

Political Dynamics in Islam: Addressing Contemporary Challenges

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Abstract

The focus of this research article has been the political dynamics of Islam that are changing. It explains basic principles such as Sharia (Islamic law), Caliphate (historic Islamic leadership) and Ummah (global Muslim community) and looks at their historical aspects and significance in the contemporary context. Then, the paper dissects the main topics sidestepped by Muslim-majority countries, such as the proliferation of alternative views of Politics Islam (e.g., Islamism, Secular Islam) and their effects on the form of government. Yet, its concentrate on the increasing yet dangerous discussion about the relation among the Islam principle with the democratically governance included both the relevant barriers and the opening for the integration. Additionally, the article discusses the past barriers and contemporary disputes among the Muslim world and West, led by the impact of these conditions on political realities in Muslim countries. When it comes the paper proclaims that are interpretation of the Islamic political thought according to the contemporary's reality being done in order to avoid this problem thus Islamic scholars and thinkers are needs to have a more complex approach while doing so. It portrays the need to grow the pathway of dialogues and communication among the different Islamic schools of thought, at the same time as the wider interfaith dialogue to find solutions to the wider political divisions. The paper highlights the relevant place of education in promoting the enlightened and sensible political participation, which in its turn can build a sound fundamental of the society. Through the juggling of educational reforms that face cutting-edge political problems, the document attempts to argue that the future belongs to Islam where it will dominate the way of peacefully progressive world order.

Keywords: Political Dynamics, Caliphate, Islamic System, Contemporary Challenges

Introduction

The political thought of Islam rests on its historical and theological foundations, which, in turn, are firmly established on the Prophetic life of Muhammad (PBUH) and the Quran, the Islamic

sacred book. Medina is considered to be the starting of the first Islamic community with the Prophet Muhammad dating back to the seventh century CE and hence, the Prophet's leadership and the Medina model became a main model of Islamic state (Rahman, 2009) The Quran itself lays out principles of justice, consultation (shura), and the importance of a righteous ruler (Quran 2: The documentary started with an interview: "I Mia Davies, 24-year-old, initially from Stoke-on-Trent and living in London for the last two years." (188, 42:38). These features coupled with the hadiths (words of the Prophet) have affected studies of Muslim philosophers who exert much effort to understand and explain these components (Ahmed, 1999). Political dynamics Islam designates the phenomenon through which religious convictions with legal interpretations, historical perspectives, and social components interact each other and shape the government of Muslims communities. This tug-of-war has been fundamental during the whole Islamic history and its creation and collapse of empires, development of legal systems and on-going governance models in the current era (Hodgson, 1986). We live in the present and political dynamics of Islam is indeed very crucial. Participating in the on-going debates on democracy and implementation of the Sharia law on the one hand, and promoting social movements and admitting that the world is becoming a global village reinforce the idea that all of the above should be known before entering political affairs in Muslim countries (Brown, 2017). In this research paper, the author lays down a scheme that explains the main political trends which drive the world of Islam. That is to say that it focuses on core principles and historic developments to help in seeing the lines that connect historical past to present day political beliefs. The focus of the paper is to consider different solutions to deal with these difficult conditions, taking in account the conflicts native to the Muslim world today. Through the course of this investigation, we will consider various offerings that may be able to give us a more secure and a fairer society in times to come.

Political Concepts in Islam

The Sharia: Definition and Sources

Sharia, originating from the Arabic term meaning "the path to watering place" or "the clear path," is the fundamental concept of Islamic jurisprudence and morality, providing guidance for Muslims in all facets of life (An-Naim, 2008). Considered as God's (Allah's) divine revelation for humanity, Sharia extends beyond mere legal prescriptions to encompass ethical principles, rituals, and social practices essential for leading a righteous life (Hallaq, 2009). It serves as the framework for shaping individual conduct, interpersonal relationships, and societal governance within Islamic communities. This comprehensive code of conduct addresses various aspects of human existence, including personal hygiene, dietary laws, familial relations, economic transactions, and matters of governance. As a dynamic and evolving system, Sharia adapts to the changing circumstances and challenges faced by Muslim societies while remaining rooted in the Quran, the Hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad), and scholarly interpretations. Through its holistic approach to morality and law, Sharia plays a central role in shaping the spiritual, moral, and social fabric of Islamic societies, reflecting the divine guidance intended to promote justice, compassion,

and righteousness among believers. The primary sources of Sharia, the Islamic legal and moral code, are foundational to understanding and interpreting Islamic law and ethics.

