



Regional Conference:

**Post Political Islam: Conditions,  
Contexts and Perspective**

Conference Explanatory Paper

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## Post-Islamism: Conditions, Contexts, and Prospects

Although the use of the term “post-Islamism” goes back to previous decades, especially the end of the 1990’s, it has once again returned to the spotlight, stronger than ever, as numerous Islamist movements today strive for greater penetration by accepting democracy, political pluralism, power-sharing, and public and individual freedoms. In the Arab-Islamic world today, many Islamist movements are also announcing a separation between the Islamic mission (Da’wah) and politics as they begin to consider this principle.

We clearly observed this approach from Islamist movements and trends in the last annual conference, held by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Amman, under the title, “The Prospects of Political Islam in a Troubled Region: Islamists and Post-Arab Spring Challenges.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, our idea (at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and at the University of Jordan’s Center for Strategic Studies) is to build on what has come before, to try to read more, and to analyze more deeply to understand this approach that is evolving in a more pragmatic and political direction, for example, through dropping historical campaign slogans, such as “Islam is the solution,” and moving towards acceptance of concepts and principles that were foreign to Islamist discourse and ideology in previous decades.

The results of the pragmatic and political evolution and transformation within political Islam’s ideology is bringing back the concept of “post-Islamism” – or more precisely the “transit” to a post-Islamist stage – meaning that Islamist movements are abandoning many of their established slogans, goals, and philosophies that formed the core of their political and religious ideology and discourse in past decades. Examples include: moving from the establishment of the Islamic state, the Islamification of society, and statements that Islam is the solution, to an acceptance of democracy as the definitive form of government; of religious, cultural, and political pluralism; and of the separation of Da’wah and politics. This means a shift to professional political parties within the political and

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1- The conference was held in Amman, May 23, 2017, and the participants were Arab and foreign researchers and experts. The conference papers were published in an Arabic-English book, *The Prospects of Political Islam in a Troubled Region: Islamists and Post-Arab Spring Challenges*, edited by Mohammad Abu Rumman, Friedrich Ebert Foundation (German), Amman, 2018, pp. 7-9.

democratic process, as well as abandonment of the “utopia” of an Islamic state based on Shariah law as understood by radical Islamist circles. Practically, this means distinguishing religion, preaching, and Islamic jurisprudence from politics and party work. These movements are engrossed in this through intellectual changes and jurisprudential and religious revisions within their circles.

Of necessity, researchers and academics have no precise definition for the concept of “post-Islamism,” and its conditions, contexts, indicators, and causes, especially those who had a role in creating and framing the concept. For example, Olivier Roy and Olivier Carre used this term in the beginning of the 1990’s to indicate the failure of the Islamist experiment and its inability to offer answers to the problems of government and economy. This motivated political Islam to drop its pronouncements and return to the process of separating the religious and political spheres, as was the case in previous centuries before the emergence of contemporary Islamist movements that ideologized and politicized Islamic discourse. Gilles Kepel’s thesis on the failure of political Islam does not differ from before, wherein, according to this view, the post-Islamist stage either takes place outside the Islamist movement and its excesses and religious ideology or reflects its failure, inability to accomplish its goals, and thus its flight towards “post-Islamism.”

The analysis of other researchers and academics differs with this view, for example, the French researcher, Francois Burgat, who doubts completely the pronouncements of the failure of political Islam, and Asef Bayat, who believes that post-Islamism is not an reversal of Islam; instead, Islamism has turned upside down Islamic concepts and ideas, such as the primacy of rights and duties (pluralistic and historical) and the integration of rights, religiosity, faith, and freedoms. This is the result of a process of adaptation and adjustment of “electoral Islam” to the democratic process, leading to large shifts within Islamist movements themselves.<sup>2</sup>

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2- To follow the discussion, dialogue, and debate among experts and researchers on the concept of “post-Islamism,” see:

- Hassan Abu Haniyeh, “Post-Islamism,” Alrai Newspaper, Jordan, 9/5/2016 <http://alrai.com/article/786051.html>
- Ismail Ben Qada, “Reading about Post-Islamism,” Alrai Newspaper, 6/9/2009 <http://www.raya.com/home/print/6f65c7e4-a628-4208-915e-17fced8c3f39/0768b733-1173-4c85-a386-8cc2290069c8>
- Mesfer Bin Ali Al Qahtani, “Decline of Political Islam or New Revival,” Al-Hay-

If we want to contextualize the theoretical trends in reading and defining the concept of “post-Islamism,” we can find three main trends:

Trend One – sees political Islam as essentialist structure that does not evolve, wherein post-Islamism is the result of the failure of political Islam itself, while society seeks other choices and alternatives.

