (Fuller 2003, 29). With the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions, this political trend has only been accelerating.

There is a long debate about the compatibility of Islam with democracy. It has been argued that *Shura* (collective consultation) is the Islamic equivalent of democracy. There are two verses in the Quran referring to consultation: 'And those who respond to their Lord and keep up prayer, and whose affairs are [decided] by counsel among themselves' (42:38) and 'So pardon them and ask protection for them, and consult them in (important) matters' (3: 158). Many Islamic thinkers have elaborated on the relationship between Islam and democracy. For example, Fethullah Gülen has argued that 'Islam recommends a government based on a social contract. During the rule of the first four caliphs (632 AD-661 AD) in particular, the fundamental principles of government mentioned above—including free elections—were fully observed' (Gülen 2001).

Democracy is not only a popular political system, but also a powerful master frame. Framing theory has explored how social movements construct and disseminate messages to mobilize supporters. According to Erving Goffman, frame is an interpretive schema through which information is encountered and processed (Goffman 1974). In effect, it constitutes a form of discourse that draws on shared meanings (Hunt et al 1994). A master frame is a set of meanings that enjoys even broader popular resonance (Snow and Benford 1992). According to Pamela Oliver and Hank Johnston, 'movement participants draw upon master frames to portray their perceived injustice in ways that fit the tenor of the times and thus parallels other movements' (Oliver and Johnston 2005, 189). Therefore, master frames tend to be as generic as possible because only then they can be used by many aggrieved groups (Carroll and Ratner 1996, 602-603). Social movements would adopt those master frames that resonate with the culture and situation of potential sympathizers. They are usually transmitted through the media, conversations, speeches, slogans,

and visual representations (e.g. photos) (Johnson 2002, 66). Therefore, the concept of master frame places more emphasis on strategies rather than value orientations of social movements (Turner 1994, 79).

The *master frame of democracy* has been utilized by many groups and parties all around the world. According to Thomas Olesen, the dominance of the democracy master frame is connected to the end of the Cold War (Olesen 2005, 56). In particular, the anti-communist revolutions of 1989 in East Europe appropriated the democracy master frame that had been first advanced by the Solidarity movement in Poland (McAdam 1996, 49). During the mid-1990s, the revolutionary movement of Zapatistas managed to frame its uprising for the rights of the indigenous population in the Mexican province of Chiapas as part of a global drive for democratization (Mann 2015, 115). The master frame of democracy was used by disability groups during protests in Egypt in 2010 and 2011 to promote equality among citizens (Barnartt 2014, 67-78). Due to its widespread application, it is subject to localized interpretations. In other words, it has a high degree of flexibility and variability in accordance to particular political and cultural conditions.

The democracy master frame consists of three main components. First, it includes the principle of *political equality* which can be summarized as 'one person one vote'. In a proper democratic system, the whole adult population can participate in free, fair and periodic elections. This is a sensitive issue for some Muslim-majority countries, where the right of women to vote and run for public office either is not fully recognized (e.g. Saudi Arabia) or is disputed (e.g. post-Taliban Afghanistan). The acquisition of citizenship is often the prerequisite for equal political rights. Actually, there are many regimes that refuse citizenship to politically marginalized groups,

such as members of ethnic minorities and foreign-born long-term residents (e.g. Rohingya Muslims in Burma).

Second, the master frame contains the concept of *majority rule* whereby the decision-making is carried out by those who received most votes. Without majority rule, democracy ceases to exist because a minority would dictate its will on the rest of society. This has been a particularly attractive component for post-war self-determination movements that represented large ethnic groups against colonial powers (e.g. Algeria 1960s). The logic of this component is straight-forward: the numerical strength of a majority can delegitimize any effort to establish a minority rule.