Firstly, the Quran, considered the literal word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad, serves as the cornerstone of Sharia, providing core principles, legal injunctions, and moral guidelines for Muslims (Rahman, 2006). Secondly, the Sunnah, comprising the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad documented in hadiths, supplements the Quran by offering insights and clarifications on various issues (Robinson, 2015). Additionally, Ijma, or scholarly consensus among Islamic jurists, is recognized as another source of Sharia, although there are differing opinions on its nature and authority within Islamic jurisprudence (Powers, 2015). Finally, Qiyas, or analogy, allows Islamic jurists to derive rulings on contemporary issues by drawing parallels with existing rulings based on the Quran and Sunnah (Zimmermann, 2008). It is essential to understand that Sharia is not a rigid, codified legal system but rather a flexible framework of principles that necessitates interpretation and application by jurists within specific historical and social contexts (Hallaq, 2009). This dynamic nature of Sharia ensures its relevance and adaptability across diverse Muslim communities and societies.

The Caliphate:

The concept of the Caliphate emerged after the death of Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century CE. "Caliph" (Khalifah) translates to "successor," and the early caliphs were seen as political and religious leaders who succeeded the Prophet in governing the Muslim community (umma) (Ahmed, 1999). The first four caliphs, known as the Rashidun caliphs, were chosen through consultation (shura) and ruled based on Quranic principles and the Prophet's practices (Robinson, 2010). Over time, the caliphate evolved into a powerful empire encompassing vast territories. The Umayyad (661-750 CE) and Abbasid (750-1258 CE) caliphates centralized authority and established elaborate bureaucracies (Donner, 2010). However, the caliphate's role gradually became more symbolic, with real power often residing with regional governors or military leaders (Lapidus, 2002). The Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 CE dealt a major blow to the Abbasid caliphate, which continued a weakened existence until its symbolic abolition by the Ottoman Sultan Selim I in 1517 CE (Dauerman, 2005). The Ottomans then claimed the caliphate title, although their legitimacy was contested by other Muslim rulers (Shaw, 1977).

The Ummah (Islamic community):

The concept of Ummah refers to the global Muslim community, united by their faith in Allah and the teachings of Islam (Ahmed, 1999). It transcends ethnic, national, and cultural boundaries, emphasizing the shared identity and brotherhood (wala) of all Muslims (Rahman, 2002). This concept has historically inspired various forms of political organization, with some advocating for a unified Islamic state encompassing the entire Ummah. The idea of a single caliphate leading the Ummah held sway for centuries, although the historical caliphates faced challenges in maintaining unity due to geographical vastness and diverse populations (Donner, 2010). Proponents of a unified caliphate argue that it would promote solidarity, offer a centralized leadership for Muslims worldwide, and ensure the implementation of Sharia law across Muslim-

majority nations (Milligan, 2016). However, many scholars emphasize the impracticality of a single caliphate in the modern world. The diversity of political systems, cultural practices, and ethnicities within the Ummah presents significant hurdles to establishing a unified political structure (Johnstone, 2010). Additionally, concerns exist regarding potential authoritarianism and the potential for replicating historical power struggles within a single caliphate (Anderson, 2016).

The concept of Ummah can also be interpreted as encouraging cooperation and solidarity between Muslim-majority nations while respecting their individual political structures (Hassan, 2010). This interpretation emphasizes fostering dialogue, economic partnerships, and collective action on issues of shared concern without imposing a centralized political authority. The concept of Ummah, inherently promotes a sense of shared identity, but it also grapples with challenges stemming from the vast diversity within the Muslim world. Sectarian divisions, notably between Sunni and Shia Muslims, contribute to theological and historical differences that can escalate into political tensions (Madelung, 1997). Moreover, ethnic and national identities often intersect with religious affiliations, leading to loyalties that sometimes prioritize local or national interests over a universal Islamic community (Roy, 2004). Socioeconomic disparities among Muslim-majority nations exacerbate these divisions, hindering collective action and solidarity (Bayly, 2004). Furthermore, the diverse range of political systems, from democracies to monarchies, poses challenges in forming a unified political front that represents the interests of the entire Ummah (Wright, 2010). While diversity enriches Islamic civilization and fosters intellectual discourse, it also presents obstacles to achieving political consensus and coordinated action, highlighting the complex interplay between unity and diversity within the Ummah.