Trend Two – believes that political Islam is linked to specific contexts and not to an unchanging essence. Thus, its discourse, ideas, and positions are evolving and accordingly, post-Islamism may be the outcome of the evolution of party movements of political Islam itself or of other Islamic phenomena.

Trend Three – views post-Islamism as a phase also, and a process, but not belonging to political Islam itself; rather, it belongs to social or cultural Islam, meaning that it is emerging outside of Islamist circles and their political movements. Examples include the new preachers phenomenon and policies of social religion or liberal Islam, Some observers even view Sufi movements as a model for post-Islamism.<sup>3</sup>

In this conference we will explore the concept of “post-Islamism,” the extent of its legitimacy and credibility, as a fundamental shift in the discourse and behavior of Islamists, as well as the reasons driving it, the conditions, obstacles, and realistic models of this concept or those approaching it, both in the Arab and the broader Muslim world, and both among Sunni or Shia.

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at, London, 5/7/2014 <http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/3399011/%D8%A3%D9%81%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%9F>

- Mada Al Fatah, “The End of Political Islam As an Orientalist Theory,” Al-Quds Al-Araby Newspaper, 4/10/2017 <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=802012>
- Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam, edited by Asef Bayat, translated by Mohammed Al Araby, Dar Aljadawel, Beirut, 2015, 1st edition, p. 2.

3- See: Mesfer Al Qahtani, “Decline of Political Islam,” op. cit., Mada Al Fatah, op. cit., Hassan Abu Haniyeh, op. cit.

## 1. The legitimacy of the concept of post-Islamism

The American thinker of Iranian origin, Asef Bayat, defines post-Islamism as changes in the ideas, approach, and practices of Islamism from within and without.<sup>4</sup> As examples of shifts in Islamist parties towards “post-Islamism,” Bayat cites Turkey’s Justice and Development Party, Tunisia’s Ennahda, and Morocco’s Justice and Development Party. They have all assimilated into the national, democratic, and political framework and abandoned many of the slogans and ideas associated with Islamist movements – such as the establishment of an Islamic or shariah state, the Islamification of society, etc. – and those parties, as Bayat describes them, have become closer to “democratic entities” in Islamic societies.<sup>5</sup>

Afterwards, we found that there are other Islamist movements and approaches that are attached to those parties and movements and are more accepting of the principle of democracy; political, religious, and cultural pluralism; power-sharing; and abandonment of the “Islamic state” project that ruled the Islamist imagination for decades. They are accepting of democracy as the definitive system of government and not merely as a temporary waystation along the way to an Islamic state or a classic caliphate. These are the general goals that the Islamist movements had established and wanted to achieve.

Despite these developments and changes in Islamist discourse and political practice, there is an element among Western and Arab politicians and researchers who doubt the credibility of this discourse and behavior. They view what is happening as merely “tactics” to achieve power, and they see that Islamists have important disagreements in their ideologies and ideas while trying to hide behind acceptance of democracy and pluralism. They claim to accept the secular state and separation of Da’wah and politics, but ultimately they remain committed to realizing their goals of establishing an Islamic state or society. There is an element that is also skeptical of the legitimacy of the concept of “post-Islamism,” which today includes many Arab governments and intellectuals and Western think tanks that, together, remain committed to denying any actual fundamental evolution in Islamist thought, especially after the toppling of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (July 2013) and the recognition of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group in many Arab countries.

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4- Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam, op. cit., p. 3.

5- Op. cit., p. 1.