Third, the master frame offers the value of *political legitimacy* that gives a normative advantage to those who claim to have the consent of the people. No modern political leader can afford to ignore the will of the majority. Thus, parties and movements that accept democracy, which privileges the many rather than the few, can gain more political legitimacy than anti-system movements (e.g. the radical Left). This is why even authoritarian regimes have organized elections and referendums to demonstrate, domestically and internationally, their 'democratic nature'. In Egypt, for example, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi won the 2014 presidential election with 96.1 percent of the vote (Kingsley 2014).

Salafis have been increasingly keen to employ the democracy master frame locally to mobilize people and support their particularistic cause. With the help of this master frame, they can gain enough political legitimacy to seek policy changes. But participation in elections does not always mean full acceptance of liberal values and norms. Salafis have often modified the idea of democracy to fit the local political and cultural context.

The reluctant democratization of Egyptian Salafism

Salafism appeared in Egypt in the 1970s. The first Salafis organized themselves into groups to purify Islam from non-Islamic elements and propagate a literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah. During the 1980s and 1990s, some of them came under the influence of al-Albani and other Salafi scholars who returned from Saudi Arabia (Gauvain 2013, 34). For three decades, Salafis refused to be involved in Egyptian politics because they viewed democracy as a man-made system that goes against the will of God and wanted to avoid any confrontation with the Mubarak regime.[1]

The Salafi scene of Egypt has been dominated by Alexandria-based *al- Da'wa al-Salafiyya* (The Salafi Call). Al-Da'wa has focused on charity activities for years. It has established a large network of clinics, orphanages and welfare projects to aid the poor and needy. Salafi leaders have denied that they have received money from Gulf countries to finance their social programs, but they have revealed little information about the source of their funding (McTighe 2014). The Mubarak regime sought to use them as a counterbalance against the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the Egyptian authorities from time to time banned their publications and arrested Salafi leaders.

Al-Daw'a did not participate in the January 25, 2011 Revolution against Mubarak. One of the founding leaders of the movement, Yasser al-Burhami, specified that it was not prohibited for Muslims to participate in the protests against the Egyptian regime, but he advised them to avoid it (AhramOnline 2011). The cautious stance adopted by Salafis can be explained as an act of political survival; in the words of another Salafi leader, 'they would have bombed us from the air if they saw our beards in Tahrir' (Ashour 2012). Hence Egypt's Salafi movement did not join the uprising against the Egyptian regime, apart from individual members.

Despite their self-restraint, Salafis decided to join the post-Mubarak political system. The Party of Light (*Hizb al-Nour* – hereafter al-Nour) was established by the al-Da'wa movement after the Egyptian revolution in January 2011. On 2 November 2011, the Salafi-oriented Alliance for Egypt was formed by three parties: *Al-Nour*, *Hizb al-Asala* (The Authenticity Party), and *Hizb el-Benna Wa El- Tanmia* (The Building and Development Party – hereafter BDP). Hizb al-Asala was formed by Muhammad Abd al-Maqsud, a Salafi preacher from Cairo. The BDP was established by the former jihadi group *Jammat al Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group) which launched a campaign of terror against the Egyptian state during the 1990s. Yet, its leaders renounced violence and established the BDR with the slogan 'construction, development, Sharia, political freedom, and social justice' (Yildirin 2014, 17).

Yasser al-Burhami justified the participation of al-Nour in the parliamentary elections of 2011-2012 by arguing that 'Islam must become involved in all aspects of life, even the political, and the Islamic movement must unite' (AhramOnline 2011). Farhad Khosrokhavar has argued that the participation of the Egyptian Salafis in the post-Mubarak political system signified a fundamental change in their strategy. By abandoning their non-political stance and forming a political party, Salafis recognized implicitly the democratic process (Khosrokhavar 2012, 114). But other scholars have viewed this shift as a tactical rather than strategic decision. According to Kamran Bokhari and Farid Senzai, 'their transformation stems more from political expediency than a natural ideological evolution. As a result, their commitment to the democratic process is tenuous' (Bokhari and Senzai 2013, 93). Whatever the case may be, the decision to participate in elections is of great significance because it creates a political precedent for the future of Salafism.