Contemporary Challenges

i. Political Islam:

The term "Political Islam" encapsulates a wide range of ideologies that leverage Islamic symbols and traditions to pursue political objectives (Ahmed, 2016). Within this spectrum, it's crucial to distinguish between different interpretations. Firstly, Islamism advocates for the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law, with Islamic principles governing all aspects of public and private life (Brown, 2017). Groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir align with this ideology. Conversely, Secular Islam emphasizes the compatibility of Islam with democratic principles and secular governance, asserting that Islamic values can coexist within a framework that respects individual freedoms and separates religion from the state (Eickelman, 2002). Turkey under the leadership of Atatürk serves as a notable example of this approach. However, these distinctions aren't always clear-cut, as some advocate for a gradual Islamization of society through democratic means, while others favor a more revolutionary approach (Wiktorowicz, 2006). Furthermore, interpretations of Sharia and the role of religion in politics vary widely within both Islamism and Secular Islam, reflecting the diverse and complex nature of Political Islam. The popularity of the Islamist movements is a multilayered issue that must be seen in the light of interrelated factors and they support to political developments. Firstly,

disenchantment with the secular regime, which is thought to be inefficient in tackling issues such as burgeoning poverty, corruption and the imperial domination of the West, has provided an opportunity to the Islamist movements to fuel the individual desires of a great number of Muslim populaces for social justice and personal independence through Islamist ideology (Kepel, 1993). Also, a wider Islamic revival which traces its roots to a renewed emphasis on Islamic thinking and way of life and a heightened sense of religious piety has encouraged Muslims to be active in this realm (Hodgson, 1986).

Moreover, the 1979 Iranian Revolution under the leadership of Khomeini had aims about a political form of Islam resulting in such sentiments creating the image of a serious rival to the field of politics across the Muslim world (Wright, 2009). Islamist movements have impacted the political dynamics in a variety of ways that are too complex and nuanced to describe exhaustively here. Primarily, revolutionaries have prompted the struggle for a more political process by stimulating the oppressed and inactive population to take a stand against the authority, dispelling the power structure (Bayart, 2007). As another issue, Islamists' movements have indeed presented challenges to authoritarian regimes that are bringing democratic reforms, but there are differing positions about democracy principles (Brown, 2017). Moreover, various Islamist groups have been convinced by all the empty niches in the field of social welfare not paid attention to by the state, thus, gaining the support from the local citizens because of the services provided (Wiktorowicz, 2006). Indeed, Islamic revivalism has not only resulted in positive impacts but religious strife and incitement as well that in some contexts were the catalyst for inter-Sunni-Shia violence. Thus, identifying the varied readings of Political Islam and the varied experience of factors that initiate their booming is of utmost importance, being the key element to having a holistic picture and understanding of the impact of Political Islam on political dynamics of the modern world.

Democracy and Islam:

The discussion on whether Islamic values and democracy can co-exist or not is on its way to becoming a century's old saga. Supporters of this kind of view suggest that Islam, in its principle of Shura where will is communicated and reached through consultation, social justice, and equality before the God, but not democracy holds values that may be converged with democracy (Esposito, 1997). Moreover, they draw heritage from the golden times of Islam when many communities followed Muslim leadership's consultative tradition, for instance, early Medina community under Muhammad (Rahman, 2009). Besides, they claim that Sharia law, if correctly understood, can be a useful resource for constructing versatile and sensitive legislation within a democratic space (An-Naim, 2008). Nevertheless, critics advance the view that by claiming exclusive dominion of God, the idea of the God Almighty may lack compatibility with shared sovereignty in a democracy. Among other explanations for critics, certain interpretations of Sharia promote fixed penalties and social norms that might be against the ideals of democracy where it is a principle of individual rights and freedoms (Merkel, 2010).