There is another view from academics and politicians who do not ignore these major changes, but also caution that their size and extent should not overstated. These changes represent a limited current or small space within political Islam, while, in contrast, the more rising and influential trend today is the radical fundamentalist trend that believes in armed action and the establishment of the Islamic state. This revivalist and traditional trend within Islamist movements remains active and unflagging for the “old dream” and fights against completely abandoning the “approach of political Islam.”<sup>6</sup>

Against this background, the conference will seek to discuss previous arguments and ideas and to deconstruct the dialectic of the legitimacy of the concept of “post-Islamism.” [Its first session, “The Concept of Post-Islamism: The Intellectual Map and Practical Contexts,”](#) will deal with the subject in three main papers. Hassan Abu Haniyeh’s paper deals with the general framework in which the term “post-Islamism” came about, the circumstances and controversies surrounding the term, and the various trends relating to its legitimacy and credibility. Luz Garcia Gomez’s paper is a more in-depth discussion and debate on the legitimacy of the concept of post-Islamism and the extent of the credibility of its applications on the ground. Dr. Nader Al Hashemi’s paper discusses “The crisis of legitimacy in Teheran: the failure of Iranian Islamism” and returns to the importance of the Iranian question because of its close link to the tenets of political Islam, both at the Shia level or within Islam more generally, since the 1979

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6 See the disputes and discussions on the legitimacy of the concept of “post-Islamism,” for example:

- Peter Mandaville, Is the Post-Islamism Thesis Still Valid? project on middle east political science, 24-1-2014 <https://pomeps.org/2014/01/30/is-the-post-islamism-thesis-still-valid/>
- Akhand Akhtar Hossain (2016) Islamism, secularism and post-Islamism: the Muslim world and the case of Bangladesh, Asian Journal of Political Science, 24:2, 214-236, DOI: 10.1080/02185377.2016.1185954
- Markus Holdo, Post-Islamism and fields of contention after the Arab Spring: feminism, Salafism and the revolutionary youth, Third World Quarterly, 38, 8, (1800)
- [Crossref](#)
- Luz Gómez García, Post-Islamism, the Failure of an Idea: Regards on Islam and Nationalism from Khomeini’s Death to the Arab Revolts, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/rec3.12002>. 9-10-2012

Khomeini revolution. It is known that Asef Bayat brought forth the concept through his reading, at the end of the 1990's, on the rise of a new model different from the traditional pronouncements of political Islam in Iran.

## **2. Contexts and paths...failure or evolution?**

If we go beyond discussion of the controversy and legitimacy of the concept, there are other debates and discussions linked to the contexts and paths that led to the birth of post-Islamism and its rise. We find more than one trend and analysis.

The first trend views the concept of "post-Islamism" as associated with the end of political Islam or its failure and successive disappointments. After Islamist movements were unable to achieve their dreams and hopes, post-Islamist projects and ideas appeared, declaring the failure of those movements and the beginning of a new phase.

The second trend believes that "post-Islamism" is a result of the natural evolution of political Islam and a new historical stage into which Islamists have moved, over the past decades, from rejecting the democratic process to accepting it, first partially and then completely. Their vision for democracy then progressed to acceptance of pluralism and power-sharing, and finally to support for the separation of Da'wah and politics and the secular state. This means that Islamists moved gradually, through involvement in the political and democratic process, from conservative, religious entities to entities that believe strongly in the democratic process. Thus, we are not seeing a stage of decline and collapse of political Islam, whether at the ideological, political, or popular level. On the contrary, we are seeing an advanced stage of the trajectory that these Islamist movements have been intentionally following, or perhaps an important trend with political Islam today. It is expected that other Islamist movements and parties will reach the same destination.

The two hypotheses may resemble two sides of the same coin: the birth of post-Islamism is a result of failure and decline, or of natural evolution. Thus, we are, on balance, seeing movements and trends that have shifted from Islamist movements to "post-Islamism," abandoned many of the pronouncements of political Islam, and moved closer to political parties engaged in the democratic process, like the case of the former Christian Democratic parties in Europe.