In the 2011-2012 parliamentary election, the Alliance for Egypt came second in votes receiving 27.8 percent of the total. As a result, al-Nour won 111 of the 498 parliamentary seats

contested; the Authenticity Party won 3 seats, and the BDP 13 seats (Al Jazeera 2012). In the presidential election of 2012, the Salafi candidate Hazem Salah Abu Ismail was disqualified by the electoral authorities. Consequently, the party supported the moderate Islamist Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh in the first round and Mohamed Morsi in the second one.

Al-Nour has shifted towards addressing social and economic challenges without abandoning its Salafi character. Its electoral program of 2011 revealed a state-centric approach whereby the government is asked to provide most services to Egyptian citizens. Also, the party favoured a planned economy with full employment provided by the state. Besides, al-Nour was preoccupied with public health and piety; it advocated the banning of smoking and alcohol (Al-Nour Party 2011, 16). The party included environmental issues in its program, claiming that the 'absence of religious faith has allowed officials and citizens alike to pollute the environment' (Al-Nour Party, 2011, 16).

Politically speaking, al-Nour has become increasingly pragmatic and flexible (Lacriox 2016). In the early post-Mubarak period, the party stressed its commitment to the implementation of Sharia as the law of the land. The competitive nature of Egyptian politics has forced them to change views; for example, former chairman Abd al-Ghaffour stated that al-Nour 'rejects the idea of a religious state. It is unacceptable' (Cesari 2014, 142). Moreover, the party chairman invited Copts to join al-Nour since they are fellow Egyptians. Ghafour even served as assistant-president of integration in the Morsi government.

While in parliament, al-Nour has been open to collaboration with other political forces. Following the December 2012 constitutional referendum which strengthened the Morsi government, al-Nour worked together with the secularist National Salvation Front against the Brotherhood (Ashwal 2013, 6). Even more surprisingly, al-Nour joined socialist parties in

opposing loans from the International Monetary Fund because Sharia forbids the payment of interest for loans (Ashwal 2013, 6).

Notwithstanding their political pragmatism, Salafis' relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood is at best ambivalent. There are historical roots to the tensions between them. Actually, al-Da'wa was established in Alexandria in the 1970s by students who opposed the Ikhwan in the local university. The Egyptian authorities tolerated its existence for many years because the movement did not seek political change. In contrast, the Ikhwan was heavily repressed by the regime because it was accused of conspiring against the state. Yet, many Salafis have criticized the Ikhwan for being too secretive and prioritizing party interests over Islamic principles. In fact, they do not consider the Brotherhood an Islamic organization. Al-Nour has taken a more conservative view than the Brotherhood on social issues; for example, they support strict gender segregation.

During the 2012-2013 protests against the Morsi government, al-Burhami and other senior Salafi leaders called for the resignation of the Egyptian president (Youm 2013). More importantly, to the astonishment of many of its members, al-Nour supported General Sisi's coup against the Morsi government. It was a politically risky decision because many supporters of the party sided with the Ikhwan and denounced the military coup. Yet, the Salafi leadership did not remain united in this act of political manoeuvring. Sheikh Ahmed Aboul Enein, a senior official, resigned from the party (Kingsley 2013). The decision of al-Nour to support the military coup against a democratically-elected president can be explained by two factors. First the party had faced harsh competition from the Ikhwan and grasped the opportunity to remain the only Islamist force in the country's political system. Second, the coup was supported by the Saudi government which is al-Nour's main external sponsor. At that time, the Kingdom was competing with Qatar for the hearts

and minds of Egyptian Muslims. Therefore, Riyadh backed Salafis and Doha supported the Ikhwan (Foreign Policy 2014).