In order to successfully implement Islamic values as part of the power structure of democratic frameworks, a complex and bumpy road is faced by many difficulties and expectations. Sharia

Law with democratic countries can turn into critical questions. Therefore, the process of making such reformation calls for a careful walk through this junction (Eickelman, 2002; An-Naim, 2008). Achieving the perfect equilibrium of the majority rule while at the same time maintaining the protection of the rights of minorities within democratic countries compounds the complexity of this endeavor (Tibi, 2010). Nevertheless, the incorporation of Islamic principles of social justice and compassion in the democratic policies could contribute to the development of fairness and cohesion, while at the same time the democracies provide a way for a more participatory involvement of Muslim communities through democratic platforms (Brown, 2017; Esposito, 1997). In addition to this, the harmony between western liberal democracy and political Islam can assist in building up the legitimacy and stability of democratic institutions. This usefulness has been made apparent in many Muslim-majority countries whereby Islam has a significant cultural and social role (Voll, 1997). Navigating these challenges and embracing these opportunities requires ongoing dialogue, adaptation, and compromise, ultimately aiming to establish stable, just, and inclusive political systems in the Muslim world that honor both democratic ideals and Islamic heritage (Brown, 2017).

Islam and the West:

The relationship between Islam and the West has traversed a composite terrain marked by both cooperation and conflict. Historical tensions have deep roots, including the Crusades, a series of religious wars launched by Christian Europe to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslims, leaving a legacy of mistrust (Tyerman, 2009). Furthermore, European colonialism in the Muslim world during the 18th and 19th centuries exacerbated these tensions, often viewed as a period of exploitation and humiliation (Robinson, 2010). The Cold War era added another layer of complexity, as US-Soviet rivalry fueled conflicts in Muslim-majority nations, frequently pitting Islamic groups against US-backed regimes (Medea, 2008). These historical experiences continue to reverberate in contemporary conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, characterized by ongoing struggles for statehood and the status of Jerusalem, which perpetuate anti-Western sentiment in the Muslim world (Shlaim, 2009). Moreover, the US-led War on Terror post-9/11 has been interpreted by some Muslims as a broader assault on Islam, exacerbating feelings of alienation and contributing to radicalization (Wiktorowicz, 2006).

The highly versatile link amongst the Muslim-majority countries and the West brings about a substantial impact on political process, the problems and the opportunities of which upcoming leaders will have to deal. Firstly, tensions between the Western countries may lead to the growth of nationalism since undifferentiated negative feelings over the West are used by the leaders to get common support and to separate people from the government's domestic policy (Bayart, 2007). Moreover, usually the Islamist support groups represent the sense of Western hostility and, concurrently, they try to serve as protectors of Islamic tradition against the Western cultural infiltration. (Kepel, 1993) western influence can function as a pretext to demolish democracy as means of suppressing internal opposition groups (Brown, 2017). While there is no doubt that problems arise, by the same token, there is also a lot of room for solutions. A European

rejectionist can spark Islamic reform movements seeking to broaden the perceptions of the Western region with modern and tolerant teachings of Islam. What is more, Western major powers' actions will have a sharper gauge in the hostile public opinion which will lead to a call for openness and transparency in their foreign strategy (Roy, 2007). Navigating the process of this relationship forms its own complexity which requires a delicate knowledge of historical resentments, inherited conflicts and their consequences on the political views of the people in the Muslim populated countries.

Addressing the Challenges

Reinterpreting Islamic Political Thought

The escalating change of social, political, and scientific contexts suggests the review of the classical Muslim political teachings which in turn creates necessity for fresh viewpoints to face today's troubling issues. On the other hand, the emerging equilibrium of global powers urges the reinterpretation (or the likewise concept) of Islamic challenges related to foreign policy, warfare, and economics justice so they can be in sync with the new realities. Along with that, altering social ideas about women's position, human rights, and citizenship must be interpreted from traditional Islamic legal frameworks and government to acquire coherence and relevance within today's reality (Ahmed 2016). However, the arrival of completely new inventions such as artificial intelligence and social media as well requires a broader view about Islamic views on communication, privacy, and social values (Esposito, 2003). This is the essence of the idea behind the relevant main message, which is that any active reevaluation and subsequent adjustment allow us to use the contemporary principles in the best way to tackle modern challenges, correctly.