In this sphere, we find Nader Al Hashemi and Nathan Brown, both highly-regarded researchers in religions and Islamist movements, saying enthusiastically that Islamist movements are not static, rigid, or in decline; rather, they are movements linked to historical, societal, and cultural contexts and passing through ideological and political stages and phases. The process will end with the stage of professional, democratic parties, with the Islamist movements casting off the guise of post-Islamism and adopting an approach appropriate to democratic conditions and realities.<sup>7</sup>

The contexts, conditions, and rationales that surround the transition from political Islam to post-Islamism, or the study of the path between the two stages and situations, are the subject of the [second session of the conference, "Post-Islamism: Evolution of Thought and Discourse or Indication of Failure?"](#) The thesis of Dr. Abdel Ghani Amid, university professor and researcher specializing in religions and Islamist movements, maintains the failure and defeat of Islamist movements through a systematic and critical approach. Dr. Khalil al-Anani, associate professor at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, discusses the crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood as an entry point to "post-Islamism," and Dr. Rashid Muqtadir, professor of international law and political science at University of Hassan II, offers us a model of these changes within the framework of Maghrebi Islamism, particularly the Justice and Development Party, which, according to researchers and politicians, represents a clear model of the concept of "post-Islamism." Finally, Dr. Mohammed Abu Rumman, researcher at the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies, deals with the future of Islamist movements from the social and comparative history perspective, outlining for us the parameters of the post-Islamist stage and positioning it within this comparative reading.

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7- See Nathan Brown, "Participation, Not Strife: Islamist Movements and Politics in the Arab World," Arab Network for Research and Publishing, Carnegie Institute for the Middle East, Beirut, translated by Saad Mahyu, 1st edition, pp. 71-75. See also: Nader Hashemi, "Islam and Liberal Democratic Secularism: Towards a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies," Arab Network for Research and Publishing, translated by Usama Ghawagi and presented by Mohammed Abu Rumman, Beirut, 2017, pp. 29-37.



### **3. The post-Islamist framework: various formations and ideas and multiple personalities**

The concept of post-Islamism is not limited to the traditional framework of Islamist movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood school, and cannot be reduced to mere politics. There are trends, ideas, and conceptions associated with the post-Islamist stage that stem from different cultural and intellectual trends. These trends were associated with the Islamist school, but they have moved closer to the concepts and ideals of a new liberal, cultural nature. These indicators and phenomena were not on just one level of development and reflection.

If there were a practical and realistic embodiment on the political level of the concept of “post-Islamism,” it would be acceptance of democracy and pluralism, large-scale abandonment of the idea of the Islamic state and the caliphate, and greater assimilation into the democratic process. However, these political changes cannot take place in isolation from jurisprudential and Islamic authority – thus, the importance of studying a diverse set of different options and schools, whether the Salafi case or the general Islamic culture. In this context, it is worth revisiting the first reform school, founded in the Arab Islamic world by Mohammed Abdu and Jamal ad-Din Al-Afghani, before the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hassan Al-Banna. This reform school was close in many of its views to advocating the importance of opening the door of *ijtihad*, making use of Western thought, developing thought and Islamic jurisprudence, and paying attention to the concepts of *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of the shariah) and *maslaha* (interest). However, the Islamist movements came later and closed this door to focus instead on the question of the Islamic identity of societies, thus slowing down the epistemic, jurisprudential, and intellectual aspects.

The third session of the conference will discuss “New Intellectual Formations and Trends.” It will cover some of the new trends and ideas – apart from the Muslim Brotherhood school – both from the Salafi and from general Islamic culture. Discussing these phenomena will be Dr. Sari Hanafi, professor of sociology at the American University in Beirut, and Dr. Stéphane Lacroix, of the Paris Institute of Political Studies, who will discuss various new intellectual approaches of Salafism. In addition, Dr. Joas Wagemakers, professor of religious studies at the University of Utrecht, will present a paper dealing with the questions of democracy and modernity for Salafists, especially post-Arab Spring, that saw political and intel

lectual changes for many Salafi trends and currents. Finally, the Yemeni researcher, Nabil Al-Bakiri, will highlight some of the similar changes in the case of Yemeni Islam.