In the 2015 parliamentary elections, al-Nour won only 11 seats. Three reasons can explain its poor performance. To start with, the Sisi regime reduced the number of party-list seats (only 120 out of 596) and increased the number of independent candidates (448 of 596). Moreover, 28 MPs were selected directly by President Sisi. Additionally, the overall voter turnout was very low and those casting their vote largely supported pro-regime candidates. The Salafi supporters 'punished' al-Nour for its ambiguous stance vis-à-vis the Egyptian military. Finally, the party itself decided to keep a low profile during the elections to avoid antagonizing the Sisi regime. During 2014, al-Nour had faced lawsuits seeking its dissolution because the Egyptian constitution states that it is 'not permissible to establish any political party on a religious basis' (Auf 2014).

Al-Nour has tried hard to survive politically in the post-coup political order in Egypt. Hence it has declared itself not a religious party, but as a party that is based on religion. In this way, its leaders have hoped to avoid the constitutional prohibition on religious parties. They have argued that the party is 'consistent with the rules of the constitution and political parties' law' (Bayoumi 2014). Also, the party seeks to guarantee fundamental rights within the framework of Sharia, including rule of law, freedom of speech, and freedom of association (Jung 2012, 3). While not abandoning the goal of adopting Sharia as the law of the land, al-Nour has campaigned for democracy and civil liberties. Thus, it can present itself as part of the pro-democracy movement in Egypt.

In any case, the participation of Salafis in the Egyptian political system constitutes an important departure from their previous isolationist stance. They constitute a relatively

inexperienced political movement which tries to strike a balance between the dominance of the military and the popularity of the Ikhwan.

The emergence of Tunisia's electoral Salafism

Salafism appeared in Tunisia sometime in the 1990s, but it did not attract a massive following. It remained a clandestine movement with little influence in the Tunisian society. The first generation of Tunisian Salafis avoided any involvement in politics and concentrated on personal morality and piety. Nevertheless, Salafis were heavily repressed by the Ben Ali regime that espoused a strict secularism. The revolution of 2011 and the subsequent rise of al-Nahda changed the political realities for Tunisian Salafis.

The Salafi-oriented Reform Front (*Jabhat al-Islah*) was established by Mohamed Khouja after the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime in January 2011. It has been viewed as the successor of the secretive group Islamic Front which operated during the 1980s. Although its candidates ran as independents in the October 2011 parliamentary elections, the party failed to win any seats. The party was legalized in late March 2012 under the al-Nahda-led government. During 2011, the interim government had twice refused to recognize the Reform Front as a legitimate party due to national security concerns (Zelin 2012). Therefore, Jabhat al-Islah has tried hard to portray itself as party that endorses pluralism. Indeed, its electoral platform stated that 'the door is open to all Tunisians who believe in the [Islamic] principles, without exclusion or marginalization' (Reform Front Party 2012).

Moreover, the Reform Front has attempted to promote a new political vision for post-Arab Spring Tunisia. While it represents the community of Salafis, the party

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advocates a more democratic political system with checks and balances. Therefore, it has committed to:

> The establishment of a pluralistic political climate...[to ensure the] transfer of power by appealing to the polls without exclusion or marginalization of any class of the society....[while] establishing the principle of the separation of the three powers and strengthening the independence of the judiciary within the limits of the provisions of Sharia (Reform Front Party 2012).

It appears that the Reform Front has not only accepted the basic tenets of democracy, but has also used them to maintain its position in the post-revolution political system. Yet, the party has not distanced itself from its Salafi roots. Hence it aims at 'restoring the Islamic way of life to establish an Islamic state that implements Islam and Sharia' (Reform Front Party 2012). In this way, the target audience is the community of devout Muslims who want the implementation of Sharia.

Apart from the Reform Front, there are two more Salafi parties: *Hizb al-Asala* (The Authenticity Party) and *Hizb al-Rahmah* (The Mercy Party) (Marks 2013, 109). The former is headed by Ali al-Mujahed who used to live in France, while the latter is led by Imam Said al-Jazeeri who spent time in Canada. Their appeal is very limited, drawing support from poor neighbourhoods of Tunis and other Tunisian cities. In fact, none of them managed to win any seats in the October 2014 parliamentary elections.

