

REVIVAL OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REGION AND BEYOND

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As part of the radical political changes that have affected a number of Arab countries over the past 3 years, the toppling of regimes and the organization of the first fair and free elections in several Arab states have allowed Islamist parties to rise to power. This highly visible political trend has caused mixed reactions, both within these countries and internationally. Prior to the Arab Spring, in most countries Islamist movements were banned from forming political parties. For decades, their members were jailed, tortured, and exiled from their home countries. Even in those states where Islamist political parties were allowed, they had limited freedom and were under the scrutiny of the regimes, as was, for example, the Moroccan Justice and Development Party.

The varied experiences of Islamist political parties in power over the last 2 years in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt offer a mixed picture. The debacle of Muslim Brotherhood rule in Egypt captured a great deal of international attention, but it did not resemble the trajectory of other governing Islamist parties in the region. Electorates have been disappointed by the performance of Islamist-led governments, which turned out to be unprepared to govern. Their poor performance is not only due to a lack of capability; it is also due to the fact that integration into the existing political system has not been smooth and free of obstruction. Islamist parties have faced fierce resistance both from secular parties and other forces in their respective societies and from abroad, as is evident from the opposition of rich Arab Gulf Monarchies.

Completed in September 2013, this monograph provides an overview of the factors behind the victory of Islamist parties in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, and continues by examining their performance in power in

different policy areas, with a particular focus on foreign policy. It argues that policymakers should not follow the popular trend of reducing the delicate political transition underway in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco to simple ideological differences between Islamist parties and their secular opponents. Instead, this is a reflection of an ongoing struggle between traditional elites. Furthermore, it should be remembered that, contrary to widespread fears, the foreign policy aims of Islamist political parties in North Africa coincide with the aims of the United States and its allies in a number of key areas.

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