Islamic academics and thinkers have become key to the Islamists' agenda, who have been driving the process of reinterpreting the Islamic scripture. Following the Islamic principle of *ijtihad*, or independent legal interpretation, scholars then improve their awareness and adopt new methods to reinterpret classical texts and legal rulings considering modern social landscapes (An-Naim, 2008; Hallaq, 2009). Allowing Muslims to engage in unstrained intellectual exchange within their communities, which will in turn, help them adopt new interpretations of established tradition while still sticking to the basic principles, which cater to the requirements of the present times (Brown, 2017). Despite that, the scholars of this movement will inescapably confront the criticisms and some form of opposition from the proponents of literal translation of Islamic texts, and the re-interpretations must give enough basis to their arguments in a manner that strong Islamic values are not compromised and in opposition to the multiplicity of modern contexts. Arguably, a rich describing remains not only relevant but also critical for developing the necessary adaptability in order to properly pass the triple barriers of being faithful to the essence of Islam, while being able to handle the enormous complexities of the existing world.

Promoting Intra-faith Dialogue

The Islamic World's spectrum encompasses a varied collection of thought schools, interpretations, and practices to which, intra-religious dialogue is not a lavish but an appropriate

option for the peace, unity, and social welfare. One his ways being that this interaction helps lower the sectarian tensions between the Sunni and the Shia Muslims. This is so that the historical and theological variations can be resolved, to the end of peaceful coexistence (Madelung, 1997) On the one hand, this process expands the scope of Islamic perception, transforming it into a vibrant format that involves intellectual exchange and novelty, as long as it adjusts to our modern times (Ahmed, 2016). On top of that, through this process we may facilitate the discussions concerning the particular problems such as extremism and gender inequality which may unify the Muslim communities around common challenges and perspectives for the good. However, promoting such dialogue faces challenges including political interference by governments exploiting sectarian differences for power consolidation and resistance from religious leaders aiming to maintain authority (Bayart, 2007; Wiktorowicz, 2006). Nonetheless, intra-faith dialogue serves as the foundation for broader interfaith dialogue, which is crucial for promoting religious tolerance, addressing global challenges, and countering extremism (Esposito, 2002; Kühn, 2012; Philpott, 2009). Through open and respectful dialogue within and between faiths, a more peaceful and just world can be realized.

The Role of Education

Education serves as a cornerstone for nurturing informed and respectful political participation within Muslim communities. Critical thinking skills cultivated through education enable individuals to analyze political information, assess policies, and engage meaningfully in the political process, countering misinformation and propaganda (Yusuf, 2006). Moreover, education fosters civic engagement by imparting an understanding of civic rights and responsibilities, encouraging citizens to actively participate in public life and hold leaders accountable for their actions (Shain & Filby, 2013). Additionally, education promotes tolerance, understanding, and respect for diverse viewpoints, essential for fostering constructive political discourse and peaceful coexistence within pluralistic societies (AbuKhalil, 2010). However, economic development maybe greatest challenges in some Muslim-dominated countries of the world, education system cannot be able to filled the gaps, curriculum often focuses rote learning than critical thinking and exposes too few about diversity. In this respect, educational reforms must be carried out, for instance, the curriculum reforms should integrate civic education and development of critical thinking skills, the encouragement of open dialogue on the sensitive topics of politics, as well as the establishment of media literacy, which will allow the student to evaluate critically the political discourse. Thus, through these reforms, educational systems can meet the needs of the 21st century, which is the real services to the nations to multiply its future goals and to contribute to a more just and democratic future for Muslim countries.

Conclusion

For the most part, education plays a central role in cultivating politically informed and responsible Muslim citizenry as well. Awareness on critical thinking skills through education cause individuals to use social, political information, evaluate policies and take a reasonable part in political process rather than allowing misinformation and propaganda. Along these lines,

education promotes civic participation by providing an avenue for democratic participation, stimulating citizens' attention to the country's affairs, and encouraging them to act responsibly towards the country leader. Education includes the development of personality, socialization, familiarization with the values of a diverse society, and the achievement of a balance of interests in the context of resolving power relations in a multicultural society. On the contrary course perspectives of traditional education systems in different Muslim countries may turn unsatisfactory because of the overwhelmingly utilized rote learning instead of critical thinking while lack of the diversity. The institutionalize of the above shortcomings requires that there be carried out educational reforms including; i) curriculum reforms that integrate civic education and critical thinking skills development, ii) promotion of open dialogue on sensitive political issues, and iii) the enhancement of media literacy to help students critically analyze political discourse. Muslim countries can nurture new leaders and citizens to actively engage in the political arena properly to avoid its democratic deficit. Education reforms might be a tool for that purpose.

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