But even clandestine Salafi groups have not completely rejected democracy. The more confrontational group Partisans of Sharia (*Ansar al-Sharia*) was established in April 2011 by Saif Allah Bin Hussein, a veteran of the war against the Red Army in

Afghanistan. As opposed to militant Salafis in other parts of the Arab world, Ansar al-Sharia does not reject the electoral process. In the words of a senior member, the group is not 'absolutely in opposition to pluralism and elections....The main point is that we could conceive of such a development, but only in the context of an Islamic state…Within this framework, the existence of parties and elections would not be forbidden' (Merone 2013). In effect, the group has attempted to blend its version of Islamism with some democratic practices.

This innovative approach largely derives from the reality of modern Tunisia which is the most Westernized society in the Arab world, apart from Lebanon. There is a large middle class that maintains strong links with France and other European countries (Honwana 2013, 8). It is politically risky for the Salafis to reject totally the electoral process in the post-revolutionary Tunisia where citizens' empowerment has become a defining element of the new political system. For example, Ansar al-Sharia has come to recognize that 'Tunisia is a specific country and this specificity should be respected…We have the Quran and the Sunnah, sure, which are universal. But we also have our own specific context. We are neither Afghanistan, nor Iraq' (Merone 2013).

Yet, Ansar al-Sharia represents the most extreme version of Tunisian Salafism with links to the international Jihadi-Salafi movement. Members of Ansar al-Sharia allegedly assassinated two left-wing politicians, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in February and June 2013 respectively (Ryan 2013). The group has also accused al-Nahda and the Reform Front of having links to the U.S. security services (The Economist 2014). Consequently, Tunisian authorities decided to designate the group as a terrorist organization in August 2013 (BBC News 2013).

Nevertheless, Salafi groups have often set the political agenda in Tunisia. When a dispute broke out in the University of Manouba over whether female students can wear the *niqab* in the

classrooms, Said Ferjani, the spokesman of al-Nahda, stated that the university must find a solution 'without infringing in any shape or form on a woman's fundamental right to choose her own clothing' (Marks 2012, 23). At first sight, al-Nahda has followed a middle path between the Salafi conservatism and secularism. In reality, however, al-Nahda has maintained an ambiguous approach towards Salafi parties. It tried to build a tactical alliance with Salafis even before their parties were recognized as legal. During the October 2011 parliamentary elections, the Reform Front asked its supporters to vote for al-Nahda in those constituencies that there were no Salafi candidates (Zelin 2012). Moreover, hard-line figures within al-Nahda have maintained links with Salafi groups; for example, Sadok Chourou participated in Ansar al-Sharia's Congress in May 2011 (Lefevre 2012, 926).

Nonetheless, the then leader of the Reform Front Mohamed Khouja accused al-Nahda of being too eager to compromise with its secular coalition partners (Hamid 2014, 201). Indeed, it seems that Salafis have increasingly competed against the moderate al-Nahda for the votes of the pious Muslims. According to Anne Wolf, there are three reasons for the defection of supporters from al-Nahda to Salafi groups: first, al-Nahda did not support a reference to Sharia in the new Tunisian constitution; second, it has not taken action against members of the Ben Ali kleptocratic regime; and finally, it did not support socio-economic reforms to improve the lives of people (Wolf 2013).

Their limited electoral appeal means that Salafis are still a marginal force in Tunisian politics. However, they have evolved into a movement that can utilise democracy as a master frame. In this way, electoral Salafis can gain legitimacy and support from pious Tunisians who participate in the democratic process.

