How does Islam connect to Social Movement Organizations?

How does Mobilization Occur in the Middle East?

The Issue:

The relationship between Islam and social movement theory has been underexplored in the Middle East.

What Scholars have Said:

Existing literature uses popular western perceptions of the Muslim world to explain the mobilization of Middle Eastern social movement organizations (SMOs).

Their Misconceptions:

When doing so, scholars either overemphasize the ideological influences of these groups (i.e. Hamas), or point to modernization as the key to unrest (i.e. 1979 Iran). The result is a skewed conception of Islam’s role in social movement groups as an explicit ideological tool or opponent of change.

An Alternative:

Using Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis tool, I have tracked four SMOs (two Egyptian and two Moroccan) and how Islam has affected their beliefs, organizational and leadership structures, recruitment and activities, and relationships with other groups.

The Result:

- Islam both benefits and restricts a SMO’s functions.
- Egyptian and Moroccan populations are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of age, religion, and beliefs.
- The result has been:
  1. An emergence of ideologically and structurally flexible non-Islamist SMOs
  2. A transformation of older, more rigid Islamist SMOs
- All four SMOs demonstrate quick adaptation skills and a sense of pragmatism

How were the countries chosen?

- Using International Crisis Group Arab Spring series as an initial guide
- Presence of SMOs, media coverage

How were SMOs Chosen?

- Tracked a four-week period where protests in the country occurred in multiple cities more than 3 times per week
- Tallied the number of times each SMO was mentioned in international, regional, and local newspapers
- Chose top 2 SMOs mentioned in each country (2 groups with Islamic ideologies, 2 without)

How does Mobilization Occur in the Middle East?

- Organizational and Leadership Structures
  - Principals of SMOs gained legitimacy from the local community
  - SMOs were able to either neutralize or strengthen their ideologically flexible structure based on political issues

- Ideologies, Ideas and Beliefs
  - Explicit ideologies supported liberal values (freedom, equal rights, justice)
  - Economic and judicial reform were the most common demands
  - The Brotherhood's demand of an Islamic state became more moderate
  - Symbols used during protests reflected the ideological heterogeneity of the four SMOs

- Recruitment and Activities
  - Mosques are no longer the hub for political dissent and recruitment
  - Private gatherings are one of the only face-to-face methods of recruitment for the Egyptian groups
  - The internet has become the dominant short-term mobilization tool, and has become the arena for both ideological and political dissent

The Process

How was the Research done?

- Coding, using Atlas.ti (a qualitative analysis tool)
- What were the primary source documents?
  - 400 newspaper articles (100 for each group)
  - 65 other documents:
    - human rights reports
    - journal articles
    - other research

The Results

- A new set of findings have emerged:
  - Islam is a key influencer in SMOs
  - SMOs need to adapt to their context

The Muslim Brotherhood

- Founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna
- Began as a group against British occupation
- Islam was since the core of the group’s ideology
- Entered the official political realm in the 1980s
- The largest and most organized social movement group in Egypt
- Created official political party (Freedom & Justice) after 2011 uprising

Kefaya, or ‘Enough’

- Founded in 2004 by a coalition of Marxists, liberals, Islamists, and Nasseries
- Began as a rally against the Mubarak Regime and his son’s succession
- Ideologically flexible with general values on freedom, justice, and equality
- Protested with the Brotherhood against Iraq War and Israeli occupation
- In 2011, it became one of the principal groups who mobilized protestors
- One of the leaders of online activism against the Mubarak Regime

Al Adl Wal Ihsane (Justice & Charity)

- Founded in 2011 by political parties, NGOs, labor unions, Islamists, and members of the Amazigh (Berber) movement
- Demands constitutional reform and recognition of King as a symbolic figurehead
- Ideological flexibility and self-described as pro-democratic
- Initially participated with Al Adl Wal Ihsane in 2011 Moroccan protests
- Differences in demands caused the Islamist group to split in December 2011

February 20th Movement

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Relationships with Other SMOs

- Ideological and generational gaps between Islamist and non-Islamist SMOs create ambiguous relationships (cooperative when demands remain vague)
- In Morocco, the King and his monarchy have become the highest religious authorities and have successfully delegitimized Al Adl’s claim on Islam
- In Egypt, the Brotherhood’s size and social services have allowed them to assume a higher religious legitimacy over the state

Recruitment and Activities

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