#### **4. Multiple and varied models of “post-Islamism”**

The developments and trends occurring in Islamist movements and their push towards a post-Islamist stage are not limited to Arab countries and societies. There are experiences and expertise formed in the Islamic world that have preceded and greatly exceeded the Arab model. Perhaps the most important of these models is the Turkish model of the Justice and Development Party (AKP); it announced (upon its formation in 2001) its acceptance of secularism and democracy and its abandonment of Islamist slogans and rhetoric, affirming itself as a “conservative, democratic party,” resembling the European conservative parties (“conservative” here means morally rather than politically.) Thus, AKP has become an advanced model for the outcomes of Islamist parties moving towards democracy and pluralism and for “post-Islamism.”

The Indonesian experience offers yet another model for advanced discourse and movements of liberal and progressive Islam. It has come a long way in intellectual, jurisprudential, and political approaches to democracy, liberalism, acceptance of others, pluralism, and modernity.

This issue is also not limited to the Sunni sphere. The Shiite sphere has witnessed similar developments and changes very close to post-Islamism, particularly with the currents and authorities that have given up the principle of the *vilayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) and have headed towards acceptance of democracy, pluralism, and secularism. Perhaps, the indicator here of Shiite authority is the well-known, Hussein Montazeri, and Mahdi Shams al-Din in Lebanon, and some of the views of Ayatollah al-Sistani, who rejected the principle of the *vilayat-e faqih*.

In first session of the second day of the conference, “Post-Islamism... Multiple Models,” we will continue to pursue these issues and matters. Dr. Ehsan Ali Fawi of Indonesia, will present his in-depth reading on the manifestations of post-Islamism and his mapping of the Islamist currents and trends in Indonesia and the debates there. Then, Dr. Emad Abushan

an, researcher and editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Iran Diplomatic, will offer his analytical reading of the trends that have represented a model for post-Islamism and the jurisprudential, intellectual, and political debates around the topic. Finally, Dr. Ali Tahir, professor of sociology at the University of Baghdad, will analyze the Iraqi Shiite model and the question of post-Islamism, its potentials, contexts, and challenges in Iraq.

## **5. Debating political Islam and post-Islamism**

To what extent is it possible to say that there are indicators and trends for the “post-Islamist” stage in Jordan?

In their book, *Jordanian Islamist Youth in “Post-Islamism:” The Question of the Civil and Islamist State and Intellectual Changes*, authors Dr. Mohammed Abu Rumman and Dr. Nevin Bendqaji describe the new parties whose founding leadership and a group of its youth were expelled from the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front and founded the Partnership and Rescue Party and the Jordanian Building Initiative (Zamzam). Along with the new assembly of the Muslim Brotherhood, they are described as parties belonging to the “post-Islamist” stage, as they have set aside Islamic dress, well-known Islamist slogans, and the idea of an Islamic state; have called for a civil, pluralistic, democratic state; and have switched their demand for a total commitment to Islamic shariah law, in the sense known to historical Islamist movements, to support for the protection of “the value of Muslim communities.”

Meanwhile, it has become obvious that there are revisions within Islamic Action Front and Muslim Brotherhood circles, with the announcement of some leaders accepting the separation of Da’wah and politics and a civil state. Clearly, this remains an area of dispute and discussion among the organizational streams, and it is not a settled matter.<sup>8</sup>

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8 See: Mohammed Abu Rumman and Nevin Bendqaji, *Jordanian Islamist Youth in “Post-Islamism:” The Question of the Civil and Islamist State and Intellectual Changes*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Amman, 1st edition, 2018.

The second session of the second day of the conference, “Debating Political Islam and Post-Islamism,” will be allocated to listening to the approaches offered by representatives of these parties. Jordanian MP Dima Tahboub of the Islamic Action Front offers us the party’s position on the civil, democratic, and pluralistic state and what the separation of Da’wah and politics means. Dr. Alaa al-Farukh will present an approach to developing Zamzam’s political ideology and to the youth involved in Zamzam, and the process of crossing over from political Islam (Islamist slogans) to “post-Islamism.” Ghaith Qudah, one of the founding youth of the Partnership and Rescue Party, will inform us of the experience of the party and its founding youth coming out of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the intellectual and political changes they have undergone over recent years. Finally, Dr. Hassan Barari, professor of political science at the University of Jordan, will critique and comment on these discussions and approaches.