Utilising the democracy master frame

The rise of electoral Salafism in North Africa is not a unique development. The first Salafi parties were actually established in the Gulf region. In Kuwait, the Islamic Salafi Alliance (*al-Tajammu al-Islami al-Salafi*) entered the national politics in the 1990s. Salafis managed to get elected as members of Kuwait's National Assembly in December 2012, July 2013 and November 2016. One of them, Ali Saleh al-Umair was moved to the position of minister for oil in a cabinet reshuffle in January 2014 (Katzman 2014, 8). In neighbouring Bahrain, the Islamic Purity Party (*al-Asalah al-Islamiyah*) was founded in 2002 and won two seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections. The participation of Salafi parties in elections in Kuwait and Bahrain can be explained by three factors. First, there is a small (but not insignificant) local Salafi community which means that such parties have an electoral base and enjoy some degree of legitimacy. Second, Salafis have allied with the Sunni monarchies to oppose local Shia political forces in the two countries. Third, Salafi parties have received significant support from Saudi Arabia (Westall 2012; Marhoon 2013). To sum up, the emergence of electoral Salafism in the Gulf is mainly connected to the politics of Sunni-Shia antagonism.

In contrast to the Gulf region, the emergence of electoral Salafism in North Africa is the result of cataclysmic political changes. The outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions has led to a wave of democratization across the region. As a result, tens of political parties have been established to participate in the post-revolution political systems. The new Salafi parties in Egypt and Tunisia have chosen to campaign through the parliament and within the constitution. These parties have ultra conservative views on social and gender issues, but they have denounced the use of violence. It is a new generation of Salafis seeking the mainstreaming of Salafism via the electoral process.

Nevertheless, there are some important differences in the political priorities of Tunisian and Egyptian Salafis. The former have focused more than the latter on cultural/language issues because French still enjoys an important status in Tunisia as a widely spoken language (Hammond 2011). As a result, Tunisian Salafis have advocated the Arabization of the education system and social life. In contrast, their Egyptian counterparts have not discussed language issues because they live in a society where Arabic is the main instrument of communication. Instead, they are concerned with the role of Christians in Egyptian politics because there is a large minority of Copts (Awad 2014). Again, local circumstances dictate priorities and set the parameters of Salafis' actions.

Irrespective of their differences, both Egyptian and Tunisian Salafis have strived to 'Salafize' the masses by demonstrating flexibility towards democracy. Their isolationist position was overcome by the speed of political events in Egypt and Tunisia. Consequently, Salafis decided to participate in the electoral process because they came to recognize the new political reality. They have seen a political opportunity for themselves to promote their agenda and later even gain power.

Consequently, electoral Salafis have developed a more consensual approach to society and politics. For instance, the Reform Front has urged the society to 'take advantage of the achievements of the Western civilization and to work on...the indigenization of them' (Reform Front Party 2012). From its point of view, Muslims could learn from the West and adopt some good things. Moreover, the Reform Front has presented a pro-democracy platform. Hence its leader Muhammed Khouja stated that 'it is no longer the time for armed jihad…we believe Islam is a religion of democracy and freedom' (Zelin 2012). Nevertheless, his understanding of democracy is quite unique. In his words, 'in Europe, democracy gives

sovereignty to the people, but in Muslim countries, we prefer to emphasize the sovereignty of Islamic legislation…the job of the lawmaker is to distinguish the *haram* (illicit) from what is *halal* (licit) according to Islamic law' (Wolf 2012). His version of democracy is tailored for religious Tunisians who wish to support electoral Salafism.

Likewise, Egyptian Salafis have attempted to strike a balance between the tenets of global Salafism and the local political realities. Al-Nour and other Salafi parties have called for Sharia to be the sole source of legislation in post-Mubarak Egypt. Hence Salafis strongly supported the 2012 constitution, prepared by the Brotherhood-controlled Constituent Assembly, because its article 219 stated that legislation will be based on Sharia as prescribed by Sunni Islam. Following the coup against Morsi in June 2013, the 2012 constitution was suspended by the Egyptian military. Although al-Nour joined a committee which had the aim to prepare a new constitution, it failed to prevent the removal of article 219; yet, it decided to support the 2013 draft constitution because al-Azhar University, the oldest Sunni academic institution in the Muslim World, ruled in favour of abolishing this article (Rose and Ashraf 2013). The Supreme Constitutional Court's interpretation of Sharia will serve as the principal source of legislation. The prevailing political circumstances forced Egyptian Salafis to change position in a way that reflects their growing capacity to compromise.

In this context of political transition, Salafis have utilized democracy as a master frame to mobilize support and increase their appeal among Muslim communities. The adoption of the democracy master frame is a necessary step for the political survival of those Salafis who have decided to follow a non-violent approach and take advantage of the post-revolutionary momentum. This development puts electoral Salafis on a collision course with those who still condemn democracy as man-made system that goes against Sharia.

At first sight, it appears that Salafi parties have been reluctant to accept the principle of *political equality* because it implies female participation in politics. Like most Islamists, they have advocated traditional roles for women. Yet, Tunisian and Egyptian Salafis have recognized implicitly the existence of this component. Al-Nour was obliged to include female candidates on the party lists for the 2011 parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, party leaders stressed that they support gender segregation and women to remain at the bottom of the lists to minimize their chances to get elected (Jadaliyya 2011). Moreover, al-Nour selected female candidates based on their 'good reputation' and commitment to wear the *niqab* (Al Arabiya News 2014). Since then, al-Nour has shifted toward a more inclusive approach. In April 2015, the party announced that its electoral list would include 120 female candidates, including Christians and *niqab*-wearing women (AhramOnline 2015). However, Salafis would accept neither a Christian nor a female as a head of state. The Salafi rationale was provided by Mohamed Mokhtar al-Mady, a senior official of al-Nour: a Christian president would not know how to apply Sharia, while a woman can 'go weak when [she] gets her period' (Dabash 2011).

In Tunisia, Salafis have faced similar dilemmas because their anti-women bias is not well-received by the society. Due to the electoral laws, the Reform Front was forced to include female candidates in its lists during the October 2014 parliamentary elections. Some of these women have been vocal about their rights and role in Tunisian politics. For instance, a female candidate stated 'I want to represent all Tunisian women. I took my own decision to participate in these elections. Nobody added my name to gain votes for veiled women' (Ouefelli 2014). While women do not play a leadership role in the movement, it seems that there is a Salafi variation of feminism in the making.

Although global Salafism has propagated a conservative and traditional view on women's rights, local followers have preferred to meet legal requirements and acknowledge societal realities. Consequently, the participation of female Salafi candidates in elections broke a long-standing taboo and set a precedent for Salafis to accept the political equality of the female population. The adoption of democracy master frame entails an obligation to accept the component of political equality, which undermines Salafi beliefs about gender relations.

Despite being a political minority, Salafis have endorsed the component of *majority rule*. Since they are trapped in their own reality, many Salafis tend to overestimate their potential influence in their respective societies. During an interview on February 9, 2014, al-Burhami claimed that the 'al-Nour party's support base is expanding every day' (El-Mahdy 2014). This misinterpretation of political reality can be easily explained. First, long isolation and clandestine experiences have contributed greatly to the loss of political perspicacity. Second, Salafis strongly believe in the eventuality of their success so the majority will eventually follow them.

In any case, democracy is not understood by electoral Salafis only as an expression of people's will to choose their leaders. It is an opportunity for a soul-searching exercise that could lead to authentic Islam. Thus, the Salafi democracy does not guarantee gender equality or equality among religious groups. In fact, it is centred on an Islamist equivalent of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'general will' that suppresses individualism and encourages conformity (Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1968, 61-65). This belief derives from the rejection of majoritarianism because the Quran and the Sunnah suggest that the view of the majority is not always right (Anjum 2016, 468).

This component can also explain the political strategy of some Egyptian Salafis in the post-Mubarak political system. Al-Nour first allied itself to the Muslim Brothers and then to the all-powerful military. In both cases, the party used this component to justify its strategy of shifting

alliance. In 2012, the decision to support Morsi in the second round of the presidential elections was presented as the only option for Egyptian Salafis; the second candidate, Ahmed Shafik, was a former senior officer of the Air Force and a former minister under Hosni Mubarak. Despite their long history of competition and mutual suspicion, Salafis and Muslim Brothers supported each other against members of the previous regime to form a new majority. But when the new president became partisan and protests erupted against him, Salafis utilized the same master frame to defend their alliance with their former foes. An al-Nour's official justified the party's pro-army stance by claiming that Egypt under Morsi 'was on the brink of a civil war and he was not accepting any proposals or compromises that would save the situation' (Kholaif 2013). In this way, their political struggle has been framed as a democratizing effort against both the remnants of the previous regime and the Brotherhood's authoritarianism for the sake of *al-Sawad al-A'zam* (the vast majority).

Finally, the democracy master frame has the powerful component of *political legitimacy* that offers Salafis recognition and acceptance for being part of the party system. Hence they can gain more legitimacy in the eyes of the general public that has been sceptical or even hostile toward them and become more attractive to potential allies. Indeed, this component has allowed the formation of broader political alliances with parties and groups that do not share the core values of Salafism. As it has already been mentioned, al-Nour has cooperated with socialist parties in the Egyptian parliament and the Reform Front has maintained a close relationship with al-Nahda (Schwedler 2007; Karakayaa and Yildirim 2013). The use of this component can also deter state repression because it raises the political cost of confronting Salafis. However, Salafis are free riding on democracy. They do not contribute much to the democratic politics, but they still enjoy

the legitimacy that comes with it. It follows that having political legitimacy can become an instrument to undermine adversaries who oppose Salafi demands.

Still the endorsement of the democracy master frame by Salafis in Egypt and Tunisia represents a significant development that differentiates them from their counterparts in other Muslim-majority countries. The adopted frame has led to the socialization of Salafis into new political cultures which include elements of pluralism. Although the master frame has been used selectively by Salafis to reach out to pious Muslims, it has also enforced on them new norms of conduct and behaviour. In effect, the master frame of democracy has encouraged participation, accountability and consensus-building.

The organization of electoral campaigns, the drafting of the party's list of candidates in accordance to state laws, and frequent interactions with the media have shaped the political behaviour of Salafi actors. As a result, Salafis must abide by the constitution and the laws that they seek to change. They must take into account not only other political forces, but also the public opinion. One may claim that their endorsement of democracy is not genuine, since Salafis support political pluralism only if this serves their political goals.

Conclusion

Salafis have been known for their condemnation of democracy as apostasy. However, Salafi parties have been established in Egypt and Tunisia. They have participated in elections and served as opposition parties. The post-Arab Spring participatory politics have facilitated the rise of electoral Salafism in both countries.

The master frame of democracy has been applied by Salafis to their local political environments to gain support. The component of political equality has not been accepted

wholeheartedly by Salafis who usually object to female participation in elections. Yet, they have been forced to amend their position. Moreover, they have utilized the component of majority rule to justify their political manoeuvring. Finally, the democracy master frame has provided political legitimacy to electoral Salafis who have found themselves operating under difficult conditions.

The future of electoral Salafism would mainly depend on state responses: political repression would inevitably bring resistance and confrontation, whereas political accommodation could encourage moderation. Salafism is often viewed as extremist and parochial, but it is not a monolithic movement. Electoral Salafism can be viewed as a new variation that ought to be recognized in its own terms.

Note

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[1] Many Salafis believe that the Quran prohibits Muslims from overthrowing - even by democratic means - the ruler as long as he allows them to perform their religious duties. Indeed, the Quran demands from Muslims to 'obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you' (4: 59). The believers can only disobey the ruler if he asks them to commit sinful acts. Those engaged only in *da'wa* and education activities have used this verse to justify their non-involvement in politics.

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